

God will not allow humans to assume the position of proprietors. They will always be stewards, deputies. Should human beings be permitted to act as owners, they would soon arrogate to themselves the very prerogatives of deity. (See Sin III. B. 1–3.)

2.Sabbath

The first full day that Adam and Eve experienced was the Sabbath day, God’s special day of rest (Gen. 1:31–2:3).

When examined in the light of the stewardship concept, the fourth commandment becomes a divine statement about human relationships. First comes the relationship with God. This day is the “sabbath to the Lord your God” (Ex. 20:10). In the Sabbath commandment the creatures are reminded of their finitude, their creatureliness. The Creator reminds the created that He retains title to His world. His earthborn children are vicegerents and stewards.

In the Sabbath commandment reference is made also to the relationship to fellow humans “In it you shall not do any work, you, or your son, or your daughter, your manservant, or your maidservant, or your cattle, or the sojourner who is within your gates” (verse 10). The steward, as God’s representative, is to make the Sabbath rest available to all God’s creatures.

Into the succession of ordinary days God has placed a gift to those created in His image. We may even say that the Sabbath is a portion of eternity set in the midst of time.

The Sabbath also establishes relationships between Yahweh and human beings, who are always creatures, and between humans and the animals, and even between human beings and the earth. A relationship of dependence on God and worship of the Creator is clearly enjoined. In specifying that one must not keep the Sabbath alone, but in the company of others, God delineated proper relations among human beings. Finally, by exempting animals from work, the Creator showed how human beings could care for the dominion that had been placed under their feet (Birch 80).

Since the Sabbath has to do with time, human beings are made conscious of time’s value. The statement “The sabbath was made for man” is followed by another: “The Son of man is Lord even of the sabbath” (Mark 2:27 , 28). As a universal time gift, the Sabbath invests all other time with greater meaning. The deeper meaning of Sabbath is that Jesus is Lord of all—time, talent, treasure, and body temple. (See Creation I. A. 1–4 ; II. C ; Sabbath I. A ; II. A.)

3.Tithes and Offerings

In addition to the Sabbath, tithes and offerings remind us that only God is proprietor in the absolute sense. Of this the first pair were reminded by the tree whose fruit they were not to eat (Gen. 2:17). After sin and expulsion from the garden, this ownership truth was reinforced in the tithing principle.

In Genesis tithing appears as an already-known practice. Abraham paid tithe to Melchizedek, king of Salem and a priest of God Most High (Gen. 14:18–20). The same is recorded of Jacob, who promised Yahweh, “Of all that thou givest me I will give the tenth to thee” (Gen. 28:22).

The tithe was to be regarded as God’s tenth. “All the tithe of the land, whether of the seed of the land, or of the fruit of the trees, is the Lord’s: it is holy unto the Lord” (Lev. 27:30). The sacred tenth was an acknowledgment of Yahweh’s ownership. “The earth is the Lord’s, and the fulness thereof, the world and those who dwell therein” (Ps. 24:1 ; cf. 50:10–12 ; Haggai 2:8).

The Israelites were commanded to tithe all the yield of their seed, “which comes forth from the field year by year” (Deut. 14:22). In this way the covenant people showed love and respect for their God. In all things He was to be first. “Honor the Lord with your substance and with the first fruits of all your produce” (Prov. 3:9).

The record indicates that the practice of tithing continued after the exile. “Then all Judah brought the tithe of the grain, wine, and oil into the storehouses” (Neh. 13:12). Clearly the tithe was for religious purposes, including the support of priests and Levites: “To the Levites I have given every tithe in Israel for an inheritance, in return for their service which they serve, their service in the tent of meeting” (Num. 18:21). In postexilic times, “men were appointed over the chambers for the stores, the contributions, the first fruits, and the tithes, to gather into them the portions required by the law for the priests and for the Levites according to the fields of the towns; for Judah rejoiced over the priests and the Levites who ministered” (Neh. 12:44). This was to be done with joy and gratitude to the Provider who had given them “power to get wealth” (Deut. 8:18).

The tithe is tangible, reminding us that the physical creation has been pronounced good. Therefore, the command is to “honor the Lord with your substance and with the first fruits of all your produce” (Prov. 3:9). The returning of the tithe saves us from a false dichotomy between the spiritual and the material. Israel’s God is the Giver of every good gift. He makes no radical differentiation between the so-called spiritual and the so-called natural. “He has made everything beautiful in its time” (Eccl. 3:11). Later Jesus would acknowledge tithing as something that “you ought to have done, without neglecting the others” (Matt. 23:23).

The returning of the tithe makes the worshiper a partner with God in concrete ways. There is an identification with the caregiving God, whose spirit of sacrificial love is taken on. God’s interests and concerns become the believer’s interests and concern. The covenant relationship is deepened.

The experience of the Jewish people under Nehemiah gives a remarkable insight into the tithing system. An entire people heartily entered into covenant with their God.

When all Judah brought the tithe of the grain, wine, and oil into the storehouses, Nehemiah appointed treasurers who were “counted faithful; and their duty was to distribute to their brethren” (Neh. 13:13).

At the end of the OT the prophet Malachi repeats Yahweh’s requirement, together with a promise of rich blessings:

“Will man rob God? Yet you are robbing me. But you say, ‘How are we robbing thee?’ In your tithes and offerings. You are cursed with a curse, for you are robbing me; the whole nation of you. Bring the full tithes into the storehouse, that there may be food in my house; and thereby put me to the test, says the Lord of hosts, if I will not open the windows of heaven for you and pour down for you an overflowing blessing. I will rebuke the devourer for you, so that it will not destroy the fruits of your soil; and your vine in the field shall not fail to bear, says the Lord of hosts. Then all nations will call you blessed, for you will be a land of delight, says the Lord of hosts” (Mal. 3:8–12).

Failure to return the tithe is viewed as a breach of the covenant.

D. Examples of Stewardship

In addition to the tithe the Lord requested offerings. Yahweh complained that Israel was robbing Him in “tithes and offerings” (Mal. 3:8). When the Israelites made pilgrimage to Jerusalem they were expected to bring an offering or gift, a *mattānāh*, from the verb *nātan*, to “give” (Deut. 16:17). The same word is used to designate a gift given by a father to his child (Gen. 25:5) and God’s gift of the priesthood to Aaron (Num. 18:7). The word suggests a gift prompted by a good and loving disposition of one person toward another (cf. Esther 9:22).

As a people in covenant relationship with God, Israel had received His richest gift, His grace. God had been merciful, gracious, and good to the nation. The Torah itself was a gift of God’s grace. The appropriate response to this manifestation of plenteous grace is suggested in Psalm 96:8 : “Ascribe to the Lord the glory due his name; bring an offering, and come into his courts! Worship the Lord in holy array.” David exclaimed in awe: “But who am I, and what is my people, that we should be able thus to offer willingly? For all things come from thee, and of thy own have we given thee” (1 Chron. 29:14).

For a model of giving, Christians look to God, “who gives to all men generously and without reproaching” (James 1:5). Sons and daughters of the Father imitate the one who “makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust” (Matt. 5:45). Believers are moved by God’s unparalleled example, in that He “did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all” (Rom. 8:32).

