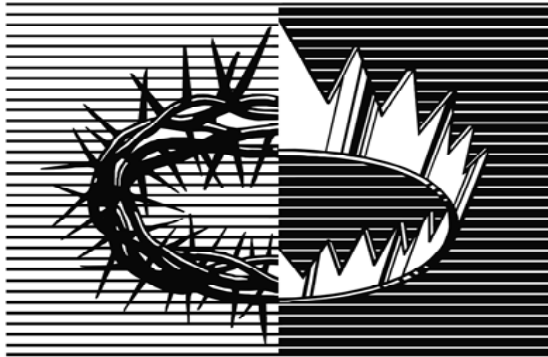


TITHE AND OFFERING READINGS



ATTENTION!

Dated material to be adapted,
translated and distributed to
Seventh-day Adventist churches
before December 2007.

2008

Eyes Touched by Grace

By Bettina Krause

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Seeing the world through eyes touched with God’s grace is the theme of this year’s readings. Too often we focus on what we can give to God. We measure our generosity in dollars and cents, and calculate our duty to God in numbers and percentages. Yet Christian giving is not about what we do for God. It is about gaining a deeper understanding of what God has done for us.

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We welcome your comments and suggestions for future authors and themes for the **Tithe and Offering Readings.**

(For your convenience, pages i-v are repeated at the end of the readings.)

SABBATHS WITHOUT DESIGNATED OFFERINGS

There are **six Sabbaths** in 2008 that do not have designated offerings. Each Division Committee is to designate these offerings for use in their Division, Conference or Union. The Sabbaths are: January 12, February 9, June 14, August 9, October 11, and December 13.

The titles of the readings of these non-designated offerings are noted as “**Scheduled Offering: Division.**”

THIRTEENTH SABBATH OFFERINGS FOR 2008

Euro-Asia Division	March 29
Inter-American Division.	June 28
North American Division	September 27
Northern Asia-Pacific Division.	December 27

SCHEDULED SPECIAL OFFERINGS

SABBATH	TITLE	DATE
10 th	Adventist World Radio	March 8
15 th	World Mission Budget	April 12
19 th	Disaster and Famine Relief	May 10
28 th	World Mission	July 12
36 th	World Mission (Unusual Opportunities)	September 13
45 th	Annual Sacrifice (Global Mission)	November 8

Sabbath 1 January 5, 2008 Offering: Outreach/Church Budget

Surgeon Paul Brand describes the bewilderment of those, blind from birth, whose sight is suddenly restored through surgery. For the first time they are confronted with a world of light, color, shapes and space. How are they to gauge depths and distances; the difference between a tall building and the height of a sidewalk curb? Brand tells of one patient who observing something interesting from his third-floor balcony was killed when he stepped off to get a closer look. Another patient, after weeks of intensive training to learn the difference between shapes, confused a loaf of bread for a hand, an apple for a key.

When we encounter the God of the universe, our perspective is also radically transformed. With eyes touched by His grace, we see more intensely the needs and suffering of those around us. Yet we also see more clearly the hope and the possibilities. Our priorities change; we experience a new sense of purpose, a new understanding of our place in the universe.

Appeal: On this first Sabbath of 2008, why don't you consider making a different kind of New Year's resolution? As you return your tithes and bring your offerings to God, determine to focus not on what *you* can give to Him, but rather on His matchless gifts to you. Allow God's love to infuse your life, to transform your priorities, and to help you see the world through new eyes.

Prayer

Sabbath 2
January 12, 2008
Offering: Division

In 1962 Seventh-day Adventist composer Wayne Hooper wrote the lyrics to one of our church's most well-known and beloved hymns: "We have this hope that burns within our hearts, Hope in the coming of the Lord... We believe the time is here, When the nations far and near, Shall awake, and shout and sing, Hallelujah! Christ is King!"

The promise of Christ's return is at the heart of Adventist identity; from the earliest years it has lent a sense of urgency to our mission and outreach work.

Does the certainty of the second advent influence your everyday life? Are you living expectantly, or are you just living? Wayne Hooper did not live to see Christ return. He died last year after a long battle with cancer. When he realized he had just a short time left, he wrote: "If there is still some music left to write or someone to help, I want to cheerfully make myself available to the Holy Spirit...and I look forward with excitement to the day when we can all sing together in the earth made new."

Appeal: Living expectantly means making ourselves available to the Holy Spirit. It means taking a long, hard look at our priorities and the way we use our time and money. As you give to God today, let it be as someone who has a hope that "burns within your heart."

Prayer

Sabbath 3
January 19, 2008
Offering: Church Budget

The mystery of gravity—that force that holds the universe together and keeps the planets rotating in their orbits—is something that scientists still struggle to adequately describe. Popular folklore says that an apple dropping from a tree inspired British scientist Isaac Newton to publish the first mathematical explanation of gravity in 1666. Later, in 1915, Albert Einstein expanded human understanding of gravity when he published his famous "General Theory of Relativity." A simple explanation of gravity is that every object in the universe exerts a "pull" on other objects around it. And it is the relative strength of this pull—or attraction—that determines the path of a planet's orbit around the sun, or that of a moon around a planet.

Gravity has a lot in common with how we as Christians chart our course in life. The priorities we set and the path we travel are determined by whatever looms largest in our life—by whatever exerts the greatest attraction for us. Do we orbit around our material possessions, caught by the irresistible pull toward whatever is "new" or "better?" Or is our path determined instead by Jesus Christ and the principles He lived and taught?

Appeal: Today, I invite you to give to God because He is truly your "guiding star"; because you have placed Him and His values at the center of your life.

Prayer

Sabbath 4
January 26, 2008
Offering: Conference/Union

The apostle Paul sums up the benefits of generosity by repeating a popular saying of his day: “Whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows generously will also reap generously” (2 Corinthians 9:6). Jesus expressed a similar thought: “Give, and it will be given to you. . . . With the measure you use, it will be measured to you” (Luke 6:38).

The principle could not be clearer: our reward will be in proportion to what we give. But what does it mean in practice? That someone who is wealthy—who can afford to give more—will receive a larger reward?

When Jesus talks about the “measure” we use, perhaps He has speaking instead about our attitude rather than the size of our gift. Is the measure we use a precise calculation of our duty to God, prompted by a sense of duty or fear? Or is our measuring cup an open hand; a heart moved by compassion for the suffering of others; a response to the great love that our Creator has lavished on us?

Appeal: As you give to God today, let it be with the measuring cup of love and gratitude. And open your heart to the spiritual blessings promised to those who give with a joyful, generous spirit!

Prayer

Sabbath 5
February 2, 2008
Offering: Outreach/Church Budget

We’ve heard many times that “it’s better to give than receive.” But did you know this is actually supported by medical evidence? A recent study in the United States tracked more than 400 couples who regularly helped others—either physically or through their finances. The researchers concluded that those who were generous with their time and resources lived healthier, longer lives.

