

Have you ever felt a gap between your life and the reality of knowing Jesus Christ as Lord?

Do you ever fear God saying to you, “I never knew you”?

In trying to understand the crucial issue of Jesus Christ as Lord of your life, it is easy to get caught up in the legalism Luther aptly describes as the “oil of our bones.” Easy to get into the seemingly inescapable rut that expresses our self with words like: “But, Lord, I preach about you! I work hard for you—trying to do what is right and avoid what is wrong. Why do I feel as if I am on the outside, nose pressed against the pane, looking in? Remember me? Do you know who I am?”

Jesus said it. It *is* possible for Christians to do many *good* things in His name, but fail to find *The Missing Connection: Where Life Meets Lordship*.

If this is your dilemma, then this book is for you. Author, lecturer and pastor, Dr. Ben Maxson experienced that missing connection. But God led him to discover how the gap could be closed. How he could internalize and realize what it means to follow Christ as Lord.

In these concise chapters the author shares years of study and exciting discovery about what it means to know Jesus Christ as Partner and Lord. This book will help you find *The Missing Connection*. It’s time to close the gap!

Born in Caracas, Venezuela of missionary parents, Ben Maxson has spent much of his pastoral ministry in the Northwest and Southern United States. Fluent in Spanish, he also gravitated back to his roots in South America to serve in two missions there. Dr. Maxson held the position of Director of Stewardship at the World Headquarters of Seventh-day Adventists from 1995 to 2004. During this time, he discovered and developed a new paradigm emphasizing biblical stewardship and shared this vision with the world church. Currently Ben is serving as Senior Pastor of the Paradise California Seventh-day Adventist Church.



Seventh-day Adventist
Stewardship Department



The Missing Connection Where Life Meets Lordship

MAXSON

The Missing CONNECTION

Where Life Meets Lordship

BENJAMIN C. MAXSON

The Missing
CONNECTION

Where Life Meets Lordship

THE MISSING CONNECTION: WHERE LIFE MEETS LORDSHIP

Copyright ©2005 by Benjamin C. Maxson

Published by the Stewardship Department
General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists
12501 Old Columbia Pike
Silver Spring, MD 20604-6600

Printed in the United States of America

The mission of the Stewardship Department is to emphasize the lordship of Jesus Christ, to enhance the integration of the gospel into the Christian lifestyle, to encourage faithful stewardship, and to facilitate the individual, corporate, and leadership dimensions of stewardship as partnership with God.

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means—for example, electronic, photocopy, recording—without the prior written permission of the publisher. The only exception is brief quotations in printed reviews.

All scripture quotations, unless otherwise indicated, are taken from the HOLY BIBLE, NEW INTERNATIONAL VERSION®. NIV®. Copyright ©1973, 1978, 1984 by International Bible Society. Used by permission of Zondervan. All rights reserved.

This book was
Edited by Claire Eva
Designed by Tami Pohle
Cover Photo ©2005 Streamline Productions Inc

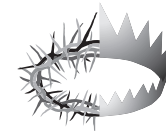
ISBN

For current information about all resources available through the Stewardship Department, General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, visit our website: <http://adventiststewardship.com>

The Missing **CONNECTION**

Where Life Meets Lordship

BENJAMIN C. MAXSON



STEWARDSHIP DEPARTMENT
GENERAL CONFERENCE OF SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTISTS



ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Discovering and integrating lordship principles into the Christian walk has been an exciting and rewarding journey. The last few years have been life changing for me. The principles outlined in these chapters have led me to a process of discovery and growth.

It is impossible to recognize all those whom God has used to touch my life and help me in discovering the eternal truths represented in these pages. Two special individuals have shared most of this journey with me.

During the last few years, my father, Glen Maxson, and I have spent countless hours together exploring the biblical basis for life lived in intimate partnership with Jesus Christ as Lord. We have shared together, taught together, and grown together. It has been a privilege to have his companionship on this journey.

For 34 years, a unique young lady has shared my life and pilgrimage. I have found in Mary much more than simply a life companion. Together, we have grown and learned to apply these principles in our home and marriage. While not doing so perfectly, integrating these principles into our relationship has changed us both and shaped us in a growing passion for Jesus Christ.

Ultimately, this journey has been a developing companionship with my Lord and Savior. The reality of His presence and the depths of His love and grace have made this pilgrimage an incredible joy and an exciting adventure. I look forward to the coming years and even deeper levels of intimacy and growth as we journey together.

Ben Maxson





FOREWORD

Vision and drive are earmarks of a successful leader. These Ben Maxson has in abundance. But there is more—a quick mind, a heart for God, and a full ministry as one who has shared with hundreds what it means to live a life of identity and partnership with Jesus Christ. This is a succinct sketch of the author.

In his own words, “The gospel experience is the core of stewardship. Only one who experiences the joy of forgiveness and the assurance of salvation can trust God enough to let Him be Lord!”

As director of the General Conference Stewardship Department for over nine years, Benjamin Maxson contributed his regular Concept column to the quarterly journal *Dynamic Steward*. In this column, Dr. Maxson graced his readers with fresh thoughts and practical points on just about every area of living as a steward and partner with Christ.

If you’ve felt a gap between your life and the reality of knowing Jesus Christ as Lord, the short chapters that follow will help you to close that gap and find *The Missing Connection: Where Life Meets Lordship*.

Claire L. Eva
Associate and Friend





*The dark riddle of life is illuminated in Jesus;
the meaning, purpose and goal of everything that happens to us,
and the way to make it all count
can be learned only from the Way,
the Truth and the Life.*

BRENNAN MANNING



*A man is never so truly and intensely himself
as when he is most possessed by God.*

WILLIAM RALPH INGE



CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION: THE MISSING CONNECTION

PART ONE: CONNECTED BY GRACE

1. Incredible Partnership 16
2. The Wonder of Grace 20
3. An Experience of Joy 24
4. Understanding Lordship 28
5. The Call to Sacrifice 32

PART TWO: CONNECTED BY CHOICE

6. Come, Be a Part of Me 38
7. Worship as Sacrifice 42
8. Money and Passion 46
9. The Call to Choose 50
10. Moving to God's Blessings 54

PART THREE: CONNECTED BY RESOURCES

11. An Act of Worship 60
12. A Tool for Discipleship 64
13. Giving Your Best 68
14. A Fresh Look at Giving 72
15. Disciples and Investing 76

PART FOUR: THE PEOPLE CONNECTION

16. Stewards of the Gospel 82
17. Partnership with Jesus 86
18. Ten Timely Tips 90
19. In All Thy Ways 94
20. God's Dream 98

PART FIVE: THE MINISTRY CONNECTION

21. Learning to Praise 104
22. Renewing our Minds 108
23. Free to Share 112
24. His World—our Task 116
25. God's Answer 120

INTRODUCTION

THE MISSING CONNECTION



*Our life is to be like a river, not a reservoir.
We should not hold back what God has given us;
instead we should pass it on to others.*

ROBERT G HERRING

*Like good stewards of the manifold grace of God,
serve one another with whatever gift each of you has received.*

PETER, THE APOSTLE

It all began with my first morning in the office. I had just arrived in Corrientes, Argentina to take up my duties as the Youth Director of the North Argentine Mission. Now, the president told me that I had been chosen to be the Stewardship Director as well. I was 23 years old and I felt overwhelmed by the challenge.

My mind immediately went back to the stewardship training I received as a pastor. I was introduced to materials and concepts by Mel Rees. Fortunately this solid foundation enabled me to develop a spiritual approach which focused on committing every area of life to Christ. During the next three years we saw positive results in local churches and in the lives of church members.

I continued this basic approach to spiritual stewardship when I returned to pastor a church in North America. A few years later I was asked to be stewardship director in a local conference. By this time I had received training in biblical money management. Most of my stewardship time was dedicated to helping individuals in this area of life. I talked about stewardship as a lifestyle, but much of my emphasis was on money management and giving.

THE SEARCH LED BACK TO ME

During this period of my stewardship journey I began a different and separate pilgrimage. In 1978, driven by the need of the members of my church, I sought out resources to help them in their walk with God. My search led to the self-discovery that I needed to know how to walk with God. I was surviving from the “spiritual crumbs” of my professional ministry. Yet I did not know how to feast at God’s banquet table!

I was in God’s word every day, giving Bible studies and preparing sermons. I was praying for and with others every day. But I needed something more in my own life. This triggered a search to know God—to know Him intimately and to walk with Him. My journey in spirituality had begun.

The next few years my personal spiritual pilgrimage and my professional ministry maintained parallel tracks. Each was growing. Each was bearing fruit. I had defined spirituality as “the opening of every part of life to the presence of God.” I was teaching discipleship seminars and at the same time, I was teaching stewardship seminars. But there was a missing connection!

Then came 1994. The General Conference invited me to join the stewardship team. We struggled with the decision. There were many reasons for not accepting a call. But the real issue was, “What was

God's will?" We prayed as a family. We committed ourselves to do whatever God convicted us to do, but we wanted to know His will. Each of us went about this discovery process in a different way.

THE NARROW MINISTRY OF STEWARDSHIP

I will never forget that Friday morning. I was at home—alone. For nearly four hours, I wrestled with God. And during those four hours, I opened my heart to Him in prayer. What did He want for us? How could I be at peace? Now, please understand me. I am not saying that God spoke to me audibly. However, I am not sure He did not.

Finally I faced a critical question, and in prayer I asked it. "Do I really want to narrow my ministry down to just stewardship?" I was enjoying my parallel ministry in the Ministerial Association in a conference. Did I really want to narrow it down? Almost immediately an alarm sounded in my head. "That's the wrong question, Ben!"

Was it what I wanted that was important, or what God wanted? I had fought that battle through before. Immediately, I surrendered to Him and said, "Lord, it is what You want that is important." Then I turned back to God and asked the question, "Do you really want me to narrow my ministry down to just stewardship?"

WHAT IT REALLY IS

I experienced the strongest conviction I have ever known in my life. In my heart, I heard God say to me: "We are not going to narrow your ministry down to stewardship. We are going to broaden stewardship to reflect what it really is—the integration of the lordship of Jesus Christ into every area of life." Suddenly I realized that my personal spiritual pilgrimage and my professional journey had come together. I had discovered the missing ingredient in my stewardship ministry—lordship.

During the last nine years I have come to understand this incredibly powerful concept. Stewardship is the intimacy of integrating God into every area of my life as Lord and Partner. It is based on a continuing process of reaffirming my salvation in Jesus Christ by faith, my acceptance of Jesus Christ as Lord and Owner, and my acceptance by faith of the living presence of Christ dwelling within to guide and control.

This is the missing connection. Stewardship without this intimate lordship is powerless and empty. But with the presence of Christ, stewardship becomes a life transforming adventure—each day a new experience with Christ, each day a deeper walk with God.



Fix your thoughts on what is true and good and right.

*Think about things that are pure and lovely,
and dwell on the fine, good things in others.*

Think about all you can praise God for and be glad about.

PHIL. 4:8, TLB



The most acceptable service of God is doing good to man.

BENJAMIN FRANKLIN



*We must alter our lives in order to alter our hearts,
for it is impossible to live one way and pray another.*

WILLIAM LAW





*Grace is an energy; not a mere sentiment;
not a mere thought of the Almighty;
not even a word of the Almighty.*

*It is as real an energy as the energy of electricity.
It is a divine energy; it is the energy of the divine affection
rolling in plenteousness toward the shores of human need*

BENJAMIN JOWETT



*Grace is the love that gives—
that loves the unlovely and the unlovable.*

OSWALD C HOFFMANN

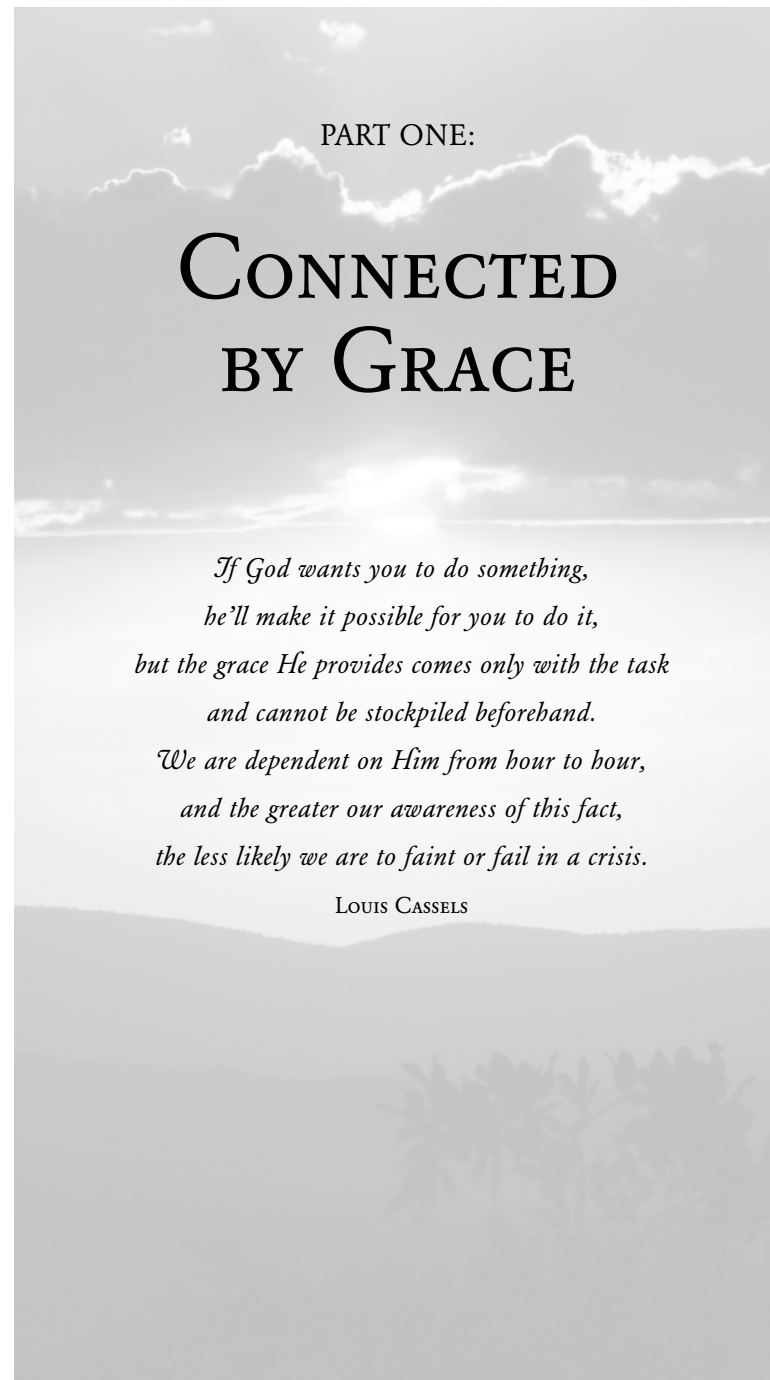


PART ONE:

CONNECTED BY GRACE

*If God wants you to do something,
he'll make it possible for you to do it,
but the grace He provides comes only with the task
and cannot be stockpiled beforehand.
We are dependent on Him from hour to hour,
and the greater our awareness of this fact,
the less likely we are to faint or fail in a crisis.*

LOUIS CASSELS



INCREDIBLE PARTNERSHIP



God is the silent partner in all great enterprises.

ABRAHAM LINCOLN

*Man has the honor of being taken into partnership with God,
and the secrets of the Lord are with them that fear Him.*

*God will give light and knowledge, so that,
by conforming to his directions,
man may become one with Jesus Christ.*

ELLEN G WHITE

Most of us know the theory that stewardship is more than tithes and offerings; that stewardship is more than managing money. When we stop to think about it, we recognize that God really is owner of everything we often claim as ours. We struggle applying this to daily life, but we at least acknowledge the concept. We talk about working for God and managing His resources. But as stewards we are more than God's employees—we are partners with God.

PARTNERS, NOT EMPLOYEES

There are different types of partnership. Normally, partners are two equals who bring something of equal value to the relationship. In some cases, one partner is the investor with the money and the other an expert with the knowledge. Sometimes partnership is a reward for a special service or superior performance. Our partnership with God, however, is quite different. After all, what can we bring to this partnership?

God is owner of all. He gives us abilities and talents, He provides all the resources, He gives us our very life. We really don't bring anything of our own to this relationship with God; we merely choose to accept the privilege of partnering with Him. And God will not force us into this incredible partnership.

INTERDEPENDENCY AND INTIMACY

God's partnership with Noah provided a means to save the human race. When God chose Moses, Israel marched out of Egypt. When God inspired Daniel, prophecy revealed the future of God's people. But the ultimate partnership was in the incarnation, when God and man become one. This is a powerful model of how God works with us in a unique partnership.

Jesus modeled interdependence with God. Throughout the Gospel of John, we find repeated references to this partnership: "The Father loves the Son and has placed everything in his hands" (3:35). "I and the Father are one" (10:30). These and many other passages reveal the intimacy between the Father and the Son. They are models of what God desires for us.

The Gospel of John provides a foundation for understanding the depth of our potential intimacy with God. Speaking of the coming of the Holy Spirit, Jesus says "On that day you will realize that I am in my Father, and you are in me, and I am in you" (14:20). In John 15, the vine provides a vivid metaphor of this partnership: "I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing" (15:5). And Jesus clos-

es His prayer to His Father with “that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me” (17:21).

IDENTITY, POSITION, AND POWER

Our partnership with God is a productive partnership. Paul says “For we are God’s workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do” (Ep 2:10). In Philippians, he declares that “it is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose” (2:13).

In addition God takes us, who have been slaves to sin (Rm 6), and lifts us to the position of friends (Jn 15:13-15). This friendship includes being “seated with Christ on His throne in heavenly places” (Rv 3:21; Ep 2:7). So this partnership includes identity—we are part of God’s family and His friends. It includes position—He places us at His side. It includes power—all we need to do His will (Php 4:19; 2P 1:3-4). And it produces fruit or results (Ep 2:10; Jn 15:5).

OUR ROLE IN PARTNERSHIP

So what is our role in this partnership? First, we must be willing to accept it as a gift. We cannot earn it, and God does not give it to us because of our ability. Instead, it is an incredible act of God’s grace which makes it possible. This is why this partnership is so humbling to us. We would rather think of God needing to reward our performance than to accept it as a gift.

Second, we must realize that this gift goes far beyond the human partnership. It becomes a union—a blending of the divine within the human. We become partakers of His divine nature (2P 1:4). We do not become divine, but God dwells within us. We do not lose our identity; instead we discover our true identity. We discover who God created us to be in the first place.

God created Adam in His own image, to reflect His image. In an incredible act of intimacy, God shaped him with His own hands. Then He gave him dominion over the world He had just created. Thus, God began a unique partnership with man. When sin destroyed this partnership, God restored our union with Him through the life and death of Jesus Christ and through the ministry of the Holy Spirit that makes the presence of Christ in our hearts a living reality (Ep 3:16-19). Christ, dwelling within the human heart, provides a new union, a new image, a new intimacy. And this partnership produces powerful results.

