



An introduction to stewardship

What is stewardship?

Stewardship can be defined as the conscious practice of understanding that everything we have been given is a free gift from God, and choosing to live as “stewards” of God’s gifts in the way we use our time, our talent and our financial resources. Jesus uses stewardship as a metaphor for the life of a disciple. In the parable of the faithful steward (Luke 12:35-48), he urges his disciples to properly use the gifts that they have been given: “Much will be expected of those who have been given much!” Jesus also teaches that there is a real connection between the way we use our material possessions and our spiritual lives: “The person who is trustworthy in these small matters will be trustworthy with great matters...I tell you, if you are not trustworthy with earthly wealth, who will trust you with true wealth? (Lk 16:10-11).

Time, treasure and talent

Another important element of stewardship is that it is not merely about our financial donations; it is about our whole way of life. As a basic orientation toward life as a disciple, stewardship is expressed in everything we do. Our financial donations are just one way we express stewardship. We also recognize that our time and our talent are gifts that God has entrusted to us, and we are called to be good stewards of these as well.

Living stewardship often begins with a conscious decision to dedicate a percentage of what we have been given back to God. Making a specific commitment helps us develop a way of life—just as developing an exercise routine can help us live a healthier lifestyle.

† **Time** We can give time to God through prayer, Scripture and spiritual reading. In addition to Sunday Mass, we can dedicate some time each day to grow in our awareness of God’s presence in our lives. Take time for morning and evening prayer, the rosary, or devotional reading.

† **Treasure** The traditional biblical financial commitment is the “tithe”—10% of our income dedicated back to God through the support and work of the church. It is often recommended that half of this be given to support your local parish, and half be given to support other church organizations or charitable work (such as the Archdiocesan Annual Catholic Appeal, St. Vincent de Paul, Martha’s Workers, etc.).

† **Talent** Each of us has been given gifts, abilities and talents. While we may use these in our profession, we can also use them to contribute to the life of the parish, or in some form of outreach ministry.

At first making specific commitments of time, treasure and talent may seem overwhelming. But—just like starting up a new exercise regimen—it soon becomes a natural, healthy part of our lives. In fact, we soon find that giving of our time, our gifts and our finances in this way gives us a new perspective on life itself—one which gives new meaning, freedom and joy to everything we do.

Why is stewardship so important to parish life?

Stewardship is important to parish life because it is at the heart of both personal discipleship and community life. A person who is living stewardship as a way of life will be growing in relationship with God, making the connection between their faith and the way they live their daily lives.

People living stewardship understand that the vitality of their parish depends upon the way they use the gifts God has entrusted to them. Every parishioner shares responsibility for a healthy, dynamic community. If every parishioner practiced stewardship, all the needs of the parish would be met and there would be more than enough to reach out to the world beyond (see Mark 6:34-44).

When he disembarked and saw the vast crowd, his heart was moved with pity for them, for they were like sheep without a shepherd; and he began to teach them many things. By now it was already late and his disciples approached him and said, "This is a deserted place and it is already very late. Dismiss them so that they can go to the surrounding farms and villages and buy themselves something to eat." He said to them in reply, "Give them some food yourselves." But they said to him, "Are we to buy two hundred days' wages worth of food to feed them?" He asked them, "How many loaves do you have? Go and see." When they had found out they said, "Five loaves and two fish." Then, taking the five loaves and the two fish and looking up to heaven, he said the blessing, broke the loaves, and gave them to his disciples to set before the people; he also divided the two fish among them all. They all ate and were satisfied. And they picked up twelve baskets full of fragments and what was left of the fish. Those who ate of the loaves were five thousand.

Mark 6:34-44

Five tips for living out stewardship

Stewardship is an important part of living out our faith; it helps us give expression to the values that are most important to us as disciples of Jesus Christ. As Christians, we believe that everything we have belongs to God—not just material things, but our lives, our time, our gifts and abilities as well. Jesus tells us that all these are the generous gifts of our generous Father—who loves us more than we could ever imagine.

Stewardship is a practice we build into our lives that helps us acknowledge the goodness of God. It is a conscious decision to give back a portion of what we have been given as an acknowledgement that we have dedicated our whole lives to God. We don't give merely what we happen to have left-over; we give back to God *first*, not last. Here are five simple suggestions for making stewardship an important part of your life.

1 Make a list of everything that God has given you. You can start with the gift of life, breath, the ability to walk and talk (remember, not everyone has the ability to do all these things), your education, home, car.... You may be thinking, "But I worked hard to make money to purchase the house and cars; they aren't gifts from God, I earned them!" Yet the truth is there are many people in many parts of the world who work just as hard, and never have the opportunity to acquire these things. As St. Paul reminds us, everything in our lives is in fact a gift from God.

2 Be grateful. Thank God for each and every thing on your list. Gratitude is the foundation upon which our Christian faith is built; it is the basis of our relationship with God. Gratitude helps us develop other virtues, like humility and forgiveness. So give thanks to God for the many, many blessings in your life.

3 Pray about making a commitment to give a portion of what you have been given back to God as an expression of your gratitude and a sign of the important place God holds in your life. Pray about what portion you should commit to. Your commitment should be proportionate to what God has blessed you with. Many people practice the biblical tradition of tithing—giving 10% of their time, talent and treasure—5% to their parish and 5% to other important causes. Perhaps that's too big a percentage for some people to begin with; they might start with 5% (2½% to the parish, and 2½% to other causes).

4 Make your commitment. Don't just make a decision—make a commitment to give that percentage through a specific pledge. Share the blessings God has given you in ways that will further God's work on earth. Like the five loaves and two fishes in the Gospel story, what you offer to God will be blessed, multiplied and used to help others.

5 Be faithful to your commitment. Stewardship is a way of life, not a hobby. Be faithful even when you don't feel like it. You'll find that being consistent in your stewardship giving can change any negative attitudes you may have, and make giving of your finances and your time a joyful event.