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Steward

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

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Volume 8 Number 1

An Attitude of Sharing

*Traci A. Lemon, Editorial Assistant
Sabbath School and Personal Ministries*

I had been thinking a lot about sharing. So when I was invited to write on the topic, I happily accepted. I thought it would be a quick, fun write, but after twelve days, “sharing” still wasn’t written. Then it dawned on me what was going on.

Recently I’ve been talking to God about what and how He wants me to share with others. And I’ve been waiting for an answer. The fact is—I’m missing the point. He has already given me the answer. God wants me to *share* Him and *live* Him by simply sharing myself! Waiting to know God’s answer actually keeps me from sharing right now.

When I’m not sharing, I’m not thinking about God but am absorbed with myself. Whenever I question my capacities and abilities, I am not hearing or believing that He is my Source. I make God “wrong” by doubting His promise to endow me the moment I need it. I make others “wrong” for believing I am capable and for trusting me to keep my word. Not exactly an attitude of sharing, is it?

What is sharing? The following distinctions come to my mind:

- *Sharing as having:* I have or can buy an object and give all or part of it to you. For example, I have some groceries, clothes, books, a gift ... for you.
- *Sharing as doing:* I am able to do some task for or with you. I will clean your house, help you wash dishes, mow the lawn, take you to church or to the doctor, teach you to read, write, cook....
- *Sharing as being:* I am with you, emotionally, in spirit, soul-to-soul. We share an emotion, express a feeling, listen, or are quiet with one another. We are just *being* together.

Sharing is more than personal—it is the very expression of who we are. We share our individuality, our vulnerability, and our love as the natural response to our God who loves us. No matter what is shared, it is never about me. It is about the God who created me and everyone He places in my life.

Jesus said: “Love one another, as I have loved you.... Love your neighbor as yourself” (Jn 13:34, 35; Mk 12:29-31). He would not commission us without empowering us. When we see what God has shared with us—His love, His power and His eternal kingdom—we can’t help but share. Don’t wait to share!

Compassion “Squelchers”

“Which of these three do you think was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of robbers?”

...”Go and do likewise.”

Jesus’ example of compassion

Jesus’ parable of the Good Samaritan epitomizes the loving way to help others. It also exposes some “compassion squelchers” that prevent us from reaching out to those in need (See Book Reviews, p. 14: *A Patchwork Heart: Ch. 6, “Compassion Squelchers”*). In this work the authors describe five compassion squelchers: 1) Fear, 2) Prejudice, 3) Time 4) Complacency and 5) Selfishness.

Read Luke 10:25-37 together in preparation for the following discussion.

1. Fear

Fear is a key reason we have for not extending compassion to others. It was common knowledge that the road to Jericho was unsafe. And seeing the dying man on the roadside was testimony to this danger. So one reason the priest and Levite passed by on the other side of the highway is most likely because they were afraid of being attacked.

Why did the Good Samaritan stop? Didn't he fear being attacked as well? Read Luke 10:33. What feeling prevailed over the Samaritan's fear?

2. Prejudice

A second compassion squelcher is prejudice. When we judge someone based upon their color, creed, or country, we show prejudice. Prejudice is a difficult barrier because most of us don't see our prejudices. Samaritans, paradoxically, were often ostracized because of prejudice. But this Samaritan knew what it felt like to be pre-judged and showed impartial concern for his fellow sufferer.

Discuss ways we show prejudice. Read Galatians 3:28. Can this text help us face this injustice?

3. Time

In one university study, the Good Samaritan story was “acted out” and the responses of three groups of students who were sent by an “injured” man were evaluated. Interestingly, the greatest number of people who stopped to help was from the third group. And what was the main contributing factor? Time! Two of the groups were told they must hurry to their next appointment; the third group was instructed to take its time.

Can taking time to show compassion be “scheduled”? Discuss examples of Jesus being approached by unexpected people in need.

4. Complacency

“Who is my neighbor?” The person we see who is in need. But it takes time and effort to help others. It is easy to sit back and let “someone else” do what God puts in our pathway to do. But what a blessing we receive as we help others!

5. Selfishness

We don't like to think we are selfish. But when we “pass by,” placing our priorities above someone's real need, we are being self-centered. Selfishness is a battle we cannot and do not have to fight alone. Christ will help us every day, as we give our lives and daily plans to Him.



Halley's Bible *Kid Notes*

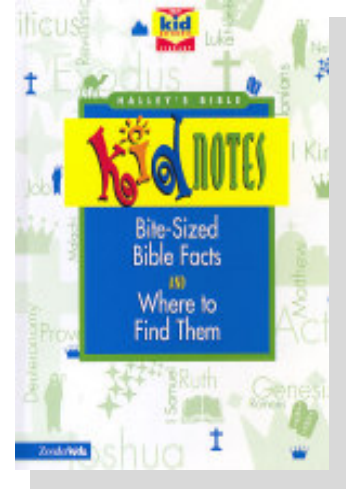
Reviewed by the Staff of Dynamic Steward

This resource, *Halley's Bible Kidnotes*, is a simplified version of the best-selling *Halley's Bible Handbook*. *Kidnotes* is based on the New International Version for children. The subtitle for the book is "Bite-Sized Bible Facts and Where to Find Them," and that is just what it is!

There is a friendly illustration with the introduction to each Bible book that many children will want to color. Following the introduction is a page of facts—the writer, the place and people of the book, why the book is important, and a list of the book's stories, with the corresponding chapter and verse. The volume also includes:

- Biblical character sketches
- Verse-by-verse references
- Study maps & charts
- An easy-to-use index

Kidnotes is recommended for children, ages six to ten. We would raise that to begin at seven or eight, because of the level of some of the vocabulary. This colorful volume would make a nice gift!



by Dr. Henry Halley,
with Jean Syswerda
Zondervan
Grand Rapids, Michigan
2003 US \$14.99

quotes

Sharing . . .

