

Kingdom Stewardship: Equipping Disciples, Mobilizing Resources and Utilizing Technology to Advance God's Mission in the World

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Date: 19.06.2010

Category: Global Generosity

Editor's Note: This Cape Town 2010 Advance Paper has been written by Ram Gidoomal in collaboration with the Resource Mobilization Working Group as an overview of the topic to be discussed at the Multiplex session on 'Mobilizing Resources for World Evangelization.' Responses to this paper through the Lausanne Global Conversation will be fed back to the author and others to help shape their final presentations at the Congress.

Introduction

At the beginning of the twenty first century, an unprecedented opportunity exists to disciple the church in the fundamental biblical pattern of holistic stewardship. As the church becomes increasingly aware of issues of sustainability, seeks to understand and foster the role of business, and expands the message of the grace of giving as a central motif of the Christian life, an environment for transformation takes root: personal and corporate.

Christ-centered stewardship; that is, management of God's resources for his intended purposes; will begin to foster more accountability for business and ministry, more collaboration among ministry efforts for greater effectiveness, and healthy motivations and patterns of giving in the lives of all Christians, regardless of wealth, location or status.

Section 1. Kingdom Stewardship: Christ-Centered Steward Discipleship

While most, if not all, Christians employ stewardship language to describe God's mission in the world, the foundational theological understanding of stewardship varies greatly across denominations and religious traditions.

Some groups think stewardship is tithing. Others think stewardship means volunteering or living a simple lifestyle. Still others identify stewardship with environmental conservation, social action, charitable giving or the making of disciples through evangelism.

Each of these good and necessary activities points to an essential facet of stewardship. But each on its own falls short of capturing the inspiring vision of biblical stewardship as a form of whole-life discipleship that embraces every legitimate vocation and calling to fulfill God's mission in the world. In this sense, holistic stewardship, transformational generosity, workplace ministry, business as mission, and the theology of work movement all share a common point of origin in the biblical view of mission as whole-life discipleship.

Why has this inspiring vision suffered a setback? It was set back for two primary reasons: (1) because evangelicals siphoned stewardship off from a holistic understanding of God's mission in order to raise funds for global missions and the local church, and (2) because evangelicals, at the same time, upheld the problematic distinction between clerical vocations and ordinary vocations, which only served to reinforce the age-old wall that had been erected between sacred and secular callings.

In the immediate aftermath of the First International Congress on World Evangelization, John Stott, in his 1975 Oxford lectures entitled *Christian Mission in the Modern World*, pinpointed the theological root cause of the problem. He discerned that evangelicals seemed unable to integrate satisfactorily the Great Commandment (Lev 19:18), to 'love your neighbor as yourself,' with the Great Commission (Matt 28:19), to 'go and make disciples of all nations.' God's mission, Stott urged in

keeping with Matthew 5:13-16, ?describes rather everything the church is sent into the world to do. [It] embraces the church?s double vocation of service to be ?the salt of the earth? and ?the light of the world?? (pp. 30-31). The aim of Lausanne is for the whole church to present the whole gospel to the whole world.

We in the Resource Mobilization Working Group believe that a proper understanding of the scope of God?s mission places a stewardship responsibility on every Christian to join with the Son in the power of the Spirit to fulfill the Father?s purpose in creation and redemption. At its most basic level, biblical stewardship is holistic and missional, touching every area of life and employing every legitimate vocation in service to Jesus Christ, who is ?the firstborn of all creation? and ?the head of ? the church? (Col 1:15-20).

In light of this renewed sense of mission, the charge of the Resource Mobilization Working Group is to offer the global church a robust concept of kingdom stewardship and generosity through the distribution of strategic biblical resources, as well as to advance a global opportunity to increase kingdom collaboration to support sustainable ministry worldwide through the use of today?s emerging technologies and unprecedented connectivity.

Kingdom Stewardship

Stewardship is a central theme throughout Scripture much like the fundamental biblical themes of creation, fall, redemption and consummation. Before we go much further, however, we need to come to a common understanding of the term.

