

The Steward Declaration

A Challenge and a Call to the Body of Christ in America

Epiphany 2022

The Steward Declaration is an appeal to all followers of Jesus, and specifically to our brothers and sisters in Christ in America, to reclaim our calling to be stewards of all of life, starting with our identity. Most often the idea of being a faithful steward is focused upon the physical elements of life including finances, but God has called us to steward everything wisely, starting with our identity. We affirm the biblical truth that we are all made in the image of God, yet this image does not belong to us. It is a gift breathed into us at creation and redeemed for us on the cross of Christ. Our identity as redeemed children of God in Jesus Christ is God's most precious gift to us. And this gift is under attack from ideologies bent on confusing and distorting it. Our American culture is experiencing a dramatic shift in how we think about the nature and value of the human person, and the results are potentially catastrophic.

As we ask what will be required of us in the face of this seismic change, we are sounding the alarm that the body of Christ has too often compromised its voice and conceded its witness because we have lost sight of our identity in Christ or perhaps because we have allowed a host of counterfeit identities to lure us away. We are in danger of forsaking our one true love by trying to serve two masters: God and ourselves. As a result, we are living more as consumers and owners than as faithful stewards. The Steward Declaration is a call to reclaim our identity and vocation as free stewards in a world of bondage and fear.

Throughout history God has used times of moral decline and cultural chaos to get the attention of his people. When we have listened, he has transformed human failure and futility into fertile moments of deep reflection that have brought God's people back to him in profound ways. When we have not, we've ended up in exile. We are presenting this Steward Declaration, believing that we are living in just such a time.

Signs of Loss

The signs of loss of our identity as God's faithful stewards are everywhere around us. Here are just a few of the indicators of that loss:

- We have accommodated the gospel to a cultural agenda and now stand by helplessly amidst the precipitous moral decline all around us. We no longer talk about sin, so grace has become a meaningless word that has lost its power to transform.
- We've placed our security in false things, sought our identity from counterfeit sources, adopted an ownership attitude toward life, and so we live with the same fear as the world around us. As a result, we have allowed idols such as affluence, self-reliance, entitlement, and financial security to take the place of a daily reliance on God's provision.
- We fear the growing disunity in our society and the forces that are causing it, preferring the status quo rather than being salt and light that bring truth into the dialogue. As a result, the voice and influence of the good news of the gospel is being lost in the public square.
- Inside our ranks we see a growing apathy toward discipleship and an insidious biblical illiteracy that cut us off from our source of truth, guidance, and strength. As a result, we live in a culture that dehumanizes people, yet we seem ill-equipped to provide a biblically informed response.
- While younger generations are yearning for an authentic experience of God, we seem unable to introduce them to a genuine walk with Jesus. As a result, they are uninspired by our message because we have lost the sweet aroma of Christ (2 Corinthians 2:15).

We hear the cries across generations for meaning, belonging, community, security, and peace; yet we've compromised our voice, forfeited our credibility, and tarnished our witness by the loss of our identity in Christ.

The problem is that, despite an abundance of programs, techniques, and strategies, we have lost our way because our identity and our calling as God's stewards have been compromised. As a result, we are trying to serve two masters and living as owners of what is God's alone.

A Vision for the Future

This Steward Declaration is not a call for us to return to a golden age of the past or toward some utopian vision of a self-actualized future. This is a call for us as followers of Jesus to find our way back onto the narrow road where Jesus is waiting. Like the father of the prodigal son, he looks expectantly for us who have squandered our inheritance to come to our senses and return to Jesus as our Lord, embracing him as the owner of everything.

Following Jesus in our day and in this culture will look nothing like it did in the past. For us to faithfully follow our Lord into the world will require us to steward our identity through a passionate return to the complete surrender that leads to freedom and the peace of God that passes all understanding (Philippians 4:7).

Only as stewards can we embrace the radical solutions God has planned for these days. Only by giving up control, trusting the Holy Spirit, living in moment-by-moment obedience, surrendering the outcomes, and waiting on God will true revival come. And such revival will take us to a new place, not recover an old one.

