

World Stewardship Day

2nd December 2017

Givers in All Season

Introduction

There are seasons of life when we are more inclined to give than during others. When we feel blessed or when we have received abundantly the propensity to give is generally higher. However, when money is tight and the challenges and obligations are many, we might hesitate to give to the Lord and to others. Solomon, in Proverbs 21:26b, sets regular giving, giving in all seasons, as the ideal for believers: *“the righteous give without sparing.”* There is a group of believers, the Macedonians, who adopted the ideal of giving in all seasons. How was this achieved? How did they give?

(Prayer)

Part I: The Need for a General Collection

Alongside with his preaching ministry Apostle Paul orchestrated an initiative of collection across the entire Christian Church. We have some details in 1 Corinthians 16:1 and 16:3. *“Now about the collection for the Lord’s people: Do what I told the Galatian churches to do.” “Then, when I arrive, I will give letters of introduction to the men you approve and send them with your gift to Jerusalem.”*

The Christians of Jewish background were facing a serious challenge. There was a severe famine in the area around Jerusalem in Judea. We read in Acts 11:27-30: *“And in these days prophets came from Jerusalem to Antioch. ²⁸ Then one of them, named Agabus, stood up and showed by the Spirit that there was going to be a great famine throughout all the world, which also happened in the days of Claudius Caesar. ²⁹ Then the disciples, each according to his ability, determined to send relief to the brethren dwelling in Judea.”*

The purpose of the collection was to bring relief to God's people in Judea, who were suffering badly. The Apostle Paul, though he defines himself as the apostle of the gentiles, was very concerned and want to bring relief to the Christians of Jewish origin. This is an example of solidarity; the Early Church was united not only in the Word but also in caring for each other beyond cultural and national boundaries. This practice stands in contrast to the tendency among some to give generosity and support only for those who are near, whom we can see and can benefit from. This was generosity without selfish motivation.

A closer examination of Acts 11:27-30 tells us that the collection was not only for the purpose of relief. The famine was not limited to Jerusalem in Judea but extended "*throughout all the world*", most probably throughout the Roman empire. The need for relief was everywhere but Paul pleaded in a specific way for the Church in Jerusalem. What could be the reason? The role played by the Church in Jerusalem, the mother church as it were, can explain this special consideration. The Jerusalem Church played a vital spiritual, administrative and missionary role in the nascent Christian Church. The contributions of all the churches for Jerusalem was therefore not only for relief but to ensure that the Church in Jerusalem could pursue its God-given assignment of acting as the governing body.

In our management of our God-given resources, we also have a double obligation: caring for the needy and supporting the advancement of God's cause. Many are fortunate not to live in places of famine, but the poor and needy will be always with us (Matt 28:14; Mk 14:7). An unknown author wrote these words about our social responsibility: "*If your Christianity is all in your head and not in your hands, then it isn't worth much.*" It is also clear that "*God has placed in the hands of his servants the means to carry forward his work in home and foreign mission*" (*The Review and Herald*, Dec. 23, 1890).

We read in 2 Corinthians 8:10b about the first response of the Church in Corinth to the appeal of Paul, "*Last year you were the first not only to give but also to have the desire to do so*". However,

the passage of time seems to have eroded the disposition of the Corinthians to give. In 2 Corinthians 9:3-5, Paul expresses some concern about the readiness of the Church for the next collection. We do not know precisely what has happened in the meantime. The fact is that the change of year or season has brought a change in the disposition of the believers to give to the Church in Jerusalem. Here Paul is pleading for them to be givers in all seasons. How do we rise above the level of an emotional, occasional, circumstantial giver to the standard of a lifelong giver, a systematic giver?

Part II: The Grace of God

As a means of stirring up the motivation of the Church in Corinth, instead of making an appeal, Paul shares about the example set by the Macedonians and the power to give in all seasons. Testimonies and examples sometimes speak louder than sermons and appeals. This is the rationale behind our Sabbath School mission stories.

We read in 2 Corinthians 8:1: *“Moreover, brethren, we make known to you **the grace of God** bestowed on the churches of Macedonia.”* Macedonia was in the northern part of present-day Greece. Paul had established churches in the Macedonian cities of Philippi, Thessalonica and Berea.

The main theme of this section is the generosity of the churches in Macedonia. Interestingly, Paul starts with what they have received, *“the grace of God”*, not with what they have given. Paul is telling to the people of Corinth that the Macedonians are recipients of God’s grace, of God’s gifts. What have they received as gifts from God? Have they received some material goodies which explain their generosity? Not necessarily.

The gift that they have received is, firstly, the giving spirit, the spirit of generosity and liberality. Fallen human beings are naturally self-centred and selfish, whatever be the extent of their

resources. The devil is so convinced of this reality that he dared ask this question to God about the famous patriarch in Job 1:9, *“Does Job fear God for nothing?”* We are inclined to do things for benefit; to gain or retain something. The Macedonians gave of their own not because they were “superhero” givers, but because God imparted this ability into them, that was His grace to them. It was the same grace that turned Zacchaeus into the most generous man in Jericho. God gives us the power to give.

It is also worth noting that the same word “grace” is used to describe the gift or donation or contribution given by the Macedonians (2 Cor. 8:6,7; 2 Cor. 9:8; 1 Cor. 16:3). The grace of God is a necessity if we want to be a source of grace for others. The opportunity to give, the inclination to give and the actual giving are all gifts of grace from God.

To help his readers appreciate the effect of God’s grace on the Macedonians, Paul describes the providential experience through which these believers have gone. We read in 2 Corinthians 8:2, *“That in a great trial of affliction the abundance of their joy and their deep poverty abounded in the riches of their liberality.”* This passage is built on two beautiful contrasts. Firstly, the great trial is a reference to the persecution that the Macedonians had to endure because of their faith. It refers to the harassment God’s people receive from the world. Instead of being brought to despair by their circumstances, they enjoyed an abundance of happiness. This is the power of God’s grace. Secondly, the trial led the Macedonians into “deep poverty” which means literally “down-to-the-depth poverty”. It is well known that Macedonia was a rich and flourishing region in the Roman empire. In this context, the poverty of the believers of Macedonia was even more painful to bear. However, according to Paul, despite their lack of resources, the Macedonians were wealthy in generosity. This is the power of God’s grace.

