



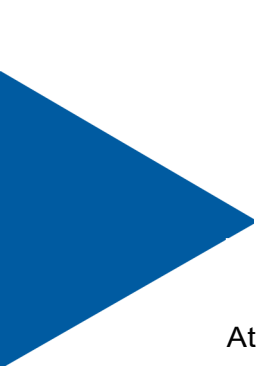
THEOLOGY

of Stewardship & Generosity



*The God
who made the world
and everything in it,
being Lord of heaven and earth, does not live in
temples made by man, nor is he served by human
hands, as though he needed anything,
since he himself **gives** to all mankind
life and breath and everything.*

Acts 17:24-25



At Cuyahoga Valley Church (CVC) we are convinced that discipleship doesn't happen by merely providing activity, events, information and programs. We have worked diligently to develop a clear and measurable definition of spiritual growth and have identified in practical terms how God wants us to live our lives.

We believe that the evidence of our growth as disciples of Jesus will reveal itself in six areas which we call the "Fruit of New Life". The fruit of new life is best understood not by our *activity*, but by our *identity*, not by what we *do*, but by who we understand ourselves to *be*. As we grow in Christ, we will see ourselves as a: **Beloved Child, Self-Feeder, Servant, Investor, Discipler, and Missionary.**

Therefore, at CVC we will passionately pursue the equipping of our communities to become faithful, fruitful disciples who are abiding in Christ, serving the Lord according to their gifts, and committed to sharing the love and message of Jesus. By doing this we are strategically cultivating communities of disciple-makers who are like groves of life-giving trees locally and throughout the world.

Said another way, we want to become a unified family of believers who are motivated by the Great Commandment and devoted to the Great Commission.

A vision of this magnitude requires each of us to be fully committed and **invested** in order to make this a reality. One of the ways we honor God is by wisely stewarding (managing) all that He entrusts to us for the accomplishing of His purposes. This is lived out by giving freely and sacrificially of our time, talents, and treasure to God and to others, without expecting anything in return.

God stresses stewardship not because He wants something FROM us but because He wants something FOR us – freedom, joy, relationship, and abundant treasure in heaven.

As we help people grow in the fruit of new life (II Timothy 2:2), one of the outcomes will be growing a culture of stewardship and generosity built on a solid scriptural foundation. The following four biblical truths are the foundations upon which we teach and model stewardship and generosity to others.

Four Foundational Biblical Truths

Biblical Truth #1: God owns everything and needs nothing

A. What This Means

God's Kingdom never has a "need". It may have "unfunded Kingdom opportunities", but neither God nor His work ever needs anything.

B. Supporting Scripture

1. God's Self-Sufficiency

a. Acts 17:24-25 English Standard Version "The God who made the world and everything in it, being Lord of heaven and earth, does not live in temples made by man, nor is he served by human hands, as though he needed anything, since he himself gives to all mankind life and breath and everything."

b. Psalm 50:10-12 "For every beast of the forest is mine, the cattle on a thousand hills. I know all the birds of the hills, and all that moves in the field is mine. If I were hungry, I would not tell you, for the world and its fullness are mine."

2. God's Ownership

a. Psalm 24:1 "The earth is the Lord's, and the fullness thereof, the world and those who dwell therein,"

b. Job 41:11 "Who has first given to me that I should repay him? Whatever is under the whole heaven is mine."

c. Romans 11:36 "For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be the glory forever! Amen."

d. Revelation 4:11 "Worthy are you, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power, for you created all things, and by your will they existed and were created."

e. Psalm 89:11 "The heavens are yours; the earth also is yours; the world and all that is in it, you have founded them."

f. Deuteronomy 8:18 "You shall remember the Lord your God, for it is he who gives you power to get wealth, that he may confirm his covenant that he swore to your fathers, as it is this day."

Four Foundational Biblical Truths

Biblical Truth #2: We own nothing and need everything

A. What This Means

We too easily forget that we are born into this world with empty hands and that we will leave this world with empty hands. We brought nothing with us into the world and we will take nothing with us out of the world (I Timothy 6:7). The inescapable conclusion, then, is that we actually possess nothing and that God owns everything. While we are on this planet, our responsibility is to be managers of His possessions.

We are helpless to contribute to the work that God is doing without Him providing us with the very resources to do so - life, health, money, time, abilities, opportunities, etc. Everything we are and everything we have is a gift from God.

We can only return back to the Lord what has flowed from Him in the first place.

B. Supporting Scripture

1. **John 3:27** “John answered, “A person cannot receive even one thing unless it is given him from heaven.”
2. **Ecclesiastes 5:15** “As he came from his mother’s womb he shall go again, naked as he came, and shall take nothing for his toil that he may carry away in his hand.”
3. **I Timothy 6:7** “For we brought nothing into the world, and we cannot take anything out of the world.”
4. **I Corinthians 4:7** “For who sees anything different in you? What do you have that you did not receive? If then you received it, why do you boast as if you did not receive it?”

Four Foundational Biblical Truths

Biblical Truth #3: God is the sole provider of all resources

A. What This Means

God provides all our resources (tangible and spiritual). He uses the resources He has entrusted to us to sustain us and to advance His Kingdom.

In order to fully access God's resources, our first priority and responsibility is to **humbly** and earnestly seek godly wisdom and wise counsel to be as certain as possible that our vision is aligned with God's vision.

What God orders, He pays for. God would not give His people a vision and then fail to provide them the funding to realize it.

B. Supporting Scripture

1. **II Peter 1:3** “His divine power has granted to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of him who called us to his own glory and excellence,”
2. **I Timothy 6:17** “As for the rich in this present age, charge them not to be haughty, not to set their hopes on the uncertainty of riches, but on God, who richly provides us with everything to enjoy.”
3. **Philippians 4:19** “And my God will supply every need of yours according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus.”
4. **John 15:7** “If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you.”

