

## ***Stewardship: Motives of the Heart Escape from the World's Ways***

Lesson #4 for January 27, 2018

Scriptures: Psalm 119:11; Ephesians 6:18; Romans 8:5-6; Hebrews 11:1-6; 1 Kings 3:14; Ezekiel 36:26-27; Proverbs 11:4,28.

1. There is only one way to salvation; that is through faith in Jesus Christ, our Lord. (Acts 4:12) In our study this week, we will evaluate how to improve our own spiritual success instead of getting buried in the world's rat race.
2. Why is the love of wealth and riches such a powerful attraction? Does wealth give us power? What should the Christian do to avoid being caught in that trap? The only safety suggested by Scripture is to focus on the things of heaven, not on the things on this earth—to spend significant time in the study of Scripture and focus on doing what is right.
3. Life is full of vicissitudes—of ups and downs. The only cure for worldliness is a true and meaningful relationship with Jesus Christ. Do we know how to make Christ our top priority? We should not be looking for some immediate benefits from such a relationship. A long-term commitment will produce the right results. See *DA* 363.3.

Christ is waiting with longing desire for the manifestation of Himself in His church. When the character of Christ shall be perfectly reproduced in His people, then He will come to claim them as His own.

It is the privilege of every Christian not only to look for but to hasten the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, (2 Peter 3:12, margin). Were all who profess His name bearing fruit to His glory, how quickly the whole world would be sown with the seed of the gospel. Quickly the last great harvest would be ripened, and Christ would come to gather the precious grain.—Ellen G. White, *Christ's Object Lessons*\* 69.1-2.

4. Would you like to live a successful Christian life? Shouldn't that be our top priority? Are you willing to work with the Holy Spirit and follow His plan for your life? The hesitation is certainly not on the side of God. We must learn to be Christ-centered and not "stuff-centered"! Think of how many things people purchase on a regular basis, things which very quickly lose their attraction and end up being nothing more than waste or trash.
5. The Bible is the most widely distributed book in the world. More than 6 billion copies have been printed. How many of them are read on a regular basis? How many are read with a sincere desire to develop a better relationship with Jesus Christ? There are more than 1,000 different translations of at least a portion of the Bible in the English language.
6. In order to really appreciate the Bible and learn the most important lessons from its pages, we must learn to ask the right questions as we read. The most important question of all in each book is: ***What does it say to us about God?***

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7. Even the Old Testament is intended to teach us important things about the God of the Old Testament: Jesus Christ. See John 5:39; 14:6; 20:31; Luke 24:44; 1 Corinthians 10:1-4. Christ was there all through the Bible, not just in the New Testament.

8. The Bible is the ultimate source of truth. It reveals to us the truth about God. And as we have already noted in previous lessons, God the Father is just like the Son; if the Father had come in place of the Son, the history we have of Jesus Christ would not have been different.

Had God the Father come to our world and dwelt among us, humbling Himself, veiling His glory, that humanity might look upon Him, the history that we have of the life of Christ would not have been changed.... In every act of Jesus, in every lesson of His instruction, we are to see and hear and recognize God. In sight, in hearing, in effect, it is the voice and movements of the Father.—Ellen G. White, *Letter 83*,\* 1895; *That I May Know Him*\* 338.

9. But, let us make no mistake. We are in the midst of the great controversy between God and Satan over the character and government of God. Who could have any question about that? However you describe it, there are two sides. Our natural human wants and desires are in all-out war against what the Spirit wants. Greed, selfishness, and lust are in obvious opposition to love, truth, and sharing. Worldliness will never make peace with Jesus Christ.
10. So, how does the Christian communicate with God? God speaks to us through His Word, and we respond as we speak to Him in prayer. Nothing in the world is more precious to God than communicating with His children.
11. Prayer is not intended to be some canned or memorized set of phrases that are familiar. Prayer is supposed to be a conversation with God as with a Friend. What do you talk to your friends about? Those are the things you should talk to God about. It is not an opportunity just to send God our want list!
12. But, we must come to God with a clear understanding of faith. And we must pray in the name of Jesus. That does not mean just to mention His name as we close or, perhaps, at the beginning. It means that we must ask for the kinds of things that Jesus would have asked for if He were praying in our stead. What would Jesus pray about? See Matthew 6:8-13; Luke 11:2-4; and Jesus's own final prayer recorded in John 17.
13. Based on all of Scripture, a biblical definition of *faith* stated so well so many times by one of God's best modern friends, Dr. A. Graham Maxwell, is as follows:

**Faith is [just] a word we use to denote a relationship with God as with a Person well known. The better we know Him, the better this relationship may be.**

Faith implies an attitude toward God of love, trust, and deep admiration. It means having enough confidence in Him, based upon the more than adequate evidence revealed, to be willing to believe whatever He says [as soon as we are sure that He has said it], to accept whatever He offers [as soon as we are sure that He is the one who is offering it], and to do whatever He wishes [as soon as we are sure He is the one who wishes it]—without reservation—for the rest of eternity.

Anyone who has such faith is perfectly safe to save. This is why faith is the only requirement for heaven.