“All true obedience comes from the heart. It was heart work with

Christ. And if we consent, He will so identify Himself with our thoughts and aims, so blend our hearts and minds into conformity to His will, that when obeying Him we shall be but carrying out our own impulses. The will, refined and sanctified, will find its highest delight in doing His service. When we know God as it is our privilege to know Him, our life will be a life of continual obedience. Through an appreciation of the character of Christ, through communion with God, sin will become hateful to us”—*Desire of Ages*, p 668.

STEPPING FORWARD

The third step is to step forward in faith, exercising the partnership He has given us. We make choices, and as we walk with God, His Spirit guides and empowers our choices. We act in a partnership that goes far beyond our very best imagination. We do not work for Him, but rather are in intimate union with Him.

No human partnership can compare. No human partnership can illustrate. The very God of the universe calls us to return to Him, to the relationship for which we were created. Then every part of life becomes an exciting adventure of walking with God, applying partnership with Him to each moment and each action.



*We really don't bring anything of our own
to this relationship with God;
we merely choose to accept the privilege of partnering with Him.
And God will not force us into this incredible partnership.*

THE WONDER OF GRACE



*Lord, I crawled across the barrenness to you with my empty cup,
uncertain in asking any small drop of refreshment.*

*If only I had known you better
I'd have come running with a bucket.*

NANCY SPIEGELBERG

*When the mask of self-righteousness has been torn from us
and we stand stripped of all our accustomed defenses,
we are candidates for God's generous grace.*

ERWIN W LUTZER

Grace—a simple, monosyllabic word, embedded in a depth of meaning. *Unmerited favor* is getting what we don't deserve. *Cheap grace* is claiming grace while choosing to live in sin. Further study finds us confronted with an even broader range of meanings. A person can be graceful or move in a graceful way. Grace can be a noun or a verb. Depending on usage, it can function as an adverb or an adjective. Even in Scripture we see a wide diversity of its use. For now, however, let's focus on God's grace towards us—sinners saved by grace.

What kind of picture does God's grace bring to us? Grace has often been defined by comparing it with justice and mercy. Here's an example: Imagine yourself driving down the road, breaking the speed limit, and a police officer stops you. If he gives you a ticket, that is justice, for you got what you deserve. If he lets you off with just a warning, that is mercy, for though you deserved a ticket, he did not give you one. However, if instead of charging you, he personally escorts you to your destination—that is grace—for he gave you more than mercy, more than pardon, more than you ever expected, more than you could ever deserve.

INTEGRAL TO THE GOSPEL

Scripture presents grace as an integral part of the gospel. God loves us with an everlasting love—a love that drove Him to give His Son to die. Christ dying for us is the essence of biblical grace. Without Calvary we could never understand or experience grace. The cross is the ultimate demonstration of the depths and cost of God's grace. Cheap grace is a denial of the true effect of God's grace. Only one who has never truly experienced God's grace would be tempted to diminish the impact and effects of grace.

The crucial issue goes far beyond just the meaning of a word. Do we really understand grace? Do we accept grace? Do we experience grace? Do we then, in turn, extend grace to others? Grace becomes relevant only when we experience and integrate it into our lives. Theory alone is useless.

PAST, PRESENT, FUTURE

There are three dimensions to grace—past, present, and future. Past grace is what God did for us on Calvary. He provided salvation for all who believe. "Because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions; it is by grace you have been saved" (Eph 2:4-5).

Present grace is the realization of the promised presence of God—the presence that brings strength to live each moment of life in Him. “God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that in all things at all times, having all that you need, you will abound in every good work” (2Co 9:8).

Future grace is the promise that the future is already taken care of; God is in control. This means that victory is possible in Jesus Christ. Through His Holy Spirit, He has provided everything we need to live daily in Him. “The God of all grace, who called you to his eternal glory in Christ, after you have suffered a little while, will himself restore you and make you strong, firm and steadfast” (1P 5:10).

THREE WONDERFUL ASPECTS

I understand three wonderful aspects to experiencing grace! The first is to accept God’s grace, to accept His forgiveness and salvation. It seems almost too good to be true. How can God love us in such a way that He is willing to die for us? The Scriptures assure us that it is true. Paul says “we are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus” (Rm 3:24). The testimony of others who have experienced grace assures us that we also can have it. It is really as simple as believing that Jesus died for us; confessing our sins and believing He has fulfilled His promise to forgive us (1J 1:9); and believing that because we have trusted in Him, we have eternal life (1J 5:11-13).

The second aspect of experiencing grace is integrating it into life. We can move beyond accepting what God has done for us to what He can do in us. Part of the wonder of the gospel is that while God accepts us in our sin, He does not leave us there. When we accept Him as Savior and surrender our lives to Him as Lord, He begins a process of transforming us. He miraculously fills us with His Spirit (Ez 36:26, 27). Through His Spirit He brings the living presence of Christ into our hearts (Ep 3:16-19). God even makes us partakers of His divine nature (2P 1:3, 4). All of this becomes ours through a choice of the will to believe that God will do what He has promised. That leads to a choice to accept by faith that it is a current reality when we choose to accept it. And finally, a choice to make every decision, every issue of life, an opportunity to surrender to His will and His control. It is fascinating to notice that even believing is the result of experiencing God’s grace (Ac 18:27).

REACHING OUT

The third aspect of experiencing grace is to extend the grace we have received to others. In a sense, we can never fully experience God’s grace until we integrate it into the way we treat one another. This is why Paul says, “So from now on we regard no one from a worldly point of view. Though we once regarded Christ in this way, we do so no longer. Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come” (2Co 5:16, 17). Paul includes the ministry of leading others to salvation as part of the effect of grace.

“Through him and for his name’s sake, we received grace and apostleship to call people from among all the Gentiles to the obedience that comes from faith (Rm 1:5). Even the gifts we have for ministry are part of this grace” (Rm 12:6; Ep 4:7). When we share the gospel with others we are extending God’s grace to them. When we forgive those who have wronged us we extend grace to them. Thus the one who has accepted God’s forgiving grace goes on to experience it even more fully by treating others with grace.

ENOUGH FOR TODAY

Oswald Chambers has this powerful statement on grace: “The grace you had yesterday will not be sufficient for today. Grace is the overflowing favor of God, and you can always count on it being available to draw upon as needed. . . . In much patience, in tribulations, in needs, in distresses, that is where our patience is tested. Are you failing to rely on the grace of God there? Are you saying to yourself, ‘Oh well, I won’t count this time’? It is not a question of praying and asking God to help you—it is taking the grace of God now.

“We tend to make a prayer the preparation for our service, yet it is never that in the Bible. Prayer is the practice of drawing on the grace of God. Don’t say, ‘I will endure this until I can get away and pray.’ Pray now—draw on the grace of God in your moment of need. Prayer is the most normal and useful thing; it is not simply a reflex action of your devotion to God. We are very slow to learn to draw on God’s grace for prayer.” (Oswald Chambers, *My Utmost for His Highest*, June 26.)

God invites us to come to Him at the throne of grace with the confidence that He loves us and has provided for all of our needs (Hb 4:16). We are believers. We have experienced His grace, and thus we accept the challenge of being stewards of God’s grace as we minister to one another (1P 4:10). Oh the wonder of God’s grace!

AN EXPERIENCE OF JOY



*The gospel is not so much a demand as it is an offer,
an offer of new life to man by the grace of God.*

E STANLEY JONES

*Because it was the message of God to humanity,
the gospel could only reveal itself in the simplest of garments.*

ADOLF DEISSMANN

I hate writing out a tithe check. But I will tithe even if it kills me,” the woman insisted. What drove her to this attitude? Why did she continue to give even though she really did not want to? How does this fit with what Ellen White says: “The Lord will not accept an offering that is made unwillingly, grudgingly”? (*Testimonies, vol 5, p 285*).

People have different reasons why they put money in an envelope and call it tithe or offering. Similarly the church uses different ways to motivate people to give. Most often we use traditional, human motivations. For example we use recognition and praise when we fund-raise. Sometimes we use guilt. At other times, we emphasize what giving will do for the donor. All these methods focus on the donors and their needs or desires. All these methods strengthen the power of selfishness.

THE FOUNDATION—THE GOSPEL

The very words tithe and offering describe a worship relationship—an act of adoration based on the salvation relationship. True worship begins with and is based on a relationship with Jesus, intimately knowing Jesus as Savior and Lord. This is why the gospel is the foundation for stewardship. Without the experience of the gospel, stewardship becomes simply a form of spiritual slavery—just another way of perpetuating a performance-based religion and life.

Even while talking about the gospel, we often misunderstand the term or use it in a limited way. Jesus spoke of the gospel of the kingdom. What is this “good news”? Is the gospel simply the act of forgiveness? Or is there a more dynamic meaning of salvation and the gospel? Can this deeper insight really help us broaden our understanding of stewardship? I find it helpful to explore the meaning of salvation through the act of salvation, the condition of salvation, the content of salvation, and the consequence of salvation.

THE ACT AND CONDITION OF SALVATION

The act of salvation took place on Calvary. God gave Jesus His Son to die. This act of grace is the central point of biblical salvation and the starting point for stewardship. Without this act, there is no salvation—no Christianity. We cannot be biblical stewards if we do not understand and personally accept this act of salvation. Through this act, God provides the gift of salvation and reestablishes the lordship relationship.

The condition of salvation focuses on what we have to do to receive and experience salvation. This becomes an area of debate when we confuse the role of obedience in the faith experience. Most of us agree that

salvation is a gift that can neither be bought nor repaid; we can only accept it. Yet acceptance is not merely mental assent; acceptance means surrendering to Jesus. It means dying to self. Salvation is not merely a bookkeeping transaction in heaven's records. It begins with an act on Calvary that initiates a process that solves the sin problem.

However, it is crucial that we realize that the only condition of salvation is that we accept the gift. This means the only condition for being lost is rejecting the gift. We must be very careful to avoid making our performance in any way a basis for our salvation. Although obedience cannot be fully separated from saving faith, we must clearly delineate that which provides us salvation.

A dynamic understanding of the gospel cannot end with the condition alone. Salvation is not only being declared just; it is also accepting Christ's solution for the sin problem in our lives. When we accept Jesus Christ as Savior, we receive Him and all that He brings.

THE CONTENT AND CONSEQUENCE OF SALVATION

The content of salvation is what we receive when we accept Jesus as Savior. He promises to come to us through the Holy Spirit (Jn 14:16-20) that we may be transformed with "power through the Spirit in the inner man, that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith" (Ep 3:15-16). He gives us His righteousness. He forgives us and He makes us a new creation (2Co 5:17). When we receive Christ, He brings the power of God into the human heart and we live from the very throne of God (Ep 2:6). All of this is included in Christ when we accept Him. The very life we live is lived in Him (Gal 2:20).

The consequence of salvation produces a life of discipleship and obedience. One cannot have Christ dwelling within and remain the same. God promises to give us a new heart and a new spirit (Ez 36:26-27). He promises to replace our heart of stone with a heart of flesh and to put His spirit in our hearts. He further states that He will cause us to walk in His principles. Paul presents the same concept when he states that it is God who will work in us to both will and do (Php 2:13). The natural result of experiencing Jesus as Savior also leads us to share with others what we have experienced.

MYSTERY OF GRACE

So how do we experience this dynamic salvation? There is no way to dissect the mystery of grace. The work of the Holy Spirit in a sinner's heart can be experienced but never described in full detail or understanding. Every part of this dynamic experience of salvation is

by faith and choice of the will. We choose to believe that what God says is true, and we choose to act—allowing God to work through us.

This brings us back full circle to stewardship as the integration of the saving relationship with Christ into every area of life. For many years, I understood lordship as obeying God. Today, I understand lordship as accepting Him at His word. And choosing to accept Him is the only way to work out His will in my life.

Because of our sinful nature and the influence of sin around us, each day we must choose to reaffirm our relationship with God. Each day we must accept His gift of grace. Each day we must surrender to His indwelling lordship. Each day we must abandon ourselves to Him to be controlled and empowered through the living presence of Christ. Only then will obedience be a joyful experience of seeing His power at work in the midst of our struggles.

LEGALISM TO JOY

This is how tithing becomes an experience of joy—reflecting on our relationship with God. When we bring this intimate partnership into the material area of life, we realize that everything we are and have belongs to Him. Joyfully we worship Him with tithe and offering, reminding our own hearts of who He is. Only the dynamic experience of salvation can move tithing, or any other part of life-style stewardship, out of the drudgery and slavery of legalism and into the joyful life of grace.

This is why stewardship must begin with a clear understanding and presentation of the gospel—the good news of salvation. Jesus Christ is Lord, Lord of every area of our lives. Thus the power of the Creator and Redeemer works in the life of the weakest believer. Rejoice! He is Lord.



Without Calvary we could never understand or experience grace.

*The cross is the ultimate demonstration of the depths
and cost of God's grace.*

UNDERSTANDING LORDSHIP



Every character has an inward spring; let Christ be that spring.

*Every action has a keynote; let Christ be that note
to which your whole life is attuned.*

HENRY DRUMMOND

Jesus cannot be our Savior unless he is first our Lord.

HUGH C. BURR

Stewardship is the human side of Lordship. Jesus is Lord and we are His stewards—managing the resources He has placed in our hands. The Lordship paradigm is the foundational concept undergirding all of stewardship. When we accept God as owner and give Him control, it transforms our entire approach to the way we live each day. Lordship is much more than simple surrender to God. It must be integrated into the very core of our being! Let's explore this paradigm, seeking to find ways to make it our own life perspective.

The apostle Paul presents Jesus Christ as Lord because of who He is and what He has done (Php 2:5-11). Being God, Jesus chose to empty Himself and become a man. Yet becoming human was not enough. He identified Himself with the essence of humanity, taking the form of a servant and dying our death on Calvary. In doing this, Christ identified Himself with our sin to the extent that He became “sin for us” (2Co 5:21). As a result, God has exalted Jesus, giving Him a name above all other names. And at the end of time, every tongue will declare Him Lord. So the fact that He is Lord is an eternal reality.

Sooner or later every person will acknowledge that Jesus is Lord. But it is not enough to say He is Lord. At the end of the millennium, even the wicked will admit Christ is Lord. It must be a confession of relationship with Him if it is to transform our lives.

MORE THAN OBEDIENCE

Too often we see Lordship as simple obedience. “God says it; we do it.” While containing an element of truth, this approach ultimately leads to failure and discouragement. The power for obedience is often missing. We try to obey only to fail again and again, attempting to do by human force of will what only God can empower.

At other times we understand Lordship to mean the loss of control. Once again, there is an element of truth here. But it must be much more. It is a surrender that leads to an even more powerful life.

Lordship is intimacy with God. It happens as Christ dwells in us and we integrate that relationship into daily life. It is the result of accepting Christ as Savior, Owner, and present within us, through the ministry of the Holy Spirit.

- As Savior, He forgives and saves us
- As Owner, He controls us
- As present within us, He empowers us

BORN FOR INTIMACY

Lordship began with creation; Adam and Eve were created for inti-

macy with God. Adam began life in the cradle of God's arms, awakened by the kiss of life. Discovering God and his own identity in relationship with God were his first conscious thoughts. As humans we are born with the capacity for, as well as the need of, intimacy with the Almighty. And we will never be at peace, never be satisfied, until we find that union with God for which we were created.

Lordship is the realization of that union for which we were born. In our relationship with Jesus Christ as Lord, we discover a level of intimacy where the core of our heart is transformed by the very presence of God. In giving the promise of "another Comforter," Jesus also promised to return to us (Jn 14:18). When the Comforter came, He brought the assurance of His presence: "On that day you will realize that I am in my Father, and you are in me, and I am in you" (Jn 14:20). This indwelling presence of Christ is the essential core of the biblical concept of Lordship.

Paul presents the promise "that according to the riches of his glory he may grant you to be strengthened with power through his Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith" (Ep 3:16-17, English Standard Version, ESV). Paul concludes that as a result of knowing the height and depth of God's love, we will be "filled with all the fullness of God" (Ep 3:15-19). This is the scope of the promised intimacy with God—Christ bringing the fullness of God into our lives.

RESTORING THE NATURAL ORDER

Lordship is also submission. It is realizing that our sinful nature places us in a natural position of rebellion against God—a position where we will create or be our own god. It is recognizing our innate "lostness" and accepting our need for a radically different life which is ours only when we die to self. The act of submission to God restores the natural order in which we were created. It allows God to resume His place on the throne of our life. It places us in the right relationship with God from which we can begin an entirely new life. By our submission we connect with God as the source of strength and power for living the daily life.

Christ invites us into a partnership. As He indwells us (Ep 3:16-17), His Lordship empowers our everyday activities. Accepting Him as owner, we manage His resources with His guidance and power. Therefore, whatever we do is done to God's honor and glory (1Co 10:31). Since it is His business, what is done in the name of that busi-

ness reflects on Him. We act in the name of the Lord, "And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him" (Col 3:17, ESV). Everything we do is done serving Him (Col 3:22-24).

A LIVING RELATIONSHIP

While this relationship offers so very much, it also confronts us with far-reaching demands that are in direct contrast to the contemporary Christianity which has been assimilated by the world around us. This Christianity has lost its power, for it has abandoned its source—the indwelling Christ. Instead of debating about issues of obedience or arguing about how to keep the Sabbath, as Lord, Jesus invites us into something much more radical—a life of intimate union with Him. Each part of that life is transformed by His presence.

Lordship means God says it and I do it. This is not because of my effort to obey. Instead it is the fulfillment of God's promise to work in us "both to will, and to do" (Php 2:13). He is Lord, and you and I have the privilege of living out this experience in every day life. How? By abiding in Him and allowing Him to abide in us. Thus, lordship moves from a theological expression to a living relationship with the King.



The Lordship paradigm is the foundation of all true stewardship.

Lordship is more than simple obedience or control.

It is based on an intimate relationship with and submission to Christ.

BENJAMIN C. MAXSON

Christ is not valued at all unless he be valued above all.

ST. AUGUSTINE

THE CALL TO SACRIFICE



Our notion of sacrifice is the wringing out of us something we don't want to give up, full of pain and agony and distress.

The Bible idea of sacrifice is that I give as a love-gift the very best thing I have.

OSWALD CHAMBERS

I never made a sacrifice. We ought not to talk of sacrifice when we remember the great sacrifice that he made who left his Father's throne on high to give himself for us.

DAVID LIVINGSTONE

Sacrifice to repay what God has done for you.... Give until it hurts.... In the average church, phrases like these are common stewardship arsenal. Though frequently used, these statements often reflect a non-biblical approach and attitude. But Scripture can help us gain a wider and better understanding of what sacrifice really means.

Sacrifice is not so much what we give up, but rather what we offer to God in recognition of who He is and who we are in relationship to Him. Worship was the context for the first biblical sacrifice. Abel and Cain brought their offerings to God. One was accepted; the other rejected. The difference lay in their attitudes of giving. Abel willingly followed God's instructions; Cain, full of pride, chose another way. "By faith Abel offered God a better sacrifice than Cain did. By faith he was commended as a righteous man, when God spoke well of his offerings. And by faith he still speaks, even though he is dead" (Hb 11:4).

