

DISCOVERING STEWARDSHIP



***LET'S PROVE THE LORD AND HAVE THE
OPPORTUNITY TO ENJOY AND
UNDERSTAND THE GRACE OF GIVING.***

This material has been prepared as an educational resource on stewardship. It was written for a special “Month of Stewardship,” and will also serve as an ongoing reference on the principles of giving and personal stewardship. It is our hope that it will be a blessing to all.

–The Ministerial Committee of the
Australasian Union Conference

#1

THANKSGIVING: THE HEART OF STEWARDSHIP

Author: Paul Chapman

DISCOVERING
STEWARDSHIP

As I sit down to write this, I can't get the words of an old chorus out of my mind. We used to sing it almost every Sabbath afternoon in our Young People's meetings at Clayfield Church.

*He owns the cattle on a thousand hills
The wealth in every mine,
He owns the rivers and the rocks and rills,
The sun and stars that shine,
Wonderful riches more than tongue can tell
He is my Father so they're mine as well
He owns the cattle on a thousand hills
And I know He cares for me.*

The words are based on a truth illustrated in Psalm 50:7-12. When God established Israel as His people, He gave them a system of sacrifices that symbolised the sacrifice of Jesus Christ, the Lamb of God, who would come to take away the sin of the world. But in their selfish and materialistic outlook on life, many came to put their trust in the animal sacrifices instead of the One they represented. So, God here challenged their attitude towards their worship of Him.

"Hear, O my people, and I will speak; O Israel, and I will testify against thee: I am God, even thy God. I will not reprove thee for thy sacrifices or thy burnt offerings, to have been continually before me. I will take no bullock out of thy house, nor he goats out of thy folds. For every beast of the forest is mine, and the cattle upon a thousand hills. I know all the fowls of the mountains: and the wild beasts of the field are mine. If I were hungry, I would not tell thee: for the world is mine, and the fulness thereof. Will I eat the flesh of bulls, or drink the blood of goats?" (Psalm 50:7-13).

The sacrifices were amply rendered by the people in their worship of God. But what God desired was an inward service of the heart. The animal sacrifices were of secondary importance. God made it clear that if He needed them, He would not need to ask the Israelites to give them to Him. He already owns them. Instead, God appeals, to them, "those who have made a covenant with Me by sacrifice," (verse 5) to "Offer unto God thanks-

giving; and pay thy vows unto the most High,” (Psalm 50:14).

In verse 23, He explain how this kind of worship is more acceptable than the mere outward sacrifices of bulls and goats.

“Whoso offereth praise glorifieth me: and to him that ordereth his conversation aright will I shew the salvation of God,” (Psalm 50:23).

The word translated “praise” in verse 23, is the same word translated “thanksgiving” in verse 14. This is the kind of worship God is wanting His people to render to him—worship that springs from hearts abounding with thanksgiving to God. But not only that. God assures us that, “. . .to him that ordereth his conversation aright will I shew the salvation of God,” (Psalm 50:23).

Today, the word “conversation” generally means verbal communication. But four hundred years ago, when our King James Version was first published, “conversation” meant a person’s entire “behaviour.” That is the idea behind the Hebrew word translated here. Literally it means “a road” and figuratively it means “a course of life.” Hence the ESV translates the verse, “The one who offers thanksgiving as his sacrifice glorifies me; to one who orders his way rightly I will show the salvation of God!” (Psalm 50:23, ESV).

Both these things, offering to God thanksgiving, and putting your life in order, follows from a heart that is made right with God. That is what God wants to do with you and me. When He does, we can’t help but offer praise and thanksgiving to Him.

Such a heart David had when he was inspired to write, “Let us come before his presence with thanksgiving, and make a joyful noise unto him with psalms. For the LORD is a great God, and a great King above all gods. In his hand are the deep places of the earth: the strength of the hills is his also. The sea is his, and he made it:

and his hands formed the dry land. O come, let us worship and bow down: let us kneel before the LORD our maker. For he is our God; and we are the people of his pasture, and the sheep of his hand. To day if ye will hear his voice, Harden not your heart,” (Psalm 95:1-7, 8a).

After reminding his readers of all the reasons to worship God with thanksgiving, David appealed to them to surrender their hearts to God. Only a heart that is in harmony with God can truly worship Him with thanksgiving.

A Creator Who Cares

From David’s Psalms, a primary reason for thanksgiving is based on the knowledge of God as our creator.

“O come, let us worship and bow down: let us kneel before the LORD our maker” (Psalm 95:6).

“[God] hath made us, and not we ourselves; we are his people, and the sheep of his pasture” (Psalm 100:3).

When we recognise that God created everything, it gives us confidence that He cares for everything. Every moment of everyday, God provides for all His creation. He starts with plant life.

“The Lord has given His life to the trees and vines of His creation. His word can increase or decrease the fruit of the land. If men would open their understanding to discern the relation between nature and nature’s God, faithful acknowledgments of the Creator’s power would be heard. Without the life of God, nature would die. His creative works are dependent on Him. He bestows life-giving properties on all that nature produces. We are to regard the trees laden with fruit as the gift of God, just as much as though He placed the fruit in our hands.” *Medical Ministry*, p. 8.

But what is so amazing, is that God does this for everyone of us, whether we believe in Him or not. Jesus emphasised the impar-

tial nature of God's love when He explained that God, "maketh His sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust," (Matthew 5:45).

Not only did Jesus declare God's daily care for creation, but He illustrated His awesome power when He fed five thousand with five loaves of bread and two fishes. The Creator's infinite power multiplied the food until there was more than enough for everyone. "And they did eat, and were all filled: and there was taken up of fragments that remained to them twelve baskets," (Luke 9:17).

"In feeding the five thousand, Jesus lifts the veil from the world of nature, and reveals the power that is constantly exercised for our good. In the production of earth's harvests, God is working a miracle every day. Through natural agencies the same work is accomplished that was wrought in the feeding of the multitude. Men prepare the soil and sow the seed, but it is the life from God that causes the seed to germinate. It is God's rain and air and sunshine that cause it to put forth 'first the blade, then the ear, after that the full corn in the ear.' It is God who is every day feeding millions from earth's harvest fields." *The Desire of Ages*, p. 367.

This is the reason we give thanks for the food we eat at our tables. We may not have grown it ourselves, but God in His infinite mercy and kindness, provides it for us daily. He does so through His eternal Son, Jesus.

"For by him were all things created, that are in heaven, and that are in earth... all things were created by him, and for him" (Colossians 1:16).

God not only created all things through His Son, but "by him all things consist," (Colossians 1:17).

Furthermore, Jesus, upholds "all things by the word of his power," (Hebrews 1:3).

That should be a humbling thought for the proudest heart. No matter who we are in this world, everyone one of us is kept alive right now by the power of Christ.

"The beating heart, the throbbing pulse, every nerve and muscle in the living organism, are kept in order and activity by the power of an infinite God." *Medical Ministry*, p. 8.

That's why, in trying to help us understand God's love and care for us, Jesus pointed us to the care God has for the things of nature.

"And why take ye thought for raiment? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they toil not, neither do they spin: And yet I say unto you, That even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. Wherefore, if God so clothe the grass of the field, which to day is, and to morrow is cast into the oven, shall he not much more clothe you, O ye of little faith? Therefore take no thought, saying, What shall we eat? or, What shall we drink? or, Wherewithal shall we be clothed? (For after all these things do the Gentiles seek:) for your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things. But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you," (Matthew 6:28b-33).

"Here Christ leads the mind abroad to contemplate the open fields of nature, and His power touches the eye and the senses, to discern the wonderful works of divine power. He directs attention first to nature, then up through nature to nature's God, who upholds the worlds by His power." *Medical Ministry*, p. 9.

If God cares that much to clothe the grass of the field with beautiful flowers, how much more do you think He cares for you? If you put His kingdom and service first, He will add unto you everything you need. Sadly, so many people have lost

their health or ruined their relationships in their selfish pursuit of getting things. It is true that if we want something in life, we need to expend the energy to go out and get it. But to be successful, without compromising our spiritual experience, we need to understand the law of life, a law that sustains the entire created universe. It is what the pen of inspiration calls “the circuit of beneficence.” Others have called it the circle of love. It is expressed in one idea. Take to give.

A Creator Who Gives

The circuit begins with God as the great Giver.

“Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights, with whom is no variable-ness, neither shadow of turning,” (James 1:17).

“In the beginning, God was revealed in all the works of creation.... And upon all things in earth, and air, and sky, He wrote the message of the Father’s love.” *The Desire of Ages*, p. 20.

That love was expressed in God giving us life and everything needed to sustain that life. He created this beautiful planet with all its bounties and privileges. He gave it to us in trust. It was His gift of love, and He intended for us to use it to glorify Him and benefit the beings He created. But when we rebelled against Him and broke His law, we forfeited His favour.

“This was the position of the human race after man divorced himself from God by transgression. Then he was no longer entitled to a breath of air, a ray of sunshine, or a particle of food.” *Faith and Works*, p. 21.

God in His love made a way to bring us back into the circuit of beneficence.

He Gave Himself

It’s ironic that in seeking to restore us into the circuit of beneficence, God gave Himself. He did that in the person of His Son.

