



DYNAMIC

Steward

Exploring Partnership with God

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Giving must flow out of an attitude of worship, rejoicing in God as Creator, Redeemer, and Friend.

Where's our focus?

Stewardship, as a ministry, must continually re-examine its focus and maintain its Biblical basis. Church funding, tithes, and offerings are all part of stewardship, yet a primary focus on money strengthens only the materialistic thrust of life and destroys the giving dimension of stewardship.

Stewardship is a dynamic partnership with God. It is not enough to encourage people to give; we must first help them in their spiritual growth. Giving must flow out of an attitude of worship, rejoicing in God as Creator, Redeemer, and Friend. The lifestyle of joy in Christ should be our primary focus. From there, we can naturally expand to other areas.

Stewardship ministry must maintain a twin focus: the broad focus on a lifestyle in Christ and the narrower focus on finances. The latter will retain its balance only in the context of the first.

Stewardship ministry is three-phased. First, recreate the vision of Biblical stewardship. Much of our church understands stewardship to be giving, and giving to be funding the church. Giving is really managing God's assets in partnership with Him, guided by the Holy Spirit. God funds His church. He has chosen to involve us in managing His money through tithes and offerings because we need to integrate Him into this difficult and challenging area of life.

Next, recruit and train pastors and church leaders to this renewed vision. Past stewardship abuses will change only when we accept and implement this vision. Administrators will provide a strong support when they see the biblical rationale and the practical results. In some sections of the world, such as Inter-America, a Biblical approach, pastoral training, administrative support, and an emphasis on systematic giving are producing miraculous results.

Finally, develop multiple resources to train pastors and members in Biblical stewardship as a lifestyle.

You can be part of this great challenge. Review your vision of God, of how He wants to be involved in your life and ministry. Commit yourself to sharing a greater vision of partnership with God. Ask Him to guide you as you develop materials to reach the people God has placed in your care.

Benjamin C Maxson, Director, General Conference Stewardship Department

Aim To widen the concept of stewardship

Method

- ◆ Suggest a proposition
- ◆ Open with an illustration to catch attention and prod for thought
- ◆ Develop questions to unpack the proposition and maintain interest
- ◆ Raise enough points to promote later reflection
- ◆ Suggest a conclusion and wrap-up

Proposition Stewardship and relationships are inter-related

Illustration The Gibson Desert in Western Australia was home to nomadic aborigines for thousands of years. In 1979 the last of the nomads, Warri and his wife Yatungka of the Munjiljarra people, were found by an expedition led by Dr W J Peasley and brought into civilization. At the time they were both naked, old, and feeble, yet had survived that hostile environment. They had been forced to live alone since leaving their tribal relatives 30 years before. When found, Warri was hardly mobile and his wife walked miles every day to find food and carry it to him. Although they received good care and medical treatment both died within a few months of reaching civilization.

Develop questions What does this story make you think of? I think of their special bonding. What kind of relationship might they have enjoyed those long years they were the only

Stewards and relationships

people in the silent desert. How would their relationship *out there* compare to the relationships people experience in crowded and bustling cities? Do human relationships have anything to do with stewardship? Is the development of relationships fundamental to good social interaction and in turn to stewardship? Are good relationships needed to create circumstances that encourage acceptance of God's principles for living? How does one develop good relationships?

Reflection How can we know that all of humanity is special?

- ◆ Humankind was the climactic act of God's creation (*Gen 1, 2*).
- ◆ Humanity is *fearfully and wonderfully made* (*Ps 139:14, KJV*).
- ◆ Humanity possesses many attributes which stand it apart from the rest of creation (high intelligence; level of social interaction; vocal with the gift of language; dexterous with the special gift of opposing thumb and forefinger; the advantage of upright posture; long-term bonding; long-term socialization of the young; the ability to and the desire for worship; the conscious awareness of the Divine through the Holy Spirit; etc.).

Are relationships important to humankind? What are some ways an individual may recognize the value of humanity?

◆ *We love because he loved us first* (*1 John 4:19, NEB*). This text expresses the basic principle of valuing humankind and describes the fundamental element of good relationships.

◆ *The real light which enlightens every man* (*John 1:9, NEB*). Surely this light must include the truth that all humanity is part of God's crowning act of creation and is also valuable because *God loved the world so much that he gave his only Son* (*John 3:16, NEB*). We might note that *God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself* (*2 Cor 5:19, NEB*). The Father through the Son was prepared to risk all for any single member of humankind to confirm the profound value of humanity.

Wrap-up Relationships are the oil that allows the business of God's machinery on earth to function effectively. In managing every area of life, in attempting to manage the entire sphere of one's influence, God wants us to look out for relationships. And managing God's affairs on earth is stewardship indeed!

Right relationships are the soil in which the reward of righteousness can grow. And the only people who can sow these seeds, and who will reap the reward, are those whose life work it has been to produce such right relationships.
—William Barclay, *The Letter from James*.

It is Sabbath morning. At the church door children eagerly hold out their hands to mom and dad for *offering* money. Parents hand the money, confident that they have started their children down the road to responsible stewardship.

