

A man wearing a dark cap and glasses is shown in profile, holding a glowing lantern high in the air with his right hand. The background is a soft, colorful gradient of red, orange, and blue. The overall mood is one of hope and illumination.

**Stewardship
Revival
Week 2024**

...

My Lifestyle

November 30th - December 7th

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Tools for Mission: Gifts and Talents

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GOD FIRST
ADVENTIST STEWARDSHIP MINISTRIES



Embracing God First

“Christians should be preparing for what is soon to break upon the world as an overwhelming surprise, and this preparation they should make by diligently studying the word of God and striving to conform their lives to its precepts.”

Ellen G. White, *Prophets and Kings*, p. 626

The signs are among us (1 Peter 4:7). Last days prophecies are unfolding before our eyes (Amos 3:7). Yet 8.1 billion people need to know His love and His wonderful plans for each of their lives (Jeremiah 29:11). They’ll be reached as His Spirit empowers us (Zechariah 4:6), which results from a life marked by revival and reformation: “A revival of true godliness among us is the greatest and most urgent of all our needs. To seek this should be our first work” (Ellen G. White, *Selected Messages*, Book 1, p. 121).

The 2024 Stewardship Revival Week, entitled “God First . . . My Lifestyle,” offers another opportunity to reflect on the importance of reformation in the practical details of our daily lives. Outward reformation flows from an inner revival that can “be expected only in answer to prayer” (Ellen G. White, *True Revival*, p. 9).

I suggest that we embrace three critical postures in our personal relationship with God during this special week:

1 Know: We are called to learn about God’s designs for our lives as we consider each topic, making it personal and bringing us to practical decisions. We need to explore the Holy Scriptures daily and apply His loving mandates to our lives. The Spirit of Prophecy invites us to be diligent in seeking God: “Those who will put on the whole armor of God and devote some time every day to *meditation and prayer and to the study of the Scriptures* will be connected with heaven and will have a saving, transforming influence upon those around them (Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 5, p. 112, italics supplied). Our application in seeking God will bring renewed spiritual vitality to our existence.

2 Humble: Let’s come daily to our Lord with humbleness (James 4:6), and He will lift up each one of us (James 4:10), allowing the impact of His Spirit in our life to produce revival and reformation (Romans 12:2). Ellen White states, “But it is our work, by confession, humiliation, repentance, and earnest prayer, to fulfill the conditions upon which God has promised to grant us His blessings” (White, *True Revival*, p. 9).

3 Submit: Let’s submit our lives totally to our Lord, and He will ensure us a life of victories (James 4:7). The submission of our lives daily includes giving our time, relationships, body/health, talents/gifts, and belongings/assets for the Lord to use us powerfully in the mission He entrusted to us personally. Recognizing that He is the Owner, that He provides all that we are and have (1 Chronicles 29:14), and that we should put Him first will help us as a family of believers in unity, love, and service for Christ.

This week, let us put God first and commit to faithfulness and generosity in all areas of our lives—including tithe and regular, proportional and systematic offerings. Hence, the Savior will use us effectively to reach out to others and help them to meet Jesus Christ, our Savior. “May the Lord direct your hearts into God’s love and Christ’s perseverance” (2 Thessalonians 3:5). Amen.



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Ready to Pay the Price

“Whoever of you does not forsake all that he has cannot be My disciple.”—Luke 14:33, NKJV

Christian stewardship emphasizes becoming disciples of Christ. It extends beyond fundraising activities. In fact, it is far easier to give of our resources occasionally or even regularly to the church than to live the way Jesus would want us to. The ultimate challenge of Christian stewardship is to follow Christ in all aspects of our lives.

Scripture elaborates on the concept of Christian discipleship, urging us to imitate the virtues of Christ. We’re called to demonstrate complete faithfulness (1 Corinthians 4:2). According to Jesus, true discipleship comes at a cost (Luke 14:25–33). We will revisit this passage of the Gospel as our initial reflection for the 2024 Stewardship Revival Week.

Luke 14:25–33 says: “Now great multitudes went with Him. And He turned and said to them, ‘If anyone comes to Me and does not hate his father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, yes, and his own life also, he cannot be My disciple. And whoever does not bear his cross and come after Me cannot be My disciple. For which of you, intending to build a tower, does not sit down first and count the cost, whether he has enough to finish it—lest, after he has laid the foundation, and is not able to finish, all who see it begin to mock him, saying, “This man began to build and was not able to finish”? Or what king, going to make war against another king, does not sit down first and consider whether he is able with ten thousand to meet him who comes against him with twenty thousand? Or else, while the other is still a great way off, he sends a delegation and asks conditions of peace. So likewise, whoever of you does not forsake all that he has cannot be My disciple” (NKJV).

We can make two initial observations about this passage. Firstly, Jesus is the one defining true discipleship. Since discipleship entails being like Jesus, who better than Him to explain its essence? Secondly, these words are directed to the crowd following Jesus, addressing the “realities of discipleship.” They highlight what should be understood and practiced by those presently following Jesus; individuals already involved in the journey of faith within the church. Luke 14:25–33 speaks directly to us, fellow brothers and sisters.



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FOUR KEY LESSONS ABOUT TRUE DISCIPLESHIP

People become disciples when God occupies the first place in their lives (Luke 14:26).¹

This passage talks about competing affections that vie for our love alongside our love for God. Within the ranks of Christ's followers, some prioritize love for parents, husbands, wives, or children over their love for God. Their loyalty and service to God come secondary to their loyalty and service to others. Then there are those who prioritize self-love over their love for God. In this verse, we are categorically informed that unless God holds the primary position in our lives, we cannot become a true disciple. While we may spend

our entire lives being members or followers, true discipleship is for those who put God first.

When God demands putting Him first, He does so to provide a secure, unmovable anchor for our faith. Faith that is dependent on relationships with others runs the risk of instability. While living on this earth, there is always a high probability of being deceived by those we esteem the most. Additionally, prioritizing affection for others over God may lead us down an unsafe path, away from God's instructions.

A person becomes a disciple when they renounce what looks good to do what is good (Luke 14:27).²

This text mentions the cross that every true disciple must carry. Often, following Christ will make us appear strange to the world, and people will look at us as bizarre. Consequently, this may invite mockery, scorn, and the possibility of being ridiculed. Therefore, it is impossible for a person whose priority is to please everyone or adapt uncritically to circumstances to become a disciple of Christ. The world, as it is today, is not a natural habitat to live up to the goal of doing God's will.

The typical biblical example of unwavering discipleship is the one portrayed by the three Hebrew boys in Babylon. Their enemies assumed that their faith in God was only for sunny days or right after they received their paycheck. The same enemies believed that

when the furnace was heated seven times above the normal, their faith would crumble. However, these young men decided to be disciples under all circumstances. They did not wait for the trial to make this decision. In Daniel 3:16, they boldly replied to the king, "O Nebuchadnezzar, we have no need to answer you in this matter" (NKJV). In essence, they were telling the king, "Our decision is already made; you already know where we stand. We will not serve your gods. If ever our God does not deliver us, we are prepared to carry this cross and pay the price."

When the furnace in our lives is heated up seven times above the normal, do our resolutions and commitments tend to meltdown? Discipleship is for those who are willing to always carry His cross.

People become disciples when they commit themselves to God permanently - Luke 14:28-30.³

Following Christ is quite like a biblically correct marriage—a lifelong commitment. When one decides to follow Christ, they are not preoccupied with the journey ahead or what might happen during the first three months. They push forward till the finish line. The Christian journey is a life of faith, meaning that we do not know exactly when we will receive everything God has promised, nor can we foresee every eventuality along the way. This is the essence of faith! According to Hebrews 11:1: "Faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen" (NKJV).

We have the sure Word of God, which

guarantees our eternal destiny when we live according to His purpose until the end. To truly become a disciple, one must commit to Him and His truth indefinitely. God requires followers to consider the cost of following Him; blind allegiance is dangerous. However, Christians must exhibit perseverance despite adversity, propelled by their love for Christ. Though challenges may hurt, this love does not make them deter. This enduring love transforms individuals, creating a deep sense of identity and purpose. Let's emulate God's perseverance, which is with us always and never forsakes us (Matthew 28:20).

4 People become disciples when they live according to the required conditions (Luke 14:31, 32).

In the concluding verses, Jesus warns against the foolishness of claiming to follow Him and then living as one pleases. Stated differently, Christian discipleship entails self-awareness and understanding the necessary conditions to ensure victory. Jesus utilized war-related terminology to impress the mind of His listeners on the need to be attentive to the conditions required for victory.

A disciple's journey resembles a war expedition; it is not a leisurely stroll by the beach in the evening, nor is it without risk. In contrast, Jesus stresses that we are engaged in a war! A dangerous enemy awaits, seeking to destroy us. Their forces outnumber us and are far more powerful; we are a minority. Discipleship is perilous; the enemy sets traps, inflicting wounds and casualties. Thus, we must remain vigilant, be in the right place, and be equipped with the right weapons. Failure to do so will result in retreat or surrender to the enemy.