This call to steward our identity in Christ provides a lens through which followers of Jesus can view and respond to the pressing social, ethical, and cultural issues of our day. The relationship between a loving owner and his faithful stewards is the normative power dynamic by which all others must be measured and modified. Our prayer is for this Steward Declaration to provide the followers of Jesus with a solid biblical framework through which to consider their faith journey in light of these pressing issues.

What might this look like?

- Imagine experiencing a renewed passion for intimacy with God as you steward your relationship with him through a recommitment to fervent prayer, rigorous study of his Word, and vibrant, Christ-centered worship.
- Imagine a fresh empowerment to steward your relationship with your neighbor and engage in the work of reconciliation and restoration, fueled by your passion to steward your identity as a child of God.
- Imagine experiencing the joy of giving freely and abundantly to God's work from all he has entrusted to you and humbly stewarding God's creation for his glory.
- Imagine your marriage, family, and community transformed by your commitment to live humbly as a faithful steward in every area of life.
- Imagine God empowering you to live a fearless life, shining through you as a source of hope, love, selfless service, and truth and equipping you to be the message of the gospel that sets people free.

This is a glimpse of the vision we pray God will manifest in our lives through the Steward Declaration.

Laying the Foundation

The Steward Declaration is built on the biblical teaching that, at creation, God's gift of relationship was given to us to steward faithfully under his guiding hand. As bearers of the image of the triune God, we were perfectly designed to live as stewards through the four relationships that mark our core meaning and purpose: our relationship to God, self, neighbor, and creation. God the Creator and Sustainer of life is the sole Lord, the one true owner of all creation.

In Eden there was one kingdom and one King. Everything God intended for his creation was given to us as a gift of grace. In the shalom of Eden, we lived as one-kingdom people. One-kingdom people are stewards. One-kingdom people are selfless. One-kingdom people know to whom they belong. One-kingdom people are secure in their purpose and identity. One-kingdom people are set free to fulfill the purpose for which they were created.

That is precisely where the enemy attacked. The false narrative was framed at the tree in Eden with the original lie "You will be like God" (Genesis 3:5). We reenact the sin of Eden every time we try to play the lord in our life and turn God's one-kingdom gift into our two-kingdom possession, dividing our life between what is God's and what is ours. As two-kingdom people, we choose control over surrender, live as owners instead of stewards, and sacrifice freedom in our pursuit of happiness through the accumulation of power and possessions. As a result, our two-kingdom life puts us in bondage.

Jesus came to proclaim the coming of the kingdom of God in his life, death, and resurrection. As followers of Jesus, we have been set free to participate in God's continuing kingdom work as his stewards. And just as in Eden, the enemy attacks this freedom with the temptation to return to our personal kingdom-building ways and play the owner instead of the steward.

In John 10:10, Jesus frames the issue, exposes the deception, and proclaims the life he redeemed for each of us. "The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full." The Steward Declaration is a call to the body of Christ to understand the demonic agenda of the enemy, name where it has become comingled with the agenda of the church, and proclaim the promise of the abundant life in Jesus that is only found through complete surrender and the life of the faithful steward.

This is the spiritual battle of our generation, and it is a battle we are losing. We will frame the battle as our call to live as faithful and free stewards in all four of these relationships. We will name the deceptions we have allowed to take root that rob us of the freedom we have in Christ. And we will proclaim for the body of Christ a new vision for God's desire to forgive, heal, and restore his people through repentance and restoration that can lead to true revival. We believe such revival starts with one unequivocal proclamation: "Everything in all creation belongs to God. We don't own any of it. We never did."

A Word About Methodology

The writers of the Steward Declaration want to be clear that this statement is not meant to be a comprehensive, exhaustive treatment of this subject. Our desire is to produce a theologically sound, biblically based declaration that raises critical issues and starts a conversation long overdue. We sought for clarity and brevity over thoroughness. That means there is much more to be said, a broad array of additional implications to be made in every category, and further applications to be developed by various audiences. Our prayer is that the body of Christ will use this statement as a springboard for these larger conversations.

