



**GOD FIRST**

ADVENTIST STEWARDSHIP MINISTRIES

# STEWARDSHIP *Revival*

*week 2019*

**GOD FIRST**

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STEWARDSHIP

*Revival*

*— week 2019 —*

GOD FIRST

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# INTRODUCTION

For the past three years “God First” has been the rallying slogan of Adventist Stewardship Ministries. This theme aligns with the revival emphasis of the world church, and it focuses mainly on the reformation component.

As we near Jesus’ second coming, we are invited to take seriously these words of the apostle Paul, “Examine yourselves to see whether you are in the faith; test yourselves. Do you not realize that Christ Jesus is in you—unless, of course, you fail the test?” (2 Cor. 13:5). The primary aim of the 2019 Stewardship Revival Week is to reflect on our Christian journey and see how the God First message has permeated the key areas of our existence.

GOD FIRST

# I PROMISE:



To **SET APART** the first moments of each day to commune with the Lord through **PRAYER**, the **STUDY** of the Bible, the Spirit of Prophecy and the Sabbath School lessons, and in **FAMILY WORSHIP**.



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



To **ESTABLISH** one new **HEALTHY HABIT**, to better serve the Lord with my mind: \_\_\_\_\_



To **OFFER** one day (or evening) each week to the Lord, spreading the good news to others through Bible studies, small groups, etc. (TMI).



To **KEEP** the **SABBATH**, preparing for Friday, keeping its limits, right through \_\_\_\_\_

To **FAITHFULLY RETURN** home \_\_\_\_\_ (home).

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To **FAITHFULLY RETURN** home \_\_\_\_\_ (home).

## DIEU EN PREMIER JE PROMETS:



DE METTRE A PART les premieres moments de chaque jour pour communier avec le Seigneur travers la PRIERE, l'ETUDE de la Bible, l'Esprit de prophetie et la leçon de l'Ecole du Sabbat, et lors du CULTE DE FAMILLE.



D'AMELIORER mes RELATIONS en croissant en foidite, pardon et en aimant par principe mieux le Seigneur avec mon esprit.



D'ETABLIR une nouvelle HABITUDE SAINTE, de servir D'OFFRIR un jour (ou une soirée) chaque semaine pour TRAVAILLER pour Dieu en partageant la bonne nouvelle aux autres a travers des Etudes de la Bible, des petits groupes, etc. (TMI).



D'OBSERVER le SABBAT, en m'y preparant comme il le convient le vendredi respectant ses limites, avec des pensees et activites appropriees.



De RENDRE FIDELLEMENT la DIME au Seigneur (10% de mes revenus).



De CONSACRER un pourcentage regulier ( \_\_\_\_\_ %) de mes revenus comme une OFFRANDE VOLONTAIRE au Seigneur.



AVEC L'AIDE DE DIEU.



AVEC L'AIDE DE DIEU.



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AVEC L'AIDE DE DIEU.



## GOD FIRST I PROMISE:



**SPEND TIME** talking to Jesus when I first wake up every day.



Ask Jesus to help me **FORGIVE** and **LOVE** others because it can be really hard.



Choose **HEALTHY HABITS** so I can listen to God's voice.



**TELL** all my friends and family about Jesus.



Make **SABBATH** extra special by getting ready.



Faithfully **RETURN** God's **TITHES** which is 10% of whatever income the **FIRST** gives to me.



**PROMISE** a percentage ( \_\_\_\_\_ %) of my income as regular offering.



WITH GOD'S HELP.



WITH GOD'S HELP.



WITH GOD'S HELP.



WITH GOD'S HELP.



## PRIMERO DIOS MI PACTO:



SEPARAR los primeros momentos de cada dia para la comunión con el Señor mediante la ORACION, el ESTUDIO de la Biblia del Espíritu de Profecía y la lección de la Escuela Sabática y a través del CULTO FAMILIAR.



MEJORAR mis RELACIONES: creciendo en fidelidad, perdón y amor por principio.



FORMAR un nuevo HABITO SALUDABLE, para servir Ofrecer un dia (o una noche) cada semana para TRABAJAR para Dios compartiendo las buenas nuevas a otros a través de Estudios Biblicos, Grupos Pequeños, etc. (TMI).



GUARDAR EL SABBADO, preparandome debidamente para el en el viernes respetando sus limites y manteniendo pensamientos y actividades apropiados.



DEVOLVER FIELMENTE EL DIEZMO al Señor (10% de mis ingresos).



DEDICAR un porcentaje regular de mis ingresos ( \_\_\_\_\_ %) como una ofrenda al Señor (pacto).



CON LA AYUDA DE DIOS.



CON LA AYUDA DE DIOS.



## 2 Corinthians 9:7

The material at hand can serve as a launching pad for this introspection exercise. The introductory subject concentrates on the nature of the God we are called to put first. The order of the following presentations corresponds with the “I Promise” commitment card produced by Adventist Stewardship Ministries. The messages, through the prompting of His Spirit, will challenge us to reflect on some sensitive but life-bearing areas such as devotional life, relationship with others, healthy lifestyle, service and witnessing, Sabbath observance, returning tithe, and participation in proportional offerings. At the end of each message we have another opportunity to make a decision to do what is right.

These presentations can be used as devotional talks at the local church or in another group setting. Depending on the practicality of meeting together, the same material fits well for family and personal worship time.

I wish you all to experience growth for more effective partnership in His final mission.

Aniel Barbe

For more information on Promise, visit:  
<https://stewardship.adventist.org/promise-offerings>.





# 1

## SEEK FIRST

The new emphasis of Stewardship Ministries is “God First.” At the beginning of the 2020 Stewardship Week, we are invited to reflect on these three questions:

1. Why should we put God first?
2. Who is the God we are called to put first?
3. What does it mean to put God first?

Our key text, Matthew 6:33, “*But **seek first** his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well*” would guide us in this exploration. Seek first.

### Part I: Why should we put God first?

Are humans really in a position to put God first? First is the place where He already belongs (Gen. 1:1; John 1:1; Rev. 1:8; 22:13). Putting God first is an acknowledgment of the position of God. When you want to complete a puzzle game, each piece should be in the right place. The same is true for the puzzle of our life. Unless God is in the right place, our life will remain incomplete.

In Matthew 6:33, Jesus presents seeking God First as the antidote to the **fears** prevailing in society (Matt. 6:25-34):

## Matthew 6:33

- Fear about basic **needs**: “Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear” (Matt. 6:25a). God is the Provider.
- Fear about **personal worth**: “Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they?” (Matt. 6:26). We are sons and daughters of the King.
- Fear about **things that are beyond our control**: “Can any one of you by worrying add a single hour to your life?” (Matt. 6:27). “Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own” (Matt. 6:34a). He controls circumstances.

