

The background features a collage of green Euro banknotes on the left side, partially overlapping. In the center and right, a large, detailed white rose is shown against a solid black background. The rose has many layers of petals, some showing a slight yellowish tint. The overall composition is framed by a white border that looks like a shadow or a frame.

Readings for the Week of Prayer

To be read from Friday, December 6,
through Sabbath, December 14, 2013

Treasuring up

**“... Treasuring up to themselves
a right foundation for the time to come,....”**
1 Timothy 6:19, Young's Literal Translation

Introduction

Everyone knows that in society there is true love, and then there is nominal love. What is the difference between the two? Are there evidences of true love? According to the divine example, one evidence of true love is "giving." And far beyond giving a simple word of encouragement or appreciation or a gesture of approval or solidarity, the heavenly Father has given much more than money and bread. He has given His most precious treasure: "For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life." John 3:16.

In reality, human history began with giving. The Lord created a human being in His own image and by His Spirit gave him life. Genesis 2:7. He breathed into him His own breath; and at that historic moment, man became a living being, capable of understanding, deciding, loving, and acting. After man was created, he received a mate who matched him and gave him great joy. Genesis 2:22, 23. The Lord gave the first pair the privilege of reproduction so they could rejoice in living with their children and descendants for generations, thus populating the earth. Today there are seven billion people on this earth, thanks to the continuing power of human reproduction.

The divine giving continued
without interruption down
through the centuries.

And this is not all in the history of divine giving. The Lord created animals and all kinds of plants; the entire planet with all of its wonderful resources was given to man so he could possess it and produce products for life. So, we may see from this perspective that man's entire existence has been marked by God's giving to man.

In the history of Israel it was the same. The history of God's chosen people began with Abraham, to whom the Lord promised blessings, a country, and descendants as the stars in number. Genesis 12:1-3. Besides this, the father of

the faithful received God's gift of righteousness. Genesis 15:1-6. Later his descendants, numbering in the millions, received more great gifts after the exodus from Egypt, including freedom and independence, houses and lands, assurance of protection, and everything that was necessary to live a blessed life.

The divine giving continued without interruption down through the centuries to the moment when God gave His beloved Son. Don't forget that it was the Lord Jesus who said that "It is more blessed to give than to receive." Acts 20:35.

Based on this divine principle and the many, many divine examples, the subject of "giving" has been chosen as the theme of this year's Week of Prayer. Let us indeed be sensitive to what is needed and what we can do as individuals and collectively to advance the Lord's work and to spread the gospel in the different countries around the world, as well as to succor those in poverty, relieve the suffering, and help the many orphans, widows, sick, and poor.

It may seem unusual to bring this subject into the Week of Prayer; but if we consider the experiences of the past, we will recognize that God's servants in the past have also done this, urging cooperation and liberality among the believers in different localities.

"If they are in connection with heaven,
they will be engaged in the work in
harmony with the angels."

"The apostle Paul in his ministry among the churches was untiring in his efforts to inspire in the hearts of the new converts a desire to do large things for the cause of God. Often he exhorted them to the exercise of liberality. In speaking to the elders of Ephesus of his former labors among them, he said, 'I have showed you all things, how that so laboring ye ought to support the weak, and to remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how He said, It is more blessed to give than to receive.' 'He which soweth

READINGS FOR THE WEEK OF PRAYER

December 6-14, 2013

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sparingly,' he wrote to the Corinthians, 'shall reap also sparingly; and he which soweth bountifully shall reap also bountifully. Every man according as he purposeth in his heart, so let him give; not grudgingly, or of necessity: for God loveth a cheerful giver.' Acts 20:35; 2 Corinthians 9:6, 7." *—The Acts of the Apostles*, pp. 342, 343.

Emphasizing this principle, the Spirit of prophecy states: "The principle of the cross of Christ brings all who believe under heavy obligations to deny self, to impart light to others, and to give of their means to extend the light. If they are in connection with heaven, they will be engaged in the work in harmony with the angels.

"The principle of worldlings is to get all they can of the perishable things of this life. Selfish love of gain is the ruling principle in their lives. But the purest joy is not found in riches nor where covetousness is always craving, but where contentment reigns and where self-sacrificing love is the ruling principle. There are thousands who are passing their lives in indulgence and whose hearts are filled with repining. They are victims of selfishness and discontent in the vain effort to satisfy their minds with indulgence. But unhappiness is stamped upon their very countenances, and behind them is a desert, because their course is not fruitful in good works.

"In proportion as the love of Christ fills our hearts and controls our lives, covetousness, selfishness, and love of ease will be overcome, and it will be our pleasure to do the will of Christ, whose servants we claim to be. Our happiness will then be proportionate to our unselfish works, prompted by the love of Christ.

Only if we are humble, earnest, and faithful can we expect the Lord's rich blessings to be poured out.

"Divine wisdom has appointed, in the plan of salvation, the law of action and reaction, making the work of beneficence, in all its branches, twice blessed. He that gives to the needy blesses others, and is blessed himself in a still greater degree. God could have reached His object in saving sinners without the aid of man; but He knew that man could not

be happy without acting a part in the great work in which he would be cultivating self-denial and benevolence." *—Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 3, p. 382.

Over the last five years, every country in the world has suffered from the ongoing economic crisis, and it still affects the lives of millions. People who lose their jobs, people who lose their homes because they cannot afford to pay for them, and people who lose all hope for the future suffer intensely and even take their own lives. The gospel work is also affected at the national and international levels. As a consequence, there are financial shortfalls that limit the possibility of sending workers to meet the calls for spiritual help, of supporting new fields, of conducting public meetings, of holding training seminars, and of carrying out the many other activities that are managed at the General Conference level.

Nevertheless the Lord has no crisis or limitation of means. In the past, He has provided for the most urgent needs of His faithful followers under the most difficult circumstances; and He can do the same today. Let us therefore pray, dear brothers and sisters around the world, that every member will be faithful and generous—whether he is able to give little or much—so that every part of the Lord's work may be supplied with the necessary funds. Only if we are humble, earnest, and faithful can we expect the Lord's rich blessings to be poured out on every member, every church, and every level of His work. Let us pray for a miracle in time of crisis and for a new experience in giving.

"Jesus knew the influence of benevolence upon the heart and life of the benefactor, and He sought to impress upon the minds of His disciples the benefits to be derived from the exercise of this virtue. He says: 'It is more blessed to give than to receive.' Acts 20:35. He illustrates the spirit of cheerful benevolence, which should be exercised toward friends, neighbors, and strangers, by the parable of the man who journeyed from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell among thieves, 'which stripped him of his raiment, and wounded him, and departed, leaving him half dead.' Luke 10:30.... A Samaritan ... passed that way, and when he saw the stranger's need he did not regard him with mere idle curiosity, but he saw a human being in distress, and his com-

passion was excited. He immediately 'went to him, and bound up his wounds, pouring in oil and wine, and set him on his own beast, and brought him to an inn, and took care of him.'... 'Then said Jesus...., Go, and do thou likewise.'

Whoever neglects to carry out the principles illustrated by this lesson is not a commandment keeper.

"Here Jesus wished to teach His disciples the moral obligations which are binding upon man to his fellow man. Whoever neglects to carry out the principles illustrated by this lesson is not a commandment keeper, but, like the Levite, he breaks the law of God which he pretends to revere. There are some, who, like the Samaritan, make no pretensions to exalted piety, yet who have a high sense of their obligations to their fellow men and have far more charity and kindness than some who profess great love to God, but fail in good works toward His creatures." *—Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 4, pp. 56, 57.

Prayer can move the arm of the Almighty in a way that we cannot even imagine. Those who turn to Him, while they are faithful in giving their tithes and offerings, will receive many blessings—more than they need. Malachi 3:10. Let us therefore come together during these days of prayer and plead with the Lord to bless His people, to help us to be faithful and generous, and to bless His work around the world.

The Lord is coming soon. Take advantage of this Week of Prayer to consecrate yourself anew to Him. Let these days from Friday, December 6, to Sabbath, December 14, 2013, be special days of communion so we may all receive the heavenly blessing. As is it written, young and old, brothers and sisters, laborers and members, may plead with the Lord for His blessing. Joel 2:15-17. The last day of the Week of Prayer, Sabbath, December 14, will be a day of fasting on which the annual offerings for the General Conference and its missionary outreach will be gathered. Let it be a solemn day for all of God's people as we anticipate the blessings that will be poured out in the next year.

—The brothers and sisters of the General Conference

Receive with Gratitude, and Give Generously

By Ellen G. White

The Lord is constantly giving

God claims the whole earth as His vineyard. Though now in the hands of the usurper, it belongs to God. By redemption no less than by creation it is His. For the world Christ's sacrifice was made. "God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son." John 3:16. It is through that one gift that every other is imparted to men. Daily the whole world receives blessing from God. Every drop of rain, every ray of light shed on our unthankful race, every leaf and flower and fruit, testifies to God's long forbearance and His great love....

Of every Christian the Lord requires growth in efficiency and capability in every line. Christ has paid us our wages, even His own blood and suffering, to secure our willing service. He came to our world to give us an example of how we should work, and what spirit we should bring into our labor. He desires us to study how we can best advance His work and glorify His name in the world, crowning with honor, with the greatest love and devotion, the Father who "so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life." John 3:16. —*Christ's Object Lessons*, pp. 301, 302, 330, 331.

It is the glory of the gospel that it is founded upon the principle of restoring in the fallen race the divine image by a constant manifestation of benevolence. This work began in the heavenly courts. There God decided to give human beings unmistakable evidence of the love with which He regarded them. —*Counsels on Health*, p. 222.

Giving and blessing

We are to remember that it is more blessed to give than to receive. —*The Adventist Home*, p. 474.

The apostle Paul, in his ministry among the churches, was untiring in his efforts to inspire in the hearts of the new converts a desire to do large things

for the cause of God. Often he exhorted them to the exercise of liberality. In speaking to the elders of Ephesus of his former labors among them, he said, "I have showed you all things, how that so laboring ye ought to support the weak, and to remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how He said, It is more blessed to give than to receive." Acts 20:35. —*Counsels on Stewardship*, p. 171.

His gifts to us are not less, but greater,
than they were to Israel of old.

Christ's followers consider that in giving back to the Lord His own they are receiving a blessing; for they are accumulating heavenly treasure.... The joy of seeing souls redeemed, souls eternally saved, is the privilege of those who have overcome obstacles in order to put their feet in the footprints of Him who said, "Follow Me." —*In Heavenly Places*, p. 300.

The Lord asks for the tithe

The Lord calls for His tithe to be given in to His treasury. Strictly, honestly, and faithfully, let this portion be returned to Him. Besides this, He calls for your gifts and offerings. No one is compelled to present his tithe or his gifts and offerings to the Lord. But just as surely as God's word is given to us, just so surely will He require His own with usury at the hand of every human being. If men are unfaithful in rendering to God His own, if they disregard God's charge to His stewards, they will not long have the blessing of that which the Lord has entrusted to them....

The tithe is essential to support the gospel ministry

When God delivered Israel from Egypt to be a special treasure unto Himself, He taught them to devote a tithe of their possessions to the service of the taber-

nacle. This was a special offering, for a special work. All that remained of their property was God's, and was to be used to His glory. But the tithe was set apart for the support of those who ministered in the sanctuary. It was to be given from the first fruits of all the increase, and, with gifts and offerings, it provided ample means for supporting the ministry of the gospel for that time.

God requires no less of us than He required of His people anciently. His gifts to us are not less, but greater, than they were to Israel of old. His service requires, and ever will require, means. The great missionary work for the salvation of souls is to be carried forward. In the tithe, with gifts and offerings, God has made ample provision for this work. He intends that the ministry of the gospel shall be fully sustained. He claims the tithe as His own, and it should ever be regarded as a sacred reserve, to be placed in His treasury for the benefit of His cause, for the advancement of His work, for sending His messengers into "regions beyond," even to the uttermost parts of the earth....

Unfaithfulness in tithe hinders blessings

A faithful tithe is the Lord's portion. To withhold it is to rob God. Every man should freely and willingly and gladly bring tithes and offerings into the storehouse of the Lord, because in so doing there is a blessing. There is no safety in withholding from God His own portion. —(Manuscript 159, 1899)...

The tithe is sacred, reserved by God for Himself. It is to be brought into His treasury to be used to sustain the gospel laborers in their work. For a long time the Lord has been robbed because there are those who do not realize that the tithe is God's reserved portion....

Hasten, my brethren and sisters, to bring to God a faithful tithe, and to bring Him also a willing thank offering. There are many who will not be blessed till they make restitution of the tithe

which they have withheld. God is waiting for you to redeem the past. The hand of the holy law is laid upon every soul who enjoys God's benefits. Let those who have kept back their tithe make an accurate reckoning, and bring to the Lord that of which they have robbed His work. Make restitution, and bring the Lord peace offerings. "Let him take hold of My strength, that he may make peace with Me; and he shall make peace with Me." If you acknowledge that you have done wrong in misappropriating His goods, and freely and fully repent, He will forgive your transgression....

God asks for offerings

So the Lord has imparted to us Heaven's richest treasure in giving us Jesus. With Him He has given us all things richly to enjoy. The productions of the earth, the bountiful harvests, the treasures of gold and silver, are His gifts. Houses and lands, food and clothing, He has placed in the possession of men. He asks us to acknowledge Him as the Giver of all things; and for this reason He says, Of all your possessions I reserve a tenth for Myself, besides gifts and offerings, which are to be brought into My storehouse. This is the provision God has made for carrying forward the work of the gospel....

He does not design that His work shall be crippled for want of means.

This matter of giving is not left to impulse. God has given us definite instruction in regard to it. He has specified tithes and offerings as the measure of our obligation. And He desires us to give regularly and systematically.... Let each regularly examine his income, which is all a blessing from God, and set apart the tithe as a separate fund, to be sacredly the Lord's. This fund should not in any case be devoted to any other use; it is to be devoted solely to support the ministry of the gospel. After the tithe is set apart, let gifts and offerings be apportioned, "as God hath prospered" you....

God has given special direction as to the use of the tithe. He does not design that His work shall be crippled for want of means. That there may be no haphazard work and no error, He has made

our duty on these points very plain. The portion that God has reserved for Himself is not to be diverted to any other purpose than that which He has specified. Let none feel at liberty to retain their tithe, to use according to their own judgment. They are not to use it for themselves in an emergency, nor to apply it as they see fit, even in what they may regard as the Lord's work....

As you gathered in your harvest, storing barns and granary for your own comfort, did you return to God a faithful tithe? Have you presented to Him your gifts and offerings, that His cause may not suffer? Have you looked after the fatherless and the widow? This is a branch of home missionary work that should by no means be neglected....

Freewill offerings for missions

Has not the time come when we should begin to cut down our possessions? May God help you who can do something now to make an investment in the bank of heaven. We do not ask a loan, but a freewill offering—a return to the Master of His own goods which He has lent you. If you love God supremely, and your neighbor as yourself, we believe you will give tangible proofs of the same in freewill offerings for our mission work. There are souls to be saved, and may you be co-workers with Jesus Christ in saving these souls for whom Christ has given His life. The Lord will bless you in the good fruit you may bear to His glory. May the same Holy Spirit which inspired the Bible take possession of your hearts, leading you to love His word, which is spirit and life. May it open your eyes to discover the things of the Spirit of God. The reason there is so much dwarfed religion today is because people have not brought practical self-denial and self-sacrifice into their lives....

