

Lord of Our Resources



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Deut. 8:7-18; Matt.6:19-21; 24:45-51; 1 Cor. 9:11-14; Phil. 4:11-13; Heb. 13:5; James 1:16, 17.*

Memory Text: “Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and comes down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow of turning” (*James 1:17, NKJV*).

Key Thought: Every good and perfect gift comes from above. We are not owners but stewards of the resources the Lord graciously places at our disposal.

The psalmist reminds us that “the earth is the Lord’s, and all its fullness, the world and those who dwell therein” (*Ps. 24:1, NKJV*). Every good and perfect gift we receive comes from the Father’s hand. The greatest gift of all was bestowed when God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son. “He poured out all heaven to man in that one great gift. And then he completed the work by surrounding man with unlimited blessings, favor upon favor, gift upon gift, opening to our view all the treasures of the future world.”—Ellen G. White, *Signs of the Times*, August 17, 1891.

When we have been redeemed by the precious blood of Christ, we will recognize Him as Lord of all our resources, for all our resources have come only from Him and certainly not from ourselves. We, then, are stewards, not owners, and as stewards we identify ourselves with the Master, whose goods we have been given to oversee. We must accept the responsibilities of a steward and act in our Master’s stead.

**Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, August 20.*

Giving Thanks for Every Good and Perfect Gift (*James 1:16, 17*).

What important truth does James reaffirm in his letter to the brothers and sisters in Christ scattered abroad? *James 1:16, 17*. What are some of these gifts? What error is he trying to help them avoid?

Our culture tells us we get what we earn, and we control what belongs to us. The Word of God, however, reminds us we get what we don't deserve and that our possessions belong to God. Every good and perfect gift comes from above. Were it not for our loving heavenly Father, we would have no life, no meaning, and no future. The apostle Paul reminds us that "in Him we live and move and have our being" (*Acts 17:28, NKJV*).

Think for a moment about the blessings you enjoy on a daily basis. Have any of us duly considered how much we have to be thankful for? What do you possess that didn't, ultimately, have its origins in God, our Creator? Wealth, power, prestige, whatever you have, at its source it didn't start with you but with God, who created all things. How important that we never forget that truth.

How does the Sabbath help keep this important truth before us on a weekly basis?

What danger did the children of Israel face as they prepared to possess the land of promise, soon to be surrounded with a multitude of blessings? *Deut. 8:7-18*. What is the Lord warning them against doing? How are we in danger of doing the same thing?

What are some of the gifts you have been given that mean the most to you? Why are they so important? What can you do to protect yourself against taking them for granted or thinking you somehow deserve them because of your own innate goodness?

Returning a Faithful Tithe

The Lord gave the following command to the children of Israel through His servant Moses: “ ‘And all the tithe of the land, whether of the seed of the land or of the fruit of the tree, is the Lord’s. It is holy to the Lord’ ” (*Lev. 27:30, NKJV*). The phrase “holy to the Lord” makes more sense when you understand that the idea of *holy* carries with it the notion of “set apart for holy use,” indicating the tithe is to be set apart for the Lord, to be used for Him and His purpose specifically, as opposed to other uses. It is something special, something different from the rest of our “seed of the land or of the fruit of the tree.”

Read Malachi 3:8-10. Why does God call not paying tithe robbery? What does that imply about who owns it to begin with?

We see various aspects of the tithing principle throughout the Bible. Abraham gave tithe to the priest of the Most High God, Melchizedek (*Gen. 14:20*), a fact that’s reemphasized in the New Testament book of Hebrews (*see Heb. 7:2*); Jacob, as well, understood the idea of tithing (*Gen. 28:22*); and, after the Exodus, God reaffirmed the law of tithing as a divine institution (*Lev. 27:30-32; Num. 18:24, 26, 28; Deut. 12:6, 11, 17*).

“Because Abraham is the father of all believers, he is the model of tithing for Christians. As Abraham paid tithe to Melchizedek, the priest of the Most High God, so New Testament believers give tithe to Christ, our High Priest according to the order of Melchizedek (*Heb. 5:9, 10; 7:1-22*).”—*Seventh-day Adventists Believe*, p. 272.

Read 1 Corinthians 9:11-14. How do Paul’s words here help us understand an important principle behind our duty to pay a faithful tithe to the storehouse of the church?

