



DYNAMIC

Steward

Exploring Partnership with God

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PARTNERSHIP

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Because of His inclusive love, God desires us to be more than His children.

Partners in the firm

We understand the pecking order: God is Shepherd; we the sheep. God is Father; we His children. God is Creator; we His creatures. God is Owner; we His managers. God is Master; we His stewards. But there is a deeper level of intimacy that God wants to develop with those who are being sanctified. He invites us to be partners in the firm!

Unlike business people in partnerships who want to get out, we can rest in our partnership with God, for He works in and for us. In our partnership with God our part is faith and obedience, and God's part is guidance and blessing.

Ellen White highlights this important relationship with God frequently in her writings. *The Lord calls upon every one of His children to let heaven's light—the light of His own unselfish love—shine out amid the darkness of this degenerate age. If He sees you acknowledge Him as possessor of yourself and all your possessions, if He sees you use your entrusted means as a faithful steward, He will register your name in the books of heaven as a laborer together with Him, a partner in His great firm, to work on behalf of your fellow men. And joy will be yours in the final day, as it is seen that the means wisely used in helping others has caused through you thanksgiving to God—Counsels on Stewardship, pp 299, 300.*

Paul asserts with confidence and joy, *We are God's fellow workers (1 Cor 3:9), workers together with Him (2 Cor 6:1).* With this is mind, *there is a positive necessity for the steward of God to pray much that he may not be deceived in anywise in handling the Lord's goods. He is a steward, a partner in the firm, and if he moves not from impulse but from a sense of conviction that he must invest his Lord's goods to advance the glory of God in the work of saving souls to Jesus Christ, then he himself will be benefitted eternally, if he holds fast his confidence and faith and trust in God firmly unto the end—Manuscript Releases, vol 16, p 258.*

We can violate our partnership with God by being unfaithful stewards, especially in regard to the use of the tithe. *Let none feel at liberty to retain their tithe, to use according to their own judgment. They are not to use it for themselves in an emergency, nor to apply it as they see fit, even in what they may regard as the Lord's work. God has shown honor to men in taking them into partnership with himself in the great work of redemption. He expects his agents to labor not against Him, but in unison with Him, that His treasury may be supplied—The Watchman, Oct 9, 1906.*

Because of His inclusive love, God desires us to be more than His children. He wants us to be His partners in the work of redemption. *As a father takes His son into partnership in his business, so the Lord takes His children into partnership with Himself—Sons and Daughters of God, p. 324.*

G. Edward Reid, Director, North American Division Stewardship Department

Application



His partners in His world

Begin your group discussion with the question, *What does partnership mean to you?* After receiving feedback, focus on a few aspects of partnering with God. Remember to identify ways to make partnering applicable in everyday life.

Gospel Sharing

We are laborers together with God, we are God's husbandry, ye are God's building (1 Cor. 3:9) .

Questions: How comfortable are you sharing Jesus with others? What steps can you take to be more open about your faith and convictions?

Example: Invite your neighbors for an afternoon of cookies and punch. You'll be surprised at how many live next to others for years without even knowing each other's names. Friendship is the cornerstone of gospel sharing. Friendship creates a comfort zone that makes gospel-sharing easy.

Community Service and Participation

Sinful men, repentant, pardoned, cleansed and sanctified were brought into partnership with God through His Son. The believers sought earnestly to receive and to obey every word of God. By the partnership of God and man, the work of warning the world is to be carried to completion.

Questions: Why is it important to be involved in your community? How are you planning to carry the work of compassion in your community?

Example: Join a local service club, prayer group, etc. Volunteer your services at local events. Offer books of your faith to your local lending library. If we don't have participation with others in our area, it is not possible to be a partner with God in Gospel sharing.

Promoting a Healthy Lifestyle

God wills that we should be healthy, happy, and useful. But we must place our wills on the side of His will.

Questions: How does the care of your body relate to your partnership with God? What lifestyle changes can you make to ensure you are an effective partner?

Example: Look for or create opportunities in your community to promote an awareness of healthful living.

Financial Partnership

Going into financial partnership with God can be an exciting adventure. Children, at a very young age, can be taught this.

Questions: What types of investment projects can you think of? Why is the tither always blessed? How can you teach tithing to children?

Example: Start an investment project with a group of children, recording the blessings and faith stories they experience through their projects.

Conclusion

Today, man has the honor of being in partnership with God, and the secrets of the Lord are with them that fear Him (*Ps 25:14*). If we want the secrets of the Lord to be with us, and retain that partnership, we must be careful how we use what God has given us.

In spite of all his possessions, David understood that God is the great proprietor of all things. David considered himself highly honored in being taken into partnership with God. His heart was filled with gratitude for the favor and mercy of God. In his prayer, when presenting offering for the building of the Temple he said *of Thine own, we have given Thee*.

I really got caught up in this book. Written for kids aged 8 to 12, it not only showed me how to make money but also taught me the value of being a good business person. I learned that money doesn't just pop out of thin air, but is something I must earn through work. I also learned the importance of keeping my promises, doing my best, having integrity, and using God's Word as a guide in all my business dealings.

Larry, a cool cat, is your guide throughout the book. He tells you all about the fundamentals of the PAWS code (*Profit through Attitude, Witness, and Stewardship*). He also gives advice and insights on identifying your talents, choosing your project, doing extra things that your customers don't expect, practicing honesty in your work and realizing that satisfaction doesn't always mean making money.

This book is divided into four sections: Summer, Winter, Spring, and Fall. Each season offers projects categorized by levels of difficulty. So you have a variety of money-making ideas to use all year long, regardless of how old you are. The book is very easy to read and understand, and gives a lot of information on making your products noticeable, fair pricing, and business forms. My favorite part of each project is the *Business by the Book* section that shows me moral and biblical values I need to apply to my job and to myself.

From this book I have learned how to plan my projects, figure out how much to charge, attract and keep customers, keep track of my money, give good service, set priorities, and be a good steward for God.

