

Stewardship: Motives of the Heart

I See, I Want, I Take

Lesson #2 for January 13, 2018

Scriptures: 2 Corinthians 8:1-7; Matthew 13:3-7,22; 26:14-16; Genesis 3:1-6; Isaiah 56:11; 2 Peter 1:5-9.

1. This lesson is a discussion of the covetousness and greed that surround us in our society today. What role has it played in the Adventist Church? Are we subject to the temptations to greed and covetousness like others?
2. Ellen White once saw in vision the Devil discussing his plans with his henchmen, the evil angels. Her report of it goes like this:

“Go, make the possessors of lands and money drunk with the cares of this life. Present the world before them in its most attractive light, that they may lay up their treasure here, and fix their affections upon earthly things. We must do our utmost to prevent those who labor in God’s cause from obtaining means to use against us. Keep the money in our own ranks. The more means they obtain, the more they will injure our kingdom by taking from us our subjects. **Make them care more for money than the upbuilding of Christ’s kingdom and the spread of the truths we hate, and we need not fear their influence; for we know that every selfish, covetous person will fall under our power, and will finally be separated from God’s people.**”—Ellen G. White, *Spirit of Prophecy*,* vol. 4, 339.2 (1884); *Counsels on Stewardship** 154.3-155.0; *TM** 473.3. [Notice carefully that this is a quote from Satan seen by Ellen White in vision.] [Bold type is added.]

3. It would be very profitable for every Adventist to get a copy of those four facsimile volumes (the *Spirit of Prophecy* set, *1SP*, *2SP*, *3SP*, and *4SP*); or, even better, get a copy of the Ellen G. White CD-ROM and read what she wrote for the special benefit of Adventists in the 1870s and 1880s.
4. How well has Satan done with that approach? What can we learn from the Bible about greed and covetousness?
5. Greed has reached into the Christian evangelism scene. Put simply, many popular television preachers are saying that God wants to bless you and are saying that if you serve Him, He will bless you; in fact, He will make you wealthy. They say that if you follow God, He blesses you with wealth and health.
6. Is God in the business of promoting materialism? Some might suggest that is the message of the blessings and curses recorded in the writings of Moses. See Deuteronomy 28:1-14; 7:12-24; and Leviticus 26:3-13.
7. Or, were those messages only for the Israelites? The prosperity gospel suggests: “If I do this, God promises to do that in return.” Is that just a business deal? What does that have to do with faith?
8. Read 2 Corinthians 8:1-7. Do you know of anyone who has given even more than s/he was/is capable of giving? What about the widow and her two mites? (Mark 12:42; Luke 21:2) What about the widow who fed Elijah? (1 Kings 17:8-16) Second Corinthians 1-9 is part of Paul’s fourth letter to the Corinthians. He had just received a message that the Corinthians were anxious to have him return and spend time with them. But, he still needed

to finish some work and finish collecting money in Macedonia.

9. Why do you think those Macedonian and Greek Christians were so generous to the Christians in Jerusalem? What did Paul say to them? Elsewhere, Paul suggested that the Philippians were fairly well off; so, is this passage talking about a different group? Do you know of any modern Christian groups that have given more than they could afford? What will happen to our wealth in the time of trouble?
10. We do not need to go back to the Bible to teach us that the cares of this life and its riches are temporary. Nothing on this earth lasts for very long. Helen Keller the blind and deaf scholar once said: "The most pathetic person in the world is someone who has sight, but has no vision." Is that true? Can you think of some examples from the Bible?

Some love this world so much that it swallows up their love for the truth. As their treasures here increase, their interest in the heavenly treasure decreases. The more they possess of this world, the more closely do they hug it to them, as if fearful their coveted treasure would be taken from them. The more they possess, the less do they have to bestow upon others, for the more they have, the poorer they feel. O, the deceitfulness of riches! They will not see and feel the wants of the cause of God.—Ellen G. White, *Spiritual Gifts*,* vol. 2, 267.1 (1860).

What was the financial condition of the advent believers in 1860 when this was written?

11. On what is our vision focused? It is not enough to have Jesus in view; we must keep Him clearly in focus. When they were quite young, Ellen White and her sister worked very hard for 25 cents per day and saved \$30 to use for God's cause!

Even though he may be poor, the youth who is industrious and economical can save a little for the cause of God. When I was only twelve years old, I knew what it was to economize. With my sister I learned a trade, and although we would earn only twenty-five cents a day, from this sum we were able to save a little to give to missions. We saved little by little until we had thirty dollars. Then when the message of the Lord's soon coming came to us, with a call for men and means, we felt it a privilege to hand over the thirty dollars to father, asking him to invest it in tracts and pamphlets to send the message to those who were in darkness.—Ellen G. White, *Youth's Instructor*,* September 10, 1907, par. 2.