What's wrong with this picture? Is stewardship carrying something a short distance? Does handing children offering at the door help them become stewards? When will children begin to reach into their own pocket for tithes and offerings instead of holding out a hand for a contribution?

Stewardship education must begin early. It is our responsibility to help our children understand their responsibilities as God's stewards. Children need to learn early that stewardship is not limited to money. We need to instill in them the truth that living in love with Jesus is what stewardship is all about. Our children need to see us practice stewardship as an integral part of worship. God gives each of us, including little children, the responsibility for our bodies, our time, our house, our surroundings, the people and animals dependent on us, our communities . . . the list goes on. When true stewardship flourishes in our hearts, it penetrates every aspect of life and what God expects of us.

A lot of time and interaction is needed to help children understand the wholistic concept of stewardship. Stewardship learning should be a opportunity for family-bonding, the activities *fun* and *memorable*. Avoid endeavors that smack of duty, pressure, or guilt. Instruction is more effective and long-lasting with a positive, rather than a negative, attitude. Here are some simple suggestions to help instill principles of stewardship in our children.

- ◆ Provide opportunities for children to earn money and to set aside their tithes and offerings.
- ◆ Give them responsibilities with backup encouragement to ensure success.
- ◆ Participate in ecology projects. Talk together about being good stewards in taking care of the earth.
- ◆ Help them make a stewardship chart where they can mark off responsibilities as they are fulfilled.

Children need to learn early that stewardship is not limited to money. We need to instill in them the truth that living in love with Jesus is what stewardship is all about.

Training young stewards

Virginia L. Smith, Director, General Conference Children's Ministry Department

Quotes . . . about a life in Christ

Once you say the yes of faith to Jesus and accept his blueprint for the fullness of life, the whole world can no longer revolve around you, your needs, your gratifications; you'll have to revolve around the world, seeking to bandage its wounds, loving dead men into life, finding the lost, wanting the unwanted, and leaving far behind all the selfish, parasitical concerns which drain our time and energies.—*John Powell*

If a man cannot be a Christian in the place where he is, he cannot be a Christian anywhere.—*Henry Ward Beecher*

Christianity without the living Christ is inevitably Christianity without discipleship, and Christianity without discipleship is always Christianity without Christ.—*Dietrich Bonhoeffer*

The purpose of Christianity is not to avoid difficulty, but to produce a character adequate to meet it when it comes. It does not make life easy; rather it tries to make us great enough for life.—*James L. Christensen*

There is simply no room for passivity in the Christian faith. Life in Christ is one long string of action verbs: grow . . . praise . . .

love . . . learn . . . stretch . . . reach . . . put on . . . put off . . . press on . . . follow . . . hold . . . cleave . . . run . . . weep . . . produce . . . stand . . . fight.—*Joni Eareckson Tada*

Unless we love God we cannot love our neighbor; and, correspondingly, unless we love our neighbor we cannot love God. Once again, there has to be a balance; Christianity is a system of such balanced obligations—to God and Caesar; to flesh and spirit, to God and our neighbor and so on. Happy the man who strikes the balance justly; to its imbalance are due most of our miseries and misfortunes, individual as well as collective.—*Malcolm Muggeridge*

Live so that if people get to know you, they will get to know Christ better.—*Croft M. Pentz*

A child of God should be a visible beatitude for joy and happiness, and a living doxology for gratitude and adoration.—*Charles Haddon Spurgeon*

A Christian is never in a state of completion but always in the process of becoming.—*Martin Luther*

You cannot have Christian principles without Christ.—*D. Sayers*



Focus To learn that when you welcome Jesus gladly into your life, the love of Jesus will rule and lead you to surrender all you have for His Kingdom.

Key Text Luke 19:1-10

Introduction Solomon says there are four things that he cannot understand: the soar of an eagle in the air; the slither of a serpent on a rock; the sail of a ship in the sea; and the way of a man with a maid (*Prov 30:18, 19*). When you fall in love, you cannot help but give yourself to the one you love. When you fall in love, you do not mind doing anything for the one you love. You cannot love without giving, not just gifts, but your entire being. I want to share with you a love story, the story of a man who fell in love with Jesus. We often hear of people falling in and out of love. But when you fall in love with Christ Jesus, and then you fall out of that love it is because of you, not because of Jesus. Because Jesus will never give up, irrespective of what you do and who you are.

Falling in love

His name and reputation Hard work and perseverance made Zaccheus chief tax collector of the Roman government. His position came with control and power. Soon he began taking bribes. He would give half to the Roman government and keep the other half for himself. Zaccheus became so wealthy from cheating and robbing the people that he earned himself a name in Jericho—*sinner* (*verse 2, 8*).

To earn a name, you don't have to do much—you just have to major in your behavior and people will give you a name. If your behavior is good, you get a good name. Zaccheus's behavior was really bad, and so he got the name *sinner*. So in Jericho *Zaccheus* was synonymous with *sinner*.

His need for forgiveness Jesus, whose main mission was to save the lost (*verse 10*) was passing through Jericho. Some of us think Jesus loves only righteous people. But *God so loved the world that He gave His only Son that whosoever believes and accepts Him could have eternal life* (*John 3:16*). When Jesus walked down the streets of Jericho, He was looking for an opportunity to save sinners.

