Christian Business Review

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WORKPLACE PRACTICES THAT Glorify God

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Taking Ownership While Giving Glory to God

PERSPECTIVES ON TAKING OWNERSHIP IN WORK EFFORTS FROM A CHRISTIAN WORLDVIEW

MATTHEW WILSON

ABSTRACT

Over the past 15 years, management scholars have begun to more seriously study the phenomenon of "psychological ownership," or what practitioners commonly call "taking ownership" in one's work. This is a mental state or form of attachment whereby individuals construe work projects or organizations as 'MINE' and become personally invested in them. Although there is a growing body of evidence suggesting that taking ownership enhances a variety of desirable work outcomes, no one has asked whether it is spiritually healthy. This essay considers the concept and practice of taking ownership from a distinctively Christian perspective. Specifically, it questions the compatibility of taking ownership with the concept of Christian stewardship. Since a biblical worldview understands God as the sole owner of everything, there is an apparent tension between taking ownership and giving God His due glory. The essay unpacks this tension and attempts to resolve it by outlining a distinctively Christian form of taking ownership in one's work.

INTRODUCTION

Many business leaders in today's workplace encourage their employees to "take ownership" of their work. Obviously, this does not mean that those employees should acquire a literal ownership stake in their businesses. Rather, the exhortation to take ownership is an encouragement to relate to one's work projects as if they were one's own. Taking ownership in a work project involves seeing it as "mine," identifying with it, and becoming personally invested in the project. It is a way of relating to one's projects, even, and most applicably, when *no* legal ownership is at stake.

The psychological process of taking ownership – what management scholars call "psychological ownership" – has been validated by empirical research[1] and praised in books like *Extreme Ownership: How U.S. Navy SEALs Lead and Win*.[2] There is also a growing body of evidence

suggesting that psychological ownership enhances desirable work outcomes such as job satisfaction,[3] organizational commitment,[4] organization-based self-esteem,[5] work engagement,[6] and intention to stay.[7] It goes without saying that committed, happy, and engaged workers make better teammates and benefit their organizations, customers, and other stakeholders.

However, the concept of taking ownership is not one that many Christian scholars have considered, and, at least to my knowledge, no one has asked whether it is spiritually healthy. This essay, in particular, considers the question of whether taking ownership is, or could be, compatible with the Christian doctrine of stewardship. Since God is the rightful owner of all creation and Christians are merely stewards of that creation, is it possible to "take ownership" in a way that still gives glory to God? This essay answers that question affirmatively by outlining a distinctively Christian framework for thinking about how Christians can properly take ownership in their work.

TAKING OWNERSHIP DEFINED

What does it mean to "take ownership" in a work project, exactly? Unfortunately, the phrase is not precisely or consistently used. The concept of taking ownership is often confused with neighboring concepts like responsibility and accountability. But as I understand it, and as I will deploy the concept here, to take ownership is a special way of becoming *attached* to one's work projects. It is distinct from being responsible or accountable to them.

When a person takes ownership in a project, she becomes disposed to construe the project as "mine" or "ours" each time she participates in it. This construal produces a special concern for the project, one that supervenes on the concern that one has for oneself. A person, therefore, cares for the project as if it were a part of herself – i.e., as if it were her own – and this forms the basis of the attachment. Although construing a project as "mine" often undergirds or reinforces a person's sense of responsibility to a project, it is possible to be responsible – i.e., to fulfill one's duties – to a project without taking ownership in it.[8]

Taking ownership manifests typically through a person's *proactive engagement* and spending of *significant effort* in a project. A merely responsible worker can arrive on time, do what is asked of him, and expend reasonable effort on a project, all without viewing the project as "mine," identifying with it, or embracing it as his own. He characteristically does all and only what is asked of him. The one who takes ownership characteristically seeks out ways to help or improve a project even when it is not asked for or required.[9]

THE CHRISTIAN CHALLENGE

The outcomes and behaviors associated with people taking ownership in projects seem generally desirable. But Christians, especially those who want to glorify God in the workplace, should be aware of a potential tension that exists between one's taking ownership and the concept of Christian stewardship. For example, one might ask whether it is spiritually healthy for a Christian to construe his work projects as "mine" given that Christian Scripture teaches human beings are merely stewards and not owners of what God has made. One might ask whether glorifying God in the workplace will, therefore, require a Christian to construe projects as "*His*" (i.e., God's) rather than as "mine." These questions are especially important for Christian business leaders to consider before exhorting their employees to take ownership in the workplace.

