

Freed to lead – Part One.

There has been an ongoing debate in leadership studies regarding whether leaders are born or made. The nature-versus-nurture discussion has focused on the traits of successful leaders and asked whether these are inherent in the DNA or acquired by those who have learned and plied the skills more successfully than others.

A primary thesis of this book is that God frees us to be steward leaders. That freedom is wholly transformative and summons from us obedient response. That obedient response determines the effectiveness of our work. Both the calling and the function of a steward leader are based on this transformation. I, therefore, contend that a steward leader is neither born nor made, but is freed.

What frees us is the truth. Jesus said, ***"If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free"***(John 8:31). It is the truth of the God revealed to us in Jesus Christ that sets us free.

In Christ we learn:

- the truth about God,
- the truth about ourselves
- and the truth about our purpose and vocation.

In Christ we see lies and deception for what they are, and we respond with obedient joy. Jesus Christ is the truth that sets us free.

"So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed" (John 8:36)

The conclusion to all I have said so far is simply this: steward leaders are freed to lead. As we are being transformed into godly stewards, we are freed to fulfill our vocation as steward leaders. **It is God's calling, Christ's redemption and the Holy Spirit's transformation that we rely on for our success.** In this way, leadership is a work of our triune God in us and through us. And if it is God's work, and we are called to obediently respond, then we are freed to lead courageously and humbly, and to trust God for the increase.

Just as we were created to bear the image of God on four levels, (Those four redeemed relationships) so we are freed to lead as godly stewards on those same four levels. Yet this freedom does not come easy. Our enemy wants nothing more than to enslave us again to a bondage that will rob us of all we have gained.

Tri Robinson (Retired pastor) writes, in this journey toward freedom, we must remember that remaining in a place of freedom doesn't just happen. The enemy is forever trying to thwart God's best plan for your life through temptation and the lure of "something better." *"Once we taste freedom, we must understand that the only way to remain in that place is through the disciplined practice of spending time deepening our relationship with God."* For the steward leader, bondage comes in a desire to forsake the freedom of the steward for the lure of absolute ownership. It may seem strange at first to oppose freedom with ownership, but that is exactly the battle we face. Ownership here means a thirst for control, for power and, ultimately, for lordship. **Freedom requires humility and trust; ownership sings to us that we are indispensable,** that we have all the answers and that our organization could not live without us.

This must be seen clearly for what it is: it is a lie of the enemy that stands directly opposed to the truth of God. The life of a steward leader is a battle for truth.

On one side is the revelation of truth given to us in Jesus Christ—

- the truth about our God,
- about our own nature,
- about our calling,
- our vocation and our future.
- It is a thoroughly triune-centered worldview, and it is the absolute truth.

On the other side is the enemy's deception that began in Eden with "Did God really say . . .?" and continues to whisper to us every day.

- It is the lie that God's nature is different from what is revealed to us in Jesus Christ.
- It is the lie that we are somehow more or less than what God created us to be.
- It is the lie that our neighbor is there to be used by us to get what we want.
- And it is the lie that creation, its resources and its beauty are there for us to use for our own pleasure to its ultimate destruction

Steward leaders are truth tellers, because they know the truth that has set them free. This truth is not a teaching, a religion, a lifestyle or a worldview. It is not an interpretation, a spiritual journey or a model to follow. This truth is not a

"what" in any shape or form. The truth that sets us free is a "who." Scripture makes this abundantly clear;

- "I am the way the truth and the life." John 14:6.
- We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth. (John 1:14).
- For this reason I was born, and for this I came into the world, to testify to the truth. (John 18:37)
- You shall know the truth, and the truth shall set you free. . . . If the Son sets you free you will be free indeed. (John 8:32, 36)

Freedom in the truth that is Christ or bondage in the lies of the enemy--that is the choice set before us. Ownership is bondage born of lies, pure and simple. We see it worked out on the four levels at which we are invited to live as the free stewards of the triune God of grace. Our freedom and the temptation to the bondage of ownership is as holistic as the calling of a godly steward. We are free then, first in our relationship with God. We respond to his grace and love through our free and spontaneous expressions of worship, praise, prayer, devotion and vocation. He has set us free for such a free response. ***"It was for freedom that Christ has set us free" (Galatians 5:1).***

This freedom brings deep loyalty without obligation. We do not love God in order to be loved by him, but ***"we love him because he first loved us"***

(1 John 4:19).

We are freed to respond and are cut loose from any sense of duty, obligation or guilt or induced ritual. It is not the wrath of God that forces us; ***"Christ's love"***

compels us" (2 Corinthians 5:14). At this first level, we must hold firmly to the conviction that we are free in our relationship to God, and as his stewards we respond in joy.

The enemy, however, distorts the free response of grace into a duty that we must carry out in allegiance to God. **When our response to grace becomes an obligation, we are again thrown back on ourselves to perform. This is burdensome and robs us of the joy of the obedient steward.** But it is much more wicked than that. In turning gracious response into burdensome duty, the enemy has also put us in control of our relationship with God. And with control comes a sense of ownership.

Once we believe that we control our relationship with God, we have been tricked. We begin to worship out of guilt. We become legalistic about our devotional time. When we read Scripture, we do it impatiently, always looking for a key verse that we can use productively. Gone is the joy of worship, the intimacy of devotional time in the presence of the Spirit and the meditation on scripture just for the sake of communing with the Word of God. The shift from the joyful and free response of the steward to the burdened response of the owner is subtle. We can slip slowly from one to the other without noticing it. This is why the vocation of the godly steward requires diligence. It is a battle for our soul that we fight every day in the power of the Spirit.

Each one of the “Lies” below corresponds to the 4 relationships that were broken and restored. How does each of the lies keep us in bondage if we believe them?

- It is the lie that God's nature is different from what is revealed to us in Jesus Christ.
- It is the lie that we are somehow more or less than what God created us to be.
- It is the lie that our neighbor is there to be used by us to get what we want.
- And it is the lie that creation, its resources and its beauty are there for us to use for our own pleasure to its ultimate destruction