What is it about giving that makes us feel so good? One of the most well-known texts in Scripture is John 3:16, “For God so loved the world that He gave His only son. . . .” Think about that for a moment. God’s ultimate gift, the sacrifice of Jesus for our redemption, was motivated by His deep love for humanity.

Perhaps this provides a clue as to why giving provides so many benefits to the one who gives. A generous person is one whose heart is overflowing with love; their gifts flow not from a sense of duty, but from an irresistible desire to show their love in tangible ways.

Appeal: As you give to God today, may you experience His transforming love; may it flavor all your relationships and influence all your choices. And may your life be marked by a generosity and openhandedness that can only come from God.

Prayer

Sabbath 6
February 9, 2008
Offering: Division

Have you ever wondered how you would react if you suddenly received a large sum of money? Three scientists recently studied the impact of money on human relationships. The experiments were simple. College students were split into two groups—one group was shown images related to money. The other group was shown neutral images, such as fish. Both groups were then put in different social settings and their actions observed.

The result? People who had been primed with images of money turned out to be less helpful and less inclined to be interested in other people or their problems. The researchers concluded that money can have an isolating effect, encouraging self-sufficiency and self-absorption.

For Christians, this shouldn't come as a surprise. Jesus knew that money can have a corrosive effect. He warned that it is impossible to serve two masters—money and God. One master asks us to see the world through eyes constantly searching for opportunities to get ahead and accumulate more. The other asks us to look at the world through eyes of compassion, attuned to the needs of others.

Appeal: Consider today who you want to serve; the choice is stark—the paths could not be further apart. As the offering is collected, I pray that each one of you will choose the way of Christ.

Prayer

Sabbath 7
February 16, 2008
Offering: Church Budget

There are times in our lives when each of us have looked into a mirror and have been shocked at what we see. And it's not always a physical mirror. Sometimes God holds up to each of us a "reality mirror" that allows us to see ourselves as we really are, and we are confronted by the image before us.

The story of Zacchaeus the tax collector provides an example of someone whose life is transformed when he catches a glimpse of himself in God's mirror. Perched in a tree above the crowd, he unexpectedly comes face-to-face with Jesus. Suddenly Zacchaeus sees himself as he really is: someone who cheats others to enrich himself, who lives in opulence while people around him struggle to survive.

What is his response? "Look, Lord! Here and now I give half of my possessions to the poor, and if I have cheated anybody out of anything, I will pay back four times the amount" (Luke 19:8).

Appeal: Have you had a face-to-face encounter with Jesus? Today, as the offering is collected, take a look in God's mirror and ask Him to change you, to reshape your values and priorities. And give today as someone who has truly experienced the transforming love of our Savior.

Prayer

Sabbath 8
February 23, 2008
Offering: Conference/Union

As you take out your wallet or purse for the offering this morning take a moment to look at the coins and notes inside. Are they perfectly clean and crisp? Or do they look old and worn? And does their condition make any difference to their value? Is a crumpled note worth a little less than a fresh, smooth one? Of course not!

The same is true for us, God's children. Our worth in His eyes remains constant no matter what trials or disappointments we experience, no matter how worn and crumpled we may feel. Psalm 17:8 tells us that God keeps us, "as the apple of His eye." Time and time again throughout Scripture we see the special tenderness God reserves for those who suffer or who are ill-treated. In Jesus' ministry, we see His extraordinary concern for those who are sick or who have experienced more than their fair share of life's hard knocks. We learn that no matter what we do or what happens to us, we can always turn to Jesus and see ourselves reflected in His eyes—a person who is loved without reservation; whose life has immense value. A person who is worth dying for.

Appeal: I invite you now to give your offerings and return your tithe to God—not as someone who is doing God a favor or fulfilling a duty. Give instead as someone who experiences every day the joy of being wholly accepted and wholly loved by the King of Heaven.

Prayer

Sabbath 9
March 1, 2008
Offering: Outreach/Church Budget

When his grandmother passed away, among the things Ted inherited was an old blanket said to have been woven by American Navajo Indians. When Ted was a boy, his grandmother would put the blanket out on the foot of his bed in case the temperature turned cold. There was nothing particularly special about the blanket. It wasn't even very colorful. "We just threw it over the back of a rocking chair in the bedroom," Ted said.

One day Ted decided to have the blanket appraised; he thought it might be worth a few hundred dollars. He was stunned to learn that his grandmother's old blanket was worth half a million dollars! It was an extremely rare style of Navajo weaving. The appraiser called it "the Holy Grail" of Navajo rugs, the ultimate example of its kind. "We had absolutely no idea!" Ted said later.

As God's children, we have been entrusted with a treasure of matchless worth—the good news of salvation. Yet so often we treat it like a familiar old rug. We toss it into the corner of our life and forget about it in the bustle of everyday life.

Appeal: Today, do you realize the immense value of what you hold in your hands? As you give to God now, let it be with a heart overflowing with gratitude and praise for His priceless gift of life.

Prayer

Sabbath 10

March 8, 2008

Offering: Adventist World Radio

Prabha was ready to take her own life. Abandoned by her husband with two small children, and her family too poor to help, Prabha had nowhere else to go. Overcome by disappointment and grief, she decided to commit suicide.

“But that night,” she says, “was a great turning point.” While tuning her radio, Prabha stumbled upon a broadcast from Adventist World Radio. A lifelong Hindu, she had never before heard of a Christ who cared for her.

With a new hope in her heart, Prabha decided to live, for God. “I am sure I have a job to do,” she says, “for the people who are like me on the edge of death.”

Appeal: Adventist World Radio broadcasts messages of hope to the people of India in several of their own languages. Other programs in nearly 70 languages are heard by millions of listeners every day. AWR’s ministry reaches into places where missionaries cannot go, bypassing government restrictions and geographic barriers.

Through shortwave radio, AM and FM programs, and Internet broadcasts, AWR is connecting with listeners who otherwise would have no access to the gospel. By giving to AWR today, you will make it possible for the message of God’s love to enter hearts and bring hope where it is most needed.

Prayer

Sabbath 11

March 15, 2008

Offering: Church Budget

It is surprising when you begin to add up the amount of time an average person spends doing routine activities. If you live to 70 years of age, you will have ahead of you about 613,600 hours. Of those, 204,400 hours will be devoted to sleep; 176,800 will be spent at work or school; 51,100 will be used for eating, bathing and caring for personal needs; 38,325 hours will go in traveling from here to there; and about 76,000 hours will be spent on household chores.

The time we have on this earth is limited and the way we choose to spend it says a lot about our priorities and our ultimate goals. The same is true for the other resources we have at our disposal—our energy, our skills, our finances. Does the way we use these things truly reflect the values we hold?

Jesus said, “where your treasure is, there your heart will be also” (Matt. 6:21). Or we could rephrase it—“where your time is spent, where your thoughts are, where you place the best of your energy and effort, there your heart will be also.”

