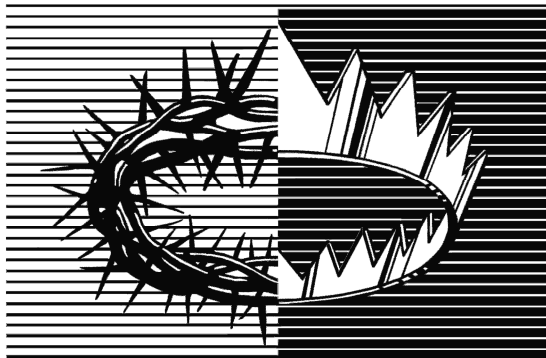


TITHE AND OFFERING READINGS



2005

ATTENTION!

Dated material to be adapted,
translated and distributed to
Seventh-day Adventist churches
before December 2004.

Encounters with Jesus

By Dr. Will Eva

The offering readings for this year have been written by Dr. Will Eva. Pastor Eva has spent his working life in pastoral ministry and in work with the ministers of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. For the past nine years he has been Senior Editor of *Ministry Magazine*—the Church’s publication especially for its pastors.

The readings follow the general theme of the life and teachings of Jesus. Stewardship principles are drawn directly from Jesus’ encounters with people and from our Lord’s parables and teachings. A number of the readings are also based on incidents recorded in the book of Acts, and a few true-life illustrative appeals have been added to provide variety.

All Scriptural passages that appear as quotations have been taken from *Today’s English Version*, better known as *Good News for Modern Man*. (Thomas Nelson Inc., Nashville, Camden, New York. Copyright by the American Bible Society, 1966, 1970, 1971.)

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We welcome your comments and suggestions for future authors and themes for the **Tithe and Offering Readings**.

(For your convenience, pages i-v are repeated at the end of the readings.)

SABBATHS WITHOUT DESIGNATED OFFERINGS

There are **six Sabbaths** in 2005 that do not have designated offerings. Each Division Committee is to designate these offerings for use in their Division, Conference or Union. The Sabbaths are: January 8, February 12, June 11, August 13, October 8, and December 10.

The titles of the readings of these non-designated offerings are noted as “**Scheduled Offering: Division.**”

THIRTEENTH SABBATH OFFERINGS FOR 2005

Inter-American Division	March 26
North American Division	June 25
Northern Asia-Pacific Division	September 24
Southern Asia-Pacific Division	December 24

Special Offerings

RECOMMENDED, To adopt the Calendar of Special Offerings—World 2005,
as follows:

JANUARY

1 Outreach/Church Budget
8 Division
15 Church Budget
22 Conference/Union
29 Church Budget

FEBRUARY

5 Outreach/Church Budget
12 Division
19 Church Budget
26 Conference/Union

MARCH

5 Outreach/Church Budget
12*+ Adventist World Radio* +
19 Church Budget
26 Conference/Union

APRIL

2 Outreach/Church Budget
9+ World Mission Budget+
16 Church Budget
23 Conference/Union
30 Church Budget

MAY

7 Outreach/Church Budget
14*+ Disaster and Famine Relief* +
21 Church Budget
28 Conference/Union

JUNE

4 Outreach/Church Budget
11 Division
18 Church Budget
25 Conference/Union

JULY

2 Outreach/Church Budget
9+ World Mission+
16 Church Budget
23 Conference/Union
30 Church Budget

AUGUST

6 Outreach/Church Budget
13 Division
20 Church Budget
27 Conference/Union

SEPTEMBER

3 Outreach/Church Budget
10+ World Mission Budget+
(Go One Million)
17 Church Budget
24 Conference/Union

OCTOBER

1 Outreach/Church Budget
8 Division
15 Church Budget
22 Conference/Union
29 Church Budget

NOVEMBER

5 Outreach/Church Budget
12* + Annual Sacrifice (Global Mission)*+
19 Church Budget
26 Conference/Union

DECEMBER

3 Outreach/Church Budget
10 Division
17 Church Budget
24 Conference/Union
31 Church Budget

*Reading provided by corresponding entity
+Worldwide Offering

SCHEDULED SPECIAL OFFERINGS

SABBATH	TITLE	DATE
11 th	Adventist World Radio	March 12
15 th	World Mission Budget	April 9
19 th	Disaster and Famine Relief	May 14
28 th	World Mission	July 9
37 th	World Mission (Go One Million)	September 10
46 th	Annual Sacrifice (Global Mission)	November 12

Sabbath 1

January 1, 2005

Offering: Outreach/Church Budget

There is really nothing in the story of Jesus' birth that says there were *three* Wise Men who came to see Mary's baby boy. While three kinds of gifts are mentioned, the Bible doesn't say how many Magi made the journey to Jesus.

Still more startling to our traditions is the fact that Scripture does not tell us the Magi arrived on the night of Jesus' birth. The fact is, if you piece the happenings of the story together, it is clear that they came quite a while later.

What *is* true and important is that these men of integrity and faith came on their long, demanding journey because they were convinced Jesus was a very special King. What *is* significant is that because of their heartfelt belief, they bowed down before Him and worshipped Him. And they showered Him with lavish gifts. Those gifts took on significance and value because they were given from the conviction these Wise Men held so deeply in their hearts.

Appeal:

As you give today and as you give all through this year, your giving is an act of conviction and worship. Your act of giving is filled with love for your fellow Church members, your fellow human beings, and your Lord.

Prayer

Sabbath 2
January 8, 2005
Offering: Division

Jesus described it this way: “God loved the world so much that He gave.” Two weeks ago we enjoyed the deep pleasures of Christmas; that special festival of giving and receiving that celebrates the loving generosity of God in giving us that which He prized most. His one and only Son.

Perhaps you gave a gift to someone special this Christmas into which you threw yourself completely. And, as a result, it became an act deeply meaningful to you and that person. You were able to watch the response that welled up in their eyes and all over their face. Is there anything more satisfying than giving and experiencing that?

God so loved that He gave.... The heart and soul of giving is truly, love. Giving and giving again remains the most profound way you and I have of expressing the love we have for the person Who has given us Himself, and to whom we have given ourselves.

Appeal: (Adapted to each World Division)

Prayer

Sabbath 3
January 15, 2005
Offering: Church Budget

Jesus’ cousin John, known as “The Baptist,” was a different sort of man, perhaps even a bit odd. But what he had to say was deeply arresting. When he spoke, sparks flew and people’s hearts flamed into life.

The soul of his message was this: “Prepare a road for the Lord. Even in the desert make His highways straight.” It was a clarion call that most certainly echoes among us here and now. It is a divine charge to this congregation, to you, and me personally.

This message is the reason this Church exists, and certainly it is the reason our Church building has been placed where it is. It is most truly the reason the structure of our Church building and this fellowship must remain and flourish.

