Freed To Lead – Part Two

As godly stewards, we are also free in ***our relationship with ourselves***. As stewards of our self-perceptions, we can see ourselves as God sees us and remain in the balance between our need for daily forgiveness and our identity as beloved children of God. Humility and courage grow in us when we live freely as God's children—secure in who we are in Christ. This freedom is an incredibly powerful gift. It keeps us from needing constantly to try to prove our worth on the one hand and doubting it on the other.

The enemy tries to steal our joy by trapping us in the anxious work of guarding our reputation and repairing our self-image. If we believe that we are the owners, and therefore the guardians, of our reputation, we will be ensnared in an endless pursuit of trying to prove ourselves to be right, seeking our vindication and righting every wrong that has been done to us. When our self-image rises or falls with others' reactions, we start living like owners—constantly propping up our worth or tearing others down. It's a restless way to live, but it's what happens when we stop being stewards of our identity and try to control it ourselves.

Our self-worth has depth and stability when it is rooted in Christ and His love for us. When this love and acceptance becomes the unshakable foundation for our self-understanding, we are truly freed to serve the kingdom as steward leaders.

This is the Key!

We are also freed in our ***relationship with our neighbor.*** We can consider our neighbors' needs, work for their well-being, rejoice in their victories, challenge them when they go astray and embrace them when they fall. We are freed from the need to be over and against our neighbors, to put ourselves in a place above

them, to benefit from their misfortunes or to be threatened by their accomplishments. And when we are freed in this way toward our neighbors, we can be granted by them the awesome privilege of leading them.

Here the enemy wants so desperately to rob us of our freedom toward the people with whom we live and work. He beckons us to see every relationship as a way to meet our own needs (What do I get out of it?). When he succeeds in reshaping the way we see those around us so that we focus on what they can do for us, he has succeeded in cultivating in us an owner's heart.

The Arbinger Institute wrote a compelling book called Leadership and Self-Deception. It tells the story of a new employee who learns the company's core value of being 'out of the box'—seeing people as real, valuable human beings instead of obstacles or tools.

This concept of being out of the box toward others is synonymous with the freedom a steward leader has toward his or her people. Consider the following discussion of leaders who are "inside the box":

They run all over people, trying to get only their own results with devastating effects. They might beat their chests and preach, focusing on results, but it's a lie. In the box, they --like everyone else--are focused on themselves. But in the box, they-like everyone else--can't see it because when I'm blaming them, I'm not doing it because they need to improve. I'm blaming them because their shortcomings justify my failure to improve. People who came together to help an organization succeed actually end up delighting in each other's failures and resenting each other's successes.

This is a splendid example of the owner-leader. Owners see relationships for what they can produce. People are used and manipulated to achieve the owner's ends. But this statement is too sharp; the shift can be subtle. We can simply view people as needing us. Our employees depend on us, our colleagues rely on our skills, our spouse cannot live without us. And so, we respond as any owner would. We nurture that dependence, capitalize on the reliance, and use the love for personal gains.

Later in Leadership and Self-Deception, the fictional character, Lou, describes the pivotal moment in his own self-reflection: I saw in myself a leader who was so sure of the brilliance of his own ideas that he couldn't allow brilliance in anyone else's. A leader who believed he was so advanced that he had to view his workers negatively in order to prove it. A leader so driven to be the best that he made sure no one else could be as good as he was.

What would it mean for you to be truly free in your relationships with the people around you? What would it mean to allow each person to be fully the person God created him or her to be and for you to be used by God to help each one of them to be that person? What if we operated in all our relationships as if there was nothing in them for us, but focused all of our energy on the well-being of others?

We have been freed for such a role in this world, one that is transformative. It is radical and it is the free response of the godly steward who is called to lead.

Finally, we are freed in ***our relationship with creation.*** We no longer need to store resources or accumulate possessions to build our own kingdom. We can live lightly in this world, caring for our environment, giving freely and joyously, holding loosely to the trappings of success and trusting God to meet our needs regardless of the circumstances. This is real freedom. It acknowledges that God is the owner of all things, and it goes further in affirming that "God will meet all your needs according to his glorious riches in Christ Jesus" (Philippians 4:19).

To be free toward creation means we ask the steward question first and the personal-gain question second (or never!) Every decision we make impacts this world, and we are freed to ask what actions best preserve this creation, believing that God seeks only our obedient response.

The enemy despises such freedom and works to persuade us to place some level of dependence on anything other than the love and grace of Christ, our possessions, our retirement plans, our income, our assets or our accomplishments. He wants us to put our trust in a job, a stock portfolio, a paid-off mortgage or a future inheritance. But when we play the owner of our assets, we shift our dependence onto something other than God.

For a leader of a not-for-profit, this may be an endowment, a major supporter, or a grant from a foundation. For a business leader, it may be the profits from a new product or the promise of a new sales manager. For pastors, our dependence may rest on a growing membership or a new associate.

As owners we must constantly work to protect our assets and promote growth. It is up to us to cast vision, plan strategically and lead boldly. <u>None of these ideas are wrong if they are carried out as the obedient response of a steward leader who has taken them on freely and joyfully. However, when they are the actions of</u>

an owner-leader, they become anxious, grasping at a future that the leader believes he or she must make happen. So, it becomes his or her vision, his or her strategic plan. The leader owns it, and it reciprocates by drowning him or her in an anxious pursuit of its achievement.

Steward leaders must never fall to the temptation to make God's vision their own. They are stewards of the vision God reveals to his people. Because it is God's vision, steward leaders respond with a passionate obedience to its calling. And because it is God's vision, they do so in a freedom that brings fulfillment and joy.

On the cover of this book is a picture of a soaring bald eagle.

It was chosen because it is a symbol of freedom. Many times, I have sat at my desk in Spokane buried with work and sensing the stress level increase, only to look out and see two bald eagles soaring high above the Little Spokane River near our home. As I watched them, I envied their sense of freedom. Even though they relied daily on the provision of food from the earth, they never looked hurried. They spread their magnificent wings to catch the thermals of the warm afternoon and seemed to soar higher and higher just for the fun of doing it. They are perfectly equipped for their role in the ecosystem. To me they have both a majestic and a humble presence in the skies. As I think about the steward leader,

I am led to the image of this great bird that is both free to soar and also created for a distinct purpose within God's wonderful creation. Free and purposeful. Humble and majestic. What a beautiful symbol.

Would you like to know this radical freedom as a godly steward? Would you like to lead your organizations with that same sense of freedom toward yourself, your colleagues, your finances, your mission and future? A combination of freedom and joyful obedience is the defining mark of the steward leader. Steward leaders are neither born nor made; they are freed for this work.

- **This section is in reference to attacks on our person. Related to how we view our self worth. We can easily look for value in the eyes of others rather than resting in the value God has placed on us by sending Jesus to pay our sin debt.**
- **What in our sin nature can cause us to struggle with this... "A leader so driven to be the best that he made sure no one else could be as good as he was."**
- **To be free toward creation means we ask the steward question first and the personal-gain question second (or never!)**