

Abundance Through Stewardship



**Ask, and you will receive,
that your joy may be full.**

– John 16:24

*I'd like to put more in the collection, but we have too many bills right now.
I'd work in the soup kitchen but I can't find a babysitter.*



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While we know that we really should help the Church and its mission with our personal resources, it's natural to be concerned about our own lives. After all, the Bible says, "God helps him who helps himself," right?

Actually, no. While it may be good advice, this isn't what the Bible says. Over and over, the Scriptures tell us to call on God — "God will supply every need of yours according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus" (Philippians 4:19).

What lies beneath most of our reluctance to share what we have is fear and distrust. Fear that if we let go, there won't be enough left for us. Distrust that God really will provide for our needs.

We think that if we tithe, we won't be able to pay our bills. If we give up several hours each week for service work, we won't have enough time to take care of our families.

Being told that we must practice stewardship just makes it worse because all too often we think that means, "Give the Church more money."

That's not what stewardship is all about. *Stewardship is about God's abundance and our trust in that abundance.*

God's Abundance

Abundance is part of the trio of sufficiency, plenty, and abundance. Sufficiency, meaning an adequate amount, is the bottom. It's enough to supply our needs, but that's it. Plenty indicates more — an amount that will supply wants as well as needs. Abundance is not just plenty; it is more than enough, an excess.

While most of us spend our lives concerned with sufficiency, God, who is the creator and Lord of all, exists on the level of abundance. God can never run out of good things to give us, His children, because He *is* abundance itself.

God never says, "Sorry, I can't help you. I've already given away all of my store of good health or wisdom or financial resources to your neighbors. Try again next week." God's abundance is there in its fullness for each and every one of us for the asking.

May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you **trust** in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.

— See Romans 15:13

Trust

The difficulty with abundance lies with us and our inability to trust. It's hard enough for most of us to have faith in those we can see and touch and hear, so it's not surprising we have trouble trusting God. When Jesus says to us, "And do not seek what you are to eat and what you are to drink, nor be of anxious mind ... your Father knows that you need them. Instead, seek his kingdom, and these things shall be yours as well" (Luke 12:29-31), we are inclined to think, "But what about mortgage payments and college tuition and health insurance? Does God even care about these things?"

That's where trust ... and faith ... come in. It's a

paradox that you can't have faith until you make the leap of faith, and you can't have trust until you decide to trust. You can't say to God, "Okay, show me where the money is going to come from and then I will trust you to provide it." You first have to trust that God will provide and then God will show you where it is coming from.

So how do we begin? We start by praying, "I believe; help my unbelief!" (Mark 9:24). Eventually, however, we must set aside our doubts, accept God at His word, and, "just do it!"



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The Next Step: Stewardship

Trusting in God and His ability to provide out of His abundance is only the beginning. There is another equally important aspect to God's blessings: Giving back to God a measure of what God gives to you. The Scriptures say, "Give, and it will be given to you; a good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over, will be put into your lap. For the measure you give, will be the measure you get back" (Luke 6:38). These words reflect one of God's laws — the more you give, the more God will give to you.

Which brings us to the next step: stewardship. Stewardship is more than just giving money. It is a way of life that recognizes God's abundance, trusts in God's love, and responds by returning those gifts in every facet of life.

Colleen Smith writes in *Catholic Stewardship: Sharing God's Gifts*, "Stewardship is a complete lifestyle, a life of total accountability and responsibility acknowledging God as Creator and Owner of all. Stewardship is

responsible management of our God-given resources of time, talent, and treasure. It enhances our relationships with God and one another. Stewardship is living out a commitment to be Christ-centered rather than self-centered and it involves a conversion of the heart.

Stewardship is a lifelong journey with each person at a different place on the path.”

What Does It All Mean?

Stewardship is an opportunity to share your gifts with God. Like marriage or parenthood, it is a joyful expression of the love we have been given by God and that we lovingly return to Him. Simply put, stewardship means giving back to God a portion of the gifts we have received.

For stewardship to be more than a solitary act of generosity, however, it must have two characteristics:

It must be planned. While the financial aspect of stewardship is the most obvious, planning how to give time and talent is just as important. If we don't, it's all too easy to let our ideas become pavement on the road of good intentions.

It must be sacrificial. It's not enough to give out of our excess. We must give in a way that costs. There are different gifts. Some of us have greater financial resources and we are thus called to be more financially generous. Others have the gift of time and it is precisely that gift we are asked to share. Regardless of our gifts, we are all called to share.

In the end, however, stewardship comes down to one very simple concept:

**“Go in peace, to love
and serve the Lord.”**

Stewardship is our way as Catholic Christians of doing that every day in every way we can.

Teach us to give and not count the cost.

– St. Ignatius Loyola

Bring the Tithes Into the Storehouse

One question people often have about stewardship is: “How much is this going to cost?” The answer is nothing ... and everything. Stewardship isn’t about giving the minimum; it’s about sharing the maximum. As the U.S. bishops have said, it “means giving as much as we can, as often as we can, from the heart as a faith response because we are generous stewards who want to share our time, talent, and treasure with others” (*A Disciple’s Response*).



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A Prayer for Stewardship

Lord God, I believe that You will always provide me with what I need, if I only ask. I know that whatever You give me is to be shared with others in my family, my parish, my community, my country, and the world. Create in me a spirit of trust so that as I have been given, so will I give. Help me to use my gifts wisely, always aware that You are the source of all blessings. Grant that I may share my time, talent, and treasure in ways that will bring glory to Your Son, Jesus, who reigns with you now and forever. Amen.

Because of its biblical roots, the concept of tithing, or sacrificial giving, is worth considering. These steps may help:



First, return to the Lord a portion of everything He has given you, whether through inheritance, paychecks, investments, unexpected windfalls, an allowance, or a Social Security check.

Second, give to the Lord generously, making sure that you “feel” it. Sacrificial giving means making a sacrifice.

Third, be specific. The biblical norm of “tithing” is ten percent of one’s gross income, meaning ten cents of every dollar earned or received. Of that ten percent, half might go to the parish Sunday collection and the other half to people in need. The latter category includes Catholic school tuition, diocesan collections, the missions, local appeals for the needy and other charities. Those just beginning to tithe may wish to pledge a certain amount with a promise to increase it after a specified amount of time. A “trial tithe” may be in order. Agree to tithe for six months after which you review your finances and then recommit or make any necessary adjustments.

— Adapted from *Catholic Stewardship, Sharing God’s Gifts* by Colleen Smith.

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Where to go for more information

Stewardship: A Disciple's Response (U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, 1992).

Catholic Stewardship, Sharing God's Gifts by Colleen Smith (Our Sunday Visitor, 2001).

Catechism of the Catholic Church, Second Edition (U.S. Catholic Conference — Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1997; distributed by Our Sunday Visitor).

Apostolicam Actuositatem ("Decree on the Apostolate of the Laity," no. 7, Documents of Vatican II).

Stewardship: Disciples Respond — A Practical Guide for Pastoral Leaders (International Catholic Stewardship Council, 1997).

Children's Stewardship Manual (International Catholic Stewardship Council, 2000).

Also see www.osv.com for additional Catholic resources or to order bulk copies of this pamphlet.

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Inventory Number: P177E • Product Number: 160P03

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Excerpts from "A Disciple's Response" taken from "Stewardship: A Disciple's Response: A Pastoral Letter on Stewardship," Tenth Anniversary Edition. United States Conference of Catholic Bishops. Publication No. 5-465, USCCB Publishing, Washington, D.C. www.usccb.org.