

Faith, Trust, and Commitment

Pastor Marcos Bomfim



GOD FIRST
ADVENTIST STEWARDSHIP MINISTRIES

FAITH, TRUST, AND COMMITMENT

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Faith, Trust, and Commitment

Pastor **Marcos Bomfim**



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FOREWORD

Welcome to the new features of the Tithe and Offerings Readings! For 2020, the Tithe and Offering Readings have available 52 two-minute videos summarizing each Sabbath's reading. The videos were created to be presented at the churches before the offering collection, and they should be followed by a personal (live) appeal and prayer. Those two last parts (appeal and prayer) should be presented in real time and not virtually.

The main focus of the "Faith, Trust, and Commitment—2020 Tithe and Offering Readings" is "giving as an expression of worship." It means far more than merely a donation. Usually, donors feel that they are buying into something and are helping or favoring someone or something. Worshiping givers, instead, understand that Someone owns them, and they give out of the perception that they have already been helped or favored by Him.

Other themes to be highlighted in the stories are: (1) the God First principle, (2) Promise (see page x), (3) the Storehouse principle, and (4) the importance of vows (see the Thematic Index for a more comprehensive list). Of the 52 readings, 28 are real-life stories, and 7 are easily identifiable fictional stories, devised to explain an important point (See "Fictional Stories" of the Thematic Index). After some reluctance and prayer, I also decided to include some stories of my own family and of my extended family (both are identified in the Thematic Index after "Author's Family Stories"). These last stories will later be edited, with more details added, and will be part of a new book with testimonies. As David said, "He has put a new song in my mouth—praise to our God; many will see it and fear and will trust in the Lord" (Psalm 40:3).

Other authors also contributed seven readings to this book: Alyssa Truman from AWR (Mar. 14); Patricia Maxwell from Christian Record Services (Apr. 11); Andrew McChesney from Adventist Mission (Apr. 25); ADRA (May 9); and Sylva Keshishian (Adventist Mission (Jul. 11, Sept. 12, Nov. 14).

My gratitude goes to God, who encouraged me to write; to my wife, Mariluz, for being bold enough to join me in venturing with God; to my parents, Irene and Osvaldino Bomfim, who lived and taught me about the God First principle; to my daughters and their husbands, Fernando and Luana, and Gabriel and Alana, for allowing us to share their stories; to those whose stories will promote God's faithfulness: Jaime Jorge (USA), Andrew MacChesney (USA), Pavel Goya (Romania), Elizabeth and Herbert Boger (Brazil), Ricardo Paccagnella (USA), Edward Heidinger and his family (Peru), Angelo Donaldo (Angola), Evelize Reinaldo and Luiz Pinho (Brazil), Luis Augusto (Brazil), Meropi Gjika (Albania), Barna Magyarosi (Romania), and Ruth and Edison Choque (Peru); to Aniel Barbe and Hiskia Missah for their invaluable suggestions; to Allan Hecht for helping with the editing process; to Sandra Blackmer, proofreader, whose invaluable work brought more clarity to the message; to Johnetta B. Flomo, who worked tirelessly editing and designing this book, making it so attractive; and, finally, to Bruno Mastrocola and his team from Synesthezia, who committed themselves to make the Tithe and Offering videos part of their ministry!

I hope that after presenting these readings (or videos) in your church, not only will your members be blessed, but you will also be spiritually enriched with an increased desire to serve the Lord and to recommit your life to Him.

TITHES AND OFFERING VIDEOS

A Simple Guide

You may play or download the two-minute videos (one for each of the 52 Sabbaths) by using the QR code below. The following are instructions on how to use them:

- The videos are to be presented in the church before the offering collection.
- They do not include the appeal or the final prayer, which should be supplied by the person scheduled to promote the offerings.
- The videos may (and should) also be shared through social media or during congresses, youth programs, camp meetings, church boards, Stewardship Weeks of Prayer, etc.
- The videos were recorded in English, but each division or union is permitted to translate them into their various languages or customize them with regional accents.
- The entire video with original soundtrack—no voiceover/no letterings—will also be available, upon request, to divisions and unions at no cost.
- Local church pastors and Stewardship Ministries directors must be informed about the videos and how to download them and share them in their churches, especially before the offering collection.
- You may watch the videos using this link: <https://stewardship.adventist.org/2020-tithe-and-offerings-readings-videos>



SCHEDULE OF THE AVAILABILITY OF THE VIDEOS (RELEASE DATES)

Quarter

First Quarter (Jan–Mar 2020)
Second Quarter (Apr–Jun 2020)
Third Quarter (Jul–Sept 2020)
Fourth Quarter (Oct–Dec 2020)

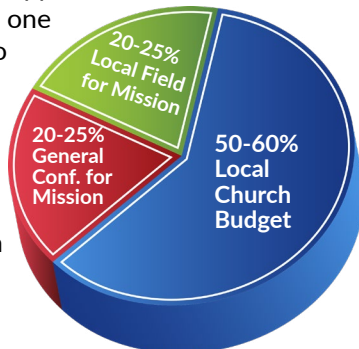
Release Date

November 1, 2019
December 16, 2019
February 7, 2020
March 23, 2020

OFFERING PLANS

There are three different offering plans used within the worldwide Seventh-day Adventist Church.

THE COMBINED OFFERING PLAN was voted as an option in a the Annual Council of 2002 after a recommendation by the World Stewardship Summit of 2001. It supports all levels of the church by putting total funds collected into one pool. The funds are distributed according to a formula approved by each division but within the following percentages: 50-60 percent for the local church; 20-25 percent to the GC for mission funds and 20-25 percent for mission work in the local field. Divisions making use of this plan currently include: **ECD, ESD, IAD, NSD, SAD, SID, SPD (Island Fields), SSD, SUD, WAD.**



The CALENDAR OF OFFERINGS is the original option. In this plan, separate offerings are promoted and received during the worship service following the approved calendar of offerings as voted by the General Conference committee every year. A calendar of the weeks of each year is drawn with certain offerings designated accordingly. About 26 Sabbath offerings are assigned to the local church, and the others are allocated between the other levels of church organization or designations in the local field. All loose offerings (not in marked envelopes) will go to the offering of the day. There are six Special Offerings days for particular ministries. Divisions ascribing to this plan currently include the **EUD, Israel Field, MENA, SPD, TED.**

The PERSONAL GIVING PLAN organizes the financial needs of the church into three categories and offers a suggested percentage of the member's income be dedicated to them. They are: Local Church Budget (3-5%). This would include utilities, maintenance, insurance, school operating expenses, children's magazines, teaching supplies, staff salaries, bulletins. Conference Advance Budget (1-2%) for Christian education, local evangelism, vacation Bible School, summer camps, union magazines, etc. World Budget (1-3%) to support the global mission needs of the church as promoted in the approved Calendar of Offerings. Sabbath School offerings are received and treated the same way as in the Calendar of offerings plan. This plan also has provision for giving towards special projects. The NAD currently ascribes to this plan.

Calendar of Offerings—World 2020

For those divisions following this offering plan.

01		JANUARY
	Outreach/Church Budget	4
	Division	11
	Church Budget	18
	Conference/Union	25
02		FEBRUARY
	Outreach/Church Budget	1
	Division	8
	Church Budget	15
	Conference/Union	22
	Church Budget	29
03		MARCH
	Outreach/Church Budget	7
	Adventist World Radio	14*+
	Church Budget	21
	Conference/Union	28
04		APRIL
	Outreach/Church Budget	4
	Hope Channel	11*+
	Church Budget	18
	Conference/Union	25
05		MAY
	Outreach/Church Budget	2
	Disaster and Famine Relief (NAD only)	9*+
	Church Budget	16
	Conference/Union	23
	Church Budget	30
06		JUNE
	Outreach/Church Budget	6
	Division	13
	Church Budget	20
	Conference/Union	27

Calendar of Offerings—World 2020

For those divisions following this offering plan.

07		JULY
	Outreach/Church Budget	4
	World Mission Budget	11*+
	Church Budget	18
	Conference/Union	25

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

09		SEPTEMBER
	Outreach/Church Budget	5
	World Mission Budget Unusual Opportunities	12*+
	Church Budget	19
	Conference/Union	26

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

11		NOVEMBER
	Outreach/Church Budget	7
	Annual Sacrifice (Global Mission)	14*+
	Church Budget	21
	Conference/Union	28

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

Calendar of Offerings—World 2020

Special Offerings

March 14	Adventist World Radio
April 11	Hope Channel
May 9	Disaster and Famine Relief
July 8	Adventist World Radio
September 12	World Mission Budget (Unusual Opportunities)
November 14	Annual Sacrifice (Global Mission)

Thirteenth Sabbath Offerings for 2020

Inter-American Division	March 28
North American Division	June 27
Northern-Asia Pacific Division	September 26
Southern-Asia Pacific Division	December 26

Sabbath Without Designated Offerings (DIVISIONS)

There are six Sabbaths in 2020 that do not have designated offerings. Each division committee is to designate these offerings for use in their division, union or conference. Hence, they are labeled “Division” offerings in the calendar. These Sabbaths are:

January	11
February	8
June	13
August	8
October	10
December	9

Summary of Offerings

General Conference	6
Division	6
Conference/Union	12
Church	<u>28</u>

Total: 52

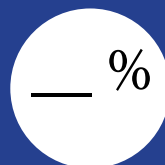
*Program provided by the General Conference

+Worldwide offering

Before reading this book, you need to know...



WHAT IS “PROMISE”?



- It is a name used for the **regular** and **systematic** offering (it is different from the freewill offering), in which,
 - the regularity of giving is determined by the regularity of receiving (the income).
 - the system is proportional (percentage-based).
- Regularity, percentage and period of validity must be previously “vowed,” “promised,” or “purposed” by the worshiper (2 Cor. 9:7).
- It is given as a percentage or proportion of the income (1 Cor. 16:1; Deut. 16:17).
- The worshiper chooses the percentage of the income that will be regularly given as “Promise” (any percentage is valid).
- It is considered as important and binding as the tithe (Mal. 3:8-10).
- It should be given after any income (Prov. 3:9).
- It is not expected when there is no income (2 Cor. 8:12).
- The worshiper offers it immediately after the tithe, and before any other expense is met or giving is done (Prov. 3:9; Matt. 6:33).

A LITTLE MORE: In Malachi 3:8-10, tithes and offerings are clearly placed under the same system. This implicitly suggests at least three similar characteristics for both: (1) regularity (according to the income), (2) proportionality (a proportion of any income), and (3) delivery (brought to the storehouse).

Ellen G. White also agrees that tithes and offerings are under the same system. She says that this system includes the concept of giving also offerings as a proportion of the income: "In the *Bible system* [singular word] of tithes and offerings [both under the same system] the amounts paid by different persons will of course vary greatly, since they are *proportioned* to the income."—*Counsels on Stewardship*, p. 73 (italics provided).

In another quotation, she comes to the point of saying that this offering along with the tithe, instead of being voluntary, is part "of our obligation." This thought is in line with Malachi 3:8-10, which confers the idea that not bringing that offering is considered by God as dishonesty. Here is the quote: "This matter of giving is not left to impulse. God has given us definite instruction in regard to it. He has specified tithes and offerings as the measure of our obligation. And He desires us to give regularly and systematically."—*Counsels on Stewardship*, p. 80.

COMPARING TITHE, PROMISE, AND FREEWILL OFFERINGS

FEATURES/ OFFERING	TITHE	PROMISE	FREEWILL OFFERING
REGULARITY	Determined by the income	Determined by the income	It is sporadic
SYSTEM	Proportioned to the income	Proportioned to the income	According to the impulse of the heart
MANDATORY	Lifelong	Lifelong	Circumstantially (when prompted by the Spirit)
PERCENTAGE	Predetermined by God (10%)	Chosen by the worshiper (___%)	N/A
POSSIBILITY OF PERCENTAGE ADJUSTMENT	No	Yes	N/A
DELIVERED TO	Storehouse	Storehouse	Place chosen by the worshiper
FINAL RECIPIENTS	Local, regional and international range	Local, regional and international range (suggested)	Chosen by the worshiper

January 4, 2020

GOD FIRST BY HABIT

With a new year there are new opportunities—with God’s mercies renewed!

Have you already established or renewed your decisions or purposes (2 Cor. 9:7) for this year? Do those purposes include God and the future life? Have you already established the habit of waking up early each morning to seek His presence? Are you seriously planning to enrich your personal devotional time this year by seeking Him faithfully, developing the habit of praying regularly, and studying your Bible and the Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide? Is your family planning to keep or to develop the habit of daily gathering together for a short family worship (all family members included) at the beginning and end of every day?

Have you also reaffirmed your resolution to keep the Sabbath this new year from sunset to sunset, no matter what may happen, and to include in this experience those who live in your house, especially your children (Ex. 20:8-10)? Have you determined to dedicate this day not simply to a selfish rest, but to the rest of the soul? Have you also purposed to attend church and Sabbath School on Sab-

bath, keeping yourself from any secular labor during this day, using the remaining time to seek the Lord, trusting that He will provide for your needs (Ps. 34:8-10)?

Have you also established or renewed your purpose to put God first and to learn to trust in Him as the Provider and Sustainer by tithing and by giving also your “Promise” (which is a regular, percentage-based offering)? Have you already decided to set both apart, tithe and Promise, immediately after any income or increase, and from all your income or increase (Prov. 3:9)? Have you also decided the percentage (%) of the income to be dedicated as your Promise, with which to worship God during this new year?

