

# OFFERING TALK RESOURCE #1

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## A STORY TO TELL...EVERY WEEK! BY DON SMITH, SVP, HORIZONS STEWARDSHIP

For ten years, I served primarily as a Church Planting Strategist and a ministry coach to start-up and revitalization pastors. During this time, I had the privilege of hearing Dr. Clif Christopher, the Founder and President of Horizons Stewardship, speak many times about the principles contained in what is considered the “must have” stewardship manual for pastors - *Not Your Parents’ Offering Plate*.

A recent seminar I attended included Dr. Christopher providing a dramatic presentation illustrating what he simply called, “The Life Changing Story.” Built into the flow of each Sunday worship experience, these stories were ONE MINUTE vignettes on how God was working through the church to change lives for the better through the generosity of the households in the congregation. It seemed simple enough. Tell a short story every Sunday that paints a word picture (sometimes using actual pictures or videos) of a life changed by God THROUGH the ministries of the congregation. Then say, “thank you” to the donors for their generosity which made this life changing story possible. Then, pass the offering plates!

After years of hearing Clif’s presentation, I became the Lead Pastor of a church where, now, I would actually have the opportunity to implement this concept which seemed to make so much sense. Immediately, we included the “Life Changing Story” segment into the weekend worship experiences.

**THE PLAN** – At the close of the message, the preacher for the day would stand before the people and offer a story that would describe how a life was changed by God through a ministry of the church. The segment would always end, “Friends, thank you for your generosity which God uses to change lives for the better.” The choir would then sing as the plates were passed.

**THE RESULT** – How did our church’s operating budget grow from \$2.2 to \$3.1 million in two years? There were many factors, but I am confident that one big reason was the decision to implement the practice of telling the stories of changed lives during each worship service just prior to receiving the offering.

**THE PROCESS** – It seems simple enough, yet congregations with which I have consulted through the years seem to have difficulty embracing the importance of such a powerful way of celebrating the generosity of the people and the faithfulness of God. Still believing that this is an effective strategy for all to consider, I offer this “how to” guide for those interested in implementing this practice:

1. **Ensure** that the congregation’s Lead/Senior Pastor is fully committed to doing this and doing it well. If the Lead Pastor really wants this to happen, then it will happen.
2. **Commit** ONE MINUTE OR LESS in each weekly worship service to tell stories about lives changed. Repeatedly using MORE than one minute may have counterproductive results as people may actually begin dreading the segment instead of looking forward to it!

3. **Collaborate** in the weekly staff meeting and hold all ministry staff accountable for submitting stories to ensure that all kinds of ministries of the church are highlighted. Maintain a list of back-logged stories that have been submitted and keep the list before the staff so there will be multiple stories from which to choose every week.
4. **Have** the preacher for the week tell the life-changing story. On a rare occasion, you may have a person whose life was changed tell her/his story, but such a testimony is best delivered through edited video.
5. **Utilize** strategic stories on appropriate Sundays. Tell the story of a child from Vacation Bible School on the Sundays prior to and following Vacation Bible School. Show pictures or video from a mission trip upon the return of the church's missionaries. Offer a story of resurrection on Easter Sunday.
6. **Connect** the Life-Changing Story with the offering to ensure that ministry is appropriately celebrated as a result of God's work through the sacrificial generosity of God's people.

I invite every church leader to consider telling stories of changed lives as a way of saying "thank you" to those who give generously and to those who have still not discovered the joy of giving. Through implementing a practice such as this, the vital ministries of the congregation can be celebrated, and the result will be constituents who, out of a sense of gratitude, will invest more resources that will be used by God to change more lives. I can say with confidence that it worked for one congregation! It can work for your place of ministry as well.