

Stewardship: Motives of the Heart

The Habits of a Steward

Lesson #12 for March 24, 2018

Scriptures: Ephesians 5:15-17; Colossians 3:23; Luke 12:35-48; James 4:14; Acts 3:21; 1 Corinthians 9:24-27; Psalm 119:9-11.

1. In this lesson we will discuss the role of forming habits in our lives. Habits tend to reveal what is most important in our lives. Developing good habits is a trait of faithful stewards. We could not survive without habits. Can you imagine having to figure out all over again how to do each task that you do each day? Daniel had a regular time to pray, and he opened his windows toward Jerusalem. (Daniel 6:10) Jesus attended the synagogue every Sabbath. (Luke 4:16) Paul also attended the synagogues on Sabbath. (Acts 17:1-2) Additionally, Paul recognized that associating with people who have bad habits can cause a lot of problems. (1 Corinthians 15:33) So, how do we cultivate good habits to replace bad ones?

We shall be individually, for time and eternity, what our habits make us. The lives of those who form right habits, and are faithful in the performance of every duty, will be as shining lights, shedding bright beams upon the pathway of others.—Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*,* vol. 4, 452.1; *CG** 202.4; *FLB** 152.4.

2. What is a habit? A habit is a neural pathway that is the quickest way to get to the behavior a person wants to do. It is an ingrained decision. One does not have to stop and think about it; s/he just does it by nature. Habits can be good or bad. So, this week we will discuss what habits should be developed by a faithful Christian steward.
3. We all need habits. What would happen if we had to carefully think through everything we do when we get up in the morning. Why do I wear socks? Do I need to wear shoes? Do I need to eat breakfast? How do I brush my teeth? Anyway, you get the idea. So, habits are important in minimizing the amount of intellectual energy that must be expended to get through our day. What habits are good for Christians?

Every morning dedicate yourself, soul, body, and spirit, to God. Establish habits of devotion and trust more and more in your Saviour.—Ellen G. White, *Letter 36*,* 1901; *Mind, Character, and Personality*,* vol. 1, 15.3.

It would be well for us to spend a thoughtful hour each day in contemplation of the life of Christ. We should take it point by point, and let the imagination grasp each scene, especially the closing ones. As we thus dwell upon His great sacrifice for us, our confidence in Him will be more constant, our love will be quickened, and we shall be more deeply imbued with His spirit. If we would be saved at last, we must learn the lesson of penitence and humiliation at the foot of the cross.—Ellen G. White, *Desire of Ages** 83.4.

4. What would our lives be like if we all did that? Surely, habits like these will point us in the direction of the road to heaven. There are many verses in the Bible suggesting that seeking God first should be the basic motive of Christians. For example, see Exodus 20:3; Matthew 6:33; and Jeremiah 29:13.
5. So, how do we put God first in our lives? See Matthew 22:37-38; Acts 17:28; Ephesians 5:15-17; and Colossians 3:23. If we recognize that even our physical existence is a gift of

God, surely we should love Him first and make Him top priority in our lives. And He commands us to love our fellow human beings as well. We need to make good use of every opportunity that comes to us, and we need to do it with all our energy as if we were working for God Himself.

