



DYNAMIC

Steward

Exploring Partnership with God

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Too often we argue over tithe as a funding issue. We bicker over our rights to manage it . . .

Holy to the Lord

A *tithe of everything . . . belongs to the Lord; it is holy to the Lord (Lev 27:30).* With these words, God brought centuries of history and tradition into direct instruction for the children of Israel.

Tithing or a commitment to tithe was an integral part of Israelite heritage. Now God brought His perspective to the family practice. Tithing was to be more than a family tradition; it was to be more than mere habit. God established His claim on the material area of life. As often as the Israelites received some material blessing, tithe would help them remember that everything belonged to God. *The earth is the Lord's, and everything in it, the world, and all who live in it (Ps 24:1).* This way, God established tithe as a personal test of loyalty.

Do we recognize God for who He is—the owner of all? Or do we claim ownership, and thus usurp God's place in life? Before we debate how tithe should be used, we must understand what it is. Before we argue about where tithe should go, we must accept God as lord and owner of all. Biblical passages on tithe clearly indicate it to be a matter of worship, recognizing God in a response of praise and submission.

Too often we argue over tithe as a funding issue. We bicker over our rights to manage it or to give it wherever we want to. This will continue as long as we see tithe as the way to fund the church, as the means to support that which we deem worthy. But is this biblically correct?

We have traditionally taught that the primary purpose for tithe was to support the ministry, or the church. Yet we cannot biblically support this position. The children of Israel did not support the sanctuary system and the Levites and priests with their tithe. Instead, they brought their tithes to God in worship, acknowledging Him as creator, redeemer, and owner. God received these tithes as worship, and then *He* gave them to the Levites (*Num 18:21-26*).

We may claim the right to manage that which we support, but can we claim the right to manage that which God supports? Tithe is a personal statement about our individual relationship with God; it is not a tool to manipulate God's church with. Tithe is a statement of faith that recognizes who God is in our lives, individually and corporately.

What does your tithe say about your relationship with God?

Benjamin C Maxson, Director, General Conference Stewardship Department

Applications



Woven into the story of Zaccheus are many practical lessons about money, relationships, and values. List several lessons you can glean from the story, and then focus on each of the lessons in the following way:

1. Identify the lesson
2. Study how Zaccheus came to learn the lesson
3. Apply the lesson by asking a series of questions
4. Develop an exercise to motivate change

Here is an example of studying one of the lessons found in the story of Zaccheus:

1. Identify the lesson

Spend your money based on the values of your life (*Lk 19:8*).

2. Study how Zaccheus came to learn the lesson

It is clear that before his conversion Zaccheus was a selfish person who spent most of his money on himself. However, the opposite behavior is seen as soon as Zaccheus changes his values in life. After his encounter with Jesus, the Holy Spirit impresses upon his mind to share with the poor and to mend broken relationships. As a result of his conversion, he gives about 50 percent of his possessions to the poor.

3. Apply the lesson by asking a series of questions

Do you know that people spend money on what they value most? Have you ever made a personal assessment of your values and funds to find out where your money goes? People are often amazed to discover that a large percentage of their income goes towards meeting their personal needs. What will your assessment reveal? And if you discover that you hardly spend anything on anyone but yourself, could it mean that your value system does not include others?

4. Develop an exercise to motivate change

a. List your values in life. What is most important to you? Perhaps it is Christian education, quality time with your family, quiet time to yourself, or recreational activities.

b. List the amounts of money you have spent on each of your values over the past three months. Be accurate and honest. What you have before you is a picture of who you are and what you are all about. Now ask yourself questions like: Am I spending where my values are? Am I balanced in my spending?

c. List areas of your spending that need readjustment. Add to your daily prayer list the areas of your life that need readjustment. Strive towards making definite changes in your lifestyle. After a six-month period, re-evaluate your values to see the progress you have made.

Lessons from Zacchaeus

When Robert Folkenberg was elected president of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, he challenged church members by saying *Give young people a piece of the pie and maybe they would stay for dinner.*

Steve Case took that challenge, and in 1992 began *Piece of the Pie Ministries*. Although well qualified with a Ph D in religious education and 20 years of experience in youth ministry, Steve feels his major qualification is his love for God and young people. The mission of *Piece of the Pie* is to draw young people to Christ by drawing them into the life of the Church. *Piece of the Pie Ministries* offers four services.

Piece of the pie



1. Speaking for youth events—Experienced, energetic speakers are available for events such as youth rallies, weeks of prayer, and campmeetings.

2. Training seminars—Qualified trainers are available for youth leadership training.

3. Short-term mission trips—In conjunction with Maranatha Volunteers International, mission trips are designed specifically for teens, young adults and their families.

4. Youth ministry resources—Currently there are seven resources available:

It's My Choice, a baptismal study guide

Shall We Dance?, a lifestyle study guide

Maranatha Guide to Adventure, a mission trip blueprint

Questions 4 You, a thought-provoking set of discussion questions

Hands-on Service Ideas, a collection of service ideas

PI=Program Ideas, weekly program ideas by email or fax

On the Case, a weekly column in the magazine, *Insight*

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With this issue of Dynamic Steward is a samplly copy of PI=Program Ideas. Subscription cost for 52 weekly issues is US\$ 25.00.

Quotes

on tithes from the *Spirit of Prophecy*

The system of tithes and offerings was intended to impress the minds of men with a great truth—that God is the source of every blessing to His creatures, and that to Him man's gratitude is due for the good gifts of His providence.—*Patriarchs and Prophets*, p 525.

The minister, should be precept and example, teach the people to regard the tithe as sacred. He should not feel that he can retain it and apply it to his own judgment, because he is a minister. It is not his. He is not at liberty to devote to himself whatever he thinks is his due. Let him not give his influence to any plans for diverting from their legitimate use the tithes and offerings dedicated to God. Let them be placed in the Lord's treasury, and held sacred for His service as He has appointed.—*Gospel Workers*, p 225.

As to the amount required, God has specified one tenth of the increase. This is left to the conscience and benevolence of men, whose judgment in this tithing system should have free play. And while it is left free to the conscience, a plan has been laid out definite enough for all. No compulsion is required.—*Testimonies for the Church*, vol 3, pp 388, 389.