The term stewardship has been abused over the years. Webster defines stewardship as the ?management of someone else?s property.? This may be an accurate enough definition for most uses, but the word stewardship is a translation of the Greek word *oikonomia*, which relates primarily to the financial management of a household. The term is a combination of *oikos*, house, and *nomos*, law.

In classical Greek usage, the word had two meanings: (1) to exercise an administrative capacity, and (2) the office of the administrator, or steward. It was used of such things as the arrangement of a building, the disposition of speech, and more particularly, the financial administration of a city.

In the gospels, *oikonomia* is used principally to mean the management or administration of the property of others (Matt 20:8; Luke 12:42; and Luke 16:2). Matthew?s account of the Parable of the Talents (25:14-30) and Luke?s Parable of the Dishonest Manager (16:1-13) clearly illustrate this usage of *oikonomia*.

In Paul?s letters, however, *oikonomia* is given its fullest and widest significance. It is applied (1) to the responsibility entrusted to Paul for preaching the gospel (1 Cor 9:17); (2) to the stewardship committed to Paul to fulfill the divine plan and purpose relative to the church which is the body of Christ (Eph 3:2); and (3) to the arrangement or administration of God, which as the letter to the Ephesians states, was ?set forth in Christ as a plan for the fullness of time, to unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth? (Eph 1:9-10; 3:9; 1Tim 1:4). The meaning here is that God is the Master of a great household (*cosmos*) and is wisely administering his rule over it; this he is doing through the person of his son, Jesus Christ, who has in turn commissioned his human stewards (Gen 1:28-30) to manage the Father?s household through the animating power of the Holy Spirit.

At its core, biblical stewardship is a coronation of God?s human stewards to fulfill the Father?s mission in creation and redemption. This is a profound privilege and goes well beyond simply being a wise trustee of God?s money and property. In fact, Scripture tells us that each of us is a steward of God?s creation and design for every area of life.

Our management of God?s resources is not a request; it is a fact. We do not choose to be managers of God?s resources; God has already entrusted his resources to us.

The Who of Stewardship

Almost everyone agrees that we need to be effective and responsible managers of money, time, resources and opportunities. Whether we are talking about financial stewardship, environmental stewardship or corporate stewardship, who would argue that we should not manage each of these areas effectively?

Yet, if we go back to the definition of stewardship, that is, "the management of someone else's resources," we first need to determine the Who of stewardship. By definition, we are managing for someone else. But for whom are we managing these arenas of life? Depending on whom you ask, you will get a variety of answers. Scripture, however, tells us that we are managers of God's estate. We see already in Genesis 1 that God is the sole founder and owner of the cosmic enterprise we call the universe. Scripture leaves no doubt about his uncontested ownership and control of all he has made, from the earth itself to natural resources to plants and animals.

At no time in Scripture do we ever read about God relinquishing his ownership of anything he created. Psalm 24:1-2 reminds us, "The earth is the Lord's, and everything in it, the world, and all who live in it; for he founded it upon the seas and established it upon the waters." God's sovereign right to his creation is further reinforced by Psalm 50:10-12, "For every animal of the forest is mine, and the cattle on a thousand hills. I know every bird in the mountains, and the creatures of the field are mine. If I were hungry I would not tell you, for the world is mine, and all that is in it."

God is the Who of stewardship. We are managing for the living God. Other people or organizations may benefit along the way as we become effective stewards. But our primary responsibility is to the One who entrusted all things into our care.

The What of Stewardship

Having established God as the creator and owner of all that we see and experience, the next question to ask is, "What has God entrusted to our care?" The NIV Stewardship Study Bible reveals more than a dozen distinct areas of life that God has designed for us to steward. These areas reflect the what of stewardship.

