

Tools for Wise Leadership

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

Series 13: Leadership Stewardship

Talk 05: Stewardship of Relationships

Welcome to the programme Tools for Wise Leadership.

We are focusing on the issue of stewardship in Christian leaders. We defined stewardship as management of someone else's affairs or property and we are exploring the implications of this definition.

In previous programmes we covered some important stewardship principles including the need for a steward to add value to whatever has been entrusted to him. Today we apply the principles to the stewardship of the relationships God has given to us. As stewards we need to add value to the relationships God has given us.

How important are relationships? Let us use the word "capital" to indicate what is needed for any enterprise to succeed. I like to think of three kinds of capital needed for a leadership endeavor to succeed. Firstly as Christians we need spiritual capital which comes from our relationship with God. The next most important is social capital which we will be talking about today. The third kind of capital is material capital consisting of the money and other physical assets needed for us to do our work effectively.

But let us now concentrate on social capital. There can be no doubt that after our bodies, the next most important thing God has given us are relationships. That means we must add value to our relationships if we are to succeed in life generally, and in our task as leaders in particular. But how do we add value to our relationships? Of the many things that can be said in answer to this question let me concentrate on only three:

Firstly, it is the biblical principle that we reap what we sow. That means we need to invest in relationships if we are to reap the many benefits that come from good relationships. Relationships do not run on auto-pilot. They need intentional investment of effort and time. The effort can include acts of service – going out of our way to help others to succeed or to meet their many other needs in life. Investment of time means making an effort to spend quality time with those who mean much to us. Quality time is spent talking and sharing – being open and vulnerable in sharing ourselves with others. Do we take an interest in other people? Do we show that we care about what is important to them? Do we take their opinions seriously? This is the sort of investment in relationships that pays a lot of dividends.

The second important consideration is our words. Proverbs 12:18 says that reckless words pierce like sword. But wise words bring healing. Then Proverbs 18:21 also says that there is power of life or death in the tongue. That means we can choose to use words to build others up or to destroy them. Choose to use words constructively.

James talks about the danger of the untamed tongue. It says

The tongue is a fire, a world of evil among the parts of the body. It corrupts the whole person, sets the whole course of his life on fire, and is itself set on fire by hell... It is a restless evil, full of deadly poison.

No wonder the untamed tongue can do great harm to relationships. So how do we tame our tongues?

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Firstly we must speak to build up and not to tear down. Ephesians 4:29 says it well, "Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen." Unwholesome talk may include gossiping. Do not gossip, nor let others use you to gossip against others. When someone gossips against another person there are proven ways to stop them. The first is to ask them to name their source. The next one is to ask "May I quote you?"

Secondly we must resist the temptation to give our opinion in every conversation. Proverbs 18:2 says that "A fool finds no pleasure in understanding but delights in airing his own opinions." And what about this wise saying from Plato, "Wise men talk because they have something to say. Fools talk because they have to say something." All this means we have to be good listeners before we become talkers. We must, as James 1 says, be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry.

One of the biggest ways relationships are damaged is through words which are (a) **not true** or (b) **not loving** or (c) **not necessary**. Does it therefore not make sense before talking about someone to simply ask three questions: (1) Is this true? (2) is it loving? And (3) is it necessary?

So much for the use of words in adding value to relationships as wise stewards. The third consideration in building good relationships has to do with conflict resolution. What is your style of resolving conflict? Do you resolve conflict in a way that builds or destroys relationships? Covey, in his 7 Habits of highly effective people points out the following 4 styles of human interaction. Let's consider these from the worst to the best:

First style is the **lose-lose** style which says if I do not win nobody else should be allowed to win. It's like the woman in 1 Kings 3 who agreed that a living baby should be cut in two so that she and her friend get half each since they could not agree on whose child it was. The woman whose son was alive was filled with compassion for her son and said to the king, "Please, my lord, give her the living baby! Don't kill him!" The attitude of the first woman was a lose-lose attitude that does not do anything to build a relationship.

The second conflict resolution style is **lose-win** where one surrenders to the will of the other, not willingly, but just to keep the peace. It's a style that is quick to please or appease. That attitude is demonstrated by the second woman in the story who opted to give away her baby rather than let the baby be killed. However the lose-win people bury a lot of feelings. And unexpressed feelings never die: they're buried alive and come forth later in uglier ways.

The third style is a **win-lose** one which seeks to win while the other party must lose. It is a style that operates from a position of power drawn from things like position, rank or expertise. This style suffers the problem of leaving people feeling bruised, unsatisfied and resentful. In the end you can win the battle and lose the war.

The best style then is the **win-win** style. This is a collaborative style which acknowledges that everyone is important. Therefore whenever there is a dispute everyone must end up winning. This is the style of those for whom relationships are important. It is the style that I am encouraging you to adopt if you are to be a good steward of the important relationships the Lord has given to you.

Today we have emphasized three important issues in terms of being good stewards of relationships. Firstly what we sow is what we reap. We need to invest in relationships in order to reap good rewards of working relationships which help us to accomplish our mission in life. Secondly we must beware of untamed tongues. We need to use words to build and not to destroy relationships. Thirdly we must adopt a win-win style of conflict resolution. Now that you know these things,

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blessed are you when you do them. Let's make a date for the next programme when we will discuss more leadership stewardship principles.

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