

D Y N A M I C

# Steward

the power to live to submit to abide to give to serve

July-September, 2002

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## The Gift That Keeps On Giving

*Fabiola Vatel, Editorial Assistant  
General Conference Stewardship Department*

**A**s I drove to work I complained to God. "I wish I had ... When will I ... ? Why can't I ... I'm so tired of ..." I murmured, my complaints intensifying with each passing mile. "Lord, I'm so sick of being in need," I whined, peering up to heaven through the dashboard. That morning I had carefully balanced my checkbook three times, hoping against hope that I had miscalculated, that miraculously more money would appear.

But it didn't. So I complained.

I finally arrived at work, pulled into a parking space, and turned off the engine. I sat there blankly staring straight ahead. Clutching my car keys in my hand, I prayed: "Lord, please reveal yourself to me right now because I don't even see the point of getting out of this car. I need a word from You."

I closed my eyes and waited.

"Those keys in your hand, who gave them to you?"

My eyes flew open. "This car? Is it Yours?"

"What about this morning? How did you wake up? And your job? That was no coincidence! Do you remember the time when ... ?"

I shamefully listened as God revealed Himself to me—carefully, lovingly laying out all the blessings He had bestowed in my life.

Like a child of Israel, I murmured against God, forgetting how He pulled me out of Egypt, led me through the Red Sea, and fed me with manna. Like Job, I was rebuked and urged to refocus my attention on His awesome faithfulness. Like David, I exclaimed, "What shall I render to the Lord for all of His benefits toward me?" (Ps 116:12)

Returning home that day, I pulled out my checkbook once again, carefully calculated my earnings, and thankfully wrote a check to God. It was only ten percent of His blessings. That's all He'd asked for. I included even more as a response to His many gifts. Because I was so focused on my need, I had ignored His blessings. God removed the scales from my eyes and made me realize that my possessions are really *not* mine. All my springs are truly in Him (Ps 87:7).

*Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning (Jm 1:17).*

## Tithe and Scripture

*Benjamin C. Maxson, Director  
General Conference  
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*This abridged lesson is an excerpt  
from, "Let God Be God, Part I—  
Biblical Stewardship Foundations."*

### Group study

**1** *Where in Scripture is tithe first mentioned?* In Genesis 14:20. Abraham has experienced the covenant promise of God—that He would bless all nations in him. In response to these blessings, Abraham lives throughout life with a sense of God's presence in everything he does. His was not an overnight transformation but a growth process in which Abraham continued to grow spiritually.

**2** *What motivates Abraham to tithe?* Abraham doesn't tithe *to be* blessed. He tithes because he *has been* blessed. Sodom and Gomorrah have been attacked by enemy kings. The people, including Lot and his family, are taken captive. Abraham gets 318 men from his household ready for battle. Small in number, they are still victorious, and it is obvious that it is God's doing. In that victory—by God's protecting him and by returning the inhabitants of Sodom and Gomorrah to their homes—Abraham experiences God's blessing.

**3** Returning from battle, Abraham comes face to face with Melchizedek, king of Salem. His natural response to God's blessing is to tithe to God, through Melchizedek. God doesn't say "Okay, Abraham, because I have blessed you, now you are to give me one-tenth." Abraham's tithing is recorded as normal practice. It is not something that was instituted or initiated after Abraham's victory. He was already used to tithing.

### Where it all began

**1** The system of offerings, tithe being a part of this system, began outside the Garden of Eden with the first sacrifice. The first offering was part of worship—acknowledging God as being worthy of worship in His holiness as Creator and with the promise of the Redeemer.

The next story of tithing is Jacob's (*Read Gn 28:22*). Jacob has just deceived his father and brother and is running away from home. Alone and exhausted, he falls asleep. In the darkness of his troubled mind comes an incredible dream: Angels ascending and descending on a stairway from earth to heaven.

**2** *Who is at the top of the ladder?* Yes, it is God. Do you remember what God says to him? *I will be with you.* God repeats the covenant He made to Abraham—that He would make him a blessing. In both places the covenant is unconditional. God says, "I will do this because I am God. Not because of anything you do. I will bless you and make you a blessing." Jacob awakens, rested and assured. He says, "I have seen God." He calls the place Bethel, "the House of God." Then he pours oil on the stone that has been his pillow. In this act of worship he is saying, "God, if you will be with me as you promised, out of all that you give me, I will return to you a tenth."

**3** In 1595, Sir Walter Raleigh discovered an 114-acre lake on the island of Trinidad. The remarkable feature of the lake was the amount of asphalt it contained. Some believed that it held more than six million tons. Over the years, the lake gave of its rich resource to pave many roads and produce other things that need asphalt. More than 500 years later, the lake continues to give and live. And the level of the lake is always the same. Can we compare ourselves to this lake? Do we give in joy? Do we give without reservation or fear? When we find ourselves gripped with the temptation to hoard all for ourselves, let us remember this lake that gave and gave.



# Becoming a Contagious Christian: Youth Edition

*Brendon Prutzman, Youth Pastor  
Spencerville SDA Church, Silver Spring, Maryland*

Mark Mittelberg's *Becoming a Contagious Christian* offers more to church leaders and their youth groups than I can begin to describe. This work is based on reaching out to those around you by developing and communicating your own faith, *in your own style*.

*Becoming a Contagious Christian* proposes taking an everyday youth group that already knows God and transforming it into a group of "contagious Christians." These materials teach you how to develop relationships where your interests lie. They teach you how to be intentional in relationships, how to transition—in a non-confrontational manner—an ordinary conversation into a spiritual one. They show youth how to effectively present Christ to others.

The program's unique strength is that it challenges young people to take their Christian walk to the "next level." Evangelism is presented in such a way that youth can actually grab hold and take new insights with them.

These materials can be presented in a variety of ways, allowing the leader to keep the group's interest and still emphasize the key points of the program. The set comes with a leader's guide, student guide, video, and PowerPoint CD-ROM. The video is excellent and speaks to youth on their level. The unique PowerPoint presentation held the attention of my youth group as well.

