

StewardCAST

A monthly e-newsletter of LCMS Stewardship Ministry

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Removing Barriers To Faithful Stewardship

You are a steward. Every human being has been created for this task. The Lord formed us in order to be His hands and His feet caring for the entire creation that He had spoken into existence. This task of stewardship has been passed from one generation to the next by virtue of us reproducing after our own kind. To this day, humanity has been tasked by the Creator to work and keep the creation (GEN. 2:15) in such a way that it reflects the image of God in which we have been created. As we live our lives, care for our family, share the Gospel with them and serve our Lord by loving and serving our neighbor, we are carrying out the very role for which we have been made. Being a steward is our identity. Stewardship is what we do.

While this is the theological theory behind our identity, the practical reality is very often far from what God intends. More often than not, fallen sinful stewards are ready

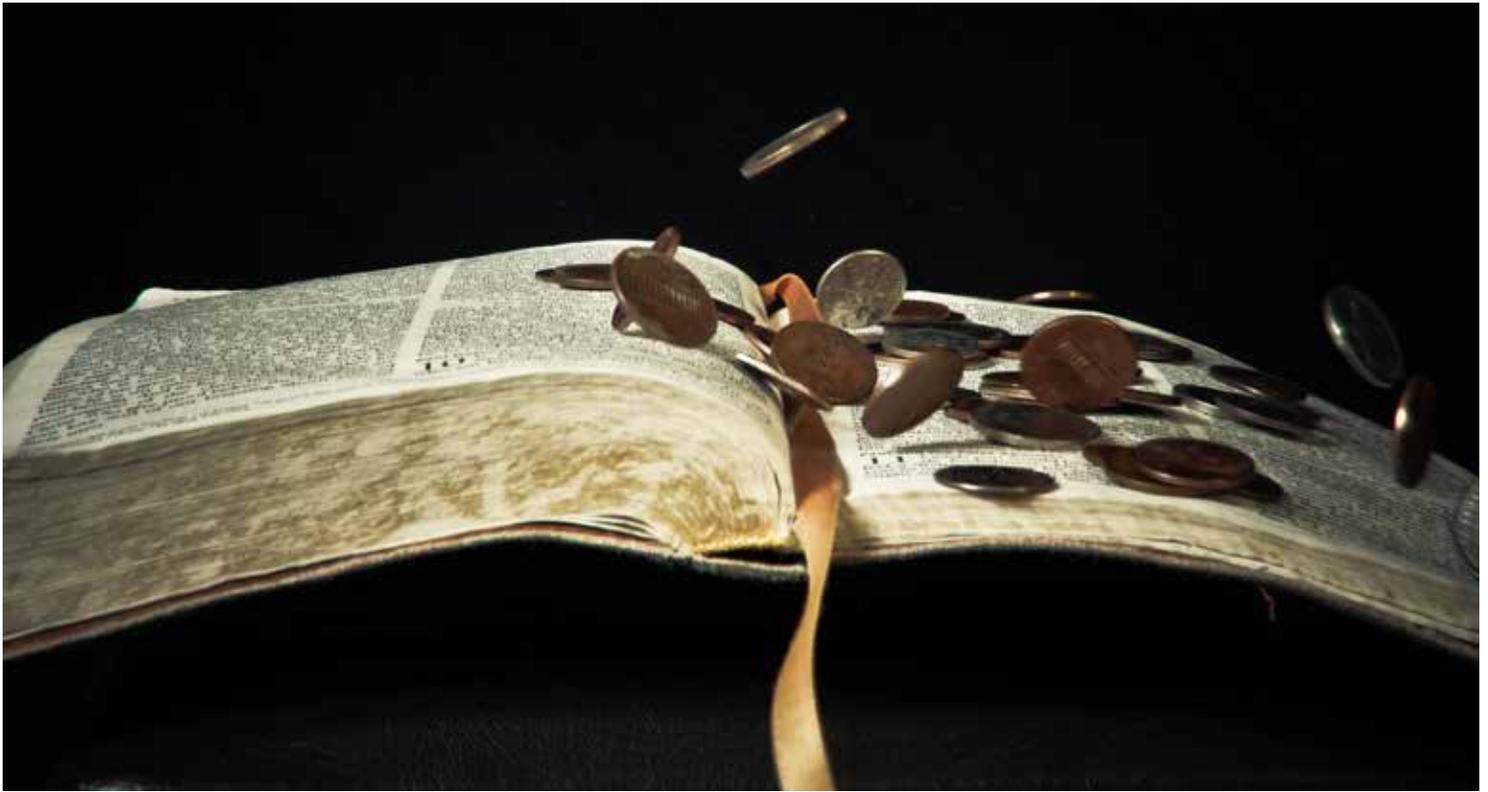
and willing to cross over the line. This line takes the sinner from steward to owner. There is only one owner of all things. That one owner, by virtue of creation, is the Lord. What God spoke into being is His. At no point in Scripture or human history has the Lord of Creation transferred title to any human beings. God is still the only rightful owner of all things, even when sinful human beings, in the Garden of Eden and after, reached out for what was not theirs in order to play the part of owner.

