



STEWARDSHIP MINISTRIES EMPHASIS WEEK, 2019

THEME: "GOD FIRST"

Mathew 6:33

Prepared

By

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Day 1

“GOD FIRST”.

God First is an initiative guiding the Stewardship Ministries of the General Conference of the Seventh Day Adventists from 2017 through 2020. The primary purpose of the initiative is to emphasize, teach and encourage the believers to put God first, to let God be number one on our priority lists of life. This will guide our daily decision-making processes and build our faith on the firm foundation that is our Lord Jesus.

GC Stewardship Ministries does not pick this initiative from nowhere, it quotes the words of our Lord and master Christ Jesus as recorded in Mathew 6:33, when the omniscient called upon human beings to put their priorities right! He said “But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well”. Matthew 6:33. Without this order of prioritization, there is no real spirituality, no faithfulness and consequently no stewardship!

Never leave your priorities mixed or unclear. Place each one in its right space and deal with it right there. *“Mixed priorities can mix even the genius to a mixed up life”*. This curtails success or growth of any sort! Today our spiritual lives see no or minimal growth just because our spiritual priorities are mixed up and most of the time not clear.

So, it is a stewardship strategic intention of the world church to get every Adventist believer into this right spiritual prioritization highlighted by our master and savior. Thus,

Before you thank anyone for anything, thank God First.

Before you praise anyone, praise God First.

Before you ask anything from anyone, ask from God first.

Before you think of anything, think about God first.

Before you start off your day, pray to God first.

Before you plan, ask for wisdom from God first.

Before you give anything to anyone, give to God first.

Before you eat, give thanks to God first.

Before you spend, return tithe and give offerings to God first.

Before you die, repent to God first.

Proverbs 3:6 “In everything you do, put God first, and he will direct you and crown your efforts with success.”

Jesus put God first.

Luke 4:4, 8, 12

¹Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, left the Jordan and was led by the Spirit into the wilderness, ²where for forty days he was tempted ^[a] by the devil. He ate nothing during those days, and at the end of them he was hungry.

³The devil said to him, “If you are the Son of God, tell this stone to become bread.”

⁴ Jesus answered, “It is written: ‘Man shall not live on bread alone.’

⁵The devil led him up to a high place and showed him in an instant all the kingdoms of the world. ⁶And he said to him, “I will give you all their authority and splendor; it has been given to me, and I can give it to anyone I want to. ⁷If you worship me, it will all be yours.”

⁸ Jesus answered, “It is written: ‘Worship the Lord your God and serve him only.

⁹The devil led him to Jerusalem and had him stand on the highest point of the temple. “If you are the Son of God,” he said, “throw yourself down from here. ¹⁰For it is written:

“He will command his angels concerning you to guard you carefully; ¹¹they will lift you up in their hands, so that you will not strike your foot against a stone.

¹² Jesus answered, “It is said: ‘do not put the Lord your God to the test.

¹³When the devil had finished all this tempting, he left him until an opportune time.

Amidst temptations, Jesus put God first. Life gets its meaning only in God. There is no temptation that comes your way that God cannot shield you from, including the temptations of eating tithe and offerings.

“In any temptation, learn to put God first, you will succeed and over come”

Day 2

STEWARDSHIP AT THE WELL!

John 4:6-7

Jacob's well was there; so Jesus, wearied as he was from his journey, was sitting beside the well. It was about the sixth hour. A woman from Samaria came to draw water. Jesus said to her, "Give me a drink."

But vs. 4 of John 4 though short starts it all! It says, “Now he had to go through Samaria”. Friends, when Jesus goes through some place, definitely He comes into contact with the people and once this contact happens, people are never the same. They gain knowledge, they change behavior, and they share testimonies of who Jesus is. As a matter of fact, once they come into contact with Him, they don’t want Him to leave them. No wonder when He went through

Samaria, the Samaritans this time believed and understood Him as the savior of the world. What a spiritual step for the Samaritans! How I wish as stewards we gained this same understanding! They urged Him to stay with them, He stayed two more days. That's what happens when Jesus gets into somebody. John 4:39-41. Get into contact with Jesus friends! Stewardship is just about being in contact with Jesus Christ our Lord. Look at this spectacular contact between Jesus and the Samaritan woman and see how Stewardship resonated at the well.

Since Jacob's well was there, Jesus, weary from His journey, sat down by the well. It was about the sixth hour. 7 When a Samaritan woman came to draw water, Jesus said to her, "Give Me a drink." Give me a drink Jesus asked! Give me! . Why did Jesus ask for water from the woman? Was Jesus begging? Whose water was or is it in the first place? Who takes ownership of the water in the wells, oceans, lakes, rivers, streams, including the water in your house. Jesus is the owner of all the fountains of the waters! The word of God states it this way; *"The earth is the Lord's, and everything in it, the world, and all who live in it; for he founded it on the seas and established it on the waters"*. Psalms 24:1-2 and 1 Corinthians 10:26.

Mrs. White says "The King of heaven came to this outcast soul, asking a service at her hands. He who made the ocean, who controls the waters of the great deep, who opened the springs and channels of the earth, rested from His weariness at Jacob's well, and was dependent upon a stranger's kindness for even the gift of a drink of water". The Desire of Ages pg. 184.

Often times I ask why God really has to ask from us that which belong to Him? Is it not because through giving and returning God connects with us and we stick together all the time? Yes. It is through our giving and returning to Him that He gets into us and changes us and gets our thoughts and plans and lives, all at the same time. It is at this point that He becomes our God and we remain His people. I admire King David's attitude towards giving to God. 1Chronicles 29:14 - King David said, *"But who am I and what is my people, that we should be able thus to offer willingly? For all things come from you, and of your own have we given you."*

When you hear His voice calling for tithe like it is in Malachi 3:10 or offerings like it is in Psalm 4:5, it should never dawn on you that He is looking for resources or assistance, rather be sure that He is looking for you. Like He did to Abraham when He asked for Isaac.

Whenever you see water flowing from any container or some place, remember God's creative power. Jesus was not asking for help from the Samaritan woman. He was calling upon for a quick and active stewardship step on the part of the

woman. Jesus urged the woman to give so that out of giving she could open herself to the fountain of the living water. Jesus was using giving as a wedge to penetrate the life of a woman whose life was completely stained by evil thoughts and totally locked into ethnicity and bad blood for the Jews.

A heart I suppose was full of hatred and unfaithfulness. Every time she saw a Jew, she grew goose bumps for fear and hatred. For this reason, I do not doubt her heart and the hearts of other Samaritans got heavy each moment a Jew appeared in their vicinity. Hearts of ethnicity! Totally uncalled for!

Unfortunately, many of us for some reasons are battling it out the same state of affairs. Our hearts are so heavy for lack of essentials, friends, and losses of some kind. We are at longheads with neighbors, friends and in-laws. This elicits habitual behavior like hatred, which ultimately replaces love in the heart of somebody and this makes life completely dark and uncomfortable.

Psychologists have researched and found that developing a habit of giving can treat a heart like that. Giving or generosity is the answer to such condition.

