

DYNAMIC Steward

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April-June, 2011

Stewardship Revival

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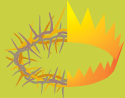
Reviving

Stewardship—

Transforming

Stewards

DYNAMIC Steward



Exploring partnership with God

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inside ds

Revival and Christian stewardship have many things in common but one similarity stands out and that is God's grace! Allow me to explain. I was seventeen when I was baptized. Little did I realize just how much my commitment to Christ would change my life and how I viewed the world around me. One thing I knew, God was leading me into areas that had never been of interest before. One theme dominated all others. I was overwhelmed with God's goodness. The prism through which I was seeing the good times and the bad was radically changing. Christ now became my focus. Little did I know the far reaching impact of this personal revival.



My focus now was getting to know Him better. Bible reading and the little book, *Steps to Christ*, made indelible impressions on choices I was making. These were the textbooks used by my pastor to prepare me for baptism. One Bible verse became the hallmark of my new experience, "God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us" (Rom. 5:8). Over and over this verse came to mind and repeatedly I was humbled. Death to old ways and anticipation of new ones seemed to come naturally. This new walk wasn't always easy nor appreciated by others. In retrospect, those early steps were not as balanced as I wish they would have been. I am thankful for family members who tried to see this conversion experience in the most positive light. It seemed everything was changing all at once—from the girls I dated, to the food I ate, to my grades in school. I doubt I had ever heard the word "steward" but I felt keenly responsible for everything I did. Change happened and no one was forcing anything on me. Revival and stewardship, it seems, are natural companions.

During one of the most gut-wrenching historical periods of God's people, the experience of the prophet Jeremiah pierced the dark shadows of the time with these words:

"Yet this I call to mind and therefore I have hope: Because of the LORD's great love we are not consumed, for his compassions never fail. They are new every morning; great is your faithfulness. I say to myself, 'The LORD is my portion; therefore I will wait for him.' The LORD is good to those whose hope is in him, to the one who seeks him; it is good to wait quietly for the salvation of the LORD" Lam 3:21-26 (NIV).

How we see life and the challenges we face in this age of uncertainties has everything to do with the prism through which we see life. We are a people of hope because we have a God who cares deeply. We have not been abandoned.

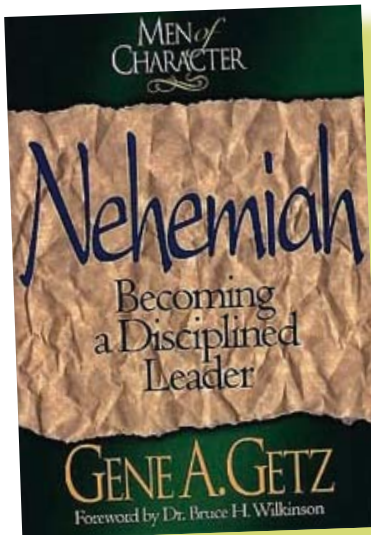
It is from this basis that I view the ministry of God's stewards. Long before the principle of tithing was introduced, God entrusted to those created in His image the role of being stewards—stewards of His caring grace and the life He had given to them. Today, our lives can become an expression of thankfulness to Him. Our finances are a visible expression of how we relate to the gift of life. Finances and life cannot be separated. Yet, we must be careful. Biblical mandates given without the context of a gracious Giving-Savior can become arbitrary and a weariness to the soul. The glass through which we see "stewardship" is vital. Even in the worst of times we can join in the chorus with Jeremiah and exclaim: "Great is your faithfulness."

Blessings,

resources

Revive Us Again
by Mark Finley
Pacific Press Publishing Association
Nampa, Idaho
2010 US \$7.99

There is nothing the church needs more than a genuine spiritual revival. There is nothing more important for church administrators, pastors and church members than seeking this revival together. There is no greater priority. In *Revive Us Again*, Pastor Mark Finley invites you to prayerfully open your heart and mind. Revival always begins with one man, one woman, one boy or one girl on their knees seeking God. You can be that one person who is used of God to bring the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on your home, your church, and your world. As you read these pages may the prayer of your heart be, "Lord, Revive Us Again." To order go to www.adventistbookcenter.com.

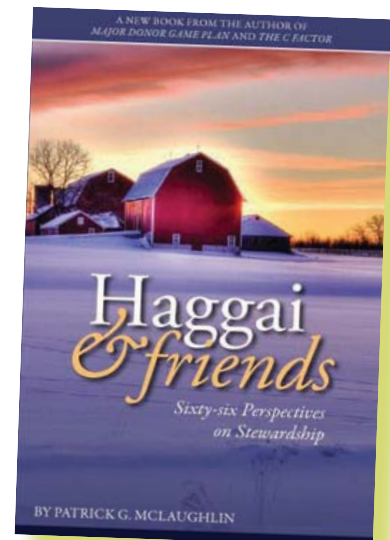


Nehemiah: Becoming a Disciplined Leader
by Gene A. Getz
B&H Publishing Group
Nashville, Tennessee
2005 US \$12.99

Meet one of the greatest leaders of all time. His name is Nehemiah. Author Gene Getz brings him to life in this Old Testament study. Whether you are a leader in your home, your church, or in your business, Nehemiah will teach you leadership principles that will work in every situation. If you face discouragement, in yourself and others, he'll teach you how to face it and emerge victorious. If morale has dropped out of sight, he'll teach you how to get people out of the cellar and out where they can once again see the "sunshine." If you struggle with conflict among your people, he'll teach you how to resolve it God's way. You name it, Nehemiah faced it! But every time—with the "help of his God"—he succeeded, even against impossible odds. One of the greatest things Nehemiah will teach you is how to pray. This book will help you "plan your work" and "work your plan!" To order go to www.bhpublishinggroup.com.

Haggai and Friends: Sixty-six Perspectives on Stewardship
by Patrick G. McLaughlin
The Timothy Group
Grand Rapids, Michigan
2010 US \$15.00

Every decision you make is one of stewardship. God wants us to grow and become wise and generous managers of all He has entrusted to us. Did you know that all 66 books of the Bible contain a stewardship principle, but none of them have as much clarity about God's perspective on this issue than Haggai? This major life lesson from a minor prophet and his friends has a very critical message for all segments of our society and culture. If stewardship is everything we do after we say we believe, then *Haggai & Friends* will challenge you toward Obedient Ownership. Discover who owns you as you carefully ponder Haggai's message and those of his biblical compatriots. To order go to www.timothygroup.com. Mention the *Dynamic Steward* and get this book for \$10 plus shipping and handling.



