

I don't want a patron

by [Carol Howard Merritt](#)

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I recently spoke at a stewardship conference. I always learn a tremendous amount when I speak, and that conference in particular was full of insightful people who inspired me to think theologically and practically about stewardship.

I also found out that there is a shift in attitude about whether a pastor ought to know the amount people give. I've never gotten any breakdown of names and amounts and I never want one. It was never an issue until my last church, which was filled with amazing non-profit directors. They were shocked that the pastors didn't know the contributors of every dollar, because they couldn't imagine doing their jobs without a detailed spreadsheet of names.

I agree that non-profit organizations need to know. Seminary fundraisers need to know. I have respect for the pastors who feel like they need to know. I just don't.

I spoke to my friend, Rob Dyer, about it. He didn't want to know either. But it kind of felt like we were the *only* two people who didn't want to know. I heard lots of arguments supporting the pastor's need to know. Most of them stated that giving is a spiritual discipline. We would be concerned about the prayer life of our members, why wouldn't we be concerned about how much they give?

"Yeah, but I don't ask the members of the church to hand in logs stating how long and how often they pray," Rob said in response to that.

Typically, in a congregation, I like to know if there is a big change in giving, because that often indicates a pastoral care issue. I like to have a general idea of what the members of the congregation give on average because I can get an understanding of how they have been taught to give. But I don't want to know about individual giving. I just don't want to treat one person better because he or she gives a lot more money. I don't want to unintentionally start a Church Rewards Program, where you get additional bonus point for each dollar.

*“Hi, Mrs. Hughes! I came by for a pastoral visit today because I heard that you just reached Platinum status with our CRP! Congratulations. Because of your faithful giving, you’ve earned one visit from a pastor each month. And a gift basket!”*

When I came home, I realized I had another reason I didn’t want to know. My daughter was reading *Pride and Prejudice*, and I was reminded of Mr. Collins, who was a clergyman and the patron of Lady Catherine De Bourgh. It’s comical how much Collins talks about De Bourgh, who is rather awful to him.

This time around Austen’s novel, all of my alliances had shifted. I was no longer feeling the same connection with Elizabeth Bennet, but I felt one with the dreadful Collins and his endless, groveling fealty.

I realized that was also the reason I didn’t want to know. I didn’t want to feel owned by someone. Maybe that’s my issue. I mean, maybe it’s wrong of me to not want to feel indebted to a certain individual in the congregation, but I don’t. As long as I don’t know and they know that I don’t know, it just feels cleaner.

So what about you? Do you think that pastors should know?