

# The Role of Stewardship



## SABBATH AFTERNOON

**Read for This Week's Study:** Col. 1:16–18; Heb. 4:14–16; 3 John 3; Gen. 6:13–18; Rev. 14:6–12; 1 Pet. 1:15, 16.

**Memory Text:** “For God did not call us to be impure, but to live a holy life” (1 Thessalonians 4:7, NIV).

Because of the depth and breadth of stewardship, it is easy to get lost in the big picture, bogged down by tangents and overwhelmed by its enormity. Stewardship is simple yet also complex, and thus easily can be misunderstood. However, neither the Christian nor the church can exist or function without it. To be a Christian is to be a good steward, as well.

“It is not a theory nor a philosophy but a working program. It is in verity the Christian law of living. . . . It is necessary to an adequate understanding of life, and essential to a true, vital religious experience. It is not simply a matter of mental assent, but is an act of the will and a definite, decisive transaction touching the whole perimeter of life.”  
—LeRoy E. Froom, *Stewardship in Its Larger Aspects* (Mountain View: Calif.: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 1929), p. 5.

What are some of the core tenets of what it means to be a Christian steward? This week, we will look more at the roles that stewardship plays in Christian life. We will do so, though, through an interesting analogy: a chariot wheel.

\* Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, March 10.

## Christ as the Center

Jesus is the central figure throughout the Bible (*John 5:39*), and we need to see ourselves in relationship to Him. He paid the penalty for sin and is “‘a ransom for many’” (*Mark 10:45*). Jesus has all authority in heaven and earth (*Matt. 28:18*), and all things are in His hands (*John 13:3*). His name is higher than all others, and one day every knee shall bow down to Him (*Phil. 2:9–11*).

“Jesus is the living center of everything.”—Ellen G. White, *Evangelism*, p. 186.

Christ is the heart of our stewardship and the source of our power. Because of Him, we produce a life worth living, demonstrating to all that He is the central focus of our lives. Paul may have experienced many trials, but no matter where he was or what happened to him, he had one priority for living: “For to me, to live is Christ, and to die is gain” (*Phil. 1:21, NKJV*).

**Read** Colossians 1:16–18, Romans 8:21, and 2 Corinthians 5:17. What do they tell us about just how central Jesus is to everything about us?

---



---



---

There is no genuine stewardship without Christ being our central core (*Gal. 2:20*). He is the center of “that blessed hope” (*Titus 2:13*), and “He is before all things, and in Him all things consist” (*Col. 1:17, NKJV*). Just as the axle is the center of the wheel and thus carries the weight of a wagon, Christ is the center of the steward’s life. Just as a solid axle provides stability allowing the wheels to rotate, Jesus is also the fixed and stable center of our Christian existence (*Heb. 13:8*). His influence should affect everything we think and do. All aspects of stewardship rotate around and find their center in Christ.

“‘For without Me you can do nothing’” (*John 15:5, NKJV*). The center of stewardship is not a hollow void but the reality of the living Christ, who is working in us to mold our characters now and for eternity.

**It’s one thing to say that Jesus is the core of our lives, but it’s another to live as if He is. How can you be sure that Jesus is, indeed, living in you as He promises He will if you will but let Him in?**

## Sanctuary Doctrine

One usually doesn't think of the sanctuary in the context of stewardship. Yet, the link is there because the sanctuary is so crucial to our belief system, and stewardship is part of the system. "The correct understanding of the ministration [of Christ] in the heavenly sanctuary is the foundation of our faith."—Ellen G. White, *Evangelism*, p. 221. It is imperative that we understand the role of stewardship in light of this biblical concept.

First Kings 7:33 describes a chariot wheel. We will illustrate the sanctuary doctrine as the hub of the wheel. The hub attaches to the axle and provides more stability for the wheel when it turns. Having experienced death and a victorious resurrection (*2 Tim. 1:10*), Christ, through His death, is the foundation for His work in the sanctuary (*Heb. 6:19, 20*) and provides the stability for our faith. And it is from the sanctuary that He ministers in our behalf here on earth (*see Heb. 8:1, 2*).

