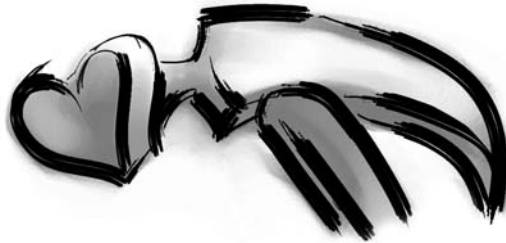


Stewardship¹



SABBATH—JUNE 6

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S LESSON: Deuteronomy 8:18; Psalm 50:12; Matthew 24:46; Matthew 25:14–30; Luke 4:16; 1 Corinthians 6:19, 20.

MEMORY VERSE: “ ‘ “Everyone who has will be given more. He will have more than enough” ’ ” (Matthew 25:29, NIV).

STEWARDSHIP DOES NOT MEAN ONLY CARING FOR MONEY and making sure that God gets His 10 percent. Yes, giving offerings are part of stewardship. But stewardship is so much more.

“The term *steward* is misunderstood and even strange in our society. We do not have any words in our modern vocabulary that carry the rich meaning of this word. *Caretaker* fails to capture the responsibility that the steward has. *Manager* does not seem to describe the relationship between the owner and the steward well enough. *Custodian* is too quiet a word. *Agent* is too self-serving in our day. *Ambassador* is too political, and it lacks the servant part. *Warden* is not personal enough. *Guardian* is too closely tied to parents.”—Adapted from R. Scott Rodin, *Stewards in the Kingdom* (Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 2000), page 27.

A QUICK LOOK AT THIS WEEK'S LESSON: How do I use my talents, my time, my money, and all the things that God has given me stewardship over? How can I truly be responsible to my Maker and Savior? This is what stewardship is all about.

1. stewardship—how we manage our time, talents, property, and so on.

SUNDAY—JUNE 7**TALENTS (Matthew 25:14–30)**

If there was a prize given for the best explanation of stewardship, Jesus easily would have won it with His parable² of the talents.

What basic message about stewardship do you take from Jesus' words in Matthew 25:14–30?

We all have talents. Note in the parable that all the servants receive one or more talents. No one is left without some talent. That is the first truth Jesus wanted to teach His disciples (followers).

We do not all have the same number of talents. It is a fact of life that we will have to accept. Some people are gifted in many ways, while others have only a few talents. Those who have several talents should never think they are better people than those who have fewer talents. Jesus' point is clear: the number of our talents is not the most important thing. What we do with whatever we have been given is what is important.

Some refuse to use their talents. Some never recognize the talents they have. Sadly, no one reminded them of their gifts. Or they did know their gifts but, for different reasons, they refused to develop them.

Not using your talents is a serious

business. The “worthless servant” gets no second chance. He is thrown “ “into the darkness, where there will be weeping” ’ ” (Matthew 25:30, NIV). Darkness describes the nothingness of eternal (forever) death. Not using what God has entrusted (given) to us blocks us in this life and endangers our eternal life. This means that the issue of being faithful stewards is a very important part of being disciples.

What are your gifts? Even more important, what are you doing with them? Are you using them to serve only yourself and your own desires? Or are you using them also in service to the Lord? Why are these questions so important?

MONDAY—JUNE 8**TIME (Matthew 4:23)**

There are many books and courses on the subject of time management. They have helped millions of people make better use of their time. Many Christians would do well to read some of these books or attend a good seminar. But there are things about the best way to use time that one will learn only by reading the Bible and by studying the life of Jesus.

What do we learn from the Gospels³ about Jesus' use of His time in Matthew 4:23; Mark 1:29–31;

2. parable—a short simple story that teaches a truth.

3. Gospels—the first four books of the New Testament that tell the story of Jesus' life and His teachings. Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John are called the Gospels.

Luke 4:16; John 2:1–11; and John 12:2? What are some of the things that we need to study, in addition to His busy schedule of preaching and healing? What other verses can add information?

In today's stressful world, the example of Jesus is as refreshing as it is worth copying. Jesus worked hard and was fully dedicated to His mission (work). But He made sure that He did not miss the blessings of the Sabbath. The Gospels make it very clear that Jesus had time for His Father, for His friends, for relaxation (rest), and for a good meal. This kind of time management (or time stewardship) will prove a blessing for all who practice it.