“For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life,” (John 3:16)

“For there is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus; Who gave himself a ransom for all, to be testified in due time” (1 Timothy 2:5, 6).

“It is the glory of the gospel that it is founded upon the principle of restoring in the fallen race the divine image by a constant manifestation of benevolence. This work began in the heavenly courts.... The Godhead was stirred with pity for the race, and the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit gave themselves to the working out of the plan of redemption.” *God’s Amazing Grace*, p. 190.

When God gave His only begotten Son to us, He poured out all of heaven in that one gift. He could give nothing more. In giving us His one Son, God pledges to freely give us all the things we need.

“He that spared not his own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with him also freely give us all things?” Romans 8:32

Paul was so inspired by this act of benevolence on God’s part, that he wrote,

“Thanks be unto God for His unspeakable gift,” (2 Corinthians 9:15).

The Message of Love in Nature

Though sin marred God’s perfect creation, His message of love can still be seen in nature.

“Even now all created things declare the glory of His excellence.... Every tree and shrub and leaf pours forth that element of

life without which neither man nor animal could live; and man and animal, in turn, minister to the life of tree and shrub and leaf.” *The Desire of Ages*, p. 20.

Nature’s message is a message of love. Everything living thing in nature receives what it needs from another part of creation. Then each part in turn takes of what it has received and gives to sustain another part of creation. This is what love does. When we see it manifested, we get a glimpse of God’s character.

“But turning from all lesser representations, we behold God in Jesus. Looking unto Jesus we see that it is the glory of our God to give. ‘I do nothing of Myself,’ said Christ; ‘the living Father hath sent Me, and I live by the Father.’ ‘I seek not Mine own glory,’ but the glory of Him that sent Me. John 8:28; 6:57; 8:50; 7:18. In these words is set forth the great principle which is the law of life for the universe. All things Christ received from God, but He took to give. So in the heavenly courts, in His ministry for all created beings: through the beloved Son, the Father’s life flows out to all; through the Son it returns, in praise and joyous service, a tide of love, to the great Source of all. And thus through Christ the circuit of beneficence is complete, representing the character of the great Giver, the law of life.” *The Desire of Ages*, p. 21.

Completing the Circuit

But that is not the end of the story. To complete the circuit of beneficence, God wants to change the way we live our life in relation to others.

Paul wrote to Titus that Jesus “gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works,” (Titus 2:14).

All iniquity means “every lawless deed” (NKJV) or “all lawlessness” (ESV).

Since God’s law is “love” (Romans 13:10), to be redeemed from “every lawless deed” means we are delivered from every loveless deed.

The love of Christ changes us and motivates us to live a life of benevolence.

“For the love of Christ constraineth us; because we thus judge, that if one died for all, then were all dead: And that he died for all, that they which live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto him which died for them, and rose again” (2 Corinthians 5:14, 15).

So now, instead of living for ourselves, we live for others. In the circuit of beneficence, that means instead of taking to keep, we take to give.

“Every true disciple is born into the kingdom of God as a missionary. He who drinks of the living water becomes a fountain of life. The receiver becomes a giver. The grace of Christ in the soul is like a spring in the desert, welling up to refresh all, and making those who are ready to perish eager to drink of the water of life.” *The Desire of Ages*, p. 195.

As we read in Psalms 50, God owns everything. In fact, the Father has given it all to Jesus. He purchased it all with His own blood (Acts 20:28).

“Now every member of the human family is given wholly into the hands of Christ, and whatever we possess—whether it is the gift of money, of houses, of lands, of reasoning powers, of physical strength, of intellectual talents—in this present life, and the blessings of the future life, are placed in our possession as God’s treasures to be faithfully expended for the benefit of man. Every gift is stamped with the cross and bears the

image and superscription of Jesus Christ. All things come of God. From the smallest benefits up to the largest blessing, all flow through the one Channel—a superhuman mediation sprinkled with the blood that is of value beyond estimate because it was the life of God in His Son.

“Now not a soul can give God anything that is not already His. Bear this in mind: ‘All things come of Thee, and of Thine own have we given Thee’ (1 Chronicles 29:14). This must be kept before the people wherever we go—that we possess nothing, can offer nothing in value, in work, in faith, which we have not first received of God and upon which He can lay His hand any time and say, They are Mine—gifts and blessings and endowments I entrusted to you, not to enrich yourself, but for wise improvement to benefit the world.” *Faith and Works*, p. 22.

The Blessing of Property

Have you ever wondered why God blesses us with property? “It is God who blesses men with property, and He does this that they may be able to give toward the advancement of His cause.” *The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 75.

But God does not compel us to give. He inspires us to give. When King David called for offerings to be given for the building of the house of God, he was overjoyed at the response of the people. He exclaimed to God in prayer, “Both riches and honour come of thee, and thou reignest over all; and in thine hand is power and might; and in thine hand it is to make great, and to give strength unto all. Now therefore, our God, we thank thee, and praise thy glorious name. But who am I, and what is my people, that we should be able to offer so willingly after this sort?

for all things come of thee, and of thine own have we given thee” (1 Chronicles 29:12-14).

Gratitude in Action

David asked, “What shall I render unto the LORD for all his benefits toward me? I will take the cup of salvation, and call upon the name of the LORD. I will pay my vows unto the LORD now in the presence of all his people,” (Ps 116:12-14).

When we realise God’s love for us, and His blessings in our lives, we will praise Him naturally. But how do we show gratitude to God beyond our words or music?

“[God] sends the sunshine and the rain. He causes vegetation to flourish. He gives health and the ability to acquire means. All our blessings come from His bountiful hand. In turn, He would have men and women show their gratitude by returning Him a portion in tithes and offerings—in thank offerings, in freewill offerings, in trespass offerings. Should means flow into the treasury in accordance with this divinely appointed plan,—a tenth of all the increase, and liberal offerings,—there would be an abundance for the advancement of the Lord’s work.” *The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 75.

When we appreciate God’s ownership of all, we will understand why Jesus taught that we are merely a steward of the Lord’s goods. God wants to use us as stewards to be channels of blessing to the world. We can be, if we use the life, the time, the talents, the possessions, and the money He has blessed us with to bless others. When we have a heart in tune with God, filled with a sense of gratitude for His unspeakable Gift, it will be a joy to be such channels.

#2

GIVING OR TAKING?

Author: Ben Thiel

DISCOVERING
STEWARDSHIP

One Monday, while doing my apprenticeship, I was talking to one of the mechanics and the cleaner during our break. We were discussing what we had done on the weekend.

When the cleaner realized that I didn't drink, smoke, take drugs or party and was still single, he was so surprised that he called another mechanic over and said, "Do you know that Ben hasn't lived!?" We continued to have an interesting discussion on what it means to live.

Have you lived? What does it mean to live? We are all alive, but have we really lived? We are in a world where we are encouraged to get a life but what does that actually mean?

The Bible says, about life: "And this is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent." John 17:3.

Just as God's character is one of giving, "So in human life, to give is to live." *Christ's Object Lessons*, p. 86.

It has been truly said that life is a school. Every day of our lives, we face situations that are learning experiences. From the time that we wake up until the time that we go to sleep, we are faced with opportunities. From our earliest moments, we quickly learn to take hold of these opportunities. The words 'mine'—ownership, 'no'—refusal, 'stop' or 'go away' are sadly often some of the first concepts that we learn. The concept of giving—giving others the opportunity of ownership, giving respect, giving space, giving encouragement, giving time to another person to express their thoughts, giving time to care, giving our efforts to assist, giving our time to listen—is a concept which is more slowly learned.

Moses

Around 1370 B.C., a young man was getting on with his life. He had every opportunity to take, rather than to give, to have glory, fame, riches, luxury and prestige. He could have had a beautiful wife, a luxurious palace, all the latest technology, servants to do all the work, the finest horses, chariots, etc. If he had followed this course in his life, we would know far less about him. He may have secured himself a beautiful pyramid and a golden coffin, so that when he died his treasures and embalmed pets could be around him, of which he would know nothing. But how much more wonderful is his reward now? He has a life!

Let us consider what it was that drove Moses forward. Hebrews 11:27 says, “By faith he forsook Egypt, not fearing the wrath of the king: for he endured, as seeing him who is invisible.” Why did he choose to leave all those opportunities and take on the glamorous occupation of herding sheep for forty years? Was his reward in heaven his motive for giving up so much in this life? What was it that he was thinking about, as he led a few million grumbling slaves out from bondage, through a hot, dry desert to the promised land? Was he thinking, “I must have patience. I really must keep my patience now. It is worth putting up with their complaining and this heat for a while. Now is my time to give my energies, my service, and if I do this right, I’ll make it to heaven and have rest, peace and happiness forever. If I can tolerate this, I will never hear a word of complaint in heaven.” Is that a life? Not at all! Moses had a life, a life completely driven by love and service to his fellow-man.

Seeking his own good, his creature comforts or any thought of self-preservation were completely absent in Moses’

life of giving. He loved the people he was leading more than himself. God said to him, “Let me alone, that I may destroy them, and blot out their name from under heaven: and I will make of thee a nation mightier and greater than they.” Moses pleaded for them on many occasions, coming to such a point of selfless giving that he was ready to express his love in the following words: “Yet now, if thou wilt forgive their sin—; and if not, blot me, I pray thee, out of thy book which thou hast written” (Exodus 32:32).

