



DYNAMIC

# Steward

living • submitting • abiding • giving

January-March, 2008

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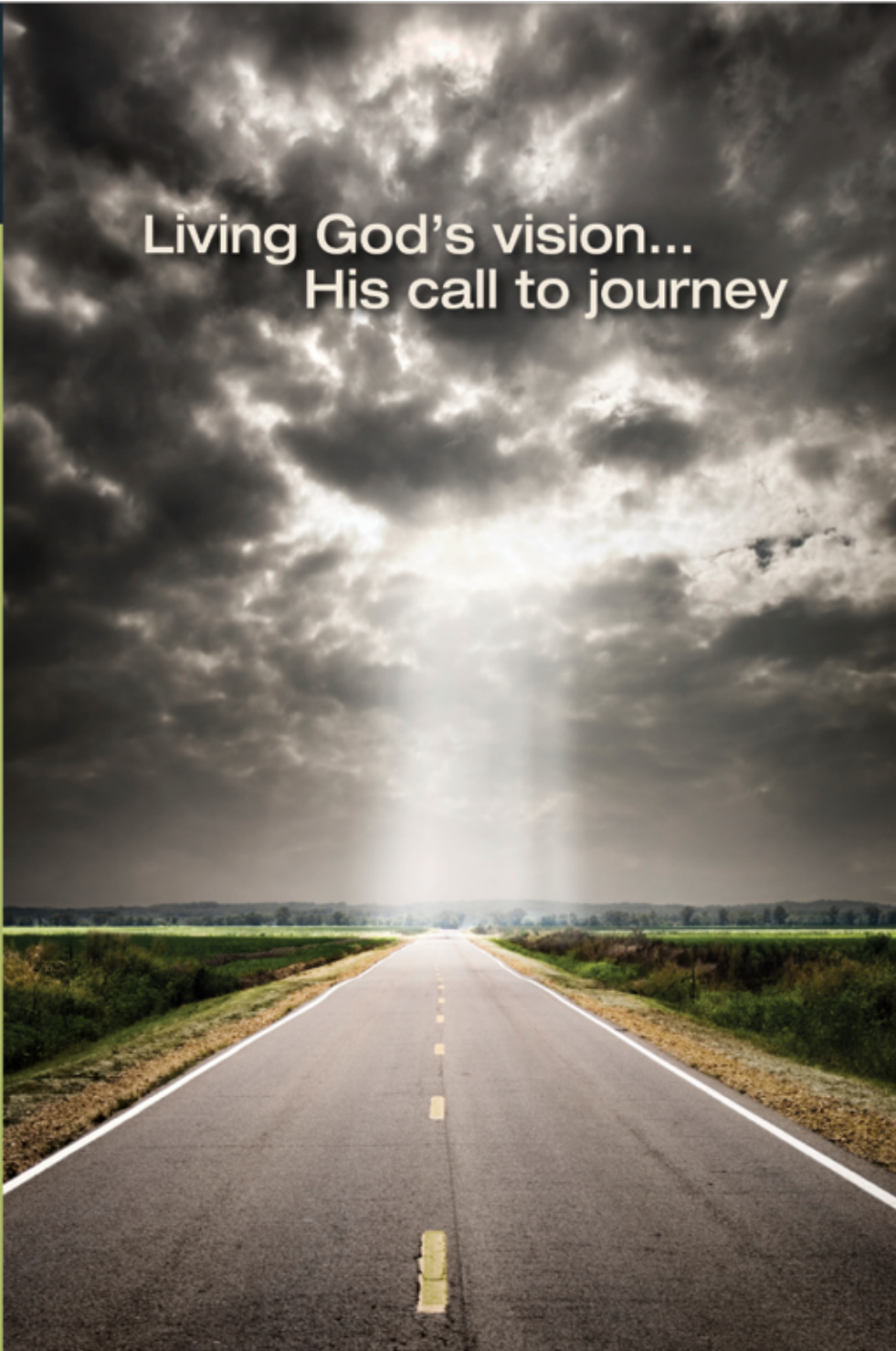
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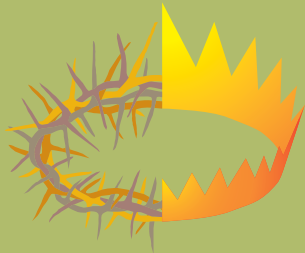
Volume 12 • Number 1



Living God's vision...  
His call to journey

# DYNAMIC Steward

This journal is produced by the Stewardship Department of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists. Your comments and questions are welcome. This publication may be duplicated as needed.



Exploring partnership with God

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## inside ds

**B**eginnings are refreshing and revitalizing. The beginning of a new year is a good time to take inventory. It is also an ideal time to pause and reflect on the basics. This issue of *Dynamic Steward* will bring together three themes in this process. We begin by reflecting on the primary substance of Christianity. While it is assumed that we are all believers and followers of Jesus Christ, in an inventory list, the initial question to be asked is “today, in terms of Christianity, what am I convinced about? What do I regard to be true?”



Descriptive of call, it was a cold high mountain night in the early 1970's when a group of young teenagers made their way up a steep incline equipped with only flashlights. Their adult leader and youth pastor led them to a clearing beside a sheer cliff and proceeded to give everyone a candle. Ceremoniously lighting these, they were instructed to form a circle, surrounded by the scent of pine trees and above them a sky full of stars. The devotional ended with an invitation for service in God's kingdom. Unique to this occasion professions were named while inviting the young people to step inside the circle in response to the call of commitment with their own distinct chosen vocations. Minutes passed, then they heard the words “Bible teacher.” Though few in number yet with hearts and souls pulled and warmed all at the same time some stepped inside the circle of candles having heard their own unique call to lifework and ministry.

I invite you to reflect for a moment, cease your many activities, and inventory these three areas of Christianity, call, and ministry. Where did you first hear the call to ministry, preaching, or teaching? Was it a memorable moment, or a gradual awareness and conviction? Where are you on the journey today? Who is traveling with you? What has been your observation?

