

Managing for the Master—Till He Comes

Rewards of Faithfulness

Lesson #12 for March 25, 2023

Scriptures: Hebrews 11:6; Isaiah 62:11; Romans 6:23; 8:16-18; John 14:1-3; Revelation 21; Matthew 25:20-23.

1. Every one of us, if left to ourselves, will end up with eternal loss and death. However, Jesus offers us eternal rewards if we are willing to follow His plan for our lives. What He offers us is so incredibly precious, and we could never possibly earn it on our own. And these promises come from God Himself. What greater assurance could we possibly have better than a promise supported by God's Word?

Hebrews 11:6: No one can please God without faith, for whoever comes to God must have faith that God exists and rewards those who seek him.—American Bible Society. (1992). *The Holy Bible: The Good News Translation** (2nd ed., Hebrews 11:6). New York: American Bible Society [abbreviated as *Good News Bible*].^{†‡} [Compare John 17:3].[‡]

2. **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. [We cannot say *will be* because we know of the story of Lucifer.]

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 is the One who 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.^{†‡} [Sections in brackets are added based on frequent statements by Dr. Maxwell in his classes.][‡]

3. What little we do know about the heavenly reward and the new earth, which will come after the millennium, is so far beyond our understanding as to be incomprehensible.

[From the writings of Ellen G. White=EGW:] **A fear of making the future inheritance seem too material has led many to spiritualize away the very truths which lead us to look upon it as our home.** Christ assured His disciples that He went to prepare mansions for them in the Father's house. Those who accept the teachings of God's word will not be wholly ignorant concerning the heavenly abode. And yet, "eye hath not seen, nor

ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love Him.” 1 Corinthians 2:9. **Human language is inadequate to describe the reward of the righteous. It will be known only to those who behold it. No finite mind can comprehend the glory of the Paradise of God.**—Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy** 674.4-675.0.††

4. How could anyone not want to be there for those rewards?

Matthew 5:11-12: ¹¹ “Happy are you when people insult you and persecute you and tell all kinds of evil lies against you because you are my followers. ¹²Be happy and glad, for a great reward is kept for you in heaven. This is how the prophets who lived before you were persecuted.”—*Good News Bible.**

5. As selfish and sinful human beings, is it easy for us to be glad and happy when we are persecuted? Always before us, we have the example of Jesus. We could add others to that example: Paul, Peter, even John the Baptist. Each of these individuals died a martyr’s death. Are we prepared even to die for the truth?

6. Let us be clear that even being persecuted and being willing to die for God **could never earn salvation**. Our works could never do anything to settle the conflict over God’s character and how He runs His government which are the key issues in the great controversy! **The great controversy will not be over until everyone continuing in the entire universe is committed to God’s loving way of running His government and until all trace of rebellion is gone. How will God finally accomplish that goal?**

7. Surely, anyone who seriously considers rewards that will be offered to the faithful would want them; they would recognize anything that they could do on this earth could never pay for a place there!

8. But there is placed before us—if we are willing to see it—a very stark contrast between two choices: Eternal life or eternal death. You cannot have half of one and half of the other. This is an all-or-nothing choice. Everyone will receive one or the other.

Romans 6:23: For sin pays its wage—death; but God’s free gift is eternal life in union with Christ Jesus our Lord.—*Good News Bible.*†*

John 3:16: “For God loved the world so much that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not die but have eternal life.”—*Good News Bible.**

9. It is hard to imagine two more stark or more distinct choices.

10. God has always been the Creator and Ruler of the universe. But, Lucifer/Satan tried to challenge God’s way of doing things. Are we completely convinced that God’s way of running the universe is the only way? Which will we choose? Love? Or, selfishness?

