

## ***The Christian Life*** ***Stewardship***

Lesson #11 for June 13, 2009

Scriptures: Leviticus 27:30; Deuteronomy 8:18; Psalms 50:12; Malachi 3:8-10; Matthew 24:46; 25:14-30; Luke 4:16; 1 Corinthians 6:19,20.

1. The purpose of this lesson is to explore the various aspects of stewardship. True “stewards” are more than caretakers, managers, custodians, agents, ambassadors, wardens, or even guardians. A true steward is one who takes seriously the responsibility of caring for and correctly using what has been placed in his custody.
2. What talents has God lent us? How are we using our talents? Are we correctly representing God by the use of our abilities?
3. Read Matthew 25:14-30. God has given talents to each of us. Some have been given more than others. Our talents will grow and increase—even multiply—as they are put to profitable use in the Lord’s cause. But, talents that are not used will gradually fade and die. Are we born with a certain number of talents, or do we gain them as we mature? And how do talents multiply? Does skill or talent in one area mean one will have talent in another? Does God give us new talents if we have “used” the talents He has previously given us?
4. Are some of our talents given to us for the purpose of earning a living, supporting a family, providing housing, clothing, and transportation that we need for our daily activities? Or does God expect even those talents to be used to His glory? Is there a way to use our ordinary living skills so as to give glory to God?
5. Read Matthew 25:29. Does it seem fair that God took away the “talent” of the person who did not use his talent and gave it to the one who had plenty? In what ways does that parable represent the truth of the Christian life? Does using our talents in the Lord’s work bring happiness? The greatest happiness comes from serving the Lord. Do the talents that God “lends” us now belong to us? Or are they just lent to us?
6. There are many lessons that can be learned from the parable of the talents. One lesson we sometimes overlook is that the Master expects a “return” on His investment. The talents we have are not given us to use however we choose or even to be wasted at our discretion. One day, the Master will “call for an account.”
7. On Tuesday of Passover week, the Pharisees, Scribes, and Sadducees were determined to discredit Jesus by bringing their toughest questions hoping to trap Him in some way. Instead, Jesus completely outmaneuvered them and put them to shame. In the process He suggested that the temple would one day be destroyed. When His disciples asked Him about that statement, He gave them the prophecies we now know as Matthew 24. Then, He immediately turned to personal judgment questions as presented in three parables. Matthew 25:31-46 makes it clear that how we use our talents has serious consequences. Notice that neither the “sheep” nor the “goats” were doing what they did looking for some kind of reward. They had developed characters that led them to do those things naturally. The sheep had learned to do what is right “because it is right.” What does that have to do with talents?
8. Read Matthew 25:1-13. What are we to learn from this parable of the 10 young women? They all had lamps. All of their lamps were working correctly at the beginning. They all intended to

do what was right. They all were waiting for the bridegroom to come. But they all went to sleep. When it came down to “crunch time,” five of them were prepared and five were not.

