

DECEMBER 2016

STEWARDSHIP EMPHASIS WEEK

Rediscovering Our True Identity



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Beloved Stewards,

The Annual Stewardship Emphasis Day and Week is another opportunity given to each one of us to pause for introspection. In the midst of the hustle and bustle of life, it is not rare that one is functioning in a coping or reactive mode; responding and complying to the dictate of circumstances, emergencies and solicitations. Apostle Paul considers self-examination to be a vital exercise for all believers, *"Examine yourselves to see whether you are in the faith; test yourselves. Do you not realize that Christ Jesus is in you—unless, of course, you fail the test?"* (2 Corinthians 13: 5). One crucial question that all need to ask and answer is the following: *Am I a faithful partner with God, accomplishing and supporting the final mission?* This interrogation is in line with the initiative Total Member Involvement (TMI) of the World Church.

Self-examination is always done against a point of reference. It is possible to take ourselves or others as points of reference. It should not be so for redeemed Christians. This is why the theme for this Stewardship Emphasis Day and Week is "Rediscovering Our True Identity". What are our life purposes as created and saved individuals? What does it mean to be created as stewards? There is an invitation to revisit the only reliable standard to assess our existence, the one set by the Creator.

This exercise, if done with sincerity of heart and prayer, can be quite distressing and may instil serious guilty feelings. Hence, before we embark in this salvific adventure, let us dwell on these words of Peter, *"For you know that it was not with perishable things such as silver or gold that you were redeemed from the empty way of life handed down to you from your ancestors."* (1 Peter 1:18). The blood of Jesus is sufficient to cleanse and restore anyone who has drifted away from one's identity and vocation as a faithful partner.

Aniel Barbe

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In the Beginning

1ST FRIDAY VESPER

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

WHAT ARE THE ELEMENTS OF OUR ORIGINAL IDENTITY, OUR CORE IDENTITY AS HUMANS?

HOW CAN A PERSON WHO HAS GONE THROUGH A SEVERE IDENTITY CRISIS BE RESTORED?

PRAYER

PART I: THE IDENTITY CRISIS

The Gospel of Luke tells the story of a man who was demon-possessed. We read about his condition in Luke 8: 27, *"When Jesus stepped ashore, he was met by a demon-possessed man from the town. For a long time this man had not worn clothes or lived in a house, but had lived in the tombs."* This man was struggling with a severe identity crisis – Luke 8:30, *"Jesus asked him, 'What is your name?' 'Legion,' he replied, because many demons had gone into him."* He was confused even about the basic element of identity, his name.

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

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

If we want to move out of an identity crisis, we need to rediscover who God is to man. True knowledge of God brings meaning and purpose. In his

teachings, Jesus was regular pointing people back to the God of creation, Matthew 19:8b, *"But it was not what God had originally intended."* It is essential to travel back to the time of creation.

PART II: OUR AFFILIATIONS WITH THE GOD OF CREATION

The account of creation reveals five basic affiliations between God and humanity:

i. God is the Creator of Humanity.

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

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

ii. God is the Model for Humanity.

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

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

iii. God is the Provider for Humanity.

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

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

iv. God is the Master of Humanity.

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

Humans are called to receive and follow instructions and directions.

v. God is a Companion to Humanity.

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

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

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

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

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

PART III: RESTORATION OF THE CORE IDENTITY

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

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

Humans are dependent beings. For years he had strayed around without clothes but verse 35 presents the transformed man as one who is dressed. Where has he gone shopping? We know the answer. Jesus was his Benefactor and Provider. He now depended upon Jesus to meet his needs. Humans are social beings. The demon-possessed man could not entertain a normal relationship with the divine and with his fellow men. Previously, he was always in solitary places and in the tomb, hiding to prevent any interaction. Now, his social ability was restored. Luke speaks about him as one who was visiting town; Mark even mentions ten cities.

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

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

The first therapy step to move out of an identity crisis, is to run to Jesus. It was effective for the demon-possessed and it will be effective for anyone - whatever our degree of identity confusion – even if the cause is supernatural. Jesus brings back purpose and meaning to the lives of those who come to Him.

CONCLUSION

If we are struggling with the discomfort of an identity crisis, if we are desperately seeking for purpose and meaning in life, we praise God for reminding us of our core identity as *God's creatures, as dependent beings, as God's representatives, as social beings, and as servants of Him.* If for

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

GOING DEEPER

What are the common manifestations of identity confusion and crisis in the society today?

What are the factors that lead us to live in opposition to our original core identity?

Read 1 Peter 1:18 and comment on the following statement: "Salvation is much more than the forgiveness of sin."

"If we want to move out of an identity crisis, we need to rediscover who God is to man. True knowledge of God brings meaning and purpose. In his teachings, Jesus was regularly pointing people back to the God of creation."

True humanity ... is to Worship God

1ST SABBATH DIVINE SERVICE

The first core element of our identity is: "Humans are God's creatures." One way of accepting and living this core identity is to worship God. Psalm 47:1-2 invites us, "Clap your hands, all you nations; shout to God with cries of joy. For the LORD Most High is awesome, the great King over all the earth." Revelation 4:11 is an echo of the previous passage: "You are worthy, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power, for you created all things, and by your will they were created and have their being." These two passages are revealing an essential truth. If we consider God to be awesome (Do you?) and God to be the creator of all things (Is He?), we are invited to worship Him, to join the chorus of those who are saying good things about God.

WHICH PLACE SHOULD WORSHIP OCCUPY IN OUR LIFE?

WHAT ARE THE EXPRESSIONS OF WORSHIP THAT ARE PLEASING TO GOD?