Appeal:

So, as you are now given the opportunity to give, you are not merely giving to keep the lights burning, or the roof in repair, but you are making highways for the King. You are giving so this Church will be here as part of a living highway upon which God Himself can walk and people of all kinds can travel unimpeded to the feet of Jesus.

Prayer

Sabbath 4
January 22, 2005
Offering: Conference/Union

Early in the story of Jesus, there is the account of how Satan confronted Him with three far-reaching temptations that are all too common to our humanity. In the third temptation, Satan displays before Christ “all the kingdoms of the world” and offers them to Him if only He will sell out, transferring His homage from God to the Devil.

This third confrontation between Jesus and Satan dramatizes the powerful connection between possessions, power, and prestige. It amplifies the “sell-out” of soul that is demanded if we actually want this kind of security. The stakes are high indeed.

Jesus’ reply to Satan is powerful: “You shall give homage to God alone and worship only Him.”

There is more energy than we realize in the simple act of returning our tithes and sacrificially giving from what we have received. As we do these things, with the eyes of our soul wide open, we are saying with Jesus, “Away with you, Satan! I give homage and worship to God alone and support His Kingdom, not yours.”

Appeal:

Won’t you do this prayerfully in your heart and mind as you now return your tithes and give your offerings?

Prayer

Sabbath 5
January 29, 2005
Offering: Church Budget

He called to them in the midst of their normal lives, as they were busy with their usual work on the shoreline of a lake that was very familiar to them.

He said, “Come and follow me!” Though they did not fully recognizing the significance of their response to His summons, they literally dropped what they were doing and followed Him.

You and I may not always recognize the calls of Jesus which come to us, even those that come on a normal Sabbath as we sit here in our customary place. Some calls are more far-reaching than others, but they come nonetheless.

As often as not, just as with Jesus’ call to His first disciples, they ask us to do something that means unselfish action in behalf of someone else. Even though our first reaction may be to question such calls, if we hear His voice and know the call is coming from Him, we will follow.

Appeal:

As you give today to support the ministry of our Church, hearing His call to action, won’t you respond—not merely to what is said by your fellow human beings—but to what He directs you to do?

Prayer

Sabbath 6

February 5, 2005

Offering: Outreach/Church Budget

If someone asked you why so much healing went on in Palestine when Jesus was there, what would you say? Why did blind people come to see, paralyzed people end up leaping, and why was a dead boy returned alive to his desperate, widowed mother?

In your answer you could say all kinds of things. But to boil it down a bit, we can say that it all happened, first of all, because Jesus loved people. Because of that, He enjoyed seeing them whole, with the deepest needs of their lives fulfilled. He also possessed what was needed to make the people around Him better, and He was not hesitant to use what He had to make that happen.

So there were at least three things that caused the miracles: Jesus loved people and therefore enjoyed seeing their deepest needs met. He was willing to use what He possessed to help them. This not only explains all the good that happened when He came among us, but also defines our lives as His disciples.

Appeal:

As you give today, you are privileged to demonstrate your love for the people around you by giving freely of that with which God has gifted you. In this way you are actually helping to meet the deepest needs of your fellow human beings. That's why our Church is here.

Prayer

Sabbath 7

February 12, 2005

Offering: Division

Capernaum is a tiny village on the shore of a famous lake that is so close, you can hear the water lapping at the rocks on the water's edge. It is one of Jesus' favorite places. And when people hear He has arrived, they come in crowds so thick that some who really need to get to the Lord are blocked by the press.

A man is nearby. He is not only blocked by the crowd but by an awful paralysis. But this man has friends whose affection for him compels them to do something most people would never even think of doing. They place him in a blanket, pick him up bodily, and carry him around the throng and onto the roof of the house where Jesus is. They rip up the roof and let the man down through the opening, placing him gently right in front of Jesus.

In so many ways, you and I may become just such friends to the scores of people in our community who have not thought of the possibility of coming to Jesus. One way of being such a friend is to give of the resources God has given you. In this way you can help needy people make their way to the feet of Jesus.

Appeal:

Right now, as you return your tithes and give your offerings ... you are actually helping to create ways for people to reach Jesus.

Prayer

Sabbath 8
February 19, 2005
Offering: Church Budget

It was truly one of the greatest days in human history. An unimposing and fearful group of people were talking and praying together in an out-of-the-way room that had become very meaningful to them. The room was somewhere in Jerusalem, and it was hidden just enough to ease their fear of the authorities.

As they prayed in that “Upper Room,” a mysterious noise, like a blast of rushing wind filled—not only the room—but the whole house! At the same moment, extraordinary little flames that looked like fire, settled on their heads as they were filled with the Holy Spirit.

After this they were no longer afraid, but spoke out in ways they would not have dared to before this happened. Along with the highest and holiest gift of all, the gift of the Holy Spirit, they were given all kinds of other gifts. And with these they unhesitatingly went out to win the world for their Lord.

Appeal:

God has filled this congregation with His great Gift, and with all those gifts that come with that greatest Gift of all. Today, as we gladly place our tithes and offerings before Him and support this Church of ours, let us do it freely and generously in response to all He has given us.

Prayer

Sabbath 9
February 26, 2005
Offering: Conference/Union

You and I know it as “The Parable of the Sower.” It is a story Jesus told that creates quite a picture of the different kinds of responses His truth receives when it is scattered in the hearts of men and women.

Some souls are like hardened ground that the seed of truth can not penetrate. Then, there are those souls that are like deep fertile soil—the truth comes to them and springs up, bearing a magnificent crop of life-giving food to nourish the world around them.

Like so much of Jesus’ teaching, this parable contains a disquieting challenge: What kind of soil would best describe your soul or mine? Jesus spoke of those who not only hear the word of God, but of those who actually put it into practice. These are the ones who catch its spirit, and in the power of God, do what it actually calls for.

Appeal:

One of the acid tests that comes to you and me as God’s truth strikes our hearts is how we handle what we possess, and how willing we are to give gifts freely to support what God wants to accomplish in His world.

As you and I give today, let us prayerfully think about how our giving reflects our response to Jesus’ challenge.

Prayer

Sabbath 10

March 5, 2005

Offering: Outreach/Church Budget

This true story took place some years ago, when a small boy excitedly boarded a great passenger ship with his parents. Passing the ship's store on his way to their cabin, the boy's eye fell on a pencil he just had to have! It was well crafted and had the picture of another ship on it, the HMS Lusitania. His father finally agreed to buy the pencil for him, and it became his pride and joy.

A few days later the boat arrived in England, and the boy and his parents were invited to tea at the home of an elderly woman. As the adults sat talking, the boy took his pencil out of his pocket and began to admire it for the hundredth time. Suddenly there was a lull in the adult conversation. With tears in her eyes, the elderly hostess glanced at the pencil and said, "You know, my husband went down on the HMS Lusitania when it was sunk during the war."