Tyler Morgan Robinson, *Fourth Grader, West Chester Seventh-day Adventist School, West Chester, PA*

Money-making ideas



50 Money-Making Ideas for Kids

by Lauree and L. Allen Burkett

(Adapted from materials by Larry Burkett)

Thomas Nelson Inc

Nashville, Tennessee, 1997

Quotes

God is the silent partner in all great enterprises.—*Abraham Lincoln*

The scheme of salvation is a wonderful science, and it is an inestimable privilege and honor to be permitted to be partners with Christ in the wonderful plan of saving the souls of men.—*Ellen G White*

The Christian is called upon to be the partner of God in the work of the conversion of men.—*William Barclay*

God cannot do some things unless we work. He stores the hills with marble, but He has never built a cathedral. He fills the mountains with iron ore, but He never makes a needle or a locomotive. He leaves that to us. We must work.—*The Kneeling Christian*

Full participation in the life of God's Kingdom and in the vivid companionship of Christ comes to us only through appropriate exercise in the disciplines for life in the Spirit.—*Dallas Willard*

Man has the honor of being taken into partnership with God, and the secrets of the Lord are with them that fear Him. God will give light and knowledge, so that, by conforming to his directions, man may become one with Jesus Christ.—*Ellen G White*

The secret of the easy yoke, then, is to learn from Christ how to live our total lives, how to invest all our time and our energies of mind and body as he did. We must learn how to follow his preparations, the disciplines for life in God's rule that enabled him to receive his Father's constant and effective support while doing his will. We have to discover how to enter into his disciplines from where we stand today—and no doubt, how to extend and amplify them to suit our needy cases.—*Dallas Willard*

Being seated together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus does not mean lolling about on the mount of transfiguration, singing ecstatic hymns, and letting demon-possessed boys go to the devil in the valley; it means being in the accursed places of this earth as far as the walk of the feet is concerned but in undisturbed communion with God.—*Oswald Chambers*

Concept



Incredible partnership

We have become partners of Christ if only we hold the beginning of the reality firm until the end (Heb 3:14, NAB)

You can rely on God, who has called you to be partners with his Son Jesus Christ our Lord (1 Cor 1:9, NJB)

Most of us know the theory that stewardship is more than tithes and offerings; that stewardship is more than managing money. When we stop to think about it, we recognize that God really is owner of everything we often claim as ours. We struggle applying this to daily life, but we at least acknowledge the concept. We talk about working for God and managing His resources. But as stewards, we are more than God's employees—We are partners with God . There are different types of partnership. Normally, partners are two equals who bring something of equal value to the relationship. In some cases, one partner is the investor with the money and the other an expert with the knowledge. Sometimes partnership is a reward for a special service or superior performance. Our partnership with God, however, is quite different. After all, what can we bring to this partnership?

God is owner of all: He gives us abilities and talents, He provides all the resources, He gives us our very life. We really don't bring anything of our own to this relationship with God; we merely choose to accept the privilege of partnering with Him. And God will not force us into this incredible partnership.

Interdependency and Intimacy

God's partnership with Noah provided a means to save the human race. When God chose Moses, Israel marched out of Egypt. When God inspired Daniel, prophecy revealed the future of God's people. But the ultimate partnership was in the incarnation, when God and man become one. This is a powerful model of how God works with us in a unique partnership. Jesus modeled an interdependence with God. Throughout the Gospel of John, we find repeated references to this partnership: *The Father loves the Son and has placed everything in his hands (3:35). I and the Father are one (10:30).* These and many other passages reveal the intimacy between the Father and the Son. They are a model of what God desires for us.

The Gospel of John provides a foundation for understanding the depth of our potential intimacy with God. Speaking of the coming of the Holy Spirit, Jesus says *On that day you will realize that I am in my Father, and you are in me, and I am in you (14:20).* In John 15, the vine provides a vivid metaphor of this partnership: *I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing (15:5).* And Jesus closes His prayer to His Father with *that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me (17:21).*

Identity, Position, and Power

Our partnership with God is a productive partnership. Paul states *For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do (Eph 2:10).* In Philippians, he declares that *it is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose (2:13).* In addition, God takes us, who have been slaves to sin (*Rom 6*), and lifts us to the position of friends (*John 15:13-15*). This friendship includes being seated with Christ on His throne in heavenly places (*Rev 3:21; Eph 2:7*). So this partnership includes identity—we are part of God's family and His friends. It includes position—He places us at His side. It includes power—all we need to do His will (*Phil 4:19; 2 Pet 1:3-4*). And it produces fruit or results (*Eph 2:10; John 15:5*).

So what is our role in this partnership? First, we must be willing to accept it as a gift. We cannot earn it, and God does not give it to us because of our ability. Instead, it is an incredible act of God's grace which makes it possible. This is why this partnership is so humbling to us. We would rather think of God needing to reward our performance than to accept it as a gift.

Second, we must realize that this gift goes far beyond the human partnership. It becomes a union—a blending of the divine within the human. We become *partakers of His divine nature (2 Pet 1:4)*. We do not become divine, but God dwells within us. We do not lose our identity; instead we discover our true

identity. We discover who God created us to be in the first place.

God created Adam in His own image, to reflect His image. In an incredible act of intimacy, God shaped him with His own hands. Then He gave him dominion over the world He had just created. Thus, God began a unique partnership with man. When sin destroyed this partnership, God restored our union with Him through the life and death of Jesus Christ and through the ministry of the Holy Spirit that makes the presence of Christ in our hearts a living reality (*Eph 3:16-19*). Christ, dwelling within the human heart, provides a new union, a new image, a new intimacy. And this partnership produces powerful results.

All true obedience comes from the heart. It was heart work with Christ. And if we consent, He will so identify Himself with our thoughts and aims, so blend our hearts and minds into conformity to His will, that when obeying Him we shall be but carrying out our own impulses. The will, refined and sanctified, will find its highest delight in doing His service. When we know God as it is our privilege to know Him, our life will be a life of continual obedience. Through an appreciation of the character of Christ, through communion with God, sin will become hateful to us.—Desire of Ages, p 668

The third step is to step forward in faith, exercising the partnership He has given us. We make choices, and as we walk with God, His Spirit guides and empowers our choices. We act in a partnership that goes far beyond our very best imagination. We do not work *for* Him, but rather in intimate union *with* Him. No human partnership can compare. No human partnership can illustrate. The very God of the universe calls us to return to Him, to the relationship for which we were created. Then every part of life becomes an exciting adventure of walking with God—applying partnership with Him to each moment and each action.

