

# StewardCAST

A monthly e-newsletter of LCMS Stewardship Ministry

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## Stewardship of Rest



***“Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest”*** (MATT. 11:28).

These words of Jesus are words that we often use when God's people are really struggling with their lives. At moments when life seems to be spiraling out of control and labor is difficult, the promise of rest is one that is welcome!

This is an entry for steward leaders. How might these words of Jesus have an impact on stewardship and how it is taught in the congregation? At first glance, one might think that work and rest are antithetical. After all, one is active and the other is passive. When one is at work, there is effort and toil, sweat and sacrifice. When one is at rest, the opposite is in play. Comfort, relaxation and

rejuvenation are the goals. Rest, as least as most 21st century people would conceive it, is passive. It might involve a hammock in the summer or a comfy couch in front of a fireplace in the winter. In the minds of most, the concept of rest and work are about as far apart as the east is from the west.

### Rest-Work Connection

The Scripture does make a clear connection between rest and work. Stewardship is the connection. In Genesis 1 there is a unique connection between the creation of man to serve as a steward of creation and rest. Man is created in the image of God. This means man is to have a dominion that reflects the actual owner of creation, God Himself. Man is formed, male and female. It is announced that it is “very good.” Then there is evening and morning, the sixth day. While it is not explicitly stated in the text, it is implausible

that the freshly minted man would be laboring when the Lord was setting the pattern of Sabbath rest. This casts new light on the relationship between work and rest! The steward was created to rest in the presence of the Creator and then reflect that Creator in the stewardship of creation!

That relationship between rest and work was created to be a good thing! Work itself was sanctified as holy. Gen. 2:15 announced that the task of the stewards was to “work” and “keep” the creation entrusted to them. This was not to be a passive thing. The steward would be actively about this labor. But it was not a toilsome labor. It was a blessed labor. As the steward did what he was created to do, there would not be any need for recuperative rest. There would be no weariness. There would be no breaking down of the body from exhaustion. The rest that was the Sabbath was the starting point for this labor. It was also the source. For the work of the steward was that of worship. This does not mean that working overtime on Sunday is a replacement for the Divine Service! As Paul would indicate in Romans 12, the work of being a living sacrifice is worship. This happens beyond the sanctuary where the steward receives rest. It takes place in creation where the labor serves to glorify the Lord and aid the neighbor. All that the steward did in faithful labor was a manifestation of worship of the Creator. This stewardship relationship of rest and work was truly very good!

However, it didn't last. As the first stewards chose to reflect their own image and will rather than the image and will of the Creator, the rest/work relationship was forever changed. Genesis 3 speaks of this redefined relationship. Labor is now toil. It brings with it

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sweat and aches and pains. It would ultimately be the death of both man and woman. In this curse of painful toil and labor, there is no concept of rest other than the stewards returning to the dust from which they were originally taken. For the fallen steward, there would be no rest.

Stewardship is THE pre-fall vocation. Created to have dominion over the Lord's perfect creation in His image, man's every action done in life is stewardship. Even vocations like spouse and parent would be matters of stewardship. Luther, in his explanations of both the First Article and the Fourth Petition, would identify them as good gifts which need to be preserved and protected. This is work. It is a far more difficult work today since stewards live in a post-fall world. But at no point in the sin and consequence account of Genesis 3 are the created stewards relieved of their duty to be stewards. Hence the great challenge the steward faces. The steward is to discharge his or her stewardship while working in a sin-broken world, separated from the Creator. The sinner/steward now only knows stewardship that is marked and marred by the sweat of the brow and the suffering of sacrifice. This stewardship is carried out laboriously and leads to fatigue. The self-centered steward will try to do the Lord's work of stewardship his way. But this is fraught with peril. Corrie ten Boom was correct when she wrote, “[...] trying to do the Lord's work in your own strength is the most confusing, exhausting, and tedious of all work” (“Tramp for the Lord,” copyright © 1974, p. 61, Penguin Putnam Inc.).

## Purpose of Rest

This makes it a necessity that any teaching on stewardship also includes the teaching and application of rest. The rest that the sinner/steward needs is the rest that Jesus is talking about in Matthew 11. The burden that is borne in stewardship is the toilsome labor of doing what the Lord has created the steward to do while under the crushing weight of sin. The rest for this kind of toil is found only in the person and work of Jesus Christ.

But this rest needs to be taught by steward leaders in its fullness. Worldly rest is a time to recover from the bumps and bruises of life in a fallen world. Rest is not the reward for our imperfect, yet pious, labor. This would be a resultative rest. This is a rest that makes

sense for the suffering steward. But it is also more than rest and recuperation. The rest of which Jesus speaks and freely offers is also a causative rest. We are called to rest in Christ so that we are then able to bear up under the easy yoke that is placed on us in Holy Baptism. Christ's rest sets the stage for the labor that He has prepared in advance for us to do (EPH. 2:10).

Notice how Jesus makes that connection of rest and work in Matthew 11. They are not opposites. These two gifts from the Lord are designed to equip and sustain the stewards in the tasks before them. Stewardship must be connected to the causative rest of pulpit, altar and font as the easy yoke of stewardship is placed on the steward. There are times when the sinner/steward chafes against the yoke. This comes from the times when the stewards try to assert their own will. This happens daily. Because it happens daily, there also needs to be a Divine balm for healing provided. This forgiving and restoring rest does not come from a hammock or a pillow. It only comes from Christ, His Word and His Sacraments.

The work and rest of the steward flows from the altar. It gives purpose. It shows the burden that comes when the labor of the sinner/steward falls short of God's expectations. It ultimately shows the rest which our Lord desires to provide through the Gospel delivered in the Means of Grace. Stewards are created to rest and work, all to the glory of the Lord. To this ten Boom adds, “But when you are filled with the Holy Spirit, then the ministry of Jesus just flows out of you.” Stewardship is not the arena of man and rest the purview of God. They are each a gift and work of the Lord in and through the stewards whom He has created.

Stewardship that is solely focused on what the steward decides to do and to give is not a teaching of stewardship that is full. If it only stresses the work of the steward, it runs the risk of creating a burden that no steward is able to bear. All stewardship teaching must begin and end in the rest that the Lord Jesus offers. Congregational steward leaders need to review their stewardship formation process. It needs to include the forgiving rest to encompass the entirety of stewardship. When this rest is granted by the Lord, taught by His steward leaders and embraced by God's people, stewardship becomes a labor of love. God's love for us. Our love for Him.