Offerings for home and foreign missions

God calls upon His people to awake to their responsibilities. A flood of light is shining from His word, and there must be a meeting of neglected obligations. When these are met, by giving to the Lord His own in tithes and offerings, the way will be opened for the world to hear the message that the Lord designs it to hear. If our people had the

love of God in the heart, if every church member were imbued with the spirit of self-sacrifice, there would be no lack of funds for home and foreign missions; our resources would be multiplied; a thousand doors of usefulness would be opened; and we should be invited to enter. Had the purpose of God been carried out in giving the message of mercy to the world, Christ would have come, and the saints would have received their welcome into the city of God....

Offerings for the poor

The offerings of the poor, given through self-denial to aid in extending the precious light of saving truth, will not only be a sweet-smelling savor to God, and wholly acceptable to Him as a consecrated gift, but the very act of giving expands the heart of the giver, and unites him more fully to the Redeemer of the world. He was rich; but for our sakes He became poor, that we through His poverty might be made rich. The smallest sums given cheerfully by those who are in limited circumstances are fully as acceptable to God, and even of more value in His sight, than the offerings of the rich who can bestow their thousands, and yet exercise no self-denial and feel no lack....

... The very act of giving expands the heart of the giver,...

The offerings of the poor, given through self-denial to aid in extending the precious light of saving truth, will not only be a sweet-smelling savor to God, and wholly acceptable to Him as a consecrated gift, but the very act of giving expands the heart of the giver, and unites him more fully to the Redeemer of the world. —*Counsels on Stewardship*, pp. 82, 83, 71, 66, 93, 87, 65, 80, 81, 101, 46, 51, 52, 36, 37, 30, 347.

The second tithe and its distribution

The consecration to God of a tithe of all increase, whether of the orchard and harvest field, the flocks and herds, or the labor of brain or hand, the devotion of a second tithe for the relief of the poor and other benevolent uses, tended to keep fresh before the people the truth of God's ownership of all, and of their

opportunity to be channels of His blessings. It was a training adapted to kill out all narrowing selfishness, and to cultivate breadth and nobility of character. —*Education*, p. 44.

To promote the assembling of the people for religious service, as well as to provide for the poor, a second tithe of all the increase was required. Concerning the first tithe, the Lord had declared, "I have given the children of Levi all the tenth in Israel." Numbers 18:21. But in regard to the second He commanded, "Thou shalt eat before the Lord thy God, in the place which He shall choose to place His name there, the tithe of thy corn, of thy wine, and of thine oil, and the firstlings of thy herds and of thy flocks; that thou mayest learn to fear the Lord thy God always." Deuteronomy 14:23, 29; 16:11-14. This tithe, or its equivalent in money, they were for two years to bring to the place where the sanctuary was established. After presenting a thank offering to God, and a specified portion to the priest, the offerers were to use the remainder for a religious feast, in which the Levite, the stranger, the fatherless, and the widow should participate. Thus provision was made for the thank offerings and feasts at the yearly festivals, and the people were drawn to the society of the priests and Levites, that they might receive instruction and encouragement in the service of God.

He cannot sustain those who think that they can do as they please with that which is His.

Every third year, however, this second tithe was to be used at home, in entertaining the Levite and the poor, as Moses said, "That they may eat within thy gates, and be filled." Deuteronomy 26:12. This tithe would provide a fund for the uses of charity and hospitality. —*Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 530.

Brethren responsible to teach faithfulness

The Lord's messengers should see that His requirements are faithfully discharged by the members of the churches. God says that there should be meat in His house, and if the money in the

treasury is tampered with, if it is regarded as right for individuals to make what use they please of the tithe, the Lord cannot bless. He cannot sustain those who think that they can do as they please with that which is His.

It is the duty of the elders and officers of the church to instruct the people on this important matter, and to set things in order. As laborers together with God, the officers of the church should be sound upon this plainly revealed question. The ministers themselves should be strict to carry out to the letter the injunctions of God's word. Those who hold positions of trust in the church should not be negligent, but they should see that the members are faithful in performing this duty.... Let the elders and officers of the church follow the direction of the Sacred Word, and urge upon their members the necessity of faithfulness in the payment of pledges, tithes, and offerings. —*Counsels on Stewardship*, pp. 106, 107.

Not enough room for all the blessings

God has made men His stewards. The property which He has placed in their hands is the means that He has provided for the spread of the gospel. To those who prove themselves faithful stewards He will commit greater trusts. Saith the Lord, "Them that honor Me I will honor." "God loveth a cheerful giv-

er," and when His people, with grateful hearts, bring their gifts and offerings to Him, "not grudgingly, or of necessity," His blessing will attend them, as He has promised. "Bring ye all the tithes into the storehouse, that there may be meat in Mine house, and prove Me now herewith, saith the Lord of hosts, if I will not open you the windows of heaven, and pour you out a blessing, that there shall not be room enough to receive it." —*Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 529.

God has a heaven full of blessings for those who will cooperate with Him.

The spirit of Christian liberality will strengthen as it is exercised, and will not need to be unhealthfully stimulated. All who possess this spirit, the spirit of Christ, will with cheerful alacrity press their gifts into the Lord's treasury. Inspired by love for Christ and for the souls for whom He has died, they feel an intense earnestness to act their part with fidelity. —*Counsels on Stewardship*, p. 30.

So it is with every other one of God's requirements. All His gifts are promised on condition of obedience. God has a heaven full of blessings for those who will cooperate with Him. All who obey Him may with confidence claim the fulfillment of His promises. —*Christ's Object Lessons*, p. 145.

"There is a terrible amount of guilt for which the church is responsible. Why are not those who have the light putting forth earnest efforts to give that light to others? They see that the end is near. They see multitudes daily transgressing God's law; and they know that these souls cannot be saved in transgression. Yet they have more interest in their trades, their farms, their houses, their merchandise, their dress, their tables, than in the souls of men and women whom they must meet face to face in the judgment. The people who claim to obey the truth are asleep. They could not be at ease as they are if they were awake. The love of the truth is dying out of their hearts. Their example is not such as to convince the world that they have truth in advance of every other people upon the earth. At the very time when they should be strong in God, having a daily, living experience, they are feeble, hesitating, relying upon the preachers for support, when they should be ministering to others with mind and soul and voice and pen and time and money." —*Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 5, p. 457.

Giving God His Own—the Tithe

By Douglas Francis, India/Sri Lanka/U.S.A.

“Bring ye all the tithes into the storehouse, . . . and prove Me now herewith, . . . if I will not open you the windows of heaven, and pour you out a blessing, that there shall not be room enough to receive it.” Malachi 3:10.

A Reuters International News Agency report dated September 24, 2008, in “FaithWorld,” by Nick Carey, was titled, “Many U.S. Christians pay tithe before mortgage, even in crisis.” The article explained that many people were faithful in giving the tithe to God, even as they lost their one and only shelter, vehicle, or asset. It is a fascinating report, and I was really amazed to see that there are still people who love God from the bottom of their hearts. (<http://blogs.reuters.com/faithworld/2008/09/24/many-us-christians-pay-tithe-before-mortgage-even-in-crisis/>)

The system of tithing is part of the system instituted by God for His followers. Carrying the original Seventh-day Adventist teachings, we have cultivated a culture of giving our tithes to the treasury of our Lord’s church, as did the patriarchs, the entire Jewish nation, and the early Christians.

More than any other authors of the Bible, King David expressed his gratitude to the Lord in the Psalms, using these words: “What shall I render unto the Lord for all His benefits toward me?” Psalm 116:12. The Spirit of prophecy presents the same heartfelt thought.

Our bountiful Benefactor

“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. He watches over us with more tenderness than does a mother over an afflicted child. ‘Like as a father pitieth his children, so the Lord pitieth them that fear Him.’ ” —(*Review and Herald*, September 18, 1888) *Counsels on Stewardship*, p. 17.

The spirit of giving is the spirit of heaven. “For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life.” John 3:16.

Satan said that God does not love. To answer this false accusation, Jesus came down to our lowly position, lived the life of a human being on this earth, and died for us. As God of the exodus, He miraculously led a nation of slaves to liberty. This great redemptive act is the backdrop for the entire Old Testament and shows His longing to be our Redeemer. God is not a distant, detached, uninterested personality, but the One who is totally involved in our affairs.

David saw God as One in whom we can find refuge, very much like the six Israelite cities of refuge, which sheltered lawful fugitives. “God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble.” Psalm 46:1.

The God who gives and loves

Jesus revealed His Father as a *giving God*. We see His giving at creation, in Bethlehem, and on Calvary.

At creation, the Father and the Son acted together. God gave us life, even though He knew this would lead to the loss of His only Son’s life.

In Bethlehem, He gave His Son to this world to let Him partake of the suffering caused by sin, which eventually led Him to a cruel death on the cross.

And it is Calvary that gives us the deepest insight into the Father of love. The Father, in His divine nature, suffered the pain of separation from His only begotten Son for the sake of this fallen race. He suffered in like measure with Christ. What greater testimony than this could ever be given of His immeasurable love?

When He walked on earth, Jesus’ favorite theme was the revelation of His Father’s love to the world. He said. “But I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you; That ye may be the children of your Father which is in heaven: for He maketh His sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust.” Matthew 5:44, 45. This makes the difference in Christianity. We have a God of love who did not keep back His only Son from a fallen race and still loves them. Most religions speak about love, but I cannot find outside of Christianity that love that encompasses one’s enemies.

Personal stewardship and gratitude

God created us, and so we belong to Him. This is the very reason why we have a sacred responsibility to be faithful stewards of our physical, mental, and spiritual faculties. He has entrusted to mankind time, opportunities, abilities, possessions, and the blessings of this earth and its resources. We are

responsible to Him for the proper use of what He has entrusted to us. So, how can we acknowledge God's ownership before Him and the world? One way is through generosity. It is a wonderful blessing that God has given us the privilege to nurture and love others and to gain the victory over selfishness and covetousness through stewardship.

But personal stewardship includes personal cheerfulness to really show the pure heart of the giving God. Paul explains: "God loveth a cheerful giver." 2 Corinthians 9:7. This indicates that, although we are called to return the tithe to God, it is freewill obedience that receives the divine blessings. We find three kinds of givers—the flint that needs hammering to be chipped, the sponge that needs to be squeezed to give moisture, and the honeycomb that simply overflows with its own sweetness. As Paul mentioned, we ought to be like honeycombs.

In Eden, a tree epitomized God's ownership

"The Lord created every tree in Eden pleasant to the eyes and good for food, and He bade Adam and Eve freely enjoy His bounties. But He made one exception. Of the tree of knowledge of good and evil they were not to eat. This tree God reserved as a constant reminder of His ownership of all. Thus He gave them opportunity to demonstrate their faith and trust in Him by their perfect obedience to His requirements.

"So it is with God's claims upon us. He places His treasures in the hands of men, but requires that one tenth shall be faithfully laid aside for His work. He requires this portion to be placed in His treasury. It is to be rendered to Him as His own; it is sacred and is to be used for sacred purposes, for the support of those who carry the message of salvation to all parts of the world. He reserves this portion, that means may ever be flowing into His treasure house and that the light of truth may be carried to those who are nigh and those who are afar off. By faithfully obeying this requirement we acknowledge that all belongs to God." —*Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 6, p. 386.

Tithing by the patriarchs

Many religions in the world today cultivate and promote giving of the tithe or a similar system to support the clergy, as was the case for the Levites in the past. Searching the Bible's teachings, as well as those in the Testimonies, we find the system of tithing—giving the tenth part of one's income—early in the book of Genesis, as many of us are aware. Long before the "law of Moses" was ever codified, Abraham faithfully returned **his tithes** to God! We read in Genesis 14:17-20 that "... the king of Sodom went out to meet him.... And Melchizedek king of Salem brought forth bread and wine: and he was the priest of the most high God. And he blessed him, and said, Blessed be Abram of the most high God, possessor of heaven and earth: And blessed be the most high God, which hath delivered thine enemies into thy hand. And he gave him tithes of all." Abraham had recovered Lot and his goods, the women, and all the people and was very thankful; when he met God's priest Melchizedek, "he gave him **tithes** of all."

It is obvious that Jacob also understood his obligation to give the tithes to the Lord, for he promised, "... Of all that Thou shalt give me I will surely give the tenth unto Thee." Genesis 28:22. This was the sacred vow of the patriarch, and we know how God blessed him. Thus, the Spirit of prophecy states: "The tithing system reaches back beyond the days of Moses. Men were required to offer to God gifts for religious purposes before the definite system was given to Moses, even as far back as the days of Adam. In complying with God's requirements, they were to manifest in offerings their appreciation of His mercies and blessings to them. This was continued through successive generations, and was carried out by Abraham, who gave tithes to Melchizedek, the priest of the most high God. The same principle existed in the days of Job. Jacob, when at Bethel, an exile and penniless wanderer, lay down at night, solitary and alone, with a rock for his pillow, and there promised the Lord: 'Of all that Thou shalt give me I will surely give the tenth unto Thee.' God does not compel men to give. All that they give must be voluntary. He will not have His treasury replenished with unwilling offerings." —*Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 3, p. 393.

The tithing principle confirmed in the times of Moses and Nehemiah

"And all the tithe of the land, whether of the seed of the land, or of the fruit of the tree, is the Lord's: it is holy unto the Lord. And if a man will at all redeem ought of his tithes, he shall add thereto the fifth part thereof. And concerning the tithe of the herd, or of the flock, even of whatsoever passeth under the rod, the tenth shall be holy unto the Lord." Leviticus 27:30-32.

Besides the instructions of Moses with regard to the tithing system, we also have the following instructions in Nehemiah 10:37, 38: "And that we should bring the first fruits of our dough, and our offerings, and the fruit of all manner of trees, of wine and of oil, unto the priests, to the chambers of the house of our God; and the tithes of our ground unto the Levites, that the same Levites might have the tithes in all the cities of our tillage. And the priest the son of Aaron shall be with the Levites, when the Levites take tithes: and the Levites shall bring up the tithe of the tithes unto the house of our God, to the chambers, into the treasure house."

The tithing system that the Lord presents to us is very beautiful in its simplicity, and its equity is revealed in its proportional claim on both rich and poor. Furthermore, the agricultural economy in Israel was based on cultivation of the land and animal husbandry, making the tithing system very appropriate for that time and place and also for following generations.

"Tithes and offerings for God are an acknowledgment of His claim on us by creation, and they are also an acknowledgment of His claim by redemption. Because all our power is derived from Christ, these offerings are to flow from us to God. They are to keep ever before us the claim of redemption, the greatest of all claims, and the one that involves every other. The realization of the sacrifice made in our behalf is ever to be fresh in our minds and is ever to exert an influence on our thoughts and plans. Christ is to be indeed as one crucified among us." —*Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 6, p. 479.

The purpose in the tithing system is not merely monetary; rather, it is highly spiritual and contributes very definitely to the restoration of God's character in

man. So, the use we make of our money is one way by which we accept or reject our Creator and Redeemer. This needs to be very seriously considered.

Thus, the principles presented in ancient times apply in today's society as well, and it is our duty to understand them thoroughly so we will not be affected by the concept of capital which forms the basis of the economic systems of the present time. Yes, the system of tithing is not merely for the Jews; it maintains its validity in the New Testament era.

"Some will pronounce this one of the rigorous laws binding upon the Hebrews. But this was not a burden to the willing heart that loved God. It was only when their selfish natures were strengthened by withholding that men lost sight of eternal considerations and valued their earthly treasures above souls." *—Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 3, p. 396.

"I speak of the tithing system, yet how meager it looks to my mind! How small the estimate! How vain the endeavor to measure with mathematical rules, time, money, and love against a love and sacrifice that is measureless and incomputable! Tithes for Christ! Oh, meager pittance, shameful recompense for that which cost so much!" *—Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 4, pp. 119, 120.

