

**STEWARDSHIP
REVIVAL WEEK**

**12th - 18th
February
2023**



REVISITING OUR TRUE IDENTITY

Stewardship Ministries and Church Growth
Seventh day Adventist Church of
Central Papua Conference

Introduction

Welcome.
Again, we praise our Master Steward and Creator God for embracing every one of us into His marvelous grace by leading us into another year 2023, with the unknown challenges ahead.

Before we begin our Stewardship week, I trust that you are enjoying this quarters Sabbath School Study guide on Stewardship. Firstly, we invite you to pause and reflect on some major life issues. From a global perspective, these years from 2020 to 2022 will go down in history as a terrifying and disruptive years. Events following one after the other are speaking volumes of warning to the world that our King and Savior, Jesus Christ is about leave the throne mercy and grace to fulfil biblical prophecies. We are almost going home.

The Stewardship Revival Week for this quarter reminds us of **“Revisiting our true Identity”** as members of Gods last day movement. We are uniquely known and identified as a movement with unique messages of prophesy, health, wholistic stewardship and of cause the people of the word and many more.

God purposely designed humans to reflect His image and represent Him in all aspects of life (Gen 1: 26; 2 Cor. 3: 18). However, it is sometimes difficult to recognize our identity when it comes to real life situations, like deciding between the will of God and self. Often, we are overcome by self in that we hardly recognize our purpose of being a Christian.

This quarters Stewardship Emphasis will commence on the 12th of February 2023. It is a time when Adventist stewardship leaders around the Conference will lead out in the revival series; encouraging members to put God first in all aspects of their lives. We encourage each local church to plan and organize the “God-First” week of prayer to nurture God’s stewards for their journey to eternity. We also encourage each member to make a promise or commitment to God each evening using the promise cards that are also available for your appeals.

My prayers are with you all as we join together in this blessed week of revival.



Pr. Wally Kapi
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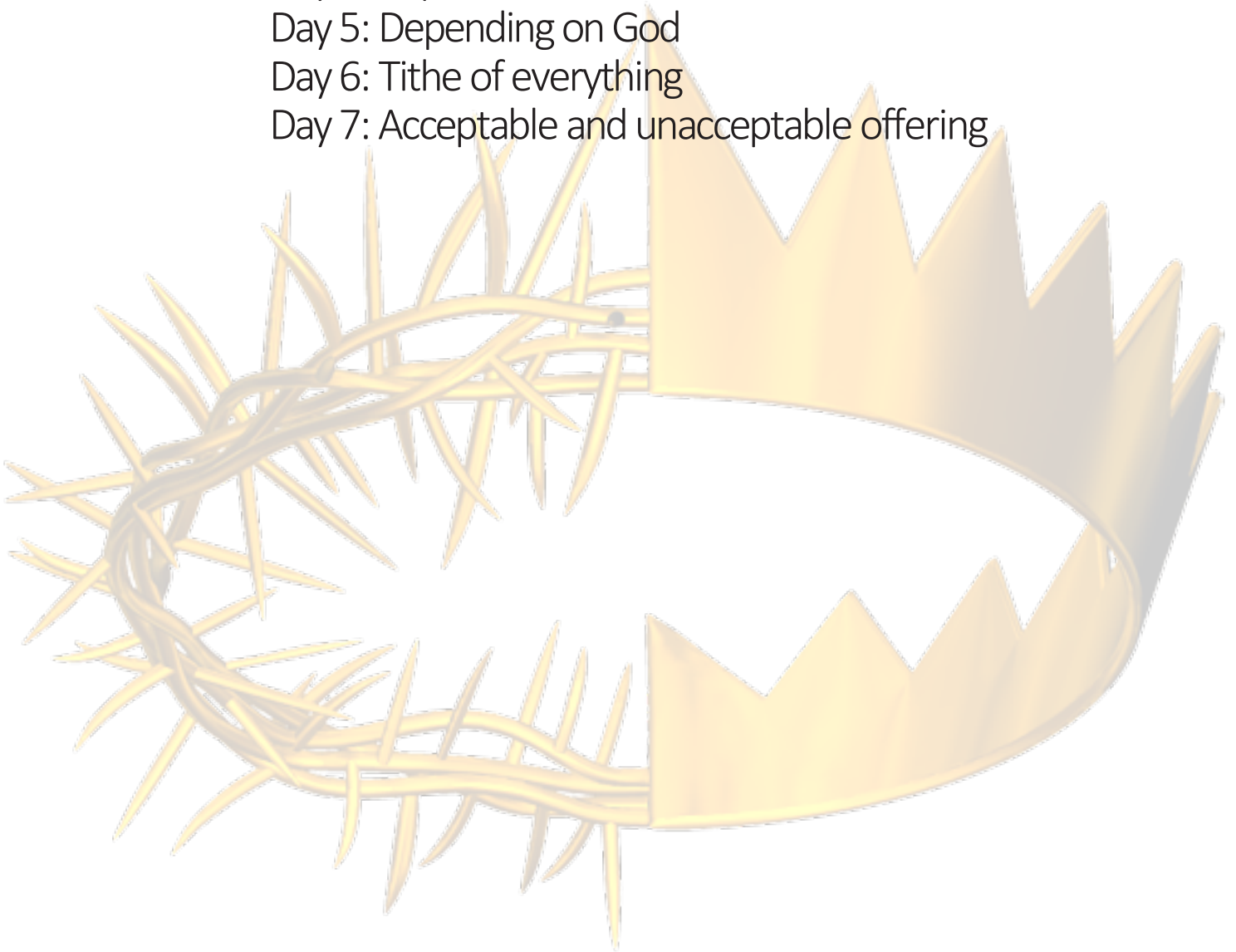
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Day 1: In the Beginning

Key Text: Luke 8: 26-39

Summary: We praise God that we can be restored into the image of God through the power of the Gods word and Spirit.

Introduction

Who am I? What on earth am I here for? These philosophical questions have practical implications for our daily life. They have to do with our identity. It is about the meaning and purpose of life. The absence of a clear identity leads to confusion; prevents full accomplishment; it is an obstacle to happiness, and it dishonours God.

What are the elements of our original identity, our core identity as humans? How can a person who has gone through a severe identity crisis be restored? (Prayer)

Part I: The Identity Crisis

Luke 8: 27, *"When Jesus stepped ashore, he was met by a demon-possessed man from the town. For a long time this man had not worn clothes or lived in a house, but had lived in the tombs."*

This man was struggling with a severe identity crisis – Luke 8:30, *"Jesus asked him, 'What is your name?' 'Legion,' he replied, because many demons had gone into him."* He was confused even about the basic element of identity, his name.

His condition was a source of misery to himself and to his neighbourhood. When one considers oneself to be "Legion", it is natural to live in tombs; it is normal to become a scary creature to others. Who we think we are affects the way we live and act. This is why it is important to know and to live according to our God-given identity.

Various fields of science try to provide explanations for the causes of identity crisis. Some commonly mentioned causes are:

- improper upbringing,
- lack of affirmation,

- unpleasant past experiences,
- lack of ideologies and values.

Without denying the other causes, Apostle Paul shares another cause. In the introduction of his letter to the Romans, Paul describes a situation of extreme confusion that was already prevailing in those days, (Romans 1: 26,27), *"Because of this, God gave them over to shameful lusts. Even their women exchanged natural sexual relations for unnatural ones. In the same way the men also abandoned natural relations with women and were inflamed with lust for one another."* It is the description of a common situation of confusion of identity. The expression "because of this" tells us that there is a cause for such a confusion of identity. In the previous verses, Paul talks about the God who made himself known at creation, Romans 1: 20, *"For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature—have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that people are without excuse."* Unfortunately, a section of humanity did not acknowledge who God really is; Paul continues in Romans 1: 25, *"They exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshiped and served created things rather than the Creator— who is forever praised. Amen."* The denial of the identity of God leads to identity crises among humans.

If we want to move out of an identity crisis, we need to rediscover who God is to man. True knowledge of God brings meaning and purpose. In his teachings, Jesus was regular pointing people back to the God of creation, Matthew 19:8b, *"But it was not what God had originally intended."* It is essential to travel back to the time of creation.

