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Steward

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but for spiritual gifts.*

Expecting blessings

Would not have you ignorant (of spiritual gifts) are the inspired words of the apostle Paul in 1 Corinthians 12:1. The church in Corinth that Paul was writing to desperately needed instruction on spiritual gifts. Who needs to know about spiritual gifts?

You need to know about spiritual gifts if: 1) You are a Christian, 2) You believe that Jesus is your Lord and you want to love Him and follow Him in the best way possible, and, 3) You want your church to be a healthy, attractive, growing group of people showing forth God's love in your community.

Teaching on spiritual gifts was not invented by some management efficiency consultant or by some department of church growth or by some theological seminary or even by some church council. The teaching on spiritual gifts comes directly from the Word of God. That gives us the assurance we need to say with confidence that it is God's way for His people to operate with one another. It is the way to do God's work whether caring for each other or learning more about the faith or celebrating the resurrection of Jesus Christ or reaching out to the lost with the message of God's love. It is the way to bring about the kind of church growth that builds the whole person and the whole body of Christ.

Faith is the key. *Without faith it is impossible to please God (See Hb 11:6).* Faith is expectation, expectation that God has something better for us. Expectation that we can be the people God wants us to be. Expectation that He has gifted us and that we will be richly fulfilled if we are doing His will through using spiritual gifts.

Faith tells us that God wants His church to grow. He wants His lost sheep found and brought into the fold. And He will do it through the gifts He has given to each of us for His glory.—*Your Spiritual Gifts, C. Peter Wagner, Regal Books, Ventura California, 1979.*

Day by day we are to return to the Lord that which He has intrusted to us. And we are to ask Him, not only for temporal blessings, but for spiritual gifts. He who asks in faith, believing that God will fulfill His work, and who acts in accordance with His prayer, doing God's will in all things, will receive rich blessings from on high. And as he receives, he is to impart to those who need help.—*Ellen White*

Application



Spiritual giftedness

A bible study

There are only three major passages in the New Testament that deal with the theme of spiritual gifts: Romans 12, Ephesians 4, and 1 Corinthians 12-14. All were written by the apostle Paul, suggesting that this theme became most important to the growth of the early Christian church. The extent of that importance can be judged by Paul's comment that the Gospel went to the entire world of His day in the first century (*Co 1:23*). And the power displayed at the beginning of the church's outreach will be matched and exceeded by the power given to the church in the last days, reaching out to share the gospel with the entire planet before Jesus returns. In this setting, note Paul's three important perspectives:

Romans 12. Here Paul details the *preparation* we must all follow in order to be the recipients of the gifts of grace from God. *Read the chapter together and follow the presentation:*

First, we give ourselves to God without reservation. This giving is as complete and unreserved as if we became one of the daily sacrifices placed on the Altar of Burnt Offering in the Old Testament sanctuary service. We give everything to God—including our natural talents—and He gives those inherited talents back to us as spiritual gifts. Spiritual gifts through which we can be involved in ministry for God.

Ephesians 4. Here Paul details the purpose of spiritual gifts in God's great scheme of things. *Read the chapter together.* Ask what the group sees to be the purpose of spiritual gifts from the reading of this chapter?

The purpose is to build the church and extend the church both qualitatively and quantitatively. Through these many gifts, God provides avenues of nurture so we can all grow spiritually, and opportunities for service (which are also nurturing to the giver), so others will be attracted into the Ark of the Church where we will survive the final flood of evil in these last days.

1 Corinthians 12. In this passage Paul notes the process by which gifts come into the service of the church. He identifies three steps in verses 4-6:

1. He states that there are gifts of grace—that's the Spirit's *equipping* the members of the congregation. *Read the chapter together.*
2. There is variety in the gifts, so all needs can be met—that's the *ministries* through which gifts are used for nurture or outreach.
3. There is *implementation*—the Greek word is the one from which we get the English word, *energy*. God energizes us to use our gifts in ministry to the glory of His name.

If we can grasp these three ideas from these three chapters in the new testament—*preparation, purpose and process*—we as individuals, and the congregation to which we belong, can become the active ministering fellowship God wishes for every congregation on earth.

*The manner of
giving is worth
more than the gift.*
—Corneille

Introduction

The *critical decade*—as well-known author, Dr. James Dobson, terms it, is the period between the ages of sixteen to twenty-six. This is a time when major life decisions are made, and therefore a time when helpful guidance is crucial. Adapted from his best-selling book *Life on the Edge*, are seven pocket-sized booklets offering insight and advice for a *generation searching for significance*. Following is a brief review of four of these volumes.

Getting Along With Your Parents

Surrounded by negative pressures, how can a young adult continue to honor his/her parents but still move into the increased freedom and responsibility his/her stage of life requires? In this booklet, Dr. Dobson reveals ways to minimized the tension between parents and their adult children.

Love Must Be Tough: Maintaining a Healthy Dating Relationship

Sharing from his personal romantic experiences, Dobson explains how one can keep emotions in check and not move too fast in the early stages of romance. He also explains the vital importance of self-respect—respect both for oneself and for the other person, who may need *space* to sort out his or her own emotions and feelings.

Finding God's Will For Your Life

In this booklet, James Dobson reassures that God is there to guide in the best choices for one's life. He describes how youth can learn to follow God's leading and *navigate around the various land mines that lie in your path*. Decisions you make today, Dobson says, will affect your life in the decades to come. Making good ones will serve you well in later life.

Money and Success

Money and Success includes some of the following brief chapters; *The Money Treadmill*, *Money: Jesus' Most Talked-About Topic* and *Sound Advice from a Dying King*. In this volume, James Dobson discusses the pitfalls of pursuing earthly treasure and how one may develop a perspective that will provide peace, joy and happiness.

Other titles in the series are *Emotions Friend or Foe?*, *The Keys to a Lifelong Love* and *Trusting God When Life Goes Wrong*. Recommended reading, presented in nicely compact volumes.



Life on the Edge Series

by Dr James Dobson
Word Publishing
Nashville, Tennessee, 2000
US\$ 3.99 each

Claire L. Eva, Assistant Director, General Conference Stewardship Department

Quotes on spiritual gifts/ministry . . .