What a request! Just think, Moses was willing to give, not just a short earthly life, but eternal life itself, if he could but see the souls for who he labored eternally saved.

Moses beheld Christ on the mountain. “It was Christ who, amid thunder and flame, had proclaimed the law upon Mount Sinai.” *Thoughts from the Mount of Blessing*, p. 45. Moses beheld Christ’s selfless character, He knew Christ, the One who had brought him out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage, the One who had opened the sea, who had given shade in the desert during the day and warmth at night, the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world, the One altogether lovely. Moses whole vision had changed—he had a life!

“He that findeth his life shall lose it: and he that loseth his life for my sake shall find it.” Matthew 10:39.

One Principle

As a church, we often talk about the principles that we stand on, principles which we find clearly defined in the Word of God and the “testimony of Jesus.” To follow these principles means losing ourselves and beholding Jesus the Lamb of God, the great Giver. God gives to us, so that we can give to others and understand the blessings of giving in our

own lives. Sometimes we may worry how we can achieve a certain standard or what others may think of us. In order to find happiness there is actually only one principle that our lives need to run by; it is found in the statement below:

“There are many whose hearts are aching under a load of care because they seek to reach the world’s standard. They have chosen its service, accepted its perplexities, adopted its customs. Thus their character is marred, and their life made a weariness. In order to gratify ambition and worldly desires, they wound the conscience, and bring upon themselves an additional burden of remorse. The continual worry is wearing out the life forces. Our Lord desires them to lay aside this yoke of bondage. He invites them to accept His yoke; He says, ‘My yoke is easy, and My burden is light.’ He bids them seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and His promise is that all things needful to them for this life shall be added. Worry is blind, and cannot discern the future; but Jesus sees the end from the beginning. In every difficulty He has His way prepared to bring relief. Our heavenly Father has a thousand ways to provide for us, of which we know nothing. Those who accept the one principle of making the service and honor of God supreme will find perplexities vanish, and a plain path before their feet.” *The Desire of Ages*, p. 330.

Do we face perplexities on the road of life? Yes, we definitely do face many challenges, so let us trust God in every area of our lives and follow this one principle: Let us make God’s service and His honor supreme in our lives.

The Courage of Heroes and the Faith of Martyrs

“A great work is to be accomplished; broader plans must be laid; a voice must go forth to arouse the nations. Men whose faith is weak and wavering are not the ones to carry forward the work at this important crisis. We need the courage of heroes and the faith of martyrs.” *Testimonies*, vol. 5, p. 187.

In the great work before us today, we need the courage of heroes and the faith of martyrs. Jim Elliot, a missionary who went to Ecuador in the late 1940’s, wrote the following words in his diary, just a few days before he was martyred by the people he had travelled so far to share the Word of God with, the Huaorani Indians. “He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain that which he cannot lose.”

After Jim Elliot’s death, his wife, Elisabeth Elliot, stayed in Ecuador and continued sharing the Gospel with the ones who martyred her husband. Instead of giving up and leaving, instead of harbouring hurt and hatred, she showed love. Elisabeth Elliot wrote much on Christian living and helped many people. Some of her quotes are:

“There is nothing worth living for, unless it is worth dying for.”

“You can never lose what you have offered to Christ.”

“The will of God is not something you add to your life. It’s a course you choose. You either line yourself up with the Son of God ... or you capitulate to the principle which governs the rest of the world.”

“By trying to grab fulfilment everywhere, we find it nowhere.”

“Our vision is so limited we can hardly imagine a love that does not show itself in protection from suffer-

ing. The love of God is of a different nature altogether. It does not hate tragedy. It never denies reality. It stands in the very teeth of suffering.”

Hudson Taylor, a missionary to China, said, “If I had a thousand pounds China should have it—if I had a thousand lives, China should have them. No! Not China but Christ. Can we do too much for Him? Can we do enough for such a precious Saviour?”

“John Knox, when in an agony of prayer for his beloved land, cried out in the burden of his soul, ‘O God, give me Scotland, or I die!’” *The Review and Herald*, October 20, 1896.

These are the words of lost/found men and women. Lost to this world and self but found to Christ and a life of giving. How is it with us? We often think of ways and strategies of strengthening and growing the church, but the real need today, especially now in this time of Laodicea is the courage of heroes and the faith of martyrs. It is a willingness to spend and be spent for the truth’s sake. Now in a time of many winds of doctrine there is need to “buy the truth, and sell it not” (Proverbs 23:23).

There is a need for the not-negotiable, the putting-all-on-the-altar approach of Luther, where he said “here I stand—I can do no other.” Or think of Paul, who was willing to be beaten, shipwrecked or killed so that others could come and hear the truth of the Gospel. In this age, in this country, our danger is of becoming very soft, of feeling that many luxuries are actually necessities. Our danger is a lack of willingness to sacrifice for Jesus.

“The greatest want of the world is the want of men—men who will not be bought or sold, men who in their inmost souls are true and honest, men who do not fear to call sin by its right name, men whose conscience is as true to duty as the

needle to the pole, men who will stand for the right though the heavens fall. But such a character is not the result of accident; it is not due to special favors or endowments of Providence. A noble character is the result of self-discipline, of the subjection of the lower to the higher nature—the surrender of self for the service of love to God and man.” *Education*, p. 57.

Giving from the Heart

Brothers and sisters, how is it with us? Do you have a life?

It used to be said that Papua New Guinea was a place where only the three M’s would go. What are the three M’s? Missionaries, Medics, or Madmen. When flying to Papua New Guinea in the past you would find very few from Australia or elsewhere on the plane, and if you talked to them you would find most of them fitted one of these categories: Missionaries or Medics sacrificing their time, risking their health and wanting to help the needs of humanity or give back to society; or the very odd Madman wanting to go on some wild adventure. Today, times have changed, as more mining ventures have opened in this resource rich country. Thousands of people are making the same sacrifices, leaving their families and flying the distance, not to give to the society that they are visiting, but to reap its financial benefits.

In life we all, without exception, make sacrifices. But the big question is—what for? The strange thing is that we often don’t seem to consider the risks of our sacrifice to our health or wellbeing if the reward is great enough. Risks are things we quickly forget about if we are pursuing what we love.

In his book, *The Sabbath*, the sixteenth century protestant, Thomas Watson wrote, “What the heart does not do is not

done.” Are our hearts somehow becoming attached to things that will burn in a few short years? Are we thinking of our good more than the good of others? If we are only worried about our own salvation, instead of also the salvation of others, then we haven’t found a life. The purpose of our lives isn’t “done.”

Then, let us behold the Lamb of God, the true Giver. He didn’t say, “I will come to earth if my sacrifice is worth it.” He risked all! He could not see beyond the tomb, yet he laid down His life and gave anyway. Though in His humanity, He cried out, “My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken me?” He still gave. God so loved the world that He gave (not lent) His only begotten Son.

“In taking our nature, the Saviour has bound Himself to humanity by a tie that is never to be broken. Through the eternal ages He is linked with us.... ‘Unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given:’ ... (Isaiah 9:6). God has adopted human nature in the person of His Son, and has carried the same into the highest heaven. It is the ‘Son of man’ who shares the throne of the universe.... In Christ the family of earth and the family of heaven are bound together. Christ glorified is our brother. Heaven is enshrined in humanity, and humanity is enfolded in the bosom of Infinite Love.” *God’s Amazing Grace*, p. 79.

A Principle of Life

Why do we give our time and effort to help others on the road of life? It is because the love of Christ constrains us. Why do we give tithes? We love our fellow man, and

according to God’s plan, we want workers to give themselves full time to sharing the news of salvation while time lasts. Why do we give offerings? To build and maintain churches where people can come learn of God’s great love. We also give offerings so that programs can be run, literature printed and practical help can be given to souls who need to be rescued and found in God’s kingdom.

“‘Great peace have they who love Thy law, and nothing shall offend them.’ [Psalm 119:165.] Can this be the feeling of many here today? Are you not easily offended, nervous, irritable, passionate? If the truth dwells in the heart, it will sanctify your life. We are not placed here in this world to please ourselves. Christ lived not to please Himself. He was constantly working to bless and save others, and not one of us should feel satisfied unless we can have a good influence over each other. We are in a world where we can see faults in the characters of other, while we do not see our own faults or realize our own dangers. We should be like Christ. He was true in every purpose, feeling, and thought. This we must individually be if we are followers of Christ. Jesus despises all pretense, falsehood, unreality.” *Manuscript 33*, 1885.

“And all who would bring forth fruit as workers together with Christ must first fall into the ground and die. The life must be cast into the furrow of the world’s need. Self-love, self-interest, must perish. But the law of self-sacrifice is the law of self-preservation. The seed buried in the ground produces fruit,

and in turn this is planted. Thus the harvest is multiplied. The husbandman preserves his grain by casting it away. So in human life, to give is to live. The life that will be preserved is the life that is freely given in service to God and man. Those who for Christ's sake sacrifice their life in this world, will keep it unto life eternal." *Christ's Object Lessons*, pp. 86, 87.

