

Live Stewardship...
Live Happy

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The *iFollow* Discipleship Series



Live Stewardship... Live Happy

Six principles for living a happier life

by
John Mathews

***i*FOLLOW**

The iFollow Discipleship Series

Live Stewardship... Live Happy

Six principles for living a happier life

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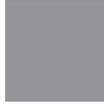
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Stewardship

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

— *Fundamental Beliefs, 21*



“In view of the history of the life and death of Christ, can we be surprised if the world is hollow and insincere? Can we in our day trust in man, or make flesh our arm? Shall we not choose Christ as our Leader? He alone can save us from sin.”¹

¹ *Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*, vol. 5. p. 1106.

Chapter One

Accept Christ as Your Savior

The Basic Choice

A choice can determine the outcome. Whatever you do, choice is the starting point that will decide the result. At the age of 12 Jesus said to his parents, “I must be about My Father’s business” (Luke 2:49). Every choice Jesus made was forever linked to the success of His mission. He chose to save us from sin, and He paid the ultimate price for our redemption.

We make thousands of choices every day. Many have become habits to which we give no thought. But have we made the choice that will determine our eternity? Have we taken the first step that will result in eternal happiness?

I hope that each of us has already taken this essential step. If you haven’t actually made this choice, please read on prayerfully. Even if you long ago decided for Christ, this truth cannot be repeated too often: we must accept *Christ daily*. This is basic stewardship and is the heart of the gospel. Every thought, decision, and action is directly related to our relationship with Jesus. Everything we do and are is connected to Jesus and has a bearing on our salvation. You may have decided back in fifth grade when you got baptized or at the altar call in your 20s. Or you may have made this choice just last week, and now you’re all afire for Christ, excited to learn all you can about how to follow Him.

But did you say “yes” today?

Jesus doesn't have to be reminded that we are His children. Once people choose to follow Him, He says, "No one is able to snatch them out of My Father's hand" (John 10:29). But we have to remember that we can move ourselves away from Him. So let's review the steps again, from the beginning.

Salvation is a Choice—You Have to Decide

I was blessed to be raised in a pastor's home, and grew up in church as a pastor's kid, (PK). I knew about the importance of worship and the power of prayer. As a PK, I participated in witnessing, Bible study, Ingathering, working for God, and loving God. I even felt called to be a pastor and completed a degree in theology, ready to work or attend seminary. It was what I knew, did, and lived. However, had I accepted the amazing miracle that is the grace of God in my own life?

Stewardship
begins with a
decision.

The summer after graduation, I was sent to work with an evangelist holding a series of meetings in a tiny Mississippi town. Not only was the town small, but the meeting was as well. I will never forget the preacher's sermon on Daniel 2. He built the image out of Styrofoam pieces held together with magnets and struck it with his hand when he described the stone hitting the image. All five of us in the meeting got the point.

There wasn't much visitation needed, so I started re-reading *The Desire of Ages*. I came to the story of the man whose son was in the grip of evil spirits. While Jesus was on the Mount of Transfiguration with Peter, James, and John, a father had taken his son to the other disciples to be healed, but they were unable to help. When the man brought his son to Jesus, the Master told the father, "If you can believe, all things are possible to him who believes." Immediately the father of the child cried out and said with tears, "Lord, I believe; help my unbelief!" (Mark 9:23, 24).

As I read, something stirred in my heart. Alone in my apartment, tears filled my eyes. The print on the page became blurry, and I had to stop reading. I had never experienced such hope. Since then, I have turned the following reassuring passage into a prayer that I have prayed many times: "Faith comes by the word of God. Then grasp His promise, 'Him that cometh to Me I will in no wise cast out.' John 6:37. Cast yourself at His feet with the cry, 'Lord, I believe; help Thou mine unbelief.' You can never perish while you do this—never" (*The Desire of Ages*, p. 429).



