

# ***Stewardship: Motives of the Heart***

## ***Stewards After Eden***

Lesson #5 for February 3, 2018

Scriptures: Isaiah 22:14-18; 1 Corinthians 4:1-2; Colossians 2:2-3; Ephesians 6:12-17; 2 Corinthians 5:10; 1 Thessalonians 2:4.

1. The role of human beings on this earth has always been to be stewards. Few have recognized that responsibility. Adam and Eve were given the stewardship of the garden. What do you think that included? It did not belong to them; they were to care for it.
2. What is stewardship?

As with Adam and Eve, God entrusts to us responsibilities of divine origin. Since the Fall in Eden, however, the task of stewardship has changed; along with the responsibilities of caring for the material world, **we are also entrusted to be good stewards of spiritual truths.**—*Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide* for Sabbath, January 27, 2018. [Bold type is added.]

3. When thinking about stewardship, we usually think of financial or economic issues. But, what does it mean to be good stewards of spiritual truths? Are we sharing the good news that we know? How can we do that better? Is the good news something we have?
4. In the Old Testament, the word *steward* comes from an expression which means “upon the house.” This would suggest that a steward was responsible for all the activities in a home. (See Genesis 43:19; 44:1,4; 1 Kings 16:9.)
5. So, what were included in the responsibilities of a steward in the Old Testament? 1) They held great responsibility. (Genesis 39:4) They were chosen because they had demonstrated great trustworthiness. 2) They recognized that what they were caring for was not their own but belonged to their master. (Genesis 24:34-38) This is the clear distinction between an owner and a steward. 3) If a steward should take for his own benefit something belonging to the master, that trust—that relationship—was broken; often, that led to dismissal of the steward. (Genesis 3:23; Hosea 6:7)
6. Read Isaiah 22:14-18. Isaiah made it very clear that Shebna’s misuse of his authority and the things for which he was supposed to be caring meant that he would be rejected by God and taken into captivity where he would die.

A steward identifies himself with his master. He accepts the responsibilities of a steward, and he must act in his master’s stead, doing as his master would do were he presiding. His master’s interests become his. The position of a steward is one of dignity because his master trusts him. If in any wise he acts selfishly and turns the advantages gained by trading with his lord’s goods to his own advantage, he has perverted the trust reposed in him.—Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*,\* vol. 9, 246.3.

7. Review what has happened to you and what you have done during the past week. Have you been true stewards not only of your possessions which were given to you by God but also of the spiritual treasure that has been given to you as well? How many of us are actually doing this? Are you prepared to share God’s good news with others?
8. In the New Testament, two words are used for *steward*; *epitropos* occurs three times, and

*oikonomos* occurs 10 times. These words clearly suggest a managerial position. The New Testament also describes the great accountability of a steward. (Read Luke 12:48 and 1 Corinthians 4:2.)

9. Read Luke 16:1-15. In this parable Jesus made it very clear that misusing not only financial belongings but also spiritual truths will lead to disaster. Wise use even of our master's entrusted treasures will benefit us. Wise stewards will also prepare for the future return of Jesus. (Matthew 25:21)
10. Notice that the Pharisees responded to Jesus's parable by "sneering at him because they loved money." (Luke 16:14-15, *GNB*\*)
11. Read 1 Corinthians 4:1-2; Titus 1:7; and 1 Peter 4:10. Surely, these texts make it clear that we must use the gifts that we have both spiritually and materially for the good of others.

Shall I open my heart to the Holy Spirit, that every faculty and energy may be aroused, which God has given me in trust? I am Christ's property, and am employed in His service. I am a steward of His grace.—Ellen G. White, *Fundamentals of Christian Education*\* 301.1; *YI*,\* May 17, 1894, par. 2.