Let us formulate the apparent tension between taking ownership and Christian stewardship more precisely. The Bible teaches that the Lord is the sole owner of his creation:

> "The earth is the Lord's, and everything in it, the world, and all who live in it" (Psalm 24:1, NIV);
>
> "To the Lord your God belong the heavens, even the highest heavens, the earth and everything in it" (Deut. 10:14);
>
> "Everything under heaven belongs to me" (Job 41:11).

Although Genesis 1:26 gives humankind dominion (הָ֣דָ֑ר) over God's creation, most Christian theologians have suggested that humans should only consider themselves *stewards*, not owners, of that creation.[10] Some have even argued that the concept of ownership is fundamentally at odds with a Christian way of life. Theologian Paul Griffiths, for example, has written that "the studious Christian… cannot coherently seek ownership."[11] Although Griffiths here understands ownership primarily in terms of legal or formal ownership, his account is also concerned with the human *desire* to own, which he thinks is essentially a desire

for sequestration and control. This, he argues, is already in tension with God's rightful ownership of creation because sequestration and control are powers that belong only properly to God.[12] Thus, to think of oneself as an *owner* is to make an idol of oneself. According to Griffiths, only the "grammar" of stewardship can rightfully place humanity in its subordinated position before God. He states:

> "The most fundamental distinction between the ownership-relation and the stewardship-relation, therefore, has to do with the presence of a third party in the latter and its absence in the former. The grammar of human ownership requires reference only to the owner and what is owned; the grammar of stewardship requires reference also to the real owner, who on the Christian construal of world and appetite is also the creator, toward whom stewards and what they hold share a relation of subordination and participation".[13]

Taking ownership manifests typically through a person's proactive engagement and spending of significant effort in a project . . . The one who takes ownership characteristically seeks out ways to help or improve a project even when it is not asked for or required.

Another way of putting Griffith's point is that Christians must recognize what they "own" is not really theirs in any ultimate sense; Christians must always be aware of the presence of a third party, namely God, in their earthly ownership relations. Philosopher Søren Kierkegaard puts the point nicely, saying, "Everyone really knows well enough that in the more profound sense no human being owns anything… *But the Christian bears in mind that he knows it*…that he owns nothing except what is given to him…as entrusted property."[14]

On the biblical picture of the world, then, human beings are merely stewards. Thus, there is a possible tension between taking ownership – that is, becoming attached to one's work as if it were one's own – and glorifying God as the sole "owner" of everything. Of course, one way to alleviate this tension would be simply to point out that taking ownership is not about real property. As a type of *psychological* attachment, it does not concern real rights of control or sequestration. It is possible to take psychological ownership in projects even when those projects are other people's property (like businesses that are owned by other shareholders) or in projects that are no one's property at all (many volunteer projects are like this). Thus, even if everything is truly under God's ownership, one might respond that people can still take psychological ownership because it does not require exclusive sequestration or control. Perhaps, then, the worry is misconceived and there is no tension after all.

We should not be too hasty in dismissing this tension, however. Some theologians have argued that the concept of Christian stewardship would extend past the "stewarding" of real property, even stewarding the environment we live in.[15] Bernard Evans, for example, suggests that the concept of Christian stewardship applies to a person's use of his talents and abilities.[16] If this is correct, then stewardship would be applicable to how one participates in projects and not merely in property arrangements. After all, Griffiths' charge that ownership can be a form of idolatry is concerned just as much about the desires and attitudes of the heart as it is with the actual system of property rights that we find ourselves within. The "owner," Griffiths thinks, fails to recognize God, or he desires to be like a god. This means that even taking psychological ownership by construing projects in terms of "mine" may be inappropriate for followers of Christ.