How do we learn about the marching orders? How can we identify the dangers

coming our way? The answer lies in God's Word. What other weapon could save us from the enemy's attack besides the prayer of faith? And how can we hope to reach the end without supporting each other in love, as comrades in this battle?

We are not only fighting against Satan, who is already defeated by Jesus, but primarily against ourselves. Self is constantly trying to take God's place through selfishness, pride, lies, and spiritual apathy. This situation is so pertinent that we are counseled by Ellen White: "Consecrate yourself to God in the morning; make this your very first work. Let your prayer be, 'Take me, O Lord, as wholly Thine. I lay all my plans at Thy feet. Use me today in Thy service. Abide with me, and let all my work be wrought in Thee'" (*Steps to Christ*, p. 70).

While we may spend our entire lives being members or followers, true discipleship is for those who put God first.

Dear brothers and sisters, as we conclude, we have been called to an adventure of faith. The final goal is to be like Christ. We should be ready to achieve it by paying the price. Put God first, choose to do what is right at any cost, commit to Him permanently, and live according

to the requirements of our profession of faith. This appeal is for people who are not just members of the church but people who desire God's conversion and commit to being His disciples. Let us call on God to help us pay the price of being His disciples, today and always.

Reflection Questions:

- 1** What are the distinctions between being a church member and being a disciple?
- 2** What hindrances prevent the believer from living fully as a disciple?
- 3** In my spiritual journey, what are the facilitators of true discipleship?

*“I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing.”
– John 15:5, NKJV*

God-First...

My Lifestyle

I choose, with God’s help, to set apart the first moments of each day to commune with the Lord through **PRAYER**, the **STUDY** of the Bible, Spirit of Prophecy and the Sabbath School lesson, and in **FAMILY WORSHIP**.

**Commitment:
Day 1**

God's Tribal Law

Cultivating Positive Relationships

Who is your tribe? In many societies today, people live in quite isolated family units, or even alone. The value of the extended family and community is sometimes not as highly prized as it is in cultures where people's tribes and families play a much more vital role.

Someone once humorously defined our "tribe" with these words: "When you find people who not only tolerate your quirks but celebrate them with glad cries of 'Me, too!' be sure to cherish them. Because those weirdos are your tribe."

Our tribe can be defined as our immediate family, our extended family, our church family,

our community, or even our global family. As God's stewards or managers, we are called to take good care of our tribe and our family. One way that we do this is by encouraging and cultivating positive relationships.

We are reminded of the importance of spending time with our tribe in Hebrews 10:25. The author encourages us not to neglect meeting together, as is the habit of some, but to take time encouraging one another, and even more so as we see Christ's return approaching.

Today, let's try to answer the question, "How can I cultivate positive relationships within my tribe—my immediate family, my church family, and my global family?"

Relationship Building: Genuine or Counterfeit Strategies

In all the important aspects of our lives, God has a blueprint for how we are to manage them faithfully, but Satan also has a counterfeit. There's a great controversy surrounding how we care for our tribe and cultivate healthy relationships:

God Says:

You are your "brother's keeper."

Provide for our family, especially in tough times.

Love and cherish our spouse just like Christ loves the church.

Follow the golden rule: "Do unto others as you would have them do unto you."

Satan Suggests:

Your #1 priority is yourself.

We can leave others to provide for themselves.

Focus on ensuring that our spouse cares for our needs.

It's a competitive world, so look out for yourself at any cost to others.

Some of Satan's ways might seem right to us in certain situations, but we can be sure that, in the end, they lead to the destruction of relationships and the fragmenting of our tribe.

When the apostle Paul wrote to Timothy, he talked about our tribe. He said, "Anyone who does not provide for their relatives, and especially for their own household, has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever" (1 Timothy 5:8).

Ellen White loved to write about the

sacredness of family relationships. In the powerful book *Adventist Home* we read, "Our work for Christ is to begin with the family, in the home. . . . There is no missionary field more important than this" (p. 35). She continues with this very clear statement, "The Lord has not called you to neglect your home. . . . He never works in this way; and He never will" (p. 246).

Wow! That's clear writing. It doesn't get much easier to understand than that.



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Grooming Our Tribe

As faithful stewards of the relationships that God has entrusted to us, how do we practically cultivate them? Let's look at four practical steps:

Jesus gave us principles about how we are to care for our tribe. "Whatever you wish that others would do to you, do also to them, for this is the Law and the Prophets" (Matthew 7:12, ESV).

We could even call this statement "The Golden Rule of the Tribe." It doesn't matter

The Golden Rule 1

whether we define the tribe as our closest, most immediate family or the people living on the other side of the world whom we will never meet; Jesus' words are just as valid. We are to love all people, everywhere, because that's how God loves, and loving like God loves fulfills "the Law and the Prophets."

Watch Our Words 2

A second key practice for cultivating positive relationships is the use of our tongue. Ephesians 4:29 states, "Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen." Colossians 4:6 expands on this theme when it says, "Let your speech always be gracious, seasoned with salt, so that you may

know how you ought to answer each person" (ESV).

As we seek to cultivate positive relationships, we must be careful and prayerful with every word we speak. Our words come from our hearts, so let's ask God daily for a new heart that is a fountain of kind, encouraging, and uplifting words.

Love Like Jesus 3

The apostle John was a disciple who was very close to Jesus, and he watched how Jesus spoke, talked, made decisions, related to strangers, and had compassion for the needy. John had a front-row seat as Jesus revealed God's love to the people around Him.

When John was an old man, he wrote, "If someone says, 'I love God,' and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen, how can he love God whom he has not seen? And this commandment we

have from Him: that he who loves God must love his brother also" (1 John 4:20, 21, NKJV).

Love is at the very heart of our tribe, our family, and our relationships. In the beautiful book *Thoughts from the Mount of Blessings*, Ellen White explains the importance and centrality of love with these words: "It is not earthly rank, nor birth, nor nationality, nor religious privilege, which proves that we are members of the family of God; it is love, a love that embraces all humanity" (p. 75).

Love People Not Things 4

We also need to ensure that our love is directed to the right areas of life. We all know that selfishness and greed are among the greatest things that tear apart relationships. They can sneak into families and churches and destroy them. In our current age, society often encourages us to hold up material things in places even higher than our relationships. How sad it is when things replace relationships.

Faithful stewards of their tribe follow this "tribal law": In an age that *loves* things and *uses* people, we are to *love* people and *use* things. That's so important that we should repeat it and even memorize it: In an age that *loves* things and *uses* people, we are to *love* people and *use* things.

Jesus used things to love people. He *used* mud to *love* a blind man; He *used* sand to love

an adulteress; He *used* water and clay pots to *love* some newlyweds; He *used* loaves and fish to *love* a crowd of hungry people; He *used* His garment to *love* a bleeding woman; and finally, He *used* a cross and three nails to build a bridge of love.

Always prioritizing people above things will help to keep our relationships strong. Following this "tribal law" will impact the way we shop, the way we travel, the way we consume, and the way we care for others.

When it comes to cultivating positive relationships, the greatest thing we will ever learn is to love like God loves. Let's study the life of Jesus, looking at how He cared for His "tribe"—His family, His disciples, His community, everyone—and as He Himself said, let's then, "Go, and do likewise."

Today, we will finish with a story that powerfully illustrates the message of being faithful stewards of our relationships:

The story is told of a man, let's call him Peter, who received a new sports car as a gift from his brother. One day, he drove it into the city and parked it on the street while he was doing some shopping. On returning to his car, loaded with shopping bags, he saw a young homeless boy staring at the shiny new vehicle with wide eyes.

As Peter approached the car, the boy shyly asked, "Excuse me, sir, is this your car?"

"Yes, it is," Peter replied. "My brother gave it to me. It was a gift."

The boy's eyes lit up with surprise at the thought of such a generous and expensive gift. "Wow!" he said. "That's incredible! I wish . . . I wish . . . I wish . . ."

But before he finished his sentence, Peter said, "Yes, I know son. You wish that you had a brother like that."

"No! No, sir. That's not it!" the boy quickly replied. "I wish . . . I just wish I could be a brother like that."

Do you want to be a brother like that, a family member like that, a community member like that, a citizen like that? You don't need to be rich enough to give away a sports car. God asks you to look at the things He has entrusted to your care, big or small, and to use them to love people.

God is the Creator and Sustainer of positive relationships. With God's help, through Christ living in your heart, you can live a life where you love people more than things, so that you choose to use your things to love people.

God's Word is filled with time-proven lessons about building and maintaining positive relationships, and having a personal relationship with God is at the heart of it.

"Our work for Christ is to begin with the family, in the home. . . There is no missionary field more important than this."