12. In reading Luke 12:35-48, we notice that Jesus used the term *steward* not only literally and financially but also metaphorically. What would He say about us today? Are we faithfully preparing for the second coming?
13. In light of Luke 12:45-46, we must realize that delay is a part of life. We must not allow a delay to distract us or prevent us from our duties.
14. Read Colossians 2:2-3 and 1 Timothy 3:16. What kind of mystery do these verses talk about? Jesus is the mystery that God wants us to tell everyone about. In the mystery religions of New Testament times, one had to pay much money and go through a lot of training to be allowed to learn the special mysteries. The word *mysterion* or *mystery* in these passages does not mean what it means in modern language as described in the *Bible Study Guide*. A mystery was something that only those "in the know" had learned. So, the truth about Christ was known only to Christians. (Ephesians 1:9) Paul wanted to let everyone in the universe know God's mystery! God's mystery is salvation for all people.
15. Read Deuteronomy 29:29. What things are there that God has revealed to us? What things are there that He cannot at the present time reveal to us?
16. Could we be true stewards of things which we do not fully understand? (See Daniel 12:4.)
17. The eleven disciples that remained after crucifixion weekend managed, with the help of many others, of course, to spread the gospel to the entire world in one generation. Could we do something similar? Think of all the advantages that we have available to us in terms of communication and travel. They had to walk or travel by horse or boat. There was no radio, television, Internet, or even regular mail service. Why can't we do that?
18. The mystery of Christ, the "hope of glory," we will never be able to fully understand. Why would God choose to leave His position of authority, power, and honor and come down and be born as a baby boy and, as Paul in Philippians 2:5-11 described, be willing to suffer the death even of a common criminal. God is unbelievable love.

Christ was treated as we deserve, that we might be treated as He deserves. He was condemned for our sins, in which He had no share, that we might be justified by His righteousness, in which we had no share. He suffered the

death which was ours, that we might receive the life which was His. "With His stripes we are healed." [Isaiah 53:5]—Ellen G. White, *Desire of Ages*\* 25.2. [Content in brackets is added.]

19. Even though we can never fully understand—certainly not fully understand in this life—why Jesus came to this earth, we have some very clear indications. When Jesus came:

The law of Jehovah was burdened with needless exactions and traditions, and **God was represented as severe, exacting, revengeful, and arbitrary.** He was pictured as one who could take pleasure in the sufferings of his creatures. **The very attributes that belonged to the character of Satan, the evil one represented as belonging to the character of God. Jesus came to teach men of the Father, to correctly represent him before the fallen children of earth. Angels could not fully portray the character of God, but Christ, who was a living impersonation of God, could not fail to accomplish the work. The only way in which he could set and keep men right was to make himself visible and familiar to their eyes.**

**Christ exalted the character of God, attributing to him the praise, and giving to him the credit, of the whole purpose of his own mission on earth,—to set men right through the revelation of God.** In Christ was arrayed before men the paternal grace and the matchless perfections of the Father. In his prayer just before his crucifixion, he declared, "I have manifested thy name." "I have glorified thee on the earth; I have finished the work which thou gavest me to do." **When the object of his mission was attained,—the revelation of God to the world,—the Son of God announced that his work was accomplished, and that the character of the Father was made manifest to men.**—Ellen G. White, *The Signs of the Times*,\* January 20, 1890, par. 6,9. Compare *Manuscript Releases*,\* vol. 18, 359; *RH*\* August 14, 1900; *YI*,\* November 21, 1883. [Bold type is added.]

20. Are we correctly representing not only the Son of God but also God the Father in everything that we do and say? Do we actually have a clear understanding of His character of love?
21. Do we comprehend the treasure that God has placed in our hands? What efforts are we putting forth to make it known to others? Are we being responsible for not only the material treasures that God has given us but also the spiritual treasures?
22. In fact, are not the intangible treasures—the spiritual truths that we possess—of more value than our tangible or material treasures? Thousands of translations of the Bible have been made.
23. Read Ephesians 6:12-17. Are we fully prepared to fight against "spiritual forces in the heavenly world, the rulers, authorities, and cosmic powers of this dark age"? To do so, we have been given "truth as a belt," "righteousness as your breastplate," "your shoes the readiness to announce the Good News of peace," "faith as a shield," "salvation as a helmet, and the word of God as the sword." (See Ephesians 6:14-17, *GNB*.\*)
24. God expects us to use these military items appropriately. We are to be constantly fighting the good fight of faith.

Only in the light that shines from Calvary can nature's teaching be read aright.

