



# DYNAMIC Steward

living ▪ submitting ▪ abiding ▪ giving

April-June, 2007

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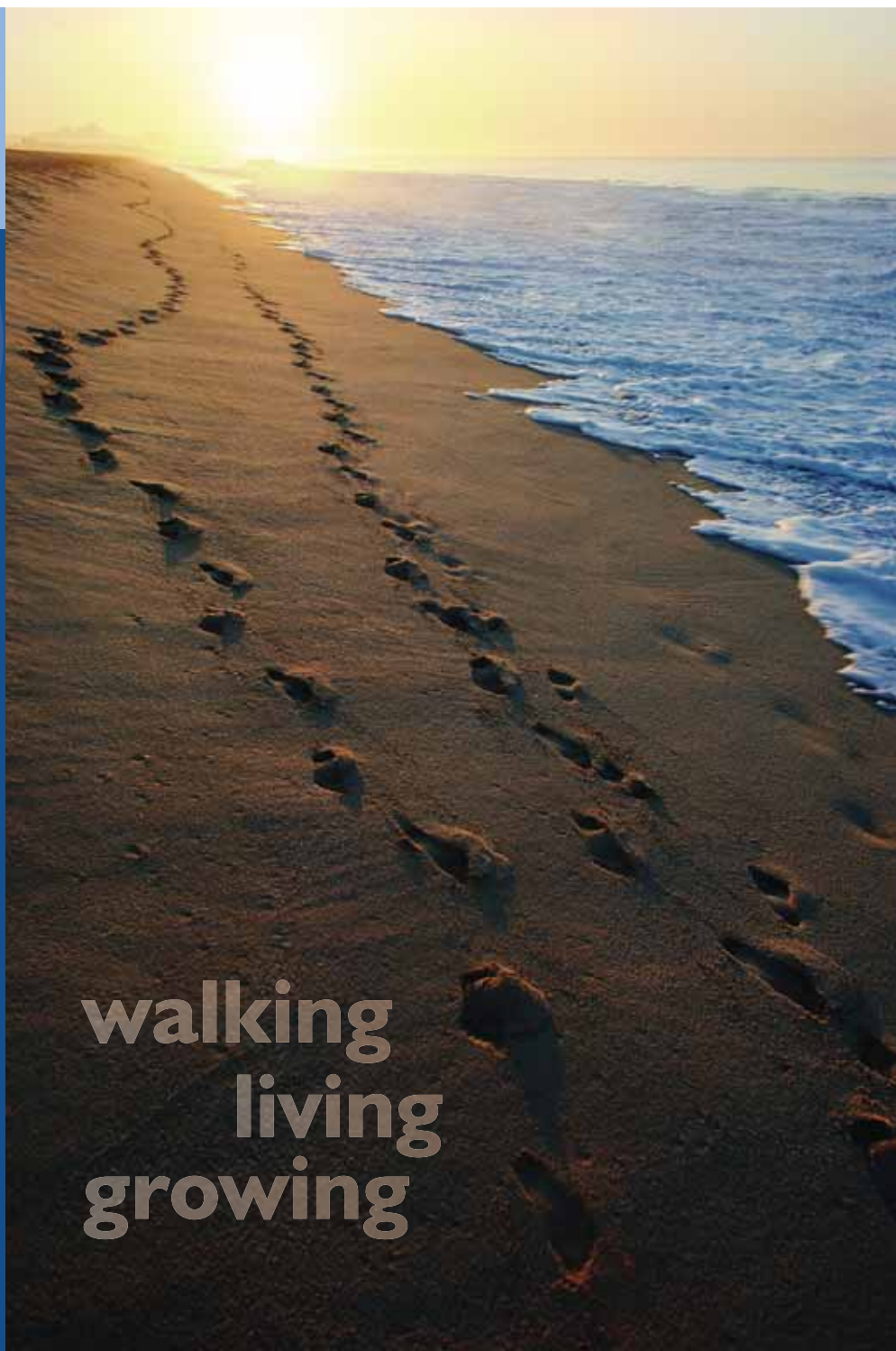
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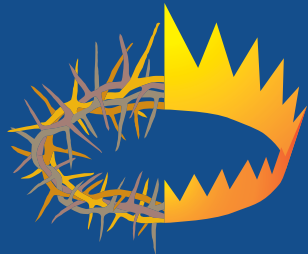


walking  
living  
growing

Volume 11 Number 2

## DYNAMIC Steward

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Exploring partnership with God

12501 Old Columbia Pike  
Silver Spring, MD 20904 USA  
voice: 301-680-6157  
fax: 301-680-6155  
e-mail: gcstewardship@  
gc.adventist.org  
editor: Ovando-GibsonM@  
gc.adventist.org  
url: www.Adventist  
Stewardship.com

### EDITOR:

Maria Ovando-Gibson

### ASSISTANT EDITOR:

Mary Taylor

### EDITORIAL ASSISTANT:

Johnetta Barmadia Flomo

### CONTRIBUTING EDITORS:

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Miguel Luna  
Kigundu Ndwiga  
Mario Nino  
Miguel Pinheiro  
Erika Puni  
G. Edward Reid  
Noldy Sakul  
Joseph Talipuan

**H**ear, O Israel: The LORD is our God, the LORD alone. You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might. Keep these words that I am commanding you today in your heart. Recite them to your children and talk about them when you are at home and when you are away, when you lie down and when you rise” (Dt. 6:4-7).