"Standing on the *sola Scriptura* [Scripture alone] principle, Biblical Adventism builds its doctrinal system from the general perspective of the sanctuary doctrine."—Fernando Canale, *Secular Adventism? Exploring the Link Between Lifestyle and Salvation* (Lima, Peru: Peruvian Union University, 2013), pp. 104, 105.

### **What** do these texts tell us about Jesus' ministration in the sanctuary?

*1 John 2:1, Heb. 4:14–16, Rev. 14:7.*

---

---

The sanctuary doctrine helps to reveal the great truth of salvation and redemption, which is at the core of all Christian theology. In the sanctuary we see not only Christ's death for us but His ministry in the heavenly sanctuary, as well. We can see, too, in the Most Holy Place the importance of God's law and the reality of final judgment. Central to it all is the promise of redemption made available to us by the shed blood of Jesus.

The role of stewardship reflects a life anchored in the great truth of salvation, as revealed in the sanctuary doctrine. The more deeply we understand what Christ has done for us and what He is doing *in us* now, the closer we come to Christ, His ministry, His mission, His teaching, and His intent for those who live out the principles of stewardship in their lives.

**Read Hebrews 4:14–16. What is found there for us in our own struggle with sin, self, and selfishness? How do we draw strength and hope from what is promised us there?**

## Christ-Centered Doctrinal Beliefs

The sanctuary is central because it is where the great truth of salvation is expressed so powerfully, where the meaning of the Cross is revealed. And all our doctrines, one way or another, must be linked to the gospel promise and salvation. Like the spokes of the wheel, other doctrines come out from the great truth of salvation by faith in Jesus.

“The sacrifice of Christ as an atonement for sin is the great truth around which all other truths cluster. . . . Those who study the Redeemer’s wonderful sacrifice grow in grace and knowledge.”  
—Ellen G. White Comments, *The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 5, p. 1137.

**What** did Jesus mean by referring to Himself as “‘the truth’” in John 14:6? Compare with John 17:17. What are we to do with the truth? 3 John 3.

---



---



---



---

Our doctrinal beliefs influence who we are and the direction in which we are going. Doctrines are not just abstract theological ideas; all true doctrine is anchored in Christ, and all should in various ways impact how we live. In fact, one could say justifiably that our identity as Seventh-day Adventists is rooted in our doctrinal teachings more than in anything else. The teachings, then, which we derive from the Bible, are what make us who we are as Seventh-day Adventists.

The role of stewardship is to live doctrinal truth as it is in Jesus, and to do so in a way that positively affects our quality of life. “You have heard Him and have been taught by Him, as the truth is in Jesus: that you put off, concerning your former conduct, the old man which grows corrupt according to the deceitful lusts, and be renewed in the spirit of your mind, and that you put on the new man which was created according to God, in true righteousness and holiness” (*Eph. 4:21–24, NKJV*).

In this text, we find what it means not only to know the truth but to live it. Being a steward isn’t just about believing doctrines, however true those doctrines are; being a steward means living out those truths in our lives and in our interaction with others.

## The Three Angels' Messages

Only twice has God warned the world of coming catastrophe: once to Noah (*Gen. 6:13–18, Matt. 24:37*) and the other through the three angels' messages (*Rev. 14:6–12*). These messages pull back a curtain to reveal a unique perspective on future world events. Our understanding of these messages has matured over time, but the message and mission are still justification by faith in Christ, “the third angel’s message in verity.”—Ellen G. White, *Evangelism*, p. 190. In other words, Jesus and His great sacrifice for us stand at the core of our present-truth message, the message we have been called to proclaim to the world.

**Read** Revelation 14:6–12. What is the essence of these messages? What are they saying to the world? What responsibility rests upon us in regard to these messages, and how does stewardship fit in?

