

StewardCAST

A monthly e-newsletter of LCMS Stewardship Ministry

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Stewardship Lessons from Time



For as long as anyone can remember, stewardship has been taught by using the “T’s” of stewardship. For many there are three. Still others count more. The most creative steward leaders have expanded this list to seven. Of late, there has been much debate over just how effective and scripturally appropriate it is to teach stewardship in this manner. It fragments stewardship into silos that are often managed independently of one another. This allows for the average steward to say something like “I have been a good steward of my time and my talents, but not so good with my treasure. Two out of three isn’t bad.” While two out of

“Time, like an
ever-rolling stream,
Soon bears us all
away; We fly forgotten
as a dream Dies at
the op’ning day”

(LSB 733:5).

three in an arm wrestling match or even a rousing game of Paper-Rock-Scissors would produce a winner, it is not a recipe for faithful stewardship. This compartmentalized approach to stewardship is not helpful. It may well even aid and abet poor stewardship. The “T’s” of stewardship is an approach that should be abandoned.

However, that does not mean that time cannot teach us a lesson about stewardship. In fact, the lesson of time may well be the best antidote for the faulty stewardship of compartmentalization. Compartmentalized stewardship can lead to hoarding. The compartmentalized steward can be seemingly

“ And which of you by being anxious can add a single hour to his span of life? ”

(MATT. 6:27).



generous in the areas of stewardship that are not close to his idols. If someone has an idolatrous view of money, she may well be more generous with her time and talents to allow her to hoard her resources of wealth. In these latter years, time has become even more idolized. As people become busier and busier, those who idolize time might be more willing to part with a larger check in an attempt to hoard their time to do with it what they want.

Time Control

Attempts to hoard time and thereby be poor stewards reveal the folly of this compartmentalized approach to stewardship. Using the image of the hymn verse, time is like an ever-rolling stream — time cannot be hoarded. No matter how much he desires it, a person cannot hoard time. To quote a modern-day poet/philosopher, “time keeps on slippin’, slippin’, slippin’/ Into the future” [The Steve Miller Band, “Fly Like an Eagle” (1976)]. Jesus echoes this recognition of the folly of trying to be a controlling steward of time when He proclaims in the Sermon on the Mount,

“And which of you by being anxious can add a single hour to his span of life?” (MATT. 6:27). Yet the one who insists on worrying about time becomes a slave to it.

You cannot hold moving water in your hands. Put it in a glass, a bowl or a reservoir, and it is no longer moving water. Its nature has changed. Time is the same way. Time continues to flow because it is still time! Many people talk about appliances or software that “save time.” These innovations can’t really save time. They may allow a person to be more efficient and faithful in their use of time, but time itself is not saved. These innovations can make us better stewards of time, a gift from God that we either use for His glory or waste. When it comes to time, one is either a good or poor steward of it. It is either black or white. There can be no gray, no middle ground.

Dr. Scott Rodin shared a thought about this stewardship lesson from time, “The time has come to insist that clocks are made for us and not vice versa.” When the steward of time attempts to cram 26 hours of work into

a 24-hour day, there is no freedom or joy for the steward. There is only the misery of what was not accomplished because the steward simply ran out of time. This regret is fueled by the fact that human beings are not the owners of time. Only God can make time. Humans can only steward this divine gift.

This misery occurs when the steward becomes more focused on *activity* rather than *identity*. Remember, human beings were created to be stewards of all the Lord’s creation. This includes time. Time is a gift from the Lord as much as family or money or land or skills and abilities are. The identity of the steward is not determined in the *how* of what he does. This identity as steward is found in the *why*. The baptized and redeemed children of God are stewards of time and any other created gift from the Lord so that they may accurately and honestly reflect the image of the One who has given these gifts. This reflection of the image of God comes in when the steward manages this blessed resource for the glory of God and the benefit of others.

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Hoarding Gifts

But if the steward is not able to hoard the gift of time, can she ever faithfully hoard any of the other gifts which the Lord has bountifully showered upon His creation? The lesson that the stewardship of time teaches in this instance is a resounding NO! Ever-rolling water that is confined might be used for good purposes in the near term. However, if ever-rolling water is hoarded it becomes stagnant, putrid and offensive to the nose as well as to the Lord.

A young vicar was asked to visit an elderly member of the congregation in which he was serving. The woman was an eclectic personality. The small apartment was stashed full of collectibles and knick-knacks of all shapes, sizes and colors. As the visit ensued, the woman proudly shared with the young vicar the treasures that she had amassed over her time on this earth. But there was one rather plain looking container that stood on one of the shelves that was clearly out of place among the other hoarded items. This was the last item that the woman shared with the young pastor-to-be.

The item was a Mason jar full of water. She announced that this was not just any water. It was water that she had clandestinely collected from the River Jordan on a long-ago trip to the Holy Land. She collected this sample directly out of the river without anyone knowing it. She hoarded this small amount of the ever-rolling stream that is the Jordan so that she could have her grandchildren baptized in it! But this treasure taken from that well-known ever-rolling stream was nothing to look at. The bottom third of the jar was filled with sediment. When the top of the jar was removed the rancid smell of stagnant water smelled like death. This well-intentioned steward had attempted to hoard something that was meant to flow freely, and it turned out to be a mess. The mothers of her grandchildren refused to let their children be baptized in that water that smelled of death! This is reminiscent of the lesson that the dairy farmer once taught about the stewardship of money. He said, “Money is like manure: spread around, it does good things, but left to sit on a pile, all it does is stink!”



“ This well-intentioned steward had attempted to hoard something that was meant to flow freely, and it turned out to be a mess. ”

This is the stewardship lesson that time teaches. When a steward attempts to hoard something that is intended to be used for God’s purposes, the results are stinky! The result is even worse when the attempt to hoard is made on something that can’t be hoarded at all! The time that is sought to be saved and stored and used for self-centered purposes still slips away and is lost. The faithful steward is one who will seek to view all of life and life’s resources as a wholistic gift that comes from the Lord and is to be stewarded in the way that time is stewarded. Everything the steward is and has is to be used for the purposes of the Gospel for the sake of those who need to know what Jesus has done for them! These gifts, used in the image of God, for God, in the way that God has intended them to be used, can do amazing things. It is time for stewards to learn this stewardship lesson from time.