Our Relationship to God

Let us then approach God's throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need. (Hebrews 4:16)

What We Believe about the Stewardship of Our Relationship with God

We were created to be faithful stewards, starting with our relationship with God. We do not own this relationship, but steward it on behalf of the One who created us for this relationship. The purpose for our lives and meaning of our existence is discovered solely in a deepening, intimate relationship with Jesus Christ. As his stewards we find meaning and purpose in life as we seek to fulfill the purposes he has so graciously entrusted to our care. When we embrace our call to steward our relationship with God, we can experience true intimacy with him. When we do not, we allow distractions to steal the joy of this intimacy and lure us into a two-kingdom life where we try to serve two masters. Therefore:

- *We reject the lie* that there are things in this world that can bring us more pleasure, happiness, and peace than knowing God intimately.
- *We reject the lie* that we can own and control our relationship to God and conform it to ways that we believe will bring us the most happiness, deceiving ourselves into believing that we can experience intimacy with Christ apart from confession, repentance, surrender, and obedience.
- *We reject the lie* that God is more concerned with what we do than who we are, that working for God should be more valued than letting God work in us, and that producing fruit through our labor is a higher calling than bearing the fruit of the Spirit through abiding in Christ.

Proclaiming Biblical Truth

As stewards we embrace the truth that God's heart is rooted in a love so lavish that he sent his own Son for the purpose of redeeming our lives, forgiving our sin, and drawing us close to himself. Therefore:

- *We proclaim the truth* that knowing God more intimately must be the greatest, highest, and most passionate desire of a follower of Jesus because intimacy is his idea and his greatest desire for us.
- *We proclaim the truth* that it is only in an intimate relationship with God, through Jesus Christ in the power of the Holy Spirit, that we discover our true identity and find God's intended meaning and purpose in our life as his stewards.
- *We proclaim the truth* that a deeper walk with Jesus changes everything: it heals us, it restores us, it reconciles us, it comforts us, it encourages us, it calls us, it equips us, and it transforms us.

Our Call to the Body of Christ

As image bearers of God through Jesus Christ, we were created for a whole, meaningful relationship with God through our identity in Christ. Therefore:

- *We call the body of Christ* to steward this relationship by returning to his embrace, becoming so surrendered to Christ that his sweet aroma will flow from us and will draw all people to him.
- *We call the body of Christ* to name the things that distract and pull us away from the intimacy God desires for us and surrender them back to God, thirsting for him to take us to a deeper level than we've ever experienced, starting with confession and repentance.
- *We call the body of Christ* to preach and teach against our works-focused culture and proclaim the truth that abiding in Christ is our highest calling and God's greatest desire for our life.

But thanks be to God, who always leads us as captives in Christ's triumphal procession and uses us to spread the aroma of the knowledge of him everywhere. (2 Corinthians 2:14)

Our Relationship to Self

*Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, that person is a new creation:
The old has gone, the new is here! (2 Corinthians 5:17)*

What We Believe about the Stewardship of Our Relationship to Self

We were created to be faithful stewards, including our relationship with ourselves. We do not own this relationship but steward it on behalf of the One who created us for it. As living beings created by God, we declare the uniqueness, value, and worth of every man and woman as an image bearer of their Creator. Because we are made in the image of God, we are objects of his love and stewards of the life he gives us. We are defined as humans by our identity in God as his stewards. When we embrace our identity as God's stewards, it touches every aspect of our lives, especially our understanding of who we are. When we believe we own and control our identity, we allow false narratives to shape who we are. We live in bondage; and as a result, we buy into the lie that lures us into a two-kingdom life and try to serve two masters. Therefore:

- *We reject the lie* that we can find our identity and purpose in any other place than in an intimate relationship with God through Jesus Christ in the power of the Holy Spirit.
- *We reject the lie* that we control and determine our own identity, whether by tying it to our success, achievements, and roles we play or by listening to the many voices that claim our identity is a preference we choose for our own pleasure.
- *We reject the lie* that our life belongs to us and not to God, including our identity.