The Single Greatest Barrier

This owner/steward relationship is really the single greatest barrier to faithful stewardship that continues to exist. A faithful steward is simply entrusted with carrying out the wishes of the owner. Any inserting of the will of the steward into the position of the owner is theft and idolatry. When the steward claims ownership, he is appropriating title to that which belongs to

another. If someone steals the car belonging to another, we don't call it poor stewardship. We call it theft. Yet this is exactly what we do when we assert our desires over God's when it comes to the use of our life and life's resources. But even worse, when one asserts an ownership mentality over the things in our life, that individual is asserting their wisdom and understanding over the Lord. This is to usurp the place of the Lord! This is not just theft. It is idolatry.

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This kind of idolatry is marked by the mentality that we know how to better utilize the resources entrusted to us than God does. This happens all the time in the congregation. This kind of idolatry is also multifaceted. It can be seen when the individuals limit their stewardship to simply the needs of the local congregation. It has been heard more than once in a congregation, “we don’t have a stewardship problem at our church because when there is a need, the money is always there.” This may accomplish the task of replacing the roof or installing air conditioning. However, if the Lord’s desire is for the stewardship of the local congregation to share the Gospel of Jesus Christ (and it is!), this type of faithless stewardship is theft. It steals the Gospel comfort from those in the shadow of the steeple who don’t know Jesus! How might free flowing resources of God’s people enable more sharing of the Gospel if they weren’t held up by the barrier of the congregational desires to only meet their own needs?

Perceptions Can Be Barriers

Another barrier to faithful stewardship is one of perception. This is a barrier that can be created by the leadership in the

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congregation. It is the perception that the resources provided to the congregation are not being managed well. If congregational leadership is not acting as faithful stewards of the resources which the Lord provides through the stewardship of the people, it will become a barrier to the stewardship of others. This can happen both ways. When a congregation is careless with spending and amasses debt that is not sustainable, it becomes a barrier to stewardship. If the Lord has called us to faithfully care for and use the resources entrusted to us individually then is it is not good stewardship to entrust

resources to those who will waste it! But this can also happen on the other side of the equation as well. Congregational leadership can also be too tight-fisted with investment in ministry that they too can become a barrier to stewardship. This model illustrates an owner mentality that flies in the face of the reality that all we are and have comes from the Lord.

The prime task of the stewardship leader is to be about the removal of barriers. The first begins with repentance of the leaders. It is critical that the steward leaders in the congregation are honest with the stewardship culture. A stewardship culture in the congregation is best defined as how things get done in the area of stewardship. That means the leaders will need to ask hard questions about their corporate stewardship. It is critical that these questions begin with what way, if any, the leadership is a barrier to stewardship. Is there a plan in place for faithfully providing teaching and modeling of stewardship in the congregation? Is the reporting of the stewardship condition of the congregation transparent to inspire the confidence of the stewards in the Lord? Are the resources of the congregation being managed in a proactive way that minimizes slavery to unmanageable

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debt that will get in the way of opportunities for the Gospel? When stewardship leaders ask and answer these questions honestly, they are taking the steps necessary to minimize barriers to stewardship.

Removing Barriers

The removal of stewardship barriers for the individual becomes a bit more of a challenge. But the process is very similar. The individual needs to assess their own stewardship culture. The asking of these questions sets the stage for God to work. The Church has at its disposal every tool that is needed for the removal of individual stewardship barriers. These tools are the Means of Grace. Our Lord has given His Word of Law to address and convict the sins of the steward who claims ownership over those things owned by God. It is then the Gospel that frees them from the burden of sin and releases them to faithfulness in every aspect of life. Preaching and teaching are irreplaceable weapons in the arsenal of stewardship barrier removal.

Steward leaders need to be in the business of removing barriers. This removal takes honesty, effort and repentance. But it is also important for the steward leader to recall that they are simply stewards of the only thing that obliterates these barriers: the Gospel. It is the Holy Spirit at work in the hearts and lives of stewards that softens hardened hearts, loosens clutched hands and directs feet and lives in the way of faithfulness. This is not a magic bullet. This kind of removal of barriers will not happen overnight. In sinfulness, broken barriers can be erected again. But that does not release the steward leader from the faithful task of serving the Lord by seeking to remove these barriers.

The time to start is now. Reflection and repentance needs no special season. As barriers come down, stewardship is loosed for the work that the Lord has established it for: the sharing of the Gospel.

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