APPEAL: As you worship Him, you may prayerfully establish or renew the decision to put God first in all or some of those areas, and to do it by habit.

PRAYER: Dear God, please accept and bless the decisions that we are making in Your presence, as we worship You with Your tithes and offerings!

1



2



January 11, 2020

PERFORMER OF JUST ONE MUSIC

Fleeing from Cuba, the violinist Jaime Jorge was only 10 years old when he arrived with his family and without his violin in Miami, Florida, United States, in 1980. Struggling hard to survive, miracles started to happen when his parents decided to move with the family to Milwaukee, Wisconsin, arriving during the worst winter in 80 years. Owning nothing, the family received strong support from the church members and neighbors, and finally Jaime's mother was able to acquire for him a violin for his practices! As they couldn't afford to buy sheet music, his mother also purchased an old turntable and a vinyl disc of a Beethoven violin concert. "You must hear and rehearse it," she told Jaime.

While applying for a scholarship for the Milwaukee Conservatory, Jaime rehearsed that specific music many times! During the test, when a professor was wondering how a boy was able to play that kind of music, Jaime told him about his family's struggles, the turntable, and why that was his only music. The professor, who had arrived from Europe just three months before, asked who the performer on the disc was. When Jaime answered, the professor said: "I could immediately recognize him by the way you are playing. He was my professor there!" And

Jorge Jaime got the scholarship!

God coordinated the time the Jorge family arrived in the United States with the time that Jaime's professor arrived from Europe. The Lord also led the Jorge family to that specific city, and provided for their basic needs during the winter. He provided the violin, the turntable, the right vinyl disc, the conservatory, and the connection with that specific professor and scholarship as well!

Jaime Jorge became a well-known Adventist violin performer, using his musical gifts to preach and minister to people around the world.

APPEAL: As you put your tithes and offerings into the offering plate, close your eyes and worship Him who has a plan for your life and is fully able to provide for you according to your needs.

PRAYER: Dear heavenly Father, please accept our worship and help us to trust in Your power to provide not only for our daily needs but also for our special ones, according to Your plans for our good. Amen.

As heard from Jaime Jorge on Sept. 29, 2018
at the Washington Brailian Church.

January 18, 2020

A WORLDWIDE MISSION

Daniel was sick for many days, unable to perform his work, because he was “astonished by the vision,” which “no one understood” (Dan. 8:27). While in Babylon, Daniel knew from the book of Jeremiah that the restoration of Israel would happen immediately after 70 years of captivity.

But now, partially understanding some developments of the great controversy and the sufferings of God’s people through the ages, Daniel was overwhelmed! Instead of a detailed explanation, God told him twice to seal up the vision because it referred to the future, to the time of the end (Dan. 8:26; 12:4).

Centuries later, as John saw a mighty angel holding that “little book open in his hand” (Rev. 10:2), he was figuratively commanded to eat it. It was sweet as honey in the mouth but bitter in the stomach. This vision was referring to the Millerite movement, the 1844 disappointment, and to the Seventh-day Adventist movement—the very time we are living in now. This was the time that Daniel was looking forward to in the future, just before Jesus’ second coming, when the knowledge of the book of Daniel would increase (12:4).

But the command for John to eat that book was followed by a very clear mission: “You must prophesy again about [or ‘to’] many peoples, nations, tongues, and kings” (Rev. 10:11).

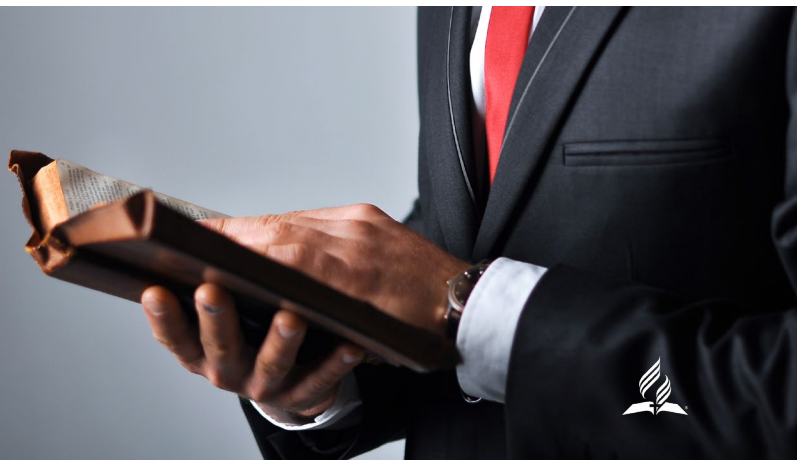
It means that our mission, as well as our Promise (regular, percentage-based offerings), must reach far more than the limited range of our local church or neighborhood. By bringing our offerings and by gathering them together in the “storehouse,” we will be able to plan more effectively to do far more for others, and to go farther and faster. And according to the Bible and the Spirit of Prophecy, this is God’s plan for our regular and systematic offerings.

APPEAL: As we put our offerings together today, let us pray that “many peoples, nations, tongues, and kings” may learn to worship God as the Creator, while there is time, because the hour of His judgment has come.

PRAYER: Dear Lord, let us ourselves be prepared for the day of Your coming, and by our tithes and offerings be able to invite others as well! Amen.



4



January 25, 2020

RAMÓN AND THE FAILING PASTOR

"In almost 16 years I have never been visited by my pastor! I really don't know what he is doing during the week. So, I have decided to give my tithe to charity," said Ramón (not his real name) to a trusted friend.

Ramon was a good church member. He was still willing to return tithe, but he was hurt. In a very kind way, his friend explained that every person has the free choice to decide if they will follow the Bible about where to bring the tithe and offerings, or if they will follow whatever is right in their own eyes.

In Deuteronomy 12 the Lord made it very clear where He expects us to bring our tithes and offerings: "But you shall seek the place where the Lord your God chooses ... to put His name for His dwelling place; and there you shall go. There you shall take your burnt offerings, your sacrifices, your tithes, the heave offerings of your hand, your vowed offerings, your freewill offerings" (Deut. 12:5, 6). And He made it even clearer: "You shall not at all do as we are doing here today—every man doing whatever is right in his own eyes" (Deut. 12:8).

Ramon's friend told him that this biblical concept is part of what we know as the "Storehouse Principle," which explicitly appears throughout the Old Testament but is also implicitly endorsed in the New Testament (1 Cor. 9:13). It is regarding that concept that the Lord Himself says: "Bring all the tithes into the storehouse, that there may be food in My house, and try Me now ... if I will not open for you the windows of heaven and pour out for you such blessing that there will not be room enough to receive it" (Mal. 3:10).

APPEAL: The Lord is inviting us today to wholly submit to Him, and to bring our tithes and offerings to where He has told us to take them. And then He invites us to "try Him." May we accept His invitation and follow His guidance today!

Prayer: Heavenly Father, help us to trust You more and more, and in humble submission to follow Your guidance as found in the Bible, despite our impulses or preconceived ideas. May the Lord Jesus be worshiped with our tithes and offerings. Amen.

February 1, 2020

WHY AM I BRINGING MY OFFERING?

The telephone rang. The friendly voice on the other end was that of Martha (not her real name): “I don’t agree with the direction my conference is taking with some issues, so I want to know where else I can send my tithes.”

Martha’s struggle would certainly vanish if she could accurately identify God’s appointed recipients of the tithe and offerings. Are we supposed to return the tithe to the pastor or to a church leader? To whom should I give my tithe?

The psalmist understood this issue: “Offer to **God** thanksgiving and pay your vows to the **Most High**” (Ps. 50:14). And David was also sure about the specific place where he should meet the Lord to pay his vows: “I will go into Your house with burnt offerings; I will pay You my vows” (Ps. 66:13), which would certainly also include the tithe.

According to the Bible, the tithe must be brought as an act of worship to God, the true recipient, and be delivered to the storehouse (see Deut. 12; 2 Chron. 31; Neh. 10, 12, 13; Mal. 3:8-10). In the Seventh-day Adventist Church, the local church stands as an outpost of the storehouse, which is the conference.

And God has the capacity to determine how the tithe should be used: to be equally distributed (2 Chron. 31:14-21) to support the authorized gospel ministry worldwide (Num. 18:21; Matt. 28:19, 20; Rev. 14:6).

Tithes and offerings are not to be considered as rewards, leverage, or punishment tools for a leader’s behavior, but as a way to worship God for His many blessings. Basing our giving pattern on the performance of leaders (fallible human beings) may lead us to disregard God’s positive command to bring the tithe and offerings to the storehouse and to try Him (Mal. 3:10).

APPEAL: Are my tithes and offerings manipulated as a display of human power, or are they brought to God’s appointed place to honor and worship Him in humbleness and meekness of heart? Let us ask the Lord to give us the right motivation, as we worship Him in His house of prayer.

PRAYER: Dear Lord, thank You for giving us the privilege to worship You today, as we humbly bring our tithes and offerings to You and into Your house. Amen!



6



February 8, 2020

JOSEPH'S BONES

"And Moses took the bones of Joseph with him, for he had placed the children of Israel under solemn oath, saying, 'God will surely visit you, and you shall carry up my bones from here with you'" (Exod. 13:19).

What do Joseph's bones teach us? Almost spoiled by the love of his father, Joseph was raised in a "golden cradle." Highly favored above his brothers, he wore the finest clothes his father could get. As an easy life and overprotection may jeopardize a child's character development, the Lord mercifully allowed him to be taken far from his home, suddenly losing all that this world can offer, except life and health.

But instead of feeling discouraged, Joseph decided to make a commitment to put God first in all things. And his resolve was not shaken even after he was unjustly sent to prison and placed into what was likely the lowest position a human could attain other than death. But from there, the Lord brought him directly to the second-highest position in the most powerful country in the then-known world. All the comforts of life were again available to him.

When Satan is not able to knock us down with trials, he often is more successful by offering sophistication and ease. Would Joseph's character thrive under this new ensnaring trial? Would he keep his eyes focused on his eternal future, or would he be charmed by the life at the court? A very strange request that he later made of his brothers reveals that he stood firm in his commitment to God! His eyes were still on the Promised Land, and not on the luxury or pomp of Egypt. "God will surely visit you," he said to his brothers, "and you shall carry up my bones from here [Gen. 50:25]." Joseph was not planning to be distracted by Egypt's easy life. His eyes were fixed on God's plan for the future, in another land, yet to be given by the Lord to His people!

APPEAL: By returning our tithe and giving our Promise (regular, percentage-based offering) we regularly remind ourselves that our spiritual, emotional, and material resources should be invested in another Land!

PRAYER: Heavenly Father, please accept our tithes and offerings as a symbol of our desire to inherit eternal life in heaven, and to put You first in all things here!

February 15, 2020

HOW MUCH IS THE TITHE OF ZERO?

"How many of you do not have any income?" Pastor Josino Campos asked his large congregation one Sabbath morning during the 1970s at the Brazilian Adventist University in Sao Paulo, Brazil. Some church members, including Marcos, age 11, raised their hands. Smiling at them, the pastor added: "This is the very best moment in life to become a Promisor!"

But how can I become a Promisor without having any income? Marcos wondered. He knew that being a Promisor means to have a commitment to regularly return tithes and to give offerings as a previously vowed percentage of the income.

The pastor seemed to read Marcos' thoughts! "If you become a Promisor now, even though you don't have any income, that means your income is zero, right?" continued the pastor. Then he added: "How much is 10 percent of zero?" After a long pause, the pastor continued: "And let's suppose that you vowed to give 5 percent of your income as offerings, how much would be 5 percent of zero?"

Marcos was still struggling to grasp the idea when the pastor concluded: "Obviously, the

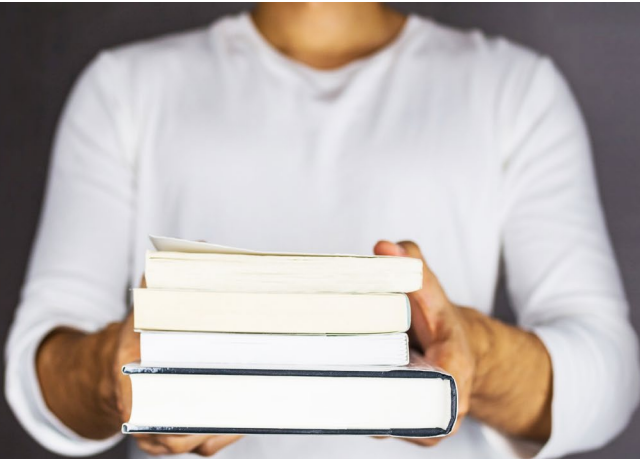
tithe of zero is zero, and 5 percent of zero is also zero. So, if you are a Promisor but you don't have any income, you give 'zero' as tithe and 'zero' as Promise (regular, percentage-based offerings), and you are faithful!" And then the pastor suggested that those who had no income pray: "Lord, you know that I've decided to become a Promisor, but I don't have any income. If you want means to forward your work in the earth, please give me an income. From everything you give me, I will first return tithe and give percent-based offerings." And so that's what Marcos Bomfim, the author of this text and the current GC Stewardship director, did.

APPEAL: As the Lord is always the first to give, He invites us to give back to Him only after He has first given us something. We give every time we are blessed, not in order to be blessed, but because we have been already blessed, recognizing Him as the Originator of all that we have.

PRAYER: Heavenly Father, as we return tithe and give our offerings, help us to recognize You as the Giver and Maintainer of us all!