This edition of our publication will assist you by addressing each one of these subjects. Together and individually we are participating in assessing as stewards the shape and order of our beliefs, ministries, and call.

We begin with the concept article that presents what is basic to Christianity and stewardship. This is followed by the profound, authentic and refocusing perspective of Ray Anderson as he draws attention to servant leadership and its relevance to God's vision.

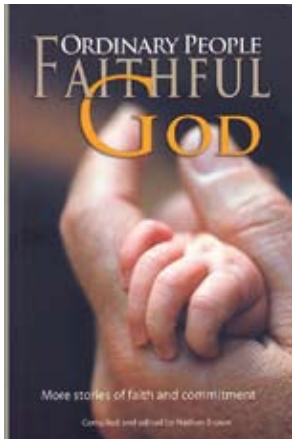
A practical checklist is Stewardship Director Kigundu Ndwiga's question and answer offering. This is followed by young adult Chaplain and Theology Professor Seth Leamon's description of living the call in the mission field of Thailand.

Pastor Ron Halvorsen Jr.'s sermon for pastors is an insightful, Scriptural call to the core of the decision to follow Jesus Christ.

May your inventory reveal past and present memories of 'living God's vision,' may your ministry checklist reaffirm 'His call to journey.'

Alongside you in His service,

# resources



**Ordinary People, Faithful God**  
by Nathan Brown  
Signs Publishing Company  
Warburton, Victoria  
2007 AUS \$14.95

A sequel to the real-life stories in the tradition of *Ordinary People—Extraordinary God*, Nathan Brown, editor of *Record and Signs* originating in the South Pacific is also the compiler and editor of this work containing ‘more stories of faith and commitment.’ This is an ideal resource that portrays stewardship in everyday real life circumstances. To order go to [www.adventistbookcentre.com.au/](http://www.adventistbookcentre.com.au/) or email [info@signspublishing.com.au](mailto:info@signspublishing.com.au).



**360° Stewardship**  
by Kirk Nowery  
Spire Resources, Inc.  
Camarillo, California  
2006 US \$12.00

John C. Maxwell comments, this “is a book to be read more than once. It is that valuable. You will be challenged to think about the things of great importance in these seven extraordinary chapters, and you will be captured by the significance of stewardship as never before.” This work addresses the full circumference and management of every dimension of life to help one become a 360-degree steward. To order call 800-992-3060 or go to [www.spire-resources.com/newcontact.html](http://www.spire-resources.com/newcontact.html).



**Wrapped in God's Love**  
by Canadian Interchurch  
Stewardship Committee  
Mennonite Church, Canada  
2003 US \$7.50

This is an excellent infancy through 18 years of age resource and workbook that focuses on the two aspects of receiving and giving as essential components of faith formation and discipleship. Included are activities “to nurture faith and to respond at each milestone, as the child increases in understanding and wisdom, to embrace a stewardship of all of life.” To order call the Ecumenical Center for Stewardship Studies at 800-835-5671 or email [office@stewardshipresources.org](mailto:office@stewardshipresources.org).

**Refresh Your Spirit  
Empower Your Ministry**

## **Christian Stewardship Association 2008 Conference**

January 30-February 2, 2008  
Hyatt Regency /  
Albuquerque Convention Center  
Albuquerque, NM  
888-424-6835 (reservations only)  
847-375-4741 (main office)

For more information go to:  
[www.stewardship.org/events/Convention/2008/index.html](http://www.stewardship.org/events/Convention/2008/index.html)



## Basic Christianity and Stewardship

Erika F. Puni, Director  
General Conference Stewardship



The Book of Acts points to Antioch of Syria where the disciples—followers of Jesus Christ—were first called “Christians” (Acts 11:26). This notation which describes the early believers of Christ is significant in helping us understand the characteristics of these people who were committed to the way and life of Jesus. In this article, I will explore the question, what is a Christian? But I also want to illustrate how Biblical stewardship is an expression of Christianity—the lifestyle of a Christian.



### Understanding the “Christian” Context

Acts 11:26 is the first of three Bible texts (Acts 26:28, 1 Peter 4:16) that uses the term “Christian,” it is in looking at the totality of Acts 10 and 11 that we can see clearly the broad meanings carried by this name for followers of Christ in the first century. Note the following observations from the biblical text.

1. Acts 11 uses the word “Christians” as a synonym for these other terms “disciples” (11:26), “witnesses” (10:39), and “brothers” (11:1). The use of “disciples” with “Christians” in the same verse conveys the idea that Christians were students and followers of Jesus Christ. He was their master and teacher, and they followed His teachings. “Witnesses” was Peter’s preferred term to explain the role of the twelve who spent time with Jesus during His earthy ministry from His baptism to His ascension and including the historical event of His resurrection (Acts 1:21, 10:39-41). Peter’s point in this testimony is that “witnesses” have an intimate knowledge and personal experience with Jesus. “Brothers,” on the other hand, is Luke’s picture which depicts the apostles (the twelve key leaders of the church at Jerusalem) as a close knit community of people, and this was certainly the case with the first twelve who shared a common life with Christ. While the emphasis of the term “Christians” is on the aspect of following, the word definitely has elements of acknowledging the Lordship and Messiahship of Jesus—He is the “anointed” and “appointed” of God (Acts 10:36, 38, 42).

2. Another key observation that provides richness to the use of the word “Christians” in the context of Acts 10 and 11 is Peter’s acknowledgment that God has no favorite people, and He accepts “all” persons regardless of their place of origin. For Peter, Christians comprise of individuals from “every nation” (Acts 10:34-36, 45; 11:1, 18), even those from outside of the Jewish society.

3. The most important observation that stands out in the context of these two chapters is the connection between “Christians” and the Gospel commission—the making of disciples for Jesus (Acts 10:33, 47; 11: 21,24; Matthew 28:19-20; ). In Acts 10 we see the three modes of making disciples (go, teach, baptize) in Matthew 28 this commission comes together in Peter’s ministry to Cornelius at Caesarea; while Acts 11 records the spread of the gospel to other areas outside of Jerusalem (Antioch included).