Benjamin C Maxson, Director, General Conference Stewardship Department



Stewardship Window

Christianity has a much broader meaning than many have hitherto given it. It is not a creed. It is the word of Him who liveth and abideth forever. It is a living, animating principle, that takes possession of mind, heart, motives, and the entire man. Christianity—O that we might experience its operations! It is a vital, personal experience, that elevates and ennobles the whole man. Every man is responsible to God, who has made provision for all to receive this blessing. But many do not receive it, although Christ has purchased it for them at infinite cost. They have not grasped the blessing within their reach, and therefore they have retained their objectionable traits of character, and sin lieth at the door. While they profess piety, Satan has made them his agents to pull down and confuse where he thought best. They exert an influence deleterious to the souls of many who need an example that would help them heavenward.

Who are the subjects of the kingdom of God?—All those who do His will. They have righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost. The members of Christ's kingdom are the sons of God, partners in his great firm. The elect of God are a chosen generation, a peculiar people, a holy nation, to show forth the praises of him who hath called them out of darkness into his marvelous light. They are the salt of the earth, the light of the world. They are living stones, a royal priesthood. They are in copartnership with Jesus Christ. These are they that follow the Lamb whithersoever he goeth.

*We welcome **Paul Ratsara** to the team of Seventh-day Adventist Stewardship Directors. Ratsara began serving the Church as a pastor in his homeland, Madagascar. He continued his service as Mission President, Union Stewardship Director, and President of the West Congo Mission. He now joins us as Stewardship Director for the African-Indian Ocean Division.*

Ellen G White, *Special Testimonies for Ministers and Workers*, No 9, p 57

Introduction

When 15-year-old Christopher Searsy was shot on a city street in Chicago, just a few blocks from Ravenwood Hospital, his friends carried him to within 35 feet of the hospital emergency room door. Christopher was too weak to be moved any farther so his friends ran into the hospital to get a doctor, or a nurse, or a paramedic. But none of the hospital personnel would leave the hospital to go to the end of the driveway to help Christopher. They quoted a hospital policy which said that no hospital employee was to leave the hospital premises during working hours to care for someone on the street. Finally, some kind and helpful soul dragged Christopher to the hospital door, but it was too late. Christopher Searsy died an hour later. Instances like this make you want to shout *Don't just stand there, do something!*

Indeed, doing something is very important to save a life, a situation, or a reputation. But God has designed a plan for success that guarantees that whatever we do in response to situations will be in accordance to His will. God's method, however, is strange at times. His method says to us *Don't just do something, stand there!*

Don't just do something

Standing in the presence of God or standing in the center of His will is much more important than rushing in with no real preparation for what lies ahead. The Bible is full of stories that illustrate this point and I would

like to give you three examples of how God reminded his people before a crisis, during a crisis, and after a crisis, to stand and wait on the Lord.

Before a crisis: Jehoshaphat, King of Judah (2 Chron 20)

Jehoshaphat was a good king like Asa, his father. Asa had led the people to tear down the altars of foreign gods and had begun to build fortified cities all around the kingdom of Judah. He also increased the size of his army to 300,000 men (*ch 14*). After Asa died, Jehoshaphat continued the reforms. He finished fortifying the border towns. He began Jewish cultural centers in every village. He increased the army to 1,060,000 men. He was prepared for anything.

Even though Jehoshaphat was well-prepared with fortified cities and a huge army, he chose to:

- Call all the people to fast and come to Jerusalem for prayer.
- Pray publicly to God and let the people know that God is in charge.
- Set his and everyone else's eyes on God for the answer.
- Listen to God's prophet and believe what he said.
- Show up at the battlefield, realizing that the battle is not ours, but God's.
- Form a choir to go out in front of the army, proclaiming victory.

Jehoshaphat's partnering with God resulted in victory. Jehoshaphat and the people of Judah are a perfect example of how we stand in the center of God's will before the crisis hits. *Don't just do something, stand there!*

During a crisis: Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego (Dan 3)

No one really knows where Daniel was, but his three friends were caught in a bind when commanded to bow down to the image nine stories tall and nine feet wide. The penalty was severe. They would be thrown into a fiery furnace. They could have pretended to bow down—maybe knelt to tie their sandal laces or done a couple of push-ups as part of a spontaneous need for exercise. They could have sneaked out of the crowd and hidden. They could have done something. Instead they faced the king with their convictions and their faith in their God: *O Nebuchadnezzar, we do not need to defend ourselves before you on this matter. If we are thrown into the blazing furnace, the God we serve is able to save us from it, and He will rescue us from your hand, O king. But even if he does not, we want you to know, O king, that we will not serve your gods or worship the image of gold you have set up (Dan 3: 16, 17).*

The upshot of the story is that they were thrown into the fire, only to discover that God was already there, waiting for them. They stood with God in the fire and were saved. During the crisis they didn't take matters into their own hands. *They didn't just do something. They stood there!*

I want to simplify your lives. When others are telling you to read more, I want to tell you to read less; when others are telling you to do more, I want to tell you to do less. The world does not need more of you; it needs more of God. Your friends do not need more of you; they need more of God. And you don't need more of you; you need more of God.—Eugene H Peterson

After a crisis: Elijah (I Kings 17-19)

Here is an example of a man of God trying to do something on his own. After years of drought, Jehovah and Baal are in competition. Who will bring the rain? Of course, Jehovah wins, the rain pours in torrents, and hearts are turned from idolatry to the true God. You'd think that after such an awesome illustration of God's power, everyone would accept Him and live happily ever after.

But all is not over. Jezebel is at the sidelines. She hears the news and sends her messenger to Elijah saying: *May the gods deal with me, be it ever so severely, if by this time tomorrow I do not make your life like that of one of them [Baal's prophets] (19:2).* Here's when Elijah loses his cool. He decides to do something; he decides to take care of things by himself. Elijah had just finished running in front of the King's chariot all the way from Mt Carmel to Jezreel (20 km). But hearing Jezebel's threat, he panics, he forgets God's watch-care over the past few years of drought, and he begins to run again. This time to Beersheba, about 150 km south. From there, he goes on another day's journey into the desert. He didn't know where he was going, he didn't have a strategy, he didn't have a clue about what he was doing, but he was *doing something*. Finally, in exhaustion, Elijah lays down under a broom tree. He is heartsick. He feels alone. He wants to die. God sends an angel to feed him. He sleeps. Energized, he travels another 40 days and 40 nights to Mt Horeb. God follows Elijah into a lonely cave, calling out *What are you doing here, Elijah?* Elijah is at a loss for words. The victory at Mt Carmel that seemed so sweet is now bitter. All that running he did, without a clue. So God speaks again *Go out and stand on the mountain in the presence of the Lord, for the Lord is about to pass by.* And Elijah finally responds by not doing something, but by standing in the presence of God.

