

DYNAMIC

# Steward

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

July-September, 2006

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where He leads?

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Volume 10 Number 3

## Growing Up



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

There was an unexpected knock at the front door. When Jay opened it, he had to cast his eyes downward, for there stood Bobby, the dark-haired preschooler from across the street.

“Can Carlene come out and play?” Bobby asked.

This account describes a typical event in many homes around the world, but this visit was an exception. Carlene was the wife and mother of the house and Jay was her husband! When Carlene told me the story, we both had a good laugh. Why? Because, even though she was touched by the little fellow’s request, it was unexpected. It did not fit with the typical order of things.

Growing up is a natural part of life. We expect it. And if it does not happen as expected, it can be a disturbing thing. Not knowing how to tie your shoes at three is normal; at thirty, it is not.

We may not think of it, but growing up in Christ is much the same. It is not in the normal order of things for one who has been a Christian for some time to show signs of spiritual infancy. Paul speaks of it this way:

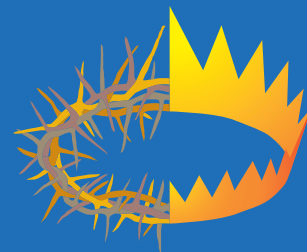
“By this time you ought to be teachers yourselves, yet here I find you need someone to sit down with you and go over the basics on God again, starting from square one—baby’s milk, when you should have been on solid food long ago! Milk is for beginners, inexperienced in God’s ways; solid food is for the mature, who have some practice in telling right from wrong” (Hb 5:11-14, *Message*).

Sometimes we coddle ourselves and our members by not helping us or them to grow up in Christ. In his book, *Intentional Disciplemaking*, Ron Bennett describes “the process of successfully discipling a childish Christian into a mature adult through the family model” (p. 27). He outlines three stages of growth: the child, the adult and the parent (See *Book Reviews*, p. 15). Each stage is vital—from the total dependence of the spiritual child, to the adult who has delved deeply into God’s Word. But the third stage, the role of parent, reveals a level of maturity that moves beyond the other two. The parent is mature and responsible enough to mentor others in their spiritual growth.

Christ’s life example shows us that He demonstrated all three stages. He was totally dependent on His Father. He even said, “I tell you the truth, unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven” (Mt 18:3). And He was steeped in the Word of God. As a result, He stepped out and took twelve men into His confidence. He was their teacher, their rabbi and mentor.

Our goal in growing to the full maturity of discipleship is to come to the place where we can be “spiritual parents,” or mentors. Isn’t it? As we learn to depend on Him completely and bathe in His Word to us, we may step out with Him in the blessed privilege of mentoring His children toward this same goal. This is what growing up is all about.

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Exploring partnership with God

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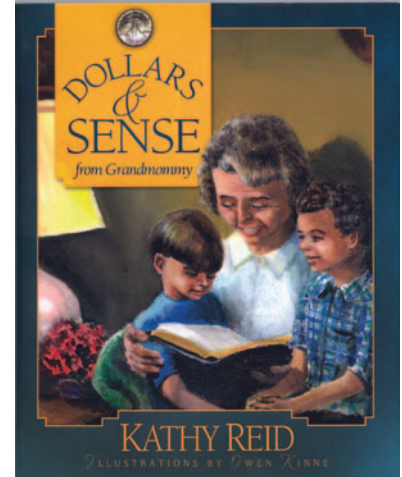
## *Dollars and Sense: from Grandmommy*

**D**ollars and Sense is an interactive storybook with activity sheets that introduce 5- to 8-year-olds to what the Bible says about money. It includes such topics as saving, spending, tithe, offerings, work, honesty, debt, contentment, seeking counsel, and sacrifice.

The book features the adventures of Bobby and Danny as they learn important lessons from Grandmommy on these topics. These character-building stories and lessons are an ideal tool for parents, home-schoolers, Sabbath School, and church school teachers.

The eleven lessons include full-color illustrations, Bible-based study guides, and practical activity sheets that are designed for use in family worship, home-schooling, small group Bible study, and church school.

Author, Kathy R. Reid, is a trained teacher/counselor by Larry Burkett's *Christian Financial Concepts* and qualified as an instructor in *Crown Ministries' Small Group Bible Study*. She is the wife of the North American Division stewardship director, G. Edward Reid.



by Kathy R. Reid  
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*“Wise Mr. Squirrel stores some nuts today.  
 Save some. Save some. Very good!  
 Dear Jesus tells him, store some nuts today—  
 Save some nuts for winter food.”*

## quotes

### *Stewardship...*

Anything that is of value in life only multiplies when it is given.—*Deepak Chopra*

We should travel light and live simply. Our enemy is not possessions, but excess.—*John Stott*

Let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven.—*Jesus Christ*

Stewardship always starts with a repentant heart, a change of mind concerning our opinion about earthly values.—*John A. Knight*

Stewardship is not humanity's way of raising money, but rather God's way of raising people into the likeness of His Son.—*Doug Carter*

The most important aspect of tithing and stewardship is not the raising of money for the church, but the development of devoted Christians.—*Fred M. Wood*

Stewardship is everything—a call, a gift, a lifestyle. We, the women and men of today, are stewards of ... the ongoing creation.—*Rosemary Williams*

## Growing Disciples in the World

*Erika F. Puni, Director  
General Conference Stewardship*



Spring is the time for new life, rejuvenation, new growth and new beginnings; and there is no better picture of this change in season than the cherry blossoms of Washington DC, capital of the United States. On the day we visited in April, thousands of cherry trees lining the lake were all blossoms—flowers of pink and white—quite a scene to behold. The cherry blossom is evidence that the trees, in spite of their leafless appearance, are still alive and growing.