PRAYER

PART I: CREATURES ARE WORSHIPPERS

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

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

Let us read Revelation 4:8:

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

Let us read Revelation 4:10-11:

"The twenty-four elders fall down before him who sits on the throne and worship him who lives for ever and ever. They lay their crowns before the throne and say: "You are worthy, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power, for you created all things, and by your will they were created and have their being."

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

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

We read in Revelation 14:7:

He said in a loud voice, "Fear God and give him glory, because the hour of his judgment has come. Worship him who made the heavens, the earth, the sea and the springs of water."

The message of the first angel v.7 is an invitation to worship the Creator.

We read in Revelation 14:8:

A second angel followed and said, "Fallen! Fallen is Babylon the Great, [a] which made all the nations drink the maddening wine of her adulteries."

The message of the second angel v.8 is about Babylon who has led many into its adulteries, of worshipping other gods.

We read in Revelation 14:9-10:

"A third angel followed them and said in a loud voice: "If anyone worships the beast and its image and receives its mark on their forehead or on their hand, 10 they, too, will drink the wine of God's fury..."

The message of the third angel vs. 9-11 tells about the terrible outcome for those who worship the beast and his image instead of God.

Logically, the promise at the conclusion of the Three Angels' Message applies to those who worship God, Revelation 14:13, "Then I heard a voice

from heaven say, "Write this: Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on." "Yes," says the Spirit, "they will rest from their labor, for their deeds will follow them."

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

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

PART II: WORSHIPPING WITH OUR ALL

How should we worship? The Bible regularly presents our voices as instruments of worship. One known text is Psalm 66: 1-2: "Shout for joy to God, all the earth! Sing the glory of his name; make his praise glorious." We are doing a beautiful job in this aspect. Apostle Paul in Romans 12:1 expands the means of worship, "Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God—this is your true and proper worship." Not only the voice, but the totality of our person should be an instrument of worship.

I want us to concentrate on a recurring expression of total worship. While writing to the Philippians, Paul uses the expression "living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God" to describe a particular practice of this Church. What is it? We read in Philippians 4: 18, "I have received full payment and have more than enough. I am amply supplied, now that I have received from Epaphroditus the gifts you sent. They are a fragrant offering, an acceptable sacrifice, pleasing to God." What is considered by Paul to be "a fragrant", "an acceptable sacrifice" and "pleasing to God"? The generous offerings of the Philippians. It was viewed by Paul as an act of true and proper worship.

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

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

This meditation on "True Identity... is to Worship" ends with a reminder, the story of the three wise men from the East. They witness the fulfillment of prophecy of Balaam: "There shall come a Star out of Jacob, and a Scepter shall rise out of Israel." Num. 24:17 They spared themselves no effort to come to Israel to meet the new-born King. They had several sleepless nights, as it was the only means for them to follow the star. Their journey was around 1300-1400 kilometres. Matthew 2: 1-2 presents the reason for their endeavours: "Now after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the King, behold wise men from the East came to Jerusalem, saying, "Where is He who has been King of the Jews? For we have seen His star in the East and have come to worship Him." In contrast, the priest and the leaders of God's people did not consider it important to accompany the wise men to Bethlehem. They were too busy doing God's work that they found it difficult to pause for worship. This is a tragedy. Worship has a cost, are we prepared for the cost?