---

---

---

As Seventh-day Adventists, our mission is to present the truth of the three angels' messages in preparation for the second coming of Christ. People must be able to make a decision regarding eternity. The role of stewardship is a partnership with God in mission (*2 Cor. 5:20, 6:1–4*).

“In a special sense Seventh-day Adventists have been set in the world as watchmen and light bearers. To them has been entrusted the last warning for a perishing world. On them is shining wonderful light from the Word of God. They have been given a work of the most solemn import—the proclamation of the first, second, and third angels' messages. There is no other work of so great importance. They are to allow nothing else to absorb their attention.”—Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 9, p. 19.

That rim of a wheel is near the point of contact with the ground and represents the mission of the three angels' messages. Their mission is to protect against theological drift and to identify our responsibility in the last-day events. We are to be stewards of this message, proclaiming it to the world.

**It's so easy, as we think of last-day events, to get caught up in charts and dates. They have their role, but as we seek to preach this message to the world, how can we make sure we keep Jesus and His sacrifice for us front and center?**

---

## Stewardship

Christ wants us to live holy lives. His life illustrates “holiness” and what ultimate stewardship should look like (*Heb. 9:14*). We should manage our lives in a way that is pleasing to God, including how we manage all that we have been entrusted with. Stewardship is an expression of that holiness.

**Compare** 1 Peter 1:15, 16 with Hebrews 12:14. What do “be holy” and “holiness” mean? How do these relate to our stewardship?

---

---

---

The Romans discovered that a chariot wheel lasted longer if a band of iron was placed around the rim. The craftsman heated the metal to expand it just enough to slip it over the rim. Cold water shrank it to a tight fit. The band of iron then made contact with the road as the wheel turned.

The iron band on the rim can represent the concept of stewardship. This is the moment of truth, where our spiritual lives rub against our practical lives. It is where our faith meets the ups and downs of life through successes and failures. It is where our beliefs get real in the rough-and-tumble scuffles of daily living. Stewardship is the outer wrapping of who we are and what we do. It is a witness of our conduct and of a life well managed. Our daily actions that reveal Christ are like the iron on the wheel that touches the road.

Actions are powerful and must be controlled by our commitment to Christ. We are to live with this assurance and promise: “I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me” (*Phil. 4:13, NKJV*).

“The sanctification of the soul by the working of the Holy Spirit is the implanting of Christ’s nature in humanity. Gospel religion is Christ in the life—a living, active principle. It is the grace of Christ revealed in character and wrought out in good works. The principles of the gospel cannot be disconnected from any department of practical life. Every line of Christian experience and labor is to be a representation of the life of Christ.”—Ellen G. White, *Christ’s Object Lessons*, p. 384.

**Look at your daily life, your daily existence. What about it reveals the reality of Christ in you, working in you, making you a new being? What conscious choices do you need to make in order to see His holiness revealed in you?**

---

**Further Thought:** At times chariot wheels had to have the band of iron reset because of stretching caused by the metal's striking against the road. Resetting took a lot of hard banging and hammering on the iron band itself. This resetting of the band of iron represents stewardship as practical sanctification. It is having the mind of Christ when responding to every large or small aspect of life, even when the process can be hard and painful. Whether this process pertains to our use of money, family relations, or employment, to name a few, all are to be responded to in the will of Christ. Sometimes, as we all know too well, we can learn this lesson only through some hard knocks.

It's not easy to reset iron. Nor is it easy to reset human character. Think of the experience of Peter. He had been everywhere with Jesus, but he didn't expect these words from Jesus' lips: "I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not: and when thou art converted, strengthen thy brethren" (*Luke 22:32*). Not too much later, after denying Jesus, Peter had a change in his life, but only after a very painful and difficult experience. In a sense, his stewardship was reset. Peter was converted anew, and his life was going to head in a new direction, but only after some real pounding.

