



DYNAMIC Steward

living • submitting • abiding • giving

October-December, 2008

Sacred Eloquence

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Volume 12 ■ Number 4

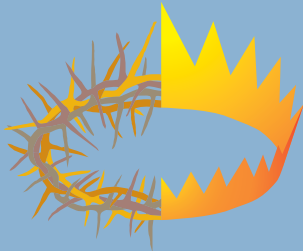


So shall my word be
that goes out
from my mouth;
It shall not
return to me empty,
But it shall accomplish
that which I purpose,
and succeed in the thing
for which I sent it.

ISAIAH 55:11 NRSV

DYNAMIC Steward

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Exploring partnership with God

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inside ds

This year-end issue of *Dynamic Steward* celebrates and presents the winners and honorable mentions that have resulted from our “Sacred Eloquence” Preachers and Writers Contest.

What a blessing it has been to receive the entries from our world divisions via email, fax or hand delivered. Each sermon has been worthy and reflective of deep thought, convictions and implications about stewardship.

The task of selecting our winners demonstrated that we have talent and gifts that are being powered by the Spirit with passion and persuasion. It is with deep appreciation to each participant that we say thank you for your contribution.

Commenting on the passage of Isaiah 55:11, J. Alec Motyer explicates that the Word of God “comes from the Lord himself and is the Lord’s chosen instrument to achieve his purposes. The Bible reveals his thoughts and ways, sets his targets, voices his promises and is powerful to achieve what it expresses” (*Isaiah, an Introduction & Commentary*).

Furthermore, the Word of the Lord does not return empty rather it produces transformation of heart, soul and life. It is effective in the mission of God, not because “the sinner responds and uses words of penitence and faith but because God has spoken” (ibid.).

The reformer Martin Luther also emphasized the significance of the proclaimed Word by drawing attention to the fact that—“when a minister was privileged to preach the Word of God, he was doing the same work for which Christ was ordained; for, as Luther loved to emphasize, the ministry of Jesus was a ministry of the oral Word” (Paul Althaus, *The Theology of Martin Luther*).

Therefore, in the sacred task of proclamation, God’s Word goes forth by means of men and women preachers and writers who embody the Word of God giving it expression in Sacred Eloquence. They do so as stewards of the gospel story.

In reference to our contest winners, the first place writer shared that his sermon, “What More Can We Be?”, was composed with his “total conviction, believing that stewardship is truly the basis of Christian life.” He also explained that it had been written for a general audience “in the context of the Philippine Adventist churches.” It is a fine exposition of stewardship that demonstrates much work done to define, explain and makes a call to choose Christian stewardship.

Gracefully written our second place winner points to the apostle Paul as a role model of stewardship as he expounds in “Secrets to Successful Stewardship.”

Creative, timely and insightful our third place winner focused on “Stewardship and the Family.” We have also included two honorable mentions thus continuing to share from the excellent selection that made our choosing winners an inspiring yet challenging task.

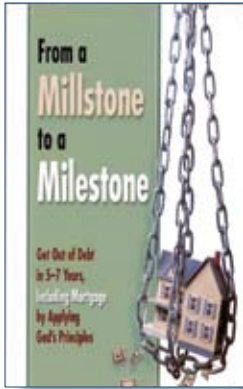
Reflecting upon this last quarter of the year, I would also like to acknowledge and extend a note of gratitude to our global stewardship leadership, their faithfulness, and inspiring efforts.

It is a joy to serve with you and I hope to meet many more of you in the coming year! As always I remain,

Alongside you in His service,



resources

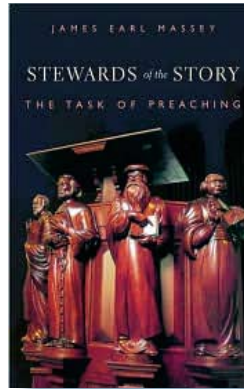


From a Millstone to a Milestone
by Bob Marett
Forward by John Cummuta
IMD Press
Westminster, Colorado
Revised Edition 2008 US \$19.95

From this book you will learn not only the tough critical, foundational principles needed to succeed, but it also addresses the practical areas of: credit and debit cards; consolidation loans; emergencies; mortgages; car loans and leases; and much, much more. You'll discover a unique process designed to get anyone out of debt by applying the principles found in the Word of God. To order go to <http://www.imdpress.com/>.



Creating a Climate for Giving
by Donald W. Joiner
Discipleship Resources
Nashville, Tennessee
Reprinted 2002 US \$12.00



Stewards of the Story: The Task of Preaching
by James Earl Massey
Westminster John Knox Press
Louisville, Kentucky
2006 US \$16.95

In this insightful book, James Earl Massey meditates on the preacher's call to be a steward of the gospel story. Through his analysis of four elements of the Christian sermon the recital of the biblical narrative; the rhetoric of recasting the biblical message for our time; the rights that accompany the preacher's task; and the realities, both divine and human, that inform a sermon Massey provides practical guidance for all preachers entrusted to share the gospel story with their congregations. This book also features six of Massey's own sermons that illustrate how one might preach as a steward of The Story. To order go to www.ppcbooks.com/ppcbooks/wjkmain.asp.