They say, “Giving can be as beneficial to your health as exercise, eating right, and having good genes. A [study](#) from the University of Michigan revealed that generosity boosts mental and physical health. Giving promotes cooperation and enhances social bonds. Selfless exchanges help develop a sense of trust while strengthening our ties with others”.

Hence, apart from being highly spiritual, giving and returning to God helps us to strengthen our ties with our creator God and boost our lives all round. God wants us to be fine all round! I tend to think that Jesus was aiming at helping the Samaritan woman to get better by practicing giving.

To date Jesus is using the wedge of giving to get our hearts better and better and accordingly, never take giving as a methodology for collecting items or money for monetary functions in the church. Its benefits extend beyond mere collections and money. The giver actually benefits more! Learn to give and encourage others to do the same, for that way we get connected to God.

Jesus said to her, “Will you give me a drink?” (His disciples had gone into the town to buy food). The Samaritan woman said to him, “You are a Jew and I am a Samaritan woman. How can you ask me for a drink?” For Jews do not associate with Samaritans.

It appears rather unfortunate that when Jesus asked for water, the woman quickly rushed her mind to ethnicity. First and foremost she was supposed to

understand that when it comes to water needs like drinking, no matter the tribe, color, ethnicity, we all take the same colorless water! There is no white water for whites or black water for the blacks or water for Samaritans or Jews. The Woman put her ethnicity first instead of putting God First. She went totally off base in her speech by mentioning Jew - Samaritan soar relations. The point was about giving. It was stewardship at its height! Jesus was looking for the heart of the woman. Jesus said give me a drink. Each time we fail or miss to put God First in our daily living, we mix up our priorities and hence mess up our lives and go totally off topic. Every time we do not return or give back to God first, we go off topic of the full meaning of life and get lost in the world of confusion and negative forces. Put God first and not any other thing!

Learn to stick to the point. Do that which the master is telling you to do.

When God says, "Give me an offering or return to me a tenth " it does not mean He is asking for help, He is seeking to connect you to the ultimate life-giving offering, Jesus Christ, so you remain with Him and in Him, so that you stop living but rather Jesus continues to live in you. At this point you can join Paul in saying, "I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me" Galatians 2:20.

When one gets to this point, there is nothing he or she cannot give or return to God, including himself first.

Let us be willing to give whenever God asks us to. If He asks for a drink, please give the drink, if asks for tithe and offerings, please give. Jesus asked the woman to give Him a drink; surely the water was there in the well. It was plenty! I am sure she had what to use to draw the water, because that's what she came for in the first place. All she needed was to draw water and give the master. God asks us to give offerings and return tithe, for sure we have them in our pockets, gardens and businesses and everywhere! Check, you have them in plenty! God does not ask you to give or return what you do not have!

When the woman said, "You are a Jew and I am a Samaritan woman. How can you ask me for a drink?" For Jews do not associate with Samaritans" It became apparent that, the woman did not seem ready to connect with Jesus in the transaction of a drink because Jesus was a Jew. It was at this point that Jesus decided to bring the point home to her.

Jesus answered her, "If you knew the gift of God and who it is that asks you for a drink, you would have asked him and he would have given you living water." If

we only knew who says return or give an offering, we would keep giving and returning and made giving our life style.

“Sir,” the woman said, “you have nothing to draw with and the well is deep. Fake excuse!

Have you ever realized that all the excuses we give for not giving or returning to God are fake! Totally fake! How can this woman say there was nothing to draw water with when actually she had come to draw water herself? Lies! The fact that she had come to draw water simply presupposes that she had it.

Equally, the common slogan I don't have what to give to God is a mere lie. Do you mean to say that you are nothing! If there is nothing to give, give up yourself to Him. After all you are the one He is looking for in what you give (offering). No one is justified in this matter of having nothing to give. No one!

The Samaritan asked where could you get this living water? Are you greater than our father Jacob, who gave us the well and drank from it himself, as did also his sons and his livestock?”

Whatever question the Samaritan woman posed to Jesus confirms one fact that she did not know Him. And that her mind was locked in human affairs of this world. She asked where can you get this living water. The very person she was asking was the living water! John 4:14, She asked are you greater than our father Jacob, who gave us the well and drank from it himself, as did also his sons and his livestock?” Can you imagine this last question!

Jesus and Jacob who is greater? At one time Jesus said “I tell you the truth ... before Abraham was born, I am.” (John 8:58, 59), He is the great I am. If He was before Abraham, who is Jacob? Little did the woman know she was talking to the creator of the Universe. Greater than any human being! Above Him there is no other! “Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made. John 1:3. That same Lord is the one who from time to time says return to me a faithful tithe.

Many times our actions and lifestyles do not affirm or depict or at least illustrate that we know the God we worship or profess. Because if we did, being faithful in returning to Him would not be such an issue like it appears to be today. If we clearly knew and understood the one who says return to me. How big He is, how providential He is, how great and mighty He is, and especially if we knew that He is the source of every blessing, we would fulfill every detail of His will.

Jesus opened it to her when He answered, “Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again, but whoever drinks the water I give him will never thirst. Indeed, the water I give them will become in them a spring of water welling up to eternal life.”

The woman said to him, “Sir, give me this water so that I won’t get thirsty and have to keep coming here to draw water.”

To this point the Samaritan has not gained any cognizance of what sort of water the master is making reference to. She thinks Jesus is talking of the water similar to that in Jacob’s well. Her mindset is so skewed to everything worldly. She said “Sir, give me this water so that I won’t get thirsty and have to keep coming here to draw water.”

Jesus does not have anything to do with worldly thoughts, intentions or mindsets. He is a strategist for eternity and whoever stands with Him or works with or listens to Him is definitely destined for eternity. Faithfulness to Him is the route to eternity!

In essence Jesus was placing emphasis and priority to a state of spiritual condition one gets to after accepting HIM as Lord. That contentment, that satisfaction, that state of hope even when the world is tearing every ray of hope down.

The Master referred to the temerity of keeping focused to the Lord when every compass is gone! The comfort enjoyed amid turbulence by the faithful. The blessed hope of the return of our Lord that keeps the wheel of faith rotating. The peace that flows from Him. That was the water the master mentioned.

Brethren and sisters, we all need this water. It is this water that blossoms the faithfulness we need to function spiritually. It’s this water that waters our day to day spiritual love that binds us together as people of God, and the same water makes us firmly connected to heaven more than any other place or institution. We need Jesus more than the water in Jacob’s well! Because Jesus is the fountain of the living water!

That was Stewardship at the well where Jesus was telling the Samaritan woman to put God first! Give to the Lord first. Give Him a drink!!

Day 3

IN GOD'S HANDS

Psalms 25:1, Lord, I put my life in your hands.

“When you put everything in God’s hand, you will eventually see God’s hand in everything” anonymous.