Reviving Stewardship: Transforming Stewards

*Erika F. Puni, Director
General Conference Stewardship*



The call for “revival and reformation” by Pastor Ted Wilson, president of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, is an invitation for the church to renew itself spiritually and to refocus on what is most important in terms of its life and mission.

This call to revival assumes that something is already at work, and this something is the working of the Spirit of God in the world and in the lives of people. It also recognizes that the church is continually bombarded by the devil in his attempts to take God’s people away from Him. In this context, it is very normal and possible for people to lose their focus on Jesus—the author and finisher of our faith (Heb 12:1-2).

REVIVING STEWARDSHIP

The call for revival is necessary and needed. At this time God’s church is called to look at Jesus anew, and to reach out to Him for His power both to live and do His will. Stewardship, as a ministry of the church, takes this challenge seriously.

In this article we will look at these two aspects of “revival” and “reformation” within the framework of Stewardship Ministries. We will illustrate how stewardship is a ministry “tool” and a partner in this call and invitation for the Seventh-day Adventist Church to be revived and transformed.

Stewardship a spiritual experience

Many Christians and Seventh-day Adventists think of stewardship as a matter of finances only; meaning, the returning of tithe and the giving offerings. While finances may be part of stewardship by themselves, finances do not reflect the whole picture of stewardship as expressed in the Bible. Stewardship first and foremost is an acknowledgement of who God is—Creator, Owner, Sustainer, Lord, and Savior.

Biblical stewardship is a spiritual experience where one accepts and submits to the rule of God in Jesus Christ (Matt 6:33). This spiritual experience and relationship with God is primary and the living out of His rule in one’s life is what stewardship is all about. It is a way of life where Jesus is the focus of everything we do: our worship, relationships, possessions, finances, and human expressions.

Stewardship a spiritual discipline

Stewardship is a personal choice to let Jesus take control of our lives. In this sense it is a spiritual discipline. It calls for our full cooperation and partnership with the Spirit of God working within us.

For example, the setting aside of a special time for personal Bible study and prayer is stewardship. The intentional planning of family worship and devotion is stewardship. The scheduling of regular time for physical exercise is stewardship. The systematic returning of tithe and the giving of freewill offerings is stewardship. Personal decisions and choices are part and parcels of stewardship—it is a spiritual response and discipline of the Christian life.

TRANSFORMING STEWARDS

The goal of Christian stewardship is a valuable transformation at the deepest level of our being where Christ is constantly working within us. This work of changing us from the inside out by the Holy Spirit is a must because we cannot do this on our own (John 15:4-5). In fact, it is impossible because of our sinful

nature. Our only hope in producing that which is pure and right is through Him working in us and for us (Gal 2:20). Let me illustrate. It is not our normal self to be kind and forgiving of each other but rather it is Christ manifesting His life in us. The work of God in us is also shown in relational activities such as our faithful Sabbath attendance and when sharing our faith in Christ. More importantly, these behavioral changes happen naturally because they are produced and motivated by the Spirit of God.

Transformation and financial stewardship

If transformation is the work of God, and I believe it is, then how can this behavioral change taking place in my mind and value system impact my faithfulness in returning the Lord's title and the giving of freewill offerings?

First, faithfulness becomes a way of life. Very often we do it even without thinking about it.

Second, faithfulness flows out of us naturally without coercion or manipulation. It is not dependent or motivated by external promotions or rewards.

Third, our giving becomes regular, and it includes giving in all other areas of the Christian life: time, spiritual gifts, family, possessions, etc.

Fourth, giving becomes a joy. It is no longer an obligation of church membership but an extension and expression of a loving relationship.

Stewardship Ministries is committed to spiritual renewal in the church through its ongoing educational and training activities around the world, while at the same time focusing on Jesus and His Spirit as the transforming power to bring about lasting changes in the life of God's people everywhere.

stewardship window

news from the director's desk ...

Welcome New Stewardship Directors



Paolo Benini
Euro-Africa Division



Pavel Liberansky
Euro-Asia Division



Javier Mejia Mejia
Inter-American Division



John Mathews
North American Division



Kwon JohngHaeng
Northern Asia-Pacific Division



James Kwame Bardu
West Central Africa Division



William Bagambe
East Central Africa Division

Stewardship: How I Lost It and My Journey Back

Patrick G. McLaughlin
President/Founder
The Timothy Group
Grand Rapids, Michigan



Pat McLaughlin is the president and founder of The Timothy Group and serves clients around the world. His time-tested, biblical methods have helped clients achieve their funding goals. He specializes in major donor programs, board training, mentoring CEOs and chief development officers, strategic planning, and capital and annual campaigns, as well as marketing and image campaigns. The parents of two grown sons, Pat and his wife, Jane, live near Grand Rapids, Michigan. They are active members of Kentwood Community Church.

In my new book, *Haggai and Friends: Sixty-six Perspectives on Stewardship*, I redefined the practice of biblical stewardship as “Obedient Ownership.” If stewardship is everything we do after we say we believe (becoming a Christian), this journey here on earth as a steward is very important. It is easier to be a disobedient owner, than an obedient one. It is so easy to lose our way on this stewardship journey. Yes, God is concerned about how we manage our time, our talent, our treasure, our vocational call, our mission and our ministry, our children, our homes, our automobiles, all that the Ultimate Owner (God the Father) has entrusted us to manage here on earth.

Losing Our Way

Just like the children of Israel, many of us have lost our way and our perspective of God’s expectations and commands and have become “disobedient owners.” We have lost our true love of God and His Son the Lord Jesus. The deity being worshipped today by many in our churches is the god of materialism and possessions. This worldwide economic meltdown seems to have originated from our personal greed. Let’s face it we want more! Many believers have sold out to the world’s system and have their self worth and their net worth confused.