What was the reason for their joy? We read in Acts 20:35, *“And remember the words of the Lord Jesus, that He said, ‘It is more blessed to give than to receive.’”* There is joy in giving. A recent research study done by six scientists of the University of Zurich (*Nature Communications*, 11 July

2017) established that there is a direct correlation between generosity and happiness. The MRI of the participants who were planning to give showed that the zone in the brain associated with happiness was more active than in the other group that had not made the decision to give.

On the other hand, the people of Corinth were finding it hard to continue to give. Paul's teaching about *"the grace of God"* represents a source of encouragement for all believers. He acknowledges that it is somehow normal not to always feel good about giving. Being generous is not in sync with our nature as humans. The grace of God had transformed the poor-persecuted Macedonians into joyful, extravagant givers. The power to give in all seasons is real and effective.

The grace that was active among the Macedonians is accessible for each one of us. Paul writes these words in Ephesians 4:7, *"But to each one of us grace was given according to the measure of Christ's gift."* Christ paid the full price for the gift of grace. How can you and I access this grace? We read in 2 Corinthians 8:5, *"And not only as we had hoped, but they first gave themselves to the Lord, and then to us by the will of God."* The Macedonians first submitted themselves to God's authority and care. Thus, they were made capable of accomplishing the will of God, the Greatest Giver. Ellen White describes the source of the giving power of the Macedonians in these words: *"The willingness to sacrifice on the part of Macedonian believers came **as a result** of wholehearted consecration"* (*Acts of the Apostles*, p.343). When we consecrate ourselves fully to God, He overcomes the selfishness in us. The fear of giving is chased away by the conviction that God is the Provider.

Part III: The Macedonian model of giving

After sharing about the power to give that the Macedonians received from God, Paul provides details about how the Macedonians gave. This is presented as an ideal for believers in Corinth and for believers in all generations. We read in 2 Corinthians 8:3,4 *"For I bear witness that according to their ability, yes, and beyond their ability, they were freely willing, imploring us with much urgency that we would receive the gift and the fellowship of the ministering to the saints."*

According to their ability

They evaluated their giving not in terms of the amount that they gave but based on what they had received. They did not compare themselves with others in giving. When others are seen as giving a large amount, we might conclude that it is not important for us to give. When others are seen as giving a small amount, we might conclude that we are giving too much. Ultimately, when one gets involved in the comparison game, one ends up giving less than one is really capable of giving. We are called to calculate our offerings in proportion, as a percentage of our income, this is to give according to our ability.

Beyond their ability

They did not give after attending to their needs. It was not out of their surplus. It is improbable that they even had a surplus! They gave sacrificially, not comfortably. Ellen White encourages this same attitude in Christians:

“And the absence of self-denial in His professed followers, God regards as a denial of the Christian name. Those who profess to be one with Christ, and indulge their selfish desires for rich and expensive clothing, furniture, and food, are Christians only in name. To be a Christian is to be Christlike.” (*Review & Herald, Oct. 13, 1896*) To make this statement relevant for today, we may have to add some other items to the list beyond clothing, furniture and food. The secret of giving “*beyond one’s ability*” is to put giving first on our spending list and to operate with a personal or family budget.

Freely willing

Giving is the result of a choice, a decision. It is done neither out of compulsion nor based on emotion. It is wrong to think that a freewill offering means that it is acceptable for the believer

to choose not to give. Freewill offering consists of giving, according to the prompting of a revived heart, a proportion of our income. It is not felt as a pressure.

Appeal to participate

Giving was perceived by the Macedonians as a privilege that they should not miss. They did not complain because of another appeal but saw this situation as a recurring opportunity to partner with God.

Conclusion

Being a giver in all seasons is not something natural for human beings. It is, however, the standard for those who have experienced the righteousness of Christ: *“the righteous gives without sparing.”* God imparts the grace of giving to those who submit to His leading. Like the Macedonians, we too can be transformed into generous and joyful givers.

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Partners Without Using Words

Introduction

Who have received the assignment to accomplish God's mission? In answering that question, we naturally think of those who have the ability to preach, teach and speak. After all, the mission is described as proclamation, so verbal skills are considered as paramount to its execution. The story of an unsung hero will show us that one can partner without using our voices and still play an essential and effective role in accomplishing God's mission. We will reflect on the value of ministries that do not prioritise the use of words and the conditions for their effectiveness.

(Prayer)

Part I: Leading People to Intimacy

The book of Exodus is much valued because it contains the 10 Commandments, recorded in chapter 20. However, the largest section of the book (chapters 25–40) deals with worship. God provides detailed and extensive instructions about creating the best conditions under which His people can worship Him. The basic text for our meditation, Exodus 31:1–11, comes from this section. One element was central to the

worship experience of Israel. We read in Exodus 25:8,9: "Then have them make a sanctuary for me, and I will dwell among them. Make this tabernacle and all its furnishings exactly like the pattern I will show you". Before leading Israel into the promise land, God's first design was to be with His people.

Relationship and intimacy have always been God's desire for His people. When Jesus came to earth, He was God with us. When He chose the disciples, His first purpose was for them to be with Him (Mark 3:14). This togetherness is also an essential feature of the message of His second coming. "Look! God's dwelling place is now among the people, and he will dwell with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God" (Revelation 21:3-4). The crowning element of God's mission is intimacy between humanity and divinity for eternity.

During the exodus, Israel had to build a "miskhan", a tent of meeting, in the desert for God to "shakhan" or "to dwell" in. This they did as a nation. Every Israelite participated in building the tent through their gifts and offerings. This is a form of partnership without using the voice. The same mission is given to His people in all generations – to lead as many people as possible to enter into intimacy with God and to prepare a people for the final reunion with Him. By learning from the experience of the tent construction in the wilderness, we can effectively accomplish our mission

today. In this meditation we will concentrate on a special group of men who accomplished their parts without using their voices.

Part II: Called by God

Exodus 31:1–11 speaks about the craftsmen who supervised and built the tent and its furniture. In the first verse God introduces his chosen master artisan to Moses. "Then the LORD said to Moses, 'See, I have chosen Bezalel son of Uri, the son of Hur, of the tribe of Judah ...'" (Exodus 31:1). The assistants are mentioned in Exodus 31:6. "Moreover, I have appointed Oholiab son of Ahisamak, of the tribe of Dan, to help him. Also I have given ability to all the skilled workers to make everything I have commanded you." These words describe the assignment of these men, whose primary instrument was their skill, not speeches, words and voices.