Appeal: God has given you one life on this earth to live. How will you use it? As the offering is collected today, I pray that your giving will reflect a commitment to a life that glorifies God and His kingdom.

Prayer

Sabbath 12
March 22, 2008
Offering: Conference/Union

The story is told of Babette Hertsard, a political refugee from Paris who fled to a remote Danish village in the mid-1800s. The community was dominated by a strict religious sect—a group that practiced strict self-denial in every aspect of their lives. For 14 years Babette was treated with kindness by the villagers, who were unaware that this modest woman was once one of France’s greatest chefs.

One day, Babette decided to thank the people of the village in the only way she knew how—by preparing a magnificent banquet. For weeks before the appointed day, boats arrived bringing rare and exotic ingredients and Babette shut herself away, cooking day and night. When the villagers sat down to the laden tables, they were faced with a dilemma. On one hand, they were pledged to eat only bland, simple food, yet they had no wish to insult Babette. One by one, the villagers tasted a bit of this and a bit of that. Slowly their inhibitions melted away. They began to talk, to laugh, to tell stories, to enjoy every morsel set before them.

Appeal: We have also been invited to a feast, prepared by our Father in heaven. It will be a banquet of unimaginable richness that will satisfy the hunger of every person present. There will be joy and laughter and fellowship. As the offering is collected, I invite you to give with a heart filled with gratitude to the One who is preparing your place at the table.

Prayer

Sabbath 13
March 29, 2008
Offering: Church Budget

Consider for a moment what money can’t buy. It can’t buy peace in the family. It can’t repair a damaged self-image. It can’t buy true friendship. It can’t mend a broken relationship or restore a loved one to life. Why is it, then, that so many of us treat money as the ultimate security blanket? Why do we spend so much energy trying to accumulate more, trying to cushion ourselves and our families from the bumps in life’s journey?

Jesus understood that humans are on a search for certainty; we’re looking for a place of ultimate refuge. In Matthew 6, He said: "Do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear... Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them."

Jesus is not asking us to give up our jobs or abandon our responsibilities. But He *is* asking us to re-examine where we place our trust. Is it in the fragile human structures that we build around ourselves? Or in the promises of the Lord of the universe?

Appeal: Don’t waste resources trying build a fortress against life’s troubles; focus instead on building up God’s kingdom. As the offering is collected, let’s commit ourselves again to the safest place in the world—our Father’s arms.

Prayer

Sabbath 14

April 5, 2008

Offering: Outreach/Church Budget

A church in Europe was looking for a mission project. The pastor heard of a struggling Christian community among the nomadic tribes of northern Africa and so the church began sending regular shipments of clothes, books, and supplies. With each parcel they also included their church newsletter so that those who received their gifts would know a little about the community that had sent them.

Some months later, the church pastor was shocked to receive a response in the form of a check for \$150. It was marked for the church's roof repair fund. An accompanying letter explained: "We read about your urgent need in the church newsletter and wanted to help."

Generosity often springs from the most unexpected sources. Great wealth is not a prerequisite for openhandedness; a giving spirit has more to do with attitude than with a healthy bank account.

Appeal: In a few moments our tithes and offerings will be collected. Ask God today to endow you with a giving spirit—a generosity that does not depend on circumstances, but which reflects a life that has been turned over to God, with nothing held back. And then wait to see what unexpected things He will accomplish through you.

Prayer

Sabbath 15

April 12, 2008

Offering: World Mission Budget

Compared to the Sabbath School Mission offerings which have been a major emphasis for more than a century, the World Mission Budget is still just a baby. It is still less than 10 years old but is adding about \$800,000 a year to the funds available for all aspects of our mission work around the world.

This is one of the few times each year that World Missions are promoted during the Church Service. We wish to especially encourage those of you who are not members of our Sabbath School to support this offering.

Appeal: The Bible says the everlasting Gospel is to be preached "to every nation, and kindred, and tongue, and people" (Rev 14:6). Let us accept this challenge by our contributions today.

Prayer

Sabbath 16
April 19, 2008
Offering: Church Budget

One of the most influential thinkers of the twentieth century was Swiss-born theologian Karl Barth. He wrote thousands of words exploring the relationship between faith, theology and culture. During lectures he often amazed his listeners with his insights and his complicated analyses of theological issues.

Towards the end of his life Barth spoke at the University of Chicago Divinity School. A reporter in the audience asked him what he considered to be his most important theological discovery.

Everyone waited for this brilliant man to begin a long and learned answer. Barth thought for a while, then said: "The greatest theological insight that I have ever had is this: Jesus loves me, this I know, for the Bible tells me so!"

Have we also made this discovery? Is this simple reality the foundation on which we have built our lives and our faith?

Appeal: As you bring your gifts to God this morning, let it be in response to this wonderful truth: that Jesus loves you, has saved you, and will soon return to take you home.

Prayer

Sabbath 17
April 26, 2008
Offering: Conference/Union

At the beginning of his ministry, the prophet Isaiah received a terrifying vision of God in all His majesty and power. God had a special mission that He needed someone to undertake. Isaiah records what happened next: "Then I heard the voice of the Lord saying, 'Whom shall I send? And who will go for us?' And I said, 'Here I am. Send me!'" (Isaiah 6:8-9).

What is intriguing is that Isaiah volunteered even before he knew what assignment God had in mind for him. Why? When it comes to doing God's work—whether it's sharing our faith with a neighbor, helping out in our community, or supporting our church's outreach program, our response is often, "Here and I. Send my brother or sister!"

What sets apart those who undertake God's work willingly from those who are reluctant? Perhaps the answer lies in the earlier part of Isaiah chapter 6. When Isaiah first sees God he cries out, "I am ruined for I am a man with unclean lips." But an angel touches Isaiah's mouth with a hot coal and reassures him, "Your guilt is taken away."

Appeal: Have you had a life-changing, life-cleansing experience with God? As you return your tithe and give your offerings, you have an opportunity to say to God today, "Here am I, send me."

Prayer

Sabbath 18

May 3, 2008

Offering: Outreach/Church Budget

Well-known preacher Charles Spurgeon once received an invitation from a very wealthy man to come and preach at his rural church. It would be a fundraising event to encourage members to donate money toward a church building debt. The man assured Spurgeon that if he came, he would have a comfortable place to stay. He said: "You are free to use my country house, my town house or my seaside home." Spurgeon's reply to the invitation was short: "Sell one of the places and pay the debt yourself."

Material wealth does not always guarantee a generous nature. So what *does* make someone a "good giver?"

Jesus taught that to be a "good giver", we first need to learn how to receive. He said to His disciples: "I tell you the truth, anyone who will not receive the kingdom of God like a child will never enter it" (Luke 18:17). It is only those who have experienced God's transforming love who can reflect this to other people. And it is only those who have opened their hearts and lives to the gospel who can share this good news with the world.

Appeal: Today as the offering is collected ask God to make you a "good receiver." And may the love and grace that God freely offers also make you a "good giver"—of your time, your talents, and your resources.