In 522 BC, a group of Jewish exiles were set free from Babylon, to go back home to Jerusalem and rebuild the temple. They started rebuilding, and then quit. They lost their way on their “obedient ownership” journey and had stopped building for 14 years. God used a prophet named Haggai to get their attention and encouraged them to get back on track, back on the path:

Then the word of the LORD came through the prophet Haggai: “Is it a time for you yourselves to be living in your paneled houses, while this house remains a ruin?” Now this is what the LORD Almighty says: “Give careful thought to your ways. You have planted much, but harvested little. You eat, but never have enough. You drink, but never have your fill. You put on clothes, but are not warm. You earn wages, only to put them in a purse with holes in it.” This is what the LORD Almighty says: “Give careful thought to your ways. Go up into the mountains and bring down timber and build my house, so that I may take pleasure in it and be honored,” says the LORD (Haggai 1:3-8 NIV).

Go ahead, ask yourself, is God the owner of all things (the Ultimate Owner), attempting to get our attention because we have lost our way on this lifelong “obedient ownership” journey? Are we seeking to manage all that we have according to the will of the Ultimate Owner?

Lost

Becoming an obedient owner and managing our lives according to God’s will is not an easy task. It takes obedience and discipline. It takes saying “no” to the wrong choices and “yes” to the right choices. I need to be a steward/an obedient owner because I am constantly being seduced by covetousness, the worship of money, and the things money will buy. Even though God instructs us to use things and love people, I am constantly in danger of loving things and using people.

The worship song, *Wonderful Merciful Savior*, reminds us of our struggle to stay on track, “Counselor, Comforter, Keeper; Spirit we long to embrace; You offer hope when our hearts have; Hopelessly lost the way; Oh, we’ve hopelessly lost the way.” It is so easy to think that all of our resources belong to us and we can use them any way we choose.

Unfortunately for some Christians, lost is more than a quirky television show about a plane crash survivor—it describes their lifelong “obedient ownership/stewardship” journey that has veered off course. Many of us will admit we have lost our way. Malachi 3:8 states, “we have robbed God” and have become embezzlers. No, we can’t break into the bank of heaven and rip off God. Instead, we took the first fruits, the tithe, and our offerings and spent them on ourselves. As Christians, are our giving patterns or our spending patterns our first consideration? C.I. Scofield said, “Don’t show me the worn tattered pages of a man’s Bible, show me his checkbook and I will show you wherein his values lie.”

Can any of us rob God?



Revival

So I have lost my way and begun to fudge a bit with my generosity, time, and talents. How do I retrace my steps back from being a disobedient steward to living and practicing “obedient ownership?” Honestly evaluate where you are and begin a process of revival and renewal as a biblical steward.

Revival is defined “as bringing someone back to life,” “the recovery of life consciousness to full strength,” “a desire to foster new, on the old,” “a renewal,” or a “re-awakening.” Are you ready for revival? Are you willing to take on this kind of challenge and growth in your walk with Christ? Becoming an “obedient owner” is not easy—it is rewarding.

The Road Map

The Scriptures are the unfolding story of God’s redemption of humanity. The theme of stewardship can be found in all 66 books of the Bible. Perhaps He knew the challenge we would have with “obedient ownership.” The journey began at creation. God created man and woman and our first job description was to “be obedient” and “to steward” the garden. We blew it and we are still blowing it. Money is such an emotionally charged issue. Time can be even more valuable than our checkbook and investment accounts. How we invest our God-given talent in His work here on earth is critical to our spiritual maturity.

Now, perhaps more than ever, the message of the minor prophet Haggai speaks truth into our lives with a clear road map. If you will be “obedient owners/stewards/servants,” I will bless you and turn your turbulent times into thriving blessings. It is the same promise God makes to us today. To obey is better than sacrifice. It is the road to maturity in your walk with the Lord. It is a counter cultural thought process, but stewardship is God’s way of making us grow and mature in our faith.

The GPS

Looking for direction in your life as a steward? It’s at your finger tips. You can’t find it in *Forbes*, *Fortune*, or *The Wall Street Journal*. The answer is found in God’s Word, the Bible. Surprise! The way to get back on course is to acknowledge you need help in this “obedient ownership” journey. There are more verses in the New Testament on stewardship than love and prayer combined. The prophet Haggai challenged Israel to “consider your ways” five different times in his short 38 verse book. The GPS will guide you on a trip across town or across the nation. I

believe God wants us to consider our ways, our lifestyles, our investments, but most of all—our giving patterns.

Obedient Owners Sign Up Here

The tithe/the first fruits are not ours to spend on ourselves. Consider a plan often called the 10-10-80 plan. Start with the most important investment a 10% tithe to your church. Obedient owners, it’s not an option, it’s an imperative. Invest 10% in a savings program and let it grow and learn to live on the 80%. Test God! Take a 90-day tithing/giving challenge. We cannot out give our Gracious Heavenly Father. He is The Ultimate Owner.

He has promised to bless those who will honor Him and His word in this area. Here is your job description for “obedient ownership,” “Command them to do good, to be rich in good deeds and be generous ready to share, in this way they will lay up treasure for the coming life which is truly life” (1 Timothy 6:18-19).

Simply stated, love your neighbor (do good), implement the great commission (rich in good deeds) and be a generous giver. This map will get your spiritual maturity journey back on track!

Stewardship Revival

Benjamin D. Schoun
General Vice President
General Conference of SDA
World Headquarters



The 2010 General Conference Session held in Atlanta, Georgia, brought change to the presidential leadership team with the appointment of Benjamin D. Schoun as one of the general vice presidents. Ben is a professional consultant in mediation and conflict resolution. He particularly enjoys church leadership and administration. Ben was president of Adventist World Radio for more than eight years before joining the presidential staff. Ben and his wife, Carol June, are the parents of one adult daughter.

As the General Conference moves into this new quinquennium (2010-2015), one of the chosen emphases is “revival and reformation.” The vision is to intentionally do what we as human beings can to ignite that spark that will bring us closer to Jesus. We need to pray and study the Bible, for instance, to reverse the statistical trend in our denomination to the contrary.¹ We must continually be vigilant against falling into Laodicean characteristics. We have a sense of the nearness of Jesus’ coming. We realize that Jesus might have come before this if His people had been alive to receiving the power of the Holy Spirit and His work had been done.² While finishing the work is in the hands of God, He has chosen to work through us. We must have such a relationship with Him that we can work as partners. That involves stewardship.