ADVENTIST VOICES PAST AND PRESENT

- A steward is responsible for managing the owner's resources, has a close relationship with the owner so that she knows what He wants her to do with them, is active, not passive in her role, is not self-serving, serves humbly and personally, and does guard her Master's assets, but not in a parental way. That is to say, makes the decisions the Master wishes, not the ones her own wisdom would suggest, like a parent would. For a better understanding of the Bible's concept of steward, reread the story of Joseph. He embodied all the concepts above.
From the lesson on Stewardship at www.ifollowdiscipleship.org
<http://ifollowdiscipleship.org/index.php?id=83&lessonID=96>.
- A desire for something better comes from God. It is His drawing power that awakens our desire for something more than we have. . . Bringing us to the point of surrender is His work, even though we are the ones who surrender. . . . Although Jesus takes the initiative there as well, we can respond to His initiative by choosing to seek Him, to seek a knowledge of Him. That is the way you consent—by placing yourself in the atmosphere where Jesus works. Whether it is in church, in public meetings, or in private before God's open Word, or perhaps in reading this book, if you will make the one attempt to respond to the drawing of Jesus and His Spirit, to gain a better knowledge of the plan of salvation, He will do the rest.
Morris Venden, *To Know God: A 5-Day Plan*, p. 40.
- Don't settle for a second-hand faith—for second best. Determine to seize life by the throat, draining every precious drop of it. "Weight" on the Lord. Fling your all into His hands and refuse to let go until you receive the blessing you stand in need of. Begin pursuing a relationship with Christ that is more than duty and more than obligation. Discover the freedom—yes, **freedom**, of serving and following God for the sheer delight and unadulterated joy of loving and being with Him! You are a child of God! You were never meant to go through this life just getting by. You were born (again) to fly!
Randy Maxwell, *"Weight" on the Lord*, p. 60, emphasis in original.

The word "never" has looked different to me ever since that day. It now has a deeper, richer, more powerful, spiritual meaning for me. I love the positive side of "never."

I had heard it many times, but all of a sudden, personally, *I understood* that unbelief is what will cause us to lose our salvation. Yet none of us can believe perfectly. We're not saved by how good or how perfect *our faith* is. We're saved by

God's grace, *through* our faith. So we say, "Lord, I do believe! But I know I'm not believing perfectly. Help my unbelief!"

We can't say it in a casual way. We can't merely assent, thinking, "I believe, sort of," or "I kind of think there might be a God up there, but it's OK because God is helping my unbelief."

No. We have to mean it sincerely, strengthening our faith with intellect and experience. Salvation is a choice, a choice we must make every day. This is stewardship of the highest order. As a central hub is to a wagon wheel, so is Christ the center of stewardship. Everything revolves around Him.

Salvation is a choice, a choice we must make every day.

Long ago, the Creator decided to fashion an earth and place on it human beings made in His own image. They were to be the Creator's stewards. He gave them the responsibility of taking care of His "very good" creation (Genesis 1 and 2). It wasn't hard; all they had to do was spend time with Him learning what He wanted them to do. The earth they were given to care for was perfect and didn't need the kind of back-breaking, heart-breaking work my grandma used to put into her garden on the side of a Tennessee mountain. But it did require a sense of responsibility—working side-by-side with and under the guidance of the Creator.

We have no idea how long they managed the garden, but they lost happiness, a perfect home, and the privilege of talking with their Creator when they sinned. Neither Adam nor Eve realized the magnitude of what they had done. One major decision now affected their responsibility as stewards. They felt they were now lords of creation, an idea suggested to them by the "father of lies," who had already led a full-out mutiny in heaven because he wanted to be the Master of the Universe. He didn't just lie when he told them they would be "like God" (they already were!), he lied when he made them think they would be more godlike if they did things his way. Satan had no intention of giving Adam and Eve any power in his new order. He wanted all the power for himself. He was just after more slaves.

Adam and Eve listened and yielded to the tempter, much to their regret. Now they had to learn about back-breaking, heart-breaking labor. Imagine Eve pulling thorns out of Adam's hands for the very first time and wondering what the red ooze was. How fast the weeds grew! And what was this vine called poison ivy. They learned a great deal about both good and evil, and not long after leaving their garden home, they learned about murder.