The church, the community of God's people in the world, is like cherry trees. It is a living organism and God expects it to grow. In fact, growth is a natural manifestation of anything that is alive. But how do you grow the Church? The Church grows when members are spiritually connected to Jesus Christ, and as disciples they, in turn, go out and introduce others to Him.

As a Stewardship Department, we believe in a growing church. Because of this, we chose "Growing Disciples in the World" as our theme for the 2006 World Advisory. This decision to focus on growing disciples is not only consistent with our philosophical understanding of biblical stewardship, but also demonstrates our commitment to the "Tell the World" initiative of the General Conference. Of the seven goals identified as focus areas for the initiative (see *Stewardship Window*, p. 5), I want to address two—spiritual growth and personal witness—that we can contribute toward in our stewardship ministry around the globe.

### Spiritual growth and Tell the World

The intent of this goal is to increase the percentage of Seventh-day Adventist members in the world who are engaged in daily, personal Bible study and prayer. But why is such an emphasis important for the individual church member and corporate church? Daily Bible study and prayer is essential food for spiritual growth. It is the fruit of the life that is connected to Christ. In the Christian walk, we study the Word of God because in it we find Jesus, the "Living Word" (Jn 5:39). It is in the Bible that we discover the will of God for ourselves and are confronted with the person of Christ, whom to know is life eternal. It is in the study of Scriptures that God will change our mindset and our behavior (Lk 24:32-35).

But Bible study in the context of this world initiative is more than what we do for personal devotion or study for the purpose of understanding an issue or query. We study the Word to know and experience Him as our personal Saviour and Lord, and this is Christian stewardship. As Seventh-day Adventists, we must commit ourselves to this goal as a matter of lifestyle. Moreover, this spiritual goal has to be part of our ongoing stewardship education in the churches.

In the real world of Christian living, Bible study is the natural partner to prayer. They go together like hand and glove. In the context of spiritual growth, prayer is both communion and communication with God. It is talking to Him as our Father and listening to Him daily. But more importantly, it is being in the presence of the Almighty. In the words of Ellen White, "Prayer is the opening of the heart to God as to a friend" (*Steps to Christ*, p. 93). Prayer is a gift from God, and the lifeline that connects us to Him 24/7. It is the breath that gives life to our soul and, in this sense, prayer is critical to being alive in Christ and fundamental to being a disciple and steward of God.

### Personal witness and Tell the World

Personal witness as a goal of Tell the World is a challenge to five-million Seventh-day Adventists to reach at least one person for Jesus and to bring them into



fellowship with the Church by the year 2010. This goal of five-million is established to encourage Adventists to participate in God's mission, but it is also a reminder to every church member that by accepting Jesus as our personal Savior and Lord, we are under obligation to God to share His love with everyone we come in contact with. It is important to note, however, that the challenge is to church members and not to pastors or professional evangelists, and the reason for this broad appeal is clear. Christ's mandate to His Church to make disciples of all peoples (Mt 28:18-20) is an invitation to every believer and member—and pastors and evangelists are included. Involvement in personal witness is based on our relationship with Jesus and our responsibility as stewards and disciples. Personal witness is the lifestyle of the Christian, and an expression of biblical stewardship.

## Our personal involvement with Tell the World

While I have limited the discussion of Tell the World to two areas, the other five are also important in fulfilling God's mission in the world. My intention is to simply identify two of these goals where I see the Stewardship ministry of the Church playing a major part in implementing this world initiative. My prayer for the reader is this: "God, help me to recognize the value of growing together with You in prayer and Bible study. Use me as an instrument of Your grace to share Your love to others every day."

*We study the Word to know and experience Him as our personal Savior and Lord, and this is Christian stewardship.*



# stewardship

news from the director's desk ...



## Tell The World

On March 13-16, 2006, a World Stewardship Advisory was held at the General Conference headquarters. Elder Mark Finley, General Vice President of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, presented an overview of the Church's new initiative, Tell the World, to the thirteen Division Stewardship directors attending the Advisory.

In the words of Elder Finley, "Tell the World is a vision of how the gospel of Jesus will be shared by the Seventh-day Adventist Church from 2005-2010. It focuses the church on its identity as a "called out" community and its end-time mission of proclaiming the gospel to 'every nation, and kindred, and tongue, and people'" (Rv 14:6 KJV).

Findley says, "Tell the World is more than a program or slogan. It is a vision of what the Church, by God's grace, will be and do in fulfilling the

command of Jesus to preach the Gospel to every creature. It is an individual and corporate commitment to live out the key values of quality of life, unity, and growth in God's family."

The church has identified seven key areas on which to focus its resources, energies, and prayers: 1) Spiritual Growth, 2) Community Involvement, 3) Personal Witness, 4) City Outreach, 5) Church Planting, 6) Evangelistic Programming, and 7) Media Ministry.

An unabridged outline of the Tell the World initiative can be obtained by visiting our website at [AdventistStewardship.com](http://AdventistStewardship.com). Please pray with us that, by the grace and blessing of God, these goals will become a part of each member's life and mission in sharing the good news of Jesus Christ.