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

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

CONCLUSION

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

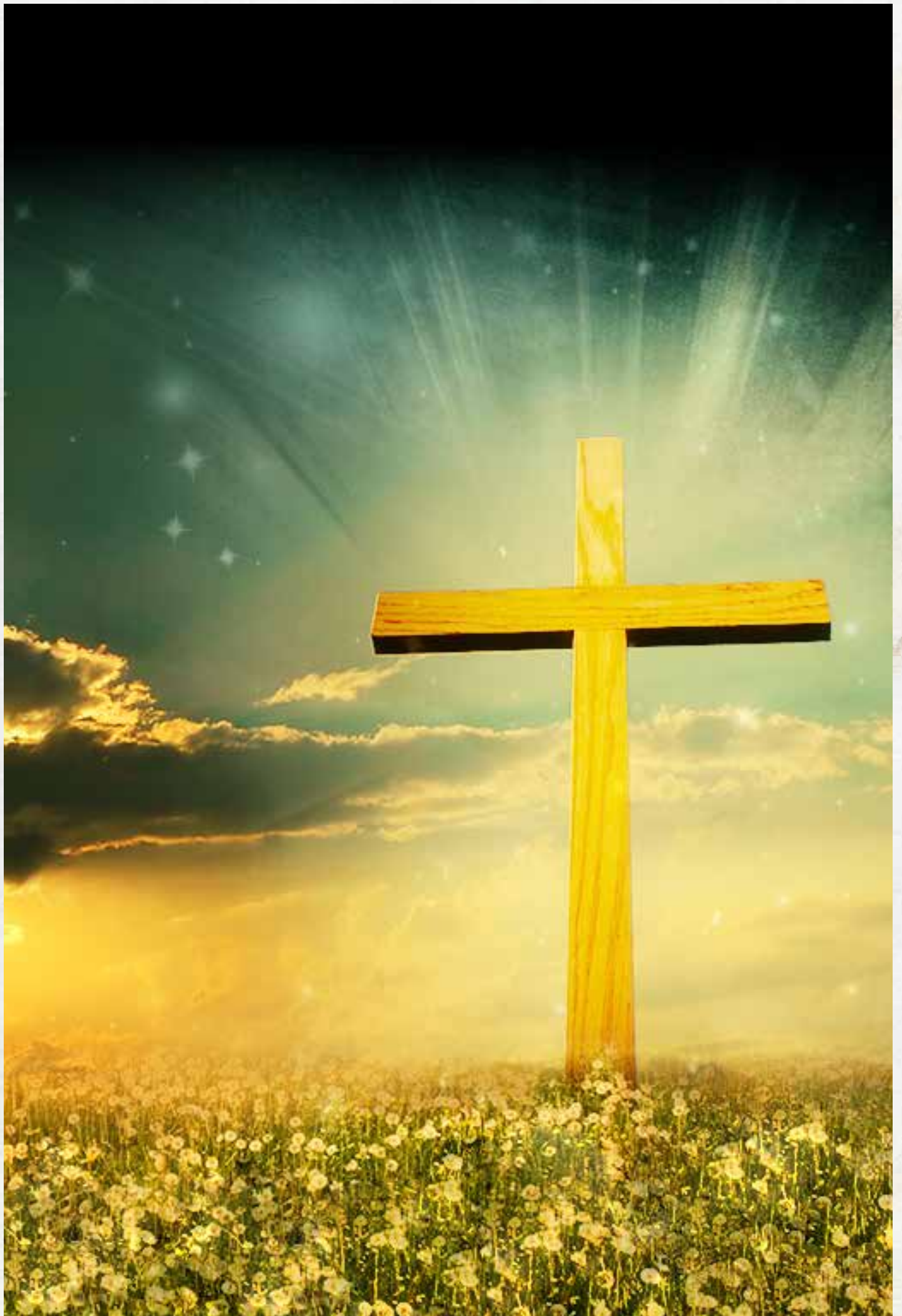
GOING DEEPER

What are the concrete actions that one can take to improve his/her personal worship?

What will be our suggestions to a family who is struggling to establish a regular pattern of family worship?

How can we as a Church create more space in the worship service for the participants to say "good things about God"?

How would we describe a "kingly gift" today? What can we do for our offerings to the Lord meet these criteria?



In Response to God's All

As a believer we usually respond to God's love by worshipping Him and witnessing about His goodness. We are called not to limit ourselves to verbal responses. How we manage our God's given resources is also an adequate expression of our response to God's blessings. This lesson focuses on the management of three significant resources: Time, Talent and Treasure.

PART I: GENERAL GUIDELINES FOR THE MANAGEMENT OF OUR RESOURCES

1. Read John 10:10. What is the design of God for His children?

He wants us to live an abundant life, to have a fulfilled existence.

2. Read Matthew 25: 14. How does God ensure that His children enjoy a quality life?

He provides each one with His best resources.

3. Read Romans 12:1-2. What does Paul invite his readers to do in response to all that God has provided?

The appropriate response to God's mercies is to dedicate the totality of our life to Him. ALL should be submitted to Him.

4. Read Genesis 12:2. For which purpose did God bless Abraham, the father of all believers?

Blessed, we are called to be a blessing to others.

PART II: THE GIFT OF TIME

5. Read Psalms 90:10. What does this text tell us about the availability of time?

Time is not an unlimited resource. No one knows in advance about the value of one's time capital.

6. Read Colossians 4:5 and Ephesians 5:16. Which attitude should we adopt about the present moment?

We should make the most of the present time. Procrastination is not a wise practice.

7. Read Ecclesiastes 12: 1. For which crucial activity should we use our time?

The wise man invites us to devote quality time "days of our youth" to cultivate a relationship with God. Growing spirituality is a time-bound exercise.

8. Read Psalm 90:12. How should we manage our time?

Time should be managed rigorously and mathematically. It should be apportioned systematically to our obligations.

PART III: ACTIVATE THE DORMANT POTENTIAL

9. Read Matthew 25. Which risk do we face concerning our God's given potential?

Unused potential is like a huge ocean that has never been sailed. Many are living below their real capabilities, due to fears and uncertainties they harbour in their hearts.

10. Read Judges 6: 11-12. What does this passage tell us about the difference between actual and used potential?

Using others' money to meet one's obligations is a common phenomenon. The popularity of debts, credits and loans do not make it harmless to those involved.

18. Read Proverbs 6: 6-8. Which lesson can we learn from the ants concerning financial management?

Savings is an essential element of wise money management. It brings many benefits.

19. Read Genesis 41: 34, 36. Which practical plan was put in place to save the people from a severe crisis?

Savings is an inspired instruction from God. It is an answer before prayer to unexpected emergencies.

20. Read Acts 4:34. What were the first Christians able to achieve through savings?

Savings can take various forms. It provides the means for effective partnership in God's service.

CONCLUSION

We are accountable for the use of God's given resources. They provide us with the means to have a gratifying life, to honour God and to bless others. The decisive factor is not how much I have received but how am I managing my time, talent and treasure?

Decision: I choose, with the assistance of Divine Wisdom, to properly manage my time, talents and treasure in harmony with God's instructions.

“We are called not to limit ourselves to verbal responses. How we manage our God's given resources is also an adequate expression of our response to God's blessings.”

A mighty warrior was living as a hiding farmer. Our actual performance can be far away from what we are able to accomplish.

11. Read 2 Timothy 1:6. What is the instruction that Paul is giving to Timothy?

There is an invitation to acknowledge what one has received as potential and to use it to the maximum, “fan into flame.”

12. Read 2 Corinthians 9:6; Proverbs 10:4. What do these texts teach with regard to the law of success?

The raw materials from God are of excellent quality. Their value can only become visible when they are used consistently.

PART IV: MANAGING MONEY

13. Read 1 Chronicles 29:12 or Deuteronomy 8:18. Who is the source of wealth?

Riches can be of divine origin. One should not feel guilty because of abundant financial blessings.