"Return to Me, and I Will Return to You"

One of the great revival texts of scripture is Malachi 3:7 (NIV): “Ever since the time of your forefathers you have turned away from my decrees and have not kept them. Return to me, and I will return to you,” says the LORD Almighty. “But you ask, ‘How are we to return?’” The word “return” is a parallel word to the word “revival.” It means coming back to God. In Hebrew the word is *shûb*. It is a frequently used word in the Old Testament, more than a 1,000 times. One Old Testament scholar has written that “better than any other verb [this one word] combines in itself the two requirements of repentance: to turn from evil and to turn to the good.”³ It is often used in a covenant context. “Return” means to repent and come back to God. It also conveys the meaning of the word “reformation,” which means repudiation of all sin, and to affirm the total will of God for one’s life.

In Malachi 3 the focus that God places on this call for his people to return is in regard to stewardship, specifically the tithe and offerings. Apparently, full revival cannot be achieved without including this matter in our consideration. The Old Testament word for “revival” is *hâyâ*, coming from the root meaning, life or to live, and in this case to come back to life. Revival is coming back to life in Jesus. The consequences of losing life either spiritually or physically are serious. So God’s people are challenged to return to Him to make them alive!

Malachi 3 encompasses more than tithe and offerings. In vs. 2 and 3 there is a comprehensive righteousness referred to. It can be brought about only through the refiner’s fire or the launderer’s soap. It must cleanse the people from sorcery, adultery, and perjury (vs.5). It must transform them away from defrauding laborers, oppressing widows and fatherless children, and depriving aliens from justice. The people must repent from saying harsh, untrue things about God, from questioning His justice and using material motives in their relationship with Him (vss. 13-15).

True revival means total commitment to our God. It includes trust in His decisions, in His timing, and His providential plans. As we draw closer to Him, positive things will begin to happen in our lives. For example, “The great outpouring of the Spirit of God, which lightens the whole earth with His glory, will not come until we have an enlightened people, that know by experience what it means to be laborers together with God. When we have entire, wholehearted consecration to the service of Christ, God will recognize the fact by an outpouring of His Spirit without measure; but this will not be while the largest portion of the church are not laborers together with God. God cannot pour out His Spirit when selfishness and self-indulgence are so manifest.”⁴



Why Stewardship is Necessary

Not only is the giving of the Holy Spirit connected to the benevolent use of our resources, but God has planned for our protection that stewardship is necessary for us in the whole plan of salvation. “Our Redeemer, who knew man’s danger in regard to covetousness, has provided a safeguard against this dreadful evil. He has arranged the plan of salvation so that it begins and ends in benevolence.”⁵ Furthermore, “Perfection of character cannot possibly be attained without self-sacrifice.”⁶

If we want to come closer to Jesus Christ, “the very act of giving expands the heart of the giver and unites him more fully to the Redeemer of the world.”⁷ Whereas, “nothing saps spirituality from the soul more quickly than to enclose it in selfishness and self-caring.”⁸

Somehow there is an organic connection between the working out of our salvation and the principles of stewardship. Not that practicing generosity in any way earns the forgiveness of our sin. That clearly is in the historic act of Jesus Christ on the cross. But the principles of honesty, benevolence, and generosity create an environment whereby Jesus can work His good in our lives. It plants in our hearts the very nature of Christ. It brings us to the place where we want to help others, where we become useful servants of God in accomplishing His plans for the earth. Without the principles of stewardship operating in our lives we are stunted Christians. Christ is limited in what He can do in our hearts and therefore cannot bring us to the fullness of salvation. Such defects in our salvation experience may even cause us to lose that salvation that we desire.

The Joy of Benevolence

When people practice the principles of stewardship, it changes them. In my experience in fundraising I have often noticed that although people may be hesitant to give a substantial gift, when they do, their lives are filled with joy and peace. A sense of meaning flows into their being. They feel that they have accomplished something significant. And . . . they appear to have a revival event in their lives. They are praising the Lord, thanking us for the opportunity that we brought to them to have a meaningful part of God’s work. They become more supportive of mission and ministry. Mutuality develops between them and those of us who use their funds in the outworking of the ministry. A spiritual result follows in the train of their benevolence.

If, as a church, we are together on doing what we can to seek revival, we as stewardship leaders must bring these principles to the attention of the people. It is a matter of education and awareness, encouragement and invitation. Some of our long-experienced leaders have noted that when a good stewardship program is in place, other facets of the work of the church, such as evangelism, revival, and involvement, will also be healthy. There will be less conflict and greater unity. There is something about this phenomenon that we must not miss.

Our task is to creatively and attractively place these spiritual and practical principles before the people with the right balance of theology and just enough specific instruction so they will know the God-revealed practices to follow without our conveying an insensitive and unspiritual grasping of material resources. Then the Holy Spirit will be able to advance even further the work of revival. For “the spirit of liberality is the spirit of heaven.”⁹

¹Institute of Church Ministry, Andrews University, “An Analysis of Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats of the Seventh-day Adventist Church,” Prepared for The General Conference Strategic Planning Committee, October 2007. This research indicates that a rather low percentage of SDA members spend daily time in Bible study and prayer.

²E. G. White, *Evangelism* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1946) 695.

³R. Laird Harris, ed. *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1980) s.v. Article 2340 shûb, by Victor P. Hamilton, 2:909.

⁴E. G. White, *Counsels on Stewardship* (Takoma Park: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1940), 52.

⁵E. G. White, *Testimonies for the Church* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 1948), 3:548.

⁶E. G. White, *Testimonies for the Church* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 1948), 9:53.

⁷White, *Counsels on Stewardship*, 30.

⁸*Ibid.* 27.

⁹*Ibid.* 14.

A Life of Surrender

Justin McNeilus
President
Generation of Youth for Christ



Justin McNeilus is the president and chairman of the board for GYC and previously served GYC as the vice president for evangelism. He lives in Minnesota with his wife, Stephanie, their two cats, Dale and Karl, and their most recent addition—an English bulldog puppy named Olive. Justin graduated from Southern Adventist University with a degree in business administration and is currently finishing a graduate degree in banking. He works in his family’s business as a vice president of Sterling State Bank. Justin is driven by a passion to see young people involved in the Seventh-day Adventist Church.

As I think of this topic, one text immediately comes to mind: “And when he had called the people unto him with his disciples also, he said unto them, Whosoever will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me” (Mark 8:34).

Let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me?

Exactly, because more than anything else, the Christian life is a life of surrender, of surrender of self in order to give oneself to God and to others. Though, at its core, Christianity is all about what God has done for us in the person of Jesus Christ—“While we were yet sinners, Christ died for us” (Romans 5:8). We must never forget the other part of the Christian life, and that is, what we do for God because of what He has done for us.