## Remember Noah's Carpenters

*Robert E. Lemon, Treasurer  
General Conference of SDA*



### A huge building project

**A**s church leaders, we spend much time preaching, teaching, and working to save others. But it is very easy to spend time saving others and yet be lost ourselves. As we look at and learn from the story of Noah, imagine with me what it would be like to have been there!

The earth had become so wicked that God decided He must destroy it with water. In Genesis 6:13-14, God gives Noah instructions to build an ark of safety. Imagine what it was like that night in Noah's home—Noah and his wife sitting at their kitchen table, going over the plans. It is a huge project, and they know they cannot do it by themselves. Noah is 480 years old and does not have any children yet. He cannot call the local lumber yard to order the wood he needs. He has no chain saw to cut down trees. Clearly, he needs helpers to build the ark.

Picture the ark as it is being built on the side of a beautiful hill near Noah's home. There is a lovely view of the valley below, lined with a small stream. The ark is not built next to a lake where it can be tested. Today we build boats near water so we can lower them in to see if they float. If there is a problem, we get into the lifeboat or swim ashore. But Noah has to build the ark right the first time, for he will not get a chance to make repairs. Because of this, Noah doesn't want just any carpenters to build the ark.

### The test flight

While in college, a friend and I decided to build an airplane. We were both pilots. I had about 400 hours of flying and my friend had nearly 80. You needed about 40 hours to get your pilot's license. We got the plans for a Tin Ginny all-aluminum single seater, with a modified Volkswagen engine. My friend's cousin was nearly finished with his Master's degree in aeronautical engineering and helped us build the plane. He was not a pilot, but was obviously much better qualified to build the plane than we were. In building an airplane, you must keep a log book of every weld, rivet, screw, and piece that you put on the plane, and initial the work you do. Then, at various points in the construction, an inspector from the Federal Aviation Administration inspects the work.

We worked on the plane on weeknights and Sundays for about a year. My friend was going to fly the plane first, because he paid two thirds of the cost and I paid one third. It was exciting as we neared completion. The last inspection was done, and we only needed to put on the covers that enclosed the inspection points, and the plane would be ready for the test flight.

I will never forget that evening my friend came to my house. He said, "Some of my friends think you should fly the plane first, since you have more flying experience." Now, I intended to fly the plane, but only after he had flown it and I knew it worked! When he left, I vividly remember going to the garage to go through the log book. I looked for all the work my friend's cousin had done. He was a much better engineer than either of us, but as he was not a pilot and this was a one-seater, he would never be flying in it! I did not check the work my friend had done. He was going to fly in the plane. But I wanted to check everything his cousin had done. He might have been in a hurry some Sunday to get to a ball game with his girlfriend or something, and might not have done a weld as carefully as he should have. Or maybe he didn't put a lock nut on some pulley that he was installing.

SCRIPTURE:  
Genesis 6:18

## Carpenters at work

Noah looked for carpenters who would be in the ark with them. I imagine him going through the list of people he knew to decide who would want to be saved in the ark with them. He needed good carpenters, but, carpenters who wanted to be in the ark!

One hundred and twenty years is a long time to work on a project. As the ark starts to take shape, word begins to spread about the crazy old man who is building a ship where there is no water. People said he was predicting that water would fall from heaven and flood the entire earth. I imagine Noah standing on a pile of wood each afternoon, telling the gathered people what God told him. His carpenters have heard the sermon thousands of times. As the crowd laughs at Noah, at times he becomes discouraged. I can imagine him saying to God, “Lord, if you just send a sign, they will believe *you*. Maybe just a few drops of rain or a clap of thunder to get their attention?” But the Lord does not send any signs now.

Can you imagine the excitement when the ark is finished and God says, “Noah, next week you will go into the ark”? I can see Noah and his three sons doing the last inspection of the ark and bringing in food for the animals.

Then Noah announces to everyone, “Be here early in the morning to enter the ark!” As the crowd gathers, something very strange happens. Animals began to come from the forest, two by two and seven by seven. I can imagine three lanes of animals going into the ark—one lane for the big animals—the elephants, lions, cows. A second lane for the smaller animals—cats, squirrels, rabbits. Noah pats some dirt to make a little ramp up to the big log ramp for the really small and slow creatures—the inchworms, caterpillars, and snails.

## The step of faith

The people begin to wonder if Noah *is* right. But the wise men say, “Don’t worry. Remember how Noah said he was going to take a nap every afternoon after his sermon? He was really down in the woods training the animals. There will not be a flood. Water will not fall from heaven. We all know that water is heavier than air and cannot fall from heaven.”

After the animals are in the ark, Noah stands at the top of the ramp, inviting the people to come in. But no one comes. He calls each carpenter by name, saying, “You promised you would come in and be saved!” A group of carpenters off to one side discuss their plans: “We don’t have to go in now and embarrass ourselves. Noah cannot close that door. It took twelve of us just to lift it onto its hinges. We can wait until everyone leaves and then go in with him and close the door. We don’t have to risk being ridiculed if it does not rain.”

After his last plea, Noah slowly enters the ark. Suddenly, the door closes! There are no visible hands closing it. Noah’s carpenters knew Noah did not close that door! Imagine them pacing back and forth that night, watching the sky. In the morning, the sun comes up and things do not seem so bad. They have several sleepless nights, but, by the fourth or fifth day, the carpenters join the crowds that taunt Noah and his family.