The best portion of a good man's life—His little nameless, unremembered acts of kindness and of love.—*William Wordsworth*

No person was ever honored for what they received. Honor has been the reward for what they gave.—*Calvin Coolidge*

The great thing about serving the poor is that there is no competition.—*Eugene Rivers*

The world cannot always understand one's profession of faith, but it can understand service.—*Ian Maclaren*

The most acceptable service of God is doing good to man.—*Benjamin Franklin*

Better to do a kindness near at home than walk a thousand miles to burn incense.—*The Defender*

Christians may not see eye-to-eye, but they can walk arm-in-arm.—*Brotherhood Journal*

A Christian man is the most free lord of all, and subject to none; a Christian man is the most dutiful servant of all, and subject to everyone.—*Martin Luther*

If but the least and frailest, let me be evermore numbered with the truly free who find Thy service perfect liberty!—*John Greenleaf Whittier*

What is Sharing All About?

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

It's mine!

When was the first time someone tried to get you to share? “Johnny, you have two apples and Bobby doesn’t have any. Don’t you want to share?” How often have you heard a statement like this? Why is sharing so challenging?

Sharing comes easily for a very few people, but for most of us, it is neither easy nor simple. Our natural sense of ownership says “It’s mine and I want to keep it!” Sharing means giving up something that is ours. And a change must occur within us for sharing to become a natural part of living.

Sharing can’t be forced. It cannot come from guilt or manipulation. Christ-like sharing is a natural part of a transformed life! It comes from a ministering lifestyle that reaches out to others to share God’s resources.

He shared in our lives

We can learn a great deal about sharing from the life of Jesus. He began by coming to share in our lives. John states, “And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth” (Jn 1:14, ESV). The “word picture” here is of Someone who became one with us, who “pitched his tent with ours.”

Hebrews 4:15 says that He was “tempted in every way, just as we are.” So we see that before He could share the blessings of eternal life with us, He had to share *in* our lives. In fact, His sharing reaches to an even deeper level. He identifies fully with us:

Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross (Php 2:5-8, ESV).

He shares His resources with us

He also shares His resources with us. Paul says, “And my God will supply every need of yours according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus” (Php 4:19, ESV).

As we look at Jesus’ life, we discover that true sharing can only come through and from our relationship with Him. This relationship puts everything else in the right perspective. We realize that we are managing His resources. Things do not belong to us. They are His to be used to His glory. How can we make this practical? Here are five principles to help in learning to share:

- 1. Accept the wonder of your position in Christ.** All heaven’s resources are yours to use in His kingdom. His resources are unlimited. Recognize the abundance of His blessings, especially the physical or material ones.
- 2. Surrender your sense of ownership.** As Christians, we can learn to hold our possessions loosely, recognizing they really belong to God. They are to be shared as He leads us through His Spirit.



3. See others as Jesus did. We can learn to see those around us through the eyes of Jesus Christ.

4. Identify with people around you. Put yourself in the place of others and recognize the solidarity we have as humans—each of us is in need of salvation! Try to see another's need through your eyes.

5. Ask the Spirit to guide you in using His resources. Look for opportunities to help others, asking the Holy Spirit to make you sensitive to their needs.

Sharing extends from a life intimately lived in relationship with God. Yes! We want Johnny to share. But more than this, we want Johnny to discover who he truly is in Jesus, and how he can learn to live a generous life that is guided by God's Spirit.

Sharing comes easily for a very few people, but for most of us, it is neither easy nor simple. Our natural sense of ownership says "It's mine and I want to keep it!" Sharing means giving up something that is ours.

Look for the upcoming April issue of DS on the topic of Stewardship and the Environment! Contributions are being accepted for sermon articles. E-mail evac@gc.adventist.org.

stewardship window more from the director's desk ...



IAD Stewardship Institute Held in Miami

From Sunday, September 14 through Wednesday, September 17, the Inter-American Division held a well-planned Stewardship Institute, under the direction of Elder Mario Nino, Stewardship Director of that division.

Institute presenters were Elder Benjamin Maxson, who spoke on the topic of Strategic Stewardship Planning; Elder Angel Rodriguez discussed Tithing in the Writings of Ellen G. White, Tithing in the New Testament, and The Theology of Stewardship; and Mrs. Claire Eva presented seminars on the Good Sense Budget Course and how to design "Eye-Catching Newsletters and Brochures." Elder George W. Brown completed the group by giving valuable presentations on the topics of preaching and how to study the Bible.

Welcome, Mary Taylor!

Mary Taylor joins us in the Stewardship Department as the new Editorial Assistant to Claire Eva and Jean-Luc Lezeau.

A native of Dayton, Ohio, Mary is married and has four adult children. She has a B.A. degree in Business Administration and comes to the department with a wealth of knowledge and experience in writing, supervision, and administration.

Mary has strong interpersonal skills and an ability to establish a good rapport with people. She is currently working on her master's degree at the University of Johns Hopkins.

Loving the Unlovely

Ken W. Smith

President and Founder

Christian Stewardship Ministries

Contact Ken at: www.csmin.org

The needs of others

What is really important? What does God require of His children? Jesus says those who will receive His Father's blessing at the final judgment are those who helped others in need—the hungry, the thirsty, the unclothed, the sick, the prisoners (Mt 25:34-46).

It is clear that God puts a high premium on ministering to the needs of others—particularly those who find themselves in difficult circumstances. And those who do help others are going to be blessed “out of their socks!”

