BE ONE
Essential Disciplines

BETHANY CHURCH
Stewardship & Giving
The topic of Stewardship, an Essential Discipline in our discipleship process, is the preaching and teaching focus during these four (4) Sundays in June. The Stewardship studies prepared by Pastor Dirk will ground your understanding on this topic. The Sunday morning sermons will focus on four stories in the Gospel of Luke which will reinforce key stewardship principles.

Our hope is that, through your studies and these selected sermons, you will gain a deeper insight into your asset management, increasing your understanding and participation in the work of God’s kingdom.


Principle 1:  


Principle 2:  


Principle 3:  


Principle 4:  

**God’s Stewardship Ladder**

1. GOOD SERVANT
2. FEELING GOOD
3. GOOD LIFE
4. GOODS

**Next Steps:**

2. Read Stewardship & Giving Study Guide.
3. Make a commitment to give at bethanychurch.com/give
4. Discuss in a Group or one-to-one
5. Come to church next Sunday
Welcome to another session in our Essential Disciplines series where we take up an interesting challenge. We live in a culture that often seems divided between the “haves” and the “have nots.” Some in our society are blessed beyond measure, while others struggle to get by. As followers of Jesus, we instinctively feel some angst about these extremes. Somehow, we sense that God is not pleased with this level of disparity. But what are we to do about all of this? What is our role as disciples in this world divided by wealth and poverty?

It turns out that the Bible addresses this concern in a clear, compelling way. In fact, God’s Story features a consistent challenge to His people, that they be faithful stewards in the creation that they enjoy. Learning this stewardship is therefore an Essential Discipline for those who want to follow Jesus. In this session, then, we discuss some foundational principles of stewardship, and, in the next session, we address some practical recommendations about giving.

1. Creation

God’s call to be good stewards begins at creation. Remember these words from the opening chapter of Genesis:

“Then God said, ‘Let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness, so that they may rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky, over the livestock and all the wild animals, and over all the creatures that move along the ground.’ So God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them.” Genesis 1:26-27

From the very beginning, God gave us this privilege of partnering with Him in ruling over His creation. Later, we read that:

“The LORD God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it.” Genesis 2:15

Just as God names the “day”, “night”, “sky”, “land” and “seas”, He assigns a similar role to the first human being:

“How the LORD God had formed out of the ground all the wild animals and all the birds in the sky. He brought them to the man to see what he would name them; and whatever the man called each living creature, that was its name.” Genesis 2:19

All this language about “ruling” and “naming” tells us that we humans bear some responsibility to care for this creation entrusted to us.

As sinful human beings, however, we have fallen short in this responsibility. Our collective greed and self-centeredness has destroyed the peace and harmony of the garden. To correct this failure, therefore, God calls a people and gives them a mission to restore order to His creation, a mission that centers on worship and love.

1 Unless otherwise indicated, all English translations of the Bible in this document are taken from The New International Version. (2011); Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.
2. Worship

1. Bringing God's Gifts

As stewards of God's creation, we must remember that all this belongs to someone else. We are not the owners. We manage for the true owner. God frequently reminds His people that creation belongs first to Him before it belongs to us. The Psalmist says:

“The earth is the LORD’s, and everything in it, the world, and all who live in it; for he founded it on the seas and established it on the waters.” Psalm 24:1

Early in His story, God requires His people to remember this truth in worship.

“A tithe of everything from the land, whether grain from the soil or fruit from the trees, belongs to the LORD; it is holy to the LORD.” Leviticus 27:30

By setting aside this holy tithe, or tenth, the people remind themselves that the whole harvest truly belongs to God, and, only because of His blessing, can they enjoy the rest of it. The Law of Moses later expands on this point, by contrasting the worship of God's people with that of the surrounding nations:

“You must not worship the LORD your God in their way. But you are to seek the place the LORD your God will choose from among all your tribes to put his Name there for his dwelling. To that place you must go; there bring your burnt offerings and sacrifices, your tithes and special gifts, what you have vowed to give and your freewill offerings, and the firstborn of your herds and flocks. There, in the presence of the LORD your God, you and your families shall eat and shall rejoice in everything you have put your hand to, because the LORD your God has blessed you.” Deuteronomy 12:4-7

The people bring their tithes and offerings to worship in a place that represents God’s presence. There, in God’s presence, they also celebrate and rejoice with their families, as a reminder that everything they possess comes only because of God’s blessing.