In this first sacrifice lies the foundation for the entire concept: What we give to God, and how we give, reflects an internal attitude toward God. We find the same true meaning of sacrifice in God's rejection of King Saul. His offering of animals was unacceptable because of His attitude of rebellion against God's direct instructions. "Does the Lord delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices as much as in obeying the voice of the Lord? To obey is better than sacrifice, and to heed is better than the fat of rams. For rebellion is like the sin of divination and arrogance like the evil of idolatry. Because you have rejected the word of the Lord, He has rejected you as king" (1S 15:22, 23).

SACRIFICE AND WORSHIP

In exploring sacrifice as worship, we discover powerful principles that can help us transform our lives into anthems of praise to our creator God.

The first sacrifice was offered in the Garden of Eden. Sin had destroyed the relationship between man and God. Shame had darkened the human heart for the first time. And in the shadows of eternity, God met the nakedness of guilt and shame with the symbolic covering of animal skins. For the first time, an innocent life was sacrificed because of a sinner's guilt. Humanity was banned from Eden. Yet the restoration of Eden was assured in the promise of another sacrifice: "And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will crush your head, and you will strike his heel" (Gn 3:15). Calvary made that promise a historical reality. God's heel was bruised and the bonds of sin were broken.

Sacrifice for God meant the Innocent One dying so that the guilty one could live. For us, sacrifice must mean surrender, death in Him, and rebirth to a life of praise and worship. For God it meant loss and pain to restore His creation. For us it means resolution of our pain—death to sin and birth to His life and power.

The implications shatter the powerless stereotypes of cultural Christianity. In Christ, life becomes worship (Rm 12:1). As Creator and Redeemer, God owns all, and we acknowledge that relationship when we offer ourselves to Him. When we sacrifice anything, we are merely returning something to the original owner—recognizing what He has done in lifting us from sin to His very throne (Ep 2:7). Thus we really give up nothing but our sinful selves when we offer something to God in worship.

For the Christian, there can be no pain in giving (or in any other activity) that is traditionally termed “sacrifice.” We lose nothing and gain everything. For when we sacrifice in an offering of praise, what is already God’s, we reinforce our relationship with Him and strengthen His role in our lives. Pain in our giving only indicates our continued claim to ownership where the sense of sacrifice as loss prostitutes worship.

SACRIFICE AND DEATH

The Christian’s pain is in the surrender and dying to self. Through that surrender we conquer, and in giving we receive. Our worship in sacrifice becomes an ongoing celebration of a new life that refutes the materialistic hedonism of contemporary culture. This does not mean there is no suffering in the Christian’s life. It means that our suffering is experienced in the context of God’s grace—our pain and loss become opportunities to further integrate His strength into our lives.

So how do we attain this attitude of sacrifice? How do we grow into a lifestyle of praise that properly enthrones God in our lives? Only when we experience the wonder of God’s sacrifice on Calvary can we enter the sacrificial life. At the foot of the cross, the greatness of His gift overwhelms us. The depth of His passion breaks through the shallowness of our lives. The wonder of the perfect God dying our death convicts us of the immensity of our sin. Love awakens, trust builds, and we finally yield in confession. The offer of new birth invites us to risk our own crucifixion. The miracle happens. We are crucified with Christ, and His life becomes ours (Gal 2:20).

Yet self must be daily subdued. Dying in Christ is not a one-time

event. The highest worship God seeks is the yielding of our lives to Him as He recreates His life in us. To do this we must daily surrender our lives to Him. Is there giving up? Is there loss? Of course! But what do we give up? What do we lose? Only what was never ours to start with. Thus the simplicity of the Christian lifestyle frees us to better manage His resources to His honor and glory.

The initial worship of accepting Jesus as Savior grows as we daily accept Him as Lord. We choose to submit to His control as the owner of our lives as we consciously relinquish our own false claim to lordship and control. This is neither easy nor painless. Paul calls it dying daily (1Co 15:31). But the death is not of our identity and our hopes. It is the death to sin’s lie and the discovery of our true identity as men and women created in the image of God.

Our identity in God is fully realized when we accept the indwelling presence of Christ through His Spirit (Ep 3:14-21). Filled with His fullness, our lives are transformed into offerings of praise in the daily details and activities of life. “Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God’s mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God—this is your spiritual act of worship” (Rm 12:1).



*Sacrifice for God meant the Innocent One dying
so that the guilty one could live.*

*For us, sacrifice must mean surrender, death in Him,
and rebirth to a life of praise and worship.*

For God it meant loss and pain to restore His creation.

*For us it means resolution of our pain—
death to sin and birth to His life and power.*



*Treat people as if they were what they ought to be,
and you help them to become what they are capable of being.*

JOHANN WOLFGANG VON GOETHE



Our greatest weakness lies in giving up.

*The most certain way to succeed
is always to try just one more time.*

THOMAS EDISON



*There is nothing more potent than thought.
Deed follows word and word follows thought.*

GANDHI



PART TWO:

CONNECTED BY CHOICE

*Could we change our attitude
we should not only see life differently
but life itself would come to be different.*

*Life would undergo
a change of appearance
because we ourselves had undergone
a change of attitude.*

KATHERINE MANSFIELD

COME, BE A PART OF ME



Discipleship is anything that causes what is believed in the heart to have demonstrable consequences in our daily life.

EUGENE PETERSON

The world has yet to see what God can do with and for and through and in a man who is fully and wholly consecrated to Christ.

HENRY VARLEY

The scene repeats itself daily. God walks into your life and invites you to walk with Him, to open your life to His presence. It's called discipleship, and it is the most exciting privilege available today. In the beginning Adam and Eve began life in an intimate relationship with God. Soon after that perfect beginning sin distorted and destroyed that relationship. Ever since, God has sought to restore that relationship one person at a time.

Jesus began His ministry by calling twelve to accompany Him on a unique journey of ministry and sacrifice, a journey that would climax at the cross. The twelve were distinguished by their ordinariness, not by their talent, power, or position. Yet the journey took them from a cross to an upper room. From there, 120 disciples went out with a vision to change the world. And they did more than change it—they turned the world upside down! Since the 120, the power of Christianity has transformed culture and become the pivotal point in history. Yet today Christianity has lost its vitality, squandered its power, and become a cultural reflection of the world around it. So perhaps it is time to go back to the basics—to the basics of *making disciples*.

CHARACTERISTICS OF THE TRUE DISCIPLE

A disciple is one who walks with, learns from, and lives in submission to a master in order to become like the master. An exploration of the lives of great men and women in Scripture reveals five characteristics of the true disciple.

A disciple is passionately in love with Jesus Christ. We have been God's consuming passion for 6000 years. In ten different passages, He calls us to love Him with all our heart, mind, soul, and strength. He invites us to love Him as He loves us—passionately. If Jesus Christ is not our consuming passion, then someone or something else will be, and to that degree, we would be practicing a form of idolatry.

A disciple maintains intimacy with God. The level of passion in any relationship is in direct proportion to the level of intimacy. The Christian builds intimacy through daily time in prayer, Bible study, Scripture memorization, and meditation.

A disciple integrates God into every area of life. This is a second level of intimacy. A marriage needs two forms of intimacy—the physical and the sharing of life together. Without either of these, the passion will grow cold; this is true in our walk with God. It is not enough to have just a devotional life—the first level of intimacy. We need the second intimacy of inviting God to share every part of our lives. In this way

intimacy and passion grow in our relationship with God.

A disciple makes God a priority in every decision. If God is really God, then He is the most important factor in every area of life. When He is left out of our decision-making, we are in control. Some Christians are learning to decline promotions that offer more money because of the negative impact the promotion could have on their walk with God and their role in the church.

A disciple actively shares Christ with others. This does not mean the ability to explain all doctrines or answer all questions. It simply means sharing the testimony of what God has done in our lives.

These characteristics create a picture of vibrant Christianity that can transform daily life. Each one involves a process of ongoing growth. No one can reach a place where growth stops. Yet, tragically many Christians are such in name only—spiritual infants who never grow into disciples. Paul speaks of this kind of Christian when he prophesies that at the end of time there will be those who will have “a form of godliness, but denying its power” (2Tm 3:5).

CALLED TO MAKE DISCIPLES

The gospel commission (Mt 28:18-20) clearly challenges us to make disciples in the context of Christ’s promised presence and His power or authority in heaven and on earth. Could it be that we have been so busy counting converts that we have overlooked making disciples? Have we confused the desired end product of our evangelism? Are we caught in the trap of institutional greatness that has led us to overlook the essence of our mission—making disciples?

Let’s allow the Holy Spirit to move us away from the institutional, numerical dynamics of baptizing for numbers. Let’s move to the higher agenda of discipling. We must recognize that we can only disciple those who have first responded to the wonder of the gospel, finding peace and assurance of salvation. Without this relationship, any attempt to disciple is doomed to the failure of producing legalistic slaves—people focused on their own performance rather than the kingdom of grace.

It is this experience of the gospel that awakens the disciple’s passion for God. We then nurture this passion as we help the disciple train to be godly (1Tm 4:7). We must teach people to daily feed at God’s “banquet table” instead of relying on second-hand crumbs from others. We must teach them to focus on the life and ministry of Jesus. As we behold Him, we grow to love Him and trust Him enough to accept Him as lord of our lives.

THE ANSWER TO OUR GREATEST FRUSTRATION

Still it is not enough to affirm the gospel or accept God as owner. For it is here that the Christian’s greatest frustration comes. We know what we should do. We want to do it. Each time we try, we find ourselves frustrated by good but ineffectual efforts. All our attempts are frustrated by our inherent sinful nature that keeps breaking through.

The secret of discipleship is found in accepting the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit. He has promised to give us a new heart and to put His Spirit in our hearts (Ez 36:26, 27). This is the power that produces the fruit in the life of discipleship. Paul talks about being transformed by the Spirit, so that Christ can dwell in our hearts through faith (Ep 3:15-19). Discipleship is this intimate and powerful union or partnership with God. It is growing in this friendship as we become one with Him, and it is taking this relationship into every area of life.

Today, once again, God walks into your life and calls *Come, follow Me. Walk with Me. Live with Me. Let Me be part of your life.* He invites you to extend the invitation to others, and then walk beside them to help them become His disciples. It is a daily adventure—learning to live with the King of Kings, to live on His throne (Ep 2:6). Let God be God each day, in every decision and every area of life.



A disciple is one who walks with, learns from, and lives in submission to a master in order to become like the master.

It is time to make disciples.

It is time to let God be God and let the church become the Church—the Body of Christ!

WORSHIP AS SACRIFICE



*Worship is a way of living,
a way of seeing the world in the light of God ...
to rise to a higher level of existence,
to see the world from the point of view of God.*

ABRAHAM J HESCHEL

He who lives a life of love and charity is constantly at worship.

CROFT M PENTZ

Sacrifice! The very word triggers varied memories and emotions. Sacrifice means giving up something we want or need. It usually means pain and loss. Parents sacrifice for their children. Athletes sacrifice to excel. Business people sacrifice to succeed. Charities challenge us to sacrifice to help others. And Christ's sacrifice on our behalf calls us to sacrifice for Him.

Worship is another word that triggers a variety of reactions. We can all remember a boring church service, and we are moved by a stimulating worship. Congregations are divided over styles of worship, and members complain about changes in the order of worship.

A POWERFUL CALL

What happens when we combine the two concepts of worship and sacrifice? Normally we think of tithes and offerings. But Paul presents a powerful call as well as practical guidelines for daily life: "Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God—this is your spiritual act of worship" (Rm 12:1). Paul clearly calls for sacrifice, but not in giving up. Instead he challenges us to offer ourselves to God in worship. Could it be that we have focused too much on what we give up in place of what we offer to God?

The concept of sacrifice first appears in Genesis. These sacrifices indicate an offering to God and a foretelling of Christ's sacrifice. From that point on, worship is always integrated with biblical sacrifice. So let's explore a little more of what worship really means.

ACCEPT THE SACRIFICE

Sacrificial worship begins with accepting Jesus' sacrifice for us. Only when you experience God's love can you worship God. Sacrificial worship means reconciling with God—restoring the relationship with God that has been broken by sin. Because of Adam's sin we are born into a broken relationship between man and God. Our own sinful acts perpetuate that brokenness.

God initiated reconciliation through Jesus' life and death. However, reconciliation between two estranged parties can never be forced. Each must desire restoration. What God accomplished on Calvary becomes real to us only when we accept it. To respond to His divine initiative, we need to face and confess our sin; accept His forgiveness; and rejoice in the reality of a restored relationship between Creator and creature. Thus the offering of ourselves to God in worship begins with bringing our sinful self to God in confession and repentance.

Our forgiveness is assured in Christ. Once we confess we can move on to thanksgiving and adoration, for our relationship is restored, and by faith we acknowledge it with worship. This worship may be the coming together with others in a corporate act. It may be a quiet moment of prayer. Or it may be a joyous celebration of God's goodness as we share our testimony of what God has done. But the greatest act of worship is to live out a living sacrifice—presenting each moment and each act of the day as an offering to God. “So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God” (1Co 10:31).

A LIFE FILLED WITH GRACE

Worship is also recognizing who God is and who we are in relationship to Him. He is Creator, Redeemer, and Owner. We are redeemed sinners, saved by grace. Our identity and status come from Him. We recognize that we belong to Him. Everything we have is first His. We face life with a different perspective. Since everything belongs to Him, we only have things and talents in sacred trust. How we use and manage possessions—how we live each day, becomes an exciting adventure. There is an awesome sense of expectancy as we wait for God to break into our lives in new and powerful ways.

Worship is also a life lived in grace, experiencing God's grace and extending it to those around us. The experience of salvation changes the way we see and treat each other. “For Christ's love compels us because we are convinced that one died for all, and therefore all died. And he died for all, that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for him who died for them and was raised again. So from now on we regard no one from a worldly point of view. Though we once regarded Christ in this way, we do so no longer. Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come” (2Co 5:14-17).

Thus worship helps us integrate our walk with God into our relationship with others. How we treat others becomes a reflection of our own experience of grace. Home and workplace become worship sites as we bring God from the intimacy of our devotional life into the activity and business of daily life.

Still further, our bodies become living temples for the presence of God (1Co 6:19). Paul even challenges us to “honor God with your body” (v 20). There is no part of life that can be excluded from this lifestyle of worship. Each part is offered to God as a living sacrifice.

SET APART FOR DIVINE USE

What happens then when we offer ourselves in worship to God? First of all, Paul tells us that it is pleasing to God (Rm 12:1). What is dedicated or offered to God is also holy—set apart for divine use. He has the prerogative to choose to use what is His as He wills. Enoch walked right into heaven; Noah spent 120 years building an ark and preaching the gospel; Abraham became the father of God's people; Jonah went from the belly of a fish to preach to a pagan nation; Jesus walked on earth as a man and offered His life on a cross—these, and many more, are lives of worship that inspire us today.

We offer what we have to Him in worship, and suddenly we discover that He places even more in our lives that our joy might grow in our relationship with Him. That more may be material blessings held in trust. It may be new challenges and opportunities. It may be a greater intimacy with Him. Or it may be the strange joy of sharing in His sufferings (Rm 5:3; 1P 4:13). Worship is each moment of life lived in a vibrant awareness of God's presence and partnership.

Now we have choices to make. Will we worship God? “Through Jesus, therefore, let us continually offer to God a sacrifice of praise—the fruit of lips that confess his name (Hb 13:15). Will we live with Him, or will we fragment our lives into pieces, some offered to God, and some lived on our own? Will we worship only with our lips, or will we offer Him everything we do, everything we have, and everything we are?”



*The greatest act of worship
is to live out a living sacrifice—
presenting each moment and each act of the day
as an offering to God.*

MONEY AND PASSION



*Building one's life on a foundation of gold is just like
building a house on foundations of sand.*

HENRIK IBSEN

Money never made a man happy yet, nor will it.

There is nothing in its nature to produce happiness.

The more a man has, the more he wants.

Instead of its filling a vacuum, it makes one.

If it satisfies one want, it doubles and triples that want another way.

BENJAMIN FRANKLIN

Have you ever thought of trying to live without money? It would be rather difficult, especially in today's world. On the other hand, have you ever thought of living without God? What if you had to choose between money and God?

Jesus contrasts the competing power of money with God by stating "No one can serve two masters. Either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and money" (Mt 6:24). There are few places where God makes such a direct comparison. Yet the competition is very real. Money competes for our interest, our time, our energy. It easily distracts us from more important priorities.

Money plays a critical role in our lives. We cannot deal without it. Even God's church has to deal with money. So, is the issue one of whether or not we will work with money, or is it a matter of the comparative level of importance or priority it has in our lives? Is it a matter of what we love—a matter of where we focus our passion?

TWO FORCES

Where is your passion? What motivates and drives your life? Though not easy to answer, these questions reflect two contrasting forces shaping our life and character.

Jesus said "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength (Mk 12:30). And Paul tells Timothy, "For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil. Some people, eager for money, have wandered from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs" (1Tm 6:10).

What is it about money that is so alluring, so tempting? Stop and think for just a moment. How do you feel when the bills are due and you don't have the money you need? Then how do you feel when you cash your surprise birthday check and you have \$100 in your pocket? There is a strange sense of security when you have enough money. With enough money you can purchase just about everything else. Or at least that is often the thought: "Just think of what we could do if we just had a little more money!"

Pause for a moment and consider how much of our society centers around money—how to get more, and how to spend it. Money is equated with success and power, with recognition and position, with accomplishment and importance. On the other hand, the lack of money is often seen as failure and weakness.

GOD OWNS ALL

So how do we deal with money, since we cannot get away from it? The starting point is to recognize what God said through the prophet Haggai: “The silver is mine and the gold is mine’ declares the Lord Almighty” (Hg 2:8). Stop and reflect on what would change if this concept became reality in our thinking. How would our priorities be different? Would we choose to use our time differently? Would we place greater importance on relationships? Would we give God more time? Would we change the way we think or the way we act?

We cannot truly accept God as owner unless we learn to trust Him. Only when we experience the treasure of God’s love and grace can we deal correctly with material treasures. Without the security of a personal walk with God, we will seek security on our own. In this materialistic world, we will search for security in money or in that which money can buy. But regardless of how much we have, security eludes us—for money is always temporary and what it buys rapidly wastes away. The wise man said, “Whoever loves money never has money enough; whoever loves wealth is never satisfied with his income. This too is meaningless” (Ec 5:10).

ONLY A SYMBOL

The true value of money can only be seen in the context of God’s kingdom. Money is only a tool or a symbol. Thirty pieces of silver purchased Judas’ betrayal of His Master. Two mites demonstrated the relationship of faith and trust of a lonely widow whose only support was a God she had learned to worship. The pieces of silver were cast back at the feet of those who had rejected the Savior. The two mites continue to stimulate endless gifts of grace and love. Money we invest in this world ultimately passes away. What we invest in God’s kingdom stores up treasures for eternity.

