

# Stewardship

Inspiring a deeper understanding of true giving

December 2011


**C**hristmas Eve services had been packed. The first one brimmed with families, worshipping amidst angels and shepherds and music and noise and children waving to their parents as they sang special songs. The late service was candlelit and meditative.

People came forward for communion remembering the incarnation of God's gift in Jesus Christ.

## A surprise

As I prepared to go home about 1 a.m., the head usher asked me to hold out my hand. There he placed a Christmas offering envelope, bulky in shape. Looking inside, I found a small toy car which one

have means, we are able to share with others.

Just as the child offered a valued toy, we, too, have much to give. 

*"From everyone to whom much has been given, much will be required; and from the one to whom much has been entrusted, even more will be demanded."* Luke 12:48

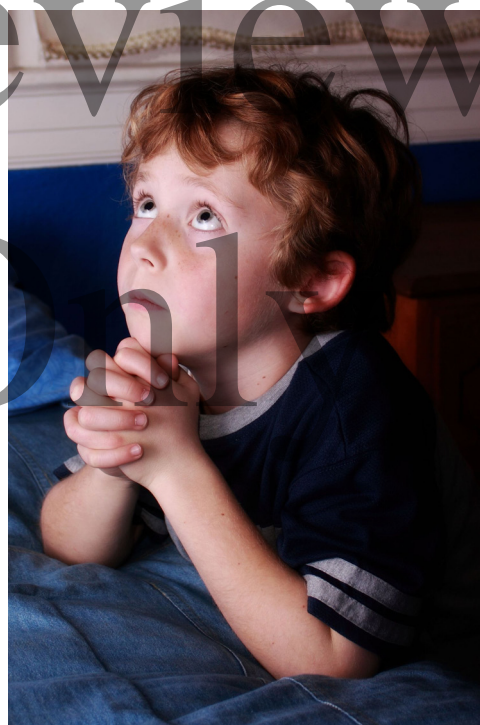
*I smiled. What a precious gift it was! This child had chosen one of his toys, a portion of what God had provided him.*

young worshipper. had offered to God during our family service.

I smiled. What a precious gift it was! This child had chosen one of his toys, a portion of what God had provided him, to give to the church for service in the world. The child understood giving in proportion to what has been received.

## We have much to give

We have abundance in our lives. We have gifts of homes, talents, families, friends, ability and resources, and we have the joy of sharing a portion to strengthen the ministry of Christ. As we



To order copies of **Stewardship** for your congregation, call 888-320-5576 or visit us at: [parishpublishing.org](http://parishpublishing.org)

**W**e need saving. God's way of saving us is through a babe, a tiny helpless boy. To receive God's gift of the Holy Child is to become children of God ourselves.

And as we receive, so we are moved to give. To give ourselves to each other. To give to those in need. To give ourselves in worship.





### Young People Speak Out

*“I’ve always given part of my money to the church, but I haven’t always been too careful with the part I’ve kept. Now I realize that just giving isn’t enough. I’m also trying to spend what I keep in a way that would please Christ.”*

*“Boy, I have to work for my money, and I have to manage it, too. No sponging off my folks, not even for church. At first it was hard to make sure I had enough left for God. But I’ve fixed that ... I take God’s part out first.”*

*“I’ll be getting married soon, and John and I have ideas about a home and family. We’re going to have to watch our money pretty closely, but we don’t want to leave God out, so we’re going to have a planned economy that includes the church.”*

*“Money? Well, I don’t have very much. I still go to school. I do go baby-sitting to get a little extra money, but that’s all. Church? Yes, of course! I can’t give a whole lot, but I know God doesn’t expect more than I can do.”*

**E**ach of us has special gifts that we have received from God. We are grateful for God’s goodness to us. We are so grateful that we want to use these gifts as God would have us use them, in service to him and our fellow humans. We don’t have much money. But what we do have comes from God, whether it is from an allowance or a job. We are careful how we use our money, too. We first dedicate a part of it to God. “On the first day of the week, let everyone of you lay by him in store as God has prospered him.” Our giving is regular ... every time we receive money or property ... and proportionate ... as God has prospered us.

We set aside this percentage for God first, just as we put God first in the rest of our lives. And we don’t begin when we’re 90, or after we’ve made our first million. We start now.