8



February 22, 2020

I AM WILLING TO SIN

"I am willing to sin, Brother Lee," Osvaldino Bomfim jocularly told the conference's cashier, a Korean immigrant working in the Sao Paulo Conference, Brazil, in the early 1960s. "Please give me a receipt," added Bomfim while delivering his tithe, "before I use this money to help myself."

What brother Lee did not know was that Bomfim was trying to make fun of something that was actually breaking his heart. Canvassing while studying theology, he left his home that afternoon with exactly CR\$36.00 (Cruzeiros, old Brazilian currency) left in his pocket, the exact amount he owed to God as tithe.

If he would pay the tithe before selling any books, he would risk not being able to buy the food necessary to feed Marcos, his 3-year-old son, who was recovering from a surgery. But he knew that to wait for the next Sabbath would be dangerous, as the temptation to use the money for personal purposes would only grow stronger. So, he decided to eliminate the risk by putting God first.

With no money left, Bomfim drove to his

assigned field and gave his canvassing talk to his first potential customer. After hearing the presentation, the customer called a friend to also listen. Surprisingly, both of them purchased a set of books each—at a price that in those times could buy a cow! Even though Bomfim did not have the books with him, the customers made out a check and paid in advance, asking Bomfim to deliver the books when he got them!

Moments later, Bomfim was back in the conference office, no longer willing to sin; instead, he picked up the books, praising the Lord for His ability to provide for His children! Years later, as the South America Division Literature Evangelism director, Bomfim taught colporteurs to also trust in the Lord!

APPEAL: Let's also exercise our trust in God as the heavenly Provider by putting Him first. His promises are still as real today as they were in the past.

PRAYER: Dear God, please increase our faith as we dare to put You first, not only while tithing and delivering our offerings, but in all aspects of our lives.

February 29, 2020

“GOD FIRST” DATING

“Two more months and this relationship will be broken,” said Cleide to her neighbor, Marcos, making fun of him after seeing him talking to a girl. She was right. His longest “serious” relationships lasted no more than three months, mostly due to his emotional immaturity and inability to love.

Then during a Week of Prayer at the Adventist boarding school in Sao Paulo, Brazil, Marcos heard about the “God First” principle: “But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you” (Matt. 6:33). Even though the context of the text is about finances, those principles could apply to other areas of life as well, he thought. “Start everything with a prayer, and your chances of succeeding will be greater,” said the pastor.

So, the first time Marcos invited Mari to an outing, he was very unsure about what to do. He wanted to put God first by inviting Him to go with them on the outing, but he had never prayed with a girl before! Would she think he was weird? Would she reject him because of that? Clearly, the Spirit was inviting him to confess Christ, and it was a turning point in his life. “If she leaves me because of a prayer,” he finally decided, “then the sooner

the better.”

So, even though a little embarrassed, he invited Mari to pray with him before starting the engine of that small Volkswagen Passat borrowed from his father. He believed his chances would be greater if he put God first. And this was the beginning of a relationship that would mature into marriage three years later, on May 13, 1986. Since then, Marcos and Mari have committed their lives to serve God as Adventist missionaries in their country and abroad.

Appeal: God is calling us to put Him first in all aspects of life, including our relationships, and even finances. And we put God first in our finances when we set apart His tithe and our Promise (regular, percentage-based offerings), even before any other expenses are met. God’s assurance is that all the other things we need “shall be added to you” (Matt. 6:33).

PRAYER: Dear God, we recognize You as our heavenly Provider and Sustainer. Please teach us to put You first in every area of life and accept the tithes and offerings that we bring today, after recognizing that You care for us. Amen.



10



March 7, 2020

WHAT IS YOUR BICYCLE?

"I will try to get home before it rains," thought Marcelo, 43, while riding his bicycle, as the clouds were building up in Sao Bernardo do Campo, one of the most affluent municipalities of Brazil. What he didn't anticipate was that this would be no ordinary ride. A widely circulated video shows the moment in which a flash flood caught him during the rain, downtown, and how he bravely tried to resist the rapidly rising waters while holding onto his bicycle.

"Leave your bicycle," someone cried out to him from a balcony, as he rode close to a pole, and was struggling to stand against the strong current. Many others shouted the same suggestion, as the waters gradually increased in speed and volume, with Marcelo still grasping his bicycle. The video finally shows the moment in which Marcelo falls, still clinging to his bicycle. His body was found later that day by the firefighters and was buried on November 25, 2018. He lost far more than the bicycle he was trying to keep!

What is the "bicycle" that the Lord is asking us to leave today? Is it a relationship that is

driving someone far from God? A job that is preventing someone from keeping the Sabbath? An unhealthy habit that is destroying our life, or spending habits that are preventing us from returning tithes and offerings?

Our eternal life may also be jeopardized if we embrace things that Jesus asks us to renounce. When Jesus calls us to surrender something, it is more than a test for eternal life! This surrendering will bless us even in this life! Ellen G. White says that "Jesus does not require of man any real sacrifice; for whatever we are asked to surrender is only that which we are better off without."—Ellen G. White, *Counsels on Stewardship*, p. 300).

APPEAL: As we worship the Lord with tithes and offerings now, let us pray so that our hearts may also be disconnected from the things of this world and connected to Him and His eternal plan for us!

PRAYER: Heavenly Father! Please accept what we bring to you today as a token of our desire to lay everything at your feet!

March 14, 2020

A MINISTRY WITH A GREAT REACH

Adventist World Radio is a media ministry of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists. With more than 1,000 radio stations and studios around the world, it is by far the media ministry with the greatest reach. Last year alone, 26 new radio stations were added in different countries.

Radio is still the primary source of communication for most of the world. It knows no borders, no walls, and no limits. It can penetrate homes and hearts with the gospel message and go where missionaries cannot enter.

The main target of Adventist World Radio's broadcasts is the 10/40 window, comprised of parts of North Africa, the Middle East, and Asia—areas currently closed to the gospel message, but easily reached by radio.

Every day, AWR receives emails, letters and messages from around the world. They touch the hearts of the staff, who pray over the needs, and requests every week. Recently, a man wrote:

"My name is Amir. I live in Iran and have been listening to your radio program. It has opened my mind, and I want to know more

about Jesus. Having other religious books is illegal here, but please send me your book by email and mail. Please cover it with a dark envelope and block out the title so it won't be confiscated."

APPEAL: Currently, AWR broadcasts in more than 100 different languages, but plans are underway to prepare evangelistic sermons for broadcast in more than 1,000 languages and dialects so that every person on the planet can listen to the gospel message in their language. Your faithful support of Adventist World Radio is making this possible. Thank you for your prayers and for partnering in the greatest calling ever—the saving of souls. Today the offering is for Adventist World Radio.

PRAYER: Father, thank you for the opportunity to work with you in the saving of souls. Please bless the ministry of Adventist World Radio. We know it is only through your Spirit that this work can go forward, and lives can be changed for the kingdom of heaven. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Submitted by Alyssa Truman for AWR.



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March 21, 2020

IS IT A CHURCH'S INVENTION?

Some may wonder who invented the tithing practice, why the Church is requiring it, or even why should it be exactly ten percent. Wouldn't a different percentage be acceptable? The answer is that the practice of tithing is not the Church's invention. Like the Sabbath and marriage, tithing has been established by God Himself for all humanity (not only for the Jews), long before the establishment of the Jewish nation, and it is practiced today by all those who recognize God as Creator and Provider, and who accept the whole Bible as His word.

Abraham and Jacob paid the tithe long before the establishment of the Jewish nation, and the law of tithing was reaffirmed for the Israelites when they were about to be established as a nation (Lev. 27:30, 32). But how can we know if the tithe should be ten percent (10%) of all our income or increase? Can we not give another percentage or a different amount? Should we return it only from our salary? What about other income?

The very word 'tithe' is a translation from the Hebrew word 'maaser' which means "a tenth" or ten percent. Not more, not less. So, any other percentage cannot be called 'tithe;' it is very important for the believer to regularly verify his income or increase, from any source, recognize it as a blessing from God and calculate the exact amount that represents one-tenth of the blessing.

APPEAL: Let us follow Solomon's invitation: "Honor the Lord with your possessions, and with the firstfruits of all your increase; so your barns will be filled with plenty, and your vats will overflow with wine" (Proverbs 3:9, NKJV).

PRAYER: Dear Lord, we recommit our lives to you today, as well as our desire to trust in you, returning the correct percentage of your financial blessings as our tithe. Please, bless us as we worship You!

March 28, 2020

WHEN TO BRING YOUR OFFERINGS?

"When are we expected to bring an offering to God?" Martha asked Jackie, who was giving her Bible studies. "Should it be monthly, every Sabbath, when there is gratitude in my heart, or a call from the pulpit, when I know about a good project, or even when I feel that this is the moment to give? Is there a biblical principle that I could use to determine when I should give offerings?"

"While the Bible says that no one should come before the Lord empty-handed (Deut. 16:16)," said Jackie, "It is also true that the Lord does not expect us to bring anything before He gives us something. Paul says that 'it is accepted according to what one has, and not according to what he does not have (2 Cor. 8:12)'. It is God's giving that should start human giving," added Jackie.

"Do you mean that we should bring offerings every time we tithe?" questioned Martha. "Well," said Jackie, "in Malachi 3:8, there is a clear indication that both tithes and offerings are equally required and expected. And the context also shows that not giving any of them would lead to separation from God and material ruin, as well as moral and spiritual decay" (verses 9-12).

"And," Jackie continued, "Solomon also provides a general principle about the regularity of offerings: 'Honor the Lord with your possessions, and with the firstfruits [the first part or the best part] of all your increase' (Prov. 3:8). He means that the regularity with which we honor God should be established by the frequency of the increase or the income, as we do with the tithe. So, tithes and offerings must be given every time there is a blessing (an increase or income), as a reminder that God is the Source of that blessing."

"God's messenger for these last days says that 'this matter of giving is not left to impulse. God has given us definite instruction in regard to it. He has specified tithes and offerings as the measure of our obligation. And He desires us to give regularly and systematically...' (E.G. White, *Counsels on Stewardship*, p. 80). "Martha," asked Jackie, "Would you like to become a Promisor, vowing to also give offerings as regularly as the Lord blesses you?"

APPEAL: As regularly as He blesses us, let us also bring what is due to Him!

PRAYER: Dear Lord! Please, accept what is yours now, in Jesus name, Amen!



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April 4, 2020

WHY VOWS ARE IMPORTANT

It was Sabbath morning, and the pastor was conducting a renewal of vows ceremony. This would encourage members to recommit themselves to keep the Sabbath, to be faithful to their spouses, and also to vow to return the tithe and a percentage of their income as offerings.

Martha was not comfortable with the latter. “Why should I make a vow about offerings?” she asked Jackie, who gave her Bible studies. “Can’t I just give as my heart is stirred, or if I trust that there is a project worthy to be supported?” said Martha. Jackie told her that, “as our ‘heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked’ (Jer. 17:9), we cannot just trust in our feelings or impulses to do what is right.”

Jackie also mentioned that, according to Ellen G. White, “it is unsafe [for us] to be controlled by feelings or impulse” when we give our gifts, because our natural inclination for selfishness is stronger than love, and so, as a rule, “evil gains the victory.” She also says that “if we are controlled by impulse or mere human sympathy,” we may stop giving “if our efforts... are repaid with ingratitude” or if “our gifts are abused or squandered.” That is why

“Christians should act from a fixed principle, following the Savior’s example of self-denial and self-sacrifice (E. G. White, *Counsels on Stewardship*, p. 25).”

“So,” said Jackie, “vows or promises, humbly taken in God’s presence, will tell Him that we allow His Spirit to replace our selfish heart of stone by a heart of His own creation, willing to ‘act from a fixed principle,’ and to fulfill His will. We do not promise that we will do it by our own strength, but by His miracle in us,” added Jackie, “as ‘it is God who works in you both to will and to do for his good pleasure’ (Phil. 2:13).”

After earnestly praying, Martha decided that she would no longer be controlled by feelings, projects or sympathy on her giving, but by principle, vowing a percentage of her income to be given regularly and systematically, as offering.

APPEAL: “Make vows to the Lord your God, and pay them; let all who are around Him bring presents to Him who ought to be feared (Ps. 76:11).”

PRAYER: Please, Lord, accept the vows that we make before you today!

April 11, 2020

MARILYN'S VISION

Christian Record Services for the Blind celebrated its 120th-anniversary two years ago. It started in 1898 when Austin Wilson, a young man of 26 who was blind, approached the General Conference with his idea to produce the Christian Record Braille magazine. Thankfully, many others saw his vision and volunteered, donated, and worked alongside Austin Wilson to continue the vital mission of this nonprofit ministry.

The U.S. National Institute of Health projects that there will be around 4 million individuals with blindness by 2050, and Lancet Global Health predicts cases will rise to 115 million worldwide. Those large numbers are hard to grasp.

After receiving and reading “Death Defeated,” a booklet recently published in Braille by Christian Record, Marilyn, a Christian Record member for more than 30 years, called to say, “Thank you.” With a tearful voice, she explained how much the book meant to her as she was dealing with the recent loss of her husband.

Today’s special offering will support Christian Record’s ministry to people with blindness.

In a sense, you are keeping Austin Wilson’s vision alive. You are sharing the gospel of Christ to people—like Marilyn—who need His words of comfort and hope translated into Braille, large print, or audio.

Be thankful for your eyes and rest them as I read: “For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord forever” (1 Thes. 4:16).

APPEAL: We will all be with the Lord forever. Marilyn will see her husband again. We’ll see our family and friends. We’ll even have a chance to meet Austin Wilson and thank him personally for his vision for Christian Record. Amen.