Tithing in the New Testament era

In the time of ancient Israel, the tithe was used exclusively for the Levites, who, having received no tribal allotment, were to devote all their time to fostering Israel's worship and spiritual life, ministering in the sanctuary, and instructing the people in the law of God. Numbers 18:21, 24.

After the crucifixion, the Levitical priesthood ended. But the mission for the redemption of mankind did not stop there. The ministry of the gospel had and has to be fostered and supported by tithes and offerings. The tithes are still to be used to support the ministry of God's church on earth. Paul explains the parallel between the Levitical and the Christian gospel ministerial system. He stated: "If we have sown unto you spiritual things, is it a great thing if we shall reap your carnal things? If others be partakers of this power over you, are not we rather? Nevertheless, we have not used this power; but suf-

fer all things, lest we should hinder the gospel of Christ. Do ye not know that they which minister about holy things live of the things of the temple? and they which wait at the altar are partakers with the altar? Even so hath the Lord ordained that they which preach the gospel should live of the gospel." 1 Corinthians 9:11-14.

"How changed the order of things in our day! The Lord's requirements and claims, if they receive any attention, are left till the last. Yet our work needs tenfold more means now than was needed by the Jews. The great commission given to the apostles was to go throughout the world and preach the gospel. This shows the extension of the work and the increased responsibility resting upon the followers of Christ in our day. If the law required tithes and offerings thousands of years ago, how much more essential are they now! If the rich and poor were to give a sum proportionate to their property in the Jewish economy, it is doubly essential now." *—Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 4, p. 474.

"It was to this plan for the support of the ministry that Paul referred when he said, 'Even so hath the Lord ordained that they which preach the gospel should live of the gospel.' And later, in writing to Timothy, the apostle said, 'The laborer is worthy of his reward.' 1 Timothy 5:18." *—The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 336.

Jesus' approach

Jesus never condemned the tithing system, concerning which the Pharisee in Luke 18:12 had said: "I give tithes of all that I possess." This statement showed that the Pharisee was very legalistic and self-righteous; people like this cannot inherit the kingdom unless they humble themselves. Two verses later (Luke 18:14), Jesus explains this.

When He condemned the Pharisees because they "pay tithe of mint and anise and cummin," He did not oppose the "tithing principle" but deplored the fact that they "strain at a gnat," while in other matters—"judgment, mercy, and faith"—they "swallow a camel." "These" (carefulness in calculating the tithe) "ought ye to have done, and not to leave the other undone." Matthew 23:23, 24. "In these words Christ again condemns the abuse of sacred obligation. The obligation itself He does not set aside." *—The Desire of Ages*, p. 616.

Instead, Jesus warned them about the dangers of greed. "And He said unto them, Take heed, and beware of covetousness: for a man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth." Luke 12:15. He also warned that it is difficult for a rich man to go to heaven due to the fact that he is tempted to become greedy day after day. "And when Jesus saw that he was very sorrowful, He said, How hardly shall they that have riches enter into the kingdom of God! For it is easier for a camel to go through a needle's eye, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God." Luke 18:24, 25. This statement does not support a conclusion that the rich will not go to heaven, but it definitely says that they will find it very difficult. In Luke 12:33, 34, Jesus insists: "Sell that ye have, and give alms; provide yourselves bags which wax not old, a treasure in the heavens that faileth not, where no thief approacheth, neither moth corrupteth. For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also."

To whom the tithe is paid

"Bring ye all the tithes into the storehouse, that there may be meat in Mine house, and prove Me now herewith, saith the Lord of hosts, if I will not open you the windows of heaven, and pour you out a blessing, that there shall not be room enough to receive it." Malachi 3:10.

This passage shows very clearly that the tithes should be paid to the storehouse of God. In other words, to the treasury of God's church. "Then brought all Judah the tithe of the corn and the new wine and the oil unto the treasuries. And I made treasurers over the treasuries, Shelemiah the priest, and Zadok the scribe, and of the Levites, Pedaiah: and next to them was Hanan the son of Zaccur, the son of Mattaniah: for they were counted faithful, and their office was to distribute unto their brethren." Nehemiah 13:12, 13. This verse very clearly proves that bringing tithes to the treasury is both Biblical and the responsibility of the congregation.

Use of the tithe

It is very obvious that the tithe is to be used only for the advancement of the ministry of the Lord. But the question is often asked whether tithes cannot be

used for something other than supporting the advancement of the gospel in a direct sense. Some people think that the tithe can be used as a poor fund, for church expenses, or for some other beneficial cause. While we consider the other needs of the church, it is very important to find other means to meet these needs. "One reasons that the tithe may be applied to school purposes. Still others reason that canvassers and col-porteurs should be supported from the tithe. But a great mistake is made when the tithe is drawn from the object for which it is to be used—the support of the ministers...."

"The tithe is the Lord's, and those who meddle with it will be punished with the loss of their heavenly treasure unless they repent. Let the work no longer be hedged up because the tithe has been diverted into various channels other than the one to which the Lord has said it should go. Provision is to be made for these other lines of work. They are to be sustained, but not from the tithe. God has not changed; the tithe is still to be used for the support of the ministry." —*Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 9, pp. 248-250.

Withholding tithes and offerings

Recently I had an opportunity to talk with a church pastor of another denomination. He mentioned that many members of his church do not pay tithes and offerings faithfully. When he approached them about this, they tried to justify their failure to be faithful in this by presenting reasons for withholding the tithes and offerings. Some said that they gave money to the poor, while others mentioned that they supported independent ministries and individuals for the advancement of the gospel. Well, that pastor told me that his organization is finding it difficult to meet the expenses of their mission at present and was on the verge of selling some properties to meet the expenses. Then, there are other people who make excuses for not paying their tithes and offerings because of others' actions. The Spirit of prophecy mentions that some people withhold their tithes and offerings, claiming that they have no confidence in the recipients. Sometimes they give the fact that they are in debt as a reason. But still, the Spirit of prophecy does not support this in any degree.

"The tithe is sacred, reserved by God for Himself. It is to be brought into His treasury to be used to sustain the gospel laborers in their work. For a long time the Lord has been robbed because there are those who do not realize that the tithe is God's reserved portion.

"Some have been dissatisfied and have said: 'I will not longer pay my tithe; for I have no confidence in the way things are managed at the heart of the work.' But will you rob God because you think the management of the work is not right? Make your complaint, plainly and openly, in the right spirit, to the proper ones. Send in your petitions for things to be adjusted and set in order; but do not withdraw from the work of God, and prove unfaithful, because others are not doing right." —*Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 9, p. 249.

People withhold the tithe for other reasons, too, such as greed or substituting other activities such as charity, giving of alms, etc. The Spirit of prophecy warns us further on this subject: "Some have felt under sacred obligations to their children. They must give each a portion, but feel themselves unable to raise means to aid the cause of God.... Let no one throw in his claims and lead you to rob God. Let not your children steal your offering from God's altar for their own benefit." —*Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 1, pp. 220, 221.

Receiving the blessing

"The overseer of the flock of God should faithfully discharge his duty. If he takes the position that because this is not pleasant to him, he will leave it for someone else to do, he is not a faithful worker. Let him read in Malachi the words of the Lord charging the people with robbery toward God in withholding the tithes. The mighty God declares: 'Ye are cursed with a curse.' Malachi 3:9. When the one who ministers in word and doctrine sees the people pursuing a course that will bring this curse upon them, how can he neglect his duty to give them instruction and warning? Every church member should be taught to be faithful in paying an honest tithe." —*Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 9, pp. 250, 251.

It is very important to receive God's blessings in our lives. Jacob wrestled the whole night with the mighty Angel to receive His blessings. It is beyond our

imagination how it will be for anyone who will be cursed by God. It is the duty of the church to educate the members about this and encourage them to receive the blessing of the Lord, not the curses. Also, it is very important for the church to teach the members in these lines, so that the church will not lose the Lord's blessings.

Individual faithfulness and church growth

In the book *The Acts of the Apostles*, Sister Ellen G. White writes the following very important statement: "Of the means entrusted to man, God claims a certain portion—the tenth. He leaves all free to say whether or not they will give more than this. But when the heart is stirred by the influence of the Holy Spirit, and a vow is made to give a certain amount, the one who vows has no longer any right to the consecrated portion. Promises of this kind made to men would be looked upon as binding; are those not more binding that are made to God? Are promises tried in the court of conscience less binding than written agreements of men?"

"When divine light is shining into the heart with unusual clearness and power, habitual selfishness relaxes its grasp and there is a disposition to give to the cause of God. But none need think that they will be allowed to fulfill the promises then made, without a protest on the part of Satan. He is not pleased to see the Redeemer's kingdom on earth built up. He suggests that the pledge made was too much, that it may cripple them in their efforts to acquire property or gratify the desires of their families." —Pp. 74, 75.

Satan is working untiringly to hinder the growth of the church. He works through individuals to stop the flow of the tithes and offerings into the treasury of God's church. The above statement of Sister White explains this very clearly. My dear brethren, we need to be very careful with this. There can be difficult situations with an individual or a group of people. Perhaps a local church, a Field, or a Union falls into this category; if so, it is not promoting the work of God but is carrying on the work of Satan. We should not be part of this trap in any way. An individual rendering his tithes to the church, churches send-

ing the tithes faithfully to the Field or Union, and the Field or Union forwarding the appropriate portion to the General Conference should always be done promptly according to the order of the church.

Blessings assured

There are so many stories we have heard of how God blessed many individuals and churches for being faithful in their consistent giving of the tithe. We owe God the tithe, while offerings are given to Him from that portion that He gives us. There is a major difference: In tithing we fulfill a duty, whereas in giving an offering we show our appreciation for God's many blessings.

"Bring ye all the tithes into the storehouse, that there may be meat in Mine house, and prove Me now herewith, saith the Lord of hosts, if I will not open you the windows of heaven, and pour you out a blessing, that there shall not be room enough to receive it. And I will rebuke the devourer for your sakes, and he shall not destroy the fruits of your ground; neither shall your vine cast her fruit before the time in the field, saith the Lord of hosts." Malachi 3:10, 11.

We are about to enter the year 2014, and it is very important that we decide to be fully on God's side. We need to make a firm decision as an individual, as a family, and as a church to fulfill the requirement and the commandment of God by giving the tithes and the offerings with a full heart to the Lord's treasury.

May God richly bless each of us to be a faithful supporter in carrying out His work on earth and hastening His second coming. Amen!

"It is not the plan of God to rain down means from heaven in order that His cause may be sustained. He has entrusted, or deposited, ample means with men, that there shall be no lack in any department of His work." *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 2, p. 659.

Reading 3 – Sunday, December 8, 2013

A Second Tithe Expected

By Raquel Orce, Spain

The term "second tithe" has been defined in various ways and has produced any number of reactions and viewpoints that must be tested by the Word. Since the tithe is 10 percent of one's total income and is a principle of systematic benevolence established in the Holy Scriptures, we will look at how the tithe was managed. *Maaser* is the basic Hebrew word for "tithe" in the Old Testament, and to it were added various modifiers.

Yearly Levitical tithe: *Maaser Rishón*

"And, behold, I have given the children of Levi all the tenth in Israel for an inheritance...." Numbers 18:21.

The tribe of Levi was located throughout Israel in forty-eight cities, according to the report found in Joshua 20 and 21. To the Gershonites, Kohathites, and Merarites—children of Levi—were assigned six cities of refuge and forty-two additional cities as their dwelling places. Numbers 35:6, 7.

The activities of the Levites, whose yearly sustenance for their service to the people is described in 1 Chronicles 24-26, included multiple tasks which were assigned to working groups: Assistance to the priests in the sanctuary, singing and music, maintenance of the place of worship, and additional tasks were performed by porters, judges, and scribes.

The tithe received by the Levites from the people was in turn tithed and given to the high priest.

The Levites received the tithes from the people and then gave the tenth part to the priests, according to Numbers 18:26, 28: "Thus speak unto the Levites, and say unto them, When ye take of the children of Israel the tithes which I have given you from them for your inheritance, then ye shall offer up an heave offering of it for the Lord, even a tenth part of the tithe." "Thus ye also shall offer an

heave offering unto the Lord of all your tithes, which ye receive of the children of Israel; and ye shall give thereof the Lord's heave offering to Aaron the priest."

Thus, the tithe received by the Levites from the people was in turn tithed and given to the high priest; this was the tenth part of the tithe—*Maaser Terumat*. According to 2 Chronicles 31:11, 12, there were special chambers where the produce given as tithes was stored. "Then Hezekiah commanded to prepare chambers in the house of the Lord; and they prepared them, And brought in the offerings and the tithes and the dedicated things faithfully;..." After the seventy years of captivity in Babylon, the same system was reestablished: "And that we should bring ... the tithes of our ground unto the Levites, that the same Levites might have the tithes in all the cities of our tillage. And the priest the son of Aaron shall be with the Levites, when the Levites take tithes: and the Levites shall bring up the tithe of the tithes unto the house of our God, to the chambers, into the treasure house...." Nehemiah 10:37, 38.

Second yearly tithe—*Maaser Shení*

"Three times in a year shall all thy males appear before the Lord thy God in the place which He shall choose; in the feast of unleavened bread, and in the feast of weeks, and in the feast of tabernacles: and they shall not appear before the Lord empty: Every man shall give as he is able, according to the blessing of the Lord thy God which He hath given thee." Deuteronomy 16:16, 17.

The people of God were to come to the place of worship at least three times a year for religious festivals scheduled on the agrarian-religious calendar, as detailed in Leviticus 23. In fact, there were a total of seven feasts, grouped into three sections. The first three feasts were to be celebrated in the first month, Abib or Nissan (March-April), beginning with the Passover on the 14th day, followed by the Feast of Unleavened

Bread on the 15th day and continuing for a seven-day period, and the First Fruits, or wave sheaf offering, on the 16th day—all of which were directly related to the gathering of the first fruits and the barley harvest, for barley was the first grain to ripen in Palestine, thus beginning the spring season.

The second gathering of Israel clustered around the Feast of Weeks, when the first fruits of the wheat harvest were presented to the Lord in the month of Sivan (May-June), on the fifth day (seven weeks) after the wave sheaf offering. This corresponds to “Pentecost” or “fiftieth.”

Then, at the end of the year, the third group of festivals occurred in the month of Tishri or Ethinam (September-October), near the beginning of the autumn season. The Feast of Trumpets took place on the 1st day; the Day of Atonement, on the 10th day; and the Feast of Tabernacles, on the 15th day and continued for seven days. This completed the harvest and the ingathering of the fruits, finishing the agricultural cycle with the grape and olive harvests.

According to the Biblical instructions, this process was carried out as follows: “To promote the assembling of the people for religious service, as well as to provide for the poor, a second tithe of all the increase was required. Concerning the first tithe, the Lord had declared, ‘I have given the children of Levi all the tenth in Israel.’ Numbers 18:21. But in regard to the second He commanded, ‘Thou shalt eat before the Lord thy God, in the place which He shall choose to place His name there, the tithe of thy corn, of thy wine, and of thine oil, and the firstlings of thy herds and of thy flocks; that thou mayest learn to fear the Lord thy God always.’ Deuteronomy 14:23, 29; 16:11-14. This tithe, or its equivalent in money, they were for two years to bring to the place where the sanctuary was established. After presenting a thank offering to God, and a specified portion to the priest, the offerers were to use the remainder for a religious feast, in which the Levite, the stranger, the fatherless, and the widow should participate.” —*Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 530.

It is important to understand the differences between the first and second tithes. Every person in Israel gave the first tithe to the Levites wherever they

lived, and then the Levites in turn gave the tenth part of the tithe to the high priest. In regard to the second tithe, every head of a household deducted a tithe from his income a second time for the specific purpose of taking it with him to the tabernacle or the temple also in the form of spices or silver (money) to celebrate the feasts, as stated above, with his family, the Levites, the strangers, and the needy.

