

God's Blessings Through Righteous Stewardship

By Pastor Suzanne Gross, September 21, 2025

Genesis 1:28 Fill the Earth! Take charge! Be responsible for fish in the sea and birds in the air, for every living thing that moves on the face of Earth.

2 Corinthians 8:13-14 Our desire is not that others might be relieved while you are hard pressed, but that there might be equality.

At the present time your plenty will supply what they need, so that in turn their plenty will supply what you need.

2 Corinthians 9:7 Each of you must give as you have made up your mind, not regretfully or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver.

Principles of Good Stewardship

We are a blessed community! We have shelter and heat and a beautiful calm and sacred sanctuary that holds our gatherings for prayer, song, praise and growth as followers of Christ. The lights work, the lawn is cut, the trees are healthy. The eaves troughs are clear. The carpets are vacuumed. The piano is tuned. The bills are paid. The geraniums and marigolds are watered and blooming! And the list goes on.... All of this happens only when all of us are stewards of our time, resources, and perhaps most importantly our care! If we don't care, things fall apart and devolve into chaos! If we care, by God's grace, we notice and respond. When this happens, we are contributing to the beautiful hospitality God shares with us, and that God expects us to share with each other, with newcomers to our community, and, most importantly multiplying that hospitality to honour God as our creator and source of great love.

Caring and responding to ensure things are in order – our finances, our building, our grounds, and our spiritual life together.... That is stewardship --- to care and notice and fix or address things that might go sideways --- in our physical surroundings and our spiritual being! In this way, stewardship and hospitality go hand in hand, my friends! Stewardship is the invisible care and work that allows our sacred hospitality on Sunday mornings, and on Wednesday evenings, and on Thursday afternoons to happen -- and sacred hospitality is where we share God's amazing and endless love!!!! If Martha and Mary coexist as models of hospitality and worship – stewardship is the Martha in the equation. Let's look at what the Bible teaches us about stewardship. We will look at stewardship of our shared planet earth, money and possessions as individuals, and money and possessions as families – both nuclear and church families!

1) All that we have is from God! We have enough! We have all that we need! That is the good news! And we are invited to be stewards of this good news! Don't worry about tomorrow! God is in charge, and through our faithfulness to God's laws of praising Him as our source, of sharing of our abundance generously, showing mercy to all -- even our enemies... God offers us the promise of blessing! And yet, the invitation to "not worry about tomorrow" doesn't let us off the hook when it comes to caring and noticing and funding and fixing and nurturing. God has given us the gift of work and knowledge and planning well -- anticipating! -- to ensure that life's tendency toward chaos is balanced by wisdom and care. And so, If we combine the humility of remembering that "all we have is from God" with the care described above -- the care of noticing and addressing descent into chaos -- if we combine these two, it is a way of bringing our physical and spiritual existence back into balance. It is a high calling! And all of us play a role.

Let's start with our shared planet. As stewards of God's earth, we are called to care for the earth and to bring rest and renewal to the land and everything that lives on it. Words from the Psalmist David in Psalm 24:1 *The earth is the LORD's, and everything in it, the world, and all who live in it.* This is a reminder that all belongs to God. We are but caretakers. In Genesis, we are given a role as human beings: Genesis 1:28 *"Fill the Earth! Take charge! Be responsible for fish in the sea and birds in the air, for every living thing that moves on the face of Earth."* Some translations use the word "have dominion" or "subdue". But this can never involve violence or mistreatment of the land and the animal life. It really means mastering the relationship -- which means knowing and understanding our animal friends and caring for a healthy land that will sustain all living things. Our extreme extraction economy and dependence on extraction is a violation of God's law of responsibility -- handed over to us as caretakers of this earth and all that is in it. Beware of the impact of our harmful interactions with our created world! God's law is to be in relationship. When we are in relationship, we care! When we are not in relationship with all of God's creation, we risk abusing God's creation. I remember how my children, when they were young, were often pulling me into relationship with the details of creation I didn't notice anymore -- little streams of water, butterflies, weeds, little hills, majestic trees..... God, help us stay connected through love and awe to all that you have created. And help us care for and protect the created world that sustains us.