4. One final point that we must not overlook is the offering of prayers and the giving of gifts by Cornelius (Acts 10:31), and the receiving of the gift of the Spirit by the Gentiles (Acts 10: 45-47). This aspect of giving is also noted in the life of the church at Antioch where disciples gave gifts to Barnabas and Paul in support of other Christians (11: 37-30). Christianity is about sharing the good news of Jesus (11:20) and giving to people in need.

### Fundamentals of Christianity

Our brief analysis of the Acts passages reveals the following features of early Christians.

1. Christians know Jesus Christ personally, and have an intimate relationship with Him.

2. Christians believe and acknowledge that Jesus is divine, and that He is the anointed of God—the Messiah.

3. Christians follow the teachings of Jesus in the Bible in both words and deeds, and they value time of devotion with Him in prayer.

4. Christians are mandated to be involved in God's mission in the world to make disciples of all peoples. They are "witnesses" of the Risen Lord.

5. Christians have open hearts that accept people of different color and culture into their fellowship and community—the church. They are "brothers," individuals who possess love and affection for Christ and other Christians.

6. Christians as a matter of lifestyle give generously in support of God's cause which includes the needs of the poor in the world.

## Stewardship and Christianity

On the basis of our study we can conclude that the word "Christianity" is synonymous with the Biblical concept of stewardship for the following reasons.

1. Stewardship is about an experience with the person of Jesus Christ: Creator, Owner and Redeemer. It's about knowing Him personally as Savior and Lord. Christian stewardship has to do with having an intimate and on-going relationship with Him twenty four-seven.

2. Stewardship is about obedience to God and the teachings of Jesus as revealed in all of His Word, the Bible. Such obedience is manifested in the Christian appropriating time for Bible study and prayer.

3. Christian stewardship raises awareness of the spiritual obligation of Christians to make disciples which results in personal involvement in witnessing and evangelism.

4. Stewards live the principles of God's Kingdom which promotes acceptance of all peoples regardless of their social status and ethnicity.

5. Christians recognize that all of life including our earthly possessions are gifts of God given freely to serve Him, and to help others. That the Christian's purpose in life is to honor and glorify God in all things.

## stewardship window

news from the director's desk ...

### Report from the Inter-American Division

September 17 was an important date and event in the life of the church in the Inter-American Division (IAD) with headquarters at Miami, Florida. This was the opportunity after many years of operating under the "Combined Offering" system (60-20-20) that the division and stewardship department took a formal evaluation of this system for receiving and distributing offerings in support of the church both locally and globally.

According to Dr. Erika Puni, stewardship director for the General Conference, "The one noticeable trend in this evaluation was the marked increase in giving to world mission and ministry of the local church over the ten year period (1995-2005) under study." He also noted, "It was evident from testimonies from denominational leaders and members that this system has served, and is still serving the needs of the church well in this part of the world field."



Stewardship directors and church leaders at evaluation meeting.

However, Dr. Mario Niño, stewardship director for IAD pointed out that there was a lot of hard work (consulting, negotiations, study, and fine tuning) and training involved in the implementation of this system to bring it to where it is now. Any success as noted in the evaluation report is contributed to God's blessings and the faithfulness, and commitment of members at all levels of the church in Inter-America to this plan.

## Empowering Servant Leadership

*Ray S. Anderson, PhD  
Senior Professor  
of Theology and Ministry  
Fuller Theological Seminary*



*Ray S. Anderson graduated from Fuller Theological Seminary with a BD in 1959. He was the founding pastor of the Covina Evangelical Free Church in Covina, California, from 1959-1970. He received a PhD from the University of Edinburgh in 1972, and has been teaching at Fuller Theological Seminary since 1976. He currently holds the position of senior professor of theology and ministry. Anderson is ordained in the Evangelical Free Church of America and has over 45 years of pastoral and teaching experience. Anderson has published over 25 books, including *Something Old/Something New: Marriage and Family Ministry in a Postmodern Culture* (2007). *An Emergent Theology for Emerging Churches* (2006), *Judas and Jesus: Amazing Grace for the Wounded Soul* (2005), *The Soul of God—A Theological Memoir* (2004), *The Shape of Practical Theology—Empowering Ministry with Theological Praxis* (2001), *The Soul of Ministry: Forming Leaders for God's People* (1997), and *Self Care: A Theology of Personal Empowerment and Spiritual Healing* (1995). He is also a contributing editor for the *Journal of Psychology and Theology*.*

When we received a call to Christian ministry most of us thought that in becoming pastors we were assuming the role of being a shepherd of the sheep. After all, the shepherd's crook is one of the most common symbols of pastoral ministry. What we had not counted on was that instead of feeding docile sheep we often ended up fighting wolves, sometimes in sheep's clothing! Very quickly we also discovered that serving as a pastor of a church was more like managing a small business whose employees were unpaid volunteers and a board of directors who each had their own agenda.

Looking back on my own seminary training, I was prepared to be a minister, but not really prepared for ministry. Our professor of pastoral theology not only taught us about officiating at funerals and weddings, but had us practice with each other doing baptisms with real water—including immersion for those so inclined! However, we were never instructed in principles of church leadership nor were there any 'practice' sessions of conducting congregational and church board meetings. Apparently it was assumed that these skills came about through on-the-job training: for better or for worse which, as it turned out, was most often for the worse! I was warned against using my role as pastor to gain authority over the people. After all, we were told, Jesus set the model for ministry when he said, "The Son of Man came not to be served, but to serve" (Matthew 29:28). Leading by serving makes a nice spiritual slogan but it is not so easily done in practice.

"I don't believe in the concept of servant leadership," a pastor once told me. "I am not the paid servant of my congregation, but their spiritual leader." I could tell from his tone of voice that this pastor was protesting as much as he was proclaiming. When pressed, he admitted that he felt like he spent more time serving the needs of the congregation than leading it. There was an angry edge to his emotions and a bit of defiance in his eyes.