Elijah sees a powerful wind that tears the mountain, but the Lord isn't there. He sees an earthquake that shakes the mountain, but the Lord isn't there. He sees a fire, but the Lord was not in the fire. Then comes a gentle whisper, God was in the whisper saying *You are not alone. Don't just do something, stand there!*

Conclusion

These are stories about God's servants reminding us that we often act on impulse, relying on our own strength. Standing still doesn't always make sense to us. It may not even seem practical. We live in a world of instant answers. We go to Infoseek, Alta Vista, Yahoo, and Web Crawler for instant answers. And when we don't get answers instantly, we bang on our computer screen, vowing to get a better, faster one.

This doesn't mean God wants us to just sit around doing nothing, being undecided. He doesn't want us to be wimps or hermits so heavenly-minded that we're no earthly good. While God wants decisive people who act and respond immediately, He also wants people who walk with Him and stand in His presence long enough to know His will. He wants people who respond to action while firmly standing in the center of His will. *Be still, and know that I am God; I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted in the earth.' The Lord almighty is with us; the God of Jacob is our fortress (Ps 46:10, 11).*

As the will of man cooperates with the will of God, it becomes omnipotent. Whatever is to be done at His command may be accomplished in His strength. All His biddings are enablings—Christ's Object Lessons, p 333. Jehoshaphat learned the lesson early. When confronted with a big challenge, even though he had great resources, Jehoshaphat chose to use his greatest weapon, his relationship with God. Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego faced it in the heat of the moment. Their greatest weapon was the presence of God Himself. Elijah temporarily lost his bearings after the great victory when he felt all alone in the face of Jezebel's wrath. But the still small voice brought him comfort and promise of an eternity with God.

The next time you need to do something, make sure you firmly stand in God's presence first. Then whatever you do will be right and it will be on time.



**God isn't interested
in how many talents
we have—He's
interested in how we
are using the talent
we have.**

Introduction

On a mountain summit grows a small patch of beautiful, fragrant flowers that flourishes in the middle of weeds and rocks. Almost completely camouflaged and unnoticed, they bloom in full resplendence. Similarly, many unnoticed people live in the midst of hardship. Far from the center of attention, they live lives of beauty and fragrance. In their obscurity, they faithfully fulfill God's calling for them. God's question on the last day will not be *How much were you noticed?* or even *How much did you do?* Rather, His question will be, *Were you faithful where I placed you?*

Matthew 25:14 begins a parable about the talents. *Again, it will be like a man going on a journey, who called his servants and entrusted his property to them.* Three servants were given eight talents. A talent was not a coin. It was a weight! About 60 pounds. The value depended on what metal was involved . . . copper, silver, or gold. One talent of silver today might be worth over 3000 dollars.

We are all blessed

When an owner places something of value in the hands of his servants, he wants it used to benefit his kingdom. For Christians, the true object of life is ministry. Jesus came to this old sinful world to serve others. Jesus placed the package of eternal life under each and everyone's Christmas tree. That supreme gift can be yours today if you accept Jesus as your very own personal Saviour.

In the parable everybody got a minimum of at least one talent. We all have a spiritual gift. Actual possession depends upon our reception of the Holy Spirit. So each of the three servants in Jesus' parable had the Holy Spirit. We don't all have the same talents. God gives us according to our abilities. What matters is not how much talent we have but what we do with it. We don't have equal talent, but we can have equal effort.

Reach your potential

Burying your talent

The man who had received the five talents went at once and put his money to work and gained five more. So also, the one with the two talents gained two more (Matt 25:16,17). The two-talent man did not do all that was possible for him to do. We must exercise our God-given abilities. Make the most of every opportunity to use your talents. We misuse or even bury talent today by saying things like:

I'll teach in the Sabbath School, but don't expect me to visit the kids in their homes.

I'll help with Pathfinders, but don't expect me to attend all the camp-outs.

I'll study my Bible, but don't expect me to pray like a prayer warrior.

The two talent man did double his holdings. Effort will be rewarded. You can accumulate according to your work. As Christians, we can grow to be Christ-like.

But the man who had received the one talent went off, dug a hole in the ground and hid his master's money (Matt 25:18). Have you ever dug a hole, placed valuable treasure inside it, and covered it up? Children often do and get frustrated trying to find their little treasures. The negligent servant buried the talent so that he could return it exactly as it was. The one-talent man is fortunate to have found his talent. The action of the negligent servant is so typical. Did he have any talent? Yes! One good one. Each of us has a talent. That sets our potential. Through hard, stern efforts with self (coupled with the blessing and power of God) you can develop your one gift. The one-talent man was punished for not trying. His sin was not in his misuse, but his disuse of that which his master entrusted to him. Invest time in your spiritual life. Every day dedicate your remaining time to becoming more like Jesus.

There are so many talents: Faithfulness, Fruitfulness, Time, Accountability, Industriousness, Means, Dependability, Mental Power, Reason, Strength, Tenderness of Heart (*SDA Bible Commentary, vol 5, p 1100*). Tenderness of heart is a talent! Yes! Over the years we should be sweeter, more and more in control of our temper. Pray in earnest for a new heart. God longs to give you a new heart. *I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh (Eze 36: 26).*

The rewards of the faithful servant

The reward for success is more success. Faithful servants are never told to rest on their oars. They are given even more responsibilities. If you don't use your talent, you lose it. This is universally true of playing the violin, typing, sending Morse code, preparing sermons, or thinking. The only way to maintain your proficiency is to be active in the service of God or your fellow man. Burying your talent is a sin.

For everyone who has will be given more, and he will have an abundance. Whoever does not have, even what he has will be taken from him (Matthew 25:29). What you do with small things, you will soon begin to do when you are given big things. A small snowball rolls down the mountain until a great avalanche develops. The little things of life reveal what we are becoming. Let's be honest with small things. Let's invest our one talent for Jesus. If you are not becoming more and more like Jesus and using your God-given abilities for others, your reward will be taken away from you and given to another.

We are either maturing to be more like Jesus or we are lost! So many join the church but do not nourish the spark that God has placed in them. Their attendance begins to drop off. Soon they sit at home. They are just hanging on. The potential they have is not cultivated. Their talent is buried.

After a long time the master of those servants returned and settled accounts with them. *'Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master's happiness!'* (Matthew 25:19,23).

