

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

### **Offerings of Gratitude**

Lesson #9 for March 3, 2018

Scriptures: Matthew 6:19-21; Ephesians 2:8; 1 Peter 4:10; Luke 7:36-50; 2 Corinthians 8:8-15; 9:6-7; John 3:16.

1. As has been demonstrated repeatedly, the differences between the kingdom of God—a kingdom based on love—and the kingdom of Satan—a kingdom based on selfishness—are obvious. It is certainly clear that we do not even begin to realize how generous God has been in sending us Jesus. But, even we as humble human beings love to give gifts to those we love. (Luke 11:13) God has given all heaven to us, including Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit.
2. Giving is an absolutely fundamental characteristic of God. If we want to be like Him, we must learn to give unselfishly. Can you imagine anything more contradictory than the term *a selfish Christian*.
3. So, what do we have to give? Certainly, one of the things that we can give is our means by paying a faithful tithe and giving generous offerings. Shouldn't we start practicing being more like God right now? Compare Exodus 36:2-7.
4. Read Matthew 6:19-21 and Colossians 3:1-2.

**Matthew 6:19-21:** <sup>19</sup> “Do not store up riches for yourselves here on earth, where moths and rust destroy, and robbers break in and steal. <sup>20</sup> Instead, store up riches for yourselves in heaven, where moths and rust cannot destroy, and robbers cannot break in and steal. <sup>21</sup> For your heart will always be where your riches are.”—American Bible Society. (1992). *The Holy Bible: The Good News Translation\** (2nd ed., Matthew 6:19–21). New York: American Bible Society.

**Colossians 3:1-2:** You have been raised to life with Christ, so set your hearts on the things that are in heaven, where Christ sits on his throne at the right-hand side of God. <sup>2</sup> Keep your minds fixed on things there, not on things here on earth.—*Ibid.\** (Colossians 3:1-2).

5. Why do you suppose this principle became a central part of the Sermon on the Mount? How is it in your experience? Is it true that “your heart will always be where your riches are”?
6. What does it mean *to store up your treasure in heaven*? How permanent are our treasures stored on this earth?

On earth everything is unstable, uncertain, and insecure; it is subject to decay, destruction, stealing, and loss. Heaven is the opposite: everything is eternal, durable, secure, and imperishable. In heaven there is no loss.—C. Adelina Alexe, “*Where Your Heart Belongs*,” in *Beyond Blessings*, edited by Nikolaus Satelmajer (Nampa, Idaho: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 2013), p. 22.—[as quoted in the *Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide\** for Sunday, February 25].

7. No matter how much or how little you have, sooner or later, it will disappear or be handed over to someone else, presumably someone in your family. Worst of all, it could be destroyed by fire or flood or stolen by thieves.
8. Why is it that our treasure pulls so incessantly on our hearts? It tugs, coerces, draws, demands, allures, and seems to focus the desires of our hearts. Think of the people who gamble, hoping to hit the jackpot! Consider your personal experience. Is your treasure in heaven? Or, here on earth? Can we truly be followers of Jesus and still keep our treasure to ourselves?
9. Of course, God expects us to be responsible. We need to be responsible not only for our own needs but also those of our family members. We need to think seriously about our future, even retirement. But, we need to remember that the big picture includes eternity.

**Hebrews 10:34:** You shared the sufferings of prisoners, and when all your belongings were seized, you endured your loss gladly, because you knew that you still possessed something much better, which would last for ever.—*Good News Bible.\** (Hebrews 10:34).

10. We could make a long list of the things that God has given us. Foremost on that list would be the offer of salvation.

**Ephesians 2:8-9:** For it is by God's grace that you have been saved through faith. It is not the result of your own efforts, but God's gift, so that no one can boast about it.—*ibid.\** (Ephesians 2:8-9).

11. We never have done or could do anything to earn God's grace. It is entirely undeserved. Even angels are amazed as they think of what God has done for sinful human beings.

**1 Peter 1:12:** God revealed to these prophets that their work was not for their own benefit, but for yours, as they spoke about those things which you have now heard from the messengers who announced the Good News by the power of the Holy Spirit sent from heaven. **These are things which even the angels would like to understand.**—*ibid.\** (1 Peter 1:12). [Bold type is added.]

12. If God did not offer us salvation through grace by faith, nothing else would really matter. We would have no hope. Our miserable lives on this earth would be all to which we have to look forward. There is no other way to be saved except by God's grace. The law cannot save us. (Galatians 3:21)

13. So, what is the relationship between God's overwhelmingly generous grace and our stewardship?

**1 Peter 4:10:** Each one, as a good manager of God's different gifts, must use for the good of others the special gift he has received from God.—*ibid.\** (1 Peter 4:10).