INSPIRED THOUGHTS

- Do not wait to feel that you are made whole, but say, “I believe it; it is so, not because I feel it, but because God has promised.” Jesus says, “What things soever ye desire, when ye pray, believe that ye receive them, and ye shall have them.” Mark 11:24. There is a condition to this promise—that we pray according to the will of God. But it is the will of God to cleanse us from sin, to make us His children, and to enable us to live a holy life. So we may ask for these blessings, and believe that we receive them, and thank God that we have received them. It is our privilege to go to Jesus and be cleansed, and to stand before the law without shame or remorse. . . . Through this simple act of believing God, the Holy Spirit has begotten a new life in your heart. You are as a child born into the family of God, and He loves you as He loves His Son.
E. G. White, *Steps to Christ*, pp. 51-2.
- Pure religion has to do with the will. The will is the governing power in the nature of man, bringing all the other faculties under its sway. The will is not the taste or the inclination, but it is the deciding power which works in the children of men unto obedience to god or unto disobedience... Talk faith. Keep on God’s side of the line. Set not your foot on the enemy’s side, and the Lord will be your helper. He will do for you that which it is not possible for you to do for yourself. The result will be that you will become “like a cedar in Lebanon.” Your life will be noble, and your works will be wrought in God. There will be in you a power, an earnestness, and a simplicity that will make you a polished instrument in the hands of God.
E. G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 5. pp. 513, 514.
- The Lord has determined that every soul who obeys His word shall have His joy, His peace, His continual keeping power. Such men and women are brought near Him always, not only when they kneel before Him in prayer, but when they take up the duties of life. He has prepared for them an abiding place with Himself, where the life is purified from all grossness, all unloveliness. By this unbroken communion with Him, they are made collaborators with Him in their lifework. Words cannot describe the peace and joy possessed by him who takes God at His word.
E. G. White, *My Life Today*, pp. 51, 52.

Adam and Eve experienced intense sadness, but they also had hope. They learned about a plan for restoration. The Creator promised them a Redeemer who would break the chains of sin that now ruled their lives. He still loved them, they could still have hope, and they could still be His stewards.

Amazing! A Creator who gives second chances! As soon as Adam and Eve sinned, the Creator was ready to redeem them. In this we see a major difference between this Lord, our Creator God, and the father of lies. God, always eager to forgive, is unlike the powerful men of earth. Can you imagine the CEO of any big corporation rehiring someone who had embezzled the business almost into bankruptcy?

God did. He does. He wants to hire you. The business arrangement is this: you manage 90 percent, He takes 10 percent. We still need to do our best to take care of the earth. But He wants to know if we will accept Him and His offer. The work is hard, but the rewards are out of this world. Are you ready to make the choice, or if you have already made it, to reaffirm it? What does this choice entail? A “yes” to salvation is only the beginning. We’re talking about learning to be managers, stewards, for God. In other words, we first have to decide if we still want to be our own little gods, or are we willing to take a secondary place? Are we willing to learn how to take care of God’s business—that little corner of His business that He gives each of us? This “yes” decision is a choice we make every day. Theologians call it sanctification; others call it stewardship, or learning to say yes to Jesus every day.



RESOURCES FOR SPIRITUAL GROWTH

- Prayer is essential for spiritual growth. It strengthens our faith and spiritual intelligence. “It is just as convenient, just as essential, for us to pray three times a day as it was for Daniel. Prayer is the life of the soul, the foundation of spiritual growth. In your home, before your family, and before your workmen, you should testify to this truth. And when you are privileged to meet with your brethren in the church, tell them of the necessity of keeping open the channel of communication between God and the soul. Tell them that if they will find heart and voice to pray, god will find answers to their prayers.” —Ellen G. White, *Prayer*, p. 20.
- “Ten Days of Prayer” is an appeal for deeper and a more meaningful prayer life. It is a call to pray. This spiritual initiative was created by the General Conference Ministerial Association of the Seventh-day Adventist church. It is a resource that will set in motion a prayer offensive involving the membership of the local church. Use it in home groups or the mid-week service at church. It is designed to help people grow spiritually in their walk with Jesus. The website, [www.tendaysofprayer.org](http://tendaysofprayer.org) gives all the information and resources needed to conduct and develop a ministry of prayer. We must join others, encourage others, and lead them in uniting in prayer that leads to revival and reformation. <http://tendaysofprayer.org/> (retrieved May 18/2014).