PRAYER: Dear Lord, please bless Christian Record Ministries, and make of each one of us a living blessing to this organization.

Submitted by Patricia Maxwell for Christian Records.

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April 18, 2020

TWO PRINCIPLES ON GIVING

Martha, a new believer, understands that tithes and offerings are not to be controlled by emotions, impulses, projects, or human sympathy, but should be vowed to be given from a fixed principle, as regularly as her income (God's blessing) is. She knows that in God's plan, both tithes and offerings are indispensable for preparing the world for His second coming. She also knows that God specified the tithe as being 10% of her income. "But how much am I supposed to vow as offerings?" she asked Jackie, her Bible study teacher.

Jackie told her that Paul established the Principle of the Purpose, suggesting that we should purpose in our hearts something to give (2 Cor. 9:7). "Some vow a fixed amount to be given regularly," said Jackie, "but there is a problem in this case: how to keep the vow if the income stops or if you lose your job? On the other hand, if our income is variable, or if it increases, a fixed amount may not express your gratitude appropriately."

"Another principle," explained Jackie, "is the Principle of the Proportion. The Bible suggests that we should give offerings 'according to the blessing' (Deut. 16:17), or according to the prosperity (1 Cor. 16:2)—which becomes easier

if we give in proportion (%) to the blessing. In this fair percentage-based system of offerings, those who earn more, give more; those who earn less, give less; and those who earn nothing, give nothing, and are considered truly faithful!"

Then, Jackie quoted Ellen G. White, when she says that "according to the amount bestowed will be the amount required", (*Counsels on Stewardship*, pp. 99). God's messenger also said that "in the Bible system of tithes and offerings the amounts paid by different persons will of course vary greatly, since they are proportioned to the income... (*Counsels on Stewardship*, pp. 73)".

"You may prayerfully vow a percentage of your income to be given as a regular offering," said Jackie, "as regularly as are God's blessings."

APPEAL: God also calls us to give offerings regularly (every time He blesses us) and systematically (proportionally), as an answer to His blessings!

PRAYER: Lord, please, accept the offering of our heart today! Amen!

VERSION UPDATED 11/27/2019

April 25, 2020

I BECAME DEBT-FREE!

Debts ate up my salary. It was my fault.

My salary shrank significantly when I changed jobs, but my spending habits remained the same. As a result, I sank deeper into debt. After returning the tithe, I barely had enough money to cover the bills.

I felt horrible. Before changing jobs, I had given 10 percent of my gross income as tithe; 10 percent for offerings; and 10 percent for charity. Now I was only returning tithe, and it would take at least four years for me to become debt-free. Unwilling to wait that long, I thought about Malachi 3, where God challenges us to test Him with our tithes and offerings.

With a deep breath, I resolved to start giving 10 percent of my gross income as a missionary offering, in addition to the tithe, hoping to find some freelance work so I could recuperate the offering money. But even though no extra work showed up, ten months after I started giving the offerings, I was debt-free! It's hard to explain what happened. This is God's math, as He never gave extra money; instead, He made my life cheaper.

Shortly after I began to give offerings, I had to buy an airline ticket to fly to visit with my ill father. The round-trip ticket, purchased at the last minute, cost only \$110, a considerable discount from the usual \$250. After that, a friend volunteered to drive me to the airport, sparing me the cost of an Uber ride. Then some friends invited me to stay in their spare bedroom, rent-free. The list could go on and on.

APPEAL: "I believe," says Andrew, "God blesses those who give to Him with more than we could ever ask or think!"

PRAYER: Heavenly Father! Please, increase our faith, so that we may dare to taste and see that the Lord is good (Ps. 34:8)!

(Adapted from a text by Andrew MacChesney, editor of *Adventist Mission*; he works at the General Conference of the Seventh-day Adventist Church).



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May 2, 2020

STARVING TO DEATH

Starving for many days, Pavel prayed, “Dear Lord, please forgive me for using your tithes in a time of need. But if You help me to repay it, I promise never again to use your resources to benefit myself, even if I die.”

Living as a married student in the communist-era Romania, and without any income, Pavel decided some time before to resort to the 40 lei (Romanian currency) tithe he had set apart, in order to purchase food for his family. He and Dana, his wife, were starving as the cans he was collecting and selling were barely able to provide for his little son’s milk. He took the money planning to return what he “borrowed” from the Lord as soon as possible, expecting that God would “understand.” But then his father died, and things grew even worse because the stipend he had been receiving from his father stopped coming!

Arriving at home from the university that day, Pavel found a letter containing 50 lei. He resisted the temptation to help himself to the money; instead, he immediately mailed to the church treasurer the 40 lei he owed to God, plus the 5 lei due as tithe for this new gift. With the remaining 5 lei, he and Dana were able to buy only some bread and yogurt.

“How are you doing, Pavel?” a 92-year-old man who was a fellow church member asked him a few days later. “You don’t look OK. What’s happening? Why don’t you take the bus instead of walking?” suggested the man. Pavel was unable to escape his questions. The man then said, “Well, I’m a retired lawyer and have some funds. I was praying to God asking whom I could help. Now I have found him. From now on, until you finish your university education, I will send you 500 lei every month to take care of your needs.” And then he added, “But don’t forget to share with others when you are blessed.”

Pavel Goia is now the editor of Ministry Magazine and works at the General Conference office in Silver Spring, Maryland, USA.

APPEAL: Let us take advantage of any crisis to strengthen our trust in the Lord, learning about His mighty power to save!

PRAYER: Dear Lord, help us to trust that You are the Provider. Please, help us to exercise that trust by returning what belongs to You with a grateful heart!

More details of this story can be read in the book, *One Miracle After the Another* by Gregg Budd, pp 115-118 (Review and Herald).

May 9, 2020

GOD'S HANDS

"After the hurricane, I didn't want to go home." These are the words of Glorimar, who lost her home and her sense of hope after a devastating storm.

Your gift to the Disaster and Famine Relief Offering today will help people just like Glorimar and her family in countries around the world through ADRA, the Adventist Development and Relief Agency.

Working in more than 130 countries, ADRA is the international humanitarian arm of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. Through your support, they deliver justice, compassion, and love to those in need through community development and disaster response. Last year, ADRA supporters responded to 104 global emergencies, and part of the offering today will travel the world to reach even more people when they need it most.

APPEAL: Today, you can do more than share your dollars. You can honor God by sharing survival, protection, and hope. Your involvement is vital. Your generosity may be used by God to fill empty stomachs and provide comfort to those who have lost everything.

PRAYER: Dear Lord, we raise today's offering up to You. Help us reach those who are starving, those who are suffering, and those who are in crisis. Make Your power known through our humble contributions today, and bring hope and promise to those who need You most today.

Submitted by ADRA for Disaster and Relief

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May 16, 2020

A STRONG CONNECTION

Although almost all who marry probably intend to remain in the relationship, about half of the couples in Western countries lose their love and end up in a divorce. Statistics show that a number equivalent to a half of the Adventists who are baptized every year will also lose their love toward God and drift away from the church, risking their eternal life. The question is, “What can I do to prevent this?”

To “love the Lord your God with all your heart,” soul, strength, and mind was Christ’s answer (Luke 10:27). In the same way as an emotional connection between two persons will grow according to the time they spend together in a relationship of trust, an emotional connection with God will be developed as a result of the time that is daily spent in activities such as prayer, reading, and reflecting on the Bible, studying the Sabbath School lessons, and also in opening and closing the Sabbath with worship.

But Jesus, established still another important principle for developing affection toward God: “Where your treasure is, there your heart will be also” (Matt. 6:21), He said. If my resources, which are carriers of affections, are invested on Earth, subjected to the action

of thieves, rust, etc., then my affections will also be here. But if my treasure is invested in heaven, by helping the poor and supporting God’s cause, by tithing and giving Promise, then my affections will also be there, and my treasures will be safely guarded forever.

A link between giving and emotional attachment is suggested by a study done with 1,054,367 members who left the church between 2015-2017 in one division. About 90 percent of them have no record of returning tithes or giving offerings at least three years before drifting away. This connection between giving to God’s cause and emotional attachment to Him is also emphasized by Ellen G. White. She says that “through every investment made [in God’s treasury], they [givers] will become more wedded to the cause of present truth” (*Counsels on Stewardship*, p. 73).

APPEAL: Let us strengthen our connection with God today, by worshiping Him also with our tithes and offerings!

PRAYER: Heavenly Father, please accept our worship today, in Jesus name, amen!

May 23, 2020

WHEN OFFERINGS ARE ACCEPTED

Can God be bribed by our tithe and Promise (regular and systematic offerings), ever granting special protection, blessings, and answering prayers of those who faithfully give to Him?

Although the Bible teaches that unfaithfulness to God in tithes and offerings brings a curse (Mal. 3:8-10), it is also clear that He cannot bless those who give them while disregarding other known aspects of His will. "If I regard iniquity in my heart [any iniquity], the Lord will not hear" (Ps. 66:18), said David. Solomon also says that the "one who turns away his ear from hearing the law [in all its points], even his prayer is an abomination" (Prov. 28:9). God is not moved by religious exercises, including returning tithe and giving Promise, while the giver harbors a haughty heart or is stubbornly breaking any other aspect of His will (Isa. 1:11-15). But because the Bible says that "all have sinned" (Rom. 3:23) and deserve death (Rom. 6:23), how can a sinner have their offerings and tithes accepted by God?

The answer is that Christ died to pay for our sins (Rom. 6:23); and to those who confess their sins, recognizing that they cannot

change themselves (Jer. 13:23), "He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (1 John 1:9). Cleansing is a work of the Holy Spirit that changes the heart (Eze. 36:26), and should precede any act of worship. It is as important as forgiveness, for without it a forgiven sinner would keep sinning again and again. Cleansing is so critical that in the book of Malachi it is said that it is only after that experience that "the offering of Judah and Jerusalem will be pleasant to the Lord" (Mal. 3:2-4). God accepts tithes and offerings only from those who accept Jesus' death on their behalf, confess their sins, and keep asking for the Holy Spirit to change their hearts.

APPEAL: While you return your tithe and give your Promise today, take time to confess your sins and to ask for a new, purified heart. It is only when we confess our sins, placing them on the divine Sin-bearer, that our offerings can please Him and be accepted by Him.

PRAYER: Lord, as we bring our tithes and offerings, please accept the offering of our whole heart. Take it, cleanse it, and heal its unfaithfulness!

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May 30, 2020

AN IMPORTANT RITUAL

Rituals, such as weddings, graduations, or funerals, are ceremonies that help us to understand and assimilate significant times or changes in life. Dedications of children, baptism, family worship, and the Sabbath public worship, likewise, are important practices for those wanting to experience spiritual growth.

The Lord determined that the Sabbath should become a weekly collective ritual, a Holy Convocation (Lev. 23:3, from the Hebrew *Miqra*), which means meeting, or assembly. It indicates that He expects us to be regularly together to worship Him every Sabbath. Ellen G. White says that “communing together [on Sabbath] in regard to Christ will strengthen the soul for life’s trials and conflicts” (*Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 6, p. 322). Stressing the importance of public, nonvirtual worship in the last days, we are warned not to forsake “the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some” (Heb. 10:25).

And what do we do while we worship together on Sabbath? Essentially, we do four things: (1) we bring our tithes and offerings, thanking Him as the Provider; (2) we pray, talking to Him; (3) we study His word, hearing from Him; and (4) we sing, praising Him. Offering, the first element established by God

for public worship immediately after the Fall, is still key in the liturgy, as it points to Christ not only as the Provider but also as God’s Offering for the world.

Even though all the tithe and the main portion of the offerings may be given electronically, it is still very important that each family member learn to worship the Lord as their Creator, Provider, and Redeemer by bringing offerings in every public service in which they are collected. Instead of considering them merely as a formality, or even a “contribution” to the church projects and ministries, tithes and offerings are to be viewed as a way to worship God, strengthening our love and developing trust in Him.

APPEAL: After leaving your offering on the offering plate, bow your head and thank God for supplying all your needs. Ask Him to increase your faith so that you may recognize His care every time there is an income or increase.

PRAYER: Heavenly Father, please accept the tithes and offerings that we bring today as a token of our desire to serve and worship you! Amen!

June 6, 2020

THE IMPORTANCE OF VOWS

To promise something to the Lord when under the influence of a conviction brought by the Holy Spirit, is something that may protect a person from the instability of the natural, deceiving heart (Jer. 17:9).

To keep the Sabbath, to stay married your whole life to the same spouse, to eat healthful food, to return the tithe and to give Promise (regular, systematic, percentage-based offerings), or even to help the needy, for instance, will seldom happen naturally or spontaneously, because the natural tendency of the human heart is to seek its own interests and not God's will or the advantage of others.

That is why vows, when made under God's influence in obedience to His Word, will help to connect us with Him and will protect us from wavering during times of crisis. Those, for instance, who never vow to wake up a little earlier every morning will likely not develop the habit of communing with Him before any other activity (Matt. 6:33). Those who never vow to keep the Sabbath or to marry someone with whom they have a special relationship, may be more prone to change their minds if the conditions change.

Those who never say to the Lord, like Jacob, that by His grace and with His help they will return a tithe of everything (Gen. 28:22) and also give regular and systematic offerings, no matter what, may have a greater risk of not accomplishing God's will in this matter.