Part II: Our Affiliations with the God of Creation

Reviving out true Identity

The account of creation reveals five basic affiliations between God and humanity:
God is the Creator of Humanity.

Genesis 1:27, "So God **created** mankind..."

Humans are the product of an Intelligent Designer; hence humanity was created with a purpose.

i. God is the Model for Humanity.

Genesis 1:27, "In the **image** of God he created them..."

Humans do not have to invent their own ways but simply have to be true reflections of God.

ii. God is the Provider for Humanity.

Genesis 1:29, "Then God said, "I **give** you every seed-bearing plant on the face of the whole earth and every tree that has fruit with seed in it."

There is no place for both pride and anxiety; humans need to acknowledge God, depend on Him and cast their fears upon Him.

iii. God is the Master of Humanity.

Genesis 1:28, God blessed them and said to them, "Be **fruitful** and **increase** in number; **fill the earth** and **subdue it**. Rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky and over every living creature that moves on the ground."

Humans are called to receive and follow instructions and directions. We not designed to be owners but managers/ Stewards of Gods creation.

iv. God is a Companion to Humanity.

Genesis 2:1-3, "By the seventh day God had finished the work he had been doing; so on the seventh day he rested from all his work.³ Then God blessed the seventh day and made it holy, because on it he rested from all the work of creating that he had done."

Humans are created in connection, in affiliation; loneliness and solitude are not normal.

These five special affiliations between God and humanity generate the core identity for human beings:

Affiliation with God	Core Identity of
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	Humanity
God is the Creator	Humans are God's creatures.
God is the Provider.	Humans are dependent beings.
God is the Model.	Humans are representatives.
God is the Companion.	Humans are social beings.
God is the Master.	Humans are servants.

When one chooses to live in harmonization with the five elements of the original core identity, one is in a place, in a condition to live to the maximum and to please God. Is it possible to reconnect with the core identity, despite the lifestyle that we have adopted? There is hope for everyone.

Part III: Restoration of the Core Identity

The encounter the man of Gerasene's had with Jesus was not without effect. We can see how Jesus helped him to move out of confusion and re-established the five core identifications in his life, as mentioned previously.

a) *Humans are God's creatures.*

One immediate result of his encounter with Jesus is described in verse 35. He was now sitting "at Jesus' feet." This action implied that the former demon-possessed was learning from Jesus. "At Jesus feet" was also a sign of acknowledging the sovereignty of Jesus. He was adopting the position of the creature at the feet of his Creator.

b) *Humans are dependent beings.* (Vs. 35)

For years he had strayed around without clothes but verse 35 presents the transformed man as one who is dressed. Where has he gone shopping? We know the answer. Jesus was his Benefactor and Provider. He now depended upon Jesus to meet his needs.

c) *Humans are social beings.*

The demon-possessed man could not entertain a normal relationship with the divine and with his fellow men. Previously, he was always in

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solitary places and in the tomb, hiding to prevent any interaction. Now, his social ability was restored. Luke speaks about him as one who was visiting town; Mark even mentions ten cities.

d) *Humans are servants. (Vs. 39)*

Many have tried to control him, to give him orders and instructions. But he was acting according to his own mind, or his absence of mind. Now in his right mind, when he received an order, a mission from Jesus, he complied without any resistance, Luke 8:39, *"Return home and tell how much God has done for you."* So the man went away and told... He demonstrated a servant's attitude.

e) *Humans are representatives.*

Jesus could not stay any longer in this territory. He was forced to leave. But his representative remained behind. Ellen White writes about the representative role of the former demon-possessed: *"Though the Saviour Himself departed, the men whom He had healed remained as witnesses to His power... When Jesus returned to Decapolis, the people flocked about Him, and for three days, not merely the inhabitants of one town, but thousands from all the surrounding region, heard the message of salvation."* Desire of Ages, p. 340

The first healing step to move out of an identity crisis, is to **run to Jesus**. Second is to **kneel/fall at Jesus feet**. It was effective for the demon-possessed and it will be effective for anyone -

whatever our degree of identity confusion – even if the cause is supernatural. Jesus brings back purpose and meaning to the lives of those who come to Him.

Conclusion

If we are struggling with the discomfort of an identity crisis, if we are desperately seeking for purpose and meaning in life, we praise God for reminding us of our core identity as:

- *God's creatures, as dependent beings,*
- *as God's representatives,*
- *as social beings, and*
- *as servants of Him.*

If for some reason, we have drifted away from this original identity, we praise God because in Jesus our **original identity** can be re-established. Let us claim this promise tonight and throughout this week: *"And souls that have been degraded into instruments of Satan are still through the power of Christ transformed into messengers of righteousness"* (Desire of Ages, p. 341). Amen.

Like the demon possessed man, we as humans need to be at the feet of Jesus, depending on His providence and power to transform us into His image.

I Promise:

To **set apart** the first moment of each day to commune with through prayer, the study of the Bible, Spirit of Prophecy, Sabbath School lessons and Family worship.

Day 2 - TO WORSHIP GOD.

Key Text: Rev. 14: 6,7

Summary: Humans were created in the image of God as spiritual beings, designed to be worshipers of the Creator God.

Introduction

The first core element of our identity is: *"Humans are God's creatures."* One way of accepting and living this core identity is to worship God. (Psalm 47:1-2) invites us, *"Clap your hands, all you nations; shout to God with cries of joy. For the LORD Most High is awesome, the great King over all the earth."* (Revelation 4:11), is an echo of the previous passage: *"You are worthy, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power, for you created all things, and by your will they were created and have their being."*

These two passages are revealing an essential truth. If we consider God to be awesome (*Do you?*) and God to be the creator of all things (*Is He?*), we are invited to worship Him, to join the chorus of those who are saying good things about God.

Which place should worship occupy in our life? What are the expressions of worship that are pleasing to God? (let's begin with Prayer)

Part I: Creatures are Worshipers

After creating man on the sixth day, the first full day given to Adam was a day of worship, the Sabbath. The Bible in Exodus speaks clearly about the importance of worship. Sixteen chapters out of forty are dedicated to the establishment of the place of worship in the desert, the tabernacle. The people spent a full year at Sinai building the tabernacle according to God's pattern and learning how to worship. God's children who have experienced deliverance from slavery are called to worship. When Peter describes God's people using the term "royal priesthood," it was a reminiscence/recollection of the Old Testament tabernacle. The purpose of this "royal priesthood" is to *"declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light"* (1 Peter 2:9b).

We are saved to say good things about God, to worship Him.

After an overview of the history of the Church through the ages, in chapters 2-3 of Revelation, Apostle John had a glimpse of heaven in chapter 4. He saw God on His throne with all His magnificence. He also saw the 24 elders and the four living creatures. Both groups are portrayed as investing themselves in a common activity.

Revelation 4:8: What John Saw was; Each of the four living creatures had six wings and was covered with eyes all around, even under its wings. Day and night they never stop saying: *"Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God Almighty, who was, and is, and is to come."*

Revelation 4:10-11: twenty-four elders fall to worship before God.

Both groups are worshipping, saying good things about God. Heaven is for worshippers. The best training for heaven is to practice worshipping because this will be our major activity.

For now, let us come back to earth and discover anew the mission that God has given to his Church. We all know about the three Angels' Messages of (Revelation 14:6-12). It is all about worship.

First angels' message: Revelation 14:7: - First angels message is an invitation to worship the Creator.

Second angel's message: Revelation 14:8: The message of the second angel v.8 is about Babylon who has led many into its adulteries, of worshipping other gods.

Third angel's message: Revelation 14:9-10: The message of the third angel vs. 9-11 talks about

the terrible outcome for those who worship the beast and his image instead of God.

Logically, the promise at the conclusion of the Three Angels' Message applies to those who worship God, Revelation 14:13, "Then I heard a voice from heaven say, 'Write this: Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on.' 'Yes,' says the Spirit, 'they will rest from their labor, for their deeds will follow them.'"

As a Church our mission is to lead people to live according to their core identity, as creatures, to worship the true God. It is also our responsibility to warn against the deception and consequences of false worship prevailing in the world. And to share about the reward awaiting true worshippers.