“Thou shalt truly tithe all the increase of thy seed, that the field bringeth forth year by year. And thou shalt eat before the Lord thy God, in the place which He shall choose to place His name there, the tithe of thy corn, of thy wine, and of thine oil, and the firstlings of thy herds and of thy flocks; that thou mayest learn to fear the Lord thy God always. And if the way be too long for thee, so that thou art not able to carry it; or if the place be too far from thee, which the Lord thy God shall choose to set His name there, when the Lord thy God hath blessed thee: then shalt thou turn it into money, and bind up the money in thine hand, and shalt go unto the place which the Lord thy God shall choose: and thou shalt bestow that money for whatsoever thy soul lusteth after, for oxen, or for sheep, or for wine, or for strong drink, or for whatsoever thy soul desireth: and thou shalt eat there before the Lord thy God, and thou shalt rejoice, thou, and thine household, and the Levite that is within thy gates; thou shalt not forsake him; for he hath no part nor inheritance with thee.” Deuteronomy 14:22-27.

Everyone was to take part in the festivals honoring God and enjoy the fellowship and free food.

While the first yearly tithe had the purpose of advancing and preserving the religious services and institutions by supporting the Levites and the priests, the second yearly tithe had the purpose of providing for the national religious festivals and ensuring the attendance and participation of every inhabitant of the land, regardless of their nationality or their social or financial status; everyone was to take part in the festivals honoring God and enjoy the fellowship and free food. These festivals occurred on

the first, second, fourth, and fifth years of the seven-year agricultural cycle, according to Deuteronomy 14:22-26.

Second triennial tithe—Maaser Ani

“At the end of three years thou shalt bring forth all the tithe of thine increase the same year, and shalt lay it up within thy gates: And the Levite, (because he hath no part nor inheritance with thee,) and the stranger, and the fatherless, and the widow, which are within thy gates, shall come, and shall eat and be satisfied; that the Lord thy God may bless thee in all the work of thine hand which thou doest” Deuteronomy 14:28, 29. Every three years, in the third and sixth years of the seven-year cycle, a difference was made in the second tithe for the poor. Instead of taking the products to the storage places in the sanctuary or temple, they were delivered directly to the homes of all the needy. This activity was a special part of the triennial charity and was connected to the canceling of all pending or unpaid debts in the seventh year among the Israelites. In addition, the law of God was to be read before all the people and the land was to rest.

“And Moses commanded them, saying, At the end of every seven years, in the solemnity of the year of release, in the feast of tabernacles, when all Israel is come to appear before the Lord thy God in the place which He shall choose, thou shalt read this law before all Israel in their hearing. Gather the people together, men and women, and children, and thy stranger that is within thy gates, that they may hear, and that they may learn, and fear the Lord your God, and observe to do all the words of this law: and that their children, which have not known any thing, may hear, and learn to fear the Lord your God, as long as ye live in the land whither ye go over Jordan to possess it.” Deuteronomy 31:10-13.

God’s reason for giving instruction concerning the second triennial tithe is described in Deuteronomy 26:12, 13. “When thou hast made an end of tithing all the tithes of thine increase the third year, which is the year of tithing, and hast given it unto the Levite, the stranger, the fatherless, and the widow, that they may eat within thy gates, and be filled; Then thou shalt say before the Lord thy God, I have brought away the hallowed things out of mine house, and

also have given them unto the Levite, and unto the stranger, to the fatherless, and to the widow, according to all Thy commandments which Thou hast commanded me:..." The second yearly tithe was shared with the family and the needy at the place of worship. But in the third and sixth years, it was different. This tithe was delivered directly to the homes of the Levites, strangers, orphans, and widows close to where it was produced.

Tithes for the Levites and the poor

These two tithes had different recipients, locations, and ways of distribution. Each family, near their place of residence, gave the first yearly tithe to the Levites, who then gave the tithe of their income and the tenth part of the tithes they received to the priestly family, in the person of the high priest, in the place where the tabernacle was situated, and later in the temple.

"It was a training adapted to kill out all narrowing selfishness, and to cultivate breadth and nobility of character."

The second yearly tithe was shared with all the needy in the form of a feast in the place chosen by God, while the second triennial tithe was given to all the needy in their place of residence. In the *Contemporary English Version*, Deuteronomy 26:12-14 reads like this: "Every year you are to give ten percent of your harvest to the Lord. But every third year, this ten percent must be given to the poor who live in your town, including Levites, foreigners, orphans, and widows. That way, they will have enough to eat. Then you must pray: Our Lord and our God, You have said that ten percent of my harvest is sacred. I have obeyed Your command and given this to the poor, including the Levites, foreigners, orphans, and widows. I have not eaten any of this sacred food while I was in mourning; in fact, I never touched it..."

"The consecration to God of a tithe of all increase, whether of the orchard and harvest field, the flocks and herds, or the labor of brain or hand, the devotion of a second tithe for the relief of the

poor and other benevolent uses, tended to keep fresh before the people the truth of God's ownership of all, and of their opportunity to be channels of His blessings. It was a training adapted to kill out all narrowing selfishness, and to cultivate breadth and nobility of character." —*Education*, p. 44.

The religious system of God's people was financed by the first and second tithes. Funds were thus provided for the Levites and the priests, for the national festivals, and for the sustenance of the needy.

The blessing of giving

Throughout the Holy Scriptures, care and concern for the poor and needy are linked to wonderful promises, beatitudes, and blessings. Seven of them from the book of Proverbs are listed below, confirming the approval of Heaven upon all who faithfully give the second tithe in harmony with the Biblical system discussed above:

- "There is that scattereth, and increaseth yet more." Proverbs 11:24. "Sharing," "distributing," and "contributing" are terms of great significance in the Bible, and they are accompanied by the principle of double increase from the Lord.
- "The liberal soul shall be made fat: and he that watereth shall be watered also himself." Proverbs 11:25. Prosperity and generosity are closely linked in the decision to give, but this Bible verse guarantees blessings to the giver.
- "... He that honoureth Him [his Maker] hath mercy on the poor." Proverbs 14:31. Reverence and honor for God are shown in gifts given to those in need.
- "He that hath pity upon the poor lendeth unto the Lord; and that which he hath given will He pay him again." Proverbs 19:17. The Lord considers offerings given to the poor as a loan to Himself, and He promises a reward for them.
- "He that hath a bountiful eye shall be blessed; for he giveth of his bread to the poor." Proverbs 22:9. The divine blessing is showered on the generous giver who shares his possessions with those who have little.
- "He that giveth unto the poor shall not lack: but he that hideth his eyes shall have many a curse." Proverbs

28:27. The Biblical principle of giving is multiplication. If something is donated, it is preserved and multiplied; and the blessings are then multiplied as well.

- "... Plead the cause of the poor and needy." Proverbs 31:9. Concern for the needy—supporting and defending them—and finding aid and giving it to them are considered the responsibility of every man to his fellow man.

These seven principles in Proverbs can be grouped according to three areas of human existence. First is the relationship of the human being with God—the recognition of Him as Creator, Giver, Sustainer, and Redeemer, which is shown in accepting and using for the benefit of every individual the products of the earth with which one is surrounded.

The joy of giving is accompanied by divine assistance and protection for the giver.

Second is the relationship of the human being with his fellow men who depend on him. Acknowledging his complete dependence on God is what makes it possible for one to be committed to providing for the needs of his fellow beings. "He judged the cause of the poor and needy; then it was well with him: was not this to know Me? saith the Lord." Jeremiah 22:16. The Lord considers helping the needy practical evidence that a person knows Him and has a permanent relationship with Him, for "blessed is he that considereth the poor: the Lord will deliver him in time of trouble." Psalm 41:1. The joy of giving is accompanied by divine assistance and protection for the giver.

And third is the fact that such giving encompasses the essence of the moral, ethical, and spiritual principles God designed for humanity, as described by Jesus Christ in Matthew 22:37-40: "Jesus said unto him, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets." Amen.

Not in Part, but the Whole—First Fruits

By Larry Watts, U.S.A., and Antonino Di Franca, Italy

"Honour the Lord with thy substance, and with the firstfruits of all thine increase: so shall thy barns be filled with plenty, and thy presses shall burst out with new wine." Proverbs 3:9, 10.

The word used for "firstfruits" above is the same as the very first word in the Bible—*re'shiyth* (Strong's H7225). In the English *King James Version*, this word is translated eighteen times as "beginning" (as in Genesis 1:1), twenty times as "first," "firstfruit" or "firstfruits," and four times in various other ways ("chiefest," "part," "thing," "time"), but never as "tithe."

Here are a few examples: "The first of the firstfruits of thy land thou shalt bring into the house of the Lord thy God." "That thou shalt take of the first of all the fruit of the earth, which thou shalt bring of thy land that the Lord thy God giveth thee, and shalt put it in a basket, and shalt go unto the place which the Lord thy God shall choose to place His name there." "And now, behold, I have brought the firstfruits of the land, which Thou, O Lord, hast given me. And thou shalt set it before the Lord thy God, and worship before the Lord thy God." Exodus 23:19; Deuteronomy 26:2, 10.

The Spirit of prophecy confirms the principle of the first fruit offering: "Besides the tithe the Lord demands the first fruits of all our increase." —*Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 6, p. 384

"Surely goodness and mercy attend us at every step. Not till we wish the infinite Father to cease bestowing His gifts on us, should we impatiently exclaim, Is there no end of giving? Not only should we faithfully render to God our tithes, which He claims as His own, but we should bring a tribute to His treasury as an offering of gratitude. Let us with joyful hearts bring to our Creator the first fruits of all His bounties—our choicest possessions, our best and holiest service." —(*Review and Herald*, February 9, 1886) *Counsels on Stewardship*, p. 18.

A short word study

Another word translated as "firstfruits" is *bikkur*. This word is so translated fourteen times of the eighteen times it is found in scripture. The four other times it is translated as "figs," "first-ripe," "fruit," "ripe." But a related word, *bkowr* (which means "first born," "eldest," "firstlings") is found some 116 times. This is the word that describes the offering brought by faithful Abel in Genesis 4:4: "And Abel, he also brought of the firstlings of his flock and of the fat thereof. And the Lord had respect unto Abel and to his offering."

From this short word study we see that the "first fruits offering" is holy, as is tithe, but not a specific and measured part of something greater (the tithe being ten percent of one's increase); but it is also the first product of the future harvest, as is the wave sheaf. The people brought the "firstfruits of our ground, and the firstfruits of all fruit of all trees, year by year, unto the house of the Lord: Also the firstborn of our sons, and of our cattle, as it is written in the law, and the firstlings of our herds and of our flocks, to bring to the house of our God..." Nehemiah 10:35, 36. These belonged 100 percent to the Lord and were rendered to Him or redeemed—depending on the kind of animals. Exodus 13:12, 13; 34:19, 20. Provision was also made to support the public worship of God. A pledge was given by the congregation to contribute a stated sum every year for the service of the sanctuary.

The difference between the tithe and first fruits extends further, however. Although neither really belong to us (they belong to the Lord as His), the tithe is ongoing, while the first fruits are exactly that—for example, the first male child, the first crop from a newly-planted tree, the first ripe grain of a harvest. The first fruits are, therefore, unique and can never be repeated. They lead the way for the blessings that are expected to follow. That is one reason why Jesus is called the "firstfruits" of the redeemed. 1 Cor-

inthians 15:20, 23. He is "the first of the firstfruits." "Like the wave sheaf, which was the first ripe grain gathered before the harvest, Christ is the first fruits of that immortal harvest of redeemed ones that at the future resurrection shall be gathered into the garner of God." —*The Great Controversy*, p. 399.

"... Christ the first fruits represented the great spiritual harvest to be gathered for the kingdom of God."

"Christ arose from the dead as the first fruits of those that slept. He was the antitype of the wave sheaf, and His resurrection took place on the very day when the wave sheaf was to be presented before the Lord. For more than a thousand years this symbolic ceremony had been performed. From the harvest fields the first heads of ripened grain were gathered, and when the people went up to Jerusalem to the Passover, the sheaf of first fruits was waved as a thank offering before the Lord. Not until this was presented could the sickle be put to the grain, and it be gathered into sheaves. The sheaf dedicated to God represented the harvest. So Christ the first fruits represented the great spiritual harvest to be gathered for the kingdom of God. His resurrection is the type and pledge of the resurrection of all the righteous dead." —*The Desire of Ages*, pp. 785, 786.

Lessons from a proverb

The phrase "the first of the firstfruits" is used twice in the Scriptures, and in both cases it is connected with an intriguing proverb: "The first of the firstfruits of thy land thou shalt bring unto the house of the Lord thy God. Thou shalt not seethe a kid in his mother's milk." Exodus 23:19; 34:26. What does this mean—that one was not to boil a kid in his mother's milk? A search of Bible commentaries and Jewish scholars pro-

duces a common answer: "That's what the heathen did in religious services, so Israel was commanded not to do that."

But there is a simpler and yet more profound meaning: God made the milk to be given to the kid for its nutrition; but if men boil the kid in his mother's milk, they do exactly the opposite, because they take both for themselves! As it is correct to give the kid the milk that is for it, so it is right to give to the Lord the first fruits that belong to Him. Therefore, we find the proverb two times at the end of the same sentence: "The first of the firstfruits of thy land thou shalt bring unto the house of the Lord thy God." That is to say, Bring the first of your fruits without delay to the house of the Lord; don't think of yourself first according to popular convenience, taking the first for yourself and putting the Lord last.

The Spirit of prophecy confirms this. "Of all our income we should make the first appropriation to God. In the system of beneficence enjoined upon the Jews, they were required either to bring to the Lord the first fruits of all His gifts, whether in the increase of their flocks or herds, or in the produce of their fields, orchards, or vineyards, or they were to redeem it by substituting an equivalent. How changed the order of things in our day! The Lord's requirements and claims, if they receive any attention, are left till the last. Yet our work needs tenfold more means now than was needed by the Jews." —*Counsels on Stewardship*, p. 68.

"Let God's portion be first set apart."

"Not only does the Lord claim the tithe as His own, but He tells us how it should be reserved for Him. He says, 'Honour the Lord with thy substance, and with the firstfruits of all thine increase.' This does not teach that we are to spend our means on ourselves and bring to the Lord the remnant, even though it should be otherwise an honest tithe. Let God's portion be first set apart. The directions given by the Holy Spirit through the apostle Paul in regard to gifts present a principle that applies also to tithing. 'Upon the first day of the week let every one of you lay by him in store, as God hath prospered him.' Parents and children are here included." —*The Adventist Home*, p. 389.

Yes, "how changed" is "the order of things in our day!" Instead of the first and best, it is all too often castoffs that end up in the church storage rooms or kitchen. When something is worn out, "the church will take it!" As Spurgeon said, we give God the parings of our lives, our time, and our energies. It is true that God will take the remnant and through them reveal the character of Christ to the universe; but these people are those who will have given God the first and best of everything He has given them, not the last.

What doth God require?

One day Jesus was asked: "Which is the first commandment of all?" His answer was crystal clear: "The first of all the commandments is, ... thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength: this is the first commandment." Mark 12:28-30. The clear implication here is that the Lord should be in the first, highest, best place in our lives, that we should use all our abilities and strength to give Him the absolute preference. The second implication is that the best and the first belong to Him. In the last days, the world under the wicked one turns all the ways of God upside down, but Christ will have a people who do not do this. They do not "pervert" the "natural" use of things to serve carnal lusts.

