

# God First

2024

STEWARDSHIP WEEK OF REVIVAL



**GOD FIRST**

ADVENTIST STEWARDSHIP MINISTRIES





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# Rejoice, Examine, and Reset

General Conference, Stewardship Ministries

Some time ago, with a group of friends, we were heading to a recreational park for the day. Our driver was a friend who had travelled there previously and was confidently driving us. We were supposed to reach our destination in two hours. When the time went beyond two hours, we advised our driver to activate the GPS on his phone. He declined, assuring we would soon arrive and there was no time to lose. When we approached the three-hour drive and the park was still not in view, our joyful chat had ceased, and our driver-friend could sense that our confidence in him had dwindled. Silently, he pulled to the side of the road, applied the break, and opened his GPS. Our group discovered we had missed the exit one and a half hours ago! We had a good laugh and never stopped teasing our driver-friend that refusing to pause can ruin a day.

At the end of each year, our God First Annual Stewardship Revival Week is a time to press the stop button and pause our multiple pursuits. The Stewardship Ministries Department encourages everyone to engage in another intentional pause to rejoice, examine, and reset. As with a piece of music, pauses bring beauty and shape. Let us resist

the temptation of undertaking a nonstop journey until we bump into next year.

## A Pause to Rejoice

Albert Einstein declares the necessity for humanity to “pause to wonder and stand rapt in awe.”

Similarly, coming out of his painful journey, Job received an invitation to “stop and consider God’s wonders” (Job 37:14, NIV). Unfortunately, life’s trials and joys are so intense that they can hide the face of God from us. Was that your experience during this current year? Do not end 2024 without reflecting on God’s love, presence, and interventions on your behalf. Our capacity to step in 2025 as happy Christians depends on our ability to pause, count, and rejoice in God’s blessings. May we join others in sacred praises during this week.

## A Pause to Examine

Life currents are so strong that they easily cause us to drift away from our anchor point without noticing. Considering this reality, the apostle Paul admonishes believers to “examine yourselves to see whether you are in the faith; test yourselves”

(2 Corinthians 13:5, NIV). A rightly timed pause is essential to undergo introspection under the guidance of the Spirit. The various meditations from the Word of God, which “judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart” (Hebrews 4:12, NIV), will help us to look at ourselves with fresh eyes through divine lenses.

## A Pause to Reset

During the time of Nehemiah, after the majestic achievement of rebuilding the wall of Jerusalem, Israel experienced a time of deep spiritual revival (Nehemiah 8, 9). They paused their everyday activities and gathered as a sacred assembly to read and listen to the Word of the Lord. As a result, they wept and confessed their sins because they got entangled in practices that were against God’s will. And it ended in renewed resolutions, “making a binding agreement, putting it in writing” (Nehemiah 9:38, NIV). It was a pause to reset. Our prayer is for God’s people to engage in meaningful conversations over needed reformations and to make commitments for the new year following the prompting of the Holy Spirit.

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# Experiencing an Intimate Relationship with God

By Derek J. Morris

Today as we start the 2024 Annual Stewardship Revival Week, I want to consider with you a very well-known passage of Scripture. If I give you the first two words, most of you will be able to complete the sentence! Are you ready? “Be still.....”? You’re guessed correctly! “And know that I am God.” This text is found at the conclusion of a Scripture song, written by the sons of Korah: “Be still and know that I am God. I will be exalted among the nations. I will be exalted in the earth” (Psalm 46:10 NKJV).

## Who is God?

Some proponents of New Age philosophies would interpret this text as follows: Be still and know that I myself am God! Back in the late 1980s, actress Shirley MacLaine, whom many consider to be a high priestess of the New Age movement, delighted a large television audience when, standing with open arms on the shore of the Pacific Ocean, she began to sing, “I am God! I am God! I am God!”

Is that what the text means? Should we all start chanting “I AM GOD.” No. You don’t have to read much of this psalm before you are reminded that you are not God! This inspired Scripture song doesn’t proclaim, “You are your own refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble.” No! The psalm begins with these words: “God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. Therefore, we will not fear, though the earth be removed, and though the mountains be carried into the midst of the sea” (Psalm 46:1-2 NKJV).

The rest of the Scriptures clearly testify that we are not God. Listen to these words from the Lord recorded through the prophet Isaiah: “You are My witnesses, says the LORD, and My servant whom I have chosen, that you may know and believe Me, and understand that I am He. Before Me there was no God formed, nor shall there be after Me. I, even I, am the LORD, and besides Me there is no saviour” (Isaiah 43:10-11). We are not God. The LORD, He is

God! Shirley MacLaine and all the other New Agers who hold the view that we are God are wrong.

## Be Still

So, what does this well-known text mean? One of the keys to understand this passage of Scripture is to discover the meaning of the first verb, translated in the KJV, NKJV and NIV as “Be still.” The sons of Korah, writing this psalm under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, do not use a common Hebrew verb, *damam*, which means to be quiet or to be silent. The Hebrew verb used in Psalm 46:10 is *raphah*, and its root meaning, according to Young’s Analytical Concordance, is “to let go.” Literally, “Let go, and know that I am God.”

Here are some other translations of the same verse:

*"Cease striving and know that I am God;"*  
NASB.

*"Stop fighting," he says, "and know that I am God." TEV*

*"Calm down, and learn that I am God!" CEV*

Some Bible commentators suggest that this word of the LORD is actually addressed to the enemies of God's people—those referred to in Psalm 46:9 whose bows and spears He will break and whose chariots He will burn. Some commentators would translate this text, "Get your hands off my people, and know that I am God. I will be exalted among the nations. I will be exalted in the earth!" That is certainly an interesting and possible interpretation.

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*Let go, slow down,  
calm down.*

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But I would suggest that the LORD is also speaking to those who have faith in Him. God is responding to the confession of those who cry out, "God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble." To those who put their trust in Him, the LORD makes this appeal, "Let go, calm down, and know that I am God!" And that is needed counsel for us, living our lives at a frantic pace, on the go 24/7/365. Let go, slow down, calm down.

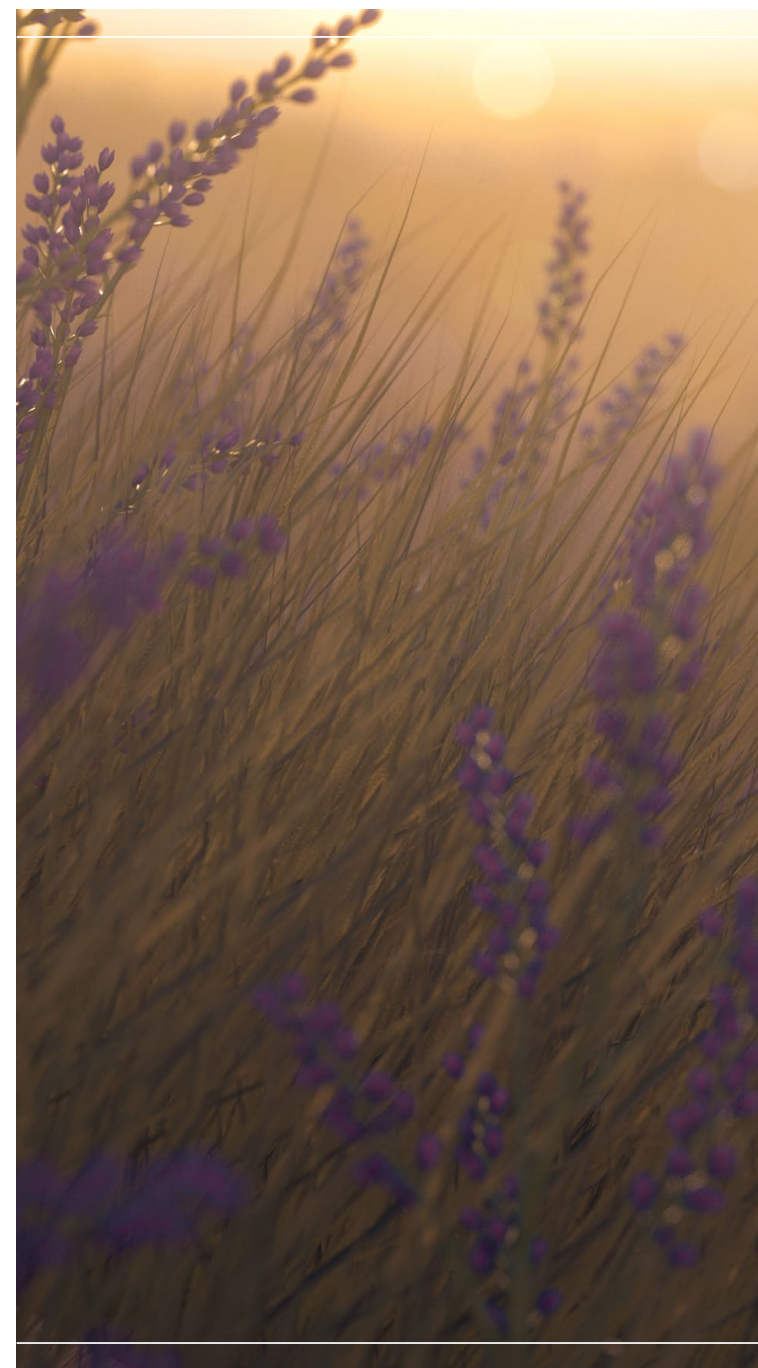
## Know

Another key verb in Psalm 46:10 that we need to understand is the verb "to know." Be still, slow down, calm down, and know that I am God! This verb translated "know" is much more than just knowing about or comprehending intellectually. The Hebrew verb *sakhal* means to know about, to understand. But the verb used here is *yada*, which means to know in the context of relationship.