Unwelcome is the gift which is held long in the hand.—*Seneca*

A teacher affects eternity; he can never tell where his influence stops.—*Henry Adams*

By the accident of fortune a man may rule the world for a time, but by virtue of love he may rule the world forever.—*Lao-Tse*

If they are connected with Christ, if the gifts of the Spirit are theirs, the poorest and most ignorant of His disciples will have a power that will tell upon hearts. God makes them the channel for the outworking of the highest influence in the universe.—*Ellen White*

The best teacher, until one comes to adult pupils, is not the one who knows most, but the one who is most capable of reducing knowledge to that simple compound of the obvious and the wonderful which slips into the infantile comprehension.—*HL Mencken*

There is a need of coming close to the people by personal effort. If . . . more time were spent in personal ministry, greater results would be seen. The poor are to be relieved, the sick cared for, the sorrowing and the bereaved comforted, the ignorant instructed, the inexperienced counseled. We are to weep with those that weep, and rejoice with those that rejoice. Accompanied by the power of persuasion, the power of prayer, the power of the love of God, this work will not, cannot, be without fruit.—*Ellen White*



I'm tired of talking to children. I've been Kindergarten leader for twenty-five years. I want out! Betty's plaintive appeal came as the church nominating committee was beginning its work. She had been in that department from the time her first child entered until her last grandchild left. Now she was pleading for relief.

Yet within a few days, she was back. She could not rest with her decision. God was convicting her to continue for one more year, to train someone to take her place. The nominating committee received the news with joy.

A few months later, Betty came to visit again. *This has been the best year of my life. For the first time I am working because I know God wants me in this department. Always before it has been because I didn't think there was anyone else who would do it.*

What made the difference? Twenty-five years in a job before it became ministry! Twenty-five years of doing something for secondary, though important, reasons. Is Betty the only one to experience this? And what about the large group of spectators who never get involved in church life and ministry?

Let's look at ministry. What differentiates ministry from duty or task? We see the difference early in Jesus' life. As a twelve-year old boy He learned about, *My Father's business*. He dedicated his entire life to serving others, and His service came to a focus in the last three years of concentrated ministry. Four key factors marking Jesus' life and service can also be ours: 1) divine calling; 2) divine equipping; 3) divine presence and 4) a focused ministry. Let's explore these factors which can transform ministry today.

First, Divine Calling—the Christian, by identity, is called to ministry. Jesus' life modeled this call: *The Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many (Mt 20:28)*. Paul presents the compelling power of redemption as the basis for our call to participate in Christ's ministry of reconciliation (*2 Co 5:14-21*). He declares that God gave us the *ministry* and *word* of reconciliation. Paul also presents the primary purpose of the pastoral gift: *to prepare God's people for works of service (ministry), so that the body of Christ may be built up (Ep 4:12)*. Christianity is not a spectator sport. We are called to active ministry—to be players on the field, not pew spectators. This call to ministry is general for all Christians, yet God calls each one of us to a specific personal ministry within the broader focus. Discovering that call marks the beginning of a thrilling journey of service in His kingdom. I find that while the location of my ministry may have changed over the years, the specific call has not. Others may find their sense of calling shifting over a period of time, as Betty discovered after the year spent training her replacement. The important fact is that we be aware and responsive to our call to service.

Partnership with Jesus

Second, Divine Equipping—God equips us for our ministry with specific gifts (*Ro 12:1-8; 1 Co 12-14; Ep 4:1-16*) and promised power (*Mt 28:20*). These gifts are not for personal benefit but for the good of the *body* (*1 Co 12:7*). God is the one who determines the gifts we receive (*v 11*). These gifts work together within the body of Christ in the same way different parts of our physical bodies work together. While clear differences exist as to gifts and ministry, these differences are of function, not status, importance or position. Identifying the unique gifts God gives to us individually is a determining factor in discovering our specific personal call to ministry. Ministering within our area of giftedness is one of the secrets of rewarding service. At the same time, the same gifts may be used in a variety of different settings as God provides varying opportunities.

Third, Divine Presence—God does not ask us to work alone. The reality of God's presence is at the very core of ministry. Jesus presents His over-arching call of making disciples in the context of His power and promised presence (*Mt 28:18-20*). The Holy Spirit transforms us with Christ's presence (*Ep 3:15-19*). Without the awareness of His presence, ministry can quickly lose its sense of divine calling or deteriorate into drudgery. As we bring Christ's presence and power into the lives of those we touch, our service becomes an extension of His ministry.

Fourth, Focused Ministry—Maintaining our focus is a challenge in our ministry. Jesus maintained a very clear focus. He knew His target audience, adapted His ministry to diverse groups and never forgot the primary purpose of His work. As we examine it, we discover Christ's ministry to be multi-leveled. His ministry to

the multitudes focused on inspiring and calling them to a higher life—a life centered in God. His ministry to the seventy was centered on discipling and commissioning them for ministry. His focus sharpened even more as He concentrated on the twelve—discipling and fashioning them as spiritual leaders. Within those twelve, He chose three whom He mentored.

The focus of Christ’s ministry was forged by His sense of calling and designed to meet the specific needs of the group. As we explore the focus of our ministry, we need to concentrate on the key purpose of ministry—making disciples. This is the general call to ministry within the body of Christ (*Mt 28:18-20*). While our individual calling may have a narrower focus, we must remember that all ministry finds its ultimate purpose in this *Gospel commission*. The Holy Spirit creates the new birth experience in our life, then God trusts us to fashion that life into a disciple who is walking with Him.

Thus ministry becomes a life of service—worship (*Ro 12:1*). It means using the gifts God has given us to extend His grace to those around us. God made us for relationship with Him. Christ’s reconciling death resolves sin’s interruption in that relationship. He then invites us to partner with Him in His ministry. Our challenge is to identify our specific calling and use the gifts he has given us. Identifying our spiritual gifts helps us identify our calling and focus. But more than anything else, He invites us to live in His presence—actively bringing others into the experience of His grace as—*partners in ministry*.

*Whoever wants to
become great among
you must be your
servant, and whoever
wants to be first must
be your slave—just as
the Son of Man did not
come to be served,
but to be serve.
—Jesus Christ*

Benjamin C. Maxson, Director, General Conference Stewardship Department

Stewardship Window more from the director’s desk . . .

On a recent trip to the South Mexico Union, I experienced a highly effective stewardship strategy. The plan was to have delegates from all the churches in the Hidalgo-Veracruz Conference attend a stewardship congress. Though the plan was for 450 delegates, a total of more than 800 attended. The meetings began on Friday afternoon and continued through Sunday lunch. The attendees included elders, local church stewardship secretaries, cell group leaders, Sabbath School superintendents and all of the pastors.