I challenge you to get this program and put it into action. There is nothing more thrilling to a young person than to introduce a friend to Christ. It is something he or she will never forget!



by Mark Mittelberg  
Zondervan Publishing House  
Grand Rapids, Michigan  
2001 US\$89.99

*"The set comes with a leader's guide, student guide, video, and PowerPoint CD-ROM."*

## Gifts and Giving . . .

*Give and spend and God will send.*—Henry George Bohn

*God's gifts put man's best dreams to shame.*—Elizabeth Barrett Browning

*What I kept, I lost; what I spent, I had; what I gave, I have.*—Persian Proverb

*It is possible to give without loving, but it is impossible to love without giving.*—Richard Braustein

*The true disciple of Jesus is neither a miser nor a spendthrift, but a steward.*—William Hiram Foulkes

*The world asks, 'How much does he give?' Christ asks, 'Why does he give?'*—John Raleigh Mott

*Give, and it shall be given unto you; good measure, pressed down, and shaken together, and running over.*—Jesus Christ

*God has given us two hands—one to receive with and the other to give with. We are not cisterns made for hoarding; we are channels made for sharing.*—Billy Graham

*It was not an accident that seventeen of the thirty-six parables of our Lord had to do with property and stewardship.*—William James Dawson

*Give what you have. To someone it may be better than you dare to think.*—Henry Wadsworth Longfellow

## quotes

## Tithe, a Tool for Discipleship

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

**M**uch of the contemporary debate on tithe focuses on limited questions. Should we tithe? Where should we tithe? Why should we tithe? This discussion really ignores the real issues: Why did God establish the tithing system? Does tithe have a purpose beyond paying church bills? Can we understand tithe in a way that helps us grow in our walk with God?

The story of Abraham and Melchizedek (Gn 14:20) is the first example of tithing. The second example appears when Jacob makes a commitment to tithe in response to God's blessings (Gn 28:22). Neither of these examples are a response to a new directive from God. They are simply a continuation of a normal lifestyle of worship. Through tithe, these men were acknowledging God's involvement in the material side of their lives. They were not supporting a church—there was no church to support. They were simply worshipping God.

Later, when God gave Israel direct instruction on tithing, it was again in the context of worship. They were to offer their tithes and offerings at the sanctuary—the dwelling place for God's name (Dt 12:5-6, 11). God received the tithe and used it to provide for the ministry of the sanctuary through the priests and Levites.

As we continue to explore the biblical record, we find tithing connected with the call to revival (2Ch 31; Ne 12-13; and Mal 3). The real issue is always worship—how we acknowledge our relationship with God as Owner and Redeemer.

However, one of the most important points for understanding God's rationale for tithing is found in what Jesus said in Matthew 6:25-34. He places money and material things in direct competition with God in our lives. He confronts us with a choice as to whom we will serve and how we will serve Him. It is interesting to note that the context is the basic necessities of life, not luxuries. A life *focused* on providing the bare necessities of food and clothing is identified as pagan. Instead of such a focus, Jesus challenges us: "But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you" (v. 33, English Standard Version).

Though it does not appear in the immediate context of Matthew 6, tithing is one of God's primary tools in our "discipleship journey" to help us keep our focus on Him, while we deal with the material world. As we tithe, we place God first. We acknowledge Him as the Owner of everything we have in our hands. We admit we are stewards—managers. So we need to explore ways of improving our worship as we tithe. There are a number of things we can do in order to improve our attitude of worship.

### Step 1: Accept our relationship with God

The first way is to recognize that true worship can only come from a heart in tune with God. Thus, the first step is to accept our relationship with God. This starts with confessing our sin, accepting forgiveness, and rejoicing in our eternal life. We are then in a new relationship with Jesus, and, when we tithe, we can affirm our salvation in Christ and celebrate Him as our Redeemer. This redemption reestablishes His ownership in our lives.

### Step 2: Accept God as Creator

The second step in making our tithe worship is to accept God as our Creator. As such, He can also recreate and give us new life. As Creator, He provides for all our needs. We acknowledge this as worshipping Him by putting Him first in returning our tithe. By seeking His kingdom and His righteousness first, we make a choice to live a new life. In this way, tithing is a tool which helps us change our priorities.

### Step 3: Surrender our ownership and accept His

Tithe is worship when it comes from one who has accepted the reality of God as Owner. This is the next step. We choose to surrender our ownership and accept His. It means we recognize that everything we have in our hands belongs to God. We are only managing it. We worship God with our tithe to remind us that everything really does belong to Him—to help us manage the 100 percent to His honor and glory. In this way we accept our responsibility to carefully oversee all the gifts He has placed in our care.

### Step 4: Recognize God's care, guidance, and love

We also make tithe an act of worship when we recognize God's providential care, guidance, and love to us. The tithe we return to God reminds us that He cares for us—that He is intimately involved in all the details of our lives. That before we tithe, He has already provided for all our daily needs. We present our tithe to Him with grateful hearts, recognizing the bountiful blessings He has given us—for we can only tithe if we have already received His blessings.

## Step 5: Accept that we are to be holy to God

Tithe as worship also provides an opportunity for us to accept that we are “to be holy to” God (Lv 20:26). Because He is Owner and we belong to Him, we are holy—set apart for His special use. In tithing we can recognize that we are completely His, that every part of our lives belongs to Him. Thus our tithe becomes a confession that we too are “set apart” for God.

## Step 6: Reconsecrate our lives to God

When we accept tithe as something which is holy, belonging to God, we recognize the blessing that is ours in handling that which is holy. To do this well, we must bring our tithe to Him in the context of our daily walk with God. Tithing then becomes an opportunity for complete reconsecration of our lives to God. We can rejoice in the reality of our salvation and acceptance in Christ. We can accept our new life in Him. We can celebrate God’s goodness in caring for us in the material world and thus recognize that He has also cared for us in the spiritual world. Tithe then becomes a testimony to God and our own hearts that we accept and worship God in our daily living as disciples.

A thirteen-year-old boy on one of the South Pacific Islands demonstrated this attitude of worship. Bringing a large fish he had caught, he told the local elder of his church that this was his tithe and asked how he should deal with it. The elder explained what he should do with the “tithe fish” and congratulated the boy on his good catch of ten fish. The young man replied, “Oh no! This is the first one. The others are still in the ocean. I’m going after them now.”

Truly, tithing provides us a tool to help us worship God, placing Him first in our lives in every way. For tithing is a tangible recognition of our incredible relationship with Him.

# stewardship

## window more from the director’s desk ...

### Leaders Endorse Simplified Offering Proposal

The ANN Bulletin of April 2002 reads: “Members of the Seventh-day Adventist executive committee voted April 19 to move toward a more streamlined offering system worldwide, and they committed to providing more information about how offering funds are divided and used.

