



# DYNAMIC

## Steward

Exploring Partnership with God

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*With Jesus in control, I am bubbly, I am joyous—all over and deep down in my soul.*

## Who's in control?

**W**illingly, I have entered into a very serious relationship that is beyond my control and beyond my wildest dreams. It all began when I let Jesus be lord of my life. My life has now taken on new meaning all because of Him—and it's exciting!

You may respond, *Get real, lady. It can't be all that good. This is the real world with real problems, real anxieties, real anger. Get real!* Well, hear me out.

I once had some *real* problems. I had some *real* ugly feelings too. Then I took Jesus at His word (the Bible) that He was almighty (possessing all power), that He was a counselor (an advisor). I said to Him *I belong to you no matter what, right? You want to be in every nook and corner of my life, right? I accept Your offer. Be owner, lord, controller, counselor of my life. Do what you want with me.*"

When Jesus Christ stepped in and took control, sparks flew, doors opened, and all sorts of good things began to happen. I am now totally dependent on Him in ALL things and for ALL things. Yet it is not a dependence that makes me weak; I am strong because Christ is in control.

In His control, I am secure. He takes good care of me. Jesus has awakened and fine-tuned in me talents that I didn't know existed. Each day I re-dedicate myself to Him—I lay my plans before Him, and I ask for His input. If He wants to change my plans, it's fine with me because I trust Him.

In His control, I am adored. My Jesus wants me near Him all the time. And I want to be near Him too. He has become my lifestyle, and I live to please Him. When He awakens me each morning,—sharing part of His life with me, showering me with His new mercies,—my day becomes an adventure.

The relationship gets sweeter and sweeter. And every day I want to be more and more like Jesus. *Real* problems still creep into my life, but I quickly turn them over to Jesus. In Jesus, I have peace when all around is turmoil.

With Jesus in control, I am bubbly, I am joyous—all over and deep down in my soul. I can't help but express my feelings about Him to others. And when I do, that Jesus-joy comes gushing out, splashing all around me. Since Jesus became lord of my life, I can't help but burst out in a song and dance of thanksgiving.

My Jesus is in total control. If He's not lord of everything, then He's not lord at all!

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*Carol Barron, Administrative Assistant, North American Adult Ministries Department*

# Applications

Giving a 40-minute sermon is easier than leading a 15-minute discussion; delivering a monologue is easier than initiating dialogue! Try this four-step method the next time you are to lead a discussion.

**Step 1—Illustrate.** Tell a story. The right story has power. It can reel in the wandering mind, bring the soul to attention, and impress upon the heart a thought to last a lifetime—all in a moment.

**Step 2—Quote.** Plant your story in an environment of credibility. Quotations and passages from authoritative, respected sources not only provide this environment, but also anchor the listener to your story.

**Step 3—Reflect.** Throw out a few questions to provoke thinking and start a discussion.

**Step 4—Apply.** Invite the participants to incorporate into their lives the story and the quotations they have reflected on.

Now let's try this method using the topic, *The Forces of Habit*.

## Four-step discussion

**Illustrate.** On the western slopes of the Rocky Mountains, a giant Sequoia lies rotting. It was a growing sapling when Christ walked the shores of Galilee. When Columbus discovered America, it was reaching maturity; during the American Civil War, it looked down from lofty heights. The tree seemed destined to live many more centuries. Then, a few years ago, a tiny beetle started to burrow into its bark and lay eggs that would produce other beetles. It seemed like an unequal battle at first, but the few beetles multiplied into hundreds, then into thousands, and finally into millions. First they attacked the bark, then they worked deeper into the trunk, and finally, they were eating the very heart and strength of that magnificent forest giant. Then one day, the rains came, the winds blew, and lightning flashed. And after withstanding the elements for centuries, the giant tree fell. Not because of the elements, but because of the weakening effects of those tiny beetles.

Bad habits do the same to people. They slowly take a toll until the day comes when the person falls like that giant tree—*Zig Ziglar*.

**Quote.** “The person who has been born into God’s family does not make a practice of sinning, because now God’s life is in him; so he can’t keep on sinning, for this new life has been born into him and controls him—he has been born again” (1 John 3:9, TLB).

“Fix your thoughts on what is true and good and right. Think about things that are pure and lovely, and dwell on the fine, good things in others. Think about all you can praise God for and be glad about” (Phil. 4:8, TLB).

“Sow an act and reap a habit; sow a habit and reap a character; sow a character and reap a destiny” (an old proverb).

“In all things showing yourself to be a pattern of good works; in doctrine showing integrity, reverence, incorruptibility” (Titus 2:7, NKJV).

**Reflect.** Why is it hard to admit that we are doing something wrong? What role does confession play in the breaking of a bad habit? What confidence does Jesus’ death on the cross give us? What should we do with our evil desires? How do we nail our desires to the cross? What specific differences might we expect if our lives were Spirit-controlled?