### Discussion Questions:

- 1 What does practical sanctification have to do with Jesus' instruction to "let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily"? *Luke 9:23, NKJV*. What has been crucified? *Gal. 6:14*. How does this illustrate the process of sanctification? How does practical sanctification help us learn to have the mind of Christ? *1 Cor. 2:16*.
- 2 What has been your own experience regarding how painful trials can teach powerful lessons about Christian life and following the Lord? Let those in class who feel comfortable talk about those experiences and what they have learned. What can we learn from each other's experiences, as well?
- 3 Think about other beliefs that we as Seventh-day Adventists hold, be it the Sabbath, the state of the dead, Creation, the Second Coming, and so on. In what ways should these various beliefs impact the conduct of our lives in general?

## Canine Literature Evangelist

by NELSON ERNST

A group of Seventh-day Adventist young people set out on a Sabbath afternoon to distribute GLOW tracts in a community in the U.S. state of Hawaii.

The young people prayed together and started knocking on people's doors.

When the first door opened, a young man said: "Hello! We are from the Seventh-day Adventist Church, and we have a gift for you."

"For me?" the surprised house owner said.

"Yes, for you," the visitor said, extending a couple of small tracts.

When the house owner accepted the GLOW tracts, the young man offered to pray for her.

"Do you have any special prayer requests that we could raise to the Lord?"

The scenario repeated itself at house after house.

"Hello! We are from the Seventh-day Adventist Church, and we have a gift for you. How may we pray for you?"

The doorbell went unanswered at some houses. At a few, the owners asked the visitors to leave.

Then two young people approached a house surrounded by a fence. Finding the gate, they fumbled to open it when an alarming sound met their ears.

"Grrrrr . . . woof! Grrrrr . . . woof!"

Peering over the fence they saw an angry dog glaring back at them.

"What do we do now?" one asked.

Neither wanted to risk trying to get past the dog to ring the doorbell.

A young man took a GLOW tract and held it over the fence. The dog watched closely.

Then the young man dropped the GLOW tract. It fell onto the ground.

The dog ran up to it and sniffed it. Then it did a surprising thing. The dog picked the tract up with its mouth. Turning around, the dog trotted to the front porch of the house and deposited it in front of the door.



Adventist Church cofounder Ellen G. White tells us: "God will use ways and means by which it will be seen that He is taking the reins in His own hands. The workers will be surprised by the simple means that He will use to bring about and perfect His work of righteousness" (*Testimonies to Ministers and Gospel Workers*, p. 300).

If an angel can make a donkey talk, why cannot he also turn an angry dog into a literature evangelist in Hawaii?

And if a dog can share Adventist literature, why can't you?

---

NELSON ERNST is cofounder and director of GLOW, a literature distribution ministry that started in California and has spread across the world.



## *The Lesson in Brief*

---

► **Key Text:** *1 Peter 1:15, 16*

► **The Student Will:**

**Know:** Comprehend the purpose of stewardship and his or her role as God's steward.

**Feel:** Appreciate the breadth of the concept of stewardship and the linkage that exists between it and the great truths of Scripture.

**Do:** Resolve, by God's grace, to allow the concept and practice of stewardship to reshape his or her character in Christ's image.

► **Learning Outline:**

**I. Know: Great Scriptural Truths and Stewardship**

- Ⓐ How does keeping Christ as the central theme of stewardship help us to avoid the excesses of legalism?
- Ⓑ How does the sanctuary system relate to the concept of stewardship?
- Ⓒ Why is it important to have all doctrines anchored in Christ?
- Ⓓ What roles do believers, living in the last days, play as stewards of God's final message to the world?

**II. Feel: The Divine Partnership**

- Ⓐ How can believers sense more urgency about their roles as stewards of the gospel message?
- Ⓑ How can Christians more fully appreciate the breadth of God's call to be faithful stewards?

**III. Do: Religion in Action**

- Ⓐ What obstacles must we allow God to remove in order to become faithful stewards?
- Ⓑ What is the relationship between biblical doctrine and our sanctification?

