



Stewardship for a Thriving Planet

by **Dr. Carol Frances Johnston**

At each stage of creating in Genesis 1, God “saw that it was good.” When human beings were created last, “God saw everything that he had made, and indeed, it was very good.” There are two crucial aspects of this to notice here: First, not only that everything created is “good”, but also that it is the whole together that is “very good”. Second, it is crucial to consider the importance of God *seeing* that it is good. One of my students once asked about this, and together our class unpacked it. We soon realized that God “seeing” and so noticing (and knowing) God’s creatures, and how the whole is greater than the sum of the parts (“very good”) is a crucial element of life. Everyone needs to be seen and understood by others and learning that God “sees” and understands them as individuals and how they are connected to everything else can be transformative.

A few years ago, I interviewed about 75 faithful, creative, and generous church and community leaders across the U.S. Gradually I noticed that they shared an experience that comes before gratitude, generosity, and

learning how to practice stewardship, and makes them possible. What I saw in those congregations was attention and care to helping people – often very wounded, anxious, and fearful people – to **receive** God’s love into their lives in a variety of tangible ways through the preaching, worship, teaching, and above all the sharing of that love in the practice of a form of hospitality that included seeing and accepting each person as a beloved child of God and valued member of God’s family. This hospitality, grounded in the experience of God’s love through Christ, was far more than friendliness – it was intentional about affirming each person as one with needed gifts to bring as well as needs to be met, so that the life of the church became one of mutuality that extended far beyond into effective mission. I heard many stories about how the church leaders, especially the pastors, saw potential in each person that they themselves had not realized they had, and invited them to bring it to share with others: the very kind of stewardship we have seen in the Genesis accounts.

This way of inviting people in and grounding them has proven to be transformative and frees up potential that exists in every person and every community in remarkable ways.

Questions to Consider:

1. How does your spiritual practice of generosity connect you to other people?
2. When has someone deeply “seen” you?
3. How does generosity reflect what you “see” in our community and beyond?

Because of **YOU** our church changes lives.