Zaccheus had heard about Christ Jesus. He had heard of Jesus' power to heal. He had heard of Jesus' power to raise the dead. He had heard of Jesus' power to forgive. And Zaccheus was the sinner in Jericho. When Zaccheus hears that Jesus is coming to town, he feels an urgency to meet Jesus. He leaves the tax booth, oblivious of his responsibilities. He spots the crowd up ahead. Jesus is surrounded by hoards of people. And he can't see Jesus. He's too short.

Driven by an overpowering feeling of love, Zaccheus climbs a tree just to see Jesus. Caught up in the excitement, the people below beckon to those to their left, others to their right. But no one looks up. No one looks up in the tree. Why would anyone look up into a tree? But, Jesus, with His divine eyes, was drawn to look up into the tree, into the seeking heart of Zaccheus.

Calling him by name, Jesus says *Zaccheus, I want to eat at your place*. Amazed and overwhelmed, Zaccheus exclaims *Jesus, is coming to my home, the sinner's home*. Zaccheus welcomes Jesus gladly (*verse 5*) because he has finally found someone who loves him just as he is, someone who will take him just as he is. He had never felt forgiveness before, he had never felt love before.

We can imagine the crowd following Jesus and Zaccheus at an uncomfortable distance. They hang around an open window, eaves-dropping on the sinner and Jesus. They wonder what the two men have in common. They cannot imagine why Jesus would want to be seen with a man like Zaccheus.

His response to love Zaccheus does not hear Jesus call him a sinner. He only hears words of love and acceptance. Zaccheus's heart is touched. The love of Jesus comes into his heart and he falls in love with Jesus. He falls so much in love that he stands up and makes a declaration *Look, my Lord* (*verse 8*). The word *Lord* in Greek means *Master*. Zaccheus calls Jesus *Master*. He says, *Look! my Lord, right now I give half of my possessions to the poor*. Who preached stewardship to Zaccheus? Did he attend a stewardship seminar? Did he receive counsel from the General

When God gets in a person, he comes out of that person. You can no more hide Jesus in a life that's redeemed than you can hide the fragrance of a rose under a hair net.
—Bailey Smith, *Real Evangelism*, p. 32

Conference Stewardship Director? Zaccheus sits at the feet of Jesus. And as he beholds Jesus, he beholds a man whose entire life speaks *giving*—giving love to others.

50% of one's bank balance, 50% of one's investment—that's a lot of money. But when you are touched by love, the gift is measured neither by size nor value. And Zaccheus was touched by the love of God. His magnanimous gesture says *If you, Jesus, love the poor and I am in love with you, I will love the poor too.* But Zaccheus does not stop at giving. He continues to say *And if I have cheated anybody out of anything, I will pay them back four times the amount I took from them.* Now that was not an easy task. Zaccheus had cheated people by miscalculating tariffs, taking advantage of their lack of knowledge. Keeping his pledge to Jesus would cost him much time in recalculating his account ledger of past several years of embezzlement, and put himself through a lot of humiliation and embarrassment.

When you become a child of God, when you are in love with Jesus, your heart is changed so dramatically that you want to make things right with anyone you may have wronged.

What was Jesus response to Zaccheus' pledge of love? *Today salvation has come to this house because this man Zaccheus is a son of Abraham—today salvation has come to the house of this man (verse 9).*

Conclusion You cannot read this story without seeing the truth that you cannot love without giving. You cannot fall in love with Jesus and be negligent of the things that Christ is mindful about. As you look at this story, I want you to imagine the town of Jericho the day after Jesus' visit. Imagine what Zaccheus does. He gathers up half of his possessions, loads them, perhaps on a donkey. People see him nudging the heavy-laden donkey down to the marketplace. And he sets up shop, not to sell, but to give away. He encourages the poor to come without fear. He says *I promised the Lord yesterday. I made a commitment to the Lord. I love Jesus and I'm asking you to take that silk scarf, or that brass vase, or ivory bowl*

Now imagine what happens the next Sabbath. Zaccheus goes to church and the church is packed. Everybody is wondering what Zaccheus will do next. One from the crowd boldly approaches Zaccheus and asks him *What has happened to you? Why the change?* Zaccheus responds with a glow on his face, with a big smile, *I'm in love. I'm in love with Jesus! He has become my Lord and I am His steward! The things that I have, I give to my Lord to use as He desires. And I have seen that He loves the poor so I choose to give my possessions to the poor.* A bold one responds *If that is what Jesus can do for you, Zaccheus, then He can do it for me!*

Continue imagining. It's the first business day since Zaccheus met Jesus. He knocks at the door of a businessman. The door opens. The man angrily says *What do you want from me now, Zaccheus? I have done my duty! I've paid all my taxes!* And Zaccheus says, *I haven't come to collect anything. I've come to apologize. I've been overcharging you. I'm very sorry. I've come to return the money I owe you. You see, I have fallen in love with the Lord Jesus. And because I love Him, I have accepted His philosophies and principles.*

Soon Jericho witnesses the testimony of him who once was a sinner but is now one of the greatest givers in recorded scripture. *Zaccheus* was no longer synonymous with *sinner*. *Zaccheus* was now a reflection of the Master. *Zaccheus* was now a living proof of the power of the Holy Spirit.