11. Look at Jesus’s promise to His disciples on His last night with them.

John 14:1-3: ¹ “Do not be worried and upset,” Jesus told them. “Believe in God and believe also in me. ²There are many rooms in my Father’s house, and I am going to prepare a place for you. I would not tell you this if it were not so. ³And after I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to myself, so that you will be where I am.”—*Good News Bible.**

12. Let us be clear. **There was no reason for Christ to have come the first time and go through all that He did if He does not plan to come back and finish the job of saving/healing His faithful people.** He has won the great controversy, and evil will be eliminated when every one of us has made our choice—the wicked to perish and the righteous to live forever.

Revelation 21:1-21: ¹ Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth. The first heaven and the first earth disappeared, and the sea vanished. ²And I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared and ready, like a bride dressed to meet her husband. ³I heard a loud voice speaking from the throne: “Now God’s home is with human beings! He will live with them, and they shall be his people. God himself will be with them, and he will be their God. ⁴**He will wipe away all tears from their eyes.** There will be no more death, no more grief or crying or pain. The old things have disappeared.”

⁵ Then the one who sits on the throne said, “And now I make all things new!” He also said to me, “Write this, because these words are true and can be trusted.” ⁶And he said, “It is done! I am the first and the last, the beginning and the end. To anyone who is thirsty I will give the right to drink from the spring of the water of life without paying for it. ⁷Those who win the victory will receive this from me: I will be their God, and they will be my children. ⁸But cowards, traitors, perverts, murderers, the immoral, those who practice magic, those who worship idols, and all liars—the place for them is the lake burning with fire and sulphur, which is the second death.”

⁹ One of the seven angels who had the seven bowls full of the seven last plagues came to me and said, “Come, and I will show you the Bride, the wife of the Lamb.” ¹⁰The Spirit took control of me, and the angel carried me to the top of a very high mountain. He showed me Jerusalem, the Holy City, coming down out of heaven from God ¹¹and shining with the glory of God. The city shone like a precious stone, like a jasper, clear as crystal. ¹²It had a great, high wall with twelve gates and with twelve angels in charge of the gates. On the gates were written the names of the twelve tribes of the people of Israel. ¹³There were three gates on each side: three on the east, three on the south, three on the north, and three on the west. ¹⁴The city’s wall was built on twelve foundation stones, on which were written the names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb. ¹⁵The angel who spoke to me had a gold measuring rod to measure the city, its gates, and its wall. ¹⁶The city was perfectly square, as wide as it was long. The angel measured the city with his measuring rod: it was 2,400 kilometres long and was as wide and as high as it was long. ¹⁷The angel also measured the wall, and it was sixty metres high, according to the standard unit of measure which he was using. ¹⁸The wall was made of jasper, and the city itself was made of pure gold, as clear as glass. ¹⁹The foundation stones of the city wall were adorned with all kinds of precious stones. The first foundation stone was jasper, the

second sapphire, the third agate, the fourth emerald, ²⁰the fifth onyx, the sixth carnelian, the seventh yellow quartz, the eighth beryl, the ninth topaz, the tenth chalcedony, the eleventh turquoise, the twelfth amethyst. ²¹The twelve gates were twelve pearls; each gate was made from a single pearl. The street of the city was of pure gold, transparent as glass.—*Good News Bible*.^{*†}

13. Revelation 21 is probably the most complete description we have of our future home. What an incredible place! But, it is not the gold or the jewels or the tree of life that is most important in heaven. The most important reward for all is to see the members of the Godhead and enjoy Their friendship. Can you imagine giving Jesus a hug? What about hugging the Father? Or, the Holy Spirit? Will we really be God's friends?

John 15:15: [Jesus said:] **“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.”**—*Good News Bible*.^{*††}

14. It is hard for us even to imagine what a closeness to God of that type would be like.

Revelation 22:4: They will see his face, and his name will be written on their foreheads.—*Good News Bible*.^{*}

15. ***What is the meaning of the term “having God’s name written on our foreheads”?***

16. Is there any sin that Jesus cannot forgive? See Revelation 21:8 as above.

17. The only reason these sins lead to the second death is because those who practice them, refuse to give those sins up. Admission to heaven would be torture to them! (GC 670.2)

18. On Jesus's last day in the temple, He confounded both the Pharisees and the Sadducees, turning their traps designed to catch Him back on them. The disciples had followed Him from Galilee to Jerusalem and were expecting Him to become the new king of Israel.

