

STEWARDSHIP EVERYTHING

PRACTICAL LESSONS FROM SCRIPTURE AND DAILY LIFE

MITCH HAZEKAMP

STEWARDSHIP AND EVERYTHING: PRACTICAL LESSONS FROM SCRIPTURE AND DAILY LIFE

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Dedication

Foreword..... 1

Another Chance at Life
Stewardship and Everything

Stewardship in Our Personal Lives 5

Stewardship and Choices
Stewardship and Christ Crucified
Stewardship and the Honor System
Square Up With God
Stewardship and Sportsmanship
Stewardship and Ownership
Stewardship and Past Blessings
Stewardship, Thankfulness, and Feeling Better
Stewardship and Your Wellbeing
Stewardship and Time
Stewardship and Walking With God
Stewardship and Running a Race
Stewardship and Prayer
Stewardship and Your Mind
Stewardship and Deception
Stewardship and Forgiveness
Stewardship and Retaliation
Stewardship and Love
Stewardship and a Humble Hero
Stewardship and Life

Stewardship in the Family.....33

Stewardship and Children
Stewardship and Adventist Christian Education
Stewardship and Pathfinders
Stewardship and Pets
Stewardship and Beyond the Grave
Stewardship—an Act of Love
Stewardship and the Cemetery

Stewardship in the Wallet.....41

Stewardship and Coach Joe Gibbs
Stewardship and Your Finances
Stewardship and the Deceitfulness of Riches
Stewardship and Debt
Stewardship and Foreclosure

Stewardship and the Recession
Stewardship and Taxes
Stewardship and the Gift of Giving
Stewardship and the Holiness of Tithe
Stewardship— a Spiritual Barometer
Tithe—Where Does it Go?

Stewardship and the World Around Us.....55

Stewardship and the Land
Stewardship and Going Green
Stewardship and Saving Energy
Stewardship and Birds
Stewardship and Hurricane Katrina
Stewardship and Patriotism

Stewardship and Our Spiritual Community 63

Stewardship and Giving Back
Stewardship and Working for Nothing
Stewardship and the Fruits of the Spirit
Stewardship and Doing Good
Stewardship and the Underdog
Stewardship and the Good Samaritan
Stewardship and the Gift of Blood

Stewardship and The Adventist Church.....73

Stewardship and the Sabbath (Part 1)
Stewardship and the Sabbath (Part 2)
Stewardship and Reverence
Stewardship and the “Sisterhood of Churches”

Stewardship in Outreach and Ministry79

Stewardship—God is First
This Little Light of Mine
Stewardship and Counting the Cost
Stewardship and Our Changing Times
Stewardship and Evangelism
They Thought You Were God
Stewardship and Missions

Conclusion.....87

Don't Worry, Be Happy!
Who is Jesus to You?
Stewardship and Everything

DEDICATION

This book is dedicated to my wife, Vivian. God brought us together and she is the love of my life. She has walked with me through the good times and the hard times. As my helpmate, she has been by my side through most of my journey through life. She has encouraged me in my ministry and in the writing of this book, has provided nutritious healthy meals, nurtured me during countless illnesses and numerous accidents and assisted me during the furthering of my education in the master's program. Vivian is my companion and favorite person on this planet. Without her support this book would likely not have happened.

ANOTHER CHANCE AT LIFE

It happened on President's Day, February 20, 2012. I had been working in the woods around our property, cutting several dead trees and burning brush piles. There was one large, dead pine tree I had avoided because it was close to the driveway and had the potential to take out some of the other trees across the yard. I still had apprehensions about cutting it; however, this was the day I finally decided to take that tree down.

I had everything in readiness. The chainsaw was sharp and full of fuel, and I had climbed the tree with a ladder to tie off a sturdy rope with a come-along. After stretching the rope several feet and tying it at the base of another tree, I pulled it as tight as a guitar string. I was confident that the tree would fall in the direction I designed and intended. Unfortunately for me, I don't remember much of what happened after that. The tree did not fall as I had carefully calculated—it broke off at the top and fell back toward me.

As a result of getting hit by the tree, I suffered two crushed vertebra, collapsed lungs, a broken nose, and multiple fractured ribs. My wife rushed from the house and initially thought I was dead. She called 911 and when the Gordon EMS arrived, the paramedic looked at me and determined that I needed the Life Force helicopter. I was airlifted to Erlanger Hospital in Chattanooga where I underwent major surgery and spent seven days in the trauma unit. After two days in the IMS unit, I was transferred to Health South for rehabilitation. Several days had disappeared from my life. In a flurry of time, my life had changed—I was now in the hands of God and a multitude of medical caregivers.