► **Summary:** Far too often Christians are guilty of the tendency to separate the doctrines of Scripture from practical Christianity, or, at least, of the tendency to neglect the relationship between them. Stewardship challenges us to rethink this dichotomy as we become stewards or administrators of the full counsel of God.

## Learning Cycle

### ►STEP 1—Motivate

**Spotlight on Scripture:** *1 Peter 1:15, 16*

**Key Concept for Spiritual Growth:** Stewardship is a broad concept that calls us to bring all things under the Lordship of Jesus Christ. As believers, we must become stewards of the full counsel of God to the world.

**Just for Teachers:** Help your students to understand what it means to be stewards not just of material goods and positions but of the truth.

**Opening Activity:** Describe the layout of the sanctuary, its compartments, and the furnishings in each room. Contemplate the spiritual significance of each article and the work of the high priest in each phase or apartment. Where supplies are available, bring to class, or create, a drawing or model of the sanctuary as a visual aid to facilitate discussion.

**Discuss:** What does the sanctuary doctrine reveal to us about the centrality of Christ to our faith? What does the sanctuary doctrine teach us about the intercessory work of Christ in our behalf? How do the principles of stewardship come into play in the sanctuary teaching?

### ►STEP 2—Explore

**Just for Teachers:** Emphasize that the center of all Christian doctrine is Christ. The themes of the atonement—from Adam’s fall to the judgment and the final restoration of all things, as exemplified throughout the ancient sanctuary system—lie in close proximity. For Seventh-day Adventists, the final expression of these Christian doctrines is bound together in the three angels’ messages of Revelation 14. Our role as stewards of the gospel is to present this message to the world in preparation for Christ’s return.

## Bible Commentary

**I. The Sanctuary Doctrine and the Principles of Stewardship** (*Review Hebrews 4:14–16; 6:19, 20; and 8:1, 2 with the class.*)

The sanctuary doctrine contains the most solemn and transformative truths for this end time. Rightly taught, the sanctuary broadens our understanding

of the plan of salvation and the principles of stewardship. But before we can appreciate the link between salvation and the principles of stewardship as taught by the sanctuary, we first need to grasp the significance of the sanctuary doctrine itself, including its importance to our faith.

Paramount to grasping the importance of the sanctuary truth to our faith is recognizing that God has made His people the guardians of the end-time truths to which the sanctuary points. Custodianship of these life-altering truths confers upon us the most sacred responsibility to impart them to a spiritually destitute world. For “all who have received the light upon these subjects are to bear testimony of the great truths which God has committed to them. The sanctuary in heaven is the very center of Christ’s work in behalf of men. It concerns every soul living upon the earth. It opens to view the plan of redemption, bringing us down to the very close of time and revealing the triumphant issue of the contest between righteousness and sin. It is of the utmost importance that all should thoroughly investigate these subjects and be able to give an answer to everyone that asketh them a reason of the hope that is in them.”—Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy*, pp. 488, 489.

With those words, the pen of inspiration furnishes the reason for the centrality of the sanctuary doctrine to our faith: the intercessory work of Jesus as our faithful High Priest. Ellen G. White goes on to establish the importance of Christ’s intercessory work to our redemption. “The intercession of Christ in man’s behalf in the sanctuary above is as essential to the plan of salvation as was His death upon the cross. . . . Jesus has opened the way to the Father’s throne, and through His mediation the sincere desire of all who come to Him in faith may be presented before God.”—Page 489.

But Christ is not just our Mediator. He is our Judge. And His work as our Advocate and His investigative work as our Judge are intimately entwined. Through His intercessory work in the sanctuary, we see that the One who judges us is also the One who pleads for our lives. The sanctuary doctrine pinpoints how the ministry of Christ reconciles the disparate work of these seemingly opposite offices.