For this reason, stewardship is about much more than giving tithes and offerings. Stewardship means we recognise that God owns everything, and we are here to manage what He has given to us. Every talent and every opportunity is to be utilised in God's work of blessing humanity.

"Every good thing of earth was placed here by the bountiful hand of God as an expression of His love to man.... He thus makes man the medium through which to distribute His blessings on earth. God planned the system of beneficence, in order that man might become like his Creator, benevolent and unselfish in character, and finally be a partaker with Christ of the eternal, glorious reward." *Counsels on Stewardship*, p. 15.

Have you been living 'to have' or 'to be'? Have you been giving how and where you should be? Or have you been giving from any wrong motive in your heart? Let us examine and recommit our hearts to Jesus. Jesus is the One who loves us so much that He would give Himself to be our ransom, even if there was only one fallen human being on this little planet!

"We are to surrender our hearts to God, that He may renew and sanctify us, and fit us for His heavenly court. We are not to wait for some special time, but today we are to give ourselves to Him, refusing to be the servants of sin. Do you imagine you can leave off sin a little at a time? Oh, leave the accursed thing at once!

Hate the things that Christ hates, love the things that Christ loves. Has He not by His death and suffering made provision for your cleansing from sin? When we begin to realize that we are sinners, and fall on the Rock to be broken, the everlasting arms are placed about us, and we are brought close to the heart of Jesus. Then we shall be charmed with His loveliness, and disgusted with our own righteousness. We need to come close to the foot of the cross. The more we humble ourselves there, the more exalted will God's love appear. The grace and righteousness of Christ will not avail for him who feels whole, for him who thinks he is reasonably good, who is contented with his own condition. There is no room for Christ in the heart of him who does not realize his need of divine light and aid." *Selected Messages*, bk. 1, pp. 327, 328.

Let us choose to give our lives and all that we possess to God and His service today. May we all find a life: a life hid with Christ in God; a rich, selfless life of giving.

In closing, let us remember that "God considers more with how much love we work, than the amount we do." *The Youth's Instructor*, January 13, 1898.

#3

TITHE: A SYSTEMATIC INVESTMENT

Author: Nathan Tyler

DISCOVERING
STEWARDSHIP

The Lord has given us a great commission, to preach the gospel to the world. “And he said unto them, Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature.” Mark 16:15

As we go about this work, what does God expect us to do with the gifts and talents He supplies to us?

“Heal the sick, cleanse the lepers, raise the dead, cast out devils: freely ye have received, freely give.” Matthew 10:8.

Therefore, the support of the work of the gospel is dependent on the support of those who are have received the message.

“Christ, as our head, leads out in the great work of salvation and bids us follow His example. He has given us a world-wide message. This truth must be extended to all nations, tongues,

and people. Satan’s power was to be contested, and he was to be overcome by Christ and also by His followers. An extensive war was to be maintained against the powers of darkness. And in order to do this work successfully, means were required. God does not propose to send means direct from heaven, but He gives into the hands of His followers talents of means to use for the very purpose of sustaining this warfare.” *Testimonies*, vol. 3, p. 388.

New Testament Tithing

Our practice of tithing is based on the examples of the faithful, from the patriarchs to the apostles.

“And [Melchisedec said] blessed be the most high God, which hath delivered thine enemies into thy hand. And he [Abraham] gave him tithes of all.” Genesis 14:20.

“[Jacob said] And this stone, which I have set for a pillar, shall be God’s house: and of all that thou shalt give me I will surely give the tenth unto thee.” Genesis 28:22.

“The tithing system did not originate with the Hebrews. From the earliest times the Lord claimed a tithe as His, and this claim was recognized and honored. Abraham paid tithes to Melchizedek, the priest of the most high God. Genesis 14:20. Jacob, when at Bethel, an exile and a wanderer, promised the Lord, ‘Of all that Thou shalt give me I will surely give the tenth unto Thee.’ Genesis 28:22. As the Israelites were about to be established as a nation, the law of tithing was reaffirmed as one of the divinely ordained statutes upon obedience to which their prosperity depended.” *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 525.

The Lord commanded the Israelites, “And all the tithe of the land, whether of the seed of the land, or of the fruit of the tree, is the Lord’s: it is holy unto the Lord. And if a man will at all redeem ought of his tithes, he shall add thereto the fifth part thereof. And concerning the tithe of the herd, or of the flock, even of whatsoever passeth under the rod, the tenth shall be holy unto the Lord.” Leviticus 27:30-32.

In the New Testament, instruction was given regarding the support of the work.

“And in the same house remain, eating and drinking such things as they give: for the labourer is worthy of his hire. Go not from house to house.” Luke 10:7.

“Let him that is taught in the word communicate [give] unto him that teacheth in all good things.” Galatians 6:6.

Jesus Himself acknowledged the tithing system.

“Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye pay tithe of mint and

anise and cummin, and have omitted the weightier matters of the law, judgment, mercy, and faith: these ought ye to have done, and not to leave the other undone.” Matthew 23:23.

“The system enjoined upon the Hebrews has not been repealed or relaxed by the One who originated it. Instead of being of no force now, it was to be more fully carried out and more extended, as salvation through Christ alone should be more fully brought to light in the Christian age.” *Testimonies*, vol. 3, pp. 391, 392.

The Use of the Tithe

In the time of Israel, the tithe had a specified and particular purpose. It given for the support of the religious teachers of the nation.

“But the tithes of the children of Israel, which they offer as an heave offering unto the Lord, I have given to the Levites to inherit: therefore I have said unto them, Among the children of Israel they shall have no inheritance.” Numbers 18:24.

“In the Hebrew economy one tenth of the income of the people was set apart to support the public worship of God.” *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 525.

The various offerings had different purposes, depending on their designation. The tithe, however, was always directed to the support of the Levites.

Today, we should follow the same guidelines. The tithe is to be used for the support of the ministry.

“A very plain, definite message has been given to me for our people. I am bidden to tell them that they are making a mistake in applying the tithe to various objects which, though good in themselves, are not the object to which the Lord has said that the tithe should be applied....

“One reasons that the tithe may be applied to school purposes. Still others reason that canvassers and colporteurs should be supported from the tithe. But a great mistake is made when the tithe is drawn from the object for which it is to be used—the support of the ministers. There should be today in the field one hundred well qualified laborers where now there is but one.” *Testimonies*, vol. 9, pp. 248, 249.

The purpose of the tithe, as illustrated by the Levites, extends beyond ordained ministers, to all other dedicated teachers of the Word. The following statement highlights the great need of women as Bible teachers, also supported by the tithe, to do an important work.

“Women, as well as men, are needed in the work that must be done. Those women who give themselves to the service of the Lord, who labor for the salvation of others by doing house-to-house work, which is as taxing as and more taxing, than standing before a congregation, should receive payment for their labor. If a man is worthy of his hire, so also is a woman....

“The tithe should go to those who labor in word and doctrine, be they men or women.” *Manuscript Releases*, vol. 18, pp. 66, 67.

What happens in the Lord’s work when the tithes and offerings are faithfully returned to Him?

“Then Hezekiah questioned with the priests and the Levites concerning the heaps. And Azariah the chief priest of the house of Zadok answered him, and said, Since the people began to bring the offerings into the house of the Lord, we have

had enough to eat, and have left plenty: for the Lord hath blessed his people; and that which is left is this great store.” 2 Chronicles 31:9, 10.

“God’s chosen messengers, who are engaged in aggressive labor, should never be compelled to go a warfare at their own charges, unaided by the sympathetic and hearty support of their brethren. It is the part of church members to deal liberally with those who lay aside their secular employment that they may give themselves to the ministry.... Those who are called to the work of the ministry, and at the call of duty give up all to engage in God’s service, should receive for their self-sacrificing efforts wages sufficient to support themselves and their families.” *The Acts of the Apostles*, pp. 340, 341.

In our Union, an equitable system has been put in place to ensure that each worker is supported sufficiently. Although being involved in the Lord’s work necessarily involves sacrifice, families do not have to suffer for lack of food, clothing or shelter, or resort to self-support in order to make ends meet.

However, when funds are lacking, the result is that we cannot employ a sufficient number of workers. Many more are needed to enter the harvest field and help to push forward the great work of the gospel. Young people who have completed the missionary training and are willing to enter full-time employment in the Lord’s cause cannot be offered a place, because there are insufficient funds to employ them. This is why it is important that all of God’s people prac-

tice good personal stewardship, so that they are able to support the work to the full extent that God has blessed them with the means to do so.

System of Tithing

The Lord counsels us to be systematic in our stewardship and our giving.

“Upon the first day of the week let every one of you lay by him in store, as God hath prospered him, that there be no gatherings when I come.” 1 Corinthians 16:2.

“This matter of giving is not left to impulse. God has given us definite instruction in regard to it. He has specified tithes and offerings as the measure of our obligation. And He desires us to give regularly and systematically.... Let each regularly examine his income, which is all a blessing from God, and set apart the tithe as a separate fund, to be sacredly the Lord’s. This fund should not in any case be devoted to any other use; it is to be devoted solely to support the ministry of the gospel. After the tithe is set apart, let gifts and offering be apportioned, ‘as God hath prospered’ you.” *Counsels on Sabbath School Work*, pp. 129, 130.

