

The Results of Stewardship



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *2 Tim. 3:1–9; Ezek. 14:14; Phil. 4:4–13; Prov. 3:5; 1 Pet. 2:11, 12; Matt. 7:23; 25:21.*

Memory Text: “Having your conduct honorable among the Gentiles, that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may, by your good works which they observe, glorify God in the day of visitation” (*1 Peter 2:12, NKJV*).

As stewards, we should live as witnesses of the God we serve, which means that we should exert a powerful influence on those around us, an influence for good.

Our story, then, is not to be isolated from the world around us. Instead, we are privileged to reflect a better way of living to those who don't know the things that we have been given. Stewardship is the act of thriving while managing God's call to live godly lives. God gives us the skill to live differently than we would live in any other lifestyle on earth (*2 Cor. 6:17*), and it is something that others should notice and even ask about. Hence, we are told: “But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts: and be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you with meekness and fear” (*1 Pet. 3:15*).

This final lesson will look at the personal benefits, spiritual outcomes, successful results, our influence, and the key to contentment in the steward's life, knowing that it is all about “Christ in you, the hope of glory” (*Col. 1:27, NKJV*).

* Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, March 31.

Stewardship and Godliness

Godliness is a vast topic. Godly people live holy lifestyles (*Titus 1:1*), becoming like Christ with an attitude of devotion and with actions that are pleasing to Him (*Ps. 4:3, Titus 2:12*). Godliness is the evidence of true religion and receives the promise of eternal life. No philosophy, wealth, fame, power, or favored birth offers such a promise.

Read 2 Timothy 3:1–9. What is Paul warning about here that’s directly related to the life of a faithful steward?

The book of Job provides a description of Job’s character and actions. It illustrates how a godly life is revealed, even through suffering. It also shows how much Satan hates that lifestyle. Even God acknowledges that there were no others like Job in his quality of faith and lifestyle (*Job 2:3*).

“There was a man in the land of Uz, whose name was Job; and that man was blameless and upright, and one who feared God and shunned evil” (*Job 1:1, NKJV*). Thus, we see a man whose faith wasn’t just an expression of words or religious rituals, although that was part of his life (*Job 1:5*). His fear of God was manifested in an entire life of godliness, even amid horrific trials. Being godly doesn’t mean we are perfect, only that we reflect perfection in our own spheres.

Read Ezekiel 14:14. What does this text say that testifies to the character of these men? What do they have in common that should be seen in all of us?

Stewardship is, really, an expression of a godly life. Faithful stewards don’t have just a form of godliness. They are godly, and this godliness is revealed in how they live, in how they handle the things that their God has entrusted them with. Their faith is expressed not only in what they do but also in what they don’t do.

Contentment

“Not that I speak in respect of want: for I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content” (*Phil. 4:11*).

If we are to be content in whatever state we are in, where must that contentment ultimately come from?

While writing to Timothy, Paul describes an unsavory group of people “who think that godliness is a means to financial gain” (*1 Tim. 6:5, NIV*). What better description of some of today’s TV hucksters could there be than this? They make a lot of money telling listeners that if they are but faithful (and that “faithfulness” includes supporting their ministries), then these listeners will be rich too. The equating of wealth with faithfulness is just another manifestation of materialism but under the guise of Christianity.

The fact is that godliness has nothing to do with wealth. If so, some of the world’s nastiest people would have to be deemed godly because they are also some of the wealthiest. Instead, Paul countered that “godliness with contentment is great gain” (*1 Tim. 6:6, NIV*). Godliness with contentment in any circumstance is the greatest type of riches because God’s grace is far more valuable than financial gain. Thus, we should be content with “food and clothing” (*1 Tim. 6:8, NIV*). In the end, no matter how much we have, there always will be more to get if we are inclined to think that way.

“Contentment in every condition is a great art, a spiritual mystery. It is to be learned, and to be learned as a mystery. . . . Christian contentment is that sweet, inward, quiet, gracious frame of spirit, which freely submits to and delights in God’s wise and fatherly disposal in every condition. . . . It is a box of precious ointment, and very comforting and useful for troubled hearts, in troubled times and conditions.” —Jeremiah Burroughs, *The Rare Jewel of Christian Contentment* (London: Publisher W. Bentley, 1651), pp. 1, 3.