It is commonplace for many believers to withhold that which they ought to give to God for the reason that, that is all there is for them to use. They throw all their trust in what God has provided to them instead of putting their full trust in the one who is the source of blessings. God Himself! The grip on this blessing is so strong that many of us forget the source of the blessing. We have chosen to depend more on the blessings (wealthy, education status, fame, power, name

it), than depending on the blesser who is God the source of all those good blessings, James 1:17. Stewardship is about depending on the blesser rather than the blessings. It's about putting God first. When will you ever join the Psalmist and put your life in the hands of the Lord? It's now!

Apostles, in their missionary errands and lives did not depend on any other source of power or encouragement except God and the hope they had in Jesus Christ. They placed all their lives in the hands of almighty God. This is a very critical element in stewardship. Total trust in the Lord is the fulcrum upon which faith rotates and mission spins. You see as stewards of the Lord, we have two sides to cover; trusting and being faithful to God first and then doing His mission to its conclusion. *"In all ways it is faithfulness that funds mission. Faith has to rotate before mission spins"* William Bagambe.

Peter is one of the excellent examples of how God's hand protects. Acts 12: 2

After Herod put James the brother of John to death with the sword during the persecution of the Church, preceded to seize Peter also. After arresting him, he put him in prison, handing him over to be guarded by four squads of four soldiers each.

Time for persecution is coming again. When it comes, never think this is the first time for the church to be persecuted. God's church suffered at the hands of the most notorious names like Herod. Swords killed faithful men like James! People like Peter were thrown in prisons.

Mrs. Ellen G White says this in her different writings;

"The same masterful mind that plotted against the faithful in ages past is still seeking to rid the earth of those who fear God and obey His law . . . Wealth, genius, education, will combine to cover them with contempt. Persecuting rulers, ministers, and church members will conspire against them. With voice and pen, by boasts, threats, and ridicule, they will seek to overthrow their faith". --5T 450 (1885).

There will come a time when, because of our advocacy of Bible truth, we shall be treated as traitors. --6T 394 (1900).

All who in that evil day would fearlessly serve God according to the dictates of conscience, will need courage, firmness, and a knowledge of God and His Word, for those who are true to God will be persecuted, their motives will be impugned, their best efforts misinterpreted, and their names cast out as evil. -AA 431, 432 (1911).

“Hoarded wealth will soon be worthless. When the decree shall go forth that none shall buy or sell except they have the mark of the beast, very much means will be of no avail. God calls for us now to do all in our power to send forth the warning to the world”. --RH March 21, 1878.

Friends, if we are still failing in simple matters like returning faithful tithe and giving of offerings to the Lord, shall we stand the looming persecution our Lord's sake? The faithful in ages past put God first and so whatever happened after that did not affect them. And surely the Lord showed His presence to them even in such perilous moments! We need to borrow a spiritual leaf from these faithful in the ages past!

Acts 12:5-8, So Peter was kept in prison, but the church was earnestly praying to God for him.

Beloved let us learn to take our trials and tribulations to God in prayer. In stewardship we don't walk by feet, we walk by knees! And that's what it means to put God first. Today we need a praying church, we need a praying home, we need a praying leadership, we need a praying soul. Peter was in prison but the knees of the faithful were on the ground seeking God's intervention. Surely the Lord intervened! In His hands we are safe, in His hands the church is secure. He bought it by divine blood; He secures it by the pierced palms of love! Yes He does!

⁶ The night before Herod was to bring him to trial, Peter was sleeping between two soldiers, bound with two chains, and sentries stood guard at the entrance. ⁷ Suddenly an angel of the Lord appeared and a light shone in the cell. He struck Peter on the side and woke him up. “Quick, get up!” he said, and the chains fell off Peter's wrists.

There is no security detail angels of the Lord cannot beat! Angels can penetrate any security apparatus! Never incarcerate God's faithful for God's sake thinking you have done anything. No! God can choose to use an earthquake as keys to open all prison cells and for all the prisoners, like He did with Paul and Silas. He came to set the prisoners free, Luke 4:18. God is God friend! He is worthy of all our trust, confidence and faithfulness. He is the chief steward of our lives and all we claim to possess. Yes He is!

This time an angel came and light shone in the cell. Interestingly God does not need electricity! His lighting system does not go off. He is never in the black out. When it is dark, He is the light of the world; light is shining wherever He goes. He is the light of the world! John 8:12. God is self-sufficient! He does not need human help. The lamb is the lamp! **Revelation 21:23. Trust Him!**

One other fascinating insight is that the angel had to strike Peter. Surely, many of us need some striking for us to wake up from the chains of this world and get serious with God's ways! We are so much chained my brothers and sisters and we need an angel who will strike and shake those chains off. Actually, the time to get your chains off is now! Especially the chains of unfaithfulness to God. *Chains fall off only when you get up!* Stand up with God in matters of stewardship please! So the angel is saying get up today and be faithful in returning tithe and giving offerings to the Lord, the chains of unfaithfulness will drop off your wrists.

Then the angel said to him, "Put on your clothes and sandals." And Peter did so. "Wrap your cloak around you and follow me," the angel told him. ⁹

Peter followed him out of the prison, but he had no idea that what the angel was doing was really happening; he thought he was seeing a vision. ¹⁰ They passed the first and second guards and came to the Iron Gate leading to the city. It opened for them by itself, and they went through it. When they had walked the length of one street, suddenly the angel left him. Technology does not originate with man, it does with God!

The angel is now leading Peter out of the cell purely by God's provision and command. And no prison authority is aware including the two soldiers, bound him and sentries who stood guard at the entrance *and gates*. The security walls of the world totally beaten down! God first! Peter was surely in the hands of the Lord.

Isaiah 54:17 No weapon formed against you shall prosper, and every tongue, which rises against you in judgment, you shall condemn. This is the heritage of the servants of the Lord, and their righteousness is from me," Says the Lord.

No weapon formed against the faithful shall prosper! Friends join the group!

Have you checked the first technology of an automatic door in vs. 10? When they *passed the first and second guards and came to the Iron Gate leading to the city. It opened for them by itself, and they went through it.*

The first time the automatic door was recorded in human history was in the 1st century AD, when a Greek mathematician and Engineer by the name of Heron of Alexandria invented the first known automatic door. But allow me to mention to you that, before engineer Heron, the automatic door was already there and recorded in the book of Acts 12:10. Technology does not start with man, it originates with God. Never put your life into the hand of technology more than you put it into God's hand. Those of you, who travel to places where such doors and many other technologies are found, never be stunned. There is nothing new, those inventions or the principles upon which they are built are with God Himself. God creates and Science invents! Science will never invent what God has not created! Science picks from what God has put in place already. It all starts with God! God first!

When the angel and Peter passed the first and second guards and came to the Iron Gate, the Iron Gate opened by itself! Hallelujah!