"The payment of the tithe was but a part of God's plan for the support of His service. Numerous gifts and offerings were divinely specified. Under the Jewish system the people were taught to cherish a spirit of liberality both in sustaining the cause of God and in supplying the wants of the needy. For special occasions there were freewill offerings. At the harvest and the vintage, the first fruits of the field—corn, wine, and oil—were consecrated as an offering to the Lord. The gleanings and the corners of the field were reserved for the poor. The first fruits of the wool when the sheep were shorn, of the grain when the wheat was threshed, were set apart for God. So also were the first-born of all animals, and a redemption price was paid for the first-born son. The first fruits were to be presented before the Lord at the sanctuary and were then devoted to the use of the priests.

"By this system of benevolence the Lord sought to teach Israel that in everything He must be first.... Everything that they possessed was His; they were but the stewards of His goods.

"It is not God's purpose that Christians, whose privileges far exceed those of the Jewish nation, shall give less freely than they gave. 'Unto whomsoever much is given,' the Saviour declared, 'of him shall be much required.' Luke 12:48. The liberality required of the Hebrews was largely to benefit their own nation; today the work of God extends over all the earth. In the hands of His followers, Christ has placed the treasures of the gospel, and upon them He has laid the responsibility of giving the glad tidings of salvation to the world. Surely our obligations are much greater than were those of ancient Israel." —*The Acts of the Apostles*, pp. 336-338.

In other important truths like the tithe and the Sabbath, we generally recognize our obligations to God; but what about other practices? What about the first fruits? "He that is faithful in that which is least is faithful also in much:..." Luke 16:10.

The giving of our first fruits is the reflection of our love and gratitude to God.

"God has laid His hand upon all things, both man and his possessions; for all belong to Him. He says, I am the owner of the world; the universe is Mine, and I require you to consecrate to My service the first fruits of all that I, through My blessing, have caused to come into your hands. God's word declares, 'Thou shalt not delay to offer the first of thy ripe fruits.' Exodus 22:29. 'Honor the Lord with thy substance, and with the first fruits of all thine increase.' Proverbs 3:9. This tribute He demands as a token of our loyalty to Him." —*Counsels on Stewardship*, p. 72.

Determining the first fruits

While giving the tithe and keeping the Sabbath are recognitions of His authority and tokens of our loyalty to the Creator, the giving of our first fruits is the reflection of our love and gratitude to God in acknowledgment of where those blessings come from. "The first fruits

of the earth were to be consecrated to God, and given back to Him as an offering of gratitude, an acknowledgment of His goodness to them." –*Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 4, p. 447. So, the first criterion for determining one's first fruit offerings is: How much do I love God? How grateful am I for all His benefits? I am not to give "grudgingly, or of necessity: for God loveth a cheerful giver." 2 Corinthians 9:7. That we are to render first fruit offerings is required, but the amount is determined by internal and external circumstances.

When we give in gratitude before
the blessings are received,
we bring into our practical lives the
sentiments of our prayers of faith.

The second requirement was the wave sheaf offering presented during the Passover. "On the second day of the feast, the first fruits of the year's harvest, a sheaf of barley, was presented before the Lord....

"Not until this was presented could the sickle be put to the grain, and it be gathered into sheaves." –*The Desire of Ages*, pp. 77, 785.

These first fruits given in anticipation of an expected harvest were only a few ripe stalks waved back and forth in acknowledgment of Jehovah's mercy and His anticipated blessings. When we give in gratitude before the blessings are received, we bring into our practical lives the sentiments of our prayers of faith.

On the fiftieth day after Passover ("Pentecost," meaning fiftieth), the priests of Israel brought before the Lord "two wave loaves of two tenth deals: they shall be of fine flour; they shall be baked with leaven; they are the first-fruits unto the Lord." Leviticus 23:17. These were offered after the harvest was gathered, and not until they were offered could anyone eat of the bounties received. Perhaps that is why John Wesley taught that one should not put a morsel of food between his teeth until he had offered thanks.

Giving a wave sheaf offering in anticipation of expected blessings is a first fruit offering. It is holy. Besides the tithe and regular systematic offerings, one's first day's pay on a new job, for exam-

ple, is also holy. Or, when one receives a raise in pay, the amount of the increase that one time is also a "first fruit" and belongs to God. When a canvasser begins working, the profit from the first book he sells belongs to God and is given as a "first fruit" offering. If one buys a house to rent out to tenants, the first month's rent belongs to God.

If we have not given God His own in this regard, let us repent and change our ways. After all, "repentance is one of the first fruits of saving grace." – (*Signs of the Times*, June 28, 1905) *God's Amazing Grace*, p. 138.

"Spiritual prosperity is closely bound up with Christian liberality. The followers of Christ should rejoice in the privilege of revealing in their lives the beneficence of their Redeemer. As they give to the Lord, they have the assur-

ance that their treasure is going before them to the heavenly courts. Would men make their property secure? Let them place it in the hands that bear the marks of the crucifixion. Would they enjoy their substance? Let them use it to bless the needy and suffering. Would they increase their possessions? Let them heed the divine injunction, 'Honor the Lord with thy substance, and with the first fruits of all thine increase: so shall thy barns be filled with plenty, and thy presses shall burst out with new wine.' Proverbs 3:9, 10. Let them seek to retain their possessions for selfish purposes, and it will be to their eternal loss. But let their treasure be given to God, and from that moment it bears His inscription. It is sealed with His immutability." –*The Acts of the Apostles*, pp. 344, 345. Amen.

"Christ came to lead men to holiness, teaching them to love their fellowmen as He their Saviour had loved them. He is the fountain of all hope, of all peace, of all happiness. If we are indeed partakers of the divine nature, our spiritual life will give evidence that we have been drinking of the exhaustless fountain which has refreshed and blessed the soul. Christ will be in us a well of water springing up into everlasting life, and we can refresh all with whom we come in contact.

"Let those whose hearts glow with the Saviour's love, talk of Jesus, dwelling upon His infinite sacrifice in behalf of man. Dwell much upon His second appearing to our world; tell also of His first coming from heaven, His life of constant humiliation and sacrifice. With softened heart and tearful eye, tell the story of His dying upon Calvary's cross, because He loved us, that we might be saved.

"'Ye are,' says Christ, 'the light of the world.... Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven.' Looking unto Jesus, working for Jesus, having the eye single to His glory, you will be imbued with His Spirit; you will not fail or be discouraged. You who have been alive to worldly interests, will you now show an interest in eternal things proportionate to their true value?" –*Review and Herald*, December 2, 1890.

Always with Us—Offerings for the Poor

By Stefano La Corte, Italy

“He that hath pity upon the poor lendeth unto the Lord; and that which he hath given will He pay him again.” Proverbs 19:17.

Dear brothers and sisters around the world, I want to introduce this reading and greet you with Hebrews 13:24: “Salute all them that have the rule over you, and all the saints. They of Italy salute you.”

In this reading, we will study the interesting subject of offerings for the poor. To begin, we ask: Who are the poor? “One who has, or those who have, limited means of subsistence, who do not have sufficient economic resources,” is the dictionary definition.

This is a generic definition and applies indiscriminately in all the countries around the world. But if we would travel to different countries and make comparisons, we would find that this concept of poverty is relative. For example, in the country where I live, I would be considered poor, because I am below a certain level of income. But if, with the same economic resources, I were to go to another country, my resources would allow me to live well.

Let us clarify this with an example. Here in Italy, one is considered poor if he earns less than €500.00 (approximately US \$665) per month. In fact, in the *bel paese* (nice country), it is very difficult or almost impossible to live a decent life if one does not earn that amount. Having that same amount of money in some other countries in the world, one could live a better life. Therefore, we can say that there is relative poverty, and there is absolute poverty. Absolute poverty would be when the means at one’s disposal would not be enough for him to survive in any country on the planet, and relative poverty would be when one is unable to live decently in his country of origin while this might be possible in other countries.

Studying the inspired Word, it is wonderful to see that in God’s original plan poverty did not exist. He placed man in a beautiful garden under optimal conditions. But after the fall, man lost the glory

of God and became so poor that he had no clothes to cover his nakedness. Furthermore, over time, his feelings became more and more insensitive and selfish, to the point where the prophet Ezekiel describes man’s heart as being like stone. Nevertheless, the Creator has not given up on fallen man and has always taken care of him, inviting him to come to Him. Israel, the people who represented God on earth, were given complete, appropriate instructions so the poor would have at least the bare essentials.

A law of physics states that for every action there is an equal and opposite reaction; and we are so accustomed to the application of this law that when we do something, we automatically think about what the consequences might be in the short or long term. To avoid the possibility that a person who is influenced by selfishness would decide not to help his neighbor, Solomon wrote that in having pity on the poor one gives to the Lord, and He will reward him.

Indeed, this is a principle. “The silver is Mine, and the gold is Mine, saith the Lord of hosts.” Haggai 2:8. And Psalm 24:1, 2 agrees with this: “The earth is the Lord’s, and the fulness thereof; the world, and they that dwell therein. For He hath founded it upon the seas, and established it upon the floods.”

If we accept the view of God’s Word that everything belongs to Him, we come to the conclusion that, as human beings created by God, we are simply administrators of His goods. In the beginning, it was the same; our first parents were given the garden of Eden to watch over and maintain. Even today, we can consider man the steward of God’s gifts. And in regard to aiding the poor today, the Word of the Lord gives specific instructions.

The poor and the second tithe

“To promote the assembling of the people for religious service, as well as to provide for the poor, a second tithe of all the increase was required....

“This tithe would provide a fund for the uses of charity and hospitality. [See Reading 3.]

“And further provision was made for the poor. There is nothing, after their recognition of the claims of God, that more distinguishes the laws given by Moses than the liberal, tender, and hospitable spirit enjoined toward the poor. Although God had promised greatly to bless His people, it was not His design that poverty should be wholly unknown among them. He declared that the poor should never cease out of the land....

“Then, as now, persons were subject to misfortune, sickness, and loss of property; yet so long as they followed the instruction given by God, there were no beggars among them, neither any who suffered for food.

“The law of God gave the poor a right to a certain portion of the produce of the soil. When hungry, a man was at liberty to go to his neighbor’s field or orchard or vineyard, and eat of the grain or fruit to satisfy his hunger. It was in accordance with this permission that the disciples of Jesus plucked and ate of the standing grain as they passed through a field upon the Sabbath day.

“All the gleanings of harvest field, orchard, and vineyard, belonged to the poor. ‘When thou cuttest down thine harvest in thy field,’ said Moses, ‘and hast forgot a sheaf in the field, thou shalt not go again to fetch it.... When thou beatest thine olive tree, thou shalt not go over the boughs again.... When thou gatherest the grapes of thy vineyard, thou shalt not glean it afterward: it shall be for the stranger, for the fatherless, and for the widow. And thou shalt remember that thou wast a bondman in the land of Egypt.’ Deuteronomy 24:19-22; Leviticus 19:9, 10.” –*Patriarchs and Prophets*, pp. 530, 531.

The sabbatical year

“Every seventh year special provision was made for the poor. The sabbatical year, as it was called, began at the end of

the harvest. At the seedtime, which followed the ingathering, the people were not to sow; they should not dress the vineyard in the spring; and they must expect neither harvest nor vintage. Of that which the land produced spontaneously they might eat while fresh, but they were not to lay up any portion of it in their storehouses. The yield of this year was to be free for the stranger, the fatherless, and the widow, and even for the creatures of the field. Exodus 23:10, 11; Leviticus 25:5....

"The observance of the sabbatical year was to be a benefit to both the land and the people. The soil, lying untilled for one season, would afterward produce more plentifully. The people were released from the pressing labors of the field; and while there were various branches of work that could be followed during this time, all enjoyed greater leisure, which afforded opportunity for the restoration of their physical powers for the exertions of the following years. They had more time for meditation and prayer, for acquainting themselves with the teachings and requirements of the Lord, and for the instruction of their households....

"The hire of a laborer was to be promptly paid: 'Thou shalt not oppress a hired servant that is poor and needy, whether he be of thy brethren, or of thy strangers that are in thy land:.... At his day thou shalt give him his hire, neither shall the sun go down upon it; for he is poor, and setteth his heart upon it.' Deuteronomy 24:14, 15." *—Patriarchs and Prophets*, pp. 531, 532. In the parable of the workers who labored for several hours, Jesus showed that their wages were paid to them at the end of the day.

"To the poor, the seventh year was a year of release from debt. The Hebrews were enjoined at all times to assist their needy brethren by lending them money without interest. To take usury from a poor man was expressly forbidden: 'If thy brother be waxen poor, and fallen in decay with thee; then thou shalt relieve him: yea, though he be a stranger, or a sojourner; that he may live with thee. Take thou no usury of him, or increase: but fear thy God; that thy brother may live with thee. Thou shalt not give him thy money upon usury, nor lend him thy victuals for increase.' Leviticus 25:35-37. If the debt remained unpaid until the year of release, the principal itself could not be recovered. The people were

expressly warned against withholding from their brethren needed assistance on account of this: 'If there be among you a poor man of one of thy brethren,... thou shalt not harden thine heart, nor shut thine hand from thy poor brother.... Beware that there be not a thought in thy wicked heart, saying, The seventh year, the year of release, is at hand; and thine eye be evil against thy poor brother, and thou givest him nought; and he cry unto the Lord against thee, and it be sin unto thee.' 'The poor shall never cease out of the land; therefore I command thee, saying, Thou shalt open thine hand wide unto thy brother, to thy poor, and to thy needy, in thy land,' 'and shalt surely lend him sufficient for his need, in that which he wanteth.' Deuteronomy 15:7-9, 11, 8." *—Patriarchs and Prophets*, pp. 532, 533.

The year of jubilee

"None need fear that their liberality would bring them to want. Obedience to God's commandments would surely result in prosperity. 'Thou shalt lend unto many nations,' He said, 'but thou shalt not borrow; and thou shalt reign over many nations, but they shall not reign over thee.' Deuteronomy 15:6.

"After 'seven sabbaths of years,' 'seven times seven years,' came that great year of release—the jubilee. 'Then shalt thou cause the trumpet of the jubilee to sound ... throughout all your land. And ye shall hallow the fiftieth year, and proclaim liberty throughout all the land unto all the inhabitants thereof: it shall be a jubilee unto you; and ye shall return every man unto his possession, and ye shall return every man unto his family.' Leviticus 25:9, 10....

"As in the sabbatical year, the land was not to be sown or reaped, and all that it produced was to be regarded as the rightful property of the poor. Certain classes of Hebrew slaves—all who did not receive their liberty in the sabbatical year—were now set free. But that which especially distinguished the year of jubilee was the reversion of all landed property to the family of the original possessor. By the special direction of God the land had been divided by lot. After the division was made no one was at liberty to trade his estate. Neither was he to sell his land unless poverty compelled him to do so, and then, whenever he or any of his kindred might desire to redeem it, the purchaser must not

refuse to sell it; and if unredeemed, it would revert to its first possessor or his heirs in the year of jubilee.

"The Lord declared to Israel: 'The land shall not be sold forever: for the land is Mine; for ye are strangers and sojourners with Me.' Leviticus 25:23. The people were to be impressed with the fact that it was God's land which they were permitted to possess for a time; that He was the rightful owner, the original proprietor, and that He would have special consideration made for the poor and unfortunate. It was to be impressed upon the minds of all that the poor have as much right to a place in God's world as have the more wealthy.

"Such were the provisions made by our merciful Creator, to lessen suffering, to bring some ray of hope, to flash some gleam of sunshine, into the life of the destitute and distressed....

"The regulations that God established were designed to promote social equality. The provisions of the sabbatical year and the jubilee would, in a great measure, set right that which during the interval had gone wrong in the social and political economy of the nation.