2. Supporting God's Work

- In the Old Testament

But why does God ask His people to bring these tithes and offerings? Certainly, He Himself does not require food and drink. It turns out that a large portion of these gifts support God's work. Recall this command from the Law of Moses:

“The LORD said to Aaron, ‘You will have no inheritance in their land, nor will you have any share among them; I am your share and your inheritance among the Israelites. I give to the Levites all the tithes in Israel as their inheritance in return for the work they do while serving at the tent of meeting.’” Numbers 18:20-21

From among all the children of Israel, God selected the one tribe of Levites to serve Him at His place of worship. They took care of
everything, from care and cleaning of the facilities, to preparation of the sacrifices, to music and public worship. And God called one family line within this tribe, the descendants of Aaron, to be His priests, ministering before the altar as intermediaries between a Holy God and His worshipping people.

Since this group was entirely devoted to God and His spiritual work, the people were responsible for providing for their daily, physical needs. By accepting this responsibility, the people actively demonstrate their support for God’s work. God creates an environment where the temple servants and the people depend upon one another. The people require the temple servants for their spiritual well-being, to keep them focused on the God whom they must worship. At the same time, however, the temple servants require the people for their physical well-being, to keep them humbled before God in this role of constant service.

And when the people fail to support His work in this way, God takes it personally. Recall this passage from the prophet, Malachi:

"Will a mere mortal rob God? Yet you rob me. But you ask, ‘How are we robbing you?’ In tithes and offerings. You are under a curse—your whole nation—because you are robbing me. Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse, that there may be food in my house. ‘Test me in this,’ says the LORD Almighty, ‘and see if I will not throw open the floodgates of heaven and pour out so much blessing that there will not be room enough to store it.’” Malachi 3:8-10

This statement points us back to the garden, promising a restoration of God’s original order. If we truly want the blessings of God to pour out, as they did in Eden, we must demonstrate our worship concretely by ensuring that there is “food in my house,” so that the work of God can continue.

**In the New Testament**

This mandate to support God’s work also continues in the New Testament church. The Apostle Paul, for example, explicitly compares support for the Old Testament Levites with that of New Testament ministers. He writes:

“Don’t you know that those who serve in the temple get their food from the temple, and that those who serve at the altar share in what is offered on the altar? In the same way, the Lord has commanded that those who preach the gospel should receive their living from the gospel.” 1 Corinthians 9:13-14

Later, he writes to Timothy, saying:

The elders who direct the affairs of the church well are worthy of double honor, especially those whose work is preaching and teaching. For Scripture says, ‘Do not muzzle an ox while it is treading out the grain,’ and ‘The worker deserves his wages.’” 1 Timothy 5:17-18; compare Deuteronomy 25:4; Leviticus 19:13.

As a preacher, I am not sure I like being compared to an ox, but the point is nevertheless clear. Part of worshiping God requires us to support His work, by providing for the physical needs of those dedicated to His service.

**3. Love**

Supporting God’s work, then, is one way to reclaim our role as stewards of His creation. But God’s work extends beyond the worship service. We show that we love God by loving others everywhere, in all places. The Apostle John makes this point crystal clear:

*We love because he first loved us. Whoever claims to love God yet hates a brother or sister is a liar. For whoever does not love their brother and sister, whom they have seen, cannot love God, whom they have not seen. And he has given us this command: Anyone who loves God must also love their brother and sister.” 1 John 4:19-21*
In the Old Testament

As a demonstration of love, the Old Testament law frequently calls God's people to remember those in need. For example, look at this law about harvesting the fields:

“When you reap the harvest of your land, do not reap to the very edges of your field or gather the gleanings of your harvest. Leave them for the poor and for the foreigner residing among you. I am the LORD your God.” Leviticus 23:22

When God originally placed the first humans in the garden, there was to be enough for everyone. Now, God's people had a responsibility to reflect this original intention. While a sinful broken world will continue to create poverty, God's people are charged to diligently address these needs. Consider this command from the Law of Moses:

“If anyone is poor among your fellow Israelites in any of the towns of the land the LORD your God is giving you, do not be hardhearted or tightfisted toward them. Rather, be openhanded and freely lend them whatever they need ... Give generously to them and do so without a grudging heart; then because of this the LORD your God will bless you in all your work and in everything you put your hand to. There will always be poor people in the land. Therefore I command you to be openhanded toward your fellow Israelites who are poor and needy in your land.” Deuteronomy 15:7-11

Among God's people, sharing His possessions, entrusted to us, should be the norm, not the exception. In the next session we will address the practical implications of this requirement, but for now, let's accept the fact that God cares deeply about the poor who live among us.