### Servant leadership: vision

More than one pastor has ended up feeling this way. Seminary graduates often enter pastoral ministry with idealistic visions of a spiritual ministry devoted largely to preparing rich and edifying sermons, giving wise counsel to lay leaders, and offering pastoral care and comfort to needy souls. After all, the call is to 'full-time ministry.' Sooner or later, these same pastors begin to realize that the congregation is reading from a different version of the original vision. 'Full time' is the name of the horse hitched to the cart with a dozen wheels with one or more dropping off at the most inopportune times, and 'minister' is the code word for the driver who also doubles as the mechanic.

The fundamental misconception with servant leadership, as reflected by the pastor cited above, is that one ends up being the servant of the people or the organization. This leads to the 'doormat' concept of leadership, where one lays down whatever dreams and plans one has and invites people to walk over them. "I am only the coach," one pastor said, "my people are the players." Or, to put it in more ecclesiastical terms, "I am only the pastor, my people are the ministers." This concept of servant leadership is really the abandonment of leadership. It leads to failure on the part of the leader and frustration among the members of the church.

Robert Greenleaf, who wrote the seminal work on servant leadership, made it clear that the leader is not subservient to the desires and goals of the organization, but is a servant of the mission of the organization. It is the vision of the specific

mission or goal of the organization, says Greenleaf, that marks the effective leader. “Foresight is the ‘lead’ that the leader has. When he loses this lead and events start to force his hand, he is leader in name only. He is not leading; he is reacting to immediate events and he probably will not long be a leader.”<sup>1</sup>

The congregation that called me to be their pastor when I graduated from seminary had been meeting in a temporary building for six months and looking to buy property. While preaching twice on Sunday (morning and evening) I assumed leadership of the church board and found myself negotiating for the purchase of the property, arranging for the financing, securing an architect and building contractor and then working alongside of the small crew of about a dozen men in our congregation every Saturday for almost a year putting up the first building. Hundreds of decisions had to be made, processed through the lay leadership, while avoiding the landmines of petty prejudices, passionately held opinions, and the power dynamics typical of strong egos!

## Servant leadership: power

I quickly realized that the major transition in my role as pastor was one of relinquishing the built-in power of the office of pastor in order to gain the authority of a pastoral leader. The temptation was to use a power-play when my authority was questioned. Transitioning into effective leadership meant letting go of power in order to define the vision in such a way that others were empowered to lead the way forward. This meant personal vulnerability (nothing to defend at the expense of another’s feelings) coupled with a persistent challenge to make the vision so compelling that it belongs to everyone (nothing to gain at the expense of another’s loss). I learned that effective leadership involves discipline that corrects disorder and direction that overcomes disorganization and confusion. Effective servant leadership means directing and coordinating the energies and resources of the people of God; this is being a ‘faithful steward’ of God’s vision.

## Servant leadership: spiritual gifts

When we lose the vision for God’s Kingdom we may be close to losing sight of the mission that transforms routine work into redemptive ministry. The gifts of the Spirit were as much for the edification of the minister as for the work of the ministry (Ephesians 4:1-16). Christ’s ministry was not first of all to meet the needs of the world, but to do the will of the Father. Jesus did not have to love the world more than the Father who sent him into the world (John 3:16). No task is merely routine, no position is merely administrative, no calling is merely an occupation when it is Christ’s on-going ministry to the Father for the sake of the world through the power of the Holy Spirit.

An effective servant leader must possess three things: a creative vision that inspires, a delegated power that enables, and a spiritual gift for ministry. Pastors are servant leaders of the people of God. They are not accountable by virtue of always having the right vision, but to submit their vision to the wisdom of God and be willing to abandon their own in favor of God’s. They are not accountable for every strategic plan, but that the plans are worked so as to lead to the will of God. They are not responsible to succeed at every point, but at every point to be accountable to the gift of the Spirit and the character of Christ in exercising that gift.

The final test of the servant leader is that the ‘little ones’ who belong to Christ are not despised and abused, for “in heaven, their angels continually see the face of

my father” (Matthew 18:10). The effective servant leader is not one who ‘works the angles,’ but who sees the angels. God’s servant leader does not stand between the people and God, but stands with the people as the faithful steward, to provide discipline and correction, and to prepare the way for the coming of the Lord.

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<sup>1</sup>Robert Greenleaf. *Servant Leadership* (New York: Paulist Press, 1977), p. 18. See also his book, *The Servant as Religious Leader* (Windy Row Press, 1982). On the vision of leadership see, Ray Anderson, *Minding God’s Business* (Eerdmans, 1986) pp. 66-68, and *The Soul of Ministry: Forming Leaders for God’s People* (Westminster, 1997), pp. 197-204.



## With Kigundu Ndwiga

*Kigundu Ndwiga  
Stewardship Director  
East Central Africa Division*



*Kigundu Ndwiga currently serves as the stewardship director and strategic planning coordinator for the East-Central Africa Division in Nairobi, Kenya. During his ministry, he has worked in many capacities such as conference executive secretary, departmental director, and Voice of Prophecy Bible Correspondent School supervisor. He also served as church pastor for the New Life Seventh-day Adventist Church in Nairobi. Elder Ndwiga's desire is to develop and implement a strong discipleship program to ground their two million plus membership in Christ and to assist the three unions in East-Central Africa to become union conferences by 2010. Elder Ndwiga and his wife, Mary, have two children: Wangari and Njuhi Ndwiga.*

**K**igundu, you have been elected as the new Stewardship Director of Eastern Africa Division,” was the news relayed by an ecstatic friend, Gideon Mutero that July 2000 morning. The unexpected call shook me to the core of my being. Overwhelmed with a sense of my inadequacy and inexperience, having only served as local conference stewardship director for only three and one-half months, I decided to abandon myself to God’s sufficient grace and accept the call.

### My Call to and Views on Stewardship

*Question: “Where did you begin?”*

My answer: I began with a three-day prayer and fasting retreat seeking God’s vision and strength.

*Question: “What else did you do?”*

My answer: I believe in seeking counsel from those with experience and wisdom. So, I approached Dr. Pardon K. Mwansa, currently one of the general vice-presidents of the General Conference, who had served as GC associate stewardship director and was the then president of EAD, an accomplished stewardship director in his own right and asked him, “What would you say is the secret of a successful stewardship ministry?”