Jesus did not deny or minimize these sources of worries that invade a human’s life, but He points to the adequate strategy: Seek God First. A.W. Tozer has a similar statement: “As God is exalted to the right place in our lives, a thousand problems are solved all at once.”

## Part II: Who is the God to put first?

People have different perceptions of the same God. This situation triggered the question of Jesus reported in Matthew 16:15b: “Who do you say I am?”

Many believers entertain a similar relationship with God as Aladdin had with the genie of the magic lamp. Aladdin rubbed his lamp to let his genie out only when he needed assistance. What is our primary intention in seeking God-First? To make life simpler, easier, and more comfortable? God is often perceived as a slave, helper, or fixer. If our God is only a servant-god, we will get rid of Him once we have used Him.

In Matthew 6:33, Jesus qualifies the God that we are called to seek first by using two words: “kingdom” and “righteousness.”



## Kingdom of God

The God we are called to seek first has a kingdom. What does it mean? In the Gospel of Matthew, also called the Gospel of the Kingdom, the kingdom is presented as near, present, and future. The kingdom is:

- a literal place.
- the manifestation of the righteousness, peace, and joy of God (Rom. 14:17).
- above all, the reign of a King.

Ellen White also wrote about the two dimensions of the kingdom: "As used in the Bible, the expression 'kingdom of God' is employed to designate both the kingdom of grace and the kingdom of glory" (*The Great Controversy*, p. 347).

The God to put first is a King! This truth has a decisive practical implication. If our God is a kingly God, we will accept His authority in all aspects of our lives.

In His prayer Jesus associates both elements, kingdom and authority. Matthew 6:10 reads, "Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven." The kingship of God affects all spheres of life.

The table below illustrates how a kingly God affects the essence of our life and even our financial stewardship:

| GOD                 | OUR IDENTITY           | FINANCIAL STEWARDSHIP                                                      |
|---------------------|------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| God is the Creator  | We are His creatures.  | We worship with our resources.                                             |
| God is the Model    | We are in His image.   | We reflect love in the use of resources.                                   |
| God is the Provider | We are His dependents. | We return tithe and give offerings in acknowledgement of His ownership.    |
| God is the Master   | We are His servants    | We use our resources to witness for Him.                                   |
| God is a Companion  | We are His friends.    | We make relationship with Him and others our priority instead of finances. |

## Seek God First

As human beings, we have the dilemma of trying to put God first while we are naturally separated from Him. “But your iniquities have separated you from your God; your sins have hidden his face from you, so that he will not hear” (Isa. 59:2).

God’s righteousness is essential for humans to put God first. It plays two functions: saving and transforming. The apostle Paul speaks about saving righteousness in 2 Corinthians 5:21:

“God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.” Elsewhere he describes God’s transforming righteousness: *“And that is what some of you were. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God”* (1 Cor. 6:11). The transforming righteousness of God does not only modify external actions, but it alters interior motives: *“For it is God who works in you to will and to act in order to fulfill his good purpose”* (Phil. 2:13).

The God we are called to seek first is both the kingly God and the righteous One who saves us from all unrighteousness. There are some practical implications to seek first a God who provides righteousness:

- God-first is not for clean-slate believers. Past failures should not keep anyone from embracing a God-first life.

## His Righteousness

God-first is not for spiritual superheroes. God empowers people to live God-first lives.

If we adopt only the concept of a kingly God ignoring the God who provides righteousness, the result is guilt, frustration, and discouragement. This week do not try to work harder on your unfaithfulness or selfishness; instead, surrender yourself to Him. He will re-create in you His image.



## Conclusion

We invite you to reinstall God to the place where He belongs.

- Put God first—He provides for your needs.
- Put God first—Embrace your identity as sons and daughters of the King.
- Put God first—The omnipotent, omniscient, omnipresent has promised to be your partner.

Remember that the God to put first is a King to whom obedience and submission are due. He is also the One who provides a higher righteousness to rescue and transform anyone who calls first to Him.

## Matthew 6:33

### I Promise:

To put God first and to be the person He has designed me to be.





# 2

## CONNECT TO OVERCOME SELFISHNESS

*"But mark this: There will be terrible times in the last days. People will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boastful, proud, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy, without love, unforgiving, slanderous, without self-control, brutal, not lovers of the good, treacherous, rash, conceited, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God—having a form of godliness but denying its power. Have nothing to do with such people" (2 Tim. 3:1-5).*

This text is a description of the social and spiritual environment of the last days. How truthful is this description when compared to what we observe in society, in the church, and in our own life?

### Part I: The Issue of Selfishness

Interestingly, selfishness is first on the list of the predominant characteristics of the last days. William Barclay considers that this positioning is not mere coincidence: "It is no accident that the first of these qualities will be a life that is centered in self. The adjective used is *philautos*, which means **lovers of self**. Love of self is the basic sin from which all others flow."

Ellen White also considers selfishness as the

## 2 Timothy 3:1-5

root problem of humanity: "Selfishness is the **essence** of depravity, and because human beings have yielded to its power, the **opposite of allegiance to God** is seen in the world today. Nations, families, and individuals are filled with a desire to make self a center" (*Counsels on Stewardship*, p. 25). Ellen White describes selfishness as the "opposite of allegiance to God." This is in opposition to the concept of putting first a kindly God that we are promoting during this week. This situation exists because it is a reflection of the basic characteristic of the prince of this world: "The spirit of selfishness is the spirit of satan" (*Review and Herald*, Oct. 17, 1882).



Who are affected by the problem of selfishness? Is Paul only describing the moral condition prevailing in society before the second coming of Jesus? The text vv.5-8 provides some clues about the identity of those "lovers of themselves."

- i. V.5: "they have a form of godliness"
- ii. V.6: "they work their way into homes"
- iii. V.7: "always learning"
- iv. V.8: "these teachers"

It seems that Paul is including church-going Christians and leaders in his description of those who are struggling with selfishness. If we are sincere and honest, we will definitely admit that we are not immune from this virus that lives and manifests itself in many ways in our lives.

What is Paul's purpose in giving this description to Timothy? We read about his intention: "Avoid such people" (v. 5). "But as for you . . ." (v. 14). His finality was to warn against easy conformity to the prevailing trend.

How can we cultivate unselfishness while living in the world marked by selfishness? The sacrificial life and death of Jesus is the greatest example of an unselfish life. As we revisit the experience of Jesus and His disciples in the Garden of Gethsemane (Lk. 22:39-43), we can learn more about His preparation to overcome selfishness and remain faithful.

## I. Coming Out

The garden account starts with these words: *"Coming out, He went to the Mount of Olives, as He was accustomed, and His disciples also followed Him"* (Lk. 22:39).