A CHRISTIAN RESPONSE

I wish to propose a response to this issue that does not require Christians to jettison or reject the concept of taking ownership entirely. But it will require Christians to modify how they take ownership in their work, such that it conforms with the Christian understanding of reality. To begin, let us first direct our attention to the New Testament's picture of "life in Christ." Scripture teaches that the Christian's life

is one whereby Christ "lives" in a person through the Holy Spirit (Gal. 2:20, Rom 8:11). A Christian no longer lives for herself (2 Cor 5:15, Gal 2:20), but for God, and she is to do all things "as unto the Lord" (Col. 3:23). This certainly includes her work projects, and it follows from this picture of life that one should not "take ownership" in one's work projects *exclusively* – in the sense of construing them as mine and mine *alone*. In other words, a Christian must always bear in mind that Christ is working within and alongside her. A Christian's efforts in her work projects should be conceived as in consultation with and in obedience to Christ. In Griffiths' terminology, one should always "recognize the presence of a third party," that is, "Christ in me." An ownership attachment to one's work that ignores this life of Christ in the believer would not be biblical.

But with this in mind, there are still two possible ways that one might orient oneself to work projects as a Christian. On the one hand, a person could attempt to remain personally and psychologically detached from her projects, construing them as God's alone (as *His*). One's participation in a project in this case would be governed by one's duties to God and in virtue of the responsibilities of one's role in the project. But on this outlook, one should remain psychologically detached from the project, not embracing it as something that is "mine." On the other hand, a person might take ownership of her projects by conceiving of them as *common projects* with God. In this case, taking ownership would involve seeing one's projects as "ours," with God as a co-participant. Then, and only in a much weaker sense, one would relate to the project as "mine" – since what is ours is also mine in a derivative sense. Christians should, therefore, ask: "Would Christ want his followers to be attached to and invested in projects with him, conceiving them as 'ours,' or to remain detached to their projects (but not to Him) in the workplace?"

Before attempting to answer, let me first say something more about what it means to take ownership *in common*. The difference between the "exclusive" and "in common" forms of psychological ownership can be grasped by analogy to the way personal property is owned exclusively or in common. In exclusive property arrangements, a single person has the right (within limits) to use or dispose of her property as she pleases. But common property ownership requires that two or more people (or institutions) cooperate in how they collectively use or dispose of the property owned. The property's multiple owners usually have a right to co-determine how the property is used or disposed of. For a very simple example, we might think of the common property arrangement embodied by two school-aged children who put their allowance together to buy a video game. They must determine jointly when each will get to play with the game, whose house it will be kept in, etc. When a person is a common owner, she is not simply free to use the object as she pleases. She must also consider the wishes of the other co-owner(s) in how she interacts with the owned property – i.e., she must "bear this in mind." A failure to do so is blameworthy.

Taking ownership in a common project, when done properly, is analogous, although certainly not identical, to owning common property. A "common project" is simply any project that requires cooperation or a coordination of effort in some goal-directed activity.[17] Examples include athletic teams, political campaigns, and most business projects. To take ownership "in common" means that when one identifies with and invests in a project, one construes the project not merely as something that is *mine*, but as something that is *ours*. This construal involves recognizing and appreciating the other people who are involved in the project, including their efforts and contributions. This type of appreciation modifies the nature and character of one's psychological attachment to the project. It also lessens the attachment's psychological "grip," so to speak, as one recognizes that others are involved.