Prayer

Sabbath 19

May 10, 2008

Offering: Disaster and Famine Relief (Program provided for NAD only)

Every year tens of millions of people around the world have their lives changed in an instant by famine, armed conflict, and natural disasters. When famine descends upon the land parents desperately wonder what their children will eat or whether they will even survive another day. When disaster strikes it only takes minutes, even seconds, for entire families to be lost, homes to be destroyed, and lives to be forever altered.

Today the Adventist Development and Relief Agency's global live-saving ministry is answering the call to ease the misery of those who suffer. By giving generously to the Disaster and Famine Relief offering, we are showing those who are languishing in a world of hunger and pain that they are loved. ADRA will use the offering you give today to provide fresh water, medical aid, shelter, and nutritious food to those who desperately need it. Most importantly with your help ADRA's emergency assistance will offer hope. Hope that there is someone who has not forgotten about them and hope that they will have a better tomorrow.

Appeal: Today you have an opportunity to reflect the character of a loving God by providing relief and healing to those whose lives are devastated by disaster and famine. By giving today you will join ADRA's mission to minister to the millions around the world who desperately thirst for hope and hunger for a better life for their families. Consider all the blessings you have received as you give generously to those who are less fortunate.

Sabbath 20
May 17, 2008
Offering: Church Budget

Billionaire Genshiro Kawamoto recently gave eight homeless families the keys to eight of his mansions, each located in some of Hawaii's most prestigious neighborhoods. Dorie-Ann Kahale, a single mother, cried as she and her five daughters left the homeless shelter where they had been staying and moved into a white, columned house with a circular driveway, a stone staircase and a deep porcelain bathtub.

While most news reports focused on the surprise and gratitude of the families, one reported the reaction of some of their new neighbors. "This will drive property prices down," said one woman who owned a house nearby. "They don't fit in here—they should have been given houses somewhere else," said another.

What do you think of their reaction? Jesus told a story about the vast, underserved mercy that God lavishes on His children. You know it well. A son went to a far country and squandered his father's money. He returned home and reconciled with his father, but his older brother, blinded by self-interest, lashed out with resentment.

Appeal: As you give a portion of your earnings to God today, I invite you to pray for eyes that are unclouded by selfishness, and for motives that have been shaped by His matchless love and mercy.

Prayer

Sabbath 21
May 24, 2008
Offering: Conference/Union

During times of political or social upheaval, countries sometimes experience extraordinary rates of inflation. Economists call this "hyperinflation", where prices increase rapidly and currency loses its value. The results for ordinary citizens can be heartbreaking. Their hard-earned savings become almost worthless overnight and the cost of everyday items rise to unimaginable levels. In Zimbabwe recently, as inflation rates reached 1,000 percent, the price of a box of tissues climbed to \$147,000; a single tissue to \$417. In response the government introduced a note worth 50,000 Zimbabwean dollars—50 times the highest available banknote, but in reality only enough to buy a loaf of bread.

As Christians we realize that a time is coming when all the material things we now hold so valuable will lose their worth. When Christ returns the economies of earth will crumble in an instant. Gold, money, stocks, and bonds: none of these things will have currency in the new kingdom that Christ will establish.

Appeal: Why wait until the moment our Lord appears to understand how transient wealth is; how unreliable money can be? Today as the offering is collected you have an opportunity to say to God, "I trust you with my material goods, I trust you with my life." Won't you put yourself in His hands today?

Prayer

Sabbath 22
May 31, 2008
Offering: Church Budget

The words of the Great Commission are so familiar to us. “Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit...” (Matthew 28:19-20). These words have inspired generations of Seventh-day Adventist missionaries to leave their homes and to endure incredible hardships to share the gospel of Christ.

But when we quote these texts, we sometimes neglect the words that precede them. In Matthew 28, verse 18, Jesus tells His disciples: “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go....” What a comforting thought! When we embark on mission, our position is not uncertain; we serve a master who holds heaven and earth in His hands.

Does this mean that we can sit back, relax and allow God to do it all? Of course not. But we *can* be sure that God has a plan for this world and that He will see it through. Our responsibility is to be faithful; to keep giving our best—of our time, our personal involvement, our financial support—to advance the mission that God has entrusted to us.

Appeal: We have come to the moment in our service when we demonstrate our commitment to God in a tangible way, through giving. Won't you respond to the invitation today to be a full partner in the work He has set before us?

Prayer

Sabbath 23
June 7, 2008
Offering: Outreach/Church Budget

A very wealthy man was once asked how much money was enough. He replied, “Just a little bit more than I have now.” How easy it is to imagine that life would be uncomplicated and our problems would disappear if only we had a little more in our bank accounts! And how easy it is to take for granted what we already have.

As followers of Christ do we also sometimes fail to appreciate our spiritual wealth? We are heirs to God's kingdom; we hold in our hands the priceless gift of forgiveness; we have received spiritual gifts to fulfill God's purpose in our lives and in His church; we have access through prayer to the mighty King of the universe.

The apostle Paul wrote: "you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for your sake He became poor, that you through His poverty might become rich" (2 Corinthians 8:9). To the Ephesians, Paul speaks about "the surpassing riches of His grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus" (Ephesians 2:7).

Appeal: You may not have a high-paying job or an expensive house, but you have access to unimaginable wealth. Today, as you bring your tithes and offerings to God, allow yourself to respond to His overwhelming generosity. Give as someone who is rich in God's love and grace.

Prayer

Sabbath 24
June 7, 2008
Offering: Division

The great Russian author Fyodor Dostoevsky wrote many moving descriptions of human redemption. Many of the characters in his books experience tragic downfalls but are then restored through unexpected acts of mercy.

Dostoevsky's fascination with redemption—with people who receive a second chance in life—was shaped by his own experience. At 27 years of age he was arrested for political crimes and imprisoned. One morning he was led outside, a judge pronounced a sentence of death and the firing squad took its place. The drumroll began. But at the very last moment, a messenger of the Tsar arrived with a pardon and Dostoevsky was released.

Dostoevsky describes this moment as the start of a new life. "When I look back on my past and think how much time I wasted on nothing...my heart bleeds. Life is a gift, life is happiness, every minute can be an eternity of happiness."

Appeal: Every Christian has also experienced this sense of new life; this passage from death to life, from the certainty of destruction to the promise of eternity. As you bring your gifts to God this morning, give as one who has been redeemed; as someone who has been given a new opportunity to respond to the inconceivable love and mercy of our Savior.

Prayer

Sabbath 25
June 21, 2008
Offering: Church Budget

The "potlatch" ceremony was a gift-giving ritual of Native Americans. At high points in the life of a community—such as weddings or births—a host would prepare a great feast. But here's the catch: it was the host, not the guests, who provided the gifts. The host would give away vast quantities of valuable goods—blankets, carved cedar boxes, food, or canoes. In some versions of the potlatch these things were not given away but ceremonially destroyed. From the mid-1800s potlatches were banned—the practice simply did not fit with western ideas of property, and the ceremonies were labeled "wasteful."

