

StewardCAST

A monthly e-newsletter of LCMS Stewardship Ministry

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Stewards by Proximity



To be created in the image of God is to be created for the purpose of reflecting the will of the Creator. ”

The closer one is to a mirror or a crystal-clear pool on a summer day, the more clearly defined is the reflection. Looking at a mirror across the room will give you a vague outline. Looking at a pool from a distance may give a dark reflection. But the closer you get, the clearer what you see.

Reflecting the true Owner

There is a truth here that stewards and steward leaders should embrace. From its institution, the role of the steward has been to reflect the image of the Owner of all. We find this clearly defined in Genesis 1:27: “So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.” The word used for “image”

in the Hebrew, and in the Septuagint Greek as well, connotes “reflection”. To be created in the image of God is to be created for the purpose of reflecting the will of the Creator. This includes the task of stewardship.

After making them as image-bearers, God defined the task of that image-bearing: “**Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it, and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth**” (GEN. 1:28). To reflect the image of the Creator, the steward is creative. First in the procreative act, then in care and concern for all of the creation entrusted to the steward. Filling, subduing and dominion are all carried out as a reflection of the will of the Creator. This is stewardship!

Holding the mirror close

Again, clear reflection requires proximity. Dr. Harold Senkbeil captures this well in his book *The Care of Souls: Cultivating a Pastor's Heart*, with a similar analogy. On the topic of sanctification, Senkbeil writes, “It is a question of proximity, you could say. Picture sitting around a campfire. The closer you are to the fire, the better you can see and the warmer you are. It is no different when it comes to sanctification; proximity to the source of our sanctification is essential. Since Jesus is our holiness, whenever He draws near to people and they to Him, they are sanctified for service to God and others. The further away they are, the more their hearts and lives will be defiled and their bodies contaminated by the influence of the ungodly world, their own

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sinful nature, and of course the power and influence of the Evil One.”¹

Sanctification and stewardship are synonyms. The steward, redeemed and restored through the redemptive work of Jesus Christ at the cross and empty tomb, is sanctified, that is, made holy, and is restored to the task of reflecting the image of both Creator and Redeemer. To be a faithful reflector of the source of our being and holiness requires proximity. The steward leader is tasked with getting the stewards under their care close to the source! The primary instruments of this are the Means of Grace! If a steward leader desires to strengthen stewards, his first task is to bring them Jesus in Word and Sacrament.

God’s way in stewardship

Stewards are not reflective through any method or program. Stewards are reflective by proximity! The closer the steward is to where Jesus promises to meet them, in the Lord’s Word, in the Lord’s House and at the Lord’s Table, the more clearly the reflection of the Owner shines through him. This doesn’t come from formulaic charts or cleverly-designed schemes. It comes from regular, prolonged exposure. Again Dr. Senkbeil hits the nail on the head: “Sanctification always revolves around

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proximity. Wherever Jesus is, there is actual righteousness and true holiness. By faith in Him we are given to participate here on earth in His divine righteousness and holiness. His blood speaks a better word than the blood of Abel; it cleanses not merely bodies, but hearts and souls, giving them a good and clean conscience before God Himself.” The presence of Jesus sanctifies the steward. The mirror is polished to a high sheen. The reflective pool is purified to perfection. So polished and cleansed by Jesus, the steward is free to reflect the Lord God to all those around them, using the created things entrusted to him or her.

Steward leader, don’t search for the perfect program. There is no such thing. Some are better than others. Some have glaring weaknesses. But programs are only guides and tools. Tools don’t build; carpenters build. Commit to God’s way in steward leadership. Get those entrusted to your

care into God’s Word. Get the stewards to the Lord’s Table. Faithful steward leading is really a matter of cultivating a steward’s heart. No program can change a heart. It is only God’s Word of Law and Gospel, rightly distinguished and applied, that changes hearts. Listen to David in Psalm 51. The proximity of God’s word changed him. Proximity will change the hearts of the stewards as well.



¹ Harold Senkbeil, *The Care of Souls: Cultivating a Pastor’s Heart*. (Bellingham: Lexham Press, 2019), 181.