An old missionary couple was returning to New York after several years of working in Africa. They had no pension; their health was broken; they were defeated, discouraged, and afraid. They found themselves on the same ship as President Teddy Roosevelt, who was returning from a hunting expedition. As they watched the fanfare that accompanied the President's entourage, the man said to his wife *Something is wrong. Why should we have given our lives in faithful service for God in Africa all these many years and have no one care a thing about us? Here this man comes back from a hunting trip and everybody makes much over him, but nobody cares about us. It doesn't seem right.* When the ship docked in New York, a band and dignitaries were waiting to greet the President. But no one noticed the missionary couple. They slipped off the ship and found a cheap apartment, hoping to make a living in the city.

That night the man's spirit broke. He said to his wife *I can't take this; God is not treating us fairly.* His wife replied *Why don't you tell it to the Lord?* A short time later he came out from the bedroom, a changed man. *The Lord settled it with me, I told him how bitter I was when the President received a tremendous homecoming, when no one met us as we returned home. And when I finished, it seemed as though the Lord put his hand on my shoulder and simply said, 'But you're not home yet!'* — Ray Stedman, *Talking to My Father*

Conclusion

There are grand rewards for faithfulness, none necessarily down here. You may be struggling today harder than at any time in your life, but do not give up on God. Someday heaven will be prepared for a palatial homecoming. You will step through the gates of pearl onto parkways of transparent gold. Jesus will welcome you home. All this will be your reward if you build your life on the foundation of Jesus Christ. *For no one can lay any foundation other than the one already laid, which is Jesus Christ. If any man builds on this foundation using gold, silver, costly stones, wood, hay or straw, his work will be shown for what it is, because the Day will bring it to light. It will be revealed with fire, and the fire will test the quality of each man's work. If what he has built survives, he will receive his reward (1 Cor 3:11-14).*

With Jesus as your Saviour, with your efforts combined with His power, you can reach your God-given potential.

Be pleased, O God, to grant unto me that great freedom of mind that will enable me to ... manage the common affairs of life in such wise as not to misemploy or neglect the improvement of my talents; to be industrious without covetousness; diligent without anxiety; as exact in each punctilio of action as if success were dependent upon it, and yet so resigned as to leave all events to thee and still attributing to thee the praise of every good work.

—Susanna Wesley



The moment we say “We don’t have enough money,” we are really saying “God is not big enough for us.”

Introduction

Dressed and speaking like common, country folk, a couple asked to see the President of Harvard University. Because they looked common and unimportant, they were made to wait for hours. Finally, realizing they wouldn't leave, the secretary went to get the president. Confident that he could take care of the situation, the president walked out, briskly greeted the couple, and asked how he could help them. They began to speak of their deceased son who had once attended Harvard University. *We would like to erect a monument in our son's honor*, they said. The president responded, *If we allowed every family to erect a monument, this place would look like a cemetery*. The parents quickly explained *We don't want a grave marker. We want to erect a building in his honor*. Sensing that they obviously did not understand the financial implication of their intentions, the president said *Do you realize how much this would cost you? The buildings on this campus are worth more than seven million dollars*. The wife turned to the husband and said, *Do you mean that is all it takes to build a university? Why don't we just build one of our own*. So Mr and Mrs Stanford walked out of Harvard University to establish, in California, Stanford University.

Why money?

Money is important because it impacts the way we see ourselves. If we don't have much money we see ourselves not just as financially poor, but as helpless and unimportant. Money is important because it affects how we see one another. We tend to treat people with money differently and give them favoritism (*James 2*). Money affects the way we look at God. Money is life. Money is a combination of time, talent and energy turned into a medium of exchange. We put our time, our talent and our energy together and we are rewarded or paid for services provided or products produced with money. And when we have enough money, we begin to think we don't need God. It is rather significant that God's diagnosis of his church at the end of time is that they are lukewarm and materialistically satisfied. And the conundrum is that God has blessed this church so abundantly.

The many syndromes

The problem is not a lack of money but a lack of dependency on God. The moment we say *We don't have enough money* we are really saying *God is not big enough for us*. Let us explore some syndromes in our lives

The owner syndrome. We tend to think of everything as ours. This is *my house, my church, my suit, my car*, etc. With this kind of thinking, there is the worry about what is going to happen to what I own. When you don't have enough, you worry; and when you do have enough, you worry from fear of losing it. When we begin to fall into that ownership trap, we are actually taking God's place.

The recognition syndrome. Bill Gates is well-recognized. But how happy is he with his 30 or 40 billion dollars. Would you like to have the commerce department looking over your shoulder examining everything you do? Do you think he is at peace and happy to be recognized as one of the wealthiest men on earth? There are times when not being recognized is an advantage—Then why do we seek to be recognized by what we wear, what we do, or how much we have?

The confidence syndrome. Sometimes we begin to have confidence in what we own, forgetting that all belongs to God. How much money would it take to have full confidence that you could handle everything?

The power syndrome. There is danger when we begin to look for power in money instead of in God. His *divine power has granted to us everything pertaining to life and godliness, through the true knowledge of Him who called us by His own glory and excellence (2 Peter 1:3)*. Paul says you can do all things through Christ who strengthens me. Ephesians 2:6 tells us that if we are in Christ we are raised and seated with Him in heavenly places. How much more power do you want?

The control syndrome. Have you heard someone express thoughts like *Until I see things changed, I am withholding my tithe and local budget support*. How can financial blackmail change the church if the Holy Spirit is not going to do it?