But on the seventh day, the sky turns black and rain begins to fall. Noah’s carpenters are first to reach the ark. They pound on the door, demanding, “We built the ark, we have the right to be saved in it!” But Noah can do nothing. They could

*I will never forget that evening my friend came to my house. He said, “Some of my friends think you should fly the plane first, since you have more flying experience.” Now, I intended to fly the plane, but only after he had flown it and I knew it worked!*

have simply walked into the ark a week earlier, but now they are lost. For years they had worked to build the ark, but they were not saved in it.

We are all carpenters building God’s “ark of safety” for the last days—His Church. Luke says, “Remember Lot’s wife.” We also need to “remember Noah’s carpenters.” God chose us to work, not just for our technical skills, but because we promised to be “in” the ark. How sad to spend our whole life building and then not taking the simple step of faith to walk in and be saved. My prayer is that none of us is left outside.



## Stewardship: Living God's Will

*Erika F. Puni, Director  
General Conference Stewardship*



I was waiting for my car at a suburbia Ford dealer in Sydney, Australia, when a framed statement on the office wall caught my eye. The statement was an acronym of the word PLANS which expressed “Ford’s Management Commitment Plans.” As a preacher who is always looking for sermon illustrations, I was interested in what I saw. Here is what that Ford PLANS stood for:

**Plan** for success and perform to the plan

**Lead** not just manage

**Accountable** for actions, and **Act** to achieve best results

Concentrate on **Necessities** and be **Necessary** to add value

Create **Satisfactory** workplace and totally **Satisfy** customers

When I read these words, I could not help but think of how Christians can learn from this commitment plan and its values, and my mind went to the New Testament passage in James 4:13-17. The apostle James was interested in practical Christianity, and he wanted God’s people to live out their faith in the ordinary things of life. One of those important aspects of Christian living was planning—thus his observations and emphasis of James 4:13.

### Message 1: Make your plans today

“Now listen, you who say, ‘Today or tomorrow we will go to this or that city, spend a year there, carry on business and make money’”(Jm 4:13). James may have heard of Christian traders (or businessmen) in the church, talking about their plans to travel from one location to another, set up shop, and make profit from the sale of their services or products. In this verse, he compliments these industrious individuals who understand the principles and value of good organization and planning. In his view, such an approach to life is consistent with Christianity—living life to the full in the present, and planning for the future.

In the twenty-first century, this same emphasis is evident in the corporate world where we hear terms like “corporate plans,” “strategic plans,” and “annual plans.” All these business concepts and practices make one point: success is contingent on good planning. God’s people, Christian stewards, are encouraged to do the same for themselves, their families, and their churches. Planning is not only biblical, it is good stewardship practice.

However, it is one thing to have plans established, but another to develop “smart” plans. This understanding of the difference between “smart” and “dumb” plans became more apparent to me during the first Gulf War when America and its allies used “smart” bombs to hit far-away targets that were too difficult or risky to approach at close range. Microchips inserted in the electronic systems of these bombs ensured that these weapons would be able to hit their targets more accurately than before. Using another acronym—SMART—we are reminded of these important components of planning:

**S** = Smart plans are **specific**, and are clearly defined.

**M** = Smart plans are **measurable** and can be assessed at any time.

**A** = Smart plans have a good fit, **appropriate** to the environment and situation.

**R** = Smart plans are **realistic**, and have been carefully thought through.

**T** = Smart plans are developed with a due date in mind, they are **time specific**.

SCRIPTURE:  
James 4:13-17



## Message 2: Life is uncertain and brief

While James encourages Christians to be organized and to plan wisely, he balances this futuristic view with the message that human life in this world is brief. “Why, you do not even know what will happen tomorrow. What is your life? You are a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes” (Jm 4:14). His rhetorical question is meant to challenge the casual mind about the purpose of human existence.

So, what is life? James answers with an object lesson about a thin cloud of vapor that is visible in the morning, but when the sun rises or the winds blow, the mist disappears. His point is, life is short! And so, while we should plan our daily schedule for the office and home; while it is OK to set out our travel itinerary for the year and our family vacations; we must always remind ourselves that these are only plans. That as humans we are subject to ill health, we are prone to personal accidents, we can be the victim of natural disasters, and death is also waiting at the door.

Given this reality, Christians must make use of every opportunity they have in life, and must heed the testimony of the preacher “Whatever your hand finds to do, do it with all your might” for today is all that is given to us (Ec 9:10). Life is even too short to be miserable. Yes, life is unfair and suffering and trials are part of our lot on this side of the second coming, but we must learn to look at life each day and say “Lord, thank you for another opportunity to live, to love, and to serve you.”

## Message 3: Seek God’s will in all things

While James affirms the practice of smart planning, he also reminds believers to maximize life’s opportunities, because human existence is temporal. With this picture clearly painted, he now turns to the thesis of this part of his letter, “If it is the Lord’s will, we will live and do this or that” (Jm 4:15). In James’ heart, as a leader of God’s people, his desire and primary concern is that church members make the matter of living God’s will a priority.

The apostle does not discourage human effort and initiative, as demonstrated in his emphasis on planning, but he offers a spiritual perspective that puts God first and foremost in all our endeavors. Simply put, the will of God is the constant factor that brings success, joy, peace, contentment, satisfaction, and a sense of wholeness. This view is fundamental for Christians, given the temporality of life on earth.