Four Foundational Biblical Truths

Biblical Truth #4: God uses stewards to manage His resources

A. What This Means

God not only uses stewards to manage His resources, but He deploys them to sustain and advance His Kingdom. Since there is no shortage of Kingdom resources, God's people already have possession of all that is necessary to accomplish His vision.

We are responsible for what He entrusts to us **as stewards, not as owners**. We dare not think of gripping tightly the things He entrusts to us. We must seek to hold everything loosely. We simply and responsibly manage the treasures He entrusts to us, never forgetting that any way He directs us to share, to save, or to spend is His sovereign right.

Good stewardship is not just releasing a few dollars here and there to a church. We start by surveying all that God has given us and remember how everything that we have, EVERYTHING, kept or released, should be used in light of eternity. God is not asking us just to share our resources, He is asking us to recognize that all our resources belong to Him. His desire is that we use what we need and then give the rest away.

Learning how to recognize and receive His direction is critically important to how well we steward what He has entrusted to us. How we do that is by studying the Bible, and by being prayerful, spirit guided, and having a posture of surrender.

B. Supporting Scripture

1. **I Corinthians 4:2** “Moreover, it is required of stewards that they be found faithful.”
2. **Exodus 36:5** “The people bring much more than enough for doing the work that the Lord has commanded us to do.”
3. **I Chronicles 29:9** “Then the people rejoiced because they had given willingly, for with a whole heart they had offered freely to the Lord. David the king also rejoiced greatly.”
4. **II Corinthians 8:1-5** “We want you to know, brothers, about the grace of God that has been given among the churches of Macedonia, for in a severe test of affliction, their abundance of joy and their extreme poverty have overflowed in a wealth of generosity on their part. For they gave according to their means, as I can testify, and beyond their means, of their own accord, begging us earnestly for the favor of taking part in the relief of the saints - and this, not as we expected, but they gave themselves first to the Lord and then by the will of God to us.”
6. **II Corinthians 9:8** “And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that having all sufficiency in all things at all times, you may abound in every good work.”
7. **II Corinthians 9:11** “You will be enriched in every way to be generous in every way, which through us will produce thanksgiving to God.”

Four Foundational Biblical Truths

Practical Applications

If you believe the four foundational biblical truths of stewardship and generosity then we would ask you to prayerfully consider taking these next steps in applying these biblical truths in your life.

Application #1

Since God owns EVERYTHING and I own nothing, I will shift my view from having full authority over *my* stuff to acknowledging God's full authority over *His stuff*.

Application #2

As a steward of all that God has given me, I will make it my primary objective to be more fully connected to the mind and heart of God, the Owner of all I possess, so that I can align my heart to God's vision and obediently manage and deploy the resources He has entrusted to me.

Application #3

I will commit to growing in gratitude for all that God has done for me and look for ways to implement practices of gratitude such as keeping a gratitude journal, obeying His commandments, serving others, expressing gratitude to others, giving thanksgiving in prayer etc. I will do this with the expectation of continuously growing a heart of greater faithfulness and generosity.

Application #4

I will move from being a person who gives what is left over to being a person who gives to God first and then lives on what is leftover.

Application #5

I will create a Giving Plan because giving without a plan leaves me vulnerable and at the mercy of my own emotions. My plan will include:

- a) Priority Giving – giving will be the first priority in my monthly budget. If I prioritize my giving everything else will take its proper place in line behind the priority of God's work.
- b) Percentage Giving – I will choose a percentage of my gross household income and just start giving.
- c) Progressive Giving – I will progressively increase the percentage I give to God over the years.

Application #6

I will strive to be an extravagant giver by reaching for a level of giving that increases my dependence on God. I will ask God to help me live out these three standards for biblical giving:

1. Tithe – A tithe is a portion (10%) of your gross income given as an offering. Many people tithe to their local church while others give to the local church and other Kingdom causes.
2. Sacrificial – You've given sacrificially when your giving impacts your lifestyle. It is giving that is unusual, uncommon, excellent, outstanding, and extra ordinary. God practiced it Himself as an example to believers when he gave His only begotten Son, Jesus, so He could bring the whole world to Himself. This sacrifice cost Him something. He did it out of love for the world.
3. Lavish Generosity – joyful, abundant, unexpected, humble, bold, benevolent and heartfelt giving.

Four Foundational Biblical Truths

Practical Applications

Self-Reflection Moment

- Which one of these six applications will come easiest for me?
- Which one will be the most difficult? Why?
- Pause and ask God to help you in all of the applications, especially the one that will be most difficult.

Conclusion

As you can see, this theology of stewardship and generosity sets an incredibly high “lifestyle” standard; a standard that can only be experienced through total commitment, humble surrender, and absolute obedience to the Lord.

It is our desire to live our lives and engage with others in such a way that God will be glorified. Therefore, we will teach biblical principles of managing the resources God entrusts to us and trust the Holy Spirit to transform the hearts of our people. As disciples of Jesus Christ, we are called to worship God, giving Him the central place in our lives. We worship God when we recognize Him as our Creator and Provider and submit to His authority in every area of our life, especially in the area of finances (Matthew 6:24). In a very practical way, how we manage the material resources entrusted to us reveals who, or what, we worship.

As we grow in Christ, we recognize that what we treasure is a reflection of our heart. Our hearts are changed when we grow in our desire to:

- be givers, not takers
- overcome a consumer mentality and adopt an eternal perspective
- learn to be good stewards of our money and possessions
- hold loosely onto material things and give away possessions to help others
- cheerfully and expectantly financially support the ministry of the church
- take risks that require faith to the glory of Christ alone.

“For where your treasure is there your heart will be also.” **Matthew 6:21**

