

# The Gift of Nurture

## The Steward Leader in God's Creation Part Two

***And God blessed them. And God said to them, “Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it, and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth.”***

**Genesis 1:28**



Adam and Eve were charged to have dominion, rule over and subdue the *earth just* as God had dominion, ruled over and subdued them. The view from Genesis is that all creation was given to us as a gift to be nurtured. It is critical for us to outline between God's definition of these words before the Fall and our post-fallen distortion where "dominion" becomes *domination*, "rule over" becomes *own and control* and "subdue" becomes *exploit*. **A strictly post-Fall understanding of these words has yielded the grossly mistaken assumption that all the gifts of God are ours to use any way we want.**

The gift of nurture is holistic, involving the entirety of God's good creation. This includes the stewarding of God's gift of time, God's investment in us of skills and talents that align with his calling, and God's provision for us through resources to meet our needs. This nurture requires that we are constantly being transformed as godly stewards, able to carry out the charge to have dominion, rule over and subdue as the very hands and feet of Christ.

To nurture means "to supply with nourishment, to further the development of." If we apply this idea of nurture to the four areas of our study; our time, talents, possessions and creation - we may be surprised by what we see.

## ***Time.***

First, what does it mean to nurture time? Time was created when "there was evening, and there was morning the first day" (Genesis 1:5). The rest of Genesis 1 and 2 tells of the creation of our world and the creation of humanity, placed in this world to tend it. **The godly steward recognizes that our time is not our own. We have been given every second of life as a gift. It is not free, but neither is it burdensome.** Time is a gift from God to be developed, nourished, and cherished. What would it mean if we took seriously the value of every second of time? What if we did this, not in an anxious way that measures value only in terms of doing, but in a more redeemed sense of desiring to invest every second in God-honoring ways.

Can you nurture time spent in a long bus ride? Can you value time spent waiting in a hospital or health center? Can you cherish time spent listening to an elder telling you the story you've heard a hundred times since you were a child?

The steward leader's relationship to time must follow the same twofold model in application as we have followed at every other level: the steward leader is free in relationship to time and also responds to the use of time in joyful obedience. To be free in relationship to time requires a true steward's perspective. It means we lay aside the fear that comes from the sense that time is slipping away. It means we see the possibilities in the use of time as wonderful opportunities to be faithful stewards, to be creative and expressive and redemptive in our investment of this precious gift. To be free means that time does not control us. The clock is not our enemy, aging is not a plague, and deadlines do not rule our life. We are free to ask, "How would God have me spend this day, this hour, this lifetime?"

There was a certain lady who led a major foundation near Eastern Baptist Theological Seminary. I had spoken with her by phone on occasion, and finally I was granted a personal visit to talk about the seminary and our needs. I met with her in her office one sunny afternoon in May, and we spent over two hours talking about the foundation and the seminary, but also about life and faith. It was a very enjoyable, yet focused experience. As we prepared to part, I asked if we could have

a follow-up meeting. She agreed, and we conducted the usual business of comparing schedules until we settled on a date and time that worked for both of us.

Satisfied that I had negotiated a suitable next step, I gathered my files in my briefcase and began to move toward the door. As she closed her calendar and placed it on her desk, she said to me in a most earnest tone, "Now, Scott, I need to tell you that even though we have a date and time on our calendars, I will wake up that day, present my schedule to God, and then ask God how *He* would have me spend my day. If he puts something else on my heart, I will have to call you and reschedule." I did the gracious thing and made some comment about how nice a process that was and how I would certainly understand if she needed to reschedule. I left her office, climbed on the elevator and, when the doors closed, I said out loud to no one but me, "Come on! Are you kidding? Who can live like that? How would you get anything done? This is absurd!" I left feeling justified in my disbelief over such a thing.

Since that day I have slowly come to realize that **she** was living in freedom to time, and **I** was the one in bondage. She was free to use her time as she felt God was leading her, even if it meant inconvenience and frustration from people who lived as if their calendar was lord. But she was more than free, she was obedient. She didn't choose to write off appointments so she could use her time selfishly. She just wanted to know that every day of her life was spent as God would have her spend it.

***Are you free in your relationship to the time God has given you?***

***Are you obedient to the way God would have you invest that time?***

That is what it means to nurture the gift of time as a steward leader. As you do, you can lead your people in freedom in their own attitudes toward time.

### ***Talents.***

When I think about freedom with regard to our skills and talents, I think about the

balance I spoke of in our second level of transformation, the balance between spiritual pride and self-degradation. Balance here means that we rejoice in the skills God gave, us and we have peace about the skills we lack. This does not keep us from sharpening our skills or developing new ones, but it does keep us from envy and jealousy regarding the skills of others. The enemy seeks to keep us in a state of discontentment regarding our skills in comparison to others. He wants us to devalue our own skills and covet those we do not possess. Yet God has skilled us for the work he created us to do.

More than anything else in life, I love to preach. I am asked with some regularity to provide preach at our church, in some of the churches in our area, and occasionally in other states. I see preaching the gospel as the highest privilege and consider it a great responsibility, and God has gifted me for this work.

On one particular Sunday, I preached at our home church and relished the experience from start to finish. I left the church feeling fulfilled and humbled by the opportunity to share God's Word. That evening my wife and I had tickets to see a Broadway show that I had long wanted to see. Few people know that if I could come back in life as someone else (a wish that comes from envy) it would be as a Broadway singer. I sang the lead in my high school musical and since that time I have secretly desired to sing and act on Broadway. So, as we watched the actors move the audience, to tears with their incredible voices, singing powerful, memorable tunes, I felt in my spirit a growing discontent. By the time we arrived back home, I was actually depressed, wishing that my skills had been different, my voice stronger and so on.

As I slumped into my chair, my wife noticed a voice message on our phone answering machine. It was my pastor. His message went something like this: "I just wanted you to know that there is a family in our congregation that has a foster son for whom they have been praying for years. Today, after they left church and got to their car, he said to them that something in your sermon had touched his heart, and he believed it was time to give his life to Jesus. They prayed for him right there and then called me with tears of joy to tell me that this boy was now a child of God. I

just thought you might want to know."

I sat in my chair, stunned. All I could do was shake my head and say to myself, *You fool! How quickly you devalue the gifts God gave you to envy after others.* I learned that day the lesson of being a steward of my skills, thanking God for them, nurturing them and driving out any sense of envy or discontent.

***Are you free in your relationship to the skills God gave you, and to those he did not?***

***Are you obedient in using them in his service, thanking him for them and rejoicing when you see them used to carry out his work?***

- [A strictly post-Fall understanding of these words has yielded the grossly mistaken assumption that all the gifts of God are ours to use any way we want.](#) What are some examples of this in your community?
- [The godly steward recognizes that our time is not our own. We have been given every second of life as a gift. It is not free, but neither is it burdensome.](#) What does it mean that our time is not our own!
- [I will wake up that day, present my schedule to God, and then ask God how He would have me spend my day. If he puts something else on my heart, I will have to call you and reschedule.](#) Could you say this to someone?
- Are you free in your relationship to the time God has given you? Are you obedient to the way God would have you invest that time?
- [The enemy seeks to keep us in a state of discontentment regarding our skills in comparison to others. He wants us to devalue our own skills and covet those we do not possess.](#) Have you experienced this in your own life?