In short, the absence of a firm and final decision, a promise, about an important point of the Christian lifestyle, as revealed in God's Word, may increase the temptation of not wholeheartedly following His guidance, and may lead that person to compromise, following Jesus from afar.

APPEAL: Considering the aspects mentioned above, do you see a need of growth in your own life? Am I willing to surrender all and to serve Him, following His will instead of the promptings of my heart?

PRAYER: Dear Lord, please renew our hearts today, and give us the resolution to stand on holy ground, closer to You, where tempestuous waters cannot reach us!



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June 13, 2020

THE MEANING OF TITHING

The act of tithing is an important indicator of the spiritual life. After studying tithing practices in five Adventist conferences on five continents, Rob McIver, an Australian researcher, concluded that tithing is correlated with five other practices of the Adventist spiritual package: (1) daily Bible study, (2) daily time for prayer, (3) opening and closing the Sabbath with worship, (4) regular study of the Sabbath School lessons, and (5) presence at Sabbath School class.

It seems clear that all those practices, including tithing, work together to deepen trust in God as well as to increase the connection to Him. The absence of any of them may also affect the others, and might indicate that a dangerous spiritual disconnection is in process, putting the person at risk of spiritual failure and finally apostasy.

One of the first typical signs of when a person begins losing trust in God is when he or she stops tithing. They might think: If there is no God in heaven, if the Bible is not reliable, or if He is a weak God, unable to fulfill His promises and take care of me, I need to take care of myself. Why then should I give money to “others”?

But for many Adventists, tithing is a practice that regularly reminds them that there is a God in heaven, that His Word is still binding, and that their income should not be taken for granted but should be viewed as part of His blessings. It is a regular reminder that He has dominion over the events of life, that He is the Creator, the Provider, and the Redeemer, and that He is able to do far more than what we ask or think.

APPEAL: Have you ever thought that your tithing patterns may reflect your connection to God and your belief in His Word? He invites you to exercise trust in Him by tithing from all that He provides for you. “Oh, taste and see that the Lord is good; blessed is the man who trusts in Him!” (Ps. 34:8).

PRAYER: Dear Lord, help us to trust in you more and more, and to believe that our support and provision come from You and not from our money! Bless the tithes and offerings that were brought to You today! Amen!

June 20, 2020

WHAT IS PROMISE?

"What did the pastor mean when he mentioned about 'Promise' and 'Promisors'?" asked Martha of Jackie, as they were leaving the church. "Well, Promisors are those who have vowed to exercise their trust in the Lord by returning to Him another percentage of their income in addition to the tithe, believing that He is the Origin of all blessings and able to provide what is necessary for their life," explained Jackie.

"But is not the tithe enough?" asked Martha. "According to Malachi 3:8-10," answered Jackie, "both are equally required by God, and the absence of one of them will configure dishonesty against Him," she added.

"But what are the differences between them?" asked Martha. "One of them," Jackie said, "is that while the tithe has a specific percentage stipulated by God (10 percent), He leaves it up to each of us individually to decide the percentage to be given as Promise," said Jackie. "Another difference is that while the tithe must be used exclusively for supporting the authorized ministry [see Num. 18:21, 24], offerings should cover a

wider range of other important necessities for the spreading of the gospel around the world," she added.

"I see that God is calling me to take a step of faith, becoming also a Promisor," said Martha. "It will help me to be more consistent, giving offerings as regularly as God's blessings and not according to my heart, or according to my sympathy, projects, or special calls, but every time He blesses!" she said.

APPEAL: Have you ever considered becoming a Promisor, sharing a proportion of God's blessings as frequently as He provides for you? Have you already decided what percentage of your income the Holy Spirit is suggesting that you start giving as Promise?

PRAYER: Heavenly Father, help us to trust in You as the Provider and Sustainer, and to recognize Your blessings by returning the tithe and giving a "Promise," a percentage-based offering of my income or increase. Amen!



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June 27, 2020

LEARNING BY EXPERIENCE

How do we help children and youth develop wise management of their resources, and invite God to be involved in their financial life while they are still young? Ellen G. White suggests that (1) parents and teachers should make the study of figures something practical very early in children's lives; (2) children should learn through practice how to rightly use money, "whether supplied by their parents or by their own earnings"; children should "learn to select and purchase their own clothing, their books and other necessities; and by [3] keeping an account of their expenses, they will learn, as they could learn in no other way, the value and the use of money" (see *Education*, p. 238).

This practice, if "rightly directed," says God's messenger, "will encourage habits of benevolence" and "will aid the youth in learning to give, not from the mere impulse of the moment, as their feelings are stirred, but regularly, and systematically" (*Ibid.*), as God is giving to them. Actually, the returning of tithe and the giving of Promise is an important exercise that connects children and young people to God every time they receive something from Him. God is then remembered by them as the Source of every

blessing.

Are your children learning how to handle money in a practical way? Are they instructed to keep an account of their expenses? Are they learning how to live a simple life in order to save and then provide for the needy? Are they being educated to put God first, by returning His tithe and their Promise, before any other expense may be met? Do they have their own tithe envelope and encouraged to use it every time they have an income?

Children are a God-given treasure loaned to parents in trust. The Lord requires parents to teach them how to trust in Him and connect with Him, including in their financial life.

APPEAL: "Trust in the Lord with all your heart," says Solomon, "and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge Him, and He shall direct your paths" (Prov. 3:5, 6).

PRAYER: Lord, help us to trust in You, as the Provider and Maintainer of life, and teach our children to experience it themselves as well! Amen.

July 4, 2020

THE POWER GOD HAS

Pavel Goia, Ministry magazine's editor, recalls one day when the Romanian police called his father, also named Pavel, to the police station. "We told you to stop building churches and bringing Bibles into the country," shouted the officer. His father was constantly bringing Bibles from the former Yugoslavia to Communist-era Romania, hiding them in the car's double floor.

"Now we will shoot you," the officer said. Looking into the officer's eyes, Pavel said, "Well, to live is an opportunity to serve. It is also a privilege to die for Christ. The next thing I'll see is Christ. The resurrection, for me, is going to be in just a second."

"You are crazy!" exclaimed the officer. "Well," said Pavel, "in order to serve Christ, you need to be crazy, because, you know, it's all contrary to human wisdom. Instead of saving, you give. Instead of being proud, you are humble. It's crazy, but you know, God's craziness is the power God has." The officers shook their heads and released him. "You are crazy," they kept saying.

To be crazy for the world means to be wise for God and to inherit eternal life! And this is the power God has! The world does not understand what we do, but we do it by faith in His Word! To be faithful to our spouse; to wait until marriage for physical intimacy; to keep the Sabbath; to return tithe and give the Promise—all behaviors that are contrary to our natural impulses and tendencies—are evidences that our eyes are fixed far beyond earthly realities!

APPEAL: Let's be crazy for God today, as we gratefully worship Him by returning our tithes and giving offerings!

PRAYER: Dear Father, please make us crazy for the world and wise for You! Give us the privilege of being partakers in building Your kingdom and saving others!

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July 11, 2020

WHEN DOCTORS HURT

Every morning little Haroun cheerfully waited for Dr. Bland, the American missionary surgeon, to come “hurt” him. He was 10 years old and had suffered a nasty fracture of his left leg. Dr. Bland had removed a large portion of his tibia, but he still had an infection. Each morning, the doctor and his team removed the dressings, squeezed out the pus, and re-packed the wound with bleach-soaked gauze. Haroun was brave; as soon as the procedure was over, his bright smile returned. Every time Dr. Bland and his medical team at the Bere Adventist Hospital in Chad visited Haroun, they would speak French with him and teach him intricate handshakes. Since Haroun was alone at the hospital, this was the highlight of his day. The rest of the time he played with other young patients or watched the “Jesus movie.”

In medicine sometimes, doctors have to cause pain to achieve healing. Patients like this young boy must trust that the physician has their best interest in mind and that the outcome will be an improvement.

In Matthew 19:13, children approach Jesus to spend time in His presence, trusting Him to bless them. Do you trust God to take care of

you? Do you trust Him to take your offerings and bless those who are hurting in the world?

APPEAL: Part of your regular offerings and gifts today will automatically be sent to the World Mission fund, supporting the ministry of more than 400 missionary families. You may also give directly to the World Mission in addition to your “Promise” (regular and systematic offerings) by writing “World Mission Offering” on your tithe envelope, or by visiting Giving.AdventistMission.org, then clicking on “My donation is for” and selecting “World Mission Offerings.” Thank you in advance for your generous giving!

PRAYER: Heavenly Father, please make us as generous as You are! Bring us closer to You as we participate in Your mission!

Submitted by Sylva Keshishian

July 18, 2020

POPSICLE IN THE FIRE

The evening of Monday, December 17, 2018 saw the second worst fire in the history of Manaus, a city of 2.1 million located in the heart of the northern Brazilian Amazon rain forest. About 600 houses in a very poor neighborhood were destroyed, leaving 2,500 people without shelter or personal belongings.

On the evening of the next day, local Adventist churches and ADRA had already served 300 meals and given 500 basic food baskets, clothes, bedding, shoes, and other necessities to those who had lost almost everything.

While many residents stood in line to receive help from the church or government for their basic needs, one Haitian popsicle seller thrilled the relief teams, said Fernando Anversa Borges, one of the ADRA workers. Even though most of Haitians living in Brazil struggle to survive as refugees after an earthquake ravaged their country in 2010, this man decided to sacrifice. Walking up the line of the survivors, he gave away all the popsicles remaining in his box, which were his only source of income—a small act with huge import. As a modern representative of the poor widow, this man was moved to help

others, giving all that God had placed in his hand.

APPEAL: Whether we live in poverty or affluence, do we need to experience some loss before being able to sympathize with those who are suffering? Or do we instead allow the Holy Spirit to change our heart, giving us empathy and true love? Are we ready to imitate Christ, sacrificing all, even our lives, for the redemption and well-being of others?

Of course, tithes and offerings do not represent all the popsicles in our box! But they are a token of our desire to help others, feeding with spiritual food those who have been ravaged by the fire of sin! As we partner with Him in this holy work, we may be sure that He will provide for us (Prov. 3:9, 10). There is nothing to fear!

PRAYER: Dear Lord, make us instruments of Your grace and love, using what You gave us to bring spiritual nourishment to those who need to know You through us!



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July 25, 2020

A RADICAL CHOICE

Becoming a Christian means that I now (1) accept the fact that I am a sinner, (2) accept Christ's death in my place for the forgiveness of my sins, (3) want to receive a new heart, and (4) accept the lordship of Christ in my life. It is a radical choice that will affect all areas of my life!

My own criteria or perceptions are no longer the parameter for making decisions, because I know that my "heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked" (Jer. 17:9). Instead, I now accept the lordship of Jesus, submitting my life to His word. One cannot have Jesus while rejecting His Word, because He and His Word are inseparable!

This submission is what wise Solomon meant in his appeal: "Trust in the Lord with all our heart, and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge Him, and He shall direct your paths. Do not be wise in your own eyes; fear the Lord and depart from evil. It will be health to your flesh and strength to your bones" (Prov. 3:5-8).

Solomon then uses the financial life to suggest a way through which we may exercise our submission to Jesus and to His word: "Honor the Lord with your possessions, and

with the firstfruits of all your increase; so your barns will be filled with plenty, and your vats will overflow with new wine" (Prov. 3:9, 10). There are promised blessings for returning tithes and giving offerings regularly, as firstfruits of every income. To honor the Lord with firstfruits means that we give our best to God first before meeting any other expenses.

On the other hand, one of the first signs of our unwillingness to submit to Jesus and to His word is the disinclination to return tithes and to give offerings of all our increase, before any other expense. Limited submission generates limited blessings, while unlimited submission brings overflowing blessings.

APPEAL: While we humbly bring our tithes and offerings to the Lord today, as the first part of all our increase, let us ask Him to give us a submissive heart and to help us to be willing to say, "Speak, Lord, for Your servant hears" (1 Sam. 3:9).

PRAYER: Dear Lord! Please speak to us today and change our hearts, making us willing to submit to Your guidance and power. Please fulfill your promises of overflowing blessings, according to Your great generosity. Amen.

August 1, 2020

I NEVER USE THE ENVELOPE!

"I never use the envelope when I give my tithe," said Jennifer (not her real name) to the pastor who was giving her Bible studies. She was a graduate student at John Hopkins University in the Washington, D.C., area, and the pastor was trying to explain to her the importance of the envelope. Jennifer answered that by her anonymity she was preventing the temptation to show herself as generous, thus losing God's blessings.

"You are right in trying to avoid parading yourself," said the pastor, "but at least two things may happen if you return your tithe anonymously and without any envelope," he said.

"First, it will be impossible for the church to provide you with a receipt," he explained, adding that the Adventist Church operates a worldwide, reliable auditing system, in which receipts are a very important part of the church's accountability. "All those who deal with the church's funds are regularly audited by persons outside their own organizations," he said. "But if you do not expect a receipt, which is your right, how can the auditors check if the tithe funds are being handled as intended?" questioned the pastor.

"Another thing," he added. "You know that the amount you gave can be considered God's tithe only if it is 10 percent of your income and applied according to His specific direction—exclusively for the support of the approved ministry [see Num. 18:21, 24]. But if you miss to stipulate that this is God's tithe in the envelope, the church's treasurer may record it differently, giving it to another destination. It would then no longer be tithe!" he said.

So, two aspects are very important when you give: first, you must write your name on the envelope, entitling yourself to receive a receipt; and second, you need to identify God's tithe or offerings on the envelope, assuring that the funds will reach the correct destination, as established by the Lord—a God of order and truth!