A close study of Scripture shows that God's stewards have been entrusted with a diverse array of stewardship responsibilities as follows: God's mission in the world; truth; new life in Christ; tangible assets such as money and possessions; grace and forgiveness; the environment; God's revelation of his will in the Bible; institutions such as the family, the state, and the church; our bodies; time; relationships of all kinds in the family and beyond; our character formation; our various service roles; and our talents, natural aptitudes and spiritual gifts.

This kind of comprehensive management is a profound responsibility and goes well beyond simply being a wise trustee of God's money and property. When this understanding of stewardship is distilled to its core idea, we see that biblical stewards are managers in trust of God's design for every area of life. Of course, the privilege of being God's stewards requires that each of us grasps what he or she personally has been called to manage. And furthermore, as the people of God sent to all regions of the world and sectors of society, we must maintain a sound understanding of the church's double vocation of service to be "the salt of the earth" and "the light of the world," and the implications for our daily lives and our theology of stewardship.

The How of Stewardship

The first major theme of stewardship recurring throughout Scripture is the fact that God is the author and owner of all things seen and unseen. Closely associated with this overarching theme of God's ownership is the idea that our effective stewardship of all things must be evaluated by God's standards. In other words, since God is the Creator of this world, who better to ask about how to

manage every arena of life effectively than the author and designer himself?

Stewardship and generosity are two of the Christian's most profound privileges. They are privileges granted by a God who loves us and wants only the best for each of us. God does not want us to view them as responsibilities to be performed or obligations placed on us by an uncaring God.

Imagine the God of the universe has called you and me to be his stewards. This curious fact alone should move us to discover not only what has been entrusted to our care, but also how God intends every area of life to be managed for his ultimate glory.

We serve a perfect God—a God who does not have some vague idea of how life best functions. God's design for life is flawless. Since humanity fell into sin and became separated from God, our tendency is to manage life as if it were our own; as if we know what is best for us and how God's mission can best be accomplished.

We can only understand the How of stewardship when we seek to know and understand the Who of stewardship. Effective stewardship can only be achieved when we diligently seek the One for whom we are commissioned as royal stewards.

The Why of Stewardship

Why would an all-knowing, all-powerful God, who is in control of all he created, appoint us as stewards over his resources?

God does not need us to be his stewards. God is more than capable of managing his creation. If God does not need us to be his stewards, why has he chosen us to be his stewards?

Scripture reveals seven purposes for which God has commissioned us as his stewards.

First, God wants his stewards to have impeccable character. Our effective stewardship prompts us toward who we are called to be as individuals. We are God's image bearers. This is a profound privilege and responsibility. Such a responsibility requires a lifetime of intentional stewardship.

Second, God seeks to develop in his stewards a sense of unflinching commitment. Our effective stewardship prompts us toward obedience to God regardless of the cost. God entrusts resources into our responsibility; money, assets, intelligence, time, freedom, institutions, relationships of all kinds, children and the possessions that can sometimes clutter life. In return, he expects our management of these things to reflect our unflinching commitment to him.

Third, God wants his stewards to exhibit conformity to his will as we become more conformed to his image. Our effective stewardship prompts us toward conforming to God's will and desires. It is only in our relentless and consistent pursuit of God that he reveals his good and perfect plan for our lives. And his perfect will for our lives is far beyond what we can dream up on our own.

Fourth, God desires his stewards to embody compassion as we act on the Great Commandment to love your neighbor as yourself (Lev 19:18). Our effective stewardship prompts us to place others' needs before our own. Throughout Scripture we read of God's desire for us to be generous givers, to live life open-handedly. The apostle Paul tells us in 2 Corinthians 8:7 that God further desires us to excel in the grace of giving. We were designed to live in relationship, in community with others. And God desires that we share his heart for those he places in our path.

Fifth, God has gifted each of his stewards with a unique calling. Our effective stewardship prompts us to fulfill our unique role in the Body of Christ (1Cor 12:12-30). God lovingly informs us in Psalm 139:13 that he has knit each one of us together in our mother's womb. Individually we are unique creatures, and as a species we are unique among all of the creatures God brought into being.