Failure—humanly speaking

Over the years, my wife Pat and I have invested in the lives of several individuals and families who met the criteria Jesus laid out. A single mother of three with an addiction to alcohol. A family of seven, including five lovely children and a father who was “allergic” to work. A homeless grandmother and her three homeless grandchildren. An ex-offender who chose to return to prison. A homeless man with a heartrending story that upon further investigation turned out to be a complete con!

From a human point of view, our efforts with every single one of these hurting people could only be graded a failure. None of them appeared to benefit in the long term from our help. They all maintained or returned to their misery. The single mom ran out on her lease, costing us several thousand dollars, in addition to the time and money we invested moving her from a filthy unfurnished apartment to a nice, clean, fully-furnished one. The mother of five wrote to our board of directors to denounce me. The homeless grandmother ultimately lost her grandchildren to the child protective services and remained homeless. The prisoner told the judge he would rather go back to jail—for seven years—than do what he had promised to do as a condition of probation! And the homeless man took what he could get and then disappeared into the anonymity of the inner city.

Despite these apparent failures, we are convinced we were successful in each instance. Why? Because we believed we did what Jesus wanted us to do.

What determines success

Since beginning our ministry, we have learned a basic spiritual truth that runs completely counter to the wisdom of the world. Success is not dependent on rescuing the people God places in our care. Success cannot be measured by how much time or money we commit to their well-being. Success is not in seeing their lives change, although we hope and pray for that to happen!

Success is purely and simply doing what God wants us to do when He wants us to do it. When we love the unlovely, when we respond to God's love and His call to help others, we succeed.

It depends on how you measure it

Reading a biography of Mother Teresa has been very helpful to me in recognizing this spiritual truth. Mother Teresa believed God's call on her life was to live among and minister to the poorest of the poor, spreading God's love to everyone she met. She spent many years caring for terminally-ill, impoverished outcasts, many of whom had just weeks, days, or hours to live. She cleaned their vomit, washed their sores, held their hands and, in many cases, provided the only love they every experienced.

SCRIPTURE :
Matthew 25:40

From a human point of view, our efforts with every single one of these hurting people could only be graded a failure. None of them appeared to benefit in the long term from our help. They all maintained or returned to their misery.

One man she cared for had never slept in a bed his entire life until she placed him in one so he could die peacefully, with a smile on his face.

My wife and I are certainly not Mother Teresa. There are many people and situations neither of us could handle. We don't go looking for what we cannot do. We have learned to *go looking* for what God wants and equips us to do. The more we look, the more we find, and the more we are blessed. Not because we necessarily enjoy the company of the people, but because we enjoy doing what God wants us to do, while helping someone Jesus called "one of the least of these brothers of mine" (Mt 25:40).

Maybe you've been disappointed in the past because your efforts to help others haven't resulted in the hoped for changes in their lives. I encourage you to measure your assistance not in terms of the response of those you help, but as your obedient response to a loving God. We worship a God who continues to seek out His children and offer them chance after chance, often through the hands of those who are already committed to serve Him.

You'll know him when you meet him

If you sense God calling you to reach out to help others more, begin to look around. Maybe your mission is the stranger in the church—the newcomer who feels too awkward to ask for help or companionship, a helping hand or even just an introduction. Or maybe it's your neighbor who needs an invitation to join you at church. If you're not exposed to the less fortunate or the disadvantaged in your daily life and you believe God is asking you to help them, call some of the organizations that deal with the homeless, the hungry, or those in or released from prison. They can help you help others.

I invite you to join with our family this year in loving "one of the least of Jesus' brothers." Ask God to put a person in your path that He wants you to reach out to. And ask Him to help you recognized that person when you see him or her. Not only will you receive the blessing Jesus promised, but you'll be guaranteed to be less concerned about your own challenges—they will pale in comparison.



The Good Life

*B. M. Ruguri, Executive Secretary
East-Central Africa Division*

An investment in human life

In 1937 Charles Dickens described the plight of orphans in Victorian England in his novel, *Oliver Twist*. Not long after that a German immigrant in Bristol, England, named George Muller decided to do something about it. He resolved to create an orphan house where children could have their physical needs met and also receive loving, spiritual nurture.

Mr. Muller had no connections and money for such a grand enterprise. But he had an extraordinary faith in God. Therefore, he asked his Lord to provide 1,000 pounds to start this ministry to the poor. He took the words of James seriously: “Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world” (Jm 1:27).

As word got around, a few shillings began to come in, along with some plates, basins, and blankets. But no large donations arrived. Muller was tempted to doubt that the project would ever get off the ground.

Then he received the first breakthrough gift—a note for one hundred pounds. However, when he found out who sent it, Muller was reluctant to accept the money. The donor was a woman who earned only about three and half shillings a week doing needlework. Mr. Muller, a man of uncompromising integrity, wondered if this poor woman had made a spontaneous donation without really considering the cost. So he paid her a visit to see whether he could change her mind.

The woman told him that she’d been left some money after the death of her father. The hundred pounds she sent to Muller had come from that small legacy her father had left. Seeing how modestly the woman lived, Muller asked her if she still wanted to reconsider.

This was her reply: “The Lord Jesus has given His last drop of blood for me. Should I not give all the money I have? I will give all the money I possess, rather than the orphan house not be established.” This unnamed believer made an investment in the kingdom of Christ, an investment in human life.

Muller not only established his orphanage, but went on to build several others. Funds kept coming in—without him ever begging for money. During his 63-year career, Muller cared for some ten thousand children. Many lives were touched. His faith in God’s provision paid off handsomely. No child ever went without a meal, and no orphanage bill ever went unpaid.