- It is through immersion in the Word of God that the search for meaning erupts into a life lived in union with the God whose presence we seek. It is through the scriptures that we follow the Israelites—chosen as they were, and yet often as inconstant as they were—and see at work in ourselves all that God saw in them: the worship of our private little idols of money and power and status that lure us away from the real treasures of life. We must, at the same time, come to trust that we carry within us the same signs of goodness and faith and desire for life that took Israel through the desert of despair to the Promised Land—and the opportunity to live a life dedicated to the will of God. We must come to see in them God’s continuing patience and love for us, so that no amount of weakness in ourselves can ever discourage us from continuing on the Way.
Joan Chittister, *The Monastery of the Heart*, pp. 4, 5.
- This website is a comprehensive source for locating the ever-expanding array of resources for Seventh-day Adventist Educators. You will find where to get resources for teaching all age groups. It is developed through the North American Division Department of Education. They make Christian education easier by linking educators with resources to continue the teaching ministry of Jesus, anytime, anywhere. It is a resource to nurture Christian faith, discipleship and spiritual development.
www.circle.adventist.org.

God Owns Everything

Once we say yes, once we accept Him as Lord of our lives, it means He is our God, Creator, and Owner. He owns the world, He claims it, “for every beast of the forest is Mine, *And* the cattle on a thousand hills” (Psalm 50:10). There has never been a time when He did not exist. He owns all the continents, all the oceans, all the petroleum and timber, and all the other commodities we have access to. He owns our house, our car, and all our clothes. He owns our purse, our checkbook (if we still use one), and yes, He owns our credit cards. He owns our television and the Internet. He owns our food and the farmers who grow it, the drivers who haul it, the grocery clerk and stock boy in the store. He cares about them and about the conditions of their lives. He even owns our pets. (Psalm 24:1)

If God is already the Owner, then He already owns you, whether you said He could or could not. He *could* force you to do whatever He wants, but that is not God’s character. In fact, those who believe that Genesis gives humanity the lordly control over the planet could learn a lot by watching how God (the only One who controls the planet) does things. God does not control

**God does not
control by force.**

by force. He loves and longs for us to love Him back. So we get to decide, are we going to consciously and intentionally turn over to God the control of our lives and all our “stuff”? Are we willing to be hired to take care of that “stuff” for Him? If we take this responsibility, we are God’s stewards. The things we are responsible to God for include our “time and opportunities, abilities and possessions and the blessings of the earth and its resources.”² This may seem like a huge task, even at times impossible, but what is impossible for us is possible with God. “Lord, I believe, help my unbelief.”

We have a lovely example of stewardship in the story of Jochebed. Moses’ mother, Jochebed, was hired by Pharaoh’s daughter to nurse her own baby. She had the stewardship of Moses. From that point on, Pharaoh’s daughter had the controlling say. Jochebed could only care for Moses as she was instructed. She even had to accept the new name given him! We will never know until we get to heaven what Amram and Jochebed named their son. To the world, for all time, he became Moses, “because I drew him out of the water,” as his foster mother named him (Exodus 2:10).

For all intents and purposes, once the Egyptian princess found baby Moses floating in the river, he was no longer Jochebed’s child—she was just his nanny. This could have been a painful position for Jochebed. She had to cling to the fact that at least Moses hadn’t been killed. But I believe she clung even more to a deeper truth. She knew her son *already hadn’t belonged to her—he belonged to God*. So she was able to accept the situation as it was and do the best she could to instill in him the foundation of truth and faith that would carry him to one of the greatest positions of power in human history. She taught him carefully.

[Jochebed] faithfully improved her opportunity to educate her child for God. She felt confident that he had been preserved for some great work, and she knew that he must soon be given up to his royal mother, to be surrounded with influences that would tend to lead him away from God. All this rendered her more diligent and careful in his instruction than in that of her other children. She endeavored to imbue his mind with the fear of God and the love of truth and justice, and earnestly prayed that he might be preserved from every corrupting influence. She showed him the folly and sin of idolatry, and early taught him to bow down and pray to the living God, who alone could hear him and help

² *Seventh-day Adventists Believe. . . , An Exposition of the Fundamental Beliefs of the Seventh-day Adventist Church*, Fundamental Belief #21, p. 301.

