

# THE STEWARD LEADER: TRANSFORMING PEOPLE, ORGANIZATIONS AND COMMUNITIES

By R SCOTT RODIN

Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press (2010)

Paperback, 194 pages

**Reviewed by Stan Patterson**

In an age when leaders in failing organizations can still count on bonus payments in the millions of dollars while followers are losing their jobs and waiting in uncertain lines at the unemployment office, the idea of a leader who is accountable to a higher authority for both the resources and persons under her care seems like something of a novel idea. R. Scott Rodin's concept of the Steward Leader brings to us a leadership model that rings true morally and biblically—consistent with the behavior of the Master.

Rodin introduces the concept of the Steward Leader with an allusion to Philippians 2:7 by challenging the reader with the idea of becoming a Steward Leader of “no reputation.” “Everything flows from the transformed heart” (p.13), and the source of the transformation is God, who initiates the process toward the end that who we are is consistent with the ideal *imago Dei*. The divine anointing of a leader to such a calling transcends earthly appointment to a position of leadership, and is demonstrated by obedience to God's voice and the consistent seeking of His power and presence (p. 14).

Steward leaders empower their people, give away authority, value and involve others, seek the best in and from their people, and constantly lift others up, push others into the limelight and reward those they lead—all so that God's will may be done in a more

powerful way. They seek no glory for themselves, but find great joy in seeing others prosper. (p. 17)

The relationship of the Steward Leader involves a dedicated passion and commitment to the lordship of Jesus which requires that I be like Jesus before I do His work on earth. “This great battle, as the internal work of transformation by the Holy Spirit,” says Rodin, “cannot be separated from our vocation and calling as leaders” (p. 55). Coming to terms with the lordship of Jesus requires that the Steward Leader recognize God as owner, and self as steward of all that God puts in his charge. “Ownership is bondage” (p. 64) and the drive to own must be replaced by the lordship of Jesus before the Christian leader can function as a faithful steward. Rodin places the Holy Spirit at the center of the process that results in the creation of a faithful Steward Leader.

The Steward Leader model Rodin proposes is built around four distinct relationships:

1. Stewards of our relationship with our Creator
2. Stewards of our relationship with ourselves
3. Stewards of our relationship with our neighbor
4. Stewards of our relationship with God’s creation

All of these relationships are organic in nature in that they require ongoing care and intentional development. The leader’s relationship to God can never be taken for granted or treated as a static condition without peril. Likewise, the accountability of self to the covenant of faithfulness must be maintained to avoid the natural drift of ownership attitudes toward God and those we have been charged to lead as His stewards. The nurture and building of a community around godly principles is not a means to an end but is an end in itself—the reconciliation goal of the kingdom of God. And the world in which we live, given to us to care for as stewards at creation, remains our responsibility and must be approached intentionally and with an attitude of obedience that is integral to the entire scope of leading as a Steward Leader.

Rodin gives us a fresh and helpful look at a leadership model that emerges from the Christian context but with clear application to the contemporary secular context. The four posts of stewardship—God, self, community, and creation (the planet we inhabit)—focus to provide a refreshing balance in understanding the calling of the leader holistically as opposed to the production model (doing) so prevalent in practice

and church growth literature. The rejection of self as owner in exchange for self as steward is the basis for leadership behavior that is again frequently challenged by ownership language applied to empowerment models within the church.

The leader's stewardship responsibility calls for care of the spiritual relationship, stewardship of self (integrity, personal growth, balanced life, etc.), stewardship of relationships (which Rodin defines much more broadly than what we might normally define them), and finally stewardship of the world in which we are called to live and lead. The leader is called to care for each with a distinct awareness that the terminal points of our lives are marked by coming and leaving with nothing to claim as our own. The leader is called to improve upon each as a contribution to holistic leadership.

Though no direct link is made between the Steward Leader model and any of the recognized leadership theories, Rodin's intense focus on "relationship" in his four primary aspects persuades me to connect it with elements of Relational Leadership Theory and Transformational Theory. As such, the Steward Leader model is rich in potential for those looking for a deeper understanding and practice of biblical leadership in the Christian context.