Ellen White,
Adventist Home, p. 35

Reflection Questions:

- 1 If I have said harsh things or done something that has damaged someone's confidence, trust, or relationship with me, what can I do to heal that relationship?
- 2 How will following the "tribal law" impact the way I shop, the way I travel, the way I consume, and the way I care?
- 3 The brother in the story gave a very expensive gift, a thing. From what I have learned today, what even greater gifts can I give to others?

*“[Love] bears all things, believes all things, hopes
all things, endures all things.”
1 Corinthians 13:7, NKJV*

God-First...

My Lifestyle

I choose, with God’s help, to improve my **RELATIONSHIPS**, growing in faithfulness, forgiveness, and loving by principle.

**Commitment:
Day 2**

The Priceless Value of Health

Today, an inordinate emphasis is placed on the accumulation of wealth and material possessions. Advertisements tell us we can be rich and quit our jobs if only we buy and follow the “proven” strategy of one self-made millionaire or another. Magazines, television shows, and social media outlets continuously bombard us with images of opulent lifestyles, luxurious homes, and lavish acquisitions. Even among Christians, the belief in and the promulgation of the “prosperity gospel” cultivates an attitude of materialistic self-interest that undermines the biblical view of Christians as faithful stewards entrusted with resources to glorify God and serve others. Are we inclined to

prioritize possessions?

The skewed focus on monetary wealth is misguided and overlooks the genuine essence of what constitutes authentic prosperity and abundant life. For those guided by biblical principles, the concept of stewardship, managing life on behalf of a Divine Owner, encompasses a holistic approach to life that prioritizes well-being and the responsible utilization of all that has been entrusted to us. Even the adage “health is wealth” does not adequately capture the full and nuanced life principles of stewardship. Health holds unparalleled value, and it impacts all dimensions of our existence.

True Value of Health

To begin with, health is the cornerstone of a fulfilling human existence. Without good health, wealth accumulation and life’s achievements lose significance. No amount of riches can buy back lost time or restore ailing bodies to vitality, despite the advances in modern medicine. Total health enables us to pursue our dreams, engage in meaningful relationships, contribute to society, and aid in the advancing of God’s kingdom here on earth. Health is the bedrock upon which all other pursuits stand.

Moreover, for people of faith, stewardship encompasses responsible caretaking of all resources entrusted to us by our Creator. This includes physical health, mental well-being, appropriate relationships, and care of the environment. The apostle Paul exhorts us to honor God with our bodies, recognizing them as temples of the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 6:19, 20). This divine mandate emphasizes the sacredness of physical health and our reciprocal responsibility to nurture and protect it.

In today’s fast-paced world, mental health issues are rampant, affecting individuals irrespective of their financial status. Stress, anxiety, and depression can debilitate individuals, hindering their ability to lead fulfilling lives and fulfill their potential. Therefore, stewardship demands nurturing mental resilience, seeking support when needed, and promoting environments prioritizing mental wellness.

Christian stewardship fosters healthy relationships built on love, trust, and mutual respect. In pursuing wealth, individuals may

neglect their interpersonal connections, leading to loneliness and isolation. However, for people of faith, relationships hold intrinsic value, reflecting God’s love and interconnectedness. Stewardship calls for investing time and effort into nurturing meaningful connections with family, friends, and community members, enriching our individual lives and society as a whole.

Our stewardship extends to environmental care, recognizing the Earth as a precious gift entrusted to humanity. As people of faith, we are called to be stewards of creation, safeguarding the planet as best we can. It entails adopting sustainable practices, conserving natural resources, and advocating for environmental justice. By preserving the environment, we fulfill our responsibility to honor and protect His creation.

The stewardship of our health is foundational to all other aspects of our lives. Without robust physical and mental health, the capacity to achieve, appreciate, and enjoy wealth, or anything else, may be severely diminished. Wealth alone cannot cure illness, alleviate chronic pain, or restore vitality. An overemphasis on accomplishments and the acquisition of material possessions can often lead to unhealthy behaviors that can, in turn, increase stress, anxiety, and neglect of self-care. Conversely, prioritizing health through balanced nutrition, regular exercise, and mindful living can yield a profound sense of well-being, energy, and clarity—qualities that enhance our ability to truly savor life’s experiences.



Zeno Charles-Marcel

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Pathway to Optimized Health

SOME PRACTICAL STEPS THAT, WHEN TAKEN, CAN MAXIMIZE OUR HEALTH POTENTIAL AS STEWARDS:

Develop a holistic self-care routine:

- Establish a consistent sleep schedule to ensure adequate rest. Adequate rest and sleep are crucial for overall well-being. We should target getting enough sleep each night, aiming for 7–9 hours for most of us adults. Create a relaxing bedtime routine, and ensure your sleep environment is conducive to rest. Establishing a consistent sleep schedule, creating a relaxing bedtime routine, limiting screen time before bed, and ensuring a comfortable sleep environment can promote better sleep quality.
- Plan and prepare nutritious meals focused on whole, unprocessed foods. We optimize our nutrition by consuming a variety of whole foods, including fruits, vegetables, lean proteins, whole grains, and healthy fats, while being mindful of portion sizes and avoiding excessive intake of processed foods, sugars, and unhealthy fats.
- Incorporate physical activity into our daily life (e.g., walking, strength training). Regular exercise is essential for maintaining optimal health. We should aim for a combination of aerobic exercise, strength training, and flexibility exercises to improve cardiovascular health, build muscle strength, and enhance flexibility. Finding enjoyable forms of physical activity makes incorporating exercise into daily life easier. “So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God” (1 Corinthians 10:31).
- Stay hydrated by drinking an adequate amount of water throughout the day.
- Dedicate time for stress-relief practices like Bible reading and prayer. Chronic stress can have detrimental effects on our health. We should implement strategies to manage stress effectively, such as spending time in nature and engaging in hobbies. Identifying stressors and developing healthy coping mechanisms reduce their impact.
- Nurture our mental health through journaling, counseling, or joining a support group.

Educate ourselves continuously:

- Read books, articles, and research papers on health topics relevant to our needs.
- Attend workshops, seminars, or online courses to expand our knowledge.
- Consult with health care professionals and ask questions to deepen our understanding.
- We should continuously educate ourselves about health and wellness topics. Stay informed about the latest research, trends, and best

practices in nutrition, exercise, mental health, and preventive care. This knowledge can empower us to make informed decisions and adopt healthy habits.

Practice self-awareness:

- We should pay attention to our body’s signals and how different foods and activities make us feel.
- We should notice our emotional patterns and thought processes that may impact our well-being.
- We should cultivate present-moment awareness.

Establish a preventive health care routine:

- Schedule regular checkups with the doctor, dentist, and other relevant health care providers.
- Follow recommended screening guidelines for our age and health profile.
- Incorporate preventive measures like vaccines and supplements as needed, and prioritize healthy habits into our lifestyle.

Cultivate a supportive environment:

- Surround ourselves with people who share our health values and can offer encouragement. “Two are better than one, because they have a good return for their labor: If either of them falls down, one can help the other up” (Ecclesiastes 4:9, 10).
- Engage in a faith-based or community group focused on health and well-being.
- Create a home environment that promotes healthy habits (e.g., removing junk food and unhelpful distractions).

Engage in purposeful activities:

- Volunteer for causes that align with our values and allow us to contribute positively.
- Explore hobbies or creative outlets that bring us joy and fulfillment.
- We should engage ourselves in being contributors and not just recipients.
- Identify ways to use our unique talents in service of others. “A cheerful heart is good medicine, but a crushed spirit dries up the bones” (Proverbs 17:22).

Embrace lifelong learning and growth:

- Reflect on our health journey regularly

and adjust our approach as needed.

- Be open to trying new healthy habits or practices that can enhance our well-being.
- Celebrate our progress, but also have patience and perseverance when facing setbacks.

Integrate spirituality and stewardship:

- Pray and think earnestly about our role as stewards of our health and well-being.
- Make it a daily habit to express gratitude for the gift of our bodies and all it allows us to experience.
- Seek guidance from God and practice our healthy religious traditions to live a balanced, purposeful life. “Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard

your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus” (Philippians 4:6, 7).

Avoid harmful substances:

- We should refrain from behaviors that can harm our health, such as smoking, alcohol consumption, and illicit and inappropriate drug use. These substances can have serious adverse effects on our physical and mental health, and avoiding them is essential for maximizing health potential.

Avoid obsession or extremism:

- We should practice prudence and moderation in all aspects of our lives, finding a balanced approach that harmoniously supports our mental, physical, and spiritual needs.

Total health enables us to pursue our dreams, engage in meaningful relationships, contribute to society, and aid in the advancing of God’s kingdom here on earth.

By consistently following these steps, we can, and eventually will, embody health principles and work toward more vibrant physical, mental, and spiritual well-being. As we incorporate these practical ideas and actions into our daily routines, we will be maximizing our health potential and leveraging our health to accomplish what God has in mind for us. These practices do not save us eternally but can save us physically and mentally from unnecessary pain, sickness, and suffering.