The garden experience can happen once there is a coming out. From where did they come out that Thursday night? Out of the upper room and out of the city of Jerusalem. They were enjoying a good time worshiping as a group in the upper room, and Jerusalem was the center of celebration during this season of the year. But Jesus chose to come out. The coming out sets the stage, creates the space for the garden experience to happen. Unless we come out from our daily routine and activities, we cannot have a garden experience.

## II. Coming Out With a Clear Purpose

Holidays, vacations, and resting days are common breaks in the life of many. They are important and refreshing. However, the coming out of Jesus had a different purpose: *"When He came to the place, He said to them, 'Pray that you may not enter into temptation'"* (Lk. 22:40).

What could be the temptation for Jesus at this time? To think of Himself or self-preservation. His strategy was neither an escapist approach to run away from temptation, nor to migrate to a temptation-free zone. He chose to overcome the temptation; to stay apart, to resist, to remain whole, to remain uncontaminated.

Ellen White speaks about the choice that we have to resist temptation: *"Man can shape circumstances, but circumstances should not be allowed to shape the man. We should seize upon circumstances as instruments by which to work. We are to master them, but should not permit them to master us"* (*Messages to Young People*, p. 194).

Jesus went into the garden to pray. The verb phrase "to pray" comes from the Greek composite word "proseúxomai," where "pros" means "toward, exchange," and euxomai "to wish, pray."

## Overcome Selfishness

Prayer is literally an exchange of ideas, wishes, and feelings between humanity and God. It is the firewall that prevents the virus of temptation to corrupt our internal system. Prayer nullifies the fiercest attacks. We do not have to collapse, to collapse into sin.

### III. Practice One to One Prayer

Were they not already praying in the upper room? Yes, but the garden's prayer had something different. We read in Luke 22:41: *"He withdrew about a stone's throw beyond them, knelt down and prayed."*

Jesus did not ask the disciples to join hands to start another season of group prayer. They came out from an evening of corporate worship in the upper room, and now He rushed into a season of private prayer. A life punctuated with frequent public or group prayers does not **compensate** for the absence of **private** prayer.

There exists a great paradox among believers. Teachers, educators, and preachers of prayer are often the ones not taking time or very little time to pray. The spiritual nature of our work does not relieve us from the necessity of communing with the Divine. Aubrey Malphurs writes about a challenge encountered by believers: *"The development of godly character is the greatest challenge of ministry, but the ministry itself is the greatest adversary of godly character"* (*The Dynamics of Church Leadership*, p. 34).

### IV. The Draining and Refilling

Personal prayer provides a unique opportunity for the one praying: "Father, if you are willing, take this cup from me; yet not my will, but yours be done" (Lk. 22:42).

The words of the secret prayer of Jesus are here disclosed. It is a practice to be always emulated! Jesus is here venting His inner thoughts and feelings resulting from the temptations and trials: "I'm finding it hard to remain faithful, to remain faithful to



the mission of offering myself.”

## 2 Timothy 3:1-5

Personal prayer in time of temptation is more of a “draining exercise” for our interior struggles, doubts, and confusion. Like with the used oil of our cars, it can be quite dirty and stinky! Nevertheless, it is essential to bring it out, otherwise we poison ourselves and others around us.

This draining exercise, personal prayer, does not only bring emotional relief; it also creates the condition for God to intervene: *“An angel from heaven appeared to him and strengthened him.”* (Lk. 22:43). God can replenish only what has been emptied. Personal prayer is the means to exchange our weaknesses for God’s strength.

## Beware of Alternatives

Personal prayer is effective for turning us into overcomers, but God does not coerce anyone to engage in personal prayer. Unfortunately, many are choosing alternatives, as did the first disciples: *“When he rose from prayer and went back to the disciples, he found them asleep, exhausted from sorrow. ‘Why are you sleeping?’ he asked them. ‘Get up and pray so that you will not fall into temptation.’”* (Lk. 22:45, 46).

Both Jesus and the disciples were experiencing sorrow. One decided to **share** the sorrow with His Father, and the others chose to **sleep** on the sorrow. The choice of an alternative to prayer led Judas to betray Jesus, Peter to deny Jesus, and the other disciples to run away from Jesus. The cost of true discipleship is too heavy to bear without personal prayer.

## Conclusion

Selfishness is the predominant and default trait of character prevalent in society, in the church, and even in the believer’s life. This situation should not be accommodated but overcome. We have counsel from sleepy Peter: *“Be alert and of sober mind. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour”* (1 Pt. 5:8). If we want to overcome

selfishness in this present generation, our first strategy should be to cultivate our own garden of personal prayer.

## I Promise:

To set apart the first moments of each day to commune with the Lord through prayer; the study of the Bible, the Spirit of Prophecy, and the Sabbath School lesson; and in family worship.





# 3

## GROOMING MY CONNECTIVITY

In a wildlife reserve there was a herd of black elephants that were getting too big for the space they were occupying. The rangers decided to relocate some of the young elephants to another spot. They chose a great location that had plenty of food and streams of water. However, these young elephants started to behave strangely. They were constantly fighting each other, hurting and bruising themselves. They were also destroying everything; uprooting all the trees. The rangers got worried and decided to consult an old retired ranger. What should we do? “Bring in an old elephant” was the advice. They brought an old elephant into the herd. They soon observed a change of behavior among the young elephants. They now looked happy and were enjoying their new spot. The rangers went back to the retired ranger to say thank you and to ask for an explanation? The old man told them: “These young elephants had to learn how to behave as a black elephant. This is what they learned from the old elephant.”

### **Part 1: The Relationship Between Humanity and God**

Humanity was created in connection and there exists five basic affiliations between God

and humanity:

**i. Humanity has a creator.**

*"So God created mankind..." (Gen. 1:27).*

As creatures, our basic responsibility is to worship God; praising Him for who God is and what He is doing in our life. In the hustle and bustle of my daily routine, do I live as a worshiper, as a creature?

**ii. Humanity has a Model.**

*"In the image of God he created them..." (Gen. 1:27).*

Humans are God's images and representatives. We do not have to invent our own ways but simply to be true reflection of God. We usually agree that the basic attribute of God is love. How loving and caring am I?

**iii. Humanity has a Provider.**

*"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'" (Gen. 1:29).*

Humans are created as dependent beings; there is no place for both pride and anxiety. Surprisingly, believers have a tendency to keep God outside the details of their lives. We call for Him only when the issue is big or has grown big.

**iv. Humanity has a Master.**

*"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” (Gen. 1:28).

Humans are designed to be God’s servants and called to follow God’s instructions. However, we are inclined to function in an opposite mode: We don’t want to receive orders from anyone, even from God. God’s laws are rejected or amended to suit our preferences.