Proclaiming Biblical Truth

In direct contradiction to these false narratives, we embrace our core identity as God's stewards. Therefore:

- *We proclaim the truth* that, in Jesus Christ, the sin that seeks to rob us of our identity is overcome, that we are now children of God in Jesus Christ, and that this identity is a gift from God that we steward for his glory.
- *We proclaim the truth* that, as God's reconciled people, we are set free to follow him wherever he calls, not seeking to build our reputation or gain the applause of others, but content to live in the will of God and enjoy the applause of nail-scarred hands.
- *We proclaim the truth* that, as stewards of this precious gift, we are called to the highest level of love and service, acting as champions of reconciliation and justice because all bear his image.

Our Call to the Body of Christ

As image bearers of God through Jesus Christ, we were created for whole, meaningful relationships with God through our identity in Christ. Therefore:

- *We call the body of Christ* to stand firm against the lie that identity is self-defined and the popular cultural narratives about human self-image that conflict with God's truth and to affirm that every believer can find their identity as a child of God in Jesus Christ.
- *We call the body of Christ* to be compassionate toward all people because they are also made in God's image and to fulfill its stewardship role by inviting all people to find their meaning, purpose, and identity in Christ.
- *We call the body of Christ* to preach, teach, and model the joy of knowing who we are because we know whose we are and experiencing the abundant life that Christ promised all who find their true self in him.

For those who are led by the Spirit of God are the children of God. The Spirit you received does not make you slaves, so that you live in fear again; rather, the Spirit you received brought about your adoption to sonship. And by him we cry, 'Abba, Father.' (Romans 8:14–15)

Our Relationship to Others

Jesus replied: “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.’ This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’” (Matthew 22:37–39)

What We Believe about the Stewardship of Our Relationship with Others

We were created to be faithful stewards, including our relationship with our neighbor. We do not own this relationship but steward it on behalf of the One who created us for it. Humanity is created to live and flourish in relationship with one another. God’s kingdom is a community—a body. Stewards are called to create community, protect their community, and care for their community. Moving out from our relationship with God and ourselves, we embrace our relationships with everyone as precious gifts, recognizing that we love and serve God by loving and serving others. When we are tempted to follow false narratives about the value of human life, we change from stewarding those relationships to attempting to own and control them, buying into the lies that only divide and isolate us. Therefore:

- *We reject the lie* that denies that sin is at the heart of all that separates us from our neighbor and that rejects the truth that it is the sin of our own idolatry, selfishness, and greed that causes us to see others as the enemy.
- *We reject the lie* that relationships are only valuable if they serve our own happiness, and we must therefore control them to that end.
- *We reject the lie* that we can develop meaningful relationships without presence, selflessness, patience, repentance, and sacrifice.

Proclaiming Biblical Truth

As faithful stewards we are called to pursue reconciliation through compassion and engagement, committing to treat all people as unique image bearers of God. Therefore:

- *We proclaim the truth* that reconciliation with our neighbor requires us to name every sin that keeps us divided, repent of every attitude that separates us, and steward every opportunity to honor God through loving our neighbor as he commanded.
- *We proclaim the truth* that it is only when we stop controlling relationships to serve our own interests and start stewarding relationships to bless and serve others that we are truly following Jesus.
- *We proclaim the truth* that when we find the affirmation we need in the love of Christ, we are set free to create God-honoring relationships that focus on the needs of others.

Our Call to the Body of Christ

Jesus prayed that we might be one as he and the Father are one, for then the world will “know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me” (John 17:21–23). We must steward this holy calling.

Therefore:

- *We call the body of Christ* to preach boldly against the sins that divide us, to repent, and to raise up a new vision for living as stewards of every relationship God places in our care.
- *We call the body of Christ* to be the loudest voice seeking biblical justice for our neighbor, the first to reconcile with our neighbor, and the most faithful stewards of every relationship with our neighbor.
- *We call the body of Christ* to preach against our ownership attitudes regarding our relationships and let God set us free to love our neighbor through Jesus Christ for the sake of the witness of the church and the transformation of our culture.