If your spiritual imagination is clearly functional, you must have figured out that as they approached this Iron Gate, the power of God released some optic or motion sensors which triggered the iron gate to open by itself for the first time in its life span. Divine power changed the manual Iron Gate to an automatic Iron Gate! It's the power released from God that turns things automatic. We are waiting for a moment when returning to God a faithful tithe and giving a faithful offering will cease to be manual, (where you have to be told or reminded) but become automatic, become your life style. This time pray that God will unleash power to mould your lifestyle into an automatic faithful steward of the contemporary times. With God's power, all stewards ought to be automatically faithful. When God asked Abraham to offer his son, Abraham did it automatically! Gen 22:10-12. When Jesus unleashed the power to Zaccheaus, Zaccheaus automatically gave half of his wealthy to the poor, Luke 19:8. When God opened

the womb of Hannah, Hannah automatically gave Samuel to God. Each one of us needs this spiritual automaticity.

Iron is not a simple material that one shakes with ease! But with God, no door no matter the material it is made of can fail to open. Nobody can close God inside or outside. God is free to open any door. Never fear any closed door! When fate closes the doors of your life, faith in God will open all of them. Just put your life in His hands like Peter did.

When Peter and the angel had walked the length of one street, suddenly the angel left him. Then Peter came to himself and said, "Now I know without a doubt that the Lord has sent his angel and rescued me from Herod's clutches and from everything the Jewish people were hoping would happen."

We need to have the mind and heart to acknowledge what the Lord has done for us in this dark world like Peter did when he said " the Lord has sent His angel to rescue me from Herod's clutches" Surely Peter saw the hand of the Lord.

"When you put everything in God's hand, you will eventually see God's hand in everything" anonymous. Stewardship is about putting everything in God's hand!

Day 4

Do Not Forget

Deuteronomy 8:10-15

10 When you have eaten and are satisfied, praise the Lord your God for the good land he has given you. 11 Be careful that you do not forget the Lord your God, failing to observe his commands, his laws and his decrees that I am giving you this day.

Beloved, the word forget is applied here to suggest not going back to God or giving any cognizance to that which the Lord has placed in your command or possession. If care is excised, one may quickly decipher that surely the Lord is our only provider. He has blessed us with healthy, wealthy, jobs, status, knowledge, families, friends mention it! Above all, He has blessed us with hope in Christ. The blessed hope!

Scripture in the book of Deuteronomy 8 is simply saying that; when you are enjoying the above blessings from the Lord, never forget the source of those blessings, that is actually the Lord our God. Scripture is quite explicit by saying be careful not to forget the Lord your God. It is said, “*A river that forgets its source soon dries up*” May be that is the reason we are drying up spiritually. Many of us forget to return to the Lord. May be we should sing song No.334 in the SDA hymnal, Come, though Fount of every Blessing.

Vs. 12-15 are quite down to earth!

“Otherwise, when you eat and are satisfied, when you build fine houses and settle down, 13 and when your herds and flocks grow large and your silver and gold increase and all you have is multiplied, 14 then your heart will become proud and you will forget the Lord your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery. 15 He led you through the vast and dreadful wilderness, that thirsty and waterless land, with its venomous snakes and scorpions. He brought you water out of hard rock”.

Self-sufficiency is a source of pride and breeds forgetfulness and is the worst plague that has hit the human race today!

When we work and get food, eat and get satisfied, build mansions and settle down, when our herds and flocks grow and multiply and grow large, when our business profit margins increase and multiply, then we take credit, thinking that its by our mighty, capacities, experiences or hard work. Pride sets in and strips us naked and leaves us utterly insubstantial towards our Lord. Our mental and spiritual capacities get benumbed to withhold credit from God and our spiritual compasses drop dead and no longer point to the Lord but to the world and ourselves. It is at this apex of the matter that many worshipers stop focusing on God and shift their total attention to the world and themselves.

- At this point, no body praises or worships the Lord; everybody is praising himself and the world. (Thus, no tithe and offerings given to the Lord).
- Right here, nobody prays to the Lord, everything is there anyway!
- People at this junction of life, want personal privacy and nobody should speak anything without permission. Human rights upheld! All doors closed.
- This is when capitalism grows its strongest roots. Everybody for himself!
- At this point the church is no longer a house of prayer but rather a center of socialization and leisure activities or entertainment
- People here stop using hearts and start using heads. All by reason! No faith in God anymore.
- Every other unspiritual nonsense creeps into the minds and lives of God’s people and the church gets derailed from its destiny to the drain of contemporality.

Saints of the living God, never forget the Lord your God, after all remember He is the one who gives you the ability to create wealth. Deuteronomy 8:18. Remember the Lord in all your are doing. Actually put Him first. Put your priorities straight.

May I invite you to join king David who said, “Praise the Lord, I tell myself, and never forget the good things He does for me.” Ps 103:2. Check! David does not say the good things He did for him; he says the good things He does for me. That means all the time. He does good things for us the entire time beloved.

Recently, I received a message that had this story from a friend who sends meaningful messages to me.

A 78-year-old man collapsed in the public and was rushed to hospital. Upon reaching the hospital was given oxygen to sustain him for 24 hours. After sometime he was getting better and so the doctor gave him a bill of 500 pounds. When the man saw the bill, he started to cry. The doctor comforted him not to cry over the bill for he would pay it in installments. But bravely, the man answered and said “I am not crying because of the money, in fact I can pay all of it in cash and now! But I am crying because for just 24 hours of using oxygen, am to pay 500 pounds. But I have been breathing God’s free oxygen for 78 years now. If I was to pay, do you know how much I owe God!

Friend, how many years have you turned? And how much do you owe Him!

You owe Him faithfulness! Put Him first and everything else will be fast! After all He paid it all. All to Him we owe! SDA Hymnal 184.

Day 5

GOD or GOLD

Daniel 3:16-17

16 Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego replied to him, "King Nebuchadnezzar, we do not need to defend ourselves before you in this matter. 17 If we are thrown into the blazing furnace, the God we serve is able to deliver us from it, and he will deliver us from Your Majesty's hand.

The biblical story of the three Hebrew men being thrown in the furnace and not burning up does not anymore sound contemporary to many listeners or readers. Once a preacher reads Daniel 3, many people get tempted to switch to others thoughts, maintaining that they know the sermon at hand anyway. Yes, you may believe that what you know about this story already seals it all. But remember the uniqueness of His word is that it is inexhaustible! No human cognitive faculty can fully get to the root of His word now, until the time when all things will be disclosed, Mathew 10:26. Against this backdrop, allow me some moments to somewhat reset the stage for this biblical passage in terms of insights and revelations positively skewed towards stewardship.

Daniel 3:1 says, King Nebuchadnezzar made an image of gold, sixty cubits high and six cubits wide, and set it up on the plain of Dura in the province of Babylon. Friends the king used Gold! But Haggai 2:8 reads thus, "The silver is mine and the gold is mine,' declares the Lord of hosts".

Here in the book of Haggai, the Lord did not send anyone to announce it, He did not just say it, and neither did He make a request, He declared it by Himself. Please read carefully and notice also that it was not any Lord who declared it, but the Lord of hosts! I do trust for sure that this is strong enough to assist a believer to realize how the Lord protected Gold and Silver for Himself.

When the above two texts are placed under sufficient spiritual scrutiny, one will infer that King Nebuchadnezzar treaded on thin ice when he used what the Lord declared to be His to make an image. I hope it did not dawn to the king whose gold it was, that his was using for his own glory!