Additionally, we will honor the sacred responsibility of stewardship over our health and maximize our potential to live a vibrant, fulfilling life of service to God and be an inspiration to others. By prioritizing health and embracing a comprehensive understanding of stewardship, we can lead purposeful lives guided

by compassion, integrity, and reverence for all creation. As we strive to be faithful stewards of our lives and resources, let us remember that true wealth lies in the richness of health and the abundance of love and service.

Optimizing our bodies, talents, relationships, and resources is the true measure of prosperity. For people of faith, this understanding is deeply ingrained in our teachings, reminding us to approach life with humility, gratitude, and a commitment to using our gifts for the greater good. By redefining our priorities and embracing a more holistic view of stewardship, we can cultivate a life of genuine wealth—one that nourishes our souls, uplifts our communities, and honors God and the sacred trust He has bestowed upon us. The value of optimal health is priceless.

Reflection Questions:

1 Am I aware of my life’s priorities and aligning my actions accordingly?

2 How do your personal experiences confirm or refute the statement: “Health is the bedrock upon which all other pursuits stand”?

3 How would maintaining or improving my health contribute to my ability to serve God and others?

“Heal me, O LORD, and I shall be healed; save me, and I shall be saved, for You are my praise.”

–Jeremiah 17:14, NKJV

God-First...

My Lifestyle

I choose, with God’s help, to establish one new **HEALTHY HABIT** to improve my condition in **SERVING** God and others.

Commitment:
Day 3

Tools for Mission: Gifts and Talents

Before embarking fully on the mission outlined in the Great Commission of Matthew 28:19, 20, it is crucial for us to appreciate and use the appropriate tools that facilitate success in the mission field. Fortunately, thank God, the Bible identifies these mission tools as spiritual gifts and talents. Hence, it's no coincidence that Christ instructed His disciples to wait until they received the power from the Holy Spirit. "But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you; and you

will be my witnesses" (Acts 1:8). This spiritual empowerment is a gift from God to all disciples. It serves as a catalyst for spreading the gospel, extending from the time of the apostles to the present day, or "in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth" (Act 1:8).

Spiritual gifts and talents do not work in isolation; they always complement each other in effective ministry. Therefore, every follower of Christ needs both talents and spiritual gifts to be fully equipped for ministry.

Talents and Spiritual Gifts

Talents and spiritual gifts share similarities but differ in nature. A talent results from the combination of genetics and training, and can be developed and directed toward either a profession or a hobby. Everyone, regardless of being a Christian or non-Christian, can possess a talent from birth, and it can be used for spiritual or non-spiritual purposes. However, the same cannot be said for spiritual gifts.

Jesus provided insight about talents and their growth in a parable He shared with His disciples: "For the kingdom of heaven is like a man traveling to a far country, who called his own servants and delivered his goods to them. And to one he gave five talents, to another two, and to another one, to each according to his own ability; and immediately he went on a journey" (Matthew 25:14, 15, NKJV).

In the parable, Jesus illustrates talents as representing what God has given us: our natural or inherent abilities meant to be used in a way that glorifies Him and draws others toward Him. The statement "each according to his own ability"

means that these talents must be employed as tools to serve others rather than for selfish purposes. Christ confirmed by asking, "Who then is that faithful and wise steward, whom his master will make ruler over his household, to give them their portion of food in due season?" (Luke 12:42, NKJV). In other words, the talent is to be developed and used to serve the children of God. Consequently, when the Master returns, there will be accountability and a reward. Christ reiterated this explanation to His servants: "Blessed is that servant whom his master will find so doing when he comes. Truly, I say to you that he will make him ruler over all that he has" (Luke 12:43, 44, NKJV).

Spiritual gifts, in contrast, are gifts from God through the Holy Spirit to empower believers for the global proclamation of the gospel, as indicated in Mark 16:15. Unlike talents, which one develops and may lead to one's profession or hobby, spiritual gifts are given by the Holy Spirit for the building up of Christ's church. Ephesians 4:11, 12 illustrates this: "And He Himself gave



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evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry” (NKJV). In essence, talents represent what God has given us as natural abilities, while a spiritual gift is the result of the action of the Holy Spirit in us.

The apostle Paul emphasized the necessity for Christians to be empowered by at least one spiritual gift of the Holy Spirit before engaging in ministry. It is the greatest need for all believers. He cautions believers against solely relying on abilities or talents to do ministry, stating in 1 Corinthians 12:1–7 that “concerning spiritual gifts, brethren, I do not want you to be ignorant. . . . The manifestation of the Spirit is given to each one for the profit of all” (NKJV).

Paul further explains that not all the spiritual gifts of the Holy Spirit are manifested in a single person. Instead, individuals receive them as the Holy Spirit determines, as outlined in 1 Corinthians 12:8–11:

“For to one is given the word of wisdom through the Spirit, to another the word of knowledge through the same Spirit, to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healings by the same Spirit, to another the working of miracles, to another prophecy, to another discerning of spirits, to another different kinds of tongues, to another the interpretation of tongues. But one and the same Spirit produces all of these, distributing each one individually as He wills” (NKJV).

Therefore, Paul encourages that “since we have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, each of us is to use them properly: if prophecy, in proportion to one’s faith” (Romans 12:6, NASB).

Furthermore, Peter wrote in 1 Peter 4:10: “Each of you should use whatever gift you have received to serve others, as faithful stewards of God’s grace in its various forms.” Since all Christians are to play an active part in the furtherance of the gospel, do you believe that you have received any or some of these spiritual gifts? If so, are you confident that you are using them to serve others and proclaim the gospel?

Reward for Using Talents and Spiritual Gifts to Serve Others

A thorough reflection on talents and spiritual gifts finds further insight in the Spirit of Prophecy. Ellen G. White wrote: “The smallest talent and the humblest service may be offered to Jesus as a consecrated gift, and with the fragrance of His own merits He will present it to the Father. If the best we have is presented with a sincere heart, in love to God, from a longing desire to do service to Jesus, the gift is wholly acceptable. Everyone can lay up a treasure in the heavens. All can be ‘rich in good works, ready to distribute, willing to communicate; laying up in store for themselves a good foundation against the time to come, that they may lay hold on eternal life’” (*Counsels on Stewardship*, p. 161).

Conclusion

The Spirit of Prophecy remarks: “However large, however small, your talents, remember that what you have is yours only in trust. Thus God is testing you, giving you opportunity to prove yourself true. To Him you are indebted for all your capabilities. To Him belong your powers of body, mind, and soul, and for Him these powers are to be used. Your time, your influence, your capabilities, your skill—all must be accounted for to Him who gives all. He uses his gifts best who seeks by earnest endeavor to carry out the Lord’s great plan for the uplifting of humanity (Ellen White, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 7, p. 281).

It is, therefore, important to identify our abilities and spiritual gifts from the Holy Spirit, and start making good use of them to serve others.

Understanding that the hope of the resurrection of the saints is based on utilizing these spiritual tools of talents and spiritual gifts is crucial. Effectively employing these tools will position us to be among the saints that will resurrect and meet Jesus at His second coming, to


be taken to the heavenly kingdom as promised. The Spirit of Prophecy affirms: “The intellect, the reason, the talents of men, are the gifts of God to be employed to His glory, for the upbuilding of His eternal kingdom. It is the spiritual and moral character that is of value in the sight of Heaven, and that will survive the grave and be made glorious with immortality for the endless ages of eternity. . . . Only those who have appreciated the grace of Christ, which has made them heirs of God and joint heirs with Jesus, will rise from the grave bearing the image of their Redeemer (Ellen White, *Selected Messages*, Book 1, p. 258).

“To Him belong your powers of body, mind, and soul, and for Him these powers are to be used.”

—Ellen White, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 7, p. 281

Reflection Questions:

- 1 Are you sure that you are making good use of these tools (talents and spiritual gifts) bestowed upon all believers, including you?
- 2 Are you sure that by using your talents and spiritual gifts, you’re laying up a treasure in heaven that will enable you to be among the saints that will resurrect and go with Jesus into the kingdom?
- 3 Do you feel challenged as you labor with these talents and spiritual gifts in the Lord’s vineyard? If your answer is yes, then what are you going to do differently after today?



*“How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet
of him who brings good news, who proclaims
peace, who brings glad tidings of good things,
who proclaims salvation, who says
to Zion, ‘Your God reigns!’”
– Isaiah 52:7, NKJV*

God-First...

My Lifestyle

I choose, with God’s help, to devote regular time each week to **WORK** for God, spreading the **GOOD NEWS** to others through Bible studies, small groups, etc.

Commitment:
Day 4

Time's Tapestry: Weaving Meaning into Every Minute

There is a story by Jorge Bucay about a woodcutter who turned up one day looking for work at a lumberyard. The salary was good, and the conditions were even better, so the woodcutter had every intention of making a good impression. The first day, he introduced himself to the foreman, who gave him an axe and assigned him to a particular forest area. Filled with enthusiasm, the man went out into the forest to chop.