This pattern of life-to-life modeling and mentoring as from parent to child within a daily life experience and intimate relationship was also evidenced with Jesus and a small group called disciples. Time spent together is key and at the core of a teacher-learner connection. Jesus modeled this foremost principle in his actions amidst the everyday life and occurrences as he walked and moved among the people, providing his disciples a living example of how life is lived when it is linked with and finds its center in God and his companionship.

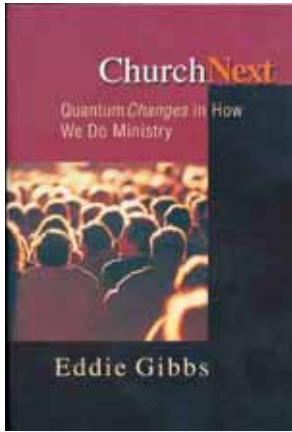
Jesus had three and a half years to intentionally ‘grow’ and facilitate the ‘becoming’ of twelve disciples to continue his mission in the world. His objective did not falter. His mentoring and life-to-life training fulfilled the principle “A disciple is not above the teacher, but everyone who is fully qualified will be like the teacher” (Lk 6:40). Therefore, discipleship is about walking alongside together, intimate relationships, imitation, mentoring, transformation, growing, and life-to-life transference from disciple maker to disciple.

How does one “do” discipleship within one’s own cultural and ministerial context in the twenty-first century? This is the challenge that this issue of *Dynamic Steward* will consider while examining the ‘whys’ and bringing forth helpful, practical ‘hows.’ The *Concept* article will initiate reflection on discipleship within denominational parameters. Our *Current* feature will speak to the usefulness and responsibility of technology within the framework of its purpose in discipleship, while *Across the Globe* will present two contrasting portraits of discipleship within their own cultural circumstance. As a final point, *Character Counts* will present the seriousness of losing sight of God’s grace.

The concept of the emerging church is one that acknowledges that our definition of discipleship must be clear as we meet the challenges of making disciples in the twenty-first century that is, within this generation that is living in a shifting world climate.

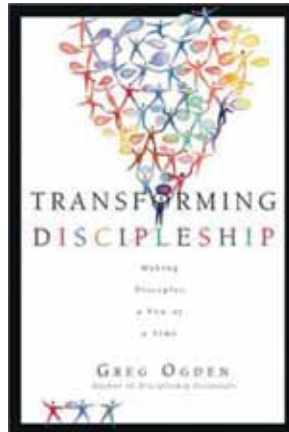
I invite you to embrace the challenges of discipleship while contemplating the words of Dan Kimball (*The Emerging Church*, p 248), “leadership in the emergent church . . . is about leaders first becoming disciples of Jesus with prayerful, missional hearts that are broken for the emerging culture. All the rest will flow from this, not the other way around.”

Alongside you in His service,



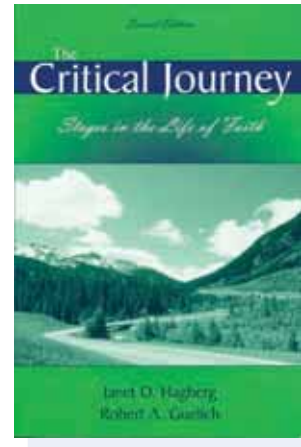
by Eddie Gibbs  
InterVarsity Press  
Downers Grove, Illinois  
2000 US \$15.00

In this book, *Church Next*, the author challenges the church to stir from living in the past to engaging in the present post-modern cultural climate. In a compelling manner Gibbs depicts the ‘quantum shifts taking place in our culture’ while offering initiatives for a mission oriented church model that is true to its biblical call. A must read for pastors and leaders.



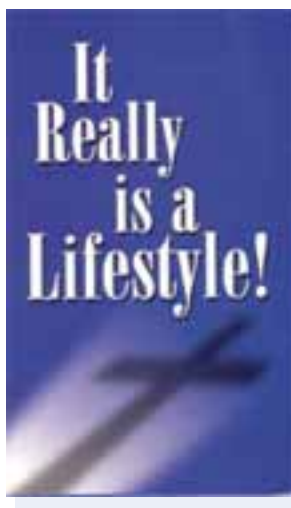
by Greg Ogden  
InterVarsity Press  
Downers Grove, Illinois  
2003 US \$13.00

In his book, *Transforming Discipleship*, Ogden well describes the discipleship deficit and the root causes for ineffective discipleship. Yet drawing from his vast experience as a pastor he presents the principles of discipleship derived from Jesus’ and Paul’s model of discipleship and as instituted in scripture. Challenging and very biblical this is a must have book for those that are equipping, growing and making disciples.



by Janet O. Hagberg  
and Robert A. Guelich  
Sheffield Publishing Company  
Salem, Wisconsin  
2005 US \$20.95

The book, *The Critical Journey*, describes the six stages of the spiritual journey. It is a valuable tool providing insight into the experience and responses of faith toward God. The areas of ministry, church and the personal life are considered within the context of questions and answers illustrating how we proceed and reason along the stages of our spiritual pilgrimage. Highly recommended for those in leadership and discipleship ministries.