APPEAL: As we worship the Lord with tithes and offerings today, let us be sure that we are facilitating for the church to be accountable and transparent, imitating the Lord, a faithful and true God!

PRAYER: Please, Lord, accept what we bring to worship You today! Amen.



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August 8, 2020

A BIRTH OFFERING

Herbert Boger was pastoring a district in Canoas, Brazil, when Beth, his wife, became pregnant. During her third month of pregnancy, the couple was visited by a pastor of their conference, who read to them some texts from the book, *Child Guidance* by Ellen G. White. Among other things, he suggested that they bring a Thank Offering when they dedicate the child months later. And so they prepared an envelope with an offering for the occasion.

But life became very challenging! Besides suffering from severe anemia during her seventh month of pregnancy, the upper part of Beth's uterine bag broke, and the amniotic fluid poured out. She rushed to the hospital and was told to get total rest until the baby's birth. But then she got an infection, which continued to worsen to the point where the physician told her that if he wouldn't be aware of the peculiarity of her case, the exams, taken alone, would suggest terminal leukemia.

Beth's situation was very risky, and with sadness she and Herbert considered what to do with the offering in the envelope if their baby did not survive. The couple spent much time in prayer; the pastors attending a ministerial council at the time also joined them in prayer, stopping their meeting to pray together a full

hour for them. Later that same day Beth had additional tests, which showed that her infection was no longer growing. So the doctors scheduled and performed a Caesarean Section.

Herbert and Beth know that the birth of their son, William, on March 12, 2005, was a miracle. Mother and baby stayed in the hospital for two weeks until Beth's infection cleared up. While there, the same pastor visited Beth again and assured her that an angel of God had been caring for William since his birth. After Beth was discharged and went home, she and Herbert* added to the envelope five times more than the original amount, concluding that no sum, however large, could represent their gratitude to the Lord!

In front of all the church members the couple not only dedicated William to God, but with tears in their eyes they placed the envelope into a basket held by a deacon.

APPEAL: Let's thank God now, and recognize His wonderful workings with our offerings!

PRAYER: Please, God, accept what we place in Your hands today!

*Herbert Boger is now the Personal Ministries director for the South America Division.

August 15, 2020

A YEARLY RITUAL

"Here is your Birthday Offering," said Irene to her son, Marcos, 8, before they left for the church that Sabbath. "Please tell the Sabbath School teacher that your birthday was last week, and don't forget to give that offering, as you do every year," said Mother, touching Marcos' pocket. She reminded him how sick he had been since he was a baby, how bad the prognosis was, how he was dedicated by his parents to serve God, and that through three very difficult surgeries the Lord graciously saved his life! So Marcos proudly gave to God that special offering.

Years ago, Osvaldino Bomfim, his father, left a small business to become a colporteur, battling against his passion to accumulate money. After marrying Irene, he decided to study at the Adventist Seminary in Sao Paulo, Brazil to become a pastor. His desire for wealth, however, led him to seriously consider a friend's proposal to leave the seminary and to partner with him in purchasing a gas station. Maybe I can get more and more money, and then participate in mission by financially supporting missionaries, he thought. But then Marcos became very sick!

While his son, who was near death, was

having surgery, Osvaldino knelt in one of the hospital's restrooms and prayed: "Dear Lord, I know You are the Owner of the universe, totally able to do anything. If this child will later enlarge Satan's lines, please allow him to rest; but if he will serve You, please perform a miracle!" Then he added: "I now give up my desire to become rich. I rededicate myself to serve You for my whole life, doing whatever You want me to do, and going wherever You send me. I will also dedicate this child to You, and will prepare all my other children to serve You!"

After Marcos' healing, the Birthday Offering became a meaningful experience of gratitude and rededication to God for this family, which raised two pastors, Marcos and Eduardo, and a pastor's wife, Junia.

APPEAL: Who is supposed to be honored with a special gift for any anniversary celebration? Is it the one who is just enjoying life, or He who created and redeemed the person's life? Praise Him as you bring Him your tithes and offerings today!

PRAYER: Lord, please accept the dedication of our lives to You today!



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August 22, 2020

IS IT SIN NOT TO GIVE FREEWILL OFFERINGS?

"When am I supposed to give offerings? Should I give every time there is a call in the church?" Joe asked his friend Carlos. "If I do not have anything to give, am I sinning if I don't give?" Joe had even more questions. "It seems easy to determine if I am dishonest with God regarding my tithes," he continued, "but how can I be sure that I am doing the right thing with my offerings?"

Carlos explained that there are two main offerings: (1) regular, or systematic—also called Promise; and (2) freewill. "Freewill offerings should be given only beyond and above Promise," said Carlos. "Our most basic giving initiative must be based not on the needs of others, nor on any call made at church, or even on personal feelings or sympathies. Instead, it must be based on God's initiative to bless, and be given as first fruits every time God gives a financial blessing, for He is ever the first to give," Carlos explained.

Joe was interested, so Carlos kept talking. "Promise reminds us that God's giving always precedes any human giving," he said. "We are able to give tithe and Promise only after we have already received something from Him. That is why both are given as a percentage of

something that was received before."

"That makes sense," said Joe, "because if you have received nothing from Him, and your income is zero, your tithe and Promise will also be zero." Carlos nodded in agreement.

"Now I see that if I have no income and there is a call to give, I am not sinning by not giving," said Joe thoughtfully. Carlos smiled and added: "On the other hand, by not tithing and giving Promise every time we have an income, we fail to recognize God as the origin of life and all blessings.

"It seems fair," said Joe. "It means that before expecting us to return tithe and give our Promise, the Lord first provides us with the conditions to give!"

APPEAL: By giving to Him as regularly as God blesses us, we are reminded that He is the Origin of life and the Sustainer of all things!

PRAYER: Please, Lord, accept our recognition of your kind mercies!

August 29, 2020

TERROR IN THE DARK

"Get down, get down!" people screamed amid the turmoil inside a 42-passenger commercial bus on October 16, 2017.

Unable to get a reasonably priced airline ticket, Alana and Gabriel Miranda had opted to spend the night traveling on a comfortable bus for a 12-hour night trip from Sao Paulo to Brasilia, Brazil's capital city. Now, awakened by screams, they realized that the bus was swaying wildly while crossing a remote area and traveling at a very high speed.

Then they heard gun shots: "Bang! Bang! Bang!" Broken glass spread all around them. Two rows in front of them they saw the driver bending over, trying to escape the bullets aimed at him from the car ahead. At the same time, in a risky decision, he was trying to overtake and maybe hit the car. He knew that if he stopped the bus, besides taking all their valuables the well-armed robbers would possibly harm the passengers.

If we escape the shooting, we might still die from an accident, thought Alana. She instinctively closed her hand when something hot fell on it, only realizing later that it was a bullet! Finally, they arrived at a police station, and the robbers gave up. Miraculously, all the

passengers were safe, except for a person who had been shot in his arm. Fortunately, he wasn't seriously injured. Because they were seated only two rows behind the driver, Gabriel and Alana wondered how they escaped the bullets!

"How can we give a Thank Offering to God next Sabbath?" Alana and Gabriel asked Alana's father, an Adventist pastor. "It should be in addition to our Promise [regular, percentage-based offering]," they said, still grateful for and amazed by God's great deliverance! "You can mark "Thank Offering" on your envelope," said the pastor. "And while placing it in the basket, you can worship Him by saying a short prayer of gratitude," he added. Alana and Gabriel remembered that it is only "through the Lord's mercies we are not consumed.... They are new every morning; great is Your faithfulness" (Lam. 3:22, 23).

APPEAL: Is there any reason for you to be grateful today? You also can recognize His gracious acts on your behalf by worshipping Him with an offering!

PRAYER: Dear Lord, please accept our worship this morning. Amen.

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September 5, 2020

UNITED, WE ARE STRONG!

Ricardo Paccagnella, an elder of an Adventist Church in College Park, Maryland, was playing tennis when a fellow player mentioned that all money collected by his Evangelical church would be retained and administrated locally. “How is your church managing its finances?” he asked Ricardo.

Ricardo explained that while most Evangelical churches function under the Congregational system (funds are mainly handled by each congregation), the Adventist Church, modeled on the biblical Storehouse system, brings most of the funds collected by each local church to a common “bucket” and then distributes them equitably through different administrative levels, regionally and internationally, to support not only authorized missionaries (through the tithe), but also missionary projects and ministries (by offerings).

Ricardo was right. The system adopted by the Adventist Church was established upon biblical principles, fostering unity and equity. No one individual or interest group is owner or controls all the funds. Local church representatives elect leaders for limited terms, and leaders are paid on the basis of a common salary scale. The church is thriving in 212 out of the 235 countries and areas recognized by

the UN, because instead of each one doing what is right in their own eyes, 21 million members contribute to the same “pot” with tithes and Promise (regular/systematic offerings). United, they are stronger, are able to do more, and go farther!

“We all may have access to financial information,” said Ricardo, “and if we identify ourselves on the envelope, we are supposed to receive receipts from what is given. Additionally, there is an independent auditing service to help make sure funds are handled as intended.” “But do you really trust this system?” asked his friend. “I trust God,” said Ricardo, “who I believe had inspired this system. Even though I know it is managed by fallible human beings like me, no circumstantial human failure will affect my practice, because I actually give to God, as an act of worship. And He is in full control of His own business,” Ricardo concluded.

APPEAL: God invites you to join your brothers and sisters from all the world, to worship Him with tithes and offerings, funding also His work around the globe.

PRAYER: Take what belongs to You, dear God, for we worship you today!

September 12, 2020

ONE SHOT

If you had one shot to make a sudden, big difference in someone's life, would you take it . . . or let it slip away? Unusual opportunities don't happen every day; but when they do, they require a rapid response from God's church. The Unusual Opportunities Offering is a special funding pool that enables the General Conference to respond rapidly to urgent projects as soon as they arise.

Let's suppose, for instance, that there is an unexpected door opened in a country that before was completely closed to the Adventist message. This fund will allow the Church to move quickly as the opportunity appears and be established in this country on a more solid basis.

Such a situation occurred after 1991, when the Iron Curtain fell, and the former Soviet Union and Warsaw Pact countries were suddenly opened to the gospel. Fortunately, the church was able to take advantage of the opportunity, organizing more than 250 evangelistic series in Russia, one of them, conducted in 1992 by Mark Finley, inside the Kremlin— the very center of a power that had declared religion as dead and the atheism as the state religion! The following year, the

Olympic Stadium was rented for another five-week series, also with Elder Finley. As a result of these endeavors, the number of Adventist members in the former Soviet Union jumped from 35,000 to 85,000 in just three years after the fall of the Berlin Wall! ("Super evangelism in Moscow". Ministry Magazine, Nov. 1993, page 15).

Part of your regular offerings and gifts today will automatically be sent to the Unusual Opportunities Offering fund to support critical necessities as they appear. You may also give your freewill offerings directly to this fund, beyond and above your Promise (regular and systematic offerings) by marking Unusual Opportunities Offering on your envelope, or by visiting AdventistMission.org/donate, and selecting "GC Unusual Opportunity Fund."

APPEAL: So, let's seize the moment. Let's speed the work of the gospel by giving generously, anticipating God's miraculous acts!

PRAYER: Dear God! Let us work together, as a well-prepared army, ready to go wherever you will send us in these last days of this world.

Submitted by Sylva Keshishian, Adventist Mission

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September 19, 2020

RISKING WITH GOD

More than one hundred years ago a group of German immigrants settled in Pozuzo, an isolated place in the Peruvian jungle. As there was no longer land available in Pozuzo, Juan and Teresa Heidinger decided to relocate after their marriage to the region of Puerto Inca, close to the Pachitea river. It was also a remote place, accessible only by the river, but with extensive land available. Far from civilization, they would need to be self-sufficient and provide for almost all their own needs.

After Teresa developed serious kidney problems, the only available medical facility was the Maranatha Clinic, accessible only by boat from their farm. The American owners, Monroe and Patricia Duerksen, after working for a while in Bolivia as regular Adventist missionaries, decided to leave the USA again, as self-supported missionaries, opening a clinic in a place without any Adventist presence. In faith, they volunteered to sacrifice and to risk all with God, believing that He would provide for all their needs.

In addition to the treatment in the clinic, Teresa also received the book “The Great Controversy”, followed by a warm invitation to join the Duerksens for Sabbath services. Impacted by the book and the kindness of the

missionaries, Tereza was baptized, followed by Juan, his mother, and finally the four children.

Thanks to the missionaries’ self-denying initiative, all four of the Heidinger’s children studied at the Peruvian Adventist University. Maritza holds a specialization to teach Biology and Chemistry in the High School, and is married to a pastor; Daisy, a food engineer, served as mayor of Puerto Inca and is now a member of the staff of Peru’s Assistant Minister of Education; Lisseth studied Psychology and married a pharmaceutical chemist, both actively serving in their local church in Los Angeles, USA; and Edward, a pastor, is currently the Secretary of the South America Division, with headquarters in Brazil.

APPEAL: Self-denial and sacrifice, are ever the fuel that ignites precious fruits for God! In what other way is God calling you to risk something for Him today? Do you believe that if you risk with Him, He will also provide for all your needs? Tithes and offerings are a practical witness of that belief, strengthening our trust in our Divine Provider!

PRAYER: Dear Lord! As we worship you, help us to trust in you more and more!