The gospels record an occasion when one of Jesus' followers was accused of extravagant waste. A woman broke an alabaster jar and poured the expensive perfume on Jesus. As she did, her tears fell on His feet and she wiped them with her hair. The criticism began immediately. "What a waste! That perfume was worth more than a year's wages!"

"Leave her alone," said Jesus. "... She has done a beautiful thing...wherever the gospel is preached throughout the world, what she has done will also be told" (Mark 14:6,9).

Appeal: Giving to God doesn't just happen with the head, it wells up from our heart and our emotions. Won't you respond today to the One who has given all for you?

Prayer

Sabbath 26
June 28, 2008
Offering: Conference/Union

In the days of Martin Luther people sometimes sought God's favor by buying "indulgences"—paying money to gain forgiveness for their sin. Those who bought indulgences were motivated by fear. They believed their money could purchase release for themselves or their loved ones from the horrors of purgatory.

The Scriptures have a lot to say about our motivation for giving to God. In 1 Corinthians 13:3 the apostle Paul makes an astounding claim: "If I give all my possessions to feed the poor...but do not have love, it profits me nothing." Why does *how* we give seem more important to God than *what* we give?

Giving to God is not a financial transaction—it is an act of worship. And in worship, it is the state of the heart that transforms what we do and say into meaningful praise to our Creator. Anyone can go through outward forms and motions. But when we give with a heart that is open to God's spirit and filled with gratitude and a desire to do His will—that is a true act of worship!

Appeal: I invite you to praise God by bringing your tithes and offerings to Him now. Bring them joyfully, without expectation of reward, but simply as a love response to the blessings our Lord has already lavished on us.

Prayer

Sabbath 27
July 5, 2008
Offering: Outreach/Church Budget

Do you remember the words of that gospel song: "This world is not my home, I'm just a-passing through. My treasure is laid up somewhere beyond the blue?" The Christian as "pilgrim" or "exile" has been a recurring image in Christian literature and music down through the centuries. Think of John Bunyan's classic book, *The Pilgrim's Progress*. Or the music of African slaves in America who sang: "I'm a pilgrim, and I'm a stranger, I can tarry, I can tarry but a night."

Throughout Scripture, God reminds us not to get too comfortable with our current reality. The apostle Peter describes Christians as "aliens and strangers in the world" (1 Peter 2:11).

What a difference it makes to our priorities, our values, our daily life, when we understand that our time here is temporary! Everything changes. How we treat our friends, our family, our neighbors. How we use our time and resources.

Appeal: "This world is not my home, I'm just a-passing through." Do these words resonate in your heart? I pray that you will give to God today as one who refuses to get too comfortable with the here and now, but whose eyes are firmly fixed on the world to come.

Prayer

Sabbath 28
July 12, 2008
Offering: World Mission Budget

The Bible teaches that Christ's coming is dependent upon the Gospel being preached to all the world. And therefore "Missions" has been a major emphasis for Seventh-day Adventists for nearly all of our church history. So it is not surprising that our Sabbath School Mission offerings have totaled over \$490 million during the last 10 years although for most of that period the yearly amount was about the same with very little increase from year to year.

Our prayers and personal involvement are also both essential for the completion of this task. But today, we are being asked to give a special offering to support our worldwide mission work.

Appeal: Matthew 24:14 says, "And this gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world for a witness unto all nations; and then shall the end come." Our contributions today will help to fulfill this gospel commission.

Prayer

Sabbath 29
July 13, 2008
Offering: Church Budget

Do you want to succeed in life? The rapid growth of the "life-coach" industry suggests that many people are prepared to go to extraordinary lengths to improve their personal and professional lives. A life coach typically offers a client three or four half-hour sessions to help set specific goals—from losing weight, to getting a promotion at work, to improving relationships, to just learning to be happier. According to newspaper reports, the life-coach phenomenon began in the mid-1980s, and there are now more than 20,000 full-time life coaches worldwide.

One satisfied customer says that life coaching is "filling a need for people like me who are really ready to transform their lives."

Christianity also offers a life transformation. But while the transformation that God offers has little to do with financial gain or personal prestige, it is the ultimate life-changing experience. And it lasts forever.

Appeal: As the offering is collected, bring your gifts of love to God and thank Him for His work in your life.

Prayer

Sabbath 30
July 26, 2008
Offering: Conference/Union

It is easy to develop an inflated sense of our own importance. In 1543, astronomer Nicolaus Copernicus published a theory that transformed how humans viewed themselves and their place in the universe. Copernicus used mathematics to disprove the belief that the Earth was the center of the universe, around which all planets and stars orbited. Instead, he argued, the Earth is just one of a number of planets that travel around the sun. Today we know that Earth is an infinitesimal speck in the vast universe. But for the religious and intellectual leaders of the sixteenth century, Copernicus had advanced an unwelcome theory that required a shocking change in perspective.

Radical changes in perspective are rarely comfortable. When we encounter the God of the universe we can sometimes feel overwhelmed, humbled, insignificant.

What should be our response to this awesome God? To praise Him with our mouths and our actions. To place all that we are and all that we have into His hands—our relationships, our finances, our plans for the future.

Appeal: Today, may you experience anew God's power and majesty. And as you give to Him today, may it be because you have crowned Him Lord of your life.

Prayer

Sabbath 31
August 2, 2008
Offering: Outreach/Church Budget

What would some of our early missionaries think if they were able to see the Seventh-day Adventist Church today? The church that Abram La Rue or J. N. Andrews knew was made up of just a handful of congregations scattered mainly across America's northeastern states. Today, these pioneers would see a church that is established in 204 of the world's 230 countries, with a message that is preached in more than 880 different languages and dialects. They would be amazed by the church's media, health, and education ministries that span the globe. But perhaps the most surprising to these early pioneers would be how church membership has grown. Today there are now more than 15 million baptized believers worldwide.

What is the glue that keeps this incredibly diverse global community together? Paul talks about the mysterious ties that bond Christian believers. In Romans 12:5 he makes it clear these ties are more powerful than just shared beliefs or a sense of family. He writes: "In Christ we who are many form one body, and each member belongs to all the others." We are, in a sense, one flesh. What hurts you also hurts me; when you're happy, I'm touched by that joy as well. Your well-being is as important to me as my own.

Appeal: I invite you now to bring your tithes and offerings to God. And I pray that what you give today will be used in a powerful way to build up and expand the body of Christ.

Prayer

Sabbath 32
August 9, 2008
Offering: Division

Generosity does not always go hand-in-hand with wealth, but often arises in circumstances where it is least expected. The apostle Paul wrote about this in 2 Corinthians 8:1 where he describes the generosity of the church in Macedonia. He says: "...their extreme poverty welled up in rich generosity... they gave as much as they were able, and even beyond their ability." Their resources were stretched to the limit, yet they still wanted to participate in the work of sharing the gospel of Christ.

