

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?

Key Texts: *John 1:3, John 3:27*

Teachers Aims:

1. To show that the good things we possess come from God.
2. To show that earthly things are temporal.
3. To show that we can be content in any situation.

Lesson Outline:

I. All Good Things Come From God (*James 1:17*).

- A. What things in your life do you believe are gifts from God?
- B. How does the Sabbath remind us God is the Giver of good things?
- C. In addition to tithes and offerings, discuss other ways we can acknowledge that all good things come from God.

II. Looking to Heaven (*Matt. 6:19-21*).

- A. Share evidence from your own life or from the news that earthly things are temporal.
- B. Why is it so important to treasure things of a spiritual nature?
- C. What do the ways you spend your time, use your resources, and interact with others say about you?

III. Being Content (*1 Tim. 6:6, 7*).

- A. Why is truly believing God will meet all our needs so vital to the Christian life?
- B. How do we honor the Lord when we are content with what we have?

Summary: God has given us all things. Earthly possessions will pass away and should be used for the glory of God. When we accept God as Lord of our resources, we will learn to be content.

COMMENTARY

Lord of Our Resources.

Making God Lord of our resources involves three distinct steps. First, it involves identifying and naming our resources. Second, we are to develop our resources as the Lord would have us develop them; and, third, we are to recognize our limits regarding the use of our resources.

Identifying our resources requires taking an inventory of all God has given us. There is a favored hymn whose opening line reads, “Count your many blessings, name them one by one.”—Johnson Oatman, Jr. and Edwin O. Excell, “Count Your Blessings,” *The Hymnal for Worship & Celebration* (Waco, Tex.: Word Music), no. 563. Our resources are our blessings. They are the raw materials out

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 tithe paying 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?

of which we achieve the dreams God plants in our hearts. When we recognize with gratitude the resources we have, we should discipline our minds to think in a positive, hopeful way. Gratitude is a cure for depression and defeat.

In the Garden of Eden, Adam's first recorded task was to name the animals. This task most likely involved observing the animals and thinking about what label fit each one. It was a verbal exercise that pulled what was experienced on an unconscious level to the conscious level. Naming brings organization to what we experience and helps us to form mental categories for our experiences. Naming creates mental structure and, therefore, is a necessary process for mature development. At the base of every discipline is a set of vocabulary to be mastered. The unique terms of each discipline give that discipline its identity. So it is with us who have been designed to uniquely reflect the image of our Creator God. It is responsible discipleship to inventory the resources He has given us, to catalog, categorize, and contemplate each resource in its relationship to the others.

Then, once we have identified the essence of who we are, we are to consider our resources in light of being a child of God. What resources add to the concept of being a son or daughter of God? How does your identity in Christ change or contribute to your core identity? How does your Christian identity affect some of the strengths and weaknesses you have observed in yourself? Do you have large desires for which you might have less aptitude? Do you have few dreams but a great many abilities? Are your desires and aptitudes well developed, but your will feeble or cowardly? How does God's promise that His strength is made perfect in weakness (*2 Cor. 12:9*) apply to you? What are the things that are fixed and the things that can be changed? What is needed to help you grow, learn, and flourish? How can you best obtain these?

These questions are necessary to develop a responsible plan for spiritual growth and development. God invites us to actively "work out [our] own salvation with fear and trembling" (*Phil. 2:12*). He promises us we can do this because He "is at work in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure" (*vs. 13, RSV*).

Developing our resources in the Lord also means we must actively choose some resources over others. We must decide when to emphasize one gift and downplay another. Without such decision making, resources remain chaotic, unorganized fragments. Chaos can be important to creativity, but creativity requires taking the steps to bring order out of raw data. Thus, every decision involves some loss. No one person at any point in life has enough time to engage in activities that utilize all their talents. Developing our resources means carefully considering the amount of time we have to do the things God is requiring of us at any given time. It also means there will be times when we will have to say No to requests that will sidetrack us.

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?

But even our ability to choose what is right has its limits. There is an old Christian heresy called Pelagianism that is easy to slip into when we emphasize Christian decision making as the avenue through which we make God Lord of our lives. Pelagius, a fifth-century monk from what is now the British Isles, lived and taught in Rome. Though quite saintly, he was deemed a heretic because he believed each person was created with perfect freedom to choose either good or evil and was therefore able to attain a sinless life by making good choices.