In addition to the seminar on *Biblical Stewardship Foundations*, the conference and union staff presented practical seminars on time and the work of the local church stewardship secretary. Also presented was a new program for stewardship education in the small group or cell ministry that is active in most churches. The conference treasurer presented reports on conference finances and their special annual offering which is called a *Thank Offering*. The members present had opportunity to provide input for the uses of the *Thank Offering* for the following year.

I discovered that this is an annual event that has been going on for about six years. The results are obvious. There is increasing support for stewardship, deepening understanding of biblical stewardship and growing faithfulness.

So what can we learn from this strategy? 1) Biblical stewardship is exciting and reaches the hunger of people’s hearts. 2) A systematic strategy must be long term. 3) Stewardship training must focus on pastors and congregational leaders. 4) Administrators need to be part of an effective stewardship strategy. Of course, each field may do things a little differently, but the basic principles still apply. Let us know how stewardship is growing in your field.



A celebration!

Three weeks ago the young couples of our church gave my daughter and son-in-law a wonderful Sunday brunch to celebrate the birth of their second daughter. And last Sabbath morning, one of the hostesses presented them with a beautiful photo album with pictures of the guests. The pictures flooded our minds with the warm emotion of that day, as we celebrated God's gift of a baby girl with such potential, purity and perfection. The thoughtfulness, the appropriateness and the value of the gifts left our family quite breathless!

In a delightful way, this is precisely what happens whenever members of God's family gather to open their *spiritual* gifts. They quickly learn how thoughtful God's gifts are, how uncannily appropriate for each person's personality they are and how extraordinarily valuable they are. To open the gifts God has already given is to begin a journey of discovery, that daily reveals more and more about their purity, their potential and their perfection for the service we can give by God's grace.

What kind of gifts?

Over the past 25 years I have been fascinated by the study of spiritual gifts. This fascination is based in part on the fact that while most other Christian churches have long cherished this subject and sought to make it part of the lives of all their members, Seventh-day Adventists have been reticent to accept the fact that through our spiritual gifts God will accomplish everything He expects of His church as we await His return. Not some things. Everything!

One of the first questions to address is: *When do we receive our spiritual gifts?* At the same moment we accept Jesus as Lord, He gives us each our own cluster of spiritual gifts. Too many of us go through life wondering when we'll receive our gifts. Wonder no longer! You are His, and His gifts have already been given. The big question is, *Have you 'opened' your gifts yet?* Have you taken the *gift box* in your hands, undone the bow, torn away the attractive paper, opened the box, lifted back the tissue paper and found . . . there it is! More beautiful, more valuable, more attractive than you had dared to believe!

Ah, I hear you moan, you make it sound so simple. But I still don't know for sure what my gifts are. Well, first you must believe God when He says that the gifts have been given. Check out 1 Corinthians 12:7, 11, and 18. Three times in this one

The joy of opening gifts

passage on the theme of spiritual gifts, Paul emphasizes that *all* of God's children have received His gifts. So the only issue we need to address is how to *unwrap* them.

Let's go through the steps of understanding:

A spiritual gift is an ability to do a ministry or service successfully. By its very nature each gift is *an ability*. So no training is required to start using your gift. You are already equipped to begin. The most erroneous belief is to think that you have to find someone to train you to use your gifts! No, you can start today. No classes. No seminars. God has equipped you, and you can't do better than that. *What gifts? You want to know! I don't know what my gifts are!*

Check for your gifts by looking within. One of the most exciting Christmases of my childhood turned temporarily into a debacle. It was the year I begged for a bicycle. I was beyond Father Christmas and didn't look for any magical appearance of a road racer. If the coveted wheels were to arrive, it would have to be from my cash-strapped parents. I weighed all possible signs, hoping there would be enough money that year—in the 1940s during World War II—for my parents to make the purchase. I was unaware that the Army's needs meant few raw materials were available to manufacture toys. By Christmas Eve my hopes were faltering. The dream still lived, but barely, as the strength of the expectation fell dramatically. I had sought in vain for anything that could remotely be construed as a wrapped bicycle: under the house, behind the outside laundry, in the rafters of the garage.

But the thought that in some mysterious way the gift might still come, kept me wide awake until very late on Christmas eve. So late in fact, that when I finally got to sleep, I didn't wake until midmorning on Christmas day! Then I dashed to the tree in the living room and there to my delight, was my dream! It was an old model, that was repainted with a brush. There were dents in the frame, and a slight bend in a couple of the spokes of the wheels. But it was mine, the gift of a lifetime.

Scripture Reading

1 Corinthians 12:7, 11&18

Suggested Hymn

Give of Your Best to the Master
(Seventh-day Adventist Hymnal #572)

As Christmas gifts are usually found *around the Christmas tree*, so spiritual gifts are found in a specific place for each of us. You must go to the right place to make the great discovery. That place is *in your own life*. You see, just as gifts don't appear under your Christmas tree by some magical process, there is no mystical approach about the bestowing and discovery of your spiritual gifts either. It is an open, straightforward process best understood by following the words of the apostle Paul in Romans 12. In the logical presentation we know as Romans, the apostle develops an argument that the Christians in Rome would feel comfortable sharing with their pagan neighbors. Like others of the apostle's *letters*, Romans is divided into two discrete sections. First: Argument, and Second: Application. The argument details the process by which we can all be justified by God. And at the end of the thesis, Paul makes an application of this teaching to life. It is as if he is saying, *So now you are justified and have been declared righteous by faith, what happens next?* And he immediately enters into a discussion of ministry through our spiritual gifts. He says, *I beseech you therefore brethren, by the mercies of God that ye present yourselves a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God which is your reasonable service (Ro 12:2).*

Every person is born with natural talents. In secular life we use those talents as we choose, and we enjoy the praise and personal glory that come from their use. In fact, in our humanity, we all tend to use our natural talents for self glorification! When we accept Jesus as Savior, we don't lose those talents. They are still part of our genetic makeup. But when we do as Paul suggests and place them on the altar as *a living sacrifice*, we give those talents back to God Who gave them. Then as we rise to a new life, God gives them back now blessed by Him as spiritual gifts that we will use in ministry to others, and by their use, give glory to God.

You look within to see what your gifts are and recognize them as God-given abilities. Some will be so obvious you won't have to think about them at all. Others you may need to think about a little longer, especially if you have not had an opportunity to use a particular gift. For example, many women have the gift of leadership which they use every day in their homes, but they have never thought of it as a gift, and have not as yet used this spiritual gift in the church or community.