God informed Moses that though he was the chosen leader of Israel, he was not the one to build the central place of worship, the tent of meeting. This assignment God gave to others, to some who are less known. The fact that God had to tell Moses about the lineages of the two craftsmen shows that they were not well known yet. Moses, like many leaders, may have sometimes suffered from the "Mr. Do it all" syndrome. The instruction of God about the builders of the tabernacle was an echo

of the advice about delegation of responsibility given to him by Jethro, his father-in-law.

We sometime find it easier and more practical to centralise the tasks and ministries of the Church and place them in the hands of a few people. We use people whom we have already tested and who have proved efficient and reliable. However, Ellen White speaks about the deficiency of this practice: "*Among those who are willing not to do everything by themselves, there is still a weakness, the tendency to rely only on people with developed talents and aptitudes. They delegate responsibilities to people who are already capable. No time is invested in the 'development and cultivation' of the talents. The workforce is remaining small*" (RH June 27, 1912). This practice deprives the Church of the multiple resources that God has provided and prevents individuals from living up to their God-given purpose. One important task of leadership is "*to combine the forces and strength of all whom they can possibly enlist as helpers. Thus they can make mighty strokes for their Master*" (ibid).

This passage also testifies that God does not choose only prophets, priests, teachers and judges but also craftsman to create the conditions under which people can enter into intimacy with Him. God called Bezalel, the master artisan, by his name in the same manner that He called Moses (Exodus 3:4; Exodus 33:12), Samuel (1 Samuel 3:10), Cyrus (Isaiah 45:3,4) and other religious, political and military leaders. The nature

of the work may be different but the calling comes from the same God. There is no hierarchy in the various callings to church ministries. The prevailing trend in society of looking down on manual activities has no justification in God's Church. How do we esteem our ministry when it is not preaching, teaching or leading? Do we think that it is of lesser value?

Part 3: Empowered by God

God wanted to reassure Moses about the correctness of His choice by describing the capacities of Bezalel. We read in Exodus 31:3, "And I have filled him with the Spirit of God, with wisdom, with understanding, with knowledge and with all kinds of skills". An artist or a craftsman is expected to have understanding, knowledge and skills. However, besides having these essential qualities, Bezalel, the artist and artisan, was also a spirit-filled person with wisdom. These were actually presented as his first qualities. The Spirit of God, "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 undoubtedly accomplish an outstanding work.

It is a fact that many artisans and artists are able to accomplish their assignments without the direct influence of the Spirit. But since all church-related ministries are spiritual in nature, in this particular context, the Spirit is of prime necessity. Are we inclined to minimise the importance of being Spirit-filled when we serve in any type of ministry of the Church? Let us remember that the deacons selected to ensure the fair distribution of food in the Early Church were not expected first and foremost to be good in mathematics or great hospitality managers but to be "full of the Spirit" (Acts 6:3).

The criterion of high spirituality should apply not only to the selection of preachers or teachers but whenever we choose people to be involved in church ministries. As a chorister, a sound technician or a platform arranger you may be naturally gifted or you may have acquired some technical expertise, but being "Spirit-filled" is the primary criterion for a ministry that is pleasing to the One who calls you. God wants to fill you with His Spirit of sanctified creativity: Knock, search, ask and you shall receive.

In addition to the Spirit, God mentions the wisdom that He gave to Bezalel. He had the discernment to know and do what was right. If Bezalel was living in our generation, he would have received thousands of likes and followers on Facebook, Twitter and other social media platforms. Artistic works speak louder than a thousand words in many situations. Unfortunately, popularity and success have often led many to moral lapses. In contrast, Bezalel was an artist with high spiritual values. He did not see himself as above God's law. How could he 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". Though Bezalel was not directly involved in a teaching or preaching ministry, he filled himself with the knowledge of God. Ellen White confirms the relationship between studying God's Word and wisdom. *"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 those who partner without using word when they elevate the Living Word and feed on that Word.

Part III: Partners in God's Shadow

An essential characteristic of partners without a voice 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.

The shadow has another interesting characteristic. The object or person it is attached to decides the direction in which to go and it follows faithfully. When a person moves to the right or the left, backward or forward, his shadow does the same promptly. 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*" (Exodus 31:11). Artists and artisans are known for their fertile imagination and great creativity and their capacity to improvise. Some of them defend their singularity or rebellious spirit by affirming: "I'm an artist." Effective partners without words are those who submit their imagination and creativity to the control and leading of God. They conform with scrupulous fidelity to the pattern set by the Divine Architect.

We all have our personal style of doing things. We are artists in our own way and time. The uniqueness of everyone and the resulting diversity should not be repressed but affirmed and valued. However, doing this has the potential to generate conflicts and ultimately affect the advancement of God's mission. This is unfortunately the

prevailing situation in many churches. The same risk had surely existed among Bezalel, Oholiab and the other craftsmen who were involved in building the tent and making its furniture and the clothes of the priests, but it was overcome. The result was a masterpiece in the desert. Frictions are kept in check or can even become healthy frictions when all sincerely adhere to the principle of being in the shadow of God, cultivating personal intimacy with Him and submitting totally to His instructions.

Conclusion

Not all are called to partner using voices, speeches and words. God's mission is much broader than a verbal exposition of truth. Evangelism is more than just putting a man or a woman behind the pulpit. God has assigned some to be partners without using words. Both partners with words and partners without words are needed for total member involvement to become a reality. God provides His Spirit and wisdom to all His partners without distinction. Effective partners are those who grow in relationship with Him and are willing to follow His instructions.

Going Deeper

- Mention some ways in which we can partner in God's mission without using words.
- How can we encourage and strengthen those who are partners without words?

- If you think that you are called to be a partner without words, how can you improve your efficiency?

TITLE: CHARITY BEGINS AT HOME

INTRODUCTION

No society or institution can survive without the home, and no amount of accolades received outside the home can undo a tarnished image at home, just as no amount of mudslinging can tarnish an excellent home record. A society built on something other than a home can't last long. The beauty of societies, the strength of nations should always be credited to a home influence. No individual can rise higher than what he or she is at home. Even Ellen G. White understood the primacy of the home in the salvation of souls when she wrote,

“The restoration and uplifting of humanity begins in the home. The work of parents underlies every other. Society is composed of families, and is what the heads of families make it. Out of the heart are ‘the issues of life’ (Proverbs 4:23); and the heart of the community, of the church, and of the nation is the household. The well-being of society, the success of the church, the prosperity of the nation, depend upon home influences” *Ministry of Healing*, 349.