This trifold brochure presents the concept of stewardship as a lifestyle--centering on Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord.

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## Discipleship Challenges

*Erika F. Puni, Director  
General Conference Stewardship*



Discipleship is the life of a follower of Jesus and is synonymous with stewardship, a life of personal surrender and commitment to the rule of God in Christ. Both of these biblical emphases imply a lifestyle of absolute trust and faith in Jesus Christ as Lord. But how is this “new” life in Christ lived out in the church, or in the larger community of the world where the church is called to be “salt” and “light?” Quite different, as a matter of fact, and this is the multi-facet challenge that we as the Seventh-day Adventist Church in the twenty-first century is facing. So let me share with you my observations of the challenge and some of the difficulties that confront us as a people.

### The challenge of knowing the goal

For some strange reason, what should have been a fairly straight forward command to the church is misunderstood by some Adventists today and so we have conflicting views about the goal of the Great Commission (Mt 28:18-20). Is the church called to make disciples, or are we in the business of simply baptizing people in the absence of a heart commitment to the lordship of Jesus Christ? This misunderstanding and confusion has at times, led to many people going through the ritual of baptism but are divorced of a transformed life from within. These church members would gladly wear the “Christian” label with great pride and would openly testify to their new “Adventist” identity, but they have no interest in a lifestyle of service, of sacrifice, or personal witness for Christ. In this scenario, we are not making disciples, but we’re creating a culture of nominal Christianity.

### The challenge of information over relationship

Discipleship is not about information or about how much we know of the Bible. Discipleship is all about whom we know and have experienced. For Philip, his personal encounter with Jesus resulted in him saying to Nathanael, “We have found the one Moses wrote about in the Law, and about whom the prophets also wrote—Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph” Jn 1:45 (NIV). Such a declaration comes not from something that Philip read in the Galilean herald, but a testimony born of meeting Christ personally. The Samaritan woman’s discovery of the Messiah, for example, was the result of her being in the presence of Christ Himself (Jn 4:4-26). Discipleship is about being in relationship with Jesus Christ.

### The challenge of post-baptism teaching

Inherent in Christ’s call for the church to make disciples is the emphasis on “teaching them to obey everything” commanded by Christ (Mt 28:20). But while teaching is recognized as an important component (a means) of the disciple-making process, the question that is frequently asked is “when should we teach them?” Should the teaching be limited only to what happens before baptism or should it continue after the event? The sad reality that I have seen in the church is that new members (infants in the faith) are very often left to care for themselves after baptism. There is no post-baptism teaching, no modeling or mentoring, no encouragement or nurturing, and consequently many of them slide back to their old life. So who is responsible for this failure in retaining new converts; the member or the church? While the answer to this question may be complex, such situation calls for a biblical response that would include the implementation of small group ministry where members under the leadership of responsible spiritual leaders provide ongoing nurturing and



encouragement for all members. Discipleship is a lifestyle of spiritual exploration and discovery and as such it does not cease with baptism.

## The challenge of biblical stewardship

If stewardship is a lifestyle of submission to the lordship of Christ, then believers would willingly give of themselves as partners with God and will take seriously their responsibility as stewards of His gifts and resources. With this biblical understanding of stewardship, I have come to accept that the new life in Christ does not stop with my public declaration of Jesus as Saviour and Lord of my life. On the contrary, baptism opens up new vistas of opportunities to express my commitment and love for Him.

## Where to go from here?

I believe the answer is found in the biblical mandate itself, “make disciples.” When the goal is clearly defined, and when the processes of how to make disciples are understood by the church then we can expect to see lasting results: faithful stewards and a multiplying community of disciples. This community will be characterized by a people with an unwavering love for Jesus, highly committed to personal devotion and Bible study, willing to share their faith with non-believers, faithful in corporate worship and in their support of the church, caring for the needs of their families, and always giving of themselves to God and to people in need. I believe this is true discipleship.

# stewardship window

news from the  
director's desk ...



## TED Stewardship Advisory in Jerusalem, Israel

**F**ifty participants from around the Trans-European Division (TED) gathered in Jerusalem, Israel, February 25-27 for the Division's Stewardship Advisory for this quinquennium. Meeting his team in one place for the very first time was the recently appointed Division Director Raafat Kamal who was very excited and pleased with the biblical approach and emphasis on stewardship. “The message was very clear—God is Lord of all. When we accept God as owner, it transforms our entire approach to the way we live each day.”

