

StewardCAST

A monthly e-newsletter of LCMS Stewardship Ministry

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A Steward Leader Lesson From the Practice Tee



Our Lord has a wonderful way of using so many different things and people to lead us to engage the task for which we were made and redeemed: stewardship!

Steward leaders know that just as our Lord uses the creation to proclaim His handiwork (PSALM 24), He also gives us stewardship reminders in many places. Stewardship sermons and Bible classes are where the Spirit teaches, and reminders of what the Spirit has taught us come from many other fascinating places. Our Lord has a wonderful way of using so many different things and people to lead us to engage the task for which we were made and redeemed: stewardship!

The perfect swing

I was once given a stewardship lesson that I didn't even notice at the time. It came in the most unexpected location: the practice tee of the local golf course! I wasn't expecting it at

the time, but now these many years later it is clear that I received a helpful reminder that day that I, and other steward leaders, need.

Here is how I learned this lesson: I took my youngest son to his first day of junior golf. The instructor took the kids aside and began to teach them basic etiquette on the course, a basic introduction to the golf clubs and several other things. At the end, he handed my son a book. This book's first lines read something like this: "Golf is NOT a game of hitting the ball. Golf is a game of swinging the club. The ball just gets in the way." I had been playing the game of golf since I was six years old and had never heard this game explained to me like this! It was revolutionary to me. Getting the proper

perspective on the game helped me learn to be a better golfer. To this day, this lesson is a part of my pre-shot routine and has helped me lower my handicap and have more fun playing a game that I enjoy with my now teenaged son ... who beats me regularly!

What does this have to do with stewardship? EVERYTHING! Many stewards view the God-given vocation of stewardship in the same way that I used to view the golf swing. I used to think I had to swing hard to hit the ball far. Many hold the faulty opinion that stewardship is all about hitting a target. It is about decisions, commitments, giving charts, percentages and paying the bills. All of these things may produce results in the local congregations to varying degrees. But they

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will inhibit the free and joyous activity of the children of God in managing life’s resources for God’s purposes. Swinging at stewardship like this will produce more divots, hazards and bogies than anything else.

But when we see stewardship as the free and joyous activity of the child of God, we start to swing freely. We see in Genesis that we were made for this task: the task of priestly care and concern for all that God has made. We use those good gifts for the benefit of his neighbor and for God’s glory. When we fail in this task, like the first stewards Adam and Eve did in the Garden, the One who owns everything by virtue of creation restores us by His work of redemption in Jesus Christ. In this restoration, a major miracle happens. Our Lord puts us back in the position of steward over what we had attempted to idolatrously steal from Him in our sin. The ongoing stewardship with which we have been entrusted is His act of grace toward us and our worship toward Him!

Changing the culture of stewardship

The lesson I learned on the practice tee so many years ago was a cultural lesson. The culture of my golf swing was fundamentally altered. This then freed me to make other minor adjustments to improve further. Likewise, when the steward leader is exposed to revolutionary thinking in stewardship, freedom is restored. This means before we can make effective technical changes in stewards, we need to have a transformative culture change in stewardship. We need to have a firm and clear grasp of the WHY of stewardship before any WHAT or HOW of stewardship can become effective.

And yet, so often, what is encouraged in stewardship is all technical change. We hear about mechanics and programs that are intended to produce immediate results. Pastors and steward leaders are bombarded by sales pitches that offer quick fixes meant to increase offering plate “revenue.” Consultants charge large fees to share “tried and true” techniques that promise to make stewardship perfect.

But technical change rarely lasts. Steward leaders are left to toil and tinker year after year, all the while praying that “next year” they will find the silver bullet that will slay the stewardship beast!



Instead, what we really need is a transformational change in stewardship culture. Wouldn’t it be great if there were a book that would do for the steward leaders what that little instructional book did for my golf game? Well, there is! And it is so much more than just an instruction manual. It is a life-giving, salvation-bestowing Word.

The best stewardship handbook

In the Scriptures we see God’s radically generous grace poured out in Jesus Christ. He takes failed stewards deserving of death, redeems them from that death, and, with the Holy Spirit at work through the means of grace, entrusts them again with the stewardship of His creation for the sake of the neighbor and the glory of God. This shows that the common failure of stewardship is sinners claiming ownership of what belongs to God. It is through God’s grace that we are restored to this task once again. Reading Scripture will show you that stewardship isn’t about us at all, but rather a task of using God’s gifts to steward the Gospel for the sake of a world that is perishing. Stewardship is ultimately not about you and me. It isn’t about programs and techniques. Stewardship is ultimately about Jesus and His Gospel!

Does that change the way you look at stewardship? It should. It should lead us out into the world as faithful stewards of the Gospel, using the gifts and resources entrusted to us by the Lord. We are free to let our stewardship swing freely and generously because it is the Spirit at work in and through us. Take this lesson from the practice tee and put it to work in your stewardship game. Your golf handicap may not go down, but your stewardship joy will certainly increase!