Of course, the issue of what we do for God is not salvation by works. To think that our works could add to the cross is the height of hubris, of arrogance; it is even the spirit of the anti-Christ, which claims to add more than what was done in our behalf by Jesus at Calvary. The Creator of the universe, the One who “made all that was made” (John 1:3), came to this earth, took upon our sins, and died for those sins.

What could we ever add to that in terms of salvation?

At the same time, as a response to the salvation that we have been given in Jesus, we have been called to live a new life in Christ, a life centered not on self but on the Lord. Perhaps the text that best describes this is found in the Old Testament:

“He hath shewed thee, O man, what is good; and what doth the LORD require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?” (Micah 6:8).

Revival and Reformation

As we all know, since the Atlanta General Conference Session in 2010, our church has been called upon to seek out the Holy Spirit so that there can be “Revival and Reformation” in our ranks, one that is so desperately needed. But true revival and true reformation aren’t just slogans or platitudes. A revival means a revival in our faith commitment to the Lord and to what He has called us to be and to do. And a reformation means just that, a reforming, a changing in how we live our lives.

And central to how we live is the whole area of stewardship. Yes, stewardship, because as Christians, who have been given so much, we have also been called to be stewards of what we have been given.

Don’t miss the key word in the last sentence: “given.” Nothing that we have—no talent, no possession, no knowledge, no business, no job, nothing is ours. Everything belongs to the God in whom “we live, and move, and have our being” (Acts 17:28), the God “in whose hand is . . . [our] breath” (Daniel 5:23).

A friend who has worked at the General Conference for almost 30 years said something that catches the essence of stewardship.

“I don’t own,” he said, “the pencil on my desk. I am called to be a steward of it, to use it to God’s glory, not my own, and to further God’s work, not my own.”

Ellen White expressed it like this: “God desires to bring men into direct relation with Himself. In all His dealings with human beings He recognizes the principle of

personal responsibility. He seeks to encourage a sense of personal dependence and to impress the need of personal guidance. His gifts are committed to men as individuals. Every man has been made a steward of sacred trusts; each is to discharge his trust according to the direction of the Giver . . ." (7T: 176).

The Body

Right off the bat, we must remember that we are not our own, that we have been “bought with a price” (1 Corinthians 6:20), and I don’t need to remind us of what that price was. Thus, all stewardship must begin with our own bodies, with our own flesh and blood. Contrary to ancient pagan philosophies, our bodies are not evil, but in fact good. What’s evil is when we, as poor stewards, misuse and abuse them in ways that go against the truths that God has revealed to us.

Revival and reformation cannot be a corporate experience until it becomes an individual one—one that starts with us, and what’s more personal than our own bodies? We are not called to be health fanatics; we are called to be good stewards of the wonderful gifts we have been given in health. We need to take care of our bodies, and they will take care of us, and allow us to do more for God and for others.

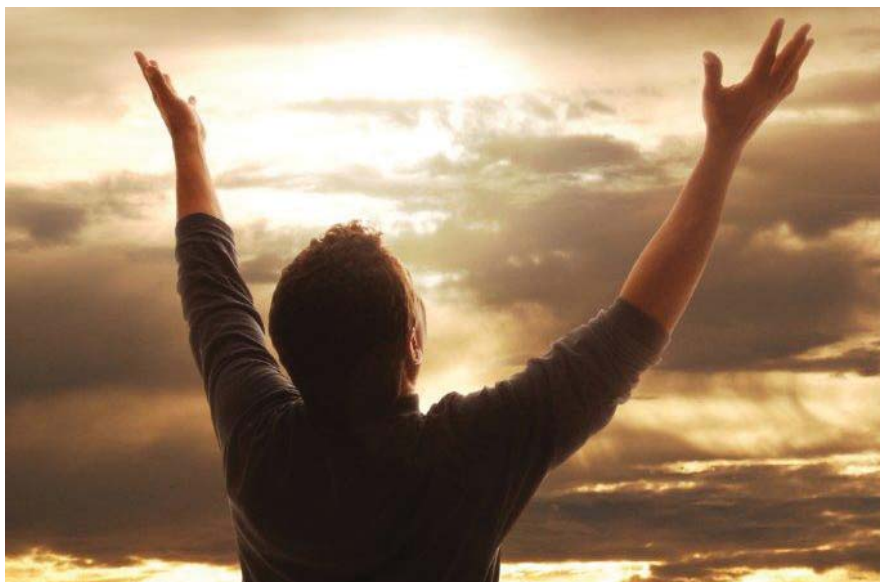
Our Special Talents

Just as each of us are unique, each has unique gifts. Even if we are talented in the same area, our manifestations of those talents are distinct. Whatever our gifts are, it is so easy to use them only for ourselves. Good stewardship means, however, that we make sure that these gifts aren’t selfishly exploited. Imagine the blessings we could be to our church and community were we to carefully and prayerfully, under the a heart submitted to the guidance of Holy Spirit, devote ourselves, especially during this call to revival and reformation, to making sure that our special gifts were being used to bless others. If you really want to be reminded how important this is, read again Matthew 25:14-30. God takes seriously how we use the gifts He has given us. We would be very foolish to do anything but take them seriously as well.

Time

As one of the most famous texts in the Bible goes: “To every thing there is a season, and a time to every purpose under the heaven” (Ecclesiastes 3:1). In many ways, time is our most precious commodity. None of us knows how much time we have; we all know, however, that it is finite and constantly diminishing.

How crucial then that we be good stewards of our time; that is, we take a close look at what we do with the time we have and ask ourselves: Is my time being used selfishly, or for the glory of God and for the benefit of others? The gift of the Sabbath, for all the other truth that it contains, shows in a general sense that God cares



about how we use our time. Now, especially, as we are called to revival and reformation, we need to make sure that our priorities in life are straight. And how we use our time truly reveals what priorities are.

Possessions

We all know the old saying, “Put your money where your mouth is.” However trite, it is powerfully true. It is easy to go to church on Sabbath, utter platitudes about faith and salvation, and maybe even throw a few dollars in the collection plate once in a while.