Seek opportunities to use your gifts. Gifts are given by God to be used in one or both of two settings: in the church in a nurture function, or in the community in either a nurture or outreach ministry. Don't wait to be appointed to some church office to use your nurture gifts! Do it, as you probably have been doing all of your life, but you were unconscious that this is a spiritual gifts' ministry.

Ask yourself these questions

When I involve myself in this kind of ministry or service, does it give me joy? If you are using a spiritual gift in ministry, it will be an experience you relish. There will not be any sense of pressure or fear about getting involved. It will be a pleasure to do what you do naturally and well.

When I involve myself in this kind of ministry or service, is it successful? The gift of accounting is an illustration. To some people adding figures and balancing budgets is worse than boring! But to those with that gift, it is a pleasure to make the columns balance—which happens under their gifted ministry! They do it successfully for it's their gift!

When I involve myself in this kind of ministry, is it appreciated and affirmed both by those that I serve and my fellow church members? This notion is based on Paul's illustration of the human body to represent the church. Every person is likened to a body part such as a hand or foot, or one of the body's organs, like the heart. Unless everything works together harmoniously, the body can't perform to its potential. And the same applies to the church. So confirm that your fellow church members affirm your ministry. To review—you have a cluster of gifts. Every member of God's family does. Your gifts are what you can do well now without training. A gift is an ability, and it extends beyond what you have already done successfully to what you have the potential to do successfully as well. Experiment! Don't wait to be appointed to some church office. Work one-on-one or in small groups. Whatever, brings you joy and is successful, whatever the members of the congregation affirm you for, these are your God-given gifts! Unwrap the gifts and discover your treasure!

The gift without the giver is bare; Who gives himself with his alms feeds three—Himself, his hungering neighbor and me.

—James Russell Lowell



A man called encouragement

Introduction

Our firm decision is to work from this focused center: One man died for everyone. That puts everyone in the same boat. He included everyone in his death so that everyone could also be included in his life, a resurrection life, a far better life than people ever lived on their own.

Because of this decision we don't evaluate people by what they have or how they look. We looked at the Messiah that way once and got it all wrong, as you know. Now we look inside, and what we see is that anyone united with the Messiah gets a fresh start, is created new. The old life is gone; a new life burgeons! Look at it! All this comes from God who settled the relationship between us and him, and then called us to settle our relationship with each other. God put the world square with himself through the Messiah, giving the world a fresh start by offering forgiveness of sins. God has given us the task of telling everyone what he is doing. We're Christ's representatives. God uses us to persuade men and women to drop their differences and enter into God's work of making things right between them. We're speaking for Christ himself now: Become friends with God; he's already a friend with you.

'How?' you say. In Christ. God put on him the wrong who never did anything wrong, so we could be put right with God (2 Co 5:14-21—Message). The disciples went everywhere preaching this message (Ac 8:4).

Supporter of the church

One man who heard was Joseph of Cyprus. Living in Jerusalem, he heard the gospel message and his life was changed. This is the story of that man.

If we carefully search the Acts files, we can put his story together. The first reference to Joseph is found in Acts. *Joseph, a Levite from Cyprus . . . sold a field he owned and brought the money and put it at the apostles' feet (Ac 4:36,37).* Here, Luke repeats something similar to what he said in Acts 2—the believers shared all things in common. Joseph was an elite estate owner on the island of Cyprus, but he decided to invest in this new cause and sold his Cyprus property. What would this mean today? Cyprus could be compared to the real estate of Washington D.C., with property valued in the millions. So Joseph gave generously. For this caring gift to the fledgling church, the disciples named him Barnabas, which means *Son of Encouragement* (v 36).

When God gets His good news through to the human heart, we have a new focus and are determined to work from a focused center. We support God's cause and His church. We recognize that we are members of His body. Barnabas would have been embarrassed had anyone pointed out the considerable value of his gift. He lived by the

principle that God is the owner and he was His manager. Barnabas realized that by supporting the church, he was putting *God's* money to work.

Optimistic about people

Our next glimpse of Barnabas is seen in Acts 9. The chapter begins with the story of Saul's amazing conversion as he approached Damascus. We read how Saul was blinded by the encounter, how he was led to the city by friends and how God sent a reluctant Ananias to restore Saul's vision. *At once*, says Luke, *he [Saul] began to preach in the synagogues that Jesus is the Son of God (Ac 9:20).* The situation heightens in our minds as we view Saul being pursued by his former friends, Jews who were intent on killing him. But again, he is rescued by his friends—making his escape in a basket lowered through an opening in the wall of the city. And this is where Barnabas comes into the story.

When he came to Jerusalem, he tried to join the disciples, but they were afraid of him, not believing that he really was a disciple (Ac 9:26). Saul tried to join them—but they did not wait with open arms. *What new tactic was this*, they thought! Slim chance that anyone like him could change! *But Barnabas took him and brought him to the apostles. He told them how Saul on his journey had seen the Lord and that the Lord had spoken to him, and how in Damascus he had preached fearlessly in the name of Jesus (Ac 9:27).*

Who was this man named Barnabas? What was he like? We can certainly surmise from this account that he was optimistic about people. He possessed the rare gift of discerning worth in others. Barnabas was quick to recognize the potential of an imperfect person. He was convinced that Saul had changed because of his encounter with Jesus, and he defended Saul. He did not hesitate to hazard his own good name on this risky newcomer to the faith. He expressed confidence and assurance in Saul. And what was the result? *So, Saul stayed with them and moved*

Scripture Reading

2 Corinthians 5:14-21

Suggested Hymn

Not I, but Christ
(Seventh-day Adventist Hymnal #570)

about freely in Jerusalem, speaking boldly in the name of the Lord (Ac 9:28). Barnabas opened the way for Saul to be accepted by the disciples of Christ. When God gets His good news through to the human heart—we recognize one another as brothers and sisters and put our trust in one another more readily.

A team player

... *And they sent Barnabas to Antioch (Ac 11:22).* The Spirit of God is on the move now, and a group of Joseph's [Barnabas's] countrymen from Cyprus—followers of Jesus Christ and converted to the Way—have found a fertile field for the gospel in Antioch. And so the Jerusalem church commissioned Barnabas to go and join the effort there. *He was glad and encouraged them all to remain true to the Lord with all their hearts (Ac 11:23).* Verse 24 says, *He was a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and faith.* The numbers were impressive and Barnabas could have had a good report. But selfish accomplishments were not his concern. He was free from the worry of who gets credit. In verse 25, Barnabas invites Saul to join his team. I've wondered why? Probably for a mix of several reasons. Such a rich field would be a good experience for Paul and would build his confidence. Barnabas also recognized that Paul had gifts of Bible study and understanding, of being able to present the truth of Christ in powerful ways. Together they formed a dynamic evangelistic team.