Through the story of Bethlehem and the cross let it be shown how good is to conquer evil, and how every blessing that comes to us is a gift of redemption.—Ellen G. White, *Education*\* 101.2; *CG*\* 47.3; *LHU*\* 255.4.

25. The Devil cannot defeat us unless we allow him to do so. So long as we are fighting faithfully against him with the Holy Spirit's help, we are invincible. But, that requires constant vigilance on our part in obeying the truth, exercising our faith, and coming to know God better each day. Only by taking up our crosses and bearing witness to the truth about God as Jesus did, can we truly put on and continue to depend on God's armor. Use it or lose it!
26. Do we sometimes think that spreading the gospel is the minister's responsibility? Have we seriously thought of the idea that we might personally be responsible in some way or another? Are we using God's gifts and His treasures appropriately?

God desires to bring men into direct relation with Himself. In all His dealings with human beings He recognizes the principle of personal responsibility. He seeks to encourage a sense of personal dependence and to impress the need of personal guidance. His gifts are committed to men as individuals. Every man has been made a steward of sacred trusts; each is to discharge his trust according to the direction of the Giver; and by each an account of his stewardship must be rendered to God.—Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*,\* vol. 7, 176.1.

27. *Taking personal responsibility* means that we do not blame others when things do not go well. (Compare Genesis 39:9 and Daniel 3:16-18.)
28. Read 2 Corinthians 5:10 and Revelation 20:12-13. One of the great conundrums in the Christian faith is the fact that we are "saved by faith" but "judged by our works." Do we have a clear understanding of the relationship between these two aspects of Christianity and salvation?
29. If we, in fact, are responsible for our actions, then we must have free will. A God of love would never hold us responsible for something over which we have no control.
30. Often, in biblical times, a steward actually lived with his master. In that context, it was sometimes easy for a steward to come to think of his master's goods as if they were his own. Notice these words from the *Handbook of Seventh-day Adventist Theology*:

"The NT takes OT ideas and joins them with first-century ideas, concepts, and words, thus enriching and enlarging the biblical teaching on stewardship. The most common Greek words used in relationship with stewardship are derived from *oikos* and *oikia*, 'house.' The *oikonomos* is one who keeps the house: the steward or manager. *Oikonomia* is the abstract noun, 'management of the house,' the meaning of which is often much broader."—*Handbook of Seventh-day Adventist Theology* (Hagerstown, Md.: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 2000), p. 653.—[as quoted in *Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide*\* for Friday, February 2].

31. What was Adam's first response when God pointed out his lack of responsibility? Where did he get the idea that he should try to blame someone else? Are we ever tempted to do that?
32. God has entrusted us with more spiritual treasure in terms of the Bible and the writings of Ellen White than any other human group in history. How much Scripture was Paul able to

carry around with him? Remember, they used scrolls. How much Scripture did Paul “carry around with him” in his memory? God’s plan for this spiritual treasure is nothing less than to see it shared with the entire world. How are we doing at getting that done?

33. Seventh-day Adventists believe that our special message for the world is the message of the three angels in Revelation 14:6-12. How many Seventh-day Adventists can correctly explain Revelation 14:6-12 so as to give a correct picture of God—a picture of love?
34. It is easy for church members to think that because they do not have theological training, spreading the gospel should be left to the pastor. But, we need to recognize that just as every scientific field is constantly being expanded to include new information, a correct understanding of “present truth” will be constantly expanding in our deeper appreciation of the “mystery” of God as revealed in the life and death of Jesus Christ. Every one of us has available the resources needed to understand, as far as possible, this mystery.
35. Read 1 Thessalonians 2:4. Is God still judging us worthy to be entrusted with the good news? Do we fully understand the implications of being stewards of the good news?
36. How can Seventh-day Adventists best witness in the world in which we live? What would a Paul or even a Jesus do in our day? Which of the 28 SDA beliefs would you be willing to die for? Which ones are you not too sure about? Is that a reason for further study? Are we ready to recognize that every aspect of our lives, even our life itself, is a gift of God and is to be used for His honor and glory? (Matthew 5:16)
37. Do you find it hard to witness to family and friends? Despite the fact that they may not initially respond as you wish they would, do you keep trying? What could we do to make the truth seem more appealing? The more we know about God, the better He looks!
38. The truth has been passed down from generation to generation—some generations of which had only a very few faithful witnesses—to our generation. Is it our primary responsibility to pass the truth on to the next generation? Or, should we have as our goal to carry the gospel to the whole world in our generation? (Matthew 24:14)
39. The word *steward* is not often used in modern speech. We do not have slaves or stewards *per se* under normal circumstances. What modern words might be equivalent or nearly equivalent to the idea of steward? Employee? Chief Executive Officer? Manager? Supervisor? Guardian? Accountant? Chief Financial Officer?
40. To get an overall view of Old and New Testament aspects of the steward’s life, review Genesis 2:15; 24:34-41; 39:4; 43:19; Isaiah 22:14-18; Luke 12:35-48; 1 Corinthians 4:1-2; Titus 1:7; and 1 Peter 4:10. The story of Shebna is a disgraceful one recorded in Isaiah 22:14-18.