1. The OT

God has always ministered His grace to the world through individuals and His people Israel. They reveal His grace to the world and in a sense become channels of blessing. Certain individuals in the biblical record epitomize the principles of true stewardship.

a.Abraham. God's covenant promise was "I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you, and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing" (Gen. 12:2). Abraham, the father of the faithful, stands out as an example of total commitment to Yahweh in covenant relationship. Of him God could say, "I have chosen him [Heb. "I have known him"], that he may charge his children and his household after him to keep the way of the Lord by doing righteousness and justice" (Gen. 18:19). Stewardship presupposes a trust relationship. Fidelity to God, commitment to His will, and obedience to His commands are the hallmark of the true steward. In His appearances to Abraham Yahweh made it clear that He wanted to make him trustee of the knowledge of God.

b.Joseph. One of Jacob's sons became the ideal steward of the OT . His story dominates the last part of the book of Genesis. Sold into cruel slavery, he rose to positions of prominence in Potiphar's house (Gen. 39:4 , 5) and in the Pharaoh's kingdom (Gen. 41:39–41). Joseph understood his mission. He realized that "God meant ... for good," the harsh treatment he had suffered, in order "that many people should be kept alive" (Gen. 50:20). In considering Joseph's life, the psalmist noted that God "had sent a man ahead of them" (Ps. 105:17). As God's steward, Joseph brought great blessings to Egypt. "The king ... made him lord of his house, and ruler of all his possessions, to instruct his princes at his pleasure, and to teach his elders wisdom" (verses 20–22). "To the ancient Egyptian nation God made Joseph a fountain of life. Through the integrity of Joseph the life of that whole people was preserved" (AA 13).

c.Israel. God wished to make Israel a channel of His truth, grace, and blessing to neighboring nations. His people were to be His stewards. These were the terms of His covenant with them: "Now therefore, if you will obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my own possession among all peoples; for all the earth is mine, and you shall be to me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation" (Ex. 19:5 , 6). They would be richly blessed; they would lend to other nations but never need to borrow (Deut. 28:12).

God's material blessing on Israel would attract the attention of the world. It was God's intention that the nations should inquire as to the reason for Israel's unusual prosperity. This would open the way for Israel to give effective witness to the Source of blessings and to point out the necessity of obeying the God of heaven (Isa. 44:8 ; 49:6 ; Mal. 3:12). God made every provision for His chosen people to be stewards of His saving grace: "I am the Lord, I have called you in righteousness, I have taken you by the hand and kept you; I have given you as a covenant to the people, a light to the nations, to open the eyes that are blind, to bring out the prisoners from the dungeon, from the prison those who sit in darkness" (Isa. 42:6 , 7).

2.The NT

a. Jesus as God's perfect steward. Jesus came into the world as God's chief steward, sent by the Father (John 5:36). Restoration, recovery, and redemption of a lost planet were the terms of reference and the parameters of His stewardship (Luke 19:10 ; Eph. 1:10). It was as if the lost section of the cosmos had been placed in His hands, for Him to rescue the people from sin's slavery (Matt. 1:21). He came to bring life (John 10:10). The Father gave Him authority for mission and judgment (Matt. 28:19 , 20 ; John 5:22–27 ; 8:29).

Jesus is the administrator of the plan of salvation, as Paul points out in Ephesians 1:9–23 . The plan hinges on Christ and His saving activities. He takes charge and superintends the project, while still in subjection to His Father, still in human flesh. God commends Jesus for being “faithful to him who appointed him” (Heb. 3:2). For this reason Jesus is worthy of “more glory than Moses as the builder of a house has more honor than the house” (verse 3). As a faithful son over God's house, He is Himself the medium of salvation. “Consequently he is able for all time to save those who draw near to God through him, since he always lives to make intercession for them” (Heb. 7:25).

b. Stewardship in Christ's parables . The idea of stewardship finds amplification in certain of the parables of Jesus. In Luke 12 , for instance, faithful and unfaithful stewards are contrasted. The servants are warned to maintain a state of readiness—loins girded, lights burning—waiting their master's return. At the sound of the first knock they are to answer the door quickly. The exact hour of his coming is not known; it may be the second or third watch of the night. For doing his master's bidding, “the faithful and wise steward” will then be “set over all his possessions” (verses 42–44). But there is another kind of steward—the unfaithful one, who is not prepared for the master's coming. “The master of that servant will come on a day when he does not expect him and at an hour he does not know, and will punish him, and put him with the unfaithful” (verse 46).

The point of the story was accountability for the knowledge and gifts of God. “And that servant who knew his master's will, but did not make ready or act according to his will, shall receive a severe beating” (verse 47). Jesus made it clear that this parable was for the disciples. On them the manifold grace of Christ had been freely bestowed. As stewards of their master's gifts, they were to share with others. At the end of the age full account of their stewardship would be required (cf. Matt. 24:45–51 ; 25:14–30).

Stewardship is the main motif of the parable of the pounds (Luke 19) and of the parable of the talents (Matthew 25). The nobleman, or landowner, travels to a far country. He calls his servants together to give them instructions and tasks to perform while he is away. In each instance he expects that they will make a profit by the wise use of their capital. Luke 19:13 indicates that they are to do business with them while he was away. In Matthew he “entrusted to them his property” (Matt. 25:14). The servants understood their responsibility. The five-talent servant “went at once and traded with them.” The one who received two did likewise (verses 16 , 17). In both parables the servants who carried out their stewardship responsibilities in the absence of the landowner/nobleman were commended and rewarded. The wise steward identifies with

the master and his interests. There will, however, be a time of review and evaluation at some future date. Judgment begins “with the household of God” (1 Peter 4:17).

In Matthew 25:31–46 stewards are judged on the basis of their treatment of the unfortunate—the prisoners, the sick, the destitute, and the homeless. Those who shared unselfishly are surprised that the King declares these deeds to have been done to Him. They are invited to “inherit the kingdom” (verse 34). Those who fail the evaluation are consigned to “eternal punishment” (verse 46).

As can be seen in these parables, stewardship has its rewards and punishments. In every case the master of the house is uncompromising—those who have received his capital are required to improve it. The standard of judgment is clear: “Every one to whom much is given, of him will much be required; and of him to whom men commit much they will demand the more” (Luke 12:48).

c. Stewardship in the apostolic church. The church in the apostles’ day presented a dynamic demonstration of Christian stewardship. The members of the community understood what it meant to be stewards, individually and as a corporate body. They modeled well the principles of Christian stewardship by their attitude and practice. Each member stood ready to perform good works, show generosity, and share their means. Acts 2:44 , 45 describes Christian stewardship in action: “And all who believed were together and had all things in common; and they sold their possessions and goods and distributed them to all, as any had need.”

The early Christians felt responsible for each other, whether Jew or Gentile, throughout the empire. This ecumenical awareness developed early. When the Jerusalem church suffered during the famine that was predicted by the prophet Agabus, the believers in the Gentile world gave liberally toward the relief effort. Paul saw this crisis as an opportunity to demonstrate genuine *agapē* love. The worldwide fellowship was strengthened and united in the task. “And the disciples determined, every one according to his ability, to send relief to the brethren who lived in Judea; and they did so, sending it to the elders by the hand of Barnabas and Saul” (Acts 11:29 , 30).

In 2 Corinthians 9:6 , 7 Paul develops a theology of giving: “The point is this: he who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and he who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully. Each one must do as he has made up his mind, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver.”

The unselfish giving of early Christians had its reflex action. “You will be enriched in every way for great generosity, which through us will produce thanksgiving to God; for the rendering of this service not only supplies the wants of the saints but also overflows in many thanksgivings to God. Under the test of this service, you will glorify God by your obedience in acknowledging the gospel of Christ, and by the generosity of your contribution for them and for all others” (verses 11–13).

While caring for members of the household of faith and for all who were in need in the communities where they lived, church members were not to neglect their own families. Stewardship responsibility begins with caring for the needs of blood relations. Paul states this very emphatically: “If any one does not provide for his relatives, and especially for his own family, he has disowned the faith and is worse than an unbeliever” (1 Tim. 5:8).

The apostles also urged upon the church the duty of providing financial support for the gospel ministry. In verse 18 Paul appealed to the words of Jesus, “the laborer deserves his wages” (Luke 10:7 ; Matt. 10:10). In encouraging Timothy to honor the elders (verses 17 , 18), he cites an OT dictum: “You shall not muzzle an ox when it is treading out the grain.” (See Deut. 25:4 ; cf. Num. 18:21 ; Neh. 12:44 , 45 .)