September 26, 2020

WHEN MONEY IS GONE

Mari and Marcos Bomfim, a ministerial couple in Brazil, were facing a terrible economic crash in their home, months after their wedding, in 1986. Powered by some poor financial choices, in addition to an eighty percent inflation rate in the country, their financial crisis happened shortly after they decided to raise their Promise's percentage from 3 to 5 percent, in recognition of God's blessings by providing both with a job.

One morning, while leaving for work, Mari asked Marcos to buy some groceries at the open fair. He answered, however, that all their money was spent, including their savings, with two weeks to go before the next paycheck.

After pouring out his heart to God that morning, Marcos found some unexpected money in a pocket, maybe enough to buy only a dozen bananas. But, besides the bananas, he came back from the market that day with a dozen oranges and some zucchini also! Later, while feeding their chicken, which they kept in their yard shared by other ministerial families, a neighbor offered him lettuce and kale from their garden. Climbing the wall, back from feeding the chicken, the sound of a falling avocado reminded Marcos that an elderly pastor

asked him to pick his avocados and to share with him the harvest. And so he did, bringing home a bag full of them! Suddenly he realized that they were witnessing a miracle like those of biblical times!

When Mari arrived at home, she couldn't believe she was being welcomed by bananas, oranges, zucchini, lettuce, kale and... avocados! Both Marcos and Mari knelt before the produce to thank their Provider for such deliverance. Realizing that it would be impossible for them to eat it all, Mari suggested to share some lettuce, kale and avocados, with Marcos' parents. When he arrived at his parents' home, his mother offered him two whole wheat loaves of bread and three liters of milk! All blessings on the same day! Marcos barely could drive back home as tears of awe for God's greatness flooded his eyes!

APPEAL: God is the same yesterday, today and forever, and we can trust in His faithful and true promises! Let us worship him with our tithes and offerings!

PRAYER: Dear God! We are children of Your possession! Please, accept the offering of our heart and bless us as we approach Your holy presence today!



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October 3, 2020

A RATIONAL VOW

Sandra was talking with Andre, a new convert, were talking about the Christian life when Joe said, “I know that the tithe is ten percent of my income, but what about the offering? How much should it be?”

“This is a common question for those who desire to do God’s will but do not trust their own hearts,” said Sandra. As Andre was listening attentively, Sandra continued. “So, in order to avoid being driven by our own changing desires, the Bible suggests us to purpose, to vow something to God in our heart (2 Cor. 9:7).” “But how should this vow be? How much would be an acceptable offering?”, asked Andre. Sandra then explained then that a vow about Promise (regular/systematic offerings) may include four aspects:

Priority: God first, must be our motto in every aspect of life, including financial stewardship. Jesus has a marvelous promise to those who “seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness... (Matt. 6:33)”. God also promises to provide abundantly for those who give “the firstfruits [the first part] of all” their increase (Prov. 3:9-10), before any other expense may be met.

Regularity: As the heart is deceitful (Jer.

17:9), and our perceptions are not reliable (Prov. 14:12), the regularity of the offering should not be determined by the calendar, the desires of the heart, calls from the pulpit or sympathy for a project or for a worker. Instead, it should be determined by God’s initiative to give. So, every time He provides a financial blessing, we must recognize its divine origin (Prov. 3:9-10) by tithing and giving Promise from it.

System: The Bible suggests a proportional, percentage-based system (Deut. 16:17; 1 Cor. 16:2). By adopting a fixed percentage for a period, the heart will not be tempted to waver from too little to too much, according to emotion.

Period: It is important to establish a time period for the Promise—perhaps a year—and then evaluate and recommit for the same or a different percentage.

APPEAL: While worshiping now today you may purpose a percentage of God’s blessings to be regularly returned beside the tithe. My Promise will be ____%!

PRAYER: Dear Lord, please, accept the vows and promises of our heart!

October 10, 2020

CRAZY FOR HIM

Pavel Goia, father of the Ministry Magazine editor of the same name, was a construction contractor working in the private sector in communist-era Romania. As a very active Seventh-day Adventist lay evangelist, he was preaching, building churches and distributing Bibles he would bring, hidden in his car, from the former Yugoslavia.

On one occasion, after being arrested, an officer put a gun to Pavel's chest threatening, "We already told you not to bring more Bibles. Now we are going to kill you." Pavel raised his hand, asking, "Hold on a second!" But the cop interrupted him saying, "Stop begging. I'm not going to let you live."

Pavel insisted, "No, no! I'm not begging for my life. Just hold on a second." "Why?", said the cop, "Do you want to say your last prayer?" "No, no", answered Pavel, "I don't say my prayers in crisis. I say my prayers all the time." "Why do I need to wait, then?" asked the officer?

Pavel calmly took off his shirt. "Now you can shoot me", he said. The officer said, "Well, the bullet has no problem entering the shirt." "I know that", answered Pavel. "The problem

is that there are people who don't have a shirt. So, don't stain it. Give it to somebody." Releasing him the cops said: "You are crazy!"

True Christians will ever consider others' needs first, imitating their model, Jesus, who for the sake of others, offered Himself. In addition to worshiping God, the main reason for giving tithes and offerings is to provide for the salvation of others, far and near to us.

APPEAL: During a moment of crisis, we may not be required to take off any piece of clothing that we are wearing in order to benefit others. However, we may help them in different ways, one being returning the tithe and a self-stipulated percentage of our income as offerings.

PRAYER: Heavenly Father, please accept our worship today, and bless those resources so that they may reach people and places where they are most needed! In Jesus name, Amen!

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October 17, 2020

THAT SPECIAL ORANGE TREE

"I didn't learn to tithe in the baptismal class," says Angelo Donaldo, an Angolan Adventist pastor. He explained that in 1977, his father was an Adventist pastor in Luau, at the border of the Democratic Republic of Congo, 1,580 km (981 miles) from Luanda, the capital of the country. "Even though I was very young," says Angelo, "I can remember very well how around our home there were ten orange trees."

"My seven siblings and I could freely eat from nine of them, but on the tenth, the most fruitful of all, we were not allowed to touch, because my father would bring all the produce to the church as the tithe," Angelo recalls. "Sometimes, my father would even hide himself all the night near the tree to prevent thieves from ravaging its produce," says Angelo. "Today, I feel myself blessed by my father's faithful life," testifies the pastor, because his example influenced some of his spiritual choices. "I believe that my father's coherent life is one of the reasons why all his children, except one, are now faithful church members," he ponders. "It was at home, not at the church, that I learned to respect God and to tithe," he says.

Like Angelo's father, our Heavenly Father also gave all the trees of the garden to Adam and Eve, except one, which He reserved to Himself. Had they respected His command, our first parents would only be expressing gratitude for all that they had received, but they would have also recognized God's authority and ownership over the garden and their lives. And the same happens today as we tithe.

Commenting about Solomon's suggestion to "honor the Lord with your possessions, and with the firstfruits of all your increase (Prov. 3:9)," and the resulting blessings (v. 10), Ellen G. White says: "This scripture teaches that God, as the Giver of all our benefits, [1] has a claim upon them all; that [2] His claim should be our first consideration; and that [3] a special blessing would attend all who honor this claim (*Counsels on Stewardship*, p. 65)."

APPEAL: Let us recognize God's authority, dominion and goodness, as we worship Him with our tithe and offerings now!

PRAYER: Take what is Yours, our dear Creator and Redeemer! Amen!

October 24, 2020

LUANA'S SACRIFICE OFFERING

"I am the only one in my class that doesn't have a cell phone," complained Luana Bomfim, 15, to her father, an Adventist pastor living in the South of Brazil, in the early 2000s. "Why don't you purchase one?", answered the father jocularly. "You know that I am just a student and that I don't have money", said Luana, with a complaining smile. "Then why don't you canvas?," suggested her father. "By so doing, you may, at the same time, do God's work and earn some money."

At the end of the campaign, with a students' canvassing team, she was finally able to purchase her first cell phone, after tithing and giving Promise (percentage-based regular and systematic offering) from all her income. Next year she canvassed again, earning enough to pay for her own expenses, to return God's part, and to still keep some money.

One day, her father was pondering on how to provide her with the best financial education. So, he suggested that she open a savings account, earn some interest from the money. "But I no longer have that money!" answered Luana. The father was really surprised! "How did you spend all that money?" he asked, incredulously, believing that parents share re-

sponsibility for the way their children manage their resources.

"Well," said Luana, "last Sabbath the pastor informed us that they launched a plan to renovate the church and asked those whose heart were touched by God to give a freewill offering, an offering of sacrifice, in addition to their Promise. After praying, I decided that if you suggested that I open a savings account, this would be the sign that I should invest all the money in the church's renovation. So, from now on, I no longer have that money," she said.

APPEAL: We are invited by God's word to regularly return tithes and give Promise. But He may also invite us to occasionally give freewill offerings, according to the promptings of the Spirit. Let us ask the Lord to make us sensitive to His voice when He calls us to deny self and to sacrifice for the advancement of His kingdom.

PRAYER: Lord, teach us to be wise, to trust in you as the Provider, and not to place our confidence in the things of this earth. Please, accept our offering!

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October 31, 2020

A SECRET REVEALED

Evellyze Reinaldo, a teacher in a private school, was the only Adventist girl of Fortaleza, Brazil. In 2010 she accepted an invitation to visit a Youth Spiritual Retreat of the Adventist Church in Manaus, a city located in the heart of the Brazilian Amazon rainforest, about 4,000 km away (2,500 miles).

And it was during that Youth Spiritual Retreat that she met Luiz Pinho, who at that time was a young Adventist School teacher, for the first time. Both of them knew that something bigger than a simple friendship was going on. So, Evellyze decided to pray, asking God if Luiz would really be “the chosen one” for her.

With God’s approval, they started a relationship, even though they lived so far away from each other. “Our love came in answer to prayer,” said Luiz, “and at the time appointed by God, which is ever the right time,” he added.

But it was only after they were already married, in 2011, that Luiz, now a state bank officer in the Bank of Brazil, revealed one of his well-kept secrets to Evellyze. “When we were engaged”, he told her, “I was so

grateful to God for finding you, that I decided to raise the percentage of my Promise”, he said, meaning his vow related to a percentage-based offering. This was his way of showing gratitude!

“It was the most beautiful thing he ever told me!” said Evellyze to their district pastor, Marcos Frutuoso, during a visit in their home in December 2018. They are now members of the Torres Church, in Manaus, Brazil, and parents of Benício, a baby boy.

APPEAL: To become a Promisor, giving a percentage-based offering, is a way to recognize God’s blessings as frequently as we are blessed. And if you are already a Promisor, have you ever considered to raise that percentage?

PRAYER: Dear Lord! Help us to worship you today with our resources because you are good, and because your mercies endure forever!

November 7, 2020

A WEEKLY APPOINTMENT

Heavily addicted to alcohol and living with his family in the Amazon jungle, Luis Augusto was never sober whenever he returned home from the small city of Rodrigo Alves, Acre, Brazil. Sometimes he would be gone, drinking, for several days, which was harmful not only to himself but also to his family. But this time he was going to town for a different reason.

While watching an evangelist preaching on Novo Tempo TV (Brazilian Hope Channel) days before, Luis decided for the first time to accept the Lordship of Jesus and to look for the Adventist church he had learned about from the TV program. The following Sabbath, he left his home at 3:00 a.m. for a four-hour walk through the jungle, looking for the Adventist church. Not able to locate the church, he sat on a curb for a while until some people passed by dressed for church. By following them, he finally found the house of God. When the receptionist asked him if he was visiting the church, his answer was clear: “No. I came to stay.” And so he did!

After the Lord delivered him from his bad habits, Luis was baptized. Then his family joined him every Sabbath, walking four hours one way to church! Some may wonder whether it was worth that sacrifice. Would it not be more convenient to stay home and watch religious programs on TV,

“as in the manner of some”? (See Heb. 10:25.)

God’s Word is clear when it says that “in order to stir up love and good works,” we need to “consider one another” (Heb. 10:24), connecting with them constantly. And the next verse warns us: “not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as in the manner of some, but exhorting one another, and so much the more as you see the Day approaching” (vs. 25).

The Lord indicates, and Luis understood, that there is no virtual experience that can replace regular worship with our brothers and sisters in church. The church is also the outpost of the storehouse, the place where we are commanded to bring tithes and offerings. Putting convenience last and God first, we connect all family members to Him there by (1) praying, (2) singing, (3) studying His Word, and (4) worshiping Him with tithes and Promise.

APPEAL: May we return our tithes and bring our Promise, presenting them as reminders of what the Lord had done for us this week! May we rejoice and worship Him!

PRAYER: Dear God, Creator of the universe, please accept the offering of our heart! Take it and cleanse it, making it Yours.

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November 14, 2020

PREM'S SACRIFICE

After Prem completed his medical training, he chose to live on a small stipend in a remote town in India as a Global Mission pioneer. Before Prem arrived there were no Adventists in the region. The nearest hospital is several hours away, so pioneer Prem uses the talents God has given him to serve the town's sick. He transformed his living room into a clinic, where he lovingly teaches the locals how to adopt a wholistic lifestyle; he also treats their illnesses. He then prays for the heavenly Physician to heal and bless them.

Through Prem's compassionate words and actions, many of his former patients now come each Sabbath to the local church building. There they eagerly wait for Prem to finish treating patients in his clinic so he can teach them more about Jesus.

"Christ's method alone will give true success in reaching the people. The Saviour mingled with men as one who desired their good. He showed His sympathy for them, ministered to their needs, and won their confidence. Then He bade them, 'Follow Me.'"—Ellen G. White, *The Ministry of Healing*, p. 143.

