

# StewardCAST

A monthly e-newsletter of LCMS Stewardship Ministry

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## Stewardship's Essential Ingredients



**I**T HAPPENS PROBABLY MORE THAN ONE WOULD THINK. The distracted baker is attempting to get that batch of chocolate chip cookies done at the very last minute. They are flying around the kitchen, frantically throwing the very familiar-looking ingredients into the bowl so that the cookies can get in the pre-heated oven. But in the necessary haste, a mistake happens. A white substance that looks like sugar goes into the bowl. But it isn't sugar. The C & H product is accidentally replaced with Morton's. Imagine the horror of eating a chocolate chip cookie that is made not with sweet sugar, but with savory salt! The substances

look alike, but they are very different. The results are not at all pleasing!

While stewardship will never be confused with or even preferred like chocolate chip cookies, there are certain essential ingredients that need to be present for a result that is faithful to God and pleasing to the steward. That ingredient list would include a faithful dose of sound teaching from the Scriptures. It is critical that ordained and lay steward leaders are constantly framing stewardship in terms of what God has created and called the steward to be. Stewardship that begins in any other manner will result

in stewardship that is either tasteless or, worse, salty and bitter instead of sweet.

### Stewardship Batter

To be reminded that God has created the steward in His image (GEN. 1:26-28) is truly a sweet identity. This is a grand antidote to the otherwise distasteful response that so many have toward stewardship. God has made the steward for this task! The steward and his or her subsequent stewardship are not some afterthought, like sprinkles and icing added to the cookie. This identity is essential to who the steward is. It is the flour that serves

as the base for the cookie! Without it, stewardship is nothing more than flailing at the wind. With it, the steward has a purpose and a place!

This identity leads to another essential ingredient for stewardship. That ingredient is humility. It is in the created identity of the steward that true humility is added to the stewardship mix. It is truly humbling for the steward to embrace the reality that nothing is owned by the steward. Whoever made everything can rightly be called God. For those who have not made everything, there is only one task: stewardship. Baskin-Robbins' 31 flavors do not apply here. It is either vanilla or chocolate. One is either God or steward. To be led by the Holy Spirit to embrace the reality of being a steward is to understand true humility. Andrew Murray characterizes it this way: "Man needs only to look back to the origin of existence to acknowledge that everything is owed to God. Man's chief care, his highest virtue, and his only happiness, is to present himself as

an empty vessel in which God can dwell and manifest His power and goodness." Humility for the steward is to understand who owns and who serves. The Creator owns. The steward serves. Like flour, sugar and eggs, this is the base batter for the stewardship cookie. With it in place, a potential delicacy awaits. Without it, only a salty mess can ensue.

### Stolen Ownership

This humility, however, is not a creation of the steward. In fact, humility is something that cannot be created by the steward. The steward, stained by sin as all human beings are, will by nature not practice humility. The sinner-steward will do everything

possible to own rather than steward. That is, in essence, what the first stewardship crisis of Genesis 3 was all about. Twisted and turned by the cunning serpent, Adam and Eve were led to make one small but fatal change. Instead of freely and humbly receiving from the Creator God, the hand reached out to snatch what did not belong to them. In this act of arrogant, ignorant pride, the creature claimed equality with the Creator.

As a result, the pride of stolen ownership has marred the role of steward. The ingrained selfishness of the old Adam makes living as a steward impossible. From childhood on, even a baptized steward learns to claim "mine." Stewardship efforts in the congregation are often scarred by the mentality of asking people to give freely from what the Lord has "given to them." Refusing to be humbled out of thinking about ownership, the steward continues to cling to what does not belong to him. The ancestor-stewards have been bearing the consequences of that action



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ever since. Death is the result. The cookie doesn't get any saltier than the tears of grief that are endured during death!

## The Gift of Humility

An essential stewardship ingredient, humility is a gift. Worked by the Holy Spirit through the conviction of rightly proclaimed Law and properly distinguished Gospel, the active righteousness of the steward manifests itself as visible humility. The steward, whose new identity flows from his baptismal connection to the cross and empty tomb of Jesus, lives out stewardship in humble repentance. Deserving nothing from the Lord except judgment and death, the redeemed steward rejoices in his “lowly status” as steward. As the poor in spirit of the Sermon on the Mount, the steward rejoices in his estate as manager of all that the gracious Lord has entrusted. No longer claiming ownership, the humble steward seeks to reflect the will of the Owner in what is done with the First Article gifts entrusted. In fact, humble stewardship is free of any consideration of self. It is all about serving the Owner by caring for His people.

It is the Gospel of Jesus Christ that truly humbles the steward. It is the Son of the Owner who sacrifices Himself for the steward. There isn't anything deserved by the steward. It is all gift! It is also the Gospel of Jesus Christ that is really the only thing the steward ultimately

stewards. Relationships with spouse, children, congregation and community are stewarded by the reality that they are redeemed by the blood of Jesus. The toil and sweat of service is stewarded for the sake of the neighbor that they would hear the Good News of Jesus Christ. Finances are stewarded in such a way that the proclamation of the Gospel is funded locally, nationally and around the world. Humbled by the Gospel, this stewardship is sweetened with the joy of grace rather than the saltiness of obligation.

As the steward leader contemplates the formation of stewards in the congregation, it is important that they don't confuse sugar with salt. It is easy to add the salt of turning stewardship into the obligation of tithes, percentages and charts. These programmatic tools can be helpful, just like a dash of salt. But faithful stewardship needs more. It needs the sweetness of who the Lord has made and redeemed the steward to be. This humbling gift of the Gospel changes obligation to joy. The reed of the steward is not broken. The smoldering wick is not snuffed out. Instead, the steward is forgiven, restored and once again set about the very task for which he has been created. Stewards reflect the glory of the Owner for the sake of creation (GEN 2:15). Heaping this sweet joy is an essential ingredient in the making of faithful stewards for the glory of God!

“ This humbling gift of the Gospel changes obligation to joy. ”