The father took his son aside and quietly talked to him about what it would mean to the lady if he gave his beloved possession her. As the boy grew up and became a man, he realized what a great thing his father had taught him that day. What do you think?

Appeal:

As you give your offerings today, consider the great value of real sacrifice and what your sacrificial giving might actually mean to you, to this Church, and to people in our community.

Prayer

Sabbath 11

March 12, 2005

Offering: Adventist World Radio

Many countries face enormous challenges when it comes to spreading the gospel. The hardships of the people of Vietnam are a sobering illustration of what this lack of freedom means.

For over ten years, Adventist World Radio has been broadcasting programs into Vietnam from its shortwave station on Guam. From time to time, reports filter back to AWR. They paint a stark picture, saying:

"Some time ago, the government forced a group of people to migrate to another area, in a plan to divide the concentration of people for easier governing. Some of our pastors came to visit them and conducted training for this group, but the government burned their village and pushed the people into the jungle.

"The government ... will kill everyone who enters and has vowed to suppress movement in this part of the country. You do not know how much impact your radio program has in Vietnam! You have at least 100,000 people who have listened to the programs and become believers...."

Appeal:

AWR's ministry reaches into places where missionaries cannot go, broadcasting the message of hope in Jesus. Today, AWR will broadcast the good news in nearly 55 languages for more than 100 hours by shortwave radio, AM/FM networks, and satellite.

Your gift today will give millions of people what could be their only chance to hear about Jesus Christ.

Prayer

Sabbath 12
March 19, 2005
Offering: Church Budget

God's promise in Malachi that He will bless you if you give your tithe faithfully, is almost too well known among us. There is another very similar kind of promise made by Jesus as he preached His great "Sermon on the Mount."

There Jesus talks of us being careful not to parade our generosity in front of everyone so we will be praised for it. Instead, "When you give," Jesus says, "don't even let your left hand know what your right hand is up to. Rather do it all in secret."

Then comes the promise: "And your Father—He who sees in secret—will reward you" (See Mt 6:2-4). Jesus simply says that God rewards quiet, unobtrusive giving!

It is really quite a strain to put on and maintain a public show, especially if you are trying to pretend you are not putting on a show! Putting our generosity on parade leads to all sorts of stress and strain. It is really much nicer to just have a quiet, private kind of relationship with God in our giving, isn't it?

Appeal:

As you give today, make it a quiet act of worship between you and God alone, and rest in that quietness, knowing that in one way or another, God will reward you.

Prayer

Sabbath 13
March 26, 2005
Offering: Conference/Union

It had to be amazing to see what happened the day Peter and John met a man who suffered with a horrible birth defect. The sacred story says he had been lame since birth—so lame that people had to carry him to the temple gate. He had not come that morning knowing what was going to happen. But true to his life-long occupation, when he saw Peter and John walking by, he begged for financial help.

Fixing his eyes on the man, Peter said, "I have no money, but what I do have I will give you. In the name of Jesus Christ, walk!" Then Peter lifted the man up and he went walking and leaping into the temple, praising God.

Peter's immediate answer to the man's request is thought-provoking. Peter knew what he and John had and what they did not have. What he had he was more than willing to give, and when he gave it, it made the world of difference to this struggling man.

Appeal:

As you give today, it is important to assess honestly what you can actually give and give it gladly. Knowing you can share what God has given you, and also knowing what it will do for someone who is in need—even a person who has given up looking for what he really needs.

Prayer

Sabbath 14

April 2, 2005

Offering: Outreach/Church Budget

She was a desperate woman, sick with an incurable disease. Because of her culture's customs and the personal nature of what ailed her, she could not come forward in the dense crowd gathered around Jesus and confess her problem openly. She wanted to ask Him to heal her, but she was afraid. So she slipped up behind Him and was finally able to just grasp the edge of his cloak, believing she would be healed. And wonder of wonders, she *was* healed.

Jesus turned around and asked, "Who touched me?" The disciples pointed out in amazement that everyone near Jesus had been constantly jostling against Him. But Jesus knew her touch had been filled with a special hope and a desperate faith. It was this faith that Jesus honored, even before the woman's act became public.

Appeal:

There are people all around us who are like this woman. Perhaps you know yourself to be one of them. Today, as you give your offerings, you are truly opening the way for people to be transformed. But you and I may never even know about it until the day God makes all things plain.

Let us give with glad, liberal hearts, knowing that He will take what we give and apply it wisely to the lives of distressed people all around us.

Prayer

Sabbath 15

April 9, 2005

Offering: World Mission Budget/Hope 4 the Big Cities

Every five years the world church chooses a special project for the General Conference Offering. This year's offering—Hope 4 the Big Cities—addresses a huge challenge facing the Seventh-day Adventist Church.

Over the past 150 years the church has grown best in rural areas and on islands, while it has grown slowly, if at all, in the great cities of the world. That is a major problem when cities are the fastest-growing population areas in the world, with millions and millions of people.

Hope 4 the Big Cities will provide seed money for every world division to focus on long-term plans to establish and nurture new churches in at least one major city within its territory. This offering will help establish new, healthy congregations in the heart of at least 23 of the world's great urban areas.

Appeal:

Nearly 100 years ago, Ellen White wrote, "The Lord has been calling our attention to the neglected multitudes in the large cities, yet little regard has been given to the matter" (*Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, November 11, 1909).

Could this have even more relevance today? Thank you for your generous offering to help reach the great cities of the world.

Prayer

Sabbath 16
April 16, 2005
Offering: Church Budget

The story of Ananias and Sapphira is abrupt and disturbing, and there isn't a sincere soul who hasn't been troubled by it. Here is a husband and wife who, after pledging to give to the Church all the proceeds from the sale of a piece of their property, end up holding back for themselves some of what they have promised to give. As Ananias brings his offering, the Apostle Peter tells him that he has, in fact, lied to God. In the face of such a verdict, Ananias, and later his wife, Sapphira, both collapse dead before Peter.

There are many things that may be said about this unusual happening, but the central message is clear: The way we handle what God has given us, and the promises we make to God in connection with our gifts to His Church are to be taken very seriously.

Appeal:

As you give your offerings today, don't be afraid to remind yourself of the importance of the act of worship we are all entering into, through the gifts we lay at the altar of God's Church.

Prayer

Sabbath 17
April 23, 2005
Offering: Conference/Union

In the end, we are all known not merely by what we say, but by how we actually act—day in and day out. Jesus had much to say about this. More, in fact, than anyone else whose words are found in the Bible. He is the One who said, "By their fruits you shall know them." And, "Thorn bushes do not bear grapes, and briars do not bear figs." He also said, "A healthy tree cannot bear bad fruit, and a poor tree cannot bear good fruit."

