

Stewardship

Inspiring a deeper understanding of true giving

December 2010

It is an old Chinese custom that near the end of the year a man would make every effort to pay all of his past debts, in order that he might begin the new year with a clean slate, owing no one. To us, “near the end of the year” means the Christmas season, and it is more often than not a time of running up new bills rather than paying old ones. We buy toys for the children; gifts for friends and relatives.

We often invest in a major purchase for the family, a flat-screen TV or a larger refrigerator, and take on new payments for another 24 to 36 months. This is our custom in the season of giving.


We give to those we love to express our love, on the birthday of the one who taught us what love is all about. This is the principle involved. But, too often, gift giving becomes an end in itself, a custom without meaning, a distraction, a Santa Claus thing, and we lose sight of Love with a capital L. We forget about God! All year we have been giving to God. We have given out of a feeling of love and gratitude. The end of the year is an excellent time to re-appraise our giving to God.

Why not adopt the old Chinese custom? Let us assume our obligation to re-pay God, in light of all that God has given us. And, in the spirit of our Lord's birthday, let us see what gift of self we can give out of our love. We know by now what our annual income is or will be from all sources, including possible gifts and bonuses. We know, too, how much we have given to God, both through the church and through worthy charities other than the church.

Does the amount I am giving truly represent what I think of Almighty God? Does it represent my love, my gratitude, my repentance, my acts of self-denial, my crosses and joys? Does it represent an acceptable share of my material goods?

Am I pleased with what I am giving? Is God pleased? Can I say I have sincerely given to the best of my ability?



In this season of giving, we should take time to re-appraise what we have offered God this year. Let's use tithing as a measure, an acceptable standard, and determine now if our gift of love is worthy of us. 

Let us be generous with gifts we can give to others: Time, Good Example, Acceptance, Seeing the Best in People, Self-esteem, Self-disclosure, Helping Someone Learn Something New, Listening, Fun, Letting Others Give to You.



Gift of the Magi

Have you ever noticed the people who return to God a truly grateful portion of their income, in thanksgiving for all the blessings that God gives them, seem almost always to be happy or content?

The reason why is illustrated beautifully in O. Henry's famous Christmas story, "The Gift of the Magi," in which the husband and wife each sacrifice their most precious possession for the sake of the other.

The wife sells her beautiful hair to buy her husband a watch fob, while he sells his watch to buy her an expensive comb.

Each gift, then, is materially useless; but the couple is exuberantly happy because they realize that each one's gift represents an act of truly unselfish love.


Our gift of money to God represents our love for him; and when we sacrifice, or give of ourselves, we more fully appreciate the many blessings God has bestowed upon us. It is this appre-

ciation, this feeling of love and trust, that shows in the person who returns to God the first portion.

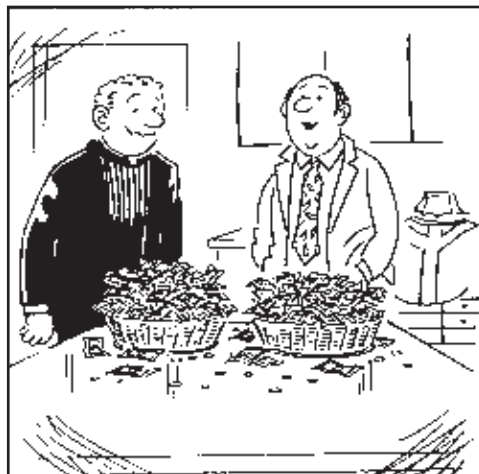
Think of the different things in life that make you happy: an entertaining motion picture, for example, a good book, a child uttering its first words, a birthday celebration, or a wedding. These occasions give us joy because we project ourselves into them or become a part of them.

The experience of sacrificial giving is much like this, but with one tremendous difference. Material pleasures are temporary. Giving is permanent. The giver's joy does not end with the last chapter of the book or the final scene of the movie. It stimulates a lasting joy because the good steward constantly gives of himself in deep appreciation of what God has given them.