The proposal to simplify the Adventist Church’s offering system came out of a Stewardship Summit held in April 2001, where delegates from each of the church’s twelve administrative districts focused on ways of making the system more firmly grounded in the biblical model of giving as worship. Delegates also called for renewed emphasis on accountability and transparency in the use of funds within the church.

Under the simplified offering proposal all regular offerings will go to a unified fund to be distributed according to established guidelines. A distribution plan will ensure the systematic support of all levels of the organization. It will begin with percentages calculated on current giving patterns and emphasize the local church and its strategic budget. ‘An individual donor’s choice to give to a specific purpose or fund will always be respected,’ says Ben Maxson, world church stewardship director. He will oversee the process of preparing specific policies to implement this offering system which will be considered by the

executive committee when it meets again in October 2002, for Annual Council.”

### Welcome, Fabiola Vatel

We welcome Fabiola Vatel as the new editorial assistant to the GC Stewardship Department! Born in Manhattan, New York to Haitian parents and reared in Montreal, Canada, Fabiola is the youngest of three daughters. She received her BA degree in English from Andrews University.

Fabiola comes to our department with an array of experience in writing and editing. One of her most recent projects was the writing and production of a series of pamphlets for the General Conference Women’s Ministries Department on the topic of abuse. We already value Fabiola’s positive spiritual influence and excellent skills.

## Before You Tithe

*Randy Alcorn, Director  
Eternal Perspective Ministries*

*Want to read and know more  
about Eternal Perspective  
Ministries? Visit their website  
at [www.epm.org](http://www.epm.org)!*

### Fundamental connection

**F**ifteen percent of everything Jesus said related to money and possessions. Our Lord made more references to money and possessions than to prayer or faith. He spoke about money and possessions more than heaven and hell combined.

Why? Because the Scriptures make it clear that there is a fundamental connection between a person's spiritual life and his attitudes and actions concerning money and possessions. Though we often divorce the two, Christ sees them as essentially related to one another. In Luke 19:1-10, the tax collector Zaccheus tells Jesus he will pay back four times and give half of what he has to the poor. Jesus replies: "Today salvation has come to this house." How does Jesus judge this fundamental change in Zaccheus' heart? By the fundamental change in his attitudes and actions concerning money and possessions; changes that didn't earn his salvation, but demonstrated it.

### An attitude revealed

In Matthew 19:16-26, we read of the rich young ruler, a counterpart to Zaccheus. Jesus knows that what's keeping him away from God is his attachment to his money and possessions. So Jesus reveals, "... Give to the poor, and you will have riches in heaven. Then come, follow me." The man regretfully says "No." Christ talks about how hard it is for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven. He knows this man is not saved; he has not changed. On what basis does He conclude this? His attitude and actions concerning money and possessions have not changed.

### A proper perspective

There are two streamlined descriptions of the early church in Acts 2:44-45 and Acts 4:32-35 which also offer insight on the proper perspective a believer should have regarding possessions. These passages feature only the church's most essential spiritual core, including Bible teaching, fellowship, communion, and prayer. We read,

*"They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. Everyone was filled with awe, and many wonders and miraculous signs were done by the apostles. All the believers were together and had everything in common. Selling their possessions and goods, they gave to anyone as he had need. Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved" (Ac 2:42-47).*

And,

*"All the believers were one in heart and mind. No one claimed that any of his possessions was his own, but they shared everything they had. With great power the apostles continued to testify to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and much grace was upon them all. There were no needy persons among them. For from time to time those who owned lands or houses sold them, brought the money and put it at the apostles' feet, and it was distributed to anyone as he had need" (Ac 4:32-35).*

## A radical change

Only a profound work of God could account for the radical change in these new believers in attitude and actions concerning money and possessions. Generous sharing, the giving of money and possessions, and liquidating assets for the good of others are not only signs of individuals with a proper perspective on giving, but these behaviors are food for thought for “church growth” experts. It’s worth noting the church growth recorded here.

Elsewhere, in Acts 19:18-20, we read of the Ephesian occultists who came to faith in Christ. Even though they had magic books that were rare and extremely valuable, they burned them. Proof, again, of the change that occurs in the heart when a person develops a proper view of giving—resulting from a life-changing decision to believe in and trust Jesus Christ.

There are others stories. In Mark 12, we read of the poor widow who gave everything. What demonstrated her devotion to and trust in God and, hence, her true spiritual condition was her attitude and her actions concerning money and possessions. Contrast that with the rich fool we read of in Luke 12. He built his own kingdom. He saved up everything for retirement, but he spent on himself. Scripture refers to him as a fool, for he died that night. The evidence of his lacking spiritual condition was that he was rich toward himself, but not rich toward God. Again, what revealed his true spiritual state was his attitude and actions concerning money and possessions.

*We need a proper perspective before tithing. There is a clear connection between attitude and actions.*

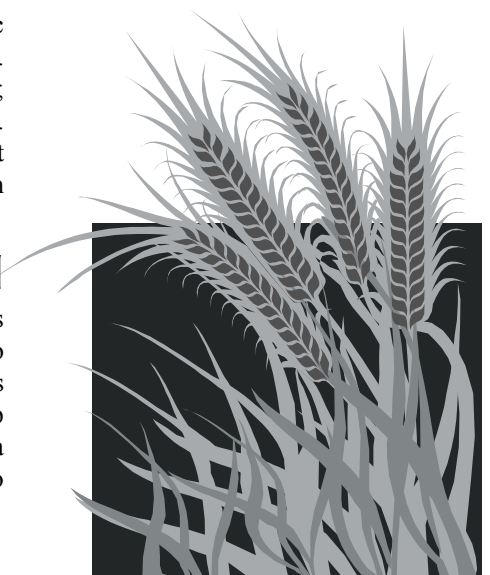
## Two treasuries?

Matthew 6:19-25 is the key passage in understanding the challenge facing us. We cannot have two “treasuries”—one in heaven and one on earth. For we read, “Where your treasure is, there will your heart be also” (Mt 6:21). Whenever we put our earnings into something, we develop a vested interest in that thing. Ideally our treasures will go where our heart is. So if our heart is changed, it will change where we put our treasures. But it works the other way also; where we put our treasures our heart will follow.

If your treasure is in house and lands and cars and boats and electronic equipment, where will your heart be? Your heart is wherever you put your treasure. Do you want your heart to be with the things of God? There is a simple solution; commit your treasure to the things of God. Develop vested interests in His kingdom. Do you want to feel more a part of your church? Then be more of a part of it. Invest yourself in what this church is all about. That’s how you gain vested interest in what’s going on.