Sixth, God wants his stewards to have a sense of unparalleled commission. Our effective stewardship prompts us to recognize the privilege of sharing in the fulfillment of God's mission. As we seek to become effective stewards in every area of life, we become much better equipped to play a part, however small or large, in the unparalleled commission of sharing the Good News of Jesus Christ.

Seventh, God wants his stewards to engage in unending celebration of his glory. Our effective stewardship prompts us to glorify continually the One who has chosen us to be his stewards. As we mature in our stewardship, our motivation for the management of his gifts increasingly reflects our desire to glorify, honor and praise him simply because he is worthy of that expression.

Becoming Kingdom Stewards

God's purposes for stewardship may best be understood through the lens of his plan, his people and his process:

God's Plan. God has entrusted us with his Son to repair our broken relationship with him. He entrusts us with a relationship with his Son. Our response is perhaps the greatest stewardship decision we will ever personally face.

God's People. God has also entrusted us with the momentous responsibility to implement his mission in the world. He could have chosen a multitude of other ways; including options that we cannot humanly conceive of; and yet he chose you and me to accomplish this urgent task. Think of it; God, knowing that we have a tendency to fail him on a regular basis, chose and still chooses us to spread the gospel and to make disciples of all nations.

God's Process. In his infinite wisdom, God has also entrusted his resources to us to accomplish the tasks he set before us. He provides us with everything we need to accomplish his divine purposes. He chooses to rely on us to share our resources, and to exercise our God-given vocations and callings to fulfill his mission in the world.

All of us have been entrusted with resources designed and created by God. Each of us has the opportunity to serve and glorify God with what he has entrusted to our care. Every individual is a steward by God's intention. But God does not want us to manage his creation by default. He wants us to manage it by design--his design. God's design to complete his mission in and through the church requires a significant degree of collaboration and generosity among his people in order to create effective and sustainable ministries worldwide. It also requires a savvy and aggressive use of technology in order to mobilize resources and to share valuable information across wide geographical regions.

Section 2. Kingdom Stewardship: Technology and the Internet in the Christ Following World

Current Trends and Opportunities for Growth in Generosity and Resource Mobilization

The Internet, much like the Gutenberg Bible, continues to revolutionize how Christ followers around the world get access to information, inspiration and community. We in the Resource Mobilization Working Group see this trend accelerating at unprecedented rates. With the advent of the "Web 2.0" sites--sites that offer fluid flow of information, targeted communication, and immediate dialogue via dominant platforms of internet communication--as well as the ever-increasing access to mobile technology worldwide, the continued innovation of internet capabilities can and will dramatically impact the Christ following ministry in the coming twenty years.

Nowhere do we see this trend having more of an impact than in resource mobilization. Christ followers at organizations like Kiva.org, CharityWater.org, and GlobalFast.org, as but a few examples, are leading the way using their God-given talents to bring innovative giving tools to the world.

One of the great aspects of the Internet (and technology developments as a whole) is how it democratizes content and community, providing information and e-commerce applications for both the modern day Widow and her mite, and the Rich Young Ruler and his fortune.

If the current crop of resource mobilization platforms that have come into prominence over the past several years is any indication, we know that the leading platforms twenty years from now are likely to be entirely different. Many of those future sites, however, are likely to be inspired by the current crop of platforms that impact resource mobilization:

