

John Boyd. Ace fighter pilot. Real-world, cutting-edge aircraft designer. Teacher of the already elite. Ground-breaking strategist. Antagonistic military misfit who ultimately helped change that very military. Robert Coram, Boyd's primary biographer, captures his truly unique story engagingly and exquisitely.

Colonel Boyd was a complex, fault-ridden, yet still amazing man, someone who impacted multiple spheres that he was appointed to in very unusual ways, several times while being a virtual outsider with regard to those spheres. This podcast episode on "designing for stewardship" is part of a series on Boyd that follows several episodes about Boyd: for example, building snowmobiles...and the art and science of high performance...and being relentlessly curious to completion. Go listen to those!

In this current episode, Boyd captures our attention because he *designed for stewardship*. Here's how: Boyd integrated two very unusual skill sets: he was a comprehensively cutting-edge *designer* of military aircraft and he unswervingly served a very high standard of *stewardship* that many others ignored. Again, Boyd *designed for stewardship*! In action, these two traits created both powerful results and powerful enemies—and unavoidably so.

But just why do I say, "unavoidably so?" Well, to answer that question, let's start with the stewardship dimension of this particular story about John Boyd. In fact, let's start *way* back. From the very beginning of history, we find that there is a conflict of stewardship visions. In the garden of Eden, the serpent worked to change the stewardship vision to a selfish version: he said "you shall be like God" if you eat of the fruit of the tree. Adam and Eve ate, and ever since, people have been enticed to move from honorable stewardship to self-absorbed or corrupt handlings of their responsibilities.

In fact, that actually started before the events of Eden. Lucifer decided that he had a vision that was preferable to the plan of God—so he recruited a third of the angels in heaven and rebelled against God's plan...and became Satan. And Jesus, the Son of God, was well aware of this—as He said to His disciples in Luke 10:18 (ESV), "...I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven." You see, even *before* what we think was the beginning of everything at Eden, there was a conflict of stewardships that was initiated by Satan.

So, from Lucifer and the rebellious angels...to Adam and Eve aspiring to a different reality...to humanity arrogantly building the tower of Babel—well, of course, all the way up until the present day, there has always been a conflict in stewardships between God and humanity—with God's approach being pure, of course, and humanity's arrogantly independent approach fallen and corrupt.

And, if those conflicts between God and man exist, how much more should we expect there to be a conflict of visions between people operating on earth. I'm not talking here about sincere disagreements about stewardship vision between well-meaning people, although that itself can get *very* messy. No, I'm talking about stewardships that are in conflict because one is much more clearly on target than the other.

So, there we have it, and here's the essential direction that we as Christians must glean from that—it's that we must always ask this question of ourselves and answer it correctly, every day: are we truly operating with the proper stewardship focus, working to honor exactly what we are rightly appointed to?

This is true of every sphere of our lives—our churches, our families, our workplaces, our nations. For example, much of the corruption and rottenness of politics is directly attributable to self-centered goals like fame, power, control, and money. But as we nod "yes" in quick agreement with that reading of bad political stewardship—is that really much different from many workplaces, families, and churches, with corruption and rottenness attributable to self-centered goals like fame, power, control, and money?

Okay now, John Boyd! A fighter pilot by vocation, Boyd clearly decided early on that the stewardship goal of building fighter aircraft was very simple: the overriding goal for Boyd was pilots succeeding at defeating

the enemy in every mission while preserving themselves and the aircraft. Well, OK, you say, that's very straightforward, but who associated with the military could possibly disagree with that?

Turns out, many *did*, as stunningly chronicled in Robert Coram's great biography of John Boyd. As the U.S. President, war hero Dwight Eisenhower himself had warned Americans about the "military-industrial complex"—where decision-makers, both civilian and military, may well work together in ways that are *not* in rightful stewardship of overall U.S. interests. And Boyd ran into this time and again—here are a few examples. Intense rivalries between the U.S. military branches like the Air Force and the Navy to win tax dollars ahead of the other branches, regardless of the true merits of the project. Unnecessary, expensive features on airplanes that actually worked significantly against the ability of pilots to win in air-to-air combat. Unhealthy relationships between defense contractor leaders and military officers who were looking at self-serving alliances without full regard for efficient military effectiveness.

John Boyd confronted some of these approaches that were serving a compromised version of stewardship—that's right, *compromised stewardship*. Boyd confronted that in technical meetings, in aircraft-physics debates, in budget analysis—you name it. He did this with many generals who outranked him and powerful politicians and defense industry leaders and highly paid experts. He defeated arguments with real science and real facts. American pilots were actually getting defeated and killed in Vietnam by pilots in Russian-built MiG's, for example, due to the U.S. military then deploying aircraft in Vietnam that served often compromised expectations of powerful players in the military-industrial complex.

But just how could Boyd *foundationally* do that? By first being the best fighter pilot in the U.S., and then a very elite aircraft designer. Boyd's stewardship standard was simple: winning every battle in the air and preserving the life of every U.S. military pilot. Straightforward, clear, meaningful stewardship. That stewardship was served first by Boyd's deep competency as an elite fighter pilot himself, competency that he had driven even deeper by mastering the math, the physics, the aerodynamics—all the factors that encompass the real world of both the art and the science of winning every dogfight high in the air.

You see, Boyd was doing exactly what we are talking about today: intense, extraordinary designing for the correctly defined, highest stewardship. That's right: *designing for stewardship*. Well, you say, Boyd must not have had the big picture—surely there were budget constraints that the higher-ups were focused on. Funny thing, the reality was exactly the opposite! The military-industrial complex kept building unnecessary, very expensive complexity into fighter aircraft. Why? Elected members of Congress with a keen eye towards re-election were often anxious to secure very large contracts for the defense companies located in their districts. And defense contractors naturally wanted the largest contracts possible. And military officers wanted to claim victory for their own branch of the military in the budget-allocation wars.

But Boyd fought for exactly the opposite of that: he wanted a stripped-down, less expensive version of a fighter aircraft, where every pound of equipment would pay off in flexibility and maneuverability. No gold-plated aircraft in Boyd's world: just the lightweight, high-powered essentials needed to win the dogfight. The real steward for the pilots *and* the field officers *and* the U.S. taxpayer was John Boyd. So, Boyd used these two key facets for foundational success: a dogged commitment to real, unpolluted stewardship supported by extreme technical design knowledge and experience. *That's* designing for stewardship.

Boyd ultimately paid a huge price for his stewardship and his very undiplomatic ways of executing that stewardship—you see, Boyd was not promoted above the rank of Colonel. But that itself is a key point: the greatest stewardship is always selfless, like the 100% technically proficient, sinless Jesus going to the Cross for you and me! So, what to make of all this? Well, the lesson for each of us is clear: first, we focus like a laser on the correct stewardship and, then, we design everything we do for fulfilling that stewardship well! You know, like John Boyd. But...even more like Jesus Christ! *Designing for stewardship*. Incredible.

A&A: Application & Action

1. Quick: state your true, active stewardship posture for the Kingdom of God. Then for your workplace. Then for your family. Be specific for each. And, if you aren't able to do that quickly, why not?
2. Is your technical competence *designed and working* to effectively fulfill the correct stewardship for the Kingdom of God? For your workplace? For your family? Give specific examples for each.
3. Have you experienced issues at your church where you think the correct stewardship substantially conflicts with the stewardship focus actually in place? Your workplace? Tell the story of the level of success you've had in helping to morph the organization to a more correct stewardship.