## A treasure found

Do you want to have a heart for missions? Then put your money in missions. As a pastor many years ago, I felt I didn’t have the concern for missions I needed to have. So I started giving more and more money to missions. And guess what? Jesus was right. My heart followed my treasure. In the same way a person gains a deep interest in IBM or Apple or General Motors by investing his or her money there, a person gains a deep interest in the kingdom of God—by investing there. Two treasuries, two perspectives, two masters. Choose yours.



## Embracing Multiplication

*Kigundu Ndwiga*  
*Stewardship Director*  
*Eastern Africa Division*

### Introduction

George Muller was a German visionary who felt called by God to open an orphanage for the needy children of Bristol, England. When God called him to this challenging task he had no money, no food to feed the hungry orphans, and no land on which to construct the orphanage. George Muller had only one precious commodity—faith in God’s willingness to answer prayer and in His ability to supply the needs of His children. Muller was guided and energized by one biblical promise, “Ask and you will receive” (Jn 16:24).

Standing on the promise of the immutable God, Muller prayed. He believed God was able to do great things. He prayed for land, and God provided land. He prayed for money to build the orphanage, and God provided it. Muller soon had over one thousand orphans under his care.

It was a mammoth task to provide food, clothing, and life’s necessities for these children. What made the task even harder was Muller’s policy to never reveal his needs, but believe that if he talked to God in prayer, God would impress somebody to supply that specific need. What an unbelievable faith!

In his prayer journal Muller narrates an episode about when there was no breakfast to feed the orphans. He asked the children to take their places at the table and confidently thanked God for providing them with a healthy breakfast. At the prayer’s end, a loud knock at the door announced the arrival of an apologetic baker with a cartload of fresh bread!

According to Muller, his ministry of caring for the orphans was secondary. He confessed that the primary reason he got involved in this ministry was to prove to the modern, unbelieving generation that God can supply our day-to-day needs in answer to prayer, if we believe and obey His will.

When Jesus looked down time’s corridor to the last generation, He wondered aloud: “When the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on earth?” (Lk 18:8). Even though unbelief was rife in Jesus’ time, He accurately predicted that there would be an alarming lack of faith in the last days of earth’s history.

### A crisis of faith

A father brought his demon-possessed son to Jesus for healing, but did not fully believe that Jesus could do it. In his dialogue with the Saviour he introduced an element of doubt. Jesus rebuked him for his unbelief, and the man cried out, “Lord, help my unbelief!” (Mk 9:2). Like Abraham in the saga over Hagar and Ishmael, we do not often believe God can be trusted to keep His promises to us. Even though He has repeatedly said He will supply our needs, the great sin of being independent and trying to be self-sufficient plagues us.

We limit our thinking to the mathematical process of subtraction, forgetting that our God specializes in multiplication! We think that if we give, we will grow poor. We cannot bring ourselves to trust Him to supply our needs when we put Him first. How many blessings we forfeit as we cling to the pittance we have!

God calls us to return to Him in childlike trust. He challenges us to believe that He is able to do all that He has promised. “For He is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to His power that is at work within us” (Eph 3:21).

The Bible records stories of faithful saints and the resultant blessings of their faithfulness. The story of the widow of Zarephath is one such story. Her exemplary faithfulness is cited by the Master in His powerful sermon. “I assure you that there were many widows in Israel ...yet Elijah was not sent to any of them, but a widow in Zarephath in the region of Sidon” (Lk 4:25-26). The fact that this woman was not even an Israelite makes her stand tall in the chronicles of faith. Jesus singled her out as an object lesson of faithfulness.

### The blessing of faithful stewardship

The widow of Zarephath looked in vain to the sky for hints of rain. Her heart was heavy as she recognized the first signs of starvation in her son. One morning, what she dreaded most came to pass. There was just enough flour and oil to make one more meal. She kept hoping that some miracle would change her impossible situation, but the gods of Sidon were unpredictable and unreliable. So, with a heavy heart, she went outside the town to collect some sticks to cook their last meal.

As she was lost in thought, a travel-worn man called out, asking her for a drink of water. Giving water to a thirsty stranger was no problem. It did not threaten her livelihood, but as she went



to get the water for Prophet Elijah, his next request stopped her abruptly. “And bring me, please, a piece of bread.”

Elijah had come here after receiving express orders from the Lord. Having delivered his bombshell to Ahab, God directed Elijah to hide at the brook Cherith. And while he was there, true to God’s promise: “The ravens brought him bread and meat in the morning and ... the evening, and he drank from the brook” (1K 17:6).

When the brook dried up, God spoke to Elijah saying: “Go at once to Zarephath of Sidon and stay there. I have commanded a widow in that place to supply you with food. So he went to Zarephath” (1K 17:9, 10).

## Asking for the impossible

And now Elijah asks for the impossible and the widow seeks to explain her plight. God did not send Elijah to someone with means, but to a poor widow. This is a rebuke to us who excuse our refusal to give to God on the pretext that we are having dire economic hardships.

“As surely as the Lord your God lives ... I don’t have any bread—only a handful of flour in a jar and a little oil in a jug. I am gathering a few sticks to take home and make a meal for myself and my son, that we may eat it—and die.” (1K 17:12) By using the terminology, “As surely as the Lord your God lives,” she is taking an oath to tell the truth. What the widow expresses is the reality of her situation. She is still operating from the mathematics of subtraction.

“Elijah said to her, ‘Don’t be afraid. Go home and do as you have said. But first make a small cake of bread for me from what you have and bring it to me, and then make something for yourself and your son. For this is what the Lord, the God of Israel, says: ‘The jar of flour will not be used up and the jug of oil will not run dry until the day the Lord gives rain on the land.’” (1K 17:13, 14).

As Elijah spoke, the widow began to see the limitations of her mathematical subtraction and decided to embrace heaven’s arithmetic of multiplication. She actually saw God’s way as the way out of her desperate situation.

Elijah’s diagnosis of the widow is true of us. One reason many of us do not give our tithes and offerings is because we are paralyzed by fear. We still embrace the arithmetic of subtraction. We are convinced that if we give tithes and offerings, we will surely come to financial ruin, for we hardly have enough to survive on. As we analyze our expenses and compare them to our little income, fear seizes us. When a “prophet” comes and challenges us to put God first, we question how we are going to survive! We need to cast out our fear and, in faith, ask God to graciously assist us in shunning the earthly, temporal arithmetic of subtraction and embrace the heavenly, eternal arithmetic of multiplication.