If it isn't wealth that inspires generous giving, then what does? Paul supplies an answer. In verse 5 he says the Macedonian Christians "gave themselves first to the Lord." Before anything else, they sought to do God's will. They placed themselves and their resources—as meager as they seemed—in the hands of their Father and said, "What would you have me do?"

Appeal: In every part of your life, have you given yourself first to the Lord? Today as the offering is collected, take a moment to recommit your talents, your time, and your resources to Him and allow yourself to be a conduit for the "rich generosity" that can only come from God.

Prayer

Sabbath 33
August 16, 2008
Offering: Church Budget

For a child, choosing teams for a game of basketball or soccer can be an excruciating process. Do you remember? The best players are picked first, then the most popular. You wait and wait as the names of your friends are called, and the group of those yet to be chosen grows smaller and smaller. Will your name be the last one called?

When Jesus was on earth He specialized in challenging the "me-first" mentality. The kingdom that He describes is full of surprises. The first will be last and the last will be first (Matt. 20:16); whoever wants to be great has to be a servant (Matt. 20: 26); it is the meek, not the strong, who will inherit the earth. And when Jesus chose his team—the twelve disciples—he did not pick the most gifted, educated, or well-known.

Everyone is welcome in God's kingdom, but there is one requirement. We have to be prepared to put God first; to place Him at the very centre of our lives; to allow Him to shape our priorities, our relationships and the way we use our time and money.

Appeal: In a few moments you will bring your gifts to God. As you do, consider what it means to be a citizen of God's upside-down kingdom. And let your gift to God today be more than just money; let it be your life.

Prayer

Sabbath 34
August 23, 2008
Offering: Conference/Union

There's an old proverb that says, "Worry gives a small thing a big shadow." The rush of everyday life can have the same effect as pushing the zoom-in button on a camera. Suddenly small details loom large. You lose sight of the big picture. Your universe shrinks to a space bounded by immediate concerns—your to-do list, your daily schedule, the correspondence or phone calls to be returned.

The psalmist had a remedy for regaining a sense of what is most important in life. In Psalm 145 David writes: "I will meditate on your majestic, glorious splendor." Taking some time to consider the majesty of God has a way of enlarging our focus and restoring balance to our lives. Consider for a moment these words from Isaiah: "For I am the Lord your God, who stirs up the sea, causing its waves to roar. My name is the Lord Almighty. And I have put my words in your mouth and hidden you safely within my hand. I set all the stars in space and established the earth. I am the one who says to Israel, 'You are mine'" (Isaiah 51:15-16).

Appeal: Do your priorities—the way you use your time and money—reflect the fact that you are a child of the mighty God of the universe, the One who "set the stars in space." I invite you today, as we give to God, to acknowledge the majesty of God in every aspect of your life.

Prayer

Sabbath 35
August 30, 2008
Offering: Church Budget

According to recent studies, the latest trend in charitable giving is for people to view their donations as "investments." Donors try to be "wise investors" and so they want to know who is benefiting from their generosity. Is it an "innocent victim" of an earthquake or famine? Or is it someone who has perhaps contributed to their own misfortune?

What should a Christian's attitude toward giving? Should our motivation be primarily to see a return on our "investment." In Matthew 25 Jesus urges his followers to feed the hungry, to clothe the naked, to care for the sick, to visit those in prison. And then Jesus offers us a compelling reason to do this. "I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me" (Matthew 25:40).

Can we really comprehend the magnitude of what Jesus is saying here? That through every act of kindness, every dollar we give, every helping hand we extend, we encounter the King of the universe. And through us, others experience the Savior's touch. What an incredible responsibility. What an amazing privilege.

Appeal: As you bring your offerings to God today, take a moment to look behind the dollars you give or the check you write, and see the face of Jesus.

Prayer

Sabbath 36
September 6, 2008
Offering: Outreach/Church Budget

Someone once said: “The real measure of your wealth is how much you’d be worth if you lost all your money.” When a disaster strikes—an earthquake, a fire, or a flood—people are often forced to decide in an instant what is most important to them. And it is rarely their house, or their car or even their photo albums and family heirlooms. It is the intangibles—the love of a husband or wife or child, the faithfulness of friends, the ability to laugh.

How much would you or I be worth if we lost all our possessions? When the disciples were called by Jesus, their response was to lay down the tools of their trade, to say goodbye to their homes, families and everything that was comfortable and familiar, to follow their Lord. They knew, without a doubt, what was most important.

Appeal: Today, I invite you to let your gifts to God reflect what is what important in your life.

Prayer

Sabbath 37
September 13, 2008
Offering: World Mission Budget (Unusual Opportunities)

For more than 130 years, we Seventh-day Adventists have generously supported the church’s worldwide mission through our tithes and mission offerings. We believe we are called to help the less fortunate, the poor, the sick, and those who do not know about Jesus. We believe that mission is a central part of our church. Yet, over the years, mission giving has effectively declined. Today we are giving less than our parents and grandparents did.

This threatens the mission of the church because these offerings are vital for starting new work in new areas, nurturing and establishing new believers in the faith, placing missionaries around the world, and advancing God’s kingdom here on earth. These offerings provide the foundation for many of the other projects we choose to support.

Appeal:
Thank you for your generous support of Adventist mission. Thank you for helping start new work in new areas, nurturing and establishing new believers in the faith, placing missionaries around the world, and advancing God’s kingdom here on earth.

Prayer

Sabbath 38
September 20, 2008
Offering: Church Budget

Jesus Christ was the creator of the universe in human flesh. He only had to speak a word and the wind and rain followed His commands. At His voice, angels obeyed. Have you ever wondered, then, why the Bible records so many instances where Jesus physically reached out and touched people, to comfort or restore them? One word from His lips would have been enough, yet time and time again we see Jesus stretching out His hands.

Think for instance of the two blind men who called out to Jesus as He passed by: “Lord, have mercy on us!” And Jesus “had compassion on them and touched their eyes. Immediately they received their sight and followed him” (Matthew 20:34).

The word “compassion” offers a clue for why Jesus so often reached out to touch people. Compassion, that overwhelming blend of love and empathy, is not an emotion that sits well with physical distance. When we feel compassion for someone we identify with them, we feel an irresistible connection.

Appeal: Our God identified so closely with us that He was willing to take on our form and live among us. Won't you respond today with generosity and love to the touch of Christ's hand in your life?

Prayer

Sabbath 39
September 27, 2008
Offering: Conference/Union

Have you ever wondered why the Dead Sea in Israel is so salty? It is one of the world's most inhospitable environments, more than six times as salty as the ocean. If a fish from one of the freshwater streams that flow into the Dead Sea ventures into its salty water it is instantly killed.

Unlike other lakes, the Dead Sea has no outlets—no rivers that flow from it. The only way water can leave is through evaporation, and so there is no way for dissolved minerals to escape.