Conrad Vine, secretary/treasurer of the Middle East Union Mission adds his evaluation of the program in this way. “I was thrilled to hear of stewardship not merely in terms of tithes and offerings, but as a biblical framework that asks me to recognize Jesus not only as Savior, but also as Lord—Lord of all aspects of my life. The materials presented were clear and biblical. I look forward to sharing the good news of the Lordship of Jesus with my brothers and sisters.”

Representing the General Conference Department at the Advisory were Pastors Erika Puni (director) and Jean-Luc Lezeau (associate director).

Division advisories are planned opportunities for the General Conference to provide orientation and support for Division and Union Directors. Additionally, these are times when the team at the General Conference, Division, and Union leadership can consult, share resources, plan and cast a vision for the department within the context of the division.

## To Information and Beyond

*Falvo Fowler*  
*Editor/Web Master*  
*GC Sabbath School & Personal*  
*Ministries*



*Falvo is an editor of Gracelink Bible study guides and an executive producer of Sabbath School University while managing seven websites for the Sabbath School Personal Ministries Department of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists. He celebrates his family and job in Silver Spring, Maryland.*

And He walked onto the information highway and looked technology straight in its bits and said to those connected “follow me.” And they came from portals that were ignored by those who professed Him but could not identify with the world around them.

If Christ had come to the world in this generation, I wonder if that is how the Gospel would have been written as his call for disciples.

If you look around at Christian media today you can recognize programs, concerts, and other media offerings targeting a buying or giving Christian demographic and not particularly the demographic that have yet to hear about Christ. The stories of the suicidal, the desperate, the dejected, the cave man abound; we hear testimony of all these people who tune in and discover the love of God, and there is a need for that.

But I would like to hear the story of the wealthy industrialist, the millionaire web professional, or the movie mogul, who at the height of their popularity discovered a God who, so full of grace and mercy, related so well with their lives that they could do nothing else but follow His Scripture into a life that touches those around them.

### New ways to teach truth

We have often made idols of our methods and hold to them as if God cannot use new ways to teach truth. We cannot keep the ever fresh gospel in old wineskins (Mk 2:22). As new methods are presented, we are called to move forward in faith and embrace new opportunities. Even the sower moved in faith knowing that the seed would take root wherever it was best received (Mt 13:1-9). We are called to be that sower. But for that to happen we, as Christians, need to break the mold we have become humanly accustomed to and continually rediscover the working of the Holy Spirit.

That is the crux of being a disciple—allowing the Holy Spirit to lead beyond the coziness of complacency into the comfort of faith...that existence of invigorating air as you leap beyond what you think you know and what you know you can learn by His leading.

### The internet—a communication tool

In today’s world of technology the internet is just one option to utilize. But to utilize it well we must produce well. Too often material is dumped onto web pages as if just that dumping will reach the world. It’s similar to emptying your refrigerator on the street and believing people will stop by for an enriching meal. Some may be desperate enough to eat it, but for the most part people walk by wondering at the callousness of such actions.

Be proud of what you believe and the God who continues to guide you through those beliefs. Invest well in production and testify well of His love. Whether it is a simple web page or an extensive website, plan your approach, study your demographic, and direct your attention to them. Paul didn’t just write letters and address it “The World. Read this—from Paul.” He wrote specifically to the Corinthians, the Ephesians, the Romans, and others. His writings were specific to the concerns of the respective audience with enough to benefit others. It is a perfect example of reaching out, but reaching out with purpose.

SCRIPTURE :  
 I Chronicles 12:32

## Use technology effectively

The internet and the generation today is culturally and geographically diverse yet unified in technology. It is possible to produce an approach to scripture specific to a demographic in your local community, but consciously and methodically have sections of the site contextualized for various other groups.

Like websites, to make podcasts effective, plan well, produce better, and place it where it can make the most difference. Concise recordings rather than long drawn out ramblings will maintain the interest of the targeted listener. Make it personal to the listener. Like Christ, tell current parables as much as possible and preach where applicable—life changing programming amazingly enough changes life.

Christian blogs are effective in reaching people if they continue to be about real people, with real concerns, real struggles, real failures, real joys, and real faith. We forget the turmoil in stories throughout scripture and tend to provide a sanitized version of life, but life is messy. In a Christian blog, people need to see a God who loves them despite their messy ways. When creating virtual writings or using real words: make yours count.

Virtual worlds, like Second Life, are probably going to be the next big thing. How do you create a buzz in a virtual world? Especially when this virtual world is very real to so many. A challenge even to some tech savvy, it is the new ground for seedlings. And if developed well, can reach the thousands who gather in this new world to watch concerts, meet dates, or just sip a virtual cup of coffee. As crazy as this all sounds, it is here, it is happening, and it will grow.

## A network of sowers

If you build a strong, well planned, scripturally-based, community, it will spread faster than the Holy Spirit at Pentecost and have just as amazing an effect. Bits and bytes do not make all the difference. If Christ had come to the world today, I believe he would not forfeit the church, small group studies, or personal visitations. He would use them as grassroots to build a network of sowers.