Are we happy and satisfied with our private and family worship? How can we improve our participation in corporate worship? Punctuality can be a challenge for many. Let us think and pray about it because worship is our reason for existence.

Part II: Worshipping with our all

How should we worship? The Bible regularly presents our voices as instruments of worship.

- **Worship with our voices- (Psalm 66: 1-2)** "Shout for joy to God, all the earth! Sing the glory of his name; make his praise glorious." We are doing a beautiful job in this aspect.
- **Totality of our person to be an instrument of worship. (Romans 12:1)**
- **Worship with generous offering as proper and acceptable worship. (Philippians 4: 18)** - While writing to the Philippians, Paul uses the expression "living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God" to describe a particular practice of this Church. What is it? We read in Philippians 4: 18, "I have received full payment and have more than enough. I am amply supplied, now that I have

received from Epaphroditus the gifts you sent. They are a fragrant offering, an acceptable sacrifice, pleasing to God." What is considered by Paul to be "a fragrant", "an acceptable sacrifice" and "pleasing to God"? The generous offerings of the Philippians. It was viewed by Paul as an act of true and proper worship.

To give is to worship. This is so since the time of Abel. David in 1 Chronicles 29:3 talks about his giving as an act of worship to God: "*Besides, in my devotion to the temple of my God I now give my personal treasures of gold and silver for the temple of my God, over and above everything I have provided for this holy temple.*"

Why do we spend much time to speak about the importance of giving as an expression of worship? Money has the capacity to compete with God to become the object of worship (Repeat). Remember these words of Jesus, **Matthew 6:24, "No one can serve (worship) two masters. Either you will hate the one and love the other, or you will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and money."** When we use our resources to worship God, it is the best way for not worshipping our resources.

This meditation on "True Identity... is to Worship" ends with a reminder, the story of the three wise men from the East. They witness the fulfillment of prophecy of Balaam: "*There shall come a Star out of Jacob, and a Scepter shall rise out of Israel.*" Num. 24:17 They spared themselves no effort to come to Israel to meet the new-born King. They had several sleepless nights, as it was the only means for them to follow the star. Their journey was around 1300-1400 kilometres. Matthew 2: 1-2 presents the reason for their endeavours: "*Now after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the King, behold wise men from the East came to Jerusalem, saying, 'Where is He who has been King of the Jews? For we have seen His star in the East and have come to worship Him.'*"

In contrast, the priest and the leaders of God's people did not consider it important to accompany the wise men to Bethlehem. They were too busy doing God's work that they found it difficult to pause for worship. This is a tragedy. Worship has a cost, are we prepared for the cost?

Once in Bethlehem, they accomplished what they have come for. We read in Matthew 2: 11, "And when they have come into the house, they saw the young Child with Mary His mother, and fell down and worshiped Him. And when they had opened their treasures, they presented gifts to Him: gold, frankincense, and the myrrh." Interestingly, Matthew neither reports on the words the wise men used in their prayers nor about the chorus they sang to the newborn king. Surely words of praise and celebrations were given, but Matthew mentioned only one aspect of worship that he considered crucial, the gifts that they presented. They came to worship the newborn king, and they brought kingly gifts to him. Christians claim to worship the resurrected king, what can be said about our offerings?

Sister White uses the example of the three wise men to make an appeal to believers of today: "If we have given our hearts to Jesus, we also shall bring our gifts to Him. Our gold and silver, our most precious earthly possessions, our highest mental and spiritual endowments, will be freely devoted to Him who loved us, and gave Himself for us" (Desire of Ages, p. 71).

Conclusion

Our first core identity is to be and to behave as creatures of God, as such we are called to be worshippers. To worship is not a side element of the life of the true believer, it is the *purpose* of our lives. Let us prioritize worship daily. We are invited to respond to the appeal Paul made to the Christians in Rome: "to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God." This is total worship. As the three wise men, let us decide today to live the essential part of total worship, giving, by giving to God as to a King.

I Promise:

To **IMPROVE** my **RELATIONSHIPS**: growing in faithfulness, forgiveness and loving by principle.

Day 3: PRIORITIZE RELATIONSHIP.

Key Text: Matthew 6: 33

Summary: Putting God First has great many blessings in all other relationships.

Introduction

Something terrible happened to me in 2018. I forgot to pick my daughter at school (Koiari Park Primary in PAU campus), and she stayed there till late. Fortunate that it was in the campus. By the time I realized, it was already 6pm in the afternoon. I had forgotten her because I was too busy that day and was stressed because of professional requirements. This tragedy/disaster is one of the numerous illustrations of the society in which we live: *The quest to make a living is a major threat to life.*

Our study for tonight explores another core identity of humans: *Prioritize relationships.* What is the value God places on a relationship with him? How can we rearrange our life priorities and put First first?

Let's pray to begin our worship. (Prayer)

Part I: Relationship First

a) Marriage and Sabbath

The creation account testifies in favour of relationship first. The two institutions established in Eden, marriage, and Sabbath, are perpetual or eternal monuments that exalt relationship. God created Adam as a perfect being, he placed him in a perfect setting, and gave him a perfect assignment. These are idyllic/peaceful conditions... not completely so. When God considered Adam, He pondered these words,

- **Marriage: (Genesis 2:18) - "... not good for man to be alone."**

Man, as a social being, cannot be fulfilled and satisfied without quality relationships and connections. How do we evaluate and assess the quality of a man's life? Are we inclined to consider only achievements and possessions? Relationship is part of our core identity; it cannot be neglected without consequence.

God found it suitable to crown his creation activity on planet earth by a day of rest. Let us have a fresh look at Genesis 2:2-3:

- b) God **rested** on the seventh day day.
- c) God **blessed** the seventh day.
- d) God **sanctified** the seventh day (made it holy).

In the first six days, He created forms and filled the void and on the seventh He created rest. E.G White commented about the Sabbath: *"God saw that a Sabbath was essential for man, even in Paradise. He needed to lay aside his own interests and pursuits for one day of the seven, that he might more fully contemplate the works of God and meditate upon His power and goodness"* (Patriarchs and Prophets, p. 48).

Interests and pursuits are laid aside so that attention, time and energy are dedicated for rapport or connection with God and others. Every week we are reminded of the authority of relationship.

At the heart of Jesus' teaching, in the sermon on the mount, emphasis is also put on the necessity of prioritizing relationship.

- **(Matthew 6:33) the Bible says, "But seek first his kingdom..."**

What is the meaning of this familiar text? the kingdom is first of all, the establishment of the reign of a King. The kingdom has a King. The Gospels talk about « His Kingdom », « Kingdom of their Father », « Kingdom of God ». The kingdom is not only a future manifestation, but it is present and near. How do we therefore seek the kingdom? It consists firstly of an encounter, a relationship, an affiliation with the King of the kingdom. For Jesus, this should be the top and permanent priority of the Christian's life. Kingdom-seekers prioritize relationship with the King of the kingdom. This is what Jesus demonstrated during his earthly ministry.

Several references are present in the Gospels about Jesus prioritizing a relationship with his Father.

Mark 1:35-36: *Jesus spends time in connection with Father in Prayer every morning.*

This special time of Jesus with His Father was taking place at the first hour of Sunday morning. The previous day was the Sabbath, the day set apart for relationship between humans and the divine. After one full day of encounter, the first thing Jesus did when He woke up on Sunday was to seek again for this sweet fellowship. We can make two beautiful deductions: maintaining a relationship with God is not confined to the Sabbath. His job was not yet completed; everyone was looking for Him. Nevertheless, He chose to put God first. How do we value and invest in relationship with God in our daily life? Are we tempted to confine relationship with God to the Sabbath? The result of putting relationship first every day is spelled out in (Mark 1:39)- with this point that *Relationship* leads to an outflow of power. Weakness in spiritual life and ministry may be indicators of lack of relationship.

Relationship leads to an outflow of power. Weakness in spiritual life and ministry may be indicators of lack of relationship.

Part II: Setting Priorities Right

I. Mary and Martha (Luke 10: 38- 42)

The Gospel of Luke tells two stories of individuals who decided to make relationship their top priority.