[Faith also means that like Abraham, Job, and Moses, God's friends, we know God well enough to reverently ask Him, "Why?"]—A. Graham Maxwell,

*You Can Trust the Bible* 81. [Bold type is added; content in brackets is added based on Dr. Maxwell's lectures.]

14. In discussing the Christian life, Ellen White said:

Prayer and faith are closely allied, and they need to be studied together. In the prayer of faith there is a divine science; it is a science that everyone who would make his lifework a success must understand. Christ says, "What things soever ye desire, when ye pray, believe that ye receive them, and ye shall have them." Mark 11:24. **He makes it plain that our asking must be according to God's will; we must ask for the things that He has promised, and whatever we receive must be used in doing His will. The conditions met, the promise is unequivocal.**—Ellen G. White, *Education*\* 257.7; *Prayer*\* 57.2; See also *Prayer* 105.1; 318.3. [Bold type is added.]

15. Doesn't God want everyone to be saved? So, if we pray for that, will it happen? What does your prayer life look like? Does it need revival and reformation?
16. Didn't Daniel do some things in connection with his prayer life that might seem foolish to some people? Why did he have to open his windows toward Jerusalem and pray in full view of his avowed enemies? (Daniel 6:10) Couldn't he have prayed in secret? Did God arrange this whole scenario in order to get rid of Daniel's enemies?
17. Read 1 Kings 3:9. What a wonderful prayer Solomon prayed on that special occasion. And God blessed him beyond measure. What was God asking Solomon to do? Read 1 Kings 3:14. See also 1 John 5:3; and 1 Peter 4:17.
18. Do you expect to see Solomon in heaven? What do you think will happen when Uriah, David, Bathsheba, and Solomon meet? If you had been God, would you have asked Solomon to write a book like Ecclesiastes at the end of his ruined life? Solomon was described as the wisest man who ever lived. But, wisdom is the application of knowledge and understanding. In his early years and perhaps briefly at the end of his life, Solomon exemplified that wisdom; but, that wisdom did not prevent him from making a tremendous fool of himself in the middle of his life.
19. What should we learn from the life story of Solomon? We may never be as wise as he was; but, we certainly do not need to be as foolish as he was!
20. Read 1 Corinthians 3:19 and Proverbs 24:13-14. There are two types of wisdom described in these verses. *God's wisdom* is wisdom that is centered on Him and how to promote His kingdom. *Man's wisdom* is centered on self and how to gain more stature, position, or wealth in this world. Which are we pursuing?
21. Read John 6:44 and 1 John 2:16. Compare Acts 4:12. Isn't God doing all He can without violating our freedom to draw us ever closer to Him each day? But, we have to do our part by allowing the Holy Spirit to come into our lives and show us how to live. We need to give God the time to communicate with us.
22. Read John 16:13 and 14:16. The work of the Holy Spirit is to guide us and empower us to do God's will.
23. What is the role of the Holy Spirit in all of this? Read Ezekiel 36:26-27; John 14:26; and Ephesians 3:16-19.

**Ezekiel 36:26-27:** <sup>26</sup>I will give you a new heart and a new mind. I will take away your stubborn heart of stone and give you an obedient heart. <sup>27</sup>I will put my spirit

in you and I will see to it that you follow my laws and keep all the commands I have given you.—American Bible Society. (1992). *The Holy Bible: The Good News Translation\** (2nd ed., Ezekiel 36:26–27). New York: American Bible Society.

**John 14:26:** The Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you everything and make you remember all that I have told you.—*Ibid.\** (John 14:26).

**Ephesians 3:16-19:** <sup>16</sup>I ask God from the wealth of his glory to give you power through his Spirit to be strong in your inner selves, <sup>17</sup>and I pray that Christ will make his home in your hearts through faith. I pray that you may have your roots and foundation in love, <sup>18</sup>so that you, together with all God's people, may have the power to understand how broad and long, how high and deep, is Christ's love. <sup>19</sup>Yes, may you come to know his love—although it can never be fully known—and so be completely filled with the very nature of God.—*Ibid.\** (Ephesians 3:16-19).

24. Ellen White had some very clear things to say about how God would like to work with us.

It is through false theories and traditions that Satan gains his power over the mind. By directing men to false standards, he misshapes the character. **Through the Scriptures the Holy Spirit speaks to the mind, and impresses truth upon the heart. Thus He exposes error, and expels it from the soul. It is by the Spirit of truth, working through the word of God, that Christ subdues His chosen people to Himself.**

In describing to His disciples the office work of the Holy Spirit, Jesus sought to inspire them with the joy and hope that inspired His own heart. He rejoiced because of the abundant help He had provided for His church. **The Holy Spirit was the highest of all gifts that He could solicit from His Father for the exaltation of His people. The Spirit was to be given as a regenerating agent, and without this the sacrifice of Christ would have been of no avail.** The power of evil had been strengthening for centuries, and the submission of men to this satanic captivity was amazing. **Sin could be resisted and overcome only through the mighty agency of the Third Person of the Godhead, who would come with no modified energy, but in the fullness of divine power. It is the Spirit that makes effectual what has been wrought out by the world's Redeemer. It is by the Spirit that the heart is made pure. Through the Spirit the believer becomes a partaker of the divine nature. Christ has given His Spirit as a divine power to overcome all hereditary and cultivated tendencies to evil, and to impress His own character upon His church.**

**Of the Spirit Jesus said, "He shall glorify Me." The Saviour came to glorify the Father by the demonstration of His love; so the Spirit was to glorify Christ by revealing His grace to the world. The very image of God is to be reproduced in humanity. The honor of God, the honor of Christ, is involved in the perfection of the character of His people.**—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages\** 671.1-3. [Bold type is added.]