**Apply.** Being filled with the Holy Spirit is an ongoing process—you can’t be filled with the Spirit today and expect the supply to last a lifetime. Translated most accurately, the Greek verb, *be filled* (as in Eph. 5:18), would read *be always being filled*. Having once had an experience of being filled with the Holy Spirit is not nearly as important as being filled with the Holy Spirit today. We need to make a conscious, rational decision to yield to Christ’s control. And when we do so, the Holy Spirit’s power will be released. As we continue yielding, He will fill every part of us.

What can you do today to be open to whatever the Holy Spirit wants to do in your life? What steps will you take this week to break a habit that keeps you from growing? With the Spirit in control, how do you see yourself thinking and acting?

Share your application ideas with our readers. Send them to the Dynamic Steward editorial office.

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*Fylvia Fowler Kline, Assistant Director, General Conference Stewardship Department*

It is your turn to lead out in the youth division next Sabbath. You've worked with the same group of kids before and so you know what will work and what won't. After reviewing the material provided by your church, you just know this won't work! So you frantically start looking for alternate material. You need something that will start a discussion. You need something that will stir excitement. You need something that will keep them occupied for 20 minutes. But you also need something that deals with the same topic or scriptural reference they have studied all week. Sound familiar? What do you do? Where do you start searching?

You won't have to go very far if you have access to these two volumes—*Youth Worker's Encyclopedia of Bible Teaching Ideas: Old Testament* and *New Testament*. Created by some of the most innovative minds in youth ministry, this collection of ideas is up-to-date and speaks in ways that your youth can understand and relate to.

Using this collection of ideas is easy. First, find your topic or scripture in the index, then choose your teaching idea, and watch your kids get the message! Many of the topics relate to stewardship—*living in the light, leaning on God, materialism, gifts and talents, relationship with God, friendship with God, giving, God goes with us, God uses what we have, etc.*

These hands-on ideas fit any group setting—Bible study, Sabbath School class, or retreat. You will find lots of new ways to liven up your group. Within these two books are hundreds of active, guided experiences from which your youth will gain a deeper understanding of the Bible. Well aware that each youth group is different from the other, the editors suggest a variety of activities—learning games, creative readings, adventures, object lessons, skits, retreat suggestions, creative prayers, and parties! After a dose of Bible teachings from these books, your kids will never think of the Bible as boring again. Instead, they will learn to embrace and apply its truths into their lives.



## An encyclopedia of ideas

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*Sheri Clemmer, Administrative Secretary, General Conference Stewardship Department*

## Quotes

### A few Ellen G White statements on giving and spirituality:

As God's work extends, calls for help will come more and more frequently. That these calls may be answered, Christians should heed the command, "Bring ye all the tithes into the storehouse, that there may be meat in Mine house." Malachi 3:10. If professing Christians would faithfully bring to God their tithes and offerings, His treasury would be full. There would then be no occasion to resort to fairs, lotteries, or parties of pleasure to secure funds for the support of the gospel.—*The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 338

Let us not forget that as activity increases, and we become successful in doing the work that must be accomplished, there is danger of trusting in human plans and methods. There will be a tendency to pray less, and to have less faith.—*Review and Herald*, July 4, 1893

Should means flow into the treasury exactly according to God's plan,—a tenth of all the increase,—there would be abundance to carry forward His work.—*Testimonies, vol. 5*, p. 150

Humility, self-denial, benevolence, and the payment of a faithful tithe, these show that the grace of God is working in the heart.—*Counsels on Health*, p. 590

The reason why our preachers accomplish so little is that they do not walk with God. He is a day's journey from most of them.—*Testimonies, vol 1*, p. 434

The burden of our message should be the mission and life of Jesus Christ. Let there be a dwelling upon the humiliation, self denial, meekness, and lowliness of Christ, that proud and selfish hearts may see the difference between themselves and the Pattern, and may be humbled.—*Review and Herald*, September 11, 1888

"The tithe . . . is the Lord's." Here the same form of expression is employed as in the law of the Sabbath. "The seventh day is the Sabbath of the Lord thy God." God reserved to Himself a specified portion of man's time and of his means, and no man could, without guilt, appropriate either for his own interests.—*Messages to Young People*, p. 305





## I. Responding with our lives

### Isaiah 6:1-8; Mark 1:16-20

Stewardship, at the heart of it all, is about everything we do with everything we have, in response to God's love and grace.

#### God's grace and love are abundant

Do you have a list of the abundance of God's love and grace? If you have enjoyed a sunrise or a sunset, then add that to your list. If you have eyes to see a tree, or ears to hear the song of a bird, or a nose that smells a flower, or a tongue that tastes your favorite food, or skin that feels the wind, then add those to your list. If you have family that loves you, or friends who care about you, or a teacher who gave you the gift of knowledge, or a neighbor who waves and smiles when you walk by, then add that to the list. If you have ever offered a prayer and had a sense that there was someone who heard you, then your list is growing. If you have, in one way or another, experienced the unseen touch of the eternal in the midst of the finite, or if you have become aware of the sacred here among the ordinary, then you have glimpsed a piece of God's love and grace. If you have ever felt encouraged or comforted or empowered by the knowledge that you are loved by God, then you understand something of the magnitude of God's gift.