Should all whom God has prospered with earth's riches carry out His plan by faithfully giving a tenth of all their increase, and should they not withhold their trespass offerings and their thank offerings, the treasury would be constantly replenished.—*Testimonies for the Church*, vol 3, p 408.

God has given His people a plan for raising sums sufficient to make the enterprise self-sustaining. God's plan in the tithing system is beautiful in its simplicity and equality. All may take hold of it in faith and courage, for it is divine in its origin.—*Messages to Young People*, p 304

Concepts

*Bless all who
worship thee, from
the rising of the sun
unto the going down
of the same. Of thy
goodness, give us;
with thy love,
inspire us; by thy
spirit, guide us; by
thy power, protect
us; in thy mercy,
receive us now and
always. The
splendor, the love,
and the strength of
God be upon us.
—C S Lewis*

Jesus clearly portrays money as a direct competition to God (*Matt 6:24*), and speaks of the impossibility of serving both money and God. Tithe is one of the primary tools God uses to establish Himself as lord in our lives. How we deal with money, and more specifically how we deal with tithe, is a reflection of where God is in our lives.

In the days of Abraham and Jacob, there was no physical church or membership to support. Yet Abraham and Jacob brought their first fruits, offering tithe to God in an act of worship. Later, when God established a corporate people with a corporate ministry, He gave what He received in tithes and offerings to the priests and Levites. For His people, the tithe continued to be an act of worship; for God it was a means to support His corporate body. The same is true today.

When our hearts are right, we worship God each time we return our tithe and offerings to Him. Tithing is a worship experience that accepts our relationship with God. It is a worship experience where we acknowledge God as creator, and accept His ownership of who we are and what we have. Claiming ownership of our own usurps God's right and His position. Tithing reminds us that redemption restores God's ownership in our lives. *You are to be holy to me because I, the Lord, am holy, and I have set you apart from the nations to be my own (Lev 20:26)*.

When we tithe, we consciously profess our trust in God to care and provide for us. When we tithe, we confess who He is in our lives and recognize His guidance and love. When we tithe, we deliberately choose to rely on Him. Thus we follow His guidance to not worry, and *seek first His kingdom and His righteousness (Matt 6:33)*. Only when we experience salvation can we worship God. Only when we surrender to His lordship can we truly tithe.

Understanding tithe in this way leads us to realize that tithe is holy, unique, different. It belongs to the Holy One; it is His to administer. Part of our worship with tithe is turning it over to Him to manage. What happens to the tithe is not our responsibility; our only responsibility is to worship God. However, when as a part of church leadership, we manage tithe funds for God's church, we must always remember that what we manage belongs to God, not to us.

A worship lifestyle includes accepting the responsibility to administer all God's gifts in partnership with Him. Tithe is not a way of paying God off with a 10% blackmail so we can do what we want to with the remaining 90%. Tithe is a sign of our willingness to manage what belongs to God—all of life, in an intimate walk with Him.

For tithe to be truly worship, we need to ask ourselves some questions on a regular basis: Who owns the home we live in? Who owns all the property we manage? Who has given us talent and strength to earn a living? Who has priority in our choices for everyday life? Who do we rely on each day? Do we really allow God to be God in every area of life?

So, how do we make our tithe truly worship? The answer lies in our attitude and action. Tithe as worship starts with a personal acceptance of Jesus Christ as savior and lord. Next is a decision to consciously recognize God as the owner of all that we have and are. Then comes an attitude of management rather than ownership.

Now, turn that attitude into acts of conscious worship, and make tithing an intentional act, not just a habit: Fill out your tithe envelope with a prayer of thanksgiving and praise; place the envelope in the offering plate with the assurance of divine partnership; live every moment acknowledging Jesus as lord of your life; do every deed conscious of the divine partnership you have with God.

So, what about you? Is your tithe worship? Only you and God know the answer. And only you can choose to make it so!

**Worship is giving to God
the best he has given us.
—Oswald Chambers**

Stewardship Window

The **mission** of the General Conference Stewardship Department is to emphasize the lordship of Jesus Christ, to enhance the integration of the gospel into the Christian lifestyle as faithful stewardship, including the material area of life, and to facilitate the individual, corporate, and leadership dimensions of stewardship as partnership with God.

Understanding and applying a clear and comprehensive biblical approach to stewardship is crucial to the life of the church and each member. Thus the desired outcomes focus on training stewardship leaders and developing materials.

Desired Outcome #1

Trained and certified division, union, and local field stewardship educators who shape the direction of stewardship ministry in their respective areas; develop their own materials and adapt other materials to their local setting; educate their respective target groups (pastors and members); and train and certify local care givers (pastors) in a biblical approach to stewardship.

Action Plan #1

Refine, expand, and continue to implement the stewardship certification process and curriculum to train division and union stewardship personnel as leaders and trainers, specifically to be a basic Stewardship Educator, a Stewardship Trainer, and/or a Stewardship Consultant; develop and provide materials for the Stewardship Certification program; and provide stewardship training for administrators as requested.

Desired Outcome #2

Growth in individual and corporate faithfulness measured by percentage increase in giving units returning tithes, giving units returning offerings, members attending church regularly, members involved in nurture ministry, and members involved in outreach ministry.

Action Plan #2

Develop and/or coordinate network materials appropriate for the world field by encouraging local development of materials consistent with the overall stewardship philosophy and vision; providing wide access to basic stewardship resources through a Stewardship Web Site, training videos, and other contemporary technology; developing and providing various methods to help pastors determine local church faithfulness levels; and encouraging a three-level reporting system where conferences/local fields report the faithfulness levels of churches and respective conference/local field to unions, unions provide summary reports of their faithfulness levels to the division, and divisions provide summary reports of their faithfulness levels to the General Conference.

Desired Outcome #3

Increase in administrators understanding, support for, and integration of biblical stewardship.

Action Plan #3

Identify stewardship trends that affect our church and its members; cooperate with organizational administrators to integrate stewardship into their fields; help implement "self-reliance" through training and developing appropriate resources; and conduct Stewardship Consultations for selected conferences to help develop a customized local stewardship strategy.