Read Romans 8:28, Hebrews 13:5, and Philipians 4:4–13. What can we find here that can help us live contented lives?

Trust

Read Proverbs 3:5. What crucial message is there for us, especially in the last part, about not “leaning” on our own understanding? See also Isa. 55:9, 1 Cor. 4:5, and 13:12.

The motto and aim of God’s stewards is to “trust in the LORD with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding” (*Prov. 3:5, NKJV*).

Of course, that’s often easier said than done. How often might we intellectually believe in God and in His love and care for us, and yet worry ourselves sick over something that we are facing? Sometimes the future can appear very scary, at least in our own imaginations.

How, then, do we as stewards learn to trust in God? By stepping out in faith and obeying the Lord in all that we do now. Trust is an action of the mind that is not depleted with use; on the contrary, the more we trust the Lord, the more our trust will grow. Living as faithful stewards is a way to express our trust in God. This trust is the foundation and driving force of the steward, and it becomes visible by what we do.

“Trust in the Lord with all your heart.” The phrase “your heart” always is used figuratively in Scripture. It means that our decisions come from an inner moral self that make up who we are (*Matt. 22:37*). This includes our character, motives, and intentions—the very core of our being.

It’s easier to trust God with the things that you can’t control. In that sense, we have no choice but to trust in Him. Instead, real trust “from the heart” comes when we have to make a choice regarding something that we can control and when our trust in God will cause us to choose one way or the other.

The apostles illustrate trusting God with all their hearts: “They were by nature as weak and helpless as any of those now engaged in the work, but they put their whole trust in the Lord. Wealth they had, but it consisted of mind and soul culture; and this every one may have who will make God first and last and best in everything.”—Ellen G. White, *Gospel Workers*, p. 25.

It is true that it’s easier to trust in God concerning the things that you cannot control. But what about things you can control? What choices might you need to make in which your trust in God will determine which way you do choose?

Our Influence

“For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord” (*Eph. 5:8, NKJV*). Paul describes the transformation of the heart as being what is seen publicly: As we “walk in the light” (*1 John 1:7, NKJV; Isa. 30:21*), our daily witness of managed stewardship will be an influential light in a dark world.

Jesus said, “I am the light of the world” (*John 8:12, NKJV*). We reflect the light of God through a stable character in our everyday public behavior.

How is our stewardship on display in ways that bring glory to God? What influence do our actions have on others? *Matt. 5:16; Titus 2:7; 1 Pet. 2:11, 12.*

Stewardship is about the management of God’s possessions, but it goes beyond this responsibility. Our stewardship is on display in front of our families, our communities, the world, and the universe (*1 Cor. 4:9*). Stewardship lived out in our occupations as well demonstrates the effect that the principles of the kingdom have on our lives. And thus, we can influence others. We reveal Christ by kindness and morality, which carry the approval of the Creator.

Our work ethics must agree also with our stewardship values. Our occupation is one stage in which the stewardship of a righteous person is seen. “He shall bring forth your righteousness as the light, and your justice as the noonday” (*Ps. 37:6, NKJV*). A steward’s influence even at work or at his or her vocation is not put “‘in a secret place or under a basket’” (*Luke 11:33, NKJV*), but is seen like a city on a hill (*Matt. 5:14*). As you purposefully live this way at home and at work, you will influence the minds and hearts of those around you.

“Everything in nature has its appointed work and murmurs not at its position. In spiritual things every man and woman has his or her own peculiar sphere and vocation. The interest God requires will be proportionate to the amount of entrusted capital according to the measure of the gift of Christ. . . . Now is your time and privilege to . . . show a stability of character that will make you of real moral worth. Christ has a right to your service. Yield to Him heartily.”—Ellen G. White, *This Day With God*, p. 243.

What kind of influence does your work ethic reveal to those with whom you work or to those who see you at home? What kind of message do you send to them about your faith?