I hear the LORD saying to us in this ancient Scripture song, "Slow down, calm down, and enjoy an intimate relationship with Me." What a precious invitation! And it's a life-changing relationship that we all desperately need, isn't it?

The psalmist David described this experience of slowing down, calming down, and enjoying an intimate relationship with God in one of his Scripture songs: "LORD, my heart is not haughty, nor my eyes lofty. Neither do I concern myself with great matters, nor with things too profound for me. Surely I have calmed and quieted my soul, like a weaned child with his mother; like a weaned child is my soul within me" (Psalm 113:1-2 NKJV). That, I believe, is a picture of someone responding to God's invitation: slow down, calm down and enjoy an intimate relationship with God.

Jesus, in the last book of the Bible, also offers an invitation for us to enjoy an intimate relationship with Himself: "Behold I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door I





will come in to him and dine with him and he with Me.” (Revelation 3:21 NKJV). That’s an intimate experience, sharing a common meal and spending quality time together.

When our two sons were still in elementary school,

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*An intimate  
relationship with God  
won't happen by accident.*

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our family returned to my homeland. We were walking near the Royal Albert Hall, in downtown London, and suddenly we saw a Rolls Royce driving by. Now that’s not unusual in that part of London, but this Rolls Royce was displaying a royal flag and had a motorcycle escort. As the car passed by, we saw Queen Elizabeth II in the back seat! We were so excited! We told all our friends about that memorable experience when we returned home to the United States of America. But imagine how we would have felt if the Rolls Royce had stopped, backed up to where we were standing, the window had lowered, and the queen had invited us to afternoon tea! Now that would have been really exciting! Why? Because sharing a meal together is so much more intimate than having someone drive by at 35 mph! If afternoon tea with the queen would



have been amazing, how much more amazing it is to have God invite us to slow down, calm down, and enjoy an intimate time with Him.

## Experience

So how can we accomplish that? How can we slow down, calm down and enjoy and intimate relationship with God? That's an especially important question for people like myself who are naturally hyper! They didn't have a diagnosis for me when I was a little boy. They just said that I had "ants in my pants"! But I'm not the only one who is rushed, stressed, busy, busy, busy. Am I? We all need to slow down, calm down, and make more room for God. Would you agree?

What would our lives look like in the days ahead, during the revival week, and the months ahead if we slowed down, calmed down in order to enjoy more fully an intimate relationship with God?

- I'm fairly certain most of us would watch less television and spend less time on Social Media.
- We might ask God to help us to let go of a long list of assignments and activities that He never asked us to do in the first place.
- I believe that we would take more time in places where we can learn about and celebrate an intimate relationship with God.
- We'd probably seek out new friends and affirm old friends who were also making a conscious commitment to slow down, calm down, and

experience an intimate relationship with God.

- We might decide to spend more time in nature and less time in artificial environments.

An intimate relationship with God won't happen by accident. It will take a conscious choice to slow down, calm down so you can enjoy intimacy with your Creator and Redeemer.

Take a moment now—think of one way you can consciously slow down, calm down, and make more room for God. Consider how you can practice putting God first during this week.



**Derek J. Morris**

President, Hope Channel International

# GOD FIRST

## I PROMISE:

-  To **SET APART** the first moments of each day to commune with the Lord through **PRAYER**, the **STUDY** of the Bible, the Spirit of Prophecy and the Sabbath School lessons, and in **FAMILY WORSHIP**.
-  To **IMPROVE** my **RELATIONSHIPS**: growing in faithfulness, forgiveness, and loving by principle.
-  To **ESTABLISH** one new **HEALTHY HABIT**, to better serve the Lord with my mind: \_\_\_\_\_
-  To **DEVOTE** regular time each week to **WORK** for God, spreading the good news to others through Bible studies, small groups, etc. (TMI).
-  To **KEEP** the **SABBATH**, preparing for it accordingly on Friday, keeping its limits, right thoughts, and activities.
-  To **FAITHFULLY RETURN** the Lord's **TITHE** (10% of my income).
-  To **DEDICATE** a percentage ( \_\_\_\_ %) of my income as a regular **OFFERING** to the Lord.

WITH GOD'S HELP: \_\_\_\_\_ DATE: \_\_\_\_\_

 **STEWARDSHIP MINISTRIES**

# Improving Personal Devotional Life

By Doctor David Shim

Our devotional life is something that can often be rushed, or completely missed, in the busyness of life. Devotionals can seem less important, especially in the rush of day-to-day crammed schedules. The commitment to devotions can wane in the times of urgency or stress. Devotions can go easily go to the back-burner of one's priority list. Daniel's life represents a radical commitment to devotions, a devotional life worth dying for. He stands as a model and an inspiration.

## Relevance of the Book of Daniel

Can the book of Daniel have any practical bearing on our lives today? Is the book of Daniel relevant to 21st century living? The answer is found in the words of Jesus in Matthew 24:15, where Jesus gives a book endorsement:

"Therefore when you see the abomination of desolation, spoken of by Daniel the prophet standing in the holy place. (Whoever reads let him understand)".

Notice these ideas found within Jesus' endorsement of the book of Daniel:

1. Daniel is an inspired prophet and by implication the book of Daniel is trustworthy.
2. The book of Daniel should be read and studied.
3. The book of Daniel would be understood.
4. The prophecies within the book of Daniel will be fulfilled.
5. The book of Daniel's message is relevant and practical for end time living.<sup>1</sup>

Jesus states that the book of Daniel is relevant for 21st century end time living. Daniel literally means "God is my Judge". Laodicea, God's last day church, means a "people judged". Daniel is a type of God's people who will be living during the time of judgment just prior to the Second Coming of Jesus.

The book of Daniel has within its two main genres: Stories and Prophecies. There are 8 stories; 6 of the stories depict characteristics that we are to seek to emulate as the prophecies are being fulfilled and 2

of the stories depict characteristics that we are to seek to avoid as the prophecies are being fulfilled.<sup>2</sup>

## Lesson from Daniel 6

In this chapter, Daniel was now an old man well into his eighties. Yet, he faced one of the greatest challenges of his life. Similar to the theme in Daniel chapter 3, worship again becomes a central issue. Daniel was not present at the test on the plain of Dura in chapter 3 and chapter 6 of Daniel removes any questions of his fidelity to God.

There exist striking parallels between Daniel 3, Daniel 6 and the Mark of the Beast:

- They involve persecution for obeying God's law. (Daniel 3:6; Daniel 6:5; Revelation 12:17)
- They involve false worship. (Daniel 3:5; Daniel 6:6-9; Revelation 13:15)
- They involve the death decree for failure to comply. (Daniel 3:6; Daniel 6:7; Revelation 13:15)
- They involve the saving of the righteous by the intervention of God. (Daniel 3:25-28; Daniel 6:19-23; Revelation 19:11)

<sup>1</sup> Leslie Hardinge, *Jesus is My Judge*, p. 1

<sup>2</sup> Leslie Hardinge, *Jesus is My Judge*, p. 6

The story of the Daniel and the lions dens has the same theme as Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego in the fiery furnace. And these two chapters parallel the end time issue of worshipping the beast in the book of Revelation.

A decree was made that anyone who worships anyone other than the king for 30 days would be thrown to the lions. Daniel knew that opening his windows and praying to God that morning would mean his death. Daniel would rather die than miss his devotions.

Daniel's example leaves a legacy of practical principles for a devotional life. First, Daniel's level of commitment was resolute. Devotions was his highest priority of his day. Everything else was secondary. Second, Daniel had a regular time and place for personal devotions. This regularity became a habit for his daily life.

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*Daniel would rather die  
than miss his devotions.*

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Daniel's devotional life became the bedrock of his legacy of faithfulness. The same is true for God's people living in the last days; the devotional life of God's last day people will become the daily anchor for faithfulness and fidelity to God.





## Practical pointers for devotional life:

1. Ask the Lord to create in you a deeper desire for Him.
2. Set a regular time and place to have devotions.
3. Pray before you begin ask the Holy Spirit to guide you.
4. Choose a passage of Scripture. You can start off with practical books like 1 Thessalonians or James.
5. Paraphrase the passage in your own words your journal or your sheet of paper.
6. Ask God, "Lord what are you trying to tell me through this passage".
7. Write your prayer response to God.
8. Think about the Bible passage throughout the day.

Take baby steps. Begin with just a few minutes a day and increase over time. If you miss a day or days, don't be discouraged start them up again; it's not about track record it's about trajectory. Pray that God will create in you a deeper desire for Him.

## Am I saved by my devotions?

The Bible is clear that we are saved by grace through faith in Jesus Christ alone. Becoming a Christian is one thing; growing in Christ requires maintain our connection to Him is another. As Jesus said it is a vine to branches relationship. Devotions maintains our connection to God as our source of strength. Accepting Jesus as our personal Saviour makes us alive in Christ. Our devotional life keeps us alive in Christ by connecting us to the source of strength.

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*God is always eagerly waiting to spend time with us and will receive us regardless of our track record*

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## What if I miss devotions?

Like with any habit it may be challenging at first to establish the new habit of daily devotions and if you miss, don't give up. The Bible says that a righteous person keeps on getting back up (Proverbs 24:15). Ask the Lord to give you strength; He will help you for He desires nothing more than to spend time with you daily!

## Quality Time

Relationships are built on quality time. Think of people who are dating; time together is the entity that is sought after and made a high priority. In fact, a couple that does not spend time together will grow apart. The difference between a friend and an acquaintance is closely related to the amount of voluntary time we spent with the individual. If we are serious about our relationships will be intentional about spending time together. Time together provides opportunity for shared experiences, conversation, and the building of memories.

Our relationship with God is also built on time. God considers time such an important factor in our relationship with Him that He established the Sabbath immediately after creating man. The Sabbath is a cyclical re-occurrence that makes our relationship with God the priority of our week. Our daily devotions are a cyclical re-occurrence that makes our relationship with God the priority of our day.