Since many things revolve around the home, partnering with God in finishing God's work cannot be realised without home involvement. To show the importance of the home, five examples from the Bible will be used.

1. THE HOME SHAPES LEADERS

Outlining the qualifications of elders or bishops, Paul stated that an elder should be, “One that ruleth well his own home, having his children in subjection with all gravity; for if a man know not how to rule his own house, how shall he take care of the Church of God?” (1 Timothy 3:4-5)

The home makes or breaks a leader. A good leader's qualities are seen at home before they are seen in public. The reason many fail to do well in leadership is that they try to be *outside* the home what they are not *inside* the home. Being a good person outside the home while acting like a tyrant at home is not good at all. There are many people who could be given sainthood by those they meet in public squares but qualify to be Satan's twin brothers (if that was possible) by those they live with. For this reason we can safely say, “Charity begins at home”. The Bible alludes to the centrality of the home in shaping society and financing God's mission.

2. SOLOMON KNEW THE POWER OF HOME RELIGION

“Train up a child in the way he should go; and when he is old, he will not depart from it” (Proverbs 22:6).

This wisest of the kings of old, if not of all kings, knew the influence of home religion. It is in the home that saints are made and sinners are produced. It can be said that the recruitment centre of both heaven and hell is the home. If this is how critical the home is, then whatever strategy we use to reach the world should be perfected in the home. The majority of adults who trouble society may trace their

current state to their upbringing. It can well be said here that “charity begins at home”.

3. THE HOME LAYS THE FOUNDATION FOR THE FUTURE

Concerning Timothy, Paul wrote, “And that from a childhood thou hast known the Holy scriptures which are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith in Christ Jesus.” 2 Timothy 3:15. Timothy was what he was to Paul and the church at large because of what he learnt at home. The success that he achieved was a product of the work done in obscurity by both his grandmother and his mother. If these two women had failed in their duty of raising Timothy, society would have been robbed of the godly example Timothy left behind. Of him we can safely say, “Charity began at home”.

4. FAITHFULNESS OR LACK THEREOF STARTS IN THE HOME

In Acts chapter 5 we see the sun setting on Sapphira and her husband Ananias. The decision to sell a piece of land and give the proceeds to the church was made at home. Unfortunately, the decision not to give all to the cause of God was made at home too. It was in the home of Ananias and Sapphira that the Holy Spirit impressed on them the idea of supporting God’s cause and it was in the same home that the devil shot down that plan.

Yes, it is in the home that the battle between good and evil is fought. It is in the home that saints and sinners are made. Home sweet home, sad to say, can be the recruitment centre of either heaven or hell. In the home, babies are born innocent and there they may turn into criminals. In the home, a nobody is turned into somebody. In the home, some are trained for the palace while others are trained for the pit.

All the good we see in friends and fellow church members can be traced to the home environment. Here again we can say, “Charity begins at home”.

5. GIVING OR GREED ARE LEARNT AT HOME (I Cor. 16:1-2)

Paul was a proponent of the home giving plan. He encouraged people to plan and implement their giving at home. My friends, what we see at church is a product of what was decided at home. Before we put our tithe envelope in the bag at church, the decision had already been made at home. One who fails to give at church decided against giving at home.

We cannot have a faithful church without faithful families. What the church is, is a reflection of the home. If you want to know how caring, faithful, loving and hospitable homes are, watch the behaviour of members at church. What we are here in church is a mirror image of what we are in our homes. Yes, we can rightly say, “Charity begins at home”.

How then can we partner with God in finishing the mission left us by Jesus? As already demonstrated, giving doesn't start at church. Giving is planned and learned and decided on at home. The church is the theatre where giving is showcased. Just as artists do not practise before a full audience but showcase their talent in the theatre, giving is practised far away from the large audience—the church. If the church is to partner with God in finishing the assignment Jesus gave us, this partnership should begin at home. Those who return tithe and give their offerings, plan such giving and practise it at home. Likewise, those who don't honour God with their substance also don't honour God at home.

Any strategy that fails to recognise the centrality of the home in giving will never produce lasting results. I call upon the families represented and present here today to practise stewardship at home. I call upon individual members of the families listening to me right now to begin partnering with God in finishing the mission of evangelising the world. When families that constitute our churches partner with God, the entire church enters into partnership with the Owner of the mission.

APPEAL

As probation is fast closing and we continue to race against time, charity should begin at home. Charity in the form of hospitality should begin at home. Charity in the form of kindness should be seen in our homes. Charity in the form of forgiveness should be exemplified in our homes. Charity in the form of faithfulness should be lived in our homes. Charity in the form of sacrificial living and the support of God's cause should be demonstrated in the home. Yes, charity in the form of partnering with God in finishing the assignment given us on the Mount of Olives must be seen in our homes. The question I leave with you is, "What can be said of you and me? Is it that charity began at home or that charity failed at home?"

TITLE: PUTTING ON GOD'S GLASSES

INTRODUCTION:

It is not easy to put on someone else's glasses. It is not easy to put on someone else's shoes. But there is no way to appreciate the challenges others are facing or the situations they are in, except by putting on their shoes or glasses. For today our task is to try and put on God's glasses. Glasses are used for sight. It is in this regard that I invite you fellow-worshippers to put on God's glasses so that we can see as God sees and value people and life as God does. Human beings will never come near to appreciating the value or worth of a soul until they put on God's glasses.

1. GOD SWINGS INTO ACTION (Genesis 3:15)

After the fall of Adam and Eve, God came to them with words full of hope. He knew that somebody already lying down does not need condemnation to stand up and walk. What such a person needs are words of hope. Somebody discouraged, somebody hurting, somebody in sin does not need condemnation but encouragement to leave the past behind and look to Jesus.

The Seed of the woman promised here is Jesus. It is that promised Seed who would restore that which Adam and Eve had lost. They lost open communion with God but with the promise of the Seed of the woman, mankind would once again have face-to-face communion with God.

That Seed was to die if they were to live. Long before He was wounded on Calvary's tree, Christ accepted the punishment for man's sin. It is this reality that made John call Jesus, "the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world" (Rev. 13:8).

By promising the woman's Seed to Adam and Eve, God was in reality giving that promise to all the posterity of that pair. No wonder Jesus spoke to Nicodemus of God's universal love.