How is tithing a visible manifestation of our acknowledgment that all that we have comes from God? Why is tithing such an important act of faith?

Laying Up Treasure in Heaven *(Matt. 6:19-21)*.

Read Matthew 6:19-21. Rewrite the text in your own words, expressing the essential message you believe the Lord is telling us here.

However simple Christ's words, the idea behind them is profound. Jesus warns us that things of this world are temporal, transitory, unstable; why, then, put all your treasure where one day it will be swept away or lost forever? Why put your money in a bank that you know is going to collapse? The Lord is pointing us to eternal things, to heavenly things, to things that long after this world and all that's in it pass away will still be here.

Read 1 John 2:15-17. In what ways are these words saying to us the same thing that Jesus did in the above verses?

How do you understand the exhortation of Jesus to “‘lay up . . . treasures in heaven’”? What specifically does this involve? *See Luke 12:16-21.*

Laying up treasure in heaven deals, not just with what we do with our money but with our whole lives. What are our priorities? What are our biggest concerns? How much of our life is spent on earthly, worldly, temporal things as opposed to spiritual and heavenly things? For example, how much time do we spend in prayer, Bible study, or witnessing as opposed to watching TV? Do our lives reveal that we, indeed, are not only preparing to meet Jesus but we are working to help others prepare, as well? Those who are laying up treasure in heaven are daily making decisions for the Lord; they are choosing obedience over sin, love over hatred, and others over self. In short, laying up treasure in heaven is living the Christian life, a life marked by self-sacrificing love, a life that isn't dominated by love of the world or the things in the world, where moths and thieves and rust exist.

Dwell on Christ's words, “‘Where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.’” Where's your heart? What does your answer tell you about yourself and where your treasure is? Is it time to transfer your account?

Living as Faithful Stewards *(Matt. 24:45-51)*.

Read the account in Matthew 24:45-51. What message is the Lord giving us here?

Look at the characteristics of the faithful and wise servant. He is doing what was expected of him. In other words, it wasn't just that he had correct doctrine or theology. Perhaps all that was implicit in his actions. The point is, the man was obedient. Hence, the time of the master's return wasn't all that important; it made no difference when he came back, because, at any time, he would find his servant working faithfully.

Meanwhile, in contrast, it is easy for us to pass judgment on the unfaithful steward and condemn him for his waywardness. And yet, how many of us act in much the same way? We use the resources our Master has placed at our disposal to serve ourselves. We preoccupy ourselves with our own present desires and agendas, at the expense of what the Lord has asked us to do as stewards of the gifts He has given us.

Read again the texts for today. How did the evil servant manifest his wrong attitude toward the Lord? What did he do? What are some modern parallels to beating the servants and eating and drinking with the drunken? In other words, how might we, today, still awaiting the coming of Christ, manifest in our lives the same wrong attitude as the unfaithful servant?

Notice, too, the unfaithful steward didn't believe that the Lord wasn't coming back; he thought it was just going to be longer than first anticipated. What could better depict a danger that we as Adventists face—we who have long been expecting the Lord to come and who often talk (rightly or wrongly) about a “delay”? Have we, even subconsciously, changed how we live because we think the Lord's coming is delayed?

Suppose Christ came back yesterday. Would He have found you a faithful or an unfaithful steward? If the answer was the latter, what would you have done differently yesterday in order to have been deemed a faithful servant?

Learning to Be Content

“But godliness with contentment is great gain” (*1 Tim. 6:6, NKJV*).

The noun translated “contentment” in 1 Timothy 6:6 implies self-sufficiency, “the state of one who supports himself without aid from others.” This state of being was highly valued by some of the philosophers in Paul’s day. While the apostle Paul also affirms contentment as a virtue, he suggests that, for the follower of Jesus, the source of contentment does not come from within but from without.

Study the following passages of Scripture that refer to “contentment” or “being content” (*Phil. 4:11-13, Heb. 13:5*). **How is a Christian able to experience contentment even in the most difficult circumstances? In what ways have you experienced some of the things Paul is talking about in these verses? What lessons did you learn in these experiences? Give specific examples of your situations and share them with your class.**

Our contentment is based upon our confidence in our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. He is the One who strengthens us. He is our Rock, when everything else is shifting sand. He is our Surety, when everything else is uncertain. Apart from Jesus Christ, there is no true contentment.