So where should God’s will be applied? It ought to dictate every facet of our Christian life and experience. In our homes, our workplace, our churches, in our relationships, business proposals, and even in our personal plans. Everything must come under the lordship of Jesus Christ—His will. If He *really* is Lord, then He is Lord of all: our worship, our leadership, our families, our technology, our economy, and our conversation.

## Message 4: Sin is living outside God’s will

In some parts of the Bible, sin is defined as the breaking of God’s law (1Jn 3:4). In James’ mind, however, sin is when Christians seek to live outside the realm of God’s reign and control. “Anyone, then, who knows the good he ought to do and does not do it, sins” (Jm 4:17). In other words, when we place our trust in ourselves and our abilities, without any consideration of God, we sin. When we thrust God to the side and take no notice of His presence; when we commit to our plans and do not consult Him, we sin.

*As humans we are subject to ill health, we are prone to personal accidents, we can be the victim of natural disasters, and death is also waiting at the door.*

As Christian stewards and God’s people today, we can learn the lessons of yielding to God’s will from the example of Christ Himself. Jesus’ desire was to always do the will of His Father. This was the underlying factor in His relationship with God. Nothing took the place of God in His heart. When teaching the disciples how to pray He said, “Your kingdom come, Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven” (Mt 6:10). In the Garden of Gethsemane and before the cross, Jesus prayed, “My Father, if it is not possible for this cup to be taken away unless I drink it, may your will be done” (Mt 26:42).

There was no situation too big or too small that Jesus did not share with His Father. And when he was tested with abuse, isolation and suffering, and the cross loomed ever so near, He continued to trust His Father and allowed God’s will to rule, whatever the cost. In your ministry and life today, will you let go of the remote control you hold and let Jesus reign supremely in your heart? If you do, then you are living the principles of Christian stewardship. Stewardship is the lifestyle of one who makes his or her plans, but lives the will of God, daily.



## A Spiritual Matter

Armando Miranda, Vice President  
General Conference of SDA



This sermon is an abridge version of the devotional given at the General Conference Stewardship World Advisory on March 13, 2006.

### A new beginning and challenge

In 1972, I was assigned to my first pastorate—a district of ten churches. The main church sanctuary had a seating capacity of at least 400, but only thirty members attended each Sabbath. And just five to seven members came to Wednesday evening prayer meeting. The worst thing was that members were fighting among themselves, which affected their lives in a very negative way.

It was a sad experience to preach to an empty and divided church. I prayed to God for wisdom to help my brothers and sisters. Many times I wept before Him. I tried to do my best—visiting the members, praying, and studying God’s Word with them, encouraging them to trust in and know Jesus—but little was happening.

I began to study the Bible and inspired writings with the members, especially on Wednesday evenings. Some began to come to church, but it was a very difficult situation. One day I prayed and said, “Lord, if you do not help me with your Church, I am lost! You know I am coming to the point of giving up. I do not know what to do for your people to be revived here. Please help me!”

After praying and receiving comfort from God, suddenly, this idea came to my mind: “I have to check the church treasury books! I must see how we are doing with the tithes and offerings.”

As I began to examine the records, I found that the two church elders were unfaithful in giving tithes and offerings, as well as other leaders. I also discovered that the treasurer had taken money for her personal use. Knowing this, I intensified my efforts to try and help these members. I prayed and talked with them about these matters. I also began preaching about how we need to come close to Jesus and be faithful in returning tithes and offerings to God.

God blessed in a special way. Members began to return to God, gave back tithes and offerings, and experienced the blessings of the Lord. They were also compelled to share their faith. By the grace of God, in seven months, forty new people were baptized and the church was revived! And our financial situation was wonderful.

Is there any relationship between finances and salvation? We know salvation is by faith alone, not by works. But obedience is the *fruit* of salvation. If we are saved by faith in Jesus and faith produces trust and trust produces obedience, then salvation is related to obedience in all things, including money. How we relate to material possessions is a spiritual matter.

### The sacredness of tithes and offerings

What is God’s attitude toward tithes and offerings? Concerning the nature of tithe, the Bible says: “It is holy to the Lord” (Lv 27:30). Offerings were also instituted by God as an important part of worship. “. . . and they shall not appear before the Lord empty handed” (Dt 16:16). “. . . None shall appear before me empty” (Ex 23:15; 34:20).

Ellen White uses the Sabbath to illustrate the nature of tithe: “For like the Sabbath, a tenth of the increase is sacred” (*Testimonies*, vol. 3, p. 395). And, “The seventh day is the Sabbath of the Lord thy God. . . . In like manner, a tithe of our income is ‘holy unto the Lord’” (*Counsels on Stewardship*, p.66).

The clear implication is that God reserved to Himself a specific portion of man’s time and means. They became the exclusive possession of God.

SCRIPTURE:  
Leviticus 27:30

*One day I prayed and said, “Lord, if you do not help me with your Church, I am lost! You know I am coming to the point of giving up. I do not know what to do for your people to be revived here. Please help me!”*

God says, “Will a man rob God? Yet you have robbed me. But you ask, ‘How do we rob you?’ In tithes and offerings. You are under a curse . . . because you are robbing me. . . . Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse, that there may be food in my house, says the Lord Almighty, and “see if I will not throw open the floodgates of heaven and pour out so much blessing that you will not have room . . . for it” (Mal 3:8-10).