*Question: “What words of wisdom did he share with you?”*

My answer: Elder Mwansa, who is skillful at painting mental pictures replied, “Feed the cow; enjoy the milk.” He told me that if I prayerfully pondered that adage, I would be successful in the stewardship ministry. He then prayed for me and gave me a picture of a cow.

*Question: “What stewardship insights did you learn from the adage and the picture of a cow?”*

My answer: Having grown up in rural Africa looking after cows, I was able to develop a stewardship philosophy which continues to influence my stewardship ministry to date. Time has just gone on to confirm the veracity of Elder Mwansa’s apt counsel. I am grateful for Elder Mwansa’s mentoring.

*Question: “What is your stewardship philosophy now?”*

My answer: One of the main reasons our stewardship endeavors do not bear much fruit is the fact that we focus on the milk and forget the cow. We may come up with fancy slogans and set tithing and offering goals to try to mobilize our members to be more faithful in giving, but unless we are willing to focus on improving the spirituality of our members, we will not succeed.

Faithfulness in stewardship is a fruit of authentic spirituality. If our members are to be faithful stewards, we must focus deliberately on helping our members plug into the power of the Holy Spirit who is the only source of authentic spirituality and challenge them to submit to the lordship of Jesus in all aspects of life.

To accomplish the above will involve a tremendous cost on our part. We must not only be content with going the second mile, but constrained by the love of Christ in our hearts for our members, we must be willing to go even ten miles if that is what it will take to assist members become faithful stewards.

*Question: “What are some of the issues you try to address in your stewardship ministry?”*

**SCRIPTURE:**  
**Proverbs 3:9**



My Answer: The greatest challenge facing the church in Africa is that of being self-supporting and being able to finance the ministry of the church. Because of the perennial cry for finances, the focus of stewardship has been tilted towards money at the expense of wholistic biblical stewardship. However, I have discovered the more I lift up Jesus and His sacrifice, the finances we seek come flowing into the “storehouse.” If encountering Christ changed the money-loving egocentric Zaccheus into a generous cheerful giver, I believe the same Christ is the key to faithfulness in stewardship and the self-support that we so seek.

*Question: “What formulates your stewardship strategy?”*

My Answer: I believe before we formulate any strategy, we must understand the needs we are addressing. To address the issue of faithfulness, we must understand the reason for unfaithfulness. It seems to me people are unfaithful for the following reasons:

- Some place their own priorities and values before the interests of Christ.
- Some have had a little or no education in Christian stewardship principles.
- Some have lost sight of the mission of their church.
- Some feel the programs of the church are not worthy of their support and sacrifice.
- Some have lost confidence in the way the church handles money.
- Some have lost confidence in leadership they do not perceive as visionary for people give to visions, not to people or organization.
- Some have real difficulty in managing their personal finances.

It is evident that to address the above reasons behind the unfaithfulness would require a multi-faceted approach to stewardship.

It is important also to underscore that, if there is going to be a revival of faithfulness in stewardship, it must happen at the local church. It is at the local church where all the resources come from. It is because of the mission of the local church that the church organization exists. What happens in our church organizations is a reflection of what happens at the local church because “the life of the body is in its cells. If the cells die, the body dies. If the cells are healthy, the body is healthy. When the cells multiply, the body grows.” *Seventh-day Adventist Minister’s Handbook*, p. 175.

*Question: “So you believe that if the stewardship ministry deliberately focused on revitalizing stewardship at the local church, there would be a revival in faithfulness?”*

My Answer: Yes, indeed.

*Question: “What then must the local church stewardship strategy include?”*

My Answer: I see four proven strategies that have personally worked for me in the local church. These strategies are geared towards raising the spiritual “temperature” in the local church, which is conducive for raising faithful stewards. These strategies are:

**Leadership strategies** which include: leadership commitment to stewardship, implementing spiritual leadership in the local church and using a team-work approach by establishing a stewardship and strategic plans committee.

**Spiritual strategies** which include spiritual disciplines like prayer, fellowship, witnessing, service, worship among others.

**Education strategies** which ensure that stewardship principles are taught systematically through all the venues and avenues available to the local church.

**Financial strategies** which include budgeting, internal controls and effective feedback to engender transparency hence build trust.

## Conclusion

My prayer is that the Lord will make stewardship a local church movement where our members see the importance of stewardship and initiate stewardship education programs at the local church without waiting for directions from “above.” We believe this is what God wills because “The greatest help that can be given to our people is to teach them to work for God and depend on him, not on the ministers” (7T 19).



## The Merit of Happiness

**Seth Leamon**

*Chaplain and Theology Teacher  
Mission College, Thailand*



*As teacher at Mission College, Thailand, Seth helps Christians and Buddhists alike to know God. A father with two children, in 2004 Seth went to Thailand to work for the GC Center for Ministry among Buddhists with the objective of finding ways to convey the love of Christ in the 10/40 window. Since 2004 he has continued this quest at Mission College. Prior to moving to Asia, Seth completed a Bachelors degree in Modern Language, and a Master of Divinity both from Andrews University, followed by four years spent as a pastor in the Michigan Conference of Seventh-day Adventists. Today Seth is involved in a verity of activities— from doing research, to writing articles and giving talks.*

**SCRIPTURE :**  
**2 Cor 3:1-3**

### Parasite utopia

Even though it had just rained, the air was warm, with precipitation dripping from the leaves of the ferns and trees that lined the steamy mountain trail. I was acutely aware of this not entirely pleasant fact as water began to run down my laboring back. I was leading the obligatory Sabbath walk for several guests that were gracing my house with their presence for the afternoon.

I found my mind wandering and wondering what the purpose of a walk was when all I really wanted to do was take a well earned respite from the press of the week.

“Only just this once would be nice” I thought to my self. “Oooo” cooed one lady “look at all the cute little worms.” This seemingly discordant element tugged at the edges of my otherwise engaged consciousness, finally pulling me firmly into the here and now.