19. So, after He had completely defeated His enemies in the temple, He left the temple and traveled across the valley to the Mount of Olives. There His disciples asked:

Matthew 24:3: As Jesus sat on the Mount of Olives, the disciples came to him in private. “Tell us when all this will be,” they asked, “and what will happen to show that it is the time for your coming and the end of the age.”—*Good News Bible*.^{*}

20. Jesus knew that He had only three days left before His crucifixion. But, His disciples had no idea what was coming. They were sure that He was about to be crowned as the new king of Israel. So, to try to help them plan for the future, He told the story of an individual who was preparing to take a long journey. He left his property in the hands of his servants.

Matthew 25:14-18: ¹⁴“At that time the Kingdom of heaven will be like this. Once there was a man who was about to go on a journey; he called his servants and put them in charge of his property. ¹⁵He gave to each one according to his ability: to one he gave 5,000 gold coins, to another he gave 2,000, and to another he gave 1,000. Then he left on his journey. ¹⁶The servant who had received 5,000 coins went at once and invested his money and earned another 5,000. ¹⁷In the same way the servant who had received 2,000 coins

earned another 2,000. ¹⁸But the servant who had received 1,000 coins went off, dug a hole in the ground, and hid his master's money."—*Good News Bible*.* [See also Luke 19:12-24.][‡]

21. What do these talents or gold coins represent?

[EGW:] I was then shown that the parable of the talents has not been fully understood. This lesson of importance was given to the disciples **for the benefit of Christians living in the last days**. And **these talents do not represent merely the ability to preach and instruct from the word of God. The parable applies to the temporal means which God has entrusted to his people**. Those to whom the five and two talents were given, traded and doubled that which was committed to their trust. God requires of those who have their possessions here to put their money out to usury for him, to put it into the cause to spread the truth. And if the truth lives in the heart of the receiver, he also will aid with his substance in sending the truth to others, and through his efforts, his influence, and his means, other souls embrace the truth, and begin also to work for God. I saw that some of God's professed people are like the man who hid his talent in the earth. They keep their possessions and means from doing good to God's cause. They claim that it is their own, and that they have a right to do what they please with their own; and souls are not saved by any judicious effort they make with their Lord's money. As judgment passes upon the house of God, the angels keep a faithful record of every man's work, their sentence is recorded by their name, and the angel is commissioned to spare them not, but to cut them down at the time of slaughter. And that which was committed to their trust is taken from them. Their earthly treasure is then swept away, and they have lost all. And the crowns they might have worn, had they been faithful, are put upon the heads of those saved by the faithful servants whose means were constantly in use for God. And every one they have been the means of saving, adds stars to their crowns in glory, and increases their eternal reward.—Ellen G. White, *Spiritual Gifts*,* vol. 4b, 38.1 [1864].[‡] Compare *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 1, 197.1-198.0 [1859]. [Is Jesus preparing a crown for each of us?][‡]

22. It is important to notice something else about that parable that Jesus told His disciples: Those who were faithful were invited to “come in and share His happiness!”

23. Does the sharing in God's happiness sound like the future you would like to be a part of? How will you fare when God comes to “settle accounts”? The Christian that we know the most about from New Testament times is Paul. Paul's life began as a privileged Pharisee from a wealthy family sent to Jerusalem to be educated by the best teachers in the world. Who could have guessed what was coming for Paul.