To the question of when the tithe is set apart, and from what portion, we find an answer:

“Let God’s portion be first set apart. We are not to consecrate to Him what remains of our income after all our real or imaginary wants are satisfied; but before any portion is consumed, we should set apart that which God has specified as His.” *Counsels on Stewardship*, p. 81.

There is also a system to the way the tithe is received and used in the Lord’s work.

“Bring ye all the tithes into the storehouse, that there may be meat in mine house, and prove me now herewith, saith the Lord of hosts, if I will not open you

the windows of heaven, and pour you out a blessing, that there shall not be room enough to receive it.” Malachi 3:10.

For Israel, the “storehouse” was understood literally—an actual place where the tithes and offerings were collected.

“And at that time were some appointed over the chambers for the treasures, for the offerings, for the firstfruits, and for the tithes, to gather into them out of the fields of the cities the portions of the law for the priests and Levites: for Judah rejoiced for the priests and for the Levites that waited.” Nehemiah 12:44.

There was also a tiered system of distribution—local Levites received tithes, and a tithe of this was taken to Jerusalem. In this way, everyone participated in tithing; even the Levites tithed.

“And that we should bring the firstfruits of our dough, and our offerings, and the fruit of all manner of trees, of wine and of oil, unto the priests, to the chambers of the house of our God; and the tithes of our ground unto the Levites, that the same Levites might have the tithes in all the cities of our tillage. And the priest the son of Aaron shall be with the Levites, when the Levites take tithes: and the Levites shall bring up the tithe of the tithes unto the house of our God, to the chambers, into the treasure house.” Nehemiah 10:37, 38.

Faithfulness in tithing

The prophet Malachi challenged God’s people when they were not faithful in returning to the Lord His portion.

“Will a man rob God? Yet ye have robbed me. But ye say, Wherein have we robbed thee? In tithes and offerings. Ye are cursed with a curse: for ye have robbed me, even this whole nation.” Malachi 3:8, 9.

Here it is clear that what God calls His own cannot be withheld or used in a way

that He does not approve. This would be robbery.

“The tithe is sacred, reserved by God for Himself. It is to be brought into His treasury to be used to sustain the gospel laborers in their work. For a long time the Lord has been robbed because there are those who do not realize that the tithe is God’s reserved portion.” *Testimonies*, vol. 9, p. 249.

This applies even in emergencies, or in situations where we may feel justified in following our own ideas.

“Let none feel at liberty to retain their tithe to use according to their own judgment. They are not to use it for themselves in any emergency, nor to apply it as they see fit, even in what they may regard as the Lord’s work.” *The Review and Herald*, November 10, 1896.

Finally, there has been a great temptation to some of our people to withhold or redirect the tithe if they did not agree with some decision made or the order of something in the church. This is nothing new; the servant of the Lord addressed this point.

“Some have been dissatisfied and have said: ‘I will not longer pay my tithe; for I have no confidence in the way things are managed at the heart of the work.’ But will you rob God because you think the management of the work is not right? Make your complaint, plainly and openly, in the right spirit, to the proper ones. Send in your petitions for things to be adjusted and set in order; but do not withdraw from the work of God, and prove unfaithful, because others are not doing right.

“Read carefully the third chapter of Malachi and see what God says about the tithe. If our churches will take their stand upon the Lord’s word

and be faithful in paying their tithe into His treasury, more laborers will be encouraged to take up ministerial work. More men would give themselves to the ministry were they not told of the depleted treasury. There should be an abundant supply in the Lord’s treasury, and there would be if selfish hearts and hands had not withheld the tithes or made use of them to support other lines of work.” *Testimonies*, vol. 9, p. 249.

Often the work in a place will suffer because of insufficient funds to employ the missionaries that are needed. This is particularly the case in places like our own Union, where the cost of operation is high. We must remember, however, that investing here will produce greater returns to the cause, as more work carried out by our workforce will result in more souls uniting with God’s people and supporting His work with their own tithes and offerings. This will be of benefit both at home and to the missions in foreign lands.

But the principle here is not only about tithe itself, but also working together in mutual confidence and building up the Lord’s work rather than withdrawing our support because we disagree with something.

Leaders’ responsibility

There is a responsibility for teachers and leaders to instruct the people on faithfulness in tithing and to set the example in their own stewardship.

“Those who go forth as ministers have a solemn responsibility devolving upon them which is strangely neglected. Some enjoy preaching, but they do not give personal labor to the churches. There is great need of in-

struction concerning the obligations and duties to God, especially in regard to paying an honest tithe. Our ministers would feel sadly aggrieved if they were not promptly paid for their labor; but will they consider that there must be meat in the treasure house of God wherewith to sustain the laborers? If they fail to do their whole duty in educating the people to be faithful in paying to God His own, there will be a shortage of means in the treasury to carry forward the Lord's work....

“When the one who ministers in word and doctrine sees the people pursuing a course that will bring this curse upon them, how can he neglect his duty to give them instruction and warning? Every church member should be taught to be faithful in paying an honest tithe.” *Testimonies*, vol. 9, pp. 250, 251.

It is also the responsibility of the elders of each church, to ensure that the members bring their tithes to the storehouse. This can be done in cooperation with the treasurer. Care should be taken in this regard, as the amount of one's tithe is confidential. However, verifying the returning of tithe is an important matter, in spiritual leadership, as well as care for the personal needs of the flock. Sometimes a lack of tithe simply means a lack of income, and the church may be able to offer support to persons in this situation, so that they can get back on their feet. In any case, there is a responsibility that the church has to ensure that its members return a faithful tithe.

“Let the church appoint pastors or elders who are devoted to the Lord Jesus, and let these men see that officers are chosen who will attend faithfully to the work of gathering in the tithe. If the pastors show that they are not fitted for their charge, if they fail to set before the

church the importance of returning to God his own, if they do not see to it that the officers under them are faithful, and that the tithe is brought in, they are in peril. They are neglecting a matter which involves a blessing or a curse to the church. They should be relieved of their responsibility, and other men should be tested and tried.” *The Review and Herald*, December 1, 1896.

“Many presidents of state conferences do not attend to that which is their work—to see that the elders and deacons of the churches do their work in the churches, by seeing that a faithful tithe is brought into the treasury.” *Testimonies to Ministers*, p. 305.

Conclusion

As we are faithful in our stewardship, both individually and as a church, the blessing of God will be with us, and He will multiply our ability to give and the blessing which results from that which we return to Him.

“A flood of light is shining from the word of God, and there must be an awakening to neglected opportunities. When all are faithful in giving back to God His own in tithes and offerings, the way will be opened for the world to hear the message for this time.” *Testimonies*, vol. 6, pp. 449, 450.

What an investment opportunity! Although what is returned to the Lord is a sacrifice in one sense, yet it is an investment of eternal proportions. There is no human scale to measure the value of souls receiving Jesus as their Saviour and receiving the gift of eternal life. Participating in this work is the best kind of investment possible.

#4

THE IMPACT OF CHARITABLE GIVING

Author: Arnaldo Pedrosa

The most popular definition of the word “charity” is the voluntary giving of help, typically in the form of money, to those in need. It is always related to providing financial assistance, aid, welfare, relief, funding, liberality, etc.

The Scriptures give us an extensive description of it. Charity (a translation of the Greek word *agapē*, also meaning “love”), is not found in the possession of “the tongues of men and of angels”; it is not found in “the gift of prophecy,” understanding of “all mysteries,” or “all knowledge.” In fact, it is much more than bestowing all our “goods to feed the poor,” or giving our “body to be burned.”

“Charity suffereth long, and is kind; charity envieth not; charity vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up, Doth not behave itself unseemly, seeketh not her own, is not easily provoked, thinketh no evil; Rejoiceth not in iniquity, but rejoiceth in the truth; Beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things. Charity never faileth: but whether there be prophecies, they shall fail; whether there be tongues, they shall cease; whether there be knowledge, it

shall vanish away.” (1 Corinthians 13:4-8).

In Christian theology and ethics, charity is most eloquently shown in the life, teachings, and death of Jesus Christ.

Liberal Giving

Our focus in this article is on liberal funding and its bearing in the work and design of God on earth. The impact, use, importance, and methods of distribution of financial support are designed for our spiritual growth in supporting God’s work and providing the monetary foundation for preaching the gospel. This is God’s plan and has been known as the primary step that a faithful steward should take.

“I speak of the tithing system, yet how meager it looks to my mind! How small the estimate! How vain the endeavor to measure with mathematical rules, time, money, and love against a love and sacrifice that is measureless and incomputable! Tithes for Christ! Oh, meager pittance, shameful recompense for that which cost so much! From the cross of Calvary, Christ calls for an unconditional surrender.” *Testimonies*, vol. 4, pp. 119, 120.

DISCOVERING
STEWARDSHIP

The Three Wise Men

“Now when Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judaea in the days of Herod the king, behold, there came wise men from the east to Jerusalem, Saying, Where is he that is born King of the Jews? for we have seen his star in the east, and are come to worship him.... And when they were come into the house, they saw the young child with Mary his mother, and fell down, and worshipped him: and when they had opened their treasures, they presented unto him gifts; gold, and frankincense, and myrrh.” (Matthew 2:1, 2, 11).