When God gets His good news through to the human heart, self-assurance is no longer based on one's accomplishments. Self-exaltation is no longer the driving force. We recognize that we have certain gifts and abilities, but they are limited. We need each other and God's cause needs all of our gifts. We become *team players*. Is it any wonder that under such leadership an evangelistic explosion ensues. There is so much talk of it around town that the popular name for these believers—*Christians*—sticks! At the end of Acts 11, Barnabas and Saul are sent to Jerusalem with a monetary gift to relief the struggling church members there. And in Acts 13, their journey sets the stage for the next episode in the life of Barnabas.

An evangelist and mentor of youth

The gospel as a way of life is caught as much as it is taught. When Saul and Barnabas were called by the Spirit for a special work, they took John Mark, Barnabas's cousin (*Co 4:10*), along as their helper. But when they arrived in Perga, John Mark left them (*Ac 13*). At the time Paul and Barnabas planned their second missionary journey, Barnabas insisted that John Mark be allowed to accompany them. Paul did not agree. Because John Mark had become discouraged and had forsaken them before, Paul felt that he could not be depended upon again (*Ac 15*). But Barnabas saw it differently. Even though he was disappointed when John Mark left them, Barnabas did not give up on his younger relative. Because of their disagreement, Paul and Barnabas separated. Barnabas took John Mark and went to the island of Cyprus. When God gets His gospel through to the human heart, it kindles a desire to share it with family as Barnabas did with John Mark. We need to build and encourage the next generation.

Conclusion

Part of Barnabas's legacy is the man John Mark. Rescued for the work of the gospel, John Mark later worked with Peter. It is commonly understood that Mark's gospel, the earliest of the four, largely reflects the gospel according to Peter. In later years he would become a trusted friend of Paul's as well. On two separate occasions, Paul calls John Mark his *fellow prisoner* and *fellow laborer* (*Co 4:10; Phn 24*). Writing to Timothy Paul says, *Get Mark and bring him with you, because he is helpful to me in my ministry (2Ti 4:11).*

The heart of Barnabas's legacy is that he cared for people. Too often the gospel message is interpreted as a set of doctrinal truths comprehended by the mind. Barnabas reminds us that the disciples of Christ not only abide in the truth, *they know how to love*. Early on, the church recognized the qualities of this unusual man and gave him the name, *Son of Encouragement*—which is the same word used by Jesus in referring to the Holy Spirit (*Ac 4:36; Jn 15:26*). That word is taken from the words *called* and *beside—one called to the side of another*. One who consoles, helps and encourages. It is a good legacy—an exquisite epitaph.

*When God gets
His gospel through
to the human heart,
it kindles a desire
to share it with
family as Barnabas
did with John Mark.
We need to build
and encourage the
next generation.*



Beautiful music

Great violins are not like works of art, writes music critic John von Rhein. They were never meant to be hung on a wall or locked up under glass. Any instrument will lose its tone if it isn't played regularly; conversely, an instrument gains in value the more it is used. As a result, the world's greatest violins are looking for first-rate violinists. The Stradivari Society brings them together—artist and work of art. It entrusts expensive violins to world-class violinists who could never afford to purchase them. The owner requires one more thing—the musician must give the patron at least two command performances a year.

God entrusts exquisite *instruments* to His people. He gives us these in the form of spiritual gifts. The instrument is God's gift to us, and our wise use of the instrument is our gift to God.

One body—many members

In Romans, Paul speaks of many gifts. He tells us that salvation in its entirety is a gift. First, we are freely justified by faith—forgiven and declared clean before God. Faith, too is a gift from God. Lastly, God gives the gift of sanctification—our behavior, thoughts and attitudes are changed through the indwelling Spirit. But God is still not finished giving His gifts. All who receive Christ as Lord and Savior are given even more gifts! Let's read about them in Romans 12. *Just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function, so in Christ we who are many form one body, and each member belongs to all the others. We have different gifts, according to the grace given us. If a man's gift is prophesying, let him use it in proportion to*

Instruments of use

his faith. If it is serving, let him serve; if it is teaching, let him teach; if it is encouraging, let him encourage; if it is contributing to the needs of others, let him give generously; if it is leadership, let him govern diligently; if it is showing mercy, let him do it cheerfully (Ro 12:4-8).

Paul describes the church as one body, comprised of different but important members. I met a man who had his great toe amputated as a result of diabetes. He now has a problem with balance. This toe seems insignificant when compared to a leg or arm. However, if you lose a great toe, you realize just how significant it is. In the body of Christ, if one member fails to function, the entire body suffers. Everyone receives special gifts from the Spirit. These gifts are for our enjoyment and the benefit of the church and world. Some people have one gift while others have more. The tragedy in life is not in being limited to one talent, but in failing to use it. Use your gift in every way possible. Don't hoard it. Don't dole it out like a miser. Spend it lavishly like a millionaire intent on going broke.

Making the most of it

Can we develop spiritual gifts? A reporter once said to George Bernard Shaw: *You have a marvelous gift for oratory. How did you develop it?* Shaw retorted, *I learned to speak as men learn to skate or cycle, by doggedly making a fool of myself until I got used to it.* Gifts are not mature at the time of discovery; they are developed through practice. When God gives you a gift, use and develop that gift to His glory. Our gifts vary. Someone can be a good third baseman but not a good pitcher. It is liberating to realize that we don't need to be skilled in everything.

A thirty-eight-year-old scrub woman would go to the movies and sigh, *If only I had her looks.* She would listen to a singer and moan, *If only I had her voice.* Then one day someone gave her the book, *The Magic of Believing.* She stopped comparing herself to others and crying about what she didn't have. She concentrated on what she did have. She took inventory and noted that in school she had a reputation for being the funniest girl around. She began to turn her liabilities into assets. As a result, Phyllis Diller emerged as a highly successful American comedian. God has given you gifts. You may not see them as exciting and may even wish you had someone else's ability. But God did not give you someone else's gifts—He gave you yours. Accept them and use them to His glory.