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This document was prepared by the General Conference Stewardship Department in response to a request from the General Conference Leadership Committee that all departments present, at the 1998 Annual Council Session, their desired outcomes and action plans.

The story of Jonah ploughed new thought patterns into the theological landscape of Judaism. Jonah drops into history in the midst of a people who differentiated themselves from the world, whose pride appropriated the goodness of God for themselves, whose prejudice locked others outside the circle of their concern. The story of Jonah shatters the narrowness and superiority of anyone or of any group who dares to think that he or it alone enjoys God's favor. The story of Jonah is meant to crush pride and crumble prejudice.

Wilderness of mercy

Introduction

Scholars and non-scholars have spent long hours persuading other scholars and non-scholars that the story of Jonah is actual history, or that it is a parable, or an allegory. It is possible to devote so much time persuading people to swallow the fish story that we fail to catch the great spiritual drama that unfolds.

Who was Jonah?

Jonah was a worshiper of the creator. He believed in God, believed in creation, worshipped on the Sabbath, understood right and wrong, knew about the controversy between good and evil, comprehended something of the justice and mercy of God. Jonah could be a member of our church.

Jonah was a strong nationalist. Like his countrymen after the exile, there grew up in him a bitterness towards others. His nation had suffered so much from its enemies. There was no room in his heart, or the nation's heart, for forgiveness or civility towards others. Humanity had been squeezed into two groups: us and them. Ninevah, capital of Assyria represented Israel's most bitter enemy. Jonah was a proud denominationalist. He could fit right in with Seventh-day Adventists who also consider themselves a called people. Like many of us, Jonah believed God reserved special blessings for his group and that somehow the virtue of being called carried with it a subtle sense of superiority.

Jonah deliberately disobeyed God. This indeed is a striking feature of the story. A worshiper of God deliberately disobeys. Some may feel Jonah was timid and that his fear of Ninevites propelled him towards Tarshish. Consider his amazing courage when, on board the ship, he told the sailor to toss him overboard. When he finally got to Ninevah there was boldness and determination in his preaching. No, he was not a coward. Why then did he disobey God?

Jonah was in conflict with God. Jonah's worship of God brought him to an intellectual understanding of what God was like. He knew God was gracious but he didn't wish for God to be gracious to his enemies. His intellectual theology had not been assimilated into his emotional life. He worshiped God, he knew God, but he wanted God's character to be changed.

Jonah fled God's presence because it was too uncomfortable. He was exposed to God's searching judgments, and his littleness, his sin, his prejudices and hypocrisies stood revealed for what they were. Yet in God's presence he would have been a changed man. In God's presence his prides and his hatreds could have been transcended. In God's presence he would have found inner healing.

The ultimate absurdity of Jonah's conflict with God is revealed in the closing scenes of this story: Jonah had pity on a vine that grows up one day and dies the next; but he did not want God to have pity on a city of million Gentiles.

Jonah was self-centered. Self-centeredness is a universal tendency. Our primary preoccupation is with ourselves. When any new idea or suggestion comes along, our first reaction is *How does this affect me, my position, my future?*

So it is not surprising that Jonah was embarrassed and angry about the failure of his preaching. It is not surprising that Jonah's emotional state was determined by his physical comfort (shade) or discomfort (blazing sunlight).

What did Jonah discover about himself and about God?

We really don't know what happened to Jonah. Did he ever preach another sermon? What effect did the Ninevah sojourn have on him? I would like to think Jonah learned a lot in a moment. Jonah learned these six things:

1. *You can run from God but you cannot hide.* God is infinitely gracious. You can spurn Him repeatedly yet He entreats with tears. *O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you, how often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing (Matt 23:37).* There is a great revelation of God's character here. Not only would He save Ninevah, but He would also save Jonah.

2. *God focuses on the world.* The church is not the focus of God's attention and concern; the world is. Both Scripture and the Spirit of Prophecy describe how precious the church is in God's eyes; but let's not let such statements suggest that God somehow has only secondary regard for the rest of the world.

3. *How to deliver a judgment message.* I expect Jonah never again spoke in thunderous tones about the destructive power of God. He now spoke with tears in his voice. He realized that God's judgment messages are meant as entreaties of the most urgent kind, not denouncements of the most violent kind.

Imagine going to the doctor who finds some serious condition in your body. And the doctor exclaims amidst the joy of discovery, *In six weeks you are going to die!* The doctor I go to had better say it differently. A judgment message from God is very tender because it arises out of the pain and longing of His heart. We who have been entrusted with that message need to speak in softer tones.

4. *You can't depersonalize humanity.* Jonah could not see individuals. He saw groups and masses. He saw *us* and *them*. He branded them with a label to justify his thinking. Those who lived in Ninevah were not people, but Gentiles. They were heathen. How easy it is to classify people into groups and thereby rob them of their humanity. When you can train yourself to look at groups, you are spared the obligation of seeing people with compassion.

It is easy to listen to a mission appeal for a school or a hospital and toss a dollar into the plate. It is a different to know a boy named Emu whose only apparent hope for an education is dependent on you. Life is so much easier when you don't have to see people as individuals.

Is there a hint of rebuke in God's word to Jonah: *And should not I pity Ninevah, that great city, in which there are more than a hundred and twenty thousand persons who do not know their right hand from their left, and also much cattle?* Yes God sees the many, but He sees much more. God sees the many in which He sees the one. But there is even more: God sees the little ones—those who do not know their right hand from their left and who therefore, like cattle, cannot be held at all responsible for the moral state of society. What great encouragement it is to know that God sees even the little ones.

5. *There's a wilderness in God's mercy.* There's a kindness in His justice which is more than liberty. Jonah had previously worshipped a territorial God. That territory was the land of Palestine. Its people were the people of promise, the direct descendants of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, the ones who kept the law and lived by the blueprint. But here in Ninevah he learned that, yes, God was a territorial God, but the vastness of His territory took in everyone and every place. There is no person who was not a child of God. That person may be far from home, he may be on a rebellious trip, but he is still a child of the king. He is royalty.