Our relationship with God can be difficult to define; it can be thought of in a ethereal nebulous way. However, the notion of time and relationship puts our relationship with God into tangible terms. In other words, no time with God - no relationship with God. It's a startling reality to reflect upon, but God is always eagerly waiting to spend time with us and will receive us regardless of our track record.

## Personal reflection questions:

- How is my devotional life?
- When have been the times when devotions have been consistent? Inconsistent? In a rut?
- When have been the times when you've had amazing devotions?
- What made the difference?
- Why do you think it's so hard to have a consistent devotional life?
- What are some of the greatest hindrances to personal devotions?
- If we are not saved by works, is devotions a work?
- Can we be saved without a devotional life?



**Dr David Shim**

President,  
Ouachita Hills College, Arkansas, USA

## *My Commitment*

To SET APART the first moments of each day to commune with the Lord through PRAYER, the STUDY of the Bible, the Spirit of Prophecy, and the Sabbath School lessons, and in FAMILY WORSHIP.

# Cultivating Quality Relationships in God's Family

By Pastor Robert Osei-Bonsu

## Introduction

My family was actively involved with our local church as I grew up. We regularly attended services each Saturday and participated in different weekly activities. What always stood out to me about church was its sense of community: people truly cared for each other. One summer, our church hosted a mission trip to another State for a week. While working on construction projects and helping local families in need was fulfilling enough work-wise. What made the experience memorable was making lasting friendships between all participants that would last long after our trip had concluded.

Stewardship is a core element of Christian theology, emphasizing responsible care of the resources entrusted by God, including material and spiritual. One aspect of Christian stewardship involves cultivating good relationships within the church.

This article discusses stewardship in relationships within the church. It draws from Scripture, theological literature, and practical examples as sources. Furthermore, this piece offers tips for building quality relationships through intentional stewardship practices for individuals and church communities.

## Importance of Quality Relationships in the Church

Paul likened the church community to a body, with each part playing a unique role in making the functioning of the whole possible. Just as the body parts are crucially interdependent, and when one suffers or rejoices, all suffer a similar impact. It highlights the significance of stewardship in relationships within the church, with each member supporting the well-being of the whole through

loving, serving, and building each other up in the faith.

John W. de Grouch's (2001) "The Stewardship of Life" highlights stewardship as a central aspect of Christian discipleship, covering all areas of life, including relationships within the church community.<sup>1</sup> Quality relationships in church require developing trust among members, showing respect, and genuine affection towards each other. Believers are expected to serve one another with humility and selflessness while encouraging one another in their faith journeys. Fostering meaningful connections that bring members closer to each other is integral to experiencing the fullness of God's love and grace.

To foster spiritual development and maturity, believers must build meaningful relationships among themselves. McManus (2018) notes how healthy relationships can increase support and encouragement during each person's spiritual

<sup>1</sup> De Gruchy, J. W. (2001). *The stewardship of life: Making the most of all that you have been given*. Westminster John.

journey.<sup>2</sup> It may result in a deeper understanding of God's love and an increased sense of belonging within the church community. To foster strong bonds within the congregations, attending worship services, Bible studies, and prayer meetings regularly may provide ample opportunities for fellowship among fellow believers.

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*Building stronger relationships within the Church community begins by practicing hospitality.*

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Establishing solid bonds within God's family or Church is vitally important for various reasons:

First and foremost, church membership provides individuals with accountability, support, and encouragement that allows for spiritual growth that leads to deeper maturity in the faith. Second, nurturing quality relationships within God's family or the church can offer emotional support during trying times - providing a safe space to share struggles while receiving comfort and advice.

Thirdly, the church is a community of believers with a shared faith. By building quality relationships

within God's family or the church, individuals can feel a sense of belonging and connectedness within a larger society. Additionally, through cultivating these quality relationships, they may discover service opportunities that help form deeper bonds while fulfilling their calling as Christians.

Ellen G. White recognized the significance of building strong relationships within God's family as being essential for spiritual development, both individually and as an institution. She wrote: "Love is the basis of godliness. Whatever the profession, no man has pure love for God unless he has unselfish love for his brother (*Christ's Object Lessons*, p. 384.2).<sup>3</sup> The sincere love and care we have for our fellow believers reflect our love for God and play a vital role in our spiritual development.

## Strengthening relationships within my church community

Building stronger relationships within the Church community begins by practicing hospitality - welcoming others into our lives and building community, as stated in Romans 12:13. This can be accomplished by sharing meals, attending Church events, engaging in dialogue, and hosting conversations about spiritual matters. Generosity also plays an integral part in good stewardship, as stated in 2 Corinthians 9:6-7. It shows our willingness to share resources such as finances



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<sup>2</sup> McManus, E. (2018). *Healthy Relationships in the Church*. In *Discovering Healthy Church Growth* (pp. 69–83). Routledge.

<sup>3</sup> Ellen G. White, *Christ's Object Lessons*, p. 384.2

or time with those less fortunate while deepening bonds within the Church families.

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*Establishing meaningful connections within the church is essential for spiritual development, emotional support, community building, and service.*

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Furthermore, service and leadership play an essential role in building relationships. By using our talents and abilities to serve the needs of believers, we can contribute to building up the church community, as stated in Ephesians 4:11-13. It can be done by volunteering, leading a small group, or mentoring others. As a part of leadership, we should encourage others to develop their skills and use their talents to serve the church community.

Here are some practical strategies for cultivating quality relationships among believers to enhance

worship participation and engagement in fellowship are encouraged.

1. **Attend Church Regularly.** Attendance at worship services, Bible studies, or prayer meetings can offer ample opportunity for fellowship among believers. It provides opportunities to fellowship with other believers, participate in worship and engage in fellowship. Regular church attendance can be an effective way of building meaningful relationships within God's family, providing opportunities to meet other believers, participate in worship services, and enjoy fellowship activities.
2. **Participation in Small Groups:** Joining a small group can offer a safe space to share challenges, receive support and engage with like-minded individuals.
3. **Serving in Ministry:** Participating in ministry can be a fantastic way to forge meaningful connections within the church community. By working alongside like-minded individuals who share similar passions, you can form deep ties through shared experiences.
4. **Engaging in ministry and outreach** is a great way to build meaningful relationships within a church community. Working toward shared goals creates an ethos of shared purpose while helping individuals discover and develop their talents and gifts. Jesus taught that His disciples

who serve others are among His highest esteemed followers (Matthew 23:11-12). When we serve each other, we demonstrate our love for God and each other and, at the same time, strengthen the community within the church (1 Peter 4:10).

5. **Regular Communication:** For relationships within a church to flourish, regular communication between believers should occur through phone calls, texts, emails, or social media. Attending church events, participating in small groups or Bible studies, and volunteering alongside one another are great ways of cultivating intentional connections (DeVries 2017). Expressing appreciation for each other creates a feeling of togetherness and respect within a congregation (Emmons & McCullough, 2003).<sup>4</sup> To foster unity and mutual respect, members must express themselves empathetically while showing appreciation toward one another (DeVries, 2017). To promote unity and mutual respect, members must express themselves respectfully while showing appreciation towards other believers.
6. **Engage in Active Listening and Empathy:** Practical communication skills are necessary to build strong relationships. It includes actively listening to others, understanding their point of view, showing empathy toward their feelings, experiences, and emotions, and showing

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4 Emmons, R. A., & McCullough, M. E. (2003). "Counting blessings versus burdens: An experimental investigation of gratitude and subjective well-being in daily life." *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 84(2), 377-389.



kindness (Gibson & Guerrero, 2018).<sup>5</sup> Ideally, it would be good to listen attentively while trying to comprehend what others say empathetically (Gibson & Guerrero, 2018).

7. **Practice Forgiveness:** In maintaining healthy relationships, practicing forgiveness is paramount. When conflicts arise, seeking and extending forgiveness is vital to restore relationships and promote unity within the church. As believers, we are called to prioritize others' needs first and love one another (John 13:34-35; Philippians 2:3-4). Building quality relationships within the church takes intentional effort and willingness from all members to prioritize others' needs and love them as Jesus would desire (Philippians 2:3-5). By doing so, believers can experience the fullness of community support that comes from being part of God's family.
8. **Engaging in Regular Fellowship and Worship:** Attending church regularly and participating in worship are integral to building strong community relationships. By gathering as a group of believers, we can share personal experiences while offering each other spiritual support and sharing our spiritual beliefs.

## Conclusion

Stewardship is deeply ingrained in Christian beliefs and involves taking care to manage responsibly the resources given to us by God. Attending church, engaging in small groups, serving in ministry, and maintaining open communication are effective strategies for developing and strengthening relationships. Establishing meaningful connections within the church is essential for spiritual development, emotional support, community building, and service. Through investing in other believers, individuals can experience God's grace within the church community. Therefore, individuals and communities alike must foster responsible stewardship of relationships within their church to build robust and thriving faith-based communities of faithful individuals.



**Pr Robert Osei-Bonsu, PhD, MEd**  
President, West-Central Africa Division,  
General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists®

## My Commitment

To IMPROVE my RELATIONSHIPS:  
growing in faithfulness,  
forgiveness, and loving by  
principle.



5 Gibson, J. L., & Guerrero, L. K. (2018). *Communicating in relationships: A guide for couples and professionals*. Routledge.