## The arithmetic of multiplication

When the widow decided to put God first, she experienced three blessings:

**1** The first blessing she experienced was the daily provision of food for herself and her family: “So there was food everyday for Elijah and for the woman and for her family. For the jar of flour was not used up and the jug of oil did not run dry, in keeping with the word of the Lord spoken by Elijah” (1K 17:15, 16). When she put

*When she chose to lose her life for God’s sake, her life was sustained.*

God first, He multiplied her limited resources. When she chose to lose her life for God’s sake, her life was sustained.

**2** The second blessing she experienced was the miraculous resurrection of her son. God performed a rare miracle to reward her faithfulness.

**3** The greatest blessing of all was her awakening knowledge of the God of Israel. The widow’s words to Elijah revealed this experience: “Now I know that you are a man of God and that the word of the Lord from your mouth is the truth” (1K 17:24). Knowing God experientially is the greatest blessing that can be accorded to a human being. Jesus said, “Now this is eternal life: that they may know you, the only true God and Jesus Christ whom you have sent” (Jn 17:3).

These blessings came her way because the widow decided to put God first. In her own way, she heeded the words of Jesus: “But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things shall be given to you as well” (Mt 6:33). Like the widow, God will bless us in ways that transcend our imagination. Shall we continue embracing the narrow arithmetic of subtraction, or will we reach out and embrace the new math of multiplication that initiates us into a glorious adventure with God?



## Looking for the Right Gift

*Dr. Ed Wright, Senior Pastor  
Collegedale SDA Church  
Collegedale, Tennessee*

### The meaning of gifts

**C**hristmas and gifts just go together! And gifts can mean a lot of different things. I received a gift on my 50<sup>th</sup> birthday that I'm sure was meant as a joke. It was a plastic denture case. Would a friend *really* do something like that? Some gifts are more of a courtesy exchange, the kind of thing you feel obligated to do. Maybe you're buying for an acquaintance and you don't really put a lot of yourself into it—either time or money. It is expected of you and you want to be accepted, so you do what's expected.

I hope that during this season we are motivated by hearts of love. At my house I've heard a few whispered conversations and have seen a few sneaky peeks here and there. Surprises are fun! When it's the people you care about, you spend lots of time and energy just to find the right gift.

So what is it about gifts and Christmas? Is it just a product of St. Nicholas and a sleigh with eight tiny reindeer? Is it a folklore myth that brings Christmas and gifts together? Some of you say, "No." There was a St. Nicholas, a real cleric of some centuries ago, who tried to embody the values of Jesus Christ in giving to others. But what does that have to do with Christmas?

### Outsiders in

Giving is part of the Christmas story. If you turn to Matthew, Chapter 2, we will set the stage. Matthew 1 includes a genealogy. Then there is a brief conversation between the angel and Joseph, but there's not much detail given. We would expect that Chapter 2 would open with the birth of Jesus, but we read: "After Jesus was born." Matthew's purpose was not to describe Christ's birth. He simply says, "After Jesus was born in Bethlehem ... magi from the East came to Jerusalem and asked, 'Where is the one that has been born King of the Jews? We saw his star in the East and have come to worship him.'" There are no details about what happened that very important night. Instead, Matthew fast forwards to the journey of these curious people called magi.

"Magi" is not a common word today. There is much folklore around these people but very little solid information. We don't know if they were kings or if there were three of them. We're not told exactly where they came from, except that it was East. We don't know their names. Actually, we know very little. So, what do we know? Well, magi were considered to be holy people. They studied various holy writings, were familiar with astronomy, but also delved into astrology. They believed that at a person's birth, their future could be foretold by the position of the stars. They believed many unusual things and perhaps even delved into some spiritism. There were strange things going on with the magi. So much so, that Jews considered magi detestable. They were right down there with prostitutes and profligates! To even consider that magi were involved in Jesus' birth was overwhelming. It rocked the world of these Jews!

Matthew is very clear. It is the outcasts who play a pivotal role in recognizing Jesus for who He is. There are no outsiders with Jesus, and He makes this point over

and over again. We simply know the magi came from the East. It could have been Moab, 40-50 miles away; Euphrates, 400 miles away; or Persia, 1200 miles away. We are not sure they rode camels, but if they did, it may have taken them three to four months to travel 1200 miles. If they were walking, a year! That's why Matthew says, "After Jesus was born." The family likely moved from the stable of His birth to a more permanent place, but they didn't leave Bethlehem. That's significant. They didn't go back to Nazareth but stayed right there for important events—perhaps like this one.

### More than a hunch

And so the magi ask, "Where is the one who's been born King of the Jews?" What they knew about this important king is not revealed. Some have wondered if they had a copy of the Jewish Old Testament. That's possible, for Jews had been exiled to Persia for hundreds of years. Whatever their source, they were convinced enough to get up off the couch, fire up the camel, and go out of their way to follow more than a hunch. This wasn't just "Well, what do you think? Shall we drop in?" They invested incredible amounts of time and energy and resources to investigate. They were under Divine conviction! The same God who spoke to them later and said "You'd better go home a different way," was speaking to their hearts saying, "I've got something you must see!" They followed the star and said "We have come to worship him." They knew this wasn't just any baby. He must have been royalty. No, rather, He must have been deity; for they came to worship Him.

In verses 9 and on we read. “After they had heard the king, they went on their way; and the star they had seen in the East went ahead of them until it stopped over the place where the child was.” Notice, He wasn’t a baby any longer, He was a child. “When they saw the star they were overjoyed. On coming to the house, they saw the child with his mother Mary and they bowed down and worshiped him. Then they opened their treasures and presented him with gifts of gold and incense and myrrh.” Gifts. This is where gift giving has its roots—in a biblical Christmas story. It’s right at the heart of the story. They didn’t just make the trip. They came prepared.

## Everyone brought something

Gift giving was quite an expected practice at that time and place. In 2 Chronicles the Queen of Sheba visits Solomon. Notice 2 Chronicles 9:1. “When the Queen of Sheba heard of Solomon’s fame, she came to Jerusalem ... arriving with a very great caravan with camels carrying spices, large quantities of gold, precious stones ...” She knew what was expected. You brought gifts to royalty!

