

Possessions.

LEVEL FOUR TRANSFORMATION



The third area is our relationship to what we call our possessions. Even the term starts us in the wrong direction. To possess means to own, to exercise control over and to keep from the use and control of others. How do you "nurture" a possession?

The answer is you don't. You can't.

The godly steward's worldview transforms how the things of this world are understood and valued.

Becoming steward leaders begins with being freed to be godly stewards, which means we were freed from the lure of ownership of things. We were called instead to nurture the physical stuff in our life in obedient response to its Maker. As steward leaders we must not fall back into old patterns of ownership and control. If money does not possess us, those who have it and can offer it to us will have no control over us. When we can nurture and develop the resources at our disposal while remaining free in relationship to them, we can lead others to freedom.

To nurture the things we possess is to always be reminded that we are temporary owners of them, never permanent or absolute owners. They are forever at the disposal of their true owner, and so we can nurture them obediently and live lightly in relationship to them.

There are two biblical stories to be considered here. First, Jesus tells a parable about three servants who were given a sum of money by their employer prior to his leaving on a

journey. When he returned, he asked about the disposition of his funds. Two of the employees had invested the money and made more, and to them he said, "Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master's happiness!" (Matthew 25:23). The third employee had buried his funds in a hole, and when asked to give an account, he simply returned the original amount back to the master. The master was not pleased. He took the small sum and gave it to the employee who had the most, and threw the lazy servant out.

Interpretations of this parable vary, but for our study there are two very clear implications. First, we are stewards, not owners, of the material things we have and use. Our owner gives them to us and asks us to use them wisely while we have them. **When he returns, he will expect that we invested them well and can show a return.** The account God will ask of us is one of obedience, not performance. That is, if the employees who invested the money had lost some of it, we can presume that the master would not have rebuked them but appreciated the attempt to nurture the funds into something of greater value. **The goal is not the amount of the return, but the obedient heart that is willing to make the investment.** The unfaithful employee was not thrown out because he took the safe route, but because he chose a disobedient response to save his own skin.

Second, as steward leaders we are called to invest our possessions in the work of the kingdom. This brings up a difficult topic and, again, I may anger some colleagues by my comments here. It has to do with the building of endowments for our organizations. If we apply this idea of nurture and investment to the work of the kingdom, we are led to ask about the stewardship of tens of billions of dollars that sit in portfolios of major Christian universities and other organizations, earning 5 to 7 percent (and more recently, negative 7 percent), with small amounts taken each year for the ministry. When the Master returns, how will he respond? Will managers of these billions and the boards who hire them be

praised for obedience in producing great results for the kingdom? Or will the Master look around at the thousands of faithful ministries that struggle desperately to fund their work while others sit on billions of dollars in safe bank accounts, and rebuke those who buried their talents in a hole while the needs of the kingdom went wanting? **When Christ returns, do you want to be held accountable for an abundant ministry or an abundant endowment?**

The second Bible story is a surprising lesson in the godly stewarding of our possessions. [Jesus] went on ahead, going up to Jerusalem. As he approached Bethphage and Bethany at the hill called the Mount of Olives, he sent two disciples, saying to them, "Go to the village ahead of you, and as you enter it, you will find a colt tied there, which no one has ever ridden. Untie it and bring it here. If anyone asks you, 'Why are you untying it?' tell him, The Lord needs *it*." Those who were sent ahead found it just as he had told them. As they were untying the colt, its owner asked them, "Why are you untying the colt?" They replied, "The Lord needs it." (Luke 19:28-34)

We know from the history of that time that a colt was a prized possession, one of the most valued possessions a household could own. It would one day serve as transportation, pull a plow, and carry items to market. In short, this young colt was going to play a major role in the health and prosperity of this family.

So, these disciples come along and find the colt as Jesus had said and, as they were, instructed, they start untying it and leading it away in broad daylight. The Scripture says that the owner sees all this happening and his response is a simple question, "Why are you untying that colt?" That may be what he said, but I think we might be missing *how* he said it I think he likely picked up a stick and came running out at them, yelling in anger at the top of his lungs, "*Why are you untying that colt?!"*

All that the disciples say in response to the man's protest is what Jesus had instructed them to say: "The Lord needs it." **The** Lord needs it. We assume that the owner of the colt

knew who "the Lord" was and that the Lord was his Lord, too. And that is all that the owner needed to hear. What a response of faith!

The owner of that precious colt did not need a fundraising letter. The disciples did not take out a brochure and say, "Well, this colt is part of the Triumphal Entry Campaign. As you'll see here, according to our Table of Gifts we need five contributions at the 'colt level,' and we are, hoping you would consider giving one of those today." They offered no plaque on the walls of Jerusalem, no seat next to Jesus at the major donor banquet. "The Lord needs it." That is all the disciples said to this angry man brandishing a stick. And upon hearing those words, the man just let it go. What a marvelous picture of a heart tuned to God! Imagine what it must have been like for that man in a few short hours to see the King of kings and the Lord of lords riding triumphantly into Jerusalem *on his own colt*.

I love this simple example of a person giving sacrificially for the right reason and then seeing the amazing things God does with that gift. That is what it means to nurture the things of this world and hold on lightly to our possessions. That includes our organizations and all of their trappings, including endowments, facilities and reputations. It includes buildings and budgets, offices and ornaments, perks and privileges and power. We are stewards of it all and owners of none of it. We are free to nurture it and obedient in response, to how we invest it. And we lead others in that same freedom and obedience.

How are you investing your possessions in the work of God's kingdom?

How free are you in relationship to your possessions ?

Where do you hear the voice of the Spirit saying to you, "The Lord has need of it"

- [To possess means to own, to exercise control over and to keep from the use and control of others. How do you "nurture" a possession?](#)

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- When he returns, he will expect that we invested them well and can show a return.... The goal is not the amount of the return, but the obedient heart that is willing to make the investment.
- When Christ returns, do you want to be held accountable for an abundant ministry or an abundant endowment?
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