2) The Bible teaches us to hold money and possessions lightly because they are gifts from God, for us to use with simplicity and humility. By doing so, we can remember and contribute generously to the economic justice God teaches us in Deuteronomy: Honour the Sabbath -- rest yourselves and the land. This violates our work, work, work temptation, doesn't it! God created us to be in rhythms of work and rest. And the Bible teaches even more about rest! Every 7 years, let the land go fallow for regeneration. Every 50 years, recalibrate the economy so that those without resources are given a fresh start. This practice of Jubilee -- Jesus refers to this as *"The year of our Lord!"* -- Jubilee has been one of the most difficult laws of God's to implement collectively and deserves a sermon all of its own. But let us remember that God desires economic justice for all of his children! And that economic justice lives in how we -- collectively -- steward our resources. And economic justice lives

right here in our blessed community in the concept of mutual aid. But for mutual aid to exist, we need to pool our resources, don't we! Our Mennonite Confession of Faith states: *As stewards of money and possessions, we are to live simply, practice mutual aid within the church, uphold economic justice.* This exhortation is by Paul in 2 Corinthians 8:13-14

13 Our desire is not that others might be relieved while you are hard pressed, but that there might be equality. 14 At the present time your plenty will supply what they need, so that in turn their plenty will supply what you need.

And in 2 Corinthians 9:7, Paul reminds us that God' loves cheerful giving!

I remember a friend of mine telling me how his mother taught him well when it came to being a cheerful and consistent giver! If he earned \$1.00, she taught him at a young age to do the math: 45% for yourself; 45% to share with others and 10% for God (i.e. the offering plate). Are we as diligent with our wealth as this mother taught her young son? Friends, imagine if we followed the tithing rule of thumb! We would be sending the signal that we care about both the physical and spiritual health of God's house!!! And if our giving turns into budget surplus, we would discern together what God is calling us to do with such funds.

And now let's look at the notion of Household! We tend to view finances as a private matter. In my earthly human household, my husband and I pool our finances – and we discuss together where we will give and how much. And we are in a country that values giving – to the point that our Canadian government multiplies our giving through the process of tax deductions. Tax deductions allow us to save in taxes, and share back those savings with thoughtful intention! And our charitable system in Canada give us assurance that funds are used with integrity. I, for one, am grateful for the transparency our system affords us. Let us use it to multiply our giving!! When we are mindful of Paul's exhortation in 2 Cor. 9:7 *Each of you must give as you have made up your mind, not regretfully or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver.* --- we are assured that our giving is coming from the right place – even as we engage with our system of tax rewards!!!! That reward returns to our hands for us to deal with in a Godly way.

And what about our church community as a household? When we gather as the family of God, God is the head of our household: we are all servants or managers or sons and daughters entrusted with responsibility to God's household! And we all have equal say in matters of management decisions. And what guides these decision? We are called to be stewards in the household of God, set apart for the service of God. It always comes back to remembering our source!!!! God is the source of our strength, God is the source of our abundance, God is the source of our generosity and our integrity! And God invites us to be

stewards of this Amazing Grace!!!! Let's move on to stewarding our speech and energy to serve. In 1 Peter 4:10-11, we are reminded to be good stewards of our speech and good stewards of our energy to serve.

10 Like good stewards of the manifold grace of God, serve one another with whatever gift each of you has received. 11 Whoever speaks must do so as one speaking the very words of God; whoever serves (which includes giving) must do so with the strength that God supplies, so that God may be glorified in all things through Jesus Christ. To him belong the glory and the power forever and ever. Amen.

The gift of speech – as if we are speaking the very words of God! This evokes humility and wisdom as the guide to our speech! Sometimes fewer words are all we need! And sometimes, oration is what is required to wake us up! Let us be good stewards of our words --- thoughtful and clear so that we can be conduits for God's love!

The gift of serving requires strength – physical, mental and spiritual! And what is the source of this strength? God's limitless strength is our strength! And through this strength is authenticity of servanthood! To summarize: As we take on our God-given role of caretaker of this earth, let us never forget that we are called to be in relationship with all living things. And this relationship is a sort of covenant to care and protect our land, our water, our air. Money and possessions are to be held lightly as tools for sharing the teachings of Jesus --- not as goals and signposts of success or status. We are invited to share generously of the abundance God provides – a generosity that contributes to God's vision of justice. Stewardship happens in households collectively! This is where we discern together and offer up together. God is the head of our households – both family and church households! When we remember this, our stewardship will always centre our source—our Father in Heaven! -- and be multiplied! And, finally, in the passage from Peter we are invited to be good stewards of our words and of our energy to serve each other. When we centre God, and when we care about our shared space and steward our God-given gifts, God will dwell and multiply the blessings God wants for his children. Amen.

Let us pray: God, our bountiful head of our households, we thank You for the abundance in our lives which all points back to You. Help us steward this abundance with the wisdom, generosity and integrity that comes from remembering You, and caring deeply for Your created world. May we multiply Your great love in this place, through the myriad ways You invite us to give back. Amen.