When Jesus comes into your life, you can no longer be the same. Are you in love with Jesus? If you are, do your works and your behavior speak of your love with Jesus?

Won't you pray . . . *My Lord Jesus, make me fall in love like I've never fallen in love before. Make me a new person. Change me. Give me a name. Come abide in my home, in my family, in my heart, from now and forever more. Amen.*

Pardon Mwansa, Associate Director, General Conference Stewardship Department. Complete transcript of this sermon is available through Dynamic Steward editorial office.





Cryogenic Christians

Key Text Matthew 24:11-13

Illustration The modern science of cryogenics has come a long way. Research centers have frozen people in liquid nitrogen at the very instant before their death. Because the body is made up of living cells that are fragile, freezing has to occur within a few seconds to produce a state of cell preservation. Once this is accomplished, the body can be kept frozen indefinitely. While frozen, the body is neither dead nor really alive. It just hangs in there. People choose to be frozen because they believe that when medical science finds a cure for the disease that is killing them, they can be revived to start living again. In the meantime, they are almost dead, yet not quite alive.

Introduction Are you one of the frozen? Is your Christian experience in a survival mode? Are you suffering from a state of suspended animation? Are you pulled back from others in a lost existence of cold indifference? Are you satisfied with the Christian experience that is on hold? Are you waiting for the day when your frozen heart will be revived and you'll feel warm again? Are you a cryogenic Christian, almost dead, not quite alive, and hanging in there?

Jesus identifies cryogenic Christianity: *Because of the increase of lawlessness, the love of many will grow cold (verse 12)*. Can love decline in the life of someone who never had it to begin with? Is Jesus talking about believers or nonbelievers? He uses a very special word for love here. It's agape love. The kind of love that only God can give. The kind of love that is the result of interacting with our Lord, of seeing Him as a Savior, experiencing His grace in our life.

Jesus is saying at the very end of time, just before the gospel goes to the world there will be an overwhelming coldness that will settle upon the Christian world.

Now in contrast to cryogenic Christianity, the real thing will finally triumph. *The one who endures to the end will be saved (verse 13)*. I like the certainty of the Bible's language here. It doesn't say they might be saved; it doesn't say they could be saved. If we abide with Jesus, Jesus will stay with us. If you cast your lot with the Savior, no matter what, He will see you through. *And the good news of the kingdom shall be preached throughout the whole world as a testimony to all the nations and then the end will come (verse 14)*. I look forward to the end. I look forward to the day when Jesus Christ comes through the clouds of Heaven to take me home. I look forward to the day our loved ones will be resurrected.

There is an end in sight. The good news is that Jesus is the focus of that glorious end. Jesus makes a call for the Christian who will be ready for His coming: *Who is it that will be ready for my coming? Who will be the wise one that knows me, and that uses his talents for the cause of God? (verse 45)*. He calls for three living components: wisdom, faith, and service. They are God's answer to cryogenic Christianity. The three parables in Matthew 25 have the necessary ingredients to reverse the chilling effects of cryogenic Christianity.

Wisdom The parable of the ten virgins teaches us that the wisdom of God is given only through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. Only one thing finally separated the wise from the foolish maidens. The wise chose to fill their lamps with oil; they made it to the marriage feast. The foolish chose to ignore the oil; they did not make it. If we are to make it in the darkness of the night, the darkness of earth's final hour to the grand gathering that Jesus has for us, we need the oil of the Holy Spirit in our lamps because our lights will go out unless the presence of God is in our hearts. The oil symbolizes the Holy Spirit (*Zac 4:1-6*). We receive the Holy Spirit when we accept the Word of God. It is not by might, it is not by power, it is not by education, it is not by natural talent, it is not by the storehouse of our fellowship that we gain a connection with God. It is through the living and dynamic word of God that our souls that are dead can once again, suddenly, become alive. We can only find the Holy Spirit when we find Jesus in the Bible. *For thus says the High and Holy One who inhabits eternity whose name is Holy; I dwell in the high and holy place and also with him who is of a contrite and humble spirit to revive the spirit of the humble and to revive the heart of the contrite (Isa 57:15)*. We cannot approach God and live if we approach Him with pride. We cannot look into the

face of our Savior and experience grace if we think we deserve that grace. We cannot be transformed on the eve of the advent of Jesus Christ if we think we don't need to be transformed. Ultimately we cannot be saved unless we feel within our being; we know within our intellect that we are utterly bankrupt before a living God and we need the living Savior to save us from our sins. And so the Bible says we must approach God in our humility to feel His presence, to have Him in our lives. So the wisdom of God is to seek God on God's terms. And God will make us wise.

