



## CALLED BY CHRIST GIFTED BY THE SPIRIT

*Giving Back to God the  
First Fruits of Our Labor*

*To Share Christ in and  
through the Church*



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Perhaps the most important lesson we can take from this third element is that if we can give our gift and not notice it, it is not a sacrificial gift. The element of sacrifice is present when something about our life has to change in order for us to be able to give the gift. We re-prioritize our spending habits, we reconsider our values. Then, every time we make our sacrificial gift, we are able to recall the reasons why we chose to give.

Sacrificial giving is the Christian steward's way of following the Lord, Who sacrificed everything so that we might have eternal life. When giving becomes sacrificial — giving away something we think we need — it compels us to look toward our true source of security — God. Only God will make us safe, and recognizing this reality helps to raise our consciousness about discipleship with Christ.

*“Consider this: whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows bountifully will also reap bountifully. Each must do as already determined, without sadness or compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. Moreover, God is able to make every grace abundant for you, so that in all things, always having all you need, you may have an abundance for every good work. The One Who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will supply and multiply your seed and increase the harvest of your righteousness.”*

(2 Corinthians 9:6-8, 10)

### GUIDE FOR GIVING

MONTHLY	HOUSEHOLD INCOME		3% WEEKLY	WEEKLY GIVING TO THE PARISH		5% WEEKLY
	YEARLY			4% WEEKLY		
\$ 500.00	\$ 6,000.00		\$ 3.50	\$ 4.50	\$ 5.75	
\$ 835.00	\$10,000.00		\$ 6.00	\$ 8.00	\$10.00	
\$1,665.00	\$20,000.00		\$12.00	\$15.00	\$19.00	
\$2,085.00	\$25,000.00		\$14.00	\$19.00	\$24.00	
\$2,500.00	\$30,000.00		\$17.00	\$23.00	\$29.00	
\$2,915.00	\$35,000.00		\$20.00	\$27.00	\$34.00	
\$3,335.00	\$40,000.00		\$23.00	\$31.00	\$38.00	
\$3,750.00	\$45,000.00		\$26.00	\$35.00	\$43.00	
\$4,165.00	\$50,000.00		\$29.00	\$38.00	\$48.00	
\$5,000.00	\$60,000.00		\$35.00	\$46.00	\$58.00	
\$5,835.00	\$70,000.00		\$40.00	\$54.00	\$67.00	
\$6,665.00	\$80,000.00		\$46.00	\$62.00	\$77.00	
\$7,500.00	\$90,000.00		\$52.00	\$69.00	\$87.00	
\$8,335.00	\$100,000.00		\$58.00	\$77.00	\$96.00	

A fundamental principle of Christian stewardship is acknowledging with gratitude that even our material goods and financial resources come from God. The Christian steward not only recognizes the gifts of assets and income, but also commits to giving God the very “first fruits” of these resources. This commitment is referred to as “sacrificial giving.”

### **American Spending Priorities**

Many consider Americans to live in the most profligate consumer society in the world. Consider how the average American spends his or her discretionary income. According to studies completed within the last few years, Americans annually spend their discretionary income in some of the following ways:

- \$92.9 billion on soft drinks, including bottled water
- \$60 billion on diets
- \$40 billion on pets
- \$32.5 billion on sports activities
- \$21 billion on beauty care products
- \$12.3 billion on specialty coffee

This list is a reflection of our culture’s priorities. It is a great challenge to practice Christian stewardship in our modern culture, which considers these spending habits as desirable and “good for the economy.” The question that challenges us is: Does this list suggest something about our own patterns of spending?

### **Freedom from Consumption**

Our culture encourages us to believe that we are what we have and consume. In this culture, the capacity to consume is the essential proof of a successful life, and the consumption of goods becomes a demonstration of status to oneself and to society. In contrast, Jesus invites His disciples to practice inward freedom from consumption. Those who aspire to embrace

Christian stewardship will heed the Beatitude, “*Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven*” (Matthew 5:3), and will renounce a preoccupation with possessions and consumption. Moreover, Christian stewardship compels us to manage all of our material goods effectively and efficiently, to avoid waste, and to invest prudently.

### **Putting God First**

The Christian steward understands that the slavery to consumerism must be challenged by consciously deciding to give God the first fruits of our labors. Sacrificial giving is how we, as Christian stewards, describe giving to God the first portion of our material wealth, our financial resources, our money. Implicit in sacrificial giving is our recognition that everything that we have — our time, our health, our relationships, our material possessions, our money — are gifts from God. The Holy Spirit helps us recognize the need we have in our hearts to give a portion of these gifts back to God with a generous heart.

We practice sacrificial giving most concretely by giving generously to the local Church, to our parish communion, and to the community at large through charitable and civic organizations. As the Bishops’ Pastoral Letter states: “*And parishioners must accept responsibility for their parishes and contribute generously — both money and personal service — to their programs and projects*” (United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, *Stewardship: A Disciple’s Response*, p. 32).

### **Sacrificial Giving**

After conscious decisions have been made to make prayer a daily habit, to spend time nurturing our family relationships, and giving something of ourselves to the worshiping communion, it is now time to reflect on these essential elements of sacrificial giving:

***Sacrificial giving is a prayerful decision.*** The first element of sacrificial giving is that it is a decision borne out of prayer, recognizing the Holy Spirit’s urging on our need to return to God the “first fruits” of the material wealth we have earned or acquired. This step means taking time out to pray and make a deliberate decision to change our spending habits in order to make God the first recipient of our income.

***Sacrificial giving is deliberately planned.*** The second element of sacrificial giving means being responsible to budget first a certain amount to give back to the Lord, taking care to account for family needs and obligations, and taking into consideration the family’s resources and personal circumstances.

How much should we give? There is no magic number. But we can start with an assessment of our level of giving now. Is the proportion of our income that we give back to God the first portion? And does that portion adequately reflect our gratitude for God’s generosity?

The chart on the next page gives an idea of how total household income translates into percentages of giving to the offertory collection. Again, there is no “right” answer. Our gift is our return to God of a portion of the gifts God has given each of us, which we choose to share with our parish and other charities. “*Every one shall give as they are able, according to the blessing of the Lord your God which God has given you*” (Deuteronomy 16:17).

***Sacrificial giving calls for sacrifice.*** The third element is that the proportion of our gift becomes sacrificial when it causes us to cut back on other spending habits. When we give out of our need, like the Gospel story of the Widow’s Mite, then we experience spiritual transformation.