

- Give extra offerings to support your church's local budget or a ministry you strongly believe in.
- Donate extra nonperishables to your church's food pantry or another local charity.
- Organize a few families to provide a Zoom concert or carol sing for shut-ins.
- Deliver freshly baked goods to your pastoral team, Sabbath School teachers, or others.
- Offer to provide all the goodies for a class party at your local church school to take some pressure off the parents and teachers.
- Sew holiday-themed face masks and give them away.
- Identify a way you can use your unique skills in service to your church.
- <Insert your own idea here.>



In 1871, Christina Rossetti penned a poem with a title you may recognize. (Hint: Turn to #126 in your hymnal.) In this poem she paints a picture of the Nativity and ponders what she would have brought the baby Jesus. Her final stanza expresses the very essence of stewardship:

*"What can I give Him, poor as I am?
If I were a shepherd, I would bring a lamb;
If I were a Wise Man, I would do my part;
Yet what can I give Him: give my heart."*



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Becky St. Clair is a freelance writer living in the Bay Area with her husband and three young children. She's an avid reader with a passion for storytelling, the ocean, Thai curry, rainy days, writing actual letters, and travel, which she unfortunately does rarely. In her free time, Becky enjoys playing percussion with the Pacific Union College Symphonic Winds Ensemble, exploring the California coast, and discovering San Francisco.

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The STEWPOT

A POTPOURRI OF PRACTICAL IDEAS to help you become a better steward

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THE HEART OF STEWARDSHIP

BY BECKY ST. CLAIR

Some of my favorite memories center around my grandmother, whom I'd describe as funny, generous, and sparkly. I say "sparkly" because nearly everything she wore had sequins or something else that sparkled as she moved. She also had a huge heart, and she loved to dress in costumes.

When I was around six years old, Grandma asked me if I would help her distribute gifts to kids at a Christmas event. I was super excited about this idea and quickly agreed. When the big night came, she was dressed as Santa, complete with bulging belly and fluffy white beard, and she handed me a special hat she'd made with "Santa's Helper" written across the front in glitter letters. (More sparkle!)

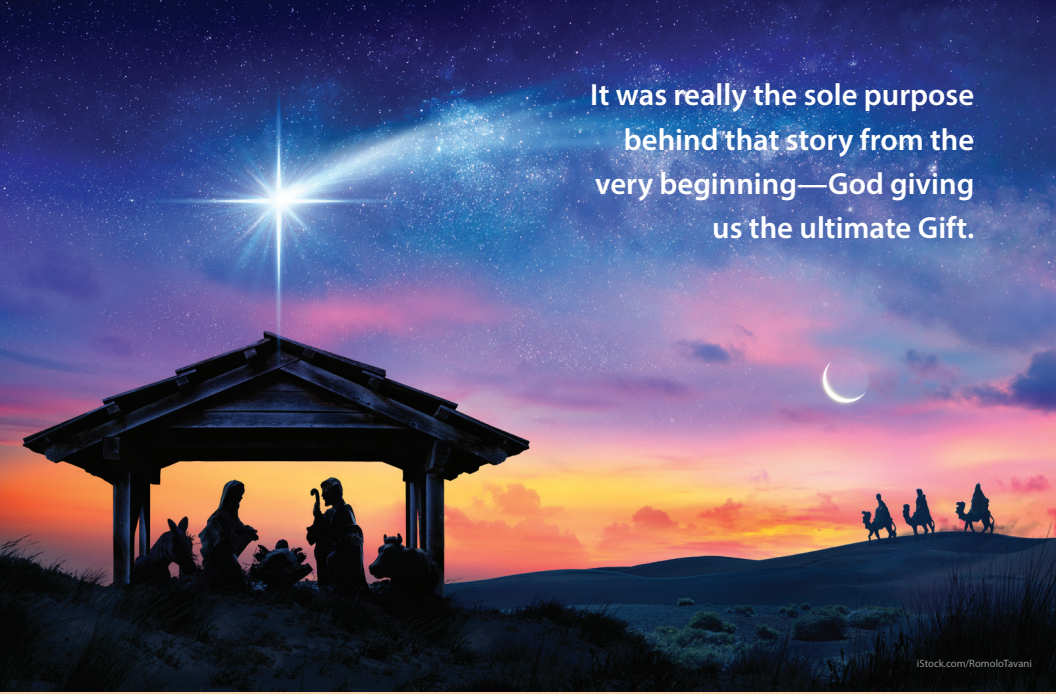
That night was magical. Grandma "ho-ho-ho'd" and smiled as she talked to each child; then she'd ask me for a gift, and I'd pull a beautifully wrapped package out of a giant red felt bag. I felt like I was in an Uncle Arthur's Bedtime Story. But mostly, I felt happy. Joyful. Those kids walked away feeling like a million bucks, and I had been a small part of making that happen. It felt good.