Although Paul did not always accept the gifts of the churches for the support of his ministry, he insisted on his right to such support. The requirement is still valid.

“If we have sown spiritual good among you, is it too much if we reap your material benefits? ... Do you not know that those who are employed in the temple service get their food from the temple, and those who serve at the altar share in the sacrificial offerings? In the same way, the Lord commanded that those who proclaim the gospel should get their living by the gospel” (1 Cor. 9:11–14).

The early church was infused with the spirit of liberality. They took the words of the apostle Paul very seriously: “Each one must do as he has made up his mind, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver” (2 Cor. 9:7). The church of the apostles is a stewardship model for all time.

The church in the apostles’ time set the pattern, provided the benchmark. As Joseph was in Egypt and Israel among the nations, so those who take on Christ’s name are both responsible and accountable. The blessings God has given to them they, in turn, are to pass on to the whole world. Stewardship is sharing the incomparable riches of Christ with fellow human beings. “This is how one should regard us, as servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God. Moreover it is required of stewards that they be found trustworthy” (1 Cor. 4:1 , 2).

The faith community does not exist for itself. It exists for the distribution, the sharing, of God’s manifold grace with a needy world. This grace is more than sentiment; it addresses concrete situations and real needs. Those needs may sometimes be spiritual or they may be material. The steward has no option but to meet these needs wherever found and on whatever level.

E. Biblical Stewardship: Applications

As God’s deputies on earth, the first couple and their descendants have been entrusted the stewardship of God-given resources. These include divine grace, life, time, talents, wealth, and the earth itself. (See Lifestyle II. C. 5.)

1. Stewardship of Divine Grace

The greatest gift that human beings have received from God is eternal life (John 3:16), not only in the hereafter but also now (John 5:24 ; 10:10). This is the “good news” Jesus came to spread. Before His ascension He entrusted the unfinished task to His disciples: “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you” (Matt. 28:19 , 20).

Paul recognized his obligation to share the gospel of grace: “For necessity is laid upon me. Woe to me if I do not preach the gospel!” (1 Cor. 9:16). But he did not limit the responsibility to himself or even to his fellow apostles. To the Corinthians he wrote that “God ... through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation” (2 Cor. 5:18). He commended the Thessalonians because the “word of the Lord sounded forth from ... [them] in Macedonia and Achaia”; their faith in God had “gone forth everywhere” (1 Thess. 1:8). He also prayed that Philemon’s sharing of his faith might “promote the knowledge of all the good that is ours in Christ” (Philemon 6).

Peter likewise spoke of the Christians’ duty to preach the good news: “But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God’s own people, that you may declare the wonderful deeds of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light” (1 Peter 2:9). The Gentiles were to observe the life of the Christians and “glorify God” because of it (verse 12). The apostle also urged that believers “always be prepared to make a defense” of the hope in them (1 Peter 3:15).

Revelation 14:6–12 contains good news, “an eternal gospel” (verse 6) to proclaim to all the world. The focus is on the God whose promise and Word transcend the present gloomy situation and point to the glorious outcome described in the final chapters of Revelation. The good news is that God does love this planet and is determined to rescue and renew it so that His original purpose in Creation may be fulfilled. Sharing this vital message in its fullness is part and parcel of Christian stewardship.

The church, as a corporate body, is under constraint to model consistently an authentic stewardship community in an increasingly secular society. In order to do so it must rein in its tastes, resist conspicuous consumption, and imitate as closely as possible the way of living of the lowly Nazarene. This will help give credibility to the church’s witness.

The individual Christian must not, however, look to the organization to assume his or her personal responsibility. If the stewardship motif says anything, it is that we are held accountable as individuals for doing the best we can with what we have, to the glory of God and to the service of fellow humans and all of creation.

In the end-time, the people of God are to join in the proclamation of the three angels’ messages of Revelation 14 . Because they have been the recipients of God’s free salvation, they are under obligation to share the message of hope and life.

2. Stewardship of Life

Life is a gift of God and belongs to God, its source. But God has graciously entrusted life to the human race. Of it He requires wise administration.

God is the abundant Lifegiver, who delights in sharing life with His creatures. The biblical account throbs with the language of dynamic, irrepressible life. For example:

“And God said, ‘Let the waters bring forth swarms of living creatures, and let birds fly above the earth across the firmament of the heavens.’ So God created the great sea monsters and every living creature that moves, with which the waters swarm, according to their kinds, and every winged bird according to its kind. And God saw that it was good. And God blessed them, saying, ‘Be fruitful and multiply and fill the waters in the seas, and let birds multiply on the earth’ ” (Gen. 1:20–22).

Adam became a living being after God “breathed into his nostrils the breath of life.” He and Eve were instructed to “be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth” (verse 28). Adam’s stewardship responsibility was to join his Creator in engendering life and preserving the precious breath of life in all humans. Cain evidently recognized this responsibility, as is suggested by the way he responded to God. Because of his failure to preserve his brother’s life, Cain was cursed by God, for the voice of Abel’s blood cried forth from the ground (Gen. 4:10–12). God called Cain to account for denying his stewardship of his brother’s life. He likewise holds us responsible for the life and welfare of our fellow human beings.

After the Flood Noah’s sons were instructed as to how they, too, as responsible stewards, must treasure God’s gift of life. “For your lifeblood I will surely require a reckoning Whoever sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed; for God made man in his own image” (Gen. 9:5 , 6). By the solemn proclamation of the sanctity of life God made the life of human beings secure. “This warning is directed against homicide and suicide” (see 1BC 264).

The sacrificial system, instituted at the gates of Eden, in which the death that human beings deserved because of their sins was averted only by the death of a substitute, was an indication of the high premium God placed on human life. This redemption, or atonement, has always been precious and costly (Lev. 1:1–5 ; 1 Peter 1:18 , 19). The cross of Calvary is the ultimate statement regarding the value of human life.

Human stewardship of life is enjoined in the Decalogue. The sixth commandment reads, “You shall not kill” (Ex. 20:13). In Leviticus 17:14 God’s regard for life is shown in rules concerning blood: “For the life of every creature is the blood of it; therefore I have said to the people of Israel, You shall not eat the blood of any creature, for the life of every creature is its blood; whoever eats it shall be cut off.”

Another evidence of God’s high valuation of human life is seen in the divine instructions regarding the cities of refuge. Those guilty of manslaughter could flee there

and be saved (Num. 35:11–15 ; Deut. 19:4–7). At the same time, the Israelites were commanded not to hate their neighbors or to bear grudges; rather they were to love their neighbors as themselves (Lev. 19:17 , 18). This was part of their stewardship responsibility.

3.Stewardship of the Earth

As noted (I. C), “the earth is the Lord’s and the fulness thereof, the world and those who dwell therein” (Ps. 24:1). At Creation everything was “very good” (Gen. 1:31). Millennia later Paul wrote, “The whole creation has been groaning in travail” (Rom. 8:22). Today, the earth reels under the weight of pollution and misuse.

The Israelites were taught that the earth must be given opportunity to renew itself. Every seventh year the land must also have its Sabbath (Lev. 25:2–7). During the sabbatical year the land was to lie fallow. No planting or pruning was to take place. If Israel gave the land its due rest, the Lord would see that no one lacked food. Another way in which God showed His concern for Israel’s proper stewardship of the land appears in the command to allow new trees to grow up before their fruit was harvested. “But in the fifth year you may eat of their fruit, that they may yield more richly for you” (Lev. 19:23–25). Every Israelite was responsible for helping to maintain the vitality of the soil. By following God’s rules for the land, the Israelites showed their allegiance to God, the owner and Creator of all the earth.

The stewardship of the earth, which God entrusted to Adam and Eve, still belongs to their descendants. We who inhabit the planet are responsible for its care. In the final judgment, the “destroyers of the earth” are destroyed (Rev. 11:18).