There is no area of life where this truth shows itself more naturally than in the area of how we practice our giving. If you and I are deeply committed to Jesus, the way we embrace His cause and His attitudes will show itself in the way we feel about other people and their needs. We will not only speak about doing good, we will actually do it by giving from what God has given us.

Appeal:

Today as you give your offerings, by faith, throw your whole self in with your gift. In doing this, you will be moving beyond mere words and will be embracing a way of living that truly makes a difference in our world.

Prayer

Sabbath 18
April 30, 2005
Offering: Church Budget

Without question it is one of the most amazing examples of community that the world has ever witnessed. The book of Acts describes it this way: “All the believers continued together in close fellowship and shared their belongings with one another. They would sell their property and possessions and distribute the money among all, according to what each one needed.”

In another place it says, “The group of believers was one in mind and heart. No one said that any of his belongings was his own, but they all shared with one another everything they had.”

While such closeness in that early community of faith found its true source in the work of the Holy Spirit among them, one way it showed itself most clearly was when the people shared so freely and beautifully with one another. Clearly they loved one another.

Appeal:

You and I have the opportunity to imitate, at least in part, the wonderful communal life of those early believers. As you give your offerings today, praise God that you are part of such a fellowship.

Prayer

Sabbath 19
May 7, 2005
Offering: Outreach/Church Budget

One day Jesus told a striking story about the subject of house construction. The story features not only two houses, but it contrasts two men. These men face a clear-cut question, one “do or die” choice: Upon what sort of ground is it wisest to build a house?

One man chooses a location for his house that consists primarily of soft, sandy soil. It is a surface that obviously requires less effort and thus less sacrifice to build upon. The other man chooses a much more demanding base for his house—one of solid rock. In fact Jesus very suggestively describes the second man as building upon “*the rock*.”

Then it happens: a once-in-a-lifetime storm of unimagined force strikes the area. Predictably, the house on the sand collapses under the strength of such a violent, relentless force, while the house built on the Rock remains unmoved.

Appeal:

As you give your offering today, do it faithfully, even if it requires sacrifice and effort. In doing so, you are most truly building upon the Rock of Ages.

Prayer

Sabbath 20
May 14, 2005

Offering: Disaster and Famine Relief

Famine is a hard reality in today's world. Millions are struggling to cope with severe food shortage. Sadly, more than enough food is produced globally to feed everyone, especially the 840 million people who fight hunger on a daily basis.

Today, the Adventist church responds to disaster and famine around the world through the compassionate ministry of the Adventist Development and Relief Agency (ADRA). ADRA provides rapid, appropriate aid to those that need it most, and it puts in place disaster preparedness plans to ease the effects of disasters when they strike.

Disasters can instantly leave thousands homeless—without food, water, or clothes. After an earthquake turns homes to mere rubble, drought ruins a country's food source, or children watch their parents die in war and are forced to flee and live as refugees, your church can be there.

Appeal:

Through ADRA, you can wrap your arms around these sufferers to extend a hand of hope and love. Please give generously to today's Disaster and Famine Relief Offering.

Prayer

Sabbath 21
May 21, 2005

Offering: Church Budget

After long months of being away at boarding school, a young boy was finally on his way home. While he had been away he especially missed his mother. As he listened to the constancy of the sound of the train's wheels on the railroad track home, it reminded him of the steadiness of his mother's love for him all his life long, and a new sense of his love for her made him want to tell her how much she meant to him.

At the next station the train stopped long enough for the boy to slip off and go into a little shop near the station. There on a glass shelf he saw an assortment of ceramic figurines. He wanted to give his mother the little cat he saw, because he knew she liked cats. But in the end, with his small allowance he could only afford a funny looking bulldog—so he bought that for her.

He was a bit ashamed of the gift, but when he got home, he gave it to his mother anyway. Her eyes filled with tears of love, as she held him to her and kissed him.

Appeal:

As you return your tithe to God today, and as you give your offering to Him, your act of love and devotion is very much like that little boy; and our Father's delight, very much like that of the young boy's mother.

Prayer

Sabbath 22
May 28, 2005
Offering: Conference/Union

Jesus often said very challenging, even potentially devastating things to the people who came to Him. He told one of his disciples who had just lost his father and wanted to go back for the funeral: "Follow me, and let the dead bury the dead!" He told a man of high standing who thought he was ready to go with Jesus anywhere: "Foxes have holes, and birds have nests, but the Son of Man has no place to lie down and rest."

As we read about these encounters, we have to wonder why Jesus said such things. One thing is obvious: He felt the need to confront those who wished to follow Him, or who were already His followers, with the down-to-earth realities of what it actually means to take up their cross and come after Him. Following Him is not for the faint of heart or the happy-go-lucky.

When it comes to giving to the cause of Christ, there is no other arena of life that reveals more about the quality of our discipleship or that tests our good intentions than our actual behavior.

Appeal:

As you return your tithe today, and as you give your offering, won't you allow the reality of Jesus' challenges to have an uninterrupted effect deep in your heart and mind?

Prayer

Sabbath 23
June 4, 2005
Offering: Outreach/Church Budget

One of the truly inspiring things about the first followers of Jesus was not only that they were willing to die for Him, but it was the *way* they died. Stephen was a deacon who possessed resolute courage. He was undaunted by the anger of powerful people who lived to oppose him and all he stood for.

On the day of his stoning, Stephen spoke to these people from his soul. He probably did not believe his words were having an effect on his hearers. Most likely, he did not notice the young man named Saul standing off to the side, holding the coats of those who threw the stones of execution. He did not know Saul was impressed by what he was seeing and hearing from the dying deacon. Later Saul would be renamed Paul.

What was needed to impress Paul, and what actually happened there that day, was simply that Stephen was faithful.

Appeal:

Today, as you return your tithe to God and bring your offering, it is not how much you give that matters nearly so much as that you are faithful and true to your Lord.

Prayer

Sabbath 24
June 11, 2005
Offering: Division

How two blind men managed to find Jesus in the first place, we are not told. How awkward they may have appeared as they followed Him, we can only imagine. The sacred story only tells us that as Jesus “walked along, two blind men started following Him.” This description by itself paints one of the most hopeful, beautiful pictures that could ever be.

As they follow, they begin to shout. And what they shout is the most magnificent prayer human lips could utter: “Have mercy on us, Son of David!”

And so, the Lord gives them the opportunity to declare their faith in Him. Then and there He heals their blindness and warns them not to tell anyone about what has happened. But the Bible says they went off and “spread the news about Jesus all over that part of the country!”

Why Jesus told them not to tell their story is not completely clear. But whatever the reason, it is interesting to note the tone of Matthew 9 where this story is told. It is almost as though it ended up being good that they spread their wonderful news!