“The wise men from the East were philosophers. They belonged to a large and influential class that included men of noble birth, and comprised much of the wealth and learning of their nation. Among these were many who imposed on the credulity of the people. Others were upright men who studied the indications of Providence in nature, and who were honored for their integrity and wisdom. Of this character were the wise men who came to Jesus.” *The Desire of Ages*, p. 59.

“The wise men had given costly presents to Jesus, and in this way God provided for the expenses of the journey and their stay in Egypt, until they should return to their own land.” *The Story of Jesus*, pp. 25-27.

“The magi had been among the first to welcome the Redeemer. Their gift was the first that was laid at His feet. And through that gift, what privilege of ministry was theirs! The offering from the heart that loves, God delights to honor, giving it highest efficiency in service for Him. If we have given our hearts to Jesus, we also shall bring our gifts to Him. Our gold and silver, our most precious earthly possessions, our highest mental and spiritual endowments, will be freely devoted to Him who loved us, and gave Himself for us.” *The Desire of Ages*, p. 65.

The Widow's Two Mites

“And he looked up, and saw the rich men casting their gifts into the treasury. And he saw also a certain poor widow casting in thither two mites. And he said, Of a truth I say unto you, that this poor widow hath cast in more than they all: For all these have of their abundance cast in unto the offerings of God: but she of her penury hath cast in all the living that she had” (Luke 21:1-4).

“The poor widow who cast her two mites into the Lord's treasury little knew what she was doing. Her example of self-sacrifice has acted and reacted upon thousands of hearts in every land and in every age. It has brought to the treasury of God gifts from the high and the low, the rich and the poor. It has helped to sustain missions, to establish hospitals, to feed the hungry, clothe the naked, heal the sick, and preach the gospel to the poor. Multitudes have been blessed through her unselfish deed. And the outworking of all these lines of influence she, in the day of God, will be permitted to see....

“Wonderful will be the revealing as the lines of holy influence, with their precious results, are brought to view. What will be the gratitude of souls that will meet us in the heavenly courts as they understand the sympathetic, loving interest which has been taken in their salvation! All praise, honor, and glory will be given to God and to the Lamb for our redemption; but it will not detract from the glory of God to express gratitude to the instrumentality He has employed in the salvation of souls ready to perish.” *Testimonies*, vol. 6, p. 310, 311.

“Frequently those who receive the truth are among the poor of this world; but they should not make this an excuse for neglecting those duties which devolve upon them in view of the precious light they have received. They should not allow

poverty to prevent them from laying up a treasure in heaven. The blessings within reach of the rich are also within their reach. If they are faithful in using what little they do possess, their treasure in heaven will increase according to their fidelity. It is the motive with which they work, not the amount they do, that makes their offering valuable in the sight of Heaven.” *Counsels on Stewardship*, p. 107.

Mary's Alabaster's Box (Matthew 26:6-13)

“There are gifts that we rightly proportion to the character and necessities of the ones upon whom we bestow them. Not many of the poor would appreciate Mary’s offering, or our Lord’s sacrifice of Himself, which gift was the highest that could be given. That ointment was a symbol of the overflowing heart of the giver. It was an outward demonstration of a love fed by heavenly streams until it overflowed. And that ointment of Mary, which the disciples called waste, is repeating itself a thousand times in the susceptible hearts of others.

“The Lord God is profuse in His gifts to our world. The question may be asked, Why does the Lord show such waste, such extravagance in the multitude of His gifts that cannot be enumerated? The Lord would be so bountiful toward His human family that it cannot be said of Him that He could do more. When He gave Jesus to our world, He gave all heaven. His love is without a parallel. It did not stop short of anything. . . .

“To human reasoning the whole plan of salvation is a waste of mercies and resources. They are provided to accomplish the restoration of the moral image of God in man. The atonement is abundantly able to secure to all who will receive it, mansions in heaven. The supposed prodigality of Mary is an illustration of the methods of God in the plan of salvation; for nature and grace, related to each other, manifest the ennobling fullness of the Source from which they flow.” *SDA Bible Commentary* [E. G. White Comments], vol. 5, p. 1101.

“What deeds of love the memory of that alabaster box broken for Christ’s anointing has through the long centuries prompted! What countless gifts that contribution, by a poor unnamed widow, of ‘two

mites, which make a farthing’ (Mark 12:42), has brought to the Saviour’s cause!” *Education*, p. 109.

THE HISTORY OF THE DIME TABERNACLE

This story is so inspiring that it is worth retelling here. Many Seventh-day Adventists, when thinking about Battle Creek, Michigan, think about the Dime Tabernacle. The building no longer exists, having burned down in January 3, 1922. This building was a fitting climax to the career of James White, who accepted the General Conference presidency for the last time. The funerals of both James and Ellen White were conducted here.

It was known as the Dime Tabernacle because the church members and the community were invited to give dimes in support of the building project. This idea was suggested by James White. Members were encouraged to save a dime (10 cents) a month for a year to contribute to the project. At that time, the denomination had about 15,000 members worldwide and many gave their dimes to help complete the building.

A decision was taken to build this larger church because of the increases in numbers being seen from the Sanitarium and the Review and Herald in Battle Creek. They laid the foundation stones in 1878 and construction was completed the next year at a final cost of \$26,275 with all the furnishings.

The main auditorium could seat 900 persons and the gallery another 1,450, with wall seats and extra chairs. There were six large Sabbath School rooms and an office surrounding the auditorium. By raising glass partitions in these rooms at the back of the auditorium, another 850 seats could be added from the north, east and south vestries, giving the entire building a seating capacity of 3,200.

At the dedication services April 20, 1879, by seating people on the steps, and adding extra chairs, there were about 4,000 people in attendance.

Four entrances provided access and exit. The auditorium pews were heavily padded, with movable benches and chairs in the rooms in the rear. Two graceful staircases led to the gallery area. Overhead there was a large dome of richly colored glass of

beautiful design and behind the pulpit were three stained glass windows that portrayed the Ten Commandments. A baptismal pool was under the platform in front of the choir space.

The Spirit of Prophecy remarks, “Our work was not sustained by large gifts or legacies; for we have few wealthy men among us. What is the secret of our prosperity? We have moved under the orders of the Captain of our salvation. God has blessed our united efforts. The truth has spread and flourished. Institutions have multiplied. The mustard seed has grown to a great tree. The system of organization has proved a grand success. Systematic benevolence was entered into according to the Bible plan. The body has been ‘compacted by that which every joint supplieth.’ As we have advanced, our system of organization has still proved effectual.” *Testimonies to Ministers*, p. 27.

“In determining the proportion to be given to the cause of God, be sure to exceed, rather than fall short, of the requirements of duty. Consider for whom the offering is to be made. This recollection will put covetousness to flight. Only consider the great love wherewith Christ has loved us, and our richest offerings will seem unworthy of His acceptance. When Christ is the object of our affections, those who have received His pardoning love will not stop to calculate the value of the alabaster box of precious ointment. Covetous Judas could do this; but the receiver of the gift of salvation will only regret that the offering has not a richer perfume and greater value.” *Testimonies*, vol. 4, p. 485.

“The Lord requires that we return to Him in tithes and offerings a portion of the goods He has lent us. He accepts these offerings as an act of humble obedience on our part and a grateful acknowledgment of our indebtedness to Him for all the blessings we enjoy. Then let us offer willingly, saying with David: ‘All things come of Thee, and of Thine own have we given Thee.’ Withholding more than is meet tends to poverty. God will bear long with some, He will test and prove all; but His curse will surely follow the selfish, world-loving professor of truth. God knows the heart; every thought and every purpose is open to His eye. He says: ‘Them that honor Me I will honor,

and they that despise Me shall be lightly esteemed.’ He knows whom to bless and who are deserving of His curse. He makes no mistakes, for angels are keeping a record of all our works and words.” *Testimonies*, vol. 5, pp. 267, 268.

Distorted Spiritual Eyesight

The Bible teaches us one obvious truth: the cares of this life and its possessions are temporary and passing. Nothing lasts forever here and definitely not long either. “While we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen: for the things which are seen are temporal; but the things which are not seen are eternal” (2 Corinthians 4:18).

Christians have myopic eyesight when they are preoccupied with the cares of this world rather than with heavenly things. Few things can blind their eyes to that path more than the deceitfulness of riches. Helen Keller, who was blind, said: “The most pathetic person in the world is someone who has sight, but has no vision.” The Bible is filled with examples of those who could see but were, indeed, spiritually blind.

“Some love this world so much that it swallows up their love for the truth. As their treasures here increase, their interest in the heavenly treasure decreases. The more they possess of this world, the more closely do they hug it to them, as if fearful their coveted treasure would be taken from them. The more they possess, the less do they have to bestow upon others, for the more they have, the poorer they feel. O, the deceitfulness of riches! They will not see and feel the wants of the cause of God.” *Spiritual Gifts*, vol. 2, p. 267.