He cut down eighteen trees in a single day. "Congratulations," the foreman said to him. "Keep up the good work."

Encouraged by the foreman's words, the woodcutter decided to do even better the following day. So that night, he went to bed very early. The following morning, he rose before anyone else and went into the forest.

But despite his best efforts, he couldn't cut

down more than fifteen trees. *I must be tired*, he thought. And he decided to go to bed even earlier than the day before.

At daybreak, he rose, determined to beat his record of eighteen trees. Nevertheless, that day, he didn't even manage to cut down half that number. The day after, he cut down only seven, then five, and on the last day, he spent all afternoon trying to chop down his second tree for the day. Anxious about what the foreman might say, the woodcutter went to inform him of what was happening and to swear up and down that he was working himself to the bone.

The foreman asked, "When did you last sharpen your axe?"

"Sharpen it?" asked the woodcutter. "I haven't had time to sharpen it. I've been too busy chopping down trees."

Time is Uncontrollable

"I haven't had time . . ." Time is an element of our lives that greatly impacts us. How do we use it, and what do we do to make the most of a period of time? Time is a permanently moving component of life; it doesn't stop, and we cannot do anything to regain time gone by. It forms a fundamental part of our lives, but in essence, it is out of our control.

We, as humans, have the need to control—it is part of our being, how we are and exist. One clinical psychologist explains our need for control: "In order to achieve the outcome that is

wanted or expected, different behaviors are used in different circumstances. Using different means to achieve anticipated outcomes is the hallmark of control. Control is the process of living."¹ All this means we must negotiate the issue of time's uncontrollability in our everyday lives. We cannot slow it down, speed it up, or halt its spin. Instead, we must learn to navigate within its constraints and adapt to its flow. This reality necessitates a balance between our desire for control and the inherent uncontrollability of time.

How Do We Make It Count?

King Solomon pondered over this same question and explained the contradictory situation in a poem as much as he could: "For everything there is a season and a time for every matter under heaven: a time to be born and a time to die; a time to plant and a time to pluck up what is planted; a time to kill and a time to heal; a time

to break down and a time to build up; a time to weep and a time to laugh; a time to mourn and a time to dance; a time to throw away stones and a time to gather stones together; a time to embrace and a time to refrain from embracing; a time to seek and a time to lose; a time to keep and a time to throw away; a time to tear and a time to sew; a

¹Timothy A. Carey, "The Being of Humans," *Psychology Today*, October 9, 2015, <https://www.psychologytoday.com/sg/blog/in-control/201510/the-being-humans>.



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time to keep silent and a time to speak; a time to love and a time to hate; a time for war and a time for peace” (Ecclesiastes 3:1–8, NRSVUE).

The above poem concentrates not on the inevitable movement of time but on the presence of different particular moments. We tend to see time as only the future, directing our eyes toward situations that haven’t happened yet. But Solomon mentions that each particular moment matters, a moment of presence for something: working, losing, hating, embracing, building, loving, or peace.

He continues to explain his reasoning in verses 9–15: What gain have the workers from their toil? I have seen the business that God has given to everyone to be busy with. He has made everything suitable for its time; moreover, he has put a sense of past and future into their minds, yet they cannot find out what God has done from the beginning to the end. I know that there is nothing better for them than to be happy and

enjoy themselves as long as they live; moreover, it is God’s gift that all should eat and drink and take pleasure in all their toil. I know that whatever God does endures forever; nothing can be added to it nor anything taken from it; God has done this so that all should stand in awe before him. That which is already has been, that which is to be already is, and God seeks out what has gone by” (NRSVUE).

First, God is the one who has given us time and a “sense of past and future.” That means there is nothing inherently wrong with time, as “nothing can be added to it nor anything taken from it,” because God has made it so. Additionally, God has seen fit to give everyone an activity to be busy with, to gain and profit from one’s toil. Furthermore, He provides daily nourishment, and not just that, but joy in the work we accomplish. Our God has given us what we need and desire. The text implies that in God, there is all. What more is there for us to want?

Being in the Presence of God Is What Matters

“God has done this so that all should stand in awe before him.” Solomon is describing to us where to focus during each segment of time. Even though time draws our mind to the future, because it constantly moves to the things to come, we should also focus on the moment we are in. However, we shouldn’t only invest ourselves in living in a particular moment, but establishing and maintaining a connection with God, in understanding who He is, what He has given us, and how much He cares and loves us. The strength to live in the future and cope with what it will bring comes from this moment of connectedness and dependence on God in the present.

God points out the importance of each single moment of focused time in His presence. “On the sixth day God finished the work that he had done, and he rested on the seventh day from all the work that he had done. So God blessed the seventh day and hallowed it, because on it God rested from all the work that he had

done in creation” (Genesis 2:2, 3, NRSVUE). The Sabbath provides a practice ground for making a stop, creating a moment of focus, and focusing on God. Sabbath allows us to develop a habit of focusing our energy on the issue that matters: our relationship with God. As a once-a-week practice, the Sabbath leads to connectedness as an everyday habit. It helps us understand the need to concentrate on our relationship with God. Sabbath keeping teaches us the value of concentration and focus, which can be transformed into an everyday habit.


Creating a habit takes, on average, 66 days. Changing our behavior takes more than two months after making a disciplined decision. A study reveals that establishing a new habit can even take up to eight months. Fortunately, there is mercy in the process, as researchers found that “missing one opportunity to perform the behavior did not materially affect the habit formation process.”² So, sometimes, failing does not mean the end of the changing process.

²Philippa Lally et al, “How the Habits Formed: Modelling Habit Formation in the Real World,” *European Journal of Social Psychology* 16, no. 6 (2009): 998–1009. <https://doi.org/10.1002/ejsp.674>.

Counting Minutes . . .

So, to learn to make every minute count, one must first know what it is that matters, which is God and His kingdom: “But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well” (Matthew 6:33, NRSVUE). Then comes a life that changes through practicing the rest of the Sabbath and the enjoyment of living in the present moment. Connecting those two elements will result in a new behavioral pattern. The connection with God in each moment will lead to resilience in dealing with the future and whatever it brings.

Would now be the moment for you and me to exercise our minds and learn to live fully in the present moment with the assurance of God’s presence?



*The connection with God
in each moment will lead
to resilience in dealing
with the future and
whatever it brings.*

Reflection Questions:

- 1** Do I trust that God is present in my everyday life?
- 2** Am I capable of silencing the issues of everyday life in my mind and focusing on God’s character?
- 3** How am I going to plan for the next months so that I can create a habit of pausing in front of God?

*“Blessed is the man who does this, and the son
of man who lays hold on it; who keeps from
defiling the Sabbath, and keeps his hand from
doing any evil.”
–Isaiah 56:2, NKJV*

God-First...

My Lifestyle

I choose, with God’s help, to keep the **SABBATH, PREPARING** for it during the week, respecting the **BOUNDARIES**, maintaining the right **THOUGHTS**, and engaging in appropriate **ACTIVITIES**.

Commitment:
Day 5

Foundations for Practicing Tithing

If you were to witness a metal ball floating freely in the air, you would naturally inquire about the invisible suspensions. Similarly, in our lives, whenever individuals or yourself adopt a particular behavior or lifestyle, there are always underlying beliefs and convictions influencing us, which I'll refer to as

"invisible suspensions." This principle applies to the practice of tithing. It stems from inner beliefs. Whenever these essential beliefs are absent or uncertain, the practice of tithing is either abandoned or feels burdensome. On this sixth day of our stewardship revival, we'll revisit three of these crucial beliefs:

God is the Owner

The motivation to return tithe flows from the belief in God's ownership. Throughout the Bible, there are numerous references affirming God's ownership over everything on planet Earth. For instance, Psalm 24:1 reads, "The earth is the LORD's, and all its fullness, the world and those who dwell therein" (NKJV). Additionally, Psalm 50:10 states that "for every beast of the forest is Mine, and the cattle on a thousand hills" (NKJV). These verses clearly emphasize the total ownership of God. He owns the earth and the fullness thereof. He possesses the livestock spread on a thousand hills and valleys. But above all, God owns human beings who dwell on it. It's as though He proclaims: "I own those who call themselves owners." If a person owns livestock, God asserts, "I not only own the cattle you consider yours, but I also own you." It is an all-encompassing ownership.

Through the act of creation, God owns everything: "For in six days the LORD made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and rested the seventh day. Therefore the LORD blessed the Sabbath day and hallowed it" (Exodus 20:11, NKJV). Who else can claim to be the originator of life and everything? Who else can claim pre-existence over the living world and immortality? If no such being exists, then God must be acknowledged as the only rightful Owner of the Earth and all that inhabit it.