Moments passed as I struggled fruitlessly to regain my mental composure, but all to no avail. I cast languid eyes back on the path, and noted with interest that in fact there were thousands of “little worms” covering the ground. With considerable alarm I realized that our erstwhile “cuties” were not stationary, but like an army were marching on our position.

Moving as fast as possible, the besieging creatures were literally throwing themselves inchworm style at our feet and legs. These weren’t worms they were leeches!

Yuck, there are few things I hate more than leeches. Once they catch a ride they really don’t like to get off their meal. They are like some nightmarish gum that as you are trying to get it off your shoe instead sticks to your hand all the time trying to bite you.

With considerable lack of grace, we began a most curious dance punctuated by discordant hoots and hollers. We had started our ill-fated journey in a most confident manner but our return to the head of the trail was far less decorous as we jerked and gesticulated attempting to forcefully remove our grasping pestilential cargo.

### The question of why

Upon arrival to the relative safety of our home the inevitable question came. “Why are you living in Thailand?” And as they looked around our small duplex I could see that their “eyes had been opened.”

No longer was this, “life in an exotic tourist destination,” this was rather, “life in a distant land with some apparently horrifying realities.” And in one form or another, our guests had finally hit the nail on the head.

Why would seemingly intelligent and potentially successful individuals sacrifice so much? And not just the inconsequential niceties but such essentials as money, home, family, possessions, retirement and of course Taco Bell.

If the truth were to be told I am not really a great proponent of sacrifice for the sake of sacrifice. And unlike our Buddhist neighbors who think we must really be gaining a lot of merit, I expect no special consideration from God. I have life to give and I give it freely.

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# young adult

This is not just some esoteric gift to God; this is a gift to those who are suffering around us. If one is giving to others only as some convoluted way to give to God, the “others” will notice and be amazingly unresponsive to our advances. If we follow the example of Christ, then to be Christian is to care for others and not to do good deeds for merit of some sort.

Aside from the thought that we must be really greedy for merit, our actions are almost incomprehensible to many in the Buddhist world. After all, those who are suffering are just living out the results of their evil actions whether in this life or the last. As such there is no such thing as injustice, and mercy is almost unheard of.

The reality of a life in Christ once understood makes Christianity seem unimaginably sweet but potentially far from the reality of every day life for the people of Thailand.

Following the example of Christ who came down to bridge the gap and show us the unimaginable love of God, we have come to live with the people of Thailand for the purpose of bridging the gap. Though it would be nice to say that it were, our presence in Asia is truly an unforeseen twist in the story of our lives.

## Living the call: authentic happiness

When one is approaching one’s life as a young person it is generally with a very interesting and potentially less than realistic view as to what the future will hold. As a young boy, I was first convinced that I would be a farmer on the great plains of the United States with coyotes howling on the wind as a perpetual reminder of the wonderfulness of my chosen life.

Later, beguiled by conventional wisdom, the benefits of medicine, law, and other fantastic possibilities filed before me in a seemingly unending barrage. So it is with interest I have found myself to be a pastor/theology teacher in Thailand and although I live a comparatively lower standard of living than those of my friends and family who are living those other lives in the west I can honestly say that I have never been happier.

There is a Chinese proverb that says, “If you want happiness for an hour, take a nap; if you want happiness for a day, go fishing; if you want happiness for a month, get married; if you want happiness for a year, inherit a fortune; if you want happiness for a life time help someone.”

Life can be short and self-centered, but I believe that the missing ingredient in most of our lives is sacrifice for a greater cause. I also believe that the greatest of causes is to help those in need be it physical, mental or spiritual. I finally believe that to give of ourselves freely and with out reservation to those in need is where we can find true happiness.

It is my wish that all would encounter true fulfillment by sacrificing for others.

*“If you want happiness for an hour, take a nap; if you want happiness for a day, go fishing; if you want happiness for a month, get married; if you want happiness for a year, inherit a fortune; if you want happiness for a life time help someone.”*



## The One With the Most Toys Wins

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*“Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moth and rust do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also” (Matthew 6:19-21).*

Imagine what it would be like to be rich. As a minister, that will take a lot of imagination. But try. The more you can get the feel of rich, the better you will understand the challenge of the words of Christ. To help you get into that mind frame, I want to share an email I got back in May of 1997. A professor at the University where I pastored sent it to me. Most emails I delete. Not this one.

The email was concerning the 97-98 basketball season for Michael Jordan. Just let these amazing numbers sink in. I will share it in the present tense. “Michael Jordan will make over \$300,000 dollars a game: \$10,000 dollars a minute, assuming he averages about thirty minutes a game. He will make \$178,000 dollars a day working or not. If he sleeps seven hours a night, he makes \$52,000 dollars every night while visions of sugar plums dance in his head.

If he goes to see a movie, it will cost him seven dollars, but he will make \$18,550 dollars while sitting there. (That’s some major popcorn money!) If he decides to have a five minute egg, he will make \$618 dollars while boiling it.

In one year he will make more than twice as much as all of our presidents for all of their terms combined. But get this. Michael Jordan would have to save 100% of his income for 270 years to have a net worth equivalent to that of Bill Gates. Geeks win!

### A rich young ruler

It is hard to even imagine that kind of money isn’t it? But try imagining having that kind of money and having Jesus ask you to give it up. In Matthew nineteen there is the famous encounter between the rich young ruler and Jesus. For much of my life I found it hard to relate to this young man. After all, he was rich, he was young and he ruled. For years I could only relate to one third of his description. Now, not even the young part fits!

I found it easy to pass over this encounter or write it off, as far as having very much in it for me. After all, I am a pastor that struggles with money issues, but not the issue of having too much of it. I think it’s easy for many of us to speed read right past this passage. To the casual glance, it doesn’t look like we have too much in common with this uncommon young man. To see just how much we have in common with him takes time.

It takes reading and praying over it carefully. When we do that, it is amazing how many scriptures come clear. Sometimes painfully clear. Maybe that is why we don’t spend a lot of time here. Things can become painfully clear here. Maybe the real reason we don’t spend a lot of time here is that this passage of scripture frightens us. This scripture scares us and we usually like to stick to scriptures that will scare others and not ourselves.