# Developing Sustainable Health Habits

By N. D. Emerson, MD

Tony rolled into our new office in a wheelchair. My family and I had just returned from serving at the Guam SDA clinic for eight years and had started an internal medicine practice in Oklahoma. I wondered why Tony, a new patient with type 2 diabetes, was in a wheelchair. At 5' 3", she weighed 325 lbs, more than her knees could carry. Tragically, she was blind due to years of uncontrolled blood sugars. She also had high blood pressure (hypertension). Her blood pressure was 180/90 when I first saw her . . . it should have been  $\leq 120/80$ . She could only afford one of her two prescribed blood pressure medications. She was also taking a statin drug, which lowered her cholesterol to 200, the average level in America. Unfortunately, average is not optimal, as it still carries considerable risk. To control her blood sugars, she was injecting 44 units of insulin a day.

## Discovering God's Plan

I could have told her that diabetes is genetic, that there is nothing to do except adjust her medications and wait for further complications such as heart attack, stroke, kidney failure, or amputation, and

that she is doomed to carry this weight the rest of her life. Instead, I chose to tell her about God's plan for a healthy body that can often eliminate the need for medications or significantly reduce it. The plan's dietary component was instituted in the Garden of Eden when God said, "See, I have given you every herb that yields seed which is on the face of all the earth, and every tree whose fruit yields seed; to you it shall be for food" (Genesis 1:29, NKJV).

I invited her to start with a total vegetarian diet that also eliminated oils. Rationale for the oil-free dietary approach in people with diabetes is science based.

At the University of Kentucky in 1973, Dr. James Anderson gave lean, healthy individuals one pound of sugar per day with only 5% of their calories from fat. After 11 weeks, they could not produce even one diabetic or pre-diabetic among the subjects. [This high-sugar diet is NOT recommended!] However, when subjects were placed on a high-fat diet (65% of calories from fat), in less than two weeks that diet induced pre-diabetes.

## Knowing Our Metabolism

When we take in carbohydrates, blood sugar rises, and the pancreas senses this and releases insulin (a "key"), which moves to the insulin receptors on the cells (the "keyholes"). The insulin "key" opens the sugar doors to the cells, allowing sugar to enter and be used. When certain fats are consumed, they "plug the keyholes" and prevent the insulin from opening the sugar doors. The result is called insulin resistance. The pancreas initially overcomes this by releasing more insulin, but it eventually becomes fatigued, unable to overcome the resistance. Blood sugars rise to pre-diabetes and diabetes levels. Recent studies suggest that oxidized fats cause the problem (e.g., extracted olive oil unaccompanied by the olive's antioxidant glutathione and then exposed to air). This gives new meaning to Ellen White's comment, "The oil, as eaten in the olive, is far preferable to animal oil or fat" (*Counsels on Diet and Foods*, 350). Plant fat, in its natural state, in nuts, seeds, olives, or avocados is unoxidised.

In 1927, Dr. James Shirley Sweeney thought he could give diabetes to medical students with a change in diet. He gave them a high-carbohydrate diet with sugar, candy, pastry, white bread, syrup, baked potatoes, bananas, rice, and oatmeal. After two days, the glucose tolerance test showed no diabetes or pre-diabetes. He gave another group a high-fat diet of olive oil, butter, mayonnaise (made with egg yolks), and 20% cream for two days. The glucose tolerance test in four of them showed pre-diabetes, and the other two were in the diabetic range.

**This study was one of the first to suggest that high blood glucose occurs in response to an increasing quantity of dietary fat and carbs and not just carbs by themselves.**

One disease outcome is often connected to others. So it was no surprise that Tony had multiple health conditions. Insulin resistance is a risk factor not only of pre-diabetes and type 2 diabetes, but also obesity, hypertension, elevated triglycerides (the fat in the blood), and low HDL levels (the good cholesterol). Any patient with three or more of these characteristics is diagnosed with insulin resistance syndrome. The high insulin production of the pancreas may keep fasting blood sugars below the diabetes range for years, but it comes at a price: fat accumulation, especially in and around the internal



organs. Since this extra insulin increases fat storage and decreases fat burning, it often also results in fatty liver disease and abdominal obesity.

For Tony, an oil-free, “Genesis 1:29” diet could lower insulin resistance, resulting in lower insulin levels and weight loss. Typical weight loss of 1–2 lbs per week happens when there is a healthy metabolic rate. Also, skipping the evening meal (now popularly known as intermittent fasting) while not decreasing total daily calories would increase the time between meals when fat burning occurs, resulting in more steady weight loss and decreased fatty deposits in the liver.

## Making it Sustainable

So, I told Tony to do what people do all around the less-industrialized world: they choose a whole grain (rice, quinoa, millet) and a legume (bean, pea, lentil, chickpea) that grows locally as their staple, and then fill out their diet with fruits, nuts, seeds, and vegetables.

Country	Grain	Legume
Mexico	Corn	Beans
China	Rice	Peas
India	Wheat	Lentils
Ethiopia	Teff	Chickpeas

Nowadays, one can put the legumes in an Instant Pot, slow cooker or Crock-Pot, the grain in a rice cooker overnight, and then add fruits and nuts for a

sweet breakfast meal and vegetables for a savoury lunch. A thoroughly cooked grain or fruit is an easily digested evening meal if a third meal is eaten.

Tony accepted the new diet for its simplicity, accessibility, and practicality, but would it be challenging to stay on such a plan? Many say “yes.” A study published in the *Journal of the American Medical Association* (JAMA) in January 5, 2005, has documented the dietary compliance challenge. After individuals were trained to follow one of four different diets and told the pros and cons, researchers later asked, “On a scale of 1 (barely compliant) to 10 (complete compliance), how well are you doing?” At three months, none averaged better than 5/10, and at six months, none averaged better than 4/10. Why the failure if they knew the benefits?

I’m sure you guessed: They lacked the power to follow through. Why? Excluding the myriad of other reasons for not complying with reasonable dietary instructions, the Bible says, “For as by one man’s disobedience many were made sinners, so by the obedience of one shall many be made righteous” (Romans 5:19, KJV). Adam’s fall corrupted his nature, which he passed on to us, his children. Now we all feel the pull to do wrong, which Paul describes as “the law of sin which is in my members” (Romans 7:23, KJV). The word “law” here could mean force or power, as in the law of gravity. However, most of us also have the will to do good, as Paul says, “For to will is present with me”

(Romans 7:18, NKJV). This willpower he calls the “law of [the] mind” (Romans 7:23). What happens when these two laws or forces meet? “But I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members” (Romans 7:23, NKJV).

As a result, we may have occasional victories, but the “law of sin” eventually wins if the battle is just between these two opposing laws or forces. Paul cries out, “O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?” (Romans 7:24, KJV). What’s God’s solution to our desperate plight? “But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us” (Romans 5:8, KJV). His death purchased two gifts: eternal life and a third law or force, called the “law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus” (Rom 8:2). “There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit. For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made me free from the law of sin and death” (Rom 8:1, 2, KJV). “The Spirit of life” refers to the Holy Spirit, and the “law of the Spirit of life” is the power the Holy Spirit gives to life. When this third law or force is coupled with the law of my mind (willpower), it produces victory over the law of sin in my members, as Paul describes. To experience this, we must invite the Holy Spirit into our lives daily (Luke 11:13) and accept His guidance.

Two years after the above JAMA study, Susan Gregory launched the blog “The Daniel Cure,” to help people have a closer walk with God as Daniel did. So, similar to Daniel’s habit, it included a total vegetarian diet (Daniel 1:12) and a 15-minute morning devotional (Daniel 6:10) for 21 days. She then encouraged them to continue the program on their own. Using the same compliance scale, Rick, a researcher, found that by simply adding the morning devotion, compliance with the diet at three months went from 5/10 (without a devotional) to 8.5/10 (with the devotional), and at six months, went from 4/10 to 8/10. Compliance doubled by spending time with God!

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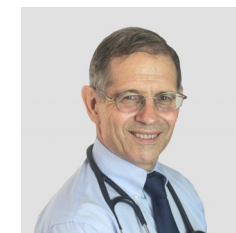
*In one year, she was off her insulin injections. In two years, her weight dropped from 325 to 211.*

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Tony, our patient, did something remarkable: She implemented what we recommended and followed through! With the help of her supportive husband, she went on an intensive plant-based, total vegetarian diet. Within two months, her blood pressure dropped to 94/56, and she stopped taking her blood pressure medications. In one year, she

was off her insulin injections, and her blood sugars were in acceptable ranges. In two years, her weight dropped from 325 to 211 (at about a pound a week) with no imposed calorie restriction and no special exercise (she was in a wheelchair). With the weight reduction, her orthopaedic surgeon now considered her a candidate for a bilateral knee replacement. She even started walking again after her surgery. Instead of going from bad to worse, she was actually getting better!

Are you contemplating the need to change to new healthy habits? Do you wish to become a better steward of your body? Strongly consider adopting a diet rich in whole-plant foods such as legumes, grains, fruit, nuts, and vegetables, and eliminate oils, meat, dairy products, and sugar-added, ultra-processed foods. Remember to incorporate and integrate other elements of a healthy lifestyle, not just focusing on one health issue or symptom. You are a whole person! Ensure that the new habits are simple, accessible, and practical to implement. Above all, you can find the strength to stick to it with a daily morning devotional schedule and gain power to change and guidance from the Holy Spirit.



**Dr. N. David Emerson**

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International Speaker on Lifestyle diseases, and  
Certified Bredeson Alzheimer Reversal Physician

## *My Commitment*

To ESTABLISH one new HEALTHY HABIT, to better serve the Lord with my mind:

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# Bearing Witness of a Personal Saviour

By Pastor Jim Howard

Have you ever felt lonely in a crowd? Surrounded by multitudes of people but noticed by no one? In this world it's easy to feel invisible. People walk right by us, absorbed in their own interests, and leave us wondering if anyone really cares.