6. There is considerable evidence in Scripture as well as supporting evidence from Ellen White to suggest that Jesus spent a lot of time every night or sometimes early in the morning communing with His Father. No doubt, They planned His activities for the upcoming day. See Mark 1:35; Luke 5:16; 6:12; *Desire of Ages* 362.3-363.1.
7. Look at Luke 2:49. Jesus said when confronted by His mother who had found Him “in the temple,” “ ‘I must be about My Father’s business.’ ” (Luke 2:46,49, *NKJV*) A more idiomatic translation of that verse as seen in the *Good News Bible** says: “He answered them, ‘Why did you have to look for me? Didn’t you know that I had to be in my father’s house?’ But they did not understand his answer.” The Greek idiom in use there was not referring to some business transaction but rather was an idiom that referred to someone’s home.
8. At times, Jesus apparently would pray all night (Luke 6:12) and come forth refreshed! How was that possible? Jesus seemed to love to talk to His Father more than anything else. Have you ever had the experience of getting back together with a long-time friend, and the time just seemed to fly? Could we develop that kind of relationship with God? Nothing could separate Him from His Father until that fateful day on Golgotha’s hill.
9. So, have we made God first in our lives?
10. Read Luke 12:35-48. There are two brief stories told in these verses. Both of them talk about the role of a faithful servant or steward. The servant who becomes lazy and does not listen for his master’s return or even gets drunk is obviously not a faithful servant.
11. So, if we are going to develop the right kinds of habits by putting God first, we must do so intentionally and repeatedly until it becomes a habit. Are we eagerly awaiting the Savior’s return?
12. Going to church and hearing the pastor speak about the second advent or peeking in the Bible every now and again, recognizing that there are prophecies about the second coming will not do the trick. We need to intentionally search the Scriptures to find the lessons which are there for us. Eternity depends on our forming the right habits.
13. While in this sinful world, we must always recognize that death is a possibility. None of us knows that we will be alive tomorrow. So, shouldn’t we always be prepared? If we claim to be Adventists which means that we are looking forward to the second coming, shouldn’t we demonstrate that by our behavior?
14. Probably our most precious gift from God is time. We cannot stop it! We cannot move it backward. We cannot move it forward; it just keeps going. Are we using our time effectively and preparing ourselves and others for the second coming?
15. Read James 4:14; Psalm 90:10-12; 34:4-5; and Ecclesiastes 3:6-8. While God has the ability to look into the future, not even His holy angels can do so. And we certainly do not have that ability. With something so precious as time, we certainly must do our best to use it profitably. What does God’s Word tell us about the use of time? Another very important resource that we have available to us is money. If we make a mistake and lose money, we have the opportunity to get it back. But, if we lose time, especially if we waste it, there is no way to get it back.

16. Our time belongs to God. Every moment is His, and we are under the most solemn obligation to improve it to His glory. Of no talent He has given will He require a more strict account than of our time.

The value of time is beyond computation. Christ regarded every moment as precious, and it is thus that we should regard it. Life is too short to be trifled away. We have but a few days of probation in which to prepare for eternity. We have no time to waste, no time to devote to selfish pleasure, no time for the indulgence of sin. It is now that we are to form characters for the future, immortal life. It is now that we are to prepare for the searching judgment.—Ellen G. White, *Christ's Object Lessons** 342.1-2; *FLB** 158.2-3. Compare *MLT* 115.3-5; *BLJ* 78.2; *CG* 123.4.

17. Even in his day, Paul declared that the days were evil. (Ephesians 5:15-16) What do you suppose he would say about our day? How many attractions do we face today that take our attention away from the things that are really important? Are we foolishly wasting the time God has allotted us to prepare for eternal life?
18. When Adam and Eve were created, they were perfect—mentally, physically, socially, and spiritually. Sin has caused tremendous losses in each of those areas. But, God has promised that He is capable of restoring us to that original form if we give Him the opportunity.
19. Read Acts 3:21 and Revelation 21:1-5. God made it very clear that a new heaven and a new earth are coming. While He was on this earth, Jesus did everything possible to uplift us spiritually, mentally, and physically. But, remember there was no reason for Him to come the first time if He does not plan to come back! So, what should we do to prepare ourselves for the second coming?

First: Like the muscles of the body, the brain grows stronger with use. If we fill our minds with what is true, noble, right, pure, lovely, and admirable, (Philippians 4:8) then our mental capacity will grow.

Second: Good health habits such as exercise and proper diet are ways that we can improve our mental capacity as well as our physical endurance and lives. Exercise lowers stress and blood pressure, improves mood, and is probably more effective at anti-aging than anything available in the drug store or online.

Third: The true steward of God will develop good habits to invigorate the soul. See Psalm 86:4-5; 62:5; and 3 John 3. Thus, we can be preserved blameless when Jesus comes back. (1 Thessalonians 5:23)

20. Think about the rituals or habits that you go through every day. How many of them have become habits? Are those habits promoting physical, mental, social, and spiritual health? Would it be better if you could change some of those habits? What choices could you make that would improve your health in each of those areas?
21. One very important habit is self-discipline. That is by no means a natural trait! However, it is one of the most important characteristics a steward can have. Galatians 5:22-23 and 2 Timothy 1:7 are just two of the verses that suggest that we need to have self-control and self-discipline. God challenges us to have balanced, sound minds that hold fast to God's principles in our lives. Think of some biblical examples: Daniel refused to change his worship habits even with the threat of being thrown into the den of lions, and God protected him. (Daniel 6) Was that a foolish thing to do? Samson lived a self-indulgent life and ended up having his eyes gouged out and doing the job of an animal. (Judges 16) Joseph refused to

be seduced by Potiphar's wife. (Genesis 39) By contrast, Solomon ended up with 700 wives and 300 concubines and worshipped some of their pagan gods. (1 Kings 11:4-5)