2. GOD'S LOVE IS UNIVERSAL (John 3:16)

The universality of God's love is expressed in the words, "world" and "whosoever." Through these words – "world" and "whosoever" – God shows the scope of His glasses. The "world" is more than just a geographical region. It includes all mankind. "Whosoever" likewise encompasses the entire population of Planet Earth and transcends our narrow view of God's love, a view that limits it to those we love, those in our economic zone, those from our region and ethnicity. "Whosoever" does not regard race or gender. The love of God for humanity is for all people, in all walks of life, educated or uneducated, rich or poor, black or white. God loves even those who do not love Him.

Putting on God's glasses then means loving human beings beyond our comfort zones. It means loving human beings beyond ethnic grouping and beyond gender. It means loving people enough to give, loving them enough to return tithes and offerings for their salvation, loving them enough to risk all for them, loving them enough to partner with God in finishing the work of spreading the gospel so that all – us and them – can be saved into the kingdom.

“Whosoever” measures not only the universality of God’s love but also God’s concern for individuals. “Whosoever believes” means that God’s love targets individuals among all the masses of people. God is as interested in crowds as He is in individuals. Where we see only crowds of people, God sees individuals with individual challenges and joys. Putting on God’s glasses, therefore, means refusing to see God’s people as faceless crowds and instead seeing individuals stranded on an island of despair and anguish.

In Matthew 10:29-31, Jesus again emphasises the importance of an individual in God’s sight. If no sparrow falls without His consent, how much more important is a human being created in His image? If God knows even the number of hairs on our heads, is that not proof that He has great interest in individuals? To underscore the value He places on an individual, Jesus found time to preach to one woman at a well (John 4) and to Nicodemus at night (John 3). Partnering with God in finishing the mission of the church means finding time to preach to individuals. The world will not be reached until individual human beings are reached with the gospel of salvation.

Human beings should be loved regardless of who they are, where they come from and how much they have. Human beings, be they Africans or Arabs, Asians or Whites, need our care. They need our concern. They need our touch. They need to be reached with the gospel of salvation. This is because no creature on earth compares in importance with human beings.

Ellen G. White, in *Christ’s Object Lessons*, p. 196, states, “The value of a soul, who can estimate? Would you know it’s worth, go to Gethsemane”. In the book *Welfare Ministry*, p. 83, she says, “The world sinks into insignificance in comparison with the value of one soul. And the human agent who is a partaker of the divine nature will love as Christ loves, will work as Christ worked”. Church, this is putting on God’s glasses.

We need to put on God’s glasses as never before, and that means loving people as God loves them. It means looking at people the way God looks at them. It means doing all we can to help them be saved. If that means visiting them, then let the church go to them. If it means broadcasting the message through TV and radio, let us pay the bills for that. If it means running campaigns to reach the high classes of society, let money be spent for that.

Finally friends, putting on God’s glasses means that we shall withhold nothing from God in our quest to save souls. If God did not withhold His one and only Son in His quest to save us, why should we withhold certain things from Him? If that calls for freewill offerings, let our bags and offering plates be full. If that calls for tithes and offerings, let no one be found guilty of robbery. Somebody needs to be saved, but they can only be saved if we put on God’s glasses.

APPEAL

Is it your desire to put on God’s glasses so that you can begin to see things as they are? Do you want to put on God’s glasses of sacrifice? Do you want to put on God’s glasses of giving? Do you want to put on God’s glasses of concern for those in darkness? Do you want to put on God’s glasses of reaching out to individuals? If it is your desire to partner with God in seeing people for who they really are—valuable objects of His love for whom He died; then raise your hand as we pray.

Partners with Aprons and Handkerchiefs

Introduction

Do we all have to join denominational service to partner in God's mission? No, we can be effective by witnessing and proclaiming the truth while going about our professional activities. Paul, the greatest missionary of the Early Church, was not one we would call a professional evangelist today. He was a professional tentmaker who was also a full-time evangelist. We will revisit these two facets of Paul's life: tentmaking and missionary work.

Part I: Paul the Tentmaker

Luke reports about the third missionary journey of Apostle Paul and he gives us a glimpse into the miracles that happened in Ephesus. We read in Acts 19:11,12: *"God did extraordinary miracles through Paul, so that even handkerchiefs and aprons that had touched him were taken to the sick, and their illnesses were cured and the evil spirits left them"*. We will not dwell on the miracles themselves but on the instruments that brought the miracles: *handkerchiefs and aprons*. These were part of Paul's regular attire, to which the believers had easy access. This attire was quite different from what the scribes, rabbis and itinerant preachers, teachers and philosophers were wearing in those days. What was the primary function of these two pieces of attire? The handkerchief, called *sudaria*, was used to wipe off sweat from brow or face, and the apron, called *semicincta*, was worn by artisans as they worked. This indicates that Paul was engaged regularly in some professional activities during the time that he was ministering in Ephesus. The same was true when he visited Thessalonica, Corinth and other places.

Other passages of Scripture shed additional light on the nature of the professional engagement of Paul. We read in Act 18:1-3, *"After this, Paul left Athens and went to Corinth. There he met a Jew named Aquila, a native of Pontus, who had recently come from Italy with his wife Priscilla, because Claudius had ordered all Jews to leave Rome. Paul went to see them, and because he was a tentmaker as they were, he stayed and*

worked with them". The Apostle Paul was a professional tentmaker. The word translated "tentmaker" usually means someone who is involved in leather work. It is different from a weaver. His hometown, Cilicia, was famous for its artisans who worked with goat-skin. The tools needed for carrying on his enterprise was a sharp knife, an awl and a big curved needle. Therefore, he could move his trade easily from one city to another. His clients were mainly among the traveling traders and the military throughout the Roman Empire as accommodation was a challenge in those days.

Part II: The Missionary

Several passages help to appreciate Paul, the professional tentmaker, as a leading missionary. Let us remain in Ephesus. It is written in Acts 19:8–10, "*And he went into the synagogue and spoke boldly for three months, reasoning and persuading concerning the things of the kingdom of God. But when some were hardened and did not believe, but spoke evil of the Way before the multitude, he departed from them and withdrew the disciples, reasoning daily in the school of Tyrannus. And this continued for two years, so that all who dwelt in Asia heard the word of the Lord Jesus, both Jews and Greeks*". According to this passage, Paul, the tentmaker, was a regular missionary. He preached for "*three months*" and then for "*two years*". He did not allow difficulties to stop him and he had a resounding success throughout the region.