Faith The parable of the talents focuses on the importance of an active faith (*Matt 25:14-30*). A householder entrusted his belongings with three servants, to one servant he gave five talents, to another two and to the next he gave one talent. When the master returned, he commended the man with five talents and the man with two. But the focus of this parable is on the person with one talent. For the gospel to go to the world, for our church to prosper, for Jesus Christ to be felt within our midst, the person with one talent is critical. It is the person with one talent who is vital for the cause of God. The person with the talent that seems unimportant will in the end determine the success or failure of God's movement. It is people like me and you, one-talent people, whom God depends upon to finish His work. The basic problem with the one-talent man in this parable is rooted in his misunderstanding of the character of his master. The Bible says he refers to his master as a harsh man. He sees God as someone to be afraid of—not someone to be a friend of. He sees God as someone who is out to get him, someone who was keeping a score card to somehow keep him out of the kingdom of God. But he does not see a kind master who forgives, who motivates and inspires. *Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ (Rom 5:1)*. We have peace so that we can live for Him without fear and the motivation that it brings. I think that if we use our one talent and we fail, God will not be dishonored. In fact, He will be honored that you used it in His cause. He is not nearly so concerned with failure as He is with an inability to use that which has been given.

Service The parable of the sheep and the goats illustrates the importance of selfless service for the weak and the lost. And there are many who long for something meaningful, something that can solve the sin problem, something that can relieve their life of guilt, something to nourish their inner being. God has given us Jesus, God has given us the Savior of the world, God has given us food for those who are hungry and He calls on us to go feed them physically and spiritually. The great judgment parable about the sheep and the goats outlines the future destiny of those who have followed Jesus in every way and those who have not. And in that great judgment day our eternal destiny will not be decided by how much theology we know. It will not be determined by how many degrees we hold. It will not be a product of how much wealth we own. In that great day, our eternal destiny will be what we have done as a result of Jesus in control of our lives (*Matt 25:31-33*).

The opposite of cryogenic Christianity is holiness, faith, spirit-filled wisdom, and love for the lost. Holiness is not a mystical experience reserved for the enchanted. Holiness simply means being separate. It means being wholly His. In the judgment, cryogenic Christians will not stand with their divided loyalties and their cold hearts. There will be no place in heaven for *the frozen*. Only one thing God will be looking for—and that is holiness. He'll be looking for men and women who have accepted His gift of Jesus Christ on the Cross. He'll be looking for those whose hearts have been strangely warmed by the white hot heat of the spirit of love. He'll be looking for the faithful and the wise who have seen Jesus in the face of an orphan or a widow, the lonely and the lost, the broken and the beaten. He'll be looking for people in the end who are wholly His.

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Introduction Historians think it may be the third most written-about story of all time, right after Jesus Christ and the American Civil War. It happened on a cold April 14, back in 1912—the sinking of the Titanic, of course. There’s something about that tragedy that fascinates people: how an unsinkable ship can hit a North Atlantic iceberg on its maiden voyage, and then 1,523 people have a full two hours and 40 minutes to basically wait to drown at 2:20 in the morning. After 17 movies, 18 documentaries, and at least 130 books already, CBS aired a four-hour mini-series, giving another look at the tragedy. And James Cameron put \$120 million worth of disaster up on the big screen for Titanic and its hundreds of tiny subplots to unfold yet again.

But you know, there’s something about this icy story that illustrates Bible truth. I Corinthians 13 explores the topic of pure love, agape love. Many other things are mentioned in this chapter too. Some bad things, but also some good things. After envy and pride and self-centeredness and grudgekeeping which are the very antithesis of love, the chapter moves to a more positive list. There’s prophecy, a good thing. There’s Biblical knowledge, another recommended commodity. The eloquence of what the Bible calls *tongues* is also one of heaven’s gifts. And yet, verse eight tells us that all these other things will pass away.

Gifts that survive the Titanic

Nothing is sweeter than love, nothing stronger, nothing higher, nothing wider, nothing more pleasant, nothing fuller or better in heaven or on earth.... A lover flies, runs, rejoices.... Love often knows no limits but is fervent beyond measure. Love feels no burden, thinks nothing of labors, attempts what is above its strength, pleads no excuse of impossibility.... Though wearied, it is not tired; though pressed, it is not straitened; though alarmed, it is not confounded; but as a lively flame and burning torch, it forces its way upwards and passes securely through all.—Thomas À Kempis

Prophecy and knowledge and tongues are all going to come to an end. Their usefulness will cease and they’ll be relegated to the

sidelines. But then there are these three words: *Love never fails*. In other words, love stays. Unlike prophecy and knowledge, love doesn’t ever become obsolete. Right at the end of the chapter (*verse 13*) Paul clearly says it again: *And now these three remain: faith, hope, and love*.

There are several points to be made here, and you’ve got to be wondering what they have to do with the Titanic. Let’s think about this, shall we?

Gifts are temporal First of all, we’d easily agree that love is going to survive this beat-up old planet. Our skyscrapers may fall and sinful kingdoms will be toppled and orphanages and bars and prisons are going to be bulldozed by heaven’s armies. But love, the very epitome of God’s own character, will survive. Paul is right—as long as there’s a God, there will be love too. But isn’t it interesting that good spiritual things like prophecy are said to be temporary. Of course, that makes sense when you stop and think about it. Prophecy in God’s Word has been provided as a gift to show us the future, to give us confidence in the ways and methods of God, to provide us with signposts to the kingdom. But after we’re in the kingdom, will we keep looking for signposts? Will we need confidence boosters, when our King and Savior are dwelling among us? There won’t be a need for prophecy when the Source of all prophecies is living right next door as our neighbor!