My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message, that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me. (John 17:20–21)

Our Relationship to Creation

The earth is the Lord's, and everything in it, the world, and all who live in it. (Psalm 24:1)

What We Believe about the Stewardship of Our Relationship with Creation

We were created to be faithful stewards, including our relationship with creation and all temporal things. We do not own this relationship but steward it on behalf of the One who created this world for us. Nowhere are the competing loyalties for our hearts more clearly seen than in our relationship with creation. Within the church we have seen a spirit of ownership and control produce a compromised message that comingles kingdom values with worldly principles, which ultimately places God's people in bondage. How we view our relationship to time, talents, finances, and the earth itself has a powerful impact on our life and witness as the church of Jesus Christ. Unfortunately, here, more than anywhere, we have bought the lie of the enemy that we own what only God owns and control what is his alone. As stewards, we must reject these lies with the full force of God's truth. Therefore:

- *We reject the lie* that God is not concerned with how we use and invest our time, our skills, or our money and that the church has no right to talk about them or challenge how we steward them.
- *We reject the lie* that the earth is not worth caring for because it will be destroyed at the end of the age; that the biblical teaching on dominion gives license to abuse, destroy, or wantonly disregard the creation; and that God's only goal is salvation of the soul, thus denying our full stewardship responsibility.
- *We reject the lie* that God has granted creation to humanity in its entirety so that material blessings are the entitlement of believers, a *quid pro quo* for our good life.

Proclaiming Biblical Truth

As faithful stewards, we view all of life as a gift, and our purpose in life is to steward it faithfully on behalf of God, the true owner. Therefore:

- *We proclaim the truth* that our use of every second of time, every ounce of our abilities, and every penny God has entrusted to us is a stewardship issue that requires prayer, discernment, and obedience. Therefore, instruction on how we steward them is the right, proper, and essential work of the church.
- *We proclaim the truth* that we are commanded and called to treat creation as God's gift to us, to use it as God intended and that dominion means to protect, care, conserve, and sustain God's creation as his representative, guardian, and steward.
- *We proclaim the truth* that God is a God of abundance, and he has entrusted his people with the resources needed to fully fund every vision, goal, and plan he places in the hearts of the leaders of his churches, ministries, and organizations—pressed down, shaken together, and overflowing.

Our Call to the Body of Christ

We must respond obediently to Scripture's clear command to steward creation in all its forms so that we will bear witness to the world of the lordship of Jesus Christ over all things. Therefore:

- *We call the body of Christ* to preach boldly that our security and our identity are found only in Jesus Christ and not in material things, freeing God's people to an unprecedented level of lavish generosity that reflects the abundance of God and equips his work globally for such a time as this.
- *We call the body of Christ* to preach and live the whole gospel and the message of hope and reconciliation to a broken world, to seek intimacy with God as our highest calling, and to not allow the pursuit, accumulation, or false security of money to usurp the place of God in our hearts and lives.
- *We call the body of Christ* to care for the environment by loving God through valuing the things he loves and by seeking the well-being and flourishing of our neighbor by stewarding all aspects of creation.

Let all creation rejoice before the LORD, for he comes, he comes to judge the earth. He will judge the world in righteousness and the peoples in his faithfulness. (Psalm 96:13)

From Proclamation to Action

If you have been moved, challenged, or inspired by this Declaration, we encourage you to engage in these five steps as you embrace your own journey of becoming a more faithful steward of the life God has gifted you:

1. **Pray.** Lay this Declaration before God and ask how he would have you respond.
2. **Partner.** Find other followers of Jesus who will walk with you on the journey to which God is now calling you.
3. **Proclaim.** Share this Declaration with others in your church, work, social networks, and community, and start discussing it within these relationships.
4. **Prepare.** Take advantage of the resources provided [here](#) to become more informed and aware of the life of the faithful steward and how God wants to prepare you for this journey.
5. **Practice.** Start your journey or this new chapter in your journey with repentance, reconciliation, and a renewed commitment to view and live all of life from the perspective of a faithful steward. Let the Holy Spirit lead you in discovering the deeper walk with Jesus that awaits you as you steward your relationship with him, with yourself, with your neighbor, and with all God’s creation.

We also invite you to [sign](#) this Steward Declaration as an indication of your support for its overall message and in solidarity with our prayerful desire that God will use it for his glory.

Signers of the Steward Declaration

We add our signature to this Steward Declaration as an indication of our support for its overall message and in solidarity with the prayer that God may use it to advance his kingdom, revive his people, and bring a fresh proclamation of the good news of his redemption, reconciliation, and hope to all people.