Appeal:

What has God done for you? As you give your offering today, may you give liberally and so spread the news far and wide.

Prayer

Sabbath 25
June 18, 2005
Offering: Church Budget

Jesus was busy. As Matthew tells about it, every now and again he makes statements like this: “So Jesus went around visiting all the towns and villages. He taught in their synagogues, preached the Good News of the Kingdom, and healed people from every kind of disease.” He was busy, He was committed to His Father, and thus, He did something in the actual lives of the people He encountered. He is our pattern.

But what was it that compelled Jesus? Matthew describes it this way: “As he saw the crowds, his heart was filled with pity for them, because they were worried and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd.”

Do you sometimes feel unmoved to give and to go? It is looking around at people with the 20/20 vision of Jesus which enables us to see them as individuals, and to discern the sometimes hidden hollowness and confusion of their inner being. When we see them as Jesus does, we are moved with compassion, and we are compelled to take effective action.

Appeal:

There are many ways of taking action, but one confronts us right here, right now. We can return our tithe with committed faithfulness, and we can give generously so that God’s work in people’s lives can go forward with fleet, uninhibited steps, moving toward the harvest.

Prayer

Sabbath 26
June 25, 2005
Offering: Conference/Union

A lovely little girl, bright as can be, sat in Church between her father and mother. She was not yet in school, but she was already learning to write. As she concentrated on making the letters her mother had given her to copy, her tongue worked involuntarily between her lips, identifying with the blunt pencil between her small, laboring fingers.

Well into the worship service, as the little girl's father sat listening to the sermon, there was a gentle tug on his sleeve. He looked down to his left, and met the triumphant eyes of his daughter as with a shy smile she handed him the piece of paper she had been struggling to write on. "Here, Daddy, this is for you," she whispered.

Taking the folded rumple of paper from his daughter's hand, he opened it and read the lovely, misshaped lettering. "I love you, Daddy," it said.

Appeal:

As you bring your imperfect gift today, you are most truly placing it in the hand of your Father. Even though it is designated for our Church, it is really for the Father, and it tells Him eloquently how much you love Him.

Prayer

Sabbath 27
July 2, 2005
Offering: Outreach/Church Budget

Simon the Sorcerer was an impressive magician in the city of Samaria. And as the result of the ministry of the deacon Philip, Simon was baptized.

But as Simon watched the wonders and miracles the Holy Spirit was performing in his city, he began to explain what he saw in terms of his old life of magic and sorcery. Apparently it was difficult for him to distinguish between sorcery and magic and the free gifts of God's divine miracles.

When Simon observed Peter and John placing their hands upon believers and then saw those believers receiving the Holy Spirit, he offered the apostles money so that he too might possess the secret power to impart the Holy Spirit to people.

To this, Peter gave one of the most shocking retorts recorded in the Bible: "May you and your money go to hell for thinking that you can buy God's gift with money!"

Appeal:

Do you ever think, perhaps without even realizing it, that through your offerings you become eligible to receive the free gifts of God? As you give your gifts today, let it be crystal clear in your soul and heart that your gift to God is as free-will as are His great, love-based gifts to you!

Prayer

Sabbath 28

July 9, 2005

Offering: World Mission Budget/ *Hope 4 the Big Cities*

Historically the Adventist Church has been a rural church—it just has not done well in big cities. For whatever reasons, the church has struggled to share its message of hope with the huge population groups in urban areas.

However, we can not continue to overlook the most rapidly growing areas in the world today. In 1950 there were eight megacities—cities with more than 5 million people—throughout the world. It is estimated that in ten years time there will be 59 megacities. Soon, more than half of the world's population will live in urban areas.

The special General Conference Offering collected today is called *Hope 4 the Big Cities*—and addresses this urgent need. It will go to all the world divisions to help them establish new churches in the heart of big cities within their territories—from Montreal to Bangkok; Johannesburg to Mexico City; Istanbul to London.

Appeal:

We can no longer ignore the cities where millions of people don't know Jesus. Your generous offering today will help fund long-term projects to establish healthy new congregations in urban centers. Thank you for your sacrifice to share the love of Jesus with city-dwellers around the world.

Prayer

Sabbath 29

July 16, 2005

Offering: Church Budget

He was not only Jesus' cousin, he was the forerunner of the Messiah. He was the one who cried out with conviction as Jesus approached, "Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!"

The next thing we hear about him is that he is languishing in Herod's prison, awaiting execution—while he hears about all the amazing things Jesus is accomplishing without him. In that horrible, testing situation, he begins to wonder about the essence of his faith and sends his disciples to ask Jesus the question that comes more often than we would like to admit: "Are you the one to come, or should we expect someone else?"

To such a question, Jesus gives this immortal answer: "Go back and tell John what you are hearing and seeing: the blind can see, the lame can walk, the lepers are made clean, the deaf hear, the dead are raised to life, and the Good News is preached...!"

Appeal:

That is forever and exactly what we are called to proclaim... And that is why we give generously; so our witness can thrive right here where He has placed us, and the news of Jesus' rescue can go out to all, even to struggling believers who may be sitting in despair and doubt.

Prayer

Sabbath 30
July 23, 2005
Offering: Conference/Union

Rest! When you have been working hard for hours and there is still more to go; when what you are carrying is too heavy and it is slipping from your aching grasp, but, still, you have to go on. When your guilt, pain, sorrow, or disappointment seems too much, and you cannot escape it. When your whole being cries out for rest, and then you are able to take it.... That is rest!

Perhaps a bell sounds, or someone in authority comes to tell you “time’s up,” and you can go home now. Or maybe it is just collapsing on your bed, with your clothes still on! Finally you can put down your heavy load. At last, you hear a word that effectively addresses your guilt. Finally, you have rest....

Jesus said, “Come to me, you who are tired from carrying your heavy load, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke and put it on you and learn from me, because I am gentle and humble in spirit; and you will find rest.”

Appeal:

Coming to Him is what it is all about. This is the word for you, for our time, and our community. Our Congregation, our Conference, and our Union exist to proclaim the reality of this promise. Won’t you give generously so that just such a precious word can be proclaimed freely, fully, and without pause?

Prayer

Sabbath 31
July 30, 2005
Offering: Church Budget

One day the great preacher-deacon, Philip, is commissioned by God to travel a particular main road. As divinely planned, Philip meets an important official from Ethiopia who has just been to Jerusalem to worship. The man is reading Isaiah’s prophecy about the coming of Jesus, and Philip asks him if he understands what he is reading.

The man’s answer is classic. He says, “How can I understand ... unless someone explains it to me?”

Then he asks an even more important question: “Tell me, of whom the prophet” is speaking? And so, Philip is able to tell the man the good news about Jesus and baptize him.