It is crucial to remember an important element regarding the creatorship of God. While His creation was to benefit human beings, there is a deeper purpose. Apostle Paul highlighted this point in his message to the Colossian church: "For by Him all things were created that are in heaven

and that are on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or powers. All things were created through Him and for Him" (Colossians 1:16, NKJV).

Not only did God create "all things" through Jesus, but the title of ownership permanently bears the name of Jesus. While human beings can use the minerals and other riches scattered throughout the Earth, they do not belong to them. Jesus shares His property with us during our short "tour of duty" on Earth, and we leave them when we die. As the Eternal Being who never dies, He retains sovereign ownership of everything on Earth and has never ceded ownership to anyone else.

There is nothing here on Earth on which the ownership of God is not inscribed: "The silver is Mine, and the gold is Mine," says the LORD of hosts" (Haggai 2:8, NKJV). Tithe is the constant reminder that God owns everything. Ellen G. White succinctly expresses this idea by stating that tithe should be returned to God, the rightful owner: "God lays His hand upon the tithe, as well as upon gifts and offerings, and says, 'That is Mine. When I entrusted you with My goods, I specified that a portion should be your own, to supply your necessities, and a portion should be returned to Me'" (*Counsels on Stewardship*, p. 46).

The motivation to return tithe sprouts from the conviction about God's ownership of everything. Disputing God's ownership of everything on Earth would undermine the faithful practice of tithing. Returning tithe is an acknowledgment of God's ownership and creatorship of the universe.



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God Is Accurate

The second foundational belief informing and influencing the practice of tithe is: God is accurate. Tithe is ten percent. When God says in Malachi 3:10, “Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse, so that there may be food in My house, and put Me to the test now in this,” says the *LORD* of armies, ‘if I do not open for you the windows of heaven and pour out for you a blessing until it overflows’” (NASB), He means the exact percentage, not something approximate, close to it, or above it. He is specific to dispel any misunderstandings regarding what He is expecting. It is considered tithe only if the percentage is ten percent.

We need to remember that our God is a God who uses numbers. We encounter examples such as the seven days of Creation, the 30 days of a month, the Ten Commandments, the 12 tribes of Israel, the 12 foundations of New Jerusalem, the 12 apostles, and the 2,300 days, among others.

Numbers mean a lot for both God and humans. We calculate our salaries in numbers, feeling aggrieved if we are paid less without

explanation. Our years are counted numerically. Vacations are measured in days. Even medical prescriptions have numbers. Given the importance of numbers in our life, why would we assume that God should not be concerned with the precise percentage we return to Him as tithe?

God could have selected any other percentage as a sign of His ownership. He could have approximated it, but instead, He chose to be specific and precise. God’s precision requires those who tithe to be equally precise for their tithe to meet the criteria of exactness.

God has not permitted anybody to determine the measure of His ownership. He, the Owner, has chosen it for the reasons known only to Him. Since the tithe is exact, those who wish to practice tithing should ensure their returns are accurate. This is probably why the Spirit of Prophecy admonishes, “Strictly, honestly, and faithfully, let this portion be returned to Him” (Ellen White, *Counsels on Stewardship*, p. 82).

Tithing Is an Act of Faith

The third foundational belief supporting tithing is faith. Without faith, tithing is a challenge. The call in Malachi 3:10 for people

to test and see if God won’t open the windows of heaven is a call to exercise faith. Faith plays a vital role in tithing for the following reasons:

God Will Keep His Word¹

Returning tithe before seeing the blessings of God requires faith. Faith holds God at His word. Some people don’t return their tithes because they don’t know about tithing. Others don’t return tithe not because they don’t have the means, rather, it’s about lacking faith in Him.

Despite being let down by those we trusted most, God is faithful. We can hold Him at His word. Numbers 23:19 assures us, “God is not a


man, that He should lie, nor a son of man, that He should repent. Has He said, and will He not do? Or has He spoken, and will He not make it good?” (NKJV). In Joshua 21:45 we read, “Not a word failed of any good thing which the *LORD* had spoken to the house of Israel. All came to pass” (NKJV). Because God keeps His word, tithing becomes easy to apply. Anyone who has consistently returned tithe can attest to the faithfulness of God.

What Beats Logic Works²

Returning tithe from an income that is already insufficient to sustain someone may seem illogical and requires faith. How can an amount that is barely enough to maintain someone be adequate after tithing? Doesn’t that beat logic? God challenges us to test Him. Tithing indeed defies logic.

It reminds me of the experience of the disciples after fishing all night, as recorded

in Luke 5:4–6, which reads: “When He had stopped speaking, He said to Simon, ‘Launch out into the deep and let down your nets for a catch.’ But Simon answered and said to Him, ‘Master, we have toiled all night and caught nothing; nevertheless at Your word I will let down the net.’ And when they had done this, they caught a great number of fish, and their net was breaking” (NKJV).



Expecting to catch fish during the day when they had failed to do so all night seemed illogical. Yet because Jesus instructed them, they cast the net and “caught a great number of fish.” In the same way, returning tithe when one’s total income is not enough and expecting to be sustained by what remains after tithe seems illogical. However, because God has promised to pour blessings, one still returns tithe, even if it appears to defy logic.

Child of God, do not fear that returning tithe will lead you to suffer. With God’s blessings, what remains after tithing will be enough to sustain you more than the amount which is not tithed. Ellen G. White underscored this when she wrote, “Those who return to the Lord the tenth will find it true that the nine-tenths are worth more to them than the ten-tenths” (*Pacific Union Recorder*, October 10, 1901).

Conclusion

Let me reiterate the three foundational principles of tithing. Firstly, God is the owner of everything on Earth. Tithe is returned in recognition of God as Owner and Creator. Secondly, God is accurate. Tithe is ten percent of one’s income. It must be ten percent to be considered as tithe. Anything less than ten percent does not meet this criteria. Thirdly, tithing requires faith. Tithing is a call to move not by sight but by faith, believing that God will keep His word of pouring blessings until one has no place to store them. Like the disciples who were told to cast the net in the deep after toiling the whole night without success, one who practices tithings says, “Though what I have is not enough, at Your word, I will return the tithe.”

Today, this week, is the time to pray for God’s Spirit to consolidate these three foundational beliefs in each one of us: God is the Owner, His instructions are accurate, and faith in Him is always rewarded. Based on these convictions, if you desire to practice (or continue practice) tithing and experience firsthand how faithful God is in keeping His word, seal your decision with prayer.


God could have selected any other percentage as a sign of His ownership. He could have approximated it, but instead, He chose to be specific and precise.

Reflection Questions:

1 If God is so accurate as to specify the percentage to return to Him, how exact are we in our dealings with God in tithe?

2 Since returning tithe requires faith, is it taking things too far to think of tithing as an exercise to strengthen one’s faith?

3 Reflect on this statement that reads, “No one who disputes God’s ownership of everything on Earth can faithfully return tithe.” How does this statement help you to rethink our understanding of tithing?



*“Bring all the tithes into the storehouse, that there may be food in My house, and try Me now in this,’ says the LORD of hosts, ‘If I will not open for you the windows of heaven and pour out for you such blessing that there will not be room enough to receive it.’”
–Malachi 3:10, NKJV*

God-First...

My Lifestyle

I choose, with God’s help, to faithfully return the Lord’s **TITHE** (10 % of my income).

Commitment:
Day 6

A life Spent for the Cause of God

Some examples in Christendom shine like a beacon in the deep darkness of our selfish world. They inspire us to be generous despite our trials. We are challenged to invest our treasure in heaven, where moths, rust, and thieves cannot reach.

A missionary once challenged his church members to make sacrifices for the cause of God. Upon visiting one of the poorest families in his church, he could not believe his eyes. Looking closer at the field, he observed that the eldest son was pulling the plow, taking the place of the strong ox the family owned. When he asked,

“Where is your ox?” He was surprised with the answer, “We sold it so that we could give an offering for the new place of worship to God.” As the missionary pondered the enormity of the sacrifice consented to by this family, he couldn’t help but shed a few tears. That family was willing to endure poverty to support God’s work.

In 2 Corinthians 8:1–5, Paul encourages the church in Corinth to grow in the grace of giving. To urge them to give generously, he shares the example of the churches in Macedonia. Paul presents the Macedonians as an example worthy to be followed when it comes to giving to God.

The Macedonians

Macedonia was a mountainous region north of Greece on the Balkan Peninsula. The Macedonians were ostracized and persecuted for believing in Jesus and for abandoning the false gods and their empty way of life. In similar conditions, many would operate in a self-preservation mode, but not the Macedonians.

Paul emphasizes that the Macedonians were not just poor but extremely poor. However, though they were in deep distress, they contributed to the relief of others. Despite all the

trials, the Christians of Macedonia are described as having an abundance of joy amid tribulation, a joy that surpassed their generosity. It was amazing for Paul to observe that such poor people could be so generous. How could generosity sprout from such poverty? It was a miracle for Paul that he could only attribute to God. Now, there’s one question to be answered: What made the church of Macedonia such a generous, joyful church that it did not need coercion to give?