In the New Testament

As we move into the New Testament, we find that Jesus frequently reinforces this message throughout His ministry. On one occasion, He discusses whom He will admit to His eternal kingdom, choosing those who cared for Him when He was hungry, thirsty, a stranger, without clothes, sick and in prison.

“Then the righteous will answer him, ‘Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink? When did we see you a stranger and invite you in, or needing clothes and clothe you? When did we see you sick or in prison and go to visit you?’ The King will reply, ‘Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me.’” Matthew 25:37-40

Just as God takes it personally when His people do not support His work, He also takes it personally when people do not care for the poor. Jesus finishes His statement with a somber warning those who ignore the plight of those in need:

“They also will answer, ‘Lord, when did we see you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or needing clothes or sick or in prison, and did not help you?’ He will reply, ‘Truly I tell you, whatever you did not do for one of the least of these, you did not do for me.’ Then they will go away to eternal punishment, but the righteous to eternal life.” Matthew 25:44-46

Caring for the poor is not optional within God's Kingdom. It is a mandatory part of our role as stewards of His creation. He intends for His garden to feed all His children.

Conclusion

These then are foundational principles of stewardship revealed in scripture. We are called to faithfully manage God's creation through worshipping Him and supporting His work, and by loving those in need around us. In our next session, we will build this on foundation and discuss practical implications for giving. In the meantime, we pray that God will lead you even deeper in your relationship with Jesus. For more information, please visit us at bethanychurch.com.
Welcome to another session in our Essential Disciplines series. In this session, we continue our discussion of Stewardship and Giving. In the last session, we established some foundational principles of Biblical stewardship, and here, in this session we will build on that foundation by discussing some practical recommendations for giving.

As we learned in our last session, we are called to be faithful stewards of God's creation. He owns everything, and He entrusts a portion of His possessions to us to manage on His behalf. We exercise this stewardship as we give faithfully to God's work and to those in need, expressing both our worship and our love. This tells us why we should give. Now, in this session, we ask some more practical questions:

1. What should we give?
2. How much should we give?
3. How often should we give?
4. To whom should we give?
5. How should we feel about giving?

1. What Should We Give?

Let's address the first of these questions: What should we give? As we search the scriptures, we find that God calls His people to give their time, talent and treasure to His work. We will examine each of these gifts more deeply in our Essential Engagement series, but, for now, let's describe each of them briefly.

1. **Time**

   Regarding time, the Apostle Paul says:

   "Walk in wisdom toward outsiders, making the best use of the time. Let your speech always be gracious, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how you ought to answer each person." Colossians 4:5-6, ESV

   A wise use of our time requires us to engage actively in God's work.

2. **Talent**

   Regarding talent, the Apostle Peter says:

   "Each of you should use whatever gift you have received to serve others, as faithful stewards of God's grace in its various forms. If anyone speaks, they should do so as one who speaks the very words of God. If anyone serves, they should do so with the strength God provides, so that in all things God may be praised through Jesus Christ. To him be the glory and the power for ever and ever. Amen" 1 Peter 4:10-11

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And the Apostle Paul says:

“There are different kinds of gifts, but the same Spirit distributes them. There are different kinds of service, but the same Lord. There are different kinds of working, but in all of them and in everyone it is the same God at work. Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good.” 1 Corinthians 12:4-7

God has designed His community so that it takes all of us, using our Spirit-given gifts and talents together, to accomplish His will.

3 Treasure

Regarding treasure, Jesus says:

“Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moths and vermin destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moths and vermin do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.” Matthew 6:19-21

How we handle our treasure reveals what we truly value. Are we always using it to indulge ourselves in this life? Or are we using it to invest in God’s heavenly, eternal work?