I know that Santa takes a back seat to the true reason we celebrate Christmas, but the gesture of gift-giving plays a major role in the Nativity story. In fact, it was really the sole purpose behind that story from the very beginning—God giving us the ultimate Gift.

Throughout the Bible we are reminded



STEWARDSHIP is a total lifestyle. It involves our health, time, talents, environment, relationships, spirituality, and finances.



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to be generous. Hebrews 13:16 says, “Do not neglect to do good and share what you have, for such sacrifices are pleasing to God” (ESV). Deuteronomy 16:17 says, “Every [one] shall give as [they] are able, according to the blessing of the Lord your God that he has given you” (ESV).

Helping my grandmother play Santa may have been one of the formative experiences that led to my love of gifting. The joy of being able to bring a smile to someone’s face is something I treasure. While I am not always able to give everything I wish I could (my five-year-old son, for example, regularly requests the \$400 kid-sized drivable Jeep he saw at Target), I do give when and what I can.

And my desire to give doesn’t stop with individuals. The joy of giving extends to organizations doing work I believe in, such as ADRA, Maranatha Volunteers International, and the American Red Cross. It extends to institutions investing in our future, such as schools, after-school programs, young professionals organizations, and youth leadership programs.

It extends to the church.

So much of what the church—both local and global—does is only possible because members are faithful in giving what they can. The Tithes & Offerings page of the North American Division Stewardship Ministries website provides a helpful metaphor: “Have you ever felt as if

you’re putting your money into a ‘black hole’ when you give your weekly mission offerings? Maybe you should think about it more as dumping your offerings into the river. Not to get rid of them, but to help mission flourish around the world” (www.nadstewardship.org/tithes-offerings).

We know that it isn’t the amount we give that matters; Jesus makes that clear when He points out the faithfulness of the poor widow who gave two coins. Despite the small amount of her offering, He insists that hers is the largest of any given that day because she has given everything she has. It is the size of her heart more than the size of her purse that matters to Him (Mark 12:41-44).

We also know that giving isn’t just about money.

When Jesus sends His disciples to minister to the people, He says they should “take nothing for the journey—no staff, no bag, no bread, no money, no extra shirt” (Luke 9:3, NIV). And they do so eagerly, giving their time, their energy, and their willingness to sacrifice everything they own to do what He calls them to do.

Later in Luke (chapter 10), Jesus tells the story of a man who does something completely outside the cultural realm of acceptability and helps someone who should be his enemy. A stranger is dying, and the Good Samaritan not only tends to his wounds, but picks him up, walks him to the nearest inn, and pays for someone there to nurse him until he is healed. He acts on his compassion.

In Acts 9:36-42 we read about Dorcas (or Tabitha), who has dedicated her life to making clothes for the poor in her community. When she dies, Peter is bombarded with stories from grieving local women who want to be sure her kindness is noted. Dorcas gave of her material resources and her talents in service to God, and her quiet efforts meant the world to many.

So, what does any of this look like in today’s reality? Let’s all take a moment to acknowledge that Christmas is traditionally (and I use that word intentionally because we have made it a tradition) one of the busiest times of the year. Office parties, school celebrations, gift-buying, gift-wrapping, gift-giving, gift-returning, family visits, concerts, community events, parades, church pageants, cooking, baking, decorating, crafting—the pressure to do it all is immense. And yet somehow in the midst of all this, we still want to pause and recognize the Reason for the holiday we’re supposedly honoring with our “busy.”

This year, Christmas looks a bit different. There are no concerts, no parades, no pageants. There are no big office or class parties and perhaps not even family visits. Sure, we’re still finding ways to stay busy, but we’ve been given a chance to stop and consider how we can be good stewards of what God has given us during this very special time of year. It may look like the following:

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