Is there a parallel here for how we relate to other people? Those of us who approach others with hearts and hands tightly closed, reap the consequences of selfishness. By hoarding our time, our energy, and our resources we risk becoming “toxic” people.

But when we approach others with an attitude of openness, allowing God's love and compassion to flow through us and touch the lives of people we met, *we* are the ones who often receive the greatest blessing!

Appeal: As the deacons receive our offerings today will you give with a heart that is open to God's grace and a mind that is open to His leading?

Prayer

Sabbath 40

October 4, 2008

Offering: Outreach/Church Budget

In a popular children's story, Clifford the dog invites all the neighborhood children to his birthday party. His owner sets up a table with ice-cream and a cake and decorates the yard. But when the appointed time arrives, no one comes. Clifford and his owner go searching for the missing guests and finally find them playing in the park. "Why didn't you come," asks Clifford's owner. "We wanted to come," they reply. "But we didn't have very good presents—not good enough for such a special friend."

It's tempting to believe that the gifts we bring to God will never be good enough. Remember the reaction of Moses when God called him into service. His first inclination was to point out his own inadequacies. "O Lord, I have never been eloquent.... I am slow of speech and tongue" (Exodus 4:10). God's response to Moses is the same one He gives each of us when we doubt the worthiness of our gifts. God reminds us that His might is sufficient to transform even our most meager efforts into powerful instruments for doing His will. "Who gave man his mouth?" God asks Moses. "Who makes him deaf or mute? Is it not I, the Lord? Now go; I will help you speak and will teach you what to say" (Exodus 4:11,12).

Appeal: Bring your gifts confidently to God today, knowing that what you offer will be blessed and multiplied beyond measure.

Prayer

Sabbath 41

October 11, 2008

Offering: Division

A 64 year old man who shines shoes for a living last year donated \$100,000 to a children's hospital. For more than 25 years Albert Lexie has worked at a children's hospital in Pittsburgh, polishing the shoes of staff and visitors and earning far less than the minimum average wage. How did he do it? For every payment he receives, he puts a little aside in a jar marked "Albert's Kids." He began in 1981 after watching a television program about children who couldn't afford medical care. Albert immediately donated his life's savings—\$750—and then set himself a goal of raising \$100,000. Even though he's reached it, he has no plans to stop. "I feel good," he told one newspaper, "I want to keep going."

A generous, compassionate spirit has nothing to do with how wealthy we are. It does not depend on our background or what we do for a living. But it has everything to do with making ourselves available to God; letting Him set our priorities and shape our goals. And through seemingly little choices, made multiple times throughout each day, we become channels for God's extraordinary grace.

Appeal: Today, as we return our tithe and give our offerings, will you allow God to use you as an agent of His love?

Prayer

Sabbath 42
October 18, 2008
Offering: Church Budget

Did you know that there are more than 2,300 verses in the Bible that directly relate to money, possessions and how we use them? Why do you think there are so many?

Consider for a moment how many of your waking hours are preoccupied with either earning money, saving money, spending money, or caring for possessions. Would you say a third of your time? Fifty percent? Seventy-five percent? For most of us, the vast majority of our time and energy revolves around “things.” Is it surprising, then, that God provides so much guidance in Scripture for how His children should manage their money? He understands how easy it can be for possessions to become the real god of our lives.

While Jesus was on earth He showed us that other people, not things, were most important. He warned us against spending too much of our time and energy building up treasure in the here and now, but to concentrate instead on storing up treasure in heaven (Matthew 6:19-20).

Appeal: Let’s give today in the spirit of Jesus, who taught us that a balanced life means valuing people above money, principles above possessions and God above all.

Prayer

Sabbath 43
October 25, 2008
Offering: Conference/Union

The story is told of a place in Mexico where hot and cold springs are found side by side. This natural phenomenon had a practical use—local women often did their laundry in the boiling water of the hot spring, and then rinsed the clean clothes in the cold spring.

One tourist watching the women at work said to his guide: "They must think Mother Nature is generous to provide such a ready supply of clean hot and cold water." The guide replied, "Actually, there is much grumbling because she supplies no soap."

Cultivating an attitude of thankfulness isn’t always easy. Often it’s the petty annoyances of everyday life that seem to get in the way. Or as Dorothy Parker once said: “It’s not the tragedies that kill you, it’s the messes.”

Appeal: Returning your tithe and offerings to God is a tangible way of showing your gratitude. You are telling God that you want to honor Him not only with your words, but also with your actions and resources. Won’t you give generously to Him today?

Prayer

Sabbath 44

November 1, 2008

Offering: Outreach/Church Budget

The idea of “property rights”—or “ownership”—is one of the oldest legal concepts, stretching back into ancient times. In 18th century England, crimes against property—even the theft of a farm animal—were considered so subversive to law and order that they were often punished with death. Today, the idea of “ownership” allows people to buy and sell, to accumulate money and property; it is the basis of the international money market as well as every trip we make to the grocery store or mall. It’s a concept that allows us to say, “this is mine and that is yours.”

For followers of Christ, though, ownership has a different meaning. God has set *His* mark of ownership on this earth. "Every beast of the forest is mine, the cattle on a thousand hills. ...everything that moves in the field is mine. ...the world is mine, and all it contains" (Psalm 50:10-12).

How dramatically this changes the way we see the world. We no longer see ourselves as “owners” but as “caretakers.” We are less influenced by advertising, which urges us to buy whatever is new or improved. We see our money not as a way to secure our own comfort, but a tool to further God’s kingdom.

Appeal: As deacons collect our offering in a few moments, I invite you to acknowledge God’s Lordship over this world and all it contains.

Prayer

Sabbath 45

November 8, 2008

Offering: Annual Sacrifice (Global Mission)

What does it mean to sacrifice for mission? What can you do without so someone can learn that Jesus loves them? Skipping dessert? Eat out less often? Drive the car an extra year? In many countries of the world, your sacrifice can go a long way to help spreading the gospel.

As Seventh-day Adventists we have a mission to carry the good news about Jesus soon return to the whole world. Yet, there are still people in this world who don’t know Him. Even worse, they have never had an opportunity to know Him. Global Mission focuses on the unreached people and areas of the world. Every cent given for the Annual Sacrifice offering goes to start new groups of believers in unreached areas.

Christ paid the ultimate sacrifice, thank you for being willing to make a small one for Him.

Appeal: Every cent you give to the Annual Sacrifice Offering for Global Mission goes directly to start new congregations in new areas of the world. Thank you for your sacrificial support to help build God’s Kingdom.

Prayer

Sabbath 46
November 15, 2008
Offering: Church Budget

Our self-image is both fragile and powerful; it is so easily damaged or broken, yet at the same time exerts a sometimes irresistible influence on our thoughts and actions. Researchers recently studied what happens when children of similar intelligence were given different messages about their abilities. After taking a test, one group of children were told they had performed “above average” or that the results showed that they were academically “gifted.” The other children, regardless of how well they did, were told they had failed and that the test results showed they needed extra help. Both groups were then asked to take another test. Can you guess the result? The children who had been praised performed much better in the second test than their peers who had received negative feedback.