4.Stewardship of Talents and Abilities

Stewardship includes the judicious use of God-given abilities and talents. For the construction of the desert tabernacle, God gave “ability and intelligence, with knowledge and all craftsmanship” to those who were to do the work (Ex. 31:2–6). Centuries later Paul described the spiritual gifts bestowed on believers for the benefit of the church body (Rom. 12:4–8 ; 1 Cor. 12 ; Eph. 4:7–14 ; 1 Peter 4:10 , 11). These gifts are skills and abilities, given by God and placed at the believers’ disposal, to be used as the Spirit directs; they serve to enrich and upbuild the fellowship of believers. The church is a community of gifted people who serve the world. Proper stewardship of these gifts entails ministry and mission, reaching out to meet human need in Christ’s name. (See Spiritual Gifts I , II.)

Christians must make the best possible use of their communication skills. Paul encouraged believers to let their “speech always be gracious, seasoned with salt” (Col. 4:6), to set “an example in speech” (1 Tim. 4:12), and to be characterized by “sound speech that cannot be censured” (Titus 2:8). As all other gifts, speech should be used to the glory of God and the blessing of others. Above all, the talent of speech should be

cultivated and used to share the good news of Jesus with all who come into the believer's sphere of influence.

In His parables of the pounds and the talents, Jesus pointed out the importance of using what the master had entrusted to his servants (Luke 19:12–27 ; Matt. 25:14–30). The correct use of the master's means—that is, their multiplication—produced approval and reward. The talent that did not grow was taken away from the servant, who was condemned to outer darkness for failing to use his talent. While the story speaks of money, “talents” or “pounds” can be taken to refer to God-given abilities and talents for one's own self-development and the benefit of others.

II. Historical Overview

A. Judaism

Jews followed OT practices in tithes and offerings during the intertestamental period. For example, Tobit (second century B.C.) relates his fictional trips to Jerusalem for the yearly feasts, on which he took with him the first fruits and the tithes of his produce. He specifies, “Of all my produce I would give a tenth to the sons of Levi who ministered at Jerusalem; a second tenth I would sell, and I would go and spend the proceeds each year at Jerusalem; the third tenth I would give to those to whom it was my duty” (Tobit 1:7 , 8). Rabbinic sources tell us that the first tithe was collected yearly; the second was due in years 1, 2, 4, and 5 of the sabbatical cycle; the third tithe was given in the third and sixth years. Thus, every year except the seventh, a person paid two tithes.

The Mishnah contains tractates on tithes and offerings. *Terumoth* specifies the gifts that should be presented to the priest, the average amount of which should be one fiftieth of the produce. *Ma'asehroth*, the tractate on tithes, gives detailed instruction on which vegetables and fruits should be tithed. A third tractate explains the payment of second tithe.

At the same time, the biblical philosophy of returning tithes and offerings out of gratitude seems to have been eroding; giving became a way of getting something in return. The Wisdom of Sirach maintains that “almsgiving atones for sin” (3:30). Tobit affirms that “charity delivers from death and keeps you from entering the darkness” (4:10 ; cf. 12:8–10).

After the destruction of the Temple a great deal of importance was attached to the correct payment of tithes. The concept of a person's being “trustworthy in tithes” came into vogue, and those who did not pay tithe were considered to be second-class Jews. While tithe paying was not obligatory except in the land of Israel, there is evidence that Jews in the Diaspora also set aside their tithe.

B. Early Church

The church of the apostles understood itself to be a new community whose life was derived from the risen Christ. “To live is Christ” (Phil. 1:21). The Pauline expression “in Christ” signifies that the members of this body have a radical new orientation: “Therefore, if any one is in Christ, he is a new creation” (2 Cor. 5:17). Their stewardship practices were the outworking of the principles that Jesus taught and the apostles passed on to them: “For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, so that by his poverty you might become rich” (2 Cor. 8:9 ; cf. Phil. 2:5–8). However, after the apostles’ demise the spirit of liberality and the grace dynamic waned. Gradually, good works, gifts to the poor, and support of the gospel ministry were no longer viewed as the outworking of the “grace of our Lord Jesus Christ” but as a means to secure salvation. Following this line of thought, Clement, bishop of Rome in the last decade of the first century, stated, “Good, then, are alms as repentance from sin; better is fasting than prayer, and alms than both.” Furthermore, “alms lighten the burden of sin” (*To the Corinthians* 2. 16). In the *Shepherd of Hermas* (early second century), fasting was commanded as a sacrifice “noble, and sacred, and acceptable to the Lord” (*Simile* 5. 3).

The early church had no tithing system such as that known among Jews. According to Irenaeus (c . 130- c . 200), “those who have received liberty” no longer paid tithes as did the Jews, but “set aside all their possessions for the Lord’s purposes, bestowing joyfully and freely not the less valuable portions of their property” (*Against Heresies* 4. 18. 2).

Tertullian (c . A.D. 200) describes the giving of Christians in Carthage. They were not to be compulsory, but voluntary: “as it were, piety’s deposit fund.” These gifts were to be used “to support and bury poor people, to supply the wants of boys and girls destitute of means and parents, and of old persons confined now to the house,” and to care for those in prison for their faith (*Apology* 39).

Epiphanius, writing in the fourth century, pointed out that tithing was no more binding than circumcision or Sabbath observance. It had been given, he said, “to keep us from overlooking the ‘iota,’ the initial letter of the name of Jesus” (*Against Heresies* 1. 1. 8).

In the late fourth and early fifth centuries, voices began to be heard demanding that Christians pay tithe. Ambrose of Milan (340–397) affirmed that God had reserved one tenth of the grain, wine, fruit, cattle, garden, business, and even hunting; it was “not lawful for a man to retain what God had reserved for Himself.” A good Christian should not taste his fruits before offering something of them to God (*Sermons* 33, 34). Augustine (354–430) maintained that Christians must pay tithes in order for their righteousness to exceed that of the scribes and Pharisees (Matt. 5:20 ; *Exposition on Psalm* 146. 7). In 576 the provincial Council of Tours directed Christians to pay their tithes. In 585 the Second Council of Macon prescribed excommunication for those who refused to pay tithe. However, tithe was not necessarily one tenth of one’s income, but a stipulated donation.

C. The Middle Ages

The medieval understanding of salvation by merit greatly affected the idea of stewardship. The primary motive for giving was to save one's soul. Fees for different services were instituted: for marrying, for burying, for confessing, for saying a mass for the salvation of a dead person's soul. In order to raise money a religious body might pledge itself to far more masses than the priests could possibly say. The fees for saying masses, along with the sale of indulgences, were chief among the complaints that led to the Protestant Reformation.

From Constantine (d. 337) onward, the Christian church was a state church. As centuries passed, the distinction between ecclesiastical and state tithes and taxes became virtually impossible to distinguish. For example, Charlemagne (742–814) regulated the division of tithe into three parts: for the clergy, for the poor, and for church support. Penalties were enforced on those who failed to pay. In England a civil law enjoining the payment of tithe was passed in 787. A 1295 law ordained that tithes were to be paid on the gross value of all crops; it further dictated how the tithe was to be paid on milk, animals, wool, pastures, and even bees. Personal tithes were also required: tithe of the profits of business and trades. Again the word "tithe" did not necessarily connote one tenth.

In the medieval system of giving, voluntary giving as a stewardship of God's means was to a great extent lost. Giving was demanded by the church and the state. The spirit of stewardship that had characterized the first-century church was no longer recognizable.

D. Reformation

The Reformation was in many respects a reaction to the abuse of clerical power and the establishment of a merit system of salvation. It did not succeed, however, in destroying the symbiotic relation between church and state. Tithing was imposed, not so much by the church, as by the state. In Germany, from 1555 on, when Lutheranism was legalized and placed under the protection of the Lutheran princes, the right of ecclesiastical oversight—and with it the right to tithe—came into the hands of the territorial secular authority. Tithes gathered were for the support of the ministry, the maintenance of schools, and the care of the poor.