#### Everything is a gift from God

Everything we have and everything we are comes to us as a gift from God. This awareness is an important prelude to any discussion about stewardship, because it keeps before us the essential truth that what we do, in whatever specific form it takes, does not spring forth out of thin air and does not exist in isolation. Stewardship is a response which is prompted by an impulse of gratitude. It is saying *yes* to God because God has first said *yes* to us. Remembering this helps prevent our efforts from becoming drudgery or an obligation. It serves to remind us that stewardship, like faith itself, is primarily a relational matter. It emerges out of and occurs within the context of the relationship we share with God.

## Responding to God

In the dramatic story of Isaiah's heavenly vision, we watch as he moves from being overwhelmed by the presence of God to experiencing the transforming power of God's unconditional grace to responding to God's call to action. In all of that experience, God is always the primary foundation upon which everything else is built. It is an awareness of who God is, and what God has done that prompts Isaiah to respond, "Here am I—send me!" (Isa. 6:8). And that is stewardship—choosing to respond to God with his life.

In the story from Mark's gospel about Jesus calling the first disciples, we find a different kind of picture, but the same results. The scene here is far more ordinary and mundane than the heavenly throne room in Isaiah's vision. It is just Jesus walking by the Sea of Galilee, encountering men working on their fishing boats. You and I can identify with this scene in many ways—it is an example of how the holy is experienced in the midst of our everyday living. There is nothing dramatic about the experience, but there is something about it that is powerfully compelling. Jesus simply says *Follow me* and they respond not with words, but with decisive action. Something beyond description (and probably even beyond explanation) leads them to make significant life changes as they choose to follow—thus beginning a journey they could not possibly comprehend. And that is stewardship—choosing to respond to the God whom they experienced in Jesus.

#### Every response is unique and personal

And what then of us? How does all of this play out in our lives today? There are no concrete and definite answers, for the answers will be different for each of us. Isaiah experienced God in his own unique and personal way and thus responded as only Isaiah could have responded. Simon, Andrew, James and John each encountered God in Jesus from their own perspective and responded with a life which

was uniquely theirs. And so it will be for us. To answer the question *How can I respond to God?* we must first ask of ourselves *How have I experienced God?* What are the gifts you have been given? What are the needs that catch your attention? What are the dreams that won't let you go? The answers to questions such as these will go a long way towards providing the answer of how you can respond to God. But whatever specific shape your individual response takes on, always remember that it is a matter of stewardship—everything we do with everything we have. Such a perspective will help us experience all of life as an encounter with the holy!

## II. Responding with what we keep

### Psalm 96; Matthew 25:14-27

For most people, most of the time, stewardship is not a subject they give much thought to. Stewardship is not exactly a fun and popular topic of party conversation. Stewardship tends to focus primarily on giving—whether it be time, talents, or money. Stewardship is often connected with issues such as proportionate giving, generous giving, and sacrificial giving. Or we look at reasons for giving such as generosity, gratitude, responsibility, and faith. Or we turn our attention to what can be accomplished when we give—things like supporting worthy causes, helping people who are hurting, providing resources to teach our children, and maintaining the church building. All these are vital aspects of stewardship, worthy of our attention, and not to be undermined. But for a moment, let's look at another side of stewardship—a side which often attracts far less of our attention but occupies a significant portion of our lives. Let us look at stewardship in terms of what we do with what we keep.

#### We are called to be faithful

If we are called to be faithful in giving away a portion of what God has given us, then are we not also called to be just as faithfully responsible with the portion that remains in our control? I believe the answer is *yes*. Over and over again in scripture there is a clear sense that we are called to respond to God with our whole lives. The Psalms speak about giving thanks to God with our whole being. The prophet Micah tells us the Lord wants us to “do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with our God” (Micah 6:8). In response to a question about which is the greatest commandment, Jesus quotes Deuteronomy: “Love the Lord your God with all your heart, and soul and mind and strength” (Deut. 6:5; Matt. 22:37). The focus is always on the wholeness of life and the reality that all of living is a matter of faith.

It is in this context that Jesus tells the story of the man who entrusts a portion of his wealth into the care of his slaves. In the end, it is a story about the responsibility of being stewards of that with which we have been entrusted. What we choose to do with our lives, or what we allow fear to keep us from doing, is finally what is important;—not because such choices and actions will somehow earn us a ticket into God's kingdom, but because God has designed life to work best and be experienced most fully and richly when we live it intentionally, with our priorities ordered towards enabling everyone to experience fullness of life.