The Words We Want (and Don't Want) to Hear

We are strangers and pilgrims on earth, with heaven—perfect, beautiful, and peaceful—as our ultimate destination (*Heb. 11:13, 14*). Until then, we have to live our existence here. The Christian worldview, especially as revealed in the great controversy, allows for no neutral parties now. We live either for God or for the enemy. “ ‘He that is not with me is against me; and he that gathereth not with me scattereth abroad’ ” (*Matt. 12:30*). Whose side we're on will be revealed, clearly and unambiguously, when He returns.

At some point after Christ returns, those who claimed to follow Him will hear one of two phrases. What are those phrases, and what does each one mean?

Matt. 25:21 _____

Matt. 7:23 _____

Christ's words “ ‘well done’ ” are the most pleasing and satisfying words a steward ever will hear. To have divine, unqualified approval expressed over our attempts to manage His possessions would bring unspeakable joy for doing our best according to our abilities, for knowing all along that our salvation is rooted, not in our works for Christ but in His works for us (*see Rom. 3:21, Rom. 4:6*).

A faithful steward's life is a reflection of the faith he or she already has. The attempt at salvation by works is seen in the words of those who sought to justify themselves before God by their works (*see Matt. 7:21, 22*). Matthew 7:23 shows how futile that self-justification really is.

“When Christ's followers give back to the Lord His own, they are accumulating treasure which will be given to them when they shall hear the words, ‘Well done, good and faithful servant; . . . enter thou into the joy of thy Lord.’ ”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 523.

In the end, stewardship is a life lived in which the two greatest commandments, love for God and love for our neighbors, are the motivations and driving forces in all that one does.

How well does your own life, and the stewardship revealed in your life, reflect these two greatest commandments?

Further Thought: “Christ came to this world to reveal the love of God. His followers are to continue the work which He began. Let us strive to help and strengthen one another. Seeking the good of others is the way in which true happiness can be found. Man does not work against his own interest by loving God and his fellow men. The more unselfish his spirit, the happier he is, because he is fulfilling God’s purpose for him.”—Ellen G. White, *Counsels on Stewardship*, pp. 24, 25.

“Wherever there is life in a church, there is increase and growth. There is also a constant interchange, taking and giving out, receiving and returning to the Lord His own. To every true believer God imparts light and blessing, and this the believer imparts to others in the work that he does for the Lord. As he gives of that which he receives, his capacity for receiving is increased. Room is made for fresh supplies of grace and truth. Clearer light, increased knowledge, are his. On this giving and receiving depend the life and growth of the church. He who receives, but never gives, soon ceases to receive. If the truth does not flow from him to others, he loses his capacity to receive. We must impart the goods of heaven, if we would receive fresh blessing.”—Ellen G. White, *Counsels on Stewardship*, p. 36.

Discussion Questions:

- 1 How does trusting in the Lord lead to contentment? What does it take to trust God with all your heart on an intellectual level? *2 Cor. 10:5*. Why is it so easy to say “that all things work together for good” (*Rom. 8:28, NKJV*) but so hard to believe it? That is, why do we say that we trust God, and really do trust Him on an intellectual level, and yet we are so fearful of the future?
- 2 In class, ask this question and then compare answers: “In 25 words or less, what is your definition of stewardship?” Then ask the question: “In 25 words or less, why is stewardship an important part of the Christian’s life?”
- 3 Read again Matthew 7:21–23. What is going on here? Why do these people say the things that they do? What do their words reveal about themselves? How can we make sure that—even as we seek to be good stewards, even as we seek to live lives of faith and obedience, even as we seek to do good works in God’s name—we do not fall into the same kind of self-deception?
- 4 We tend to think of Christian influence only on an individual level. But what about at the level of your local church? What kind of influence does your church as a whole have in the community?

Seeking Three Signs

by ANDREW MCCHESENEY, Adventist Mission

Starlene Peters felt convicted to sign up for a two-week mission trip to South America as she listened to a veteran U.S. missionary speak at a youth conference in her native country of Trinidad and Tobago.

But the desire confused her. She just had returned to the Seventh-day Adventist Church after seven years of wild partying, and she did not feel qualified to serve as a missionary.