- Martha had a great sense of hospitality. She welcomed Jesus in her house and did everything to attend to His needs. However, Luke, use the words “**distraction*” to speak about Martha’s activities. Her courtesy/ politeness and good manners were preventing her from experiencing something more essential.
- *Mary adopted a different posture/ position, “... sat at the Lord’s feet and listened to his teaching.”* (Luke 10: 39)- She received critics for her choice. But Jesus settled the dispute between the two sisters by these words: “*But the Lord answered her, “Martha, Martha, you are anxious and troubled about many things, but one thing is necessary. Mary has chosen the good*

portion, which will not be taken away from her.”

The word “*necessary*” is better translated in this context by “*primary*”. It is good to prepare food and take care of visitors, but it is **primary** to **cultivate relationship with the Lord.**

II. Zacchaeus (Luke 19: 1-10)-

Zacchaeus was a tax collector. His name indicates that he was of Jewish origin. A Jew who adopted this profession in those days was considered as a traitor and an irreligious person. He was despised by other Jews and excluded from the religious community. Tax collectors had a poor social life. However, Zacchaeus and the other tax collectors were ready to pay the price because they were driven by something else, the acquisition/ gaining of wealth. It was a well-paid job and at the same time it was easy to earn extras by taxing more than required. *Many are still sacrificing relationship with God and others for the sake of possession.*

For a long time, Zacchaeus convinced himself that his possessions could compensate for relationship. After a while, he felt that something was missing in his life and he wanted to see Jesus, at least from a distance. Fearing rejection and defamation, he did not make a way through the crowd. He climbed into the sycamore tree and hid behind the branches and leaves. When he heard Jesus expressing his wish to visit him in his house, **he accepted to reconnect with his core identity as a social being.** The Bible says, “*So he came down at once and welcomed him gladly*” (Luke 19:6). The unspiritual is now *taking* time to welcome the poor rabbi from Nazareth instead of using his precious time to make more money. Here we witness a reversal of priority.

Both Mary and Zacchaeus confirmed a permanent reversal of priority. Mary, at a later stage, demonstrated that her attachment to and her love for Jesus was priceless. The Bible says in (John 12:3), “*Then Mary took about a pint of*

pure nard, an expensive perfume; she poured it on Jesus' feet and wiped his feet with her hair. And the house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume." Judas Iscariot estimated the perfume to be worthy of a year's wages. ***She gave generously because for her relationship had precedence and priority over possession.***

Zacchaeus, the greediest man in Jericho, turned into the most generous inhabitant of the city. The Bible says: (read- Luke 19:8) – ***Zacchaeus makes things right to restore his relationship with God and others.***

This act of Zacchaeus was a way of honoring Jesus, his new friend. It also marked the restoration of a relationship with all those that he wronged previously. Jesus commended him for his change of priority by using these words, (Luke 19:9), "... *Today salvation has come to this house, because this man, too, is a son of Abraham.*"¹⁰ *For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost."*

As long as Zacchaeus was transferring relationship with God and others to a secondary position, he was lost. **The mission of Jesus is to lead people to put relationship first. This is key to salvation.**

Conclusion

There is a distinctive desire in all humans to improve the quality of their lives. This is a legitimate/ genuine aspiration and goal. The problem lies with the strategy that the world is suggesting hard work and acquire as much as possible. The prophet Haggai speaks about the limitations of this strategy in (Haggai 1:6) "*You have planted much but harvested little. You eat, but never have enough. You drink, but never have your fill. You put on clothes, but are not warm. You earn wages, only to put them in a purse with holes in it.*"

After one has filled belly, pockets, house and bank account, it is common that the feeling of emptiness continues to prevail. You feel lost and powerless. What else should one acquire?

We are reminded that humanity was created to prioritize relationship with God and others. The absence of this foundation cannot be compensated by hard work and possessions. Mary and Zacchaeus have tried to make a living by all possible means, destructive for both, but they only started to live when relationship became their priority.

Let us choose today to live according to our core identity, in relationship with God and others with this promise:

I Promise:

To IMPROVE my RELATIONSHIPS: growing in faithfulness, forgiveness, and loving by principle.

Day 4- A REPRESENTATIVE OF GOD

Key Text: Romans 8:29

Summary: As Christians, we are called to represent God by reflecting on His image through the acts of love until one is fully converted.

Introduction

What does it mean to be created in the image, in the resemblance of God? This is a passionate topic. Both scholars and church members have wrestled with this subject. Did Adam look like God? Did he have the same attitudes as God? Is the similitude/ likeness limited to only some aspects of Adam's life? What about us today? Here are quite some good questions, that we will, unfortunately, not be answered. However, we acknowledge that "*created in the image, in the resemblance of God*" has to do with our core identity as humans.

We will explore the topic from the perspective of a simple definition of an image: An image represents a given reality. How do we become God's representatives? Is there a unique way of best representing Him? (let's begin with Prayer)

Part I: Living as God's Representatives

This idea of reflecting God's image, being a representative of God, is so crucial for the believer that Paul presents God Himself as leading us into that direction.

The Bible says, "Be conformed to the image of His Son" (Romans 8:29). This passage is saying that brothers and sisters are "*to be conformed to the image of his Son.*" Who are the brothers and sisters? (Vs. 28) These are "*those who love him, who have been called.*" This is the category/ group of people who are supposed to represent Christ.

Representing God is the responsibility of all believers. Let us consider God's role in the process. God is the subject of two verbs in (Romans 8:29), "*foreknew*" and "*predestined*".

- To foreknow is an *attribute* in God to know in advance.
- Whereas "predestine" is an *action* verb. It is much more than a goal set by God for "*brothers and sisters*". It is a planned

activity of God to lead "*brothers and sisters*" to a certain point, "*to be conformed to the image of the son.*"

He does not only have a purpose for humanity, but He is the One who enables us to represent the Son and by extension represent Himself. Through Him, we can live in harmony with our original identity as God's representatives.

Ellen White Comments about (Romans 8:28), "Though the moral image of God was almost obliterated/ destroyed by the sin of Adam, through the merits and power of Jesus it may be renewed. Man may stand with the moral image of God in his character; for Jesus will give it to him. Unless the moral image of God is seen in man, he can never enter the city of God as a conqueror" (*The Review and Herald, June 10, 1890*).

This passage talks about both the necessity for us to be images, representatives of God, and also the investment of God in Christ to make this a reality. He has the capacity to beautify tainted and distorted images. Who are we representing?

We are "Ambassadors of God" (2 Corinthians 5:20). The noun ambassador conveys the idea of a messenger, an interpreter, and of one who goes. At the time of Apostle Paul, an ambassador was a respected official serving the Roman's Empire. His responsibility was to represent the Emperor or the Roman's government in the transaction of business, negotiation of peace and alliances and expression of friendship to governments in foreign countries. In (Ephesians 6:20), Paul uses the word ambassador in a figurative/ symbolic sense, he considers himself to be an ambassador of Christ. Believers are also called to serve as ambassadors. Representatives of God do not

occupy a static position but are active on His behalf.

Interestingly, birth was the foremost qualification for one to fulfil the position of ambassador in the Roman's Empire. Hence, we can better understand the argument of Paul, that a prerequisite to serve as an ambassador of God is a restored affiliation, to be reconciled with God as sons and daughters. The function of representatives of God can be fully accomplished only by born again Christians.

Our representation of Jesus is supposed to grow with the passing of time. The Bible says, *"And we all, who with unveiled faces contemplate the Lord's glory, are being transformed into his image with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit."* (2 Corinthians 3:18).

The expression "ever-increasing glory" suggests that there is a transformation from not being an image, to a blurred/ unclear image and finally to a bright and clear image. This exercise has to happen with "unveiled faces," with sincerity and honesty of heart, with a real desire to be transformed. Are we a better reflection of His image each new day? It is when we invest time in contemplation/ meditation that our actions will become adequate/ suitable representations of the Divine.

Part II: A Reflection of God's Love

How can we reflect the Son of God in a practical way? The inaugural/ opening speech of Jesus at the Synagogue of Nazareth gives an interesting hint. In (Luke 4:18), Jesus speaks of His mission quoting *(Isa 61: 1,2); "The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me, because He hath anointed Me to preach the gospel to the poor; He hath sent Me to heal the brokenhearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised."*

Jesus is declaring that he has a special concern for the poor, the broken, the captives, the blind and the prisoners. Representatives of Jesus are

those who demonstrate the same attention to the needy, the weak and the vulnerable. They accomplish the ministry of compassion and love. Two passages confirm that a unique expression of God's image is to love.