#### Stewardship transforms life

So, what does it mean to be responsible stewards with what we keep? In concrete, practical terms, how do we begin to allow faith to shape and order the whole of our living? For many of us, it will not involve drastic or dramatic changes in how our lives already are. If you have made an effort to make decisions in your life which are in keeping with your faith, then such faith will already be evident. None of us are perfect and there is always room for growth; but for many of us, faithful living is already a part of who we are. In another sense, however, taking seriously the idea of stewardship in *all of life* will transform our entire experience of faith. It will enliven even the mundane aspects of our life by affirming the connections with the divine source of all of life. It enhances our sense of purpose in life as we remember that everything we do holds meaning and makes a difference.

## *Responding to God*

*with our lives*

*with what we keep*

*with what we give*

In a certain country, there was a lot of terrorist activity. A child of a rich family was playing in the beautiful garden of her home. Suddenly, however, one of her father's guards came and grabbed her to take her away to safety because of an impending terrorist attack. The guard risked his life to save the little girl.

After he rescued her, he turned to her and said, *Will you now give me a kiss on the cheek for what I've done for you?* The girl answered *How can I kiss you on the cheek after you have taken me away from the flowers of my garden that I like so much?*

The guard found it difficult to explain to the girl that he had actually saved her life.

This is how we sometimes behave in being so attached to the trivialities of life in view of the great salvation received through Christ—*Pulpit Helps*, July, 1991

# Sermons

*“Then God said, ‘Let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness’” (Gen. 2:26). With that decision to build the nature of God into the very core of our being, the mold was set for stewardship.*



Practicing such stewardship is not always easy. Sometimes it means spending more time and energy making decisions. Sometimes it means making unpopular choices. Sometimes it means living with the uncertainty of not knowing for sure what is best in a situation. But we can move forward with the confidence that we are never alone and we are always loved. Because we are talking about the ways in which faith impacts virtually every aspect of our living, it would be impossible to cover the subject even in a superficial way. But a few examples provide a sense of what such an approach to life might look like.

## **Stewardship means being intentional**

Time is a resource each of us can use. Every day we have 24 hours that can be used in a variety of ways. The choices we make about how we spend our time have direct implications regarding faith and our experience of life. We have choices in how we spend our time and those choices impact not only our lives, but also the lives of those with whom we share life. It's easy to fall into unhealthy habits simply because we don't pay attention. Good stewardship means being intentional about our choices and decisions.

Another aspect of such stewardship has to do with how we use our money. Our personal budgets reflect our faith, perhaps much more than we would care to admit. What is important to us? What are we choosing to support with the resources at our disposal? A good question to keep before us (regarding not only money, but also all of the other life choices we might review) is, *Will the results of this choice enhance my life and the lives of others in the world, or will it detract from an experience of abundant life for me or for others?* Such a question keeps open a wide range of possibilities, while maintaining a sense of connection with the rest of creation and with God. It becomes a balancing act. Some of our choices in life will directly enhance the quality of life for others (volunteering in an elementary school or a crisis center, for example) while other choices will be directed more towards ourselves (joining a health club or renting a movie might fit in this category). But in all of the various ways we use the resources of our lives—time, money, talents—an attitude of stewardship will keep before us a desire to enhance life rather than detract from it. So, even in our choices which seem most personal, we will want to reflect on the impact we might be making, both in our own lives and in the lives of those around us. The real point is that such decisions are taken seriously and examined from a perspective of faith. How is my faith being lived out in this particular choice?

How we relate to our children, how much time we spend at work, where we invest our savings, the kinds of things we do for entertainment, the car we buy, the way we treat our neighbors—all of these represent choices we make in our everyday lives. And they all have something to say about our faith. It is not just a question of whether we are stewards of what we have been given in this life. It is a question of what kind of stewards we are being. How are you responding to God with what you keep?

## **III. Responding with what we give**

### **2 Corinthians 8:1-7; 1 Peter 4:10-11**

We get a little bit uncomfortable when we start talking about money and giving. Indeed, our culture has the negative perception that the church is always talking about money (usually in the form of asking for some of yours). And such a perception is not completely without justification. The church has not always been very responsible with this message, but a strong case can be made that the church has a responsibility to talk about the whole issue of stewardship, including money and giving, in the strongest and most persistent terms possible. Stewardship is not an option in our lives. We are stewards of the gifts which God has given us. That is simply a given reality, built into the very fabric of our lives by our creator. What will we do with the trust which has been given to us?

## **We are created in God's image**

The foundation was laid down the moment when God decided on the

fundamental shape of humanity. The creation of human beings is described this way, “Then God said, ‘Let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness’” (Gen. 2:26). With that decision to build the nature of God into the very core of our being, the mold was set for stewardship. Since we are created in God’s image and likeness, and since God is, among many other things, both giving and loving, then by definition we were created with a basic need to give. It is a part of who we are. To deny that need is to be less than what God intends us to be.