Instead of pulling people towards God, Nebuchadnezzar pushed the entire kingdom of Babylon towards idolatry, calling everybody in kingdom to worship gold instead of worshipping God! If you have a family head that has a mind like that of Nebuchadnezzar, how safe is such a family? Today, many people are worshipping Gold instead of God. As matter of fact the church of God is short of Gold because much of it is used to erect images and they are placed in the plain of Dura of people's hearts in the provinces of this world.

Today do you know how much tithe is used to buy cars? Do you know that most of those cars that park in the Church compound every Sabbath and other days

are images of Gold in the plain of Dura? They were bought by tithe money, which belongs to God! How about the mansions many believers live in, I mean houses. Fantastic as they appear, magnificent as they look, they are constructed by using tithe, the gold that belongs to God. They too are images of gold in the plain of Dura! Most businesses run by very many believers are sustained by tithe and offerings of the Lord. Even those are images of gold erected in the plain of Dura in the province of this world. Right now many Adventists have joined the world in worshiping images. We have almost 80% of the church made up of Nebuchadnezzars! People using what belong to God to erect images for their own satisfaction.

So the mind Nebuchadnezzar had is the same mind many of us have. We have used so much gold, which belongs to God that we have become idol worshipers, our children too are taught to worship idols; friends and relatives also have been invited to worship images in the plain of Dura of our hearts. Total Confusion in the kingdom! We worship gold instead of God! Our priorities are upside down! Instead of God and then Gold, we start with Gold and worship the devil. Dangerous!

It's wrong to use what belongs to God to glorify the devil. Accordingly, God is not at all in consonance with this kind of mind. That's why God should be justified for sending Nebuchadnezzar into the bush and ate grass like animals for seven years.

Unless we put God first, the seven years period may be looming for many including Seventh Day Adventists. We must restore our spiritual sanity to focus on God instead of gold. Let gold belong to the Lord of hosts, Bring the holy tithe to the Lord Malachi 3:10, Leviticus 27:30.

From here be willing to read Vs. 2-12. After erecting the image, king then summoned the satraps, prefects, governors, advisers, treasurers, judges, magistrates and all the other provincial officials to come to the dedication of the image he had set up. ³ So the satraps, prefects, governors, advisers, treasurers, judges, magistrates and all the other provincial officials assembled for the dedication of the image that King Nebuchadnezzar had set up, and they stood before it. ⁴ Then the herald loudly proclaimed, "Nations and peoples of every language, this is what you are commanded to do: ⁵ As soon as you hear the sound of the horn, flute, zither, lyre, harp, pipe and all kinds of music, you must fall down and worship the image of gold that King Nebuchadnezzar has set up. ⁶ Whoever does not fall down and worship will immediately be thrown into a blazing furnace." ⁷ Therefore, as soon as they heard the sound of the horn, flute, zither, lyre, harp and all kinds of music, all the nations and peoples of

every language fell down and worshiped the image of gold that King Nebuchadnezzar had set up.

In a nutshell, you may have realized that surely, the king of Babylon organized a big occasion and invited top brush people of society to come and worship the image. Imagine! All the top degrees of that period were there just to give honor to gold not God! There was no music or instrument that praised God; all of it was praising gold! Virtually every being worshiped the gold the king has commanded.

Today is no difference! Even the elect have chosen to use the gold of God to erect images. Today degrees honor gold more they honor God. Today 's music and instruments are sounding more for gold than for God.

Praise the Lord! Beloved, there is always a remnant! When everyone in Babylon chose gold, the remnant comprised of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego chose God. They put God first.

⁸ At this time some astrologers ^[b] came forward and denounced the Jews. ⁹ They said to King Nebuchadnezzar, "May the king live forever!

¹⁰ Your Majesty has issued a decree that everyone who hears the sound of the horn, flute, zither, lyre, harp, pipe and all kinds of music must fall down and worship the image of gold, ¹¹ and that whoever does not fall down and worship will be thrown into a blazing furnace. ¹² But there are some Jews whom you have set over the affairs of the province of Babylon—Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego—who pay no attention to you, Your Majesty. They neither serve your gods nor worship the image of gold you have set up."

Friends of mine, when you are not keeping your promises with God, never think everyone has fallen with you. There is a remnant! When your spirituality is day-by-day growing cold, never think everybody is growing cold, there is a remnant. When you are not ready for the second coming of Jesus Christ, never think every body is not ready for the master, there is a remnant! When you choose to build images to glorify the evil one, the remnant is building relations with their creator. When you choose to use tithe to build houses and buy cars and plots of land, the remnant returns tithe to the Lord and is kept in the storehouse of the Lord.

Before the king the men were interrogated *"Is it true, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, that you do not serve my gods or worship the image of gold I have set up? ¹⁵ Now when you hear the sound of the horn, flute, zither, lyre, harp, pipe and all kinds of music, if you are ready to fall down and worship the image*

I made, very good. But if you do not worship it, you will be thrown immediately into a blazing furnace. Then what god will be able to rescue you from my hand?"

16 Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego replied to him, "King Nebuchadnezzar, we do not need to defend ourselves before you in this matter. 17 If we are thrown into the blazing furnace, the God we serve is able to deliver us from it, and he will deliver us^[c] from Your Majesty's hand. 18 But even if he does not, we want you to know, Your Majesty, that we will not serve your gods or worship the image of gold you have set up.

When they were brought before the king, the controversy between God and the devil was at its peak. The war between truth and falsehood raged. If you are observant enough, you must have already seen that it's about worship. Who is worshipping whom?

Friends, in this great controversy of worship, where are you? Who are you worshipping today? By the way, has it ever dawned to you that the holy tithe is God's presence in you and around it there is a great controversy. The devil always desires to destroy that holiness in you. As believers the only weapon we have to fight the devil is the holiness, which God imparts in us when we accept to do His will. His holiness is the source of courage to face the fires of this world blazing against God. His holiness is the foundation of right doing. His holiness in us propels the growth of our faith in God. Therefore, the devil fights tooth and nail to destroy this element in us. That's why when you cease to recognize God's holy tithe and offerings in your life, there is no other unholy act you can't get into. You are left completely devoid of His presence/holiness.

When you stop returning and giving tithe and offerings respectively to the Lord, it simply means you have chosen gold instead of God.

The three Hebrew men refused to worship gold and chose God and this made them fit to face fire. Honestly, if at this time you are still reluctant returning to the Lord the holy tithe and offerings, will that reluctance help you to face fire during persecution, which is actually looming?

The king said to them, "I have furnace (fire)" but the 3 men said we have God! They put God first. When they were thrown into the furnace, the God they mentioned to the king was there with them and there was peace in the fire,

there was life in the fire, there was hope in the fire. The furnace did not function as expected by the king and his staff.

They threw 3 but in the fire they were 4, this surprised Nebuchadnezzar. He was not supposed to get surprise. They were 3 and they said to him, the God we serve will save us, how many are those? 4. The 3 men speaking + God. The King did not mind/count what they told him. But it turned to be true. Likewise, you may not mind about what I am writing to you today, but there is day when this will count in your spiritual life. Yes, one day it will!