- a) (1 John 4:8), *"Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love."* And for James to reflect God's image is to have a moral lifestyle and much more,
- b) (James 1:27), *"Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world."*

There is one story in the gospel, The Good Samaritan, that clearly illustrates what it means to be a reflection of God, of God's love.

Ellen White comments in this story; *"In the story of the good Samaritan, Jesus gave a **picture** (an image) of Himself and His mission"* (Desire of Ages, p. 498).

These are four striking similitudes between the Samaritan and Jesus the Model.

1. Putting aside all prejudices/bias.

Jesus the Master Model cared for the foreigners, ate with the outcasts and identified himself with the rebellious humanity. The Bible says in, (Romans 5:10), *"while we were God's enemies, we were reconciled to him through the death of his Son..."* The Samaritan cared for a Jew who was full of hatred for his kind. To love like Jesus is to cross barriers; *social, intellectual, cultural, geographical, and linguistic.*

2. Attending to immediate need.

Jesus the Master Model ministered in words and concrete acts of compassion. The Bible says, *"Jesus went through all the towns and villages, teaching in their synagogues, proclaiming the good news of the kingdom and healing every disease and sickness."* (Matthew 9:35). It is said of the Samaritan, *"He went to him and bandaged his wounds, pouring on oil and wine. Then he put the man on his own donkey..."* (Luke 10:34). To

love like Jesus is to make a difference in people's life providing the best service needed.

3. **Paying the cost for a deeper need. (Sacrificial giving)**

Jesus the Master Model did more than teaching and healing, He paid a heavy cost. He was *"obedient to death even death on a cross!"* (Philippians 2:8). It was the only means to address the deeper need of sin. Our good Samaritan gave more than bandage, oil and wine. To ensure shelter and healing, he paid two denarii (v.35), the equivalent of two days' pay of a skilled worker. To love like Jesus is to use our blessings, to bless others with sacrificial love. What would our societies look like if our church create a budget for specific needs apart from clothing and feeding ministries that go may be once a quarter or year that become more program like ministries than deep need oriented.

4. **Working for full restoration.**

Jesus the Master Model continues His ministry on our behalf even after paying our debt at the cross. The Bible says in (Hebrews 4:14), *"Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has ascended into heaven, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold firmly to the faith we profess."*

The Good Samaritan demonstrates the same spirit, doing the extra mile, (Luke 10:35b), *"Look after him," he said, 'and when I return, I will reimburse you for any extra expense you may have.'* His aim as a representative of Jesus was not just alleviation/ mitigation of suffering but full rehabilitation or restoration. To love as Jesus loves, is a constant and permanent investment to lead people to wholeness.

Jesus love always have follow up plan, making sure that the needy one has fully recovered. It reminds me of how much time we give to the needy. Sometimes, we visit once and say we did our part. According to this passage, we take full responsibility until one has fully immersed into the image of God, by complete transformed faith.

Conclusion

After telling the story of the Good Samaritan, Jesus made the following appeal to the expert in the law; *"Go and do likewise."* "The Samaritan has behaved as my image, as my representative, do the same." The same appeal is valid to all those who are created in his image, in his resemblance: Put aside all prejudices/biases; attend to people's needs. Be ready to pay the cost of service and ... lead people to wholeness. This is our core identity. As an image of the Master Model, we are not supposed to be static/ motionless but to be an active representative – loving and serving others not just following *"systems, creeds and rites."* The good news is that the One who created us and called us to be representatives, is able and willing to shape our lives. Run to Him, take time to contemplate the life of Jesus and grant permission to the Master Artisan. Choose today to become his next masterpiece in making this promise!

Day 5: TO DEPEND ON GOD.

Key Text: Numbers 14:7-9

Summary: We have a providential Father and God who promises to provide for life in all aspects. Only trust and believe in Him.

Introduction

According to the Bible, the human race is not the result of the survival of the fittest. Our first parents came to life with all the adequate or suitable conditions in place. They were created as perfect living creatures and placed in the best environment. Who they were and what they possessed were all inherited from the Divine. In the original design, God is the Provider and Sustainer, and human beings are supposed to be **dependent** upon Him.

The first temptation was a direct attack to this core identity; *dependence* upon the Divine Provider. When the Evil suggested to Eve that *"You shall be as gods"*, it was an invitation to deny God as their Provider. *"Eating the fruit of the knowledge of good and evil"* was a statement by Adam and Eve that they reject God as their source of knowledge. We know, we witnessed, and we experienced the consequences of choosing independence from God.

How does the rediscovery of this core identity *"Dependence on God the Provider"* help to address the issues of fear, pride and selfishness that have affected humanity of all generations? *(Let's pray before we begin into the study)*

Part I: A Remedy for Fear

The fear level in our present society is one of the highest that humanity has ever experienced. We hear and see about death and violence almost every day. There are many causes behind this alarming situation: criminality, sorcery, economic recession, climate conditions are among the causes. Lily Rothman comments on the new causes of fear today, *"Another notable difference today is that many people feel that they may have to confront threats on their own."*

People feel that they cannot depend on government, police and other institutions to protect them from some major threats. This ineffectiveness to acknowledge the existence and presence of a dependable being or entity lead to an escalation or increase of fear, to a culture of fear.

This was the state of mind of the 10 spies after the 40 days they spent to survey the Promised Land. We read in (Numbers 13: 31-33):

- *"The people are stronger than we are"*
- *"All the people we saw there are of great size."*
- *We seemed like grasshoppers in our own eyes, and we looked the same to them."*

They were responding to what they see, the giants and ferocious inhabitants, to how they perceived themselves, grasshoppers, and all this was mixed with some irrational/ foolish thought, *"The land we explored devours those living in it."* This situation brought their fear to a level that they were paralyzed and refused to enter their long-cherished destination. Fear has multiple causes. Unattended fears prevent many from fulfilling their life goals.

Surprisingly, one of the spies, Caleb the son of Jephunneh, demonstrated courage and boldness. The same experience can lead to different reactions! Caleb responded to the fear of his companions by doing the following, *"Then Caleb silenced the people before Moses and said, 'We should go up and take possession of the land, for we can certainly do it.'" (Numbers 13:30):*

Was he naïve/ inexperienced *youthful*? Was he trying to impress the leader, Moses? Not at all! His courage rested on a deep conviction, (Numbers 14:7-9):

- *The will Provide and Protect "*

He acknowledged God's **providence** of good things and **protection**; he decided to depend

upon Him. This was the source of his peace in the midst of the crises. He was an inspiration for Joshua, the future leader and he can be one for us living in the midst of this fearful generation.

Forty-five years later, Caleb was now an old man of 85 years, but an ounce of fear had not tainted his courage. When Joshua was dividing the land, he came forward and reminded the new leader that the hill inhabited by ferocious giants was promised to him;

- (Joshua 14:12), *"Now therefore, give me this mountain..."*

Age can reduce physical vigor, but it has no effect on courage and boldness as long as we remain faithful to our core identity, dependence on God.

Part II: A Remedy for Pride

Pride is disastrous for everyone it controls. Solomon the wise man wrote these words;

(Proverbs 16:18) *"Pride goes before destruction, a haughty spirit before a fall."*

John Maxwell applies this truth to leaders of today, "Leaders who fail to prune their pride will meet demise. That's not a guess, it's a guarantee. With pride, it's not a matter of 'if' we will fall, but 'when.' There are no exceptions." How do we protect ourselves from this terrible virus? Are we already victims of pride?

The story of the king of Babylon, a symbol of human's pride, teaches about the cure to pride. Nebuchadnezzar made the following reflection about himself, (Daniel 4:4,30) *"I... was... in my palace, ... 'I have built... by my mighty power and for the glory of my majesty?"*

The "I" was prominent. He praised himself for his great achievements. The Ancient History Encyclopedia provides a description of Ancient Babylon: *"The city is known for its impressive walls and buildings, its reputation as a great seat*

of learning and culture, the formation of a code of law which pre-dates the Mosaic Law, and for the Hanging Gardens of Babylon which were man-made terraces of flora and fauna, watered by machinery, which were cited by Herodotus as one of the Seven Wonders of the World."