14. Read Matthew 6:24. How can money become a dangerous resource for the believer?

It has the capacity to compete with God to rule over our lives. However, each individual has the capacity to designate the king of his or her life.

15. Read Luke 14: 28. Which principle can we learn from this text about handling money?

A spending plan is essential. It is also called a budget. Using money should not be left to impulse.

16. Read Proverbs 19:2 and Proverbs 21:5. How do these passages warn against impulsive buying?

Commercials appeal to our senses. Critical thinking leads people to buy wisely and less.

17. Read 2 Kings 4: 1. Which form of mismanagement of money is described in this passage? What was the consequence?

True Humanity ... Is to Prioritize Relationship

MIDWEEK PRAYER MEETING

Something sad and terrible happened in 2015 in the city Dieppe, France. A dad forgot his baby, Gael, (six months of age), inside the car all afternoon and the baby died of dehydration. This engineer, 35 years old, was asked by the police to provide an explanation. He told them that he was too busy that day, running up and down, and was stressed because of professional requirements. This tragedy is one of the numerous illustrations of the society in which we live: The quest to make a living is a major threat to life.

THE MEDITATION OF TODAY EXPLORES ANOTHER CORE IDENTITY OF HUMANS: PRIORITIZE RELATIONSHIPS. WHAT IS THE VALUE GOD PLACES ON HAVING A RELATIONSHIP WITH HIM?

HOW CAN WE REARRANGE OUR LIFE PRIORITIES AND PUT FIRST FIRST?

PRAYER

PART I: RELATIONSHIP FIRST

The creation account testifies in favour of relationship first. The two institutions established in Eden, marriage and Sabbath, are perpetual monuments that exalt relationship. God created Adam as a perfect being, he placed him in a perfect setting, and gave him a perfect assignment. These are idyllic conditions... not completely so. When God considered Adam, He pondered these words, Genesis 2:18, "*It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him.*" Man, as a social being, cannot be fulfilled and satisfied without quality relationships and rapport. How do we evaluate and assess the quality of a man's life? Are we inclined to consider only achievements and possessions? Relationship is part of our core identity; it cannot be neglected without consequence.

God found it suitable to crown his creation activity on planet earth by a day of rest. Let us have a fresh look at Genesis 2:2-3: "*By the seventh day God had finished the work he had been doing; so on the seventh day he rested from all his work.*"³ Then God blessed the seventh day and made it holy, because on it he rested from all the work of creating that he had done." In the first six days, He created forms and filled the void and on the seventh He created rest. Ellen White wrote these words about the Sabbath: "*God saw that a Sabbath was essential for man, even in Paradise. He needed to lay aside his own interests and pursuits for one day of the seven, that he might more fully contemplate the works of God and meditate upon His power and goodness*" (*Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 48). Interests and pursuits are laid aside so that attention, time and energy are dedicated for rapport with God and others. Every week we are reminded of the preeminence of relationship.

At the heart of Jesus' teaching, in the sermon on the mount, emphasis is also put on the necessity of prioritizing relationship. We read in Matthew 6:33, "*But seek first his kingdom...*" What is the meaning of this familiar text? There is a tendency among Christians to associate the kingdom firstly and sometimes exclusively with a place, a country or a city. This

understanding has led many Christians to be attracted only by the values of the kingdom: love, peace, justice; or by the quality of life the kingdom needs satisfied: health and body restored, eternal life. But all are missing the essential. However, the kingdom is first of all, the establishment of the reign of a King. The kingdom has a King. The Gospels talk about "His Kingdom", "Kingdom of their Father", "Kingdom of God". The kingdom is not only a future manifestation but it is present and near. How do we therefore seek the kingdom? It consists firstly of an encounter, a relationship, an affiliation with the King of the kingdom. For Jesus, this should be the top and permanent priority of the Christian's life. Kingdom-seekers prioritize relationship with the King of the kingdom. This is what Jesus demonstrated during his earthly ministry.

Several references are present in the Gospels about Jesus prioritizing a relationship with his Father. One insightful incident is the one that took place in Capernaum reported in Mark 1:35-36: "*Very early in the morning, while it was still dark, Jesus got up, left the house and went off to a solitary place, where he prayed.*"³⁶ Simon and his companions went to look for him,³⁷ and when they found him, they exclaimed: "*Everyone is looking for you!*"

This special time of Jesus with His father was taking place at the first hour of Sunday morning. The previous day was the Sabbath, the day set apart for relationship between humans and the divine. After one full day of encounter, the first thing Jesus did when He woke up on Sunday was to seek again for this sweet fellowship. We can make two beautiful deductions: maintaining a relationship with God is not confined to the Sabbath and the point of saturation, if too much, is never reached. His job was not yet completed; everyone was looking for Him. Nevertheless, He chose to put First first. How do we value and invest in relationship with God in our daily life? Are we tempted to confine relationship with God to the Sabbath? The result of putting relationship first everyday is spelled out in Mark 1:39, "*So he traveled throughout Galilee, preaching in their synagogues and driving out demons.*" Relationship leads to an outflow of power. Weakness in

spiritual life and ministry may be indicators of lack of relationship.