him in every emergency. . . . From his humble cabin home he was taken to the royal palace, to the daughter of Pharaoh, ‘and he became her son.’ Yet even here he did not lose the impressions received in childhood. The lessons learned at his mother’s side could not be forgotten. They were a shield from the pride, the infidelity, and the vice that flourished amid the splendor of the court. How far-reaching in its results was the influence of that one Hebrew woman, and she an exile and a slave!³

Jochebed was, in a sense, hired to act as a steward for Pharaoh’s daughter. But in fact she was a steward for God, the real Maker, Owner, and Master of her child. And it didn’t stop there. Moses, as an adult and after some hard lessons, was known most of all for his humility. Moses and other Bible stalwarts had heavy soul-saving choices to make. Moses, says Paul, “when he was come to years, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh’s daughter; Choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God” (Hebrews 11:24, 25, KJV). He came to understand that this great mass of unruly people weren’t his—they were God’s. In fact, the only time he lost sight of that and acted like he was the owner instead of the under-shepherd (steward) was when God instructed him to speak to the rock, and Moses not only struck it twice, but also said, “ ‘Hear now, you rebels! Must we bring water for you out of this rock?’ ” (Numbers 20:10).

Have you ever done something similar? Have I? Have we taken credit for something we knew perfectly well God did, or gotten angry with people who bucked our authority? If so, this story contains good news. Moses repented. Despite losing his temper and perspective, he still knew who the real Owner was. And, as heartbroken as he was not to enter the Promised Land, he was allowed to view it from the top of Pisgah (Deuteronomy 34). At Moses’ death, “God buried him; God also resurrected him and took him to heaven.”⁴ Imagine Moses’ amazement when he came to life and, looking into the face of Jesus, learned that he had entered the real Promised Land! Not only that, but centuries later, Moses had the unspeakable opportunity of coming to this earth to comfort and encourage the Son of God when He was nearing the end of His earthly life (Matthew 17:2–4).

Choosing salvation is the first step to enjoying God’s heavenly rewards.

³ Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, pp. 243, 244.

⁴ Ellen G. White, *The Adventist Home*, p. 477.

Salvation is Conversion, and it Includes Commitment

Once believers have chosen to follow Christ, chosen to become an under-manager for God, they discover that's only the beginning of an amazing journey. Like Jochebed, new Christians must accept a whole new order of things. Like Moses, we must learn to work under God's authority, to follow His bidding, and

We must learn to work under God's authority.

to leave the results in God's hands. Accepting salvation and committig to Christ as a steward causes a visible change. Let's look at some individuals in the Bible where a visible change took place.

Zacchaeus the Tax Collector

Everyone knew who Zacchaeus was. The chief tax collector of Jericho was wealthy by the time we meet him in the Bible, and he probably got that wealth like all the other tax collectors—by using questionable methods.

In Zacchaeus's day, the tax collection system assumed malfeasance. Those hired by the government (thus earning the instant hatred of their fellow countrymen) to collect taxes were not paid for this job. Instead, they simply decided how much to *tell* people their taxes were, and keep the extra. Maybe Zacchaeus thought to himself, "Tax is one denarius per person. I think I'll just say it's two. Or maybe three. If I think they can afford it, I'll tell them it's five! If they complain, I'll threaten to call in the Roman authorities and have them thrown in jail for debt."

In this way, Zacchaeus had amassed a considerable fortune.

Then he heard about an unusual traveling teacher. If rumors were to be believed, the teacher paid His taxes out of a fish's mouth. You know the rest of the story: Zacchaeus is too short to see, and apparently the Holy Spirit is already working on him, because he so forgets his dignity as to run ahead of the crowd and climb a Sycamore tree so he can see the teacher. When Jesus gets to the tree, He looks up and calls to Zacchaeus to come down *quickly* so He can visit his house. Zacchaeus scrambles down and takes Jesus home. During that visit, a visible change takes place in Zacchaeus.

