

Readings & *Stewpot* posted on: www.imsda.org/forms

September 2, 2017 – Local Church Budget

Mary was on the phone at work and then suddenly left with no explanation. Her coworkers wondered what had happened to put the distraught expression on her face.

The next day, Mary returned with a happy expression. She had just purchased a brand new SUV. She elaborated: "I shop whenever I'm stressed, angry, or sad. Yesterday, my husband decided to leave me and I felt devastated. However, after purchasing this new vehicle, I feel much better." Apparently, the bigger the problem, the bigger the shopping experience. This is not an isolated situation. It is known as "Retail Therapy." Shopping gives people a high; it stimulates the brain chemical called dopamine, which makes people feel better.

(Tara Parker-Pope, "This is Your Brain at the Mall: Why Shopping Makes You Feel Good?" WSJ. December 6, 2015 <http://www.wsj.com/articles/SB113382650575214543> (accessed on April 11, 2016).)

There is nothing wrong with enjoying life, having nice things, or developing oneself as long as those things are under God's guidelines.

(Charles Stanley, *When the Enemy Strikes: The Keys to Winning Your Spiritual Battles* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2004), 110-117)

For many, a temptation exists to deal with problems through shopping, addictions, or lust. But the true solution is Jesus Christ. The enemy of souls watches people's needs and weaknesses closely so he can affect the believer and, consequently, God's cause.

The more a person spends on wants or addictions, the less that can be given for God's work locally and globally. Let's pray for accountability and self-control as we choose today to be good stewards for God's glory.

September 9 – Fall Mission Appeal (World Budget)

Jesus said in Luke 12:34, "For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also." In this passage we see how the underlying principle of giving impacts our hearts. When we give to build God's kingdom our hearts follow; we resonate with the heart of God. "For God so loved the world that He gave. . ." (John 3:16).

A small church with a dozen members could not afford to keep the lights on, but the leaders prayed and claimed the promise, "Give, and it will be given to you: good measure, pressed down, shaken together, and running over will be put into your bosom" (Luke 6:38). The church committed to sacrifice for God's work. God blessed in the form of a trust maturing and the local church received \$37,000 as a result.

Another church was struggling to afford evangelistic meetings. God's promises were claimed. In a little more than a month, a dear saint passed away and left \$77,000 to the local church.

A few years later, another church had ambitious plans for soul-winning, but not many funds. This time two brothers stepped forward who had been impressed by the Holy Spirit and donated \$22,000.

Commit to giving sacrificially for evangelism and watch God's blessings flow in your life and in the church.

September 16, 2017 – Local Church Budget

A census taker once asked a little child, “How many people live in this house?” He replied, “We are five.” The census taker further questioned him, “Who are they?” The little boy began to name each one of the family members: “My dad, my mom, my sister and I.” The census taker noticed that the calculations of the child were off by one. The child counted again, “My dad, my mom, my sister and I.” Realizing that his math was off again, he frowned and then cleverly shouted, “and God.” (John E. Simpson, *Great Stewards of the Bible* (New York: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1946), 14.)

God should be part of every family. However, a census taker might not look favorably on such a family addition since God cannot be seen. The first human family, however, had the blessing to count God among its family members. Adam and Eve enjoyed direct communion with their Father. But then sin was introduced to the world and Adam, Eve, and their children observed the Garden of Eden from a distance, forbidden its enjoyment by angels with flaming swords guarding the entrance (Genesis 3:24). They must have been devastated with the separation from God, not to mention the stewardship privileges of the garden now taken away from them.

Abel gives believers the first lesson of stewardship. He was faithful to God’s command by bringing an acceptable offering to God, a lamb. Cain, however, disregarded God’s command and followed the line of disobedience of his parents. Stewardship is obedience to God even when it does not make sense. May you choose today, like Abel, to be faithful as a steward of God’s grace in our local church.

September 23 – Combined Youth Ministries (Conference Advance)

Had you been born in ancient Egypt, you would have used onions and beans as a means of exchange. Siberia, on the other hand, used garlic. Think about this the next time you are eating a bowl of chili! You are eating what others considered of much value. Other primitive societies used beetle legs as currency. As garage sale enthusiasts might say, “One person’s trash is another person’s treasure!”

Talking about money is very personal in many, but not all cultures. In China, for instance, common questions among acquaintances are, “How old are you?” “How much money do you make?” Both questions would be considered inappropriate for most people in the United States. Money can even be considered of more value than relationships. For example, a person might move across the United States or the world if the right amount of money were offered. For other cultures, however, no amount of money would be enough to entice them to live away from family and friends. (John and Sylvia Ronswalle, *At Ease: Discussing Money and Values in Small Groups*. (Downers Grove, IL: The Alban Institute, 1994), 31, 32.)

Jesus said, “For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also” (Matthew 6:21). The heart is important. He knew that many things compete for believers’ hearts. In the competition for the heart, treasure is the defining factor. Where is your heart and treasure today? Jesus said, “Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and dine with him, and he with Me” (Revelation 3:20). May we open our hearts today to our Savior and Lord as we give to the ministry needs in our local IA-MO conference.

Sept 30 – Sunnydale Academy (MAU designated SAA as the recipient of this offering)

Worship and giving are linked in God’s heart. “Our love for God falls short if its only gift is in words of praise.” (John E. Simpson, *Great Stewards of the Bible* (New York: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1946), 29.)

Two individuals visited a Seventh-day Adventist church after years of struggling with returning tithe to God. Drastic events happened in their lives that made them take that final step. One fell twice in the parking lot of a convenience store while getting his medication, which led to multiple fractured ribs and other complications. The other man had a long struggle with addictions, to the point of its leading to a separation from his wife. The man found himself alone, away from his loved ones, and wondering what to do next.

The men had almost nothing in common: one was old while the other was young; one was Caucasian and the other Hispanic; one had been baptized in the church more than 30 years ago, while the other never got close enough to the church to make that decision. Almost immediately after visiting the church they knew that returning to God meant faithfulness in all areas of their lives, including tithing. Both remembered teachings on tithing. They were compelled to give to God as a sign of their commitment and thankfulness.

What is your commitment to God today? May your faithfulness be not only in words, but also in actions. May the Lord bless you as you respond with generosity to God’s unselfish love.