## **There is joy in giving**

A minister worked closely with a couple on the wedding plans over a fairly extended period of time. The actual event was a small, family-oriented service, which was very meaningful for those who participated. The next day the newly married couple stopped by his office to thank him for his help and to give him some money as a thank you gift. He told them that working with them had been a privilege and he would like for them to keep the money. They responded by telling him, *Our joy will not be complete unless you accept our gift.* That attitude is at the heart of Christian stewardship. Our joy will not be complete unless we can respond by giving something in return.

Not only have we been created to give, but we have also been given an overwhelming abundance and variety of gifts with which to respond to this built-in need. John 3:16 tells the story—“For God so loved the world that he gave.” From that basic foundation comes our understanding that ultimately all good gifts come from God. Our gifts are not all the same and they are not always easy to discern, but we can be confident that they are waiting for us to discover. “We have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us” (Rom. 12:6). It is only when we bring all our gifts together that the ultimate gift of God’s grace can be fully realized and experienced in our lives and in the world. We each hold a piece of the gift, but the combined whole is definitely greater than the individual parts.

We have been created to give. We have been blessed with the gifts and the resources to give. And we have been called to give in service. “Like good stewards of the manifold grace of God, serve one another with whatever gift each of you has received” (1 Peter 4:10). Paul describes this attitude of stewardship to the Corinthian Church as he tells them about the churches in Macedonia. “They voluntarily gave according to their means, and even beyond their means, begging us earnestly for the privilege of sharing in this ministry to the saints” (2 Cor. 8:3-4). Ultimately, the purpose for our gifts and the reason for our giving is found in serving one another in the name of God. It is an economy of abundance and a world view based on love as the central and defining principle. It is a privilege in which we can discover joy.

## **Giving is important to our spiritual health**

How then, can the church not talk about stewardship and giving? Stewardship and giving are as important to our spiritual health as prayer and Bible reading. It is a theme which is at the very heart of what it means to be human beings who have been created by God in His image. It is an essential part of what it means to be in relationship with God. And it is a vital component of the life which God calls us to live in response to the grace which God has revealed to us.

We are people who have been abundantly blessed. The question then before us is, *How will we respond?* We have an opportunity to take an important step towards responding. Will we be faithful in offering our gifts to God? Will we be faithful in using our gifts to serve? Prayerfully consider ways in which you can be intentional and generous.

Stewardship is everything we do with everything we have and as stewards of God’s grace, we have been called to serve with all our gifts.

*(Originally, this was a series of three separate sermons.)*

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**Roger C Lynn, Pastor, The United Church of Moscow, Moscow, Idaho (an American Baptist/Disciples of Christ congregation)**

**Christ has no hands but our hands  
To do His work today;  
He has no feet but our feet  
To lead men in His way;  
He has no tongue but our tongues  
To tell men how He died;  
He has no help but our help  
To bring them to His side.**

**We are the only Bible  
The careless world will read;  
We are the sinner’s gospel,  
We are the scoffer’s creed;  
We are the Lord’s last message  
Given in deed and word—  
What if the line is crooked?  
What if the type is blurred?**

**What if our hands are busy  
With other work than His?  
What if our feet are walking  
Where sin’s allurements is?  
What if our tongues are speaking  
Of things His lips would spurn?  
How can we hope to help Him  
Unless from Him we learn?**

**—Annie Johnson Flint**

## Scripture

Genesis 24:1-14

## Key Text

“Then he prayed, ‘O LORD, God of my master Abraham, give me success today, and show kindness to my master Abraham’” (Genesis 24:1-14 NIV).

## Introduction

This is one of the most beautiful love stories in the Bible. This is also one of the finest stories of stewardship in the Bible. Eliezer is an excellent example of a dedicated steward—one who manages the affairs of another. As the story unfolds we see in him the characteristics of a good steward.

### 1. A person of prayer

Charged with the serious task of finding a wife for his master’s son, Isaac, he earnestly prayed about the matter, seeking above all the guidance of God. His notion of *success* was simple—the will of God as a kindness to his master. His journey was not an ego trip; he was about his master’s business.

His prayers were not empty rituals; he prayed from his heart (verse 45). Eliezer believed in a God who answers prayer. Likely, he had learned that from his master, Abraham, who was a man who lived in constant communion with God.

# Marks of a faithful steward

### 2. A person of persistence

In the house of Bethuel he refused to eat until he had accomplished his business for Abraham (verse 33). First things first! This faithful steward would not be sidetracked from his priorities. He persevered. His persistence is reflected, also, in the way he handled the pressure to stay with Bethuel’s family for 10 days. He saw no good reason to linger, though he would have received many privileges and pleasures as a welcome guest. God had answered his prayer, blessed his mission, and he was eager to get home and report to his master.