The Bible does not praise workaholics (people who work too much). But the Bible also does not praise those who are lazy. As always, there is a balance. We get done the things we need to get done, but at the same time, we do not burn out our minds or bodies. God has the first claim on our time. We show this in our keeping of the Sabbath and our daily time for prayer and worship. Our loved ones also deserve to have a fair share of our time. Then there is time for work, for relaxation, and for many things. The church also claims an important part of our time. But there always must be a balance so that we do not fall into one trap or another.

Do you do too much or not enough? How can you live a more balanced life so that you can have better stewardship of your time?



Jesus worked hard, but He always rested on the Sabbath.

TUESDAY—JUNE 9

**STEWARDS OF OUR BODY
(1 Corinthians 6:19, 20)**

Most people think that their bodies are their own property. They claim that they have full control over their bodies. This is true of a great many women who claim that they should be free to decide whether or not they will have an abortion.⁴ This is also true of all who feel they have the right to harm their bodies by the use of illegal or abusive drugs or by eating large amounts of junk food or by having sexual relationships whenever they want with as many partners as they choose.

What does 1 Corinthians 6:19, 20 tell us about how we use our bodies? What are the ways we can put these words into practice?

4. abortion—the act of taking out an embryo or fetus (unborn baby) from its mother's womb before the embryo or fetus is old enough to stay alive.

Paul was warning against the abuse of our body through immoral sex. Unfortunately, this is as true today in many parts of the world as it was in ancient (old time) Corinth, a Greek city known for abusive sex.

But the basic idea is that we should not “sin against our body,” because we are not our own. First, we have been created by God through Jesus Christ. He is our Maker. So we are responsible to Him for all we do. Second, He is our Savior, the One who has bought us “at a price.”

Stewardship of our bodies suggests taking good care of our health too. It has to do not only with what we eat but also with the amount of rest we take and with keeping fit through proper exercise. And we should avoid using drugs that are addictive or otherwise harmful.



Jesus expects us to take good care of our bodies.

Yet, again there is need for balance. “Health should be a part of the daily Christian style of life. But too much attention to health can be a form of idol (false god) worship that gets in the way of a satisfying relationship with God. Health is to give

service to God, but is not a goal in itself.”—Adapted from Leo R. Van Dolson and J. Robert Spangler, *Healthy, Happy, Holy* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald® Publishing Association, 1975), page 43.

Take a good look at all your health habits, not just diet. What do you need to improve on? What changes can and should you make? What holds you back from doing what you know is right?

WEDNESDAY—JUNE 10

THINGS WE OWN (Leviticus 27:30)

Christian stewardship is also about money. Money is an important part of our lives and does play an important part in stewardship.



Stewardship is also about how we manage our money.

Read Leviticus 27:30; Deuteronomy 8:18; Psalm 50:12; Malachi 3:8–10; Matthew 6:31; and Matthew

23:23. What lessons do you learn from these verses?

Fact number one: Everything begins with God. God owns everything. And He gives us the strength to work and make a living. Those who say, “It is all my own hard work,” forget an important truth. It was God alone who helped them earn what they did.

Fact number two: God takes first place in all we have and do. This includes our use of money. Before you spend any part of your money, make sure you have set aside your tithes and offerings. Then spend the rest of the money wisely. Always remember that stewardship includes the use of whatever money you have been entrusted with.

Fact number three: God expects His people to return to Him at least 10 percent of their wealth. That was the rule in the Old Testament. And that principle (rule) has never been discontinued or dropped. In Old Testament times, the tithes were received by the priests and used for the support of the sanctuary services.⁵ Today our tithes are received and used for supporting the worldwide gospel⁶ work that God has entrusted (given) to His church.

Fact number four: The more we give, the more we are blessed. Try it, and you will see for yourself the truth of the words that “ ‘it is more blessed to give than to receive’ ” (Acts 20:35, NIV).

There is an old English saying, “Let him put his money where his mouth is.” The idea is that people can talk about how much they believe in something. But this talk is meaningless if the people are not willing to put some of their money into it. How does the act of giving tithes and offerings show where your heart really is? What does your giving reveal (make known) about your faith?