Because the 3 men put God first, ²⁸ Then Nebuchadnezzar said, *“Praise be to the God of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, who has sent his angel and rescued his servants! They trusted in him and defied the king’s command and were willing to give up their lives. ³⁰ Then the king promoted Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego in the province of Babylon.*

When the faithful put God first, kings praise the Lord. When the faithful put God first, there is promotion instead of demotion. When the faithful put God first, the name of almighty God is lifted before the kingdoms of the heathen.

Put God first and not Gold first.

Day 6

“I have found a man”

Daniel 2:25, Arioch took Daniel to the king at once and said, “I have found a man among the exiles from Judah who can tell the king what his dream means.”

Bible readers and believers know that this dream story starts right at the first verses of chapter two in the book of Daniel.

Keen minds to this text however, ought to have observed that while the dream is prophetic, the remaining part of the passage is narrative in nature. This presentation is tailored to the narration section of the chapter, where you ultimately find the behavior and discipline of men of God amidst a crisis.

Believers of the most high, many of us practice Christianity, but men and women of God do spirituality! While Christianity is practicing and getting involved in religious practices, spirituality is actually doing the will of God from the heart and deeply rooted in His word to the point of standing with God in all circumstances.

Daniel was not just a religious practitioner, but he was truly and deeply spiritual, that is, he was fundamentally grounded in the mercies and word of God. He was a doer of the God’s will. Stewardship is done by spiritual men and women and not mere Christians. Stop being Christian be spiritual!!

2 In the second year of his reign, Nebuchadnezzar had dreams; his mind was troubled and he could not sleep. 2 So the king summoned the magicians, enchanters, sorcerers and astrologers to tell him what he had dreamed. When they came in and stood before the king, 3 he said to them, “I have had a dream that troubles me and I want to know what it means. 4 Then the astrologers

answered the king, “May the king live forever! Tell your servants the dream, and we will interpret it.”

5 The king replied to the astrologers, “This is what I have firmly decided: If you do not tell me what my dream was and interpret it, I will have you cut into pieces and your houses turned into piles of rubble. 6 But if you tell me the dream and explain it, you will receive from me gifts and rewards and great honor. So tell me the dream and interpret it for me.”

Verses 2 to 6 unearth facts on how certain dreams can trouble people’s minds to the point of losing sleep. After that get into utter confusion to the extent of proposing to kill all most everybody!

Truly, this dream came from God, intentioned to bring to light that which was coming in the life of Babylon and the king. Yes, it troubled Nebuchadnezzar. But the worst blunder he made was to take his case to the so-called wise men. Who is wise in matters of God except God Himself? “Until you take it to God in prayer, it will never get straight with you” in your spiritual journey, please consult with God always. Seek God in all your trials and tribulations! God does not work with enchanters, sorcerers or astrologers. Let me hit the nail on the head. Today if you are a believer in God, learn to take all your issues to God. Nothing will get fixed spiritually unless and until it is done within the parameters of spirituality and this simply means trusting in the Lord God alone. Leave the magicians alone! No wonder the wise men could not reveal the mystery to the king. They had no command over God’s oracles. After they expressed their apparent failure in telling the king the dream and its interpretation, actually the king announced and promised them death, vs. 5.

10”The astrologers answered the king, “There is no one on earth who can do what the king asks! No king, however great and mighty, has ever asked such a thing of any magician or enchanter or astrologer. 11 What the king asks is too difficult. No one can reveal it to the king except the gods, and they do not live among humans.”

Notice, the astrologers told the king “there is no one on earth who can do what the king asks”. No one on earth! Did they tell him the truth? No, Daniel was right there on earth. Actually among them! It does not matter where you live, what matters is your position with God. There is always a man standing with God! If you are falling down with the world, there is a man standing with God. When you stop returning tithe and giving offerings to God, somewhere there is a man standing with God, still returning tithe and giving offerings to God. There is always a Daniel! Such men make the Church of God. Today the church does not

need education as much as it needs a Daniel, today, the church does not need technology as much as it needs a Daniel! There is spiritual family of God, until you have a Daniel! Please choose to be a Daniel today.

When they said there was no man, *12 this made the king so angry and furious that he ordered the execution of all the wise men of Babylon. 13 So the decree was issued to put the wise men to death, and men were sent to look for Daniel and his friends to put them to death.*

*14 When Arioch, the commander of the king's guard, had gone out to put to death the wise men of Babylon, Daniel spoke to him with **wisdom and tact**. 15 He asked the king's officer, "Why did the king issue such a harsh decree?" Arioch then explained the matter to Daniel. 16 At this, Daniel went in to the king and asked for time, so that he might interpret the dream for him.*

I appreciate how Daniel handled the crisis. The book says that he spoke with wisdom and tact. May be we need to abandon the so-common strategic management styles everybody espouses today and start on tactical management. Daniel looked for the way to the king and asked for time so he could take the matter to God in prayer. This is how wise men behave friends. Put God first irrespective of the situation. Daniel put God first.

17 Then Daniel returned to his house and explained the matter to his friends Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah. 18 He urged them to plead for mercy from the God of heaven concerning this mystery, so that he and his friends might not be executed with the rest of the wise men of Babylon.

Beloved, time has come for us to urge fellow believers to plead for God's mercy so that we will all be faithful to the Lord, other wise death is looming.

Praise the Lord! The bible records that *19 during the night the mystery was revealed to Daniel in a vision. Then Daniel praised the God of heaven 20 and said: "Praise be to the name of God for ever and ever; Wisdom and power are his. 21 He changes times and seasons; he deposes kings and rises up others. He gives wisdom to the wise and knowledge to the discerning. 22 He reveals deep and hidden things; he knows what lies in darkness, and light dwells with him. 23 I thank and praise you, God of my ancestors: You have given me wisdom and power, you have made known to me what we asked of you, you have made known to us the dream of the king."*

Verses 19-23 reveal the power and faithfulness of God to His people.

Mrs. White says, “ God hears prayer. Christ has said, “If ye shall ask anything in my name, I will do it, Again He says, “If any man serve me, him will my father honor, “John 14:14; John 12:26. If we live according to His word, every precious promise He has given will be fulfilled to us. (MH, 226, 227).

Have you ever imagined that at this time, in the entire kingdom of Babylon, only Daniel has the dream and its interpretation? Only Daniel qualifies to be called wise! Wise men are rare to find even in church to day. Returning to God is an act of wisdom. But how many do you find returning? At this time Daniel is better than king Nebuchadnezzar whose head is empty. You are not wise unless you take the matter to God in prayer. You are not wise until you chose to stand with God. Daniel praises the Lord. When God blesses you, take time to praise Him. Returning a faithful tithe and giving to Him offerings is part of praising Him for what He has done for you.

Daniel Interprets the Dream. 24 Then Daniel went to Arioch, whom the king had appointed to execute the wise men of Babylon, and said to him, “Do not execute the wise men of Babylon. Take me to the king, and I will interpret his dream for him.”