Prerequisite to Generous Living

First, the Macedonians had received the grace of God. By nature, we are self-centered and cannot give generously. And even when we give, we might be motivated by selfish reasons. To give freely to the cause of God, we must find the grace of God in the person of Jesus Christ.

Second, they gave themselves first to the Lord. Many people do not give generously to God’s cause because they have not yet surrendered themselves to the Lord. The secret behind true giving lies in giving ourselves first to God.

We must answer the following question: How can we give tithes and offerings with the

same generosity as the Macedonians? Ellen G. White states: “This matter of giving is not left to impulse. God has given us definite instruction in regard to it.” And then she adds: “He has specified tithes and offerings as the measure of our obligation” (*Counsels on Stewardship*, p. 80). This quote affirms that there are clear principles to be followed regarding tithing and offering. Regarding tithing, the Bible clarifies that it is 10% of our income (Leviticus 27:27–30). And for the Christian who wants to be faithful, this settles it.



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As for offerings, it is still an area where some doubts and hesitancy often persist: How to give offerings? How much to give? Let's look

at some guidelines from the Lord regarding the perfect and acceptable offering:

God First—Matthew 6:33

It is the principle of the lordship of God. Either Christ is the Lord of everything, or not the Lord of anything. So He must occupy the first place. It is a biblical principle: The first fruits

belong to the Lord. "Honor the LORD with your possessions, and with the firstfruits of all your increase" (Proverbs 3:9, NKJV).

With Joy and Gratitude—2 Corinthians 9:7

All our offerings should express joy and gratitude because they are a part of what God gives us for our sustenance. "All that we do is to be done willingly. We are to bring our offerings with joy and gratitude, saying as we present them, Of Thine own we freely give Thee. . . .

Come to the Lord with hearts overflowing with thankfulness . . . , and manifest your appreciation of God's bounties by bringing to Him your thank offerings. (Ellen White, *Counsels on Stewardship*, p. 198).

Out of Love—1 Corinthians 13:3

Unfortunately, many give offerings for the wrong reasons, like:

- Out of duty or obligation
- To be seen or remembered
- Out of guilt
- On impulse—like responding to an altar call.

But consider this statement: "Without pure love the most expensive offering is too poor for God to accept" (Ellen White, *Testimonies for the*

Church, vol. 2, p. 652). The motive that should drive us to give offerings should be our love for Jesus, His church, and others. Where your love (heart) is, there you will put your treasures.

After considering these basic guidelines, we need to answer the question of how much we should give as offerings. There is no fixed amount; it varies from person to person. But there is more to it.

HOW MUCH SHOULD WE GIVE AS OFFERINGS?

Give Proportionally (Deuteronomy 16:17)

In harmony with Deuteronomy 16:17, Ellen White gave the following explanation: "In the Bible system of tithes and offerings the amounts paid by different persons will of course vary greatly, since they are proportioned to the income" (White, *Counsels on Stewardship*, p. 73). This statement means that the greater the blessings we receive, the greater our gifts returned to God should be. Because: "For everyone to whom much is given, from him much will be required" (Luke 12:48, NKJV).

Proportional or percentage-based giving is the best way to know if our offerings are faithful and loyal. It does not have to be a fixed amount every Sabbath or every month because offerings, like tithe, vary significantly, as they are proportional to income. The percentage system

works like this: If you earned more, you will offer more; if you earned less, you will give less; and if you earned nothing, you will give nothing. Giving should always be based on a percentage and not on what happens to be in our wallets or purses at the time of collection. Thus, you will have a clear conscience before God because you are faithful, according to what God has granted you.

There is an inspired instruction: "After the tithe is set apart, let gifts and offerings be apportioned, 'as God hath prospered' you" (Ellen White, *Counsels on Stewardship*, p. 80).

We call upon everyone to decide to start a covenant of faithfulness with God, whether it be 5, 6, 8, 10%, or even more. The important thing is to begin this journey of faithfulness.

2 Planning Our Giving (1 Corinthians 16:2)

Planning our giving means that we should not think or worry about the offering as we arrive at church, or worse, when the deacon passes the collection plate, but plan it during the week, you and your family. The Bible recommends: “None shall appear before Me empty” (Exodus 23:15, NKJV). It requires some planning. For example, at sunset worship on Friday, as you and your family set aside your offering, discuss with your spouse and children the importance of the offering on Sabbath. And if your children and spouse do not have an income, give them a portion of the

designated offering so they too may joyfully participate in worship with offerings to the Lord.

This attitude brings benefits to the whole family. Their parents’ faithfulness will inspire the children, and they will follow the example when they have their income. From a young age, the children are educated and taught to be faithful stewards and to love the Lord’s work.

Conclusion

Why are these divine guidelines important? Because it’s all about God’s plan. “The only means which God has ordained to advance His cause is to bless men with property. He gives them the sunshine and the rain; . . . He gives health and ability to acquire means. All our blessings come from His bountiful hand. In turn He would have men and women show their gratitude by returning Him a portion in tithes and offerings” (Ellen White, *Testimony Treasures*, vol. 2, p. 41).

Additionally, it helps develop a character like Jesus. “Objects that call benevolence into action must be placed before them, or they cannot pattern after the character of the great Exemplar” (Ellen White, *Counsels on Stewardship*, p. 14).

Appeal

The world asks, “What does a person possess?” On the other hand, God asks, “How does this person use what he or she possesses?” Genuine Christians do not need to consult their bank statement to know their wealth before giving to the Lord. Even when facing trials or limitations, we can embrace the example of faith and generosity patterned by the Macedonians and give joyfully to the Lord. We cannot excuse ourselves for not giving generously. I invite you to renew a commitment of faithfulness to God in tithe and percentage-based offerings, not directing it to what you think is best, but trusting in His sovereignty and the divine direction given to God’s church.

“Moreover, brethren, we make known to you the grace of God bestowed on the churches of Macedonia: that in a great trial of affliction the abundance of their joy and their deep poverty abounded in the riches of their liberality. For I bear witness that according to their ability, yes, and beyond their ability, they were freely willing, imploring us with much urgency that we would receive the gift and the fellowship of the ministering to the saints. And not only as we had hoped, but they first gave themselves to the Lord, and then to us by the will of God.”

– 2 Corinthians 8:1–5, NKJV

Reflection Questions:

1 What do you understand from the biblical principle presented in Deuteronomy 16:17 of percentage-based offering? What are the dangers of giving any amount as an offering?

2 How can you follow the example of the Macedonians in complete surrender in other areas of life besides faithfulness in tithe and offerings?

*“Honor the LORD with your possessions, and with the firstfruits of all your increase; so your barns will be filled with plenty, and your vats will overflow with new wine.”
–Proverbs 3:9, 10, NKJV*

God-First...

My Lifestyle

I choose, with God’s help, to dedicate a **REGULAR PERCENTAGE** (____%) of my income as **OFFERINGS** to the Lord

**Commitment:
Day 7**

An Urgent Call to Seek God First

WHAT TO DO WHEN A CRISIS KNOCKS AT YOUR DOOR AND YOU DON'T KNOW WHAT TO DO?

Some people frequently make things worse while trying to make them better. This happens because they manage their lives based mainly on their own perceptions (see Proverbs 14:12), ignoring that we all suffer from an incorrigible distortion of perceptions. Our discernment cannot be trusted because “the heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked; who can know it?” (Jeremiah 17:9, NKJV).

Speaking to those afraid of tomorrow and eager to secure material things, Jesus enunciated a timeless principle that goes beyond the material realm and is applicable to all aspects of life. It became a life management principle for those who accept the lordship of Jesus: “But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you” (Matthew 6:33, NKJV).

To Seek God First

Jesus’ promise (“all these things will be added to you”), is not for those who seek God in their own way, but for those who seek Him according to His prescription. To “seek first,” or to put God first, signifies not only the higher value we must place on this pursuit (“the kingdom of God and His righteousness”), but also the specific priority, urgency, and chronological order with which we must seek them.

Our daily schedule will reflect the importance we attach to seeking God’s kingdom and His righteousness. To put God first means

that the very first activity of every day and main purpose of life is to seek God’s kingdom and His righteousness. Putting God first also means obedience to *all*¹ His commandments. God, His kingdom, His commandments, and His righteousness will have precedence and primacy in any decision and activity (1 Corinthians 10:31). In this sense, “to seek first” is the same as to “fear God.”²

But what does it mean to seek first the [1] kingdom of God and [2] His righteousness, and what practical steps could we adopt to do it?

Seeking First the Kingdom of God

As the Source of life and Creator, God is the Possessor of all things and the Ruler of the universe. However, through deceit, Satan usurped God’s dominion on planet Earth and challenged His authority. After sin entered the world, all humans became naturally opposed to

God’s authority and are inclined to become a law unto themselves. They follow their inclinations and preferences and look for their glory first, disconnecting themselves in this way from the Source of life.