That woman’s initial investment of one hundred pounds expanded incredibly. It was a good venture. Investing in God’s kingdom always is the best. It’s the sure bet that turns losers into winners.

Everybody wins

Do you know what the main problem with gambling is? Almost everybody must lose. There has to be an overwhelming number of losers in order for there to be a few winners, maybe even one winner. A *Washington Post* reporter recently figured out that you’re seven times more likely to get hit by lightning than become a millionaire through the lottery. Gambling can only thrive if there are enough losers.

Investing in the kingdom of God, however, is a different matter. Everyone who turns in a bid to advance the kingdom of God wins. There are no losers. Listen to this promise Jesus shared in Luke 6:38: “Give and it will be given you, good measure,

SCRIPTURE:
Matthew 6:19-21

pressed down, shaken together, running over, they will pour into your lap. For by your standard of measure it will be measured to you in return.”

Every time we invest in human lives, every time we invest in the kingdom of heaven, we lay up for ourselves treasures in heaven. That’s what Jesus tells us. Now it’s important to make sure that we are investing in God’s kingdom. We have a responsibility to invest as wisely as we can.

There are many faithful stewards who are clearly helping the needy and plainly expanding God’s work in this world. Jesus’ promise is that when we give, we receive in the same measure. Everyone who invests in God’s work comes out a winner. And that’s true however much or however little we have to give.

Even when we give two mites like the poor widow, as long as it is given from a full heart, we shall not lose our reward. Jesus said that if we give a glass of water to someone in His name, we shall never lose our reward. And when we invest in heaven, our investment will grow abundantly. It is for this reason Paul could declare when he came to the end of his impressive apostolic career: “Yet I am not ashamed, because I know whom I have believed, and I am convinced that he is able to guard what I have entrusted to him for that day.” (2Tm 1:12)

Beloved, when we invest in heaven our God will guard that which we have entrusted to Him, and we will enjoy the gains and the interest when our God establishes His everlasting kingdom that will never end. No one who invests in heaven and lays the treasure therein will face bankruptcy.

An extraordinary story

Corrie ten Boom, author of *The Hiding Place*, tells a wonderful story about her mother’s final years of life. The elderly Mrs. ten Boom suffered a massive stroke that left her paralyzed and virtually speechless. The only words she could speak were “Yes” and “No,” and the name “Corrie.”

Each morning Mrs. ten Boom would sit by the window of their home which overlooked a busy street. People she had known for years would pass by that window; people she had tended when sick or encouraged when in trouble. As Corrie wrote, “Mama’s love had always been the kind that acted itself out with a soup pot and sewing basket.”

After a few hours Corrie would hear her name spoken. She would look into her mother’s face, realizing that she had seen someone she could not name. So Corrie played a game of twenty questions with her mother. Was it someone from church? Mrs. ten Boom would answer “Yes” or “No.” Was it a neighbor? Finally, Corrie would narrow it down, and then began calling out names until she heard her mother’s delighted “Yes!” And then she would realize—“Oh, it is her birthday” or “Oh, his wife is sick!”

Corrie would then write that person a note, telling them that Mrs. ten Boom was thinking about them, and wishing them well. At the close of the letter, Corrie would place the pen in her mother’s stiffened fingers to help her sign her name. That angular scrawl was soon recognized and loved all over the town of Haarlem.

Mrs. ten Boom sat at that window day after day, unable to move, her worn hands folded helplessly on her lap. But still, she poured out her love to the people walking by on the street below. She was still giving. She shared her life. That is how she had lived, and that is how she wanted to die.

Each morning Mrs. ten Boom would sit by the window of their home which overlooked a busy street. People she had known for years would pass by that window; people she had tended when sick or encouraged when in trouble.

We have an important decision to make about what we are going to invest in and where we are going to invest. Are we going to invest in human lives, in the kingdom of God, or are we going to take a long shot at that pot of gold? The pot of gold may make us rich, but we will only be living for ourselves. It is Jesus who warned that when we try to save our lives through self-preservation, we only lose them. The only way to truly save our life is by investing it in His kingdom—guided and motivated by the values of Jesus that are enthroned at the very center of our heart.

It is then we will become winners—by sharing ourselves and our resources—“pressed down, shaken together, and running over” into kingdom business. This is the good life.



Four Circles of Spiritual Life

*Loren Seibold, Senior Pastor
Worthington SDA Church
Worthington, Ohio*

1. The intimate circle

Ask any Christian and he will tell you he is seeking a strong and well-rounded spiritual life. What many don't realize however, is that there is more to a strong spiritual life than a set of personal spiritual disciplines. Our relationship to God is lived in the context of a bigger world. I picture this as a target-shaped diagram I call "The Four Circles of Your Spiritual Life."

The first circle is the most personal one. It represents the part of your life where you have a personal relationship with God. In this circle are your needs and your prayers about them, your love for God as you respond to His love for you, temptations and your response to them, attitudes, spiritual disciplines, your communication with God and His with you. In short, it is the most private and intimate part of your spiritual life. Your beliefs make up part of that picture, as they relate to your relationship to God. Your behavior and choices go into this circle. This is what Jesus was talking about when He prayed this prayer for His followers: "And this is eternal life, that they know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom thou hast sent" (Jn 17:3).

This part of your spiritual life is an individual experience. When you lay on your deathbed, as your heart slows and your thinking goes dark, this is the circle you inhabit alone with God. At that point, God is not going to say, "Was your family faithful to me? Was your church faithful to me?" He will ask, "Do you know me?" His saving relationship is with you, personally.