Taking ownership in a *common* project as *ours* is praiseworthy, especially when compared to its alternative, for it is possible for one to take ownership in a common project as if it were exclusively one's own. If this happens, it hurts a person's ability to successfully collaborate, participate in teams, and lead others, because the person will fail to fully appreciate the efforts of others in the project.[18] Thus, to truly see a common project as "ours" is a more excellent and praiseworthy way of becoming invested in a project. Such a person more easily welcomes and respects the participation and input of others because she perceives their efforts as intrinsic to the project itself.

With this in mind, let us return to the question of whether Christ would want his followers to be attached to and invested in their projects with him, conceiving them as "ours." I believe the answer is yes. The Bible speaks of God's kingdom as being "at hand" (Matt. 3:2, 4:27; Mark 1:15), and He invites Christians to "participate" (1 Cor. 10:16) in this kingdom as "ambassadors" (2 Cor. 5:20), "priests" (1 Pet. 2:9), "partners" (Phil. 1:5), "children" (1 John 3:1; Rom. 8:17), "heirs" (Rom. 8:17), and "co-workers" (1 Cor. 3:9; 2 Cor. 2:6). For our purposes, I will focus on the concept of being a "co-worker." In 1 Corinthians 3:9, the Apostle Paul states that

Christian believers are "co-workers," or "fellow workers," with God (Θεου γαρ εσμεν συνεργοι).[19] Translators have rendered the Greek in the following ways:

(KJV) For we are laborers together with God.
(NASB) For we are God's fellow workers.[20]
(NIV) For we are co-workers in God's service.

The Greek here is capable of two slightly different meanings. The first emphasizes the idea that God and his people bring about a single effect together, as in a joint-work or joint-effort. The KJV, NASB, ESV, and Darby translations all seem to convey this sense.

A second interpretation emphasizes the idea that Christians are joint-laborers *with each other*, and together they are in God's service, but it does not necessarily imply that Christians jointly work together with God to bring about a single effect.[21] This second interpretation allows for the distinction between tasks performed by humans and the work that God accomplishes on His own. But for the purposes of our question, it does not matter which interpretation is correct. For one thing is clear: God chooses to work *through* his people. Whether Kingdom tasks are effectuated jointly or severally, God chooses to accomplish at least some of His kingdom work through human agency. Although God does not need humans to effectuate his will, and humans cannot accomplish Kingdom ends on their own (John 15:5), He mysteriously chooses to partner with his followers in bringing about His ends.

A Christian's efforts in her work projects should be conceived as in consultation with and in obedience to Christ . . . An ownership attachment to one's work that ignores this life of Christ in the believer would not be biblical.

If God wants Christians to see themselves as co-workers or fellow workers with Him, then it is plausible that God would want his people appropriately to identify with and invest themselves in the projects they undertake with Him, including those at work.[22] A Christian's agency and initiative *matters*, even if that "mattering" sometimes (or always) depends upon God's empowering grace. Christians can thus see the larger project of God's Kingdom as something that is responsive to their agency. And as Colossians 3:23 tells us, God's Kingdom extends past church-related projects or specific ministry activities and includes "whatever you do." Christians are to see all their earthly projects as subordinated to, and included in, God's Kingdom work.

A PARABLE OF STEWARDSHIP

God chooses to partner with his followers, and He sometimes leaves *the means* to accomplish a particular end partially or fully up to them. The Parable of the Talents in Matthew 25 illustrates this point.[23] In the parable, a wealthy man entrusts his fortune to his three servants before leaving on a journey. One servant gets five talents; another gets two; the last servant gets one.[24] The master doesn't leave them with instructions, but we do know that he is the sort of man who would expect a return on his investment. The servants who received five talents and two talents each earn a 100% return on the master's money. The servant entrusted with one talent, however, buries it. It earns nothing. When the master returns, he is pleased with the first two servants, saying, "Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things" (Matt. 25:21, 23). But he accuses the last servant of being wicked and lazy. Even though the master did not give specific instructions as to what to do with the money, he says, "You knew that I harvest where I have not sown and gather where I have not scattered seed. Well then, you should have put my money on deposit with the bankers, so that when I returned I would have received it back with interest." (Matt. 25:26). The Master is displeased with the servant's stewardship of his money.