"These regulations were designed to bless the rich no less than the poor. They would restrain avarice and a disposition for self-exaltation, and would cultivate a noble spirit of benevolence; and by fostering good will and confidence between all classes, they would promote social order, the stability of government....

"If the law given by God for the benefit of the poor had continued to be carried out, how different would be the present condition of the world, morally, spiritually, and temporally! Selfishness and self-importance would not be manifested as now, but each would cherish a kind regard for the happiness and welfare of others; and such widespread destitution as is now seen in many lands would not exist." *—Patriarchs and Prophets*, pp. 533, 534, 536.

The situation in the early Christian church

"The record declares, 'Neither was there any among them that lacked,' and it tells how the need was filled. Those among the believers who had money and possessions cheerfully sacrificed them to meet the emergency. Selling their hous-

es or their lands, they brought the money and laid it at the apostles' feet, 'and distribution was made unto every man according as he had need.'

"This liberality on the part of the believers was the result of the outpouring of the Spirit. The converts to the gospel were 'of one heart and of one soul.' One common interest controlled them—the success of the mission entrusted to them; and covetousness had no place in their lives. Their love for their brethren and the cause they had espoused, was greater than their love of money and possessions. Their works testified that they accounted the souls of men of higher value than earthly wealth.

"Thus it will ever be when the Spirit of God takes possession of the life. Those whose hearts are filled with the love of Christ, will follow the example of Him who for our sake became poor, that through His poverty we might be made rich. Money, time, influence—all the gifts they have received from God's hand, they will value only as a means of advancing the work of the gospel....

"In those days, when the number of the disciples was multiplied, there arose a murmuring of the Grecians against the Hebrews, because their widows were neglected in the daily ministrations....

"The hearts of those who had been converted under the labors of the apostles, were softened and united by Christian love. Despite former prejudices, all were in harmony with one another. Satan knew that so long as this union continued to exist, he would be powerless to check the progress of gospel truth; and he sought to take advantage of former habits of thought, in the hope that thereby he might be able to introduce into the church elements of disunion.

"Thus it came to pass that as disciples were multiplied, the enemy succeeded in arousing the suspicions of some who had formerly been in the habit of looking with jealousy on their brethren in the faith and of finding fault with their spiritual leaders, and so 'there arose a murmuring of the Grecians against the Hebrews.' The cause of complaint was an alleged neglect of the Greek widows in the daily distribution of assistance. Any inequality would have been contrary to the spirit of the gospel, yet Satan had succeeded in arousing suspicion. Prompt measures must now be taken to remove all occasion for dissatisfaction,

lest the enemy triumph in his effort to bring about a division among the believers....

"Summoning a meeting of the believers, the apostles were led by the Holy Spirit to outline a plan for the better organization of all the working forces of the church. The time had come, the apostles stated, when the spiritual leaders having the oversight of the church should be relieved from the task of distributing to the poor and from similar burdens, so that they might be free to carry forward the work of preaching the gospel. 'Wherefore, brethren,' they said, 'look ye out among you seven men of honest report, full of the Holy Ghost and wisdom, whom we may appoint over this business. But we will give ourselves continually to prayer, and to the ministry of the word.' This advice was followed, and by prayer and the laying on of hands, seven chosen men were solemnly set apart for their duties as deacons.

"The appointment of the seven deacons to take the oversight of special lines of work, proved a great blessing to the church. These officers gave careful consideration to individual needs as well as to the general financial interests of the church, and by their prudent management and their godly example they were an important aid to their fellow officers in binding together the various interests of the church into a united whole....

"The order that was maintained in the early Christian church made it possible for them to move forward solidly as a well-disciplined army clad with the armor of God. The companies of believers, though scattered over a large territory, were all members of one body; all moved in concert and in harmony with one another." —*The Acts of the Apostles*, pp. 70, 71, 87-89, 95, 96.

"When general collections were taken up in the Gentile churches for the relief of the Jewish believers, the liberality of the converts in Macedonia was held up as an example to other churches. Writing to the Corinthian believers, the apostle called their attention to 'the grace of God bestowed on the churches of Macedonia; how that in a great trial of affliction the abundance of their joy and their deep poverty abounded unto the riches of their liberality. For to their power,... yea, and beyond their power they were willing of themselves; pray-

ing us with much entreaty that we would receive the gift, and take upon us the fellowship of the ministering to the saints.' 2 Corinthians 8:1-4....

"It was not necessary to urge them to give; rather, they rejoiced in the privilege of denying themselves even of necessary things in order to supply the needs of others. When the apostle would have restrained them, they importuned him to accept their offering. In their simplicity and integrity, and in their love for the brethren, they gladly denied self, and thus abounded in the fruit of benevolence....

"Unselfish liberality threw the early church into a transport of joy; for the believers knew that their efforts were helping to send the gospel message to those in darkness. Their benevolence testified that they had not received the grace of God in vain. What could produce such liberality but the sanctification of the Spirit? In the eyes of believers and unbelievers it was a miracle of grace." —(*The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 344); *Counsels on Stewardship*, pp. 171-173.

The widow of Zarephath

"The widow of Zarephath shared her morsel with Elijah; and in return, her life and that of her son were preserved. And to all who, in time of trial and want, give sympathy and assistance to others more needy, God has promised great blessing. He has not changed. His power is no less now than in the days of Elijah." —(*Prophets and Kings*, p. 132); *Counsels on Stewardship*, p. 174.

The widow's mite

"The Saviour called His disciples to Him, and bade them mark the widow's poverty. Then His words of commendation fell upon her ear: 'Of a truth I say unto you, that this poor widow hath cast in more than they all.' Tears of joy filled her eyes as she felt that her act was understood and appreciated....

"Jesus said of the poor widow, She 'hath cast in more than they all.' The rich had bestowed from their abundance, many of them to be seen and honored by men. Their large donations had deprived them of no comfort, or even luxury; they had required no sacrifice, and could not be compared in value with the widow's mite." —*Counsels on Stewardship*, p. 175.

Mary's acceptable offering

"It is the heart service that makes the gift valuable. When the Majesty of heaven became a babe, and was entrusted to Mary, she did not have much to offer for the precious gift. She brought to the altar only two turtledoves, the offering appointed for the poor; but they were an acceptable sacrifice to the Lord. She could not present rare treasures such as the wise men of the East came to Bethlehem to lay before the Son of God; yet the mother of Jesus was not rejected because of the smallness of her gift. It was the willingness of her heart that the Lord looked upon, and her love made the offering sweet. So God will accept our gift, however small, if it is the best we have, and is offered from love to Him." —(*Review and Herald*, December 9, 1890) *Counsels on Stewardship*, p. 176.

As fragrant incense

"Experience shows that a spirit of benevolence is more frequently found among those of limited means than among the more wealthy. Many who greatly desire riches would be ruined by their possession....

"The poor man's gift, the fruit of self-denial, to extend the precious light of truth, is as fragrant incense before God. Every act of self-sacrifice for the good of others will strengthen the spirit of beneficence in the giver's heart, ally-ing him more closely to the Redeemer of the world, who was rich, yet for our sakes became poor, that we through His poverty might be rich.

"The smallest sum given cheerfully as the result of self-denial is of more value in the sight of God than the offerings of those who could give thousands and yet feel no lack. The poor widow who cast two mites into the treasury of the Lord, showed love, faith, and benevolence.... God's blessing upon that sincere offering has made it the source of great results.

"The widow's mite has been like a tiny stream flowing down through the ages, widening and deepening in its course, and contributing in a thousand directions to the extension of the truth and the relief of the needy." —(*Signs of the Times*, November 15, 1910) *Counsels on Stewardship*, pp. 177, 178.

As estimated in the heavenly balances

"In the balances of the sanctuary, the gifts of the poor, made from love to Christ, are not estimated according to the amount given, but according to the love which prompts the sacrifice. The promises of Jesus will as surely be realized by the liberal poor man, who has but little to offer, but who gives that little freely, as by the wealthy man who gives of his abundance. The poor man makes a sacrifice of his little, which he really feels. He really denies himself of some things that he needs for his own comfort, while the wealthy man gives of his abundance, and feels no want, denies himself nothing that he really needs. Therefore there is a sacredness in the poor man's offering that is not found in the rich man's gift;..." —*Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 3, pp. 398, 399; *Christian Service*, p. 180.

One day a young man came and asked Jesus: "Good Master, what good thing shall I do, that I may have eternal life?" The young man was confident in himself because he believed he had observed the law of God. But "Jesus said unto him, If thou wilt be perfect, go and sell that thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven: and come and follow Me." Matthew 19:16, 21.

This message is repeated to all of us who proclaim to the whole world that we keep God's law. To reach perfection we have to give as charity what has been entrusted to us. Even in this aspect the Son of God gave us a perfect example: "Who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God: But made Himself of no reputation, and took upon Him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men: And being found in fashion as a man, He humbled Himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross." Philippians 2:6-8.

When we need a loan and apply to a credit institution, we must provide sufficient guarantees that we will repay the money. Often a guarantor is required—one who agrees to pay our debt in case of default. If a friend, a brother, or a needy person asks for our help, how do we respond? Are we afraid that the money we lend may be lost? Do we also want a guarantor? Let us not be afraid! Solomon reminds us that the Lord is the

guarantor: "He that hath pity upon the poor lendeth unto the Lord; and that which he hath given will He pay him again." Proverbs 19:17.

In the sermon on the mount, Jesus extends the invitation, "Lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal: For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also." Matthew 6:20, 21.

"This is the treasure for which Christ bids us labor. Character is the great harvest of life. And every word or deed that through the grace of Christ shall kindle in one soul an impulse that reaches heavenward, every effort that tends to the formation of a Christlike character, is laying up treasure in heaven....

"And at the final day, when the wealth of earth shall perish, he who has laid up treasure in heaven will behold that which his life has gained." —*Thoughts from the Mount of Blessing*, p. 90.

Even today, the church of the last days follows the instructions given in the inspired Word. In the early 1990s, to meet the need of the believers who, due to illness or natural disaster, have fallen into poverty, the Good Samaritan Department was established as part of the General Conference, inspired by the parable in Luke 10:33-35: "But a certain Samaritan, as he journeyed, came where he was: and when he saw him, he had compassion on him, And went to him, and bound up his wounds, pouring in oil and wine, and set him on his own beast, and brought him to an inn, and took care of him. And on the morrow when he departed, he took out two pence, and gave them to the host, and said unto him, Take care of him; and whatsoever thou spendest more, when I come again, I will repay thee."

We thank the Lord and all the donors that this Department has been able to provide financial assistance and sustenance to those in need in many countries around the world, easing the suffering of orphans, widows, the sick, and victims of earthquakes, floods, storms, and other disasters. With God's continued blessing, we will continue to help as He makes it possible in the future. May He bless each of us richly in this great and marvelous work, so that also in this way we may be followers of Jesus. Amen!

Inspired Christians

By Pablo Hunger, Austria/U.S.A.

Gratitude of the first Christians

The defining characteristic of Jesus' followers in the first century was a life inspired by their Master. Their hearts overflowed with such an experience with God that they could not keep from expressing their gratitude to their Saviour and Lord—gratitude for forgiveness and the sacrifice of God's Son, being that they were guilty and merited punishment; gratitude for the peace of knowing that they could trust completely in Christ, who died and now lived to intercede for them before the Father and who guided their steps; gratitude for the victories against weakness and vice, and for the power received from on high to do the will of God; gratitude for the wise counsel of scripture, and for the opportunity to witness how families and social relationships were strengthened when every heavenly counsel was followed. In all of their acts was reflected the acknowledgement that Jesus was the center of their actions.

The Saviour meant everything to them; He was the motivation for all their acts and words. His reflected life was not only heard but also seen in living service to their fellow men, and for this they were called "Christians." This name was a reflection of the experience they had made with their Master.

Willingness of the Waldenses

In the Pra del Torno in northern Italy is found the school of the Barba, the missionary school of the Waldenses. For five bitter winter months in the high altitudes of the mountains, under severe physical conditions, the youth were instructed in the Holy Scriptures. From there they went out to sell their handicraft and watch for opportunities to share portions of the Bible that had been copied by hand. The principles of the Waldenses included modesty and simplicity. They lived and taught their children to be satisfied with little, their main priority being to support the proc-

lamation of the eternal gospel financially and in every other possible way. They were convinced that pomp, ambition for riches, and wealth separate man from God. In the Synod of Chanforan (1532)—when the Waldenses joined the Swiss Reform—with the meager funds they had, they paid 1,500 silver shields for the translation of the Bible into French by the theologian Olivetano, cousin of the reformer John Calvin. Today this sum would be about \$25,666. The young people were full of fervor for their Master Jesus Christ, who lived a life of poverty and service; they were ready to pay the highest price with their own blood to serve and honor Christ rather than renounce the truth.

The same is required today. "Christ calls for young men who will volunteer to carry the truth to the world,... men whose hearts are warm with Christian love, and whose hands are eager to go about their Master's work." —(*Manual for Canvassers*, p. 22 [1902]) *Colporteur Ministry*, p. 19.

Will we accept God's call? Does His love burn in our hearts? Does the work of our hands reflect gratitude for Jesus?

Freewill offerings

The inspiration and love of Christ is the true motive of a Christian's practical service. This inspiration, as it did for the Waldenses, will lead one to give generous contributions from what God has entrusted to him. When one's heart overflows with gratitude, every offering will be an opportunity to give and express his love for Christ in the form of giving to His children in need and doing everything possible to obtain means for the proclamation of the eternal gospel.

Jesus extolled the attitude of the widow who, despite being poor, gave her last two mites to the treasury of the temple. "Mites" in Greek is *lepta*, the term given to the smallest coin of hammered bronze in Judea in the first century A.D. Although the widow's dona-

tion consisted of the least valuable coin and financially amounted to very little, she was honored by Jesus because she made the greatest sacrifice she could in her heartfelt gratitude toward God. To the Lord this donation was considered of great value.

"And He called unto Him His disciples, and saith unto them, Verily I say unto you, That this poor widow hath cast more in, than all they which have cast into the treasury: For all they did cast in of their abundance; but she of her want did cast in all that she had, even all her living." Mark 12:43.

"She believed," the Spirit of prophecy brings out, "the service of the temple to be of God's appointment, and she was anxious to do her utmost to sustain it. She did what she could, and her act was to be a monument to her memory through all time, and her joy in eternity. Her heart went with her gift; its value was estimated, not by the worth of the coin, but by the love to God and the interest in His work that had prompted the deed." —*The Desire of Ages*, p. 615. We need the same inspiration and devotion as the widow.

"It is the heart service that makes the gift valuable.... So God will accept our gift, however small, if it is the best we have, and is offered from love to Him." —(*Review and Herald*, December 9, 1890) *Counsels on Stewardship*, p. 176.

We live in a world in which ambition consumes people's energies. The desire to get means and secure the things of the world destroys marriages, relationships of parents and children, and even life itself. Under such circumstances, there is no time to converse with one's spouse, to spend time with one's children, to pray, or to read the Bible; the primary thought is to work, work, to make more, more.

Questions to ask ourselves

Christians are not exempt from this danger. We soothe our consciences with the thought that we go to church

on Sabbath and give tithes and offerings; but the question is whether that which we do is done with desire and devotion—if we are truly at peace with God. Do we daily experience the first love? Are we investing our all in eternity, as did the widow, with gratitude, or are we giving a minimal amount in comparison to the desires that dominate our human impulses—what we eat, how we spend our time, and how we spend our money? How often do we indulge ourselves in purchasing things that we use for a short period of time as a result of a momentary whim, after which they are set aside?