The same is true of the gift of tongues. Whether you think of the Bible’s gift of tongues as an ability to speak many foreign languages, or as an ecstatic experience of worship to God in a language you don’t even know, isn’t it plain that when we enjoy face-to-face fellowship with our Redeemer as one unified redeemed Body, we won’t need that gift? We’ll be right there; we’ll see Him *face to face* (*verse 12*).

Likewise with knowledge. Think of people who invent Pentium chips or write the great books or build the tallest buildings. But when we get to heaven, what will become of our opinions of our great knowledge? Again, as Paul himself describes it, we’ll realize that *now we know in part* (*verse 12*). And it’s a pretty tiny part at that.

Friend, do you see why Paul cuts right through our little list of achievements? *Now we know in part*, he writes. *We prophesy in part, but when perfection comes, the imperfect disappears. Much of what we’ve learned will vanish* is how this verse is rendered in the Clear Word paraphrase. So many of what we lovingly and even proudly call our spiritual gifts are going to melt away when we bow at Jesus’ feet in heaven, aren’t they? All the Greek we know, all the Bible definitions we’ve

memorized will fade away in Paradise. Useful tools they've been, to be sure; let's not misunderstand. We want to thank God for our gifts and use them all we can here on this earth. But what greater glory to be in the presence of God! One writer put it this way *The light of a candle loses its importance when placed in the bright light of the sun.* And in a way, this is where I think Paul is taking us in his next paragraph. *When I was a child, I talked like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I put childish ways behind me.* Then he goes on: *Now we see but a poor reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known.* What a picture he paints, where our old thoughts, made so murky by sin and selfishness and confusion, are finally cleared away when we reach the distant shore. The fog and smog and haze are gone; the dreadfully limiting effects of sin are gone.

Soon we'll be going home The talented contemporary Christian group, *Glad*, sings about this in their song *When He Comes Again*, by John Keltonic. It goes like this: *And when He comes again, He comes again to take us home. And oh to know His love and grace, To finally see His face, our King. No longer through a dim and clouded glass, When Jesus comes to take us home at last.*

And as Paul describes it, boys turn into men. Spiritually speaking, small children, whose fondest dream was to drive the little go-karts at Disneyland, are given keys to real Cadillacs. What does all this mean? Nothing we've piled up here is going to survive the trip to the New Jerusalem. Our talents and gifts and assets and bank accounts; they're going to be obsolete. Oh, we'll have assets there too, and talents and abilities. But they'll be so vastly improved, so completely different, that we may as well consider that we're starting new.

Which takes us back to the Titanic. Nothing survives, the Bible tells us, except faith, hope, and love. None of our carefully packed suitcases, our luggage, our trinkets and treasures, are going to make it across the cold, dark ocean. In the CBS mini-series of the Titanic, multimillionaire John Jacob Astor IV goes down into a watery grave along with his money and his Airedale, Kitty. Isa and Isador Straus, the owners of Macy's, both lose their lives when the wife doesn't leave her husband. Streetcar magnate Harry Widener dies and his mother dedicates a library at Harvard to her son's memory. Benjamin Guggenheim, traveling with his mistress, changes into fine evening clothes before perishing in the 28-degree water. All the fortunes in the world couldn't keep 882 feet of ocean liner from going down to the bottom of the Atlantic Ocean with its 1,523 victims.

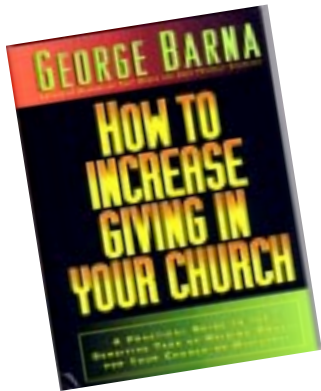
Only love survives How true it is, as Paul writes, that nothing is going to survive except love. So, what are you piling up today, right now? Talents and possessions and even some character traits you're kind of proud of? Or the gift of love? Chapter 12, which describes spiritual gifts, explains that we don't all get the same gift. We can't all have the same thing. It might be impossible for you to be a preacher or a prophet, no matter how hard you try. But love, rather than being a spiritual gift, is a fruit of the spirit. It's in that classic list of nine over in Galatians 5:22,23—*Love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.*

Love is not a spiritual gift, it's a fruit of the spirit. That means every single one of us can have it! The number one thing that survives, Paul tells us, is a thing we can have. We can indeed learn to love in the way this beautiful chapter commends and commands. Is your confidence misplaced today, invested in Titanic stock? There's a beautiful text note in the New International Version's study helps: *Love supersedes the gifts because it outlasts them all. Long after these sought-after gifts are no longer necessary, love will still be the governing principle that controls all that God and His redeemed people are and do.*

Love remains, Paul tells us. *Love outlasts them all.* If you knew that was true of a certain kind of stock, wouldn't you begin to do some investing?