Our church is blessed with great resources. However, they are often not used to the best of potential. For example the Sabbath School study guides: we hardly have enough time to truly discuss the material during Sabbath School. We could split the study for mid-week small group. Then we could further discuss and recap on Sabbath morning. In fact, the mid-week would be a good time to bring a non-Christian to the study without the intimidation of a full blown congregation. Imagine the social interaction that is guided through that study! Imagine the strength of that community in that church because they came together during the week and followed up in the blessing that is the Sabbath!

## The print media is technology

Remember that print media is still technology and it still works wonders. The fact that you're reading this in printed form is testimony to that.

Whether webpage, podcasts, blogs, virtual worlds, or even the printed page, there is a need for Christians to live an exemplary life in Christ without compromise. There are many people who are waiting for a community that can relate to their lives while demonstrating a life filled with God's grace and lead by His mercy.

*Life changing  
programming  
amazingly enough  
changes life.*



## Reflecting on Discipleship in Rwanda

*Debby Thomas  
Missionary  
Rwanda, Africa*



*Debby lives and works in Rwanda, Africa with her husband, David, and their four children. They came to Rwanda in 1997 after the genocide. Debby and David work with the Rwandan Friends Church, which has about 60 churches. They have concentrated mainly on transition from a missionary-dependent to a God-dependent church in their first years of ministry. They are now transitioning to transformational development (Debby) linked with discipleship and a multiplicity of small groups (David).*

Here in Rwanda we are part of a pre-modern culture. We very much like modern culture, and are striving to become more modern yet we are in many ways even now pre-modern. Nevertheless, there is also an aspect of being a Christian culture, people are very open to Christianity and speak openly about their relationship to God. So in regard to discipleship, my challenge is not one of a post modern culture but rather considering the challenges inherent in the process of discipleship within the context of a pre-modern Rwanda.

### Describing the challenges

Presently, discipleship is weak in my church in Rwanda and I also observe the same difficulties in other churches. I consider there are a number of causes for this. Foremost, the model that has been used to plant churches in Rwanda is a western one. Generally, the churches here are building centered and pastor centered. Services follow the general pattern of services in the West with prayer, music, sermons and testimonies, but each part is much longer here and is done in an African way. Also, in this western church model there is not a considerable emphasis on discipleship, but rather on the pastor as a caretaker model.

Consequently, members attend church, many are involved in a choir, and some become leaders. Also, Bible studies and all night prayer meetings are very common. Yet, there is usually a need to have an apt leader for these events who really knows the Bible, and is recognized as a leader in the church. Equipped leaders are hard to come by and we always have a leadership shortage in our churches.

Acknowledging our challenges, we have tried forms of discipleship that are used in the United States and have been disappointed. We implemented one very simple discipleship method that was created for Africa. It consisted of 16 lessons, each one typed out on one piece of paper folded like a booklet. The information was exceptional, the method was outstanding yet, it didn't take off. Primarily, the churches cannot afford to photocopy the materials. The \$1.50 that it cost for one set of discipleship materials is far beyond the means of the church or the disciple in most instances. Additionally, many cannot read and many who can are reading at a very simple level that creates difficulty in understanding the written material. Lastly, is the fact that there is not much literature available in Kinyarwanda (the language of Rwanda) and people here are not very proficient in using written material other than the Bible.

Another challenge is that in this culture the form of learning at school is very much by rote, reflecting how and or putting into practice the materials studied is not encouraged. Therefore, most adults here in Rwanda have never been guided to think for themselves nor have they been challenged to use their knowledge to solve problems.

Therefore, classroom learning is seen as an exercise in memorization, not something that can be put to use. We have had many seminars for pastors and Christians that are extensive with useful, helpful information, but they go back to their churches and do not apply any of it. Any form of discipleship that is to be put into effect will have to implement a direct link between learning and doing.

### Responses to challenges

Despite the many challenges to discipleship in Rwanda, I think the Rwandan culture is set up perfectly for discipleship. People live very open community lives. They

SCRIPTURE :  
1 John 1:1



walk to the market almost daily, go fetch water daily, and are generally always together with people. A natural form of discipleship, one that focuses on being together, having discussions together, doing ministry together, fetching water, going to market, cooking, etc. would be an easy and natural way to go about discipleship. People have time and are open to friendships through the real life actions of everyday activities. Using the natural rhythms of life for discipleship would help any teaching that is done to be applied directly to the lives of the disciples making the information more easily acted on and put to use rather than stored away as head knowledge only.

Believers who are taught to study the word together with those in their neighborhood (versus only hearing it from pastors), who reach out to non-Christians and those in need around them, who are actively involved as a Christian in the goings on of the neighborhood are more likely to show the marks of a true disciple.

## Ministry solutions

What we are presently doing with our church leaders education is relating the classroom work fervently to their work in the church. They study for two weeks in the classroom and are given assignments to practice what they have learned in the church environment. They are then evaluated by the pastors on the level of success of putting the information into practice. I do not consider that we need to completely abandon classroom methods in Rwanda, but we cannot rely on them as our primary resource for forming disciples. Any classroom learning must be strongly and directly connected to ministry for the classroom teaching to have any effect on our leaders.