But Jesus is different. He's interested in us. He notices us. The love of Jesus isn't just for "the world," but for each individual. The beauty of the parable of the lost sheep is the *number* of sheep that were lost (Luke 15:4). There was one. Only one. And the Good Shepherd pursued that one lost sheep until He found it. That's what Jesus' love is like. It's personal. You are worth everything to Him. So when Jesus walked this earth, He ministered to people individually. "Every soul was precious in His sight" (*Gospel Workers*, p. 117). As faithful and caring stewards, we are called to seek his lost sheep using His way.

## Personal Labour

The personal interest and labours of Jesus are what define His method of reaching people:

"The Lord desires that His word of grace shall be brought home to every soul. To a great degree this must be accomplished by personal labour. This was Christ's method. His work was largely made up of personal interviews. He had a faithful regard for the one-soul audience. Through that one soul the message was often extended to thousands" (*Christ's Object Lessons*, p. 229).

It was to one man, Nicodemus, that Jesus spoke the well-known words, "For God so loved the world." But it wasn't just "the world" that Jesus was concerned about. He cared about Nicodemus' personal situation—"Are you the teacher of Israel, and do not know these things?" John 3:10. It was the personal interest that Jesus took in Nicodemus that influenced him to eventually become a dedicated disciple.

The same could be said of the woman of Samaria in John 4. In the middle of a discussion about Jews

and Samaritans, Jesus made the matter personal: "Go, call your husband, and come here.' The woman answered and said, 'I have no husband.' Jesus said to her, 'You have well said, "I have no husband," for you have had five husbands, and the one whom you now have is not your husband; in that you spoke truly'" (John 4:16-18). When the woman left to tell her townspeople about the encounter, it wasn't Jesus' teachings about true worship that she passed along. Instead, she said, "Come see a Man who told me all things that I ever did" (John 4:28). It was the way He addressed her personally that touched her heart.

Nathanael questioned whether anything good could come out of Nazareth, but when Jesus called him a "true Israelite," it got his attention. "How do you know me?" was Nathanael's quizzical response. "Jesus answered and said to him, 'Before Philip called you, when you were under the fig tree, I saw you'" (John 1:48). And that's all it took to convince Nathanael. "Rabbi, You are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!" (John 1:49). It wasn't only the miraculous nature of Jesus' knowledge that won

this disciple's heart—it was the personal nature. It was the fact that Jesus cared enough to know details about Nathanael's life and to take a personal interest in him.

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*It wasn't only the miraculous nature of Jesus' knowledge that won this disciple's heart—it was the personal nature.*

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Even the eyewitness testimony of trusted friends wasn't enough for Thomas to believe that Jesus had risen from the dead. But all that changed when Jesus appeared to the disciples and addressed his doubt personally: "He said to Thomas, 'Reach your finger here, and look at My hands; and reach your hand here, and put it into My side.'" The fact that the risen Lord of all the earth would take a personal interest in him was more than enough to persuade the doubting disciple: "And Thomas answered and said to Him, 'My Lord and my God!'" (John 20:27, 28).

Saul of Tarsus was a persecutor of Christians before becoming the great apostle Paul. He refused to consider that the lowly Nazarene might be the long-expected Messiah. That is, until he had an





encounter with Jesus. The glorified Christ introduced Himself to Paul as one who knew him personally: “I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting. It is hard for you to kick against the goads” (Acts 9:5). Paul knew in that moment that Jesus had been reading his heart. He had been kicking against, or resisting, the conviction of the Spirit. Paul was compelled to yield to the wondrous love of Christ, “who loved *me* and gave Himself for *me*” (Galatians 2:20).

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*Making disciples is primarily a personal work. It can't be accomplished by sermons alone.*

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Peter had made His allegiance to Jesus known publicly. But for all his self-confidence, he was not very self-aware. Like so many of us, Peter would have to learn the hard way. Once, twice, three times he denied His Lord. And then the fateful moment came. Immediately after the final denial, “the Lord turned and looked at Peter” (Luke 22:61). How could it be that Jesus was thinking of Peter while He Himself was suffering? It was the personal love and attention of Jesus, even after Peter’s failure, that drove the apostle to his knees and led him to a fuller conversion.



Taking an individual interest in people is something every disciple of Jesus can do. This is what witnessing is all about, and it's the great need of the church: "Christ's method alone will give true success in reaching the people. . . . There is need of coming close to the people by personal effort. If less time were given to sermonizing, and more time were spent in personal ministry, greater results would be seen" (*The Ministry of Healing*, p. 143).

Making disciples is primarily a personal work. It can't be accomplished by sermons alone. The personal witness of every church member is needed. Jesus said, "The harvest truly is plentiful, but the labourers are few. Therefore pray the Lord of the harvest to send out labourers into His harvest" (Matthew 9:37, 38). What is needed is more harvest workers—more people with the caring heart of Jesus, willing to take an interest in people's eternal welfare.

## The Growth Process

Jesus' imagery of the harvest gives us a biblical strategy to follow in our personal efforts to make disciples—the growth process. First, we **prepare** the soil of the heart by befriending people and showing them that we care. Next, we **plant** seeds of truth by engaging in spiritual conversation, inviting them to a Bible study or church event, or sharing a piece of literature. When an interest is expressed, it's time to **cultivate** that interest by going through a series of Bible studies together to gain a fuller understanding

of the truth. At the conclusion of these studies, we should **harvest** positive decisions by appealing to our friends to follow Jesus and be baptised. Finally, we need to **preserve** the harvest by nurturing our friends in the development of spiritual habits and training them for to make disciples themselves. All along the way, the key to your success will be the personal interest, sympathy, and love that you express in all your labours.

Our love for God and others is merely a reflection of His love for us. "We love Him because He first loved us" (1 John 4:19). And the power of that love rests to a great degree in its personal nature. We love Jesus, not merely because He's the Saviour of the world, but because He's *our* Saviour. Similarly, making disciples is about drawing close to people, noticing them, listening to them, and taking a personal interest in them. It's about showing our love through this personal labour, and then telling them the good news of a *personal* Saviour.



**Pastor Jim Howard**

Director, Personal Ministries and Sabbath School,  
General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists®



## My Commitment

To DEVOTE regular time each week to WORK for God, spreading the good news to others through Bible studies, small groups, etc. (TMI).

To learn more about Christ's method of making disciples, along with helpful training resources, go to [grow.adventist.org](http://grow.adventist.org)

# Managing Time and Keeping the Sabbath

By Doctor Leonard Johnson

*I must work the works of Him who sent Me while it is day; the night is coming when no one can work.” (John 9: 4, NKJV)*

We have received a responsibility to manage well the precious resources of time, finances, self, and talents given to us by our Creator. This obligation is clearly noted in Psalm 100:1-3 where the Psalmist entreats us to “make a joyful shout to the Lord,” “Serve the Lord” and “Come before His presence” because “It is He who has made us, and not we ourselves; We are His people and the sheep of His pasture” (NKJV). Additionally, Apostle Paul enjoins believers everywhere to “glorify God in your body and in your spirit” (1 Corinthians 6: 20). By implication, we are to glorify God in the use of talents, resources and certainly of time which is the focus of this message.

## A Gift from God

Unlike the gifts of talents and treasures, time is that which we hold in common. Talents are based on one’s ability (refer to Rom. 12:6-9), and financial resources are as God apportions or permits.

However, God has given to each person the same amount of time in a day - 24 hours. Indeed, an impartial God! The Hebrew word “yom” used for day in Genesis 1 “always refers to a twenty-four-hour period when the word is modified by a definite or cardinal number” (Strong, J. 1996 - *The exhaustive concordance of the Bible* electronic ed). Furthermore, in the book *Working the Angles: The Shape of Pastoral Integrity*, Eugene Peterson explains the beginning and ending of a day. “The day doesn’t start when we wake up. In fact, we enter the day sleeping, resting, unaware of what God is doing as he starts the day. We are given the opportunity to wake to a day already spoken into creation and we did nothing to make it happen” *Salty Believer “Evening and Morning”* Byran Catherman.

Clearly, the reference to a day in Genesis 1 is a literal 24-hour period that constitutes a gift of time each day for the entire week. This remarkable gift of time from the Creator demands that we wisely apportion it for worship, work, family, self, and rest etc. Peter Drucker observes that “Time is the

scarcest resource and unless it is managed nothing else can be managed.”

How does one carve out time for all the above? Prioritising is crucial.

## The Need to Prioritise

In John 9:4, Jesus declares, “I must work the works of Him who sent Me while it is day; the night is coming when no one can work.” The sense of urgency is obvious here. Jere Patzer, a former president of The North Pacific Union, captures this urgency by asserting that “leaders must have an ‘intentional’ ministry” (*The Road Ahead* Jere Patzer p.70). With this statement, he deliberately promotes the importance of managing time to get the best and the most out of a day. In addition, Edgar Mills defines the concept of “intentionality” as “Purposely directing one’s life as much as possible rather than allowing it to be determined by external pressures.” Essentially, one must proactively take charge of his life and that which surrounds it as opposed to allowing circumstances to control and dictate one’s life. Benjamin Franklin sums it up well when he said, “If you fail to plan, you are planning to fail.”

While in undergraduate school, I learned the art of planning my day the night before by creating an agenda. I listed in order of importance what I needed to get done. Though apparently routine, this worked well for me. Of course, that is not to say that everything got done; but most of the time, I met deadlines without compromising worship time and the important things of life. Inspired writer Ellen White states, "It is wrong to waste our time. If every moment were valued and rightly employed, we should have time for everything that we need to do for ourselves or for the world." (*The Ministry of Healing*, p. 208) It is no wonder the Apostle Paul implores believers to "walk circumspectly, not as fools but as wise," vs.16 "redeeming the time, because the days are evil." (Ephesians 5:15, 16, NKJV) To walk circumspectly is to walk "strictly," "accurately," "diligently," "carefully" as noted by the SDAC 6.