Does this mean that we should give all our money to God? Of course not. It already belongs to Him. What it means is that we recognize that every part of life may become an act of worship as we manage God’s assets in the different dimensions of His kingdom: Tithe becomes a recognition of who God is and who we are. Offerings become acts of worship and praise, celebrating the wonder of a God who provides for all our needs. And what we invest in supplying our family needs is also an act of worship as we care for those God has put in our immediate trust.

MONEY REFLECTS YOUR WALK

The key issue is one of attitude. One approach says we are the owners. The other joyfully confesses our dependence on God as the owner of all. Even more importantly, if we do not recognize God as the owner of the money He places in our hands to manage, then that money begins to own us. This is why God makes a contrast in the context of who or what we serve. “You cannot serve both God and money.”

So, how we manage our money becomes a reflection of our walk with God. Our check registers are a constant diary telling the stories of how we make God the priority in our lives. Do we allow our meaning and security to come in our walk with God, or do we seek them in our ability to accumulate and use the wealth of material possessions for our own purposes? It is really a question of who or what will be God in our lives. So choose today! What has won the passion of your heart? Is it money? Or is it God?



Money plays a critical role in our lives.

We cannot deal without it.

But what level of importance or priority

does it have in our lives?

It all comes down to what we love

and where we focus our passion.

THE CALL TO CHOOSE



A budget is a theological document.

It indicates who or what we worship.

JAMES S. HEWETT

Beware of little expenses: a small leak will sink a great ship.

BENJAMIN FRANKLIN

We walk through life ignoring the major choice we face in each activity of every day: “Whom will we serve? Which god will we follow?” Though Scripture describes this confrontation in only a few places, each generation faces the same decision.

The confrontation on the mountaintop was between 850 false prophets and one prophet of God. The issue was worship—which god will the people serve (1Kg 18:21)? The challenge seemed so simple; the decision so easy. Yet it was a battle of life and death. The result was a revival that changed the direction of a nation.

We face a similar confrontation. In each activity, every day, Christ calls us to choose the god we will serve. And at every moment the choice is one of life or death. The call to choose is bold and clear in most of life’s activities. However, when the situation is tied to our heart, the call is faint. Our personal finances is one such area: money and the heart are so co-dependent that the battle becomes fierce and Christ’s call seems but a whisper.

PURSUING THE CREATOR

Why is money such an issue for God? Why does He refer to money or material possessions in more than 2200 biblical verses? Why can the way we deal with money compete with God? We cannot be God’s stewards and serve both God and money. Stewardship is a lifestyle lived within the lordship of Jesus Christ—discipleship. And how we integrate God into the material side of life is financial discipleship.

It is really a matter of whom, or what, we follow and depend on. If God is really owner, then to choose or focus on material things means to turn our back on the Creator. When we pursue the created instead of the Creator, we create our own materialistic god. We focus on material things for many reasons: planning for the future; providing for our families; achieving success; gaining independence; becoming wealthy; and even providing for the church. As innocuous and even necessary as many of these reasons may appear, they actually deny God’s role in our lives. Thus, a focus on the material becomes essentially self-centered, building a reliance on ourselves and effectively making us our own gods.

FOCUSING ON SELF

When money takes priority in our lives, we begin to build confidence in our own ability to provide for our needs, thereby effectively removing God from His position as owner and provider. We lose faith

in Him when we place our faith in ourselves.

Paul wrote to young Timothy, “For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil. Some people, eager for money, have wandered from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs” (1Tm 6:10). Paul realized how the love of money as a self-centered lifestyle can produce great evil in our lives. This clearly takes the place of God’s invitation to love Him with all our hearts (Dt 6:5; Mk 12:30).

We cannot simply ignore the issue of finances. After all, money is an integral part of life; it can challenge daily living in many different ways. Therefore, it is important to focus on how we can integrate our relationship with God into the way we deal with money.

MAKING GOD FIRST

When dealing with the critical area of material possessions, we must realize that stewardship is really a lifestyle lived within the lordship of Jesus Christ. Within this stewardship lifestyle exists financial discipleship—the actions and attitudes that integrate God into the material side of life. Tithes and offerings are an important part of that financial discipleship.

Financial discipleship means making God primary in managing our finances. It means surrendering ownership to God and inviting Him to be intimately involved in each decision. It means taking God at His word and trusting Him to provide while applying His principles to the material side of life.

GIVING HIM THE GLORY

The first step in financial discipleship is spiritual discipleship. We cannot make God lord of our material goods unless we first accept Him as lord of our lives. This starts with accepting the gift of the Cross, accepting the Savior who loves us and died for us. And we cannot expect to continue with God as lord of our lives if we do not allow Him to be lord of our material blessings.

When we accept Jesus as our personal Savior, He invites us to make Him first in our lives: “But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well” (Mt 6:33). Recognizing God as owner, we acknowledge that He provides for all our needs, and that He trusts us to manage what really belongs to Him. This means we have to surrender control to Him.

To integrate Christ into the financial side of our lives, we must prioritize life around God; we must learn to manage material things to His glory. One of the ways to do this is to recognize money as an indi-

cator of where our hearts are. Our checkbooks are a reflection of our discipleship.

TAKING IT TO THE LORD

So it is important that we worship God in the way we deal with our money. This means we put Him first in our decisions about money. For example, our tithes and offerings are part of worship that remind us that God is owner. Similarly, it is just as important to make every financial decision an act of worship. We must bring God into every decision-making process, asking Him to guide us in applying scriptural principles to how we use our money.

We cannot allow wrong motives to determine how we use money, or even how we determine what to give as tithe or offerings. Greed, recognition, or reward cannot help us in our worship. Motives can interfere with worship, making it self-centered. Only the Holy Spirit can be an effective guide to our decisions. Financial discipleship is really just an extension of our relationship with God as lord into the management of our physical or material blessings.

Financial discipleship opens gates of opportunities to glorify God in daily life! It is a way to exalt Him in our own hearts before the world.



*Financial discipleship means making God primary
in managing our finances.*

*It means surrendering ownership to God
and inviting Him to be intimately involved in each decision.*

*It means taking God at His word and trusting Him
to provide while applying His principles to the material side of life.*

MOVING TO GOD'S BLESSINGS



*When we acknowledge God's ownership,
every spending decision becomes a spiritual decision.*

LARRY BURKETT

*Jesus Christ said more about money than any other single thing
because money is of first importance
when it comes to a person's real nature.
Money is an exact index to our true nature.*

HOWARD DAYTON

Jim and Diane are struggling in their relationship. Like many other couples, what started as friction over spending habits has escalated into financial distress. Each one defines his or her needs differently and their arguments now threaten the very stability of their home.

This brief scenario is not new or rare. Studies show that the majority of divorced couples list financial troubles as a primary contributing factor to their divorce. Ignoring the issue of family finances only endangers and weakens our homes. We must admit financial concerns are a major issue in far too many homes today.

STRUGGLING TO DEFINE YOUR NEEDS

The normal way of dealing with finances is the “Needs Based Approach.” With this approach, we determine our spending and managing of family finances based on what we define as our needs. Often, we confuse needs with wants and desires. For example, we need transportation—a basic car. We want a nice car, and we desire a luxury or sport model. This is one point where contention can begin as each family member struggles to define their “needs.” Then we struggle to meet our needs by working harder or investing smarter.

This “Needs Based Approach” has several key presuppositions:

- It's “my” money
- I know what I need
- I can provide for my needs
- More money means greater satisfaction
- Life is about meeting my needs

The implications of this approach are serious:

- I am rarely satisfied because I never have “enough”
- I act as owner and can easily feel threatened by others
- I can find myself trapped in materialism
- I lose interest in others and their needs
- I become more selfish and self-centered

TRANSFORMING OUR “CORE” EXISTENCE

There is another way of looking at family finances. It is the “God's Blessings Approach.” Looking at finances in this way, we recognize that God has already blessed us with material possessions, and it is our duty to glorify Him by how we use them. This approach transforms the very core of our existence.

The “God’s Blessings Approach” also has some key presuppositions:

- It is all God’s money—He is the Owner
- God knows what I need
- God provides everything I need
- I am a manager of God’s possessions
- God invites me to glorify Him with what He has placed in my hands

The implications of this approach are radical:

- I learn to trust God in the daily needs of life
- I find peace of mind in financial issues
- I discover contentment with what God has provided
- I rejoice in the privilege of partnership with God
- I learn to invest God’s resources in His kingdom as I manage His money

STEPS TO A RADICAL TRANSITION

So how do we move from a “Needs Based Approach” to “God’s Blessings Approach?” What has to happen in our thinking to make this radical transition?

Step 1. Accept God’s ownership. This means making a conscious choice. It may even mean turning ownership of your material possessions back over to God. Some people have even found it helpful to write out a “quick claim deed” transferring their things back to God.

Step 2. Actively seek God’s guidance. No one else has the right to tell you how you should live. This should be something between God and you.

Step 3. Decide to accept God’s purposes for money. These are to provide for your family, to help others, and to fund God’s mission.

Step 4. Define your needs—how much is enough? This means you have to differentiate between your needs, wants, and desires, as mentioned earlier. Again only God has the right to define these for you, and the family should be included in the dialogue in this process.

Step 5. Invest God’s money in His kingdom. In other words, do everything in your financial dealings to God’s glory. Whether we provide for our families, help others, or fund God’s mission, we do this guided by His Spirit, and with an attitude of praise and worship.

CONCLUSION

We live in a world that is obsessed with selfish desires and material possessions. Far too many Christians find themselves in financial bondage because they have accepted the world’s priorities and values. God has blessed us with everything we need to provide for our families and fund His mission. The issue is, “What will we do?” Will we live, based on our needs, or will we consciously choose to move into God’s kingdom and live within His blessings?



Struggles with family finances are real and threaten marriage.

The approach we take to our needs can make all the difference.

We need to move away from assessing our needs from a worldly viewpoint to one which centers in living in God’s blessings to us.



*Money is one of the acid tests of character
and a surprising amount of space is given to it in Scripture.*

*Whether a man is rich or poor,
observe his reaction to his possessions
and you have a revealing index to his character.*

OSWALD SANDERS



*God has given us two hands—
one to receive with and the other to give with.
We are not cisterns made for boarding;
we are channels made for sharing.*

BILLY GRAHAM



*It was not an accident
that seventeen of the thirty-six parables of our Lord
had to do with property and stewardship.*

WILLIAM JAMES DAWSON



*It is not the greatness of the gift
that makes the offering acceptable to God;
it is the purpose of the heart,
the spirit of gratitude and love that it expresses.*

ELLEN WHITE

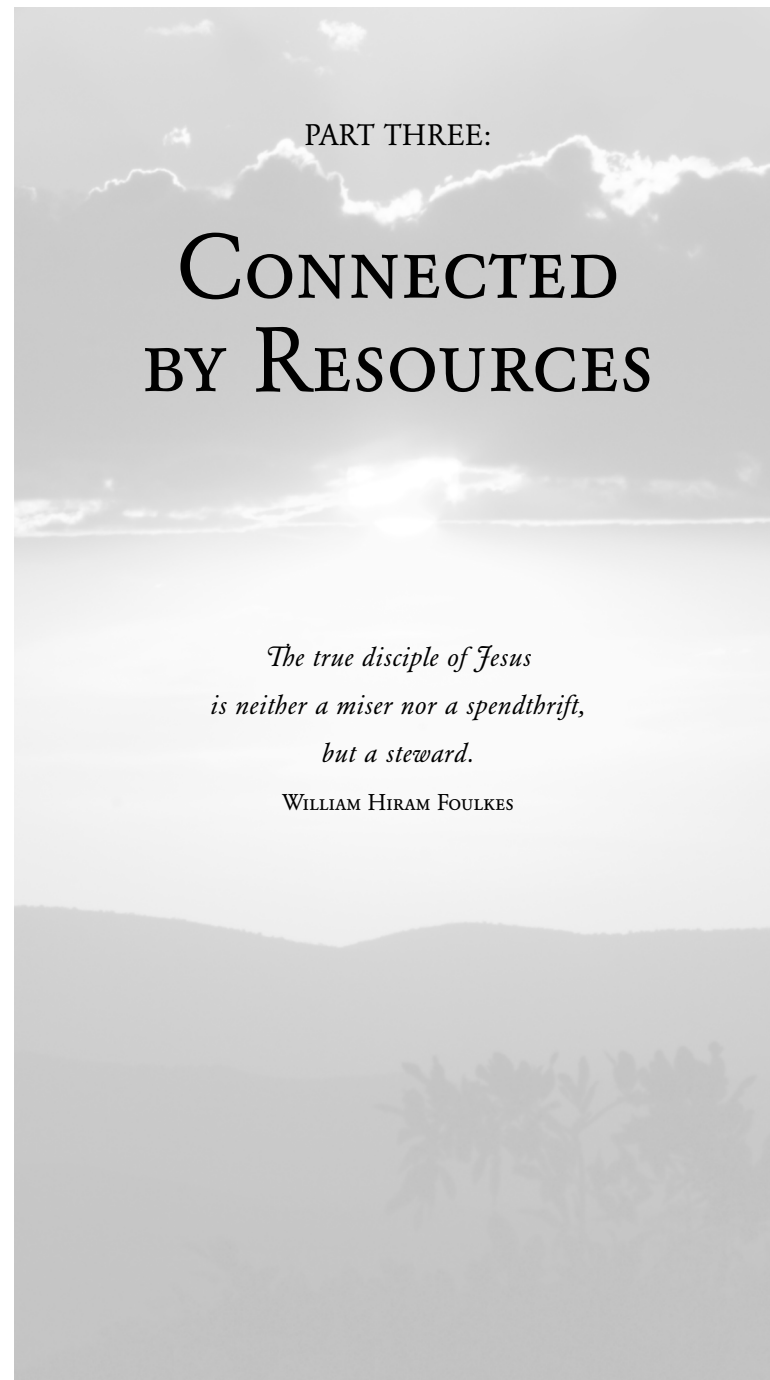


PART THREE:

CONNECTED BY RESOURCES

*The true disciple of Jesus
is neither a miser nor a spendthrift,
but a steward.*

WILLIAM HIRAM FOULKES



AN ACT OF WORSHIP



The system of tithes and offerings was intended to impress the minds of men with a great truth—that God is the source of every blessing to His creatures, and that to Him man’s gratitude is due for the good gifts of His providence.

ELLEN WHITE

We should give as we would receive, cheerfully, quickly, and without hesitation; for there is no grace in a benefit that sticks to the fingers.

SENECA

Jesus clearly portrays money as a direct competition to God, and speaks of the impossibility of serving both money and God (Mt 6:24). Tithe is one of the primary tools God uses to establish Himself as lord in our lives. How we deal with money, and more specifically, how we deal with tithe is a reflection of where God is in our lives.

In the days of Abraham and Jacob there was no physical church or membership to support. Yet Abraham and Jacob brought their first fruits, offering tithe to God in an act of worship. Later, when God established a corporate people with a corporate ministry, He gave what He received in tithes and offerings to the priests and Levites. For His people, the tithe continued to be an act of worship; for God it was a means to support His corporate body. The same is true today.

A REMINDER TO TRUST

When our hearts are right, we worship God each time we return our tithe and offerings to Him. Tithing is a worship experience that accepts our relationship with God. It is a worship experience where we acknowledge God as creator, and accept His ownership of who we are and what we have. Claiming ownership of our own usurps God’s right and His position. Tithing reminds us that redemption restores God’s ownership in our lives. “You are to be holy to me because I, the Lord, am holy, and I have set you apart from the nations to be my own” (Lv 20:26).

When we tithe, we consciously profess our trust in God to care and provide for us. When we tithe, we confess who He is in our lives and recognize His guidance and love. When we tithe, we deliberately choose to rely on Him. Thus we follow His guidance to not worry, and “seek first His kingdom and His righteousness” (Mt 6:33). Only when we experience salvation can we worship God. Only when we surrender to His lordship can we truly tithe.

TITHE—A SYMBOL FOR ALL LIFE

Understanding tithe in this way leads us to realize that tithe is holy, unique, different. It belongs to the Holy One; it is His to administer. Part of our worship with tithe is turning it over to Him to manage. What happens to the tithe is not our responsibility; our only responsibility is to worship God. However, when, as a part of church leadership, we manage tithe funds for God’s church, we must always remember that what we manage belongs to God, not to us.

A worship lifestyle includes accepting the responsibility to administer all of God’s gifts in partnership with Him. Tithe is not a way of

paying God off with a ten percent blackmail so we can do what we want to with the remaining ninety percent. Tithe is a sign of our willingness to manage what belongs to God—all of life—in an intimate walk with Him.

For tithe to be truly worship, we need to ask ourselves some questions on a regular basis: Who owns the home we live in? Who owns all the property we manage? Who has given us talent and strength to earn a living? Who has priority in our choices for everyday life? Who do we rely on each day? Do we really allow God to be God in every area of life?

ATTITUDE AND ACTION

So, how do we make our tithe truly worship? The answer lies in our attitude and action. Tithe as worship starts with a personal acceptance of Jesus Christ as savior and lord. Next is a decision to consciously recognize God as the owner of all that we have and are. Then comes an attitude of management rather than ownership.

Now, turn that attitude into acts of conscious worship, and make tithing an intentional act, not just a habit: Fill out your tithe envelope with a prayer of thanksgiving and praise; place the envelope in the offering plate with the assurance of divine partnership; live every moment acknowledging Jesus as lord of your life; do every deed conscious of the divine partnership you have with God.

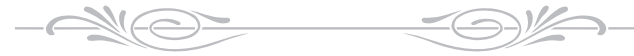
So, what about you? Is your tithe worship? Only you and God know the answer. And only you can choose to make it so!



Only when we experience salvation can we worship God.

Only when we surrender to His lordship can we truly tithe.

Understanding tithe in this way leads us to realize that tithe is holy, unique, different. It belongs to the Holy One; it is His to administer.



The world asks, How much does he give.

Christ asks, Why does he give?

JOHN RALEIGH MOTT



*Should all whom God has prospered with earth's riches
carry out His plan by faithfully giving a tenth of all their increase,
and should they not withhold their trespass offerings
and their thank offerings,
the treasury would be constantly replenished.*

ELLEN WHITE



A TOOL FOR DISCIPLESHIP



*Christian giving is God's divine plan to make us like Himself;
it reveals our religion and bares our souls;
it is prophetic and has to do with the inner sensitiveness
and gives a keener vision to His work and plans.*

WARREN H. DENISON

*Give, and it shall be given unto you; good measure, pressed down,
and shaken together, and running over.*

JESUS CHRIST

Much of the contemporary debate on tithe focuses on limited questions. Should we tithe? Where should we tithe? Why should we tithe? This discussion really ignores the real issues: Why did God establish the tithing system? Does tithe have a purpose beyond paying church bills? Can we understand tithe in a way that helps us grow in our walk with God?

The story of Abraham and Melchizedek (Gn 14:20) is the first example of tithing. The second example appears when Jacob makes a commitment to tithe in response to God's blessings (Gn 28:22). Neither of these examples are a response to a new directive from God. They are simply a continuation of a normal lifestyle of worship. Through tithe, these men were acknowledging God's involvement in the material side of their lives. They were not supporting a church—there was no church to support. They were simply worshipping God.