2. How Much Should We Give?

When it comes especially to giving our treasure, we must also ask another question. How much should we give? In the previous session, we saw that the Law of Moses required the people bring a tithe, or 10%, of their income to the place of God’s presence on at least an annual basis. Some scholars believe that a second or a third tithe was also required on certain years. In addition, the people often brought gifts and offerings over and above these tithes. Some scholars therefore argue that 30% or more of a person’s income in the Old Testament actually went to God’s work. For these and other reasons, debate continues in Christian circles as to whether we ought to continue the Old Testament practice of tithing, however it is defined.

1 Much Given, Much Required

The New Testament, however, seems to suggest a more progressive and less-specific guide for giving. While the 10% rule might be a good place to start, we cannot end there. Jesus sets forth a broader principle. He says:

“From everyone who has been given much, much will be demanded; and from the one who has been entrusted with much, much more will be asked.” Luke 12:48

In the context, Jesus says that He will hold stewards accountable for the trust that they have been given. Those entrusted with much will be expected to use and invest that trust wisely.

2 Maximum, not Minimum

So, Jesus does not give us a minimum. In fact, He indicates that we ought to do the most, the maximum, that we can do with what He has given us. This truth becomes even more apparent in this story about a poor woman:

“As Jesus looked up, he saw the rich putting their gifts into the temple treasury. He also saw a poor widow put in two very small copper coins. ‘Truly I tell you,’ he said, ‘this poor widow has put in more than all the others. All these people gave their gifts out of their wealth; but she out of her poverty put in all she had to live on.’” Luke 21:1-4

Jesus values the level of our sacrifice more than the amount of our gift. He is not impressed with the size of our wallet. He is looking for the intent of our heart, and the faithfulness of our actions, regardless of how much we may or may not have.
Getting Started

We should add one more point about the amount of our gift. We understand that many people have a difficult time making ends meet, and, like it or not, many have incurred some level of debt in the process. For those in this position, we strongly urge you to take a Biblical stewardship course, like Financial Peace University®, to learn how to get this debt under control.

In the meantime, however, we suggest that you start to give something on a regular basis, even if it’s just a small, token amount at first. Give a dollar, if you can, but bring it every week. Then, as God enables you to break free from your debt, increase that amount until you feel that you are wisely managing the blessing that God is providing.

3. How often should we give?

Now let’s address another question: How often should we give?

On a Regular Basis

The Law of Moses required God’s people to give on a regular basis. These offerings and gifts supported the Levites who, in turn, maintained the people’s common place of worship. The Levites depended upon these regular gifts for their daily needs.

In the same way, the work of the gospel also requires regular giving from God’s people. As we saw in the last session, the Apostle Paul compares the work of the Levites to the work of ministers in the New Testament church. If we believe that supporting God’s work is an important expression of our worship, then we must commit ourselves by giving regularly to this work.

Whether we give weekly, monthly, quarterly or annually, the important thing is that we give regularly. Our regular support of God’s work demonstrates in a concrete way our willing engagement in His work of the Gospel.

In Times of Blessing

In addition to our regular giving, we are also called to give in times of blessing. The Law of Moses made a provision for “freewill” or “thanksgiving” offerings. Note, for example, this command:

“...to that place you must go; there bring your burnt offerings and sacrifices, your tithes and special gifts, what you have vowed to give and your freewill offerings, and the firstborn of your herds and flocks. There, in the presence of the LORD your God, you and your families shall eat and shall rejoice in everything you have put your hand to, because the LORD your God has blessed you.” Deuteronomy 12:5-7

Clearly, in this passage we see an emphasis on giving above and beyond the regular “tithes”. The people are instructed to share their blessing in God’s presence, in celebration of His goodness.

In Times of Need

Finally, we must be prepared to give in times of need. The early church in Acts provides perhaps the best example of this principle:

“All the believers were together and had everything in common. They sold property and possessions to give to anyone who had need.” Acts 2:44-45
Obviously, we are talking here about legitimate need. Paul gives this instruction to Timothy:

“Anyone who does not provide for their relatives, and especially for their own household, has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever.” 1 Timothy 5:8

Paul will not condone laziness. At the same time, however, our broken world too often deprives people of basic necessities, such as food, clothing and shelter. As disciples of Jesus, we cannot simply ignore this great need. As we observed in the last session, our Lord will hold us accountable for how we respond to the “least of these brothers and sisters” who are desperately in need.