“To me, I was not missionary material,” said Peters, who was 25 at the time. “So I decided to pray.”

She asked God for a sign: that random people at the youth conference would tell her to become a missionary. No one knew her; so, she thought no one would approach her.

“But several people that same day came up to me and told me, ‘Have you ever thought about being a missionary?’” she said.

Peters rationalized that people were thinking about mission service after the U.S. missionary’s presentation; so, she asked God for a second sign: that her father would tell her to become a missionary. “My father is not a church-going person, and I am his only daughter,” Peters said. “So to me, the chances were slim to none. I thought I had gotten God into a corner.”

The next day, her father called her and said, “Maybe you should go where God leads you.” He said he was pleased with the recent changes in her life.

Peters prayed angrily that night. She didn’t want to risk her job for the mission trip to Guyana. She asked for a third sign: that God provide the U.S.\$450 needed for the trip.

The next day, the last day of the conference, a stranger handed Peters a white envelope and walked off. “When I looked inside, it was a check for \$450, the exact amount I needed for the trip,” she said.

Peters ended up staying in Guyana for one and a half years, teaching at a mission school. Since then, Peters has been going on short- and long-term mission trips nonstop, pausing only to raise funds for the next trip. In 2014, Adventist Church President Ted N. C. Wilson presented her with an award for her work with the church’s One Year in Mission program.



Peters, now 32, said it is never too late—or too soon—to share Jesus.

“Before my first mission trip, I had just come back to church; so, I didn’t feel Christian enough to go on a mission trip,” she said. “Now I do all trips all the time. God provides for all my needs.”

Read more about STARLENE PETERS (pictured with Adventist Church President TED N. C. WILSON) in last week’s story.

With so many world events and theories about the end times, it's easy to focus on things that we think are leading to Christ's coming instead of on Christ Himself, who alone is the key to our preparation. This quarter's guide, *Preparation for the End Time* by Norman R. Gulley, is on the end time, but the focus is on Jesus in the context of the last days and how to be prepared for them. Yes, we need to look at historical dates, world events, and history itself because the Bible talks about them in the context of the end. But the Bible talks more about Jesus, about who He is, what He has done for us, what He does in us, and what He will do when He returns. Christ and Him crucified must be the center of our faith; or, as Paul said, "For I determined not to know anything among you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified" (*1 Cor. 2:2*). The more we focus on Him, the more we become like Him. The more we obey Him, the more prepared we will be for all that awaits us—both in the immediate future, and in the end—the day when we do enter "the place" (*John 14:1-4*) that Jesus has prepared for those who love Him.

Lesson 1—The Cosmic Controversy

The Week at a Glance:

SUNDAY: **The Fall of a Perfect Being** (*Isa. 14:12-14*)

MONDAY: **More Than Head Knowledge** (*Gen. 3:1-7*)

TUESDAY: **War in Heaven and Earth** (*Rev. 12:1-17*)

WEDNESDAY: **With You Always, Even Unto the End** (*Matt. 28:20*)

THURSDAY: **The Law and the Gospel** (*Rom. 7:7*)

Memory Text—*Revelation 12:17, NKJV*

Sabbath Gem: The great controversy will end with the victory of Christ over Satan. All of us can share in that victory. As part of that victory, God calls us to faith and obedience now, as we await all that we have been promised in Jesus, whose coming is assured.

Lesson 2—Daniel and the End Times

The Week at a Glance:

SUNDAY: **Faithful in What Is the Least** (*Luke 16:10*)

MONDAY: **The Humility of Daniel** (*Dan. 2:17-23*)

TUESDAY: **The Golden Image** (*Daniel 3 and Revelation 13*)

WEDNESDAY: **Conversion of the Gentiles** (*Dan. 4:34-37*)

THURSDAY: **The Faithfulness of Daniel** (*Dan. 6:4, 5*)

Memory Text—*Daniel 2:47, NKJV*

Sabbath Gem: God was able to use Daniel and his companions to be His witnesses in captivity. Their stories are from the past, but they serve as models for us, who live in the end time. We, too, are called to be witnesses for God to a world that does not know Him.

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