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*"You must live in the present on today's deposits."  
- Marc Levy*

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Basically, the text is saying that one should "Take diligent heed how (he) walk(s)" The follower of God is admonished "to follow a disciplined course. He is to make every effort to resist the temptations that





surround him" *Ibid*. And in doing so, he is to redeem the time or make the most of the opportunity. It is so easy to procrastinate. For example, consider the many plans and resolutions made at the beginning of the year. Have they been implemented, and are they still being pursued? Philosopher Lao Tzu says, "the longest journey starts with a single step."

Marc Levy makes clearer the need to prioritize. He says, "Consider the following shared with me. There is a bank that credits your account each morning with \$86,400! It carries over no balance from day to day. Every evening deletes whatever part of the balance you failed to use during the day. What would you do? Draw out ALL OF IT, of course! Each of us has such a bank. Its name is TIME. Every morning, it credits you with 86,400 seconds. Every night it writes off, as lost, whatever of this you have failed to invest to good purpose. It carries over no balance. It allows no overdraft. Each day it opens a new account for you. Each night it burns the remains of the day. If you fail to use the day's deposits, the loss is yours. There is no going back. There is no drawing against the "tomorrow." You must live in the present on today's deposits. Invest it so as to get from it the utmost in health, happiness, and success! The clock is running. Make the most of today." *If Only It Were True* Marc Levy.

## Privileged Time

It is difficult to talk about time without considering the days of the week as alluded to earlier. Moreover, it would be reckless to talk about days and time without considering the weekly gift of the Sabbath. The words of Moses continue to echo, reminding people everywhere, "Six days you shall labour and do all your work. But the seventh day is the Sabbath of the Lord Thy God" Exodus 20:9, NKJV). Therefore, "Remember, the Sabbath day to keep it holy!"

This timely reminder each week is designed to create balance and perspective enabling you and me to reconnect with our God, self, family, and nature and to conform to God's rhythm of time. Famous Jewish author Abraham Heschel calls the Sabbath "a palace in time." – *The Sabbath: Its meaning for Modern Men* (New York: Farrar, Straquus, and Giroux, 2005), p. 12.

Each seventh day, God's heavenly palace descends from heaven to earth, and the Lord invites us into the glory of His presence for this 24-hour period to spend a time of intimate fellowship with Him. SS *Quarterly Lesson 8* May 13-19, 2023. The Sabbath points us to our Creator and Redeemer every week and invites us to worship Him. Is it any wonder that at the centre of the great controversy over Christ's worthiness to receive worship as Creator is the Sabbath! (*Ibid*). Sabbath worship is time well spent with our Creator and Redeemer! And the good news is that it will continue in the new earth (refer to Isaiah 66:22, 23).

In conclusion, I reference an interesting analogy made by Stephen Covey that underscores the need to embrace the Sabbath or what I call privileged time. Says Covey, "Suppose you were to come upon someone in the woods working feverishly to saw down a tree. 'What are you doing?' you ask. 'Can't you see?' comes the impatient reply. 'I'm sawing down this tree.' 'You look exhausted!' you exclaim. 'How long have you been at it?' 'Over five hours,' he returns, 'and I'm beat! This is hard work.' 'Well why don't you take a break for a few minutes and sharpen that saw?' you inquire. 'I'm sure it would go a lot faster.' 'I don't have time to sharpen the saw.' The man says emphatically. 'I'm too busy sawing!'"

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*"Time is the scarcest resource and unless it is managed nothing else can be managed."*  
-Peter Drucker.

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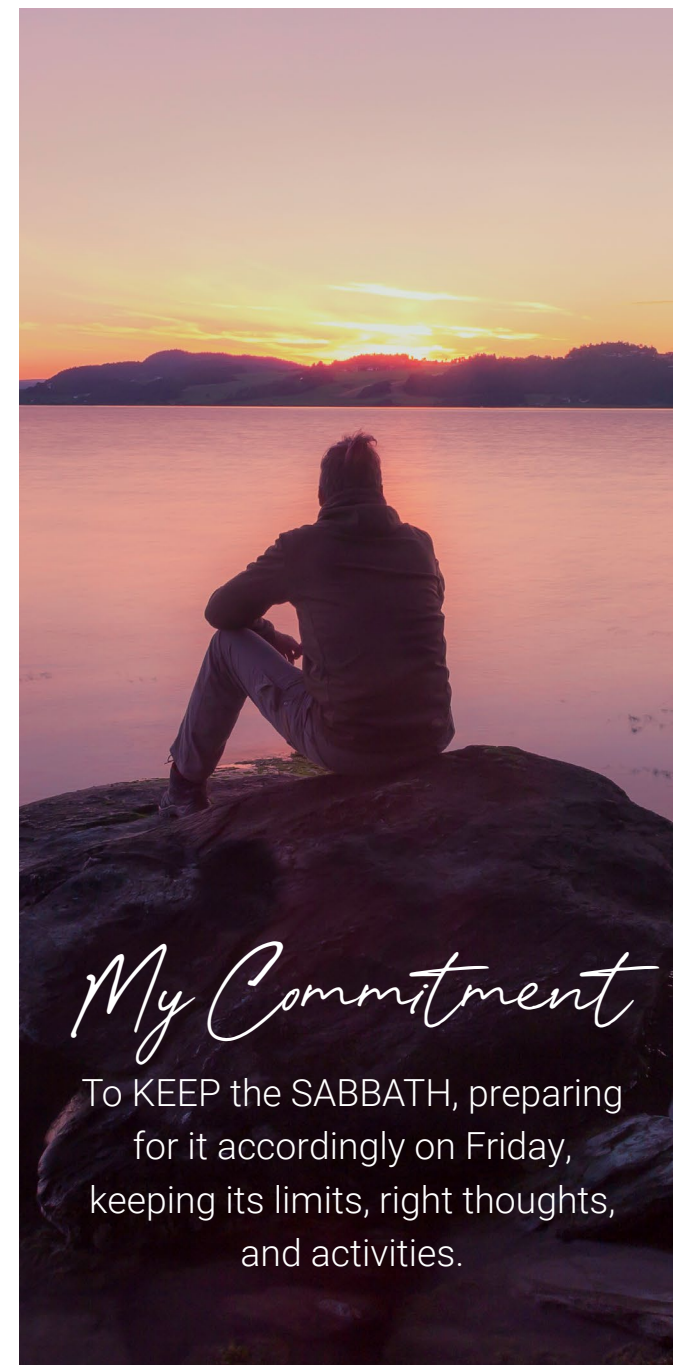
Perhaps, many people are stressed, disturbed, and troubled simply because they are too busy to spend quality time with God daily and embrace God's Sabbath – a pause in time designed to renew, restore, and provide purpose and perspective. I

need to sharpen my saw. This advice of President Abraham Lincoln deserves the full attention of those living in a frenzy world, "If I had eight hours to chop down a tree, I'd spend six sharpening my axe." Spending time with God honing your axe is never wasted!



**Dr Leonard Johnson**

Executive Secretary of the Inter-American Division,  
General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists®



# God's Trust School

By Pastor Marcos Bomfim

Is it true that tithe should be given for the purpose of supporting the ministry of the church, or is there a higher purpose for giving tithe? One important thing is why we are commanded to tithe, and a different thing is how tithe should be used after it is given.

To avoid some common mistakes related to this issue, we will review some instructions about "Why" we should tithe and "How" to tithe.

## Why to tithe?

**1. Tithe is an expression of trust.** Every time tithe is brought to the storehouse according to God's prescription, it testifies that the worshipper believes that there is a God in heaven, that He is the Sustainer and the Provider (Psalm 145:14-16, 19-20), and that they still believe in the Bible as God's word, a reliable guide for life (Psalm 119:105). As a matter of fact, to refrain from tithing out of fear that the remaining resources would not be enough is an indication that someone no longer trusts God as the Provider and Sustainer. That person no longer believes that there is a supernatural reward for those who practice tithing (Malachi 3:10-11).

That is why the absence of tithe, when there is an income, is an indicator of apostasy. And because it is so dangerous for one's spiritual life, this lack of trust should be dealt with in a loving and responsible way by selected and faithful church leaders, those who see themselves as guardians of the souls of men and women entrusted to them.

**2. Tithe is an exercise of allegiance,** "... that you may learn to fear the Lord your God always" (Deut. 14:23). It is not uncommon that church members and even pastors mistake the purpose of tithing ("that you may learn to fear the Lord") for the use of the tithe, or how it is spent (e.g. Numbers 18:21; 1 Corinthians 9:3-14).

Those who tithe are supposed to do it in recognition of God as Creator, Owner of all things, and Legislator of the Universe. The desire to tithe was not generated in the human heart nor in the Church's councils. As it was commanded by God Himself (Leviticus 27:30-33; Malachi 3:8-11) the act of tithing confirms that the worshipper aligns himself or herself with His instructions, and does it out of submission to His word.

**3. The Tithe and the Sabbath** are both signs of loyalty to God, an acknowledgment of His sovereignty. Both practices require real sacrifice (of time and/or resources), in trust that God will provide. Those who fear God and keep the Sabbath, refrain from working and generating income during those twenty-four hours, from which they could eat. In turn, they believe that God will abundantly supply what they missed out on earning during those hours.

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*The absence of tithe, when there is an income, is an indicator of apostasy.*

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Those who tithe, also out of the fear of the Lord, refrain from helping themselves out of those ten percent of their income that they could otherwise "eat" from. They do it out of the belief that God will open the windows of heaven and pour out "such

blessing that there will not be room enough to receive it". They also believe that because of this practice, the devourer will be rebuked (Malachi 3:10-11).

Therefore, keeping the Sabbath and tithing are practices that exercise faith and trust in God's ability to provide, and prevent any Deist inclination. This practice will lead to more prayer, and prayer will strengthen faith, opening the way for God to provide through His miraculous works.