## Cultivating discipleship in Rwanda

As disciple makers and disciples it will be most effective to be out with and among the people recognizing that our biggest impact in their lives will be through having real life experiences together. Walking through everyday occurrences with our disciples will give them a concrete example of how the Christian life is lived out. It is also a very natural way for Rwandans to disciple other Rwandans in their cultural context.

I am convinced that we will not see a healthy, growing, church that is reaching out to the lost until we are able to disciple on a deeper level. Real life transformation that takes place in the discipleship process is essential before Christians are able to truly become a new creation and lead others towards God. I believe that by bearing in mind the responses and principles put forth, we will be preparing the soil for cultivation and making way for the Holy Spirit to work freely in the lives of our Rwandan believers and church members.

*As disciple makers and disciples it will be most effective to be out with and among the people recognizing that our biggest impact in their lives will be through having real life experiences together.*



## Gehazi: Blind to God's Grace

*Kent A. Hansen, J.D.  
Clayson, Mann, Yaeger & Hansen  
Corona, California*



*Kent Hansen is a business attorney in Corona, California specializing in healthcare and higher education law. He also serves as general counsel to Loma Linda University Adventist Health Sciences Center, La Sierra University and two local conferences. He authors a weekly email devotional, "A Word of Grace" for Your Monday, in which this article first appeared. The devotional reaches out with encouragement and challenge to busy professionals sitting down to their computers at the beginning of the work week. It has readers from Alaska to Zanzibar. Persons wishing to subscribe can contact him at [khansen@claysonlaw.com](mailto:khansen@claysonlaw.com). Attorney Hansen is also the author of two books: *Cleansing Fire, Healing Streams: Experiencing God's Love through Prayer* just released by Pacific Press and *Grace at 30,000 Feet and Other Unexpected Places* published by Review & Herald.*

SCRIPTURE:  
2 Kings 5

Let's cut to the chase—the story of Naaman ends with Gehazi stricken with the leprosy that Naaman had at the beginning. His skin is a sickly white and, in an odd congenital contagion, Gehazi's descendants will suffer from the dread disease as well. The problem with leprosy is that it attacks the nervous and immune systems so the body does not have its usual warning defense to pain. Without that warning, small cuts and minor infections become destructive, disfiguring lesions.

Who is Gehazi and why does he suffer this fate?

### A disciple of Elisha

He is the servant to Elisha, prophet of Israel, and the religious leader of the nation. Gehazi travels with Elisha. He is the man to go to for those who want an interview or favor from the prophet. Gehazi is Elisha's spokesman and confidante. Gehazi is a useful man to the prophet, his ministry and, indeed, to the mission of Israel.

But Gehazi wants to be so much more. . . .

He was brushed aside when he sought to intervene with a wealthy woman who appealed to Elisha for the healing of her son (2K 4:25-31). Now, he watches Naaman, a rich unbelieving Gentile, show up at the humble home of Elisha bringing a fortune in gold and silver and fashionable clothing with him in the hope of purchasing his healing. He listens to Naaman try to give Elisha a good share of that fortune in gratitude for his miraculous healing (2K 5:15).

It is a defining moment. Naaman came to them to get what he could get nowhere else in the world. He is healed. He is grateful. He is wealthy. His money can do so much good: maybe an endowment for the School of the Prophets; food for the poor that Elisha is so fond of serving; an "Elisha Institute of Prophecy and Healing"; financial security for Elisha and Gehazi and their families because the fortune of a prophet in a troubled land is volatile. They can do a lot of good with Naaman's money and can do well for themselves. What is not to like about the situation?

### Blind to grace

Gehazi is astonished and angered when Elisha tells Naaman with typical bluntness, "As the Lord lives, whom I serve, I will accept nothing" (2K 5:16). Naaman presses him to accept, but Elisha refuses. Then Naaman makes an odd request for two mule loads of dirt to build an altar at home. He begs pardon for having to accompany his king into the temple of the loathsome Assyrian god Rimmon when he gets home. Elisha goes along with him on both counts (2K 5:17-19).

Gehazi stewes over this while Naaman and his caravan leaves. Just after Gehazi sees them disappear beyond the first hill, he makes up his mind. "My master has let that Aramean Naaman off too lightly by not accepting from him what he offered. As the Lord lives, I will run after him and get something out of him." So Gehazi went after Naaman" (2K 5:19-21).

It is not surprising that Gehazi cites "the Lord" as his authority. Plans to do what you want to do any way seem justified if you can claim God as your inspiration. Turning a profit by selling to non-believers what believers know to be the gracious gift of a loving God also seems reasonable. After all, if the "Gentiles" want the same advantages, they should "join the club" and come inside too, right?

And why not “do well” for yourself while doing “good”? Didn’t our Lord himself multiply a few loaves and fish into a meal for 5,000 with plenty of leftovers? Don’t profits make it possible to do so much more good for those in need? (Mt 26:6-13).