PART II: SETTING PRIORITIES RIGHT

The Gospel of Luke tells two stories of individuals who decided to make relationship their top priority. We read first about two sisters, Martha and Mary, in Luke 10:38-42. Martha had a great sense of hospitality. She welcomed Jesus in her house and did everything to attend to his needs. However, Luke, use the words "distraction" to speak about Martha's activities. Her courtesy and good manners were preventing her from experiencing something more essential. Luke 10: 39 tells us that Mary adopted a different posture, "And she had a sister called Mary, who sat at the Lord's feet and listened to his teaching." She received critics for her choice. But Jesus settled the dispute between the two sisters by these words: "But the Lord answered her, "Martha, Martha, you are anxious and troubled about many things, but one thing is necessary. Mary has chosen the good portion, which will not be taken away from her." The word "necessary" is better translated in this context by "primary". It is good to prepare food and take care of visitors but it is primary to cultivate relationship with the Lord.

The second story is reported in Luke 19:1-10. Zacchaeus was a tax collector. His name indicates that he was of Jewish origin. A Jew who adopted this profession in those days was considered as a traitor and an irreligious person. He was despised by other Jews and excluded from the religious community. Tax collectors had a poor social life. However, Zacchaeus and the other tax collectors were ready to pay the price because they were driven by something else, the acquisition of wealth. It was a well remunerated job and at the same time it was easy to earn extras by taxing more than required. Many are still sacrificing relationship with God and others for the sake of possession.

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

Both Mary and Zacchaeus confirmed a permanent reversal of priority. Mary, at a later stage, demonstrated that her attachment to and her love for Jesus was priceless. We read in John 12:3, "Then Mary took about a pint[a] of pure nard, an expensive perfume; she poured it on Jesus' feet and wiped his feet with her hair. And the house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume." Judas Iscariot estimated the perfume to be worthy of a year's wages. She gave lavishly because for her relationship had precedence over possession.

Zacchaeus, the greediest man in Jericho, turned into the most generous inhabitant of the city. In Luke 19:8 we read, "But Zacchaeus stood up and said to the Lord, "Look, Lord! Here and now I give half of my possessions to the poor, and if I have cheated anybody out of anything, I will pay back four times the amount." This act of Zacchaeus was a way of honouring Jesus, his new friend. It also marked the restoration of a relationship with all those that he wronged previously. Jesus commended him for his change of priority by using these words, Luke 19:9, "Jesus said to him, "Today salvation has come to this house, because this man, too, is a son of Abraham. ¹⁰ For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost." As long as Zacchaeus was relegating relationship with God and others to a secondary position, he was lost. The mission of Jesus is to lead people to put relationship first. This is key to salvation.

CONCLUSION

There is an innate desire in all humans to improve the quality of their lives. This is a legitimate aspiration. The problem lies with the strategy that the world is suggesting: hard work and acquire as much as possible. The prophet Haggai speaks about the limitations of this strategy in Haggai 1:6 "You have planted much, but harvested little. You eat, but never have enough. You drink, but never have your fill. You put on clothes, but are not warm. You earn wages, only to put them in a purse with holes in it." After one has filled belly, pockets, house and bank account, it is common that the feeling of emptiness continue to prevail. You feel lost and powerless. What else should one acquire?

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

Let us choose today to live according to our core identity; in relationship with God and others.

GOING DEEPER

In the arrangement of priorities, what is the frequent rationale that is used?

With all the good things we say about relationship (with God and others), why is it that in practice it is relegated as something of minor importance?

What are the changes that are needed for relationship to occupy the prominent position in our lives?

"We are reminded that humanity was created to prioritize relationship with God and others. The absence of this foundation cannot be compensated by hard work and possessions."



True Humanity ... Is to be a Representative of God

2ND FRIDAY VESPER

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

WE WILL EXPLORE THE TOPIC FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF A SIMPLE DEFINITION OF AN IMAGE: AN IMAGE REPRESENTS A GIVEN REALITY. HOW DO WE BECOME GOD'S REPRESENTATIVES?

IS THERE A UNIQUE WAY OF BEST REPRESENTING HIM?

PRAYER

PART I: LIVING AS GOD'S REPRESENTATIVES

This idea of reflecting God's image, being a representative of God, is so crucial for the believer that Paul presents God Himself as leading us into that direction. We read in Romans 8:29, "For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers and sisters." This passage is saying that brothers and sisters are "to be conformed to the image of his Son." Who are the brothers and sisters? We read in verse 28 that they are "those who love him, who have been called." This is the category of people who are supposed to represent Christ. Representing God is the responsibility of all believers. The expression "those who love him" excludes also the idea of an arbitrary God who forces "brothers and sisters" to represent Him.

Let us consider God's role in the process. God is the subject of two verbs in Romans 8:29, "foreknew" and "predestined". To foreknow is an attribute or capacity in God to know in advance. Whereas "predestine" is an action verb. It is much more than a goal set by God for "brothers and sisters". It is a planned activity of God to lead "brothers and sisters" to a certain point, "to be conformed to the image of the son." He does not only have a purpose for humanity, but He is the One who enables us to represent the Son and by extension represent Himself. Through Him, we can live in harmony with our original identity as God's representatives.

Ellen White makes the following comments about Romans 8:28: "Though the moral image of God was almost obliterated by the sin of Adam, through the merits and power of Jesus it may be renewed. Man may stand with the moral image of God in his character; for Jesus will give it to him. Unless the moral image of God is seen in man, he can never enter the city of God as a conqueror" (*The Review and Herald*, June 10, 1890). This passage tells about both the necessity for us to be images, representatives of God, and also the investment of God in Christ to make this a reality.

He has the capacity to beautify tainted and distorted images. Who are we representing?