9. Are all of God’s people “asleep” today? Only 8-15% of Americans attend church “regularly.” And regularly is defined as once a month! Europe has long since given up religion. Are we unaware of how close the second coming is? When we look around the world, do we see evidence that the end is near? Through careful Bible study, prayer, and witnessing, are we “storing up” “oil” for the day of need?
10. Read Luke 16:1-12. At first glance this seems to be a strange—even un-Godlike—parable. Is God in any way like the crooked manager? Are Christians supposed to be “like Him”? It is interesting to note the parallels between this parable and the Christian life.
  - 1) The crooked manager was dealing with his master’s goods—they did not belong to him. We have been given talents from God. They do not belong to us.
  - 2) This story was an actual true event that was known to the people that Christ was addressing. (COL 367.4; 368.1)
  - 3) The manager had been using the goods entrusted to him only for his own pleasure and enjoyment *in this present life at that present time* with no thought for the future. When he realized that the owner was “calling him to account,” he began to think of the future. Christians should always live their lives with an eye to the future.
  - 4) The crooked manager began to *share* what he had in his hands even though it belonged to the master. By sharing his master’s goods—even dishonestly—he was making provision for his own future. In the same way, Christians are to share the goods which do not belong to them but which have been entrusted to them by God to make provision for their future. (See *Christ’s Object Lessons* p. 366-375)
11. Think of all that Jesus accomplished in His 3 ½ years of ministry. How can we be more like Him in that respect? Jesus would often heal, preach, and teach all day and then go into the hills and pray all night, coming out refreshed! How did that work? If God asked you for an appointment in the middle of the night, would you be able to stay awake? I would!
12. In the times of the Old Testament, people had gotten the impression that what God required was the killing and sacrifice of animals. Those were brought to the temple, killed, prepared, and then offered. God is saying that now He needs “living sacrifices.” (Romans 12:1) That is the true kind of worship that God asks of us. He does not want dead pigeons. God needs active, working stewards to spread the “good news.” God has chosen to finish His work using human beings. He could have used angels, but it is for our best good to be involved in that work.
13. Read Exodus 20:8-11. (Compare Deuteronomy 5:12-15) God has given us six days of the week to provide for our own physical, mental, social, and spiritual needs while at the same time working for Him. But, the Sabbath is to be a special time of fellowship with Him. God expects us to balance our lives in a way to give appropriate and adequate time to each of the tasks that He gives us. Christians must learn to prioritize their tasks and give a balanced effort to each one.
14. One of the most important talents that we are given is time. Time management is a very important skill.

15. How did Jesus divide up His time while carrying out His ministry? The majority of His time was spent in healing, teaching, and preaching. He spent more time healing than teaching or preaching. (Matthew 4:23-25; DA 350.3; MH 19; ChS 132.1) As noted in the *Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide* for Monday, June 8, 2009, in addition to those “general tasks,” Jesus reached out to personal friends such as healing Peter’s mother-in-law. (Mark 1:29-31) He always “kept” the Sabbath as it should be kept. (Luke 4:16) He found time to associate with people in their social gatherings. (John 2:1-11) He even attended feasts at Pharisee’s homes. (Luke 7:36-50; John 12:2)
16. A review of these facts should teach us that God is not calling us to be “workaholics.” Indeed, there is a lot of work to do. Jesus Himself said that when we see how much work there is to be done, we should pray for God to send more workers. (Matthew 9:35-38; Luke 10:1,2) Look over your life. Are you giving a good balance to your activities? Are you giving to the Lord His fair share?
17. There were times when Jesus worked to near exhaustion. Even His disciples were concerned about His work schedule. (ST, December 11, 1879, par. 9) Was Jesus a workaholic? Are there times when even in a balanced life, we should be working very hard for the Lord?
18. What priorities are evident in your life?
19. Are we good stewards of our bodies? Our bodies are to be “God’s temples.” (1 Corinthians 6:19,20) In its original context, this verse was speaking against abusing our bodies by sexual immorality. Would this verse be applicable also to poor eating habits? Too much junk food? Just too much food? Poor health secondary to the use of tobacco, alcohol, drugs, or even a lack of exercise? Since God made us and has given us whatever talents we possess, does that impact our priorities in life? Do you have any responsibility to God when you sit down in front of a huge plate of food for Sabbath lunch?
20. Some people are so concerned about “health reform” and eating and acting in the most healthful way that it has been said about them, “They’re going to practice health reform even if it kills them!”
21. The purpose of practicing health reform is to have bodies and minds that are clear, fit, and prepared to carry out the tasks which we are given. Health reform is not an end in itself but a means to serving God. Are we following God’s advice in the areas of diet, exercise, and even rest?
22. As we have seen, Christian stewardship is not just about money. But it certainly does include the correct and wise use of our money. It is God who gives us the ability to get riches. (Deuteronomy 8:18) To the world, “Money isn’t everything, but it is way ahead of whatever is in second place!” God expects us to recognize that everything we have belongs to Him. (Psalms 50:12) And as a recognition of that fact, we are to return one-tenth of our “increase” to Him. (Leviticus 27:30) Remember that it all belongs to Him. He promises us that we will be richly rewarded for doing so. (Malachi 3:8-10) If we will make God our business Partner, we can stop worrying about our daily needs for food, clothing, housing, etc. (Matthew 6:31) Remember that Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like some of the birds, for example. But, our stewardship does not end with giving a faithful tithe and generous offerings. (Matthew 23:23) The ancient Israelites gave approximately 25% of their income “back” to the Levites and the temple services. That was not all just tithe. We must recognize that stewardship also

represented support for the government.