Here one might notice that this last servant did not forget that he was a steward. He knew who the true owner of the talent was. And in a sense, he did take care of the money. But the master is displeased with the way he went about executing his stewardship task. What was it, then, about this

servant's stewardship that was lacking? Commentators have commonly taken the master's displeasure with the servant to be a result of some failure of responsibility.[25] If one were to suppose that there is a norm or duty that when safekeeping someone else's money, one ought to put it on deposit, then perhaps it was irresponsible for the servant to do nothing with the master's money. If this is right, then the master's displeasure may be explainable by the servant's failure to meet an implicit *obligation*.

But that is not all that is going on here. As R. T. France notes, to bury money in the ancient world was a recognized form of responsible safekeeping; the primitive banking system at the time meant the practice of depositing money was not widespread.[26] And even if the third servant had put the money on deposit, we do not get the sense that the master would have found this to be *excellent* or praiseworthy. The master is pleased with his other two servants precisely because they were proactive in putting his money to good use, not because they were merely responsible. His delight was in the initiative they took to *double* his money.

The story, of course, doesn't give us detailed information about what motivated the first two servants. Context seems to suggest, however, that they were motivated both by their knowledge of the master's expectations and their own creativity and resourcefulness. Since they were not given direction as to how the money should be deployed, they were left to manage the master's money as if it were their own, while simultaneously not losing sight of who the real owner was. In other words, they stewarded the money left to them by construing it as a kind of common project, one undertaken with the Master. One can also infer that they were personally invested in that project, because attaining a 100% increase in wealth surely required a significant investment of time and energy. The parable thus provides at least some indication that the psychological mindset of taking ownership in a project (as "ours") and stewardship are not incompatible; they are complementary.[27]

APPLICATION

What does this all mean, practically speaking? From a first-person standpoint, the conclusions of this essay don't obviously, or even necessarily, recommend specific changes in one's outward behavior; they challenge, rather, one's inward disposition and approach to work. This is, of course, consistent with the teachings of Jesus, whose sermons often included challenges to inner dispositions and attitudes of the heart (e.g., Matt. 5:21-48). This essay, therefore, serves as a reminder and a challenge to Christians for how they think about engaging in their work. It challenges Christians first to construe their work projects as common projects, undertaken with God, not merely as things that are "mine." Then, depending on the individual and his or her situation, there may be further implications for how he or she takes ownership.

For those already possessing a cultivated disposition to take ownership – at least in the secular sense – this essay should be a reminder that proper stewardship of one's talents and abilities requires both the subordination of those talents and abilities to God and the recognition of God's presence in the midst of one's projects. Such recognition will help guard against improper pride in one's projects when they are successful, and against improper dejection when they fail – both of which are common experiences for people disposed to take ownership at work.[28]

This does not mean, however, that Christians should strive to become detached from their work projects. Taking ownership in one's work remains a type of excellence, when done appropriately. The Bible does not suggest that Christians should approach their work in a rote or routine way, *merely* out of obligation or responsibility to God (although that responsibility exists as well). As Colossians 3:22-24 exhorts us, Christians should approach earthly work "with all [their] heart" and "with sincerity of heart." Complete detachment is not the biblical picture of stewardship or work.

Investing oneself in one's work projects does not, however, mean that one puts one's ultimate hopes in them. As philosopher Robert C. Roberts reminds us, "The Christian who would hope in God must draw back from her investments in finite hopes – because these are bound to let her down … she must invest the ultimate prospects of her life in God alone; and that means a serious alteration of her attachment to her earthly hopes." Nevertheless, once she has put these hopes in their proper place, she can with gratitude receive "from the God of hope the happy prospects that come to her in this earthly life. This means she can rejoice in these exactly as befits limited hopes."[29] In other words, a Christian should enjoy taking ownership in earthly projects, and she can be hopeful of their success, but she should never take ownership in those projects in a way that makes them an ultimate source of hope.