### **v. Humanity has a Companion.**

*“By the seventh day God had finished the work he had been doing; so on the seventh day he rested from all his work. 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” (Gen. 2:1-3).*

Humans are social beings. We are created in connection, in affiliation, and in design to prioritize relationship with God and others. In our society, characterized by consumerism, it is not rare for the quest to have, to acquire, and to possess to take precedence over relationship.

Progress and advancement are often measured in terms of connectivity. However, it is a lamentable reality that humanity is struggling in its connection with God and others. This has started with the introduction of sin, which is a disruption of relationship. As its first consequence, Adam and Eve hid from God; they engaged in finger-pointing, and the once-harmonious equalitarian-couple relationship was affected.

## **Part II: Reconstruction of Connectivity**

The Gospel of Luke tells the story of a demon-possessed man (Lk. 8:26-38). We read about his initial condition in verse 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 was caused by a severe identity crisis. *“Jesus asked him, ‘What is your name?’ ‘Legion,’ he replied, because many demons had gone into him”*

## Grooming My Connectivity



(verse 30). He was confused even about his basic identity, his name. This man suffered from a disruption of connectivity—with himself, God, and others.

When one considers oneself to be “Legion,” it is natural to live in tombs; it is normal to develop a destructive pattern and to become a scary creature to others. Who we think we are affects the way we live, act, and relate to others.

The encounter between Jesus and the confused man of Gerasenes was not without effect. Jesus helped him to move out of confusion and to reconstruct his connectivity.

One immediate result of this encounter with Jesus is described in verse 35. The man was now sitting “*at Jesus’ feet*.” “*At Jesus feet*” is a sign of restored relationship between the former demon-possessed person and his Maker. He is now acknowledging the sovereignty of Jesus. This posture also evokes the idea of worship. Reconstruction of his vertical connectivity was in progress.

For several years the man had walked around without clothes, but verse 35 presents the transformed man as one who is dressed. This speaks of the new respect that he had for himself. This is a prerequisite for him to connect positively with others. Where has he gone shopping in this desert? We know the answer. Jesus was his Provider. He was now depending upon Jesus to meet his needs instead of devising ways that were destructive. Reconstruction of his connectivity with himself was in progress.

Previously, the demon-possessed man could not entertain any normal relationship, either with the divine nor with other people. He was always in solitary places and in tombs, hiding from interactions. Now, he wanted to remain in the company of Jesus, and Luke speaks about him as visiting the town. The Gospel of Mark even mentions 10 cities. He reconnected positively with the outer world. Reconstruction of connectivity with others was in progress.

Many had tried to control him, to give him orders and in-

structions. But he had acted according to his own mind, or his absence of mind. Now when he received an order, a mission from Jesus, how did he respond? We read in 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 to the Master's command. Jesus could not stay any longer in this territory. He was forced to leave. But His representative remained behind—not Peter, James, John, or Andrew, but the former demon-possessed man.

Ellen White writes about the representative role of the former demon-possessed: "*And souls that have been degraded into instruments of Satan are still through the power of Christ transformed into messengers of righteousness*" (*The Desire of Ages*, p. 341). The former demon-possessed man was now adding value to the lives of people around him. In contrast to the previous negative and destructive connection, he could now establish a purposeful connection with the Divine and others.

This encounter testifies that in Christ we sharpen our relational skills and improve the relationship we entertain with ourselves and the exterior world. The apostle Paul clearly speaks about salvation and mission in terms of connectivity: "*All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting people's sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation*" (2 Cor. 5:18, 19).

## Conclusion

It is essential to pause to assess the quality of the relationships we entertain with God and others. Are we satisfied with our relationships? Are others satisfied with how we are connecting with them? The connectivity reconstruction that occurred for the demon-possessed man can be ours. The turning point in his life experience is captured in these words: "at Jesus' feet." Make it our daily experience. Every day let's choose to go first to Jesus.

## I Promise:

To improve my relationships: growing in faithfulness and forgiveness and loving by principle.





# 4

## HEALTH, MIND AND QUALITY PARTNERSHIP

We have received the assignment to partner in God's mission. How can we be adequately equipped to serve effectively? Maybe you are thinking of reading more, attending some seminars, or even going to school. It is good to explore all possible means to provide the best service to God. Are we grooming ourselves, the best instrument, to serve and witness? Our reflection concentrates on building a healthy mind.

### **Part I: The Value of Intellectual Power**

In several instances, the Bible presents those who have served effectively as individuals with great knowledge and high intellectual capacity.

Speaking about Solomon, the son of King David, Hiram used these words: *"Praise be to the Lord, the God of Israel, who made heaven and earth! He has given King David a wise son, endowed with intelligence and discernment, who will build a temple for the Lord and a palace for himself"* (2 Chr. 2:12). The temple that Solomon built was not only an architectural prowess; it served as a place of worship for all nations. Solomon, the wise, led ancient Israel into its golden age.

## Daniel 1:20

Daniel was known as a fine political leader in a foreign land, and we owe to him an extensive record of biblical prophecies. Think of Christianity, of Adventism, without the writings of Daniel! The biblical account reports that he was intellectually empowered: *"To these four young men God gave knowledge and understanding of all kinds of literature and learning. And Daniel could understand visions and dreams of all kinds"* (Dan. 1:17). The word "Sekel" from "Sakal" means "prudence, perspicacity, discretion, intelligence, knowledge, wisdom." Daniel was not only highly spiritual but also a man of great intellectual acuity.



The apostle Paul was the most successful missionary of the early church even though he was not part of the twelve who were with Jesus from the beginning. A study about the factors that contributed to his effectiveness would be instructive. These words of Festus provide a glimpse of the profile of Paul: *"At this point Festus interrupted Paul's defense. 'You are out of your mind, Paul!' he shouted. 'Your great learning is driving you insane'"* (Acts 26:24). He was recognized as a man of great knowledge. He himself speaks about the dual elements he employed in ministry: *"So what shall I do? I will pray with my spirit, but I will also pray with my understanding; I will sing with my spirit, but I will also sing with my understanding"* (1 Cor. 14:15). He was both a spirit-filled person and a man of intelligence.

Believers who have developed their mental powers are in a good position to partner effectively. One reason is that they usually exercise a bigger influence on their environment; the result is higher witnessing potential. Another reason is the likelihood that they are receiving a better reward for the work they've accomplished; hence, they dispose of more means to support God's mission. A final reason would be the expertise acquired by those who have sharpened their mental powers. These same aptitudes could be very useful in the execution of various church ministries. It is written about Moses, a great leader, *"Moses was educated in all the wisdom of the Egyptians and was powerful in speech and action"* (Acts 7: 22).

We should not confuse intellectual sharpness with academic achievements. There is a general tendency to consider and val-

ue only one type of intelligence, whereas intelligence exists and manifests itself in various forms: verbal, visual, physical, musical, mathematics, and logic—introspective and interpersonal. Mental power can be achieved in one or in several areas.