25. Is all of that really possible? How can we make sure that we are on God's side every day

of our lives? Each day should begin with a time for the study of God's Word and prayer. We need to commit ourselves to live obedient lives and to grow our faith relationship with Him. Do people see Jesus in us? Could Jesus have failed when He came to this earth? If there was no possibility of His sinning, then it is a lie to call what He had temptations!

Remember that Duty has a twin sister, Love; these united can accomplish almost everything, but separated, neither is capable of good.—Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*,\* vol. 4, 62.2.

26. Christian duty is love in action. If we consider what Jesus did while He was on this earth, there should not be any question about what we should be doing. By contrast, the world's methods are hatred and its twin: rebellion. Rebellion is hate in action. This was what motivated Lucifer in heaven, causing him to become Satan, the great rebel.
27. But, so often we think of Christian duties as tiresome chores. Do you worship God because you really want to? Or, because you think you must?

**A sullen submission to the will of the Father will develop the character of a rebel. By such a one service is looked upon as drudgery. It is not rendered cheerfully, and in the love of God. It is a mere mechanical performance. [If he dared, such a one would disobey. His rebellion is smothered, ready to break out at any time in bitter murmurings and complaints.] Such service brings no peace or quietude to the soul.**—Ellen G. White, *Manuscript 20*,\* 1897 (MR\* #970); *Signs of the Times*,\* July 22, 1897, par. 11. [Section in brackets is present in *Manuscript 20*,\* 1897 and *Signs of the Times*\* but omitted in *That I May Know Him*\* 120.4; 12MR\* 236.1. Bold type is added.]

28. Real character is shown by what we do when we think no one is looking!
29. So, what is the relationship between duty and love? Duty without love produces the character of a rebel. Love without duty produces nothing.
30. As we know, Jesus said that it is impossible to buy one's way into heaven. Riches can never earn us a place in the kingdom of heaven. Only righteousness and experiencing a relationship with Jesus Christ can do that. See Acts 4:12.
31. We are told that the angels are constantly at work to minister unto God's children on this earth. (Hebrews 1:14) How does the Holy Spirit's work coordinate with the work of angels?
32. A careful review of Scripture and even the writings of Ellen White will make it quite clear that the core issues in the life of a Christian need to be Bible study, prayer, and witnessing.
33. We need to learn to witness because until we practice sharing what we believe with others, we will not really understand the weaknesses in any of our arguments.
34. John 15:15 makes it very clear that Jesus Christ wants to be our Friend. Would that produce a kind of spiritual intimacy? What would that imply?  
**John 15:15:** I do not call you servants any longer, because servants do not know what their master is doing. Instead, I call you friends, because I have told you everything I have heard from my Father.—*Ibid.*\* (John 15:15).
35. Many examples have been and could be given about what happens to any living thing when it is separated from its source of life. Plants die; animals die. So, how can we expect our spiritual life to thrive without a close connection with Jesus Christ?
36. How many people do you know who have read themselves into the truth. There is nothing

quite so powerful in leading us in the right way as a careful study of Scripture and/or the writings of Ellen White.

37. The story is told of an elderly man who was nearly blind and could not read for himself any longer. He would go to different houses in the community with either *Desire of Ages* or *Great Controversy* and he would knock on doors and say: "I am an old man, and I can't read any more. Would you be willing to read a chapter from this book to me?" Then he would ask questions. You might be able to guess that he was by far the most successful soul winner in that church.

38. The famous English cleric Samuel Chadwick once said:

The one concern of the devil is to keep Christians from praying. He fears nothing from prayerless studies, prayerless work, and prayerless religion. He laughs at our toil, mocks at our wisdom, but trembles when we pray.—<https://www.christianquotes.info/quotes-by-author/samuel-chadwick-quotes/#axzz4xkcKmbk9> (Accessed November 7, 2017).

39. It is quite clear from reading the Bible and *The Desire of Ages* that Jesus spent many nights in prayer. In fact, it seems that each night He would bow down and pray in conversation with His Father to set out His plans for the next day. Could we do that? What do you think would happen if we did?

Prayer is the opening of the heart to God as to a friend. Not that it is necessary in order to make known to God what we are, but in order to enable us to receive Him. Prayer does not bring God down to us, but brings us up to Him.—Ellen G. White, *Steps to Christ*\* 93.2.

40. Could we start a Christian revolution by practicing faithful Bible study and prayer? What do you think would happen? Have you ever actually taken a notebook and written down things for which you prayed to see how the answers came? How would that affect your faith? Why not try it, starting this week?

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