Blurred spiritual eyesight puts eternal salvation in jeopardy. It is not enough to keep Jesus in view; we must keep Him in focus. The messenger of the Lord describes the devil’s strategy (as he speaks to his angels) to entice us through the charms of materialism. Unfortunately, this tactic seems to be working well –

“Go, make the possessors of lands and money drunk with the cares of this life. Present the world before them in its most attractive light, that they may lay up their treasure here, and fix their affections upon earthly things. We must do our utmost to pre-

vent those who labor in God's cause from obtaining means to use against us. Keep the money in our own ranks. The more means they obtain, the more they will injure our kingdom by taking from us our subjects. Make them care more for money than the upbuilding of Christ's kingdom and the spread of the truths we hate, and we need not fear their influence; for we know that every selfish, covetous person will fall under our power, and will finally be separated from God's people." *Counsels on Stewardship*, pp. 154, 155.

A Danger to be Avoided – The Prosperity Gospel Theology

This idea, or variants of it, says: God wants to bless you, and the proof of His blessing is the abundance of material possessions that you own. In other words, if you are faithful, if you follow Him, He will make you wealthy in worldly goods. Financial blessing and physical well-being are always the will of God, according to this theology and faith, and donations to religious causes will increase your material wealth.

This idea is nothing but a false theological justification for materialism, because what it's really saying is, Do you want to be materialistic and to feel good about it? Well, we have got the "gospel" for you.

This theology teaches that, in giving to God, we gain in return a guarantee of material wealth. That is making God a selling machine and turns our relationship with Him into nothing but a trade: I do this, and You promise to do that in return. We give, not because it is the right thing to do but because of what we get in return—that's the prosperity gospel—a misdirected sideshow, nothing more than half-truth clothed in biblical language.

Spiritual Prosperity and True Liberality

"Those churches who are the most systematic and liberal in sustaining the cause of God are the most prosperous spiritually. True liberality in the follower of Christ identifies his interest with that of his Master. In God's dealing with the Jews and His people to the end of time, He requires systematic benevolence proportionate to their income. The plan of salvation was laid by the infinite sacrifice of the Son of God. The light of the gospel shining from the cross of Christ rebukes selfishness and encourages liberality and benevolence. It is not to be a lamented fact that there are increasing calls to give. God in His providence is calling His people out from their limited sphere of action to enter upon greater enterprises. Unlimited effort is demanded at this time when moral darkness is covering the world. Worldliness and covetousness are eating out the vitals of God's people. They should understand that it is His mercy which multiplies the demands for their means. The angel of God places benevolent acts close beside prayer. He said to Cornelius: 'Thy prayers and thine alms are come up for a memorial before God.'" *Testimonies*, vol. 3, p. 405.

Conclusion

"Time is rapidly passing into eternity. Let us not keep back from God that which is His own. Let us not refuse Him that which, though it cannot be given with merit, cannot be denied without ruin. He asks for a whole heart; give it to Him; it is His, both by creation and by redemption. He asks for your intellect; give it to Him; it is His. He asks for your money; give it to Him; it is His." *The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 566.

#5

THE SYSTEM OF CHURCH SUPPORT

Author: Rolly Dumaguit

In the Bible we find the basic guidelines for a meaningful church support system. God is providing liberally for the needs of his children especially in the furtherance of His cause in this earth.

“God’s providence has arranged the entire plan of systematic benevolence for the benefit of man. His providence never stands still. If God’s servants follow His opening providence, all will be active workers.” *Testimonies*, vol. 3, p. 399.

He “planned the system of beneficence, in order that man might become like his Creator, benevolent and unselfish in character, and finally be a partaker with Christ of the eternal, glorious reward.” *Testimonies*, vol. 9, p. 255.

On the other hand he wants us as to be His helping hand. “All our blessings, temporal as well as spiritual, come from God. The money you possess is the Lord’s, left to you to further his cause in the earth. There should be no withholding from the Lord of his goods.” *Northern Union Reaper*, April 16, 1907.

“All the prosperity we enjoy is the result of divine beneficence. God is the great and bountiful giver. If He requires any portion of the liberal supply He has given us, it is not that He may be enriched by our gifts, for He needs nothing from our hand; but it is that we may have an opportunity to exercise self-denial, love, and sympathy for our fellow men, and thus become highly exalted. In every dispensation, from Adam’s time to ours, God has claimed the property of man, saying: I am the rightful owner of the universe; therefore consecrate to Me thy first fruits, bring a tribute of loyalty, surrender to Me My own, thus acknowledging My sovereignty, and you shall be free to retain and enjoy My bounties, and My blessing shall be with you. ‘Honor the Lord with thy substance, and with the first fruits of all thine increase.’” *Testimonies*, vol. 4, pp. 476, 477.

“God has made men the channels through which His gifts are to flow to sustain the work which He would have carried forward in the world.

He has given them property to be wisely used, not selfishly hoarded or extravagantly expended in luxury and selfish gratification either in dress or in the embellishment of their houses. He has entrusted them with means with which to support His servants in their labor as preachers and missionaries, and to sustain the institutions He has established among us. Those who rejoice in the precious light of truth should feel a burning desire to have it sent everywhere.” *Testimonies*, vol. 4, pp. 477, 478.

Tithes – The Support of the Ministry

The example of giving a tenth in support of those who minister the Word of God is first found in Scripture in the example of Abraham. Jacob also pledged to return tithe when he prayed, “If God will be with me, and will keep me in this way that I go, and will give me bread to eat, and raiment to put on, So that I come again to my father's house in peace; then shall the Lord be my God: And this stone, which I have set for a pillar, shall be God's house: and of all that thou shalt give me I will surely give the tenth unto thee” (Genesis 28:20-22).

This principle was systemised in the nation of Israel, when God said to them, “I have given the children of Levi all the tenth in Israel for an inheritance, for their service which they serve, even the service of the tabernacle of the congregation.... the Levites shall do the service of the tabernacle of the congregation, and they shall bear their iniquity: it shall be a statute for ever throughout your generations, that among the children of Israel they have no inheritance. But the tithes of the children of Israel, which they offer as an heave offering unto the Lord, I have given to the Levites to inherit: therefore I have said unto them, Among the children of Israel they shall have no inheritance” (Numbers 18:21-24).

The role of dedicated ministry of the Word was carried over into the Christian church. The ministry were supported by the church, as stated by the apostle: “Do ye not know that they which minister about holy things live of the things of the temple? And they which wait at the altar are partakers with the altar? Even so hath the Lord ordained that they which preach the gospel should live of the gospel” (1 Corinthians 9:13, 14).

The tithe is proportional to income—ten percent—and so is shared by everyone equally. This is part of God’s system of support for His work on earth.

The Challenge of Giving A Freewill Offering

How is the financial situation of your church? Struggling a bit, finding it hard to meet the needs of your church projects? Perhaps we have enough tithes to support the ministry. However, we are struggling to meet the demands of repairing and building new churches! Well, then this is a big challenge for every one of us. In reality, we have meager funds from offerings to finance our church projects and this is affecting our churches around the world. We hope and pray that the Holy Spirit will inspire us to see the sacredness of giving to the Lord the right amount of freewill offerings proportionate to our income.

We want to look at the specific challenge found in Malachi chapter three.

God says, “Will a man rob God? Yet ye have robbed me. But ye say, wherein have we robbed thee? In tithes and offerings. Ye are cursed with a curse: for ye have robbed me, even this whole nation. Bring ye all the tithes into the storehouse, that there may be meat in mine house, and prove me now herewith, saith the Lord of hosts, if I will not open you the windows of heaven, and pour you out a blessing, that there shall not be room enough to receive it.” Malachi 3:8-10.

Yes it is true, sometimes we are not seeing the blessings prepared by God for us. He is ready to pour them down. He is saying “Prove me, I want to pour my blessings upon you. What are you waiting for? Try me, test me. Haven’t I blessed my people in the past? I will do it again for you today.”

Did you notice in Malachi 3:8 that you can rob God, not only in tithes, but also in offerings? And this is where the real test comes in. Am I giving to the Lord only what already belongs to Him (tithe), which is my duty to do anyway, or am I doing more (offerings), which involves faith and love?

The Uses of Offerings

Beyond the tithe, the Hebrews had many opportunities to give freely. “The contributions required of

the Hebrews for religious and charitable purposes amounted to fully one fourth [25%] of their income. So heavy a tax upon the resources of the people might be expected to reduce them to poverty; but, on the contrary, the faithful observance of these regulations was one of the conditions of their prosperity.” (*Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 527). Another statement says that “No less than one third of their income was devoted to sacred and religious purposes” (*Testimonies*, vol. 3, p. 395).

Whenever they came to worship, God’s people were to bring an offering. “Three times in a year shall all thy males appear before the Lord thy God in the place which he shall choose; in the feast of unleavened bread, and in the feast of weeks, and in the feast of tabernacles: and they shall not appear before the Lord empty: Every man shall give as he is able, according to the blessing of the Lord thy God which he hath given thee.” (Deuteronomy 16:16, 17).

They were also to be hospitable, and in the third year a second tithe was used by themselves individually to help others. “Every third year, however, this second tithe was to be used at home, in entertaining the Levite and the poor, as Moses said, ‘That they may eat within thy gates, and be filled.’ Deuteronomy 26:12. This tithe would provide a fund for the uses of charity and hospitality.” *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 530.