Aesop tells of an old crow in the wilderness who was terribly thirsty. He came to a jug with some water in the bottom of it. The crow put his beak into the jug, but he couldn't reach the liquid. What did he do? He began picking up pebbles one at a time and dropped them into the jug. As the pebbles accumulated in the bottom, the water rose until the crow was able to drink. In the gifts we bring,

Scripture Reading

Romans 12:4-8

Suggested Hymn

Wonderful Words of Life
(Seventh-day Adventist Hymnal #286)

each of us is dropping in our own little pebble. Using our gifts to serve may not seem important, but as the pebbles accumulate in the jug and the water rises, God builds His kingdom and brings His plan to fruition.

Giving what we have

In the fall of 1994 a couple boarded a flight bound for Orlando's Disney World. Theresa, the wife, was nearly seven months pregnant. Thirty minutes en route, she doubled over in pain. Flight attendants asked for a doctor and a Long Island internist volunteered his help. Theresa gave birth to a baby boy, but he was in trouble. The umbilical cord was wrapped tightly around his neck and he wasn't breathing. Two paramedics rushed forward to help. One of the men asked for a straw to suction fluid from the baby's lungs. The plane did not stock straws, but a flight attendant remembered having a straw left over from a juice box she brought on board. The paramedic inserted the straw into the baby's lungs as the internist administered CPR. Next the doctor asked for something to tie off the umbilical cord. A passenger offered a shoelace. Four minutes of terror passed and the baby whimpered. The crew joyfully announce the birth and everyone cheered. The baby boy was named Matthew, which means *Godsend*. Those people on the plane *were all godsend*s, the baby's father said. God used them to meet the needs of that family. What better picture of the Church could there be? We are God sent—each with a gift—each willing to give what we have and do what we can to help others.

According to grace

We have different gifts, according to the grace given us (Ro 12:6). The Greek word translated as gifts is *charismata*. In the New Testament charisma is a Special gift God bestows. I could practice a lifetime and never play the violin like Itzhak Perlman. He has, the *charisma* that is a gift from God. Paul says everyone has his own charisma. It may be for preaching, building houses, or singing. Your charisma may be for teaching or making people feel at home. But everyone has his own.

The spiritual gifts listed in Romans 12 are *prophesying, serving, teaching, encouraging, contributing to the needs of others and leading*. Prophesying does not just refer to predicting the future. The word means *forth telling*. The prophet is one who announces the Christian message with the authority of one who knows. Verse 7 speaks of the gift of ministry, which implies practical service. This gift of ministry or *service* includes such simple things as cooking a meal for a grieving family or mowing the lawn of a shut-in. Nothing demonstrates love so well as does practical service.

Verse 7 also lists the gift of *teaching*. Christ's message is not only proclaimed, it must also be explained. We have Sabbath School teachers at every level who are gifted by God for this work. Verse 8 lists exhortation or *encouragement* as a gift. The British navy has a regulation which says, no officer shall speak discouragingly to any other officer about any undertaking in which he may be engaged. Do you know someone who is discouraged? You may use the gift of exhortation to cheer him with words of encouragement.

Giving is another spiritual gift. Every Christian has a measure of this gift, but some are especially endowed with the gift of generosity. If you are motivated to joyfully relieve the burdens of others, it may be that God has given you this gift. Verse 8 also addresses the gift of leadership. It is challenging today to find capable leaders in the Church. God is calling leaders with a sense of service and responsibility.

The final gift is the gift of *mercy*. With this gift we may extend grace and forgiveness to others. How wonderful to be able to give such a gift!

You are God's gift

It was Christmas time and three-year-old Macy observed a number of presents accumulating under the tree. Caught up in the excitement of gifts and giving, one morning Macy picked up, shook and guessed what was inside every package. Then in a burst of inspiration she grasped a big red bow that had fallen off a present and held it to her head. *Look at me, Daddy, she smiled brightly. I'm a present!*

It's true. *You* are God's gift. He wants to use you to love others in a world that is dying from a lack of love. God has equipped you to bless others. If you chose, you may speak His Word with confidence. You *can* minister to those in need.

*God's gifts
put man's best
dreams to shame.
—Tennyson*



Encountering the original

Introduction

My sister is three years older than I am, but when we were children the three might as well have been twenty-three! It went like this: After supper, she'd say, *Will, Dad says you must help me wash the dishes.* I'd say, *Forget it, you aren't my boss. Wash them yourself!* She'd reply, *But Dad told me to tell you that you have to help me, so you'd jolly well better!* I'd retort with defiant finality, *Forget you, it's not my turn!* Then I'd hear a sound at the kitchen door and turn around to see my father standing there. He would look at me and say, *Will, would you please help your sister with the dishes?* And I'd say, *Yes Sir!* And that was that, except for the slight, irritating grin just showing on my sister's face.

Some of us may go through similar things when it comes to being called to do the work of the Church. Though we love our Lord, and within ourselves we want to respond to Him deeply, we may not feel as excited as we'd like to about the calls that come to us through our peers in the church. These calls simply don't stir us as they used to. But to hear the voice of the Lord Himself calling us to serve Him, that may be another thing. When a co-worker relays the orders of the president to you, it's one thing. When the orders come directly from him, they take on a different meaning altogether.

His voice among the voices

There are so many voices of dubious authority quoting God to us. Some have more authority than others. But the voice that must be heard above them all is that of the Father Himself calling us in the freshness of the here and now, to fulfill the missions of our moments and the underlying purpose of our lives in His world. There are so many voices calling us to so many *missions*. They relentlessly bombard our consciousness these days. Some are good, legitimate voices, but they are not the voice of God speaking clearly, compelling us into His mission for our day.

Every generation needs to hear God's voice for itself, giving the specific marching orders of its particular time and situation. When we don't hear it, we find ourselves confused, striking about all over for answers and for a sense of some sort of mission, even if we go about constructing one and assigning it an authority it does not actually possess. When we don't hear God's voice, we are vulnerable to other voices and missions, and sometimes it's the good ones that can be most distracting.

The call of Jesus to His disciples is full of meaning. Early in each of the Gospels there is a description of how Jesus gathered His nuclear twelve around Him. When you look closely at these calls, the thing that stands out is this: Whether they were busy fishing or tax collecting, when Jesus came by and called, these men immediately dropped what they were doing and followed Him. There is something unaccountably compelling and authoritative in Jesus' call that just isn't in the other calls, even the best ones.