“Paul in this letter to Timothy would impress upon his mind the necessity of giving such instruction as should remove the deception which so easily steals upon the rich, that because of their riches they are superior to those who are in poverty, that because of their ability to acquire they are superior in wisdom and judgment—in short, that gain is godliness. Here is a fearful deception. How few heed the charge which Paul commissioned Timothy to make to the rich! How many flatter themselves that their acquisitiveness is godliness! Paul declares, ‘Godliness with contentment is great gain.’ Although rich persons may devote their whole lives to the one object of getting riches, yet as they brought nothing into the world, they can carry nothing out. They must die and leave that which cost them so much labor to obtain. They staked their all, their eternal interest, to obtain this property, and have lost both worlds.”—Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 1, p. 541.

Why does one not necessarily need to be rich in order to face the dangers Ellen White is talking about? Why is the imbalanced pursuit of anything worldly dangerous? What practical steps can we take to make sure we don’t get caught up in this trap?

Further Study: Look at two case studies in stewardship. Compare the story of the rich fool with the story of Nicodemus.

The Rich Fool: *Luke 12:13-21*

“By the parable of the foolish rich man, Christ showed the folly of those who make the world their all. This man had received everything from God. . . . He did not realize that God had made him a steward of His goods that he might help the needy. He had a blessed opportunity of being God’s almoner, but he thought only of ministering to his own comfort.”—Ellen G. White, *Christ’s Object Lessons*, p. 256.

Nicodemus: *John 3:1, 2; 19:38-40*

“Now, when the Jews were trying to destroy the infant church, Nicodemus came forward in its defense. No longer cautious and questioning, he encouraged the faith of the disciples and used his wealth in helping to sustain the church at Jerusalem and in advancing the work of the gospel. Those who in other days had paid him reverence, now scorned and persecuted him, and he became poor in this world’s goods; yet he faltered not in the defense of his faith.”—Ellen G. White, *The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 105.

Discussion Questions:

- 1 What if everyone felt at liberty to place their tithe wherever they felt the urge to place it, as opposed to the church itself? It’s hard to see how the church could still function or even exist. What should this tell us about the importance of where we place our tithe? Discuss this issue as a class.
- 2 How does the act of returning tithes and offerings help keep us from being greedy?
- 3 Suppose someone were to come to your class and say, “Look, I just lost my job. I barely have enough money to pay the rent and feed my kids. I just can’t possibly return tithe. I can’t get by on what I have now.” What would you say to that person? What could you do for that person, as well?

Where's Ina? part 1

Virgie Amora

Ina is a widow who lives in a mountain village in the southern Philippines. *Ina* is the local word for mother, and it fits Ina. Whenever children in the village cry for their mother who is gathering food in the forest, Ina comforts them. Whenever somebody in the village is sick, Ina brings herbs and roots to treat them.

Although Ina's village has no Adventist members yet, Ina faithfully worships God with the school children. She hushes the noisy ones and reminds them to listen to the teacher.

When Ina gathers sweet potatoes from her garden plot for dinner, she brings extras for the missionary teachers.

When a storm tore half the roof from the missionary teachers' hut, Ina came to help us fix it. She was everyone's mother.

One day Ina did not attend morning worship at the school. She did not attend evening worship at the missionaries' hut. They grew worried and went to find her. Others searched for Ina too. "Ina! Ina!" the people called at her hut. The door was open, but no one answered. Just then someone inside the dark hut coughed. "Ina?" they called.

A frail voice struggled to say, "Come in!" Quickly the teachers climbed the stick ladder to the house, and inside they found Ina curled up under a thin blanket, very weak, very sick.

"What happened, Ina?" one missionary teacher asked, touching her hot forehead. The teacher bathed her hot body and asked her if the children could sing for her.

"Please, sing, Maestra [teacher]," Ina said.

The children began singing songs that Ina knew. Tears streamed down Ina's face. "Stop singing," Ina whispered. "Stop singing and pray for me."

The group bowed their heads and prayed for Ina. "Dear God in heaven, our Great Physician, please touch Ina and make her whole so that she can again worship You."

After prayer Ina told the children, "Be good; love one another; obey your parents, and love your teachers. God is coming soon to take us to heaven. Now, sing," she pleaded.

Ina was still very sick when the missionary left the village for her monthly trip to Mountain View College. Every step she prayed that she would see Ina alive when she returned.

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