Love is the one ingredient of which our world never tires and of which there is never an abundance. It is needed in the marketplace and in the mansions. It is needed in the ghettos and in the governments. It is needed in homes, in hospitals, and in individual hearts. The world will never outgrow its need for love.—C. Neil Strait



How to Increase Giving in Your Church

by George Barna

Regal Books

Ventura, California

1997



The book is based on the observation that although Americans are the most generous people in the world, they have some characteristics that contradict their generosity. Americans are—more likely to sue fellow citizens; ill-informed about their own national history; more comfortable living with debt, but less comfortable living with relatives; workaholics who treasure pleasure; keenly devoted to television while consuming pizza as if it were a drug; likely to transform entertainers into wealthy, pampered cultural icons; more likely to abort babies and divorce spouses. Yet Americans attend church more often than peers of other first-world nations.

They give to people, not institutions. Americans, generally, are willing to give away large sums of money to organizations whose sole purpose is to enhance people's quality of life. Donors seem to have greater confidence in church, and feel that churches more than likely use the funds wisely. Donors give because of what the church is doing in the community and in their lives. They want to know that they are agents for spiritual transformation in the world. Of the more than \$60 billion a year given to religious nonprofit organizations, more than \$40 billion go directly to churches, most of which come from individuals—not corporations or foundations.

Three basic motivations: resonance, effective use of funds, and effective application to human need.

Barna suggests that the basic answer to increasing finances in your church is to *preach the Word*. Of utmost importance is visioning. Without a vision for ministry the people will devote their resources to nonministry ventures. There is no money problem, just a vision problem. A series of stewardship sermons has been proven to be as much as two and a half times more effective than a sermon now and then throughout the year.

Pastors and church leaders must help people understand stewardship by communicating Biblical stewardship principles, develop a fiscal budget, communicate the church's financial needs to the congregation, and identify ways people can respond financially. Preachers must explain wealth, where it comes from, why we have it, how we are to handle it, and how God evaluates our performance as trustees of His resources.

For successful fund-raising, a leader must: actively campaign on a consistent basis, use the power of personal touch (people give to people), and maintain a high level of visibility.

Barna ends the book with 14 key principles for effective stewardship:

- ◆ Raise money for life transformation, not organizational survival.
- ◆ People give to people and causes, not to institutions and programs.
- ◆ Both the head and the heart must be reached.
- ◆ There is no substitute for absolute integrity. None.
- ◆ A visionless church is an impoverished church.
- ◆ People give to winners. Tell your story.
- ◆ Fund-raising is a means to an end (ministry and mission).
- ◆ Dream big, pray big, ask big, minister big.
- ◆ Ministry donors don't just give, they invest.
- ◆ Stewardship is a lifestyle, not an event.
- ◆ Listen carefully, respond strategically, thank people sincerely.
- ◆ Use the pastor appropriately in the stewardship process.
- ◆ People appreciate useful information.
- ◆ Let compassion and servanthood, not dollar goals, be your motivation.

This book was an immediate hit with me and I recommend this book especially for young pastoral interns. The principles contained herein could make the difference between a successful ministry and a painful survival. My thinking and actions are already being affected for the better by this book.

Brennan Manning's book, *The Signature of Jesus*, summons Christians to the *purity of the gospel and the scandal of the cross* (p 7). The book is transparently honest in its approach and relevant in its application.

The author summons us to radical discipleship that transforms our lives, giving our witness a convincing power. This happens only when we crucify self and follow the Crucified. In the introduction, the author tells us this is risky, but hopes that we *will be daring enough to be different, humble enough to make mistakes, courageous enough to get burned in the fire* (p 13). He progressively leads us to trust implicitly in God despite all things, placing our confidence more in the realm of the supernatural and less in the realm of the natural.

Manning beckons us to sojourn with Abraham in our own spiritual journey, trusting completely in God's providence and not in human wisdom. He sums up this point when he asserts that *the reality of a Christian is that of men or women who leave what is nailed down, obvious, and secure and who walk into the desert without rational explanations to justify their decisions or to guarantee their future* (p 16).

The author shows us how to be energized by God's power and enlightened by His wisdom. He offers the following suggestions: First, *the courage to take up the cross*; second, *the willingness to forgive*; third, *the discovery of where true wisdom lies*, which is experiencing the love of Christ crucified; fourth, *the surrender of the heart to reckless love*, that is the love of Christ (pp 60-68).

In the fifth chapter, he captures what it means to live as Christ's disciples by appealing to the Swiss psychologist, Carl Jung, when he asked: *What if I should discover that the least of the brothers of Jesus, the one crying out most desperately for reconciliation, forgiveness, and acceptance, is myself? ... that I myself am the enemy who must be loved, what then? Will I do for myself what I do for others?* (p 105).

In his discussion of paschal spirituality in chapter six, the author gives its seven characteristics to help us understand what he means by the term.

Everyone who longs to have an authentic spiritual life transformed by Christ's relentless love, needs to read this book. It will grip you to the core and challenge you to live by faith that transcends darkness of doubt and discouragement. It will help you to experience inner peace and joy that break through turbulence and suffering, marking you forever by the signature of Jesus.