"God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, that

whosoever believes on him will not perish, but have eternal life" (Jn 3:16). That pronoun "whosoever" is singular and individual. You have the same chance for a saving relationship with God as the man or woman next to you. But you will arrive at the final judgment on your own track and yours alone, and nothing your pastor can do or the church can do is going to make something happen to you that you haven't taken personal responsibility for.

2. A godly family

The second circle is just a little larger than the first one. It is that part of your spiritual life that encompasses your family. I represent this sphere with the advice of St. Paul in Ephesians 5 and 6. A godly family, says Paul, is one in which wives and husbands love one another, in which children obey their parents, and their parents don't diminish and belittle them to the point of anger. The first verse in the passage summarizes the right attitude: "Be subject to one another out of reverence for Christ." The members of a Christian family should be, as Christ was, humble and willing to defer to one another, and of course that happens best among people who have a personal connection with God.

We want our children to know God, and we try to help them to. We want our marriages to reflect the Lord's love. Yet this circle differs from the first. No matter what you do, you can only lend your influence to your family. Your children are going to have to face God on their own, just as you do.

Sadly, this is too frequently a troubled circle of our lives. As years pass, as this old world becomes more troubled, so do our families. Our families, too, need a strengthening context.

3. Together as congregation

That's the reason for the third circle: our life together in a congregation. Jesus told His disciples (Jn 13:35) "By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another." A church is not a church just because we have doctrines in common, but because the people in the church have learned to love one another. And I'll go so far as to say that churches that are consumed by politics and backbiting and infighting don't have the right to bear the title of "church."

This circle actually has two levels. Part of our energy is directed to nurturing those already in the church, those who are part of us and whom we love. The other part of this circle is demonstrated when we stand at the door and beckon others to come in—or when we go out and get them and walk them in beside us. Remember this description of the church in Acts, chapter 2: "And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved." What can we do to add to our number day by day those who are being saved?

4. A Christian in the world

This leads naturally to the final circle of your spiritual life: your being a Christian in the world. Remember some of Jesus' final instruction before He returned to heaven: "You shall be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria and to the end of the earth" (Ac 1:8).

Please notice, He didn't ask, "Would you be so kind as to take the assignment to be my witnesses?" There was no choice. If they said something about Him, they witnessed of Him; if they said nothing, that was a witness too. Their actions, whether

directly religious or not, were a witness of Him. Whatever the world thought of them, it thought of Him. And whatever it thought of Him, it thought of His church.

Ironically, we who work for the church may be the ones who have the least exposure to the world outside of it. Most laypeople know more people outside their church than the pastor does. Those you relate to your friends and relatives and neighbors—those you know from clubs and organizations—on all of these people you, as a Christian and a Seventh-day Adventist Christian, have some influence for good or ill.

You can choose (and I hope you do) to speak openly of your faith, to tell people that you are a Seventh-day Adventist Christian and be proud of it. I've come to realize, however, that some people are a little ashamed of their faith, as though it's something you do privately, and other people don't need to know the details. It was never intended to be that. Ideally, your church should be as natural to talk about and be proud of as your favorite football team, and you ought to feel as comfortable inviting someone to church as you would to a game.

But whether you witness openly or not, you do witness. Who you are, what you do, how you act, how you speak, how you do business—that's your witness. That being the case, I ask with Peter, "What manner of persons ought ye to be in all holy conversation and godliness?" (2P 3:11)

I had a church member once who managed to "vaccinate" an entire small town against the church. He went around witnessing and at the same time ripping people off, not paying bills, and coming on to every woman he met. It was a remarkably effective inoculation technique. When we went ingathering, people said, "If you would have that guy for a member, I won't have anything to do with you." I've had more positive examples since, praise God—people who show up at church and say, "We wanted to come by and worship with you because we have so much admiration for one of your church members."

Inside out and outside in

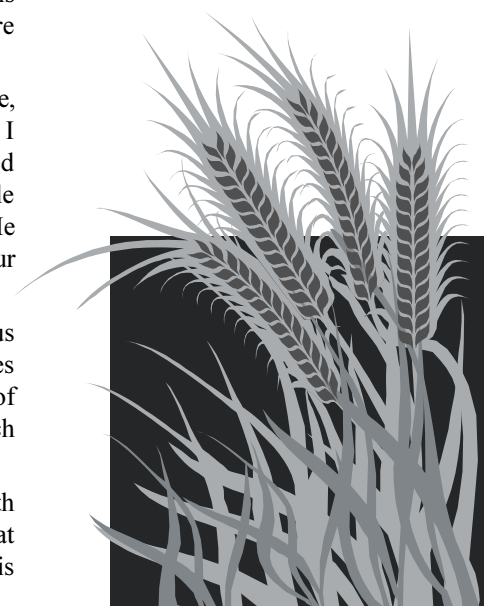
So one way or another, God's reputation is on the line with each of us, and as it turns out, so is our salvation. For Jesus said, "Everyone who acknowledges me before men, I also will acknowledge before my Father who is in heaven" (Mt 10:32).

All of us live in each of these circles. They're nested within one another. Influence, it turns out, flows both ways: from the center out, as well as from the outside in. I heard recently of a medical technique where doctors implant the medicine you need in a tiny capsule inside your skin, and little by little it radiates out into your whole body, allowing healing to occur. So it is with Christ. You draw near to Jesus, He infuses you with spiritual power, and that radiates outward to your family, to your church, and to your world.

It flows the other way too. Strong influences for good in the world around us protect and strengthen our relationship with God. The right kind of friends nurtures your interest in church. A good church exerts a strong influence on the happiness of the family that attends it. A family that loves God exerts a strong hold on each individual within it—even those with spiritual struggles.

To have a strong hold on God, you must nurture your heart relationship with Him; but you must also place yourself in a context (such as regular attendance at church, nurtured by positive Christian friendships) that will strengthen you. What is your influence in all of the circles of your spiritual life?