In verse 24, Daniel reverses the decree of the king. When you stand with God, you can reverse the decrees of this world. In the same verse, Daniel is now commanding the commander! He says do not kill the wise men of Babylon. Things have changed, the cloud of death is gone and hope and life are back! Amen.

Daniel instructed Arioch the commander to take him to the king so he could fix the problem. Vs. 25 is wonderful. As Arioch moved with Daniel, he shouted, I have found a man! Never think there is no believer or faithful person. There is always a man in the congregation. But today be that man beloved!

26 The king asked Daniel (also called Belshazzar), “Are you able to tell me what I saw in my dream and interpret it?” 27 Daniel replied, “No wise man, enchanter, magician or diviner can explain to the king the mystery he has asked about, 28 but there is a God in heaven who reveals mysteries. God First!

Daniel gave the credit to God. Actually, when you return tithe and give offering to the Lord, you are giving credit to the Lord, saying, we give you out of what you have given us. Daniel put God first and God revealed the mystery. Do you know why many of us are ignorant of many mysteries in this world? It’s because we have mixed up our priorities. We put others things before we put God.

I want you to see Daniel heading for the palace with Arioch. See Daniel before the king, the king's head is empty, but Daniels heart and mind is full of revelations from God. See the king who has questions but Daniel carrying all the answers. If you are to be sincere, who is the king here and now? Of course Daniel! When you choose God, kings are below you. You can command all the commanders of this world, all the kings will listen to you and you can reverse decrees! Choose God first and be the man!

Day 7

ABRAHAM'S SPIRITUAL JOURNEY

Gen 12:1-5

Right to say, I have listened and read quite numerous sermons and publications regarding Abraham. For that matter, I do not claim full authorship even of this presentation entitled "Abraham's spiritual journey. Just allow me to share these wonderful spiritual insights with you today.

It is amazing to discover that in Isaiah 41: 8, God calls Abraham His friend.

Was God right to address Abraham as His friend? Yes. Look at Abraham in Gen 12:1-5 God called Abram to leave his home country, his people and his father's household and go to a different land. Abraham left as the lord had told him vs. 4. Here, Abraham does not ask any questions, where, how, when? Spiritual automaticity!

Abram obeyed the lord without question. By faith. How many times have we obeyed God without question?

On a scale of 1-10 marks if you asked to award marks to Abraham for his faith to God at this point, how many marks would you give this believer? It is faithfulness that makes you God's friend.

He starts with God with no question.

Gen 15:1-3, 7-8

Chapter 15 begins with the word of the Lord coming to Abram in a vision.

The message in the word is that don't be afraid Abram, am your shield, your very great reward.

Remember in chapter 12, God promised him to be of great nation, simply meaning that He would give him people because nations are made of people.

After 5 years Abram begins to ask questions to God. Vs 2 and 3 of chapter 15 are questions. Is there a moment in life where life is made up of questions? By the way isn't life made up of more questions than answers? God had to struggle to make him believe; He had to take him out to count the stars. Un like it was in the beginning. What does this say to our spirituality?

At this stage when Abram is asking questions, how many marks can you give Abram on that scale of 10?

Gen 16:1-6

All that is taking place in this text here is happening after 10 years.

At this time Abram's family is messed up. He has accepted to sleep with Egyptian maidservant, the maidservant is pregnant and she now walking above the shoulders of her mistress because of her social status. And the mistress is bitter about this behavior. The blame is sent to Abram. There is chaos in the home, chaos in the family!

The life of the home is messed up because now Abram has taken control of his life. He is listening to people and himself than he is listening to God as before. He is living in fights, no peace!

If you were asked to rate his spirituality at this point in time, what would you give him on the same scale?

Many of our spirituality get stuck on one of these stages. And this is a big determining factor on the stewardship temperature of a believer.

At this point you may have noticed that in spite of the frailties of Abram, God is still stuck on His promises to Abram. He is the same yesterday, today and tomorrow and His promises are sure!

Gen 17: 1-5

The lord appeared to Abram at 99 years reminding him to walk with him and to be blameless. God is still saying you will be a father of many nations; and that your name will change from Abram to Abraham. God said because I have made you a father of many and I will make you very fruitful and kings will come from you. I will establish an everlasting covenant between you and me says the lord. I will give Canaan to you and your descendants.

Vs. 15-16 Sarai's name will change to Sarah, I will bless her surely with a son, she will be a mother of nations and kings will come out of her.

Vs. 17 is a very sad one after God has promise all that to Abram and his wife and therefore family, *Abram laughed at God in doubt*. Will a son be born to a man of 100 years or will Sarai bear a child at the age of 90? God why don't you change to Ishmael to be your blessing.

This is normally the case with many human beings; they always want to do it in their way forgetting that God's way is the best. Many people laugh at spiritual life styles and at spiritual activities. some people only live to laugh. At this time, hasn't Abram lost faith in God? Or if he has not yet where is his faith at this point in time? When the best he can do is to laugh at God.

What is Abram's score at this point on his spiritual scale?

Gen 21:1-2

At this time the lord's promises began to get fulfilled. Sarah got a baby and Abraham named him Isaac. It is likely that it took Abraham around 15 or more years to get the promise realized. With God it does not matter how long it takes, He full fills it anyway. He is God of true promises. Your time is not His time, but His time is your time.

At the time when he had lost, only laughing, God came with a blessing of a child. Isaac was born. Now Abraham is 100 and Sarah is 90 years of age. Don't be afraid

a miracle is coming on your way according to His promises. Stewardship is full of miracles and God's power.

Gen 22:1-5

God tested Abraham by asking him to offer his son Isaac.

Did he ask questions? No. By faith he whole-heartedly accepted to offer his son? Because of this, he was considered righteous. Offering is an act of worship, obedience and righteousness. It is the evidence that you have God with you and you believe in Him by doing His commands of love.

James 2: 21 - 23, read: Now if you were to scale Abraham, What would be his mark?

This is the point all of us need to reach. Don't park at any other stage, but this one. Where no matter what it takes you remain faithful to God and His word.

I do believe we are not any different from Abraham. But time is now ripe for us to stand and be counted among the faithful!

Day 8

The Wounds of Jesus.

Scripture: Luke 23:33 Isaiah 53:5 | Peter 2:24

Credit is given to Ron Halvorsen, Sir, Director, Southern Union Conference Church Growth Department, and North American Division, who wrote this message.

Credit for this message entitled the “wounds of Jesus” goes to Ron Halvorsen. Take time to grasp the spiritual insights therein. He starts in an interesting way;

The greatest mount.

Great is Mount Sinai--where God’s voice rumbled; where across the blazing dark skies God wrote the 10 commandments with his finger. Great is Mount Horeb--where the bush burned but did not consume; where Moses stood in the presence of his God without his sandals. Great is Mount Pisgah--where Moses viewed the Promised Land; where Israel received promises from God. Great is Mount Carmel--where Elijah challenged the Prophets of Baal; where the name of God was vindicated.