## About delusion

Jesus deals with such questions in a terse fashion: the profit motive has no place in the service of God. “No one can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and money” (Mt 5:24).

This instruction of Jesus is manifest in the idea of the charitable non-profit corporation. As a matter of public policy, the state permits enterprises to pursue charitable purposes in religion, education, healthcare, or science and exempts them from taxes on income or property so long as the mission is charity rather than profit. This does not mean that such an organization cannot turn a profit, but profit cannot be the motive for corporate existence.

If a non-profit corporation begins to serve a privileged few, compensates its employees above fair market value, builds huge reserves without meaningful operational expenditures on the mission, then the corporation is considered in the eyes of the law to be an avaricious for-profit “wolf” in the “sheep’s clothing” of a non-profit. The tax-exemption in such case is being abused to give the corporation an unfair advantage in the business market in which it is operating.

The same thing is true of individuals. I tell my fourth-year dental students in my Dentistry and the Law course: “You are about to graduate and start your career. You are likely to make a lot of money. But do whatever you do because it serves others and satisfies your soul. If you are only seeking money, there will never be enough money to satisfy you. That will doom you to unhappiness.”

My words echo Solomon’s observation in Ec 5:10: “The lover of money will not be satisfied with money; nor the lover of wealth, with gain.”

Money itself is not the real problem, as the Apostle Paul wrote to Timothy about men and women who imagined “that godliness is a means of gain.” Paul said, “Now there is great gain in godliness with contentment, for we brought nothing into the world and we cannot take anything out of the world. But if we have food and clothing, with these we will be content. But those who desire to be rich fall into temptation, into a snare; into many senseless and harmful desires that plunge people into destruction. For the love of money is the root of all kinds of evils. It is through this craving that some have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many pangs” (1Tm 6:5-10).

The distraction of accumulating and preserving wealth will destroy belief, Jesus said in the parable of the sower (Mt 13:22). He also said in the parable of “the rich fool” that building up a large estate or reserve to hedge against the future can be a deadly delusion (Lk 12:16-21).

When Jesus returns to earth, he is not going to ask his followers, “How much ‘stuff’ did you accumulate for me?” He is going to ask “What did you do with the ‘stuff’ I gave you to help the hungry, the thirsty, the stranger, the naked, the sick and the oppressed?” (Mt 25:31-46).

## Stewardship, power and grace

The fact is that everything that we have really belongs to God (Ps 50:10-12). We are his servants and the stewards of his wealth. We are charged to see that it is used in the expression of his love and grace to his children, not for our corporate interests or estate plans. When we start to accumulate and exploit his assets in his name for our gain he says, “Stop making my Father’s house a marketplace!” (Jn 2:16).

Legend has it that in a telling moment, Pope Julius II showed the theologian Erasmus the treasures that Julius had accumulated for the church through many military campaigns and political maneuvers. Julius told Erasmus, “It can no longer be said of Christ’s Church, ‘Silver and gold have I none.’ ” Erasmus replied, “But can the Church still say, ‘Take up your bed and walk?’ ”

There is no sin in wealth in itself, only in placing the desire for it above trusting devotion to God. It is tempting, as Paul said, to desire to be rich for the good that can be accomplished with the fortune, but it is unnecessary for the advancement of mission to fulfill that desire. We are the ones to be spent. We, ourselves, are the currency in the hand of God. As Paul wrote to the Corinthians, “I will very gladly spend and be spent for your souls. . .” (2Cor. 12:15).

In commenting on Paul’s statement, Oswald Chambers wrote, “We have no right in Christian service to be guided by our own interests and desires. In fact, this is one of the greatest tests of our relationship with Jesus Christ. The delight of sacrifice is that I lay down my life for my friend, Jesus. I don’t throw my life away, but I

## Gehazi: Blind to God's Grace *continued*

willingly and deliberately lay it down for him and his interests in other people. Many of us are interested only in our own goals, and Jesus cannot help himself to our lives. But if we are totally surrendered to him, we have no goals of our own to serve. We tend to be devoted, not to Jesus Christ, but to the things which allow us more spiritual freedom than total surrender to him would allow" (My Utmost for His Highest [Grand Rapids, MI: Discovery House, 1992], entry for February 24).

The story of Naaman began in grace with Elisha saying without condition or reservation, "Let him come to me, that he may learn there is a spokesman for God in Israel" (2K 5:8). That is the point!

What we do in serving and healing others either points to God or to us. If our service points to God it points to life because Jesus Christ is the "author and finisher of our faith" and our only hope for eternity. If our efforts point to us, finite creatures that we are, we point to death because that is our assured end without God.

The way of grace, both its glory and its devastation, is that it is all God and none of us. Our life originates in God and continues in God, and if here and now is all that is important to us then we are only as good as last year's tax return and this year's financial statements. If eternity in the presence of God is what is important to us then we can work quietly and faithfully in the knowledge that we have a future and a hope provided for us. What we do now is simply a step on a journey to our Lord and our God who not only is our goal but who is also the power by which we may achieve it.