I had a church member once who managed to vaccinate an entire small town against the church....When we went ingathering, people said, "If you would have that guy for a member, I won't have anything to do with you."



The Fellowship of the Unashamed

Dr. Wilber Alexander

*Clinical Professor of Family Medicine
Loma Linda University*

Embarrassed

Norman Rockwell is famous for his intimate sketches of the common folk of America. Many of his masterpieces have been featured on the cover of the *Saturday Evening Post*.

One such cover by Rockwell is a scene in a country store in Anytown, USA. In the picture you see the usual store furnishings: the counter, cash register, and shelving. Also pictured are many items carried by enterprising store owners: canned goods, personal effects, and hardware items. There are tables and a soda fountain at the entrance of the store. And seated at one of the tables, close to the plate glass window, is a little old lady with eyeglasses. Her gray hair is neatly tucked under a ribboned hat and her shoulders are draped with a knit shawl. A small boy at her side, obviously a grandson dressed in his Sunday best, has a paper napkin tucked into his stiff shirt collar. You can feel great silence within the picture.

Several unshaven men dressed in soiled and ragged work clothes are staring wide-eyed and a bit sheepishly in the direction of the lady and boy. There, in the presence of those in the store and open to the gaze of those passing by, this saintly soul and little one sit with bowed heads and folded hands saying grace before they eat their sandwiches.

The letter response to this picture was amazing. Some people made sarcastic comments, but many wrote to express their admiration for this “old-fashioned” Christian witness. Their letters also confessed pangs of conscience for being “ashamed to fly the colors of Christianity within their own circle of influence.”

The temptation to be ashamed

The temptation to be ashamed of Christianity is common to Christians today. By “ashamed” I mean the hesitancy to be labeled as spiritual, the timidity in standing for principle in the face of possible ridicule, the apologetic attitude toward Christian belief, and the reluctance to speak with conviction of the power of Christ.

We are tempted to be ashamed in several ways. Living at a time when intellectualism is a recognized status symbol, some Christians are tempted to fear that the simple gospel, the old, old story, does not have that virility of thought that will commend it to inquiring minds. This tempts us to try to put the gospel into an esoteric fabric to try to make it intellectually respectable.

Because not many people the world sees as great are found within the ranks of Christianity, because Christianity has always moved up from the lower social strata and appeals mainly to the common man, Christians are afraid that the simple gospel just belongs to simple people, and no serious effort is made to reach the elite who help make up the “all” who have sinned and come short of the glory of God (Rm 3:23).

Even with the passing of years, the offense of the cross has not ceased. Fear of what other people think of Christians, a natural sensitivity to ridicule, dampens the spirit and tempts the witness of some to silence. These fearful ones feel that they dare not become zealous or enthusiastic or get “off center” a bit, because they might be labeled as fanatics. So they are tempted to live a quiet, ethical existence and never witness to what is going on inside.

False humility tempts others to be ashamed of the gospel. Many feel that they have no talent or personality for witnessing. If they do witness, it would only look like a proud parade of piety. And we are tempted to discredit our own experience and think we are unworthy to witness for Christ. We have all of these temptations in common, and there are more. There are also specific reasons why your own witness is not more spontaneous, more evident, and more consistent.

Ashamed of Jesus?

The temptation to be ashamed, apologetic, or reluctant raises some serious questions for serious Christians. Can we continue to be embarrassed or silent in a world that is going over the “dizzy edge of disaster” while it so openly disregards Christ and His words? Can we be ashamed when it is so apparent that man, with all of his brilliant attainments, has not yet discovered a way to govern the selfish human heart?

As Christians, can we afford to be ashamed while we hold the knowledge of the only way humanity can be rescued for eternity? Can we ever be ashamed when we know how much God counts on our personal witness in reaching the lost?

As we think of the degree of ashamedness that tends to weaken our Christian witness, will you thoughtfully note these words of Jesus: “For whoever is ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of him will the Son of man also be ashamed, when he comes in the glory of his Father with the holy angels” (Mk 8:38 RSV).

At this crisis time in earth’s history, God is calling all professing Christians into a fellowship of the unashamed. This fellowship began in dead earnest on the day of Pentecost, ten days after Jesus ascended into heaven as Victor over sin and death. It began on the day He poured out His Holy Spirit in fullness on His disciples. When those men and women walked down the stairs of the upper room and moved out into

The temptation to be ashamed, apologetic, or reluctant raises some serious questions for serious Christians.

Judea and Samaria and the uttermost parts of the world, they knew they had the greatest thing on earth, and they could not wait to share it!

The power of the witness of one person in that first fellowship led to the conversion of Paul. This proud Pharisee was not able to forget the witness of the unashamed Stephen, and after Damascus Gate, he too joined the Fellowship of the Unashamed, becoming its most powerful witness. When we read of Paul's witness, we cannot help wondering what made him so bold, so unashamed.

In the book of Romans, you will find three short verses in chapter one that are the essence of his witness: "I am under obligation both to Greeks and to barbarians, both to the wise and to the foolish: so I am eager to preach the gospel to you also who are in Rome. For I am not ashamed of the gospel: it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who has faith, to the Jew first and also to the Greek" (Rm 1:14-16 RSV).

1 "I am under obligation." From the time his eyes opened in the house on Strait Street, Paul began to live on the "red" side of life's ledger. He knew he was a great debtor. The lift of this great obligation to God brought dignity and meaning to his life. He no longer saw mankind. This was too general. He no longer saw *just* the chosen ones of Israel. This was too narrow. He saw individual people of all social, educational, religious, and financial levels—people desperately needing to know they had a Friend and a Savior in Jesus Christ.