**4. The Tithe and the Mark of the Beast.** Those who will not worship the beast, who will not receive the mark of the beast, will be terribly mistreated. And the persecution may start with economic sanctions, so "that no one may buy or sell except one who has the mark or the name of the beast, or the number of his name." Revelation 13:17. This situation will generate an unimaginable stressful situation for God's people. Normal life in society will no longer be possible. Simple things like fuelling a vehicle, going to the supermarket, and paying utility bills, will suddenly become impossible for those who have not received the mark of the beast. How to eat if you are not able to buy? Therefore, they will need to leave everything behind, fleeing to unfrequented places where they should wait for supernatural sustenance, like the people of Israel in the desert.

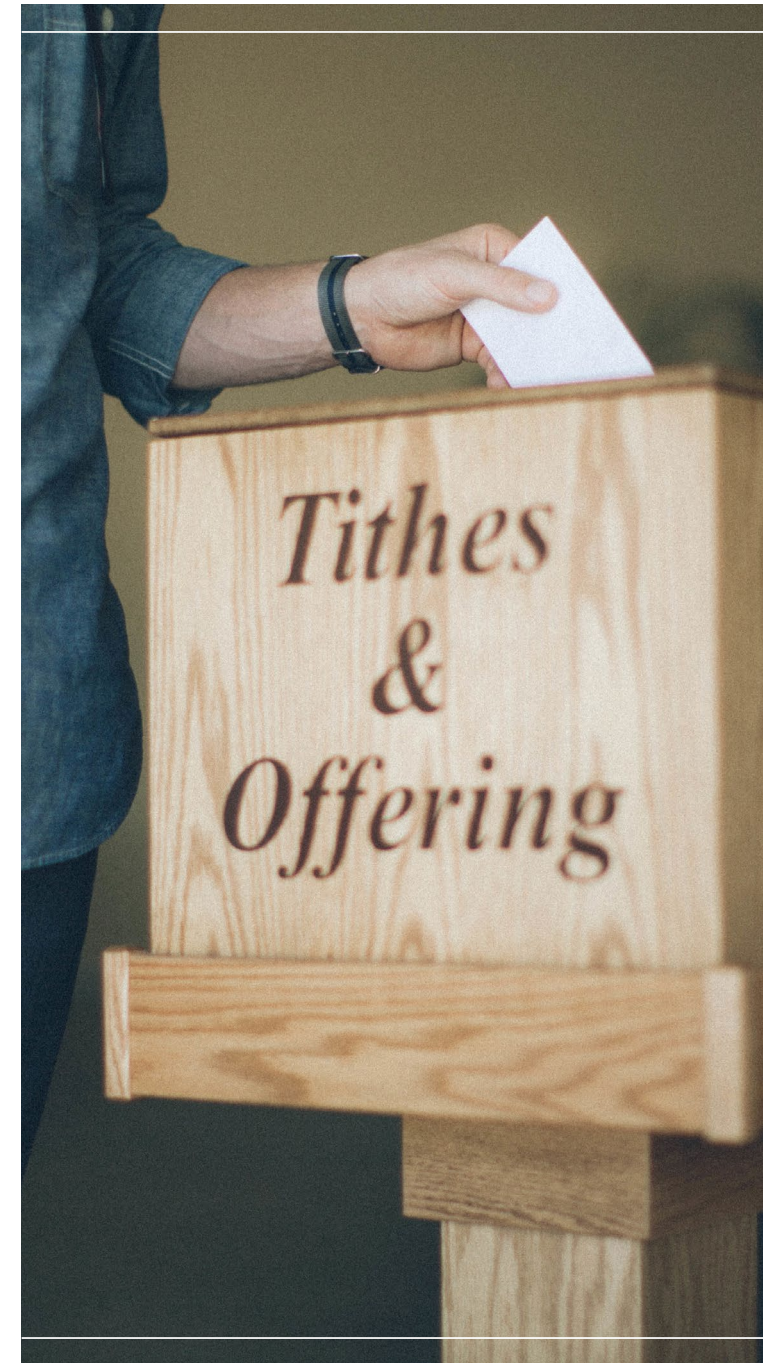
But not all will trust. What will those professed Christians do, who in times of relative peace have not exercised their trust in God by tithing, for example? Will they now suddenly change their minds and trust in God's supernatural ability to

provide? Will they now leave all their possessions behind to flee, trusting in God's provision? The act of tithing is God's trust school that will prepare His people for far more difficult challenges that will increase in frequency and strength as we near Jesus' second coming.

## How to tithe?

**1. The tithe is a regular offering,** given after any income or increase (Lev. 27:32; Prov. 3:9-10). In this sense, there is no room for spontaneity in the act of tithing, because it is not generated or triggered by any human initiative or feeling. Instead, it should be prompted by God's initiative in providing us with an income or increase. It tells us that it is always His giving that starts our giving. Therefore, the regularity by which we tithe, should follow the regularity by which God gives us some financial increase or income. It is all about Him, and should lead us back to Him, in a grateful response to His giving.

**2. The tithe is a proportional offering,** given as an established proportion of every income or increase. There is also no room for human spontaneity in this aspect, as God has not left humans the task of choosing what proportion to give as tithe. Instead, He has established a specific proportion—a tenth (or ten percent)—as the measure of our obligation, and humans should not modify it. Multitudes in the world are living in a financial mess, and one of the reasons is that they do not have any control over how much they earn or spend.





But by requiring that humans should give a proportion of their income or increase, God is indirectly compelling them to accurately assess their earnings (it is obvious that without knowing exactly how much someone is earning, it is impossible to give a faithful tithe). Therefore, for our own sake, instead of modifying the percentage, or giving a random amount as tithe, we must stick to the proportion established by God: ten percent.

It is told that a church member was lamenting to the pastor about how much he was tithing. "It is too much", he said. The pastor immediately invited him to kneel and pray. To the church member's dismay, the pastor prayed: "Dear Lord, this poor brother is suffering because he is giving too much as tithe. Please, give him less so that he can return less to you."

**3. The tithe should be brought to God's storehouse** (Malachi 3:10). The place where the tithe should be brought was also not left to human discretion (Deuteronomy 12:3-6, 8, 11-14). By bringing all tithe resources to God's established place, as an act of worship, God's people are unified in adoration of Him.

But besides unity in adoration, bringing the tithe to the Storehouse also promotes the unity of purpose and action. Funds that were brought by all, should be managed in a corporate way, using the representative system, not according to individual discretion. Also, the bigger amount of resources, which are gathered in the Storehouse, will allow

God's people to think bigger and to distribute it in an equitable way. Because of this method, God's work can start and grow even in regions where tithe is not given due to the absence of believers.

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*Besides unity in adoration, bringing the tithe to the Storehouse also promotes the unity of purpose and action.*

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**4. Tithe funds should be spent according to God's directions.** He determined that the tithe should be exclusively given to the Levites, "in return for the work which they perform, the work of the tabernacle of meeting" (Numbers 18:21). Even though there are no longer Israelite Levites leading God's Temple, and we are now in a different era, the principle remains. Those spiritual Levites, which are appointed and authorized by the body of Christ to work exclusively as spiritual leaders of the flock, and are not involved in any other secular endeavour, should be sustained by tithe funds (a clear allusion to this principle is found for example in 1 Corinthians 9:3-14).

Because of the Storehouse principle, the Adventist



Church adopted a representative administrative model. According to this model, individual churches never pay their own pastors, as the tithe funds are in their entirety sent to the Storehouse. This system allows the equity in their payment, providing the same salary scale to all pastors of the same country or region. In the Adventist Church, pastors of small or poor districts are under the same salary scale as pastors of big and wealthy districts. And their income follows a salary scale whose ceiling will not be modified if more tithe funds will be received. Instead, if more tithe is brought to the Lord's treasury, the church will be able to hire more workers and speed up the preaching of the gospel.

If God's direction is followed, it means that the local church building and operation should not be supported by tithe funds. "...The house of worship is the Lord's property, and that it is to be scrupulously cared for [through offerings]. But the funds for this work are not to come from the tithe."<sup>1</sup> Adventist education, charity, etc., are also among the "various objects which, though good in themselves, are not the object to which the Lord has said that the tithe should be applied. Those who make this use of the tithe are departing from the Lord's arrangement. God will judge for these things."<sup>2</sup>

## Conclusion

God is the One who tells us "How" to bring the tithe, and how those resources, once gathered at His Storehouse, should be spent. According to His word, a tithe will only become tithe if [1] it represents the right proportion (ten percent), [2] it is brought to the Storehouse, as determined by Him, and [3] is exclusively used to maintain the modern spiritual Levites, those appointed and authorized by the church as spiritual leaders. This is how the tithe funds should be spent.

But even more important than that, is why we tithe. The tithe should be given for the purpose of learning to trust God. It is a tacit recognition that He is the Creator, Provider, and Sustainer.



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1 White, Ellen G., *Counsels on Stewardship*, page 102.

2 White, Ellen G., *Counsels on Stewardship*, page 102.

# Impossible Givers

By Pastor Aniel Barbe

*1 Kings 17:4-6. <sup>4</sup> And it will be that you shall drink from the brook, and I have commanded the ravens to feed you there."*

*<sup>5</sup> So he went and did according to the word of the Lord, for he went and stayed by the Brook Cherith, which flows into the Jordan.*

*<sup>6</sup> The ravens brought him bread and meat in the morning, and bread and meat in the evening; and he drank from the brook.*

One of the most famous biblical passages cited to encourage oneself and others to give is the text about the giving practices of the Macedonians and the praises they received from the Apostle Paul. Their generosity is well described in these words: "that in a great trial of affliction, the abundance of their joy and their deep poverty abounded in the riches of their liberality" (2 Corinthians 8:2). How was such lavish giving possible during a time of scarcity and when one's resources are limited? They stand as examples of impossible givers!