4. To Whom Should We Give?

As we consider giving our time, talent and treasure in support God’s work, then we need to ask to whom we should give. Where we should invest these gifts? Here we offer two practical recommendations:

1. **Start with the Local Church**
   
   First, start with your local church. God establishes local church communities as His base of operations. In these local communities, His people pool their time, talent and treasure to make a spiritual dent on the region around them. In these communities, they do the messy work of becoming a loving, restoring, intergenerational family. Here they learn how to laugh and cry together through each stage of life. They step on each other’s toes, learn to forgive one another, and then work together for the good of the kingdom. They model God’s grace, mercy and healing power to the community around them. As they do the work of becoming and making disciples of Jesus, they become countless sources of light that pierce the spiritual darkness around them. Our commitment to doing God’s work together therefore begins with supporting the local church.

2. **Then Consider Other Faithful Stewards**

   After supporting our local church, then, we should consider giving to other individuals or organizations that will faithfully use our gifts to advance God’s Kingdom. Just as individuals must become faithful stewards of God’s provision, we must insist that organizations likewise manage their resources well.

5. How Should We Feel About Giving?

Finally, we must ask one more important question: How should we feel about giving? Paul is perfectly clear on this point. He says:

“Remember this: Whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows generously will also reap generously. Each of you should give what you have decided in your heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. And God is able to bless you abundantly, so that in all things at all times, having all that you need, you will abound in every good work.” 2 Corinthians 9:6-8

If we truly care about the advancement of God’s work, then we should be filled with joy when we are able to give to it. And, our giving comes with this promise, that God will honor our gifts by pouring out His blessing on our work, so that it produces abundant, everlasting fruit in His kingdom.

**Conclusion**

These then are just a few practical recommendations for giving. We pray that God will enrich spiritually as you learn this Essential Discipline of Stewardship & Giving. And we pray that God will lead you even deeper in your relationship with Jesus. For more information, please visit us at bethanychurch.com.
Opening

Why can stewardship and giving discussions make us uncomfortable?

Going Deeper

1. Creation

✓ Read Genesis 1:26-27; 2:15-19. Describe the role that God intended human beings to have within His creation.

✓ How well do you think that we, as human beings, have fulfilled this role over time?

✓ What steps can we, as God’s children, take to re-establish our stewardship role in creation?

2. Worship

✓ Why did God establish the practice of tithing for the people of Israel?

✓ Why is giving to God’s work an expression of our worship?

✓ Do you believe that God intends the practice of tithing to continue among His people today? Why or why not?

3. Love

✓ Why is love an important motivating factor in our role as stewards of God’s provisions?

✓ How does God want us to view those who are under-resourced in our world?

✓ Read Matthew 25:37-46. How should we respond to Jesus’s warning in this passage?

Next Steps

• Assess how well you think that you are doing at being God’s steward.

• Decide on one step you can take to become a more faithful steward.

• Share this decision with someone you trust, and give them permission to hold you accountable for this decision.
**Stewardship & Giving Discussion Guide**

**PART 2**

**Opening**
What was your experience growing up when it comes to giving to church or to those in need?

**Going Deeper**

1. **What should we give?**
   ✓ Why should we view our time, talent and treasure as God’s resources, given to us to manage well?
   ✓ Read Matthew 6:19-21. What does Jesus mean when He says that “…where your treasure is, there your heart will be also…”?

2. **How much should we give?**
   ✓ How should we regard the 10%, tithing rule that emerges from the Old Testament?
   ✓ Can we give “too much”, in some cases?
   ✓ Read Luke 21:1-4. What lesson should we learn from this woman and her practice of giving?
   ✓ How much should we give if we are struggling with personal debt?

3. **How often should we give?**
   ✓ Why is it important to give on a regular basis?
   ✓ Why is it important to give in times of blessing?
   ✓ Why is it important to give in times of need?

4. **To whom should we give?**
   ✓ Why should we start by giving to our local church?
   ✓ What should we know about an organization before we decide to invest God’s resources with them?

5. **How should we feel about giving?**
   ✓ 2 Corinthians 9:6-8. Why does God love a “cheerful giver”?

**Next Steps**

- How have you done with the decision you made after our last session, to improve your level of stewardship?
- Continue down this path of improvement and share your journey with someone you trust.