2 Corinthians 11:24-33: ²⁴Five times I was given the 39 lashes by the Jews; ²⁵three times I was whipped by the Romans; and once I was stoned. I have been in three shipwrecks, and once I spent 24 hours in the water. ²⁶In my many travels I have been in danger from floods and from robbers, in danger

from fellow-Jews and from Gentiles; there have been dangers in the cities, dangers in the wilds, dangers on the high seas, and dangers from false friends. ²⁷There has been work and toil; often I have gone without sleep; I have been hungry and thirsty; I have often been without enough food, shelter, or clothing. ²⁸And not to mention other things, every day I am under the pressure of my concern for all the churches. ²⁹When someone is weak, then I feel weak too; when someone is led into sin, I am filled with distress. ³⁰ If I must boast, I will boast about things that show how weak I am. ³¹The God and Father of the Lord Jesus—blessed be his name for ever [*sic*]!—knows that I am not lying. ³²When I was in Damascus, the governor under King Aretas placed guards at the city gates to arrest me. ³³But I was let down in a basket through an opening in the wall and escaped from him.—*Good News Bible*.*†

24. But, how did Paul feel about all those experiences?

Romans 8:16-18: ¹⁶God's Spirit joins himself to our spirits to declare that we are God's children. ¹⁷Since we are his children, we will possess the blessings he keeps for his people, and we will also possess with Christ what God has kept for him; for if we share Christ's suffering, we will also share his glory.

¹⁸ **I consider that what we suffer at this present time cannot be compared at all with the glory that is going to be revealed to us.**—*Good News Bible*.*†

25. Having received all those beatings and been through all those problems, Paul must have had some amazing sermons. Try to imagine what it would be like to hear Paul call you to become a Christian. Paul looked beyond the troubles of this life to the reward that he was sure was coming. Just before having his head chopped off by a Roman soldier, he wrote:

2 Timothy 4:6-8: ⁶ As for me, the hour has come for me to be sacrificed; the time is here for me to leave this life. ⁷I have done my best in the race, I have run the full distance, and I have kept the faith. ⁸And now there is waiting for me the victory prize of being put right with God, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give me on that Day—and not only to me, but to all those who wait with love for him to appear.—*Good News Bible*.*

26. What would life be like in the Seventh-day Adventist Church if everyone was faithful and paying their tithes? And witnessing to their friends and acquaintances?

27. Our Bible study guide suggests that it might be something like this:

The Stewardship Vision for Seventh-day Adventist Churches Around the World

It's sometime in the future; and pastors and local church leaders have been successful at creating a stewardship environment in the church. They have taught, trained, supported, and encouraged the church family in biblical financial management.

People are implementing biblical principles in their lives. They are growing in generosity, saving on a regular basis for the unexpected, and moving out from under the bondage of consumer debt.

Their lifestyles are marked by moderation, discipline, and contentment. Money has been eliminated as the rival god, and they are growing in their relationship with the Creator God.

It's Sabbath morning, and people are arriving for services. In their demeanor is a sense of peace—a lack of anxiety over financial matters, a pervading sense of contentment and gratefulness.

Marital conflict over money has been largely eliminated. They enter worship with a sense of anticipation and expectation of God's presence and work among them.

The church's ministries are fully funded, and it has a strong outreach. It extends the love of Christ in very tangible ways to those in need.

Funds have been made available to provide church facilities that wonderfully support ministry and that are maintained with excellence.

The question before us all is, "What is God calling us to do with whatever resources He has entrusted to us?"—*Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide** for Friday, March 24.

28. Think about how much wealth Jesus owned when He was crucified. And what about Paul? Neither of them had anything of human value left! **Did they feel that their lives were hopeless and poverty-stricken? Or, were they able to look beyond this life to rewards which are beyond our understanding?**

Romans 2:6-7: ⁶For God will reward every person according to what each has done. ⁷Some people keep on doing good, and seek glory, honour, and immortal life; to them God will give eternal life.—*Good News Bible.**

Ephesians 2:1-6: ¹In the past you were spiritually dead because of your disobedience and sins. ²At that time you followed the world's evil way; you obeyed the ruler of the spiritual powers in space, the spirit who now controls the people who disobey God. ³Actually all of us were like them and lived according to our natural desires, doing whatever suited the wishes of our own bodies and minds. In our natural condition we, like everyone else, were destined to suffer God's anger. [Will we choose love? Or, selfishness?]

