

Tools for Wise Leadership

A programme of TWR-Africa, produced by TWR-Zimbabwe, presented by Rev Dr Roy Musasiwa

Series 13: Leadership Stewardship

Talk 01: Stewardship Introduction

Welcome to the programme Tools for Wise Leadership. For several programmes now we have emphasized that in order to lead others well you have to lead yourself well first. As we have seen in previous programmes this applies to the heart, by which we mean our character, to the head, by which we mean our mastery of knowledge necessary for us to function as leaders and to the hands, or the skills we need for effective leadership.

From this programme onwards we now shift gears. While keeping in mind lessons learnt from the past we want to focus on stewardship and how this applies to leaders. But what do we mean by stewardship? It's a word that is not much used in modern English, but it's a good word. It simply means management of someone else's affairs or property. For the next few programmes we want to study how leadership is a form of stewardship. As we do so let us keep our definition of stewardship in mind. We have said stewardship means management of someone else's affairs or property.

The first issue that we need to come to grips with is that in leadership what we are managing are the affairs or the property that belongs to someone else. In Christian terms we acknowledge that what we are put in charge of all belongs to God. We will see that this is a very important concept for Christian leadership so let us see the biblical evidence that all we have, including ourselves and the people we lead, belongs to God.

Genesis 1:28-30 tells us about the sixth day of creation when human beings were created. God blessed them and said to them, "Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air and over every living creature that moves on the ground." Then God said, "I give you every seed-bearing plant on the face of the whole earth and every tree that has fruit with seed in it. They will be yours for food. And to all the beasts of the earth and all the birds of the air and all the creatures that move on the ground – everything that has the breath of life in it – I give every green plant for food." And it was so. So yes, everything we have was given to us by God.

This of course does not mean we are given all these things to do as we please with. The things remain God's and we are only managers of what belongs to God. Psalm 24:1 says "The earth is the Lord's, and everything in it, the world, and all who live in it." Did you get that? The earth and everything in it still belongs to God. It even says the world and all who live in it belong to God. That includes you the leader. You belong to God. Your leadership capacities also belong to God. There is no need to boast of being better than anyone else just because you happen to be a leader. 1 Corinthians 4:7 is instructive. It says, "For who makes you different from anyone else? What do you have that you did not receive? And if you did receive it, why do you boast as though you did not?" You see if you truly understand Christian stewardship any idea of boasting becomes misplaced. To remind you of the Scripture we have just read, "For who makes you different from anyone else? What do you have that you did not receive? And if you did receive it, why do you boast as though you did not?"

So here is the first principle of stewardship. The God who owns all things has made us stewards or managers of what belongs to him.

Naturally following from this first principle is the related second principle. It is the owner, and not the steward, who determines the purpose and usage of the property. In general whoever makes

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anything determines its purpose and therefore usage. When you buy a gadget, like a computer or a cellphone it comes with the maker's manual. That manual tells you what that gadget was designed for and how we should use it. The moment we lose sight of the manufacturer's intention we are bound to abuse that which has been entrusted into our hands.

I once asked my students to close their eyes and turn on their sense of imagination and I would like you to do the same right now. Please close your eyes. OK, now imagine a very primitive tribe which has never come across any modern gadget. They don't know what a car is and have never seen one. Now in the middle of the night while they are all sleeping you drive and park a car in their compound and you go away leaving it there. Next morning the first person to go outside the hut sees this strange thing parked right in their compound.

How does your imagination take the story forward? What is the sequence of subsequent events from there? Well maybe the first person who sees this thing loudly and fearfully awakens everybody else. Before long there is a huge crowd of people surrounding this car, and initially nobody daring to go anywhere near it. It could be an evil omen sent by angry gods. They are all excitedly sharing various opinions of what this thing could be and why it is in their midst. Maybe someone will throw a stone at it to see if it is alive. Well it makes a gonging sound but it does not move.

Eventually these tribesmen gather enough courage to touch this thing. They then debate what the gods meant this gift to be used for. Eventually someone suggests this could be an ideal place for chickens to lay their eggs in and this idea begins to sound really sensible. They break the windows, put some grass into this gadget and happily let their chickens lay eggs in it. Meanwhile they still walk their long distances as usual when a vehicle could now be available to take them to different places fast. Why? The people have no knowledge of the purpose for which a car was manufactured. And their lack of purpose easily leads to the abuse of the gadget. As you now open your eyes bear in mind that if something is not being rightly used, it is being abused.

Does this apply to leadership? Yes, in every way. We have to recognize how everything, including our talents, the work we do and the people we lead in doing that work belongs to God. He has entrusted those things to us to be stewards over them. But it is God who determines the purpose of all these things and he has given us a manual, the Bible, to let us know the purpose of all those things that belong to him. Now it follows that if we are not in touch with the real owner through his word to us, we are bound to abuse what has been entrusted to us. As we have seen in the illustration of the tribesmen, failure to understand the maker's purpose will inevitably lead to abuse.

We will continue to discuss leadership stewardship principles next time we meet on this programmes. In the mean time I encourage you to develop a good relationship with God who made all things. It is only by developing such a relationship that you can understand God's purpose for the leadership position you occupy. Do not be like the tribesmen who abused the car because they had no relationship with its manufacturer, and did not understand its purpose. If you are like me you will want to hear God saying, "Well done, good and faithful steward. You have been true to my purposes for your leadership. Come into the joy of your master. Well now that you know these things, blessed are you if you do them.

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