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BLESSED TO BE A BLESSING

Order of Divine Service

Call to Worship

Opening Hymn: #567 "Have Thine Own Way"

Pastoral Prayer:

Offering Appeal:

Children's Story:

Scripture Reading: Genesis 12:1-3

Special Music:

Sermon: "God's Call to Be a Blessing"

Commitment Ceremony (Conducted by Church Pastor or Church Elder)*

Closing Hymn: #322 "Nothing Between"

Benediction

* Use Commitment Cards for Commitment Ceremony

NB: An afternoon activity and a seminar are also included in this packet.

SERMON

SERMON—GOD'S CALL TO BE A BLESSING

By Pastor Hiskia I. Missah

BIBLE TEXT

Genesis 12:1-3: ***“The Lord had said to Abram, ‘Go from your country, your people and your father’s household to the land I will show you. I will make you into a great nation, and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse, and all people on earth will be blessed through you’ ”***(NIV).

INTRODUCTION

Today the world is permeated with evil and idolatry, and spirituality has greatly declined. Satan works harder than never before because he knows his time is soon coming to an end. He appears to be successful in conquering this world and claims it as his own, but ever since this earth was created about six thousand years ago, Satan never wins because God has preserved a remnant people in every generation. In the unbroken line from age to age that begins with Adam, God has chosen faithful people who love Him and honor Him in all aspects of their lives. One of them was Abraham. In his time, God preserved Abraham to be a role model and a law keeper for the next generations. Ellen White wrote, ***“He chose Abraham, of the line of Shem, and made him the keeper of His law for future generations.... Abraham had grown up in the midst of superstition and heathenism. Even his father’s household, by whom the knowledge of God had been preserved, were yielding to the seductive influences surrounding them, and they ‘served other gods’ than Jehovah.”***—*Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 125. Abraham was living in a time of apostasy; he was surrounded by a seductive evil environment. However, Abraham stood firm in his faith among the faithless, and faithfully continued to worship the one true God.

THE CALLING

Age doesn’t matter to God when He calls people to be His “chosen” ones. God called Samuel when he was just 11 years old in Priest Eli’s house (1 Samuel 3). He called David to be a king when he was 30 (2 Samuel 5:4). Based on the historical context and clues from the Bible, it has been estimated that when Jesus called His twelve disciples, almost all of them were under the age of 18, and most likely they were bachelors—except for Peter, who had a wife (<http://www.davidpaulkirkpatrick.com/2013/03/25/jesus-bachelors-the-disciples>).

God called Abraham when he was no longer young; he was 75 years old (Genesis 12:4). God asked him to get out of his country, from his clan and tribe, from his father’s house to go to a place unknown to him. Did he refuse to obey God’s words? No, absolutely not. He didn’t say, “God, I am too old to make this trip. I would not be able to walk a far distance anymore, and I have no idea where I should go. So please let me stay in my tent enjoying my old age and the rest of my life.” Instead, when God called Abraham and asked him to go, without question,

Abraham immediately took Sarai his wife, Lot his nephew, his servants, and all his possessions and went out of Harran to a strange land.

Hebrews 11:8 says, ***“By faith Abraham, when he was called to go out into a place which he should after receive for an inheritance, obeyed; and he went out, not knowing whither he went.”*** This is the kind of faith that all Christians need to have. Abraham’s obedience is the evidence of faith he had, belief in things that are not seen. Hebrews 11:1 says, ***“Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.”*** Abraham gave us a great example of obedience, of how to obey God’s command no matter what, despite not knowing where the long road will end. As the ultimate result of faith and obedience, there is a reward God promised we would receive, recorded in Galatians 3:9: ***“So those who rely on faith are blessed along with Abraham, the man of faith”*** (NIV). We will be blessed, just like Abraham was.

THE PURPOSE OF THE CALLING

Why did God call Abraham? Because when God does something or allows things to happen in our lives, there must be a reason and purpose in it. It was true of Abraham. Genesis 12:1-3 says, ***“The Lord had said to Abram, ‘Go from your country, your people and your father’s household to the land I will show you. I will make you into a great nation, and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse, and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you’ ”*** (NIV). So, the purpose of God’s calling to Abraham was that He wanted to bless Abraham so that he would be a blessing to others and to all people on earth.

THE PROMISES

There are quite a number of blessings that God promised to fulfill in Abraham’s life; some of them are as follows. God said:

1. ***“I WILL SHOW YOU THE LAND”***

Wholly depending on God’s promise, Abraham abandoned his comfort zone; his family and relatives, whom he loved; his household and homeland; and went to the foreign land God had promised to show him. Faith had become an essential part of Abraham’s character; he had confidence that God would fulfill His promise.

“By faith, he became a sojourner in the land of promise, as in a land not his own, dwelling in tents, with Isaac and Jacob, the heirs with him of the same promise” (Hebrews 11:9, ASV).