In verse 22, “King Solomon was greater in riches and wisdom than all the other kings of the earth ... Year after year, everyone who came brought a gift—articles of silver and gold, and robes, weapons and spices, and horses and mules.” Interesting. Everyone brought a gift. Let me remind you of another Old Testament experience—a ritual or daily part of Jewish life—the Old Testament sanctuary. Every worshipper was invited to bring a sacrifice. Depending on the wealth of the worshipper and the event, it might be a cow. But few people could afford to bring a cow. More might be able to bring a lamb or goat. Some could only afford a pigeon or a dove. And some, not even that. The Old Testament law allowed the worshipper to bring a handful of flour. Everyone could afford a handful of flour. And everybody was meant to bring something.

In Psalm 96 there is a description of this kind of God-worship—not just royalty worship—but God-worship. Psalm 96:8: “Ascribe to the Lord the glory due his name.” What is that next phrase? “Bring an offering.” “Ascribe to the Lord the glory due his name” is a part of giving Him worth and honor and glory. To “bring an offering and come into his courts. Worship the Lord in the splendor of his holiness.” Every worshipper is meant to bring an offering.

## Whatever it takes

This isn’t an offering appeal. This is recognition that we as worshippers bring a gift. It’s not surprising that when the magi finally found the Christ child, they gave Him something. But the sequence is very important. Look at Matthew 2. It is so important that it must inform what we do, not only today, but always. “On coming to the house, they saw the child with his mother, Mary” (vs. 11). Step number one: they found him. Finding Jesus is critical. It’s the first thing we do. Find Him at all cost. Whatever it takes, find Him.

But don’t end there. What happened next? “They bowed down and worshipped him.” That was more than just a code phrase. That meant to Matthew’s Jewish readers that this was more than just a baby. You only worship the Divine. You

*For those wise men and for us, the giving of the gift is as much worship as the bowing and adoration and praise.*

worship God alone. For these holy men, foreigners as they were, to bow down, face-in-the-dust worship, that’s significant! If you have really found Jesus, you will instinctively bow down in worship. He is infinitely greater than we are and deserves our adoration. So, first we find Jesus. Second, we bow down and worship Him.

Finally, number three. After you have found Him and have worshipped Him, then, you give Him of your treasure. If you get it the other way around, it feels like pressure and manipulation. It doesn’t feel good at all. But if you have first found Him and worshipped Him, the giving is natural and instinctive, and comes from your heart.

We give gifts—sometimes as a joke, sometimes as a courtesy exchange, sometimes as a bribe, sometimes as a display of pride, or ego. I hope we give as an expression of love. In the right sequence, and given to the right Person, a gift is an act of worship. And for those wise men and for us, the giving of the gift is as much worship as the bowing and adoration and praise. We must continue to seek Him with all our hearts. When we have found Him, we must bow and worship. But we must also give Him the most important thing that we have. Our hearts.

## Let's Go Back to Bethel

*William D. Watley, Pastor  
St. James A.M.E. Church  
Newark, New Jersey*

### The journey from home

It must have been one of the loneliest nights of his life. Jacob had run away from home. As he faced the reality of his failing eyesight, Isaac found himself thinking more and more about the inevitability of his death. He needed to pass on the mantle of family leadership and make disposition of his estate between his two sons.

Isaac prepared to bless Esau as head of the family. However, Isaac's wife Rebekah favored their son Jacob over Esau and successfully conspired with him to steal his brother's blessing. When Esau discovered that his brother had cheated him, he swore that Jacob would not live to enjoy the rewards of his trickery. No matter what we're after, the way we get it is just as important as getting it.

Esau recognized that although there was nothing he could do about his lost birthright and stolen blessing, he could do something to prevent Jacob from enjoying what rightfully belonged to him. He resolved that when his father died, he would kill Jacob. Rebekah learned of Esau's designs and told Jacob to run fast and far to the distant home of her brother Laban.

Jacob was alone in the middle of the night, fleeing the murderous wrath of his brother. There he was, miles from his home, perhaps on the first long journey of his life. The journey from home is always a long and difficult journey to make. There he was, the grandson of Abraham, father of the faith; there he was, the son of Isaac, whose own life had been spared because of his father's faith—separated from all he knew and loved. There he was, on the bleak summit of the Bethel plateau, with his head propped upon a stone for a pillow. There he lay—heart burdened and spirit depressed.

### Alone, but not deserted

Out there by himself, Jacob discovered he was not alone. While feeling dejected, he discovered that he was not deserted. Out there, away from the reach of Esau, Jacob discovered that he was not out of the reach of God. As he dreamed, he saw the vision of a ladder or stairway that stretched from heaven to earth, upon which angels were ascending and descending. The Lord who stood above it told Jacob that one day his descendants would dwell in the land and in the place where he slept. Jacob received the further assurance that God would be with him and would one day bring him back to this place.

Jacob awoke and said: "Surely the Lord is in this place and I did not know it! This is none other than the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven" (Gn 28: 16-17, NRSV). The next day Jacob took the stone that had been his pillow, set it up as a monument, and consecrated it by pouring oil on it. He called the place Bethel, which means "house of God." Jacob made a vow, saying, "If God will be with me, and will keep me in this way that I go, and will give me bread to eat and clothing to wear, so that I come again to my father's house in peace, the Lord shall be my God, and this stone shall be God's house; and of all that you give me I will surely give one tenth to you" (Gn 28: 20-22, NRSV). Let us note a couple of things about Jacob's pledge to

tithe. First, Jacob's pledge was made when he was a wandering fugitive. His pledge was made when he was at his weakest financially. His pledge was based on his faith that God would provide him the means to keep it.

We ought never assume that persons who tithe are necessarily more prosperous and free of debt than others. We ought never assume that those who pledge to tithe know that they will be able to keep their pledge or that they know how they will pay their tithe. We ought never assume that persons who tithe have their financial situation all worked out. "If they had my bills, they wouldn't be tithing," some might say. How do you know they don't have as many bills as you?

Like Jacob, many people who pledge to tithe are financially shaky at best. Jacob's pledge was a result of his belief in God's promise of protection and care for him. Most people I know pledge on the same basis. We pledge in faith that God will help us and provide the means for us to keep our pledge. The apostle Paul reminds us, "Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what is seen? But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience" (Rm 8:24-25, NRSV).

Secondly, Jacob's pledge to tithe was a voluntary act. Jacob did not tithe because tithing was part of God's law at that time. The first Old Testament tither was Abraham. In Genesis 14:20 Abraham tithed to Melchizedek a tenth of everything he had as an act of thanksgiving to God for victory in battle. In Genesis 28 Jacob pledged to tithe to God a tenth of all he had. Both of these incidents occurred many generations before the law was given to Moses.