According to human's standard, Nebuchadnezzar had effectively reached the summit. However, boasting about oneself still remains a dangerous exercise. (Daniel 4:33b) talks about the consequence of Nebuchadnezzar's pride, *"He was driven away from people and ate grass like the ox. His body was drenched with the dew of heaven until his hair grew like the feathers of an eagle and his nails like the claws of a bird."*

It is hard to put a name on the disease that affected the proud monarch. The least that we can say is that it was an acute form of identity disorder: A man developing characteristics of an animal and behaving as an animal. Pride is a departure from the core identity of acknowledging God as the Provider and depending upon Him. Hence, we should not be surprised that the fruit of pride is confusion of identity. Are you worried about your actual behavior? Are you constantly involved in the comparison game? Are you always trying to look and do better than others? Do you have the impression that people perceive you as strange and weird? Take time to do your assessment - maybe there is a rampant/ flourishing pride challenge that has crept into your life.

Nebuchadnezzar restored to his right mind

Fortunately, the book of Nebuchadnezzar ends with a report about his restoration, (Daniel 4:34), *"At the end of that time, I, Nebuchadnezzar, raised my eyes toward heaven, and my sanity was restored. Then I praised the Most High; I honored and glorified him who lives forever."*

Pride is a departure from the core identity of acknowledging God as the Provider and depending upon Him... Pride is a departure from the core identity of acknowledging God as the Provider and depending upon Him.

This verse and the following provide clear indication about the cause of his restoration. He raised his eyes toward heaven, meaning that he was no more focusing on himself. This is a sign of acknowledging the sovereignty of the God of heaven. Praises were redirected towards the Most High; no more to himself and his achievements. He was healed from his pride, healed from his identity disorder by accepting God as Provider and choosing to depend on Him. Victims of pride can reverse their destiny. The secret is to acknowledge that God is the source of what we have and that He provides the strength and power for all accomplishments.

Part III: A Remedy to Selfishness

Selfishness is another flaw of the human's fallen nature. Isaiah uses a striking imagery to describe the selfishness of the leaders of Ancient Israel, (Isaiah 56:11), *"They are dogs with mighty appetites; they never have enough. They are shepherds who lack understanding; they all turn to their own way, they seek their own gain."*

This trait of character is not without consequences for others and for the individual.

- **Disorder and evil practices.**

The Bible says, *"For where you have envy and selfish ambition, there you find disorder and every evil practice."* (James 3:16)

Selfishness gives rise to offensive and unfair actions. Two common examples are the exploitation of the poor by the rich and the destruction of the world's environment to satisfy personal ambitions.

- **Wrath and anger.**

Paul talks about the disapprobation/ disfavor of God against the selfish, Romans 2:8, *"But for those who are self-seeking and who reject the truth and follow evil, there will be wrath and anger."* In the next verse he speaks about *"trouble and distress."*

Selfishness is a serious problem; how can it be overcome? King David shares a testimony about his capacity to live an unselfish life, to live a generous life.

The Bible says, (1 Chronicles 29: 14) *"But who am I, and who are my people, that we should be able to give as generously as this?"* He is surprised and amazed by his own generosity, and he wants to find the reason. In the following line, he reveals the triggering factor, *"Everything comes from you, and we have given you only what comes from your hand."*

Once David has realized that God was the Provider of everything, he naturally became a channel to pass the blessings to others. Giving was for him a statement and a reminder that God was His Provider. When one realizes God's solicitude, one becomes a loving person. **If God is the Provider, nothing prevents Him from providing again after we have shared what we have received. Hence, one should not be afraid of giving.**

Acknowledging God as the Provider moves us away from selfishness and leads to generosity. Ellen White comments, the practice of generosity is an additional blow to selfishness. She writes, *"Constant, self-denying benevolence is God's remedy for the cankered sins of selfishness and covetousness"* (The Adventist Home, p. 370). True benevolence is qualified by two loaded words, "constant" and "self-denying". The word "constant" implies that she is not referring to impulsive and unplanned giving but one that is systematic when returning tithe, giving offerings and helping the needy. The word "self-denying" refers to sacrificial giving; not to giving the surplus or giving the smallest coin or note that happen to

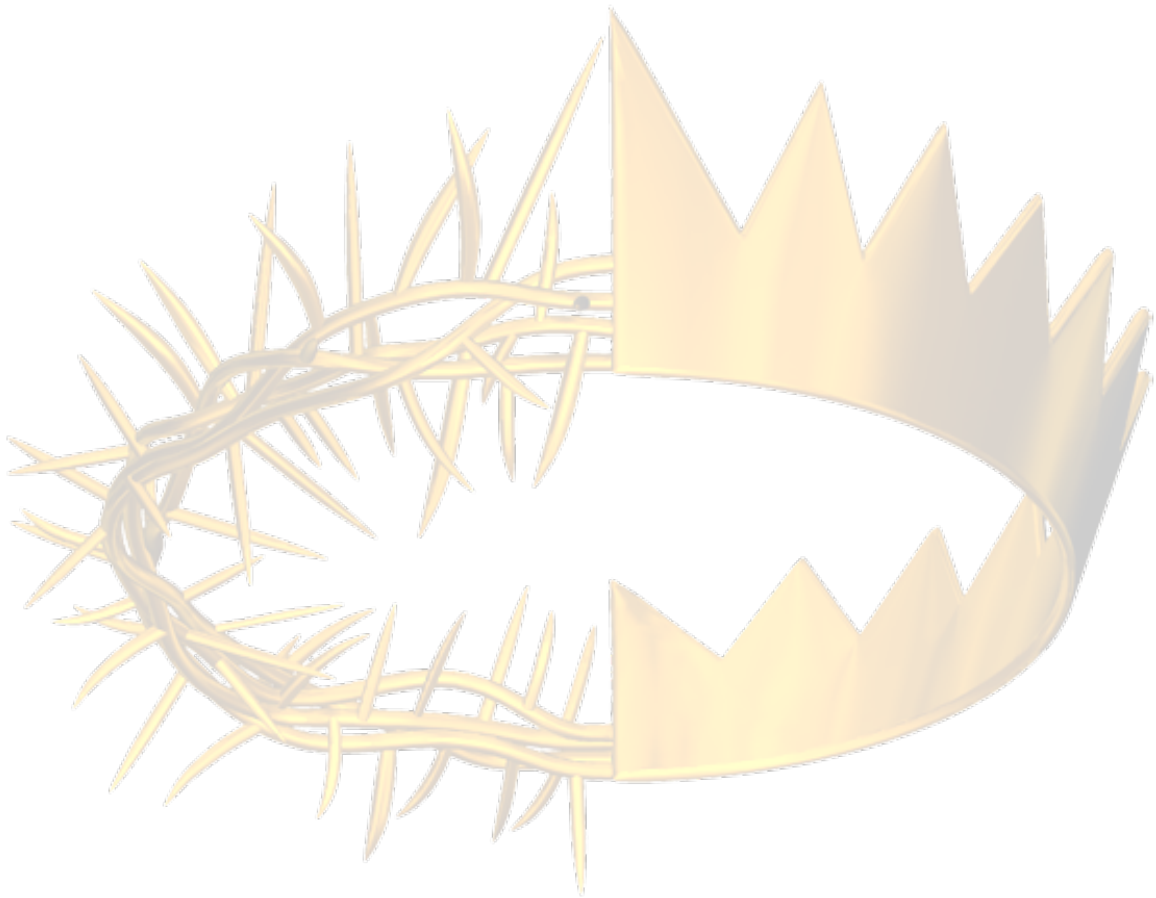
be in our pocket at the time of offering. Our mode of giving is an effective weapon to overcome selfishness.

Conclusion

"Every man must decide whether he will walk in the light of creative altruism or in the darkness of destructive selfishness," says Martin Luther King Jr. What will be our decision at the end of this message? Are we confronted with the issues of fear, pride and selfishness? Are they going to control our existence and prevent us to live

Our mode of giving is an effective weapon to overcome selfishness.

abundantly? The remedy is found in our core identity: Acknowledging God as Provider and depending upon Him.



