

Reaching FORWARD – #1 Returning To God

[Slide 1] Dscplshp 3 Returning time, talents, and resources to God

[Slide 2] What is a Disciple? It is following Jesus wherever He goes.

[Slide 3] As a part of the Seventh-day Adventist movement, and recognizing our prophetic role in history, a disciple of Jesus Christ is one who is growing in an authentic relationship with God and others. I will commit to: REACHING FORWARD

[Slide 4] Following God through daily spiritual practices

[Slide 5] Opening myself to God by participating in regular corporate worship

[Slide 6] Returning time, talents, and resources to God

“I have two toys and I am glad, You have no toys and that’s too bad, I’ll share my toys...” You remember singing that song at Sabbath school. Or your may have remembered your Mom or Dad humming it softly as a hint to encourage you to share a toy with a brother, sister, or friend. The theme of the song is about caring for someone else enough to let him or her have time with something that is precious to you. That love for another person encourages you to willingly trust them with your precious toy.

Jesus created our world and us. He then asked us to be stewards of everything He had just created. Doesn’t the thought of that wonderful creation time and the gift of trust fill your heart with joy! Our continued care taker role has also been called ‘stewardship,’ an old type of word with a huge meaning.

As Adventists we have described stewardship this way.

[Slide 7] 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

[Slide 8] acknowledge God's ownership by faithful service to Him and our fellow men, 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/her faithfulness.

[Slide 9] Matthew 6:25-33 describes trusting God and invites us to see what has been called the “big picture.” We would describe “big picture” as the entire perspective on a situation or issue. Spiritually, it means seeing our world and our place in the world, as a trusting companion of our all compassionate and wise God.

²⁵ “Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more important than food, and the body more important than clothes? ²⁶ Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they? ²⁷ Who of you by worrying can add a single hour to his life? ²⁸ “And why do you worry about clothes? See how the lilies of the field grow. They do not labor or spin. ²⁹ Yet I tell you that not even Solomon in all his splendor was dressed like one of these. ³⁰ If that is how God clothes the grass of the field, which is here today and tomorrow is thrown into the fire, will He not much more clothe you, O

you of little faith? ³¹ So do not worry, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' ³² For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them. ³³ But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.

[Slide 10] An average person's anxiety is focused on:

- 40% -- things that will never happen
- 30% -- things about the past that can't be changed
- 12% -- things about criticism by others, mostly untrue
- 10% -- about health, which gets worse with stress
- 8% -- about real problems that will be faced

An executive, decided to do all her worrying on one day each week. She chose Wednesdays. When anything happened that gave her anxiety, she would write it down and put it in her worry box and forget about it until next Wednesday. The interesting thing was that on the following Wednesday when she opened her worry box, she found that most of the things that had disturbed her the past six days were already settled. It would have been useless to worry about them. (You may want to have a 'worry box' for your group.)

[Slide 11] Isaiah 30:15 gives us a succinct cure for worry and anxiety.

¹⁵ This is what the Sovereign Lord, the Holy One of Israel, says: "In repentance and rest is your salvation, in quietness and trust is your strength, but you would have none of it.

This is Jesus' voice speaking through the prophet, Isaiah, giving us a prescription for removing our anxiety. It is an invitation to trust God with all our resources and ourselves. We are urged to return control of everything to Him. By trusting God and joining Him in stewardship of our resources and ourselves we are reordering our principles. In this way we end the struggle of needing to control and focus on trusting our all-wise and compassionate God.

[Slide 12] Let's explore the answer to the question; what does God want us to return to Him? Stewardship is more than just giving tithes and offerings. It is the lifestyle of daily choosing to be a disciple. God wants us as more than just managers; He is offering us to be ministry friends and partners with Him.

(The 7 T's list comes from an article by Reggie Leach, Treasurer of the Minnesota Conference of SDA, 2005.)

There are 7 "T's" that can help us remember.

[Add] Time: God asks us to give Him 1/7th of our time, the Sabbath hours, as a sign (commitment, contract, covenant) between us. *"There remains, then, a Sabbath-rest for the people of God; ¹⁰ for anyone who enters God's rest also rests from his own work, just as God did from His"* (Hebrews 4:1-10).

As faithful disciples these hours will be a joyful time of worship and communion with Him. And, as we grow in our discipleship walk, our time, like the patriarch Enoch, will be more and more devoted to God, until we are practicing a daily discipleship lifestyle--24/7.