This is a story that encompasses all that the Church is about. And perhaps, in particular, the Seventh-day Adventist Church: A deacon is sent to explain biblical prophecy in a life-changing way to an enquiring man who is then baptized.

Appeal:

As you return your tithe and give your offerings today, let the connection between your offerings and the mission of this congregation be unmistakably plain in your heart and mind.

Prayer

Sabbath 32

August 6, 2005

Offering: Outreach/Church Budget

A young man is attracted to a young woman, but at first he is too afraid and shy to tell her how he feels. Perhaps he is not even sure how to do it. So he wonders how she feels about him. He thinks about her all day, and at certain calculated times, he takes the long way around, scheming she might cross his path if he does. And if so, he can at least steal a quick look at her.

But how does she ever find out how he feels? At some point, perhaps by a look or a certain smile, she begins to realize how he feels. Then he asks her on a special date. When they walk together, he holds her hand and she holds his.

Though in the past he may have been a bit “tight-fisted,” now he is happy to spend his money on her, making their time together something special. He often gives her things she likes, and finally he asks her to marry him. She says “Yes,” and with that they give the gift of themselves to one another. They get married, and forever after it is all about sharing what they have with one another.

Appeal:

It is the same between God and us, isn't it? Today as you give your offering, make it an act of worshipful love toward the One Who loves you, and to Whom you have given your very self.

Prayer

Sabbath 33

August 13, 2005

Offering: Division

To say the least, what happened suddenly interrupted the otherwise average journey of Saul of Tarsus. With a troubled conscience, he was traveling toward Damascus in the name and authority of his faith and his Church. His mission was to break up and apprehend a ring of Christians there.

Just outside the city, a light from the sky flashed around him and knocked him to the ground. At the same time he heard a voice saying to him “Saul, Saul! Why do you persecute me?”

Struck blind by that light, Saul, later known as Paul, entered the city, encountered the Christian community there, and became a lifelong, passionate lover and proclaimer of the One against Whom he had formerly fought. Paul's turning to the light was for him an abrupt, one-hundred-eighty degree turn about.

Appeal:

Perhaps God is trying to reach you today to adopt a new challenge with more demanding patterns of discipleship. Open your soul to Him and to that possibility as you bring your offering to Him today.

Prayer

Sabbath 34
August 20, 2005
Offering: Church Budget

One day Jesus was indoors working with the people while His mother and brothers stood outside, patiently waiting to see Him. Apparently some of the people there began to feel the discomfort of his family's long wait and said to Jesus: "Look, your mother and brothers are standing outside, and they want to speak with you."

It was then that Jesus asked a seemingly insensitive thing: "Who is my mother?" And, "Who are my brothers?" Then he pointed to his disciples and said, "Look, here are my mother and my brothers!"

We can be so distracted by the apparent rudeness of the remark that we do not catch Jesus' underlying meaning. It is that He embraced those who, with Him, held a common faith and way of life. They *were* family.

There is no clearer way of actually living out this wonderful reality, than to generously share with one another from what we have.

Appeal:

As you give today, you are sharing with all your mothers, brothers, sisters, sons, daughters, aunts, and uncles who are part of our intimate family of faith.

Prayer

Sabbath 35
August 27, 2005
Offering: Conference/Union

Peter was a guest, staying at the home of a man named Simon who lived on the seashore near Joppa. At the same time, Cornelius, a Gentile captain in the Roman army, was praying for guidance, and God told him to go and talk with Peter.

One day Peter went up onto Simon's rooftop to pray. There he had a vision of all kinds of unclean creatures that no respectable Jew would eat. And God told Peter to kill and eat the animals anyway.

When Peter refused, God countered Peter, telling him plainly: "Do not consider anything unclean that God has declared clean." As Peter puzzled over the vision, Cornelius' men stood knocking on the downstairs' door. God told Peter to unhesitatingly go with them to talk with Cornelius the Gentile, whom Peter considered as unclean as the crawling animals the Lord had just ordered him to eat!

Peter's ungodly prejudice against his fellow human beings had almost gotten in the way of the gospel.

Appeal:

As you give today, don't allow any traditional negative attitudes or prejudices prevent you from giving what God has called on you to give.

Prayer

Sabbath 36
September 3, 2005
Offering: Outreach/Church Budget

It doesn't matter who you are, where you live, what you possess, or even what you believe in. By the nature of things, you still have to contribute in one way or another to the general good of the world around you. You must decide if you will be an active, mature contributor, or a passive, self-centered consumer.

As one typical example in thousands, let's imagine someone is renting an apartment. Every month he is expected to pay an agreed-upon rent which goes for the improvement and maintenance of the apartment and perhaps the whole apartment building. If, however, our phantom person does not pay his rent, and if others in the building also default, it will not be long before the apartment and the building will be "run down" and uninhabitable.

We should not give our offerings and return our tithe merely out of duty. But we also have to return our tithes to the One who owns and maintains the world. This we must recognize to be a matter of sacred principle for us.

Appeal:

Today as you give, by all means give with warmth and a true heart, but also give out of principle and the realization of your duty before God and in behalf of your fellow human beings.

Prayer

Sabbath 37
September 10, 2005
Offering: Go One Million/World Mission Budget

Today's offering is for a special world initiative of the Seventh-day Adventist Church called *Go One Million*.

The goal of *Go One Million* is to train and prepare one million church members around the globe for soul-winning activities. We thank the Lord that this original objective has been far surpassed; currently almost 2 million church members are actively sharing their faith through this initiative.

Go One Million participants work with specially prepared kits of materials that match the audiences, languages, and cultures in which they work. Today's offering will help provide these kits for an ever-increasing number of *Go One Million* participants.

Appeal:

You are invited to personally participate in *Go One Million* this morning by generously supporting this outreach program with your offering.

Prayer

Sabbath 38
September 17, 2005
Offering: Church Budget

How do you feel about the immense beauty, value, and meaning that is yours today because you are actually a son or daughter of God? As this reality flooded deeply into John's thirsty soul, he exclaimed: "See how much the Father has loved us! His love is so great that we are called God's children—and so, in fact we are."

It is this amazing truth that gives our lives definition, certainty, identity, and a deep sense of belonging. Having this truth imbedded in our souls is to possess a treasure whose value we simply can not compute.

Jesus told a parable in which he spoke this way of membership in the family or kingdom of heaven. He said, "The kingdom of heaven is like a treasure hidden in a field. [When] a man happens to find it ... he is so happy that he goes and sells everything he has, and then goes back and buys the field."

When you discover the treasure of the Kingdom and realize its matchless value, that makes you want to give up everything you have, just so you can possess it.

Appeal:

As you reach out your hand to give your offering today, think again of the value of what you are indeed investing in.

Prayer

Sabbath 39
September 24, 2005
Offering: Conference/Union

One time, Jesus told this parable: "Also, the Kingdom of heaven is like a buyer looking for fine pearls. When he finds one that is unusually fine, he goes and sells everything he has, and buys the pearl."