12. Read Matthew 13:3-7,22. Have you observed any of the scenarios that Jesus suggested in His parable of the sower and the seed? Jesus suggested that the weeds are the cares of this world and the desire for wealth. Why is that such a dangerous trap for so many? Why did Jesus say in the same verse that the "deceitfulness of riches" would be responsible for many losing their salvation? Could our love for riches choke out our love for God and His work?
13. The Seventh-day Adventist Church is growing in membership very rapidly as churches go. But, almost all of those new members are in Third World countries where wages are low. In the past, the United States, Canada, and Australia along with some help from Europe supported the work in those poorer countries; but, that is no longer possible. What are the implications for the church? Over 90 percent of our membership is in countries of the Third World.
14. Read Genesis 3:1-6. Ellen White added to this picture, suggesting that while enjoying

themselves working in the garden, Adam and Eve wandered apart from each other. When Eve looked up, she realized she had come dangerously close to the tree of knowledge of good and evil.

15. Try to imagine being one of the beings in the universe looking down at this earth and watching Eve walking towards that tree and away from Adam. Were the eyes of the entire universe focused on what was happening there and what happened next?
16. Does the serpent's approach to Eve sound like a modern advertising agency? She saw the fruit; how beautiful it looked. It appeared to be delicious. When the serpent spoke to her and suggested that it was very desirable, she wanted it. So, she took it. Thus, we see the three steps in greed: I see, I want, I take.
17. One of the worst things about greed and covetousness are that they are quiet sins; that is, they happen inside of us. No one else can observe what is actually going on in our minds. King Ahab coveted the vineyard of Naboth and pouted over it until his queen arranged for Naboth to be murdered so that Ahab could have that vineyard. (1 Kings 21) Achan saw and wanted the Babylonian garment, the silver, and the gold. Very soon, he found himself taking them and burying them in his tent, thus, leading to the destruction of himself and his entire family. (Joshua 7:20-22)

“If selfishness be the prevailing form of sin, covetousness may be regarded as the prevailing form of selfishness. This is strikingly intimated by the Apostle Paul, when describing the ‘perilous times’ [2 Tim. 3:1] of the final apostasy, he represents selfishness as the prolific root of all the evils which will then prevail, and covetousness as its first fruit. ‘For men shall be lovers of their own selves, covetous’ [2 Tim. 3:2].”—John Harris, *Mammon* (New York: Lane & Scott, 1849), p. 52.—Quoted in *Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide** for Tuesday, January 9. [Brackets and content in brackets including italic type are in the Bible Study Guide.]

18. Is covetousness the basis for virtually all other sins? Reread the 10th commandment in Exodus 20:17; and then, look at Paul's argument recorded in Romans 7:7-13.
19. Read Isaiah 56:11. It seems that the people in positions of power in Isaiah's day were as greedy as many people seem to be today.
20. Greed, covetousness, and selfishness are the absolute antithesis of the character of Christ. Paul said: “For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for your sakes He became poor, that you through His poverty might become rich.” (2 Corinthians 8:9, *NKJV*)
21. So, in what areas of our society do we see the most obvious greed and covetousness? Is it in businesses? The stock market? The economies of nations?
22. Think of the fate of Judas. It was all because he was so greedy and loved money so much. Who would want to follow his example? See Matthew 26:14-16 and the chapter on Judas in the *Desire of Ages* 716-722.

How tenderly the Saviour dealt with him who was to be His betrayer! In His teaching, Jesus dwelt upon principles of benevolence that struck at the very root of covetousness. He presented before Judas the heinous character of greed, and many a time the disciple realized that his character had been portrayed, and his sin pointed out; but he would not confess and forsake his

unrighteousness.—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages** 295.1; *CTR** 264.7; *CC** 286.2.

23. Judas actually arrived at the place in his thinking that he believed that if he could force Jesus to free Himself and, thus, prove His power to become king of the Jews, then he, Judas, would be credited with putting Jesus on the throne!
24. Would it be safe for God to admit to heaven greedy people with all the wealth available there?
25. Read Galatians 5:22-25. The first two verses discuss the famous fruit of the Spirit. And we should notice very importantly that the last part of the fruit of the Spirit is self-control. What is the relationship between “putting to death human nature with all its passions and desires” and the Spirit-control of our lives?
26. Read 2 Peter 1:5-9. Notice once again that self-control and endurance are a major part of Peter’s ladder.
27. So, how can we overcome selfishness, greed, and covetousness with the help of the Holy Spirit and still maintain self-control, the gift of the Spirit? Does this seem like a contradiction? What tools does the Holy Spirit have to help us overcome greed? Working with the poor? Giving generously to support God’s work for the poor? How do we develop self-control and learn to do things as Jesus did? How many of us have really sacrificed in order to give? Consider these words about Jesus when He was still a youth:

Jesus worked to relieve every case of suffering that He saw. He had little money to give, but He often denied Himself of food in order to relieve those who appeared more needy than He. His brothers felt that His influence went far to counteract theirs. He possessed a tact which none of them had, or desired to have. When they spoke harshly to poor, degraded beings, Jesus sought out these very ones, and spoke to them words of encouragement. To those who were in need He would give a cup of cold water, and would quietly place His own meal in their hands. As He relieved their sufferings, the truths He taught were associated with His acts of mercy, and were thus riveted in the memory.—Ellen G. White, *Desire of Ages** 87.1.

28. It is fair to say that the ultimate human goal is to be happy and satisfied? That goal can never be reached by human materialism.