I'm not sure when I first became conscious of my surroundings. I had awakened in a strange place—a life punctuated by oxygen tubes, medications, bandages, and wheel chairs, interspersed with occasional hospital food trays. In the midst of all the doctors and nurses bustling about, the daily visits from my wife, Vivian, were most definitely the highlight of each day.

I suffered through four breathing treatments each day in order to eventually be released from the oxygen tube that adorned my nose. I was also required to participate in daily rehab activities. I had to learn to walk again, rebuild my strength, recover my thinking processes—I had to re-learn how to function as before the accident.

“You have granted me life and favor, And Your care has preserved my spirit” (Job 10:12).

“You will show me the path of life; In your presence is fullness of joy; At your right hand are pleasures forevermore” (Psalms 16:11).

As the process of recovery continued, I scrutinized my memory for answers and found it clouded from all the medications I was taking. I discovered a darkness interrupted by hallucinations, nightmares, and pain. I spent long nights lying on my back, awake, watching the ceiling. Some nights I was delirious and pleading for help:

“Somebody help me, somebody please help me...”

My inability to maneuver well and my ever-present brace, called a “turtle shell,” were continual reminders of my broken back and impaired condition. The significant pain experienced while getting up from the hospital bed was a constant reality of my accident’s aftermath.

Visitors came and went: our children, pastor, and friends. I vaguely remember my mother, brother, and sister when they visited. I have been told that countless thousands were praying for me from across the nation. Many stated that it is a miracle I am alive. Others suggested that God must have a reason for saving my life. I am finding this to be more and more of a reality. It seems to me that I have been snatched from the grip of death and given another chance.

“The Lord protects those of childlike faith; I was facing death, and then He saved me” (Psalms 116:6, NLT).

I write this on Monday, May 14, 2012. I have been released from the doctor to return to work, part time. In my early days of rehab I could only walk short distances with a walker and a rehab specialist. I have undergone treatment at Health South and Gordon County Hospital during the last several months and am now walking up to two miles at a time. Many competent health care professionals have examined and treated me. Soon they will all have released me from their care,

sending me out on my own to make a difference in my life and any others I may reach.

I have been through a lot in the past few months—things I never thought would happen to me. I have a new appreciation for life and a renewed thankfulness for my family, realizing just how precious they are to me. I am indebted to my neighbors who cleaned up my property, mowed my grass, transported me to rehab, and have assisted Vivian and me in numerous ways. My gratitude extends to my colleagues at work who have stepped up to the plate, tackling the extra tasks created by my absence. Additionally, I am exceedingly grateful for the many who prayed for me and have expressed concern through cards, letters, and calls. Most importantly, I am thankful for a loving God and His willingness to deliver me from certain death and give me another chance at life.

And such a gift as this I should receive and care for with my utmost efforts in stewardship.

“Thanks be to God for His gift that is too wonderful for words”
(2 Corinthians 9:15, NCV).

“This is my comfort in my affliction, For Your word has given me life” (Psalms 119:50).

“I have had these troubles in my soul, so now I will be humble all my life. Lord, because of you, people live. Because of you, my spirit also lives; you made me well and let me live” (Isaiah 38:15-16, NCV).

STEWARDSHIP AND EVERYTHING

“This is what the Lord says, who saved you, who formed you in your mother’s body: “I the Lord, made everything, stretching out the skies by myself and spreading out the earth all alone.”
Isaiah 44:24 NCV He declared, “There is no other God; I am the only God...” (Isaiah 45:5 NCV)

Countless attempts have been made through the years in an effort to define stewardship. Leroy Edwin Froom once wrote on *Stewardship in its Larger Aspects*. He stated that it neither begins nor ends with money. Stewardship, he declared, “is the all-inclusive principle of the whole of life.”

My picture of stewardship is all-encompassing, and includes: God and all of His creation; a star filled sky on a clear dark night; a snow covered mountain peak towering heavenward; a field of ripened grain under a canopy of blue; a cherry orchard hanging heavy with luscious red berries; an orange grove under a warm tropical sun laden with juicy fruit; a cascading waterfall plunging into a pool of icy water; the vastness of a desert sweltering in the heat of the day; the teeming multitudes attempting to eke out a life in the midst of privation; a jam-packed interstate overflowing with cars and trucks. It visualizes an emergency vehicle screaming through traffic with the sirens blaring, attempting to save a life.