Day 6: TITHE OF EVERYTHING

Key Text: Malachi 3: 10

Summary: Tithe of everything is not concentrated to monetary value alone. Rather its everything that comes from God as a possession which we claim ownership.

How would you feel if your hairdresser had to leave in the middle of a hair cut? To comfort you, he explains that he has completed the haircut partially; meaning that he cut the front part and not the back. This illustrates the huge difference between partial and complete. Many sincere believers have asked the question: On what should one tithe? On the total income received or on a portion of the income? Does it make a difference? To answer this question, we will revisit some foundational biblical passages about the practice of tithing that will provide an “it is written” answer to our inquiry.

Part I: Examples from Tithers

The first biblical reference to tithing practices involves Abram (Gen. 14:20). God granted him a great military victory over a coalition of four kings. On his return from the battle, during which he had rescued his nephew Lot and others who had been captured by the four kings, he met Melchizedek, the king and priest of Salem. Abram’s natural reaction was to give back “a **tenth of everything**” in response to the protection and the material and spiritual blessings received.

This biblical story points, among other things, to the principle that tithe is based on all increase. In this particular circumstance, the “**everything**” acquired by Abram represents the “food,” “goods,” and “possessions” that were taken from Sodom and Gomorrah (Gen. 14:11, 12, 16) and probably what the defeated army had left behind. Angel Rodriguez follows an identical line of thought: “Genesis 14 deals with properties, and the loss and recovery of goods”—Angel Rodriguez, *Stewardship Roots*, p. 43.

The items constituting the spoils of war taken by Abram were definitely diverse, and so was his tithe. Abram’s example is of the utmost value as it preceded the creation of the

Israelite nation and its priesthood system, thus pointing to the universality of the practice of “tithing everything” for believers. Ellen White makes the same application: “As did Abraham, they are to pay **tithe of all they possess and all they receive**” (E. G. White, *Counsels on Stewardship*, pp. 66, 67)

The second biblical reference to tithing comes from the story of fugitive Jacob (Gen. 28:10-22). It is not about the actual practice of tithing but about the promise to God made by the runaway patriarch: “Of all that you give me I will give you a tenth” (Gen. 28:22). This promise was made as he worshipped the God who committed Himself to be with him and bless him. Jacob’s commitment was to tithe from “all.”

One can understand the criterion “of all,” a practice that Jacob used to return tithe, by considering the nature of the possessions that he acquired. Previously, God had given him the promise of “heaven’s dew and earth’s richness—an abundance of grain and new wine” (Gen. 27:28). Jacob made his commitment to tithe in anticipation of the fulfilment of this divine promise. The unfolding of his life tells us how the promise was actually realized. After 20 years of service, Laban agreed to pay him and gave him his wages (Gen. 30:28). He became the owner of large flocks, servants, camels, and donkeys (Gen. 30:43). His wealth was not limited to livestock; it was also in monetary form. He bought a plot of land with pieces of silver (Gen. 33:19) and gave significant amounts of silver for his sons to buy provisions from Egypt (Gen. 42:25). When he moved from Canaan to Egypt, besides livestock, he brought the “possessions” that he had accumulated (Gen. 46:6). As it was a time of severe famine, his “possessions” undoubtedly consisted of non-agricultural products. The wealth of Jacob was diverse.

If we accept that Jacob was true to his promise of returning a tithe “of all” that God would give him, we can conclude with confidence that he tithed from his livestock, from the silver that he acquired, and from the other possessions that he had accumulated. Israel, as the nation descending from Jacob, adopted this principle of tithing in faithfulness to the vow made by the patriarch.

Part II: Instructions About Tithing

An important text used to support the practice of tithing is (Leviticus 27:30-32). Interestingly, this passage speaks about tithe from the products of the land and is one of two instances where the tithe of livestock is explicitly mentioned. Can we conclude that other items that constitute personal wealth can legitimately be excluded from the tithing exercise? Some have gone as far as to conclude that a businessperson, a mechanic, a teacher, a builder, or anyone earning an income in cash should be exempted from the experience of tithing. How should we understand (Leviticus 27:30-32)?

The broader context of Leviticus 27 provides instructions concerning what the Israelites were generally devoting to the Lord, and about the possibility of redeeming and exchanging some of these things using money, or more precisely, silver shekels. This no exhaustive list enumerates person (vss. 1-8), animals (vss. 1-13), house (vss. 12-15), family land (vss. 16-21), fields outside of family land (vss. 22-24), and the tithe of the produce of the land and the herd. They could exchange the tithe of the produce of the land devoted to God for cash by adding 20 percent to its value, but no provision was made for exchanging the tithe of animals.

Regarding tithing, the emphasis on land, produce, and herds (vss. 30-32) can be understood by the fact that in those days the economy of Israel was predominantly agrarian. It was expected that people would devote the product of their labor to the Lord. However, ignoring the fact that the income and wealth of some people were already counted in

monetary form (silver shekels) would be intellectual dishonesty. The multiple references to silver shekels in this chapter testify to the transition to a monetary system. Why is there no mention of or instructions concerning tithe returned from and in cash in this passage? The most probable answer has to do with the primary thrust of the chapter: converting devoted items into cash. Hence, if what was devoted to the Lord was already in the form of cash, there would be no need to mention it in the list found in Leviticus 27. Therefore, it is difficult to disregard the practice of tithing cash income or to find support for partial tithing from Leviticus 27:30-32 transition to a monetary system.

The Gospels do not elaborate much on tithing, but they are not silent either. Ellen White explains this by mentioning that tithing was assumed by Jesus just as was the legislation concerning the Sabbath (Review & Herald, May 16, 1882). At least two passages from the Gospels shed light on the tithing practice prevailing among the Jews during the time of Jesus. The accepted practice was to tithe from “all I get” (Lk. 18:12). Jesus acknowledges that this principle was diligently applied to the minutest gain (Matt. 23:23a). Though He condemned the mindset of some worshippers and tithers, with their boasting and self-righteous attitudes, He did not question the practice of tithing from all that one gets (Matt. 23:24b).

Part III: The Value of a Tithe of Everything

How much is everything? Is tithe concentrated to monetary values only?

The real value of tithe is not monetary but symbolic. **First, it serves to illustrate and acknowledge that God is the “Giver of all things.”** The products of the earth, the bountiful harvests, the treasures of gold and silver are His gifts. Houses and lands, food and clothing, He has placed in the possession of men and women. He asks us to acknowledge Him as the Giver of all things; and for this reason, God says, “Of all your possessions I reserve a tenth for Myself, besides gifts and offerings, which are to be brought into My

storehouse. This is the provision God has made for carrying forward the work of the gospel”—*Ellen G. White, Counsels on Stewardship, p. 65.*

The returning of the tithe is a statement that God is not only the Owner of the tenth but of **everything that we receive** and of the material world. A partial tithe cannot convey adequately the idea that God is the “Owner and Giver of all things,” but one of a partial Owner. This stands in contradiction to what the apostle Paul declared to Timothy: “The living God, who gives us richly all things to enjoy” (1Tim. 6:17, NKJV).

When God is not acknowledged as Giver of all, we can infer some of the consequences by reading the words of Paul to Timothy: “Command those who are rich in this present age not to be haughty, nor to trust in uncertain riches but in the living God, who gives us richly all things to enjoy (1 Tim. 6:17, NKJV). These consequences include:

- An attitude of arrogance/ pride. We boast over what we consider to have acquired by ourselves.
- Trusting in riches instead of trusting in God. If we do not see the hands of God behind our riches, it is easy for our riches to become our gods.

These characteristics are the opposite of what is expected from a spiritual man or woman.

When God is acknowledged as Giver of all, we can also infer some of the results from the words of Paul to Timothy, “Let them do good, that they be rich in good works, ready to give, willing to share, storing up for themselves a good foundation for the time to come, that they may lay hold on eternal life” (1 Tim. 6:18, 19, NKJV):

- Inclination to do good to others. You are good to others when you realize that Someone is good to you.
- Propensity to give and share. A generous spirit results from the conviction

Second, a “tithe of everything” fosters peace of mind and serenity because it is a demonstration of trust. When my resources are tight, and I still choose to return a complete tithe, it is an

utmost exercise of total dependence. The Bible is clear about the relationship between trusting in God and peace: “You will keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on You, because he trusts in You” (Isa. 26: 3, NKJV).