Later, when God gave Israel direct instruction on tithing, it was again in the context of worship. They were to offer their tithes and offerings at the sanctuary—the dwelling place for God's name (Dt 12:5-6, 11). God received the tithe and used it to provide for the ministry of the sanctuary through the priests and Levites.

As we continue to explore the biblical record, we find tithing connected with the call to revival (2Ch 31; Ne 12-13; and Mal 3). The real issue is always worship—how we acknowledge our relationship with God as Owner and Redeemer.

JESUS' PERSPECTIVE

However, one of the most important points for understanding God's rationale for tithing is found in what Jesus said in Matthew 6:25-34. He places money and material things in direct competition with God in our lives. He confronts us with a choice as to whom we will serve and how we will serve Him. It is interesting to note that the context is the basic necessities of life, not luxuries. A life *focused* on providing the bare necessities of food and clothing is identified as pagan. Instead of such a focus, Jesus challenges us: "But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you" (v. 33, ESV).

Though it does not appear in the immediate context of Matthew 6, tithing is one of God's primary tools in our "discipleship journey" to help us keep our focus on Him, while we deal with the material world. As we tithe, we place God first. We acknowledge Him as the owner of everything we have in our hands. We admit we are stewards—managers.

So we need to explore ways of improving our worship as we tithe. There are a number of things we can do in order to improve our attitude of worship.

Step 1: Accept our relationship with God

The first way is to recognize that true worship can only come from a heart in tune with God. So, the first step is to accept our relationship with God. This starts with confessing our sin, accepting forgiveness, and rejoicing in our eternal life. We are then in a new relationship with Jesus, and when we tithe, we can affirm our salvation in Christ and celebrate Him as our Redeemer. This redemption reestablishes His ownership in our lives.

Step 2: Accept God as Creator

The second step in making our tithe worship is to accept God as our Creator. As such, He can also recreate and give us new life. As Creator, He provides for all our needs. We acknowledge this as worshipping Him by putting Him first in returning our tithe. By seeking His kingdom and His righteousness first, we make a choice to live a new life. In this way, tithing is a tool that helps us change our priorities.

Step 3: Surrender our ownership and accept His

Tithe is worship when it comes from one who has accepted the reality of God as owner. This is the next step. We choose to surrender our ownership and accept His. It means we recognize that everything we have in our hands belongs to God. We are only managing it. We worship God with our tithe to remind us that everything really does belong to Him—to help us manage the 100 percent to His honor and glory. In this way we accept our responsibility to carefully oversee all the gifts He has placed in our care.

Step 4: Recognize God's care, guidance, and love

We also make tithe an act of worship when we recognize God's providential care, guidance, and love to us. The tithe we return to God reminds us that He cares for us—that He is intimately involved in all the details of our lives. That before we tithe, He has already provided for all our daily needs. We present our tithe to Him with grateful hearts, recognizing the bountiful blessings He has given us—for we can only tithe if we have *already* received His blessings.

Step 5: Accept that we are to be holy to God

Tithe as worship also provides an opportunity for us to accept that we are “to be holy to” God (Lv 20:26). Because He is owner and we belong to Him, we are holy—set apart for His special use. In tithing we can recognize that we are completely His, that every part of our lives belongs to Him. Thus our tithe becomes a confession that we too are “set apart” for God.

Step 6: Reconsecrate our lives to God

When we accept tithe as something which is holy, belonging to God, we recognize the blessing that is ours in handling that which is holy. To do this well, we must bring our tithe to Him in the context of our daily walk with God. Tithing then becomes an opportunity for complete reconsecration of our lives to God. We can rejoice in the reality of our salvation and acceptance in Christ. We can accept our new life in Him. We can celebrate God's goodness in caring for us in the material world and thus recognize that He has also cared for us in the spiritual world. Tithe then becomes a testimony to God and our own hearts that we accept and worship God in our daily living as disciples.

A thirteen-year-old boy on one of the South Pacific Islands demonstrated this attitude of worship. Bringing a large fish he had caught, he told the local elder of his church that this was his tithe and asked how he should deal with it. The elder explained what he should do with the “tithe fish” and congratulated the boy on his good catch of ten fish. The young man replied, “Oh no! This is the first one. The others are still in the ocean. I'm going after them now.”

Truly, tithing provides us a tool to help us worship God, placing Him first in our lives in every way. For tithing is a tangible recognition of our incredible relationship with Him.

*Titling is one of God's primary tools in our “discipleship journey”
to help us focus on Him as we deal with the material world.*

In tithing, the real issue is always worship.

GIVING YOUR BEST



*We make a living by what we get,
but we make a life by what we give.*

WINSTON CHURCHILL

No one has ever become poor by giving.

ANN FRANK

We know the story well, but do we understand it? God speaks to Abraham and tells him to go to a mountain and offer his son as a burnt offering. Abraham obeys, and begins a journey of faith that will end with an offering of praise. When Isaac asks about the offering, Abraham responds that God will provide. When they reach the top of the mountain, Abraham explains God's command.

This incredible story triggers a number of questions. How could God ask this of Abraham? How could Abraham agree? How could Isaac submit? What would we do if placed in a similar position?

The book of Hebrews helps us understand Abraham's response. "Abraham reasoned that God could raise the dead, and figuratively speaking, he did receive Isaac back from death" (Hb11:19). And somehow, Abraham's faith is contagious. Isaac also trusts God enough to place himself on the altar.

GOD PROVIDES

We know the rest of the story. God provides the offering in the form of a ram caught in a thicket (Gn 19:13). This account points to the reality that God always provides the offering, whether it is a ram on the top of a mountain or a Savior on a hill called Calvary. God always provides.

In fact, if we stop to think about it, God even provides when we give our offerings to Him. All that we have comes from His hand and belongs to Him. So when we offer Him something, we can only give back to Him what we received from Him in the first place. What gives the offering any meaning? Our attitude!

THE FRUIT OF LOVE

Remember the story of Cain and Abel? Each brought an offering, but God only accepted the offering from an obedient heart.

"God does not receive the offerings of any because He needs them and cannot have glory and riches without them, but because it is best for His servants to render to God the things which are His. The freewill offerings of the humble, contrite heart He will receive and will reward the giver with the richest blessings. He receives them as the sacrifice of grateful obedience. He requires and accepts our gold and silver as an evidence that all we have and are belongs to Him. He claims and accepts the improvement of our time and of our talents as the fruit of His love existing in our hearts. To obey is better than sacrifice. Without pure love, the most expensive offering is too poor for God to

accept.”— *Testimonies*, vol 2, pp 652-653.

Offerings are only meaningful when they reflect who we are in relationship to God. They express our worship and praise to God and our willingness to admit that He is the owner—that all we have comes from Him. The Psalmist challenges us: “Ascribe to the Lord the glory due his name; bring an offering and come into his courts. Worship the Lord in the splendor of his holiness; tremble before him, all the earth” (Ps 96:8-9).

IDOLATROUS OFFERINGS

When it comes to offerings, God demands the best. He asks that we give Him what is most precious to us, for anything less would be a form of idolatry. For our own good, He must first reside in our hearts and lives. He calls us to give ourselves to Him in a lifestyle of worship (Rm 12:1). Only after we have given ourselves to Him can we truly worship Him with an offering.

This makes me wonder about the times I casually place an offering in the plate. Is it worship? Have I given myself, or am I just following a habit begun in childhood? Have I reached the place of trusting God with all that is precious to me? Have I recognized that He is the owner, and that all I have comes as a blessing from His hand?

As I quietly reflect on these questions, I am compelled to confess that far too often my giving is mechanical and without thought. Often it is based on the perceived need, and not as a response to God’s blessings.) Sometimes, it is even given grudgingly, from a sense of duty.

ACTS OF WORSHIP

What then can I do to make my offerings truly an act of praise and worship? Here are a few thoughts that come to mind:

- I can keep my walk with God fresh and intimate. I can spend time with Him and daily remember He has saved me through His grace.
- I can reflect on what God gave for me—all that was most precious to Him—His Son! As one man has said, “When Jesus died on Calvary, God’s pockets were empty.”
- I can reflect on the reality that all I have comes from and belongs to Him. God only asks us to give after we recognize that He has provided everything.
- I can thank Him for the many blessings He brings each day and live with the awareness of His provision.
- I can seek to daily praise God and joyfully acknowledge who I

am in light of who He is as Creator and Redeemer.

- I can take all that is precious to me and place it in His hands, trusting Him to care for it far better than I can.
- But most of all, I can give Him my heart, for that is all that is truly mine to surrender: “The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise” (Ps 51:17).

Isn’t it time that we gave God the offering He wants?



*I have found that among its other benefits,
giving liberates the soul of the giver.*

MAYA ANGELOU

Freely ye have received, freely give.

JESUS CHRIST



He who gives to the poor will lack nothing.

SOLOMON

Think of giving not as a duty but as a privilege.

JOHN D. ROCKEFELLER, JR.

A FRESH LOOK AT GIVING



*God has given us two hands—
one to receive with and the other to give with.
We are not cisterns made for boarding;
we are channels made for sharing.*

BILLY GRAHAM

*Give what you have.
To someone it may be better than you dare to think.*

HENRY WADSWORTH LONGFELLOW

Giving and offerings mean different things to different people. And people give for many different reasons. But the real question is how should a church leader approach giving? If we simply appeal to human motives, we may reinforce the focus on self. If we do not present accurate information, we may disappoint or confuse people.

There are two sides to giving. The one deals with the donor—the motives encouraging someone to give. The second side deals with leadership—those involved in asking people to give. Giving actually brings these two groups together. So how does a leader deal with giving?

AN ACT OF WORSHIP

First, we must remember that giving for a Christian is first an act of worship. The primary purpose for tithes or offerings is to give glory to God, to recognize Him as Creator and integrate Him into the material side of life. Appeals to traditional human motivations may actually reinforce chains of selfishness and sin. Thus, we must ask ourselves the following questions: Who is really owner of all that is in our hands? What does it mean for God to be owner? What can you really give to God? Can we as Christians give anything more than our own hearts? What makes our tithe and offerings worship?

Truly all we have and are belongs to God. Tithe is worship when we recognize our relationship with God. Offerings are worship when, in partnership with Him, we invest God's money in His kingdom. They become an extension of our partnership with God. Without this partnership with God, we cannot worship Him with offerings—they are only payoffs. Offerings reflect our hearts and our experience with God, and are the result of the Holy Spirit's guidance in intimate partnership.

The first challenge is to help people grow so that their giving is an extension of their faith walk with God. Giving without a faith relationship cannot be worship. Giving based on something other than the faith relationship and the assurance of salvation becomes false worship. However, the way we present information is critical, even if people are growing spiritually. So here are some pointers to help a leader working with givers.

The best giving follows vision, not duty. This vision must have a biblical origin. We don't have to wonder about God's vision, we can go to Scripture to discover it, and then articulate it in the contemporary context. A strong spiritual leader presents this vision in proportion to God's ability, and His ability to be involved with what His Church is

doing. A biblical vision for ministry and the church provides the biblical leader a powerful foundation for helping members see what God is doing.

The best giving follows mission, not structure. It is hard for people to see God working through or in the structure of an organization. However, they easily see God in His commission to us to *go into all the world and make disciples*. Matthew 28:18-20 provides the clearest and most powerful mission a church could find. God promises to be with us always, even unto the end of the world. This assures us that in joining this mission, we walk with God in intimate partnership.

The best giving also follows people, not programs. God is, first of all, a personal God, and we need a personal touch when working for Him. Thus, when working with members, we need to remember they respond to people better than to programs. So we need to be visible and real, and we need to maintain absolute and transparent integrity. We must also present the ministry or project we are asking them to support as people, not institutions or programs.

The best giving follows passion, not pressure. That means our hearts have to be involved, and we must have a personal commitment. At the same time we need to help our members become involved. Christianity is not about giving. It is about a passionate involvement with the Lord of the universe. True giving by a Christian comes as a result of a personal commitment to and heart involvement with this incredible God.

The best giving follows growth and progress, not maintenance. Many of our appeals focus on maintaining or repairing the status quo in either the organization or institution. Sometimes the appeal deals with a current crisis. Other times, the appeal creates a sense of crisis in order to develop a greater sense of need. We need to remember that God has no losing causes. He sees the bigger picture, and He invites us into a growing adventure with Him.

The best giving follows information, not promotion. Only the Holy Spirit has the right to convict people on their giving. But we can help the Holy Spirit by providing information. That information must be complete, transparent and understandable. In today's world, what is unknown, misunderstood, or hidden, is automatically suspect. The spiritual leader who seeks to involve people in supporting God's king-

dom will provide accurate information of what God is doing and how they can join with Him in His mission.

The best giving follows conviction, not manipulation. Only the Holy Spirit can bring that conviction. Only God can create the desire, and when He does, He gives the power to follow through on that conviction.

Managing God's investments. It is time for us to go back to a biblical approach to raising money, to trusting God to work in people's lives and in their giving. He is the Owner-Partner. We are managing partners. Everything belongs to God and we manage His investments in partnership with Him. We acknowledge that relationship through our tithes, and we invest directly in His kingdom. We manage His assets, and we invest them in His kingdom through offerings and in the way we care for our families.

I believe that spiritual leadership is partnering with God. And when we invite others to partner with Him by joining what He is doing, we are helping them join the most exciting thing in the universe—His Kingdom.



*The first challenge is to help people grow
so that their giving is an extension of their faith walk with God.*

*Giving without a faith relationship cannot be worship.
Giving based on something other than the faith relationship
and the assurance of salvation becomes false worship.*

DISCIPLES AND INVESTING



*The highest reward for a person's toil is not what they get for it
but what they become by it.*

JOHN RUSKIN

All our money has a moral stamp.

It is coined over again in an inward mint.

*The uses we put it to, the spirit in which we spend it,
give it a character which is plainly perceptible to the eye of God.*

THOMAS STARR KING

Most of us live in a world of wealth and plenty. Some of that wealth is real, some of it is temporary and some of it is just “paper wealth.” Market fluctuations build and destroy fortunes. The promise of fortune allures contemporary generations to look at investments in a way that is often compulsive. In many cases investing has become part of daily life. Yet there are very real dangers for the Christian working with investments. The temptation to pursue money can lead us away from God. As a result, we need to explore issues and principles to help us integrate our faith and our investment principles.

The command is simple and direct—“So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God” (1Co 10:31). This straightforward instruction provides a comprehensive guide for anything a disciple manages, including investments. Yet few Christians think about this principle when planning their investment strategies.

DISCIPLE INVESTING

It is very easy to develop goals and strategies for financial investments in a way that is isolated from our walk with God. So let's identify some principles to guide—not where a disciple invests—but how a disciple makes decisions about investing. Let's begin by identifying some of the factors that challenge a Christian approach to investing. Then we will explore key issues to consider as we apply biblical thinking to our investment strategies and important principles that will help us keep God first in our lives.

The first danger we need to think about is what Paul warns, “For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil. Some people, eager for money, have wandered from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs” (1Tm 6:10). The distraction of financial wealth can easily lead one away from God. Jesus said it in another way, “You cannot serve both God and money” (Mt 6:24). Because of the direct involvement with material possessions, investing presents a real danger to our relationship with God unless we manage our investing to God's glory.

Our motivation for investing is another area we need to examine carefully. Greed, recognition, pride, fame or power can be driving forces for investing. Each of these can strengthen the hold of sin in our lives. We can grow to depend on our wealth rather than on God. We can shift our eyes from Him to our own abilities. What is our purpose for investing? What type of investments should we make? What principles should guide our investing? What are the priorities that shape or inform our

investments? What is our focus? These are some of the questions we need to prayerfully think about as we plan an investment strategy.

KEY PRINCIPLES IN PLANNING

I see three key principles that can help us in planning our investments in a Christian way. The first is to do everything to the glory of God (1Co 10:31). This principle is foundational and will guide every part of our lives. We obviously will not want to do anything that would detract from God's glory. But I wonder if we should not go a step further. Shouldn't we actively seek to bring Him glory in each step of life? Do we really want to spend energy and resources on something that would only be neutral?

The second principle to guide Christian investing is: "But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal" (Mt 6:20, KJV). This does not mean that the only place we can invest is in the church or in a mission program. However, this passage does remind us of the eternal reality.

Considering eternity does bring a new dimension into thinking about investments. It helps us shape our purpose for investing. The final principle is perhaps most important: "But seek ye first the kingdom of God and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you" (Mt 6:33, KJV). As we put God and His kingdom foremost in our lives, everything will fall in place—even our investments. If He is first, then we need not fear that our investing will lead us away from Him.

PUTTING IT INTO PRACTICE

So let's explore some direct applications of these principles. First of all, the money we invest is really not ours—it belongs to God. When we invest, we are managing His resources. He needs to be involved in the process. If we have put God and His kingdom first—if we have accepted Christ's lordship—we can trust the Holy Spirit to guide us. Also, because it is God's money we are investing, we will be careful and prudent. As we invest to His glory, we will carefully choose the types of investments that will bring honor to His name.

When we consider money in the context of God's kingdom, we discover there are only three basic points that should guide our use of money—caring for the family He has placed in our care, advancing God's mission on earth and helping others. As God's kingdom is the primary consideration in determining the type of investments a disciple makes, we should ask ourselves the following questions: 1) Will the

investment reflect Christian values? 2) Will it support something that would be contrary to God's kingdom? 3) Is the organization or company in which the investment is made involved in an activity or product that is inherently sinful or damaging?

WHAT DOES THIS ALL MEAN?

Integrating God into our investment decisions can only work as we recognize God as owner and lord of every portion of our lives. From a godly perspective, wealth is an extension of our partnership with God—managing His resources. This gives us a unique view of investing as Christian disciples. And, as we follow His principles in making investment decisions, we will be inspired as we seek to do everything to the glory of God.