We must always remember that in the sight of God, the gift, is not as important as the giver. The spirit in which we give is what counts. We give out of hearts full of love and gratitude; we give generously; we give prayerfully. Thus our gifts and our lives are acceptable unto the Lord. ☩

**T**he stewardship of all life will lead some to enter full-time Christian service. To all, it will mean an on-the-job witnessing, no matter what our abilities. our bank accounts, or our jobs. Christian stewardship means the glad contribution of time and abilities to the work of the local church and church-related causes around the world.



**A**t the present time, I'm sure everyone is caught up in what is called the "Christmas rush."


We have decorations to put up, cards to be mailed, a tree to be trimmed, gifts to be purchased and wrapped for all of our loved ones ... you get the picture.

However, gifts for people are not the kind of gifts I had in mind. The Bible states that everyone has been given a gift. We read in 1 Corinthians 7:7 that "each one has been given his own gift from God, one has this gift and another that."

Do you know what gift God has given you? Are you using that gift so that God will be pleased? Most people associate a gift with giving. We should think of using our gifts to serve.


I'm sure you've heard the expression, "I'm giving all I can afford now. I just can't do anything more."

If you are giving all that you can be assured that God is aware of it. However, God might ask, "What are you doing with the gift I gave you?"

Here is how you can give more without it costing a cent! Give some thought to putting your talents to work for God. The Bible says that all have that talent. Show God what you can do with it! I'm sure God will be pleased. 

**J**esus, in the Old Testament tradition, cared for the poor and those suffering. He urged his disciples to have compassion for the lame, the hungry and the blind. He also encouraged them to visit the sick and to be worthy and generous stewards.

Today churches should not be suffering from material poverty, yet we know that many are doing just that. They struggle to pay expenses and have little left to assist the poor that come to their door for alms. The cynic will say in his heart, our Lord said, "The poor you will have with you always." Then, can the church pay its way in today's world and still be expected to be charitable to those in need? The answer is yes, the Lord expects his stewards to pay the utility bills, keep the church in good repair, and to build up the church in numerous ways. But we must not forget those in our midst who are in need both physically and spiritually. It happened in Jerusalem after the Day of Pentecost when, "No one in the group needed anything." (Acts 4:34).

Some may reason, "I want to be a generous steward, but I have a family and bills to pay," and certainly this may be true. However, there are other contributions a good steward can make. Do you have a skill in plumbing, painting or minor carpentry. Church is always in need of skilled people who can donate a little time. This saves money that can be used to serve the truly needy. Whatever the resources you have in your hand is not the harvest, it's the seed. Sow it! 

**B**y giving to the church, we become a part of the purpose for which it was created: to spread the Good News about salvation.

When we give of our time and talent, we are actively involved in the church's mission. When we give of our wealth, we support that mission with our own power of life.



**M**ike Gavin hated Christmas, not its true meaning, but the commercial aspects, including the overspending on gifts for people who really didn't need anything.

One year, Mike's son, Kevin, age 12, was wrestling on the junior high team. Shortly before Christmas, they competed against an inner-city church team. These youngsters, dressed in old sneakers and gym shorts, presented a sharp contrast to Kevin's team in their spiffy uniforms and regulation wrestling shoes. Also, the other team wrestled without headgear, which alarmed Mike's wife, Nancy.

Kevin's team easily won the match in every weight class. Mike, who loved kids, said, "I wish just one of them could have won ... losing like this could take the heart right out of them."

#### **An envelope on the tree**

That afternoon, Nancy bought an assortment of wrestling headgear and shoes and sent them anonymously to the inner-city church. On Christmas Eve, she placed an envelope on the tree, with a note inside telling Mike what she had done and that this was his gift from her. She reports that Mike's smile was the brightest thing about Christmas that year.

So in succeeding years, she continued this tradition, selecting various people to help in Mike's name. The envelope became the highlight of the Gavin family Christmas. Even their children looked forward to learning who was receiving Mike's gift each year.

After 10 years, Mike died of cancer. Nancy was in grief, but when Christmas came, she still placed an envelope on the tree. In the morning, she was thrilled to see three more envelopes as



well, one from each of their children, who had each made a gift to someone in need on their father's behalf.

#### **Giving and receiving**

We need to be good stewards of Christmas in our own homes, in our own families, and in our own churches. Let the theme of this Christmas be giving and receiving. Receiving first, the amazing grace of God in the gift of Jesus Christ. Then to give. A gift for someone in need. A thank-offering of money for the Lord's work at your church. What do we have that we did not receive?

In all the hustle and bustle of the season, we need to take time to meditate on the significance of the holy day. We need to make sure that we are exchanging love, in addition to our gifts. ☩