The author states, this book is about church leaders taking responsibility not only for managing the finances of the church but also for creating Christian philanthropists. That means taking responsibility for creating systems, raising funds, and funding ministry so that church members learn to be givers and have opportunities to give with excitement for the ministry of Jesus Christ through the church. To order go to www.discipleshipresources.org.



Basic Trek: Venture into a World of Enough
edited by Dave Schrock-Shenk
Herald Press
Scottsdale, Pennsylvania
2002 US \$10.99

An excellent stewardship resource for young adults and small groups. *Basic Trek: Venture into the World of Enough* a four week "trek" that starts each day with a story and a scripture passage followed by reflection questions to consider and actions to try. A creative approach that explores the question "what is enough?" 'Powerful,' 'provocative,' 'spiritual,' 'engaging,' and 'exciting,' state readers of *Basic Trek*. To order or request information call 1-800-759-4447 or go to www.amazon.com.



*Erika F. Puni, Director
General Conference Stewardship*



While conducting a stewardship education program in a major city church, a local pastor told me that he had not preached a stewardship sermon in the past two years of his ministry. His reason for not preaching on the subject related to a perceived “conflict of interest” in the minds of some church members. Some members believed the reason why pastors preached on stewardship was because they were paid from tithe funds. If this was the only reason why pastors preached and taught on the subject of stewardship, then I would be concerned myself. However, I know that stewardship is more than tithes and offerings.

Stewardship is an all inclusive response from the believer’s heart for all that God has done through His Son, Jesus Christ. Stewardship is about the Lordship of Jesus in all areas of our lives as stewards and disciples, and this is why it is imperative for ministers to preach on this subject on a regular basis.

The sermon as a spiritual tool

In stewardship education, the sermon is a tool for communicating spiritual values and biblical themes to followers of Christ. The potential and capacity of a sermon to influence people’s worldview and core beliefs, for example, are inherent in its very nature as a communication instrument.

However, the sermon is no ordinary means for communicating information. This medium allows for God to speak directly or indirectly to listeners and readers on the basis of His Word as articulated by the speaker or writer. This is an untapped power of influence that pastors and lay leaders could use to a great effect in promoting stewardship as a Christian lifestyle.

Through the sermon, church members are reminded of their spiritual responsibilities to God as Creator and Owner of the universe. Through the sermon, believers are placed in an open field of Biblical learning to explore and experience the freshness of God’s love in new ways. Through the sermon, God reaches out and touches human hearts in a personal manner. Through the sermon, seekers of truth are affirmed and encouraged in their encounter with God. Through the sermon, followers of Jesus are inspired and challenged to respond to Him in new ways of service and at new levels of sacrifice.

The sermon moves listeners into doers

Peter’s preaching on the day of Pentecost as recorded in Acts 2 has many components of a sermon that are worth noting, particularly its effect on people. The first notable factor is the presence of God in the context and process of the sermon delivery.

The second important factor as demonstrated in this sermon was Peter’s constant focus and reference to Jesus. This was his subject and purpose for preaching. “Men of Israel, listen to this: Jesus of Nazareth was a man accredited by God to you by miracles, wonders and signs” Acts 2:22 (NIV). “God has raised this Jesus to life, and we are all witnesses of the fact” Acts 2:32 (NIV). “Therefore let all Israel be assured of this: God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ” Acts 2:36 (NIV).

In the sermon, Jesus must be presented to the listening and reading audience as the Incarnate of God and the only answer to our human questioning.

A third significant factor in Peter’s preaching is the fact that his sermon was a testimony of his life experience with the Living Christ (Acts 2:32). A powerful



sermon, therefore, is one where the preacher or writer is telling his or her own story of personal encounter and victory in Jesus.

The fourth factor and one that is a fundamental of any sermon is the recognition that this medium of communication has to do with the exposition of the Word of God—the Bible. The sermon is a God given opportunity to open up the riches of His treasures in scriptures to those who are willing to learn and accept His offer of grace.

It is a spiritual tool that can move individuals from being unbelievers to followers of Christ. In this event, for example, not only were people's hearts convicted by the power of the Holy Spirit (Acts 2: 37), but three thousand of them made a life changing decision to accept Jesus as their Savior and Lord. They were baptized and became members of the church (Acts 2:41). This kind of impact and result can only happen when the Bible is preached and Jesus is lifted up.

... the sermon is a tool for communicating spiritual values and biblical themes to followers of Christ.

stewardship window

news from the director's desk ...

ECD Stewardship Advisory & Certification Program



Participants at the ECD Stewardship Advisory and Certification Program at Dar-es-Salaam in Tanzania. The GC director is seated fourth from the right.

About sixty participants (East Central Africa Division [ECD] union Stewardship directors and conference/mission stewardship directors within Tanzania), including administrators (presidents, secretaries, and treasurers of local conferences/missions and the union), attended the East Central Africa Division Stewardship Advisory and the Level Two Certification Program at

Dar-es-Salaam, Tanzania, from June 21-28, 2008.

A key part of the training was the involvement of each participant in preaching every night, including the two Sabbaths in an assigned church, and visiting members together with local elders at some time of the day or night.

These engagements with the local churches in the city were an opportunity to provide spiritual renewal and stewardship education for church members while giving the team front line ministry contact with God's people in Tanzania.

first place sermon

What More Can We Be?