14. Using the expression from the *King James Version*, we are "stewards of the manifold grace of God." After all, what do we have that we have not been given through one or more of God's gifts to us?

15. Read Luke 7:37-50. The story of Mary's incredible generosity should be a great example for all of us. This young woman who had fallen from a life of privilege to the point where she was despised even by her relatives became a devoted follower of Jesus Christ. Consider these additional details of the story and her life given by Ellen White.

16. God's absolute unselfishness awakens human generosity. And nowhere do we find that awakening of generosity in the human heart illustrated more beautifully in Scripture than Mary's act during the feast at Simon's house.

At the table the Saviour sat with Simon, whom He had cured of a loathsome disease, on one side, and Lazarus, whom He had raised from the dead, on the other. Martha served at the table, but Mary was earnestly listening to every word from the lips of Jesus. In His mercy, Jesus had pardoned her sins, He had called forth her beloved brother from the grave, and Mary's heart was filled with gratitude. She had heard Jesus speak of His approaching death, and in her deep love and sorrow she had longed to show Him honor. At great personal sacrifice she had purchased an alabaster box of "ointment of spikenard, very costly," with which to anoint His body. But now many were declaring that He was about to be crowned king. Her grief was turned to joy, and she was eager to be first in honoring her Lord. Breaking her box of ointment, she poured its contents upon the head and feet of Jesus; then, as she knelt weeping, moistening them with her tears, she wiped His feet with her long, flowing hair.

She had sought to avoid observation, and her movements might have passed

unnoticed, but the ointment filled the room with its fragrance, and published her act to all present....

Mary heard the words of criticism. Her heart trembled within her. She feared that her sister would reproach her for extravagance. The Master, too, might think her improvident. Without apology or excuse she was about to shrink away, when the voice of her Lord was heard, "Let her alone; why trouble ye her?" He saw that she was embarrassed and distressed. He knew that in this act of service she had expressed her gratitude for the forgiveness of her sins, and He brought relief to her mind....

The fragrant gift which Mary had thought to lavish upon the dead body of the Saviour she poured upon His living form....

Mary knew not the full significance of her deed of love. She could not answer her accusers. She could not explain why she had chosen that occasion for anointing Jesus. **The Holy Spirit had planned for her, and she had obeyed His promptings. Inspiration stoops to give no reason. An unseen presence, it speaks to mind and soul, and moves the heart to action. It is its own justification.**

Christ told Mary the meaning of her act, and in this He gave her [563] more than He had received. "In that she hath poured this ointment on My body," He said, "she did it for My burial." As the alabaster box was broken, and filled the whole house with its fragrance, so Christ was to die, His body was to be broken; but He was to rise from the tomb, and the fragrance of His life was to fill the earth. Christ "hath loved us, and hath given Himself for us an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet-smelling savor." Ephesians 5:2.—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*\* 558.4-563.0; CC\* 306.4. [Bold type is added.]

17. But, there is more to this story.

Christ might have extinguished every spark of hope in Mary's soul, but He did not. The Heart-searcher read the motives that led to her actions, and He also saw the spirit that prompted Simon's words. "Seest thou this woman?" He said to him. "She is a sinner; I say unto thee, Her sins, which are many, are forgiven; for she loved much: but to whom little is forgiven, the same loveth little. And he said unto her, Thy sins are forgiven."

**Those present, thinking of Lazarus, who had been raised from the dead by Christ, and who was at this time a guest in his uncle's house, [240] began to question, saying, "Who is this that forgiveth sins also?"** But Christ continued, "Thy faith hath saved thee; go in peace."—Ellen G. White, *Signs of the Times*,\* May 9, 1900, par. 15; *Daughters of God*\* 239.4. [Bold type is added.]

Since Mary, Martha, and Lazarus were siblings, it means that Simon was also Mary's uncle.

**Simon had led into sin the woman he now despised. She had been deeply wronged by him....** But Simon felt himself more righteous than Mary, and Jesus desired him to see how great his guilt really was. He would show him that his sin was greater than hers, as much greater as a debt of five hundred pence exceeds a debt of fifty pence.—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*\* 566.5. [Bold type is added.]

18. Mary was Simon's niece; he had led Mary into sin. Mary's life of sin probably began with that incest. That led her all the way to demon possession. (See DA 568; Luke 8:1-3.)

