

The Steward Leader and Creation.

Temptation of Control Part One.

Finally, we come to the nurture of God's creation as a steward leader. Here I will be brief, not because there is little to say but because there is so much to say. This is a larger subject than I can manage in the scope of this book. At the intersection of the call to freedom and obedience as a steward leader and the global environmental crisis, we face an enormous, overwhelming challenge. To nurture creation at this point in human history is simply not enough. We are in an all-out battle to save it. Our opportunity for nurture is gone. If we do not act boldly, we will destroy this world and ourselves with it.

This has profound implications for the steward leader. It will affect everything, from how we build new buildings to how we choose our food providers, from what we will do with acres of lawn around our buildings to how much travel we will choose to do to conduct business. If we are first stewards of God's earth, then as steward leaders we will find countless ways to lead our organizations in the care of that earth. **We care for the earth not as those who see it as divine or part of us, but as those who serve the Creator who entrusted it to us. This is not an option for a steward leader. It is mandatory!** Care for creation is not one choice in the variety of ways to live as Christians. It is basic to our very being as the children of God.

To nurture God's creation in this day and age requires us to be outspoken and proactive in transforming our organizations to conform to the very best in sound environmental practices. It starts with our own attitudes and habits and then permeates our organizations.

How are you personally involved in nurturing God's creation?

In what ways does your organization bear witness to our call to be caretakers of the earth?

Steward leaders nurture creation itself, their time, their skills and their possessions, and they lead their people and their organizations in the same freedom toward the same obedience.

The Temptation of Control

More than at any other level, this fourth one is where our kingdom-building tendencies tempt us the most. The root of this temptation is our desire for control. Simply put, nurture is other-centered while control is wholly self-serving. This is a struggle for lordship! We want control because we can use it to serve ourselves. We grow up believing that there is nothing scarier than being "out of control." As we grow wiser, we learn that there may be nothing more terrifying than the consuming desire to be in control of everything.

After 27 years in ministry, I've seen few things more destructive than the drive to dominate every area of life. We believe that with control comes security, power, and peace. We seek security in our ability to use control to shape and manipulate things, so they turn out our way. We believe that with enough power we can force solutions and mandate outcomes to our own liking. And we can then find peace in our ability to know what is good for us and create a world that produces that good.

Of course, this is all a clever and terrible deception. When we actually have even a small portion of that power, we totally mess things up. We discover that our fixes don't always help, our attempts to control things backfire, and the peace we were chasing slips even further away because we tried to grab it through power. The call to nurture involves time, talents and possessions, and so we will face the craving to control in each area.

Trying to control time.

When we seek to control time, we are proved a fool. Time is a cruel taskmaster, and the more we seek to control it, the more it laughs in our face. Try to slow things down or control how fast time passes, or make it yield to your own goals and timelines. Impossible! Yet the enemy keeps whispering in our ear that we need to control time, or it will run away with us. And so, we end up in bondage to the time we seek to control.

Both our freedom in respect to time and our bondage to it seem to show up most readily in our planning processes. I have led strategic planning for dozens of ministries over the past decade. We often wrestle with the difference between hearing God's voice and vision—and simply listening to our own thoughts. The one reliable indicator that has helped me guide my clients in deciphering these conflicting voices is this idea of freedom with respect to time.

Here is how it works. When plans are made as a result of listening to our own voices, they are accompanied by a certain anxiety about time. That is, the timelines that are created generate anxiousness and concern. Missing milestones or falling behind feels serious—like something important is at risk. Simply put, there is little freedom with respect to the measurable deadlines that are contained in plans that we generate by listening to our own voices.

A group gains a different sense after having created a plan that is a faithful response to hearing God's voice. That plan has just as many deadlines and measurable goals, but there is a deep peace that permeates the process. It is based on the conviction that if this is truly God's vision for us, we begin a journey with him in accomplishing it. That journey may take us in a lot of directions that we cannot see today, and that's okay. This is God's plan, his timeline, and he will lead us through it in his time and in his way. This doesn't invite laziness—it calls us to give our very best and stay fully committed to the vision. This removes the anxiety over the timing of the work when people are both freed and called to passionate, obedient response.

The enemy will seek to enslave us to time in the mistaken belief that somehow we can control it for our own use. As steward leaders, we must resist this temptation for ourselves first, then for our people and our organization.

- We care for the earth not as those who see it as divine or part of us, but as those who serve the Creator who entrusted it to us. This is not an option for a steward leader. It is mandatory! (God is in control but we must be responsible.)
- The root of this temptation is our desire for control. Simply put, nurture is other-centered while control is wholly self-serving. Another expression of selfishness?
- We believe that with enough power we can force solutions and mandate outcomes to our own liking. Who are we serving?
- We often wrestle with the difference between hearing God's voice and vision—and simply listening to our own thoughts. Who is leading?
- It is based on the conviction that if this is truly God's vision for us, we begin a journey with him in accomplishing it. That journey may take us in a lot of directions that we cannot see today, *and that's okay*. As we serve Him, we trust and follow Him.