23. Do we honestly believe that everything we have belongs to God? Or do we have a sense that it is ours? When we use the work talents that God has given us and we receive a salary in return for that work, do we regard that money as “ours”? Are we making God’s “cause” and the work of the church the top priority? Are we supporting God’s work as we should? Have we experienced the fact that it is “more blessed to give than to receive”? (Acts 20:35) We may be giving lip service to God, but are we “putting our money where our mouth is”? At the same time, we must remember that God loves a cheerful giver. (2 Corinthians 9:7)
24. Today, many Christians believe that by serving God, they will become wealthy. That is sometimes called the “health and wealth” gospel. That was the belief that the Pharisees and Sadducees shared. Shouldn’t God be giving those of us “saints” more money because we are faithfully serving Him? What is wrong with that philosophy? Doesn’t God reward those who serve Him? Are all the rich people you know “saints”?
25. God created us. He has cared for us down through the millennia. He came to redeem us from sin. He has gone away again, but He is coming back. We do not know exactly when He will return. There is plenty of evidence that we are hastening toward that day. Jesus said, “Do business with this [your talents] until I come back.” (Luke 19:13, *NASB*) Jesus has promised to come back. We should be expectantly waiting for Him. But we are to do more than just wait! We are to take advantage of the time and use it efficiently for our own needs and those of our family, but we are also to “forward” the cause of God.

We are to be vigilant, watching for the coming of the Son of man; and we must also be diligent; working as well as waiting is required; there must be a union of the two. This will balance the Christian character, making it well developed, symmetrical. We should not feel that we are to neglect everything else, and give ourselves up to meditation, study, or prayer; neither are we to be full of bustle and hurry and work, to the neglect of personal piety. Waiting and watching and working are to be blended. “Not slothful in business; fervent in spirit; serving the Lord.” [Romans 12:11]—Ellen G. White, *The Adventist Home*, p. 23.

26. Look back over the last few weeks of your life. If God were standing next to you evaluating what you have accomplished in those few weeks, what would He say? Would you be called a faithful steward? God does not ask us to give Him what He has not given us. He does not expect us to exercise talents that we have not been given.

The Lord will not require from those who are poor that which they have not to give; He will not require from the sick the active energies which bodily weakness forbids. No one need mourn because he cannot glorify God with talents that were never entrusted to Him. But if you have only one talent, use it well, and it will accumulate. If the talents are not buried, they will gain yet other talents.—Ellen G. White comments, *The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 5, p. 1100.4.

27. So, what is the relationship between “salvation by faith alone” (Acts 16:31) and “faithful stewardship of our talents”? Doesn’t this lesson seem to suggest that there is a lot of faithful work to do? Are we saved by faith but judged by works? Does our stewardship say anything about our faith? Can we have a growing, vibrant, living relationship with Christ and do nothing?

If you were dating a young man or a young woman and you told them that you really wanted to develop a good relationship but you just did not have any time to spend with them, what do you think would happen?

28. Are we using all the talents we have? Do we even know how many talents we have? Is it possible that we might have hidden talents that even we ourselves are not aware of? Have we explored new avenues for serving the Lord? Read *Councils on Stewardship*, pages 195-206. And read *Christ's Object Lessons* pages 325-365.
29. What have we learned about God in this lesson? God knows that a life of usefulness is much happier than a life of idleness. He has given us talents to use not only as needed by ourselves and our families here on earth but also to serve His cause. He knows that if we come to understand the importance of working with Him, we will have the best possible lives. Stewardship is the most direct way to live healthy, happy, holy lives. God always wants what is best for us. We may not always recognize that, but it is true. What a blessing it is to serve such a God!

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