Even though most Protestants felt comfortable with secular enforcement of church legislation, some dissented. Ulrich Zwingli (1484–1531) strongly disagreed with the ecclesiastical system of tithing, holding that giving should be voluntary rather than mandatory. Other groups, such as the Anabaptists, the Quakers, and the English Separatists, were equally against ecclesiastical tithing. However, such dissenters were in the minority. It was generally understood and accepted that the state should care for its obligations by sharing its largess and using its power to enforce the church's financial levies upon its members.

On the Catholic side, the Council of Trent (1545–1563) declared that the payment of tithes was due God and that all who refused to pay them were to be excommunicated.

However, this regulation was not enforced. The French Revolution brought tithing in the Roman Catholic Church to an end.

E. The North American Experiment

Even in colonial America it was difficult to draw effective lines of demarcation between church and state. The pattern of centuries with the state financing the church was too strongly ingrained and took many years to shake off. The American Revolution helped reverse the trends and practices of many centuries. But the great “American experiment” proved traumatic to the churches, which could no longer look to the state to finance their activities. Thrown on their own resources, the churches were forced to reexamine the apostolic model. The new situation was a blessing in disguise. Voluntary gifts actuated by the spirit of Christ were obviously the path to take, but church leaders had no history, no tradition, no past experience, to draw on.

Innovative church leaders devised various methods. Unfortunately, some were unworthy of the name Christian. Pew rentals, bazaars, suppers, games of chance, and lotteries were tried. Some clergy decried these “new” methods, pointing out that they were no better than the “old” methods of pre-Reformation days.

The American church can be credited with the revival of interest in Christian stewardship, although the emphasis was almost exclusively on the financial aspect. Church historians usually give the late 1800s as the beginning of the stewardship movement in America. From the outset the movement was fueled by the great interest in foreign missions. Later came the attempt to construct the theological base and the effort to bring practice and theory together in the local church. Many training programs and strategies were put in place, with varying degrees of success. In the year 1920 twenty-nine denominations from the United States and Canada came together at the call of a group of stewardship leaders in New York City to form the United Stewardship Council.

III. The Seventh-day Adventist Stewardship Experience

Most Christians would agree with the Seventh-day Adventist Statement of Fundamental Beliefs, which states:

“We are God’s stewards, entrusted by Him with time and opportunities, abilities and possessions, and the blessings of the earth and its resources. We are responsible to Him for their proper use. We acknowledge God’s ownership by faithful service to Him and our fellow men, and by returning tithes and giving offerings for the proclamation of His gospel and the support and growth of His church. Stewardship is a privilege given to us by God for nurture in love and the victory over selfishness and covetousness. The steward rejoices in the blessings that come to others as a result of his faithfulness” (*SDA Yearbook* 1999, 7).

Seventh-day Adventist history runs parallel to the development of the American religious scene. Born in the religious fervor of the missionary movement and forged specifically by the intense apocalypticism of the times (the great Second Advent movement) the Seventh-day Adventist Church developed a strong stewardship consciousness.

A. Finances

An entire chapter of the *Seventh-day Adventist Church Manual* is dedicated to gospel finance. There the Adventist concept of stewardship is set forth. The paragraph over “Stewardship” reads:

“Christians are God’s stewards, entrusted with His goods, and the divine counsel is that ‘it is required in stewards, that a man be found faithful’ (1 Cor. 4:2). The question of stewardship in its fullest form covers many aspects of Christian life and experience, such as our time, our influence, and our service, but there is no doubt that the stewardship of our means is a vitally important phase of this question. It is one which concerns every member of the church. It involves our recognition of the sovereignty of God, of His ownership of all things, and of the bestowal of His grace upon our hearts. As we grow in the understanding of these principles we shall be led into a fuller appreciation of the way God’s love operates in our lives” (*SDA Church Manual* 1995, 135, 136).

1. Tithes

In 1859 Adventists adopted a plan called Systematic Benevolence that encouraged regular giving, proportional in some way to one’s income or property. Early in 1863 the *Review and Herald* suggested one tenth of one’s income as a minimum contribution. “The children of Israel were required to give a tithe, or tenth, of all their increase And it cannot be supposed that the Lord requires less of His people when time is emphatically short, and a great work is to be accomplished in the use of their means in giving the last merciful message to the world” (RH Jan. 6, 1863). In 1876 the General Conference unanimously adopted a resolution stating: “We believe it to be the duty of all our brethren and sisters, whether connected with churches or living alone, under ordinary circumstances, to devote one tenth of all their income from whatever source, to the cause of God” (*ibid.* Apr. 6, 1876).

Adventist pioneers saw tithing as rooted in Scripture. Ellen White wrote many articles and devoted entire chapters in her books to the subject of gospel finance. The rendering of tithe and offerings was a requirement of gospel order. The motivation was evangelical: support of the gospel ministry and the spread of the message of salvation. By the year 1878 the tithing plan was well established in denominational policy and practice.

Around the world, church members and their children compute the tithe as one tenth of their income. Those who conduct their own businesses are encouraged to return the tithe on their earnings.

Tithe is used for the support of the gospel ministry, for the prosecution of the church's mission to the world. This is done on the basis of the OT use of tithe for the support of the Levites (Num. 18:21). The General Conference *Working Policy* states:

“The tithe is to be held sacred for the work of the ministry and Bible teaching, including conference administration in the care of churches and field outreach operations. The tithe is not to be expended upon other lines of work such as church or institutional debt paying or building operations” (V 05 05).

Local churches remit 100 percent of the tithe contributed by the members to the conference or mission. These associations of churches forward one tenth of the tithe received to the unions, which are groupings of conferences. Next, the unions send one tenth of the tithe they receive to the division, one of the 12 sections of the world church. Finally, the divisions send on one tenth of their income to the General Conference. Thus, church members, without reference to where they live, have a part in the mission of the church through the tithe, which they return to the local congregation.

The church sees in its financial plan “a larger purpose than appears in its financial and statistical reports. The arrangement is more than a means of gathering and distributing funds. It is, under God, one of the great unifying factors of the Advent movement” (*SDA Church Manual* 1995, 137).

2.Offerings

Recognizing that the Israelites were called upon to give at least a second tithe (Deut. 12:17 , 18 ; 14:22–27) and possibly also a third one (Deut. 14:28 , 29), early Adventist leaders encouraged believers to contribute freewill offerings for other church projects, above and beyond the 10 percent tithe. For example, in 1876 an additional “one third” offering (of the Systematic Benevolence quota) was suggested for the Tract and Missionary Society.

Later came other offerings, notable among them the weekly Sabbath School offerings. In 1878 penny boxes were placed near the door to receive funds for local Sabbath School expenses. Sabbath schools started collecting offerings for missions in 1885, providing members the opportunity of supporting a worldwide church. Part of the special offering taken on the last Sabbath of the quarter is designated for a special project which is highlighted throughout the quarter.

A variety of offerings is collected in local churches, either regularly or occasionally. Their use is carefully controlled by appropriate entities at the local church, the conference, the union, and the General Conference.

Serious, committed Christians, make certain that the funds entrusted to them by the Creator are used in His service. Through estate planning, church members may place their estate in the hands of trustees so that treasure which they handled wisely in life may

continue to bring glory to God and serve human need even after their demise. This is good stewardship that brings satisfaction and fulfillment to the follower of Christ.

3. Department of Stewardship and Development

In 1966 the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists organized what became known the next year as the Department of Stewardship and Development to assist conferences and world divisions in promoting stewardship awareness. This department was asked to prepare literature, training programs, and seminars for pastors and churches. In addition to practical, hands-on teaching, the department was to keep on the cutting edge of theological issues pertaining to stewardship. Walter M. Starks was chosen as the first director of the new department.