We live badly when we forget this. We take shortcuts to achievement by stepping on the backs of others, seeking to outdo them or to use them to our glory. We measure our progress by asking "Haven't I done more? Don't I merit more? Have they paid enough for what I do for them?"

"Know that the Lord is God. It is he that made us, and we are his, we are his people and the sheep of his pasture" (Ps 100:3). When we convince ourselves that we are necessary and that our service is indispensable to God we are going to be driven by performance rather than living generously and loving wholeheartedly in grace and trust. Living that way acknowledges that God is our providence and that we represent his providence to those who come to us for his word and healing. This principle, as a matter of bedrock truth, requires us to treat each person with equal dignity whether in our actions or those of the institutions that we establish and operate in God's name.

### Who is the "grace" ful disciple?

Gehazi's thinking is graceless and contemptuous toward both Elisha and Naaman. Gehazi values his shrewdness over Elisha's graciousness. When he calls Naaman, "that Aramean" it is an ethnic slur, not a compliment. He feels justified by his presumed religious and ethnic superiority to exploit Naaman.

Gehazi is also disdainful of the spiritual cost already paid by Naaman. This feared, powerful, heroic general has surrendered for the first time in his life and it is to Yaweh, the God of Israel. But actions without price-tags are irrelevant to "on-the-make" men and women like Gehazi. That's why their usefulness to the cause of God is limited and their influence is ultimately negative.

Naaman's priorities are gratitude and devotion. He shows a steady softening heart and opening of mind and the submission to God's authority that are the hallmarks of true conversion.

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# character counts

The priorities of Gehazi are self-advancement and profit. He ignores the transformational wonder of God's grace to focus on the bottom line of "What's in this for me?" He hypocritically and falsely claims the authority of mission to benefit himself. When Naaman sees Gehazi coming, he stops and asks him, "Is everything all right?"

Gehazi replies, "Yes, but my master has sent me to say, 'Two members of a company of prophets have just come to me from the hill country of Ephraim; please give them a talent of silver and two changes of clothing'" (2K 5:21-22).

Trusting, open-hearted Naaman generously offers him two talents of silver—double the request—and urges Gehazi to take them. Naaman even sends two servants with Gehazi to carry the treasure.

Gehazi dismisses the servants when they get to the town, stores the loot and then goes to see Elisha. Elisha asks him "Where have you been, Gehazi?" (2K 5:25).

## Vision—choice and grace

If you start out on your own apart from God, soon enough you are going to be practicing deceit to cover your inadequacy. Gehazi tells Elisha, "Your servant has not gone anywhere at all."

Elisha then exposes him, "Did I not go in spirit when someone left his chariot to meet him? Is this a time to accept money and to accept clothing. . . .Therefore the leprosy of Naaman will cling to you and to your descendants forever." Gehazi leaves Elisha and walks into history "leprous, as white as snow" (2K 5:26-27).

It takes a while for the neuropathy of leprosy to manifest itself by lesions on the skin. There is simply a growing insensitivity to the warnings of pain that something is wrong. Envy, ambition, greed and self-righteousness can render us just as insensitive to the growth of sin in our life until it tragically breaks out in disfiguring shame. Gehazi had been a leper for some time.

When lepers, whether of the physical or moral variety, come to us for healing because we represent God to them, we should help them with all the grace that God provides. But if we attempt to exploit their gratitude to serve our selfish interests, we take on the insensitivity, decay and disfigurement of lepers ourselves.

The story of Naaman puts these issues in stark contrast. Jesus drew its ultimate point and it bears repeating: "No one can serve two masters. The person will hate one master and love the other, or will follow one master and refuse to follow the other. You cannot serve God and worldly riches" (Mt 6:24, NCV). "Take care! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; for one's life does not consist in the abundance of possessions" (Lk 12:15).

Life is a blessing of grace. You don't deserve it and can't afford it, even on a payment plan. That's why Elisha refused payment from Naaman. That's why Christ gives it to you. So I ask you, does this message find you on your way home, free, happy and open-handed in the love of God like Naaman or conniving and bargaining and on the run for what you can get out of someone else like Gehazi? The difference between those two positions is as wide as eternity.

"O taste and see that the Lord is good. Happy are those who take refuge in him" (Ps 34:8).

*Life is a blessing of grace. You don't deserve it and can't afford it, even on a payment plan.*



## A NEW INITIATIVE

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# gifts of heaven



### What is *Gifts of Heaven*?

*Gifts of Heaven* (GOH) is a new initiative of the General Conference, designed to provide information to church members as to how tithes and offerings are used to support the ministry of the Church worldwide. As Christians, we practice principles of systematic giving—returning to God His tithe and giving offerings freely, as an act of worship.

As God's steward, the corporate Church has a spiritual responsibility to give an account of how tithes and offerings are used to develop Christ's mission on earth. In this context, division, union, and conference leaders can use the *Gifts of Heaven* package to help their constituents understand how the Church manages God's financial gift.

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