As God’s children, let us never forget that we find our identity, our self-image, in our relationship with God. He tells us that our lives have intrinsic worth. We are precious to Him and He has endowed us with special gifts and abilities. And from this firm foundation of security, God asks us to use our talents, skills, time, and resources in His service.

Appeal: In a moment, our tithes and offerings will be collected. As a child of God, dearly loved by Him, won’t you respond by giving of your best today?

Prayer

Sabbath 47
November 22, 2008
Offering: Conference/Union

Someone once said that there are three kinds of people: the flint, the sponge, and the honeycomb. To get anything out of a flint you must hammer it, and then you get only chips and sparks. A sponge is quick to soak up water, but to get water back you must squeeze it; the more pressure you use, the more you will get. But the honeycomb just overflows with its own sweetness.

When Paul describes the fruit of the spirit in Galatians 5:22 and 23 he is describing the “honeycomb”—someone whose life is so filled with God’s grace that it overflows with “love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.” It is reassuring that Paul doesn’t list these characteristics as a standard that we must strive toward, with iron self-discipline. These are not the result of someone “hammering” or “squeezing” us into shape. Rather Paul presents the fruit of the spirit as the inevitable outcome of a life that has been turned over to Christ.

Appeal: As the offering is collected today, ask yourself: “What sort of person am I? Do others see a flint, a sponge or a honeycomb? Does my life—my attitudes, my relationships, the way I use my time and resources—reflect the fact that Christ lives in me? As you recommit yourself to God, may you experience anew the sweetness that comes from living for Him.

Prayer

Sabbath 48
November 29, 2008
Offering: Church Budget

Moments of great danger have a way of focusing our minds on what is truly important. In the hours after the Titanic struck an iceberg on April 14, 1912, the people aboard scrambled to board lifeboats or find life jackets. There were eleven millionaires on the ship that night and Major A.H. Peuchen was one of them. As the order was given to abandon ship, he left behind more than \$300,000 in money, jewelry, and securities in a box in his cabin. "The money seemed a mockery at that time," he said later. "I picked up three oranges instead."

How clear are we on what has greatest value in our lives? Do we distinguish between that which is transitory and that which is eternal? Jesus told the story of a man who forgot the difference. The man planted a good crop and decided to build a warehouse to store his extra grain. Before long he was caught up in the pursuit of accumulating more and more. "But God said to him, 'You fool! This very night your life will be demanded from you. Then who will get what you have prepared for yourself?'" (Luke 12:20).

Appeal: Don't wait for a moment of crisis to know what is most important in your lives. As you give your offering and tithe this morning, use this opportunity to affirm His Lordship in your heart and in every part of your life.

Prayer

Sabbath 49
December 6, 2008
Offering: Outreach/Church Budget

Author Charles Dickens often wrote about the terrible social inequalities of 19th century England. He shocked his readers with descriptions of poverty, crime, and life in London slums. In his classic book, *A Christmas Carol*, Dickens introduced a character whose name has become a by-word for selfish greed—Ebenezer Scrooge.

Why did so much of Dickens' writing focus on these themes? It was inspired by personal experience. Dickens came from a wealthy family that had fallen on hard times. His father and mother were imprisoned for failing to pay their debts, and at the age of 12 Dickens went to work 10 hour days in a London boot factory. He lived among the squalor, disease, and hopelessness of London's underclass, and he never forgot the experience. The inscription on Dickens' tomb reads: "He was a sympathizer to the poor, the suffering, and the oppressed."

Appeal: True empathy comes from personal encounters; from seeing firsthand the needs of others. As you give to God today, make a decision to search out people this week who need to feel the loving touch of God. And allow yourself to be a tool in the hand of God to achieve His purpose.

Prayer

Sabbath 50
December 13, 2008
Offering: Division

We live in a media-saturated environment. Some researchers estimate that our eyes and brains are subjected to up to 3,000 advertising and corporate messages every day—through television, radio, print, even as we drive to work, or walk into a grocery store. One recent study suggested that a typical 12-year-old watches 7,600 television advertisements for junk food in a single year. How successful are these ads? Very! Experts say that marketing directly to children is a proven way to reach into their parent's wallets.

Two thousand years ago the apostle Paul wrote: "whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things" (Philippians 4:8). Paul knew what researchers today have also discovered. By beholding we become changed. Our values, our priorities, and our choices are shaped in large part by what we see and hear.

Appeal: Today, as you prepare to return your tithes and give your offerings to the Lord, I want to challenge you: don't let the world set your agenda, choose your standards, or dictate how you use our money. But instead keep your eyes focused on Jesus and the priorities of His kingdom.

Prayer

Sabbath 51
December 20, 2008
Offering: Church Budget

Who is the world's most generous person? Is it Warren Buffet who last year announced that he is giving away 85 percent of his \$44 billion fortune to help fight poverty and disease in developing countries? Or is it someone like Mother Teresa, who had no money to give but instead devoted her life to caring for the orphans and outcasts of the streets of Calcutta?

Luke records a story that shows how difficult it can be to quantify generosity. One day Jesus and his disciples sat watching rich people bring their gifts to the temple treasury. Then, almost unnoticed, a poor widow came and quickly dropped in two very small coins. "I tell you the truth," Jesus said, "this poor widow has put in more than all the others. All these people gave their gifts out of their wealth; but she out of her poverty put in all she had to live on" (Luke 21:3,4).

Appeal: It has been said that God looks at the heart, not the hand; the giver, not the gift. When God looks at you today, what does He see? As you give to Him now, I invite you, like the widow, to place all that you are and all that you have into His tender care.

Prayer

Sabbath 52
December 27, 2008
Offering: Conference/Union

There are so many ways to give God praise. The psalmist tells us to: “shout for joy to the Lord all the earth, burst into jubilant song with music” (Psalm 98:4) and, “bow down in worship, let us kneel before the Lord our Maker” (Psalm 95:6).

But the Scriptures also suggest that praise involves more than words, music or prayers. The apostle Paul says: “offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God—this is your spiritual act of worship” (Romans 12:1). Have you ever thought of praise as a lifestyle decision? But this is exactly how Paul describes it. By choosing to follow Christ we put to death—or sacrifice—our old preoccupations. We dedicate ourselves instead to living for Christ and His values.

This kind of praise expresses itself through everyday choices, those moments when we respond with kindness rather than anger; when we put someone else’s needs before our own; or when we slow down enough to hear the Holy Spirit speaking to us. This praise includes how we use our time, how we make our financial decisions, and how we set our priorities.

Appeal: Today I invite you to praise God with your tithe and offerings. May we each experience the joy of honoring God not just with our words, but with our lives as well.

Prayer