The determining factor in tithing is not gratitude or generosity, but something much more significant. “This is a matter of simple honesty. . . . It is a moral responsibility that is not to be controlled by the state of human emotions or tendencies, but by the unwavering principle and value of honesty (Mal 3:8). The tithe is the Lord’s; and He bids us return to Him that which is His own” (*Education*, p. 139).

## God’s purpose

The plan of tithes and offerings was introduced by God with the purpose of—

**1** *Recognizing God’s lordship.* “The system of tithes and offerings was intended to impress the minds of men with a great truth—that God is the source of every blessing to His creatures” (*Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 525).

**2** *Restoring human dignity.* Because of the plan of salvation, God declares that He again trusts us with the responsibility of His creation. By bringing our tithe to Him “we are declaring that God is the Possessor of all our property and that He has made us stewards to use it for His glory” (*Tithes, The Pacific Recorder*; Oct 10, 1901).

**3** *Being an instrument in character development.* The tithing system was instituted by God as “a training adapted to kill out all narrowing selfishness and to cultivate breadth and nobility of character” (*Education*, p.44).

## Our role as stewardship leaders

After briefly reviewing God’s plan for tithes and offerings and its importance in worship, we must ask the following question: “What is the role of the Stewardship Department in the Church?”

The *Church Manual* reads: “The Stewardship Department was organized to help members become effective stewards and to assist in the implementation of God’s plan of systematic benevolence throughout the church. Since stewardship responsibility includes the proper management of the *entire* life, stewardship concepts encourage the proper care and use of the body temple, time, abilities, and material possessions.” (2000 Ed, p. 116).

“The question of stewardship . . . covers many aspects of the Christian life and experience . . . but there is no doubt that the stewardship of our means is a vitally important phase of this question. . . . It involves our recognition of the sovereignty of God, of His ownership of all things, and of the bestowal of His grace upon our hearts” (Ibid, p. 152).

## Conclusion

The time has come to complete the mission God has entrusted to us and to prepare for Jesus’ return. Part of this mission is to help members understand what it means to be faithful stewards and partners with God.

God is calling us to faithfully return the tithe and joyfully give our offerings. “If all the tithes of our people flowed into the treasury of the Lord as they should, such blessings would be received that gifts and offerings for sacred purposes would be multiplied tenfold, and thus the channel between God and man would be kept open.” (*Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 4, p. 474).

There is a Chinese proverb that says: “If you give a fish to a poor man, you are going to feed him for one day. But if you teach him to fish, you will feed him forever.” If we help members to be faithful to God, He will open the windows of heaven upon them. For the sake of the Church He holds dear, and, by His grace, let us focus our ministry on teaching God’s principles of biblical stewardship.



## The Importance of Being Reliable

**Ken W. Smith**

President and Founder

Christian Stewardship Ministries

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*Being God's steward in the world means being someone who can be counted upon. Ken Smith shares ways to help us be more reliable.*

### Becoming reliable

When was the last time you said you would do something, but then did not do it? Or you did it so poorly that everyone would have been better off if you had said “No” to begin with?

If you make a habit of breaking your promises, you will soon develop a reputation as an unreliable person.... [But] ... if you are a Christian, you have another problem. Jesus tells us, “Simply let your ‘Yes’ be ‘Yes,’ and your ‘No,’ ‘No’ (Mt 5:37). When we say “Yes,” but we are consistently unreliable, we do more than damage our own reputation—we damage God’s reputation in the eyes of those who see Him through us. Not only do we discourage other Christians, but we also discourage unbelievers from even considering the claims of Christ.

I have never met anyone who really wanted to be known as unreliable. But I have known many people who have too often said “Yes” when they should have said “No.” Or have said “Yes,” but then did not perform as they promised due to poor organization.... I am not talking about the person who occasionally does not live up to commitments. We have all experienced that from time to time. I am talking about the person who acquires a reputation for not being reliable.

### Getting motivated

There are several reasons people become known as unreliable. Sometimes just recognizing the problem and making a conscious effort to do what you say you will do will change your reputation. Or perhaps you need to improve poor personal organization or develop your ability to say “No” to ensure that you can keep your commitments.

If you are not well-organized, you may want to become better organized if you can see it in terms of what God wants you to do or be or become. Ask God to show you His desire for you in terms of personal organization. If your struggle is not so much whether God wants you to be better organized, but rather how to get there, then be sure you have enough regular daily quiet time to enable Him to tell you how.

And if your struggle involves knowing when or how to say “No,” this is what you should address in your time with God. The bottom line is that unless, and until, you are willing ... to spend enough time with God regularly, you probably will not make significant progress in becoming more reliable. And if you do, you will.

### Listening and planning

To begin seeking God’s guidance, if you have no time regularly committed, start with fifteen minutes a day. If you already have established the habit, then set a goal of one hour with the Lord, but work up to that gradually. And if you already spend an hour, concentrate on improving the *quality* of your time with Him.

To become reliable, you also need a regular time for personal planning and daily organization. Again, if you do not have any time set aside for planning, you might begin with ten or fifteen minutes. Even that will seem like a long time until you learn to fill it wisely....

Try scheduling your planning time in the morning before the day catches up with you ... or at the end of the day. After you have established a routine, you can discover the best time for you on an ongoing basis.