Further developments have ensued. In 1971 provision was made for stewardship secretaries in the local churches to promote stewardship of temple, treasure, talents, and time among members. In 1980 stewardship was connected with the Ministerial Association. At the creation of the Church Ministries Department in 1985, the official fostering of stewardship, through published materials and various workshops and seminars, became a part of that new entity. In 1995, when some of these functions were divided, Stewardship became a separate department.

Although returning tithes and giving offerings is essential to the Seventh-day Adventist theology of stewardship, stewardship includes much more. Stewardship touches the whole of life, and its concepts inform the pressing questions posed today. These questions bring up the issues with which church members must grapple— environmental and social concerns, public and personal health concerns, the pressing issue of poverty, and all the perplexing questions that surround the beginning and end of human life and, of course, the use of earth's finite resources. The list is not exhaustive. But the biblical teaching about stewardship enables Christians to balance these apparently conflicting concerns in a manner that is pleasing to Jesus Christ who is Lord. The ongoing task for Christians is how to apply these great principles in today's complex world.

B. Earth

Human beings are at the mercy of nature, but at present the planet itself groans under the human attacks and is indeed threatened with extinction at the hand of humankind. By greed and wastefulness, often under the guise of advancing technology, humans have wounded Planet Earth unto death. The earth is filled with life-threatening toxic wastes. Natural resources have been dangerously squandered. In some cases the land has been robbed by overuse of its ability to produce. Even the seas have been plundered of their once-rich resources.

In such a world as this, Seventh-day Adventist Christians are called to live a simple life, without greed or waste. Recognizing that the resources of the earth are finite, they are to protect and conserve the environment. The church promotes vegetarianism as a

healthful way to increase the availability of food. Schools and churches carry out varied and often creative ecological programs.

The observance of the seventh-day Sabbath, in loving response to the commandment (Ex. 20:8–11), provides an opportunity for Adventists to celebrate Creation along with the Creator. Individuals, families, and church groups frequently spend Sabbath afternoons in nature activities. These promote an understanding of the marvels of the natural world as well as the need for protecting God’s creation.

In 1992 the Annual Council voted a document, “Caring for God’s Creation,” which presents the Seventh-day Adventist position on stewardship of the earth. We quote in part:

“The world in which we live is a gift of love from the Creator God, from ‘him who made the heavens, the earth, the sea and the springs of water’ (Rev. 14:7 , NIV; cf. Rev. 11:17 , 18). Within this creation He placed humans, set intentionally in relationship with Himself, other persons, and the surrounding world. Therefore, as Seventh-day Adventists, we hold its preservation and nurture to be intimately related to our service to Him

“Because we recognize humans as part of God’s creation, our concern for the environment extends to personal health and lifestyle. We advocate a wholesome manner of living and reject the use of substances such as tobacco, alcohol, and other drugs that harm the body and consume earth’s resources; and we promote a simple vegetarian diet

“We accept the challenge to work toward restoring God’s overall design. Moved by faith in God, we commit ourselves to promote the healing that rises at both personal and environmental levels from integrated lives dedicated to serve God and humanity.

“In this commitment we confirm our stewardship of God’s creation and believe that total restoration will be complete only when God makes all things new” (RH Dec. 31, 1992).

These statements signal a growing awareness on the part of Seventh-day Adventists of the impact of Christian stewardship on their interaction with God’s world. The world and material substance are not bad in and of themselves; in fact, “all things bright and beautiful, all creatures great and small” are made by the Creator to be enjoyed by human beings (cf. Gen. 1:31). Christians are to treasure “the beauty of the earth.” They should have respect for the earth, but they must not worship it. Throughout Scriptures God is always above and apart from Creation.

C. God’s Grace

Revelation 14:6–12 contains good news, “an eternal gospel” (verse 6) to proclaim to all the world. The focus is on the God whose promise and Word transcend the present gloomy situation and point to the glorious outcome described in the final chapters of

Revelation. The good news is that God does love this planet and is determined to rescue and renew it so that His original purpose in Creation will be fulfilled. Sharing this vital message in its fullness is part and parcel of Christian stewardship to which Adventists are committed.

Because of this aspect of stewardship, Adventists are dedicated to the ministry of bringing the gospel to everyone. Because they are stewards of God's grace, Adventists operate medical and educational institutions and relief organizations. They preach and teach, and they support those who carry out ministry. (See Lifestyle II. A.)

D. Life and Health

Contrary to Greek dualism, which perceived a human being as body and soul, the latter imprisoned in the first and eager to be set free from it, the Scriptures admit no such dichotomy. They speak of wholeness. Far from being despicable because it is earthly, the body is of major importance. Thus, in order to keep the mind and spirit in optimal condition, a person must care for the body, which is "a temple of the Holy Spirit" (1 Cor. 6:19). For this reason, "health reform and the teaching of health and temperance are inseparable parts of the Advent message" (*SDA Church Manual* 1995, 148).

In keeping with the biblical injunction, the Seventh-day Adventist Church has fostered healthful living among its members as well as others whom it may reach. Around the globe a well-developed system of medical institutions seeks to alleviate suffering and promote wellness. The *Church Manual* states, "We belong to God, body, soul, and spirit. It is therefore our religious duty to observe the laws of health, both for our own well-being and happiness, and for more efficient service to God and our fellow men" (*ibid.* 1995, 148; see Health ; Lifestyle II. B).

In today's technological society, stewardship of the body includes life-and-death decisions, especially those relating to the termination of life through abortion or euthanasia. In harmony with the biblical teaching, Adventists are committed to the value and sanctity of human life. Two General Conference documents of 1992 deal with the issues.

The "Guidelines on Abortion" are based on "broad biblical principles" that life is a valuable gift from God and at the same time our response to God's will; yet it is our right and responsibility to make decisions regarding life. "Prenatal human life is a magnificent gift of God Thus prenatal life must not be thoughtlessly destroyed. Abortion should be performed only for the most serious reasons." Further, "the church does not serve as conscience for individuals; however, it should provide moral guidance." Decisions on abortion should be made by the individuals involved, aided by "accurate information, biblical principles, and the guidance of the Holy Spirit. Moreover, these decisions are best made within the context of healthy family relationships." Finally, "church members should be encouraged to participate in the ongoing consideration of their moral responsibilities with regard to abortion in the light of the teaching of Scripture" (RH Dec. 31, 1992; see Marriage II. F. 1).

Based on the same biblical principles, the document “Care for the Dying” appeals to practical and responsible Christian love. “After seeking divine guidance and considering the interests of those affected by the decision (Rom. 14:7), as well as medical advice, a person who is capable of deciding should determine whether to accept or reject life-extending medical interventions.” When the person is not capable of making such a decision, those closest to the individual should responsibly face the decision. Compassionate love should permeate the environment surrounding the dying. (See Marriage II. F. 2.)

“While Christian love may lead to the withholding or withdrawing of medical interventions that only increase suffering or prolong dying, Seventh-day Adventists do not practice ‘mercy killing’ or assist in suicide (Gen. 9:5 , 6 ; Ex. 20:13 ; 23:7). They are opposed to active euthanasia, the intentional taking of the life of a suffering or dying person” (RH Dec. 31, 1992).

E. Time

Time is a precious gift of God. It is the stuff of which life is made. How it is used says a great deal about one’s stewardship—one’s relationship with the Creator. The biblical writers speak to the shortness of time and the necessity of making the most of it. Time is to be used in the development of one’s self and in the expression of neighborly love. “Teach us to number our days,” says the psalmist (Ps. 90:12), and the wise man exhorts, “Whatever your hand finds to do, do it with your might; for there is no work or thought or knowledge or wisdom in Sheol, to which you are going” (Eccl. 9:10). Paul urges “making the most of the time, because the days are evil” (Eph. 5:16), and he notes that “it is full time now for you to wake from sleep” (Rom. 13:11). Jesus counsels His followers to work while it is day (the time of opportunity), for “night comes, when no one can work” (John 9:4).