Paoring L. Ragui

Vice-President for Student Services & Public Relations

Adventist International Institute of Advanced Studies

Silang, Cavite, Philippines



Paoring L. Ragui hails from the Manipur State of India. He received his BA degree from Spicer Memorial College and his doctorate degree in Pastoral Studies from Southeast Asia Graduate School of Theology in Singapore. In 1979 he commenced serving at Adventist International Institute of Advanced Studies (AIAS) in the Philippines in different capacities, including Director of Admissions and Records and Assistant Professor. He is presently serving as Vice-President for Student Services and Public Relations. He is an ordained minister whose passions in the ministry are evangelism and prison ministry. He is married. His wife hails from the Philippines. They have four children.

SCRIPTURE:
Matthew 25:23

This sermon addresses three basic questions. It is my prayer that our Lord will speak to us and help us understand the true meaning of Christian stewardship.

1. What is Christian stewardship?
2. Who and what are involved in Christian stewardship?
3. What will be the reward of a faithful steward?

Definition of Christian stewardship

A good definition is vital to a clear understanding of the subject matter. So let us define Christian stewardship.

I will join with Elder Mel Rees, the former GC Stewardship Director, in stating that “stewardship is not a synonym for money.... It is a relationship.”¹ A relationship between God, the Creator, and the human, the created being. Elder Rees emphasized that until this is recognized and accepted, a person will never understand the real meaning of Christian stewardship.²

Random House Dictionary defines a *steward* as “a person who is entrusted to take charge or manage property and finance, or administers anything as the agent of others.”³

The second word, “Christian” is a simple word. It comes from the Greek word *Christianos*, “a follower of Christ.” It was used first in Antioch of Syria to describe the disciples of Jesus Christ.⁴

So a Christian steward is a person who is a follower of Jesus Christ, who has been entrusted by God to manage, oversee, take charge or to care for what God has entrusted to him or her.

Who and what are involved in Christian stewardship?

The answer to this question is: God and human kind, based on a mutual relationship between them. Yet, how does this work?

First, one recognizes that God is the Creator of the universe, including human kind. God owns everything, the psalmist declared, “the earth is the Lord’s and everything in it” (Psalm 24:1, 2).

Second, one recognizes that human beings were created by God in His own image (Genesis 1:26; 2:7), and they were entrusted to manage all that God had made (Genesis 1:28).

Scripture tells us that the first human beings were to have dominion over the fish of the sea, the birds of the air, the cattle, and every creeping thing on the earth (Genesis 1:26). Adam was also asked to give them names (Genesis 2:20).

God’s ownership and our role as caretakers includes every aspect of our life on earth. It is both a blessing and a responsibility. Dr. Angel Rodriguez in his summary note puts it well: “We work together with God. We are stewards of our lives. Since we live within time and space, we are also stewards of our time and our environment. We were created in God’s image. This image is what we are and finds expression in every aspect of our being. We are, therefore, stewards of our bodies, of our spiritual life, of our mental and intellectual capacities, and of our social being.”⁵

Reflecting practically, we can ask, Who is this God? Do I really know Him? The Bible describes Him as the great God, the “Great I Am” (Exodus 3:14) meaning, He was God, He is God, and He will be God, the Yahweh of Israel (Isaiah 43:3, 15). In creating the world, He simply spoke and things came in to being (Genesis 1:1, 3, 20).

We don’t know what powerful language He might have used—Aramaic, English, Greek, Hebrew, Hindi, Pilipino, or Spanish. The Bible simply affirms that things came into existence.

What a powerful God! The Prophet Isaiah gives Him the titles the Mighty God and Everlasting Father and Prince of Peace (Isaiah 9:6). God also sustains us (Psalm 3:5). In addition, this God loves us greatly and He sent his only Son to die for our sins. If we believe in Him, He will save and give us eternal life (John 3:16; Romans 6:23).

Therefore, we need to affirm God’s goodness to us. He has given us life, health, family, friends, money, time, and salvation. We ask, what should be our response to Him? What more could we ask of Him?

Yet, God asks of us only one thing—“faithfulness.” That is faithfulness to Him in being faithful stewards (Matthew 25:23) that includes returning his tithes and giving offerings (Malachi 3:10), keeping our body healthy by living a healthy lifestyle (1 Corinthians 3:16, 17; 10:31), managing our God-given talents and time diligently, using and improving them by sharing our love and time to minister to others, and to truly worship Him. With the Holy Spirit working in us, our gratitude to God should be deep, our love for Him supreme, and our loyalty to Him, undivided. How else could it be?

What will be the reward of a faithful steward?

While a steward is a manager, a superintendent, a servant, a caretaker, the designation is used only in response to what God has given him. We become good Christian stewards not because we want to be saved but because Christ first saved us. It is God who first does great things for us, giving us life, wealth, health and everything. We only respond to His goodness. Therefore, whatever a steward does is his natural task to be faithful to God (1 Corinthians 4:2). And if we are faithful, Christ will one day soon say to us, “well done, thou faithful servant, enter thou into the joy of the Lord” (Matthew 25:23).