Stewardship is all about the things of God in the spiritual world and also comprises the secular things relating to mankind and this earth. Stewardship is about a God who “made everything.” It is about a God who “gives life to all people.” It is about a God who is the “only God.” He is the God of everything, and we are His stewards of that everything.

The bottom line for me is that God created us, loved us, and expressed that love through His sacrifice on the cross. My response is to love him back by accepting His provision for my salvation. I demonstrate my love for God through obedience and faithful stewardship! Stewardship is all about God and everything He has created.

STEWARDSHIP AND OUR PERSONAL LIVES

STEWARDSHIP AND CHOICES

It was about lunchtime when we arrived at my parents' home in Michigan. We had been driving for most of two days through a wintry mix of precipitation. I was cold, tired, and definitely hungry. Upon arrival I mentioned to my father that my windshield wipers had been overworked during the trip and needed wiper fluid. Dad became preoccupied with that need and recommended I fill it right away. I was hungry and wanted to eat lunch first, but instead respected my father's wish to take care of what he considered an immediate need for the car.

The garage was not well-lit, and in my haste to accomplish the task, I filled the wrong receptacle. Still hurrying to finish the chore, I attempted to syphon the fluid out with a hose and put it in the proper place—but while syphoning, I inadvertently ingested a miniscule amount of the liquid. When we examined the ingredients listed on the can, the fluid was found to contain poison and was highly toxic.

My mother suggested calling the poison control hot line and although I had swallowed only a minute amount, they advised I go to the hospital to receive the antidote. I ended up with an IV, staying the entire night in the hospital for observation. This was all the result of hastiness and improper light. These unwise choices resulted in a loss of money and vacation time, as well as the hassle of filing a health insurance claim. In addition, I had to suffer teasing by my siblings for having made such a stupid mistake.

Every day we are faced with simple or complex decisions. Some are of little importance while others can have serious and long-lasting effects. Our daily choices, even the “simple” ones, can be of significant magnitude or minor consequence. Part of conducting our lives in an efficient and respectful manner involves weighing decisions and assigning priority.

One of the most important choices each of us face in this life, however, is our decision concerning whether or not we will serve the

Lord. Joshua was also challenged with this question. Nevertheless, he gave the right answer.

“And if it seems evil to you to serve the Lord, choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve, whether the gods which your fathers served that were on the other side of the River, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land you dwell. But as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord” (Joshua 24:15).

STEWARDSHIP AND CHRIST CRUCIFIED

“For GOD so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life” (John 3:16).

God exemplified a divine blueprint for faithful stewardship! When He gave His life, He established an everlasting principle of selfless sacrifice. He set the example of the unchanging Christian standard of giving. He modeled sacrificial giving. In the offering of Jesus He could have given no greater gift. He gave everything He could give. He gave His life so that the human family could live forever.

In a recent sermon, Ty Gibson emphasized the sacrifice of Jesus. He stated that Jesus laid down His life, completely void of self-interest. He laid aside his omnipresence for “all eternity.” Gibson pointed out that Jesus was willing to sacrifice His own life because of His love for us; and expounded, “God loves you and me more than His own existence.”

Have you ever given thought to God’s responsibility as a steward of the plan of salvation? He was the only One who could pay the penalty for our sins. He was the only One who could meet the price for our redemption. What if He had mismanaged His sacred trust? What if He had refused to step forward to pay the price? What if He had been unfaithful in His stewardship?

Think about the heaviness of heart that must have settled upon our Savior as he struggled with the darkness of separation while facing the cross. Consider the enormous weight of the sins of all the inhabitants of earth as they crushed out the life of our Lord. Darkness enveloped Him. He sweat drops of blood as He wrestled against principalities, against “spiritual hosts of wickedness” (Ephesians. 6:12).

“...I lay down My life that I may take it again. No one takes it from Me, but I lay it down Myself” (John 10:17, 18).

God so loved that He gave, and Jesus laid down His life for us. Love motivated God to give, faithful stewardship kept Him on the cross.

Recognizing this, the crucified Christ is a recurring theme throughout the New Testament. The Apostle Paul declared it to be a primary message he was admonished not only to know himself, but to know (and teach) among the people.