22. Paul was very clear in his understanding of the importance of self-discipline.

1 Corinthians 9:23-27: ²³ All this I do for the gospel's sake, in order to share in its blessings. ²⁴ Surely you know that many runners take part in a race, but only one of them wins the prize. Run, then, in such a way as to win the prize. ²⁵ Every athlete in training submits to strict discipline, in order to be crowned with a wreath that will not last; but we do it for one that will last for ever. ²⁶ That is why I run straight for the finishing line; that is why I am like a boxer who does not waste his punches. ²⁷ I harden my body with blows and bring it under complete control, to keep myself from being disqualified after having called others to the contest.—American Bible Society. (1992). *The Holy Bible: The Good News Translation** (2nd ed., 1 Corinthians 9:23-27). New York: American Bible Society.

The world is given to self-indulgence. Errors and fables abound. Satan's snares for destroying souls are multiplied. All who would perfect holiness in the fear of God must learn the lessons of temperance and self-control. The appetites and passions must be held in subjection to the higher powers of the mind. **This self-discipline is essential to that mental strength and spiritual insight which will enable us to understand and to practice the sacred truths of God's word.** For this reason temperance finds its place in the work of preparation for Christ's second coming.—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages** 101.2; *CC** 271.4; *LHU** 363.6; *1MCP** 308.2. [Bold type is added.]

23. Christians who are faithful to God must practice and train to be self-disciplined. It is impossible to be really good at anything you do without a lot of practice. Athletes know this; musicians know this. Christians should know this as well.

24. There are some outstanding characters mentioned the Bible. Think of Enoch and Noah. What is implied by the statements that Enoch walked with God? A story has been told about a young boy who was asked about Enoch. That boy responded: "Enoch walked with God; and one day, God said to him: 'We are closer to My house than to your house, so why don't you come home with Me?'" Has Enoch been the only one who has had a special relationship with God? (Genesis 5:24; 6:9) Ellen White had some very interesting words to say about Daniel and his friends.

... [They] realized that in order to stand as representatives of true religion amid the false religions of heathenism they must have clearness of intellect and must perfect a Christian character. And **God Himself was their teacher.** Constantly praying, conscientiously studying, keeping in touch with the Unseen, **they walked with God as did Enoch.**—Ellen G. White, *Prophets and Kings** 486.1; *CSA** 55.5; *CC** 247.2; *LHU** 193.2. [Bold type and content in brackets are added.]

25. Do you think someone in 2018 could walk with God as they did? Is there any other way to protect ourselves from the evils in our world?

Being a faithful steward entails an all-encompassing life that begins with being in agreement with God (*Amos 3:3*). We must walk in Christ (*Col. 2:6*), walk in newness of life (*Rom. 6:4*), walk in love (*Eph. 5:2*), walk in wisdom (*Col. 4:5*),

walk in truth (*Ps. 86:11*), walk in the light (*1 John 1:7*), walk in integrity (*Prov. 19:1*), walk in His law (*Exod. 16:4*), walk in good works (*Eph. 2:10*), and walk the straight path (*Prov. 4:26*).—*Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide** for Friday, March 23.

Is that still possible?

26. One of the characteristics that Jesus emphasized was humility. But, it is a difficult trait for proud human beings to develop. See Matthew 11:29-31; Ephesians 4:2; Philippians 2:3; and James 4:10. One of the clearest comments about walking humbly before God is found in Micah 6:8.

No, the LORD has told us what is good. What he requires of us is this: to do what is just, to show constant love, and to live in humble fellowship with our God.—*Good News Bible** (Micah 6:8).