Some years ago, a painting was shown at a London art gallery. From a distance, it looked like a monk with his head bowed and his hands folded in prayer. But a closer look revealed that the monk was squeezing an orange into a small glass as he looked down at it. Could this painting be a portrayal of us? Could it be that when we pray everything seems right from a distance, but upon closer inspection we are actually doing something else?

We should not forget the parable of the rich man whose business had been enormously profitable and wanted to expand it further. Jesus concluded the story by saying, “But God saith unto him, Thou fool, this night thy soul shall be required of thee: then whose shall those things be, which thou hast provided? So is he that layeth up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God.” Luke 12:20, 21.

Rich in God

We should be rich in God. How is this possible? First, one’s heart must love God above all and recognize that He owns the world and everything in it. With Him we can obtain joy and riches that money cannot buy. Love will grow to the degree that we spend time with God in reading His word and communicating with Him in prayer. It will grow as we meditate on Christ’s life, what He has done, and what He is doing for us and others. As we contemplate the beauty of His character, we will be transformed. This type of investment is eternal. It leads us wholeheartedly to make a different type of financial investment—contributions to carry out His purposes. We will be inspired to give our tithes and offerings so souls

may be reached with the truth and the needy may be comforted. We will rejoice to see new souls, for through our contributions we have helped rescue lives for eternity.

Sensitive to others’ needs

I remember as a child wanting to have a game that I had seen at a friend’s house. My parents offered to help, but not by buying me the game—something that would only feed the natural desire of a child to ask for everything he sees and desires. Rather, they gave me the equivalent of the amount the game would cost in the form of natural herbs that my mom cultivated and which I could sell. This was a challenge for me, and it also served as a way to understand the effort needed to acquire things. For several days, my younger sister and I went out with enthusiasm to offer our products to our neighbors. Great was our satisfaction when we had sold everything, not just because we had gained the money for the game we wanted, but also because we first gave the tithe to the Lord and even had money left over for other things.

Following the example of my parents, I have tried to help my children do certain tasks for which they are paid so they may have their own savings accounts, thus teaching them to return to God the tithes of what He has given them and to contribute to the advancement of His work. In addition, I encourage them to give some of their earnings to help children in other countries who are in need. It is inspiring to me to see how happy they are to contribute generously of their funds to buy Bibles for children in underprivileged countries, to help sick children, etc. It is also a great joy to see them ask others for “mites” so they can contribute even more for the proclamation of the gospel.

Benevolence and liberality

“The apostle Paul, in his ministry among the churches, was untiring in his efforts to inspire in the hearts of the new converts a desire to do large things for the cause of God. Often he exhorted them to exercise generosity. In speaking to the elders of Ephesus of his former labors among them, he said, ‘I have showed you all things, how that so laboring ye ought to support the weak,

and to remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how He said, ‘It is more blessed to give than to receive.’ ‘He which soweth sparingly,’ he wrote to the Corinthians, ‘shall reap also sparingly; and he which soweth bountifully shall reap also bountifully. Every man according as he purposeth in his heart, so let him give; not grudgingly, or of necessity: for God loveth a cheerful giver.’ Acts 20:35; 2 Corinthians 9:6, 7.

“Nearly all the Macedonian believers were poor in this world’s goods, but their hearts were overflowing with love for God and His truth, and they gladly gave for the support of the gospel. When general collections were taken up in the Gentile churches for the relief of the Jewish believers, the liberality of the converts in Macedonia was held up as an example to other churches. Writing to the Corinthian believers, the apostle called their attention to ‘the grace of God bestowed on the churches of Macedonia; how that in a great trial of affliction the abundance of their joy and their deep poverty abounded unto the riches of their liberality. For to their power, . . . yea, and beyond their power they were willing of themselves; praying us with much entreaty that we would receive the gift, and take upon us the fellowship of the ministering to the saints.’ 2 Corinthians 8:1-4.

“The willingness to sacrifice on the part of the Macedonian believers came as a result of wholehearted consecration. Moved by the Spirit of God, they ‘first gave their own selves to the Lord’ (2 Corinthians 8:5), then they were willing to give freely of their means for the support of the gospel. It was not necessary to urge them to give; rather, they rejoiced in the privilege of denying themselves even of necessary things in order to supply the needs of others. When the apostle would have restrained them, they importuned him to accept their offering. In their simplicity and integrity, and in their love for the brethren, they gladly denied self, and thus abounded in the fruit of benevolence.” —*The Acts of the Apostles*, pp. 342, 343.

Choosing to be Christians inspired by God and consecrated to Him with all our hearts will make a huge difference in our lives. This experience will automatically produce outward results. Like the Waldenses and the Christians of Macedonia, with joy and love for our Lord,

we will be willing to serve, speak, and contribute as much as we can for Him.

This is why the apostle Paul—whom it can also be said that his life was inspired by Christ—wrote to the Corinthians, “Every man according as he purposeth in his heart, so let him give; not grudgingly, or of necessity: for God loveth a cheerful giver.” 2 Corinthians 9:7.

As two people who are in love willingly make great sacrifices for one another, so—as Christians consecrated and inspired by Christ—we should devote everything we have and are to our Lord. In everything—in our words and actions—God wants love and gratitude for Him to be the motive.

What if one does not feel love for God?

I remember an experience I made with a friend. We were both raised in Christian homes. From the time we were small, our fathers worked together doing evangelistic campaigns, seeking for sincere souls. When we became young people, we had the privilege of studying together in the missionary school. We shared many happy times and made unforgettable experiences. We enjoyed recreational activities and exerted a lot of energy in them. Yet all of this did not automatically put the love of Christ in our hearts. At the end of our studies, we went our separate ways.

In my life, I noticed that my heart was cold. Even though I was habitually doing everything that was instructed in the Scriptures, Jesus’ love did not burn in me. I struggled with tears, pleading with God to give me a “heart” experience. With the help of the book *Steps to Christ* and conversing with God through prayer, expressing the emptiness I felt in my heart, the day came when suddenly His promises enlightened my mind and filled my heart with love and fire. For me this was the beginning of a new life inspired by Christ.

After several months of experiencing the flame of such love for God, I found my friend, who invited me out for a meal and a movie, something we had often shared before. In all truth, this pastime had given me a certain satisfaction; but on many occasions I had placed my spiritual life in danger. That day I realized I had to make a decision.

I shared with him my newfound experience with God and my resolution to seek activities that would not jeopardize my spirituality.

Unfortunately, my friend let himself be influenced by carnal impulses, and his decisions led him to great misfortune. Led by his feelings, he married a woman whose thoughts and ways were far from those of God. Today his home is the source of many problems (habits and customs which do not honor God are fostered there) as a result of the ties he made without God’s blessing. I have often prayed that he will experience the first love for Christ, but this is an experience I cannot give him. Every person has to decide for himself or herself to fall in love with Jesus and be inspired by those things that are everlasting.

The power of prayer and its results

John Knox was described as short in stature and of a weak constitution. A contemporary of his, Mr. Thomas Smeaton, said, “I know not if God ever placed a more godly and great spirit in a body so little and frail.” When that frail body went on its knees, Mary Queen of Scots trembled. She said she feared the prayers of John Knox more than the combined armies of Europe.

In his book, *The Christian Family*, Larry Christenson writes that John Knox prayed with such power that all Scotland was awakened. He goes so far as to attribute the entire Protestant Reformation in Scotland to Knox’s prayers. “Lord, give me Scotland, or I die!” Knox cried. The Lord could answer such an intense prayer, and He did!

Willingness and blessing

When a person is inspired by God, he enjoys His many blessings and, as a result, gains great victories in Christ. Heaven’s blessings—spiritual as well as material—are waiting to rain down on God’s children, contingent on their sincere surrender to Him. We should act out of love, truly believing the promises given to Malachi. “Bring ye all the tithes into the storehouse, that there may be meat in Mine house, and prove Me now herewith, saith the Lord of hosts, if I will not open you the windows of heaven, and pour you out a blessing, that there shall not be room enough to receive it.” Malachi 3:10.

Let us not be like the rich young ruler. After asking Jesus the way to eternal life and receiving Jesus’ counsel to share his riches with his fellow man, He went away sorrowful because he was very rich and was unable to let go of his apparent security—his material goods. He had received a call from God to be generous (because his self-centeredness was getting in the way of his salvation), but he refused to see the true wealth in that opportunity.

“Come to the Lord with hearts overflowing with thankfulness for past and present mercies, and manifest your appreciation of God’s bounties by bringing to Him your thank offerings, your freewill offerings, and your trespass offerings.” —(*Review and Herald*, January 4, 1881) *Counsels on Stewardship*, p. 198.

“Then shall the King say unto them on his right hand, Come, ye blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world: for I was an hungred, and ye gave Me meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave Me drink: I was a stranger, and ye took Me in: naked, and ye clothed Me: I was sick, and ye visited Me: I was in prison, and ye came unto Me. Then shall the righteous answer Him, saying, Lord, when saw we Thee an hungred, and fed Thee? or thirsty, and gave Thee drink? When saw we Thee a stranger, and took Thee in? or naked, and clothed Thee? Or when saw we Thee sick, or in prison, and came unto Thee? And the King shall answer and say unto them, Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these My brethren, ye have done it unto Me.” Matthew 25:34-40.

The blessings we give to our neighbors—out of the generosity God plants in our hearts—is a service done to the Master.

An example of faith and blessing

George Müller was born in Prussia on September 27, 1805. His father was a tax collector, and the son seemed to inherit his father’s ability with figures. When he was converted to Christ, Müller was impressed by the many statements of Jesus telling His followers “to ask.” At that point in his life, Müller and his wife launched into a daring experiment. First, they gave away all of their household goods. The next step was even more daring; he refused a regular sal-

ary from the small mission he had been serving. He then set out to establish an orphanage to care for the homeless children of England.

The first home was set up in a rented building on April 21, 1836. Within a matter of days, 43 orphans were being cared for. Müller and his associates decided that their mission would operate under the following guidelines:

1. No funds would ever be solicited.
2. No debts would ever be incurred.
3. No money contributed for a specific purpose would ever be used for any other purpose.
4. All accounts would be audited annually.
5. There would be no appeal to a person's ego by the publication of a donor's name.
6. No "names" of prominent people would be sought for the board or to advertise the institution.
7. The success of the orphanage would be measured not by the numbers served or by the amount of money taken in but by God's blessings on the project, which Müller expected to be in direct proportion to the time he spent in prayer.

When the first building was constructed, Müller and his friends remained true to their principles. The public was amazed when a second building was opened six months after the first. The group kept concentrating on prayer, and eventually there were five new buildings, 110 workers, and 2,050 orphans being cared for.

Müller not only counted on God to provide; he believed that God would provide abundantly. For more than 60 years, Müller recorded every specific prayer request and the result. He was responsible for the care of 9,500 orphans during his life. These children never went without a meal. Müller never asked for help from anyone but God. \$7.5 million came to him for his missions, and he vowed that it was all in answer to believing prayer.

May the Lord inspire us to live by faith, to love Jesus with all our hearts, and to give joyfully and generously of the goods He has entrusted to us for the progress of His work. In so doing, may we rejoice, as did as George Müller and other men and women of God, in the fulfillment of the divine promises. Amen.

An Elevated Gift

By Idel Suarez, Jr., U.S.A.

"Speak to the Levites and say to them: When you take from the Israelites the tithe that I have given you as your inheritance from them, you must separate from it an elevated gift to God, a tithe of the tithe." Numbers 18:26, Living Torah Version.

Tipping or tithing

Two young men, Henry and Timothy, were talking together. Henry asked Timothy, "Would you consider being a porter?"

Timothy quickly shook his head and said emphatically, "No, I would not."

"Why not?" questioned Henry.

Timothy explained, "I do not want someone to tip me according to his or her biased opinion of my services."

So it is with tithing. When we do not pay a faithful, systematic tithe, we are merely tipping the Lord as if He were our waiter and not our High Priest. Tipping is subjective. Tithing is objective and absolute.

According to God's plan, we are accountable to render not just the tithe of our means, but our entire soul. Our funds, our time, our thoughts, and our talents must not be merely tipped but systematically and willfully given to God and His service as an elevated gift.

The surrender of our soul as an elevated gift

During this Week of Prayer, we have studied and meditated on the subject of stewardship. We have read about our privilege of offering our tithe, a second tithe, first fruits, gifts for the poor, and various other offerings to God's work. But the question arises, Are you tipping God? Do you remember your obligations to Him only as an afterthought? Do you think about giving only when it is convenient?

By God's grace, we are accountable to God not just for our means, but also for our time and other talents. We are not to tip God, like we would a waiter, with some of our extra money or free

time. God is to have the first, best, and foremost place in our thoughts, words, and actions. We are to pay our tithe first and make time for God first—every morning and every Sabbath.

Did you know that the tithe of the Decalogue is the Sabbath? It is one commandment of ten, the tenth of the law, consecrated to God. Hence, every morning and every week we need to elevate ourselves as a gift to God.

Who you are is God's gift to you, but what you become by His grace is your gift to Him. As the psalmist says, "unto Thee, O Lord, do I lift up my soul." Psalm 25:1. Our entire soul—body, mind, and spirit—is to be placed at God's service.

It is our privilege to elevate who we are and what we have as a gift for God and His glory.

I am reminded of the story of a little girl who went to a country church. When it was time for the deacons to collect the offering, this little girl had no money to give. The deacon approached her seat and she kindly asked him to set the offering plate on the floor beside her feet. As he did so, she stepped onto the offering plate and, lifting her eyes heavenward, prayed aloud, "Lord, I have no coins, but I give you myself." Does this not summarize the desire of every true believer?

Our whole soul is to be surrendered on the offering plate of God. All we have and are is actually just borrowed from Him for a limited time. It is our privilege to elevate who we are and what we have as a gift for God and His glory.

David knew this, and he expressed it well in 1 Chronicles 29:14: "But who am I, and what is my people, that we should be able to offer so willingly after this sort? for all things come of Thee, and of Thine own have we given Thee." In reality, all we give to God is the return of what belongs to Him in the first

place. David emphasizes that it must be given or offered “willingly.” God loves a cheerful giver.

Like the pine tree, our needle leaves must point heavenward. Like the huge Alps of Europe covered with snow, we are to be clothed in Christ’s white garments of righteousness all year long, every day, and every moment.

Some may inquire, “Doesn’t God demand too much of us?” Should we try to haggle with God so as to give Him less while He seeks to give us more? Should we merely tip Him with our thoughts, funds, and talents? Or should we offer all as an elevated gift to Him who is worthy and priceless?

He gave His very best, the foremost,
the first in His realm.

Let us consider this from another perspective. Did God tip us? Did He send an angel or a created being to redeem us? No. God sent His only begotten Son. He gave His very best, the foremost, the first in His realm. He sent Jesus Christ, the second person of the Godhead—one equal with Him in power, existence, and nature.

“Willingly and cheerfully Christ gave Himself to the carrying out of the will of God. He became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross. Shall we feel it a hardship to deny ourselves?... His death ought to stir every fiber of the being, making us willing to consecrate to His work all that we have and are. As we think of what He has done for us, our hearts should be filled with love.” —*Counsels on Stewardship*, p. 302.

Our collective responsibility in tithing

Why, then, should we individually or as a group think about reducing our donations for God’s work? Why should some fields excuse themselves from sending a faithful, systematic tithe of the tithe to the General Conference, just as some members who do not faithfully render their tithe to the local church?

Collectively—as a church, as a field, or as a union—we also have an opportunity to give to God’s next level of organization, the General Conference. This collective giving encompasses two

aspects: Providing missionaries to go abroad into new mission fields, and assuring that the fields and unions send the tithe of the tithe to the General Conference.