God promised to show Abraham the land he would go to, and He did. In the same manner, God wants to lead us through our life journey as well. He knows the full scenario of our lives; He knows the end from the beginning, so He prepares all the best things for us. But He requires our total submission to His leading and will; He wants us to put

our trust in Him. He has promised that He will lead you through your pursuit of higher education; He will lead you to achieve your ambition; He will lead you to get a desirable job; He will lead you in finding your soulmate; He will lead you to the place where He wants you to go and serve; and eventually He will lead you to the “promised land”—the everlasting heavenly home—but with one condition: you have to trust and obey.

One of my favorite songs, “Trust and Obey,” composed by John H. Sammis in 1887, reads,

When we walk with the Lord in the light of His word,
What a glory He sheds on our way!
While we do His good will, He abides with us still,
And with all who will trust and obey.

Ref. TRUST AND OBEY, for THERE’S NO OTHER WAY,
To be happy in Jesus, but to trust and obey.

Proverbs 3:5, 6 says, **“Trust in the Lord with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding. In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths.”**

Sometimes it is hard to trust God and follow His commands. Sometimes for the sake of keeping God’s Law we may be required to give up a career or profession that has a promising future, or we might be forced to leave our home, our parents, our family because of God’s name. Sometimes it might look as if it’s impossible to follow God’s way because of doubt and disbelieve. But Psalm 84:12 says, **“Lord Almighty, blessed is the one who trusts in you”** (NIV). We will be blessed if we trust and obey.

2. “I WILL MAKE YOU INTO A GREAT NATION”

One quiet and bright starry night, when Abraham was lying in his tent contemplating his future, God appeared and talked to him in vision. He said, **“ ‘Do not be afraid, Abram. I am your shield, your very great reward’ ”** (Genesis 15:1, NIV). Abraham answered with disbelief: “What God? You said You would give me a great reward? What can You give me? I am old now—advanced in years—and You haven’t given me any children. All my possessions will be inherited by Eliezer, my servant” (author’s paraphrase). As a response, Genesis 15:4 recorded, **“Then the word of the Lord came to him: ‘This man will not be your heir, but a son who is your own flesh and blood will be your heir’ ”** (NIV). God promised Abraham a son.

God knew Abraham was skeptical and doubted, so He asked him to go outside his tent and to **“ ‘look up at the sky and count the stars—if indeed you can count them. . . . So, shall your offspring be’ ”** (Genesis 15:5, NIV). In Genesis 13:16 God promised, **“I will make your offspring like the dust of the earth, so that if anyone could count the dust, then your offspring could be counted”** (NIV).

According to a Pew Research Center demographic analysis, in 2015 Christians continued to be the largest religious group in the world, making up almost one third (31.2 percent) of Earth's population (7.3 billion people). (See <http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2017/04/05/christians-remain-worlds-largest-religious-group>.) Abraham's descendants were to number into billions of people, and as Christians, we are part of this great family of God.

The General Conference Office of Archives, Statistics, and Research recorded that in 2017 the Seventh-day Adventist Church world membership reached 20,008,779 members, and we are among them. By God's grace and through the work of the Holy Spirit, that number will increase more and more in the years ahead; many more souls will join God's fold. Through Total Member Involvement, God's promise to Abraham "to be a great nation" will materialize.

Are we really Abraham's descendants? Absolutely, yes! Galatians 3:26-29 confirms it: ***"So in Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith, for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. IF YOU BELONG TO CHRIST, THEN YOU ARE ABRAHAM'S SEED, AND HEIRS ACCORDING TO THE PROMISE"*** (NIV).

This Bible text assures us that if we are baptized into Christ, we are also Abraham's heirs and will receive the eternal inheritance as promised.

3. "I WILL BLESS YOU"

Genesis 22:17 says, ***"I will surely bless you and make your descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky and as the sand on the seashore. Your descendants will take possession of the cities of their enemies"*** (NIV). Can we count the stars in the sky and the sand on the seashore? It is impossible to do so, but this was the word of God, which has been fulfilled. The world's population, as recorded in 2018, has reached 7.6 billion people.

This is a beautiful promise that God gave to Abraham in the time past, but it is also true for us in this present time. God knows our needs, and He wants us to live an abundant life. He will bless us and meet our needs. In the New Testament the apostle Paul repeated God's promise. Philippians 4:19 says, ***"And my God will meet all your needs according to the riches of his glory in Christ Jesus"*** (NIV).

Genesis 15:7 says, ***"Then He said to him, 'I am the Lord, who brought you out of Ur of the Chaldeans, to give you this land to inherit it'"*** (NKJV). According to this promise, Abraham's descendants would receive the right to inherit the "promised land," the area where they would settle after their exodus from Egypt. This is a real blessing.

Besides the physical blessings, God blesses us spiritually—the gospel blessings. God promised Abraham in Genesis 22:18: ***"And through your offspring all nations on earth will be blessed, because you have obeyed me"*** (NIV). This is a great promise

that God gave Abraham: that all people on earth would be blessed through his descendants, blessed not only by the gospel message but also by technology, science, communication, and medical invention.