F. Children: The Greatest Treasure

Material goods give the Christian steward the means to do ministry in tangible ways. But treasure is not confined to material possessions. Children, “a heritage of the Lord” (Ps. 127:3), are among His most precious gifts. They are placed in the hands of parents, who become responsible for preparing them for service in this life and the world to come, when God will ask, “Where is the flock that was given you, your beautiful flock?” (Jer. 13:20). In parenthood human beings are cocreators. Their offspring are candidates for immortality, who must be gently and firmly moved toward the place where they too can assume full stewardship responsibilities.

Therefore, Christian education—discipline and training—is of great importance. The development of all the faculties is required under the great commandment (Matt. 22:37), and the intentional transmission of values and the culture is critical. The church is an intergenerational community. An excellent example of passing the faith on from generation to generation is that of Eunice and Lois, Timothy’s mother and grandmother. “I am reminded of your sincere faith,” says Paul to Timothy, “a faith that dwelt first in

your grandmother Lois and your mother Eunice and now, I am sure, dwells in you” (2 Tim. 1:5 ; cf. Deut. 6:7).

Raising children for the Lord is the stewardship duty of parents and indeed of the entire community of faith (Isa. 54:13). Seventh-day Adventists take this stewardship obligation seriously and have developed a system of education, from kindergarten through the university, which is the second largest among Protestant denominations. In addition, Sabbath School, Pathfinder clubs, and a variety of other activities for children and youth are designed to protect and develop this treasure. (See Marriage I. B. 4.)

One official publication sets forth the purpose of Adventist education as follows:

“All children and youth have been entrusted by the church to the education system for spiritual nurture and educational excellence The education program is predicated on the belief that each student is unique and of inestimable value, and on the importance of the development of the whole person The total process of Seventh-day Adventist education seeks to renew faith in Christ, to restore in man the image of his Maker, to nurture in man an intelligent dedication to the work of God on earth, and to develop in man a practical preparation for conscientious service to his fellow man” (NAD *Working Policy* 1993–1994, F 05 05, F 05 10).

G. Talents and Abilities

The Scriptures indicate that God endows human beings with gifts and abilities (1 Cor. 12:4–11) that He expects them to use in service to others. This was true also in OT times (Ex. 31:2–6). God gives humans “ability and intelligence, with knowledge and all craftsmanship, to devise artistic designs, . . . for work in every craft” (verses 3–5).

Paul speaks at length about the *charismata* —what is given as a gift. These are skills and abilities that are placed at God’s disposal to be used as the Spirit directs. So-called natural gifts and skills become *charismata* only as they are used for the enrichment and upbuilding of the fellowship. The church is described as a community of gifted people—charismatics—who are at the service of the world. Stewardship, therefore, entails ministry, mission, reaching out to meet human need in Christ’s name through the exercise of the gifts (1 Peter 4:10 , 11 ; Rom. 12:6–8).

Christians should also make the best possible use of their communication skills. The talent of speech is to be cultivated and used to share the good news of the gospel with all who come into the sphere of their influence. The gift of speech has great potential for good or evil. As all other gifts, it must be used to the glory of God and the blessing of fellow humans.

H. Citizenship

Stewardship also involves support of and respect for properly constituted government. The Department of Public Affairs and Religious Liberty of the Seventh-day Adventist Church provides leadership and counsels the church's members on good citizenship:

“In view of its divinely ordained role, civil government is entitled to humanity's respectful and willing obedience in temporal matters to the extent that civil requirements do not conflict with those of God; in other words, humanity is bound to ‘render therefore unto Caesar the things which are Caesar's,’ to reserve for “God the things that are God's” (Matt. 22:21), to exercise an active, personal interest and concern in matters affecting the public welfare, and to be an exemplary citizen” (NAD *Working Policy* 1993–1994, HC 05 02).

The NT teaches that Christians are “to be subject to rulers and authorities, to be obedient, to be ready to do whatever is good” (Titus 3:1 ; cf. 1 Peter 2:17 ; Rom. 13:1). As part of their priestly function Christians are to pray “for kings, and all who are in high positions” (1 Tim. 2:2). Jesus' words imply obligation, duty: “Render therefore unto Caesar the things which are Caesar's, and unto God the things that are God's” (Matt. 22:21 , KJV). This is in obedience to the second great commandment, “You shall love your neighbor as yourself” (verse 39). All that is basic to good citizenship can be subsumed under the stewardship motif. Again, faithfulness in these matters is regarded by Heaven as prerequisite to greater responsibilities. In the parable the master says, “Well done, good and faithful servant; you have been faithful over a little, I will set you over much; enter into the joy of your master” (Matt. 25:23 ; see Lifestyle II. C. 4).

IV. Ellen G. White Comments

A. On the Concept

“By the terms of our stewardship we are placed under obligation, not only to God, but to man. To the infinite love of the Redeemer every human being is indebted for the gifts of life. Food and raiment and shelter, body and mind and soul—all are the purchase of His blood. And by the obligation of gratitude and service thus imposed, Christ has bound us to our fellow men. He bids us, ‘By love serve one another’ (Gal. 5:13). ‘Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me’ (Matt. 25:40)” (Ed 139).

“The idea of stewardship should have a practical bearing upon all the people of God Practical benevolence will give spiritual life to thousands of nominal professors of the truth who now mourn over their darkness. It will transform them from selfish, covetous worshipers of mammon, to earnest, faithful coworkers with Christ in the salvation of sinners” (CS 112, 113).

“The spirit of liberality is the spirit of heaven. The spirit of selfishness is the spirit of Satan. Christ’s self-sacrificing love is revealed upon the cross. He gave all that He had, and then gave Himself, that man might be saved. The cross of Christ appeals to the benevolence of every follower of the blessed Saviour. The principle illustrated there is to give, give. This, carried out in actual benevolence and good works, is the true fruit of the Christian life. The principle of worldlings is to get, get, and thus they expect to secure happiness; but, carried out in all its bearings, the fruit is misery and death” (RH Nov. 15, 1906).

“We should never forget that God has placed us on trial in this world, to determine our fitness for the future life. None can enter heaven whose characters are defiled by the foul blot of selfishness. Therefore God tests us here by committing to us temporal possessions, that our use of these may show whether we can be entrusted with eternal riches. It is only as the self-sacrificing life of Christ is reflected in our life that we can be in harmony with heaven, and be fitted to enter there” (2SM 134).

“Evidence of the work of grace in the heart is given when we do good to all men as we have opportunity. The proof of our love is given in a Christlike spirit, a willingness to impart the good things God has given us, a readiness to practice self-denial and self-sacrifice in order to help advance the cause of God and suffering humanity. Never should we pass by the object that calls for our liberality. We reveal that we have passed from death unto life when we act as faithful stewards of God’s grace. God has given us His goods; He has given us His pledged word that if we are faithful in our stewardship, we shall lay up in heaven treasures that are imperishable” (RH May 15, 1900).

“A steward identifies himself with his master. He accepts the responsibilities of a steward, and he must act in his master’s stead, doing as his master would do were he presiding. His master’s interests become his. The position of a steward is one of dignity because his master trusts him. If in any wise he acts selfishly and turns the advantages gained by trading with his Lord’s goods to his own advantage, he has perverted the trust reposed in him” (9T 246).

B. On Creation

“The things of nature, upon which we look today, give us but a faint conception of Eden’s beauty and glory; yet the natural world, with unmistakable voice, proclaims the love of God. Even now ‘the earth is full of the goodness of the Lord.’ It still reveals the working of the great Master Artist. It declares that One omnipotent in power, great in goodness and mercy, has created all things” (AUCR June 1, 1900).

“We were brought into existence because we were needed. How sad the thought that if we stand on the wrong side, in the ranks of the enemy, we are lost to the design of our creation. We are disappointing our Redeemer; the powers He designed for His service are used to oppose His grace and matchless love” (ST Apr. 22, 1903).