*One man gives freely, yet gains even more;
another withholds unduly, but comes to poverty.*

*A generous man will prosper;
he who refreshes others will himself be refreshed.*

PROVERBS



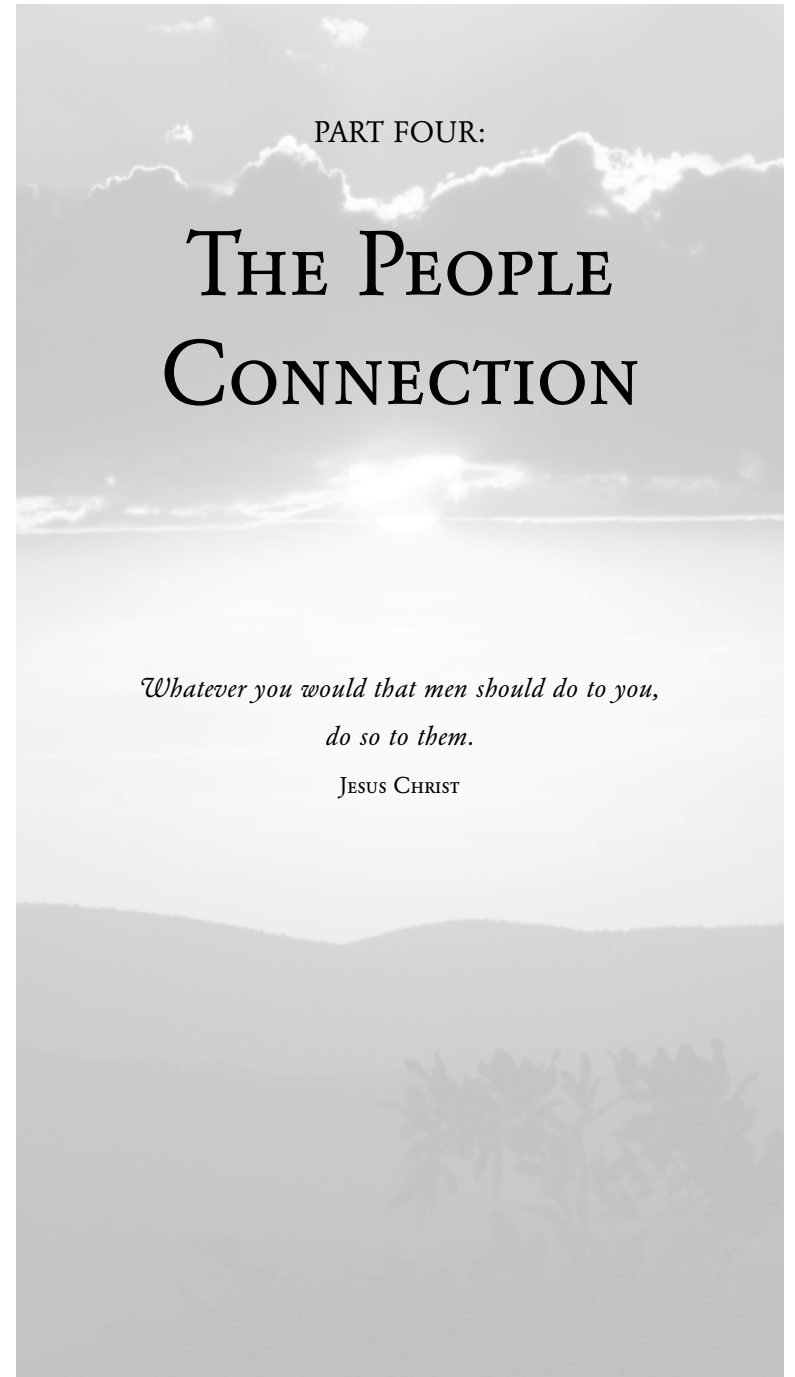
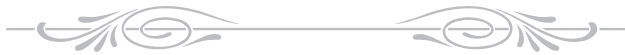
*Blessed are they who have the gift of making friends,
for it is one of God's best gifts.
It involves many things, but above all,
the power of going out of one's self,
and appreciating whatever is noble and loving in another.*

THOMAS HUGHES



*The unity that binds us together,
that makes this earth a family
and all men brothers and sons of God,
is love.*

THOMAS WOLFE



PART FOUR:

THE PEOPLE CONNECTION

*Whatever you would that men should do to you,
do so to them.*

JESUS CHRIST

STEWARDS OF THE GOSPEL



*Talk about the questions of the day;
there is but one question, and that is the gospel.
It can and will correct everything needing correction.*

WILLIAM EWART GLADSTONE

*The gospel is the fulfillment of all hopes,
the perfection of all philosophy, the interpreter of all revelations,
a key to all the seeming contradictions of truth
in the physical and moral world.*

HUGH MILLER

It's good news! It's the gospel! And it is a battle ground. We fight over the meaning. We debate the theology. We argue over its implications. But we apply it only rarely. In the midst of battles which divide the church, we brawl over law and grace. We call each other names, form our exclusive clubs and isolate ourselves in our theological palaces, comforting each other that we are right.

Meanwhile, thousands struggle with lives of quiet desperation—seeking to do what is right and hoping to someday find the peace Jesus promised. The average contemporary Christian has a brain full of information, but a head full of confusion and a heart full of pain. Never before has so much been written and debated about the gospel. And never before has the gospel, the “good news” of salvation, been more needed.

A NEW REALITY

Stewardship, as the human side of the lordship of Jesus Christ, is based on the gospel. It is the process of integrating the gospel into every area of life. In a day when the world seems to have lost hope, the gospel is still “good news.” In lives desperately seeking understanding and hope, the gospel still brings a new reality. Where sin binds human hearts and lives, the gospel still has the power to shatter the shackles that chain our souls. And we are stewards of this “good news.”

Paul states, “This is how one should regard us, as servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God. Moreover, it is required of stewards that they be found trustworthy” (1Co 4:1-2, ESV).

Among these mysteries, Paul includes Christ (Col 2:2, 1T 3:16), Christ in us (Col 1:26-27), as well as the gospel (Ep 6:19).

So our stewardship includes how we manage or deal with the gospel—the good news of salvation in Jesus Christ. While the gospel can be defined or stated in many different ways, with many different theological nuances, for me the simplest is the best. The gospel is the good news that Jesus has solved the problem of sin in our lives—past, present, and future. He has done everything necessary to save us.

KNOWING IS NOT ENOUGH

However, simply knowing the concept of the gospel is not enough. Even the devil knows the theory. Being stewards of this mystery of the gospel means we must go beyond the words to understanding, accepting, and integrating this incredible “good news” into our daily lives.

The term “mystery” implies there is something about the gospel that transcends human understanding or explanation. We cannot

know the fullness of God's love or the depths of His pain in saving us. We cannot comprehend the incredible wonder of heaven descending to earth—God made flesh. We can only accept it by faith. Yet, we can experience the reality of salvation. We can know eternal life the moment we believe (1J 5:13).

There are several arenas in which we manage or are stewards of the gospel:

The first is our own walk with God. Accepting Jesus as Savior is only the first step. Each day we must choose to submit to His eternal reality. Accepting Jesus as Lord, living within us (Ep 3:16-19), is the way we “apply” Him to daily life. Each issue is a choice—to live on our own or in Him. Each moment is a choice—to live in the reality of a sinful world or the certainty of God's kingdom.

Choosing to seek His kingdom puts everything else in the right perspective (Mt 6:33). By faith we accept the Holy Spirit (Gal 3:14) and learn to listen to God's voice guiding our lives and making the gospel real in the details of living. Will we live by faith (our relationship with God) or will we choose to live by human reason and effort?

The second arena for stewardship of the gospel is in the way we confront the world and its attractions. Again Paul leads us into the mystery of the gospel: “But far be it from me to boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world” (Gal 6:14, ESV). Here we are faced with the choice of the world or Calvary. We can daily choose to die, to be crucified in Christ.

One of the most profound truths of the gospel is that we have died in Christ and been raised to a new life in Him (Rm 6:1-14). We are participants in His death and partakers in His life. Are we willing to accept the reality that we are crucified to the world? We can choose to move forward in faith, serving God and His kingdom. We are in the world but not of the world (Jn 17:14-18). Thus, we invade the kingdoms of this world with the kingdom of God (Mt 24:14). We proclaim the gospel through lives lived in the presence of the King of Kings.

The third arena where we are stewards of the gospel is in our relationships with those around us. As we experience the authenticity of grace, we can choose to integrate the gospel into the way we accept and treat others. Once again we are faced with the choice to live by faith. We can choose to see others in the light of the gospel. Because they are the focus of God's love, we can choose to love others, even

when they are unlovable. While rejecting the sin, we can choose to accept the sinner. We can choose to forgive as we have experienced forgiveness.

Only one who has experienced the gospel can extend that gospel to others. Those who cannot extend grace to others have not truly experienced grace themselves. For the gospel *experienced* leads to the gospel *extended*. We faithfully function as stewards of God's mysteries as we share it with those God places around us.

Then how can the gospel attain this power in our lives? How can we reach this experience? It all begins with accepting it ourselves—accepting by faith the reality of Christ dying for us and Christ loving us. Listen to Paul's words:

“That according to the riches of his glory he may grant you to be strengthened with power through his Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may have strength to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled with all the fullness of God” (Ep 3:16-19, ESV).



*When we think of the atonement
we are apt to think only of what man gains.*

*We must remember what it cost God
and what it costs him now when men refuse his love.*

FRANK FITT

PARTNERSHIP WITH JESUS



*If they are connected with Christ, if the gifts of the Spirit are theirs,
the poorest and most ignorant of His disciples
will have a power that will tell upon hearts.
God makes them the channel for the outworking
of the highest influence in the universe.*

ELLEN WHITE

Unwelcome is the gift which is held long in the hand.

SENECA

I'm tired of talking to children. I've been Kindergarten leader for twenty-five years. I want out!" Betty's plaintive appeal came as the church nominating committee was beginning its work. She had been in that department from the time her first child entered until her last grandchild left. Now she was pleading for relief. Yet within a few days, she was back. She could not rest with her decision. God was convicting her to continue for one more year, to train someone to take her place. The nominating committee received the news with joy.

A few months later, Betty came to visit again. "This has been the best year of my life," she exclaimed. "For the first time I am working because I *know* God wants me in this department. Always before it has been because I didn't think there was anyone else who would do it."

What made the difference? Twenty-five years in a job before it became ministry! Twenty-five years of doing something for secondary, though important, reasons. Is Betty the only one to experience this? And what about the large group of spectators who never get involved in church life and ministry?

Ministry or duty? Let's look at ministry. What differentiates ministry from duty or task? We see the difference early in Jesus' life. As a twelve-year old boy He learned about *My Father's business*. He dedicated his entire life to serving others, and His service came to a focus in the last three years of concentrated ministry. Four key factors marking Jesus' life and service can also be ours: 1) divine calling; 2) divine equipping; 3) divine presence and 4) a focused ministry. Let's explore these factors that can transform ministry today.

Divine Calling. The Christian, by identity, is called to ministry. Jesus' life modeled this call: "The Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many" (Mt 20:28).

Paul presents the compelling power of redemption as the basis for our call to participate in Christ's ministry of reconciliation (2Co 5:14-21). He declares that God gave us the *ministry* and *word* of reconciliation. Paul also presents the primary purpose of the pastoral gift: "to prepare God's people for works of service (ministry), so that the body of Christ may be built up" (Ep 4:12).

Christianity is not a spectator sport. We are called to active ministry—to be players on the field, not pew spectators. This call to ministry is general for all Christians, yet God calls each one of us to a specific personal ministry within the broader focus. Discovering that call marks the beginning of a thrilling journey of service in His kingdom. I find that

while the location of my ministry may have changed over the years, the specific call has not. Others may find their sense of calling shifting over a period of time, as Betty discovered after the year spent training her replacement. The important fact is that we be aware and responsive to our call to service.

Divine Equipping. God equips us for our ministry with specific gifts (Rm 12:1-8; 1Co 12-14; Ep 4:1-16) and promised power (Mt 28:20). These gifts are not for personal benefit but for the good of the *body* (1Co 12:7). God is the one who determines the gifts we receive (v 11). These gifts work together within the body of Christ in the same way different parts of our physical bodies work together. While clear differences exist as to gifts and ministry, these differences are of function, not status, importance or position.

Identifying the unique gifts God gives to us individually is a determining factor in discovering our specific personal call to ministry. Ministering within our area of giftedness is one of the secrets of rewarding service. At the same time, the same gifts may be used in a variety of different settings as God provides varying opportunities.

Divine Presence. God does not ask us to work alone. The reality of God's presence is at the very core of ministry. Jesus presents His overarching call of making disciples in the context of His power and promised presence (Mt 28:18-20). The Holy Spirit transforms us with Christ's presence (Ep 3:15-19). Without the awareness of His presence, ministry can quickly lose its sense of divine calling or deteriorate into drudgery. As we bring Christ's presence and power into the lives of those we touch, our service becomes an extension of His ministry.

Focused Ministry. Maintaining our focus is a challenge in our ministry. Jesus maintained a very clear focus. He knew His target audience, adapted His ministry to diverse groups and never forgot the primary purpose of His work. As we examine it, we discover Christ's ministry to be multi-leveled. His ministry to the multitudes focused on inspiring and calling them to a higher life—a life centered in God. His ministry to the seventy was centered on discipling and commissioning them for ministry. His focus sharpened even more as He concentrated on the twelve—discipling and fashioning them as spiritual leaders. Within those twelve, He chose three whom He mentored.

The focus of Christ's ministry was forged by His sense of calling and designed to meet the specific needs of the group. As we explore

the focus of our ministry, we need to concentrate on the key purpose of ministry—making disciples. This is the general call to ministry within the body of Christ (Mt 28:18-20). While our individual calling may have a narrower focus, we must remember that all ministry finds its ultimate purpose in this *Gospel commission*. The Holy Spirit creates the new birth experience in our life, then God trusts us to fashion that life into a disciple who is walking with Him.

Thus ministry becomes a life of service—worship (Rm 12:1). It means using the gifts God has given us to extend His grace to those around us. God made us for relationship with Him. Christ's reconciling death resolves sin's interruption in that relationship. He then invites us to partner with Him in His ministry. Our challenge is to identify our specific calling and use the gifts he has given us. Identifying our spiritual gifts helps us identify our calling and focus. But more than anything else, He invites us to live in His presence—actively bringing others into the experience of His grace—as *partners in ministry*.



There is a need of coming close to the people by personal effort...

We are to weep with those that weep,

and rejoice with those that rejoice.

Accompanied by the power of persuasion,

the power of prayer,

the power of the love of God,

his work will not, cannot, be without fruit.

ELLEN WHITE

TEN TIMELY TIPS



*Make each day useful and cheerful and prove that you know
the worth of time by employing it well.*

*Then youth will be happy, elders will be without regret
and life will be a beautiful success.*

LOUISA MAY ALCOTT

*Time is the coin of your life. It is the only coin you have,
and only you can determine how it will be spent.*

Be careful lest you let other people spend it for you.

CARL SANDBURG

Time flies!" One person says. Another exclaims, "Where has this year gone?" Time! We all have the same amount, and yet we each manage it differently. How we do so is a reflection of our relationship with God. Time is limited. It can neither shrink nor expand. And yet it is fluid. The tick of the clock does not change, but how we deal with time does. Some days we control our use of time, and other days we feel like time is controlling us.

Time is important in our spiritual life. The apostle John wrote of a time when "there should be time no longer" (Rv 10:6). Jesus declared that His time had come (Mt 26:18; Mk 1:15). Daniel speaks of a false power that would seek to "change times" (Dn 7:25). And on a couple of occasions, God actually changed time when the sun stood still (Js 10:12-14) and when the shadow on the sundial moved back ten degrees (2Kg 20:8-11).

How we use or manage our time is really a reflection of our values and priorities. In this manner, the way we deal with time is very similar to the way we deal with money. Each demonstrates what is important to us. This is one of the reasons God gave us the Sabbath and tithing to serve as personal "thermometers" of spiritual growth. Let's look at ways in which we can bring God into our management of time.

THE LORD OF TIME

The first tip is to recognize that as Creator, God is Lord of time. He must be at the center of our thinking about time. As in every other area of life, our challenge is to learn to put God first. In other words, the way we manage time tells us what place God has in our heart. This is one of the reasons He gave us the Sabbath—as a way to help us bring Him into this critical area of life. We worship Him on Sabbath as we recognize Him as Creator (Ex 20:8-11), Redeemer (Dt 5:12-15), and Sanctifier (Ex 31:13). As Christians, worshiping Him on the Sabbath reminds us each week that He is Lord, not only of the Sabbath, but of each and every day.

Putting God first in time begins with the Sabbath. It continues by taking time with God each day. Regardless of our preferences, we can begin each day with God. However, one's focused devotional time may vary from person to person. Let me suggest that if you are a morning person, take time in the morning for your devotional experience. If you are a night person, you might prefer to have your most meaningful time with God in the evening. Either way, try giving Him a part of your most productive time. I find that my growth with God

is directly proportionate to the quality of time I give Him for listening to Him and His Word.

A second tip in dealing with time is to have a clear sense of mission and to integrate that mission into your schedule. A God-given mission brings clarity and focus to our lives. Then we arrange our schedule around that mission. Otherwise, events will seize control of our time. We each have different gifts and functions. Yet ultimately, the mission of each and every Christian is to glorify God. “So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God” (1Co 10:31). Part of this mission is to help others know the God we know.

Balance is another tip that guides us in our use of time. A compulsive focus on one area of life will control our use of time. God wants us to live in a balanced way that helps us grow in our relationship with Him and those around us. Proper balance results from a growing integration of God’s lordship in every area of life. Can we trust God to guide us in the daily details of life?

PERSONAL GROWTH AND STRATEGIES

A personal growth plan is a fourth tip to help us in managing our time. God has created us with an almost limitless capacity to grow. If we spend just one hour a day growing in some way, we have over 300 hours a year for growth. The potential is enormous.

A fifth tip is to make a time log for one week about once a year. Record all activities on a 15-minute basis. Total the time you spend in differing categories for each day, and then for the week. Next analyze your use of time. Measure it against your priorities and values. Then determine any changes you want to make.

Tip number six is to have a strategy for using the small corners of time throughout the day. You can carry a book with you and take advantage of those extra two to five minutes to read a page or two. Or you can carry a notepad, index cards, or an electronic organizer and use those few minutes to make notes or develop a concept. You can also use fragments of time for special intercessory prayer. Work your way through the members of your family, your friends, or your prayer list, lifting each one to God in prayer.

The seventh tip is to plan your activities for each day. I find two effective ways of doing this planning. One is to do it the evening before, and the other is to do it first thing in the morning. Either way works well. Establishing goals to be accomplished during the day may be a helpful part of that planning.

Number eight is the tip to “chunk” your time. Organize your activities into time blocks of about 20–40 minutes. This organization can be based on groups of similar activities, or segments of activities that require a larger block of time.

TAKE A BREAK

Taking a break every 25–40 minutes is the ninth tip. This can be a break from what you are doing, or a break created by changing activities. You can accomplish this with a physical or mental change of pace. Most people find this type of rhythm helps keep the mind focused and fresh. It also helps maintain a higher energy level and prevents boredom.

The tenth tip is to take God with you into every activity. Practice His presence by opening your mind to the reality that He is always with you (Mt 28:20). You can do this by consciously asking Him to go with you throughout the various activities of your day. Another helpful tool is to think about having Jesus visibly beside you in each activity. Imagine what it would be like if you could see Jesus walking or sitting beside you in every part of your day.

Time is precious. That which is wasted can never be regained. We can only move forward, but we can do so intentionally. We can ask God to help us take control of our time by surrendering each moment to Him and by asking Him to transform all we do through His presence. Thus time becomes a lifestyle of worship as we offer ourselves completely to God (Rm 12:1-2).



*We have to live but one day at a time,
but we are living for eternity in that one day.*

ANONYMOUS

IN ALL THY WAYS



Good leaders make people feel that they're at the very heart of things, not at the periphery. Everyone feels that he or she makes a difference to the success of the organization. When that happens, people feel centered and that gives their work meaning.