“Materialistic values are associated with a pervasive undermining of people’s well-being, from low life satisfaction and happiness, to depression and anxiety, to physical problems such as headaches, and to personality disorders, narcissism, and antisocial behavior.”—Tim Kasser, *The High Price of Materialism* (Cambridge, Mass.: The MIT Press, 2002), p. 22.—Quoted in *Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide* for Friday, January 12.

29. Why do you think the prosperity gospel is so popular? What do you think Jesus would say about that form of the “gospel”? What is its appeal?
30. Members of the royal family of England and wives of presidents in the United States have often taken up special challenges to try to deal with major troubles which face our world. One sage once wrote: “If we are looking for the source of our troubles, we shouldn’t test people for drugs—we should test them for stupidity, ignorance, greed, and love of power.” Do you think that would be a good approach? If only we had such a set of tests!

31. After thinking about Galatians 5:22-23, would you say that God's control is really better than self-control? Will God need to monitor and control everyone who is admitted to heaven day and night to keep us out of trouble? Wouldn't self-control be the ultimate goal?
32. When we are born, all we are aware of is our own personal needs. All we can do for our parents and family is poop and pee and smile once in a while! But, Christians need to reach the place where their first concern is for God and other people. How do we manage to make that transition? Maturity! When we work for others, especially the poor, does it become clearer in our minds what is really important and what is not so important? In a world full of selfishness and greed, how can we separate our real needs from our wants, what we consider real necessities from our preferences, our basic issues from embellishments? Is there a clear plan laid out in Scripture for overcoming greed and selfishness? If we truly became like Jesus, would it be safe for God to return self-control to us?
33. What are the emotional impacts of dissatisfaction, discontent, greediness, coveting, and fantasizing about and loving material things? One of the biggest challenges of dealing with greed and covetousness in the church is that those are largely secret sins. Adultery and murder are clearly identifiable and condemned; but, consider what Ellen White wrote.

God does not regard all sins as of equal magnitude; there are degrees of guilt in His estimation, as well as in that of man; but however trifling this or that wrong act may seem in the eyes of men, no sin is small in the sight of God. Man's judgment is partial, imperfect; but God estimates all things as they really are. **The drunkard is despised and is told that his sin will exclude him from heaven; while pride, selfishness, and covetousness too often go unrebuked. But these are sins that are especially offensive to God; for they are contrary to the benevolence of His character, to that unselfish love which is the very atmosphere of the unfallen universe.** He who falls into some of the grosser sins may feel a sense of his shame and poverty and his need of the grace of Christ; but pride feels no need, and so it closes the heart against Christ and the infinite blessings He came to give.—Ellen G. White, *Steps to Christ** 30.1. [Bold type is added.]

34. Could some "faithful saints" fail to get into heaven while some repentant "drunks" might be admitted? See Matthew 7:21-23 and 25:31-46.
35. If we are ever to overcome greed, selfishness, and covetousness, where should we start? If you have ever had the experience of fighting this battle, you know that the earlier in the sequence you take action, the easier it is to avoid the sin. If covetousness and greed take the steps of *I see, I want, and I take*, we should resist the first hint of covetousness and greed by simply turning our vision away. But, are we still in Laodicea? Laodiceans are blind! We are looking or trying to look in all the wrong places.
36. While many of the saints in the Bible were quite wealthy—see for example Abraham, Job, and Boaz—these men clearly placed God in a position of top priority in their lives. So, we should do our best to avoid looking at any sin, whatever that involves. Remember that Jesus said: "If your right eye causes you to sin, tear it out and throw it away; it is better for you to lose one of your members than for your whole body to be thrown into hell." (Matthew 5:29, *NRSV*) What does that really mean? If anything stands in our way of placing God first in our lives, we need to get rid of it.
37. The second step in greed is *wanting*. James 4:7-8 gives us some idea about how to deal with wanting: 1) Resist the Devil, 2) Cleanse your hands, and 3) Purify your hearts. The

only way to conquer the sin of wanting is to fill your mind and heart with Jesus Christ. When we do that and our thoughts are constantly of Him, there will not be time or space for wanting things we should not want.

38. The final step in covetousness is the “purchase point”: *I take*. But, even at that point, Christ promises us: “I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.” (Philippians 4:13, *NKJV*) Our Bible study guide suggests:

Through self-control—which, for the Christian, is nothing less than completely surrendering to divine control—our thoughts, passions, and energies may be directed to use God’s material blessings in accordance with His will.—*Adult Teachers Sabbath School Bible Study Guide* 30.

39. What have you learned from this lesson about the relationship between self-control and divine control?
40. What things could we as individuals or as groups do to help the poor and needy and begin to take our minds off getting and taking? We could visit the sick and disabled of the church. We could assist in a Sabbath school class or Pathfinders for the youth. Even as individuals we could help by: 1) Serving food at a homeless shelter; 2) Raising money to help a nonprofit organization; 3) Help a local family or even a poor church family with some need they have; or 4) Visiting or encouraging people in a nearby prison. If we are going to learn to be like Jesus Himself, wouldn’t it be good to try practicing some of these things even now?

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