“Every faculty of mind and soul reflected the Creator’s glory. Endowed with high mental and spiritual gifts Adam and Eve were made but ‘little lower than angels’ (Heb. 2:7), that they might not only discern the wonders of the visible universe, but comprehend moral responsibilities and obligations” (Ed 20).

“The power of God is manifested in the beating of the heart, in the action of the lungs, and in the living currents that circulate through the thousand different channels of the body. We are indebted to Him for every moment of existence, and for all the comforts of life. The powers and abilities that elevate man above the lower creation are the endowment of the Creator. He loads us with His benefits. We are indebted to Him for the food we eat, the water we drink, the clothes we wear, the air we breathe. Without His special providence, the air would be filled with pestilence and poison. He is a bountiful benefactor and preserver. The sun which shines upon the earth, and glorifies all nature, the weird solemn radiance of the moon, the glories of the firmament, spangled with brilliant stars, the showers that refresh the land, and cause vegetation to flourish, the precious things of nature in all their varied richness, the lofty trees, the shrubs and plants, the waving grain, the blue sky, the green earth, the changes of day and night, the renewing seasons, all speak to man of his Creator’s love. He has linked us to Himself by all these tokens in heaven and in earth” (SD 17).

C. On Treasure

“When rightly employed, wealth becomes a golden bond of gratitude and affection between man and his fellow men, and a strong tie to bind his affections to his Redeemer. The infinite gift of God’s dear Son calls for tangible expressions of gratitude from the recipients of his grace. He who receives the light of Christ’s love is thereby placed under the strongest obligation to shed the blessed light upon other souls in darkness” (RH May 16, 1882).

“There are only two places in the universe where we can place our treasures—in God’s storehouse or in Satan’s; and all that is not devoted to God’s service is counted on Satan’s side, and goes to strengthen his cause. The Lord designs that the means entrusted to us shall be used in building up His kingdom. His goods are entrusted to His stewards that they may be carefully traded upon, and bring back a revenue to Him in the saving of souls. These souls in their turn will become stewards of trust, cooperating with Christ to further the interests of God’s cause” (CS 35).

“Money is a blessing when those who use it consider that they are the Lord’s stewards, that they are handling the Lord’s capital, and must one day give account of their stewardship” (OHC 192).

“The special system of tithing was founded upon a principle which is as enduring as the law of God. This system of tithing was a blessing to the Jews, else God would not have given it them. So also will it be a blessing to those who carry it out to the end of

time. Our heavenly Father did not originate the plan of systematic benevolence to enrich Himself, but to be a great blessing to man. He saw that this system of beneficence was just what man needed” (3T 404, 405).

“God has a claim on us and all that we have. His claim is paramount to every other. And in acknowledgment of this claim, He bids us render to Him a fixed proportion of all that He gives us. The tithe is this specified portion. By the Lord’s direction it was consecrated to Him in the earliest times. The Scriptures mention tithing in connection with the history of Abraham. The father of the faithful paid tithes to Melchisedec, ‘priest of the Most High God.’ Jacob also recognized the obligation of tithing. When, fleeing from his brother’s wrath, he saw in his dream the ladder connecting heaven and earth, the gratitude of his heart found expression in the vow to God: ‘If God will be with me, and will keep me in this way that I go, and will give me bread to eat, and raiment to put on, so that I come again to my father’s house in peace; then shall the Lord be my God: and this stone, which I have set for a pillar, shall be God’s house: and of all that thou shalt give me I will surely give the tenth unto thee’ ” (RH Dec. 8, 1896).

D. On Talents

“However large, however small the possessions of any individual, let him remember that it is his only in trust. For his strength, skill, time, talents, opportunities, and means, he must render an account to God. This is an individual work; God gives to us, that we may become like Him, generous, noble, beneficent, by giving to others. Those who, forgetful of their divine mission, seek only to save or to spend in the indulgence of pride or selfishness, may secure the gains and pleasures of this world; but in God’s sight, estimated by their spiritual attainments, they are poor, wretched, miserable, blind, naked” (*ibid.* May 16, 1882).

“God has lent men talents—an intellect to originate, a heart to be the place of His throne, affection to flow out in blessings to others, a conscience to convict of sin. Each one has received something from the Master, and each one is to do his part in supplying the needs of God’s work Speech is a talent. Of all the gifts bestowed on the human family, none should be more appreciated than the gift of speech. It is to be used to declare God’s wisdom and wondrous love. Thus the treasures of His grace and wisdom are to be communicated” (*ibid.* Apr. 9, 1901).

“Our first duty toward God and our fellow beings is that of self-development. Every faculty with which the Creator has endowed us should be cultivated to the highest degree of perfection, that we may be able to do the greatest amount of good of which we are capable. Hence that time is spent to good account which is used in the establishment and preservation of physical and mental health. We cannot afford to dwarf or cripple any function of body or mind. As surely as we do this we must suffer the consequences” (CH 107).

“Young friends, the fear of the Lord lies at the very foundation of all progress; it is the beginning of wisdom. Your Heavenly Father has claims upon you; for without solicitation or merit on your part He gives you the bounties of His providence; and more than this, He has given you all heaven in one gift, that of His beloved Son. In return for this infinite gift, He claims of you willing obedience. As you are bought with a price, even the precious blood of the Son of God, He requires that you make a right use of the privileges you enjoy. Your intellectual and moral faculties are God’s gifts, talents entrusted to you for wise improvement, and you are not at liberty to let them lie dormant for want of proper cultivation, or be crippled and dwarfed by inaction. It is for you to determine whether or not the weighty responsibilities that rest upon you shall be faithfully met, whether or not your efforts shall be well directed and your best” (FE 85, 86).

E. On Mission

“In commissioning His disciples to go ‘into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature,’ Christ assigned to men the work of extending the knowledge of His grace. But while some go forth to preach, He calls upon others to answer His claims upon them for offerings with which to support His cause in the earth. He has placed means in the hands of men, that His divine gifts may flow through human channels in doing the work appointed us in saving our fellow men. This is one of God’s ways of exalting man. It is just the work that man needs, for it will stir the deepest sympathies of his heart and call into exercise the highest capabilities of the mind” (9T 255).

“There is a yet deeper significance to the golden rule. Everyone who has been made a steward of the manifold grace of God is called upon to impart to souls in ignorance and darkness, even as, were he in their place, he would desire them to impart to him. The apostle Paul said, “I am debtor both to the Greeks, and to the Barbarians; both to the wise, and to the unwise.” By all that you have known of the love of God, by all that you have received of the rich gifts of His grace, above the most benighted and degraded soul upon the earth, are you in debt to that soul to impart these gifts unto him” (Ev 255).

F. On Children as Treasure

“Parents have been entrusted with a most important stewardship, a sacred charge. They are to make their family a symbol of the family in heaven, of which they hope to become members when their day of test and trial here below shall have ended. The influence exerted in the home must be Christlike. This is the most effective ministration in the character-building of the child. The words spoken are to be pleasant. No boisterous, arbitrary, masterful spirit is to be allowed to come into the family. Every member is to be taught that he is to prepare to be a member of the royal family” (10MR 324).

G. On Time

“Time is money, and many are wasting precious time which might be used in useful labor, working with their hands the thing that is good. The Lord will never say, ‘Well done, thou good and faithful servant,’ to the man who has not taxed the physical powers which have been lent him of God as precious talents by which to gather means, wherewith the needy may be supplied, and offerings may be made to God” (CS 288).

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Christian Lifestyle and Behavior

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Introduction

Human behavior matters to God who created us and who bound Himself to us with love. It matters to the surrounding creation because dominion over the earth is still in human hands. It matters to the human community because our lives are interdependent and closely intertwined. And finally, human behavior matters to each individual because each action, decision, and word is a seed that bears fruit in the character and produces consequences.

Several sciences (psychology, sociology, anthropology) help us to understand and explain the human lifestyle. Christian ethics, however, transcend descriptions of behavior. Drawing on revealed data about the nature, condition, and destiny of human