This last article of the Week of Prayer seeks to highlight our collective responsibility in giving. As fields and unions gather the tithe from their members, Biblically speaking, these groups of churches have a spiritual and moral duty to contribute the tithe of the tithe in a timely and faithful manner to the General Conference. Under the subheadings that follow, a Biblical and historical precedent is briefly presented as proof that the tithe of the tithe apportioned to the General Conference is necessary to hasten the return of Christ. This gospel of the kingdom must be preached in all the world before Jesus returns. “And this gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world for a witness unto all nations; and then shall the end come.” Matthew 24:14.

To this end, fields should also be willing to give the tithe of the tithes received from their workers and members as a collective, elevated gift to God for carrying out the gospel commission. Even as this article is being written, the present truth is reaching Egypt, Yemen, Iraq, North Korea, and other remote areas of our planet. Let us then go back to when God called Israel, even as He calls spiritual Israel today, to find proof that the tithe of the tithe is an elevated gift.

An elevated gift in the Jewish dispensation

God instructed Moses to teach both the nation of Israel and the Levites about His tithing plan. “And all the tithe of the land, whether of the seed of the land, or of the fruit of the tree, is the Lord’s: it is holy unto the Lord.” Leviticus 27:30. Every Israelite was to bring ten percent of his gross income to the Lord’s house. This tithe was given to the Levites. “And, behold, I have given the children of Levi all the tenth in Israel for an inheritance, for their service which they serve, even the service of the tabernacle of the congregation.” Numbers 18:21. The Levites, in turn, gleaned a tithe from that tithe to give to Aaron the High Priest. “Speak to the Levites and say to them: When you take from the Israelites the tithe that I

have given you as your inheritance from them, you must separate from it an *elevated gift* to God, a tithe of the tithe.” “You must therefore separate an elevated gift from all the tithes that you take from the Israelites, and you must give it as God’s *elevated gift* to Aaron the priest.” Numbers 18:26, 28; *Living Torah Version*.

This principle of an “elevated gift,” as the Jews call it, or a “heave offering,” as the King James Bible refers to it, was the tithe of the tithe. The Hebrew word for “heave offering” is *terumath* (Strong’s 8641). It literally means a “present or sacrifice offered up.” Hence, the Jews call the tithe of the tithe: *terumath maaser*—the elevated gift of tithe. And the Hebrew root word for *terumath* is *rumath* (Strong’s 7311), which really means “to elevate, to rise up, to raise, to be a high act.”

What a picture these definitions are painting! The people paid a ten percent tithe of their gross income to God for the Levites, who in turn paid the tenth of the tithe they received to the next level up, the priesthood. This last step of the tithing was the tithe of the tithe, the *terumath maaser*, the “elevated gift.”

An elevated gift during the reformation in Nehemiah’s day

When Nehemiah was called to bring about a reformation in Judah, one of the first things he did after rebuilding the walls of Jerusalem was to reinstate the complete tithing system, including the “elevated gift.” All Jews, those who had remained in the country and those just returning from Babylon, were required to deliver the tithe to the Levites. The Levites collected that tithe; and they, in turn, entrusted a tithe from it to the priests in Jerusalem. This tithe of the tithe was not to stay with the Israelites nor with the Levites, but was to be given to the house of Aaron.

“And the priest the son of Aaron shall be with the Levites, when the Levites take tithes: and the Levites shall bring up the tithe of the tithes unto the house of our God, to the chambers, into the treasure house.” Nehemiah 10:38. Later, in Nehemiah 13:5, it mentions “great chambers,” in which in past times the “offerings of the priests” were deposited. But, the Hebrew word used for “offering” in this text is again *teru-*

math, an elevated gift reserved for the household of Aaron, the high priest.

Hence, a line can be drawn down through time from Israel all the way to our day of bringing an *elevated gift* to the storehouse at Jerusalem (the headquarters of old), what we now call the General Conference.

The tithe of the tithe as an elevated gift in our day

These principles of systematic tithe giving, briefly described above, are found in the Old Testament and are an example for us today. Paul wrote: "For whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the scriptures might have hope." Romans 15:4.

Systematic tithing is a simple two-step process. Step one: The Israelites gave the tithe of their income for the ministry of the Levites. Step two: The Levites gave the *elevated gift*, the tithe of the tithe, to the house of Aaron. In this way, the same principle followed by the Israelites was applied to the Levites. So it should be in our day.

The Israelites of old serve as a type to the remnant church of these last days. Paul wrote that we are all Israelites if we have the faith of Abraham. "Know ye therefore that they which are of faith, the same are the children of Abraham." Galatians 3:7.

Today, we continue the simple two-step process of systematic tithing. Step one: The members of the Reform Movement (spiritual Israel) give their tithes to their respective field or union conferences, which administer the funds as did the Levites of old. Step two: The field or union conferences send the *elevated gift* (tithe of the tithe) to the General Conference, which is made up of pastors according to the gift of administration of the Spirit. Step one deals with the tithe. Step two deals with the tithe of the tithe. Step one is always ten percent (10%) of the total income a member earns. Step two is one percent (1%) of the [original] income of the members (which is 10% of the income of the field conference or union).

Even when more levels of organization are placed between the members and the General Conference, the systematic two-step tithe amounts do

not change. For example, all the tithes of the local church members are channeled through the church to the field. If the field is under a union, then the tenth of the tithe (10% of the contributions of the members of the local church) is funneled through the union to the General Conference.

"The conference passed on a tithe of these tithes to the General Conference."

The pioneer Adventists followed the same systematic two-step tithing principle: "Not until 1876-1879, however, did Adventists institute a full-fledged tithing system (adapted from the Levitical model) as the basis for denominational finance. Leaders encouraged members to adopt the tithing plan as God's ordained arrangement for the support of the ministry and the work of the church. Tithes gathered in the churches were remitted to the conferences for the support of the ministers in their respective territories. The conference was designated as the storehouse for the tithes. The conference passed on a tithe of these tithes to the General Conference."¹

Promise of a blessing or a curse regarding the elevated gift

When the children of Israel entered the land of Canaan, they were all to assemble before two mountains. They were to speak as one people of twelve tribes. They were to repeat the blessings and curses found in the Torah, or the Pentateuch, which Moses had written. These mountains were Mount Ebal and Mount Gerizim. "And it shall come to pass, when the Lord thy God hath brought thee in unto the land whither thou goest to possess it, that thou shalt put the blessing upon mount Gerizim, and the curse upon mount Ebal." Deuteronomy 11:29. These two mountains represent two ways placed before every believer throughout time. God promises to bless those who obey His laws and to curse those who disobey.

The prophet Malachi took that same principle of blessing-cursing and applied it to the system of tithing and systematic giving—the tithe, the tithe of the tithe, and offerings. "Will a man rob

God? Yet ye have robbed Me. But ye say, Wherein have we robbed Thee? In tithes and offerings. Ye are cursed with a curse: for ye have robbed Me, even this whole nation. Bring ye all the tithes into the storehouse, that there may be meat in Mine house, and prove Me now herewith, saith the Lord of hosts, if I will not open you the windows of heaven, and pour you out a blessing, that there shall not be room enough to receive it. Malachi 3:8-10.

Was it only the common people who were cursed, or could the Levites also be cursed, for not paying a faithful and timely tithe? Although Malachi's text is generally applied to individuals, it is also applicable to the Levites. Likewise, if the people were blessed for their faithfulness in stewardship, would not the Levites also be blessed for their faithfulness in systematic giving?

Why was the whole nation cursed? The whole nation was cursed because they were not bringing "all the tithes into the storehouse." Malachi 3:10. The people were paying only some of their tithe, and the Levites were paying only some of the tenth of the tithe to Aaron's family, but not all of it. Like Ananias and his wife Sapphira, they were withholding some of it for their own purposes. They were unfaithful, and therefore a curse was upon them.

God gives special blessings when His people return an honest and timely tithe. He also gives a blessing when the field conference, made up of several churches, sends their tithe honestly and on time to the General Conference. This is clearly stated in the Testimonies: "Those churches who are the most systematic and liberal in sustaining the cause of God are the most prosperous spiritually."²

This special blessing of tithing and tithing the tithes continues to the end of time: "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 to them. So also will it be a blessing to those who carry it out to the end of time."³

The statements quoted both above and below speak of churches in plural. Churches are organized into field or union conferences. They can lose God's blessings if they do not implement the second step of the tithing system, not

giving the tithe of the tithe to the General Conference.

"It is the worst kind of generalship to allow a conference to stand still or to fail to settle its honest debts. There is a great deal of this done; and whenever it is done, God is displeased."⁴

"The churches need to be impressed with the fact that it is their duty to deal honestly with the cause of God, not allowing the guilt of the worst kind of robbery to rest upon them, that of robbing God in tithes and offerings."⁵

Notice how the inspired pen states that it is the "worst kind of robbery" for a conference not to settle its debts. The "debts" refer to a conference not paying its workers an honest and timely salary. Hence, it is worse when a field or union conference does not send the tithe of the tithe to the General Conference than when a member withholds tithe from his or her local church. Neither is correct, but one is judged to be the "worst kind." Why? Because workers and their families in poor countries suffer when funds are not faithfully remitted to the General Conference to be disbursed throughout the world to help missionaries in foreign and new countries.

The tithe of the tithe as an *elevated gift* creates a word picture of many people lifting up to God an offering, as if acknowledging His kindness and sovereignty. It is like a team of people hoisting one of its most honored members up on their shoulders. It takes the cooperation of many to support one person, or to pay a worker in a foreign land who is winning souls for Jesus.

We are thus, individually and collectively, responsible to ensure that the *elevated gift* reaches the General Conference, as in the time of old it reached Aaron's priesthood. To receive the full spiritual blessings as a family, as a field, and as a union, strict accountability must be maintained at all levels. The members should give their tithe honestly and in a timely manner to their local churches. The tithes then pass untouched to the field and union treasuries. Even as the local church does not deduct from the tithe before remitting it to the field, neither does the union deduct from the field's tithe of the tithe for the General Conference. This *elevated gift*, the tithe of the tithe, is thus delivered honestly and in a timely manner to the General Conference.

Emptied his pockets

During the 1700s, Dr. Benjamin Franklin, the great American statesman whose face appears on the highest circulating American currency—the one hundred dollar bill—heard an Englishman preach in the city of Philadelphia. This Englishman was George Whitefield. Franklin listened and commented about how Whitefield had an "extraordinary influence" on "his hearers." Franklin originally intended to place no more than one shilling in the offering plate. Yet as Whitefield continued his appeal, Franklin finally put four gold sovereigns in the offering plate—all the money he had in his pockets. He literally emptied his pockets to support the missions project of Whitefield.⁶

He literally "emptied His pockets"
to save you and me from
eternal perdition.

In the words of Pastor Douglas Francis, who spoke at the World Assembly in South Africa in 2012, God "emptied His pockets" to redeem humankind from sin. "He paid the price for our redemption. He paid the ransom money, and now He wants what He purchased—our hearts. He wants us to love Him."⁷

When sin demanded death from the sinner, God in His everlasting mercy placed His own Son on the offering plate of Calvary. God looked into His own pockets and was willing to part with everything He had. He literally "emptied His pockets" to save you and me from eternal perdition.

John 3:16, the most famous verse in the New Testament, says, "For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life." True love is giving. God gave His Son to us forever. He did not give us a heavenly tip. He did not give us the crumbs of the universe. He gave us His only begotten Son. He emptied Heaven's pockets. God Almighty gave us the *elevated gift* of the universe. Jesus is the *elevated gift*—the true tithe of the tithe—the cream of the crop, the icing on the cake, the genuine heave offering.

"It was by the Lord Jesus Christ Himself, who gave His life for the life of the world, that this plan for system-

atic giving was devised. He who left the royal courts, who laid aside His honor as Commander of the heavenly hosts, who clothed His divinity with humanity in order to uplift the fallen race; He who for our sake became poor that we through His poverty might be rich, has spoken to men, and in His wisdom has told them His own plan for sustaining those who bear His message to the world."⁸

"And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto Me." John 12:32.

The greatest elevated gift is Jesus Christ. Once Jesus is elevated in our thoughts, words, and actions, men and women will be drawn to Him for salvation. Beholding Jesus and Him crucified with the eyes of faith elevates and resets our goals and life course. Then, we, too, will wish to lay all on the altar for His sake and for the salvation of others.

The apostle Paul writes: "But unto every one of us is given grace according to the measure of the *gift* of Christ." Ephesians 4:7. Christ is the Father's gift to humanity.

Paul compares Christ to Adam. He says that from Adam we receive only the debt of offence, sin, and death. But God in His eternal election has given us Christ as the *elevated gift* of grace. Jesus Christ is the free *elevated gift* by grace. "But not as the offence, so also is the free *gift*. For if through the offence of one many be dead, much more the grace of God, and the *gift* by grace, which is by one man, Jesus Christ, hath abounded unto many." Romans 5:15.

Jesus is the *elevated gift* by which we are justified. It is all of grace, that none should boast, but all should praise the free gift of Christ. "And not as it was by one that sinned, so is the *gift*: for the judgment was by one to condemnation, but the free *gift* is of many offences unto justification. For if by one man's offence death reigned by one; much more they which receive abundance of grace and of the *gift* of righteousness shall reign in life by one, Jesus Christ." Romans 5:16, 17.

As Heaven has given, we are also called to give an *elevated gift* that should reach the General Conference and ultimately the entire world mission field. It is like throwing a pebble into a lake that causes ripples of water to expand outward until they reach the shoreline.

That “one” amplifies as the number one in our lives and in our existence: Jesus Christ—the only true One—who lived, died, rose from the dead, and now justifies, intercedes, and prepares to come for His chosen ones—the church. “My dove, my undefiled is but one; she is the only one of her mother, she is the choice one of her that bare her.” Song of Solomon 6:9.

Are you willing to empty yourself
for the cause of God?

Are you willing to empty yourself for the cause of God? Are you willing to empty your pockets for Jesus Christ so this message of the kingdom may reach the four corners of our planet? Are you willing to encourage your field or union conference leaders to expedite the tithe of the tithe, the *elevated gift*, honestly and speedily to the General Conference?

“Another year has nearly passed into eternity, with its burden of record. Let us look over the past year, and if we have not done our full duty willingly, heartily unto the Lord: let us come up to the new year in making a faithful record to our God.”⁹

May God continue to bless you and this present truth. Amen.

¹ *The History and Use of the Tithe*, Appendix B. “Where Should I Pay My Tithe?” “Gospel Finance: Pulling Together,” Chapter 3, “Adventists, Organization, and Tithing,” pp. 41, 42; *Adventist Review*, March 3, 1988, p. 10 (218). Note: This is not written by Ellen G. White.

² Ellen G. White. *Special on Tithing—The Church and Its Mission*, p. 4; *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 3, p. 405.

³ *Ibid.*; *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 3, pp. 404, 405.

⁴ *Special on Tithing—The Church and Its Mission*, p. 13; *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 5, p. 374.

⁵ *Special on Tithing—The Church and Its Mission*, p. 12.

⁶ Peter Marshall and David Manuel (1977). *The Light and the Glory*. Old Tappan, New Jersey: Fleming H. Revell Company, p. 248.

⁷ Wendy Eaton. “Public Meetings Summary.” *The Sabbath Watchman*, vol. 87, No. 3 (November-December 2012), p. 8.

⁸ *Review and Herald*, February 4, 1902; *Counsels on Stewardship*, p. 6.

⁹ *Special on Tithing—The Church and Its Mission*, p. 20; *Testimonies to Ministers and Gospel Workers*, p. 308.