6. *Your special place in the plan of God.* Up to this time Jonah saw himself as part of the elect—the chosen ones, and he thought that being chosen meant being a favorite. But outside Ninevah, crushed by his failure, crippled by frustration, Jonah begins to realize that he is called as a co-worker with God. He can say, as did the apostle Paul centuries later, *by God's grace I have a ministry.* Jonah understood that being called, chosen, and blessed by God was not an indication of worth, it was an invitation to work. Jonah discovered his missionary destiny. Jonah discovered that God uses broken people for the highest purposes. *Man is happy when he has a utensil that remains whole and is saddened when it breaks. God, on the other hand, whose most cherished possession is a man's heart, delights when it is broken in humility.*

Conclusion

Jonah is not just a fish story. Jonah is a drama played out over and over in the lives of individuals and of religious organizations. In this drama we are confronted with our littleness and narrowness, our preoccupation with ourselves. In this drama we are challenged by a great God—to see Him anew, to break out of the shell of our little existence, to catch a vision of the purpose and plans of God, and to rediscover the missionary destiny of His people.



“It is clear that he does not pray, who, far from uplifting himself to God, requires that God shall lower Himself to him, and who resorts to prayer not to stir the man in us to do the will of God, but only to persuade God to will what the man in us wills.”
—Thomas Aquinas

Introduction

It was memorable for me to swim a length of a pool for the first time—out of my depth and not drowning! I knew I could swim for I had swam fearlessly at the shallow end many a time. And I knew there were people nearby to rescue me just in case something were to happen. Yet, it required a commitment of faith to begin swimming across the pool. It took even greater faith to go those last few exhilarating yards.

F-A-I-T-H, as an acrostic, says **F**orsaking **A**ll **I** Trust **H**im.” Faith says *Forsaking all, I trust Him to go beyond what is seen and secure.* Faith is trusting in the Lord with all your heart without leaning on your own understanding. Faith is following God in every part of your life. That doesn’t mean we undervalue the mind, understanding, and common sense; it means we do not base our life on what we can figure out or feel strongly; it means God is at the center—and that is not always easy.

Abraham found a life of implicit faith to be exhilarating! Genesis chapters 13 and 14 tell us at least four things about faith.

Faith goes back to God after failure

In Genesis chapter 12 we see that Abraham had really messed things up. Fear in Egypt had replaced faith. It was no credit to him that Pharaoh threw him out. What does Abraham do? He goes back to where he had first built an altar (*Gen 13:4*). While in Egypt there were no altars, no mention of God. After his display of

lack of faith, and after facing the consequences of it, Abraham approaches God again. Now we see his *desire to return from disgrace to grace, to be quit of life’s compromises and breathe again the clean air of the place where faith had once been fresh and strong—J C L Gibson.*

Faith does not give up after failure; it gets up after failing to find God again. When you fail, don’t give up. Get back to the *altars*—get back to the place where you once found the presence of God very near. Search Him in prayer, Bible study, fellowship, and regular worship. Get back in touch with God. You may have failed Him, but He still loves you.

And once you restore your relationship with God, it is much easier to sort out difficulties with other people.

Faith gives way to others and works through love

The new wealth of Abraham and Lot created some logistic problems: They need more room to accommodate their family, their herds, and their staff. Abraham’s faith, restored by contact with the Lord, enables him to be at ease with himself and deal graciously towards his nephew. He doesn’t pull rank as head of the tribe, he doesn’t fight for first place. As far as Abraham was concerned, he didn’t have to show Lot who was senior partner, he didn’t have to make a statement of power. As far as Abraham was concerned, it was God who was in control.

Lot, by contrast, chooses for himself (*Gen 13:11*). He takes the fertile valley of Sodom, in spite of the moral and spiritual danger. Sodom was wicked and sinning greatly against God. Abraham chose to take the higher ground, both morally as well as literally. Abraham was willing to defer, to work harder to remain close to God.

Was Abraham a wimp, a doormat, wanting a quiet life, not standing up for himself? Chapter 14 shows that Abraham was no wimp. Here we see him as a skilled military general defeating a far greater army to rescue Lot from the trouble he has gotten himself into. In deferring to Lot, Abraham illustrates true servanthood. In Philippians 2 Paul urges Christians to imitate the meekness and servanthood of Christ. The meekness of Christ is not weakness—there is none stronger than Jesus. Only faith that can strengthen us to be like Abraham, to serve others joyfully.

Faith brings God’s approval and assurance

Faith of Abraham

*Dark as my path may
seem to others, I
carry a magic light in
my heart. Faith, the
spiritual strong
searchlight, illumines
the way, and although
sinister doubts lurk in
the shadow, I walk
unafraid toward the
enchanted wood
where the foliage is
always green, where
joy abides, where
nightingales nest and
sing, and where life
and death are one in
the presence of the
Lord.—Helen Adams
Keller*

In Genesis 13:14-17, God repeats and extends his promise to Abraham not simply to make him a great nation (as in chapter 12), but to multiply his offspring to be as numerous as the dust of the earth.

Choices made for God may mean an immediate material loss (obedience to God means we pay our tithe even when others save money and think us stupid). Yet all our material losses are more than compensated spiritually. We may not always feel so at the time, but afterwards as with Abraham, God confirms it.

A minister was asked to consider pastoring a new congregation where the membership was larger, the income was more than liberal, where the future looked brighter. It was a tempting offer for he was not happy where he was. As he contemplated on the offer, he simply could not find any peace from God to apply for the position. So he decided to remain where he was. Not long after that decision was made, he felt the blessing of God in his spirit for that decision, for exercising his faith.

Faith produces generosity and wisdom

In Genesis 14 Abraham meets with the kings of Salem and Sodom. Melchizedek, the king of Salem, who was also a priest, feeds Abraham and pronounces a blessing on him. Abraham responds by presenting to Melchizedek a tithe of all that he had captured.