SCRIPTURE:  
Matthew 5:37

During planning time, you need to do several things to improve your ability to be reliable. First, make a list of all the commitments you have made to others, including God. Remember your spouse, your children, your boss, your coworkers ... and everyone you talked to the day before. Perhaps you could write down any commitments you make.

Next, establish a date to fulfill every commitment you have made. Some short-term commitments you can complete immediately. Long-term projects you may need to break into steps, giving each step its own deadline. Finally, you need to report to each person to whom you made a commitment. Even if you have not done what you promised, at least report your progress or lack thereof.

### Establishing routines

When you set aside planning time on a daily basis, you can review your ongoing commitments and add any new ones you made the prior day. You can begin to measure your progress and see where you are slipping. You can give yourself time to recover before it is too late. And if all else fails, you can at least tell the person you committed to that you have not lived up to the commitment.

Too often, when we see ourselves slipping behind, we hunker down and sentence ourselves to feeling guilty. Time passes, and so does the pain associated with a broken commitment—until we see the other person, or remember. Then the guilt washes over us again and again.

If you are living with the guilt of broken commitments, put them to rest. Call the people involved and ask for their forgiveness. Then accept that forgiveness, forgive yourself, and move on. If you are struggling with a commitment that you must break, take the initiative. Contact the person and receive a release from the commitment, or make a new one you can keep.

Once quiet time and planning time have become routine parts of your day, you are ready to establish other routines. Routines are the key to personal organization, and personal organization is the key to becoming consistently reliable. You should have a routine time to go to bed and a routine time to get up. A routine time to break for lunch and to leave the office. If you have a family, you should have a routine dinner time and a routine time to spend with family members.

As you establish more routines in your life, you will find that you are becoming more reliable. You will begin to think in terms of when you will do the things you are committing to. Just as importantly, you will begin to realize what you do not have time for. You will begin to say “No” and not feel guilty. You will realize before saying “Yes” that if you do, you run the risk of being unreliable....

### Breaking the tardiness habit

It is easy to overlook punctuality as a problem area. But have you ever heard anyone rush into a meeting or appointment and say, “Boy, am I glad I am late”? Of course not. We instinctively know that tardiness is bad.... But have you ever stopped to think about why habitual tardiness is bad? It is because habitual tardiness indicates a lack of respect for the other person.

If you are guilty of habitual tardiness, try looking at it as being consistently unreliable. If people expect and plan for you to be late, your reputation is sullied. In effect, you are saying that you consider yourself more important than those around

*It is easy to overlook punctuality as a problem area. But have you ever heard anyone rush into a meeting or appointment and say, “Boy, am I glad I am late”?*

you.... If you want to overcome habitual tardiness, decide to and plan to be early wherever you go. Determine in advance when you should leave in order to be early, and then exercise the discipline to leave at that time.

If you need some help—some accountability—then you might impose a fine on yourself for every minute you are late. Or ... give up something you want whenever you are late.

Being reliable is important, to you and to God. So make it a priority. If you want to be known as a reliable person, true to the commitments you make, decide to become better organized. Allow time for listening to God and for personal planning. Establish routines and commit yourself to breaking the tardiness habit. Follow these simple measures, and you will succeed.

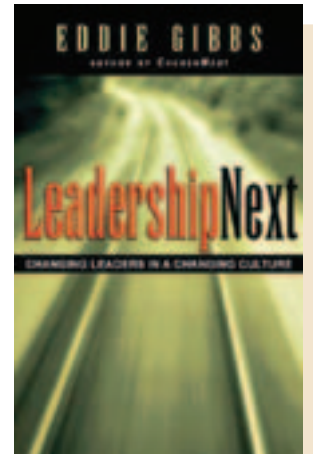


## *Leadership Next*

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

This volume on leadership is one of the best I have read recently. In it, Eddie Gibbs addresses the leadership challenges that we face in today's church. The old, traditional way of leading the church, which followed the acronym PLOC (Plan, Lead, Organize, and Control), no longer works.

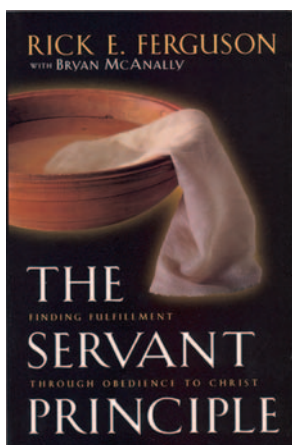
Leadership today is not about controlling but about connecting people to one another. Gibbs also argues that church leaders should be shaped by God's mission rather than by a self-serving agenda of numerical growth or defensive isolation. Growth should be a by-product, not a primary focus. Gibbs then mentions the acid test of church leaders: the number of disciples they have mentored on the path to spiritual maturity—and we all have serious problems qualifying here. A great book for pastors concerned with their influence in their churches.



by Eddie Gibbs  
InterVarsity Press  
Downers Grove, Illinois  
2005 US \$14.00

## *The Servant Principle*

*Reviewed by Erika F. Puni, Director  
General Conference Stewardship Department*



by Rich K. Ferguson  
Broadman & Holman Publishers  
Nashville, Tennessee  
1999 US \$12.99

The title of this leadership book takes the reader right to the heart and thesis of this collection of sermons—servanthood and Christian service. For Ferguson, servant leadership is all about total obedience and dependence on Jesus Christ, daily (p. 19). Servant leadership, he would argue, is contrary to human nature and does not come naturally to us.

