**Three Battles Every Leader Must Win**

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I have been asked to write a three-part series on leadership development for Christian leaders in China. I see leadership development as a journey moving us along a path that has been designated as ours to tread. Along the path there are obstacles that must be overcome if we are to continue our journey and not stop or retreat back to where we came. I refer to these confrontations with obstacles as ‘battles’. In the spiritual realm they truly are battles as the enemy seeks to render us ineffective in our work for our Lord. I will lift up just three of these battles. There are certainly more, but these three represent to me some of the core issues we deal with as believers who are called to lead.

**Battle #1 – From the Bondage of the Owner to the Freedom of the Steward**

As a leader you have a choice to make regarding how you understand your calling, your work. You can take an ‘ownership’ approach to leadership, believing that your ministry, your congregation, your reputation, your effectiveness as a preacher and teacher are really *yours*. So you build *your* ministry, protect *your* congregation, defend *your* reputation and take pride in *your* preaching and teaching and the impact it has on others. In these ways you play the owner, and the fruit of ownership is bondage. Absolute slavery!

The alternative is to view leadership through the lens of the godly steward. The godly steward believes that everything belongs to God and has been given to us through his grace as a gift to be cared for and nurtured. As such, our ministry is and always has been God’s ministry entrusted to us to tend, nurture and grow as God blesses it. Our congregation are God’s people, entrusted to our care but only as we are empowered and led by the Holy Spirit. Our reputation is solely in God’s hands as we answer the call to absolute obedience and leave the rest to Him. And finally, the effectiveness of our work is not ours. We teach and preach to the best of our ability, praying and believing that when God blesses it, it is effective. And we rest secure in that belief. In these ways we carry out the vocation of the godly steward, and the fruit of this stewardship is freedom.

So let me ask, is your life and ministry a reflection of the freedom of the steward, or are you experiencing the bondage that comes when we hold our work so closely that we begin to believe that it is actually ours? The freedom to be the steward flows from the truth that is found only in Jesus Christ. It is the truth that sets us free! The bondage of ownership is the result of listening to the subtle lies of the enemy that play on our pride, our desire to try to control our world, and our insecurities about our own abilities and effectiveness. As we listen, we grasp ever tighter to our work, and that grasping is our bondage. It is time to let go, to give back to God what was his anyway, and to be set free.

Leadership development begins with the heart of the leader. It is about the transformation of our character before it is about the transaction of our daily work. The first battle every leader must win is the battle with our self; the battle to step off the throne of our own kingdoms where we play the lord over those things we pretend to own, control and keep for our self. Victory in this battle comes in the form of the daily submission of everything to the one Lordship of Jesus Christ. As we reject the lure to play the owner and acknowledge our high and holy calling to be stewards of our ministry and our people, we experience real growth, real development as leaders and followers of Jesus Christ. And the fruit is real freedom and joy.

My prayer is that you will allow the Holy Spirit to set you free as a faithful steward of the gracious gifts of God. Resist the enemy and he will flee from you. Submit your ministry daily to God, for it is His, after all. And embrace the freedom that is yours and the joy that comes from one who entrusted and blessed you with the glorious calling of ministering in the name of Jesus Christ.