

Growing in Christ The Christian Life

Lesson #11 for December 15, 2012

Scriptures: Deuteronomy 8:11-17; Philippians 2:3-4; 1 Corinthians 15:51-52; Revelation 22:1-5; Matthew 22:39; Genesis 2:21-25.

1. I thought we should begin this lesson by reading something that was written almost one hundred years ago.

One Solitary Life

Here is a man who was born in an obscure village, the child of a peasant woman. He grew up in another village. He worked in a carpenter shop until He was thirty. Then for three years He was an itinerant preacher.

He never owned a home. He never wrote a book. He never held an office. He never had a family. He never went to college. He never put His foot inside a big city. He never traveled two hundred miles from the place He was born. He never did one of the things that usually accompany greatness. He had no credentials but Himself...

While still a young man, the tide of popular opinion turned against him. His friends ran away. One of them denied Him. He was turned over to His enemies. He went through the mockery of a trial. He was nailed upon a cross between two thieves. While He was dying His executioners gambled for the only piece of property He had on earth—His coat. When He was dead, He was laid in a borrowed grave through the pity of a friend.

Nineteen long centuries have come and gone, and today He is a centerpiece of the human race and leader of the column of progress.

I am far within the mark when I say that all the armies that ever marched, all the navies that were ever built; all the parliaments that ever sat and all the kings that ever reigned, put together, have not affected the life of man upon this earth as powerfully as has that one solitary life.

This essay was adapted from a sermon by Dr. James Allan Francis in "The Real Jesus and Other Sermons" © 1926 by the Judson Press of Philadelphia (pp 123-124 titled "Arise Sir Knight!").

2. While Jesus certainly must have dealt with money while working in the carpentry shop, during His public ministry we have no evidence that He earned any money, paid any debts, paid for any lodging, or bought any food, although we know that Judas was in charge of the "purse" for Jesus and the disciples. On one occasion, He paid the temple tax—and did it in a miraculous way! (Matthew 17:24-27) He depended on others for almost everything. (Luke 8:1-3) He depended especially on His Father. More than that, He advised His followers to do the same! (Luke 10:4; 12:33; But, contrast Luke 22:35,36) Could we really live such "Christ-like" lives in our societies today? At the end He gave His life! Could we do all of that and still support our families? Consider the story of George Mueller.
3. Could we live lives that always represent God and Christianity in the best possible way? Anyone can call himself/herself a Christian. But, does his/her life truly represent Jesus? Are we so "heavenly minded that we are no earthly good"? What is the relationship between "good deeds" here and our preparation for heaven? When we get to heaven, will we still be serving others?
4. The *Seventh-day Adventist Encyclopedia* defines *stewardship* as "the responsibility of God's people for, and use of, everything entrusted to them by God—life, physical being, time, talents and abilities, material possessions, opportunities to be of service to others, and their knowledge of

truth.” (Compare Matthew 7:21-23; 25:31-46) Are these expectations too high?