When I recall what happened long ago between my sister, myself and my father, I think of the contrast in the authority of the two voices Nathaniel heard when he was called to his mission. The story is in John 1:43-50. Philip goes to Nathaniel to tell him that he's found the Messiah. But when Nathaniel hears Philip's story, he says something like this: *Really now, have you indeed encountered Messiah! Tell me, can anything worthwhile come from a place like Nazareth?* Nevertheless, having heard Philip, Nathaniel comes to see and hear for himself. And when He meets up with the voice of Jesus for himself, he cries out, *Rabbi, you are the Son of God; you are the King of Israel.* I think this encounter tells us the way it works. Other voices have their place, but it's only the voice of the Original that really makes things happen.

The voice and a clear sense of mission

So we need a sense of mission derived not merely from the traditionalistic, corporational mold. It must not be one simply assigned by the church, that is, by our brothers or sisters, but one that is warm with the compelling voice of Christ Himself. This sets us free to be and do His will right where we find ourselves every day, right in the kitchens of our everyday life. But what kind of a mission might He call us into?

I believe in the corporate vision and mission of God's people and in their training to effectively carry out that mission. God calls not only individually but

Scripture Reading

Phillipians 2:5-8

Suggested Hymn

Have Thine Own Way, Lord
(Seventh-day Adventist Hymnal #567)

corporately. But what I am emphasizing today is that we must not wait any longer for these things when the call of Jesus is already on our ears and in our hearts.

The mission that will ignite into vital action is one that, coming straight from Christ, will be much like His mission. It will have to do with a sacrificial, practical proclamation of the Gospel that manifests itself, first of all, right where we are in our own localities and right among the people of our own neighborhoods. God has placed each of us where He has for a reason. It has been a strategic placement. In many ways our placement is highly suggestive of our immediate calling and our mission.

Being where we are means actually getting to know our neighbors as fellow human beings and friends. It means learning to love them, so that tactfully, sensitively, wisely and disinterestedly we will quietly spend ourselves on them. Under God's guidance we will stand willing to give them what they need—from the physical, through the emotional and on to the spiritual. Our behavior will not be contrived, arousing suspicion. It will be real because we've become authentic friends or acquaintances.

A biblical perspective

The active mission in Christ's call comes to us very much like the call that came to the Good Samaritan. Let me retell the story in more general terms, so that it will fit up against our lives more easily.

He's actually a very simple man, not honored by his fellows. One day, while on business, in the course of a journey he is taking, he encounters another who has been treated in a way that has left him stripped, bruised, wounded and near death. The victim has collapsed on the side of the road. The men of corporate religion have already gone by. They've seen the man, but have other more *churchly* missions in mind. They keep their well-insulated distance from situations like this one.

It is then that the first man—the simple, dishonored man—comes onto the scene. At the sight of the pain and in the face of the predicament of his fellow human being, he hears a voice or calling. It is not audible, but it reaches deep. Despite his uneasiness, this man stops, goes to where the man is, bandages his misery, speaks kindly to him, lifts him onto his donkey and holds him up. He walks him down the road to a place where further help is available. He does not hover about. He simply pays for the man's treatment and promises to return.

In this kind of mission one simply gets down to it. Such action needs no real training. It just takes a caring heart, a bit of time in the middle of the journey and the willingness to risk a little. This sort of call excites me. It's primitive. In itself it is simple, though I must say that it can be quite demanding.

Philippians 2:5-8 describes a Christ who had everything. He was, in fact, equal with God. But when Jesus looked at us in our dilemma, He did not search for ways to hold on to all he had. Seeing us as we were, identifying with us and being moved with compassion, He gave it all up, taking on our vestments, our vulnerabilities, our situation, our very nature. He actually became one of us, one with us to effect our rescue. This is Christian mission. It's straightforward. It isn't encrusted with levels of bureaucracy. It means getting our hands down and dirty in the lives of fellow human beings—descending into their sorrows and disinterestedly lifting them up right where they need it. From there, the sky's the limit.

Years ago evangelist Billy Graham and his son were walking together when the boy accidentally stepped on a small ant hill. As father and son looked down they saw the ants dashing about in disarray. The boy felt compassion for the ants and said, *Dad, what can I do to help them?* The boy bent down and with his hands tried to gather the trampled dirt in an effort to reconstruct the ants' home. Obviously this didn't help. It only confused the ants all the more. Standing up, he looked into his father's eyes and said, *What can I do to make things right?* Billy Graham says that the answer to his son's question struck him deep in his soul. He said, *Son there is only one way for you to repair the damage, and that is for you to go down there and actually become one of them, one with them.*

There's the voice. There's our calling. There's our mission.

*Christ's method alone
will give true success
in reaching the people.
The Savior mingled
with men as one who
desired their good.
He showed His sympathy
for them, ministered to
their needs and won
their confidence.
Then He bade them,
'Follow me.'*

—Ellen White

Book Reviews



Growing True Disciples

by George Barna
Barna Research Group LTD
Ventura, California, 2000
US\$ 17.99

George Barna is well known for his sociological study and analysis of the North American church. This work challenges us to reevaluate our definition of success and is a good follow-up to his 1999 book, *The Second Coming of the Church*. Noting little difference between the lifestyle of the Christian and that of the world, the author invites us to return to the biblical objective of discipleship.

Barna defines discipleship as *becoming a complete and competent follower of Jesus Christ*. He continues with an extensive exploration of discipleship, its elements and its importance.

After defining and exploring discipleship, Barna then describes the state of discipleship in the contemporary church. Using the results of detailed surveys, the author reveals the lack of spiritual growth and maturity in the average Christian and the church. He then goes on to explore a number of churches that have effective discipleship strategies. From these studies he identifies key factors that need to be included in such strategies.

Barna ends, describing five models for discipleship. He analyzes the pros and cons of each model and closes with an invitation to return to the biblical priority of making disciples. The author calls the contemporary church back to the integrity of its mission—making disciples. Barna concludes: *True discipleship must be a priority within the Church. In fact, without a heavy emphasis upon discipleship, there is no church.*

Barna's challenge is real and powerful. The church cannot survive by being further assimilated into the post-modern culture. It is time for us to be the church—believers radically committed to Jesus Christ and His kingdom. It is time to return to our mission—making disciples—people growing in their walk with God. Disciples become a counter-culture within a world that has lost its focus and a church that has lost its power.

Benjamin C Maxson, Director, General Conference Stewardship Department

As I set out to read, *Preaching That Matters; The Bible and Our Lives*, by Stephen Farris, I was uncertain as to which direction the author was going. It became clear quite early on that Farris was writing to clergy. This book is an excellent review for ministers on the methods of sermon preparation.