Rock-hewn sepulchres of the type Shebna was constructing for himself are common in the environs of Jerusalem.

Prof. N. Avigad has identified this tomb of Shebna with one on the slopes of the Mount of Olives discovered many years ago, and from which an inscription was taken to the British Museum. This inscription, which defied decipherment for many years, reads: “This is [the sepulcher of Sheban]yahu, who is over the house. There is no silver or gold here, but [his bones] and the bones of his slave-wife with him. Cursed be the man who will open this!” (Brackets indicate a conjectural restoration of broken and illegible portions of the inscription in its

present state.)—Nichol, F. D. (Ed.). (1977). *The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*,\* vol. 4, 191–192. Review and Herald Publishing Association. [Brackets and content in brackets are in the source.]

41. Ultimately, especially in New Testament times, a steward was considered to be the one responsible for making everything in the household run in order. The two words *epitropos* and *oikonomos* are both found in Galatians 4:2. Paul used these words to describe our personal responsibility for spiritual matters.
42. In summing up what we have learned in this lesson, which is more valuable: 1) Our personal material possessions which God has given us? Or, 2) The spiritual truths that God has given us? Which of these two prepares us for a life in eternity with Jesus Christ our Lord? Try to imagine everything Paul went through in trying to spread the gospel. Consider these words in 2 Corinthians 11:23-33 as presented in *The Message* paraphrase:

**2 Corinthians 11:23-33:** <sup>23–27</sup> I've worked much harder, been jailed more often, beaten up more times than I can count, and at death's door time after time. I've been flogged five times with the Jews' thirty-nine lashes, beaten by Roman rods three times, pummeled with rocks once. I've been shipwrecked three times, and immersed in the open sea for a night and a day. In hard traveling year in and year out, I've had to ford rivers, fend off robbers, struggle with friends, struggle with foes. I've been at risk in the city, at risk in the country, endangered by desert sun and sea storm, and betrayed by those I thought were my brothers. I've known drudgery and hard labor, many a long and lonely night without sleep, many a missed meal, blasted by the cold, naked to the weather.

<sup>28–29</sup> And that's not the half of it, when you throw in the daily pressures and anxieties of all the churches. When someone gets to the end of his rope, I feel the desperation in my bones. When someone is duped into sin, an angry fire burns in my gut.

<sup>30–33</sup> If I have to "brag" about myself, I'll brag about the humiliations that make me like Jesus. The eternal and blessed God and Father of our Master Jesus knows I'm not lying. Remember the time I was in Damascus and the governor of King Aretas posted guards at the city gates to arrest me? I crawled through a window in the wall, was let down in a basket, and had to run for my life.—Peterson, E. H. (2005). *The Message: the Bible in Contemporary Language*.\* (2 Corinthians 11:23–33). Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress.

43. Should we feel personally responsible for souls that could be lost? Think of what God in Christ has done for us. We could never begin to repay. But, what is a reasonable expectation that God might have of us? Do you know any modern Christians who have the same fervor that Paul had for the gospel? Paul said that we are not our own, we have been bought with a price. Do you recognize that in your own personal experience? Do you act accordingly? We are all stewards. Are we correctly representing God?

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