I have often wondered about the details of the conversation that took place in the home of Zacchaeus. It must have stunned those listening. When Jesus talked, Zacchaeus listened. When Zacchaeus talked, Jesus listened. But we will never know the details except for Zacchaeus announcing in the hearing of all, "Look, Lord, I give half of my goods to the



OTHER VOICES

- The term steward is misunderstood and even foreign in our society. We do not have any terms in our modern vocabulary that carry the richness of this term. Caretaker fails to capture the responsibility laid on the steward. Manager seems inadequate to describe the relationship between the owner and the steward. Custodian is too passive a term. Agent is too self-serving in our day. Ambassador is too political, and it lacks the servant aspect. Warden is too administrative and loses the sense of the personal. Guardian is too closely tied solely to parental responsibilities.
R. Scott, Rodin, *Stewards in the Kingdom*, p. 27.
 - Perhaps changes are in the air right now. Maybe you're in the midst of a decision. It's disrupting, isn't it? You like your branch. You've grown accustomed to it and it to you. And, like Joseph, husband of Mary, deciding whether to keep her or cast her out, you've been a pretty good branch-sitter. And then you hear the call. 'I need you to go out on a limb and . . .' Regardless of the nature of the call, the consequences are the same: civil war. Though your heart may say yes, your feet say no. Excuses blow as numerous as golden leaves in an autumn wind. 'That's not my talent.' 'It's time for someone else to take charge.' 'Not now. I'll get to it tomorrow.' But eventually you're left staring at a bare tree and a hard choice: His will or yours?
Max Lucado, *God Came Near: Chronicles of the Christ*, pp. 40-41.
 - "Make no mistake Christ says, "if you let me, I will make you perfect. The moment you put yourself in My hands, that is what you are in for. Nothing less, or other, than that. You have free will, and if you choose, you can push Me away. But if you do not push Me away, understand that I am going to see this job through'. . . And yet—this is the other and equally important side of it—this Helper who will, in the long run, be satisfied with nothing less than absolute perfection, will also be delighted with the first feeble, stumbling effort you make tomorrow to do the simplest duty."
C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, p. 172.
 - "I want to define worship, and, here is where I want to be dogmatic. Worship means to 'feel in the heart'; that's first—feel it in the heart. Now I happen to belong to that segment of the Church of Christ on earth that is not afraid of the word 'feeling.' We went through a long deep-freeze period at the turn of the century, when people talked about 'naked faith.' They wanted to hang us out there like a coonskin drying on the door. And so they said, 'Now, don't believe in feeling, brother; we don't believe in feeling. The only man who went by feeling was led astray; that was Isaac when he felt Jacob's arms and thought it was Esau.' But they forgot the woman who felt in her body that she was healed! Remember that? A person that merely goes through the form and doesn't feel anything is not worshipping."
A. W. Tozer, *Worship: The Missing Jewel*, <http://worr.org/images/File/Tozer-Worship%20The%20Missing%20Jewel.pdf> (retrieved October 20, 2013).
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poor; and if I have taken anything from anyone by false accusation, I restore fourfold” (Luke 19:8).

One visit from Jesus resulted in a wealthy man’s giving away his fortune.

That day Zacchaeus made a choice and commitment to follow Christ. He might have thought this decision would be easy, but he soon realized that the sanctification process would be harder than he had expected. First of all, would he really follow through and give half his possessions to the poor, as well as pay back four times as much he had stolen? One visit from Jesus resulted in a wealthy man’s giving away his fortune. He was likely going to become a poor man overnight, but conviction and honesty prevailed. His next consideration was his job. The easy solution would be to give it up. The harder choice would be to keep it but do it honestly. Everybody understood that the tax man had to make a surcharge to live on. What would his community think was fair? Could he—would he—live by a new standard every day, from then on? Would he continue this new life after the notoriety had worn off and Jesus no longer traveled through his town?

That would require true commitment, and it would continue to confirm the words that Jesus spoke that day at Zacchaeus’s home, “Today salvation has come to this house” (Luke 19:9).

Mary Magdalene

Another beautiful example of stewardship is the story of Mary Magdalene. The Bible doesn’t tell us much but what we do know from Mark 16:7 and Luke 8:1-3 is that she had been cleansed from seven demons by Jesus. Ellen White enlarges upon the story.