WARREN BENNIS

Community-minded people regard hard work and service to their fellow man as a life-long commitment, expressed on a daily basis.

JIM TURNER

The question startled me. “Will you be my business advisor?” Joe had tired of his profession and was buying his own business. The business had a number of challenges, and he was asking me to be available to counsel him whenever he needed it. When I protested that I really did not have the appropriate business qualifications, he clarified what he wanted.

He had others to help him with the business decisions he would face. What he wanted was someone to help him integrate God into the way he would *do* business. He wanted someone with whom he could reflect on God’s involvement in the new business. More than this, he was determined to operate his business on the basis of biblical principles and in a Christ-like manner.

So we began to explore foundational principles that he could apply to the way he would run his business and work with his employees. Together, we discovered that God can be just as real in the workplace as in church. Let’s explore some of these principles.

BIBLICAL BUSINESS PRINCIPLES

The first principle we discovered was that since God is really the owner, the business was His. That took a great deal of pressure off Joe. He could now function as the managing partner, managing the business for God as owner. He also could know that God was intimately interested in the details of their business.

This insight led us to the next key principle: Whatever we do in the workplace should be done to God’s honor and glory (1Co 10:31). Since it is His business, what is done in the name of that business reflects on Him. Joe determined to act in such a way that God would be exalted and honored. He would also seek to act in the name of the Lord, “...Whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him” (Col 3:17, ESV). The following verses led us to the conclusion that everything that is done in the workplace should be in service to Christ:

“Slaves, obey in everything those who are your earthly masters, not by way of eye-service, as people-pleasers, but with sincerity of heart, fearing the Lord. Whatever you do, work heartily as for the Lord and not for men, knowing that from the Lord you will receive the inheritance as your reward. You are serving the Lord Christ (Col 3:22-24, ESV).”

Since he was serving God as the owner, Joe began to pray about daily details in the business. Nothing was too big or too small to bring to God. Joe discovered a rich source of practical counsel in the book

of Proverbs. He now read it for insights as to how to manage the business and the employees.

Joe discovered that it was good practice to treat employees as he thought God would. He found that after doing his best, he could leave matters in God's hands and not be as stressed by thinking about what still needed to be done or what should be done differently. He found a purpose higher than simply making money or succeeding in turning the business around. He saw his purpose in life to be serving God in daily activities and decisions—doing God's business, not his own.

A CASE STUDY

Then came the day Joe started having problems with his foreman. The foreman's work was not up to standard, and the quality of the product was starting to decline. Customers were beginning to complain. Over a period of weeks things got worse, and Joe thought about firing the foreman. What should he do? We explored how Matthew 18:15 might apply. After time in prayer, Joe privately confronted the foreman from the perspective of seeing him as a brother who was doing something wrong.

Together they explored the implications, decided on corrective measures, and established a time table to follow. Six weeks later Joe told me that applying the biblical principle not only solved the problem, it restored a good worker and boosted morale with all the employees as they felt the difference. The biblical process had the added benefit of earning the foreman's loyalty.

BLESSINGS BEYOND THE BUSINESS

Joe and I discovered that bringing God into the ways of doing business could have a powerful impact on the business. But it had an even greater impact on Joe. God became more real to him. And I grew as a business counselor. Oh, I didn't know any more about running a business, managing production, making contracts, or monitoring production. Instead, I learned that God wants to be involved in every aspect of our lives. There is no area that is beyond His ability. He can guide. He can provide. He can be real in the workplace.

This experience led me to ten key points to help us bring God into the workplace:

- Believe that God is real and that He wants to be involved in your daily life.
- Invite God into your life each day and bring daily issues to Him in prayer.

- Take God with you into the workplace. He promises to be with you always (Mt 28:20). Practice His presence—even at work.
- Surrender your life to God each day and seek to apply biblical principles to the way you live.
- If you own a business, transfer the ownership of that business to God. (The state may not recognize this transfer, but it will transform your attitude toward the business!)
- If you are an employee, remember, beyond serving the business, you are serving God. Choose to do everything you do for Him, not just for the earthly boss or owner.
- At the end of the day, leave things in God's hands, do your best, and then trust Him.
- Ask God to give you a vision of what He wants for your life in the workplace.
- See your work as a ministry of worship to God—serving Him in ways that honor and exalt Him.
- Look for ways to treat those around you as Jesus would have treated them.



*It is not doing the thing which we like to do,
but liking to do the thing which we have to do,
that makes life blessed.*

JOHANN WOLFGANG VON GOETHE

GOD'S DREAM



The people I have been able to help most are those I trust.

ANONYMOUS

*The glory of Friendship is not the outstretched hand,
nor the kindly smile, nor the joy of companionship;
it is the spiritual inspiration that comes to one when he discovers
that someone else believes in him
and is willing to trust him with his friendship.*

My friends have come unsought.

The great God gave them to me.

RALPH WALDO EMERSON

God has a dream. It is a dream full of power and vision! It is a vision of what He wants to create in His Church—His people. And it all focuses on relationships. We find God's dream in three key passages: Romans 12, Ephesians 4, and 1 Corinthians 12.

God's dream is a picture of a church that works together as one united body. Each member has a ministry. And members work together in love, rejoicing, and weeping together. It is a picture of a church that reaches out to the world with the gospel of Jesus Christ, and because of its ministry, it becomes mature, "attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ" (Ep 4:13).

Paul states: "Now you are the body of Christ and individual members of it" (1Co 12:27, ESV). "So in Christ we who are many form one body, and each member belongs to all the others" (Rm 12:5). This dynamic vision is not something we can create. Christ is the only one who can produce the relational transformation described in these chapters. Let's explore how we can be part of this exciting reality.

AN ACCOMPLISHED FACT

This vision of God's church is not a wish. It is a reality! It is what God has already brought about in Jesus Christ. When Paul presents this picture, he does not describe a process of becoming. Instead, he presents it as an accomplished fact. The Church is what it is because we are in Christ. Our connection to Him transforms our relationships with everyone else.

Most of what He expresses in each of these epistles, following these key chapters, is practical counsel on how to live as God's Church. God establishes the relationships, and then He teaches us how to live within them. Christ changes our identity, and this change in identity changes our relationships. Our challenge is to integrate our new identity into our relationships—to see ourselves and others in the context of Christ. Our vertical relationship with God spills over into our horizontal relationships with those around us.

THREE ARENAS TO CONSIDER

There are three relational arenas that are affected by our relationship with Christ: the home, the church, and the world around us. Each is transformed by the reality of who we are in Christ. We need to learn to live out this reality. We do not have room to explore all the counsel Scripture provides about how we should relate in these three arenas. So we will focus on the core substance of how relationships are transformed.

The first step in our stewardship of relationships is recognizing who we are, because we are in Christ. We do not choose to become His Church. We choose Christ and He makes us part of what Scripture calls the “body of Christ.” It is a package deal. We cannot accept Him without being part of His Church. And being part of His Church connects us with others. We cannot live in isolation. So the question is, now that we are part of this Church, how does this impact on the way we live?

The second step in transforming the way we relate to others is to value those around us as Christ does—He died for them! For value is determined not by what we think, but rather by what Jesus has already done. This view denies our natural tendency to compare ourselves with others and pretend we are better. It also denies the desire to value human position or status. Terms of importance and standing become irrelevant in the context of God’s kingdom. In fact, we need each other. Alone, we are incomplete.

The rest of the “relationship journey” is the process of applying and integrating these two steps. But this is not something we can do naturally or by human effort. Our sinful human nature is foreign to Kingdom relationships. This relational journey starts at one place alone—a hill called Calvary. We have to die to self, and that is the divine miracle of being crucified with Christ. Until this happens, we cannot see ourselves or others as God does. We cannot love others as ourselves except in the context of a passionate love for God.

This brings us to a core relational truth—a love sequence. God loves us. We experience His love, and love for Him awakens in our hearts. Out of this experience of love, we can love those around us. As others experience our love, they begin to experience God’s love. And the cycle continues. God has trusted us to be the expression of His love on Earth; His primary way for restoring our relationship with Him.

MOVING TOWARD OTHERS

We must change the way we look at others in the world. Far too often we retreat into our “Christian ghettos,” afraid to interact with those who do not think or act the way we do. Threatened by these differences, we build relational walls for protection. But instead of finding protection, the walls we build destroy us and our service for Him. God designed His Church to be a light on a hill, not a collection of candles in a candle shop.

Instead of calling others to come to us, we need to move toward them. We need to build friendships with those God has placed around us. The church of His day condemned Jesus for His relationships with the common people of the world. Isolated in their “hallowed halls,” God’s people had lost touch with the world and with their mission. Could it be that the same has happened to us today?

CONCLUSION

God has a dream! We are that dream. And we will only discover the fullness of our life in Christ in restored relationships—relationships that are transformed by the reality of His presence. We can choose to live in isolation, or we can choose to build relationships. God’s way for changing the universe is through relationships. We may choose to be part of that transformation. We can revel in His dream for us!



*If you would win a man to your cause,
first convince him that you are his sincere friend.
Therein is a drop of honey which catches his heart,
which, say what he will,
is the highroad to his reason.*

ABRAHAM LINCOLN



*To all who will walk humbly with God,
He will give His Holy Spirit and will minister to them
through the agency of Holy angels to make right impressions
upon human minds.*

ELLEN WHITE



*Give strength, give thought, give deeds, give wealth;
Give love, give tears, and give thyself.
Give, give, be always giving.
Who gives not is not living;
The more you give, the more you live.*

ANONYMOUS

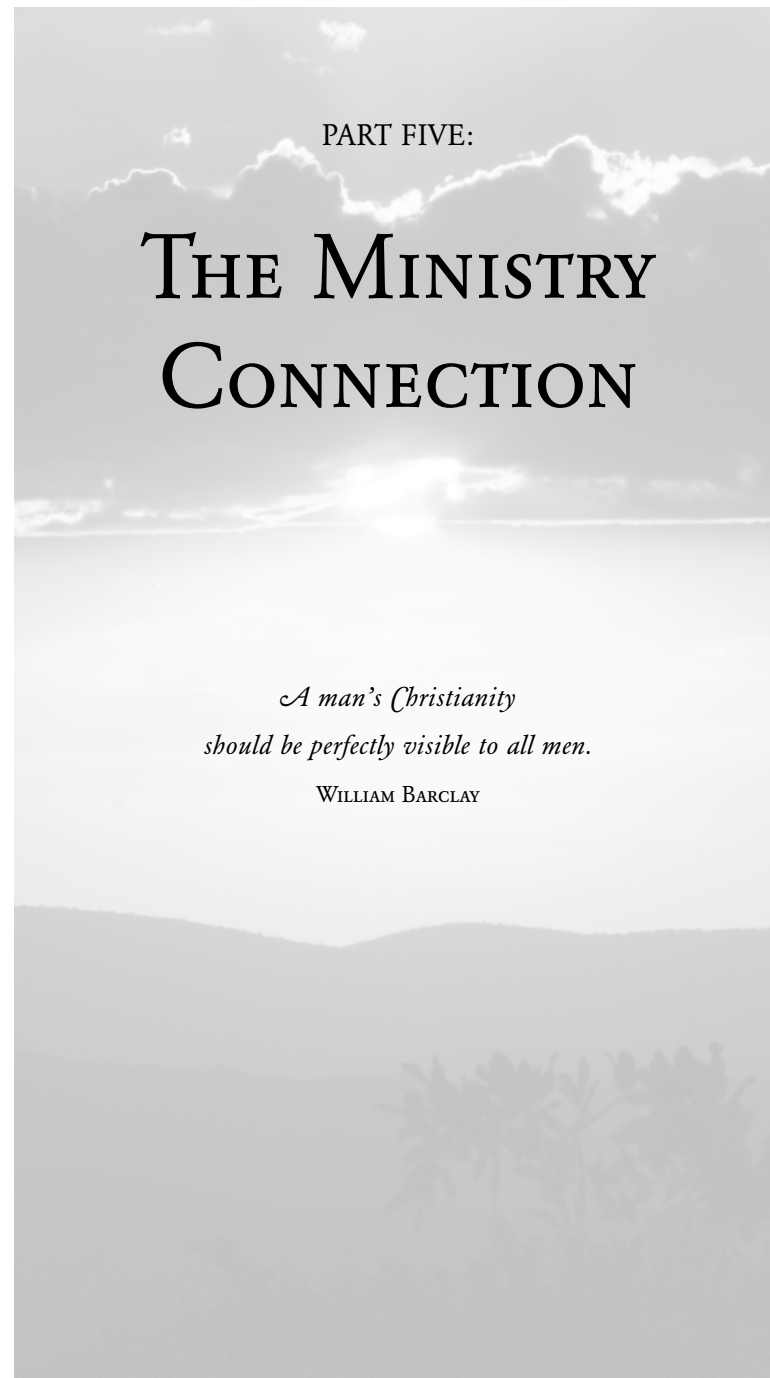


PART FIVE:

THE MINISTRY CONNECTION

*A man's Christianity
should be perfectly visible to all men.*

WILLIAM BARCLAY



LEARNING TO PRAISE



*Nothing tends more to promote health of body and of soul
than does a spirit of gratitude and praise.*

ELLEN WHITE

*A thankful heart is not only the greatest virtue,
but the parent of all other virtues.*

CICERO

It was group prayer time. The leader invited the group to spend time in praise and adoration. Each person prayed, most of them focusing on thanking God for different blessings. As I listened, I heard many wonderful things, but very little in the way of praise and adoration. This same situation is often repeated. We do well with thanksgiving, but it seems we are not sure of how to praise or adore God.

So what is praise? Webster defines praise as “an expression of approval or admiration.” A secondary definition is “the extolling of a deity, ruler, or hero.” So why is it so difficult? What do we need to do to learn to praise?

There are several factors which make praise difficult. The first is that we are simply not accustomed to praise. We have few models from which to learn. Second is the fact that praise requires that we set self aside and think of God first. We cannot be thinking of self and praise God at the same time. Third, in order to praise, we need to change the rhythm of life. We must take time to focus on God and His attributes. Simply put, praise does not come naturally for most of us. We have to learn to praise.

Praising God has the power to change our lives. Praise takes the mind off self and helps us identify God and His reality. It transforms the perspective from which we approach life and places us in the context of who God is. Praise helps us recognize God and His ability to impact our lives. It reminds us that He loves us and is deeply involved in the details of our daily living.

I FOCUS MY MIND ON HIM

I find there are several steps I take that help me praise God. The first is to focus my mind on Him. Especially when learning to praise, I find it helpful to spend a few moments contemplating God and His character. Second, I focus on a particular act or characteristic of God. Then I simply tell Him what I think of Him and recognize Him for that act or characteristic. Comparing God or one of His attributes to something or someone else helps me recognize His greatness or transcendence. Finally, I seek to move the praise from words to action. This goes far beyond a physical posture or movement. Instead, I seek to place my life in the context of praise—to make my life an act of worship and acknowledgment of who God is.

This type of praise is not easy. Nor does it come automatically. It demands a surrender of self that is described by the apostle Paul as a “living sacrifice,” a “spiritual act of worship” (Rm 12:1). It is something

I am learning to do, and it is well worth the effort.

The Psalms are full of calls to praise God. They are helpful in teaching us how to praise. And they give us a number of topics for praise. The following are the praise categories I find helpful:

Praise God for who He is. God is Creator. He is Redeemer and Lord. The names of God are valuable in this kind of praise. Sometimes I find it beneficial to focus an entire prayer of praise on the different names of God. As I pray, I acknowledge His identity as revealed in His many names.

Praise God for His character. Every aspect of God's character is worthy of praise. His love, His goodness, His majesty, His integrity, His greatness, His faithfulness, and all the rest of His attributes are helpful in praising Him.

Praise God for what He does. This includes what He has done in the past, what He is doing now, and what He has promised to do in the future. This type of praise can flow over into thanksgiving, but at times I find it helpful to simply praise God for what He does, and leave the thanksgiving to another part of my prayer, or another time.

There is no single "right" way to praise God. It can be done individually or in a group. And there are a number of ways that I have tried and found meaningful. A praise prayer is the first one which comes to mind. This means making praise the focus and content of an entire prayer. Singing praise is also very powerful. There is something about music which lends itself to praise. Journaling praise is a unique way of focusing the mind on praise. Simply write your praise to God in your spiritual journal. A "praise walk" in which we take a walk and focus our minds totally on praising God is another way of making praise meaningful. We can even dedicate an entire day to praising God and seek to focus our mind on praise throughout the day.

PRACTICING THE PRAISING OF GOD

Let's practice what we have explored together and just pause for a moment to praise God:

"We praise you our God, for you are King of kings and Lord of lords. You are God, and we choose to recognize and adore you. Before we were born, you loved us. Your love awakens us to a new life, and we accept you as Lord. We praise you for you are the Creator of all things. You shaped us with your hands and you speak your love to our hearts.

"We praise you, Oh, God, for you have redeemed us. You became one with us. You were made sin for us. And in your redemption we find life. We worship you for you have made it possible for sinners to find life and hope. You have given us eternal life, and that assurance transforms our past, present, and future. You are worthy of praise, and we acknowledge your compassion and mercy.

"We praise you our God, for you have called us to partnership with you. You have placed us on your throne with you (Ep 2:6), and we accept your calling. You transform our days with your presence. You consent to walk with us and in doing so, you lift us to a new life. We worship you with our hearts. We praise you with our lips. And we choose to serve you with our lives. Accept our sacrifice of praise.

"Let all that we are praise you, our King and Lord. Let our lives live to glorify your name. Let us give you honor and praise, for you are worthy. You are the God of the ages and the Lord of our days. Let us praise you forever and ever."



Why art thou cast down, O my soul?

And why art thou disquieted within me?

*Hope thou in God. For I shall yet praise Him,
who is the health of my countenance, and my God.*

PSALM 42:11

RENEWING OUR MINDS



*The more accurately we search into the human mind,
the stronger traces we find
of the wisdom of Him who made it.*

EDMUND BURKE

*The greatest revolution in our generation is the discovery
that human beings, by changing the inner attitudes of their minds,
can change the outer aspects of their lives.*

WILLIAM JAMES

God gave us an incredible gift at Creation—minds with the capacity to grow throughout eternity. Because of our minds, we can be creative. We can choose. We can learn. And we can know God. We were created for relationship with God. As Adam opened his eyes for the first time, he must have seen the face of his Creator lifting from the intimacy of the kiss of life. That burgeoning relationship with God would have been the first information to register on the human mind.

Our minds control our lives. It is in the mind that we develop habits, and it is in the mind that a relationship with God takes place. God asks us to love Him with our minds (Mt 22:37). He calls us to a living sacrifice and a transformed mind (Rm 12:1-2). We can have the mind of Christ (1Co 2:16), and be transformed into His glory (2Co 3:18). Our attitudes are influenced by our relationship with God (Php 2:5; Ep 4:23). God promises to put His law in our minds (Jr 31:33). He invites us to pray with our minds (1Co 14:15). He calls us to focus our minds on true and heavenly things, and the peace of God will guard our minds (Col 3:1-2; Php 4:4-9).