The word "ambassador" is also used by Paul to speak about our identity as representatives of God. We read in 2 Corinthians 5:20, "We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God." The noun ambassador conveys the idea of a messenger, an interpreter, and of one who goes. At the time of Apostle Paul, an ambassador was a respected official serving the Roman's Empire. His responsibility was to represent the Emperor or the Roman's government in the transaction of business, negotiation of peace and alliances and expression of friendship to governments in foreign countries. In Ephesians 6:20, Paul uses the word ambassador in a figurative sense, he considers himself to be an ambassador of Christ. Believers are also called to serve as ambassadors. Representatives of God do not occupy a static position but are active on His behalf.

It is interesting to note that, in those days, the special function of ambassador could only be accomplished by someone who was a senator, someone who was born in the senator class. Birth was the foremost qualification for one to fulfil the position of ambassador in the Roman's Empire. Hence, we can better understand the argument of Paul, that a prerequisite to serve as an ambassador of God is a restored affiliation, to be reconciled with God as sons and daughters. The function of representatives of God can be fully accomplished only by born again Christians.

Our representation of Jesus is supposed to grow with the passing of time. We read in 2 Corinthians 3:18, "And we all, who with unveiled faces contemplate the Lord's glory, are being transformed into his image with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit." The expression "ever-increasing glory" suggests that there is a transformation

from not being an image, to a blurred image and finally to a bright and clear image. Paul once again ascertains that this comes from God. We are invited to invest ourselves in "contemplat[ing] the Lord's glory," – this is to meditate on His life. This exercise has to happen with "unveiled faces," with sincerity and honesty of heart, with a real desire to be transformed. Are we a better reflection of His image each new day? It is when we invest time in contemplation that our actions will become adequate representations of the Divine.

PART II: A REFLECTION OF GOD'S LOVE

How can we reflect the Son of God in a practical way? The inaugural speech of Jesus at the Synagogue of Nazareth gives an interesting hint. We read in Luke 4:18, "*The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me, because He hath anointed Me to preach the gospel to the poor; He hath sent Me to heal the brokenhearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised.*" Jesus is declaring that he has a special concern for the poor, the broken, the captives, the blind and the prisoners. Representatives of Jesus are those who demonstrate the same attention to the needy, the weak and the vulnerable. They accomplish the ministry of compassion and love.

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

There is one story in the gospel, The Good Samaritan, that clearly illustrates what it means to be a reflection of God, of God's love. Ellen White writes these words about this story, "*In the story of the good Samaritan, Jesus gave a picture (an image) of Himself and His mission*" (*Desire of Ages*, p. 498).

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

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

Attending to immediate need. Jesus the Master Model ministered in words and concrete acts of compassion. According to Matthew 9:35, "*Jesus went through all the towns and villages, teaching in their synagogues, proclaiming the good news of the kingdom and healing every disease and sickness.*" It is said of the Samaritan, Luke 10:34, "*He went to him and bandaged his wounds, pouring on oil and wine. Then he put the man on his own donkey...*" To love like Jesus is to make a difference in people's life.

Paying the cost for a deeper need. Jesus the Master Model did more than teaching and healing. He paid a heavy cost. He was "*obedient to death even death on a cross!*" (Philippians 2:8). It was the only means to address the deeper need of sin. Our good Samaritan gave more than bandage, oil and wine. To ensure shelter and healing, he paid two denarii (v.35), the equivalent of two days' pay of a skilled worker. To love like Jesus is to use our blessings, to bless others.

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

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

CONCLUSION

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

GOING DEEPER

Why does the mass media influence so much our actions?

How can one turn into a better representation of God?

What is the difference between "a static and an active" representation of God? Give real examples of active representation of God.

"As an image of the Master Model, we are not supposed to be static but to be an active representative – loving and serving others not just following "systems, creeds and rites."

True Humanity ... is to Depend on God

2ND SABBATH DIVINE SERVICE:

According to the Bible, the human race is not the result of the survival of the fittest. Our first parents came to life with all the adequate conditions in place. They were created as perfect living creatures and placed in the best environment. Who they were and what they possessed were all inherited from the Divine. In the original design, God is the Provider and Sustainer and human beings are supposed to be dependent upon Him. The first temptation was a direct attack to this core identity; dependence upon the Divine Provider. When the Evil suggested to Eve that "You shall be as gods", it was an invitation to deny God as their Provider. "Eating the fruit of the knowledge of good and evil" was a statement by Adam and Eve that they reject God as their source of knowledge. We know, we witnessed and we experienced the consequences of choosing independence from God.

HOW DOES THE REDISCOVERY OF THIS CORE IDENTITY "DEPENDENCE ON GOD AS THE PROVIDER" HELP TO ADDRESS THE ISSUES OF FEAR, PRIDE AND SELFISHNESS THAT HAVE AFFECTED HUMANITY OF ALL GENERATIONS?

PRAYER

PART I: A REMEDY FOR FEAR

The fear level in our present society is one of the highest that humanity has ever experienced. Barry Glassner, who studied the phenomenon of fear in the US, claims that "there have been very high fear levels in the U.S. continuously," since 1980. A survey conducted in South Africa during 2013 points to the existence of a "mass fear" in the country. 94% of the participants to the survey were "extremely afraid." There are many causes behind this alarming situation: terrorism, criminality, economic depression, climate conditions are among the causes. Lily Rothman comments on the new causes of fear today, "Another notable difference today is that many people feel that they may have to confront threats **on their own**." People feel that they cannot depend on government, police and other institutions to protect them from some major threats. This incapacity to acknowledge the existence and presence of a dependable being or entity lead to an escalation of fear, to a culture of fear.