Philip G Samaan, Editor, *Adult Bible Study Guide*

I've been reading *My Utmost for His Highest* twice a year since 1979, and this powerful work continues to impact my life

Originally from Scotland, Oswald Chambers, served as teacher and then director of a Bible College. He passed away in 1917 in Alexandria, Egypt, as a civilian chaplain to the British forces in World War I. Only in his 40's when he died, Chambers left a spiritual legacy of inspiration and wisdom. His wife continued her ministry of transcribing her short-hand notes of his classes and sermons. She then compiled what she considered the best of Oswald's material into this one-page per day devotional.

This book lives up to its title. Chambers calls us to radical discipleship and portrays Christianity as a total submission to Jesus Christ—to living in growing intimacy with God. His January 6 reading states *Worship is giving God the best that He has given you. Be careful what you do with the best you have. Whenever you get a blessing from God, give it back to Him as a love-gift. Take time to meditate before God and offer the blessing back to Him in a deliberate act of worship.*

Chambers brings us back to living the experience of grace in the practical issues of life. Christianity as a theory is useless until we bring it into daily life. *I may teach sanctification and yet exhibit the spirit of Satan, the very spirit that persecutes Jesus Christ. The Spirit of Jesus is conscious of only one thing—a perfect oneness with the Father. . . . All I do should be based on a perfect oneness with Him, not on a self-willed determination to be godly. This will mean that others may use me, go around me, or completely ignore me, but if I will submit to it for His sake, I will prevent Jesus Christ from being persecuted.* (Jan. 28).

Benjamin C Maxson, Director, General Conference Stewardship Department

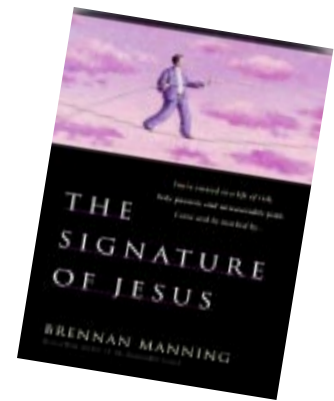
The Signature of Jesus

by Brennan Manning

Multnomah Books

Sisters, Oregon

1996



My Utmost for His Highest

by Oswald Chambers

Discovery House Publishers

Grand Rapids, Michigan

1992



Resources

Stewardship training seminars presented by *Benjamin C Maxson* are now available on video and audio tapes. Each seminar is six to eight hours in length, divided into 30-minute segments, and designed to be used by itself or with an instructor. Also available are the participant's workbook and instructor's manual.

To order, contact either AdventSource (5040 Prescott, Lincoln, NE, 68506; Tel: 800-328-0525; Fax: 402-486-2572 email: 74617.1241@CompuServe.com) or the General Conference Stewardship Department (12501 Old Columbia Pk, Silver Spring, MD 20904; Tel: 301-680-6157; Fax: 301-60-6155; email: gcstewardship@CompuServe.com). The cost of each set is \$79.95 for video and \$29.95 for audio, and is available at a subsidized rate to churches in the mission fields.

For pastors and church leaders:

Volume I: Biblical Stewardship Foundations This seminar explores stewardship and its Biblical foundations. The very word *steward* implies the reality of Christ as Lord. The relationship with Christ as Lord must begin with experiencing the gospel. From there, stewardship becomes the process of weaving that relationship into every area of life.

Volume II: Strategic Church Stewardship This seminar explores the strategic elements that make stewardship ministry successful. To be effective, stewardship must focus on the overall lifestyle in Christ. Even financial stewardship must begin with helping people grow spiritually, and discipling them to become partners and friends with Christ.

For church members

Normal Christianity This seminar explores a biblical approach to daily life. Biblical principles provide the foundation for living life in a dynamic, vibrant partnership with God. He created us to enjoy Him—to share life with Him. As we accept Him, He becomes the driving force in our lives. Christianity means passionately loving Jesus Christ and submitting totally to Him as Lord.

Editorial

Beginning July, each issue of *Dynamic Steward* will focus on a particular theme. 1998 will emphasize Gospel and stewardship; tithe; and partnership.

Although this issue was not planned to be thematic, while putting it together, I realized that there is an underlying theme after all! From Maxson's challenge to include God in our vision and ministry, to Robert's analysis of our relationships, to Smith's call to train young stewards, to the sermons that emphasize the Christian life, I see a theme: *Christian stewards reflect Jesus—in everything*. Christian stewards are those in whom others see humanity as God intended his prized creation to be.

How does your life reflect Jesus? How can you touch someone as Jesus may have? What practical things can you do to enhance your role as God's steward? It doesn't need to be complicated or require a lot of time. Here's a suggestion that I've made a part of my life: Set a time, say every Friday evening. Go through your address book—both personal and business acquaintances. Ask for the Holy Spirit's guidance. Then, prayerfully write a note, send a copy of an interesting story, or just give a call to someone you have not talked to in a while. Your unexpected gesture will do more than build better relationships. Your effort to reach out will be a small, but bright, reflection of Christ Jesus.

Never underestimate the power of the Holy Spirit's prompting when you are a true steward, a living reflection of Jesus. And don't be surprised if someone responds *Thanks! How did you know that was just what I needed?*

Fylvia Fowler Kline, Assistant Director, General Conference Stewardship Department



**Stewardship Department
General Conference of
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