APPEAL: Global Mission Pioneers sacrifice much to take Jesus to the unreached cities, towns, and villages around the world and to put His method of outreach into action. The question is, what are you willing to sacrifice to help support them?

The Annual Sacrifice Offering, collected in some countries on November 14, is a good time to make a special gift to support the work of Global Mission Pioneers. Part of your Promise (regular and systematic offering) already supports the Global Mission Pioneers, but if in addition you would like to help share Jesus with unreached people, write "Annual Sacrifice Offering" on your tithe envelope or visit global-mission.org/giving and select "Global Mission's Annual Sacrifice Offering."

PRAYER: Dear Lord, help us to sacrifice for mission, as You sacrificed all in our behalf!

Submitted by Sylva Keshishian

November 21, 2020

SIMPLE LIFE

Reminiscences of his parent's home always bring good memories to Pavel Goia, *Ministry* magazine editor. Even though his dad was a prosperous construction contractor during the Romanian communist era, the family never had a fancy car, expensive furniture, or a big house. "He would always say to Mom," remembers Goia, "If things were better, we would promote God's work. Those are the treasures we have, because we don't take anything except souls to heaven. So, let's invest in souls."

"One time when we were building a church," says Goia, "Dad came home with \$25,000 after putting on a new roof for a school. Then Mom asked, 'How much should we give? Ten percent?' Dad said, 'No, no, no! Give it all.' Then Mom said, 'Let's keep \$2,000 for the house, for emergencies.' Dad agreed and said, 'OK. Keep 10 percent and give 90 percent.'"

"Sometimes he would give half," remembers Goia, "depending on the need of the church, not our need. He would say, 'Who gave us the money? Who gave us health? He's going to give us more again. Give it all. Give it to the church.'"

"That didn't happen just one time," says Goia. "It was usually the case. We got used to constantly hearing this again and again until it was anchored into our system."

APPEAL: How may God use you to teach your children the importance of living simply and giving liberally to God, which will wed their hearts to Him? Once giving habits are established early in life, they will protect the children from many materialistic and consumerist snares. You may give them a small, regular allowance, for instance, and teach them to put God first by returning tithe and Promise (regular, systematic, percentage-based offering) before meeting any other expenses. According to Jesus, wherever your children put their money, there their hearts will be also (Matt. 6:21).

PRAYER: Dear Lord, while we worship You with tithes and offerings, help us today not only to give for Your glory, but also to be models and educators, so that the younger generations may follow our steps and also find You!

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November 28, 2020

A DAY FOR RELATIONSHIPS

God is love, so the Christian religion is one of loving relationships. Christianity presupposes relationship with God (vertical) and with one another (horizontal). To “have love” for one another is so important that Jesus Himself described it as being a true indicator of discipleship (John 13:35).

The Lord also set apart a special day, the Sabbath, for us to regularly connect with Him and with our brothers and sisters. But it sometimes requires sacrifice. In places such as the Amazon region, for example, where people may have to travel long distances to church, some families start their journey on Friday evening, returning home on Sunday. And they do that not because they have time to waste, but because they see it as a spiritual exercise that strengthens their love for God and for their neighbors. They see fellowship with other Christians and worshipping God together on Sabbath as essential for spiritual growth.

In the apostolic era, there were already some who were quite lax on gathering together regularly with fellow believers. But God warned them and us that the act of gathering with others would increase in importance as the day of His coming approaches (Heb. 10:25). In Leviticus 23:3, the Lord also stresses the importance of

strengthening connections with one another on Sabbath: “Six days shall work be done, but the seventh day is a Sabbath of solemn rest, a holy convocation” (italics added). The word “convocation” (Heb. *Miqra*), means meetings, assemblies, gatherings; and the Lord considers them as being holy and an integral part of Sabbath keeping.

In the Adventist Church, our connections with one another have an even broader dimension. By returning tithes and giving Promise to the church, the outpost of the storehouse, we strengthen the connections with our brothers and sisters from around the world that are doing the same. We exercise our mutual trust, and we testify that we are connected, that we love and care for each other, and that we have a common goal—to work for God not only as individuals but also as a well-organized army, speeding the final preaching of the gospel and Jesus’ second coming. Working together, we do more, we can go farther and faster.

APPEAL: As we come into God’s presence today, let us worship Him in community and strengthen our ties to each other by returning our tithes and bringing our Promise to His storehouse!

PRAYER: We are Yours, Lord! Please accept our worship today! Amen!

December 5, 2020

BIG TREES REPLACED BY SMALL TREES

"We've already told you many times to stop sharing Bibles and building churches," said the officer to Pavel's father (also named Pavel). During the Romanian communist era, those who were against the government or who were sharing Bibles were often arrested and beaten badly. "So many of my friends were beaten very badly," says the son, Pavel Goia, Ministry magazine editor, "but it didn't stop anything." Nevertheless, for some well-known people, additional consequences could be even worse.

One comedian, for instance, after speaking on TV for many years, started to subtly make fun of the dictator. Not wanting to make the comedian a martyr, the government officials decided to kill him in such a way that they wouldn't appear guilty of his death. So, they radiated him without his knowledge and sent him home to die.

That time, instead of beating Pavel (the father), the officers just warned him again and, strangely, let him alone in a room during the whole night. In the morning he was allowed to go home, apparently unharmed. Goia smiled and asked, "You just left me alone in a room?" But they shook their heads and said,

"You don't get it, do you?"

But after a few days Goia experienced extreme diarrhea, started to lose his hair, and then began losing his nails. The doctor told him that he had leukemia caused by high radiation. "If I live, I live for Jesus", said Goya before resting in the Lord. "If I die, I die for Jesus. Sometimes, it is good to take out a big tree so that small trees may grow. Please, God, give fire to my children." He longed for his children to love and witness for the Lord, and God granted his request!

APPEAL: How much are our children ready to sacrifice for Christ? If they are not willing to sacrifice something in order to keep the Sabbath, to retain moral purity, to live a healthful lifestyle, or to return tithes and Promise, will they in the future be willing to sacrifice even their lives for Jesus? It is today that we must teach them by instruction and example how to sacrifice for Christ.

PRAYER: While we worship You with tithes and Promise, help us to learn how to sacrifice for You, and how to teach the next generation to do the same! Amen.

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December 12, 2020

THE ISOLATED TITHER

What happens if conditions for the regular “assembling of ourselves” in the church (Heb. 10:24, 25) are less than ideal? How can someone stay faithful and remain spiritually strong if isolated from their local church?

An interesting example is the story of Meropi Gjika, an Albanian woman. Evangelized by Daniel Lewis, an Albanian-born missionary from the United States, Meropi accepted the Adventist truth during the 1940s. For some reason, however, she was not immediately baptized. Then, at the end of World War II, when a communist regime was installed in Albania, all Christian churches were banned and Lewis was arrested. So, Meropi was isolated from the larger Adventist community for almost 50 years! Finally, in 1991, she was found by Ray Dabrowski from the General Conference, who visited Albania after the government lifted some of the religious restrictions.

Meropi told Dabrowski that she had three great desires: first, to be baptized; second, to hand over to the church the tithe and offerings that she had set aside from her small income for 46 years; and third, to see an Adventist church building in her country (ANN, Feb. 19, 2001). Only the first two were fulfilled before her death on February 17, 2001, at the age of 97.

Was Meropi foolish for keeping that money for so long, resulting in its value being eroded by a 46-year inflation? Could she not have used those funds to help the needy or even to support lay evangelists in a country ravaged by poverty?

Apparently, Lewis had faithfully taught Meropi solid biblical principles when he gave her Bible studies, and she learned them well. She was actually practicing what the Bible teaches on this subject: the portion of our income that is considered tithe (1) must represent the right percentage (10 percent; the Heb. word *maaser* means “a tenth”); (2) must be delivered to the storehouse (Deut. 12, 14; 2 Chron. 31; Mal. 3:8-10); (3) must be applied according to God’s prescription—the support of the authorized ministry (Lev. 18:21, 24); and (4) must be equally distributed among the authorized ministry (Deut. 18:1-8; Neh. 13:8-14).

APPEAL: Tithing is an act of submission to the God who established it, and who gave specific directions about how to deliver and distribute it.

PRAYER: Heavenly Father, help us to accept Your guidance in this matter! Amen!

December 19, 2020

THE LAST TWO CHRISTMAS EGGS

Barna Magyarosi was struck by enticing smells as he climbed the stairs to his family's apartment on the top floor of the building. It was Christmas Eve in the 1980s in communist Romania, and it seemed that all the neighbors were baking cakes at the same time! He anticipated that something special would be waiting for him as well, but he was disappointed when he realized that the mouth-watering smells ended when he entered his apartment!

"Aren't we also having something special for Christmas?" Barna asked his mother, Genevieve. "I haven't yet found a recipe for making a cake using just two eggs," she answered, feeling frustrated for not being able to provide a treat for her children. She then went into another room, closed the door, and cried to God for help. Like the poor widow, she had been faithfully putting God first, returning her tithe even during the most difficult times. Deciding to believe in His promises and that He would provide for her family, she felt peace in her heart.

A few minutes later, one of the neighbors knocked on the door and asked if Genevieve had two eggs she could borrow, because she didn't have enough for her Christmas cake.

Trusting in God's provision, Genevieve gave the neighbor her remaining two eggs. She was happy to help someone, but her heart was aching at the thought that her three children were hoping for a cake that evening. Moved by principle, however, she put God first, others second, and her own desires last.

Fifteen minutes later, a stranger knocked at their door. Because Barna's father worked in a pharmacy depot, he often helped people have access to rare medicines, and the stranger was a grateful person whom Barna's father had helped the previous summer. The man had felt the desire that morning to take oil, flour, sugar, and eggs to Barna's family. Now, they could have a cake! (Barna Magyarosi is now the secretary of the Inter-European Division.)

APPEAL: God has thousands of windows He can open when we only see closed doors! Let's exercise trust in His supernatural provision as we worship Him with tithes and offerings—a small part of the blessings already received!

PRAYER: Dear Lord, please accept what we bring today, from what You have kindly provided.



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December 26, 2020

SAVED BY THE GOD FIRST PRINCIPLE

“Quickly, quickly!” cried Edison Choque. “We must leave immediately.” It was December 26, 1999, and Edison was an Adventist pastor in Trujillo, Perú. Along with Ruth, his wife, and their two children, Mercy and Kevin, they were excited about traveling to Lima, the capital, for vacation. “The bus will depart at 7:00 A.M. and will not wait for us!” he warned.

Edison was concerned about the time because they had woken up late, after packing the night before. But because the bus station was only 3 kilometers (1.9 miles) away, and the taxi was already waiting for them at the door, it seemed that they would make it.

But just as they were walking out the door, Mercy, their 5-year-old child, asked: “What about family worship? Are we not supposed to have it today?” “Well,” said Edison, looking to Ruth, “we will have worship inside the bus while we’re traveling.” But Mercy was firm: “You’ve said many times that we should never leave this house without having family worship.”

Father and Mother looked at each other again and nodded their heads. They decided that it was more important to keep the God First principle than their vacation plans. So they

quickly read the Sabbath School quarterly for Mercy and Kevin, and then hurried to the bus station—only to realize that the bus had already left! All eyes then turned to Mercy, because the tickets were not refundable, and the next bus wouldn’t depart for four hours!

Later that day they were shocked to learn that the very bus they had missed had crashed with a truck, instantly killing 16 people! The Choque family wept for the people who had been killed and for their families, but at the same time, they were also filled with gratitude to God for using the God First principle to save their lives! (Edison and Ruth now work at the South America Division office, in Brazil; Mercy is a pastor’s wife; and Kevin is a pastor. Both Mercy and Kevin also live in Brazil.)

APPEAL: Let us plan to start the new year by putting **God first** in all aspects of our life, including our financial life. Let us honor Him with our tithes and offerings, and to do it before any other expense are met!

PRAYER: Heavenly Father, please accept our tithes and offerings as our worship! Please help us to put You first in every aspect of our life. Amen!

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AUTHOR

MARCOS FAIOCK BOMFIM

Pastor Marcos Faiock Bomfim has served as director of Stewardship Ministries of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists since his election on October 11, 2015, at the world church's year-end meetings held in Silver Spring, Maryland, United States.

In July 2015, at the General Conference Session in San Antonio, Texas, United States, Pastor Bomfim was elected to serve as

Stewardship and Family Ministries director for the South American Division (SAD). He previously served for five years in various positions in the same division, including associate secretary for Ministerial, and director of Family Life and Health Ministries.

Born in a pastoral home, Pastor Bomfim began his ministry as a pastor in Brazil and served for nine years as a district pastor in Sao Paulo, Brazil. He also served as Stewardship Ministries director for the South Brazil Union for five years, following 11 years as Stewardship Ministries director in two conferences in that same union.

Pastor Bomfim, now a DMin candidate in Andrews University, was the speaker of a nationwide daily radio program (Novo Tempo em Família [New Time in Family]) for 10 years and , and during 2014 and 2015, he was the host of the Lar e Família (Home and Family) program, a 30-minute TV program that airs weekly at SAD Hope Channel (Novo Tempo/Nuevo Tiempo), located in Brazil for the past two years.

Beyond his pastoral ministry, his other great passion is his family. He is married to Mariluz da Silva Bomfim, an educator and family therapist. Together, they are blessed with two daughters: Luana and Alana, both married, and Emilia, a granddaughter, who is the seventh generation of Adventists in their family.



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