“For I determined not to know anything among you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified” (I Corinthians 2:2).

“Nor is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved” (Acts 4:12).

“But God forbid that I should boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ...” (Galatians 6:14)

“Therefore the burden of [Paul’s] teaching among them was Christ and Him crucified. He sought to show them that their most earnest study and their greatest joy must be the wonderful truth of salvation through repentance toward God and faith in the Lord Jesus Christ” (Ellen G. White, *Acts of the Apostles*, 272.2).

May our own “earnest study and greatest joy” be of Christ’s ultimate gift, our repentance toward Him, and persevering faith.

STEWARDSHIP AND THE HONOR SYSTEM

We recently enjoyed a camping trip at one of our favorite places, Cades Cove. A sign at the camp store caught my attention:

“After hours, firewood and ice are on the honor system. Please place the money in the small brown envelopes and slide them under the door. Firewood \$3.30, Ice \$1.65, Thank You!”

I can recall days gone by in Michigan farm country when roadside vegetable stands would sell their seasonal garden crops on the honor system. A proprietor willing to sell on the honor system is putting a lot of trust in the honesty of local consumers who would frequent his roadside stand to purchase his goods. If a dishonest person would

happen by, they could easily walk away without compensating the owner for his product.

Merriam-Webster defines the honor system as “a system...whereby persons are trusted to abide by the regulations (as for a code of conduct) without supervision or surveillance.”

Honesty is a recurrent theme in the Scriptures:

“Lord, who may dwell in your sacred tent? ... The one whose walk is blameless, who does what is righteous, who speaks the truth from their heart; whose tongue utters no slander, ... who keeps an oath even when it hurts, and does not change their mind” (Psalms 15:1-2, 4, NIV).

“And whatever you do, do it heartily, as to the Lord and not to men, knowing that from the Lord you will receive the reward of the inheritance; for you serve the Lord Christ” (Colossians 3:23-24).

“In every way be an example of doing good deeds. When you teach, do it with honesty and seriousness. Speak the truth so that you cannot be criticized. Then those who are against you will be ashamed because there is nothing bad to say about us” (Titus 2:7, 8, NCV).

Ellen G. White, one of my favorite authors, also wrote about the importance of being honest.

“Love truthfulness and honesty. These are sacred treasures. Do not lay them aside for a moment... Let truthfulness and honesty ever live in your heart...” (*An Appeal to the Youth*, 44.4).

“Nothing but goodness and purity, honesty and holiness, can enter heaven.” (*An Appeal to the Youth*, 56.1).

Our daily lives should be as a model steward of the honor system. Our character is more important than our bank account or investment portfolio.

SQUARE UP WITH GOD

New Year's Day was always inventory day in our family business. My parents owned a grocery store on the main street of our small town in Michigan. Dad, Mom, and all of my siblings (four brothers and two sisters) eventually worked in our small establishment. And as December drew to a close it was time to finalize the records, determine annual income, square up the accounts, and close out the year.

The inventory process in the early years of my life included all of the employees and most of my family cataloging the entire supply of items in one day. Every box, can, bag, and object had to be counted—including each item on every shelf and all the bits and pieces in the stockroom. We would work in teams of two with each team marking down the numbers on a large sheet. For example: 12 cans @ 39 cents, 17 boxes @ \$1.99, or one bag @ \$5.55. We even had to count every piece of bubble gum at one cent each.

Today, of course, our family inventories are but a fading memory of an outdated system and antiquated process. The 21st century has ushered in new technologies featuring barcode printing capabilities, inventory management software, self-scanning systems, inventory counting podcasts, and much more. One or two people armed with modern equipment can now accomplish the entire inventory procedure in significantly less time than it took our entire family to finish in a full day.

December—the end of the year—is a good time to take inventory of your finances and review your personal management of the possessions entrusted to you. If you find that you have been remiss throughout the year or are found wanting in this area of your walk with the Lord, it is a perfect time to square up with God.

Martin G. Collins made the following observation:

“A builder who does not count the cost before laying the foundation is humiliated as a disgraceful failure, yet an unfinished life is far more tragic than a rock foundation without a building. Jesus warns, ‘No one, having put his hand to the plow, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God’ (Luke 9:62). Thus, failure to count the cost of following Christ results in an incomplete life. ‘Holding fast to the