As Apostle Paul introduces the Macedonians as an example of giving, he provides a clear answer to the question "How was this possible?" which is

very relevant for us today. We read in 2 Corinthians 8:1, "Moreover, brethren, we make known to you the grace of God bestowed on the churches of Macedonia." The capacity and willingness of the Macedonians to give was a "grace of God," literally a gift from God. Paul employs the words "*charis*," translated "*grace*," no less than eight times to speak about the privilege of participating in the collection or how God enables the believers to give (2 Corinthians 8.1, 4, 6-7, 9, 19; 9.8, 14). The generosity of the Macedonian was activated neither from the inside nor from the outside but from His side. Ellen White confirms this principle: "The power to give comes from the One who invites us to give. Once the believer consecrates himself or herself to God, the propensity to give emerges naturally (2 Corinthians 8:5). They were transformed into the image of the Divine Giver." (Ellen G. White, *Acts of Apostles*, 343).

Let us reflect on how God's grace transforms the ravenous into regular givers during a time of scarcity.

## Ravens Become Channel of Life

The Bible tells us how ravens were transformed into channels of life. This incident is reported in 1 Kings 17:4-6. It was a time of extended drought, causing a famine in the land of Israel. Elijah, the prophet of God, was ordered to go to Brook Cherith, an isolated place, and to hide there. Water was available from the brook, but the absence of dew and rain would rapidly cause all the edible plants to dry up. Food became a challenge. God had made provision for this situation in his wisdom: "I have commanded the ravens to feed you there." (1 Kings 17:4).

When God mentioned "ravens" during a time of drought, Elijah was sorely perplexed. Usually, ravens come to "feed on" animals and other creatures who die of hunger during a drought. Now God was saying the ravens won't come to "feed on" your dead body but to "feed you" because of the order I gave them. God could have chosen a more kind-hearted bird for this mission, but he chose the ravens to be channels of life. Elijah knew what the book of Moses says about this bird which is often portrayed as a symbol of death. We read in Leviticus 11:13-15, "And

these you shall regard as an abomination among the birds; they shall not be eaten, they are an abomination: the eagle, the vulture, the buzzard, the kite, and the falcon after its kind; every raven after its kind." Ravens are categorized with the eagle, vulture, and buzzard, the birds of prey which have a voracious appetite. Elijah was undoubtedly familiar with the incident when Noah sent out a raven who "kept going to and fro until the waters had dried up" (Genesis 8:7). We can guess why, in contrast to the dove, the raven was happy to be outside the ark when the water was receding. It was a time for our raven to feast on the creatures destroyed by the flood. As omnivores, they eat food of both plant and animal origin. This is the type of bird that God had commanded to serve as a channel of life.

Do you know that the six famous resident ravens of the Tower of London are fed daily with kilograms of raw meats consisting of mice, chicks, rats, and assorted raw meats? As a special treat, they are given biscuits soaked in blood. Recently, the raven master had to dismiss one of the ravens, George, from the Tower because he was eating the television aerials. Our God has a strange sense of humour, using ravens to feed His prophet! The ravens were impossible givers!

The Bible reports how the ravens responded to the command they received from God: "The ravens brought him bread and meat in the morning, and bread and meat in the evening; and he drank from the brook." In this passage, the writer highlights



the constancy and regularity with which the ravens brought the food to Elijah. The brook dried up of water after some time, but the ravens did not stop being a channel of life until Elijah left the place. Interestingly, ravens don't usually carry things on their feet as other prey birds; the meat and bread must have been in their beak or bill. Hence, these ravens could not avoid seeing, tasting, and smelling the food they were carrying to Elijah. There was indeed a constant temptation for the raven to divert the destination of the food to a different place or to an extra stomach. Ravens are known to be clever at stealing food and hiding food in secret places. However, the Bible text witnesses that the ravens were faithful even when they were unsure about their own subsistence after the special delivery. The service delivery of the ravens informs us that God transforms inside out. He can use impossible givers.

Should we end this reflection only with a *whoa* of amazement? Let us read Job 12:7 *"But now ask the beasts, and they will teach you; And the birds of the air, and they will tell you..."*. If we could question the ravens, what would they tell us about them ravens bringing food regularly to Elijah? As we end the Stewardship Revival Week of 2024, what can we learn from this short passage: "The ravens brought him bread and meat in the morning, and bread and meat in the evening."

## Our Calling v/s Our Nature

As God's people, we have received an assignment similar to the one given to the ravens. We read in Malachi 3: 9 "Bring all the tithes into the storehouse, that there may be food in My house." We are called to bring food to the house of God, not bread and meat but "the all tithes." This passage's context helps us understand that God is referring to the 10 percent of our income and offerings.

The Bible also highlights the regularity with which believers must fulfil their assignment of bringing food. We read in Deuteronomy 16:17, "Every man *shall give* as he is able, according to the blessing of the Lord your God which He has given you." This text does not refer to the 10% tithe but to offerings. No one is asked to give more than what one has received or what one's beak or bill could carry. However, this text states a common principle that applies to all: "according to the blessing of the Lord your God which He has given you." As you are blessed, you give and give in proportion to what you have received.

These instructions and commands from God filter through our human nature. The two often conflict with each other. While God commands giving and generosity, our natural inclination leads us in the opposite direction. Apostle Paul speaks about human self-centredness in the well-known passage of 2 Timothy 3:1-5. There, he lists the 19 evil characteristics of the last days. His list starts with

the expression "lovers of themselves" "philautoi" love directed to self and then mentions "lovers of money" as its first expression. William Barclay makes an interesting comment: "It is no accident that the first of these qualities will be a life that is centred in self... Love of self is the basic sin, from which all others flow." Self-centredness is at the essence of our identity. We are impossible givers. Paradoxically, the God who knows us perfectly commands us to become giving channels. Our situation resembles strangely to the assignment given to the ravens in Elijah story. Fortunately, God applies the exact solution to us as with the ravens; He transforms inside out.

## Growing as an Impossible Giver

The transformation from a voracious to a generous being is not confined to the raven's species. The Bible provides some mind-boggling examples of the change of self-centred individuals into extravagant givers. Two foremost examples are the widow who fed Elijah and Zacchaeus.

After Elijah left the Brook Cherith, God guided him to a place called Zarephath in the region of Sidon. At the town gate, Elijah met a widow who was gathering sticks. Following God's instructions, the prophet would ask the woman for water and then for a piece of bread. This request destabilized the woman, and she replied to Elijah: "As surely as the Lord your God lives," she replied, "I don't have any bread—only a handful of flour in a jar and a

little olive oil in a jug. I am gathering a few sticks to take home and make a meal for myself and my son, that we may eat it—and die.” (2 Kings 17:12). Her answer reveals her self-preservation instinct. She wanted to make the most of the little resources she disposed of for herself and her son, even if it was a last meal. Her response was both natural and legitimate.

However, the story does not end with a refusal but reveals a shift from the self-preservation mindset. The widow finally chose to use what she had to prepare food for Elijah. With hindsight, we congratulate the widow for her wise course of action. Her action had led to a miracle. However, on that day, when she returned home to prepare and deliver the food to Elijah, the benefits of her actions were not clear to her. Where did she find the strength, faith, and audacity to give first and then use what was leftover for herself and her son? ...

The next account comes from the Gospel of Luke 19, the story of the Zacchaeus. He was of Jewish origin, but he decided to collaborate with the Romans, the ruling power of the day, to make a living, a good living. He was not only collecting his due for service rendered, but through extortions and other means, he was gratifying his craving for more. As a result, Zacchaeus was treated as a traitor to his people and excluded from the social and religious community. He accepted his status as persona non-grata because pursuing material





possessions was his life's dominant purpose. Interestingly, at some point, the same Zacchaeus would make a solemn statement that does not reflect his natural inclination: "Then Zacchaeus stood and said to the Lord, "Look, Lord, I give half of my goods to the poor; and if I have taken anything from anyone by false accusation, I restore fourfold." He is speaking about giving and reimbursing instead of collecting and holding tight to his wallet. Is this a case of split personality?

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*The generosity of the Macedonian was activated neither from the inside nor from the outside but from His side.*

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Zacchaeus has undergone an inside-out transformation, as with the ravens and the widow of Zarephath. We read about the explanation given by Jesus in Luke 19: 9 " "Today salvation has come to this house..." Jesus redeemed him from his natural inclination. The greediest man in Jericho could now behave as the most generous man in the city. An Impossible Giver was born on that day. The same transformation, God can operate in us who are

called to bring food into the storehouse.

The Apostle Paul describes how the Macedonians were turned into impossible givers: “And they exceeded our expectations: They gave themselves first of all to the Lord, and then by the will of God also to us” (2 Corinthians 8:5). What God requires from us may not always be easy or natural. It is often beyond human expectations, requiring some additional strength, which we seem not to have. The Macedonians, while struggling with life challenges, “gave themselves first of all to the Lord” and the Lord intervenes in them and through them. The good news is God’s Spirit empowers and transforms us from the inside-out.

God can turn each of us into impossible givers, irrespective of our biological and social inclinations, by renewing our mind. Believers should not be discouraged by the gap between their natural selves and God’s expectations in all areas, including giving. You can become an impossible giver. He transforms anyone who “gave himself or herself first of all to Him” into channels to bring food to his house. Furthermore, He makes our giving regular and systematic, as we are blessed, not only prompted by events or our good mood. Finally, He grows us into partners in His final mission. Let us pray daily for the grace of giving.



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*My Commitment*

To DEDICATE a percentage  
(\_\_\_\_%) of my income as a regular  
OFFERING to the Lord.





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