John Maxwell tells of a personal experience. In one of his early pastoring jobs, he had just a handful of people attending church regularly. A few months

later there were 60 to 65. Many changes had taken place and the congregation was growing. One day, just as he was getting ready to go on the platform, one of the major donors in his congregation stopped him and said *You have been here six months and a lot of things have changed in this church. And unless certain things are changed back to the way they were, I am not going to give any more tithe.* John responded *What are you telling me this for. Why don't you tell this to the One you ought to.* With that, he grabbed the church member by the arm, pulled him to his knees and said *Repeat after me, 'Dear God I have chosen to rob you.'* The man exploded *Don't say that!* John Maxwell walked on to the platform to preach, knowing that might be his last sermon in that church because of what he did to the man who gave more than 50 percent of the church budget. However, the man returned the following week and said *Thank you, Pastor. All this time I thought this was my church because I paid more than half of the budget. I thought it was mine to control. I have finally realized this is God's church, and never again will you have to struggle with me trying to control the church with my money.*

The if-only syndrome. Our excuse is sometimes *If only we had this or if only we had that, we would follow God's will for this church if only we had.*

The Hezekiah syndrome. Hezekiah, wanting assurance, asked God to move the sundial back 10 degrees. Think of all the laws of physics that God had to balance to stop the earth on its rotation, move it back 10 degrees and restart it. By all the laws of physics and all the laws of the universe, that movement should have caused massive earthquakes and tidal waves to destroy this earth. Yet God, with one little finger, simply adjusted all—merely to strengthen the weak faith of one man. However, when people from Babylon arrived, inquiring about this power that could reverse all laws of nature, King Hezekiah responded by showing them all his riches. Consider how history might have changed had he shown them, not his wealth, but a glimpse of God Almighty. But we know the result of his folly: A few years later, they returned to take away all his wealth.

The Three principles of Matthew 6

It all comes down to who is in control of our lives and everything we have. Matt 6:24 says *No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other or he will be devoted to one and despise the other.* There are three principles.

1. *Do not store up earthly treasures (Matt 6:19).* Make sure your priorities are correct. Where do you put the focus? Advertisements today talk about needing a lot of money and a long life. We hear about the importance of retiring to enjoy the same, if not better, lifestyle you have now. God's idea, however, is that when we pass away, we would have administered God's resources so well that there is nothing left to corrupt or to destroy, but it is left in His hands to manage as He wills.

2. *Put first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness (Matt 6:25-32).* If I worry, I am saying *I am God and I can take care of myself.* Mel Reese tells a story of a wealthy man who owned a large farm. He always had the best crops in the neighborhood. He was known to say *This property belongs to God. I'm just managing it for God. I am faithful with my tithes and He blesses.* One day the locusts came eating every grain in the field. They reached his property line and ate his wheat too. His neighbors and friends came to him, saying *Where was your God when the locusts came?* His response was *If God wants to pasture His locusts on His wheat fields, that is His business.*

3. *Seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness.* The problem is not with money, but with you and me. In Matthew 19 a rich young man asks Jesus what he must do to be saved. Jesus replies *Do not murder, do not commit adultery, do not steal, do not give false testimony, honor your father and mother and love your neighbors as yourself.* In exasperation, the man claims to have kept all these commands and asks what he still lacks. Jesus says to him *If you want to be perfect, go sell your possessions and give to the poor and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come and follow me.*

We often use this story to encourage people to give more in offering. That is not the point of this story. The problem was not the wealth in itself but the fact that the wealth stood between God and him. The only way money will not own us is if we recognize that everything we have belongs to Him.

A woman was trying to maneuver her big, fancy car into a parking spot when a young man quickly cut in front of her with his little car, and claimed the parking spot. As he got out of his car, the woman asked why he did what he did. "Because I'm young and I'm quick," he replied, walking away. The woman calmly aligned her car behind the young man's and began to repeatedly bash into his car. Very upset, the man asked her why she was doing what she was. She replied, "Because I'm old and I'm rich."

Money follows affections, not thought.—John and Sylvia Ronsvale



Walking alone with God

Introduction

One of the greatest challenges is finding enough time for that which is essential. Oswald Chambers asks a very simple question that gets to the heart of the problem: *Have you ever been alone with God?* He quotes Mark 4:34: *When they were alone, he expounded all things to his disciples.* It is when we are alone with God that He is able to mold us into something He can use. *The only way we can be of use to God is to let Him take us through the crooks and crannies of our own characters.*—Oswald Chambers, *My Utmost for His Highest*, January 12.

In the Bible there are many examples of the value of spending time alone with God. Enoch is described as one who *walked with God* (Gen 5:21-24). This walking with God resulted in such a closeness that God *took him*. Just what this experience was is made clear to us by Paul in Hebrews 11:5: *By faith Enoch was taken up so that he should not see death; and he was not found because God took him up; for he obtained the witness that before his being taken up he was pleasing to God.* Because Enoch walked alone with God he developed a character that took him to heaven. Paul says that Enoch was *pleasing to God*. How do we achieve this character?

Now is the time

Some may think it was a lot easier for Enoch because he lived closer to the time of the beginning, only a few years after the creation. But remember, He lived just prior to the flood, a time when the earth was so wicked that God had to cleanse the earth of everything. *That time was no more favorable to the development of Christian character than is the present time, yet we read that Enoch walked with God. Christ was as verily Enoch's Saviour as He is our Saviour, and in His power, notwithstanding the corruption of that degenerate age, Enoch perfected a Christian character. The voice saying to us, "He that followeth Me shall not walk in darkness," said the same words to Enoch, assuring him that if he followed the Saviour, he would not walk in the darkness of ignorance.*

There never has been and never will be an age when the moral darkness will be so dense as when Enoch lived a life of irreproachable righteousness.—Ellen G White, 'Our Privilege in Christ Jesus,' *Signs of the Times*, October 4, 1899.

John Gill says *He walked in the name and fear of God, according to his will, in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord then made known; he walked by faith in the promises of God, and in the view of the Messiah, the promised seed; he walked uprightly and sincerely, as in the sight of God; he had familiar converse, and near and intimate communion with him.* The secret was his righteous character. He spent time alone with God, which influenced his daily walk and enabled him to be the witness that was needed in the evil world in which he lived. Spending time alone with God every day will help us understand ourselves in a way that would allow us to grow in God's grace. A relationship of intimacy takes commitment. Enoch spent time alone with God when perplexed and disturbed by the wickedness of his day. He did not throw up his hands in despair; instead he went to God in prayer.

When we are alone with God, He infuses us with His grace to give us victory over sin. *The spirit which Enoch, Joseph, and Daniel possessed, we may have. We may draw from the same source of strength, and realize the same power of self-control; and the same graces may shine out in our lives. By reflecting the light of Christ to all around us, we shall become the light of the world. Said Christ, 'A city that is set on a hill cannot be hid.' 'Let your light so shine before men that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven.' A surly, fault-finding, selfish, uncourteous person cannot have this sacred influence.*—*The Desire of Ages*, p 362.