### 3. A person of persuasion

Bethuel and Laban agreed quickly to Eliezer’s plea, realizing that God was with this faithful steward. From what we later learn about Laban, we know that he was not easy to convince. Only when they conceded, “This is from the LORD” (verse 50), did Eliezer present them with costly gifts from Abraham. The gifts were not bribes to persuade them but were expressions of gratitude to those already persuaded.

Someone has said “The world steps aside to let the man pass who knows where he is going.” Men of purpose, vision, and faith are persuasive.

## Conclusion

Eliezer’s stewardship gave him a place in something more important than this one happy marriage. From Abraham, through Isaac, would come the people of Israel, and through them would come the Messiah, our Savior.

Every faithful steward is accomplishing more than he or she can know at the time.

Are the marks of a faithful steward, which shine so conspicuously in Eliezer, true also of your life?

*Nothing lies beyond the reach of prayer except that which lies beyond the will of God. Prayer can do anything, prayer is omnipotent.*

—R A Torrey



Giving God a tenth of all one makes or has is an ancient practice, the origins of which are lost in the unrecorded past. Abraham is the first tither mentioned in the Bible. With his armed servants, Abraham defeated a pagan army led by four kings. Returning with the spoils of war, Abraham encountered Melchizedek, the king of Salem and priest of God. This king-priest blessed Abraham and blessed the God who had given him victory. In response, Abraham “gave him a tenth of everything” (Gen. 14:18-20).

The next tither we meet is Jacob, grandson of Abraham. Jacob was fleeing through desert country when the Lord appeared to him, promising to be with him, to watch over him, and to bring him back home safely. In gratitude for the promised blessings Jacob vowed, “Of all that you give me I will give you a tenth” (Gen. 28:10-22). Jacob’s offspring became the nation of Israel, a nation formed by God.

When God delivered Israel from slavery, He made a covenant with them and brought them into the promised land of Canaan. The people of Israel were to be governed by laws given by God through Moses. The *Law of Moses*, as it came to be called, included tithing the produce of the land, the flocks and herds, or the money when crops and animals had been converted to cash. The law declared that “a tithe of everything . . . belongs to the Lord” (Lev. 27:30). It didn’t become His when it was given; it was already His. Not to tithe, therefore, was to rob God. Restoring the ancient practice, in contrast, would bring prosperity to the nation (Mal. 3:8-12).

Some have argued that Christians need not tithe because they are under grace, not under law. This is nonsense. Firstly, no Christian should do less for God than did an ancient Jew. Secondly, Jesus endorsed the practice of tithing (Matt. 23:23). Thirdly, tithing responds to an older law than the law of Moses. It responds to the law of gratitude. The tithe is not a means of bribing God to secure a blessing. Rather, the tithe is a way of acknowledging God as the giver of every blessing received and promised. When Abraham tithed to Melchizedek, it was not to obtain a blessing. He was already blessed and was properly thankful.

Jesus is our King-Priest, “a high priest forever, in the order of Melchizedek” (Heb. 6:20). That certainly makes Him a tithe-receiving priest. He has blessed His people with the greatest of blessings—their salvation. This blessing was purchased at the greatest of costs—His death. Our gratitude for that should make us joyful tithers to Him.

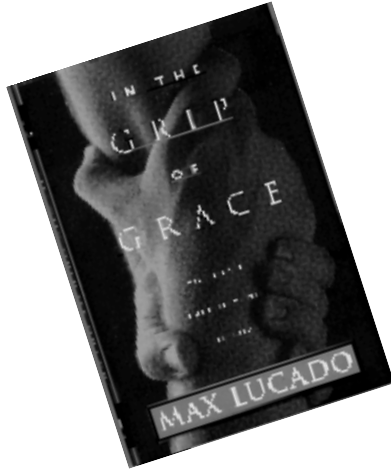
## Tithing: a response to grace

Israel’s tithes supported the temple and priesthood. Our tithes support the church and its ministry. Tithing makes it possible for preachers to occupy their pulpits and pursue their rounds of varied services. Tithing makes it possible for missionaries to make disciples among all the nations of earth. Tithing underwrites the mission of the church to feed the hungry, shelter the homeless, care for the sick, and evangelize the lost. Tithing provides the buildings, equipment, and supplies needed by the church for its global task. Tithing was not invented by some church finance committee. Tithing is God’s financial plan, and it cannot be improved upon. It is His basic plan, and devoted Christians gladly add freewill offerings to their tithes. Those who do so are the happiest of the Lord’s followers.

Tithing initiates nothing. It places no claim upon God. It is not a bargaining chip. Biblically understood and practiced, tithing is human response to divine grace. We give to God because He has already given to us. He is no poorer if we fail to tithe, but we are impoverished. He is no richer if we do tithe, but we are enriched. Tithing is rewarded, for God rewards all obedience to His Word. But we do not give in order to get; we give because we have received.