An Inner Experience

While some Christians focus on establishing God’s kingdom in society first, often by pushing a political or sociological agenda, Jesus teaches that God’s kingdom is primarily an inner experience. “The kingdom of God does not come with observation,” said Jesus, “for indeed, the kingdom of God is within you” (Luke 17:20, 21, NKJV). Hence, “the Saviour attempted no civil reforms, . . . attacked

no national abuses [and] . . . did not interfere with the authority or administration of those in power.”³ He understood that “to be efficient, the cure must reach men individually, and must regenerate the heart.”⁴

The question arises: Who is in charge of the decision-making processes happening in the innermost depths of one’s being—God’s Word and His will, or one’s own will?



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¹ For more verses about keeping *all* God’s commandments, see Deuteronomy 6:1, 2, 24; 8:1; 10:12, 13; 11:3, 22, 32; 28:1, 13–15, 58; Psalm 119:4; Ephesians 2:8–10; Colossians 1:10.

² About “fearing God,” see Deuteronomy 4:9, 10; 6:1, 2; Ecclesiastes 12:13; Psalm 103:17, 18; 111:10; 112:1; 128:1; 28:9; 1 John 5:3.

³ Ellen G. White, *Our Father Cares* (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald Pub. Assn., 1991), 225.

⁴ *Ibid.*

How to Seek God's Kingdom?

Only when someone understands how harmful it is to be in control of their own lives can they see the advantages of and find joy in accepting God's kingdom and obedience to His commandments. Through the surrender of self (Galatians 2:20), complete control of life is yielded to Jesus, facilitated by the indwelling of the Spirit (see Romans 8).

Certain spiritual disciplines serve both [1] as **exercises** leading to the inward establishment of God's kingdom, and [2] as **indicators** of the acceptance of God's kingdom and Jesus' lordship:

1 Regular Communion with God (individual and collective)

This discipline is the backbone of one's spiritual life and, therefore, must hold the highest priority daily. Each morning begins with dedicated time for prayer, studying the Bible, delving into the Sabbath School lesson, and the Spirit of Prophecy writings. Family worship is observed, and attendance at church services is maintained.

2 Walking with God

This involves an ongoing conversation with God during the day, seeking to please Him in all actions. His Word is memorized and frequently recited, and His voice is discerned amidst the noise of daily life.

3 Lifestyle and Habits

Prioritizing God's statutes over personal inclinations, tastes, and preferences—including attire, relationships, finances, diet, and sexuality—with the desire to please Him. New habits and practices are adopted, aligned with

God's Word. All practices that are harmful to the body and may impair the spiritual perceptions or becloud any service that should be rendered to God are surrendered to Him.

4 Emotional Life

Love, forgiveness, and faithfulness will be given toward fellow sinners, not based on their merit, but in submission to Jesus and His Word. This process starts in the family circle and extends to encompass all humanity.

5 Service to God

All daily activities are considered opportunities to reflect Christ's love, benefit others, and guide them toward studying the Bible and accepting Christ's lordship.

6 Sabbath Keeping

The Sabbath, observed from sunset to sunset, is wholly dedicated to strengthening one's connection with God, the church (the body of Christ), and those in need. Friday serves as a preparation for the Sabbath. Appropriate thoughts and activities will be sought during the Sabbath.

7 Financial Spiritual Worship

Recognizing that everything belongs to God and acknowledging Him as the Provider and Sustainer, those who seek first God's kingdom surrender their entire financial lives to Jesus' control, not limiting their commitment to tithes and offerings. A ten percent tithe and "Promise" offerings are regularly returned to Him as an act of worship rather than a mere donation.⁵ All material resources are considered His, at His disposal, to be surrendered when He directs.

Seeking First His Kingdom

Righteousness is an intrinsic attribute of God, an integral part of His nature, and, consequently, it represents the state of those who are approved of Him. It is the Scriptures, not church leaders or our own perceptions, that provide "instruction in righteousness" (2 Timothy 3:16, 17, NKJV), God's standard for righteousness. It also provides guidance on how to achieve it.

But how can someone become approved of God if "there is none righteous, no, not one; there is none who does good" (Romans 3:10–12, NKJV)? The Bible says that humans can never achieve righteousness by their own efforts in keeping the law (Ephesians 2:9). Even if they could perfectly keep God's law, this would not change their intrinsically sinful nature (Romans 3:20), because the law cannot change their inclination for evil (Romans 8:3).

The Bible teaches that we are saved by God's grace through faith in Jesus' substitutionary

sacrifice (2 Corinthians 5:21; Ephesians 3:8; 1 Peter 2:24). Because our sinful nature produces death (Romans 6:23; 8:6), Jesus decided to offer His life as a ransom. When someone acknowledges their sinfulness, confesses their sins (1 John 1:9), and believes in the efficacy of Jesus' substitutionary sacrifice, they are immediately justified by God and considered righteous (Romans 5:1). This kind of righteousness, coming from God, is not based on any attempt on our part to be good, but it is based on something good Jesus did for us (Titus 3:5).

Paul says that he wants to refrain from "having my own righteousness, which is from the [attempt to keep the] law." Instead, he yearns for that righteousness "which is through faith in Christ [the substitutionary sacrifice], the righteousness which is from God [and is attained] by faith [in Jesus' substitutionary sacrifice]" (Philippians 3:9, NKJV).

⁵About "Promise" offerings, see "'Promise' Offerings—Putting God First," Stewardship Ministries, accessed May 5, 2024. <https://stewardship.adventist.org/promise-offerings>.

HERE ARE SOME INITIATIVES THAT CAN HELP US RECEIVE GOD'S RIGHTEOUSNESS:

Regular Bible and Spirit of Prophecy Study:

Engage in regular study of the Bible and Spirit of Prophecy writings to receive "instruction in righteousness" (2 Timothy 3:16, NKJV), to understand what God desires us to be and to do.

Embrace Every Part of Scripture:

"All Scripture is given by inspiration of God" (2 Timothy 3:16, NKJV). Avoid skipping parts of the Bible that you may like less, as they may contain messages you need the most.

Pray for Love of Truth:

Ask God to instill in you a "love of the truth," even if it hurts because it is opposed to your inclination. Pray for the ability to examine God's revelation with an unbiased, unprejudiced mind (Acts 17:11), not be offended by the plain truth, and steer clear of finding "pleasure in unrighteousness" (2 Thessalonians 2:12, NKJV).

Seek Reproof and Endurance:

Pray for the ability to accept any reproof God sends you (Revelation 3:19), to "endure sound doctrine" (2 Timothy 4:3, NKJV), and to be zealous in His sight (Revelation 3:19).

Seek Heart Examination:

Like David, ask God to search your heart, and if He identifies any wicked way in you, ask Him to lead you "in the way everlasting" (Psalm 139:24, NKJV).

Acknowledge Sinfulness:

Not having anything to confess may represent a dangerous spiritual condition

(1 John 1:10; Revelation 3:17). If confronted with your own sins, recognize that being a sinner is the condition for salvation, as Jesus came to save sinners, not the righteous (Luke 5:31).

Daily Confession:

Confess specific sins daily as prompted by God's Word and His Spirit (1 John 1:9). Is there any known duty I'm not following? Am I keeping the Sabbath appropriately? Is there any tithe that has not yet been returned to God?

Fix What Is Wrong:

By God's grace, decide to repair what is not right in His sight (Ephesians 2:8-10; Philippians 4:13).

Trust in God's Forgiveness:

Once sin is confessed, believe that "He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (1 John 1:9, NKJV). Some sins that have involved other people must be confessed to them also.

Don't Trust Your Own Feelings:

If after confessing your sins you still feel burdened because of them, read 1 John 3:20: "For if our heart condemns us, God is greater than our heart, and knows all things" (NKJV). Is it worth trusting more your feelings than God's Word?

Pray for Forgiveness of Others:

Remember Jesus' teaching: "For if you forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses" (Matthew 6:14, 15, NKJV).

God is calling upon His people in the last days to warn all humanity to "fear God and give glory to Him, for the hour of His judgment has come" (Revelation 14:7, NKJV). As we end the Stewardship Revival Week of 2024, it is an adequate time for every genuine follower

of Christ to put God first, or to "seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness." Jesus' promise remains as certain as when He first spoke it: "And all these things shall be added to you" (Matthew 6:33, NKJV). Do you believe it?

A black and white photograph of a hand holding a lit lantern in a field of tall grass at dusk. The lantern is on the left, and the grass is in the foreground and background. The sky is a soft, hazy grey.

*“But seek first the kingdom of God and His
righteousness, and all these things shall be added
to you.”
–Matthew 6:33, NKJV*

God-First...

My Lifestyle

I choose with God’s help . . .

**Commitment:
Day 8**



Explore the magnificent
beauty of one of God's
most precious gifts.



Scan me!

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