The example of Jesus

When we are alone with God, we follow the example of Jesus. *And in the early morning, while it was still dark, He arose and went out and departed to a lonely place, and was praying there* (Mk 1:35). In the quietness of the early morning hours Jesus spent time alone with His Father, gaining insights, strength, and encouragement for the day's work. *No other life was ever so crowded with labor and responsibility as was that of*

Jesus; yet how often He was found in prayer! How constant was His communion with God! Again and again in the history of His earthly life are found records such as these: 'Rising up a great while before day, He went out, and departed into a solitary place, and there prayed.'—*Reflecting Christ*, p 118. If Jesus needed daily communion with His Father, how much more do we need time with our Heavenly Father. Satan, like a roaring lion, is looking for those he can devour. Like Jesus, we need our batteries charged daily.

We spend so much of our time caring for our bodily needs: food, clothing, shelter, recreation. We need to also spend time caring for the needs of our souls. By studying, reading, meditating, and contemplating on God, His Word, and His plan of salvation we can develop our relationship with God on a daily basis. These activities are best done in our secret place of prayer, alone with God. This is walking alone with God.

The joy of abiding in Him

Thomas Merton wrote, *The world of men has forgotten the joys of silence, the peace of solitude which is necessary, to some extent, for the fullness of human living. Not all men are called to be hermits, but all men need enough silence and solitude in their lives to enable the deep inner voice of their own true self to be heard occasionally. When that inner voice is not heard, when man cannot attain to the spiritual peace that comes from being perfectly at one with his own true self, his life is always miserable and exhausting. For he cannot go on happily for long unless he is in contact with the springs of spiritual life.*—Thomas Merton, *The Silent Life*, p 167.

Our need for God is best illustrated by the analogy of the vine and the branches of John 15. Jesus tells us that we must abide in Him and He in us in order for us to have a fruitful life. The nourishment we draw from Jesus must be constant lest we wither and die. If we remain attached to Jesus, drawing nourishment and strength from Him, we will be fruitful and thus glorify Him. There is no better way to abide in Christ than by contemplating His life and ministry. *It will do you good, ...to frequently review the closing scenes in the life of our Redeemer. Here, beset with temptations as He was, we may all learn lessons of the utmost importance to us. It would be well to spend a thoughtful hour each day reviewing the life of Christ from the manger to Calvary. We should take it point by point and let the imagination vividly grasp each scene, especially the closing ones of His earthly life. By thus contemplating His teachings and sufferings, and the infinite sacrifice made by Him for the redemption of the race, we may strengthen our faith, quicken our love, and become more deeply imbued with the spirit which sustained our Saviour. If we would be saved at last we must all learn the lesson of penitence and faith at the foot of the cross.... Everything noble and generous in man will respond to the contemplation of Christ upon the cross.*—*Testimonies for the Church*, vol 4, p 374.

Conclusion

It is often difficult to find the time to be alone with God. *There has never been an age more loquacious than ours, one more extroverted, one more concerned with surface things.... Modern man finds it difficult to pursue... that inner silence of soul which the Psalmist has in mind when he says that we should 'listen to what the Lord God will say' (Ps. 85:8).... Modern man rarely listens to what God has to tell him. He is overwhelmed by a constant stream of words poured forth from printing presses and loudspeakers.... Christians... have widely lost the faculty of listening to their inner voice*—*In Heavenly Places*, p 227. While we rush from day to day, it is important to commune with God and meditate on His Word, and listen to the plans He has for us.

For I know the plans that I have for you,' declares the LORD, 'plans for welfare and not for calamity to give you a future and a hope. 'Then you will call upon Me and come and pray to Me, and I will listen to you. 'And you will seek Me and find Me, when you search for Me with all your heart. 'And I will be found by you,' declares the LORD, 'and I will restore your fortunes (Jer 29:11-13).

Take time to walk alone with God every day. Listen to His voice, meditate on His Word, and pour out heartfelt prayers before His throne of mercy and grace. Become empowered to accomplish great good for our Lord.

*We can choke
God's word
with a yawn;
we can hinder
the time that
should be
spent with God
by
remembering
we have other
things to do. "I
haven't time!"
Of course you
have time!
Take time,
strangle some
other interests
and make time
to realize that
the centre of
power in your
life is the Lord
Jesus Christ
and His
Atonement.
—Oswald
Chambers*

Book Reviews



The Second Coming of the Church

by George Barna

Word Publishing

Nashville, Tennessee, 1998

US\$ 24.99



Speaking of Stewardship

edited by William G Carter

Geneva Press

Louisville, Kentucky, 1998

US\$ 14.00



Near to the Heart of God

by Bernard Bangley

Harold Shaw Publishers

Wheaton, Illinois, 1998

US\$ 12.99

This work is the result of many years of research and careful study of the Christian Church, especially in North America. But more than a study of trends within the church and society, this book is a comparison of where the church finds itself today when compared to society. The similarities are far too many and too close.

This leads to a comparison of God's plan for His church and the reality of where the church finds itself. This leads to a call for the church to stop playing church and become the Church—to stop dabbling with religion and to grow spiritually. Barna outlines a proposed strategy to take the church back to its rightful existence of being God's church. This strategy begins with a biblical rediscovery of God's vision for His church. It is a call to allow the power of the risen Christ to recreate His church.

Barna then goes on to explore the critical elements that have the power to make a difference. These elements include leadership, dealing with diversity, Christian thinking, cultivating a biblical world view, and the role of the family. This is a powerful book that demands careful consideration. It forces us to face ourselves in light of culture's impact on the church. It warns us of the urgent need for change and revival. Yet at the same time, it gives us the assurance that God can make a difference if we give Him room. This may very well be Barna's best book yet.

This collection of 23 sermons, organized in five categories, covers various stewardship areas. It addresses topics such as giving and the use of money and possessions in the church. Each sermon is written by a pastor or a preaching professor. The five categories are:

- √ Theological Dimensions of Stewardship
- √ Personal Preparation for Stewardship
- √ The Spiritual Discipline of Giving
- √ Money and Possessions as Issues in the Life of Faith
- √ Interpreting Our Global Responsibility and Congregational Mission

The sermons provide a wide spectrum of stewardship preaching at its best. In them are dynamic stewardship thoughts and models to develop and customize your own stewardship preaching. The concepts presented in this book can help pastors think through their own stewardship ministry and develop a comprehensive stewardship preaching strategy. The book is well worth exploring and can serve as a good resource for sermon ideas.