But, in the end, if we truly believe in what we profess, faithfulness in tithes and offerings and others gifts reveals it. Though stewardship of our possessions is more than tithes and offerings, it is nothing without at least that. To take, right out of the gate, 10 percent of what you earn (what you have been given of God) and return it to Him is an act of faith, an act that, when neglected, not only reveals a lack of faith but that will, over time, weaken it more.

God doesn’t need us to give of our possessions; we need to do it for ourselves. It is for our good, because each act of giving is an act of faith. And we need all the faith we can get, because only through faith will the Lord be able to work in us the changes so desperately needed to bring about a revival and reformation.

Conclusion

Though our church’s cry for revival and reformation is a corporate one, one that is calling our whole church to renew its commitment to our Lord and to the message He has given us, nothing will happen until something happens in each of us, individually. We each, as individuals—regardless of what anyone else does or does not do—have to make the choice to surrender to the Lord, to be open to His Holy Spirit, and to act upon His leading in our life.

And, central to it all is stewardship, what we do with all the gifts that we have been given.

Remember, “*given.*”

Practicing Nehemiah's Prayer Process

I have been involved in church planting since 1972. After starting a church that became very successful, I left the home base to help start a sister church in the Park Cities area of Dallas. A group of us felt confident that God wanted a new witness in this part of the city. We soon discovered, however, that we were faced with what seemed to be an impossible task. Property values were out of sight. The property that was available was scarce and included small plots that were not large enough for a church. The depth of the problem is reflected in the fact that no one had constructed a church building in this part of Dallas for nearly twenty-five years.

We looked and prayed for months—in the meantime meeting on Sunday evenings in a rented facility. To be perfectly honest, many of us were getting very discouraged. We felt we might need to give up and go back to the home-base church. We had already learned from other experiences in starting several other sister churches that it was very difficult to maintain a ministry in our culture without a permanent facility—particularly in this area of the country.

While I was trying to come to grips with reality, the Holy Spirit directed me to Nehemiah's prayer process. I can remember vividly how I identified with Nehemiah's helpless feelings. From a human point of view, I saw no solution. I also began to wonder how long our small group of people would be willing to participate in a ministry that seemed to be faltering because of our rather dead-end search for property. We were *all* getting restless. Furthermore, even if we "found" some property, how could we pay for it?

The more I studied what Nehemiah did—and how he did it—the more convinced I became that I should share his prayer process with our little church body. As I reflect back, I now know that the Lord gave me faith at that moment in my life to believe that Nehemiah's approach to prayer would also work for us. Consequently, I outlined Nehemiah's experience. I then led the church body through the same steps taken by this Old Testament leader. The difference, of course, is that it wasn't just my personal prayers but our prayers together as a group of believers.

Using the Prayer Process

1. We acknowledged God's greatness with the use of Scripture, hymns, and prayers. As we worshiped the Lord in this way; we let Him know that we knew and believed that He could find us a piece of property and/or a permanent facility—even though it seemed to be a human impossibility. If He could resolve Nehemiah's predicament, we told the Lord that we believed He could solve ours.

2. We reminded God of His promises to us. I asked various members of the body to openly share scriptural statements with the Lord. Vividly; I remember that one person shared Jesus' own words that are recorded by Matthew in his Gospel—"Ask, and it shall be given to you; seek, and you shall find; knock, and it shall be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it shall be opened" (Matthew 7:7-8).

3. We confessed our sins to God. Here again, we used scriptural statements. We also shared in our own words our human failures. We confessed our lack of faith. We claimed forgiveness based upon John's wonderful promise in 1 John 1:9.

4. We were very specific in our prayers. At this point in the process, we asked God to lead us to people who could help us—both Christians and non-Christians. We reminded the Lord that if He could use Artaxerxes, we believed that there

were people in Dallas who could help us if God moved on their hearts and gave us opportunity to make our needs known.

We also asked for miraculous financial resources, for ours were very limited. We were a small group of people, and no one among us was considered wealthy. We hardly had enough income to pay the rent on our facility from week to week and to take care of some part-time salaries. We were praying for a miracle!

The Miracle Happened

God answered our prayers in ways that were far beyond what we imagined. We were overwhelmed with His grace. Please understand that it didn't happen all at once. We also faced one difficult barrier after another. But over a period of time, God unfolded a plan that was absolutely supernatural.

Nehemiah's Prayer Process

- Pray out of a heart of deep concern.
- Make prayer a priority over other needs.
- Pray persistently.
- Recognize that God is great and awesome.
- Remind God of His promises to us.
- Acknowledge our unworthiness and sinfulness, our human weaknesses and failings.
- Be specific in our prayers if we want to get specific answers.

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What Shall I Render?

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As a young girl growing up in a Caribbean culture, I was taught to always give God my best. Best as defined by my Christian mother required a special dress and shoes that were exclusively Sabbath attire only. Additionally, my Sabbath School lesson was to be studied daily. And it didn't end there, for I was not permitted to leave food on my plate, as an expression of gratitude for God's provision. I was encouraged to "let others know about Jesus" whenever the opportunity presented itself. In retrospect, these memories remind me of how specific and intentional my training in spiritual responsibility was.

Despite my mother's best efforts, I have since learned that God wants us to rend our hearts, and not our garments. As such, greater accountability is required of those who claim God's promises to be the provider of every good gift. Likewise, "to whom much is given, much is required." Each week during the worship service, we are challenged with the question from Malachi 3:8: "Will a man rob God?" Perhaps a visitor hearing this verse might be aghast and ponder, who would rob God? How absurd! Absurd? Maybe. Nevertheless, we congregants, with the passion and haste of Peter would exclaim, "Oh, no Lord, I would never..."

In defense of the well meaning "Peters," I don't believe people openly plan to "rob God;" but, our overall posture as stewards (or the lack thereof), paints a very incriminating picture. This causes me to ponder, "Will a man rob God?" With thunderous retort God responds, "Yet, ye have robbed me, even this whole nation."

And we say, but "Lord, wherein have we robbed thee?"

TIME

Have you considered your time? You spend no time in personal devotion, but are excessively overburdened with the duties of your life. Then when you fall behind and are running late, time with God is the first appointment to be dropped or cancelled. Read Psalm 5:3.

But ye say, "Wherein have we robbed thee?"

TALENTS

You fail to utilize your talents. Gifts specifically designed for you. Instead you "sit" on them week after week. In business, the law of economics dictates no investment—no returns! However, God promises the benefit of increased talents according to our faith. Read Psalm 90:17.