For those who struggle to take ownership in work projects, this essay may be helpful in a different sense. Failure to take ownership of a work project is common for at least two reasons. On the one hand, a person might not perceive a project as responsive to his or her agency. In this case, one fails to see how one's efforts or ideas matter. A necessary condition for psychological ownership is the ability to perceive oneself as *efficacious* within a project – i.e., the agent must perceive herself as having some influence over it.[30] In many cases, people fail to see the influence that they do have on the projects they participate in. One helpful resource I can suggest is the practice of job crafting.[31] But as a Christian, one might also consider that, if God is truly in the midst of one's projects, then asking the Holy Spirit for guidance, direction, and counsel as one participates in a project may be an appropriate way to become invested in it. It is a way of influencing a project that no boss, teammate, or committee can interrupt.

On the other hand, a person may find it hard to accept their participation or role in a project. People often find themselves being "forced" to participate in projects they don't like or would not choose for themselves. "I need you to be on this curriculum committee" or "I'd like you to be in charge of collecting names for this list" are both somewhat cringeworthy requests. Some people even feel that their entire jobs consist of being part of projects (or being in roles) that they would not choose. How, then, can one take ownership in such situations? One must somehow come to "accept" or welcome such projects as things that one can embrace. Otherwise, a person will, at best, behave responsibly to the project.

Fortunately, Scripture may actually give Christians a unique advantage in this respect. Colossians 3:22-24 provides encouragement to Christians that all types of work can be pleasing to the Lord and worthy of "an inheritance." Much like Jesus' encouragement to his disciples in Matthew 10:42 that no act of kindness, no matter how small, will go unnoticed or unrewarded – yes, even the cup of cold water given – Colossians assures us that even a slave's work can be pleasing to God. By keeping this in mind, Christians might more easily overcome the hurdle of "accepting" the projects they are assigned so that they can embrace them as their own. Knowing that God may be pleased with one's participation in a project, even when one doesn't desire it oneself, can help a person move in this direction.

For those who lead others, the suggestions above regarding people's perceived efficacy and acceptance of projects can easily be translated into management strategies with some creativity. I will additionally suggest two other possible applications of the framework offered here. First, for those who manage other Christians, leaders may wish to consider modifying their exhortations to take ownership in ways that help employees include God as a middle term. For those managing non-Christians or people whose faith commitments are unknown, there may be interesting opportunities to share one's faith simply by alluding to one's own mode of taking ownership. We might imagine a manager saying to an employee:

> I am very invested in this project with you and the team, and I'm trying to take ownership of it with everyone. In my own case, not only do I see it as something we're doing together, I believe that God is involved and in the midst of our work.

I can imagine a natural response to be, "What do you mean by that?" which opens the door for further conversation. This, of course, is only an example, and there are likely better permutations others will think of. Such evangelism will also not be inappropriate in many situations, but this is another practical way to glorify God in the workplace. Even when words are not spoken, the act of construing projects as "ours," with God in the center, glorifies Him because it acknowledges His presence and activity in one's life.[32]

NOTES

[1] For a recent and thorough review of this research literature, I recommend: Sarah Dawkins et al., "Psychological Ownership: A Review and Research Agenda," *Journal of Organizational Behavior* 38 (2017): 163–83. Pierce and Jussila also have a more lengthy (although slightly less recent) monograph on the topic: Jon L. Pierce and Iiro Jussila, *Psychological Ownership and the Organizational Context* (Northampton, MA: Edward Elgar Publishing, 2011).

[2] Jocko Willink and Leif Babin, *Extreme Ownership: How U.S. Navy SEALs Lead and Win* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2015).