# Book Reviews



## *In the Grip of Grace*

by Max Lucado

Word Publishing

Dallas, Texas

1996

A stream of devotional works by Max Lucado in recent years has established his reputation as an author who targets people conscious of the nitty-gritty problems of daily living. Readers of this latest publication whose hearts need exposure to the warmth of God's love will not be disappointed for this book examines one of the greatest biblical doctrines: the matchless gift of God's grace.

An examination of the chapter headings ostensibly presents the book as a commentary on the first eight chapters of Paul's letter to Romans, but it almost certainly did not evolve from this purpose. It seems more likely that the author took material presented in devotional form over a number of years and re-shaped it with a Romans-like format. Whichever the case, the resultant work is not a whit diminished in its powerful impact upon the reader.

The initial *Parable of the River* sets the tone for what follows. In this vivid recasting of the old story of the prodigal son, the futile attempts of four rebellious brothers to return to their family castle find their parallel in different lifestyles pictured by the apostle in the opening chapters of his letter. Hedonism, legalism, judgementalism—all are put to the sword in succession. Sin has one answer alone, and that is Jesus. In a graphic illustration, Lucado compares the frantic attempts of Chairman Mao's medical staff to embalm his corpse in a life-like way to those who try to extort true life from a lifestyle that leads only to death. "Sin does to a life what shears do to a flower . . . Surround it with water. Stick the stem in soil. Baptize it with fertilizer. Glue the flower back on the stem. Do what you wish. The flower is dead" (p. 60).

Lucado proceeds to share a string of further illustrations, largely from his own experience, of the marvelous nature of divine grace. We read of an insurance company letter terminating coverage after a string of accidents; his loan of a personal credit card to his son; the fun of reserve team baseball players when the regulars went on strike for more pay; the blessings of Christmas pot-lucks for an impoverished ministerial graduate; and an altercation with a *no-entry* sign. From all of these, Lucado draws practical insights that match the thesis of the apostle as the book of Romans unfolds.

*This is a must for Seventh-day Adventists* is my conviction. Perhaps we are especially prone to personal achievement: we who exalt law, not as a means of salvation, but as a standard of life, yet who have so often stumbled over the very principles that are our blueprint for living. Perhaps it is especially easy to look on ourselves as deserving of special praise because of our roll as a prophetic people. Lucado cuts the prospective legalist down to size as he exalts Christ as the answer to boastfulness or self-pride.

Many phrases linger on in the memory after the book is laid aside....

"The fruit is more important than the name of the orchard" (p. 168).

"God would prefer we have an occasional limp than a perpetual strut" (p. 137).

"To return to sin after baptism is like committing adultery on your honeymoon" (p. 115).

One impression towers above all others as you peruse this book. The author is in love with Jesus. No wonder Jesus' grace is so rampant in his thinking. In the final chapter, *What we really want to know*, Lucado examines five questions of the apostle Paul in the final verses of Romans 8 questions that in a sense sum up the whole of Christian experience. He concludes, "You wonder how long My love will last. Find your answer on a splintered cross, on a craggy hill. That's Me you see up there, your Maker, your God, nail-stabbed and bleeding.... That's your sin I'm feeling. That's your death I'm dying. That's your resurrection I am living. That's how much I love you" (p. 180).

One thing is for sure, start this book and you will certainly finish it! And when you have done that, you too will love Jesus more than ever.

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*Martin I Anthony, Director, Trans-European Division Stewardship/  
Personal Ministries Department*

# Book Reviews

## *Celebration of Discipline*

by Richard J Foster  
HarperCollins Publishers  
New York, New York  
1988



It is impossible to read this book and not be spiritually challenged. In fact, those who are not willing to be challenged in their spiritual walk with God must not read this book, for doing so will cause them great disturbance.

While discussing the topic *meditation*, Foster suggests creating a richer attachment with God by detachment: "The detachment from the confusion all around us is in order to have a richer attachment to God. Christian meditation leads us to the inner wholeness necessary to give ourselves to God freely" (p. 21).

When he talks about the need for a life of prayer in those who believe, he writes: "All who have walked with God have viewed prayer as the main business of their lives" (p. 34).

An observation he makes about contemporary culture is that it makes people believe happiness is found in having plenty. To such he explains: "Because we lack a divine Center our need for security has led us into an insane attachment to things. We really must understand that the lust for affluence in contemporary society is psychotic.... It is time we awaken to the fact that conformity to a sick society is to be sick" (p. 80).

After I read this book, I made some decisions in my own life. Firstly, that I will have some form of Sabbatical time every year. This will be time for personal evaluation of my relationship with God. Secondly, that I will de-accumulate. This means I will take intentional steps to give away the many things I have accumulated, things I do not necessarily use.

I challenge you to read this book. And in turn, let the book challenge you to make a decision or two that will change your life forever.