Benjamin C Maxson, Director, General Conference Stewardship Department

When it comes to devotional books, everyone—the young and the old, the graduate student and the high school dropout—wants the same thing. We all want devotionals that are thought-provoking, yet simple and brief. We don't want the frills of *thee's* and *thou's* or heavy theology.

Bangley's compilation of daily readings from the spiritual classics is just that. The readings are brief—Some as short as eight lines, but none that go over a page. The format is clear—A Bible text, a devotional reading, and a personal response. The language is simple—Be it Evagrius Ponticus, Martin Luther, or John Donne, you can understand it the first time through!

The best of the spiritual classics come together in this treasury. These readings are gleaned from the writings of more than 60 inspiring men and women of God, including some never before in print. For every day of the year, there is one reading, one specific thought to deepen your faith.

Let this book guide you through the year and draw you nearer to God's heart.

Fylvia Fowler Kline, Assistant Director, General Conference Stewardship Department

Book Reviews

The clue to the message of *Making Life Rich Without Any Money* by Phil Callaway is found in its subtitle, *Finding Joy in What Really Matters*. This book is full of real-life stories, both humorous and serious, stories about what is really important in everyday life. In this book you won't find quick money-making schemes, accounting software programs, budget information, or stock market tips. What you will find, though, is a snapshot of life. For instance, you will discover that a job offer with a big pay increase that would move the family far from family and friends isn't all that important after you have experienced an earthquake while there for an interview. You will be reminded that *100 years from now, no one will remember what kind of house I lived in, what model car I drove, or the size of my bank account. . . But the world may be a better place because I slowed down enough to listen to God's voice, because I was important in the eyes of a child, because I learned to be content with the things I did not have.* These are the things that matter the most.

At the beginning of each chapter is a meaningful quote. Several of my favorites were *When you have accomplished your daily task, go to sleep in peace; God is awake (Victor Hugo)*; *Circumstances and situations do color life, but you have been given the mind to choose what the color shall be (John Homer Miller)*; *You gave me everything to live with, and nothing to live for (A teenager's suicide note to his parents)*. The quote generally gives you a feel for the content of the chapter that follows. I found the quotes selected by the author to be very thought-provoking and full of wisdom.

This book provides excellent sermon illustrations, devotional ideas, youth talks, and general good advice. Phil Callaway's personal mission statement (*I will consider myself a success when I am walking close to Jesus every day*) comes through the pages with a strong conviction. He gently reminds us that we are to store up our treasure in heaven and not pine for the things of this world.

Phil Callaway is an award-winning columnist and author of *Honey, I Dunked the Kids*; *Daddy, I Blew Up the Shed*; and *The Total Christian Guy*. His humorous short stories have appeared in magazines like *New Man*, *Focus on the Family*, and *Marriage Partnership*. He is a popular speaker at conferences, churches, and marriage retreats. Phil resides in Alberta, Canada with his high-school sweetheart, Ramona, and their three children. To contact him for more information about his books, videos, or speaking appointments, you may write him at P.O. Box 4576, Three Hills, Alberta Canada T0M 2N0, or e-mail him at phil.callaway@pbi.ab.ca

I highly recommend *Making Life Rich Without Any Money* for every church library.

Sheri Clemmer, Administrative Secretary, General Conference Stewardship Department

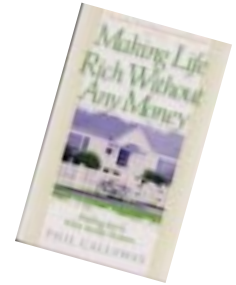
Barnes begins the book saying *It's too much, Lord! Just one thing after another —too much pain, too much worry, too much sadness, too many hard days, and endless nights, and I'm just so tired . . . Lord, it's just too much. Help!*

This book is a reflection of the lessons learned from troubles in life. It comes from personal experiences of the author who has seen her family go through separation, illnesses, depression, anger, and discouragement. Yet through it all, she felt the paralleled experience of growing closer to God.

The ending is truly a dose of encouragement to all of us who experience life at its worst: *When my cup overflowed with trouble, You made my cup deeper and stronger. You washed it free of trouble and filled me to overflowing with Your goodness, and You keep on doing it every day of my life even when it's raining. You are a God of abundant mercy. You are a God of abundant strength. You are a God of abundant blessings. It's too much, Lord. But thank you!*

I really enjoyed reading this book. It made me contemplate on my own life, take inventory of what my priorities are and where I stand with God.

Maureen Hudgins, Secretary, General Conference Stewardship Department



Making Life Rich Without Any Money

by Phil Callaway

Harvest House Publishers

Eugene, Oregon, 1998

US\$ 8.99



My Cup Overflows

by Emilie Barnes

Harvest House Publishers

Eugene, Oregon, 1998

US\$ 12.99

Resources

Stewardship training seminars presented by *Benjamin C Maxson* are 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 301-680-6155 email gcstewardship@compuserve.com). The cost of each set, excluding shipping is \$79.95 for video and \$29.95 for audio (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.

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.

Editorial

It caught my eye. It was a full-page, color advertisement. *I absolutely must have it*, I said to no one in particular, as I envisioned myself looking 15 years younger. It was a strange looking thing with electrical wires and discs. The detailed description of this product ended with a *claim*, a *promise*, and a *guarantee*.

The Claim: Stick the discs on any part of your body, turn on the switch, and let the discs work your muscles without any help from you—Just a few minutes were equivalent to 300 sit-ups. *The Promise:* You will be slimmer and trimmer in 30 days or less. *The Guarantee:* Try it for 30 days. If you're not satisfied, you'll get your money back.

In spite of the promise and the guarantee, I have not purchased it yet. You see, I don't know anything about the company, I don't know of anyone who is slimmer because of it, and I don't know if this company keeps its promises. I am not ready to go into a business transaction, be it 30 days or one single day, with someone I know nothing about. Besides, what if the quacky thing sucks a hole into me? The risk is too great.

This issue of *Dynamic Steward* explores partnership with God—risk-free, worry-free. Millions world-wide testify to the miraculous power of this partnership. Besides, God's promise is the best guarantee you could ever have! In the lead article, Reid points out that, in this partnership, we work with a firm where God Himself *registers our names in the books of heaven*. Maxson, in the Concept section, reminds us that partnership with God is a gift—I do not earn it. I only accept it, claim His promise, and live out a life of adventure in God's grace and love—moment by moment, day by day.

What a gift. What a guarantee. Without the risk!

Fylvia Fowler Kline, Assistant Director, General Conference Stewardship Department



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