There is a story told of a young student who asked his teacher if a good Christian would be rewarded with a home in the new earth. The teacher replied, “maybe not, because God owns the universe and everything in it, however, we will have life tenancy. Do you think that will be long enough?” Think about it, life tenancy...throughout the ceaseless ages of eternity. What a reward for those who are faithful stewards!

Summary and facets of stewardship

Let us review the many facets of Christian stewardship.

1. *Christian stewardship* is the foundation of faithful Christian living. Therefore, it is vital to understand the basic principles.

2. *Christian stewardship* is based on a relationship between God and human kind in partnership.

3. *Christian stewardship* also involves giving. We return our tithes and give other offerings to support God’s work.

4. *Christian stewardship* calls for keeping our bodies healthy and strong. Also, to diligently use our God-given time and talents to His glory.

5. *Christian stewardship* calls for us to love and worship God and serve our fellowmen.

6. *Christian stewardship* has rewards. First, the future words of commendation from our Master, “faithful servant.” Secondly, there will be a heavenly home, and lastly, eternal life, a life long tenancy.

Conclusion

Claire L. Eva, the former editor of *Dynamic Steward* magazine in her farewell editorial message, appealed to us, saying, “He (God) is in us, may we serve Him from this moment on, in greater ways than we ever could imagine.”⁶ Consequently, let us determine to be faithful stewards of the great God that we may enter into His joy and live with Him throughout eternity. What more can we be?

¹Rees, Mel. *Basic Stewardship Manual* (General Conference of SDA, Far Eastern Division, Department of Church Ministries,) Singapore, 1990, p. 3.

²Ibid., p. 3.

³The Random House College Dictionary rev. ed., (New York: Random House, 1975), p. 1289.

⁴SDA Bible Dictionary, vol. 8 (Washington, DC; Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1979), p. 205.

⁵Angel Rodriguez, *Stewardship Roots, Dynamic Steward*, (1994), p. 16.

⁶Eva, Claire L., ‘Servant or Friend or Brother?’ [Editorial], *Dynamic Steward*, vol. 10, no. 4 (2006), p. 2.

second place sermon

Secrets to Successful Stewardship

Melak Alemayehu Tsegaw
Stewardship Director
Central Ethiopia Field
East-Central Africa Division



Melak Alemayehu currently serves as the Stewardship Director in the Central Ethiopia Field. Presently, Melak is working on a Masters degree in Pastoral Theology at Adventist University of Africa.

The Merriam-Webster Dictionary defines stewardship as, “conducting, supervising, or managing of something, *especially the careful and responsible management of something entrusted to one's care*” (italics added).

This noble concept that evidently entails trustworthiness, heavy responsibility and accountability may be unpopular among the self-centered and in an individualistic society where only “I, me, and myself” seem to matter. Nonetheless, whether we recognize it or not, human beings are stewards of the Most High who is the creator and the rightful owner of everything in the universe. The word of God is unambiguous in affirming this truth: “The earth is the LORD's, and everything in it, the world, and all who live in it” Psalm 24:1. Needless to say, if one assumes the position of a steward one important thing that is required of him is faithfulness (1 Corinthians 4:2).

Success in stewardship can be measured by the degree of recognizing and faithfully fulfilling the owner's desire in all respects. Therefore, it is important to search for the secret to successful stewardship. And one of the most accomplished stewards in the history of the Bible, the apostle Paul, could serve as a role model in our search for these traits.

When we take a closer look at Paul's life and teachings, we discover the following four secrets to successful stewardship.

1 *Admit that you are not your own.* The apostle is not ashamed to declare that he has no rulership over his own life, rather points to Jesus as the one owning his life and living in Him. Here are his words: “I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me” (Galatians 2:20-21). Paul counts himself as a dead person when it comes to leading his life and acknowledges Jesus, who gave his life to redeem humanity from the slavery of sin and Satan, as the rightful owner of everything. Hence, he reminds each one of us, “You are not your own; you were bought at a price” (1 Corinthians 6:19-20).

A steward cannot be successful without recognizing the importance of submission to the true owner. Let's pause for a moment and ask ourselves the following questions: Do we consider ourselves as managers of God's property, which includes of our very selves? Do we search for the will of God in our daily lives and in the decisions that we make so that we may fulfill his desire? Successful stewardship begins with admitting the fact that we are not the owners but stewards.

2 *Understand the love of Christ.* In whatever he did, Paul's motivation came from his understanding of the supreme love of Christ. “For Christ's love compels us, because we are convinced that one died for all, and therefore all died” (2 Corinthians 5:14 NIV). And it is this heart that is filled with the love of Jesus that motivates us to be good stewards. It can indeed overflow with selfless deeds which become a blessing to our fellow humans as well as capture the pleased eyes of God. On the contrary, any good work which doesn't spring from this love is a short-lived conditional love and a fruit of hypocrisy. And God abhors it.

Recognizing the importance, Paul prays for us so that we may experience this secret of successful stewardship. “And I pray that you, . . . may . . . grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ” (Ephesians 3:17-19 NIV).

- The love of Jesus is so wide that it encircles the whole world (John 3:16).
- The love of Jesus is so long that it lasts forevermore (Jeremiah 31:3).