"But ye say, "Wherein have we robbed thee?"

SERVICE

God's kingdom is robbed of souls, every time we fail to witness. Our preoccupation with reaching in far exceeds the pursuit of opportunities of reaching out to suffering humanity. Read Luke 17:10.

"But ye say, "Wherein have we robbed thee?"

HEALTH

Violation of the health laws by poorly caring for our body temple is a major form of robbery. Failure to care for our body temple results in (to borrow a medical term) "failure to thrive" or in layman's term "failure to spiritually develop." God's clarity on this subject is affirmed by the servant of the Lord, as she emphatically states, "The spirit of God cannot come to our help and assist us in perfecting Christian characters, while we indulge our appetites to the injury of health" CD:57.

"But ye say, "Wherein have we robbed thee?"

GIVING

In tithes and offering. You see, many of us place God on a lay-away plan. You know how it works—you pay a small amount this week and pledge to pay the balance in subsequent installments. Then we spend the rest of the year playing catch up. God does not take IOU's for he has already instructed us on this principle. And he certainly does not need our tips, because He "owns the cattle on a thousand hills." However, what he does want from us is our loyalty and obedience. He wants us to give our "all." Inclusive is our commitment of time, talents, body temple, service and specifically our tithes and offering.

Are you robbing God? Can God trust you to be a good steward of all your spiritual endowments? If you are desirous of a balanced life in God, then commit with me today to pursue stewardship revival in gratitude of His marvelous grace. Read Malachi 3:10.

Every Man's Life a Plan of God

That is one of the most thrilling thoughts that has ever come to me—every man's life, everybody's life, a plan of God! If this is really so, it changes our outlook on everything it makes life worth living.

Does God have a plan for every life? Does He have a blueprint, as it were, for everyone of us? Friends, I believe He has (Mark 13:34).

The reason why so many of our lives are unsatisfactory to us is that we do not follow God's plan for our lives. We have so much heart hunger, so much frustration, so much sadness. Why? One reason is that so many of us either neglect or reject God's plan for us.

Biblical Examples

Look at the prophets and apostles of the Bible. There was Jeremiah—he was a humble, unknown priest, very retiring in his nature; but the word of the Lord came to him and he was plainly told that before he was born God had planned his life (Jeremiah 1:5).

Moses' life was a plan of God. He tried to change God's plan, but finally when he made his full surrender, God's plan worked out for him.

The apostle Paul's life was planned by God, but Paul had other plans. He was a member of the Sanhedrin and a great opposer of God. But contrary to all his dreams, his ideas, and plans, when he surrendered his life to Christ, he had a new vision; and after a long life of service, he stood before a great king (Acts 26:19).

And there was the apostle Peter. God had a plan for his life also. Peter certainly made a great failure at first. But, later on, a great change came and he submitted to God's plan (John 21:18, 19).

We are all stewards of God, but how many are failing to act that way! God has given "to every man his work, the work for which his capabilities adapt him, the work which will result in the greatest good to himself and to his fellow men, and in the greatest honor to God. Thus our business, our work, our calling, is a part of God's great plan; and so as it is conducted in accordance with His will, He Himself is responsible for the results (1 Corinthians 3:9).

A Plan for Everyone

What about God's plan for our lives? Have we tried to find out what it is? Have we been willing to follow it as God has led us step by step? Remember, we are responsible for all the talents God has loaned to us (1 Corinthians 12:8-11).

It is said that Michelangelo, the famous Italian sculptor, once stood staring straight ahead at a great block of marble. A friend approached and asked him what he was looking at. "An angel," he said. He saw what the mallet, the chisel, and patient skill could do with that rejected stone. He set to work and produced a masterpiece.

So God sees possibilities in every human heart that is dedicated to Him. He sees how beautiful the life will be if His plan is carried out. Your work may be in one place, mine in another, but "to every man his work."

When Gideon with his three hundred men won that tremendous victory over thousands of enemies, "Every man in his place" was his motto. Every man had a task assigned to him, and everything depended upon each man's being loyal and true in his place.

When Nehemiah was rebuilding the walls of Jerusalem, every man was to build a part of the wall next to his own house (Nehemiah 3). Verse after verse, verse after verse, telling us about folks who did the work right where they were.

Accepting God's Plan

How many of us will volunteer today to accept God's plan? How many will say: "I am willing, Lord, to follow in Thy way wherever it may lead. Whatever Thy plan for my life may be, show it to me step by step. I do not ask to see the full plan to the end of the journey. Let me see it each day as duty comes, as opportunity comes, as privilege comes." May God help each one of us to make that kind of consecration!

God is willing to reveal His plan for us, but there are two requirements if we would know what it is. First, there must be the sympathy of trust; and, secondly, the faithfulness of obedience. There must be sympathetic trust or we shall never have spiritual insight. God reveals Himself to the trustful, loving heart, and He makes His ways clear to those who obey Him.

Each of us, then has his work; and how important are those individual peculiarities which God has given to each of us for the accomplishment of that task! Our service to God is not a by-product of life; it is life itself. So, working and watching, happy will be the servant whom the Lord shall find so doing; that is, doing the work that is in God's plan for him, not merely idly looking for Christ, but doing His will here and now, knowing that every man's life is a plan of God.

Adapted from Every Man's Life a Plan of God in Thirty Sermons by H. M. S. Richards, copyright Voice of Prophecy.

Disinterested Benevolence

Disinterested—a strange word, an intriguing one. The word immediately raises these questions, "Am I to have no interest in the objectives to which I contribute? Am I to throw my money to the winds, as it were, not caring where, when, or how it is used?"

On the contrary, disinterested benevolence will increase the interest of the giver in the projects to which he contributes because it will free him from the selfish human frailties which so often stifle generous giving.

The dictionary defines the term this way, "not influenced by personal interest or selfish motives." The key word is influenced. The reason why disinterested benevolence is "very rare" in the world today is that personal interest and selfish motives form the basis for most giving; and personal interest and selfish motives are subject to human frailties and faults.

A Story Told

A lady resigned from a school board because of an official action which was not to her liking. It is immaterial whether the decision was right or wrong or whether she took the right or wrong action in resigning. What is important is the act which accompanied it. To quote her words:

"And I quit paying my pledge to the school too!" This is the amazing by-product of the influence of personal feelings in giving.