⁴ But God's mercy is so abundant, and his love for us is so great, ⁵that while we were spiritually dead in our disobedience he brought us to life with Christ. It is by God's grace that you have been saved. ⁶In our union with Christ Jesus he raised us up with him to rule with him in the heavenly world.—*Good News Bible.*†* [Only those who have the characteristics noted in Galatians 5:22-23 will rule.][‡]

29. In the past, many Christians have somehow gotten the idea from church leaders that they would need to earn salvation by doing good deeds and supporting the church financially.

It is very clear from a careful reading of the Scriptures that such a thing would be impossible. What can we do to earn salvation?

1 Corinthians 13:1-3: ¹I may be able to speak the languages of human beings and even of angels, but if I have no love, my speech is no more than a noisy gong or a clanging bell. ²I may have the gift of inspired preaching; I may have all knowledge and understand all secrets; I may have all the faith needed to move mountains—but if I have no love, I am nothing. ³**I may give away everything I have, and even give up my body to be burnt— but if I have no love, this does me no good.**—*Good News Bible*.^{*†}

30. The only thing that God is asking from us is a faith relationship, leading us to accept His plan for our lives.

31. So, **how do we resolve the apparent contradiction between being saved by faith and rewarded for our works? The truth is that faith works!** Those who have come to love Jesus truly will do everything they can to work for Him. **We cannot do anything by ourselves to earn salvation.** The only thing we can do is exercise faith by taking time in Bible study and prayer and allowing the Holy Spirit and Jesus to transform us into children and friends of God and “grow” our Christianity. This requires a commitment, spending time studying, praying, and witnessing.

32. Some verses in the Bible seem to suggest that the ones who will be rewarded are God’s children. We need to remember that **all human beings are God’s children.** Some of His children will be rewarded because they are His faithful friends.

Galatians 5:19-21: ¹⁹ What human nature does is quite plain. It shows itself in immoral, filthy, and indecent actions; ²⁰in worship of idols and witchcraft. People become enemies and they fight; they become jealous, angry, and ambitious. They separate into parties and groups; ²¹they are envious, get drunk, have orgies, and do other things like these. I warn you now as I have before: those who do these things will not possess the Kingdom of God.—*Good News Bible*.^{*} [Paul was surely talking about things he knew.][‡]

33. So, what are you willing to do to show that you are God’s friend? Sinning just makes us children of wrath. (Ephesians 2:3)

Romans 14:23: But if they have doubts about what they eat, God condemns them when they eat it, because their action is not based on faith. **And anything that is not based on faith is sin.**—*Good News Bible*.^{*†}

34. **Faith is what draws us nearer to God; sin takes us away from God.**

35. If we are willing, each one of us has been given a charge by Jesus Christ Himself to do His work, to return our faithful tithes and offerings to His cause, and to witness to others of the truth.

36. Paul recognized that living the Christian life would not be easy.

1 Corinthians 9:24-27: ²⁴Surely 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. ²⁵Every 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 [*sic*]. ²⁶That is why I run straight for the finishing line; that is why I am like a boxer who does not waste his punches. ²⁷I harden my body with blows and bring it under complete control, to keep myself from being disqualified after having called others to the contest.—*Good News Bible*.^{*†}

Philippians 3:14: So I run straight towards the goal in order to win the prize, which is God's call through Christ Jesus to the life above.—*Good News Bible*.^{*}

37. The fact that God has already won the great controversy and we merely join the winning side does not mean that it will be easy. Satan will do everything he possibly can to make our lives as difficult as possible. We will suffer affliction; some might even be martyred. But, we can survive because we keep our eyes fixed on Jesus and what He did for the entire universe.