When to human eyes her case appeared hopeless, Christ saw in Mary capabilities for good. He saw the better traits of her character. The plan of redemption has invested humanity with great possibilities, and in Mary these possibilities were to be realized. Through His grace she became a partaker of the divine nature. The one who had fallen, and whose mind had been a habitation of demons, was brought very near to the Saviour in fellowship and ministry. It was Mary who sat at His feet and learned of Him. It was Mary who poured upon His head the precious anointing oil, and bathed His feet with her tears. Mary stood

beside the cross, and followed Him to the sepulcher. Mary was first at the tomb after His resurrection.⁵

One obscure woman living on the unwanted fringe of society was trying to understand the message of Jesus. She could see, hear, and realize that there was more to life than what she had. Mary, the great sinner, chose to say “yes!” to Jesus’ offer of total salvation, committed herself entirely to His cause, followed Him with the other women, and became the very first evangelist—the first one to say, “He is risen! I’ve *seen* Him!”

Saul Renamed Paul

Resolute, determined, fanatical Saul, struck terror into the hearts of early Christians! But his name was changed to Paul, and he became a world class theologian. He is the most obvious biblical example of this amazing—you could say shocking—change God can make when a person makes the choice to commit everything to Him. We find large segments of Paul’s story in the Bible. He is first mentioned, almost offhandedly, in Acts 7:58. Those who stoned Stephen to death because he spoke the truth about Jesus “laid down their clothes at the feet of a young man named Saul.” A few verses later, in Acts 9:1, Saul is described as “breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord.” He set out to travel from town to town spying on and arresting people who insisted Jesus of Nazareth was alive and worthy of worship. To Saul, this was blasphemy of the highest order. There was only one God, and it was not some obscure Galilean!

Saul sincerely believed he was doing God’s will. He was out to defend God’s chosen people, Israel, from this strange and troubling new Way. Saul was committed to the old order of things, “the way it had always been done.” He would have argued that he was being a good steward, that he was taking care of God’s business protecting His assets. But Saul had missed out on the most important part of good stewardship: that of listening to the Owner enough to be sure you are on the same wavelength with Him, and then checking back often enough to be sure you’re really doing *what He wants you to do*, not what *you* think is a good idea! Good stewards never run ahead of the Owner without guidance.

**Good stewards
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⁵ Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 568.

It's clear that the Holy Spirit was working on Saul. In fact, I believe God works on everyone, trying to get them to listen and make a decision for Him. God never sleeps nor gets tired or weary (Psalms 121:4; Isaiah 40:28). There is no end to His wisdom. He is seeking and saving the lost as much now as when he was looking for Saul. If, as in the case of Saul, God knows that you are really deceived, He may bring out the *Big Stick* to get your attention. He knocked Saul down on the road to Damascus. For a man so sure of himself, it was a traumatic and humbling event to experience in front of his entourage. Can you imagine how Saul must have felt as he was helped up, completely blind, and led by the hand into the city?

Twice Jesus confronted Saul for persecuting Him. Saul's stubbornness was compared to that of a donkey kicking against the pricks of a rider's spurs. He blatantly refused to heed His call the first time, so Jesus spoke clearly to him a second time: "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting" (Acts 9:5).

Those words went right to the secret chamber of Saul's heart and set in motion a monumental theological argument. He had a choice to make. His temperament was such that if he believed in something, he was fully committed to it. He was fully convinced that he had the Right Way, the way God wanted him to go. Now he had to decide whether to be a steward who followed orders or insist on being his own boss. Would he be fully committed to the very cause he had been doing his best to destroy?

What a difference a decision makes.

Jesus began by making Saul dependent on some of the very Christians he wanted to silence. Years later, Saul, now Paul, remembering vividly the experience on the road to Damascus, told King Agrippa, "I was not disobedient to the heavenly vision" (Acts 26:19). Saul made the right choice, the right commitment.

Saul, Christian hunter and killer, became Paul, "slave of Christ." What a difference a decision makes. In a later day, he called himself "chief of sinners." He knew he was forgiven, but it must have been hard living with the knowledge that he had been responsible for the imprisonment and death of a large number of Jesus' faithful followers.

Our Turn

We have looked at several examples (there are many more), of people choosing to follow Jesus as their Lord and Savior. But since we have the freedom to choose, not everyone will choose to follow Christ.