SCRIPTURE :
1 Corthians 4:2

- The love of Jesus is so deep that it stooped down from heavenly court to the shameful death of the cross (Philippians 2: 6-8).
- The love of Jesus is so high that it raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms (Ephesians 2:6).

When we understand this love we will consider our stewardship activities as a tremendous privilege rather than as a mere drudgery.

3 *Recognize your accountability.* Paul recognized the fact that he will one day give account, on whatever he owed, to his Master who entrusted him. He unequivocally asserts this fact when he writes to other fellow believers, “For we will all stand before God’s judgment seat” (Romans 14:10-11). Paul elaborates the purpose of our appearance before the judgment seat of God, “For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive what is due him for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad” (2 Corinthians 5:10). While the importance of accountability is starkly evident, the lack thereof in a steward’s life leads to negligence in accomplishing the will of the master.

Paul was so confident about what he will eventually receive when he appears before God’s judgment throne, for he has lived every moment of his life as a steward with a sense of responsibility and accountability. Sure enough, he has the following to say as he was about to conclude his earthly journey: “I have fought the good fight; I have finished the race; I have kept the faith” (2 Timothy 4:7-8).

What will our final words be when we face the inevitable death at the end of our earthly journey? Will we be able to repeat Paul’s same words? If so, it would mean that we have cultivated the sense of accountability in our lives. If not, it is now time that we give this important issue a serious thought.

4 *Declare that you can do all things through Christ who strengthen you.* When we listen to stewardship sermons or read books that list numerous “DOs” and “DON’Ts”, we become so overwhelmed to the point of feeling inadequate. Subsequently, a seed of doubt is planted in our mind, and the involuntary “I just can’t do it!” response inescapably takes a strong hold. And this humbling experience which leads to admitting that we cannot do things on our own is not necessarily a bad thing. In fact, it could be a step in the right direction. Jesus himself has said it straightforwardly, “...apart from me you can do nothing” (John 15:5). Ellen White aptly comments on this point, ‘your promises and resolutions are like a rope of sand.’

However, what is equally true yet more uplifting is recognizing the fact that “[We] can do everything through him who gives [us] strength” (Philippians 4:13). This is indeed our best armor against doubt, unbelief, spiritual deficiency and inadequacy, which surely enables us to affirm, as the Apostle Paul has, “Apart from Christ we can do nothing. But through him we do everything!”

This truth is so vital that all others cluster around it. It is through Him we recognize the heavenly knowledge that we are not of ourselves but His. It is through Him we can understand His wondrous love that surpasses knowledge. It is through him that we can recognize our responsibility and accountability. And His strength never runs out or fails us. He is a faithful God who empowers his stewards to be faithful. Glory be to his name!

The apostle is not ashamed to declare that he has no rulership over his own life, rather points to Jesus as the one owning his life and living in Him.



third place sermon

Stewardship and the Family

Mundia Liywalii

Stewardship Director

Zambia Union Conference

Southern Africa-Indian Ocean Division



Mundia Liywalii currently serves as the Stewardship Director in the Zambia Union Conference. Mundia was born forty years ago in the town of Senanga, located over 400 miles from Lusaka the capital of Zambia. He grew up in a family of nine. Mundia has been in the Stewardship Department for the past twelve years the first eight years at the West Zambia Field Office and the past four years at the Zambia Union Conference. Mundia holds a BA degree in Theology from Solusi University and is currently pursuing a Master's degree in Pastoral Theology at Adventist University of Africa. Mundia is married to a teacher and they have four children.

For a long time stewardship has been confined to the church and individuals. But nothing that is not domesticated at home succeeds. Unless the builders of the home and their children accept stewardship as a family affair, faithfulness in stewardship will remain “pie in the sky.”

Stewardship in the family

Many people grow cold feet when the topic of stewardship is mentioned. This has made it difficult to teach stewardship to members of our church. If an announcement is made in a church with membership well above five hundred that there will be a stewardship study in the afternoon, only between twenty and fifty members will show up. Sometimes I feel that if stewardship was a clothing factory, it would have long folded due to lack of customers. This is further validated by low levels of participation of members in returning of tithe and offerings.

However, there are members found all over the world who continue to be faithful in their stewardship of resources as verified by commitment to returning God's portion. But the question is where would the church be if all the members of the church remained faithful to their baptismal vows?

Probably the failure in stewardship not only of resources but other areas might be that this very important subject has remained in custody of the church and has not been allowed to change residence. It is talked about, preached about, prayed about in church but not made a family business.

Stewardship of the body (1Corinthians 3:16-17)

People who gather every Sabbath for worship in our churches are first family members before they are a church community. The average number of hours a person is at church might be six hours per week compared to one hundred and sixty two hours spent at home. This then requires that the home where family members spend most of the time be made the center of stewardship education.

Many of those who abuse substances do so within the precincts of the home. Alcohol abuse in most cases takes place in the presence of family members. The ravaging effects of alcohol are seen in ruined families, destroyed marriages and loss of jobs. Babies are born with Fetus Alcohol Syndrome in the family circle. These and many other effects would be reduced if stewardship of body was brought home.