### Part II: An Empowered Mind

Several theories exist about the origin of intellectual power. Is it inborn or acquired? Though we admit the power of heredity, it is difficult to deny the reality of developing one's intellectual power. The craftsmen who partnered with Moses to build the tabernacle can teach us about an empowered mind.

Exodus 31:1-11 speaks about the craftsmen who supervised and built the tent and its furniture. The master artisan was Bezalel son of Uri, the son of Hur, of the tribe of Judah; and his assistant was Oholiab son of Ahisamak, of the tribe of Dan. They were not men of words and speeches, but they were individuals with great intellectual power: *"And I have filled him with the Spirit of God, with wisdom, with understanding, with knowledge and with all kinds of skills."*

As a good craftsman, Bezalel had knowledge and all kinds of skills. Knowledge is acquired through a learning process, and skills are forged through regular practice. This is a universal law, and no one is exempt, even believers. It requires personal investment, humility to learn from others, and perseverance.

The learning process is highly facilitated by the physical condition of the learner. The Hebrew boys in the court of Babylon understood the relationship between a healthy body and an empowered mind. We read about their decision to adopt a special diet: *"So the guard took away their choice food and the wine they were to drink and gave them vegetables instead"* (Dan. 1:16). The outcome was astounding: *"In every matter of wisdom and understanding about which the king questioned them, he found them ten times better than all the magicians and enchanters in his whole kingdom"* (Dan. 1: 20). Knowing and following health principles contribute to both our physical health and mental performance.

## Healthy Mind and Quality Partnership



Besides knowledge and skills, Bezalel, the artist and artisan, is presented as a spirit-filled person. This is actually presented as his very first quality. “Ruach Elohim” is a reference to the Spirit of God, which hovered over the water at the start of Creation week. The Spirit participated in giving form to what was formless and in filling what was empty. It is the same Spirit that gives to one believer “a message of wisdom, to another a message of knowledge ..., to another faith ..., to another gifts of healing ..., to another miraculous powers, to another prophecy, to another distinguishing between spirits, to another speaking in different kinds of tongues, and to still another the interpretation of tongues.” Endowed by the very same Spirit, Bezalel could develop his intellectual capacity as a craftsman. God wants to fill us with His Spirit to unleash our intellectual potential: Knock, search, ask, and we shall receive.

In addition to the Spirit, the text mentions the wisdom of Bezalel. An empowered mind is a combination of mental power and the discernment to know and do what is right. How could Bezalel be so filled with divine wisdom? Proverbs 9:10 gives a reliable answer: *“The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom, and knowledge of the Holy One is understanding.”* The fear of the Lord was the fountain of his wisdom. To fear the Lord is to respect and submit to God and not try to act as an idol for others and oneself. Another source of wisdom is “knowledge of the Holy One.”

Ellen White confirms the relationship between studying God’s Word and an empowered mind: *“The effort to grasp the great truths of revelation imparts freshness and vigor to all the faculties. It expands the mind, sharpens the perceptions, and ripens the judgment”* (*The Great Controversy*, p. 94). God empowers individuals who elevate the Living Word and who feed themselves on the Word.

Another essential characteristic of an intellectually empowered person is captured in the name of Bezalel. His name literally means *“in the shadow of El.”* The person bearing that name is supposed to be under the influence of God, close to Him and under His protection. Bezalel was not only helping to build a

tent where others could meet God, but he found his identity in an intimate relationship with God.

**Daniel 1:20**

A shadow has another interesting characteristic. The object or person it is attached to decides the direction in which to go, and the shadow follows faithfully. This willingness to follow instructions was expected from the artisans and artists working on the tent. *"They are to make them just as I commanded you"* (Exod. 31:11). They conform their work and lives with scrupulous fidelity to the pattern set by the Divine Architect.

## Conclusion

We can partner with God only with what He has given to us. However, it is not rare that our real potential, mental potential, has remained latent or inactivated. *"God designed that our powers of body and mind should be put to use. Some have not improved to the best account the ability that God has given them"* (*Counsels on Stewardship*, pp. 120, 121). The Lord is challenging us to grow an empowered mind to improve the quality of our service. How do I respond to His call today?

## I Promise:

To establish one new healthy habit, to better serve the Lord with my mind: \_\_\_\_\_ .





# 5

## TURNING BUSINESS OPPORTUNITIES INTO WORSHIP PLATAFORMS

Do I have to join denominational service to partner fully in God's final mission? When we come across a bright and dedicated young person our usual reaction is to encourage him or her to join the ministry, to become a pastor. You may have experienced this situation on either side. The truth is that one of the greatest missionaries of the early church, the apostle Paul, was not one we would call a church worker today. While we revisit two facets of his life, tentmaking and missionary work, we can learn more about partners outside denominational service.

### Part I: Paul the Tentmaker

Acts 19:11, 12 provides a glimpse of the miracles that happened in Ephesus. The instruments that brought the miracles were Paul's handkerchiefs and aprons. It is interesting to note that even Jesus had never used such instruments. These were part of Paul's regular attire. It was quite different from what the scribes, rabbis, and itinerant preachers, teachers, and philosophers were wearing in those days. The handkerchief, called a sudaria, was used to wipe off sweat from the brow or face; and the apron, called a semicincta, was worn by artisans as they worked. The presence of handkerchiefs and aprons indicates

## 1 Corinthians 9

that Paul was engaged regularly in some professional activities during the time that he was ministering in Ephesus.

The apostle Paul was a professional tentmaker (Acts 18:1-3). The word translated “tentmaker” usually means someone who is involved in leather work. It is different from a weaver. Paul’s hometown, Cilicia, was famous for its artisans who worked with goat skin. The tools needed for carrying on his enterprise were a sharp knife, an awl, and a large curved needle. They were not heavy instruments; hence, he could move his trade easily from one city to another. His clients were mainly from among the traveling traders and the military throughout the Roman Empire, as accommodation was a challenge in those days. Paul, the one who covered thousands of miles by land and sea to preach the gospel, the one who wrote the largest number of books in all the Bible, was just a professional tentmaker; a partner with *aprons and handkerchiefs*.



## Part II: Paul the Missionary

Several passages help us to appreciate Paul as a leading missionary. In Ephesus, he preached for “*three months*” and then for “*two years*” (Acts 19:8-10). He did not allow difficulties to stop him, and he had resounding success throughout the region.