One may ask a practical question: How was Paul balancing his professional and his preaching activities? During a farewell meeting in Miletus with the Elders of the Church in Ephesus, Paul speaks about his profession and his ministry during his stay in Ephesus. We first read in Acts 20:33,34: "*Yes, you yourselves know that these hands have provided for my necessities, and for those who were with me.*" Paul, the tentmaker, was a well-known figure for the people of Ephesus. He worked diligently to provide for his personal needs and to assist others. Concerning his investment in ministry, we read in the same speech, in Acts 20:31: "*Therefore watch, and remember that for three years I did not cease to warn everyone night and day with tears*". He "*did not cease*", he was preaching "*night*" and "*day*". Writing to the believers in Thessalonica, he uses the same expression

“night and day” in reference to his work as a tentmaker (2 Thessalonians 3:8). How do we reconcile these two realities: preaching “night and day” and working “night and day”? The only possible explanation was that while he was working in his workshop he was simultaneously sharing the good news. Then, during the time of the Mediterranean siesta, the hours in the middle of the day, he went to the Tyrannus lecture hall dressed in his working attire for some special lectures. Perhaps when he put his handkerchiefs and aprons aside during the discussions, some people took them and went to perform healing miracles. The Apostle Paul was both the professional tentmaker and the full-time missionary.

Ellen White writes about the perfect balance between Paul the missionary and Paul 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 ... He gave his fellow workers instruction in spiritual things, and he also set an example of industry and thoroughness... 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 was to proclaim the good news of Jesus Christ. The execution of his professional activity represented another opportunity of fulfilling this same life purpose. There was no distinction between Paul the professional tentmaker and Paul the missionary. To him, everything was about witnessing for Jesus.

Paul was what we would call today a self-supporting missionary. However, he did not deny the theological correctness of being remunerated for service rendered to the Church. He writes in 1 Corinthians 9:13,14: *“Do you not know that those who minister the holy things eat of the things of the temple, and those who serve at the altar partake of the offerings of the altar? Even so the Lord has commanded that those who preach the gospel should live from the gospel”*. 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

What are the benefits of being a self-supported missionary? Apostle Paul explains his choice in 1 Corinthians 9:12b, *“Nevertheless we have not used this right, but endure all things lest we 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 may prevent him from moving forward and progressing faster in God’s mission. We can identify two hindrances that being a remunerated missionary could have caused for him:

Prejudices. Some were accusing Paul of preaching for personal gain. In his defence Paul declares, *“I have coveted no one’s silver or gold or apparel”* (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. This attitude is in line with what is written in 2 Corinthians 6:3, *“We give no offense in anything, that our ministry may not be blamed”*. 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 realise all these extended missionary trips by depending solely on these occasional supports. The resources of the Early Church were quite scarce and the large-scale missionary efforts of Paul necessitated significant finances. He also had to support the members of his missionary team. He freed himself from the limitation caused by the lack of church funds by generating his own resources for mission. How

motivated 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. She highly recommended the "tentmaking" approach for the expansion of the work in the US and for the world mission: "*The whole church needs to be imbued with the missionary spirit; then there will be many to work unselfishly, in various ways as they can, without being salaried*" (*The Southern Work*, p.17). "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).

Part IV: Becoming a self-supported missionary

How can we explain all this dedication and investment without expecting any remuneration or financial benefit? Paul even allowed the mission to shape the course of his career. *He moved whenever there was a mission opportunity; he did not move for a business opportunity.* There was a spirit of self-denial and an unconditional love in him for perishing souls.

Let us hear the words of Paul himself about the driving force behind his self-supporting ministry. We read in 1 Corinthians 9:16-18, "*For if I preach the gospel, I have nothing to boast of, for necessity is laid upon me; yes, woe is me if I do not preach the gospel! For if I do this willingly, I have a reward; but if against my will, I have been entrusted with a stewardship. What is my reward then? That when I preach the gospel, I may present the gospel of Christ without charge, that I may not abuse my authority in the gospel*".

He gives two reasons for his actions: "*for necessity is laid upon me*" and "*the reward*". "*For necessity is laid upon me*" means "*to be under compulsion, to be pressed*". In other words, he couldn't avoid his duty to preach. In his letter to the Church in Rome, he talks about being "*a debtor both to Greeks and to barbarians, both to wise and to unwise.*" He acknowledged that he has a master to whom he is indebted. The text of 2 Corinthians 5:14 conveys the same idea of being compelled. Here, he clearly defines the source of the compulsion, "*For the love of Christ compels us*". He has experienced the love of the crucified and risen Saviour. His new identity and his calling are undeserved; they are the result of God's grace. This is the reason he preached without ceasing "*night and day*", even while undertaking his professional activities.

However, Paul wanted his actions to go beyond the call of duty and obligation. To preach was to fulfil his duty, to share the gospel free of charge, denying himself any benefit, was to go beyond his obligation. This was the reward, the privilege, that he was not ready to forsake. This is radical stewardship; to go beyond the call of duty.

Conclusion

The majority of us have a profession. Not many are called to leave their jobs and enrol in denominational employment. Nevertheless, we are all the products of His infinite love. In response, we support God's final mission by returning tithe, giving offerings and donations and making ourselves available after working hours. We praise God that many are already living as faithful stewards. However, Paul has set an example of radical

partnership in God's mission for believers – being a full-time missionary while being a full time professional. Is God calling us to do something more radical, beyond the call of duty? Why not consider being a missionary with aprons and handkerchiefs?

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Going Deeper

- How can the missionary model set up by Paul help us to address the issue of finding time after working hours for witnessing?
- In what ways can our profession become a platform for ministry?
- Think of examples of some radical things that God could be asking us to do to advance his cause.

WHO KNOWS HOW LONG?

Events of great significance are taking place around us. Events we least expected in our time are making headlines and taking the spotlight. Among such events are the collapse of the Soviet Union without a shot being fired, climatic changes whose effect can be seen in a lack of food in many households, floods prompted by heavy rains, rising sea levels threatening the lives of many inhabitants of islands around the globe. Another spectacular event, which happened on 4 November 2008, was the election of a black president in the most powerful nation on earth – the United States of America. Many African-Americans shed tears of joy and disbelief because in their own words, they never thought such a thing could happen in their life time.

Friends, could it be that there are other things we think cannot happen in our life time? Listen to what the servant of the Lord said:

“The agencies of evil are combining their forces and consolidating. They are strengthening for the last great crisis. Great changes are soon to take place in our world, and the final movements will be rapid ones” (*Testimonies for the Church*, volume 9, page 11).

Since we do not know how long it may take before our Lord’s return, I suggest the approach to life we should follow is to partner with God now.

