

# StewardCAST

A monthly e-newsletter of LCMS Stewardship Ministry

[lcms.org/stewardship](http://lcms.org/stewardship)



## More Stewardship Tipping

“

There is no greater gift given in creation than the gift of the long-promised Messiah, Jesus Christ!

”



**I**N DECEMBER, GIFTS ARE THE NORM. Christmas, for those in the Church, is about the ultimate gift of all time: “The Word became flesh and dwelt among us” (JOHN 1:14). There is no greater gift given in creation than the gift of the long-promised Messiah, Jesus Christ! The ultimate end of this divine gift is a gift most precious: life and salvation.

All other gifts that have been given in reflection of this gift pale in comparison. But this has not limited the critical reality that the concept of gifts has been co-opted by those in the world. Starting with the advent of the JCPenney Wish Book, the concept of material gifts delivered under the Christmas tree by a jolly old elf that looks surprising like a mid-20th century Coca-Cola ad has overshadowed the gift of the

Christ Child. How did this happen? Malcom Gladwell would tell us that there have been many Tipping Points in this process. No marketing plan conceived on Madison Avenue or on the main streets of hell can be pointed to as THE point where the gift of Jesus was no longer the focal point of the Christmas season. But as one views the reality of this season now here, this is a truth that the Church ignores at its peril.

### Tipping Toward Transactional Stewardship

The same kind of Tipping Point reality can be identified in stewardship as well. The virus of institutional survival has co-opted the critical task of the individual Christian. Created by God to bear His image (GEN. 1:26-28) by the way he or she works and

keeps creation (GEN. 2:15), the modern steward is awash in a reality that their stewardship is far more focused on keeping treasured institutions alive than on sharing the Gospel. What caused this Tipping Point? There are two reasons. First, the cost of Gospel ministry has grown exponentially over the decades. Second, there has been a rise of the “Golden Calf” ministry. These are ministries that are carried out in the local congregation because “we have always done them” without any critical look as to its faithfulness and effectiveness in the vastly different society that is today. This underlying Tipping Point has opened the door for stewardship to be transactional rather than a matter of identity. Programs that were labeled “stewardship” were really fundraising and bill paying. This unintentional but devastating slippery slope created a sense of lacking authenticity. No matter how the pastor or steward leaders tried to say that the stewardship effort was not about the money, because it was inextricably linked to the budget, it was about the money. Distrust ensued. The individual idolatry of personal possession conflicted head-on with the institutional idolatry of ministry support that may or may not be needed any longer. The immovable object collided with the unstoppable force. Sin does that. Help! Stewardship has fallen, and it is not certain that it can get up again!

### Tipping Back Toward Identity

Understand, this is a diagnosis, not resignation. The reality is that if stewardship



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... make a resolution to teach stewardship  
from a biblical and confessional perspective.”

can have a Tipping Point in the wrong  
direction, away from being who God has  
created stewards to be and toward seeing  
stewardship as institutional survival, it  
can also be tipped back! This process takes  
an intentional, long-view perspective on  
the formation of stewards. Repentance  
is key. Repentance is not created by slick  
marketing or programs. Repentance is  
a work of the Holy Spirit. Where does  
the Holy Spirit do His work? In Word  
and Sacrament! What then becomes  
necessary is the pastors and steward  
leaders once again focusing stewardship  
on the identity of the steward rather than  
the activity of the steward. Only when the  
fallen corporate and individual stewards  
are shown the purpose for which they  
have been created in God’s Word can  
stewardship once again reach a Tipping  
Point in a godly direction.

### A Challenge to Tip Back

This takes time. As the year 2018 ebbs  
away and 2019 looms on the horizon,  
make a resolution to teach stewardship  
from a biblical and confessional  
perspective. Pastor, seize every  
opportunity in the lectionary to tie the

steward to their baptismal identity. Preach  
about the stewardship consequences of the  
baptized life! Use the word stewardship.  
Any other vocabulary word that one  
might use (vocation, generosity, service)  
will need to be explained. This opens the  
door to a concept of ownership or human  
activity. This doesn’t accomplish anything  
good. When the steward is reminded  
that they have nothing but what the Lord  
entrusts for the sake of the Gospel and the  
neighbor, the Law convicts and the Gospel  
restores! Dare to study stewardship in  
Bible class more than once in 2019. Don’t  
be afraid to teach stewardship holistically.  
There are many wonderful resources on  
the LCMS stewardship website that need to  
be downloaded and utilized.

Will the Tipping Point be reached in one  
series of sermons or one program? No.  
Will the Lord lead it to happen over time  
when stewardship is taught faithfully?  
YES! Remember, steward leader, you aren’t  
going to tip this by yourself. You can’t. God  
will. Put Him to the test in this! Teach it  
truthfully and faithfully in 2019. Watch  
Him tip your stewardship right-side up! As  
we read in Scripture, God is faithful, He  
will do it!