The main player in the parable is a businessman whose life is consumed with the search for the best pearls available. By definition, what he is looking for are pearls that stand out from the ordinary. He simply cannot be satisfied with what is commonplace.

But one day he finds a single, stunning pearl. And his purpose changes from that of merely searching for extraordinary pearls, to a passion to possess the one pearl that takes his breath away! He must have this pearl! But possessing it means he must sell everything he has. And so that is just what he does.

What or Who is this pearl? It symbolizes none other than the absolutely unique and surpassingly magnificent Being of our Lord, and all we have in Him.

Appeal:

In our weekly giving, may we always be reminded of the Pearl of great price. And may we give with the same spirit and motivation, giving our all to possess the one and only, unique and magnificent Pearl.

Prayer

Sabbath 40

October 1, 2005

Offering: Outreach/Church Budget

One of the most magnificent things about the early Christian believers is the deeply moving quality of togetherness they experienced as children in God's family. While they had their differences, they loved one another. They shared things in common, they took up for one another, and when one of them was in trouble, it was as though all of them were.

This togetherness was illustrated once when Peter was imprisoned. It was at a time, right after Stephen's stoning and James' execution, when there was increased persecution, and everyone in the Christian family had good reason to fear that Peter would be next.

As Luke tells the story in Acts, there is a poignant, one-sentence word picture that describes a scene in the home of John Mark's mother. It says, "Many people had gathered there and were praying" for Peter. It is very clear that this combined prayer meeting had much to do with the amazing, angelic rescue of Peter.

Appeal:

In giving today, you are participating in and affirming the strong and beautiful spirit of being a true disciple of Jesus. And there is nothing better than being a part of that.

Prayer

Sabbath 41

October 8, 2005

Offering: Division

Have you ever marveled at the way a family you admire seems to possess the mysterious and winsome quality of belonging to one another—of simply being a family?

Perhaps it is most obvious in the way a young mother holds her first baby. You can see the love and wonder in her eyes as she draws him near and looks into his beautiful face. If you look closely, you will see it in the warmth of her eyes and the angle of her eyelashes as she gazes down. She sees so much more than just a tiny fist clasped around her finger or the glimmering little smile that plays around his lips as he gazes back at her.

As often as this happens, it never becomes common place. It is ever and always a thing of surpassing value and beauty. And it is as perfect a reflection of how God views His children—how He views you—as any of us will ever have from among ourselves.

Appeal:

As you give today, take a glance around you and marvel at the wonder of family love. Praise God that, with all our struggles, we have such pictures of His love—pictures of what we have the privilege of actually contributing to Sabbath by Sabbath.

Prayer

Sabbath 42
October 15, 2005
Offering: Church Budget

Jesus once fed thousands of people with the five small loaves and two meager fish a small boy gave up to be placed in His hands. This is a story beyond the amazing. It tells us volumes about the nature of the simple, faith-filled offerings we bring to the Lord and what happens when we bring them specifically to Him.

This story is full of meaning. It is about what we, as His followers, can learn from how He handles impossible situations. It tells us what He can accomplish, even when a faltering faith is exercised.

But the meaning we concentrate upon today as we bring our “loaves and fishes” to Jesus in the form of tithes and offerings is this: The most amazing things happen when we take the impossibly little we have in our hands and place it in the hands of Jesus. When in little-boy faith, we participate in this simple act, it is astonishing what Jesus does with it.

Appeal:

As you give your offering right now, look beyond the obvious. You are not just putting it into the hands of a deacon, or even the Church, but instead, by faith, you are placing it in the hands of the Lord Himself.

Prayer

Sabbath 43
October 22, 2005
Offering: Conference/Union

Jesus continually confronted the over-established traditions of His time; especially the religious traditions that falsely quoted God to enforce men’s authority.

One time Jesus quoted Isaiah to express His deepest concern about adherence to ill-conceived tradition: “These people,” said Isaiah, “honor me with their words, but their heart is really far away from me. It is no use for them to worship me; because they teach man-made commandments as though they were God’s rules!”

Let us not give out of tradition or merely because someone says we should. Let us not give out of some sense of human obligation or our need to display to anyone how faithful we are.

Appeal:

Instead, as you give your offering today, throw yourself—heart and soul—into the giving of your tithes and offerings; and give them to God. In this way, your gifts will go out in specific response to the call of God to you, and your giving will be your way of actually worshipping Him.

Prayer

Sabbath 44
October 29, 2005
Offering: Church Budget

One night Paul had the fascinating vision of a man in a neighboring country begging him to “Come over into Macedonia and help us!”

But the part of the story that is so intriguing is the part we usually don’t talk about. Right before this vision, Luke tells us that even though Paul passed through at least four regions that were apparently as “gospel hungry” as any other, the Holy Spirit discouraged him from preaching there! Only when Paul reached Troas, did the Holy Spirit give him the visionary call to go to Macedonia.

But what does this have to do with the offerings we give? It tells us that we need to thoughtfully and prayerfully open our hearts to the leading of the Holy Spirit as we decide what our part will be in a given ministry. We are not to give blindly, but with hearts ready to follow the prompting of the Spirit.

Appeal:

As you give today you may not have a vision or hear a voice, but as stewards in God’s world, it is our responsibility to be ready to hear God’s quiet call as He directs us to give to a particular ministry.

Prayer

Sabbath 45
November 5, 2005
Offering: Outreach/Church Budget

Can you resist the eyes of your puppy when he looks up at you at the supper table, obviously wanting a sample of what you are eating? Maybe you can. But what if you picture the face of a girl or boy you know personally, and imagine they are beyond the point in their hunger where they are even able to look up at you, let alone do it with pleading eyes? There are few people who could stand by with food on their plate and resist giving such a child every morsel they have.

More than once, those who tell the story of Jesus describe Him being moved with compassion as He looked at a crowd of people or at a particular person who came to him with his specific need.

When genuine human need presents itself to you—that is, when someone or some group is in real want, be it physical, psychological, or spiritual—do you possess the mature empathy of Jesus so that you are moved to the point of actually doing something to help them?

Appeal:

This Church of ours has all kinds of ministry opportunities. As you give your offering today, envision particular people in your minds eye. Imagine them and how your offering will make a difference in their lives. Then allow the Holy Spirit, through that mental picture, to move you to give thoughtfully and generously.

Prayer

Sabbath 46

November 12, 2005

Offering: Annual Sacrifice (Global Mission)

If our early Adventist pioneers were resurrected today, they would be shocked to see how their “little flock” has become a worldwide denomination of nearly 14 million members in more than 200 countries, complete with the largest Protestant school system in the world, hospital networks, publishing houses and health food factories, media centers and satellite television networks!