How was Paul balancing his professional and preaching activities? This is the biggest challenge, even for those with the best intentions to serve. In his farewell address with the elders of the church in Ephesus, Paul elaborates on the dual components of his life. He worked diligently to provide for his personal needs and to assist others (Acts 2:33, 34), and he added: “*So be on your guard! Remember that for three years I never stopped warning each of you night and day with tears.*” (Acts 20:31). He “did not cease”; he was preaching “night” and “day.” Elsewhere, he uses the same expression “*night and day*” in reference to his work as a tentmaker (2 Thess. 3:8). How do we reconcile these two realities: preaching “*night and day*” and working “*night and day*”? The explanation was that while he was working in his workshop, he was simultaneously sharing the

## Turning Business Opportunities into Witnessing Platforms

good news. And during the time of the Mediterranean siesta, with no time to change, he simply put off his handkerchiefs and aprons to engage in some lectures and more discussions. The apostle Paul was concurrently a professional tentmaker and a full-time missionary.

Many professionals are sincerely seeking to engage in service and mission after working hours. It often results in frustration because of their hectic schedules and multiple obligations. Paul, the professional, adopted a creative solution: service and mission while working for his living.

Ellen White writes about the perfect balance between the missionary and the tentmaker: *“As he worked with Aquila he kept in touch with the Great Teacher, losing no opportunity of witnessing for the Saviour, and of helping those who needed help. ... As he worked at his trade, the apostle had access to a class of people that he could not otherwise have reached”* (*The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 351). The ultimate purpose of Paul’s life after his conversion was to proclaim the good news of Jesus Christ. The execution of his professional activity was another opportunity of fulfilling his life purpose of witnessing. There was no divergence of finality between the two; to him, everything was about witnessing for Jesus.

Paul was what we would call today a self-supporting missionary. He agreed with the correctness of being remunerated for service rendered to the church (1 Cor. 9:13, 14). But for himself, he did not use *“this right”* (1 Cor. 9:11) or *“these things”* (1 Cor. 9:15). He preached *“without charge”* (1 Cor. 9:18).

### Part III: Advantages of being self-supported

Are there real benefits of being a partner with aprons and handkerchiefs, or is it only an option by default? The apostle Paul explains his choice in 1 Corinthians 9:12b: *“But we did not use this right. On the contrary, we put up with anything rather than hinder the gospel of Christ.”* The verb *egkopé*, “to hinder,” literally means “to cut.” Paul was first concerned about the progress and advancement of the gospel of Christ. In his view, depending on external financial assistance might prevent him from moving forward

## Turning Business Opportunities into Witnessing Platforms



and progressing faster in God's mission. He could overcome major challenges by being a self-supporting missionary.

**Prejudices.** Some were accusing Paul of preaching for personal gain. In his defense Paul declares, *"I have not coveted anyone's silver or gold or clothing"* (Acts 20:33). By working on his own, he gave no occasion for anyone to say that he preached the gospel in order to enrich himself. Ellen White comments on Paul's position: "He might justly have claimed support from his Corinthian hearers; but this right he was willing to forgo, lest his usefulness and success as a minister should be injured by the unjust suspicion that he was preaching the gospel for gain" (*The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 349).

**Mission Is a Costly Enterprise.** From time to time Paul received assistance from the churches in Macedonia and from the church in Thessalonica. Nevertheless, it would have been impossible for him to accomplish all these extended missionary trips by depending solely on the scarce resources of the early church. How motivated and creative are we to move forward in God's work when external financial support is not readily available?

Ellen White commends Paul's approach to ministry: *"Paul set an example against the sentiment, then gaining influence in the church, that the gospel could be proclaimed successfully only by those who were wholly freed from the necessity of physical toil."* Being a self-supporting missionary does not mean reduced effectiveness. Ellen White highly recommends the "tentmaking" approach for the expansion of the work in the United States and for the world mission. *"Much of the work will have to be made self-supporting. There is more to do in a short time than can be done if men wait to be sent and paid for their work"* (*An Appeal to Seventh-day Adventists to Fulfil Their Duty to the South*, p. 12). The emergence of a worldwide pool of partners with aprons and handkerchiefs can be the needed condition to bring the exponential growth that we are praying for.

## Conclusion

Paul allowed the mission to shape the course of his career and life. He moved whenever there was a mission opportunity, not for a business opportunity. What was the driving force behind his self-sacrificing spirit?

Paul attributed the following reason to his actions: “For ... I am compelled to preach” (1 Cor. 9:16–18). It means “to be under compulsion, “to be pressed.” In other words, he couldn’t run away from his duty to preach though he was a professional tentmaker. Elsewhere, he talks about being “a debtor both to Greeks and to barbarians, both to wise and to unwise.” The source of his compulsion was “the love of Christ” (2 Cor. 5:14). His new identity was undeserved; it was the result of God’s grace. Hence, he preached without ceasing “night and day,” while undertaking his professional activities.

To preach was to fulfil his duty, to share the gospel free of charge, denying himself any benefit. Paul went beyond his obligation, beyond the call of duty. He considered this to be the greatest reward, the privilege, that he was not ready to forsake. This is radical partnership.

Not many are called to leave their jobs and enroll in denominational employment. However, all are the products of His infinite love. In response, we support God’s final mission by returning tithe, giving systematic offerings, and making donations. Think today how you can organize your time to make yourselves available for service and witnessing. Paul has raised partnership to even a higher level; being simultaneously a full-time professional and a full-time missionary. Is God calling you to do something more radical? Why not consider turning your business opportunities into witnessing platforms?

## I Promise:

To offer one day (or evening) each week to work for God, spreading the good news to others through Bible studies, small groups, etc. This is Total Member Involvement.





# 6

## REST TO ACHIEVE MORE

A king wanted to clear a piece of forest to build a new palace. He called the two best woodcutters of his kingdom, Tom and Jack, and told them that he wanted the work to be completed rapidly and that the one who cuts the larger portion will receive an extra reward. Without losing any time our two woodcutters started the work. At the end of the first hour, Tom stopped cutting and moved behind a tree. Jack, who was observing closely, decided to cut with extra energy thinking that this was the time to overcome Tom. After a while, Tom was back, and he continued to cut his portion of the forest. However, at regular intervals, Tom stopped his work and went behind his tree. Jack was delighted by this situation, and he now had full confidence of winning the special reward. Finally, it was the end of the day, and the king came to inspect the work done. He was impressed by the job done by the two woodcutters. He asked his servant to measure the portions cut by Tom and Jack to decide who should receive the special prize. Jack had no doubt about winning. But when the servant announced the result, Jack could not believe his ears. The winner was Tom. Turning to Tom, he said, "With all those pauses, you managed to cut more than I did. How is that possible?" "Each time I went behind the tree, I was sharpening the blade of my ax," answered

Tom. This is the principle of resting to achieve more.

## Part I: Occasional and Daily Rest

Occasional rest is the one that we take after intense effort. We pause to be revitalized, before continuing our mental or physical activities. It can be through a power nap, a small break in between the hours of work, some days of holiday, or taking some time to worship. The value of occasional rest on the productivity of individuals is a well-established reality.