The King of Sodom doesn't bother to bring God into it at all and makes an abrupt, businesslike offer to Abraham. *Give me the people but keep the goods for yourself*, says the King of Sodom to Abraham. Abraham does not accept the offer; instead he only takes his expenses and the share belonging to the men who fought with him. What is going on here? Why does he give one tenth to one and refuses to take advantage of the other? In the one case Abraham responds to the blessing and gives without looking for return—an act which can only be done with faith in a generous God. In the other case, Abraham's faith makes him shrewd and wise enough not to be beholden to the King of Sodom. *I have raised my hand to the Lord, God most high, creator of heaven and earth and have taken an oath that I will accept nothing belonging to you so that you will never be able to say 'I made Abraham rich' (Gen 14:22-23).*

Faith made Abraham generous to those who honor God and cautious in dealing with those far from God lest they would boast that Abraham was in some way in their debt. A minister had a lot of grass to cut but could not afford a lawn mower. Next door lived a man who did not go to church much, but who had a lawn mower. When asked why he did not borrow his neighbor's lawn mower, the minister said *I don't want him to get the impression that he has done his bit for God by doing me a favor with the loan of his mower.* That man's spiritual needs were more important than the minister's grass. Does the Church sometimes ask outsiders for too many favors? Perhaps that's why people are sometimes cynical about us. The word goes round: *They're always begging, always looking for our money.* A faith like Abraham's will seek to be generous and to serve the outsider, taking care not to give the impression that it is the other way round.

Faith goes back to God after failure

Faith is willing to give way to others and works through love

Faith brings God's approval and assurance

Faith produces generosity and wisdom

Conclusion

Our faith must be very strong like the faith of Abraham. Have you let God down? Faith gets up and goes back to him. Do you have problems in the family? Faith works through love. Do you have a difficult decision to make? Find out what God wants and *in all your ways acknowledge Him and He will direct your path.*

May a living faith make you both generous and wise. May God keep you in perfect peace as you stay your minds on Him as you trust in Him.



**If a blade of
grass can grow
in a concrete
walk and a fig
tree in the side
of the mountain
cliff, a human
being
empowered with
an invincible
faith can survive
all odds the
world can throw
against his
tortured soul.
—Robert Harold
Schuller**



No man can tell whether he is rich or poor by turning to his ledger. It is the heart that makes a man rich. He is rich or poor according to what he is, not according to what he has.—Beecher

Introduction

At a campmeeting in Zambia, a prominent leader with good intentions announced that there was a financial need for a special project. He gave the details of this worthy cause and then said *As the Spirit moves you, come up to the front and publicly announce your offering to the Lord for this special project*. There were people of varied financial situations and means in the audience; some with surplus wealth, some with moderate incomes, some with barely nothing.

A farmer, who owned a lot of cattle and in the business of selling animals to the butchers and milk to the dairies, walked up to the front in great majesty and announced that he would give two cows to this project. Two cows were equivalent to about US\$1000 ! A loud *Amen* followed the farmer's announcement. Of course, he then asked his wife to stand and be acknowledged. Next, another farmer stood up, walked to the front with gusto and determination. He, rather loudly, announced his gift of four cows. This time the *Amens* were even louder than the first time and they were accompanied by an enthusiastic applause. A third farmer stood up and walked to the front. Not wanting to be outdone, he pledged six cows. This time the cheering almost brought the roof down. The pledging and

How big is your heart?

cheering continued until all the wealthy people in the audience had contributed great amounts towards the special project.

Towards the end, an ordinary man, without extraordinary airs, humbly walked to the front and pledged items equivalent to US\$ 10.00. The only responses that came were from the little children sitting in the front pews. (They had no concept of the value of money. They were by now conditioned to say *Amen* and clap when a pledge was made.)

The smaller the amount, the quieter the amens; the higher the amount the louder the amens. The size of the gift does not matter in the eyes of the Lord. What matters is the sacrifice involved in the gift.

What Jesus sees

Imagine Jesus Christ in the temple. The people are invited to bring their offerings. Jesus is seated at a vantage point. Not only can He see the amount each person was giving, but he can also see their hearts. A rich man stands up with a money bag filled with coins of gold and silver and walks with his head held high. Another has his servant carry his bag to draw attention to his wealth.

Jesus sees the bags of gold and silver. He sees their hearts—some with good intention, some with selfish motive, some with an agenda. Then a poor widow stands up, copper coins squeezed tightly in her fist. People look at her wondering why she's walking up to the front without an offering. But Jesus sees what is in her clenched hand. Jesus sees her heart of worship. The copper coins plunk on top of the heavy gold. There is silence. There is a moment of heavy silence before Jesus speaks. He begins, *I tell you the truth*. Every time Christ Jesus says the words *I tell you the truth*, it's a sure sign that something very important is to be said. Jesus then draws closer to the widow and points at her. Now the poor woman is embarrassed and prays for the earth to open up and swallow her. Jesus says *Look at this woman*. Of course, everyone looks. And then Jesus says *This poor widow that you see right here has put in more than all the others*.

There are looks of confusion and anger. There is a low murmuring amongst the worshipers. Then Jesus points to the rich and says *All these people gave their gifts out of their wealth but she out of her poverty putting all she had to live on (verse 4)*. What Jesus is saying is *All of you are rich. You have plenty in your homes, you have plenty in your bank accounts, you have your animals. But this woman who is not just a widow but also poor has nothing. She did not have a selection from which to choose. She has no money in the bank, she has no assets, she has no animals. She brought what she had to live on—two copper coins she had to meet her daily needs*.

In preparing to come to the temple to worship, the woman must have asked herself *What will I give to the Lord? I have nothing*. Moved by the Holy Spirit, moved by the power of Jesus she says, *My entire life is under You God. You take care of*

Sermons

*me. I will give you that which I have. All I have to live on is two copper coins. I will bring them to you. She picks the two copper coins, leaving her home void of anything valuable.. She knows that her decision means that when she returns home, there will be nothing waiting for her. There will be no money. There will be no food. She knows that this decision to give Jehovah all she had meant that she will return home to kneel and say to the God of heaven *My Jehovah I seek of thee and ask of thee to take care of me.* Scripture says that out of her poverty she gave all she had to live on.*

What really counts

The lesson here is clear. I often wonder about itemized lists of large donations and extravagant gifts printed in church publications and other public announcements. What is the measure of the great gift in the eyes of God? The gift should not be measured by the amount, but by the sacrifice involved in the giving. Scriptures says *for God so loved the world that He gave His only son.* If God had a million sons from which to give, it would have been a different understanding of love. We would have said *After all God gave out of the many sons He had.* But God had only one Son!