This hasn't happened by accident, but by sacrifice and a clear vision to take the Good News to the entire world. That is the essential business of Global Mission—reaching into unentered areas and firmly establishing new believers in the faith.

Appeal:

Your generous support of the Annual Sacrifice Offering helps fund thousands of Global Mission pioneers and hundreds of new congregations around the world. Thank you for taking part in this central mission of the church.

Prayer

Sabbath 47

November 19, 2005

Offering: Church Budget

From Genesis to Revelation the theme is Jesus. You could also say that the central theme is love. You may even want to be more specific and say that the theme of the Bible is sacrifice. If you did that, you would not be pressing things too far; for the death of Jesus on a cross is the heart of the salvation story.

From the very beginning, the matter of sacrifice was at the center of the faith of God's people. Each sacrifice was designed to keep the hearts of the people on the great Sacrifice that was to come.

Sacrifice is always at the heart of God's way of dealing with sin and suffering. One of the most effective ways we have of investing ourselves in what God has done for us through Jesus' sacrifice is for us to throw ourselves into the heart of the spirit of sacrifice—to give sacrificially of ourselves and our means, for the salvation of those around us.

Appeal:

As the offering plate comes by, and you have an opportunity to give sacrificially, you can renew your heartfelt belief in all that God has done for you and your fellow human beings in the sacrifice of Jesus.

Prayer

Sabbath 48
November 26, 2005
Offering: Conference/Union

At the core of Seventh-day Adventist faith is the expectation that Jesus is coming soon. Jesus talked more and more intensely about this as His ministry drew toward a close. As part of what He said, He told the parable of the ten virgins.

The center of the parable's meaning is the need for us not merely to get ready, but to *be* ready for the coming of Jesus, the bridegroom. The five bridesmaids who were ready for the bridegroom's arrival were those who had seen to it that they had extra oil with them for their lamps. If things took longer than expected, they could still welcome the bridegroom appropriately with lamps lit, when he did arrive.

Our readiness to get up and meet the Bridegroom when He comes has a lot to do with how we manage the resources that God has given us. If our lamps are lit, and we are filled with the oil of the Spirit of Christ, it will show itself quietly in the way we live and especially in the way we give. That is simply the way it is.

Appeal:

As you give your offering today, be courageous and test your heart by considering the "why" and the "how" of your giving.

Prayer

Sabbath 49
December 3, 2005
Offering: Outreach/Church Budget

The master of a great estate went off on a long journey. While he was gone he put three of his servants in charge. Each was given an amount to manage that was proportionate to his ability and his responsibility on the estate.

When the master returned, he found that the first two servants had wisely invested the funds, and as a result, each had doubled what the Master had given him. The third servant made excuses, saying he knew how exacting his master was. So, in order to safely preserve the master's property, he had gone and buried it. Needless to say, the master was angry with this man and dismissed him.

What gifts, talents, or assets has your Master given you to care for? Everything you have is His. He has given it to you, not for safekeeping or burying, but to be carefully and responsibly used and wisely invested.

Appeal:

It is important that we take what we possess and invest it wisely in projects that will show a profit in the most important arenas of God's world.

God bless us as we invest wisely in His kingdom today.

Prayer

Sabbath 50
December 10, 2005
Offering: Division

As Jesus neared the cross He began to speak plainly about what must happen to Him. Hearing these things, Peter took Him aside and said, “This must never happen to you” Jesus!

With surprising intensity Jesus clearly identified such a suggestion as coming directly from Satan. Christ told Peter that in trying to dissuade Him, Peter was thinking in a merely human way, thus making himself an obstacle.

He then turned to the rest of his disciples and said, “If anyone wants to come with me, he must forget himself, carry his cross and follow me.”

At the moment of sacrifice, there are always powerful voices, some of them within, persuasively telling us that the sacrifices we are asked to make are too great, and that making them will destroy some more desired way of life. The persuasive argument is that taking the sacrificial way could even destroy something we have dreamed of having all our lives.

Appeal:

As you return your tithe today and give your offerings, you may know in your heart that, in the end, that which is truly worthwhile is almost always reached through sacrifice. It is the way of the cross.

Prayer

Sabbath 51
December 17, 2005
Offering: Church Budget

“My Father, if it is possible, take this cup away from me.” When you think about it, it is really quite amazing that this prayer is even recorded in the Bible. You would think that if Jesus actually felt the temptation that raged behind such a prayer, it would be kept secret.

But what is the temptation that prompts such a desperate prayer? It is an altogether understandable one: the temptation to avoid Golgotha, to find some way other than the way of the agonizing, costly sacrifice.

But the prayer is there. So we know how real, how common, this temptation is to every human being. But it is also there because of the powerful way in which it ends: “But not what I want, but what you want.”

Appeal:

The offering is about to be taken. This moment is really one of the most important moments in your worship today. Give as God calls for you to give, with true sacrifice and surrender.

Prayer

Sabbath 52
December 24, 2005
Offering: Conference/Union

Have you ever thought about, or better yet, deliberately opened your soul to the exhilarating joy that permeates the story of Jesus birth? To be sure, there is some joy on earth among human beings, but as Jesus is born, the real joy is what fills heaven and overflows to earth. It is irrepressible. It bursts out. It is unrestrained delight.

There is an angel with glory all over him as he announces the birth. There is “good news” and there is “great joy.” And suddenly, there is a whole army of angels set free to sing as it seems even angels have never sung, “Glory to God in the highest heaven....”

Why the joy? Much of the reason may be summed up in the delight that is felt by the giver of a gift. It has to do with the joy that floods in when the time has finally come to give the gift we could hardly wait to give.

Tomorrow is Christmas. It celebrates the giving of *the* Gift. It tells us that the joy of giving is what heaven and real life on earth is all about.

Appeal:

As you give today, know deep in your soul all over again, the profound joy and satisfaction that comes with a gift gladly and generously given.

Prayer

Sabbath 53
December 31, 2005
Offering: Church Budget

Today marks another ending and the immediate prospect of another beginning. As always, it is a time for honest personal evaluation, and a time to look with exhilaration into the face of what is new and untouched.

Today is a time for deep, practical repentance. It is a moment “tailor made” for you to renew before God, and with all your heart, your relationship to the essential people and principles in your life, and of course, with the Lord Himself.

What are the things that matter most to you? What are your most cherished values? What do you actually care about most?

Isn't it those people closest to you ... the ones you love? Isn't it your Lord and your faith and the small and large things you have been called to do in your corner of the world? Deep down, these are the things that move us most, that give us meaning, or at least that we would like to lead us to our best action day to day through the coming year.

Appeal:

As you bring your offering today, make this moment of giving a moment of truth between you and your Lord. Walk confidently into the New Year with your heart clean and true and glad before Him.

Prayer