Tobacco in all its forms is taken by family members in the presence of each other. The effects of smoking are well chronicled everywhere and yet in some instances family members wait until the church's Health Ministry presents a topic on the dangers of smoking. How many family members would still be alive were they helped by those who are their next of kin? The question is what am I doing for my family members to be all round faithful stewards?

Stewardship of talents (Matthew 25:14-30)

Before talents are identified at church, they are first seen in the family circle. If family members cultivate and nurture the talents in their members from childhood, the talents blossom to maturity. But if they are stifled, then the church will miss out on those talents because they will not come to public notice.

SCRIPTURE:
Proverbs 3:9

Members of the family are therefore themselves stewards of each other. Before the church gives encouraging words to a budding talent in anyone, family members should be foremost in doing so. A talent appreciated by those outside this inner circle while ignored by family members will take long to mature. A family member with a talent that is ignored at home asks the question “if what I have is good, why don’t I hear that from my parents and siblings?” The family can enhance or stifle talent development. This too is a proof that stewardship should be the domain of the home and not left to church.

Stewardship of the time (Ecclesiastes 3:1)

Many churches have difficulty encouraging their members to come early for services. Many church boards and business meetings are called off because people are late. Sabbath schools in many of our churches begin with very few people. The pews are fully occupied only at eleven o’clock, the magic hour of Adventists. But where do people learn to be punctual or tardy? Is it not at home? Where do we learn to value time? Is it not at home? Where do children learn that time has no value? Is it not in the home?

Before the church complains of tardiness, it should shift its stewardship agenda, from the church to the family.

Stewardship of resources (Proverbs 3:9)

Resources of all sorts are acquired and used in the family. It is in the family that plans to acquire wealth are hatched and executed. It is in the family where members learn habits of thrift or not. It is in the family where members learn lessons of generosity or stinginess. It is in the family where members learn to be earners and not mere spenders of what others have earned.

If this is how important the family is, then every family should not leave any stone unturned in bringing stewardship in the family. The story of the widow who gave all she was to live on, made that decision at home not at church. The woman who broke the alabaster jar of very costly perfume, made that decision at home. Ananias and Sapphira as Acts 5 indicates made the decision to keep back the farm proceeds at home. The church was just a place where a scheme executed in the family was fulfilled.

Those who fail to return tithe do so in the family not at church. Those who do not give offerings cheerfully as a show of gratitude do so in the family at home and not at church. Those who use tithe to make themselves comfortable do not sit at the table discussing that at church but do so in the comforts of their homes. It should be stated that even those few faithful members who return tithe, do so at home and not at church. The church is just a destination of the family faithfulness.

Conclusion

Stewardship will not succeed at church, stewardship will not flourish in individuals, stewardship will not be a way of life among the members of the church, until it is domiciled in the family and the time to do so is now.

Probably the failure in stewardship not only of resources but other areas might be that this very important subject has remained in custody of the church and has not been allowed to change residence.



honorable mention

Stewardship and the Plan of Redemption

Reto Mayer

Secretary-Treasurer

French-Italian Swiss Conference

Euro-Africa Division



Reto Mayer has been the Secretary-Treasurer of the French-Italian Swiss Conference since 1992. In 2005 he became the Vice-President of the Swiss Biblical Society. Reto was born in Schaffhausen, Switzerland, in 1960. At an early age he moved with his parents to Gland where he would later engage himself as youth leader in his local Seventh-day Adventist church. After a year in Newbold College (England) learning English, he attended the Theological Seminary at Collonges-sous-Salève in France, where he obtained his degree in Theology. Before joining the Conference leadership, he worked as a local pastor in several cities in Switzerland. Reto is married to Lorena and they have two daughters, Stephanie and Annatina.

And whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him. Colossians 3:17 NKJV

The question

Reflecting on this verse as a twenty-first century Christian, I cannot help but ask, do we earn our money “in the name of the Lord Jesus?” Do we build our home “in the name of the Lord Jesus?” Do we live our life “in the name of the Lord Jesus?” What about our family, our relationships, our church? Do we manage our time “in the name of the Lord Jesus?” Do we handle our health “in the name of the Lord Jesus?”

I think we sometimes fail here. We often try to be “good people,” doing and saying things that give a good impression of ourselves. Yet, when no one is looking at us, we are another kind of person, a person who does not really care about managing his or her time, money, or health.

We ask, are not Paul’s words to the Colossian believers too ideal, too difficult to live up to in a normal Christian life? How do we understand the apostle’s words as God’s stewards today? Paul’s admonition to do everything we do or say “in the name of the Lord Jesus” is a challenge for us today! How can we respond to that challenge?

The experience of the Colossians and ours

The Colossian believers had warmly responded to the Spirit’s invitation to “bring forth fruit” (Colossians 1:6) in their life, and Paul observed their “good order and the steadfastness of their faith” (Colossians 2:5). Paul therefore prays “that they may walk worthy of the Lord” (Colossians 1:10).

The English word “worthy” is equivalent to the French word *digne*. When we look at the definition of this word in French, we find this explanation: “He who agrees, who is in conformity with someone”. In other words, the Colossian believers walked in conformity of the Lord! Paul had guided them to walk with the Lord by explaining first who the Lord was and what He had done for them. Notice the following:

“... giving thanks to the Father who has qualified us to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in the light. He has delivered us from the power of darkness and conveyed us into the kingdom of the Son of His love, in whom we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins” (Colossians 1:12-14).