We realize that the joy of sacrificial giving then is love. In spite of trial and tribulation, love emerges as the factor in the individual's happiness

It is the inner glow that distinguishes those people who become good stewards of their money from others. It is the joy of sacrificial giving. 

Monetary gifts to God teach us patience and prudence. We learn how to control our inordinate wishing for many things that we buy. This discipline of our will makes it easier for us to live God's law. Therefore giving definitely helps us to do God's will.




"It was a stroke of genius Reverend, asking them each to give the price of a movie!"

The Good Steward

One bleak Christmas Eve many years ago, a Yale student, spending his vacation in settlement work in the lower end of New York City, found a German widow woman in a cheerless attic tenement with three little daughters that all had typhoid fever, without fuel or food or medical attention. He got fuel and made a fire, brought food and a doctor. One of the children died; the other two recovered. The woman came to the Neighborhood House, then to the church, then to Christ. Hearing of the famine in India, she made up her mind to show her gratitude by taking up the support of one or more Indian famine waifs in memory of the little girl whom she had lost. She was earning her living and supporting her family by scrubbing floors at night in a great office building in the neighborhood.

Out of her hard earned wages, she began to set aside a dollar and a half a week, and found that she was able to take care of four famine waifs. She also began to interest herself in those about her neighborhood who were in poorer circumstances than herself.

On the following Christmas Eve, when I went to the new rooms to which she had moved from her attic tenement, I found that she had papered them with her own hands and had put in a baby organ that the children were learning to play. She gathered together a group of poor children for a Christmas party and got her fellow scrubwomen to join in providing for the treat. Out of the newborn love of her Savior, she soon had learned the great lesson of Christian giving. 



God is a great giver. We can never out-give God. When we share what we have generously, God blesses us with priceless gifts. Peace, health, happiness and satisfaction, courage can never be purchased. They are the rewards of proper investments.

“Yes” to Something Better

Just saying “No” to temptation isn’t usually easy by itself. In resisting temptation, we need to say “Yes” to something better, such as good stewardship in all areas of life.

Tempted to eat or drink too much? Say, “Yes,” to better health and good nutrition. Tempted to run up credit card debt? Say, “Yes,” to living within your means and your budget.

If you’re tempted to be selfish, say, “Yes” to sharing God’s gifts to you with others and finding the joy that it brings. Tempted to be lazy? Say, “Yes,” to being a giver and using your time and unique talents wisely. Tempted to pass on gossip? Say, “Yes,” to speaking

about others in the way you wish they would speak about you. Tempted by an “ego trip”? Say “Yes,” to putting God first.



Jesus too was tempted. But in saying, “No,” to each temptation, Jesus said, “Yes,” to something much better.





Live music fascinates me. Unable to play myself, I become enrapt watching a great artist infuse music with emotion while mastering the correct notes in perfect timing. A great performance moves me.

It can teach us about stewardship too! This is especially true in watching a hand bell choir perform. The transcendence of the music and the message of stewardship are unmistakable: we have a note to play in the beautiful music of Christian community. Notice the similarities:

- **Individuality** Each ringer is independent, but inextricably a member of the group. All are needed, no one is left out.
- **Distinction** Each individual's contribution is distinct as the highs and lows of the notes are struck. Our God-created uniqueness shines forth.
- **Choir** An individual cannot make music alone. Only together is harmony created.
- **Importance** Every single ringer is vital. No one is more or less important than another.
- **Togetherness** The group must move together as a whole or the music doesn't ring out.
- **Faction** In some pieces, a subset of ringers moves in another direction, but always returns bringing resolution to the musical tension.
- **Direction** To achieve unity, the group needs direction. A visionary director brings out the best in everyone.
- **Choir and Director** It's tempting to think that the director is everything. But without the choir, the director accomplishes nothing.

Call it the musical parable of stewardship: God directs a choir resounding to use our time, talent, and treasure to bring about his Kingdom. 

