

Sharing God's Bounty

Have a Heart

February: the month devoted to love. Stores are filled with heart-shaped boxes of candy and heart-shaped cards and vases of flowers with heart-shaped gift tags. All this is available for the consumer so that he can find the appropriate expression of his devotion to his loved one. If that expression of love has been preceded by a year of thoughtful and loving words and deeds, it is welcomed and cherished by the recipient. If not, it is just an empty ritual, done out of duty rather than true devotion.

Our relationship to the Lord is similar. God, too, desires our sincere devotion, not empty lip service. *"The Lord says: 'These people come near to Me with their mouth and honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me'"* (Isaiah 29:13).

Stewardship is serving, helping, giving, but love is the basis for stewardship. Without love, our good deeds are empty and without merit. The first act of true stewardship is to *"love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength"* (Deuteronomy 6:5). Jesus called this the most important commandment (Mark 12:29, 30). With that love for the Lord in us, we are enabled to be good stewards. Then we can do acts of good stewardship, acts of true devotion. We are enabled to . . .

- *"Give generously to him and do so without a grudging heart"* (Deuteronomy 15:10).
- *"Carefully observe [his decrees and laws] with all your heart and with all your soul"* (Deuteronomy 26:16).
- *"Share with God's people who are in need. Practice hospitality"* (Romans 12:13).
- *"Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for men"* (Colossians 3:23).

God, through Ezekiel, promised, *"I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit in you and move you to follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws"* (Ezekiel 36:26-27). This promise he has fulfilled in his Son, Jesus, who has followed his Father's decrees and kept his laws for us. As we strive to live fruitful lives of stewardship, at the same time, we rest in Christ who has been the perfect steward for us.



Tithing is an outgrowth of a sense of thankfulness. Since God's mercies are constant and unfailing, our response should be of the same nature in proportion to our ability. The "grace of gratitude" has high rating in the Christian standard of virtues. It is developed by saying "Thank you" to God. At the entrance to life abounding stands the cross of self-denial.