“And you who once were alienated and enemies in your mind... He has reconciled in the body of His flesh through death, to present you holy, and blameless, and above reproach in His sight” (Colossians 1:21-22).

“In Him you were also circumcised with the circumcision made without hands by putting off the body of the sins of the flesh, by the circumcision of Christ, buried with Him in baptism in which you also were raised with Him through faith in the working of God, who raised Him from the dead. And you, being dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, He has made alive together with Him, having forgiven you all trespasses, having wiped out the handwriting of requirements that was against us. And He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross” (Colossians 2:11-14).

SCRIPTURE :
Colossians 3:17

Christ has qualified us to be partakers of the inheritance!

Christ has given us redemption through his blood and forgiveness of sins!

Christ has reconciled us with Him so that we can stand before Him without reproach!

Christ has circumcised us to be alive after having forgiven all our trespasses by nailing them to the cross!

These verses are clear! Everything is done! We are God's children, we have been saved, our sins forgiven, and we are standing in the sight of the Lord as without sin!

That's what Christ has done for us.

Here lies, for me, the most important issue about stewardship. What place does God/Jesus Christ have in my life?

If He is not first and foremost for me, then perhaps His atoning death (redemption) is not that important for me.

But Jesus died on the cross to forgive my sins, to make me partaker of the inheritance of the saints, and to have life! When I realize the means and see the unconditional love of Jesus for me, how can I say that some of the things I do or say are not that harmful for me? Should not my life be a response to His love?

The Bible states, "as the elect of God, holy and beloved, put on tender mercies, kindness, humility, meekness, long-suffering, bearing with one another, and forgiving one another... But above all these things put on love, which is the bond of perfection" (Colossians 3:12-14).

What matters most

Peter was just seven years old when he participated in a children's summer camp for the first time. The first days were not easy as he missed his parents and his home. It didn't help when he saw his friends receiving presents from their parents. He became sad and wanted to leave. However, one day he received a large box. Happy beyond words, he tore the box open to find biscuits, chocolates, and little toys. Peter did not seem to care much about them, instead he grabbed the envelope on top. Too young to read, he asked me if I could read the letter for him.

Meanwhile, I saw the other children circling around the box definitely looking interested. I cautioned Peter to look after his box. Yet, he wouldn't move, he just looked at the envelope. His words were: "Let them take everything, I don't mind, because I have what is really important the letter!" What were the words written in this letter? Nothing "special." Only that Peter's parents loved him, missed him and they were happily thinking of the day he would be coming back home. His parents insisted he enjoy everything at the camp!" Ever after this, happily, he carried the letter with him wherever he went.

Like little Peter, with full assurance, we too can walk around as if clutching our own letter, knowing that Christ loves "me." Happily, we can live the words "whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him" (Colossians 3:17).

The plan of redemption tells us that Jesus loves us, he did everything for us. This influences our stewardship, how we earn our money, build our home, live our life, work, relate to others, serve our church, manage our time, and handle our

health. We now conform, walk and live "in the name of the Lord Jesus", happy, "knowing that from the Lord we will receive the reward of the inheritance" (Colossians 3:24).

*And you, . . . He
has made alive
together with Him,
having forgiven
you all trespasses,
having wiped out
the handwriting of
requirements that
was against us. And
He has taken it out
of the way, having
nailed it to the cross"*
(Colossians 2:11-14).

NKJV



honorable mention

Stewardship Recognizes God as Owner

Micah Choga

*Division Stewardship Director
Southern Africa-Indian Ocean*



Micah Choga currently serves as the Southern Africa-Indian Ocean Stewardship and Trust Services Director. Micah also served in the Central Zimbabwe Field as Stewardship, Sabbath School, and Personal Ministries Director. When the field organized into a conference, he served the conference as both the Executive Secretary, Stewardship Director, and later as both Secretary and Ministerial Director. Micah served the Zambezi Union Mission as Stewardship Director, Global Mission and Satellite Evangelism Coordinator. After the union organized into a Union Conference, he served as Stewardship Director, Global Mission Coordinator, Ministerial Secretary, and Executive Secretary of the Union Conference. Micah is married to one wife. They have five children and one grandson. Hobbies: Preaching the Word of God and gardening.

SCRIPTURE:
Psalm 24:1

In order for us to appreciate this presentation, let us begin by defining the term steward. According to Nelson's Bible Dictionary stewardship is, "The management of another person's property, finances, or household affairs." This means that a steward is one who takes care of property or affairs belonging to another. In other words a steward represents the interests of the owner.

As a guide to our presentation we will examine four questions.

1. From a biblical point of view, who is the owner?
2. Who is the steward?
3. What is expected from the steward?
4. What the steward ought to remember.

Does the Bible support the idea of ownership? If it does who is the owner?

From a biblical point of view, who is the owner?

In response to our first question, we will go to the Book of Psalms. Addressing the issue of ownership, the psalmist points out that, "The earth is the LORD'S, and everything in it, the world, and all who live in it" (Psalm 24:1 NIV). See also (1 Chronicles 29:11-12).