1. Partner with God Now (Ecclesiastes 10:9)

What we leave for tomorrow may never be done because we may not live to see tomorrow or tomorrow may not permit us to do the work of today. Procrastination should not tempt us and we should not leave present duties undone. Things may appear promising today, but that promise may be wiped out by a change in the environment and in circumstances.

Evangelism should be a now and here business because delay may find someone’s probation closed or circumstances unfavourable for reception of the message. The person we neglect to reach today may be unreachable tomorrow.

Our duty to God and our fellow human beings cannot be postponed to another day. Life is unpredictable. We are alive now but we may be gone just a few seconds from now. What we do not do for God today may not be done for Him tomorrow or next month. What we fail to do for our spouses today may not be done for them tomorrow because death may snatch them away through stroke, high blood pressure, a heart attack or a fatal road accident. All these things come without giving a warning.

2. Be Ready Every Moment (Matthew 24:43–44)

It seems human beings are time-conditioned. We seem to work well under excruciating pressure. We do not begin preparing for the Sabbath on Sunday but wait until it is 4pm on Friday; then we want to show everybody that the Sabbath is approaching.

Some farmers will stay put as if they have changed occupations until they see the rains falling. Some students will put aside their studies until the examination timetable is displayed on the notice board, and then suddenly they will be seen with piles of books so high that they intimidate even themselves. Some believers will not pray until sickness catches up with them. Some couples will not appreciate their partners until they lie cold in a casket. What a shame for a husband or wife to wait for Valentine's Day in order to show love for his or her spouse! Some people will never think of God until they are sick, or until their business has collapsed or until their retirement package has gone or they have lost their marriage!

In many instances some may still make up but not so in our relationship with God. To wait until one hears the trumpet sounding will be fatal. We must live each day as if we have no other day to live. That which we would do had we known the hour death would strike, should be our focus today. No one can predict how long it will take before unfulfilled prophecies are fulfilled. It may take years but it is possible for some to be fulfilled in a matter of days, weeks or months. The call to be ready is for everybody still alive, hence the need to reach everyone with this message.

But how will those steeped in African traditional religions be ready if we don't partner with God in taking the good news to them? How will a secular-minded person appreciate the difference Jesus makes in the life of an individual without Christians witnessing to him or her? If we believe that the whole world is to be made ready for the return of Jesus, then every member of the church should bear the burden of partnering with God to make this a reality.

3. Invest in Heaven (Matthew 6:19–21)

It is as we invest in heaven that we look forward to being there. Giving to advance God's work here on earth, caring for the poor, returning tithe and offerings all constitute investing in heaven.

Laying up treasure in heaven will give nobility to the character; it will strengthen benevolence, encourage mercy; cultivate sympathy, brotherly kindness, and charity. It will unite the soul of man with Christ, by links that can never be broken. You may lay up for yourselves treasure in heaven by being rich in good works--rich in imperishable and spiritual things (*Our High Calling*, p. 195).

While there is a frenzy of mass investment in many enterprises, which is not wrong in itself, we should never lose sight of where God would want us to place our wealth.

Let not those who have made pledges to carry on the work of God repent of their vows, and withhold that which they have given. Those who have taken upon themselves the responsibility of annulling a pledge that has been made to God are assuming to do that for which they will not care to account in the day of final reckoning. The counsel of men who would at this time advise that means be withheld from the cause of God and invested in other enterprises should be rejected, for the Lord says to you, "Lay up your treasure in heaven." "Invest your means to advance My work, to open new fields, that the light of present truth may shine to all parts of the world. (*The Upward Look*, p. 92)

APPEAL

What are you investing in? Is it in infrastructure, buying shares in profitable companies, or education with no consideration for that which matters most? We should all plan to invest where it really matters – heaven. No one knows how long it will take before probation closes and before it is impossible to do missionary work. The final movements will be rapid ones, so why not be rapid also in what you do? Why not partner with God in finishing the mission by investing in the salvation of men and women, boys and girls? Why not partner with God now before it is forever too late to do so? Why not partner with God in calling people everywhere to be ready? It is time, brothers and sisters, to partner with God in finishing this work because we have suffered, and it is enough. We have mourned, and it is enough. We have buried our loved ones, and it is enough. We have endured pain, and it is enough. Is it your desire to partner with God in finishing the work by returning tithe and giving offerings liberally? If that is your desire, stand with me as we pray.

Partners with Our Own Means

Introduction

Does God really need us as partners? This question is pertinent when we know that the God of the Bible is omnipotent, omnipresent and omniscient. He even declares Himself as the Owner of everything (Psalm 24:1-2). How relevant is any discussion about partnering in God's mission? Luke 8:1–3 sheds some light on our question: *"After this, Jesus traveled about from one town and village to another, proclaiming the good news of the kingdom of God. The Twelve were with him, and also some women who had been cured of evil spirits and diseases: Mary (called Magdalene) from whom seven demons had come out; Joanna the wife of Chuza, the manager of Herod's household; Susanna; and many others. These women were helping to support them out of their own means."* According to this passage, Jesus partnered with the 12 and He even depended on some women partners. We will learn more about the nature of this special partnership.

(Prayer)

Part I: Expansion in Mission

Luke 8:1–3 serves as an introduction to a major section of the earthly ministry of Jesus – His third tour in Galilee. This period represents the last segment of Jesus’ mission before he journeyed to Jerusalem to be arrested and put to death. The Gospel of Luke concludes this section with Luke 9:51, where it is written, “Now it came to pass, when the time had come for Him to be received up, that He steadfastly set His face to go to Jerusalem”. This phase of His ministry was rich in teaching and in demonstration of power and expansion in mission.

During his travels in Galilee, Jesus started to use parables to make his teachings even clearer to his followers. One major parable He taught was the parable of the sower. He also taught about “who is the greatest” and warned against sectarianism. He spoke plainly about his death and resurrection. Another peak experience was the transfiguration, through which He pointed the disciples even further into the future, giving them a glimpse of His second coming in glory.

During this tour, Jesus had the opportunity to show His power to control the elements by calming the storm and walking on the water. He demonstrated compassion and healing power by healing the daughter of Jairus and the woman who had a flow of blood for 12 years. He fed a crowd of 5 000 men plus women and children who

probably ate more than the men because they outnumbered them! This tour became the platform on which Jesus presented Himself as the all-powerful One.