THURSDAY—JUNE 11

WHILE WE ARE WAITING (Matthew 24:42–46)

There is an important point in the parables about the talents and the pounds (money) that we must not miss. In Matthew 25, “ ‘the master’ ” (verse 19, NIV) went on a long trip. And he returned after a long time to settle the accounts with his servants. In Luke 19, we are told that the “ ‘man of noble birth’ ” (verse 12, NIV) went to a far-off country. While on his mission, He was made king and then “ ‘returned home’ ” (verse 15, NIV).

Jesus clearly spoke about Himself. He wanted His disciples to know that He was going away and that it would take a while before He would come back. But when He returns, He will ask for an account (report) of what was done with what we have been given.

5. sanctuary services—the offerings of animal blood given as a payment for sin. The animal blood was offered in place of the sinner’s blood. The service represented Jesus’ dying on the cross for our sins. After Jesus died, this law was not needed.

6. gospel—the good news that Jesus saves us from our sins; the good news about salvation.

According to Matthew 24:42–46, what should we be doing while we are waiting for the second coming of Christ? What do these verses mean for us in how we should live?

While we wait, we live with a purpose. It is not an idle wait. We should live as dedicated disciples who are careful stewards (managers) over all we have been given. “We are to be watchful for the coming of the Son of man. And we must also be honest and hardworking while we wait. There must be a union [the act of joining together] of the two. This will balance the Christian character⁷ and make it well developed. We should not feel that we are to neglect everything else and give ourselves up to study and prayer only. And we are not to be so busy with work that we neglect personal devotions of prayer and study. Waiting and watching and working are to be blended. ‘Not slothful [lazy] in business; fervent [eager] in spirit; serving the Lord.’ ”—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *The Adventist Home*, page 23.

We are waiting for the Owner (Jesus) of everything to return. Soon He will come and will want to know what we have done with our gifts, our time, our physical (body) strength, and our money. The fact that He comes to inspect the results of our faithful stewardship should not in any way frighten us. The servant who had buried his talent and refused to use it to help others blamed the master for

being a “hard man.” But the blame was totally false. Note that the servants who had been faithful stewards did not share this negative view. Every effort they had put into their stewardship assignment was fully worth it when they heard their master say, ““Come and share your master’s happiness” ’ ” (Matthew 25:21, NIV).



The servant who buried his talent in the earth refused to use it to help others.

If Jesus came back next week, what do you think He would say to you about what you have done in the past week with the things He entrusted (given) to you?

FRIDAY—JUNE 12

ADDITIONAL STUDY: A mine for more information on the topic of stewardship is *Counsels on Stewardship*. Ellen G. White’s comments on this issue have been put together into this book. Read Section VIII, which deals with the right reasons for giving (pages 195–206).

7. character—who you are; all the things that a person does, feels, and thinks are what a person is made of; a person’s character is the sum of the choices he or she makes, such as a choice to be honest or to cheat.

“The Lord will not require from those who are poor that which they have not to give. He will not require from the sick the active energies which a weak body cannot give. No one need feel sad because he cannot glorify [give praise to] God with talents that were never entrusted to him. But if you have only one talent, use it well, and it will grow. If the talents are not buried, they will gain other talents.”—Adapted from Ellen G. White Comments, *The SDA Bible Commentary*, volume 5, page 1100.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- ❶ How are we to understand the whole question of stewardship and responsibility to God in connection with salvation by faith alone? Are we saved by what good stewards we are? Or does our stewardship show that our faith is real? And even if we make mistakes here, why should we not give up?
- ❷ What is wrong with what has been called the “health and wealth gospel”? It carries the idea that if you live right, God will give you lots of money and

good health. How is this not a true principle of stewardship?

❸ Discuss the following statement: “The greatest, most gifted people are useless if they don’t [do not] make themselves available to be used by God. In short, *availability* is more important than *ability*.”—Mike Nappa, *The Courage to Be Christian* (West Monroe, Louisiana: Howard Publishing Company, 2001), page 164.

❹ A church member who struggles through hard times says that he or she just cannot afford to pay tithe or offerings. What advice do you give to him or her? What different methods (ways) could or should be used with this person?

SUMMARY: We all have been given one or more talents. We have been entrusted with gifts from God. As stewards, we are expected to manage these gifts to the best of our ability. We do so while recognizing that all we have comes from God. Stewardship should not be a hard duty but a joyful privilege (honor) in serving God through our lives.