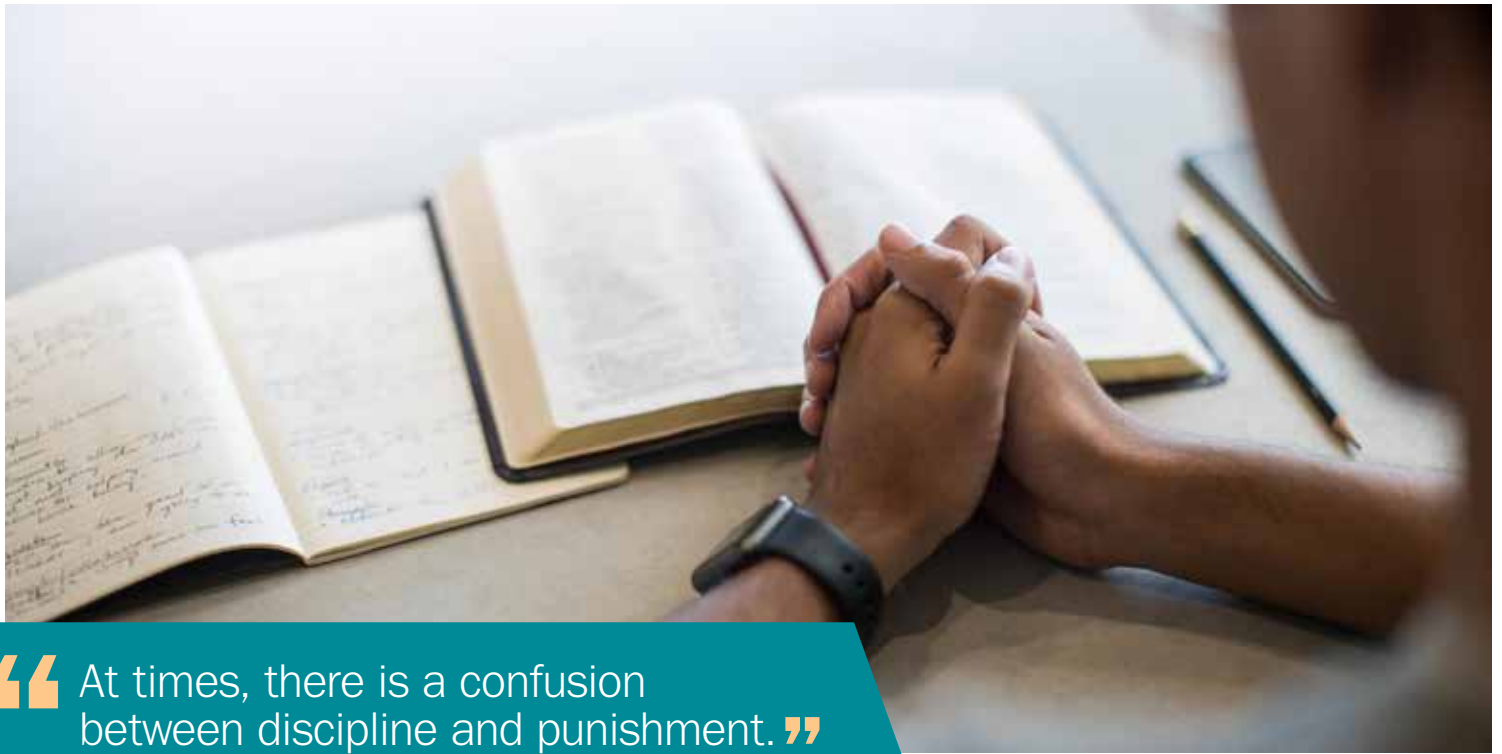


StewardCAST

A monthly e-newsletter of LCMS Stewardship Ministry

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“ At times, there is a confusion between discipline and punishment. ”

Disciplines of a Godly Steward

H JACKSON BROWNE, JR. once said, “Talent without discipline is like an octopus on roller skates. There’s plenty of movement, but you never know if you are going forward, backward or sideways.” While the mental imagery of this thought is humorous, the sentiment is spot on. Everything in creation needs discipline in one form or another. A person who is out of physical shape needs the discipline of a healthy diet and an exercise regimen to regain healthy form and function. A freshly mown lawn is an example of discipline. The mower is used to discipline the grass to keep

it under control and at a good height, so that roots can grow deeper and thicker for a healthier lawn. Parents of human children understand that discipline is essential in forming the children entrusted to them by the Lord so that they do not end up harming their neighbor or themselves as they grow to be productive, faithful members of society.