*And, behold, one came and said unto him, Good Master, what good thing shall I do, that I may have eternal life?*

*And he said unto him, Why callest thou me good? there is none good but one, that is, God: but if thou wilt enter into life, keep the commandments.*

**SCRIPTURE:**  
**Matt 19:16-21**

*He saith unto him, Which? Jesus said, Thou shalt do no murder, Thou shalt not commit adultery, Thou shalt not steal, Thou shalt not bear false witness,*

*Honour thy father and thy mother: and, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself.*

*The young man saith unto him, All these things have I kept from my youth up: what lack I yet?*

*Jesus said unto him, If thou wilt be perfect, go and sell that thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven: and come and follow me. (Matthew 19:16-21)*

*It becomes clear that the rich young man is willing to give Jesus a lot, but not everything. Not his toys.*

## Giving and holding

After reading Matthew 19:16-21, it seems clear that the rich young ruler is willing to give God a lot. He is willing to give Jesus his sincere questions, his full attention, and his respect. He is even willing to give his grade point average, his family tree and pedigree, his spotless history and citizenship grade. He doesn't even mind giving Jesus his church attendance and giving records.

But the point of this passage is not all the things the rich young ruler is willing to give for God. It is about what he isn't willing to give to God. You see, the point is that he isn't willing to give everything. There is something he is holding back. There is something that he is holding on to. There is something that is holding him back and that has a hold on him. That is what this passage is about.

And maybe that is the reason we don't like to spend too much time here. We are afraid of what Jesus might ask us to give up for him. Afraid of what it would mean to follow Him fully. Afraid of where He might lead us. Afraid of what He might ask us to do and what He might ask us to leave behind. Reading these verses, it becomes clear that the rich young man is willing to give Jesus a lot, but not everything. Not his toys. Not the login to his bank account. Not the key to his safe. Not his personal treasure. Not his heart. And that is really the heart of it all, isn't it? Jesus said, *"Where your treasure lies, there will your heart be also."*

For a few minutes, looking into Jesus eyes, the rich young man thinks he has it made. But Jesus eyes are searching more than the young man's handsome face and spotless exterior. Jesus is looking into his heart and He sees something the young man does not see. So He will help him gently. Then He will call him boldly.

But for all that he has and knows that he has done, he knows he is lacking something. He knows something is missing. The young man still doesn't get it. He should have but he doesn't see his true sinful condition. Yet, at the same time he feels that there is something missing, there is an emptiness.

Notice verse twenty.

*"The young man saith unto him, All these things have I kept from my youth up: what lack I yet?"*

He knows he is lacking something but he can't put his finger on it. There is a small place in his heart that is aching, hurting, empty. The natural thing is to try to fill the emptiness with something. The rich young ruler tries to fill it with stuff, but he can't. For there are empty places within the human heart that Jesus alone can fill. He doesn't need stuff, he needs a Savior. He needs Jesus, but the question is will he see that and then reach out for Him.



## The One With the Most Toys Wins (continued)

### The call

This isn't an ancient story. I have met hundreds of people who like this rich young ruler try to fill the emptiness of their soul with stuff. I see them at Wal-Mart, Sears, the Mall, trying to heal the pain of their emptiness with plastic.

He needs Jesus but will he realize that in time and choose Him? By the way if you have an emptiness that you are trying to fill with stuff perhaps you too need Him. Watch the master teacher at work. See how he handles the problem.

He goes deeper and gets closer to the emptiness within the rich young ruler's heart, the need.

*Jesus said unto him, If thou wilt be perfect, go and sell that thou hast, and give to the poor; and thou shalt have treasure in heaven: and come and follow me.*

I could not say this to my congregation or to my friends or enemies, only Jesus could. He gets to the real problem. We don't like to stay very long in this chapter at this verse. It scares us. It does me. I have so little. I want to hold on to what I got. Whether a rich young ruler or a poor young preacher. Yet, Jesus says:

*Go sell your possessions and give to the poor, And you will have treasure in heaven. Then Follow me.*

There it is in black and white. Clear as spring day. Jesus is after two things.

First: He wants the young man to know that he is not really perfect.

Second: He wants him to understand that as much as he loves Jesus (or claims that he does), Jesus will not take second place in the young man's life. Discipleship, following Jesus is all or nothing.

### Idle worship and hypocrisy

Jesus is saying to the young man something He said long ago. In the very beginning of our sinning.

*Thou shalt have no other Gods before me.*

In other words you cannot serve two masters. He wants this young man as he wants us to know that you can't save yourself. Keeping the commandments is not enough. There is something more to it than a legal commitment. Love must enter into the agreement. Jesus puts his finger on the real problem.

Amazing, the insight of Jesus. He sees beneath the surface. He gets down to the depths of the heart and tells the young man that as well behaved as he is, he is still a idol worshipper. Jesus wants him to know unequivocally that he is still a conservative pagan, a well behaved legalist a self righteous sinner, a man in need of salvation.

Amazing, the courage of Jesus. He wants the man to know that he needs to follow Jesus wholeheartedly. Jesus will not play second string. And will not play the religious game of hypocrisy.

### Playing the game

It is easy for us like the rich young ruler to play games with Jesus.

I don't know what games you play. It may be the stock market, play the field, the martyr, the sinner, spiritual hide and seek. Maybe you play spiritual yo-yo. Or



judge and jury or critic or gossip. There are other games religious young rulers and old rulers play. Maybe you are playing church cop, or church skeptic, maybe you play wounded or you pout or feel sorry for yourself or play cool. Pastors, maybe you even play God. But God will not play games. He knows how serious you are and knows when you are just playing games.

Perhaps that is why we are afraid of this passage, and do not linger in this chapter at these verse very long. For here in this place we see that God won't play games, yet we like to fool ourselves but we don't fool Him.

This story is so compelling because it is so insightful into our own human nature. Like the rich young man we act out a part and obey the law but still will not let go of what really holds us and keeps us from following Him. Through His word I am sure that each of us have a game we play and a choice we must make.