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*Pardon Mwansa, Associate Director, General Conference Stewardship Department*

### Communion with God = **POWER**

Here is a power-packed devotional book that covers more than 50 topics on communing with God through prayer. It has all the spiritual information and just enough provocative thought to suggest direction. Methodically written, this book is easy to follow. Each devotional is divided into four sections: a short scriptural passage; a thought-provoking question for contemplation; several quotations (primarily from the writings of Ellen G. White) to help discover the answer to the question; and a concluding prayer thought.

Through *Communing With God*, your mind will gain understanding, your heart will feel peace, and your physical body will be strengthened. You will find answers to many of your questions. You will discover the great power that can be yours through prayer and dependence on God's Word. You will develop an intimate relationship with Jesus.

A commitment to use this book regularly could not only change your life but also influence your family and friends. This is a devotional book for your own growth and discovery; it is also a great book for sharing. Use it for your personal Bible study or with a small group. Make *Communion With God* a *power tool* in your life. Spend 20 minutes of your day with this book (in your favorite chair), experience each spiritual gem in the presence of the Holy Spirit, and claim God's promise in sincere prayer.

Communion with God = **P** rayer to a God who is

**O**mnipotent, Almighty, and unlimited in power.

**W**orship with Scripture and praise to

**E**mmanuel, God who is with us and is our

**R**esource in times of need.

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*Gale Cole, Departmental Secretary, General Conference Stewardship Department*

## *Communion With God*

by the Ministerial Association  
General Conference of  
Seventh-day Adventists  
Silver Spring, Maryland  
1997



# Resources

Here are two resources prepared by Gordon Botting, Stewardship Director and Financial Educator, Pacific Union Conference, North American Division of the Seventh-day Adventists. These products may be ordered through AdventSource, 5040 Prescott, Lincoln, NE 68506; Tel 402-486-2519; Fax 402-486-2572; email 74617.1241@compuserve.com

**ABC's of Financial Freedom.** This money management series is designed for members of the church as well the community. It can be used as a community outreach seminar, a family ministries workshop, a small group learning activity or can even be part of your church lending library for individual families to use. Some of the topics included are *dealing with your attitude towards money; developing an action plan for your financial future; designing and staying within your budget; using a credit card wisely; purchasing your home; getting out and staying out of debt.* The package includes a 4-hour video series, a leader's guide and a 24-page workbook

Video Set (English)	\$45.00
Workbook with or without Biblical texts (English)	\$ 5.00
Workbook with Biblical texts (Spanish)	\$ 5.00
Workbooks in orders of 20 or more	\$ 4.00
Leader's guide (English and Spanish)	\$35.00

**Stew Pot.** This is a bulletin insert designed to help understand that we are to be stewards not only of our finances and possessions, but of our relationships, our health, our time, and our spiritual well-being. The 12-month subscription (one insert per month) is available in English and Spanish; vol. 1, which is the 12 issues of 1996, is also available in French. One subscription entitles you to make unlimited photocopies of the master.

A one-year subscription for a conference	\$120.00
A one-year subscription for an individual church	\$ 29.00

## Editorial

Stewardship as the human response to Jesus Christ as lord begins with the fact that God is still God. "Know that the Lord is God. It is he who made us, and we are his; we are his people, the sheep of his pasture" (Ps. 100:3, NIV). Stewardship is about recognizing that God is God, and letting Him function as God.

God in our lives gives us the strength and confidence to face a life caught up in the daily currents of our society. He gives us courage to work with a church struggling to live out Christianity in a sinful world. He gives us grace to minister with members struggling to respond to the guidance of the Spirit while dealing with the forces of habit and sinful nature. God is present and at work. This is His church. He is still God. He is still able. "Know therefore that the Lord your God is God; he is the faithful God, keeping his covenant of love to a thousand generations of those who love him and keep his commands" (Deut. 7:9, NIV).

Each issue in life is a choice of who will be God, who will be in control. Leadership and ministry in God's church begin with giving God room to work through us. Confidence in God is the best solution for the temptation to control others through financial pressures, guilt, or any other form of manipulation. Thus the first task of stewardship ministry is to encourage and strengthen the walk with God so that we and those we work with can effectively allow Him to be God. We will succeed as Christians and as a church when we let God be God in our lives, individually and corporately.

*Benjamin C Maxson, Director, General Conference Stewardship Department*



**Stewardship Department  
General Conference of  
Seventh-day Adventists**



**Editor»** Fylvia Fowler Kline

**Editorial secretaries»** Sheri Clemmer »  
Gale Livengood Cole

**Contributing editors»** Martin Anthony »  
Itamar S DePaiva » Arnaldo Enriquez » M K  
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**For more information about  
stewardship and  
to contribute an article or sermon,  
contact us at**

**12501 Old Columbia Pike  
Silver Spring, MD 20904  
(301) 680-6157 Phone  
(301) 680-6155 Fax  
gcstewardship@compuserve.com  
FFKline@compuserve.com**