Without doubt she made this pledge believing that Christian education is important, and with the desire to see some worthy boy or girl benefit from this Christ-centered schooling. But just as soon as her feelings were hurt she not only refused to have anything to do with the school, but quit paying her commitment as well.

Did her decision make Christian education any less important? Did the unfortunate boy or girl need less support now than previously? No. This act hurt a number of people. It worked a hardship on the student who had been benefiting from her generous gift each month. It hurt the school which was having a difficult time making its income cover the costs; but more importantly, it hurt the well-meaning lady most of all.

Soon she lost interest in the position she held in the church and was on the verge of resigning. She found herself toying with the idea of staying home from church. The bitterness in her heart was nourishing a cancer in her soul.

The "I" Syndrome

The road of "giving to things" instead of "giving to God" has many detours. So many church building programs have been weakened or stifled because "they didn't build it the way I wanted it!" "I won't give if brother you-know-who is on the building committee!" "If they put the church on that lot, I won't put in a dime!" "I don't want anyone telling me what I have to give!" There are too many I's in giving to things too much self-interest.

The adversary is a clever one! He will use any method to keep people from giving, or to get them to stop giving. He isn't particular so long as the weeds of selfishness he sows in each heart will flourish and bear the fruits of bitterness, disunity, and self-interest.

True Benevolence

Disinterested benevolence stems from a genuine love for God and His gift to humanity. It is not affected by circumstances. It is not subject to the wise or unwise use of the funds given or by the success or failure of the project. Disinterested benevolence permits the donor to give willingly to a project with which he is not totally in accord.

It allows one to give to an activity which may not be operating entirely to the donor's personal satisfaction. In brief, it never allows personal feelings to stifle or diminish the gift. This is giving to God not giving to things.

Jesus is the perfect example. "His life was without selfish interest, but ever marked with disinterested benevolence." EW:269.

Every gift should be measured by the unfathomable Gift of heaven. The greatest offering one could make would then appear as nothing in comparison. This is the key to disinterested benevolence. One must consider the object to which he gives of far more importance than the gift.

"How vain the endeavor to measure with mathematical rules, time, money, and love against a love and sacrifice that is measureless and incomputable!" T4:119.

If the Christian can catch a glimpse of God's love then self-interest and selfish motives will disappear, lost in awe and the wonder of it all. Giving would be to Him not to things. This is disinterested benevolence the object of the gift being of infinitely more value than the gift.

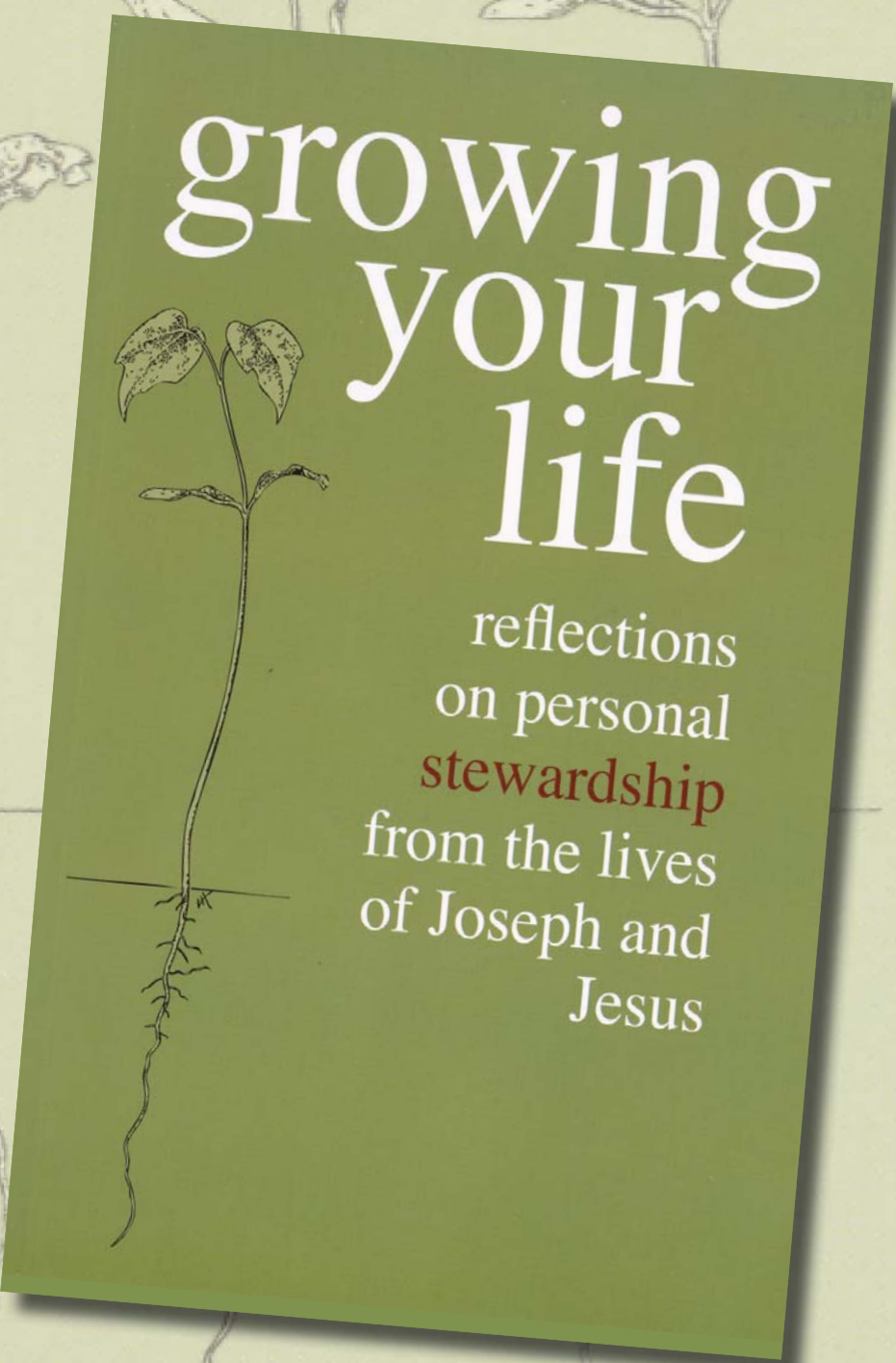
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