5. The Bible suggests that the greatest happiness is found in living for and serving others. That is God’s way. Satan’s way is the selfish way. We all start out being completely selfish—all we can think about is our own needs. Is that why we need a new birth? How can we learn to live the Christian way instead of Satan’s way? Is that possible for inherently selfish human beings?
6. We have been offered the privilege of being sons and daughters of the King of the Universe. And He wants us to come and live with Him forever! Is there anything that we honestly do not owe Him? Is there anything that we could possibly give Him as payment for such an offer?
7. There is an interesting contrast presented by two different commands given by Jesus, first through Moses and then personally Himself. Moses told the children of Israel to “love your neighbor as you love yourself.” (Leviticus 19:18) Jesus repeated that command in Matthew 22:39. But later, He told His disciples to love each other as He had loved them. (John 13:34,35) What is the difference? Does everyone around you recognize that you are a Christian? Is it obvious? Do you ever try to hide your Christian identity?
8. Read 1 Corinthians 10:31-11:1 and compare Matthew 5:16. How can we live lives for God’s glory—not for our own good but for the good of all—and represent God and His church correctly?
9. Read 1 Peter 1:13-16. How can we avoid having our lives shaped by our environment? Or, by our human desires? We are to be holy, that is, set apart, different, Godlike in the world.
10. So, how can we become so closely united with God and associated with Jesus Christ that when carrying out His will for our lives we will be but carrying out our own impulses? (DA 668.3) Is it possible for simple human beings actually to learn to do what is right because it is right? Could we really discover that serving others and serving God is what is best for us?
11. Most of us would recognize that living a completely selfish life is a miserable way to live. By contrast, would living for others be the happiest way to live?
12. Human life is all about relationships—from the very intimate relationship of marriage and family to the wider relationships with friends and the outside world.
13. Read Genesis 2:21-25; Malachi 2:14-16; and Ephesians 5:21-33. It is clear that the biblical concept of marriage is a very high ideal. Anything that disrupts or breaks that covenant relationship is most unfortunate.
14. God hates divorce. (Malachi 2:16) Why are there so many people getting divorced in our day? Even the definition of marriage seems to be changing. Even before they get married, people write legal documents to define what they may and may not do when they get divorced! In our world today, people seem to think they can take part in trial marriages—even living together without being married for a period of time to see whether “things will work out.”
15. Why do you think our world has deteriorated into polygamy, cohabitation, divorce and remarriage, even homosexuality? Why do you think divorce is almost as prevalent in the church as it is in the world?
16. It was God’s original plan that husband and wife should live together in a growing relationship and in the process learn how to get along with someone whose thinking is different from one’s own. Husbands are to learn from their wives and wives from their husbands how to be more like God. We are made—male and female—in the image of God. Each is to learn from the other. Yet, selfishness has become so dominant in our society that even the simplest obstacles seem to be an excuse for destroying a marriage. Selfishness is the problem.
17. Why do so many people in our world today think that adultery, fornication, and pornography are norms? Why is it that studies show that 80% of the population in America have had at least one sexually transmitted disease-human papillomavirus (HPV)?
18. One of the most challenging relationships known to human beings is the relationship between parent and child. To a small child, his parents are like God. As he becomes a teenager, he seeks

to throw off restraint for what he considers to be his rightful freedoms. God has given us the challenge of being parents to teach us something about the challenges He has in relating with us. Do we treat our children as gifts from God? Do we treat them as God treats us?

Parents cannot commit a greater sin than to allow their children to have nothing to do. The children soon learn to love idleness, and they grow up shiftless, useless men and women. When they are old enough to earn their living, and find employment, they work in a lazy, droning way, yet expect to be paid as much as if they were faithful.—Ellen G. White, *Christ's Object Lessons*, p. 345.

19. How should Christians deal with employer/employee relationships? Read James 5:4-6 and Ephesians 6:5-9. What would it be like to work if your employer was Christ? (Matthew 11:28-30) In our society would it be possible to replicate that kind of relationship? How would you treat Christ if He was your employee?
20. Read Romans 13:1-7. How could Paul write such words while he was under the government of Rome with Nero as Caesar? And what about those who lived under Stalin, Hitler, Idi Amin, or others of similar character? What is our civic responsibility to them?
21. Rightly or wrongly, the government has responsibilities to its citizens. Some governments do better than others. But, there are some things which we cannot do for ourselves and for which we depend upon the government. We should pay our taxes, do our civil duties, respect the laws of the nations when they do not conflict with the laws of God, and do our best to avoid and prevent crime and violence.
22. Christians will recognize their social responsibilities. (Isaiah 61:1-3; Matthew 25:31-46) If we are saved only by faith, what is the role of doing all those things that we might call service to humanity? Does how we treat others reflect on our relationship with God?
23. Paying a faithful tithe and being generous with offerings to the church and to other worthy causes is an important way to curb selfishness.

Acts of generosity and benevolence were designed by God to keep the hearts of the children of men tender and sympathetic, and to encourage in them an interest and affection for one another in imitation of the Master, who for our sakes became poor, that we through His poverty might be made rich. The law of tithing was founded upon an enduring principle and was designed to be a blessing to man.