God may not ask all of us to bring to him all that we have to live on. But when the Holy Spirit moves upon our hearts, when the understanding is truly clear that all our living is dependent on what comes from God, when our faith is answered in God as our supplier of all our needs, when our minds are enlightened with a global comprehension of the demands of God's service, when our hearts have been moved from the desires of the things on this earth to the love of things in heaven,—then our gifts to God will not be measured by the amounts. Our gifts to God but will be measured by such deep levels of sacrifice as only the Holy Spirit can tell us to do.

Conclusion

A missionary had been witnessing faithfully to a certain individual. Following their conversation one day, the unconverted man placed a small statue and a silver coin on the table before him. Then he took two slips of paper and wrote something on each. Putting one beside the image and the other with the money, he turned to the Christian worker and said *Please read this.* On the note by the idol were written the words *Heathen god.* The sheet next to the coin bore the inscription *Christian god.* From what that needy soul had observed in the lives of the merchants from so-called *Christian* nations, he concluded that money was the object of their devotion!

How can you apply this into your own life? Every time you are about to go to church or when you get your paycheck, you sit down and ask yourself the question *What could the Holy Spirit ask me to give to God?* And when you have ascertained what the Spirit of the Lord has impressed upon your heart to give to God, verify it by asking yourself *What would Jesus say about my level of sacrifice?* Sacrifice is a relative term nobody can define what is sacrifice and what isn't sacrifice. What does the balance of your bank account mean when you contemplate on what to give to the Lord as appreciation for what the Lord has done for you? Are you giving to God an offering that represents your sacrifice?

Pray for judgment to determine what a great gift is in your life.
Ask of God *What shall I give to You?*
Bring unto God what the Spirit impresses upon your mind.

Money in itself is neither good nor bad; it is simply dangerous in that the love of it may become bad. With money a man can do much good; and with money he can do much evil. With money a man can selfishly serve his own desires; and with money he can generously answer to the cry of his neighbor's need. With money a man can buy his way to the forbidden things and facilitate the path of wrongdoing; and with money he can make it easier for someone else to live as God meant him to live. Money brings power, and power is always a double-edged thing, for it is powerful to good and powerful to evil.—William Barclay



Your money or your life

Introduction

A distraught woman writes *Dear Pastor, In reply to your request to make a pledge, I wish to inform you that the condition of my bank account has made it impossible to give. My shattered financial condition is due to federal laws, state laws, city laws, brothers-in-law, and outlaws. Due to these laws, I pay so many taxes that now my brain is taxed. I am required to get a business license, dog license, and marriage license. I also contribute to every charity and organization which the genius of man is capable of bringing to life, including the Red Cross, purple cross, and the double cross.*

For my own safety, I must carry life insurance, property insurance, liability insurance, auto insurance, and now, earthquake insurance. As a result of all of this, I try to give an inexhaustible supply of money for every known need, desire, and hope of the human race, and when I don't, I am either talked about, held up, or robbed. Now pastor, had not the unexpected happened, I could not have enclosed a check with this letter—The dog who has been coming to my door begging for his bit everyday, just had pups in my kitchen. I sold them and here's your share!

What's it all about?

That's a humorous letter because it reflects a frustrating truth about how it is in life these days, with so many demands for our money and support bombarding us with needs and threatening to overwhelm us. Views such as that of this honest woman, sermons that aim at your wallet, and letters that ask to give from your limited resources make stewardship all about money. But, that's not what Christian stewardship is all about.

So rather than make another demand for money today, I think it might be helpful to remember and rethink the biblical concept of stewardship. How should we tend to all our limited resources? Stewardship has very little to do with paying a bill to the church. Stewardship has more to do with how you view your personal relationship with God, and your neighbor. Indeed, the Bible says that decisions about money and possessions are, at heart, spiritual decisions because, for good or ill, they affect our relationship with God and our neighbor.

Surprisingly, Jesus talked about money and possessions more than any other topic. Jesus talked about the widow's mite, rendering unto Caesar what is Caesar's, the rich young man, and that great parable about the use of our God-given talents—all these illustrations provide us clear guidance about stewardship.

Where's your treasure?

Perhaps the most powerful statement about the relationship between you and your possessions comes from a one-liner in Matthew's sermon on the mount: *Where your treasure is . . . there also will be your heart.* A modern translation puts it this way: *Don't store up treasures on earth where moths and rust can destroy them and thieves break in to steal them. Instead, store up your treasures in heaven . . . and remember your heart will always be where your treasure is.* In the long run the things of our lives will find their way inside us, and they will shape our inner spirit.

A little boy was given two dimes. He was told one was for the church and the other for an ice cream cone. He ran down the street with a bit too much enthusiasm, stumbled and fell. To his dismay one of the treasured dimes rolled out of his hand and down the sewer drain. Looking up to heaven with a sad face he said, *Well God, there goes your dime.*

What's taken over?

One basic principle involved in stewardship is that we are supposed to enjoy the good things in life and take pleasure in them as gifts from God, but we need to learn not to let the things of life take over our hearts. Jesus did not say it was sinful to have possessions or even to be wealthy. Indeed, there is some indication that His ministry was supported by wealthy women. However, He did say that unless we use them wisely, possessions can be a barrier to our spiritual health. So Jesus insisted that we keep our priorities straight and not be possessed by the act of possessing. Our first priority must always be the kingdom of God;

our second priority must always be taking care of those in need and sharing of what we have. St. Augustine said it well some 1500 years ago with his classic definition of stewardship: *Find out how much God has given you and take from it what you need. The remainder which you do not require is needed by others. The superfluities of the rich are the necessities of the poor. Those who retain what is superfluous, possess the goods of others.*

