

The One Calling of the Steward Leader - Part 1

Obedient and joyful response--that is the only requirement of the steward leader. However, for us to be true to this calling, to be consistent and unshakable in this one vocational focus, we must embrace a new paradigm for effective leadership. This paradigm emphasizes "being over doing" and freedom over ownership.

Recapturing the joy of being. "We are continually tempted to forget that it is not what men do that is the vital matter, but rather what they are. In Jesus Christ neither legal observances nor the omission of legal observances avails anything "but a new creature." (Hannah Whitehall Smith, author).

God is a great deal more concerned about our really being new creatures than about anything else, because He knows that if we are right as to our inward being, we shall certainly do right as to our outward actions.... The essential thing, therefore, is character, and doing is valuable only as it is an indication (or the fruit) of being. ***[James 2:17, So also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead.]***

This is the foundational principle for the steward leader. Scripture speaks clearly and directly to this theme. Throughout the message of God's saving work in Jesus Christ, we learn that God seeks first the transformation of our hearts before the transaction of our business. Matthew records; ***From that time on Jesus began to explain to his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things at the hands of the elders chief priests***

and teachers of the law, and that he must be killed and on the third day be raised to life.

Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. "Never, Lord!" he said, "This shall never happen to you!" Jesus turned and said to Peter, "Get behind me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to me; you do not have in mind the things of God, but the things of men." Then Jesus said to his disciples, "If anyone

would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me will find it. What good will it be for a man if he gains the whole world yet forfeits his soul? Or what can a man give in exchange for his soul? (Matthew 16:21-26)

The denial of self for the sake of the cross does not mean that we set aside self-care or deny ourselves the time we need for spiritual growth. The life we are called to lose is precisely the “doing driven” life driven life that measures worth by accomplishments and wealth by possessions and power. We are called to lose the life that promises applause and material reward, that we might be given the true life of the godly steward.

Jesus makes it clear by asking what the value of a life of doing-gaining the whole world--is if it costs us our very being--forfeiting our soul. Being a godly steward of our self has an internal, transformation focus rather than an external, transaction focus. It is life versus death, fulfillment versus burnout, freedom versus bondage.

In his letter to the church in Corinth, Paul writes, If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels but have not love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal. If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have a faith that can move mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. If I give all I possess to the poor and surrender my body to the flames, but have not love, I gain nothing. (1 Corinthians 13:1-3)

Paul points to the transformation of the heart as the required transformation from which all our acts of love must flow. Cut off from inner transformation, our acts, our very best doing, is reduced to "a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal." It profits us nothing. We are nothing, It is empty and void of meaning.

Compare the following two stories from Matthew: Now a man came up to Jesus and asked "Teacher, what good thing must I do to get eternal life?" "Why do you ask me about what is good?" Jesus replied. "There is only One who is good. If you want to enter life, obey the commandments." "Which ones?" the man inquired. Jesus replied, "Do not murder, do not commit adultery, do not steal, do not give false testimony, honor your father and mother' and "love your neighbor as yourself." "All these I have kept," the young man said. "What do I still lack?" Jesus answered, "If you want to be perfect, go sell your possessions and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me." When the young man heard this, he went away sad, because he had great wealth. (Matthew 19:16-22)

"The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field. When a man found it, he hid it again, and then in his joy went and sold all he had and bought that field."(Matthew 13:44)

The contrast of these two Scriptures is striking. Both speak of the transformation of the heart and how it impacts our actions. In the first, the rich young ruler asks what he must do to inherit eternal life. He asks Jesus a two-kingdom question, and Jesus gives him a one-kingdom answer. It is not about doing but being. It requires a change of heart, which was too much to ask for the wealthy inquisitor. He went away in his two-kingdom mindset, trying to do his way into the kingdom of God. And all it brought him was sadness.

Jesus also tells us the story of a man who was plowing his field and came across a treasure of great price. Presumably it was no less valuable than the entrance into the kingdom of God sought by the rich young ruler. However, the farmer has a change of heart, a fundamental change of mind, and that translates into changed action. He not only does what the rich young ruler cannot--- sell his possessions, but he does it with great joy. One person was given an opportunity to set aside his kingdom-building bondage to walk with Jesus in freedom, and he went away sad. The other realized the unparalleled wealth of the kingdom of God and joyfully sold everything he had to answer its call. He was free! We live in an incredible tension between being and doing. So let me ask you the following questions.

What criteria do you use when you allocate your time and talents?

What drives your daily schedule your personal goals?

What determines your vocational satisfaction?

What fills your deepest need for acceptance, meaning and self-worth?