

StewardCAST

A monthly e-newsletter of LCMS Stewardship Ministry

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Prepositional Stewardship

There are certain prepositions that very often come up in the discussion of stewardship. Stewardship has been described as what the Christian gives TO. This makes sense. Theoretically, the steward gives a gift TO the Lord. Practically, this is done most often TO the local congregation. This allows the congregation, then by extension district and Synod, to be active in mission and ministry as they meet their budgets. This giving TO allows for the support of workers, the maintenance of property and the preaching of the Gospel. The preposition TO is directional. It often finds its end locally as well. The local congregation may well be the end of the

giving TO with very little thought about what exists beyond the local context.

But TO is not the only preposition that is often connected to stewardship. When speaking about the rationale of stewardship, there is also extensive use of the word FROM. The faithful Christian steward gives their gifts FROM gratitude to the goodness of the Lord. St. James reminds, "Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change" (JAMES 1:17). The life of a faithful Christian steward confesses this as they respond to this gift by managing all of life and life's

resources considering whence these gifts come. The Lord gives, and the steward gives FROM a desire to respond. This stewardship preposition also tends to be limiting. It makes stewardship very personal. This can only happen when the steward is willing to engage two stewardship questions: "How has God blessed me and how is He calling me to respond?" The danger in this reflection comes when the steward forgets FROM whence the gift comes. This forgetfulness flows from the residual effects of the Garden of Eden. There, our first parents forgot who was God and who were supposed to be stewards. This continues when the modern-day steward thinks that they actually own things!



Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above ...

There are other prepositions that are included in the grammar of stewardship. Sometimes “over” and “above” are used. These are used by congregational leaders who are urging an even greater commitment of stewards to give FROM gratitude to the Lord and to give TO the ministry needs of the local congregation. Prepositions like these, while well-intended, often reinforce the shortsightedness of the Christian steward. They lead them to see stewardship as only a local endeavor designed to perpetuate the institutions of the local congregation. In a worst-case scenario, these prepositions lead the hearer to feel manipulated by emotions like fear that flow from the reality that without support, favorite institutions may cease to operate.

Forward and outward

There is, however, yet one more preposition that better captures the essence of a faithful steward. That preposition is THROUGH. As one reads the Scriptures, the idea of “steward as conduit” is one that is easily seen. In the creation account in general, the call of the steward is to work and keep the creation for the sake of others. The working and keeping of Gen. 2:15 is for the sake of the results of Gen. 1:28’s injunction

“The work of the steward is now to be about stewarding the Gospel.”

to be fruitful and multiply. The working and keeping of the steward was never for self. It was always a forward and outward movement. The steward was to work and keep the creation for generations to come!

The Lord God entrusts to His stewards things of the greatest value. The perfect creation was the first treasure entrusted to the steward. This working and keeping didn’t go well. The aftereffects of the stewardship failure of Adam and Eve are felt to this day. This is the great reason that modern stewards have such a challenge with stewardship. The modern steward, living in a fallen world, is still to be about the original, pre-fall task of working and keeping the creation for others. But these

stewards are discharging that task in a fallen world, where each steward faces the daily temptation “to be like God” in the way their first parents attempted to be.

But this forward and outward nature of stewardship forms the way that the forgiven and restored steward is to carry out their task of being a steward. Forward and outward are the directions of the Gospel! The Lord Jesus went forward and outward from His eternal throne to secure the re-creation. At cross and tomb, Jesus sets right the order that stewardship failures of all time had messed up. From that complete work of death and resurrection, the Holy Spirit has poured forward and outward, calling failed stewards to repentance and faith in Jesus! Working through the Gospel, the fallen and restored steward is set free from the fear of death and is restored to the task of working and keeping!

Stewarding the Gospel

The first and foremost treasure entrusted to His stewards is the treasure that is the Gospel. The work of the steward is now to be about stewarding the Gospel. This



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GIVE NOW



is done with the full investment of all of
 life and life's resources. But the work of
 the steward employing their management
 of the First Article gifts entrusted by God
 is not central. This working and keeping
 all serve the stewardship of the Gospel!
 Every gift of the created order is used by
 the faithful Christian steward for the sake
 of the delivery of the Gospel to others. Yes,
 this does include financial stewardship. But
 it is also so much more. It is the investment
 of all that we are and have in being faithful
 caretakers and sharers, not owners of what
 God has done for us in Christ.

Ripples of stewardship

This makes faithful Christian stewardship
 in the modern world a forward and
 outward action. The Holy Spirit working
 through the individual stewards that
 make up the corporate stewardship of the
 local congregation, district and Synod is
 inherently a missional act. For this reason, it
 would be helpful for the local congregation
 to shape their stewardship message along
 the ripples that flow out of the wonder
 that is Acts 1:8. There Jesus says, “But you
 will receive power when the Holy Spirit
 has come upon you, and you will be my
 witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and
 Samaria, and to the end of the earth.”

An Acts 1:8 model of stewardship is one
 that is first and foremost directed by the
 Holy Spirit. Remember, it is the Holy Spirit
 that calls, gathers, enlightens, sanctifies and

keeps both the individual Christian steward
 and the entire Church. It is that working of
 the Holy Spirit that allows for stewardship
 of the Gospel first in the Jerusalem of the
 home. It is there that real stewardship that is
 selfless and for the sake of others is modeled.
 From the home comes the stewardship that
 is carried out for the sake of others in the
 Judea of the local congregation. If there is a
 place where stewards of the Gospel should
 work most clearly, it would be within the
 body of Christ! This then overflows and
 ripples out to the Samaria in which the local
 congregation has been planted by the Holy
 Spirit. Stewards of the Gospel are led by the
 Holy Spirit to be the hands and feet of Jesus
 for their neighbor so that they too might see
 the Gospel at work among the community.
 Then, joining with other congregations
 in the district and Synod, the ripples of
 stewardship for the sake of the other in the
 Gospel continues in regional, national and
 international mission work. Stewardship
 that flows through the conduit of the faithful
 steward to the world in need is the kind of
 stewardship that the Scriptures teach!

Prepositional stewardship is key to this. But
 one needs to adopt the correct preposition.
 It is time that the church stops focusing
 on the TO and FROM, for these allow
 for ownership mentality to still sneak in.
 It is time for us to move to a stewardship
 understanding that is THROUGH God
 working in and through His stewards for the
 sake of the kingdom.