[Add] Treasure: In studying our stewardship relationship with God, there is an interesting parallel between Time and Treasure. In the same way that the Sabbath hours are holy hours, our tithe dollars are holy dollars. “*A tithe of everything from the land, whether grain from the soil or fruit from the trees, belongs to the Lord; it is holy to the Lord*” (Lev 27:30). Tithe is 10% of our increase. This money is used for world wide pastoral support and mission outreach.

[Add] Temple: “*Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit...? You are not your own; you were bought at a price,*” (I Cor. 6:19, 20). If we take Paul’s counsel to heart, we will live a discipleship lifestyle to honor God with our bodies.

[Add] Talent: God has created each one of us with unique abilities to share with others. If our focus is on others and not on self, we will use our spiritual gifts to reproduce, nurture, and grow other disciples around us. “*From Him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work*”(Ephesians 4:11-15).

[Add] Trust: We are to study God’s Word regularly in a growing devotional lifestyle. “*You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart*” (Jer. 29:11-13). Seeking God will lead us into a deeper discipleship relationship with Him. The results of this trust are peace, confidence, security, and assurance.

[Add] Truth: We have been given a great commission to “*Go and make disciples of all nations...*” (Matt. 28:19). Our stewardship and discipleship responsibility is to trust “the Way, the Truth, and the Life” and to share with others.

[Add] Terrain: “*The Lord God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it*” (Gen. 2:15). As stewards, we are the administrators of God’s creation. Even though the earth is not in its original pristine condition, we still have the original responsibility to care for the earth.

Spiritual Stewardship is defined as returning control, or unqualified surrender of our resources to the Lordship of Jesus. It is returning to a true focus for our lives (do you remember the slide from presentation 2 with Jesus in the center of our lives?). It is Re-creation in our lives now, today! With the promise of heaven soon to come as the reward or priority for how we focus our lives.

[Slide 13] Consider this quote. “I am inwardly fashioned for faith, not for fear. **Fear is not my native land; faith is.** I am so made that worry and anxiety are sand in the machinery of life; faith is the oil. I live better by faith and confidence than by fear, doubt and anxiety. In anxiety and worry, my being is gasping for breath--these are not my native air. **But in faith and confidence, I breathe freely--these are my native air**” (Dr. E. Stanley Jones, *Transformed by Thorns*, p. 95).

Doesn’t it sound like the heart of Matthew 6:25-33? Verse 25 asks us to consider what is truly important, not food, or drink, or what to wear, or how to get those things. It invites us to live a purposeful life with Jesus; to “*seek first His kingdom and His righteousness*” (verse 33).

Verse 32, “*your heavenly Father knows that you need them.*” Don’t worry, He will provide. This is permission NOT to worry.

How is that possible with life in a world where sin has kept us from trusting anyone or anything? What does spiritual stewardship; true discipleship, look like?

[Slide 14] Mark 12:41-44 (also Luke 21:1-4) contains the story we call “The Widow’s Mite.”

⁴¹ *Jesus sat down opposite the place where the offerings were put and watched the crowd putting their money into the temple treasury. Many rich people threw in large amounts. ⁴² But a poor widow came and put in two very small copper coins, worth only a fraction of a penny. ⁴³ Calling His disciples to Him, Jesus said, “I tell you the truth, this poor widow has put more into the treasury than all the others. ⁴⁴ They all gave out of their wealth; but she, out of her poverty, put in everything—all she had to live on.”*

[Slide 15] The widow gave all she had, not knowing how her needs would be met, but trusting God. She knew Him to be all wise and completely trustworthy. God knew her need and she trusted Him to care for her.

[Slide 16] God knew how hard the refocusing process would be for each of us. He sent His Son to show us the way; to be our coach. Returning time, talents, and resources to God, it is not just about money. It is about everything we “own.” Is 10% God’s? No! 100% is His, He is the Creator, the owner of all.

Our resources are in the areas of:

Time –Treasure –Temple –Talent - Trust –Truth -Terrain

A disciple will trust God with all their resources. Discipleship is returning to Him the control of everything about our lives and allowing His Lordship of our resources and ourselves. It is inviting Him to make our lives fruitful to His glory and the salvation of others: friends for eternity! This level of trust is so FREEING, it is to our benefit to trust Him!

[slide 17] Let’s take a few moments to stop and spend some time doing the worksheet “Stewardship Activity.” Please rank the items in the two sections on your own. We will give you 5 minutes. Then we will give you time at your table to compare and discuss your answers. Please be prepared to report to the group.

[Slide 18-22] You might have chosen a chorus that has become the theme song for your study time during the discipleship series or have been singing #330 “*Take My Life and Let It Be.*” Conclude with a group benediction.