The system of benevolence was arranged to prevent that great evil, covetousness. Christ saw that in the prosecution of business the love of riches would be the greatest cause of rooting true godliness out of the heart. He saw that the love of money would freeze deep and hard into men's souls, stopping the flow of generous impulses and closing their senses to the wants of the suffering and the afflicted.—Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 3, p. 547.

I speak of the tithing system, yet how meager it looks to my mind! How small the estimate! How vain the endeavor to measure with mathematical rules, time, money, and love against a love and sacrifice that is measureless and incomputable! Tithes for Christ! Oh, meager pittance, shameful recompense for that which cost so much! From the cross of Calvary, Christ calls for an unconditional surrender.—Ellen G. White, *4T*, pp. 119,120; cf. *2T* 24

24. It is estimated that only about 25% of Seventh-day Adventists pay a faithful tithe. Why do you think that is? Should Adventists give their money to the cause that they think is most worthy? Or, should we give our tithe through the regular church channels?
25. What lesson can we learn from Jesus Himself about faithfulness in our tithes and offerings to the church? Consider the story of the widow's two mites. (Mark 12:41-44; Luke 21:1-4) Those two little copper coins—worth almost nothing—which the widow gave ended up in the hands of the Sadducees! They probably despised her offering. But, Jesus praised her for giving it. While many

may believe that the church has misused its money or they are unhappy about something that the church is doing, surely, the widow had every possible excuse for not giving her offering to the Sadducees. But, she gave her offering to God, and we should do the same. If something about the church needs to be corrected, there are other methods for dealing with that.

26. The Bible also makes it very clear that we are responsible for the members of our family, our parents—especially as they grow older—and our children. By extension, we are also responsible for those around us—particularly people in the church—who are suffering financial setbacks or are among the poor. If seeing the needs of others around us does not lead to a generous response on our part, how can we claim to be Christians?
27. How should we respond to the drunk standing on the street corner claiming he will work for money or food? While we may be working hard at a full-time job, the Bible makes it clear that everything we have is a gift from God. Does that give us permission to hoard it?
28. What should we learn about giving from the example of Peter and John at the temple gate? (Acts 3:1-26) Are there other things that we can give besides money? Even if we consider ourselves poor, do we have a responsibility to others around us?
29. In light of what we have studied so far, what does it mean to be Christ-like or to live a Christian lifestyle? If one were to take all the guidance given throughout the Bible as a criteria for judging, would there be enough evidence to convict you as a Christian?
30. Our Bible study guide suggests that Jesus spent more time talking about wealth, money, and possessions than any other topic. Why do you think He did that? Would you agree with that assessment? Did Jesus say anything new that Moses had not already said under His inspiration? Why was it necessary for Jesus to repeat this instruction? Had they forgotten Moses' admonitions?
31. So many people in our world act as if money is their god. Why does Deuteronomy 8:18 say God gave us the power to acquire wealth? If money is our god, are we breaking the first commandment? Might we be breaking other commandments as well?
32. The Pharisees taught that if one is good, God will bless him; if God is blessing him, he will be wealthy. According to their definition, if one is poor s/he is cursed of God. In light of that, shouldn't Jesus have—at least for a period of time—become wealthy so He could meet them on their level? How did they regard Him in His poverty? Does the possession of wealth give us the right to dominate over others who may not be so well-off financially?
33. Is true wealth measured by the amount of one's worldly possessions? Or, by his/her closeness to Christ and having the Holy Spirit dwelling in his/her life?
34. How do we make decisions about spending our money? Do we sometimes act as if we have more trust in our bank account than we do in God? Are we ever caught up in the proverbial race of "keeping up with the Joneses"?
35. Do you know anyone who thinks s/he has too much money? Does the accumulation of earthly wealth ever bring true happiness?
36. We sometimes seem to forget that God has never transferred ownership of any part of His creation to us. Everything we have and are belongs to Him. Are we brave enough to pray, "Lord, what do you want me to do with Your money?" Many of us would intellectually recognize that everything belongs to God. But, do our actions and our motives and our desires reflect that fact?
37. If you were to die today, what would your friends and associates say about you? Are you respected for your true Christian witness?

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