Discipline or Punishment

At times, there is a confusion between discipline and punishment. They are related. Neither discipline nor punishment is fun. However, what makes discipline distinct

from punishment is the end goal. The writer to the Hebrews captures this sentiment when the Holy Spirit leads him to write, “*For the moment all discipline seems painful rather than pleasant, but later it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it*” (HEB. 12:11). Punishment is meant to be punitive and negative. This is the do the crime, do the time model. In catechetical terms, it is justice. Punishment gives the sinner what he or she deserves. Punishment is an end in itself. While the stated goal may be to change behavior, it really serves as the consequence of an unfaithful action. Crime

leads to punishment. While the one dishing out the punishment may desire change in the long term, it is not the immediate goal. Pilate wasn't looking to change any behavior in Jesus when he had him flogged. It was just to inflict pain, take out consequences and pacify a blood-thirsty mob.

Discipline is vastly different. Discipline is not about crime and punishment. Discipline is parental. It flows not from justice but love. Again, the writer to the Hebrews captures this thought completely when the Spirit leads him to write, *"It is for discipline that you have to endure. God is treating you as sons. For what son is there whom his father does not discipline? If you are left without discipline, in which all have participated, then you are illegitimate children and not sons"* (HEB. 12:7-8). Discipline is administered by a loving parent to form their child into the person that the Lord has created and redeemed them to be. To be disciplined is to be loved! It has the long-term view of bringing the person being disciplined into a proper relationship with their parent or authority. Godly discipline is meant for the best interest of the child, employee or even the Christian steward.

Stewardship and Discipline

Discipline is necessary in every aspect of our life. It is most especially true in our understanding of stewardship. By nature, as sinners we are not at all inclined to be good stewards. Following the lead of our first parents, our inclination and proclivity is to reject the title and task of steward, in an attempt to usurp the title of owner. This

is not only the heart of the original sin, it is the genesis of all our sins. No matter what sin we find ourselves jumping head first into like a lad jumps in mud puddles in a rainstorm, it all flows from a rejection of our vocation as steward. Our hands continue to reach out for created things just like Eve's hand was extended for the fruit that, while pleasing to the eye and good for food, and desirable for gaining wisdom, was still forbidden. Daily, sinful human stewards reach out to grasp and claim ownership of things that belong to the Lord by virtue of creation. While it is true that the sinner is redeemed and restored in the blood of Jesus, it doesn't mean that he or she will be free from the covetous desire to own what belongs to God!

What We Truly Need

Because of this simultaneous reality, stewards of God's creation need discipline! Again, recall that what is needed is discipline, not punishment! Failed stewards do not need verbal spankings from the pulpit or in Bible class when they fail. What is needed is discipline! Discipline does include the proclamation of God's Law. When stewards fail, God's Law must be preached to rectify the situation. But the restorative word of the Gospel is the ultimate end. When the fallen steward hears the Law of the Lord that convicts them of their sins of ownership, the

goal is never to crush them. The goal of the Word is the bring them to repentance. Absolution is the key difference in the disciplining of stewards. Forgiveness proclaimed once again leads the disciplined steward to faithful response to the Lord!

Remember, discipline is more than punishment. While correctives in the arena of stewardship are needed in every congregation, it is important to remember the old adage, "an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure!" A congregation that seeks to be disciplined stewards for the sake of the Lord's kingdom needs to have the formative aspect of stewardship help up before its people on a regular basis! This also includes taking steps to form the steward in the process of faithful stewardship.

Faithful Stewards and Discipline

So, what are the disciplines of a faithful steward? First, a faithful steward is marked by a desire to learn more and more about who the Lord has made them to be as a steward. The clear word of God that teaches the baptismal identity of a steward on a regular basis is needed for disciplined stewards to emerge in the congregation. The faithful steward will not grumble about the teaching of stewardship from the Word. They are disciplined by it in a willingness



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to allow the Lord to work in their lives of stewardship. Receiving this discipline leads to repentance and restoration of the steward. This is what the Lord desires!

Second, the disciplines of a faithful steward, includes, pastors and stewardship leaders to be fearless. These vocations have been established by God for the sake of the kingdom and the believers that make up that kingdom. While St. Paul admonishes that we are to preach Christ crucified, it is important to recall that part of that proclamation includes the preaching and teaching of stewardship. For disciplined stewards to grow in a congregation, the steward leaders cannot fear the topic!

Third, the disciplines of a faithful steward require corporate stewardship as well as individual stewardship. The steward leaders of the congregation undercut the formation of faithful stewardship when they are

not faithful with the resources that have already been entrusted to them. Lack of transparency, foolish spending of resources beyond that which are provided by the congregation, abuse and underpayment of professional church workers, lack of proper stewardship of the facilities for ministry and hiding behind debt to avoid doing new ministry in the local setting are just a start.

This list is in no way exhaustive. But notice what is NOT on this list. The disciplines of Godly stewards is not about the right program, pledge card or consultant. It is all about the means of Grace. God's Word is the only tool needed to discipline the Godly steward to be willing to serve the Lord in the great vocation of being a steward of life and life's resources for the glory of God. This discipline is needed. But it comes in the old form of preaching and teaching!

God's Word does indeed discipline the steward. It might not seem pleasant at the time. However, as it plays out by the leading of the Holy Spirit, this discipline will produce a result in the individual and the congregation that is beyond imagination!



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