[3] Fabian Bernhard and Michael O'Driscoll, "Psychological Ownership in Small Family-Owned Businesses: Leadership Style and Nonfamily-Employees' Work Attitudes and Behaviors," *Group and Organization Management* 36, no. 3 (2011): 345–84; Joshua Knapp, Brett Smith, and Therese Sprinkle, "Clarifying the Relational Ties of Organizational Belonging: Understanding the Roles of Perceived Insider Status, Psychological Ownership, and Organizational Identification.," *Journal of Leadership & Organizational Studies* 21, no. 3 (2014): 273–85; Melissa G. Mayhew et al., "A Study of the Antecedents and Consequences of Psychological Ownership in

Organizational Settings," *The Journal of Social Psychology* 147, no. 5 (2007): 477–500; He Peng and Jon Pierce, "Job- and Organization-Based Psychological Ownership: Relationship and Outcomes," *Journal of Managerial Psychology* 30, no. 2 (2015): 151–68.

[4] Tzu-Shian Han, Hsu-Hsin Chiang, and Aihwa Chang, "Employee Participation in Decision Making, Psychological Ownership and Knowledge Sharing: Mediating Role of Organizational Commitment in Taiwanese High-Tech Organizations," *The International Journal of Human Resource Management* 21, no. 12 (2010): 2218–33; Linn Van Dyne and Jon L. Pierce, "Psychological Ownership and Feelings of Possession: Three Field Studies Predicting Employee Attitudes and Organizational Citizenship Behavior.," *Journal of Organizational Behavior* 25 (2004): 439–359.

[5] Jun Liu et al., "Psychological Ownership: How Having Control Matters," *Journal of Management Studies,* 49, no. 5 (2012): 869–95; Xiao-Fu Pan, Qiwen Qin, and Fei Gao, "Psychological Ownership, Organization-Based Self-Esteem and Positive Organizational Behaviors," *Chinese Management Studies* 8, no. 1 (2014): 127–48.

[6] Hazel Melanie Ramos et al., "Psychological Ownership in Small Family Firms: Family and Non-Family Employees' Work Attitudes and Behaviours.," *Journal of Family Business Strategy* 5, no. 3 (2014): 300–311.

[7] Hang Zhu et al., "From Personal Relationship to Psychological Ownership: The Importance of Manager–Owner Relationship Closeness in Family Businesses," *Management and Organization Review* 9, no. 2 (2013): 295–318.

[8] Here I have in mind Garrath Williams' conception of being responsible as a kind of "readiness" to respond to "a whole host of normative demands, within a field of mutual accountability." It is thus possible to meet the normative demands of one's role within a project without becoming personally invested or attached to a project. See Garrath Williams', "Responsibility as a Virtue," *Ethical Theory and Moral Practice* 11, no. 4 (2008): 455–70. The concept of responsibility, of course, has many different senses. Nicole Vincent, for example, has developed a structured taxonomy of six related responsibility concepts. For those interested, see Nicole A. Vincent, "Responsibility: Distinguishing Virtue from Capacity," *Polish Journal of Philosophy* 3, no. 1 (2009): 111–26. This essay assumes that Christians are responsible to those in authority (Col. 3:22) and to God, but the aim of this article is to focus on the concept of taking ownership as it is distinguishable from the concept of responsibility.

[9] This quality of *proactively* contributing to a project may also be understood as "taking initiative," "being imaginative" or being "enterprising." Some grammarians consider "proactive" to be a buzzword associated with business-speak. Nevertheless, it presents a nice conceptual contrast between actions that are "reactive" – i.e., doing what one is told. The alternatives listed here are suggestions from Richard Palmer, *The Good Grammar Guide* (New York: Routledge, 2003), 157.

[10] The idea that humans are stewards of God's creation is often linked to Genesis 1:28.

[11] Paul Griffiths, *Intellectual Appetite* (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 2009), 154.

[12] Griffiths, 143.

[13] Griffiths, 156.

[14] Emphasis added. Søren Kierkegaard, *Christian Discourses and The Crisis and a Crisis in the Life of an Actress.*, ed. and trans. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong, *Kierkegaard's Writings* 17 (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997), 29.