Offerings for charitable purposes are extensively used for welfare work to help the worthy poor inside and outside the church.

At once time in the history of the work in Australia, a second tithe was dedicated for building (in this case they were constructing the Sydney Sanitarium). “Our fellow labourers in Australasia responded cheerfully and heartily. The second tithe

was set apart to increase the building fund. Many gifts of money, labor, and material, representing untold self-denial, were made.” *The Needs of the Cause in Australasia*, July 4, 1903.

The question now is how much we will return to God in our tithes and freewill offerings? We have seen that inspiration is telling us that it should be at least 20% of our income.

I know a unit of the General Conference in which all their ministers and Bible workers are working together to teach faithfulness in systematic benevolence. Although it is a poor country, the brethren are returning tithes and second tithes of their income. After some years of education and practice, they were able to increase the salary of the workers in line with the standard of the country and were able to build several church buildings from their second tithes without help from the General Conference.

A Responsibility to Educate Church Members

“It is part of the minister’s work to teach those who accept the truth through his efforts, to bring the tithe to the storehouse, as an acknowledgment of their dependence upon God.” *Gospel Workers*, p. 370.

This is not only a matter of teaching theory. We are told that ministers “should, by precept and example, teach the people to regard the tithe as sacred” (*Counsels on Stewardship*, p. 101). For this reason, our workers set an example of also returning tithe, even though they are supported from the tithe fund. Beyond this, they are often the first to give to offering appeals, and quietly as they go about their work, they personally respond to many needs of those around them.

Consider the life of the missionary worker. “God’s chosen missionary can

have no settled abode, but must take his family from place to place, often from country to country. The character of his work makes this necessary. But this frequent moving places him under heavy expense. Then, too, in order to exert a good influence, his wife and children, and he himself, must set a fitting example of neat and becoming dress. Their personal appearance, their living quarters, their surroundings,—all must tell in favor of the truth they advocate. They must always appear cheerful and fresh, that they may bring sunshine to those who need help. They are often obliged to entertain their brethren, and while they find this a pleasure, it is also an additional expense.” *Gospel Workers*, p. 450.

As Jesus said, “when thou doest alms, let not thy left hand know what thy right hand doeth,” (Matthew 6:3), thus many of these sacrifices are never known to others. Nevertheless this spirit of generosity is still a part of setting a good example in teaching others to be faithful in tithes and offerings.

On the other hand, this subject is one which we must not forget to teach. “Ministers frequently neglect these important branches of the work,—health reform, spiritual gifts, systematic benevolence, and the great branches of the missionary work.” *Pastoral Ministry*, p. 206. That is the purpose of this series of articles—to keep the principles of stewardship in the forefront.

Practice the Habit of Liberality, Economy And Self Denial

“Those churches who are the most systematic and liberal in sustaining the cause of God are the most prosperous spiritually. True liberality in the follower of Christ identifies his interest with that of his Master. In God’s dealing with the Jews and His people to the end of time,

He requires systematic benevolence proportionate to their income.” *Testimonies*, vol. 3, p. 405.

“When the members of the church... shall learn to deny themselves, when they shall consecrate themselves to God, when they shall practice economy as true-hearted sons and daughters of God;... They will have a sense of the sacredness of God’s work. They will see the necessity of the tithe money being faithfully paid into the treasury, and reserved for the sacred work to which God designs that it shall be devoted,—to carry the last message of mercy to a fallen world. God’s people are to lift the standard of truth in every place.” *Manuscript Releases*, vol. 1, p. 185.

Personal Stewardship

Finally, we must remember that stewardship goes far beyond giving some of our income to the church or to charitable causes. A “steward” is one who manages goods on behalf of another. In fact, all things that we have belong to God, and we are His stewards.

In view of this, we should manage wisely what we have. This includes living on a budget—planning ahead and being disciplined in our spending and saving. “Those whose hands are open to respond to the calls for means to sustain the cause of God and to relieve the suffering and the needy are not the ones who are found loose and lax and dilatory in their business management. They are always careful to keep their outgoes within their income. They are economical from principle; they feel it their duty to save, that they may have something to give.” *Testimonies*, vol. 4, p. 573:1.

Personal stewardship also means we think about we are spending money on. “Every church-member is bound by covenant relation with God to deny him-

self of every extravagant outlay of means. Let not the want of economy in the home life render us unable to act our part in strengthening the work already established, and in entering new territory." *The Review and Herald*, January 17, 1907.

Another important issue is that of debt. The Scripture is very clear: "The rich ruleth over the poor, and the borrower is servant to the lender." Proverbs 22:7. Therefore we are told, "Owe no man any thing, but to love one another: for he that loveth another hath fulfilled the law." Romans 13:8.

Many times we have seen that good church members are sadly unable to support the needs of the gospel because of their choices to incur debt. So much of their income is spent on interest payments for goods they have bought on credit, that they have nothing to spare.

There is also the temptation to engage in risky speculation, in hopes to earn a high rate of return. This is often a trap. "Some will strike out into flattering speculative money-making schemes, and others will quickly catch the spirit of speculation. It is just what they want, and they will engage in lines of speculation that take the mind off from the sacred preparation that is essential for their souls in order for them to be prepared to meet the trials which will come in these last days...."

"Every movement of this order, which comes in to excite the desire to get riches quickly by speculation, takes the minds of the people away from the most solemn truths that ever were given to mortals. There may be encouraging prospects for a time, but the end of the matter is failure. The Lord endorses no such movements." *Counsels on Stewardship*, p. 234.

No matter their age, all of God's people should have a will made out in case they should pass away. This is as important for those with young families as it is for those who are older.

"Many are not exercised upon the subject of making their wills while they are in apparent health. But this precaution should be taken by our brethren. They should know their financial standing and should not allow their business to become entangled. They should arrange their property in such a manner that they may leave it at any time." *The Adventist Home*, pp. 396, 397.

Of course, having a will in place which distributes your assets to God's cause upon your death, still does not absolve anyone from assisting the work of the gospel during their lifetime. "I saw that many withhold from the cause while they live, quieting their consciences that they will be charitable at death; they hardly dare exercise faith and trust in God to give anything while living. But this deathbed charity is not what Christ requires of His followers; it cannot excuse the selfishness of the living." *Testimonies*, vol. 5, p. 154.

Let us all be careful that our personal stewardship is always such as would please the Lord. "Moreover it is required in stewards, that a man be found faithful." 1 Corinthians 4:2.

Conclusion

Are you ready to take up the challenge? God is waiting for you. He loves you, He is testing you today. He will not fail you. The apostle Paul admonished us, "But this I say, He which soweth sparingly shall reap also sparingly; and he which soweth bountifully shall reap also bountifully. Every man according as he purposeth in his heart, so let him give; not grudgingly, or of necessity: for God loveth a cheerful giver" (2 Corinthians 9:6).

"When we see Jesus, a Man of Sorrows and acquainted with grief, working to save the lost, slighted, scorned, derided, driven from city to city till His mission was accomplished; when we behold Him in Gethsemane, sweating great drops of blood, and on the cross dying in agony,—when we see this, self will no longer clamor to be recognized. Looking unto Jesus, we shall be ashamed of our coldness, our lethargy, our self-seeking. We shall be willing to be anything or nothing, so that we may do heart service for the Master. We shall rejoice to bear the cross after Jesus, to endure trial, shame, or persecution for His dear sake." *The Desire of Ages*, pp. 439, 440.

"What we give does, in time of need, often come back to us in fourfold measure in the coin of the realm. But, besides this, all gifts are repaid, even in this life, in the fuller inflowing of His love, which is the sum of all heaven's glory and its treasure." *Thoughts from the Mount of Blessing*, p. 136.

ALLOCATION OF OFFERINGS

In the Australasian Union Conference

Sabbath School Offerings

1st Sabbath School Offering of each month – for General Conference projects
 2nd, 3rd, 4th, 5th Sabbath School Offering – 25% RLPA (Union), 75% Conference/Field/
 Churches Decision

Divine Service Church Offerings

1st Sabbath Church Offering of each month – for local church
 2nd Sabbath Church Offering of each month – for Elim Heights Youth Camp
 3rd Sabbath Church Offering of each month – for local church
 4th Sabbath Church Offering of each month – for local church
 5th Sabbath Church Offering of each month – Mission Field / Field Conference to decide

Special Offerings

Fourth Sabbath

4th Sabbath of every month an extra offering to be collected for Pacific Island Mission Fields

Young People's Offerings

50% Union, 25% Field, 25% Local Church

Prayer Meeting Offerings

For local church

Week of Prayer Offerings

For General Conference (New Missions) – Send to Union

Dollar – A – Day Offering

An offering to fund three departments of the Union namely: Education, Health and Missionary Departments. Please remember this offering as these Departments are becoming very active, and the lack of funds can seriously hinder their work.

10% Dues on Local Offerings

10% Dues on Local Church Offerings to be forwarded to the Conference/Field, who in turn send 25% to the Union. (This was formerly called “tithe of offerings,” but is not tithe per se, but instead is used for the respective departments at Conference and Union level).



Steward \ˈstü-ərd | stew·ard
n. A person employed to manage or look after another person's property.