This work has a strong biblical foundation in the way it offers Bible passages as the base for expounding biblical truths on Christian leadership. It is also practical in its use of illustrations and human interest stories (very often from the author's ministry) to make a point. In so doing, it helps the reader to identify the principle while, at the same time, it opens up opportunity for personal application. The chapters which represent individual sermons, come across as personal appeals from the heart of a pastor—a spiritual leader—to the hearts of his parishioners and readers.

Structurally, the leadership ideas and concepts in *The Servant Principle* flow well from beginning to end and are very easy to follow. Organized into eight sections under a leadership/biblical theme and presented in short chapters, this work is ideal for reading at home or on the road. Its messages are excellent for devotional reading and applicable for personal development anywhere it is read.

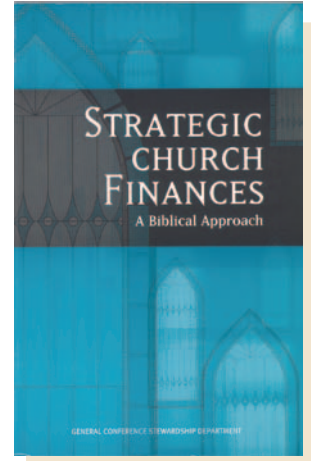
## *Strategic Church Finances*

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

The General Conference Stewardship Department is pleased to announce the release of its new book, *Strategic Church Finances: A Biblical Approach*. The work, based on a revised two-day seminar, focuses on a strategic approach to church finances that is built on a solid understanding of biblical stewardship.

Chapter titles include Biblical Stewardship Review, Money in Stewardship, The Pastoral Role in Stewardship, Local Church Stewardship Strategy, Principles for Capital Projects, and How Church Money is Used.

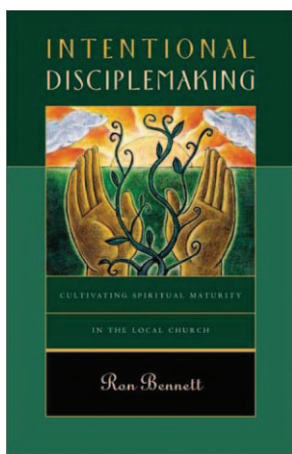
This volume is an excellent resource/workbook for pastors and church members to work together to understand, not only how church money is used, but why.



General Conference  
Stewardship Department  
Silver Spring, Maryland  
2006 US \$2.50

## *Intentional Disciplemaking*

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



by Ron Bennett  
NavPress Publishing  
Colorado Springs, Colorado  
2001 US \$11.00

In his book, *Intentional Disciplemaking*, Ron Bennett says, “To Christ, discipleship was following Him, not just His principles, ideas, or philosophy. It was not primarily conceptual but personal.... Jesus specifically gave points of reference as to what makes someone his disciple: commitment, competence, character, and conviction” (p. 14).

The book is an unusual combination of sentences packed with wisdom, and language that flows comfortably, with vivid illustrations the reader can’t help but ponder. Bennett’s appeal is to disciples who want to help other members “grow up” into mature adults. He describes three stages of discipleship—childhood, adulthood, and parenthood. Spiritual parents are spiritual mentors: “Christians who have a history of experiencing the reality of Christ and are now mature and responsible enough to encourage spiritual growth in others” (p. 29).

As you read, you will learn the difference between Christian conformation and transformation, ways to “evangelize with a penetrating strategy of ongoing love, relationship and service,” and more about how NonChristians think and feel. If you want to help the world and church see authentic followers of Christ, you won’t want to miss this book!

# Now available on DVD!

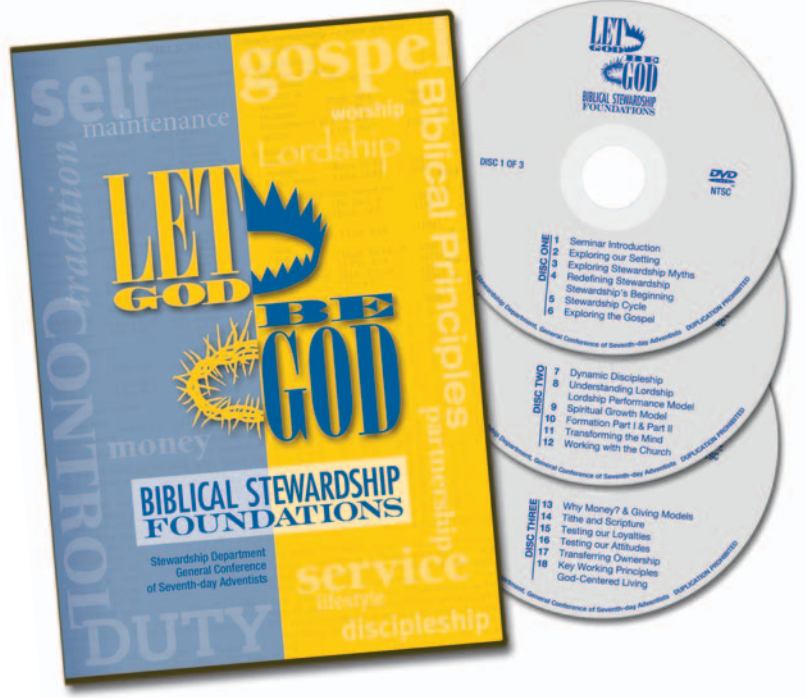
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