The rich young ruler “went away sorrowful, for he had great possessions” (Matthew 19:22) when Jesus invited him to follow Him. So far as we know, the young man never did follow Jesus. Then there is Judas. It is indeed sad when Jesus says of him, “It would have been good for that man if he had not been born” (Matthew 26:24). How sorrowful it is when one chooses a path away from Christ.

Who we are
defines the
steward.

Salvation is a choice, a choice that calls for the absolute commitment to God of everything we have and are. Who we are defines the steward. And that commitment brings unbelievable change to one’s life.

Are you ready to commit yourself to Him? Your money? Your time, talents, job, and family? All of it? Doing this every day is a step toward learning what your personal job as a steward is. In other words, we’re all meant to be stewards. Some principles of stewardship are universal, but above all, one must listen to God to find out what particular part of His kingdom He wants you to care for.

Salvation Provides Greater Happiness

One may feel he can live a happy life without Jesus, but happiness in Jesus is far different. In Jesus, *true* happiness is found. “No truth essential to our salvation is withheld, no miracle of mercy is neglected, no divine agency is left unemployed. Favor is heaped upon favor, gift upon gift. The whole treasure of heaven is open to those Christ seeks to save. Having collected the riches of the universe, and laid open the resources of infinite power, He gives them all into the hands of Christ, and says, All these are for man. Use these gifts to convince him that there is no love greater than Mine in earth or heaven. His greatest happiness will be found in loving Me.”⁶

"The whole
treasure of heaven
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The bottom line is that choosing God will lead you to greater happiness than you have ever known. Some will think it foolish. But when you realize that Jesus cared enough about you to give His life—to risk giving it up eternally—just for you!— you’ll begin to discover true joy. The prophet Isaiah compared it to the radiant joy we find at weddings: “I will greatly rejoice in the LORD, My soul shall be joyful in my God; For He has clothed me with the garments of salvation, He has covered me with the robe of

⁶ Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 57.

righteousness, As a bridegroom decks himself with ornaments, And as a bride adorns herself with her jewels” (Isaiah 61:10).

You may be astonished to learn that your response gives the unimaginably great God of all the universe joy! How could He care so much about one mere human? The only answer is that He has a heart of love, far beyond anything we can understand. Zephaniah 3:17 says, “The LORD your God in your midst, The Mighty One, will save; He will rejoice over you with gladness, He will quiet you with His love, He will rejoice over you with singing.” This is the only place where the Bible describes God as singing, and He is singing a love song. God singing? Over me?! Yes, it is true. In Luke 15:7, 10, Jesus says twice that there is great rejoicing in heaven over one sinner who repents. The joy of God, pouring over your head and mine, can’t help but increase our own newfound joy as His child.

As you begin to study what it means to be a steward, your joy and responsibility will only grow. Even when trials and tribulations come—and they will—you’ll find that deep in your soul, underneath the turbulence, is an abiding joy and peace because you are now the child of the King.

God created a garden planet and gave it to us. We are to be “stewards” under Him. Accepting Christ as our Lord and Savior is where it begins. The principles of salvation, discipleship, and stewardship bring happiness. We will want to live with Him forever. The goal of God’s plan is to bring us back to the perfect garden planet, to restore us to the jobs we gave up, and to be His loving and beloved stewards, keepers and caretakers of everything He has made. Live Stewardship... Live Happy.

Accept Christ as Savior

Believing in something or someone is what I do.
Demigods of wood, stone, finite or flesh are my view.

Patiently Christ waits and someday will see
If I sincerely accept Him for all eternity.

The stakes are high for your life and mine.
Accept the Savior now; we haven’t much time.

Christ’s life alone can save us from death and sin.
Open your heart’s door and let the Savior come in.

—By John Mathews



Bible Study

Look at Acts 9 and the first and last chapter of 1 Corinthians and Galatians. What keys does Paul give concerning his choices and the strength of his commitment? Why do you think he so often begins and ends his letters with these things?

What comes first: Christian stewardship or acceptance of salvation? What does a successful steward look like? As you study this book, refer back to this question to see if your ideas and beliefs have changed or grown, and if you have seen a visible change in your life.