Tools for Wise Leadership

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

Series 13: Leadership Stewardship

Talk 09: Stewardship of Talents

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. We emphasized that one of the main purpose of a steward is to add value to what has been entrusted to him or her. We have seen how this applies to the stewardship of our bodies, our minds and emotions. We also looked at the stewardship of the relationships God has given to us including marriage and family relationships. And then in the last programme we looked at stewardship of money and other physical resources, emphasizing that since all physical resources were created by, and belong to God, we must use them optimally for God's glory, without selfishness and without waste.

Today we want to look the stewardship of our talents, meaning those special abilities God has given to us. All of us are talented in one area or another. Maybe you gifted in the use of management skills, like good planning and organizing. May you have a gift of leadership, such as envisioning the future and influencing others to follow in your direction. Or maybe you rose to prominence because of your skills in the technical areas of your training, such as accountancy, information technology or one of the many others areas of professional competence. These are the sort of talents that form the subject of our discussion today. God has made you a steward of the talents he has given you.

Let us bear in mind the parable of talents that Jesus told in Matthew 25:14-31. There Jesus told the parable of a man going on a journey, who called his servants and entrusted his property to them. To one he gave five talents, to another two talents, and to another one talent, each according to his ability. The man who had received the five talents went at once and put his money to work and gained five more. So also, the one with the two talents gained two more. But the man who had received the one talent went off, dug a hole in the ground and hid his master's money.

When the master of those servants returned he settled accounts with all three of them. For the two who had added value to their talents the master said, 'Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master's happiness!' But to the man who had buried his one talent the master said, 'You wicked, lazy servant! At least you should have put my money on deposit with the bankers, so that when I returned I would have received it back with interest. His talent was taken away from him and given to the one who has the ten talents.

Now while the talents referred to in this parable are physical talents the principles involved equally apply to the special abilities God has given to us. And what are those principles?

Firstly, we are not given an equal share of talents. Some people are exceptional public speakers, or singers, or instrument players while others can hardly do those things. If you are not good at public speaking you may be very gifted with a wonderful memory and can remember names and faces, as well as events that have taken place in the past. One person may be very good in five areas of life while perhaps you are good in only one area. But all this is ok because that was all determined by God the giver.

The problem comes when the attitude towards these gifts becomes wrong. For example the 5 talent person might become very boastful and feel superior to others. To such a boastful person Paul says

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in 1 Corinthians 4:7, "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?" If you truly understand Christian stewardship any idea of boasting becomes misplaced.

The more common problem when it comes to talents, however, is not the boastful Christian but the envious Christian who thinks he or she is not talented enough. Not being satisfied, the one talent Christian goes and buries the one talent instead of adding value to it. Churches are struggling mainly because of the one talent Christians who have buried their talents. But is that not also true of other organizations and companies? What about you?

One sign of dissatisfied leaders burying their talents is when they cease to act as themselves and start mimicking other leaders whom they believe are more talented. When David fought Goliath he acted according to his true self. He refused to go in Saul's armour. Often we think we will be effective only if we mimic the American Televangelists, or some other prophet. If we are to be transformational leaders we need to respond to the needs, as ourselves, not as copies of other people. We were born originals. Let us not die as copies of other people. There is only one you, and nobody can be a better you than you. Even Billy Graham cannot succeed in being you in the same way you can be you.

The next stewardship principle we learn from the parable of the talents is that what you do not use you will lose. This is dramatically illustrated by the man who failed to trade with his talent. Whereas those who utilized their talents had more added to them, the man who buried his talent had it taken away from him. This principle seems to apply across the board. If you have a skill and you never practice it, it becomes rusty and eventually you lose the skill. Twenty two years ago I decided to take up piano playing as a hobby. As I practiced on the piano I soon could play some pieces with a good degree of confidence. I then became so busy I denied myself any time to practice the piano. Now 22 years later I have no clue how to play the piano anymore. What I did not use I lost. But things more important than playing the piano could be lost as well if we do not use them. Please make sure you do not lose your talent for planning, organizing or leading others because of not using that talent.

The other side of the coin is true as well. When we use our talents well we tend to increase their value. The 5 talent man got busy utilizing his talent. His master said to him, 'Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things.'

There is something really interesting about this episode. When this 5 talent man was trading he was doing it for the benefit of his master. It now turned out that doing something for the benefit of others is in fact tantamount to doing something for your own benefit. As Jesus explained in Luke 6:38, "Give, and it will be given to you. A good measure, pressed down, shaken together and running over, will be poured into your lap. For with the measure you use, it will be measured to you."

So there you my friend. We have today seen how stewardship applies to talents, just as it applies to money and other tangible assets. As a leader be a good steward of the abilities God has given you to lead his people, not for your benefit but for theirs. But in the process of benefiting others you really benefit yourself. If you refuse to benefit others as the one talent man did, you are in fact denying yourself the benefits that would otherwise accrue to you. So until we meet in the next programme please practice these tools of wise leadership.

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