This period also marked a significant advancement in mission. Jesus perfected the training of the twelve by sending them on their own for the first time. He also visited the Gentile regions outside the borders of Israel. He visited places such as Tyre, Sidon, Bethsaida and Decapolis. He went north as far as Caesarea Phillipi. Outside Tyre, he repeated the miracle of the multiplication of bread by feeding 4 000 men, thus presenting himself as the Bread of Life for all nations. Jesus was benchmarking the concept of a universal mission. This was indeed an exceptional period in His earthly ministry, a time of expansion in mission. How did He manage to accomplish that much?

In the introduction to his gospel, Luke takes time to inform his readers about the logistics that were necessary for *proclaiming the good news of the kingdom of God from one town and village to another* (Luke 8:1–3). Interestingly, the logistics came through external assistance, through the partnership of some women. These women played an essential role in assisting both Jesus and His missionary crew. Jesus, the all-powerful God, depended on humans, and on a handful of women, for the execution of His mission. This is a stunning paradox.

When we study the Biblical prophecies we understand that God's mission for Planet Earth has entered into its final phase. It is time to move forward and to go faster. Do we have the needed logistics to support this expansion? Ellen White shares this thought about God's design: *"He does not design that his work shall be crippled for wants of means."* Is the Church, is *your* church, experiencing sufficiency of means in the execution of God's final mission?

Part II: The Contributions of the Women

Luke is careful to mention how these women invested of their means for the third Galilean tour to become a reality and a success. We read in Luke 8:3b *"These women were helping to support them out of their own means."* He uses two expressions: *"support"* and *"own means"*.

The word διηκόνου (diekonoun) has a double meaning. It refers both to service rendered and to financial patronage. The context can accommodate both meanings. An itinerant preacher with twelve disciples definitely had some essential needs that had to be attended to: the washing and mending of clothes, the preparation of food and so on. Jesus left His carpentry shop; His followers left their boats and nets and, in one instance, a tax collector's booth, and therefore they needed financial support

to survive. The women provided some of the needed support. We should not minimise the value of financial and material support. These mundane things are essential for the good news to move forward; they are the wheels of mission.

These women use their "own means". Which types of "own means" was Luke referring to? When they were providing services, it was according to their abilities, both simple and complex. The "means" also refers to financial means. It could have been some pocket money or savings. The word "means" (in Greek ὑπαρχόντων or "Uparchonton") also captures the idea of possessions, solid assets, of a certain value. It is possible that these women sold some of their valuables to assist Jesus and the disciples. They started a practice that later would be emulated by the Early Christian Church – selling assets and bringing the proceeds to support God's mission.

Women in all generations always seem to want to buy something important for themselves. These women were surely not an exception. However, they demonstrated an exceptionally self-sacrificing spirit. We are often prompted to appeal to the Conference, to the Union, or to some rich donors to find the means for mission; these women used their *own means*. Ellen White gives simple advice: "*Each should keep a missionary box at hand, and drop into it every penny he is tempted to waste in self-indulgence*" (Counsels on Stewardship, p.290). Do we have our missionary box, drawer,

purse or bank account? It is essential if we want to be counted among those who supported Jesus with their own means.

Part Three: The Driving Forces

What are the factors that led these women to support Jesus and the disciples with their own means? There are three reasons; one is socio-emotional and two are from the text itself.

It is well known that women are natural carers and givers. A study done by the Women's Philanthropy Institute at Indiana University's Center on Philanthropy has established that women are more generous than men when it comes to charitable donations. This could partially explain the investment of these women to support Jesus and the twelve.

Traditionally, appeals for financial patronage and stewardship responsibilities targeted men, who were considered to be the main source of income and who usually earned a higher income. Findings about the generosity of women have led fundraisers and stewardship educators to reach out intentionally to this segment of the church – the women. Today, we can praise God for many women who are giving extensively from

their own means and many others who are influencing their spouses and children to support God's mission. A sanctified natural inclination to care and give is a powerful asset in advancing God's mission.

Another explanation for the supportive attitude of these women is the fact that they were *with Jesus*. The company of Jesus the Great Giver can only transform individuals into His image. The Apostle Paul in 2 Corinthians 3:18 testifies of this experience: "*And we all, who with unveiled faces contemplate the Lord's glory, are being transformed into his image with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit.*"

In the book "Tithing Practices among Seventh-day Adventists", Robert K McIver shares his findings about the positive relationship between tithing behaviour and spiritual practices: "*Among Seventh-day Adventists, tithing behavior is very closely related to a range of other practices relating to religion, such as whether they attend Sabbath School, read and reflect on the Bible each day, and pray often during the day*" (p.30). The closeness of our connection with God and His Word leads to the regular renewal of His Spirit and faithfulness is a fruit of the Spirit. When we invest in growing spirituality, the outcome will be growth in liberality.

Another reason that clearly explains the spirit of benevolence is the fact that these

women *"had been cured of evil spirits and diseases."* They have experienced the delivering power and goodness of Jesus. Without this background, it is difficult to understand how Chuza, the manager of Herod's household, would allow his wife to move around with Jesus and use their personal means to support the ministry of the obscure Rabbi from Nazareth. Jesus' intervention saved the life of his beloved wife. Stewardship is always the response of a grateful heart. It is interesting to note that in traditional patronage the beneficiaries often showed gratitude only with words and emotions, but here the beneficiaries showed their gratitude by becoming givers themselves. This is a unique feature of Biblical stewardship. We give because He has already given. We love Him because He first loved us.

Conclusion

Jesus, the One who has the power to multiply bread, is clearly indicating that the Divine One chooses to associate with human partners in the work of proclaiming the good news of the kingdom. He needed both the twelve disciples and the women who gave of their own means.

The next occasions on which we meet these same women from Galilee are at the foot of the cross (Luke 23: 49), at the burial of Jesus (Luke 23: 55) and when they become

the first witnesses of the resurrection of Jesus (Luke 24:1-9). Faithfulness in supporting God's mission prepares for faithfulness in times of crisis. These women did not run away when Jesus was arrested and condemned. The lives of these women were a confirmation of the words of Jesus in Luke 12:34, "For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also." Their dedication to supporting Jesus was an expression of their total dedication to Him. Our involvement today in supporting God's final mission is a sure indicator of where we will stand during the final crisis.

Going Deeper

- What reasons could the all-powerful God have for choosing to partner with frail and limited human beings?
- God has already provided the means for His work to go forward: According to your observations, does your local church have the needed resources to accomplish fully its God-given mission?
- How can we increase the pool of partners to include members of all segments of the church?