When to human eyes her case appeared hopeless, Christ saw in Mary

capabilities for good. He saw the better traits of her character. The plan of redemption has invested humanity with great possibilities, and in Mary these possibilities were to be realized. Through His grace she became a partaker of the divine nature. The one who had fallen, and whose mind had been a habitation of demons, was brought very near to the Saviour in fellowship and ministry. **It was Mary who sat at His feet and learned of Him. It was Mary who poured upon His head the precious anointing oil, and bathed His feet with her tears. Mary stood beside the cross, and followed Him to the sepulcher. Mary was first at the tomb after His resurrection. It was Mary who first proclaimed a risen Saviour.**—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*\* 568.2. [Bold type is added.]

19. Read Luke 8:1-3. What kind of women were associated with Jesus during His ministry? Do you think that any church committee would have chosen a former demon-possessed prostitute to be the first person to hear and spread the gospel of a risen Savior? (John 20:11-18)
20. Read Exodus 34:26; Leviticus 22:19-24; and Numbers 18:29. Why did God give such specific instructions about what was acceptable as an offering to Him? Why did He forbid cooking a young sheep or goat in its mother's milk? Relatively recent excavations have shown that cooking a young goat or sheep in its mother's milk was a part of some of the fertility cult religious practices in the land of Canaan to which the children of Israel were going. As much as possible, God was trying to keep them away from those heathen practices.

Entire devotion and benevolence, prompted by grateful love, will impart to the smallest offering, the willing sacrifice, a divine fragrance, making the gift of priceless value. But, after willingly yielding to our Redeemer all that we can bestow, be it ever so valuable to us, if we view our debt of gratitude to God as it really is, all that we may have offered will seem to us very insufficient and meager. But angels take these offerings, which to us seem poor, and present them as a fragrant offering before the throne, and they are accepted.—Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*,\* vol. 3, 397.0.

21. In a previous lesson, we discussed the story of the widow who gave her two tiny copper coins known as mites. That woman gave not only a tithe but also she gave all she had. What she demonstrated was her true motives. (See James 4:12; Proverbs 16:2; and 1 Corinthians 4:5.)
22. Paul had heard of the very difficult situation that the Jewish Christians were experiencing in Jerusalem. How many years had Paul lived in Jerusalem? He wanted them to understand that just because he was a missionary to Gentiles that did not mean that he did not care about them. So, he spelled out very specific instructions to his Gentile friends in Corinth about their responsibilities to help their Christian brothers back at headquarters. (2 Corinthians 8:8-15)
23. What are your motives in giving to the church? We are motivated to do things on a spectrum all the way from supreme selfishness to altruism and love. Where are we on that spectrum? Are we good at justifying our selfish behavior? Or, are we motivated by love? What have we done in the last month that was truly loving and self-sacrificial?
24. God challenges us to study daily the life of Christ. As we see how loving and giving He was, it should motivate us to follow His example.
25. Is there anything wrong with just giving from a sense of obligation instead of a sense of love?

The man who attempts to keep the commandments of God from a sense of obligation merely—because he is required to do so—will never enter into the joy of obedience. He does not obey. When the requirements of God are accounted a burden because they cut across human inclination, we may know that the life is not a Christian life. True obedience is the outworking of a principle within. It springs from the love of righteousness, the love of the law of God. The essence

of all righteousness [98] is loyalty to our Redeemer. This will lead us to do right because it is right—because right doing is pleasing to God.—Ellen G. White, *Christ's Object Lessons*\* 97.3-98.0.

26. Does God ever ask us to do anything which is not ultimately for our own best good? If we are going to eventually become a part of God's kingdom and that kingdom operates completely out of love, shouldn't we start practicing that right now? While on this earth, could we actually learn that it is more blessed to give than to receive?

True faith and true prayer—how strong they are! They are as two arms by which the human suppliant lays hold upon the power of Infinite Love. **Faith is trusting in God,—believing that He loves us, and knows what is for our best good. Thus, instead of our own way, it leads us to choose His way. In place of our ignorance, it accepts His wisdom; in place of our weakness, His strength; in place of our sinfulness, His righteousness. Our lives, ourselves, are already His; faith acknowledges His ownership, and accepts its blessings. Truth, uprightness, purity, are pointed out as secrets of life's success. It is faith that puts us in possession of these. Every good impulse or aspiration is the gift of God; faith receives from God the life that alone can produce true growth and efficiency.**—Ellen G. White, *Gospel Workers*\* 259.2; *FLB*\* 90.3; *2MCP*\* 541.2. [Bold type is added.]

27. During this series of lessons, we have discussed stewardship in light of our motives. Maybe the one passage that captures this idea most succinctly is 2 Corinthians 9:6-9.

