

Journey to the Joy of Giving

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Just as Christians grow in their relationship with Jesus Christ, it's a fact that we also grow in our understanding and practice of Christian stewardship. There are no doubt some people who, with their very first offering, feel a sense of joy. But I think for many people, it's a more of a progression that may differ from person to person.

Experiencing joy in giving is often far more caught than taught. Yes, we can learn from scripture and other people. When we find someone who is an inspiration for us, someone with whom the gospel shines, their faith and their joy can be contagious. Barring those explosive encounters with the Gospel in the witness of others, real joy in giving may progress more slowly—but it will come. Joy is a by-product of being a Christian.

STEP ONE in giving might well be duty. Many of us were taught to give by parents or grandparents. Either as children or as new converts to Christianity, we have yet to reach the maturity that comes as we grow in grace and knowledge of the Gospel. Giving from a sense of duty

does not mean a lack of commitment. It is a meaningful experience, but it may not reach the level of real joy.

STEP TWO may begin when we find great satisfaction in giving. When a Christian child earns their first paycheck, there is great satisfaction in being able to put their offering in the plate. One gets to give. Giving is satisfying and fulfilling, yet may not reach the level of joy.

STEP THREE might well be when we grow to giving to God from a sense of gratitude. This is a big step! Giving is no longer just giving to a church; it's now become giving to God in gratitude for all that Christ has done. At this point, real joy begins to come alive.

There may be other steps for some; the journey can be traveled rather quickly, or it may take some time. Others give to special offerings and, through that, find joy.

There once was a guy named Guy. Guy only occasionally put a large chunk of money in the offering, but he tended to give toward special needs. When Guy invited himself to a Church Council meeting, the members cringed. They all respected

Guy, but he was a blunt person and they also had a bit of fear.

At one such meeting, everyone greeted Guy cordially, though without much enthusiasm. The president of the congregation gave Guy a spot on the agenda right after the devotions.

When the chair called on Guy, he got right down to business. He said, "I know the council has been discussing a new copy machine. I hear there are three being considered. If you'll buy the best one, I'll cover the cost. Also, we've been collecting money for a chair lift for a long time. I have decided to finish paying for it. Our church is getting older, and we dare not wait around too long."

For many people, finding joy in giving comes much like it did for Guy. The council blessed and thanked Guy for his generosity, and not only did Guy write a check for both special needs, his regular giving to the church also went up.

The journey to joy may be different for everyone, but joy in giving should be intrinsic to every Christian.