John 16:33: "I have told you this so that you will have peace by being united to me. The world will make you suffer. But be brave! I have defeated the world!"—*Good News Bible*.^{*}

38. We are naturally selfish. We tend to want to keep what we have for use for ourselves. But, we know that we were created by God. We are saved by God. We are sustained every day by God.

Acts 17:28: "As someone has said,
'In him we live and move and exist.'
It is as some of your poets have said,
'We too are his children.'"—*Good News Bible*.^{*}

James 1:17: Every good gift and every perfect present comes from heaven; it comes down from God, the Creator of the heavenly lights, who does not change or cause darkness by turning.—*Good News Bible*.^{*}

Ephesians 2:10: God has made us what we are, and in our union with Christ Jesus he has created us for a life of good deeds, which he has already prepared for us to do.—*Good News Bible*.^{*}

39. Are we prepared to do the good deeds that God has created us to do? Are we going to be faithful to the Master? No matter what our personal future is on this earth, we can look forward to a glorious future in God's kingdom.

1 Corinthians 15:45-58: ⁴⁵For the scripture says, "The first man, Adam, was created a living being"; but the last Adam is the life-giving Spirit. ⁴⁶It is not the spiritual that comes first, but the physical, and then the spiritual. ⁴⁷The first Adam, made of earth, came from the earth; the second Adam came from heaven. ⁴⁸Those who belong to the earth are like the one who was made of earth; those who are of heaven are like the one who came from heaven. ⁴⁹Just as we wear the likeness of the man made of earth, so we will wear the likeness of the Man from heaven.

⁵⁰ What I mean, brothers and sisters, is that what is made of flesh and blood cannot share in God's Kingdom, and what is mortal cannot possess immortality.

⁵¹⁻⁵² Listen to this secret truth: **we shall not all die, but when the last trumpet sounds, we shall all be changed in an instant**, as quickly as the blinking of an eye. **For when the trumpet sounds, the dead will be raised, never to die again, and we shall all be changed.** ⁵³For what is mortal must be changed into what is immortal; what will die must be changed into what cannot die. ⁵⁴So when this takes place, and the mortal has been changed into the immortal, then the scripture will come true: “Death is destroyed; victory is complete!”

⁵⁵ “Where, Death, is your victory?

Where, Death, is your power to hurt?”

⁵⁶Death gets its power to hurt from sin, and sin gets its power from the Law.

⁵⁷But thanks be to God who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ!

⁵⁸ So then, my dear brothers and sisters, stand firm and steady. Keep busy always in your work for the Lord, since you know that nothing you do in the Lord’s service is ever useless.—*Good News Bible*.^{*†}

40. Imagine the joy of seeing the Lord and having Him say to us, “Well done, you good and faithful servant!” So, what will be the basis for God’s ultimate judgment?

[EGW:] Do all church-members realize that all they have is given them to be used and improved to God’s glory? God keeps a faithful account with every human being in our world. And when the day of reckoning comes, the faithful steward takes no credit to himself. He does not say, “My pound;” but, “Thy pound hath gained” other pounds. He knows that without the entrusted gift no increase could have been made. He feels that in faithfully discharging his stewardship he has but done his duty. The capital was the Lord’s, and by his power he was enabled to trade upon it successfully. His name only should be glorified. Without the entrusted capital he knows that he would have been bankrupt for eternity. The approval of the Lord is received almost with surprise, it is so unexpected. But Christ says to him, “Well done, thou good and faithful servant: thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things: enter thou into the joy of thy lord.”—Ellen G. White, *Review and Herald*,^{*} September 12, 1899, par. 17.[‡] *Counsels on Stewardship*^{*†} 111.3-112.1.[‡]

41. Do we understand all that is implied about the talents in Matthew 25? Are we prepared to give all that God asks of us to support His cause while we look forward to His glorious return?

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