I don't know what your game is. But I do know that the rich young ruler's was Monopoly. But then Jesus came along and said two words that threatened his game, two words that could be wipe him off the Monopoly board. Looking at him in love Jesus said:

*"Follow me."*

The rich young ruler had a choice. Jesus will not force you to leave your game. He will just ask. Jesus did not give him a Halvorsen look. He gave him a heavenly look of love, and said the words, gave him the choice.

*"Follow me."*

The young man looked down at the board. He looked at all his money, stacked so neatly and so high, he saw all of his land. His houses and hotels, and he chose. There were tears in his eyes, but he chose.

He decided to keep playing.

Ellen White in that beautiful book entitled, *The Desire of Ages* captured this story in one sentence.

*He loved the gifts of God more than he loved the Giver. (Oh my. Oh no.)*

Jesus answered, if you want to be perfect:

*Go sell your possessions and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven: then come follow me. When the young man heard this, he went away sad, because he had great wealth" (Matthew 19:22).*

## Final call

He walked away from Jesus, so he could keep his stuff. That rich young ruler, will probably be, one of the best behaved, best mannered, and best dressed men in hell. But that won't matter will it? Jesus said, *"What profit is it, if you gain the whole world and lose your own soul?"*

And, Jesus never said anything he did not mean. Do you see the nice young man, in the nice suit? He's walking away from Jesus. Do not follow him, he is lost! Jesus had looked deeply into his eyes and saw his heart, and Jesus knew what the young man needed. Jesus said gently to him, let go of your stuff, let go of the game, then come and follow me.

Jesus was offering him discipleship. He was calling him to real life, an abundant life. He was calling him to eternal life. It was really what the young man

wanted and needed. But when Jesus called, the young man looked down at the board. He looked at all his money, stacked so high and neat. He saw all of his land, houses and hotels and decided to roll the dice a few more times rather than follow Jesus to and through eternity.

Whether you are serving as a pastor, stewardship leader, or layman, I don't know what game you play. I do not know what you are holding on to, or that is holding on to you. But Jesus calls you gently, calmly but authoritatively to true discipleship. While there is a lot that Jesus will take. There is one thing that he will not take—and that's second place.

*While there is a lot that Jesus will take. There is one thing that he will not take—and that's second place.*

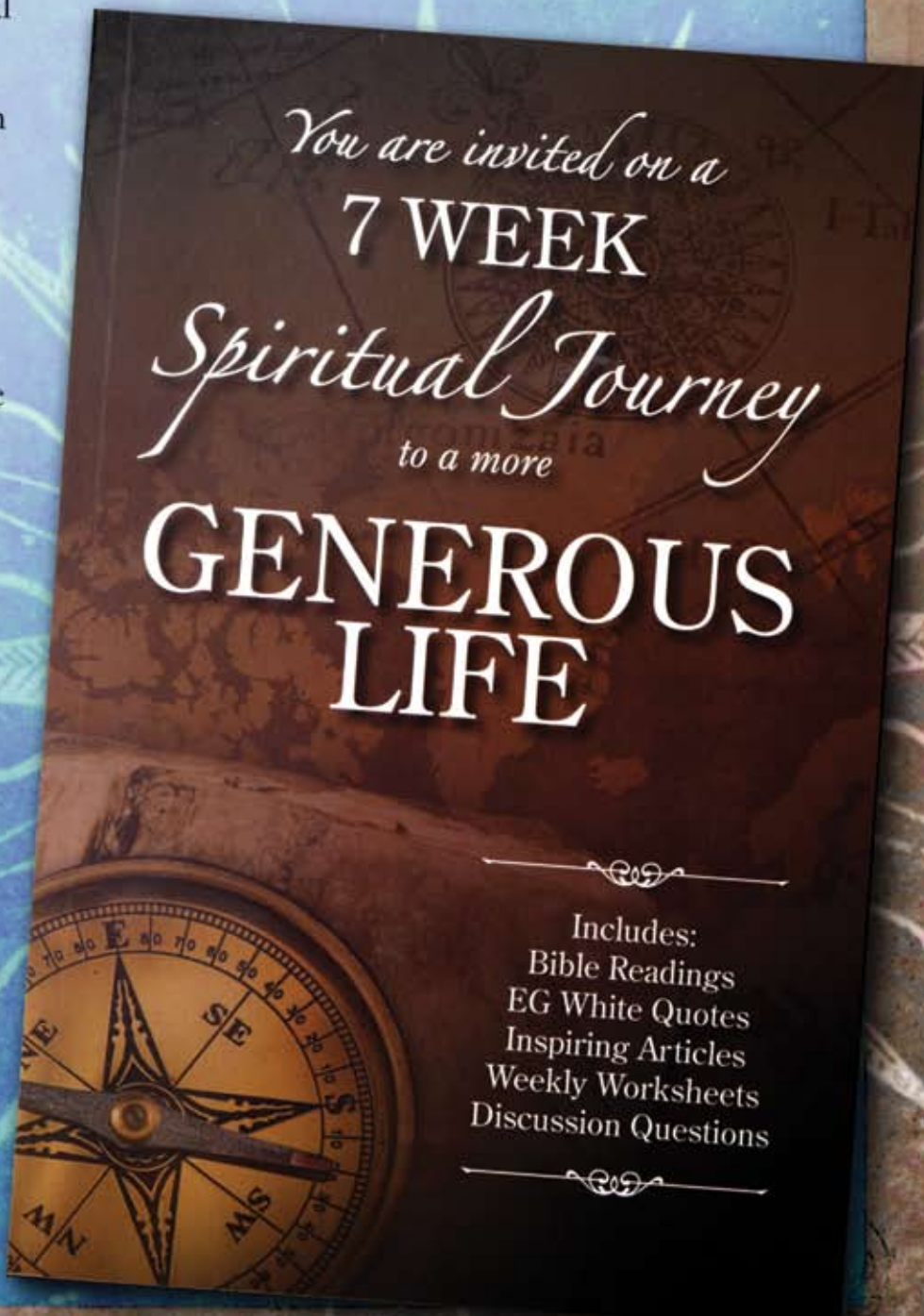
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