Have you ever played some trust games? A well-known one is the blind walk. You close your eyes and allow someone to guide you along a maze path. After some time, you experience the peaceful sensation that results from complete trust. This is possible when you keep your eyes closed all along the way and choose not to peek from time to time. Perfect peace is the outcome of perfect trust. A tithe of everything is one of the means set by God for His peace to be manifested in your life.

CONCLUSION

The examples from the patriarchs and the teachings of Jesus testify to the practice of a tithe of everything. This habit serves as a powerful reminder of God as the Giver of all things. This custom participates in developing good, generous and heavenly focused individuals. In a world of uncertainties and confusion, the exercise of tithing from everything, an apex of total dependence, will definitely contribute to our inner peace. “And try Me now in this,” says the LORD of hosts” (Mal. 3:10). What would be our response?

Day 7: Acceptable and Unacceptable Offerings

Adapted from Marcos Bonfim- Stewardship Director- General Conference

Key text: Mark 12: 43

Summary: God evaluates all offerings and accepts the giver before the gift or offering.

There are plenty of indications in the Bible implying that the Lord evaluates, assesses, and rates our giving or its absence. The fact that He purposely sat opposite to the treasury (Mark 12:41) and that He rated the poor widow's offering (Mark 12:43) should tell us that even today, He is watching and assessing our giving patterns. Another important truth is that some offerings are accepted and valued by Him, while others, irrespective of their amount, cannot be accepted and become even offensive to Him. What are some of the conditions for God to accept an offering?

1. WHEN IT IS PRESENTED BY A HEART THAT IS RIGHT WITH GOD. (Psalm 40:6-8; 51:16, 17; Isaiah 1:10-13; Hosea 6:6; Malachi 3:2-5; Matthew 9:13; Mark 12:33)

(Malachi 3: 3)- God accepts those offerings that are brought "in righteousness" (verse 3), that is, by those who have allowed God to purify, to refine them (verses 2, 3) from sins such as sorcery, adultery, perjury, overreaching or oppressing hirelings in their wages, and oppression of the vulnerable and foreigners (verse 5), to mention a few. Only then will "the offerings . . . be acceptable to the Lord" (verse 4). It becomes clear that the Lord evaluates the giver before the gift. The best and biggest offering will never be accepted if the one who brings it is not right with God. Thus, we need to bring a "heart offering" before we bring a "monetary offering."

We bring a "heart offering" when we regularly take time daily to allow the Holy Spirit to examine our thoughts and inclinations, comparing them with the Word of God. By confessing our sins and believing that Jesus' death was sufficient to pay our debt, we receive the power to loathe/ dislike ourselves because of our evil ways and deeds (Ezekiel 36:31), and then to receive a new heart, full of desire to do God's will (Ezekiel 36:26, 27).

2. WHEN IT IS BROUGHT BY A HEART THAT IS RIGHT WITH MEN. (Matthew 5:23, 24; Hebrews 13:16)

Everyone who is right with God will strive to be right with other human beings. Those who bear a contentious spirit or are oblivious to the feelings, rights, or needs of others show that their religion is false. Therefore, their offerings cannot be accepted by God. For this reason, Jesus says that if you are bringing your offering to the church (God's storehouse) and "remember that your brother has something against you," stop giving your offering "and go your way. First be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift" (Matthew 5:23, 24, NKJV). Have I done all I can to live peaceably with all men and women (Romans 12:18) and to help those in need around me? Without that sanctifying experience, our offerings cannot be accepted by God.

3. WHEN IT IS PRESENTED BY AN OBEDIENT PERSON. (1 Samuel 15:22; Psalm 40:6-8; Isaiah 66:2-4)

King Saul was eager to present offerings to the Lord, but only as a way to cover his wilful disobedience to the Lord's command. Instead of confessing his sin, he kept presenting excuses for doing what was against God's will (1 Samuel 15). Some people today may also do the same when they work during the Sabbath hours, promising to bring that day's wages as a kind of "compensation offering" for doing what is not right. But if a married man has an affair, will his wife accept a cake prepared by the other woman as compensation? Therefore, Samuel said to Saul, "Has the Lord as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices, as in obeying the voice of the Lord? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to heed than the fat of rams" (1 Samuel 15:22, NKJV). God will never accept offerings as a replacement for loyalty to His commandments.

4. WHEN THE WORSHIPER IS SEEKING FOR HEAVENLY, NOT AN EARTHLY, REWARD. (Matthew 6:1–4)

Some people may bring large offerings or make significant donations while compelled by less-than-ideal motivations. Some, for example, want to be recognized as philanthropists or benefactors, others have an eye on a position on the church's committee, and still others may give out of love for the pastor. Because those earthly motivations generally expect a human recognition (a kind of reward), they cannot be accepted by God. Nevertheless, when I do not try to promote myself through my offerings, then what Jesus said may be accomplished in my life: "Your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you" (Matthew 6:4)

5. WHEN IT REPRESENTS AN APPROPRIATE PROPORTION OF THE INCOME. (Deuteronomy 16:17; Mark 12:41–44; 1 Corinthians 16:1, 2)

Jesus once said that the person who gave the lesser amount gave more than all who gave far larger amounts (Mark 12:41–44). Instead of lacking math knowledge, the Creator of the universe indicated that His estimation of what we give is not based on the amount but on the proportion given. Six percent of the income given by the poorest person means the same as an offering of six percent of the income of the wealthiest one, even though the amounts will differ greatly.

By choosing the proportional system to decide *when* and *how much* to offer, we testify that we do not give to earn merit. Instead, we give as an answer to His giving because He is always the first to give. He will never expect us to give anything if He has not given us something (2 Corinthians 8:11, 12).

By not purposing a fixed percentage of their income to give as an offering (2 Corinthians 9:7), people may be leaving it to their own deceitful heart (Jeremiah 17:9) to decide about *when* and *how much* to give. Conversely, by prayerfully choosing a proportion of the income to give as an offering, they put God in control of *when* and *how much* to give. I give a fixed

proportion of what He gives me, in answer to His giving. As we are partners in His business of saving souls, the more He blesses me financially, the bigger the amount that I will return to Him. And if He needs more to be invested in His business, He will give me more, for He knows that from every cent that He gives me, a fixed percentage will be invested back in forwarding His kingdom.

7. WHEN IT IS GIVEN ACCORDING TO THE SPECIFICATION. (Genesis 4:4, 5; Hebrews 11:4)

Cain and Abel's story shows us that God cannot accept offerings that are not brought according to His specifications. Cain resolved to do it his way, and God "did not respect Cain and his offering" (Genesis 4:5, NKJV). Abel pleased the Lord by following His guidance and bringing "the firstborn of his flock and of their fat. And the LORD respected Abel and his offering" (Genesis 4:4, NKJV)

Space will not allow us to explore all the specifications found in the Bible and the Spirit of Prophecy about acceptable offerings. But besides the items already covered above, we may add that regular offerings should also be brought to the Lord as first fruits, respecting the God-first principle (Matthew 6:33). First fruits (or firstborn) offerings were regularly brought to God by His children in remembrance that He is the Provider and Sustainer of life. They are only accepted because Jesus, the Lamb of God, died as a ransom for our sins, opening the way for us to be accepted by the Father. This kind of offering is "primarily triggered, not by good feelings, a specific need, a call, sympathy for a pastor or a religious leader, nor even a desire to provide for the temple or mission work. Instead, [it] should be triggered by God's act of sending some form of an increase. They are a means to worship God, in addition to the tithe (Malachi 3:8–10), whenever there is an addition of income."

CONCLUSION

Before every act of worship through offerings, we are invited by God to assess our hearts to see if there is still an unconfessed sin that may prevent our offering from being accepted. But we must also evaluate our relationship with

God and with others, the motivation that is leading us to offer, and the regularity and quality of the offering. Is it the best that we can bring? Is it expressing gratitude and allegiance to Him? Let us take advantage of worship through offerings to get even closer to the One who not only ransomed us through His blood, but also sustains us!