The language is so clear that the LORD is the rightful owner of the world and everything that is in it. The language used in the text is all inclusive that it leaves nothing in the world that does not belong to God. Just from the text cited above, we have no claim of ownership of anything that is in the world. Can you name some of the things we normally refer to as ours? The Bible also makes this claim "for every animal of the forest is mine, and the cattle on a thousand hills. I know every bird in the mountains, and the creatures of the field are mine, If I were hungry I would not tell you, for the world is mine, and all that is in it" (Psalm 50:10-12 NIV).

God's ownership includes even the birds of the air, the cattle and even all the creatures of the field. Lest we be tempted to think that the ownership of God excludes the beasts of the field. That's the reason why God says that if He was hungry, He could not even come to any one of us to beg for food since the whole world belongs to Him. It is so easy for us to relate to God as though He was dependent on us.

Matthew Henry commenting on God's ownership affirms that God, "has an incontestable propriety in them and dominion over them, has them all always under his eye and within his reach, and can make what use he pleases of them; they all wait on him, and are all at his disposal?" It is by this right of ownership that the Lord throws a challenge at us that he could not be seen to be in need when the whole earth is full of His treasure. By virtue of God being the owner, it does not make sense to think of Him as one begging for support from His creatures. Haggai 2:8 testifies that even the silver and the gold belong to God. 1 Corinthians 6:19-20 reminds us that we also belong to God both by creation and redemption. An accurate understanding of ownership assists us to be aware that even we ourselves belong to God.

Food for thought: How would you feel if somebody taking care of your property behaved in a manner that demanded you to beg for your own property?

Thus we can see that our God as an owner has no need for things since this whole world and its fullness is under His disposal to use as He chooses.

Illustration

Some years ago I read a story about a certain farmer who one afternoon was studying his Bible. The farmer read the texts we just have read. Convicted by his new discovery, the farmer knelt down to confess to God that for all the years he had regarded the farm as his property not knowing that God was the real owner. The farmer re-dedicated the farm back to God as the rightful owner, while he was going to manage the farm on God's behalf.

He committed the security of the farm and its prosperity in God's hands. The same afternoon the farmer met his fellow neighbors who were all farmers with high excitement to tell them of his new discovery that God was the real owner of his farm. When the fellow farmers listened to him, they just laughed at him as if something had gone wrong in his mind. How could he say the farm belonged to God when it was he who had bought the farm at a sacrifice and even held title to it?

The farmer insisted that regardless of their words of discouragement he was going to stick to his decision. It is said during the planting season, the farmers went out to sow their seed. Unfortunately, there came a plague of locusts and destroyed all the crops in the neighboring farms except for the farm of the farmer who had committed his farm to God.

When the other farmers saw that his crop was not destroyed by the locusts, they came to inquire from him on what chemical he was using to destroy the locusts. The farmer replied that he had no chemical except for the fact that the same God who was owner of the farm was also the same God who owned the locusts. So He could choose whether to allow the locusts to graze in His farm or not.

How important it is for us like the farmer to recognize God as the rightful owner of everything we own including ourselves. Such a realization would lead us to leave the security of everything in God's hands.

Having established the undisputable ownership of God of our world and everything in it, we now need to consider our second question.

Who is the steward?

To address the question we need to go to the book of Genesis where God gave dominion of His creation to man. The Genesis account points out that at creation God said, "Let us make man in our image, in our likeness, and let them rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air, over the livestock, over all the earth, and over all the creatures that move along the ground" (Genesis 1:26). The record in the book of Genesis tells us about God committing everything He had created to be under man.

The psalmist affirms the same thought by saying that God put everything under man so that men could take care of God's creation. See also (Psalm 8:6-8). In assigning humanity the responsibility of dominionship, God did not surrender His right of ownership. We are stewards in the sense that God committed to us to take care of His creation. We are also stewards because we had no share in creation but we are actually part of the creation. Since all of us belong to God, we are in that respect stewards of God.

What is expected of us?

If I were to ask each one of us to tell me what kind of qualities you expected to see in a person you could entrust with your valuable property, some of you may talk about trust, some may think of a sense of responsibility while some may think of accountability while some may say faithfulness. This brings us to what Paul says about what is expected among stewards. "For it is required in stewardship that a man be found faithful" (1 Corinthians 4:2). What does this tell us? It simply says

to us, stewardship is a position of trust and honor.

You cannot just go into the streets and pick anybody you find to make them a manager. You need to do a careful selection. If human beings have high expectations for their managers, what about the God of heaven? Faithfulness is not a partial requirement. It is not something that has a time frame. No wonder the Bible encourages us to be faithful until death (Revelation 2:10). In Matthew 24:45 Jesus raises a question about the faithful servant who remains faithful until the coming of his master.

The challenge is for you and me to ask the Lord to help us to be the kind of stewards who will be faithful in handling the property of the owner.

What we ought to remember

We need to remember:

1. That God is the rightful owner of the earth and everything in it.
2. That whatever we have has been entrusted to us by God so that we can manage it on His behalf.
3. That God is not dependent upon us.
4. That we should manage God's property in the manner that God would like it to be managed.
5. That stewardship is a position of trust and honor.
6. That true faithfulness is a lifetime requirement.



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