The Gospels testify of the importance of occasional rest. When the disciples returned from their missionary journey and reported their accomplishments, Jesus gave them the following advice: *"Come with me by yourselves to a quiet place and get some rest"* (Mk. 6:31b).

Their task of sharing the good news was not yet complete, and it was one of greatest importance; but still Jesus invited them to pause for a while.

Lack of sleep is a major cause of road accidents. Some surveys even place sleeping at the wheel as a more frequent cause of road accidents than drunk driving. Drivers aged 17 to 24 who reported sleeping six or fewer hours per night were about 20 percent more likely to be involved in a car crash compared with those who slept more than six hours a night. Not having enough sleep results in the slowing down of brain functions, more mistakes, reduced productivity, difficulty controlling emotions, bad temper, and a lack of sharpness in making decisions. Unfortunately, we rarely see a road safety campaign that sensitizes people on the issue of adequate sleep.

In the United States, the lack of sleep is also among one of the 10 most frequent causes of visiting the doctor.

People with sleep debt, or a lack of sleep, have difficulty disintegrating carbohydrates, they produce higher cortisol hormones, and they have a reduced effect of insulin. Hence, they are more prone to obesity, cancer, and diabetes.



The Creator of life, of abundant night, set the night and day cycle at Creation. We read in Genesis 1:5b: *"And there was evening, and there was morning—the first day."* This pattern repeated itself during the Creation week. There is a natural clock implanted in each human. This is the reason why at least seven hours of sleep are needed to function normally, and the majority of people need eight hours for optimal functioning. Sleeping enough hours daily is an alignment to the Creation order.

The psalmist indicates another value of night rest. In Psalm 16:7 he said, "I will praise the Lord, who counsels me; even at night my heart instructs me."

It is time to receive revelations from God. There is also a promise for those who are struggling with sleep issues: "For he grants sleep to those he loves" (Ps. 127:2b).

## **Part II: The Weekly Rest**

From the beginning of humanity's history, the Bible establishes the existence and necessity of weekly rest.

We read in Genesis 2:3, *"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."* God rested on the seventh day of Creation, and according to Exodus 20:9-11, humanity was to follow this example. This first reference about weekly rest informs us also about the nature and purpose of this rest. God, the all-powerful, was not exhausted at the end of the sixth day of Creation! Adam was created on the sixth day, and his first full day of life was a day of rest! Without excluding the element of recuperating from physical fatigue, we understand that the weekly rest has a broader purpose.

We can learn about the broader purpose of weekly rest in Leviticus 23:3: *"There are six days when you may work, but the seventh day is a day of Sabbath rest, a day of sacred assembly. You are not to do any work; wherever you live, it is a Sabbath to the Lord."*

First, this verse is reaffirming the existence of a specific literal weekly rest: *"Six days you may work, but the seventh day is a day*

## Rest to Achieve More



*of Sabbath rest.*" It is not just a state of mind. During biblical times, people used to literally stop their usual activities from Friday sunset to Saturday sunset.

Second, this passage is informing us of the major purpose of weekly rest: a day of sacred assembly. It is meant to be a day of encounter and meeting between humanity and God. It is a day of collective worship. The exercise of weekly rest is similar to what many do with their wardrobes when they are entering summer after a cold winter; the winter clothes are removed from the closet to create space for more adequate summer clothes. When we free ourselves from our routine activities, we have additional time to spend in the presence of God. If weekly rest was only a day of physical rest, the choice of any day wouldn't have mattered much. But as it is an appointment day for an encounter, choosing the designated day, the seventh day, is essential.

Finally, the text is clear about the Owner of the weekly rest: *"It is a Sabbath to the Lord."* This portion of time is not ours; it belongs to God. Therefore, it should be disposed according to His instructions.

The idea of blessing is closely attached to the keeping of the weekly day of rest. It is the only day of the week that God declared as blessed (Gen. 2:2). The same idea of blessing is echoed in Isaiah 56:2: *"Blessed is the one who does this—the person who holds it fast, who keeps the Sabbath without desecrating it, and keeps their hands from doing any evil."*

This weekly rest is a day of blessing not because the seventh day of the week has more hours than the other days of the week. The weather is not always fine on the seventh. It is a blessed day because it is designed to be a day of meeting with God. When God meets us:

- He provides words of comfort.
- He provides instructions.
- He gives us the opportunity to share our thoughts and feelings.
- He satisfies our needs.

## Mark 6:31b

Interestingly, God did not declare a place or a locality to be blessed but a specific portion of time. Otherwise, people living far from that given place would be penalized in comparison to those who are living closer. The seventh day is a reality for the whole universe; everyone everywhere can access the blessings of the seventh-day rest.

During His earthly ministry, Jesus used the seventh-day rest for two major activities. It is written in Luke 4:16 that *"on the Sabbath day he went into the synagogue, as was his custom."* Many of His miracles were accomplished during the hours of the weekly rest. One interesting episode is reported in Matthew 12:9, 10, 13: *"Going on from that place, he went into their synagogue, and a man with a shriveled hand was there."* The attendees asked him a question about a specific appropriate activity for the Sabbath hours: *"Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath?"* After challenging their thinking, Jesus provides a clear answer: *"It is lawful to do good on the Sabbath."*

Ellen White describes succinctly the proper observance of the sabbath in these words: *"The law forbids secular labor on the rest day of the Lord; the toil that gains a livelihood must cease; no labor for worldly pleasure or profit is lawful upon that day; but as God ceased His labor of creating, and rested upon the Sabbath and blessed it, so man is to leave the occupations of his daily life, and devote those sacred hours to healthful rest, to worship, and to holy deeds"* (*The Desire of Ages*, p. 207).

## Conclusion

Believers should be careful not to follow blindly the slogan "24/7." During past decades, we have observed the gradual intrusion of personal, social, and cultural activities into the time that was traditionally reserved for sleeping. Sleeping time should be protected.

Weekly rest is crucial for our total well-being. Let us keep in mind Psalm 119:2: *"Blessed are those who keep his statutes."* Our key decision as we end this message is the following: As we plan our week, let us make provision to rest and commune

with God on the seventh day, Friday sunset to Saturday sunset, to join a community of believers to worship God, and to take time to do good to others. Through weekly rest, we are refueling our abundant life.

## I Promise:

To keep the Sabbath, preparing for it accordingly on Friday, keeping its limits, right thoughts, and activities.





# 7

## SIGNS OF REVIVAL

Several reasons exist to be faithful to God in tithe and offerings. Today we are exploring a primary reason: they are signs of revival.

### Part I: The Test in Eden

From the very beginning, it was essential for human beings to express clearly whom they consider as Owner and Lord. God had established signs of ownership and lordship for our first parents.