Such websites include, but are not limited to: Kiva.org; a platform that brings online peer-to-peer transactions to the world of Microfinance. CharityWater.org; a fundraising platform for clean water, reaching the masses through a brilliant design and aesthetic, multimedia tools and live Twitter festivals from communities with new wells. Durhamcares.org; a platform that highlights organizations that set outcome goals for themselves, and allows users to give directly to that charity, and/or if/when the charity hits their goals. MinistrySpotlight.org; an open platform that seeks to help Christ followers find ministries that match their passions, along with an expert blog section to help users learn about effective ministry approaches. GlobalFast.org; a platform (inspired by Isaiah 58) that only accepts financial donations that have been made through fasting and praying. With its "track your impact" functionality, it is particularly effective in equipping adolescents and young adults in creating a new generation of givers and transforming the recipients of such aid as they learn the source. GenerousGiving.org; less high-tech, but possibly the best online resource for materials for pastors, educators, seminarians, small groups and individuals on the "Why" of giving. Nationalchristian.com; an evangelical organization, National Christian Foundation (NCF), which is leveraging technology at a very high level in the stewardship/charitable arenas. All of NCF's processes harness the web and sophisticated technologies to impact the kingdom from a financial stewardship standpoint. As a result, in just the first three and a half months of 2010, NCF has managed over 6,800 transactions totaling over \$90 million in contributions for thousands of givers. It also managed over 17,000 transactions totaling over \$125 million in grants to fund Kingdom work all over the world. Virtually all of this activity is driven by the web and other related technology. NCF is also investing several million additional dollars in 2010 specifically to expand how it leverages technology for the coming decade.

We believe there are a number of essential ingredients that any leading resource mobilization website must have to be successful: Interactive/User Contributed Content. Sites can no longer get by with a sophisticated, online business card with static data. Users need to be drawn into an experience. Blogs, forums/chat groups, and comments are all ways to make this happen. Multimedia; MP3s, streaming video, webcams and movies. There are few places where the difference between good and great is so pronounced. A good video promoting a ministry might get a few thousand views; a great one, a few million. One needs to search no further than the videos produced for Advent Conspiracy to see what a great video looks like. Translation Services. It is essential that the global church be able to communicate readily with one another. New applications from providers such as Google offer a translation service via API. Social Marketing. Websites must integrate with social marketing applications such as Facebook and Twitter. Equipping the Local Church. Aside from Scripture, the primary distribution channel for inspiration, information and the selection of ministries to fund is the local church. Resource mobilization sites must look for ways to support the institution of the local church. Microsites and widgets are two ways to support local community and dialogue, such as private discussions with just the pastor and members of the church. Individual users should also be able to access the broader content from the entire database and participate in the worldwide dialogue. Security. Resource mobilization initiatives around the world have differing needs for security, both in terms of information readily accessible on the website, as well as the need for protection from outside hackers. Techniques to address these challenges might include user permissions, allowing members to access various levels of communication, and hosting their sites with certain ministry leaders in the hosting space who are experts in that area. Sharing with Other Websites. If this point is unheeded, confusion and inefficiency will result, scores of Christ followers will be unmotivated, and resources will remain un-mobilized.

The current state of Christ following Web 2.0 sites looks a lot more like a post Tower of Babel reality than a potential Acts 2 environment. If you are a Christ follower in Lisbon, Portugal, and have a passion for church planting movements in Cameroon, you are not currently likely to find a Christ follower in Manchester, England who shares that passion or one in Chicago who cares about Christ-Centered Economic Development in Cameroon. With thousands of current ministry sites, they are likely to be going to different websites to get their information.

A new initiative has arisen among more than a dozen leading websites to share content and community among a federated yet independent and autonomous group of websites. Aside from the shared development costs (why build twenty different mapping modules or Facebook applications?), this presents a great opportunity to share content and community through APIs and shared contributions to a back-end, behind-the-scenes platform administered by a not-for-profit with a governing board made of ministry leaders and Christ following technologists from the for-profit sector. For more information on this initiative, please contact RWMG member, Henry Kaestner.

Finally, Web 2.0 sites are not the only means by which technology is impacting resource mobilization.

Some examples include the new podcast from the people at MinistrySpotlight, and the digitization of the NIV Stewardship Study Bible and related resources by the Stewardship Council.

In the Resource Mobilization Working Group, we do not believe that God needs our money to do his work, but we do believe that in marshalling our resources for his glory, we are brought closer to God. When used in giving/resource mobilization, technology is a ministry in and of itself, seeking to transform efficiently the life of the recipient AND the giver.

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