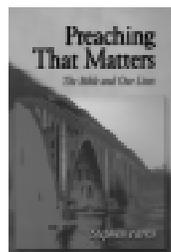
In his introduction, Farris presents three distinct claims. Firstly that God speaks to us. Secondly that God speaks to us through the Bible, and thirdly that God speaks to us through preaching. He then proceeds to explain that in his view there is a missing link in many of our sermon presentations—we use far too few analogies. His working definition of analogy: *To 'draw an analogy' is to make a comparison between the similar features or attributes of two otherwise dissimilar things, so that the unknown, or less well known, is clarified by the known.*

Farris perceives that in their sermons, ministers normally do not link the world of the biblical text to the world in which we live and preach. He then proceeds to explain how we can do this through many different techniques. Along with this he gives warning as to the improper use of this method. In conclusion he still desires that the minister remembers, *The life-giving power in preaching comes not from the preacher's skill or eloquence, and most certainly not from her or his mastery of homiletical method. It comes from God.*

As he proceeds through the book, Farris gives an in-depth study on the preparation of an analogy. He follows with a good warning that, unless the minister studies, meditates and prays, any preparation is in danger of losing the Spirit that is necessary for the message to get through to the congregation. Farris continues to give advice on how to prepare a sermon using analogies, along with details and examples from his own experience. I enjoyed the fact that he gives examples after each concept he presents. In the final chapter he demonstrates how to put the sermon together, modeling the methods he has previously given. Then he follows up with an actual sermon he delivered.

In all, Farris has written a most helpful book for ministers who wish to review some of the techniques of sermon preparation. And he describes how to build a bridge from the biblical text to the realities of our daily lives. A very practical book for use by ministers, students and scholars.

Arthur F Bell, Retired Minister, Colton, California



Preaching That Matters

by Stephen Farris
Westminster John Knox Press
Louisville, Kentucky, 1998
US\$ 19.95

In order to facilitate the understanding of his book, James W. Thompson places it within the history of homiletics. Old homiletics was based on the practice of taking a text and distilling from it a central truth that was then developed and communicated through rational arguments to the audience. The idea was to persuade the listeners concerning the truth of a particular idea. It is usually believed that this type of preaching was the result of the influence of the Enlightenment and of Aristotelian rhetoric. The new homiletics argued that we live in a post-Christian era and that the new generation of Christians knows little or nothing about Christianity. Accordingly, preaching should seek to lead the congregation to experience the beauty and emotional aspects of the text. The congregation should not simply listen to the sermon but participate in it in so that each person may draw his or her own conclusions. This was fundamentally a post-modern approach to homiletics that denied the certainty of absolute truth and sought to entertain rather than to persuade.

Thompson acknowledges some of the gains of the new homiletics but shows its limitations and ineffectiveness. Modern preaching, he says, puts the emphasis only on the narrative materials of the Bible, ignoring many other biblical genres. It emphasizes the individual and not the community, the affective and psychological, not the objective truth. It does not describe how preaching can contribute to the creation of a communal identity with its own peculiar ethics and mission. His suggestion is to examine preaching in the pre-Christian period. Since we live in a post-Christian period, he argues, examining the preaching of Paul during the time when the culture was pagan, that is to say pre-Christian, may help us to develop a true biblical homiletic. This is certainly a welcomed approach to the study of homiletics and one that has much to offer to Adventists preachers.

A study of Paul's preaching, Thompson argues, reveals among other things that it is distinctively Christian in that it is grounded on the authority of God. Grounded, not only on rational modes of persuasion, but that it calls the community to a radical change of behavior. Second, he preached the gospel—the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus—as the only means of salvation. Paul sought to shape communities through a pastoral preaching that instructed them and defined their identity as Christians. Through theological preaching he led the church to reflect on the meaning of the gospel in its particular situation. Hence, persuasion was an indispensable element in his preaching. Third, Paul preached the Word of God given to him through revelation and also as found in the Old Testament Scripture. Fourth, Paul's preaching reveals that the character of the preacher cannot be separated from the content of the preaching. The authenticity of the preacher is a powerful argument for the gospel.

Finally, for Paul, the results of preaching is in the hands of God, who is personally involved in the proclamation of the gospel. He is responsible for the transformation of individuals and the creation of Christian communities committed to Christ as Savior and Lord. Paul teaches us that, *the ultimate effectiveness of preaching rests on the power of the gospel, the preacher's captivity to God's word and the preacher's knowledge of the larger agenda of the preaching ministry* (p. 19).

The book ends with a number of sketches illustrating the use of Pauline passages for preaching. This book is highly recommended.



Preaching Like Paul

by James W. Thompson
Westminster John Knox Press
Louisville, Kentucky, 2000
US\$ 19.95

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:

Let God be God 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.

Let God be God 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

I received many gifts during my years of teaching. Among my treasures, is a blue Cinderella cup that a little freckled-face second grader gave me. I've asked myself, *Why do I keep the cup?* My truest response is, *It's not so much the cup, but the heart that came with it.*

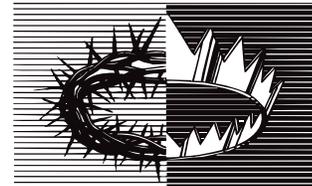
I have a relative who is the most thoughtful gift giver, with an *ear* for hearing the silent hankering of my heart. One year I was looking for some used silverware from an estate sale. I'd had this longing for silverware to go with my wedding china for some time and hoped this might be an inexpensive way to fulfill my dream. But realizing that such items go first in estate sales, I relinquished the wish. For my birthday that summer, my relative lay her own silverware before me as my gift. I'm not sure she knew what that meant to me.

Another gift from the heart came from my son. He knew I'd anguished over the loss of my recorded collection of children's stories and songs. Last Christmas he scrutinized the Internet to replace an old recording which included a favorite old Bantu story from Africa. What a profound and meaningful gift!

God gives his gifts like that—straight from His heart to ours. *Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above and comes down from the Father of lights (Jm 1:17).* He gives us spiritual gifts so that we might give back, share with others and ease the burden of another on our journey home. God gives His gifts with both hands. He doesn't hold back. After all, hasn't He already emptied heaven for us?

Let us remember. . . *each member belongs to all the others (Rm 12:5).* May we use our spiritual gifts freely to sustain and build up one another. As Michael Tucker aptly put it in his sermon: *Use your gift in every way possible. . . Spend it lavishly like a millionaire intent on going broke.* But the paradox is, you will be anything but broke!

Claire L. Eva, Assistant Director, General Conference Stewardship Department



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General Conference of
Seventh-day Adventists**



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