When we read about the proposition of the devil—"You shall be as gods" (Gen. 3:5)—we can ask about the issue on which Adam and Eve were tested? Humans were already **LIKE** God. They were created in His image, sharing honor, privileges, and responsibility. What was the essence of the devil's suggestion? The devil was in fact making the following suggestions:

- Why don't you aspire to be GOD yourself?
- Why don't you stop acknowledging God as your Owner and Lord?

In response, Adam and Eve played the owners/the lords in place of the real Owner/Lord. The test in Genesis 3 is one of lordship/ownership, and the forbidden fruit was only a sign. Our

first parents failed the test of ownership/lordship with the terrible consequences that resulted.

### Part II: Lordship in the Bible

Acknowledging God's lordship has remained essential for believers of all generations. It was the primary code of conduct for ancient Israel: *"Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one. Love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength"* (Deut. 6:4, 5).

The apostle Paul presents lordship as a condition for salvation: *"If you declare with your mouth, 'Jesus is LORD,' and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved"* (Rom. 10:9). Acknowledging Jesus as Savior and Lord are the essentials of salvation.

Jesus, the Lord, explains that lordship is much more than a verbal confession: *"Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven"* (Matt. 7:21). Lordship has to be demonstrated through concrete, tangible actions.

According to Acts 17:26, a person's existence takes place along two dimensions: time and space.

How does one show that God is the Owner/Lord in these two fundamental dimensions of life?

The Bible provides a clear sign for humanity to acknowledge the lordship of God over time: *"Keep my Sabbaths holy, that they may be a sign between us. Then you will know that I am the Lord your God"* (Ezek. 20:20). The Sabbath has been a sign of lordship from the very beginning, together with the tree of knowledge of good and evil. Apparently, Adam and Eve did not fail this part of the test.

God has also provided clear signs for humanity to acknowledge His lordship over space, over the material world: *"He asks*



*us to acknowledge Him as the giver of all things; and for this reason He says, Of all your possessions I reserve a tenth for Myself, besides gifts and offerings, which are to be brought into My storehouse" (Counsels on Stewardship, pp. 80, 81). Ellen White also wrote: "Tithes and offerings for God are an acknowledgement of His claim on us by creation, and they are also an acknowledgement of His claim of redemption. Because all our power is derived from Christ, these offerings are to flow from us to God. They are to keep ever before us the claim of redemption, the greatest of all claims, and the one that involves every other" (Testimonies for the Church, vol. 6, p. 479).*

The sign of Ezekiel 20:20 has three elements: tithe, gifts, and offerings. Tithe is 10 percent of our income. Gifts are special donations. Offerings involve systematic giving in proportion to blessings received. Giving is an essential sign of God's lordship because money or material possessions have the capacity to compete with God for lordship. *"No one can serve two masters [lords]. For either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will hold to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon" (Matt. 6:24).*

Ellen White establishes a close parallel between the two signs of God's lordship, Sabbathkeeping and tithe returning: *"God has sanctified the seventh day. That specified portion of time, set apart by God Himself for religious worship, continues as sacred today as when first hallowed by our Creator. In **LIKE** manner a tithe of our income is holy unto the Lord" (Review and Herald, May 16, 1882; emphasis supplied). She also challenged believers for keeping one and neglecting the other: "While we as a people are seeking faithfully to give to God the time which He has reserved as His own, shall we not also render to Him that portion of our means which He claims?" (Review and Herald, May 16, 1882).*

When keeping the Sabbath, we are reminding ourselves and acknowledging that not only the seventh day belongs to God, but all the days of the week and all the days of my life. When returning tithe and bringing our gifts and offerings, we are reminding ourselves and acknowledging that not only a portion of our income belongs to Him, but all our belongings and the material world.

## Signs of Revival

### Part III: Tithing and Offerings in the Context of Revival and Reformation

God has regularly appealed to His people to undergo revival and reformation. Revival is an invitation to them to turn away from foreign gods and to acknowledge Him as the sole Lord of their lives. Outside of the books of Moses, references to the tithing system are closely related to the context of revival and reformation.

The Bible reports on the reform that took place during the time of King Josiah (2 Chr. 29–31). The major components of Josiah's revival were the temple restored, worship services restored, Passover celebrated once again, and Levites restored to ministry. We can read about the response of the people to the call to revival and reformation: "As soon as the commandment was circulated, the children of Israel brought in abundance the first fruits of grain and wine, oil and honey, and of all the produce of the field; and they brought in abundantly the tithe of everything" (2 Chr. 31:5, NKJV).

The same process is described in the book of Nehemiah (Neh. 10:37, 38; 12:44; 13:5, 12). During this time of revival Ezra read the law. Corporate worship was restored. The people made a commitment to faithfulness to God in tithe and offerings. Storerooms for the tithe and offerings were established.

The time of the prophet Malachi was an age of apostasy, and the book of Nehemiah is an appeal from God to His people. An extract of the first chapter describes the rebellious nation: "A son honors his father, and a servant his master. If then I am the Father, where is my honor? And if I am a master, where is my reverence?" (Mal. 1:6, NKJV). The major issue was the absence of acknowledgment of God as Master, as Lord.

Chapter 3 presents the plea of God to His people. It is a call to return, a call to revival. "Yet from the days of your fathers you have gone away from my ordinances and have not kept them. 'Return to Me, and I will return to you,' says the Lord of hosts. 'But you said, in what way shall we return?'" (Mal. 3:7). After



listening to God, the people ask a pertinent question: How should we demonstrate that we have returned to God? Before He provides the answer, He reminds the people how they have departed from Him: "Will a mere mortal rob God? Yet you rob me. 'But you ask, "How are we robbing you?" 'In tithes and offerings. You are under a curse—your whole nation—because you are robbing me'" (Mal. 3:8, 9). They were robbing God of the honor that He deserves as God. He ends the conversation with an appeal: "'Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse, that there may be food in my house. Test me in this,' says the LORD Almighty, 'and see if I will not throw open the floodgates of heaven and pour out so much blessing that there will not be room enough to store it'" (Mal. 3: 10).

In the book of Malachi, the process of revival and reformation can be summarized in three steps: (1) extended dialogue over apostasy; (2) a call to return to God; and (3) reforming ways, including returning a faithful tithe and giving offerings.

## Conclusion

Since 2010, the Seventh-day Adventist Church has made revival a major theme. Has this message taken root in the church and in my heart? During this time, God's people need to recognize His ownership and lordship. One practical way is to return a faithful tithe and give appropriate offerings. This is how we give Him the honor that is due to Him.

## I Promise:

To faithfully return the Lord's tithe(10% of my income).

To dedicate a percentage (\_\_\_\_\_) of my income as a regular offering to the Lord).



**GOD FIRST**

ADVENTIST STEWARDSHIP MINISTRIES