COOPERATING WITH HIM

You and I are involved in a battle for our minds, and part of that battle takes place in the mind (Rm 8:5-8). Because of sin, our minds have a natural bent to evil. The influences of a sinful world further damage our minds. Repeated actions develop actual physiological structures—pathways in the mind. These neurological pathways are the habits and memories that control much of our lives. We face the power of sin when we consider the combination of our sinful natures and habit pathways. Even if we could develop completely new habits, we have no ability to free ourselves from sin's power. We are naturally slaves to sin (Rm 6:16).

So we need to be freed from the control of sin. Our natures will not be transformed until the Second Coming (1Co 15:51-54). However, Jesus has solved our problem. When we accept Him as our Savior, He frees us from the dominating power of sin (Rm 6:1-7; 11-14; 8). We have the freedom to choose a new Master. While Christ provides us with a new life and transforming power, He does not force them on us. We have a part to play. We must choose this new life and cooperate with Him in the renewal of our minds. As we do, a new character becomes a present reality. Let's explore some steps we can take to cooperate with God and enjoy a new life:

Step 1: Prayerfully face your sinful reality. We naturally resist admitting our sinfulness and want to think that we are not as bad as others. Yet we are all equally sinful. In fact, as we compare ourselves with Jesus, we discover a different perspective—we cannot compare ourselves with others, for we see ourselves as Paul did—*as chief of sinners* (1Tm 1:15). Until we accept our pervading sinfulness, we will not desire a transformed heart and renewed life.

Step 2: Gratefully accept your reality in Christ. As Christians we have confessed our sin and have accepted Jesus as our personal Savior (Rm 5:6-8; Ep 2:4-9). We have entered into the reality of eternal life (1J 5:11-13). Yet because of our sinful natures and the ongoing battle with sin (Rm 7:18-19), it is easy to give up. Through a choice of the will, we can accept the reality of who we are in God. We are forgiven (1J 1:9). We are created anew (2Co 5:17). We have all the power we need to live with God (Php 4:13; 2P 1:3-4). We are seated with God on His throne (Rv 3:21; Ep 2:6). We begin life each day in this new reality.

Step 3: Focus your mind on Christ and the things above. God does not coerce our hearts or minds. We must choose that on which we feed and focus. God invites us to fix our eyes upon Him (Col 3:2; Hb 12:1-3). As we look to Him, new pathways and memories begin to develop in our minds. “When we know God as it is our privilege to know Him, our life will be a life of continual obedience. Through an appreciation of the character of Christ, through communion with God, sin will become hateful to us” (*Desire of Ages*, p 668).

Step 4: Be willing to live with the mystery of God. We can know enough about God to walk with Him, but we will never be able to understand Him completely. He is transcendent—far beyond us. How can our finite minds understand a Creator who has been present through all eternity? How can we understand One who speaks and causes worlds to appear? How can we comprehend a God who would become human (Jn 1:14) and die on a cross? If we over-analyze and dissect our knowledge of God, we may destroy our walk with Him.

Step 5: Practice devotional skills. The spiritual disciplines are the tools of discipleship for nurturing intimacy with God. Through regular Bible reading, prayer, meditation, memorization, journaling, and other such avenues, we immerse ourselves in Scripture and saturate our minds with God and His reality. Thus, new structures are built in the brain, new pathways which can become stronger than the old sin-

ful habits. These physiological structures will even help us to resist old habit patterns. As we seek to know and walk with God, our minds become the setting for companionship with our Creator and Redeemer—our human minds touch the mind of God.

Step 6: Practice the presence of God. Jesus promised to be with us (Mt 28:18-20). Paul declares that through the Holy Spirit, Christ fills our hearts (Ep 3:15-19). By faith, we can accept His presence. We can focus our minds on this reality throughout the day and slowly we will develop an awareness of His presence. As we become accustomed to and focused upon His presence, we will find our lives transformed. Being aware that Jesus is with us, we resist anything that would break the harmony of our hearts with His.

Step 7: Actively resist sin. Christ has freed us from the controlling power of sin (Rm 6), but this does not mean there is no struggle. Our natures are still sinful. The enemy still prowls like a roaring lion—seeking to destroy us (1P 5:8). In the strength of Christ we can resist him, and the power that conquered Calvary will gain the victory again. As we submit to God, we have power to resist (Jm 4:7-8).

THE SEQUENCE IS CLEAR

We submit to God. We resist the devil. We come close to God. By faith we claim His presence, and in His power we resist the temptation. But we must do it at the level of our desires—our minds (Jm 1:14-15). Jesus teaches us that sin really takes place in the mind (Mt 5:21-22, 27-28). And the battle is won or lost there. As we resist sin, accepting His victory as ours, we move forward in faith, claiming His power and His new life.

When Jesus comes, our sinful natures will be transformed. One day, every sinful habit will be gone. But while we wait for Him, we may grow in Him. We can experience His transforming grace renewing our minds. We can take part in His divine nature (2P 1:4). We can look to Him and be transformed into His likeness.



Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus.

PAUL, THE APOSTLE

FREE TO SHARE



No person was ever honored for what they received.

Honor has been the reward for what they gave.

CALVIN COOLIDGE

The best portion of a good man's life—

His little nameless, unremembered acts of kindness and of love.

WILLIAM WORDSWORTH

When was the first time someone tried to get you to share? “Johnny, you have two apples and Bobby doesn’t have any. Don’t you want to share?” How often have you heard a statement like this? Why is sharing so challenging?

Sharing comes easily for a very few people, but for most of us, it is neither easy nor simple. Our natural sense of ownership says “It’s mine and I want to keep it!” Sharing means giving up something that is ours. And a change must occur within us for sharing to become a natural part of living.

Sharing can’t be forced. It cannot come from guilt or manipulation. Christ-like sharing is a natural part of a transformed life! It comes from a ministering lifestyle that reaches out to others to share God’s resources.

HE SHARED IN OUR LIVES

We can learn a great deal about sharing from the life of Jesus. He began by coming to share in our lives. John states, “And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth” (Jn 1:14, ESV). The “word picture” here is of Someone who became one with us, who “pitched his tent with ours.”

Hebrews 4:15 says that He was “tempted in every way, just as we are.” So we see that before He could share the blessings of eternal life with us, He had to share in our lives. In fact, His sharing reaches to an even deeper level. He identifies fully with us:

Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross (Php 2:5-8, ESV).

HE SHARES HIS RESOURCES WITH US

He also shares His resources with us. Paul says, “And my God will supply every need of yours according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus” (Php 4:19, ESV).

As we look at Jesus’ life, we discover that true sharing can only come through and from our relationship with Him. This relationship

puts everything else in the right perspective. We realize that we are managing His resources. Things do not belong to us. They are His to be used to His glory. How can we make this practical? Here are five principles to help in learning to share:

Accept the wonder of your position in Christ. All heaven's resources are yours to use in His kingdom. His resources are unlimited. Recognize the abundance of His blessings, especially the physical or material ones.

Surrender your sense of ownership. As Christians, we can learn to hold our possessions loosely, recognizing they really belong to God. They are to be shared as He leads us through His Spirit.

See others as Jesus did. We can learn to see those around us through the eyes of Jesus Christ.

Identify with people around you. Put yourself in the place of others and recognize the solidarity we have as humans—each of us is in need of salvation! Try to see another's need through your eyes.

Ask the Spirit to guide you in using His resources. Look for opportunities to help others, asking the Holy Spirit to make you sensitive to their needs.

Sharing extends from a life intimately lived in relationship with God. Yes! We want Johnny to share. But more than this, we want Johnny to discover who he truly is in Jesus, and how he can learn to live a generous life that is guided by God's Spirit.



Sharing can't be forced.

It cannot come from guilt or manipulation.

Christ-like sharing is a natural part of a transformed life!



A Christian man is the most free lord of all,

and subject to none;

a Christian man is the most dutiful servant of all,

and subject to everyone.

MARTIN LUTHER



The world cannot always understand one's profession of faith,

but it can understand service.

IAN MACLAREN



HIS WORLD— OUR TASK



*You've seen the world—
the beauty and the wonder and the power,
the shapes of things, their colors, lights and shades,
changes, surprises—and God made it all.*

ROBERT BROWNING

I look upon the world as my parish.

JOHN WESLEY

The environmental community confronts us with a challenge. Will we survive the abuse we heap on our environment? Periodic reports on the “greenhouse effect” or global warming warn of environmental change and potential catastrophe. While we understand the end of the world will come with the Second Coming of Jesus, as Christians, we are not exempt from this challenge or from responsibility for misuse of our world and its resources. In fact, Christians who emphasize Jesus’ Second Coming and a catastrophic end to the world are often accused of being indifferent to the environment.

The perceived attitude is one of disinterest in the long-term survival of the environment since it will all be destroyed at the Second Coming. This all makes me wonder where we lost our God-given sense of responsibility! After all, this world does belong to God, and we are stewards of the resources He has placed in our hands.

IN THE BEGINNING

If we are to seriously accept the care for God’s world, we must return to where it all began—creation.

During the six days of creation, God spoke this world and all its resources into existence. The world is His by right of creation. He claims it as His own: “The earth is the Lord’s, and everything in it, the world, and all who live in it” (Ps 24:1).

On the sixth day of creation, God created Adam and Eve and gave them the responsibility of “ruling” over this world and all in it (Gn 1:28-30). This “dominion” was presented in the context of their being created in God’s image. Thus our management of natural resources is an extension of the initial responsibility given to humanity at creation—an extension of God’s management. As a result, we must administer this trust in the spirit and attitude of the Creator.

CHALLENGING A SACRED RESPONSIBILITY

However, there are a number of factors which challenge our fulfillment of this sacred responsibility:

Selfishness. We must face the reality of our natural sinful tendencies. We tend to think about our needs and wants regardless of others, or the impact on the environment.

Indifference. Too often we simply don’t care. We see natural resources as limitless and don’t stop to think about our impact on the world around us.

Ignorance. We do little to educate Christians as faithful stewards, and even when we address the subject of stewardship, little is said about care for the world and our environment.

Ownership. We forget that God is the real owner of this world and think it is ours to do with as we wish. So, what can we do?

It all starts with basic Lordship. We must accept this world as a divine trust. Weakened as it may be by six thousand years of sin, the environment is the context in which our stewardship takes place. Ignoring care for the environment is a rejection of the initial responsibility given to Adam and Eve. This is a sacred trust.

Accepting this trust, we must look for ways to make a difference in the practical issues of daily life. There are world environmental issues, but few of us have much impact at that level. However, we can make an impact on the portion of the environment which God has placed in our hands—our areas of direct responsibility.

- We can extend our worship of God into our management of all our resources, including the world in which we live.
- We can help our church members understand this sacred trust. This should include sermons on the world belonging to God and our role as stewards of His creation.
- We can move from a wasteful or careless attitude to one of careful choices. This includes our decisions about the use of resources in our homes.

“This is our Father’s world . . .” the hymn says, but what do our lives say? How long can we continue to ignore the sacred responsibility God gave to Adam and Eve?



*If we accept the world as a divine trust,
we must look for ways to make a difference in the practical issues of
daily life—in the care of our environment.*



*It is not accident that wherever we point the telescope we see beauty,
that wherever we look with the microscope there we find beauty.
It beats in through every nook and cranny of the mighty world.*

RUFUS MATTHEW JONES



*The world is God’s epistle to mankind—
his thoughts are flashing upon us from every direction.*

PLATO



GOD'S ANSWER



*To be simple is to fix one's eye solely on the simple truth of God
at a time when all concepts are being confused,
distorted and turned upside down."*

DIETRICH BONHOEFFER

Our life is frittered away by detail . . . Simplify, simplify."

HENRY DAVID THOREAU

Tom and Cheryl are struggling. After twenty years on the fast track of professional careers, they are strained and stressed. They face a choice—do they continue their treadmill existence or do they take the opportunity to downsize and move to a country community with the promise of a simpler lifestyle?

Simplicity! The very word rings with appeal. Trapped in a world where life's mad rush and slavery to the material dominate our agendas and control our energies, we long for something different. Finding a simpler way appeals to our confusion and seems to promise a solution to our frenetic frustration. Many are reacting to pressure and are turning to a simpler lifestyle. Is this what we mean by simplicity? Is this the solution to the challenges of a materialistic, secular culture? Surely not!

LUST vs TRUST

It all narrows down to the simple choice of lust versus trust—lust for material possessions and contemporary values, versus trust in God and what is His. Simplicity is not merely an exercise in self-control or restraint. It is not limiting possessions or choosing to live a simpler life, for all of this can be done from self-centered motives and selfish values. "Simplicity is a choice to follow God and allow Him to rule."

Simplicity is the assimilation of key lordship principles into how we think and live. Let's explore simplicity in the context of our relationship with God. Simplicity is easier to *describe* than to *define*. It is a complex external expression of an internal reality. It begins in the heart, and, at the same time, builds our walk with God. True simplicity cannot come about without focusing the heart on God. Living out simplicity in our everyday life through values and choices also strengthens our walk with God as we allow Him to be the priority focus of our lives. It means putting God first in response to His invitation (Mt 6:33). It means leaving our anxiety and worry behind. "Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything . . . present your requests to God" (Php 4:6).

Simplicity is not a biblical call to escape from today's pressures. It is a call to move toward God. It is an extension of authentic Christianity as our focus on God replaces other passions and idols in our lives. The words of the classic hymn are just as true today:

*Turn your eyes upon Jesus,
Look full in His wonderful face,
And the things of earth will grow strangely dim,
In the light of His glory and grace.*

A CALL TO WORSHIP

Simplicity is a call to worship God. It begins with acknowledging Him as Owner, Redeemer, Creator and Sustainer. It means offering ourselves to Him as living sacrifices (Rm 12:1). It means not allowing the world to shape and control us, but allowing Him to transform us, beginning with our minds or hearts (Rm 12:2).

We begin by accepting our identity in Christ. God rescues us from sin and leads us into an intimate partnership with Him. Every day by faith we accept the presence of His Spirit in our lives (Gal 3:14). Simplicity becomes a lifestyle as we walk in the Spirit. And by His Spirit, the presence of Christ dwells in our hearts (Ep 3:16-17). He is the primary force guiding and empowering our lives (Php 2:12-13).

SIMPLICITY—SEEING THINGS CLEARLY

Oswald Chambers writes: “Simplicity is the secret to seeing things clearly. A saint does not think clearly until a long time passes, but a saint ought to see clearly without any difficulty. You cannot think through spiritual confusion to make things clear; to make things clear, you must obey. In intellectual matters you can think things out, but in spiritual matters you will only think yourself into further wandering thoughts and more confusion.

“If there is something in your life upon which God has put His pressure, then obey Him in that matter. Bring all your ‘arguments and . . . every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ’ regarding the matter, and everything will become as clear as daylight to you (2Co 10:5). Your reasoning capacity will come later, but reasoning is not how we see. We see like children, and when we try to be wise we see nothing (see Mt 11:25).

“Even the very smallest thing we allow in our lives that is not under the control of the Holy Spirit is completely sufficient to account for spiritual confusion, and spending all of our time thinking about it will still never make it clear. Spiritual confusion can only be conquered through obedience. As soon as we obey, we have discernment. This is humiliating, because when we are confused we know that the reason lies in the state of our mind. But when our natural power of sight is devoted and submitted in obedience to the Holy Spirit, it becomes the very power by which we perceive God’s will, and our entire life is kept in simplicity.” (*My Utmost for His Highest*, September 14 reading).

THE FRUIT OF OUR WALK

Simplicity becomes a discipline or choice. Gradually, almost imperceptibly, He invades the life and creates a new heart, a new mind. We are led into the discipline of putting God before material things and earthly priorities. Simplicity becomes the fruit of our walk with God and a method for integrating that walk into growing areas of life.

We can now look at material possessions with new light. Surrounded by our relationship with God, we recognize that possessions are really His—we hold them in trust. As we manage His resources, we discover that material belongings are not intrinsically evil, and what we think we control ends up controlling us. We see that what we yield to God’s ownership and control becomes an instrument for His glory.

CELEBRATION OF GOODNESS

We may grow in relationship to God to the point where simplicity becomes a celebration of His goodness—recognizing God’s hand in little or much. We can learn to say with Paul: “I am not saying this because I am in need, for I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances. I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want. I can do everything through him who gives me strength” (Php 4:11-13).

Biblical simplicity is an invitation to intimacy with God—focusing on Him in such a way so that our relationship with Him will be the controlling force of our lives. His presence transforms our values and priorities, and holy simplicity becomes God’s answer for the pressures and pace of contemporary life.



*God’s presence transforms our values and priorities,
and holy simplicity becomes God’s answer for the
pressures and pace of contemporary life.*



BIBLICAL ABBREVIATIONS

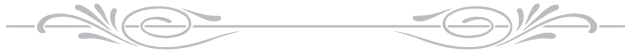
OLD TESTAMENT

Gn	Genesis	Ec	Ecclesiastes
Ex	Exodus	SS	Song Of Songs
Lv	Leviticus	Is	Isaiah
Nu	Numbers	Jr	Jeremiah
Dt	Deuteronomy	La	Lamentations
Js	Joshua	Ez	Ezekiel
Jd	Judges	Dn	Daniel
Ru	Ruth	Ho	Hosea
1S	1 Samuel	Jl	Joel
2S	2 Samuel	Am	Amos
1K	1 Kings	Ob	Obadiah
2K	2 Kings	Jo	Jonah
1Ch	1 Chronicles	Mi	Micah
2Ch	2 Chronicles	Na	Nahum
Ezr	Ezra	Hk	Habakkuk
Ne	Nehemiah	Zph	Zephaniah
Es	Esther	Hg	Haggai
Jb	Job	Ze	Zechariah
Ps	Psalms	Ma	Malachi
Pr	Proverbs		

NEW TESTAMENT

Mt	Matthew	1Tm	1 Timothy
Mk	Mark	2Tm	2 Timothy
Lu	Luke	Ti	Titus
Jn	John	Phn	Philemon
Ac	Acts	Hb	Hebrews
Rm	Romans	Jm	James
1Co	1 Corinthians	1P	1 Peter
2Co	2 Corinthians	2P	2 Peter
Gal	Galatians	1J	1 John
Ep	Ephesians	2J	2 John
Php	Philippians	3J	3 John
Col	Colossians	Ju	Jude
1Th	1 Thessalonians	Rv	Revelation
2Th	2 Thessalonians		





ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Ben Maxson was born in Caracas, Venezuela, of missionary parents. He has spent much of his pastoral ministry in the Northwest and Southern United States, but also gravitated back to his roots in South America to serve in two missions as Youth and Stewardship Director.

Among his many roles, Ben has worked as a Church Growth consultant, Ministerial Director, Evangelism Coordinator and Church Ministries coordinator for Stewardship. Dr. Maxson held the position of Director of Stewardship at the World Headquarters of Seventh-day Adventists from 1995 to 2004. During this time, he developed the solid paradigm of biblical stewardship and shared his vision with the world church.

Currently Ben is serving as Senior Pastor of the Paradise California Seventh-day Adventist Church. He and his wife Mary have two adult children and one grandchild.

