

StewardCAST

A monthly e-newsletter of LCMS Stewardship Ministry

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Breakthrough Stewardship!

“Breakthrough stewardship” that is Biblical stewardship will not come from a program.

When one hears the term “breakthrough stewardship,” it might conjure up ideas of a program of sermons, Bible classes and visitations that have taken a congregation from the brink of financial ruin to the cutting edge of ministry. Perhaps in this “breakthrough” someone has finally been able to put the right words together to get even the stingiest steward to become an ardent tither. Maybe such a “breakthrough” will lead to droves of people stepping up to teach Sunday School, making evangelism visits and even fully staffing the stewardship committee. “Stewardship breakthroughs” are sought as the silver bullet solution to the nagging generational quest for more faithful stewardship in the local congregation.

“Breakthrough stewardship” that is Biblical stewardship will not come from a program.

These breakthroughs will only come when God’s Word is brought to bear on the lives of individual stewards and the congregations they are gathered into by the Holy Spirit. Stewardship is what the Holy Spirit does in and through the individual steward in leading him to repentance which manifests itself in confession and absolution. Once freed by the Gospel, the steward is then given the privilege of stewarding the Gospel of Jesus Christ for the benefit of his neighbor as he uses the gifts which the Lord has entrusted to him.

The cure of confession

Dietrich Bonhoeffer captures this “breakthrough” in the final chapter of his book *Life Together*. While not directly mentioning stewardship, Bonhoeffer, in addressing Confession and Communion, speaks about breakthroughs. What makes

this so applicable to stewardship is where his chapter starts. According to Bonhoeffer, the single greatest challenge to the community of believers/stewards is the fact that everyone present, pastor and laity alike, is a sinner. Sinners have broken the community that exists between God and His people. Sinners have broken the community that God created between believers as well. This sin has existed from the moment in time when our first parents reached out for a fruit that was forbidden. While this is indeed a matter of stealing, there is an even more devastating consequence of this sin. The sinner/steward was then, is now, and will continue on this side of eternity to be, an idolater. Every sinner/steward has struggled with this sinful desire to take God’s place. The steward who claims ownership and direction of his life or any part of that life apart from God’s will, cuts himself off from God!

A stewardship breakthrough can only come about when the Holy Spirit leads the steward to confess that he is indeed broken! Thus, confession of sin is a clear part of stewardship. Until the steward is led by the Holy Spirit to confess to God and to fellow stewards of the Gospel that he daily sins and falls short of the glory of God, there cannot truly be a restoration of the community in which the steward is called to live for and serve the Lord.

Accountability between stewards

This leads to stewardship breakthrough number two. The Body of Christ is assembled under the guidance of the Holy

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**Those fed and
 nourished by Christ
 in the Supper taste
 the breakthrough
 that the Lord wants
 them to have!**

Spirit. He assembles believers around Word and Sacrament, creating a place where the Gospel is freely given.

The steward is called to reflect this image of gracious generosity not only in the way he relates to God, but also in the way he relates to the people with whom he is gathered around the Gospel. The necessary stewardship breakthrough to which Bonhoeffer points in confession is more than just a “me and Jesus” kind of thing. Failed stewardship has an impact on the brother or sister in Christ. A necessary stewardship breakthrough happens when the Lord leads the steward to admit that there is a critical accountability between stewards. The faithfulness of a steward is a great blessing to the body. Failed stewardship shatters the Body of Christ in the local congregation and in the greater world. This will not be overcome programmatically. The only cure for this shattering of the body is confession.

Bonhoeffer admits that this is serious and hard. *“Sin demands man by himself. It withdraws him from community”* (*Life Together*, 112). But confession of this to God and accountability to one’s brothers and sisters in Christ is also liberating. *“The sinner surrenders; he gives up all his evil. He gives his heart to God, and finds the forgiveness of all his sins in the fellowship of Jesus Christ and his brother”* (*Life Together*, 112). This confession connects us to the cross and the certainty that the cross gives us.

Stewardship in community

We become stewards for the neighbor and for God’s glory. The stewardship breakthrough

we need is created by God as His Spirit leads us to see our place in community. The steward needs Jesus. Of that there is no doubt. But the steward is also needed by his neighbor. This is the community God creates for us with Christ as the head. Redeemed sinners

are restored to be stewards of the good news entrusted to us by God so that the Gospel can go forward. Faithful stewards give of themselves and what they have received from the Lord so that the proclamation of the Gospel can go forward.

This stewardship has a goal. Bonhoeffer ends his chapter with it. The stewardship breakthrough leads forgiven and restored sinners/stewards to the one place where the community will be solidly rooted: the Lord’s Supper. As the Lord leads the steward to confess to God and his fellow believers, and to be absolved, there is a hunger and thirst for the community as it is assembled around Jesus’ radically generous gift of His body and His blood in the Supper. Those fed and nourished by Christ in the Supper taste the breakthrough that the Lord wants them to have! Notice that it isn’t about how much the steward gives or serves. It is all about what the Lord gives and how the steward is called to share it for the sake of those who don’t know Jesus!

The stewardship breakthrough that is needed is one that points the sinner/steward outside himself. This breakthrough in Jesus builds and sustains the community through the stewardship of the Gospel as the sinner/steward is forgiven and craves to give that forgiveness to his neighbor!