

Crash Course in Christian Stewardship

Christian stewardship begins with the scriptures: *“The earth is the Lord’s and everything in it.” Psalm 24:1* Therefore, everything that we are, and everything that we have is a gift from God. This means we are stewards. A steward is one who is responsible for caring for the property of an owner.

What does the stewardship of my property imply? That we are to act as if our property were on loan to us from God. We have a responsibility to give back to God some of which He has given us.

How should we give? Here are three principles. We should give **First-fruits**, not leftovers. *“Honor the Lord from your wealth, and from the first of all your produce, so that your barns will be filled with plenty, and your vats will overflow with new wine.” Proverbs 3:9-10* This means putting God first, setting aside His portion before paying creditors.

Second, we should give **proportionately**. *“Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse, and test Me now in this, says the Lord, if I will not open for you the windows of heaven, and pour out a blessing until it overflows.” Malachi 3:10*

Thirdly, let us give **joyfully**. *“Let each one do just as he has decided in his heart; not grudgingly or under compulsion for God loves a cheerful giver.” II Corinthians 9:7.* The key to giving joyfully is to be found in **making a decision** and living with it. *“Let each one do just as he has **decided** in his heart.”*

How much should we give to the Lord’s work? There are a few things that we should not consider. We should not consider the minimum amount needed to meet the budget. There is a great danger in assuming that what we are trying to do in a stewardship campaign is simply to get people to support the budget. This kind of thinking leads to the idea that the goal is for everyone to give the minimum amount to meet the budget.

By the same token, we shouldn't consider what others are giving. Some feel that for the sake of fairness, the budget and/or campaign goal should be evenly divided among all the givers. But this is not Biblical, nor is it fair. For some, that evenly divided amount would be difficult to give, and for others it would not represent a sacrifice at all.

What should we consider? We should consider how we have been blessed. When thinking about our blessings, there is a temptation to compare ourselves to those who are more fortunate than we are. When we do this, we do not feel very blessed. If we are going to compare, let's compare ourselves to the millions of poor, hungry and oppressed people of the world. Only when we do this, will we see that indeed we are blessed beyond measure.

We should also give a proportion of our income. The Old Testament standard was the "tithe," the Hebrew word for tenth. The people of God were required by the Law to give a tenth of their income. Does the tithe remain in effect for Christians? Jesus noted that the religious in His day tithed and commented that they should, but it should be remembered that these were Jewish people living under the Law. Christians today are not under the Law, but under grace. Paul indicates that we should give proportionately, but does not indicate the proportion. So what is the guideline? Perhaps it can be found in the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5:21-48), where Jesus indicates that His followers, living under grace, should be able to exceed the requirements of the Law. This is why the United Methodist Church states that we should recognize the "tithe" as the minimum standard of giving in the church. Acknowledging this, many people give above and beyond the tithe.

What if I am not able to tithe? After a review of your personal budget, decide what portion you can give to the Lord's work and then give it on a regular basis. You will probably want to work toward the tithe or at least increase your giving over time. Set some goals for yourself. For example, a good goal would be to increase the percentage you give by 1% per year or whatever works best for you.

Finally, what is asked of stewards? *"It is required of stewards that they be found faithful. I Corinthians 4:2* Let's all be encouraged to be faithful by taking steps upward and onward in our giving patterns.