This was the state of mind of the 10 spies after the 40 days they spent to survey the Promised Land. We read in Numbers 13:31-33, "We can't attack those people; they are stronger than we are."³² And they spread among the Israelites a bad report about the land they had explored. They said, "The land we explored devours those living in it. All the people we saw there are of great size."³³ We saw the Nephilim there (the descendants of Anak come from the Nephilim). We seemed like grasshoppers in our own eyes, and we looked the same to them." They were responding to what they see, the giants and ferocious inhabitants, to how they perceived themselves, grasshoppers, and all this was mixed with some irrational thought, "The land we explored devours those living in it." This situation brought their fear to a level that they were paralyzed and refused to enter their long cherished destination. Fear have multiple causes. Unattended fears prevent many from fulfilling their life goals.

Surprisingly, one of the spies, Caleb the son of Jephunneh, demonstrated courage and boldness. The same experience can lead to different reactions! Caleb responded to the fear of his companions by doing the following, Numbers 13:30: "Then Caleb silenced the people before Moses and said, "We should go up and take possession of the land, for we can certainly do it." Was he naïve? Was he trying to impress the leader, Moses? Not at all! His courage rested on a deep conviction, Numbers 14:7-9: "The land we passed through and explored is exceedingly good. If the LORD is pleased with us, he will lead us into that land, a land flowing with milk and honey, and will give it to us. Only do not rebel against the LORD. And do not be afraid of the people of the land, because we will devour them. Their protection is gone, but the LORD is with us. Do not be afraid of them." He spelled out his antidote to fear: "The Lord will lead us" and "The Lord is with us." He acknowledged God as the Provider of good things and as protection; he decided to depend upon Him. This was the source of his peace in the midst of the crises. He was an inspiration for Joshua, the future leader and he can be one for us living in the midst of this fearful generation.

Forty-five years later, Caleb was now an old man of 85 years, but an ounce of fear had not tainted his courage. When Joshua was dividing the land, he came forward and reminded the new leader that the hill inhabited by ferocious giants was promised to him, Joshua 14:12, "Now therefore, give me this mountain of which the LORD spoke in that day; for you heard in that day how the Anakim were there, and that the cities were great and fortified. It may be that the LORD will be with me, and I shall be able to drive them out as the LORD said." Age can reduce physical vigor but it has no effect on courage and boldness as long as we remain faithful to our core identity, dependence on God.

PART II: A REMEDY FOR PRIDE

Pride is disastrous for everyone it controls. Solomon the wise man wrote these words, Proverbs 16:18, *"Pride goes before destruction, a haughty spirit before a fall."* John Maxwell applies this truth to leaders of today, *"Leaders who fail to prune their pride will meet demise. That's not a guess, it's a guarantee. With pride, it's not a matter of 'if' we will fall, but 'when.' There are no exceptions."* How do we protect ourselves from this terrible virus? Are we already victims of pride?

The story of the king of Babylon, a symbol of human's pride, teaches about the cure to pride. Nebuchadnezzar made the following reflection about himself, Daniel 4:4 *"I, Nebuchadnezzar, was at home in my palace, contented and prosperous." In verse 30, he added, "Is not this the great Babylon I have built as the royal residence, by my mighty power and for the glory of my majesty?"* The "I" was prominent. He praised himself for his great achievements. The Ancient History Encyclopedia provides a description of Ancient Babylon: *"The city is known for its impressive walls and buildings, its reputation as a great seat of learning and culture, the formation of a code of law which pre-dates the Mosaic Law, and for the Hanging Gardens of Babylon which were man-made terraces of flora and fauna, watered by machinery, which were cited by Herodotus as one of the Seven Wonders of the World."* According to human's standard, Nebuchadnezzar had effectively reached the summit. However, boasting about oneself still remains a dangerous exercise.

We read in Daniel 4:33b about the consequence of Nebuchadnezzar's pride, *"He was driven away from people and ate grass like the ox. His body was drenched with the dew of heaven until his hair grew like the feathers of an eagle and his nails like the claws of a bird."* It is hard to put a name on the disease that affected the proud monarch. The least that we can say is that it was an acute form of identity disorder: A man developing characteristics of an animal and behaving as an animal. Pride is a departure from the core identity of acknowledging God as the Provider and depending upon Him. Hence, we should not be surprised that the fruit of pride is confusion of identity. Are you worried about your actual behavior? Are you constantly involved in the comparison game? Are you always trying to look and do better than others? Do you have the impression that people perceive you as strange and weird? Take time to do your assessment - maybe there is a rampant pride challenge that has crept into your life.

Fortunately, the book of Nebuchadnezzar ends with a report about his restoration, Daniel 4:34, *"At the end of that time, I, Nebuchadnezzar, raised my eyes toward heaven, and my sanity was restored. Then I praised the Most High; I honored and glorified him who lives forever."* This verse and the following provide clear indication about the cause of his restoration. He raised his eyes toward heaven, meaning that he was no more focusing on himself. This is a sign of acknowledging the sovereignty of the God of heaven. Praises were redirected towards the Most High; no more to himself and his achievements. He was healed from his pride, healed from his identity disorder by accepting God as Provider and choosing to depend on Him. Victims of pride can reverse their destiny. The secret is to acknowledging that God is the source of what we have and that He provides the strength and power for all accomplishments.

PART III: A REMEDY TO SELFISHNESS

Selfishness is another flaw of the human's fallen nature. Isaiah uses a striking imagery to describe the selfishness of the leaders of Ancient Israel, Isaiah 56:11, *"They are dogs with mighty appetites; they never have enough. They are shepherds who lack understanding; they all turn to their own way, they seek their own gain."* This trait of character is not without consequences for others and for the individual. Apostle James writes about the consequences of selfishness, James 3:16, *"For where you have envy and selfish ambition, there you find disorder and every evil practice."* Selfishness gives rise to objectionable and unfair actions. Two common

examples are the exploitation of the poor by the rich and the destruction of the world's environment to satisfy personal ambitions. Paul talks about the disapprobation of God against the selfish, Romans 2:8, *"But for those who are self-seeking and who reject the truth and follow evil, there will be wrath and anger."* In the next verse he speaks about *"trouble and distress."* Selfishness is a serious problem; how can it be overcome?