*This abridged sermon is taken from Dr. Watley's book, **Bring the Full Tithe: Sermons on the Grace of Giving**, copyright 1995 by Judson Press. Used by permission of Judson Press, 800-4-JUDSON, [www.judsonpress.com](http://www.judsonpress.com).*

*It's easy to forget the promises we made when we were scared and desperate or when we first felt the presence of Christ and the power of the Holy Spirit.*

We tithe because the Scriptures identify tithing as an appropriate standard, one way of expressing thanksgiving and faith. Other standards of giving lifted up by the Scriptures include that of the widow, who gave the two mites; Barnabas, who sold his field and brought the money and laid it at the apostles' feet; and Jesus, who gave His life. Each gave not a tenth, but all. Their gifts of all, like Abraham's and Jacob's gifts of the tenth, were given voluntarily, as acts of thanksgiving and expressions of faith. For "God loves a cheerful giver" (2Cor 9:7, NRSV).

At the close of Genesis 28, we see Jacob, the homeless young man, making a faith pledge to give God a tenth. By the opening of chapter 35, over thirty years have passed. We observe two things. First, God has kept the promise made at Bethel; second, Jacob has not. Since the time that Jacob rested his head on the stone in the middle of the night, he had become a very wealthy and powerful person. He had settled at Shechem with his large family. He owned herds of livestock and his land holdings were vast. God had kept every promise made to him. Jacob, however, had become so comfortable at Shechem that he had forgotten his promise to return to the spot of his heavenly visitation and build an altar there. He had forgotten that he had promised to give a tenth of all he had to God.

## The heart's altar

It's easy to become so comfortable at Shechem that we forget about the promises we made at Bethel. That's why I believe that every now and then we ought to rededicate ourselves anew to God. I believe in renewing our stewardship and reviewing our discipleship commitments. It's easy to forget the promises we made when we were scared and desperate or when we first felt the presence of Christ and the power of the Holy Spirit.

But though our memories are short, God's memory is long. God came to Jacob and said, "Arise, go up to Bethel and dwell there; and make there an altar to the God who appeared to you when you fled from your brother Esau" (Gn 35:1). Jacob then went to his household and said: "Put away the foreign gods that are among you and purify yourselves. Then let us arise and go up to Bethel, that I may make there an altar to the God who answered me in the day of my distress and has been with me wherever I have gone" (Gn 35: 2-3). Not only had Jacob forgotten his vow, but he had allowed strange gods to infiltrate his household. When we forget our word to God and God's word to us, it's easy to become infiltrated by strange gods, strange doctrines, and strange ideas. When we fail to remember the God of Bethel it's easy to start making allowances and permit things that we know we shouldn't. Incorrect and forgotten stewardship commitments lead to shady discipleship. When we fail to keep God first in our giving, God also ceases to be first in our living.

Maybe that's why the spiritual life of the church is sometimes so poor, and our stewardship has become so shaky. When the early church had needs, people sacrificed and gave as God had prospered them. Somewhere we started believing that we needed to get something back for what we gave other than the blessings that God has given and continues to give. We started pushing tickets, pushing tapes, and pushing shows. More sins and strange practices have entered the life of the church through some of our fund-raising. Let's go back to the Bethel of sound biblical

giving and stewardship where we pledge: "I'll erect an altar in my heart and give at least a tenth of all you give to me."

We need not only to return to our Bethels of biblical stewardship and tithing; we need to return to other Bethels of broken promises and forgotten vows. We need to go back to that Bethel and do as we promised. We were taught to give in the church and to the church with thanksgiving and faith. We were taught to respect God's church, God's preacher, and God's people.

Maybe, like Jacob, we were wandering around lost in life, confused and lonely, but the grace of God found us and comforted us in the day of our distress. We need to find our way back to Bethel.

When Jacob went back to Bethel, God met him there and called him again by his new name, Israel. When we return to Bethel, God will meet us there. We'll hear God speak afresh and receive a new vision and a new name.



## Bring the Full Tithe

Claire L. Eva, Assistant Director  
General Conference Stewardship Department

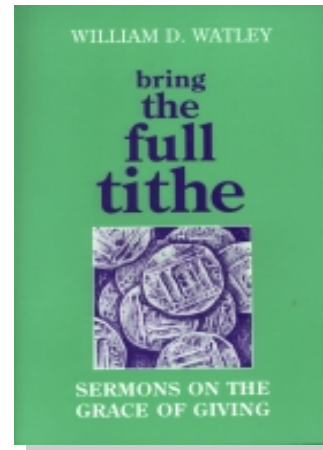
Dr. William D. Watley, pastor of St. James A.M.E. Church in Newark, New Jersey, is author of *From Mess to Miracle* and has co-authored *Preaching in Two Voices* and *Poems of a Son, Prayers of a Father*.

*Bring the Full Tithe* presents a series of 16 inspirational sermons on biblical tithing. *Dynamic Steward* has featured one of these sermons, “Let’s Go Back to Bethel,” in this month’s journal. Other titles include “The Beginning of Giving,” “The Grace of Giving,” “Honey from a Lion,” and “The Burden of Our Blessings.”

Dr. Watley draws from the experiences of such Bible personalities as Jacob and Esau, Abraham and Lot, and Paul. He helps the reader to face such questions as:

- What does the Bible say about tithing?
- Does tithing mean you will prosper and be free of debt?
- What do you mean, I don’t own what I earn?
- Do you give out of a sense of duty or love?

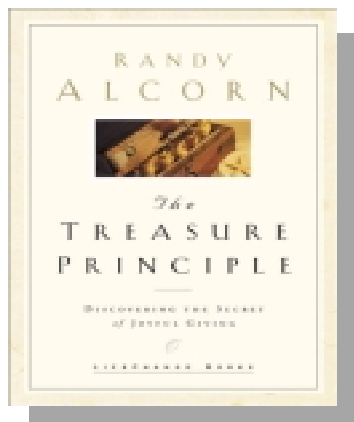
As I read, it was obvious to me that Dr. Watley speaks from his own experience and ministry and that he knows what it can mean personally, and for the body of Christ, to give systematically—offering a full tithe to God. I heartily recommend this book as one to have on hand as a truly inspirational resource.



by William D. Watley  
Judson Press  
Valley Forge, Pennsylvania  
1995 US \$13.00

## The Treasure Principle

Review by the staff of *Dynamic Steward*



by Randy Alcorn  
Multnomah Publishers  
Sisters, Colorado  
2001 US \$9.99

Bestselling author, founder, and director of Eternal Perspective Ministries, Randy Alcorn is also one of our feature writers in the sermon section of this issue of *Dynamic Steward*. He has authored numerous books, including the stewardship classic *Money, Possessions, and Eternity*.