2 "I am eager—I am ready." There is a note of continual spontaneity here that speaks of Paul's willingness to witness. This Jew plans to go to Rome, the seat of imperial power, with all of its odds and ends of humanity, degraded, depraved, brutal, and shameless, and he is certain that his witness can conquer for Christ.

3 "I am not ashamed of the Gospel." There is a wonderful boldness in these words. They are spoken by an insignificant Jew whose heart is full of faith in Jesus Christ as the world's only Savior.

Paul was not an impressive person and, by his own admission, he was not an orator. His fellow Jews considered him an apostate and despised him. He had been persecuted, driven out of city after city, stoned, and left for dead. Yet he spoke for Christ and was eager to speak again.

The gospel Paul preached was abhorred by both Jewish and Greek cultures. How could it fare any better in Rome? In spite of all the opposition, ridicule, and persecution, Paul says "I am not ashamed of the Gospel"

In the book of Romans Paul speaks of the universality of sin, the terrific burden of guilt, the foreboding outlook of penalty, the impossibility of man to rescue himself or to live a righteous life, the incarnation, life, and death of the Lord as a sacrifice for sin, the hand of faith grasping the offered help, the indwelling of the Holy Spirit in believing souls, the admission of man into a life of peace, victory, and sonship, and the saint's place in the Father's love from which nothing can separate.

To Paul, this gospel was not just a philosophical system. It had the power of divine love in it. It held eternal truth. In his witness he lifted the apparent weakness of the cross above all the power of the divine world. The God-Man, the embodiment of divine power hanging helplessly there on the cross, suffering, dying in agony—the thought was all so strange, so touching, so conquering.

Paul believed wholeheartedly that wherever the gospel found believing hearts, it became a power to remove all obstacles to man's redemption. He never ceased to marvel at this gospel power that worked in the lives of those to whom it had been

preached. Converts multiplied. Men of all walks of life found freedom and peace. He was convinced that nothing and no one else, was able to save. There was more.

4 "I am not ashamed . . . for I know whom I have believed. . ." (2Tm 1:12). Paul knew the power of the uplifted Son of God in his own life. And because he was thoroughly convinced of the truth of the gospel of the cross and had personally experienced its blessing and power, he could witness unashamed.

Christians Anonymous

These words from Scripture are bold and searching, probing into silences, compromises, evasions, ashamedness—into all attempts to be "Christians Anonymous." The Bible is calling today for each Christian to join the Fellowship of the Unashamed. We are called to:

- A personal salvation that is certain of God's power, so that we have something personal to share with conviction.
- A growing experience in the things of God. John says . . . "that which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon and touched with our hands concerning the word of life, these truths we proclaim" (1J 1:1-4).
- A surrender to the working and infilling of God's Holy Spirit.
- A genuine concern for every man, woman, and child who is without Christ.
- A commitment to witness for Christ wherever we are—in word and deed—flooding the world with the message.

We are called again to determine not to know anything except Jesus Christ and Him crucified. So whether men and women will listen or not, they will know that there has been an unashamed witness among them.



A Patchwork Heart

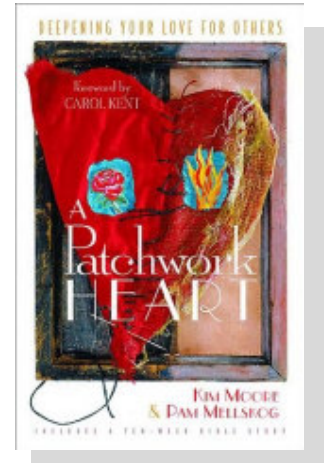
*Reviewed by Claire L. Eva, Assistant Director
General Conference Stewardship Department*

What is a “patchwork heart”? In their work bearing the same name, authors Kim Moore and Pam Mellskog begin with an allegory to illustrate what it means to have such a heart.

The book that follows this simple allegory is rich with meaning and stories which illustrate the important journey toward deepening your love for others. How can you share with others if you have little to share? The turning point for Kim Moore seems to have been her own tragic personal losses she willingly shares with her readers.

After sharing two biblical meanings for “compassion,” the authors conclude: “This is great news for the compassionately challenged.... We learn ... we don’t possess enough love and concern within ourselves to continually give to the people in our lives. But God has an unending amount of compassion that He is more than willing to share” (p. 38).

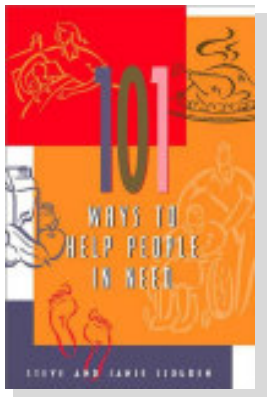
Each chapter offers a new aspect toward learning to become a more compassionate Christian and “grace giver.” This is a wonderful book to help you as you grow a “patchwork heart” that cares for others. (For more information, see page 2, Application.)



by Kim Moore & Pam Mellskog
NavPress
Colorado Springs, Colorado
2002 US \$8.00

101 Ways to Help People in Need

Reviewed by the staff of Dynamic Steward



by Steve and Janie Sjogren
NavPress
Colorado Springs, Colorado
2002 US\$ 8.00

Have you been thinking a lot about ways to help people in need but are not sure where to start? This small volume is packed with ideas—101 to be exact! If you feel the need to find new and creative ways to reach out to your community, this book is for you.

The book is divided into four levels: 1) Relief—Meeting an Immediate Need, 2) Reconciliation—Seeing People Get Right with God and One Another, 3) Reconstruction—Creating New Economic and Life Opportunities, and 4) Relocation—Becoming World Changers.