When asked of the columnist, *How do you save up good ideas so you can write them in the future?* Erma Bombeck responded *What is saved is often lost. I don't save anything. My pockets are empty at the end of a week. So is my gas tank. So is my file of ideas. I trot out the best I've got, and come the next week, I bargain, whimper, make promises, cower and throw myself on the mercy of the Almighty for just three more columns. I didn't get to this point overnight. I came from a family of savers who were sired by poverty and worshiped at the altar of self-denial. Throughout the years, I've seen a fair number of my family who have died leaving candles that have never been lit, appliances that never got out of the box. It gets to be a habit. I have learned that silverware tarnishes when it isn't used, perfume turns to alcohol, candles melt in the attic over the summer, and ideas that are saved for a dry week often become dated. I always had a dream that when I am asked to give an accounting of my life to a higher court, it will be like this: 'So, empty your pockets. What have you got left of your life? Any dreams that were unfulfilled? Any unused talent that we gave you when you were born that you still have left? Any unsaid compliments or bits of love that you haven't spread around?' And, I will answer, 'I've nothing to return. I've spent everything you gave me. I'm naked as the day I was born.'*

Where's your joy?

What's unique and special about this form of Christian stewardship is that it brings great joy into life. Indeed, we are encouraged by God to enjoy living freely and openly by giving up the strings which bind us to things of the world. There's an old Jewish proverb which says: *Every person must render an account before God of all the good things he beheld in life and did not enjoy.* The key words are *beheld* and *enjoyed*, not *saved*, *stored*, and *treasured*. One philanthropist summed it up saying *I get three kicks out of every dollar I've ever had: one, when I make it (and you know how much I love to make a dollar, he grinned). The second kick is when I bank it (and I do have a Yankee lust for savings), but the third kick comes when I give it away—and this is the greatest kick of all.*

What's your response?

Think about your responses to God's gifts. In the world of entertainment, Jack Benny was a legend of stinginess. For most of his professional life, Benny kept up a running gag of his unwillingness to part with a penny, embarrassing everyone with creaking vaults in the cellar and reluctant fumbling in his change purse. One particular show, it was a dark and rainy night and Benny was accosted on the street by a mugger. The robber sticks a gun in Jack's face and says, *Your money or your life.* There's a long pregnant pause and the impatient robber shouts out a second time, *Your money or your life!* Jack strikes his classic pose and responds, *I'm thinking, I'm thinking.* Think about your stewardship. It's all about your money and your life.

**Money can buy medicine
but not health**

**Money can buy a house
but not a home**

**Money can buy companionship
but not friends**

**Money can buy entertainment
but not happiness**

**Money can buy food
but not an appetite**

**Money can buy a bed
but not sleep**

**Money can buy a crucifix
but not a Savior**

**Money can buy the good life
but not eternal life**

Book Reviews



A Life of Prayer

by Paul Cedar

US\$ 24.99

Imagine what it would have been like to eavesdrop on the prayers of Jesus. What an incredible experience it would have been to hear a conversation between the Son of God and His heavenly Father.

Prayer is one of the most important, intimate acts of Christians, and yet we continue to travel through life carrying our own burdens, suffering through guilt and agonizing over decisions which can be easily passed to the Lord in prayer. Many of the greatest blessings in life come as answers to prayer, but still many of us do not know *how to pray* fervently and consistently, intimately and humbly.

Paul Cedar, in *A Life of Prayer*, takes on the role of mentor to guide us through cultivating a life of daily prayer. After addressing the purpose and unlimited potential of prayer, Cedar addresses such issues as:

Determining the proper posture of prayer

Claiming God's promise through prayer

Realizing God's protection through prayer

Avoiding the Pharisees' approach to prayer

A Life of Prayer offers practical suggestions, sample prayers, and two personal prayer notebooks to guide and strengthen your prayer time



Immanuel

by John Witmer

US\$ 24.99

Jesus Christ . . . Son of God . . . Messiah . . . Savior . . . The Word . . . Son of Man . . . King of kings and Lord of lords . . . There are many names given to Jesus. The second person of the Godhead is clearly the central focus in God's drama of redemption. Yet, tragically, many Christians know only a fraction of what the Bible teaches about Jesus. In *Immanuel*, Witmer unveils the Scriptural teachings and historical evidence of Jesus Christ.

John Witmer has done us all a great service by distilling what the Bible teaches about Jesus Christ, writes General Editor Charles Swindoll. *Much like a careful archeologist, John has diligently dug through God's Word and brought to the surface the riches about Jesus Christ found within its pages. Like treasures held up to the light, he allows the various facets of the person and work of Christ to flash their brilliance.*

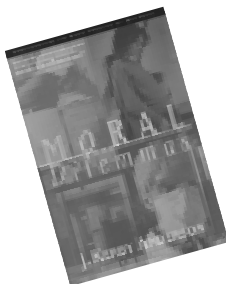
Scriptural teaching treasures and practical applications abound in *Immanuel*. Witmer describes a full picture of Christ in four distinct phases:

the Son of God before He became a man;

the divine suffering of man on earth;

the glorified and ascended Christ, and;

the reigning King today.



Moral Dilemmas

by J Kerby Anderson

US\$ 24.99

A Christian today is confronted on all sides with *Moral Dilemma*—topics as diverse as abortion, genetic engineering, capital punishment, gambling, or civil disobedience. Anderson has the answer and the evidential support for today's *Moral Dilemmas*. In an easy-to-understand style and using solid biblical support, Anderson presents the arguments for and against the most timely, contemporary issues of the day.

Each topic that Anderson addresses is defined clearly and all major viewpoints on the issue are addressed. Anderson presents a thorough history of many of the topics including euthanasia, abortion, and capital punishment. Anderson then performs a biblical analysis on each issue citing examples from both the Old and New Testaments. In addition to instructing individuals on what their actions should be, Anderson offers suggestions to lead society to the correct and moral decision.

Moral Dilemmas is an important resource for pastors and church leaders as well as all Christians who desire greater knowledge on what the Bible says about contemporary issues, says Swindoll.

Published by Word (Nashville, Tennessee), these books are part of the *Swindoll Leadership Library*. Over the next seven years, a total of 40 books will be released to complete this library collection.