King David shares a testimony about his capacity to live an unselfish life, to live a generous life. We read in 1 Chronicles 29: 14, *"But who am I, and who are my people, that we should be able to give as generously as this?"* He is surprised and amazed by his own generosity and he wants to find the reason. In the following sentence, he reveals the triggering factor, *"Everything comes from you, and we have given you only what comes from your hand."* Once David has realized that God was the Provider of everything, he naturally became a channel to pass the blessings to others. Giving was for him a statement and a reminder that God was His Provider. When one realizes God's solicitude, one becomes a loving person. If God is the Provider, nothing prevents Him from providing again after we have shared what we have received. Hence, one should not be afraid of giving.

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

CONCLUSION

"Every man must decide whether he will walk in the light of creative altruism or in the darkness of destructive selfishness," says Martin Luther King Jr. What will be our decision at the end of this message? Are we confronted with the issues of fear, pride and selfishness? Are they going to control our existence and prevent us to live abundantly? The remedy is found in our core identity: Acknowledging God as Provider and depending upon Him.

GOING DEEPER

Why is it so attractive to be independent, even of God?

Share a testimony about how the acknowledgement of God as the Provider has chased away the spirit of fear?

Why does the absence of dependence on God lead one to pride?

State some reasons why acknowledgement and dependence on God lead to a spirit of generosity?



Signs of Revival

Giving has always been a major element for worshippers of the true God. Two practices, tithing and offerings, were passed from one generation to another as expressions of God's Lordship. This lesson shares the significance and value of these practices for believers.

PART I: ACT OF WORSHIP

1. Read Genesis 14: 17-20. What is the consequence presented in this passage about returning tithe?

The natural reaction of Abram was to offer a tithe (10%) in response to the blessing of protection he received. The identified sequence is: Blessed, he gave tithe based on his increase.

2. Read Genesis 28: 18-22. What was the context in which Jacob promised to return tithe (10%)?

Jacob was worshipping God for His goodness and his promise of returning tithe was part of this service.

3. Read Leviticus 27: 30-32. Which word is used by God to indicate the sacredness and the Owner of tithe?

The same word "Holy" is used for "Sabbath" and "Tithe". Both are set apart for honouring God as Lord of time and of the material world.

4. Read Numbers 18: 21,26. What was the position of the Levites in regard to tithe?

They were both recipients and givers of tithes. They received tithe from God, the Owner of tithe, and they returned a tithe to God, of what they received from Him.

5. Read Deuteronomy 16: 17. How were the believers suppose to express gratitude to God?

They were supposed to decide and then to give a percentage "in proportion" of their blessings as offerings.

PART II: EXPRESSION OF REVIVAL

6. Read 2 Chronicles 31: 5-8. How did the people express their recommitment to God?

King Hezekiah initiated a revival in Israel, inviting the people to return to God. The culmination of this revival was a call to return faithful tithe and offerings.

7. Read Nehemiah 10:37-38. Which instruction was part of Nehemiah's revival message?

There is clear reference to the place where believers were supposed to bring tithe and offerings, to the "house of God."

8. Read Malachi 1:6. What was the spiritual condition of God's people during the time of Malachi?

A rebellious nation who was not honouring God for who He is.

9. Read Malachi 3:7. How did the people respond to the call of the prophet to return to God?

They wanted to know how they should demonstrate their return to God.

10. Read Malachi 3:10a. What was the sign of revival given to the people by Malachi?

Returning tithe and offerings to the house of God, also called "storehouse."

11. Read Matthew 23:23. What is the teaching of Jesus concerning tithing in the absence of a genuine transformation?"

Tithing cannot compensate for other deficiencies present in our spiritual life.

PART III: WINDOWS FOR MORE BLESSINGS

12. Read Matthew 14:17-21. What has happened to the bread and fish given to Jesus?

The only food that Jesus could multiply was the basket that was given to Him.

13. Read Malachi 3:10b. How did Malachi describe the blessings that rest upon those who return the whole tithes to the storehouse?

The image used is one of a rainy day that is flooding everywhere.

14. Read Proverbs 3:9-10. What is the reward to those who give their best as offerings to God?

He always finds a way to give us much more than what we had previously.

CONCLUSION

The revival of the spiritual life of the believer is incomplete in the absence of faithful tithing and offerings. Anyone who neglects these practices is penalizing himself from receiving new blessings from above.

Decision: I choose to surrender all, to worship God including returning a faithful tithe and an appropriate offering.

*Two practices, tithing and offerings,
were passed from one generation
to another as expressions of God's
Lordship.*

I PROMISE ...

- I want to set apart the first moments of each day to commune with the Lord in prayer, Bible study, the Spirit of Prophecy and family worship.
- I want to be used by the Holy Spirit to reach out to others with the message of salvation, beginning with my own family.
- I want to establish one new healthy habit and offer my body to God's service:
- I will faithfully return the Lord's tithe (10% of my income).
- I will dedicate a regular percentage (%) of my income as a free will offering to the Lord.
- I want to dedicate something of that which has been entrusted to me to help speed up the last-day efforts of spreading the gospel to all the world.

With God's help:

Date:

"I can do all this through him who gives me strength" (Phil. 4:13).



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