The work of judgment will exonerate the righteous of guilt and ultimately remove sin from the sanctuary. But before either of these two objectives can be accomplished, “there must be an examination of the books of record to determine who, through repentance of sin and faith in Christ, are entitled to the benefits of His atonement. The cleansing of the sanctuary therefore involves a work of investigation—a work of judgment. This work must be performed prior to the coming of Christ to redeem His people; for when He comes, His reward is with Him to give to every man according to his works. Revelation 22:12.”—Page 422.

The coming of Christ, spoken of here in Revelation, is symbolized

elsewhere in the Bible by marriage. And the symbol of a marriage supper or feast, prior to the marriage itself, is used in Scripture to describe the investigative judgment before the Second Coming. “The coming of Christ as our high priest to the most holy place, for the cleansing of the sanctuary, brought to view in Daniel 8:14 . . . is also represented by the coming of the bridegroom to the marriage, described by Christ in the parable of the ten virgins, of Matthew 25.”—Page 426.

“In the parable of Matthew 22 the same figure of the marriage is introduced, and the investigative judgment is clearly represented as taking place before the marriage. Previous to the wedding the king comes in to see the guests, to see if all are attired in the wedding garment, the spotless robe of character washed and made white in the blood of the Lamb. Matthew 22:11; Revelation 7:14. He who is found wanting is cast out, but all who upon examination are seen to have the wedding garment on are accepted of God and accounted worthy of a share in His kingdom and a seat upon His throne. This work of examination of character, of determining who are prepared for the kingdom of God, is that of the investigative judgment, the closing work in the sanctuary above.”—Page 428.

Thus, we observe that the work of judgment is an investigation into the character of God’s people, as symbolized by the wedding garment. The fact that the judgment is portrayed as a wedding feast, or supper, prior to the wedding, or Second Coming, conveys that the investigative judgment is “in favor of the saints,” as Daniel tells us (7:22, *NKJV*). Yet, how does this investigative judgment of the character of God’s people with its favorable verdict specifically tie into stewardship, the topic of our study?

The pen of inspiration clearly illuminates the role of stewardship in the investigative judgment. “In the judgment the use made of every talent will be scrutinized. How have we employed the capital lent us of Heaven? Will the Lord at His coming receive His own with usury? Have we improved the powers entrusted us, in hand and heart and brain, to the glory of God and the blessing of the world? How have we used our time, our pen, our voice, our money, our influence? What have we done for Christ, in the person of the poor, the afflicted, the orphan, or the widow? God has made us the depositaries of His holy Word; what have we done with the light and truth given us to make men wise unto salvation? No value is attached to a mere profession of faith in Christ; only the love which is shown by works is counted genuine. Yet it is love alone which in the sight of Heaven makes any act of value. Whatever is done from love, however small it may appear in the estimation of men, is accepted and rewarded of God.”—Page 487.

**Consider This:** In the closing citation, the author asks a series of six soul-searching questions. Suppose your name came up for review at this moment in the judgment. What would the answers to those questions be?

### ►STEP 3—Apply

**Just for Teachers:** Jesus declares that His gospel will be preached as a witness for all peoples and the end will come (*see Matt. 24:14*). The statement is unequivocal. It does not say, “If you preach the gospel, then the end will come.” It is prophetic, not conditional. Jesus says that the gospel will be preached and that the end will come. The only question that remains for believers, then, is this: Will we be a part of this great work or not?

#### Application Questions:

① How will faithful stewards maximize time for their primary spiritual calling?

---



---

② Why is it important to have a cogent, clear presentation of truth?

---



---

③ How can Christians guard against those tendencies that pull us away from the central message and keep us occupied with sideline issues?

---



---

### ►STEP 4—Create

**Just for Teachers:** Farmers realize that planting precedes harvest. Christians expect a great end-time harvest. What does that expectation suggest about spiritual planting?

#### Activities:

- ① Plan spiritual planting activities that can be done with friends.
- ② Define sanctification in relation to stewardship.