Inductive Bible Study

Texts for Discovery: *Deuteronomy 8:7-18, Matthew 6:19-21, 24:45-51, Philippians 4:11-13*

- 1 List all the things that contribute to your quality of life—food, health, shelter, education, etc. (do not forget mobility, companionship, freedom, truth). See how many items you can list that you receive as a direct result of God’s mercy and kindness. Then attach a monetary value to them. The point of this exercise? Without even mentioning the gift of salvation, we are totally indebted to God. What are the implications of this indebtedness in how we live our daily lives?
- 2 God obviously does not need material help from us. Yet, He commands, “ ‘Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse’ ” (*Mal. 3:10, NIV*). Is this command for His benefit or for ours? If it is for us, what benefits are ours when we return a faithful tithe?
- 3 What, in addition to money, can we give God as a token of our loyalty and gratitude? Read Romans 13:8-10. How does loving our neighbors reveal our appreciation for what God has done for us? How can we love more effectively as individuals? As a church? Be specific.
- 4 Read Philippians 4:11-13. Notice the context of the familiar promise: “I can do everything through him who gives me strength” (*vs. 13, NIV*). What, in our modern society, is “the secret of being content” (*vs. 12*)? How does one achieve contentment?
- 5 People often refer to the story of the rich young man (*Matt. 19:16-26*) as an example of the sacrifice God wants us to make for His kingdom. But is that really the story’s point? How is being a good steward of all God gives us better than giving away all our resources? Or is it?

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?

In essence, Pelagius taught the heresy that our choices are responsible for our salvation. He reasoned that since we must choose Christ to be saved, our choice is the all-important factor. The problem with such thinking is that it de-emphasizes our fallen nature and the essential role of grace in the salvation process.

Our will, or our ability to make “right” choices, is as fallen as our conscience or our desires. By nature we often make choices that are not in our best interest. Perhaps this is why God’s Word consistently encourages us to work in community, to confess to one another, and to seek counsel from others. There is a risk in acting alone. We need to make use of all the support structures God has provided to strengthen our will and our capacity to make good choices. Then we can trust God. Christianity emphasizes that because He is our Lord, even our wrong choices can eventually work for good (*Rom. 8:28*).

Witnessing

In examining the lordship of Jesus Christ, we see that possibly nothing reminds us more of Someone greater than ourselves than the principles of stewardship.

As in anything in the Christian life, the ideas of stewardship are foolishness to the world but life itself to those who believe.

Commiserating over inadequate salaries with a coworker? When was the last time you let him or her know how God provides for you when you have less to work with, having taken one-tenth off the top for tithe, plus a liberal offering?

Has someone shared how there never seems to be enough time to get everything done? When was the last time you shared the blessing of the Sabbath? Surely, if God can create the earth in six days, you can accomplish all you need to in the same amount of time and set aside a day just for God.

And what about your daily devotions? How does the practice of setting aside time alone with God each day help you?

What is your witness in terms of stewardship? Do people see God’s blessings multiplied in you because of your faithfulness? Do you recognize and acknowledge that every good and perfect gift is given freely from God?

Having freely received, do you freely give, or are you like the Dead Sea, which is stagnant because it only receives? Sometimes what we term “good stewardship” is really selfishness. Have you become more attached to the gift than to the Giver? Have you started to act as if you are the owner, rather than a steward?

Let us truly reflect on all God has given to us and express our gratitude by freely giving of our time, talents, and resources.

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?

Life-Application Approach

Icebreaker: Take a mental walk through your home. What things are precious to you? How would you react if some catastrophe (fire, flood, terrorism, etc.) destroyed them all? Jesus desires to save us from the trauma of lost possessions. He invites us to store our treasures in heaven. See Matthew 6:19-21. Share and discuss how having our true treasures in heaven changes our focus. How would it assure security and peace, even in the midst of a crisis?

Thought Questions:

① God warned Israel that after they were in their new land, they would think they themselves were the ones who brought all the blessings to pass (*Deut. 8:7-18*). Why is it so important for us to “ ‘remember the Lord your God, for it is he who gives you power to get wealth’ ” (*vs. 18, RSV*)? Discuss what happened to Israel that fulfilled God’s warning. What practical things can we do to always be able to recognize the true origin of our blessings?

② Heaven and its beauties can become so desirable that we have a hard time living in today’s world with its struggles and challenges. Paul, in his confinement, was able to say “I have learned in whatever state I am, to be content” (*Phil. 4:11-13, NKJV*). Read the passage as a group. Define contentment, then discuss why it is so necessary. How does our attitude, both in good times and in trouble, affect our witness?

Application Question:

The word *stewardship* flashes images of tithing and planned benevolence into our minds. A deeper impact comes when we consider that stewardship should involve every aspect of our lives. God has given us the gift of time, talents, and creativity, as well as the ability to earn wages and accumulate things. Keep a record for at least three days of how you have spent not only your money but your time and talents. Then review that record and present it to God. How will He reorder your life in all the areas of life stewardship?

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:

- ❶ 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.
- ❷ How does the act of returning tithes and offerings help keep us from being greedy?
- ❸ 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?