As I read *The Treasure Principle* I was impressed with two things. Firstly, Randy believes and practices “what he preaches.” I was moved by his honest, personal journey in joyful giving. Secondly, I could not help but look more seriously at my own life and attitude toward giving.

The author lists six specific “treasure principle keys”: 1) God owns everything. I’m His money manager; 2) My heart always goes where I put God’s money; 3) Heaven, not Earth, is my home; 4) I should live not for the dot but for the line; 5) Giving is the only antidote to materialism; and 6) God prospers me not to raise my standard of living, but to raise my standard of giving.

The biblical passages are well chosen and spiritually meaningful. This small volume will challenge the Christian who is serious about allowing Christ to be Lord of all, which, of course, includes the material side of life.

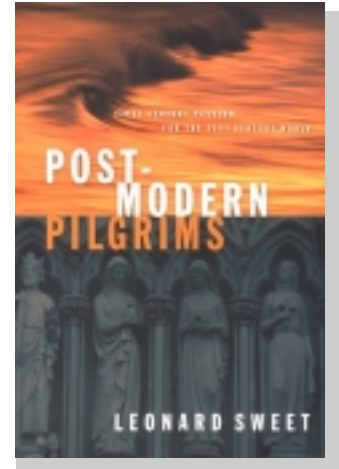
## *Post-Modern Pilgrims*

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

Leonard Sweet is a leading voice articulating historical Christianity in a post-modern culture. In this work he proposes a biblical view of tradition and the innovation created by the future. His analysis is accurate and comprehensive. He presents a systematic and detailed review of the trends and issues created by the ongoing changes in society and what is now known as the post-modern world.

Sweet's understanding is illustrated by multiple examples from business, education, recreation, and church. He even adapts his style to the post-modern mind's way of thinking, which is experiential, participatory, and image-driven. He uses the acronym EPIC as the outline for the entire book: E—experiential; P—participatory; I—image-driven; C—connected. Throughout the book, the author shows how biblical Christianity meets the needs of this transitional culture. He also exposes the challenges facing the contemporary church—a church which has allowed itself to be assimilated by the rationalistic traditions of the modern world.

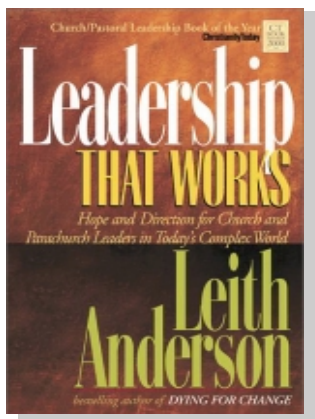
This is an excellent book for anyone wishing to explore contemporary issues and the relevance of Christianity to our world.



by Leonard Sweet  
Broadman & Holman Publishers  
Nashville, Tennessee  
2000 US \$19.99

## *Leadership That Works*

*Jean-Luc Lézeau, Associate Director  
General Conference Stewardship Department*



by Leith Anderson  
Bethany House  
Bloomington, Minnesota  
1999 US \$16.99

This book is about leadership that works at the crucial level: the local church. There is an abundance of materials specifically designed for those in organizational leadership. But Anderson is in love with the local church. Is it not at that level that the real work is done, after all? His book is a factual, practical guide for those who are trying to understand, let alone lead, a local congregation in the current changing times—a congregation that also faces a challenging future.

To be a good pastor, old ways are no longer valid. We all know that new generations are not responding in the same fashion as older generations, especially where faithfulness in tithes and offering are concerned. The question is, do we know exactly why? Anderson tries, with success, to answer these questions. It is not theory. Through his experience, he explains in such a way that others will be helped to be successful as well.

## GC Stewardship Website

It's here! You can now get online and take a look at our new website at [AdventistStewardship.com](http://AdventistStewardship.com). Although the site is still a "work in progress," you'll find much information there. The "Resources" section includes all of our *Dynamic Steward* (DS) journal issues in pdf format, Tithes and Offering Readings and special documents on biblical stewardship for your study. Soon the DS themes titles will be listed as well.

The "About Us" section includes our mission and vision statements, our statement of philosophy, and a section about our staff. You also find a list of FAQ—or Frequently Asked Questions, services we provide, links or sites we recommend, and how you can contact us. We appreciate your comments. Please let us know how we can best serve you.

## editorial

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

When I was a child I learned to appreciate the value of the material. Coming from a family of seven children, we had to learn to stretch a little a long way. The year I entered the seventh grade, as the nursery rhyme says, our "cupboard was bare." My father was ill, and my mother was doing her best to make ends meet.

I'll never forget Mom's efforts to make sure I had an outfit to wear that first day of school—finding a hand-me-down green skirt and white blouse, washing, starching, and ironing the outfit with love. The next year I began working and was able to pay for my clothes and help out with household expenses. I am grateful for the discipline I gained; it was rewarding to work hard and be recompensed for my efforts.

Two accomplished musicians—husband and wife—performed at the renowned Carnegie Hall. After much adulation and a standing ovation, the woman stepped up to the microphone and said, "We would like for you to know that we do not attribute any of our talent to God. Our performance is the result of our personal achievement alone—the product of many years of hard work and training."

I was amazed at the espoused belief of those musicians. But the unsettling and recurring reality I face is that I have uttered the same sentiments. "I worked hard for this, and it is mine!" I have partaken of the same faulty thinking. No matter the arena—when you've worked hard, it is easy to believe that the gifts are yours.

I've come to see things differently now. And I seek His Spirit to help me *internalize* this one thing: *Every* gift is from above. I thank God for life. For every gift. For every talent. I thank Him for the material blessings He lovingly places in my hands.

In reflecting on being His steward, I like to think about the home I "own." I put quotes around "own" because, even though my husband and I have the papers and are making payments, someday we will leave it. We will move away, or, should Christ not return before then, we will die. And the home, or land, will still be here to be occupied by another. It is His. "Occupy until I come," He says (Lk 19:13). "Share what I place in your keeping, as I continue to empty heaven for you."

I agree with Randy Alcorn in *The Treasure Principle*. Tithing is a good place to start. We are His children and care for His gifts. If our hearts are His, our treasures will follow.

This newsletter is produced by the Stewardship Department of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists. Your comments and questions are welcome. This publication may be duplicated as needed.



Exploring partnership with God

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