28. **2 Corinthians 9:6-9:** <sup>6</sup> Remember that the person who sows few seeds will have a small crop; the one who sows many seeds will have a large crop. <sup>7</sup>**You should each give, then, as you have decided, not with regret or out of a sense of duty; for God loves the one who gives gladly.** <sup>8</sup>And God is able to give you more than you need, so that you will always have all you need for yourselves and more than enough for every good cause. <sup>9</sup>As the scripture says:

“He gives generously to the needy; his kindness lasts for ever.”  
[Psalm 112:9]—*Good News Bible*\* (2 Corinthians 9:6-9). [Bold type and content in brackets are added.]

29. Each time we give, we should do so in the spirit of Christ. And as we give in faith, our faith increases. If faith is a relationship with God as with a close friend, then surely following His example and, thus, becoming more like Him would be a sign of the friendship He is asking us to learn about.

It will be seen that the glory shining in the face of Jesus is the glory of self-sacrificing love. In the light from Calvary it will be seen that the law of self-renouncing love is the law of life for earth and heaven; that the love which “seeketh not her own” [1 Corinthians 13:5] has its source in the heart of God; and that in the meek and lowly One is manifested the character of Him who dwelleth in the light which no man can approach unto. [1 Timothy 6:16]—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*\* 20.0. [Content in brackets is added.]

30. Have you personally experienced the reality of seeing your faith grow because of giving?

The spirit of liberality is the spirit of Heaven. The spirit of selfishness is the spirit of Satan. Christ's self-sacrificing love is revealed upon the cross. He gave all that he had, and then gave himself, that man might be saved. The cross of Christ appeals to the benevolence of every follower of the blessed Saviour. The principle illustrated there is to give, give. This carried out in actual benevolence and good works is the true fruit of the Christian life. The principle of worldlings

is to get, get, and thus they expect to secure happiness; but carried out in all its bearings, the fruit is misery and death.—Ellen G. White, *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*,\* October 17, 1882, par. 11; *Ibid.*\* November 15, 1906, par. 10.

31. Why are we as human beings so naturally selfish? When we are born, all we can think about is our own personal needs. But, as we grow and become more mature and especially when we have children of our own, we start to realize how important it is to reach out to help others.
32. A great exercise that each of us should attempt is to make a list of all the things that God has done for us. After looking at such a list, could we ever persist in selfishness? Selfishness is the ultimate guarantee of being miserable. The only real happiness comes from giving.
33. Do we daily think of the many things that God has done for us? Are our hearts overflowing with gratitude for all these gracious gifts? Then, shouldn't we find ways we can give back? What could we as a church group or as a Sabbath school group do to keep before our eyes the incredible needs there are in other parts of the world?
34. As we have noted, God loves a cheerful giver. Do we actually give cheerfully? Or, are we more likely to give grudgingly? On what basis do we decide that we should give and how much to give? Have you noticed that giving cheerfully inspires the desire to give cheerfully again? Cheerful giving should become a self-fulfilling prophecy. Is it not also abundantly clear that cheerful givers love God and even delight in Him?
35. Is it clear in our minds the important distinctions between tithe paying and the cheerful giving of offerings?
36. Review Luke 2:21-24; Leviticus 12:1-8; and 2 Kings 12:4-5. On the eighth day of our Lord's life on this earth, He was taken to the temple in Jerusalem to be circumcised and dedicated to the Lord. According to Luke, the young couple gave a pair of doves or two young pigeons as an offering. Leviticus 12:1-8 spell out the details of such offerings.
37. Those very specific directions remind us that tithe—a specific 10% of our increase—is to be given regularly. Offerings are also sometimes given on a graduated basis. That is, wealthier Israelites were expected to give more while poorer Israelites gave less. The fact that Joseph and Mary gave the offering of the poor at the time of the dedication of Jesus suggests their poverty.
38. Of course, tithe was primarily for the use of supporting the priests and Levites—or in our day the pastoral staff. Offerings could occasionally also be used for the special needs of priests; but, they can be designated for other things such as church building, even restoring the temple as in ancient times. (2 Kings 12:4-5) Voluntary offerings can be given for helping the poor, spreading the gospel, supporting missionaries, etc. (Deuteronomy 16:11-14)
39. Why do you suppose God asks us to give these two different kinds of gifts to Him? The absolutely incredible generosity of Jesus toward Mary whose past life had been severely degraded (Luke 8:1-3) helps us to understand why she was so generous in the case of the fragrance in the alabaster box. Mary was probably not invited to that feast at Simon's house. Martha may have been the hostess; Lazarus was an honored guest.
40. Ellen White specifically wrote about Judas. It was this experience that led him to go for the first time to talk to the Sanhedrin and arrange to betray Jesus. But, honestly, are there any of us who are not hopelessly in a state of sin? None of us deserve anything more than the death that will apply to sinners at the end. Shouldn't we be just as excited about giving back to God's cause as Mary was with the perfume in her alabaster box?

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