27. Could we walk as humbly as Jesus did? Should we be humble when dealing with our fellow humans?
28. Read Titus 2:7; Psalm 119:72; and Matthew 5:8. These are just a few of the other characteristics that we should be developing: Self-control, obedience to God's laws, and purity of heart. What does that mean? It is talking about the use of our minds.
29. How can we become better users of time? Do we understand it? Do we realize how much time we might be wasting when we could be preparing for the kingdom to come?
30. Read Psalm 119:9-11. David very clearly recognized that to keep our lives pure, we need to obey God's laws and His commands. So, what practical steps can we take to incorporate more spiritual habits into our lives? Matthew 6:33 talks about seeking God first. How do we do that in our busy schedules in 2018? Do we need to be self-disciplined? Is that easy? What things could we adjust that would give us a closer walk with God? Will the Holy Spirit help us in developing better habits if we give Him opportunity to do so? How can we know for sure which practices are the most effective ways to walk with God? Practice makes perfect! We also need to practice what we preach! How busy was Jesus? He had to take time from His sleep to talk to His Father!

A high school track-and-field coach once interviewed a prospective athlete who boasted that she could high-jump five feet six inches, which is quite impressive. Her performance, however, was quite different. After the first two track meets (competitions), she was ready to quit because she had not been able to jump the entering height, which was only three feet six inches—two feet lower than her boast of five feet six inches.

Nevertheless, she persisted, returning to jumping fundamentals. She practiced each component of jumping repeatedly. She mastered her approach steps, perfected her arc, and transformed the jumping functions into intuitive habits. She established the school high jump record that year and placed third at state championships. The following year she established the district championship meet record (five feet three inches) and was runner-up at state championships. Following graduation, she was recruited by top universities.—*Adult Teachers Sabbath School Bible Study Guide** 159.

What does that teach us? We need to persevere.

31. Have you ever set a goal for yourself like this young woman did? If you keep working on it,

can you make progress? Many of us would not be able to high jump five feet six inches; but, each of us can develop a close walk with God if we are determined to do so.

32. Unfortunately, many of the uses of the word *habit* are connected to bad things like obsessions, addictions, etc. But, habits do not need to be bad. Forming good habits is one of the requirements that we need to develop.
33. How do we develop good habits? Maybe we should start with seeking? Do we start our days with God, thus, placing Him as top priority in our lives? Do we return a faithful tithe, thus, recognizing that God owns everything that we have in our possession? What might we expect as a result of making God first in our lives? We might find that Satan works even harder to trip us up!
34. One of the few commands in the Bible involving time is the fourth commandment. Clearly, God said that we are to spend six days doing our work and one day resting as our Sabbath. There were also special times for celebrating such as weddings and births.

Work, family, rest, and worship seem to be the dominant themes of the fourth commandment. What seems missing—overtly, at least—is explicit instruction regarding leisure and entertainment. Contemporary culture, through technological advancements that have lessened our workload, has filled that emptiness with entertainment, much of which is pointless at best and destructive at worst. But it could be argued that the fourth commandment provides sacred principles that we can apply to our use of leisure time and that we can use to govern our recreational activities.—*Ibid.** 161.

35. Was God suggesting that we do not need time for leisure and entertainment? In light of the times in which we live, should leisure and entertainment form a major part of our schedule? Christian stewards will also be cautious in their consumption of beverages, (Proverbs 20:1; 23:29-35) avoiding sexual immorality, (Leviticus 18 and 1 Corinthians 6:18-20) preventing various other diseases, (for example, Leviticus 14) and following God's advice about various healthful habits.

Paul admired athletic discipline and used running to illustrate spiritual principles related to self-control (*1 Cor. 9:24-27, 2 Tim. 4:7, Heb. 12:1-3*). God's promise to ancient Israel is equally meaningful for modern Israel: " 'If you diligently heed the voice of the LORD your God and do what is right in His sight, give ear to His commandments and keep all His statutes, I will put none of the diseases on you which I have brought on the Egyptians. For I am the LORD who heals you' " (*Exod. 15:26, NKJV*).—*Ibid.** 161.

36. In our lessons so far, we have talked about responsible stewardship in the areas of spiritual, physical, mental, financial, and emotional health and well-being. Have our lives improved as a result of what we have learned? How can we develop habits which we know are essential for Christian stewards? Do physical activity and exercise which improves physical health also contribute to our spiritual growth? They help us to think more clearly. Does God intend for us to get buried in a hectic schedule? Do we have balanced lifestyles? What would happen to our lives if we made God first in everything we do and think?

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