Just a few ways on the list are: Nail Care, Backpacks for the Homeless, Adopt a Prisoner’s Family, Potluck in the Park, Nursing Home Pet Parade, Literacy Programs and many more. What is especially helpful is the counsel that comes with the list—inspirational wisdom and sound suggestions for how to help. Look for other books by the Steve Sjogren—*Seeing Beyond Church Walls* and *Conspiracy of Kindness* are just two!

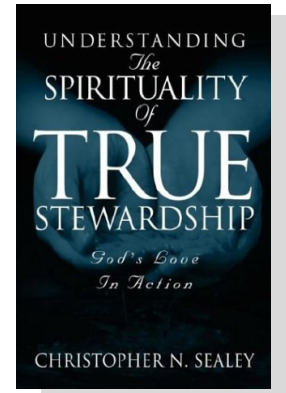
Understanding the Spirituality of True Stewardship

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

Christopher Sealey makes a worthwhile contribution to stewardship thought with this book. He seeks to present a broad approach to stewardship as a lifestyle, built on a solid biblical foundation. His two chapters on the Levitical system of offerings provide detailed research and application of the various offerings and their relevance to stewardship thinking.

The author's chapter on "Stewardship as an Evangelical Tool" presents a strong focus on salvation and the forgiveness of sin. However, he appears to make stewardship a requirement for salvation rather than an outgrowth of the saving experience. Sealey states, "Our understanding of the principles of true stewardship is critical to our salvation. Our adherence to those principles determines our eligibility for eternal life."

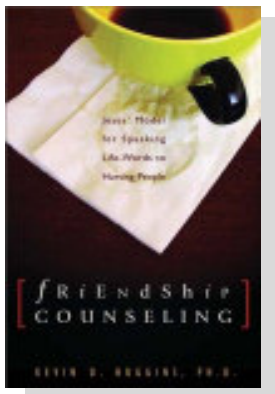
I also wish that Sealey could have seen giving as an outgrowth or application of the stewardship relationship with God. He appears to narrow too much of stewardship down to giving and thus appears to contradict the book's title. On the other hand, there is a great deal of good in this book. His last two chapters focus on a practical application of stewardship to church life. These are especially valuable and can be very helpful to an effective stewardship program in the local congregation. Find the author's website at <http://www.chrissealey.com>.



by Christopher N. Sealey
Xulon Press
Longwood, Florida
2003 US \$12.99

Friendship Counseling

*Reviewed by Jean-Luc Lézeau, Associator Director
General Conference Stewardship Department*



by Kevin D. Huggins
NavPress
Colorado Springs, Colorado
2003 US\$ 19.99

Do you ever feel embarrassed because you don't know what to say when a friend is telling you of the pain he is experiencing? Kevin D. Huggin's book will help when you are stalling and sputtering, trying to find the right words to say.

The main purpose of *The Friendship Counselor* is to prevent people from suffering for the wrong reasons. Many Christians have mistaken ideas about the Christian life. When troubles come, as they surely do, they don't understand what is happening to them. They feel they don't deserve this! Surely, God has made some kind of mistake.

But we forget that God uses suffering in our lives to accomplish things that neither paradise nor prosperity ever could. We need to understand that Jesus' ultimate goal when He was talking to people in pain was character transformation. He wanted to give them eternal value, meaning, and joy.

In his work based on a Christlike approach, Huggins helps us not only to be a good friend, but a better friend.

The Life of Christ—Luke dramatized

Zondervan US \$14.99

In this “Sharing” issue of Dynamic Steward, we would like to tell you about a new resource from Zondervan: *The Life of Christ*, an NIV dramatized recording of the gospel of Luke. This unabridged, 3-hour dramatization comes in a set of three CD’s.

The recordings are beautifully orchestrated, and the drama gives you the experience of feeling present during each scene. The CD’s are introduced by Lee Strobel, former atheist and current teaching pastor at Saddleback Valley Community Church in Orange County, California.

This is a lovely addition to your church library and a fine resource to use at home or take along with you as you travel.

editorial

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

Clive Staples Lewis once wrote: “I have never concealed the fact that I regarded Him as my master; indeed I fancy I have never written a book in which I did not quote from him.” Who is this “master” Lewis speaks of? George MacDonald—leading novelist, poet, and Christian fantasy writer of Victorian Britain.

Because I appreciate Lewis so much, I decided to read more of MacDonald’s works. Just this weekend I finished *The Baronet’s Song*, (originally entitled, *Wee Sir Gibbie of the Highlands*).*

In brief, Gibbie is a young mute child and son of an alcoholic cobbler who drinks away his meager earnings. Hungry and ill-clad, Gibbie roams the city streets day and night. He often steals away in the darkness to lead his drunken father home. But when his father dies, Gibbie wanders the expansive countryside in search of a place where he can belong.

From the beginning, the author reveals Gibbie’s character as that of a joyous boy with a beautiful heart. Gibbie shares whatever he has. When cruelly mistreated, he does not retaliate. The thought that he could possibly be a “victim” doesn’t enter his mind. His only response is love. Sound too good to be true?

Where does the lad get all his joy? Gibbie is MacDonald’s ideal of true Christianity. And he awakens the desire in me to want to be like Gibbie.

When Jesus stood in His hometown church and read His “Magna Carta” or great charter of liberty, He described how people act when they are filled with God’s Spirit: “The Spirit of the Lord is on me because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor” (Lk 4:18, 19).

As we contemplate what it means to share with others— from our little or from our much—may we do so with a joyous heart like Gibbie’s.

*From *The Poet and the Pauper*: Bethany House, 2002

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Exploring partnership with God

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