Book Reviews

Drawn from the vast resource of J I Packer's teaching and writing, these daily readings emphasize the central Christian theme of a sovereign God who is also our loving heavenly Father. Each reading is dated and under a page in length. The readings are separated into weekly themes that are topically indexed at the end of the book. All themes emphasize the overall theme of being part of the family of God and focuses on the worshipper's relationship with God as creator, redeemer, protector, and father.

Both scholarly and down-to-earth, Packer is recognized worldwide as a leading evangelical theologian. He is currently Board of Governors Professor of Theology at Regent College in Vancouver, Canada and an active writer, lecturer, and preacher. Those who enjoy Packer's insightful teachings and writing style will enjoy this devotional while seeking a deeper, more personal relationship with God.

Don't treat these words as if they were inspired, Packer says, but use them as a springboard to see how high your heavenly Father lifts you. Always forthright, thoughtful, and challenging, these daily meditations will encourage all who are part of the family of God.

Of the devotional life, Packer says *To rush God randomly babbling about what is on our mind at the moment, with no pause to realize His greatness and grace and our own sinfulness and smallness, is at once to dishonor Him and to make shallow our own fellowship with Him.*

This book was provocative to me. For instance, Anderson speaks of the Sabbath as being a rest from the 6th day—a sort of something out of nothing. He talks about Moses' burning bush experience as being the theological beginning point on the Bible. He notes that the Creation story was Moses' way of soothing Israel's slavery-damaged morale caused by Egyptian bondage.

Anderson points out that Christ came to humanize humanity. The Holy Spirit was the soul agent for this purpose following the resurrection. Pentecost had more to do with empowering through the Spirit than being filled with the Spirit. Empowerment comes before equipping. *Before we load people up with methods and equip them with concepts and theories of ministry, we need to empower them by having them learn spiritual empowerment in their daily lives.*

On the day of Pentecost, three things happened that made the disciples effective: They were empowered by the Holy Spirit; they preached a risen Christ; and they promised the Holy Spirit to all who believed. Pentecost meant *power for mission--not the name of a church.*

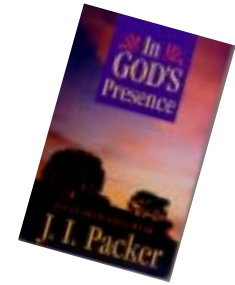
Anderson suggests that without identifying the *mission*, there is no need for the *filling* of the Spirit. The church must develop a ministry that includes discernment, caring, and community.

This quote on page 143 jarred my senses: *The powerlessness and irrelevance of the church is not that it lacks tactical encounter with the world, but that its strategy is one of survival rather than sacrifice, of success rather than service, of reputation rather than responsibility.*

Speaking of Jesus, Anderson notes that Jesus was clearly a student of the Scriptures but was also a servant of the Spirit. Those who set the standard and character of Christ's ministry included blind Bartimaeus, the despised Samaritan woman, the scorned prostitute, the desperate father of the demon-possessed boy, etc.

The soul of ministry is Christ/ Holy Spirit empowerment which brings life to the church and results in ministry within the body of believers, extending to those who are dying in sin.

The world's needs did not set Christ's agenda. His agenda was set by the Father's priority—the redemption of fallen man.



In God's Presence

by J I Packer

Harold Shaw Publishers

Wheaton, Illinois, 1998

US\$ 14.99



The Soul of Ministry

by Ray S Anderson

Westminster John Knox Press

Louisville, Kentucky, 1997

US\$ 22.00

Resources

Stewardship training seminars presented by *Benjamin C Maxson* are available on video and audio tapes. Each seminar is six to eight hours in length, divided into 30-minute segments, and designed to be used by itself or with an instructor. Also available are the participant's workbook and instructor's manual. To order, contact either AdventSource (5040 Prescott, Lincoln, NE 68506; Tel: 800-328-0525; Fax: 402-486-2572 email 74617.1241@compuserve.com) or the General Conference Stewardship Department (12501 Old Columbia Pk, Silver Spring, MD 20904; Tel 301-680-6157; Fax 301-680-6155 email gcstewardship@compuserve.com). The cost of each set, excluding shipping is \$79.95 for video and \$29.95 for audio (available at a subsidized rate to churches in the mission fields).

For pastors and church leaders:

Volume I: Biblical Stewardship Foundations This seminar explores stewardship and its Biblical foundations. The very word *steward* implies the reality of Christ as Lord. The relationship with Christ as Lord must begin with experiencing the gospel.

Volume II: Strategic Church Stewardship This seminar explores the strategic elements that make stewardship ministry successful. To be effective, stewardship must focus on the overall lifestyle in Christ. Even financial stewardship must begin with helping people grow spiritually, and discipling them to become partners and friends with Christ.

For church members

Normal Christianity This seminar explores a biblical approach to daily life. Biblical principles provide the foundation for living life in a dynamic, vibrant partnership with God. He created us to enjoy Him—to share life with Him.

Editorial

“In the days of Israel the tithe and freewill offerings were needed to maintain the ordinances of divine service. Should the people of God give less in this age? . . . As our blessings and privileges are increased—above all, as we have before us the unparalleled sacrifice of the glorious Son of God—should not our gratitude find expression in more abundant gifts to extend to others the message of salvation? The work of the gospel, as it widens, requires greater provision to sustain it than was called for anciently; and this makes the law of tithe and offerings of even more urgent necessity now than under the Hebrew economy. If His people were liberally to sustain His cause by their voluntary gifts, instead of resorting to unchristian and unhallowed methods to fill the treasury, God would be honored, and many more should would be won to Christ.”—*Patriarchs and Prophets*, pp 528, 529.

“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, his laborers will be encouraged to take up ministerial work. . . .The tithe is the Lord's and those who meddle with it will be punished with the loss of their heavenly treasure unless they repent. Let the work no longer be hedged up because the tithe has been diverted into various channels other than the one to which the Lord said it should go. Provision is to be made for these other lines of work. They are to be sustained, but not from the tithe. God has not changed. The tithe is to be used for the support of the ministry. The opening of new fields requires more ministerial efficiency than we now have and there must be means in the treasury.”—*“The Use of the Tithe,” Echoes From the Field, June 21, 1905.*

Excerpts from the writings of Ellen G White.



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