[15] See, for example, Bernard Evans, *Stewardship: Living a Biblical Call* (Collegeville, Minnesota: Liturgical Press, 2014); Jochen Douma, Nelson Kloosterman, and A. H. Oosterhoff, *Environmental Stewardship* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2015); Peter Block, *Stewardship: Choosing Service Over Self-Interest* (San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler Publishers, 2013); John Taft, *Stewardship: Lessons Learned from the Lost Culture of Wall Street* (Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons, 2012).

[16] Evans, *Stewardship: Living a Biblical Call.*

[17] I borrow this term from Adams, who identifies the excellent participation in common projects as a virtue. See Robert Adams, *A Theory of Virtue* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2006), 84–94.

[18] Van Dyne and Pierce identify some of the potential negative side effects of psychological ownership in: Van Dyne and Pierce, "Psychological Ownership and Feelings of Possession: Three Field Studies Predicting Employee Attitudes and Organizational Citizenship Behavior." *Journal of Organizational Behavior* (25(4), 2004): 439-59.

[19] A similar phrase is found in 2 Corinthians 2:6.

[20] The ESV and the Darby translations also use the phrases "fellow workers" or "fellow workmen," respectively.

[21] As Barnes puts it, Christians are united in their work as servants who are employed by the same master, but "without saying that the master participated with them in their work." Albert Barnes, "Albert Barnes' Notes on the Bible," n.d., http://www.studylight.org/commentaries/bnb/1-corinthians-3.html.

[22] Even those who slave for earthly masters are taught to conceive of all their work as work done unto God (Eph. 6:5-8).

[23] There is a similar parable told in Luke 19:11-27.

[24] Carson notes that a talent was commonly valued at six thousand denarii, which "it would take a day laborer twenty years to earn." D.A. Carson, *The Bible Expositors Commentary*, ed. Tremper Longman and David Garland, Revised Edition, vol. 9 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2010), 579.

[25] See, for example: Carson, 9:581; Donald A. Hanger, *World Biblical Commentary*, vol. 33B (Dallas, TX: World Books, 1995), 734.

[26] R.T. France, *The Gospel of Matthew* (New International Commentary on the New Testament) (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., n.d.), 548, 955. Cf. the rabbinic comment on the untrustworthiness of bankers, that "Money can only be kept safe by placing it in the earth" (*b. B. Mesi'a* 42).

[27] This parable is one of a series of parables whose context is the second coming *(parousia)* of Christ. Thus, the parable ends with the master throwing the last servant into the outer darkness where there is weeping and gnashing of teeth. One must therefore exercise caution in interpreting the parable. The analysis presented here is not meant to imply that anyone risks damnation because they fail to take ownership in one or more of their given work projects. Rather, it merely attempts to investigate what *excellence* in stewardship may look like, since the passage seems to give clear lessons about stewardship, among its other aims. This analysis thus embraces the interpretive idea that there is an "open-ended nature of parables, and different readers may rightly place the emphasis on different aspects of their discipleship" (France, 952).

[28] Thanks to an anonymous reviewer for suggesting this point.

[29] Robert C. Roberts, *Spiritual Emotions* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2007), 152.

[30] Pierce posits being efficacious as merely one of three "routes" to psychological ownership, but this seems to be more of a necessary condition. See Jon L. Pierce, Tatiana Kostova, and Kurt T. Dirks, "Toward a Theory of Psychological Ownership in Organizations," *The Academy of Management Review* 26, no. 2 (2001): 298–310.

[31] There is a job-crafting workbook resource marketed by Job Crafting, LLC, available for purchase at https://jobcrafting.com. This resource is supported by the academic research of Wrzesniewski and Dutton: Amy Wrzesniewski and Jane Dutton, "Crafting a Job: Revisioning Employees as Active Crafters of Their Work," *Academy of Management Review* 26 (2001): 179–201; Amy Wrzesniewski et al., "Job Crafting and Cultivating Positive Meaning and Identity in Work.," *Advances in Positive Organizational Psychology* 1 (2013): 281–302.

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