But above all mountains are Calvary. Mount Calvary--the pinnacle of Divine love; an altar of God’s sacrifice. It was on Calvary that the center of the great controversy began to rage. It was on Calvary that good triumphed over Evil, Mercy over Maliciousness, and Love over Hate. It was on Calvary that the Savior suffered for a sinner. How can mortal tongue and faltering, feeble lips speak the magnitude of Calvary? How can human mind, corrupted by sin, ever fathom the glory that shone from the wounds of our Lord?

The greatest story

Over the pain and pretense, wounds and wants, Jesus cries, *It is finished*, and His tender lips are silent. The lips of Jesus speak only truth. His lips are not the babbling lips of the carnally minded. The eyes of our Lord Jesus on Calvary on that day are closed. The eyes of Jesus see well in all people. His eyes, compassionate and tender, sparkle with divine love.

On Mount Calvary, Jesus allows death to come to Him. He invites death to come to Him. He says *Come to me, Death. So that the dying might understand my*

love, come to me Death. So that the sick might understand my compassion, come to me Death! Jesus allows death to come to Him--slow, torturing, cruel, unmerciful death.

In reading the story of Calvary, in unraveling the theology of the act, in coming to grips with redemption and reconciliation, we miss the point. We unwrap Him theologically-- we see the nakedness of the theology of it, but we don't really see the body, we don't understand the wounds.

Christ was wounded in the head, the hands, the feet, and the heart. His wounds represent the whole truth of love.

They wounded His head

A crown of thorns was crushed upon His brow until blood dripped down His forehead, down His face, and into His eyes. With thorns, the people crowned Him King of the Jews. The first attack on Jesus was on His mind. A twelve-year-old in their own temple embarrassed theologians. Rulers were overruled by a servant. Lawyers were tricked by their own laws. No one could understand how that mind could be so profound, and so they always attacked the mind. The wisdom of man cannot cope or compete with the mind of God.

When they attacked Him with thorns, blood flowed from His head. The head--the mind where sin begins. At the mind, God can save the hand from murder. At the mind, God can save the heart from lust. At the mind, God can save the heart from crime. At the mind, God can save the soul from sin. To destroy sin, God must cleanse the mind. So Jesus bled first at the mind. The only way God can vanish darkness, the only way God can vanish from our hearts the degradation of sinning, the only way He can heal the hurt of sins is to cleanse the mind of sin.

When Paul saw a vision where blood dripped down the face of Jesus, he was moved to tell us to cleanse our minds. *Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus (Phil 2:5, KJV)*. Pure mind leads to pure life. Our minds must be cleansed by the sacred blood of Jesus. The bleeding head of God is crowned by man's foolishness, the bleeding head of God on Calvary is crowned by man's lawlessness, and the bleeding head of God is crowned by man's carnal mind. Man's mind must be cleansed, and so God's head was wounded.

They wounded His hands

The hands of man are tools for good or evil. The hands of man can build or destroy God's world. The hands of man can add or take away from God's church.

They can be beautiful hands, touching needs. Or they can be wicked hands, polluting everything they touch.

At His birth, Jesus with baby hands, reached out in love. His little hands reached up to a mother chosen by God. *Mary, teach his hands touch and not to hurt, to love and not to soil, to give and not to take.* In His death, Jesus reached out to cleanse and save. The crib and the cross came together by a babe's reaching hands.

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When a man, Jesus touched with healing hands. His hands touched lame legs and they walked in praise of God. His hands touched the eyes of the blind and they saw what they believed. His hands held out hope for the hopeless. Jesus' working, healing hands, were bleeding hands on Calvary. On Calvary His hands were saving hands, hands crucified.

They wounded His feet.

The feet of Christ went about His father's business. His feet lead Him to Jordan, to Galilee, to Samaria. He was a missionary of mercy and He went about showing love--He taught the people to love a prostitute. He taught them that living for God was more than going to the temple. He said *Walk two miles for your enemy.* (There was a law in Jesus' times that permitted a Roman soldier to force a Jew traveling in the opposite direction to turn around and carry his burden for a mile. So the Jews put mile markers along the road to keep from carrying a Roman's burdens for more than a mile. Another law stated that Roman soldier could take the outer robe of a Jew for himself. So the Jews often wore their moth-eaten old robes over their good robe.)

They hated His missions of mercy. They hated the feet of Jesus--feet that went places they would rather forget. Their feet would go to the temple, but not to the tenement. So they nailed His feet to the cross. Jesus' feet bled from the hard stones of man sinning. They bled from the hard stones of selfishness. They bled from walking the road of sin to redeem the ungodly. He walked from the height of deity to the depths of humanity

They broke His heart.

The last wound in our Lord was inflicted on His heart. It was the wound that brought death. On Calvary, Jesus died of a broken heart. When the Roman spear pierced His side, a mixture of blood and water poured out. Blood and water--that is how man is redeemed. Through the blood of Jesus comes cleansing from sins and the water of baptism. Wounded in the side, the baptism of blood and water, Jesus died of a broken heart. He could bear nails pounded into His hands; He could bear the crown of thorns crushed on His brow; He could bear the nails piercing His feet; but He could not bear to see what sin would do to us.

His heart was broken because His love was refused, spurned, and rejected. *My God why hast thou forsaken me. He was saying I stretch out my hands to them, Father, and they reject me. I pray for them, and they persecute me. I weep for them and they laugh at me. They all have forsaken me, but not you father.* Love brought Him into a crib, wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger. Love brought Him to a cross, wrapped in blood and love. And love will bring Him back in the clouds of glory, wrapped in power!

A popular monk in the Middle Ages, revered by all the townspeople, was known for his godliness and his love. One morning He said, *this evening at vespers I'm going to preach on the love of God.* The townspeople were excited. As the sun began to set, the people gathered at the great cathedral. They came to hear the monk preach the love of God. The last rays of sunlight glistened through the stained glass windows. Darkness began to creep into every corner. Total darkness engulfed the cathedral and the people were still waiting for the monk. Then they saw candlelight, a tiny little light came from the side room. It was the monk--He walked over to the great crucifix. The old monk held the candle and put it to the forehead where the artist had painted in red the symbol of the blood.

The monk didn't say a word and the people waited. Then he brought the candle down to the torn hands that symbolized love. He still didn't say a word. They waited. The candle moved to the soiled feet. Finally, he brought the candle

to Christ's side. The artist had captured torn flesh of the Savior's side. There wasn't a sound, except for crying. The old monk then said, *this is my sermon on the love of God. In His head, in His hands, in His feet and in His side. For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son that who so ever believeth in Him shall not perish, but have everlasting life. This is my sermon on the love of God.*

John 3:16 is a component in the Bible that surpasses all other components. Take this text out; you can as well discard the rest of the Bible. It is the pivot of scripture and a fulcrum of salvation. It is a place where the rubber of sin meets the road to salvation. It is a center of divine stewardship where every steward must copy. It is a place where the principle of divine giving is introduced in the world of sin.

Put God First!