The state of Israel, the one hundredth smallest country in the world, is composed of Abraham's direct descendants. This country has claimed the following inventions:

I. COMMUNICATION AND TECHNOLOGIES

- a. The cell phone was first developed at the Motorola plant in Israel.
- b. Microsoft-Israel developed most of the Windows NT and XP operating systems.
- c. The Pentium MMX Chip technology was designed in Israel at Intel.
- d. Both the Pentium-4 microprocessor for desktop computers and the Centrino processor for laptops were entirely designed, developed, and produced in Israel.
- e. Voice mail technology was developed in Israel. The Israeli company Amdocs is the largest company in the world in this field.
- f. An Israeli company was the first to develop and install a large-scale solar-powered and fully functional electricity-generating plant in Southern California's Mojave Desert.
- g. Israeli company Retalix created the grocery scanners used at such stores as Costco, Albertsons, and 7-Eleven, as well as 25,000 additional stores and quick-service restaurants throughout the United States.

II. MEDICAL INVENTIONS

- a. Israeli scientists developed the first fully computerized, no-radiation diagnostic instrumentation for breast cancer.
- b. An Israeli company developed a computerized system for ensuring proper administration of medications, thus removing human error from medical treatment.
- c. Israel's Given Imaging developed the PillCam—the first ingestible video camera, which is so small it fits inside a pill. It is used to view the small intestine from the inside, and the camera helps doctors diagnose cancer and digestive disorders.
- d. Researchers in Israel developed a new device that directly helps the heart pump blood. The new device is synchronized with the heart's mechanical operations through a sophisticated system of sensors.
- e. A new brain implant has been developed in Israel that can lower the risk of stroke by diverting blood clots away from sensitive areas of the brain.
- f. The Israeli company Insightsec developed an ultrasound system for removing tumors without surgery.

- g. Dr. Gal Yadid, Dr. Rachel Mayan, and Professor Abraham Weizmann from Bar Ilan University developed a form of drug rehabilitation using a natural steroid that is inserted into the brain and produces a resistance for the drugs.

III. SCIENCE

- a. Primate research at Hebrew University is leading to the development of a robotic arm that can respond to the brain commands of a paralyzed person.
- b. Two Israeli researchers are generating cancer-killing molecules that will recognize cancerous cells and target them aggressively, while not affecting healthy cells.
- c. Israeli researchers developed a novel stem-cell therapy to treat Parkinson's Disease using a patient's own bone marrow stem cells to produce the missing chemical that enables restoration of motor movement.
- d. The Quicktionary, a pen-sized scanner that scans a word or a sentence and translates it into a different language, was developed by the Wizcom Company, based in Jerusalem.

Source: <https://www.levitt.com/57-contributions-israel-has-made-to-the-world>

God's promise to Abraham that his descendants will be a blessing to all people on earth has been completely fulfilled.

Contemplating this particular promise—“***Through your offspring all nations on earth will be blessed***” (NIV)—I remember an experience of my father that was similar to that of Abraham. Long before I was born, my father was a school principal and a devoted member of a Sunday-keeping church. Even though he was an elder of the church, however, he was a drunkard. Before he preached he had to drink two cups of strong liquor. He did this so he wouldn't feel fearful as he looked at the people in the audience and so his tongue would “loosen” and never run out of words.

During Christmas and New Year's Eve he would go to the church, walking straight in his clean suit. By the time he returned home after midnight he was no longer walking straight; instead, he would often be found drunk lying in a ditch and people would have to carry him home.

For self-defense and protection, he wore around his stomach a “magical” amulet with satanic power placed around his stomach. Whenever he played soccer while wearing the amulet, no one would dare to come in physical contact with him, because they would end up breaking a leg or something similar. When he walked around the village, the villagers would bow down to him with full respect and out of fear.

THE CALL. Then came his conversion. One day someone placed a flyer for an evangelistic series and a Sabbath tract at the front door of his house. He read the tract and faithfully attended the evangelistic meetings. He became convinced of the Sabbath truth, and when the preacher made an altar call, he went up front and made his decision to accept Jesus as his

personal Savior and be baptized.

After his baptism he no longer drank, he threw away his amulet, and he became sober. He turned out to be a good man. The results of his conversion, however, were severe. He was fired from his job as school principal, and he was disowned by his family and hated by his friends. The community expelled him, and he felt that they didn't want him to live in their neighborhood any longer.

MOVED TO A FOREIGN ISLAND. One year after I was born our family moved to another island, to a foreign land, to follow God's calling. In that new place my father got a job as a Bible teacher. In time, when I was older, he took me along with him whenever he went to various homes to give Bible studies. He used a small slide projector and assigned me to be the operator. It was an excellent job for me; I was so proud and happy to be part of my father's ministry of spreading the gospel—the message of salvation through Jesus Christ.

By accompanying my father to the Bible study sessions, I was exposed to the Bible teachings and the 28 fundamental beliefs of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. The Scriptures and the doctrines of the church became deeply implanted in my mind, and I enjoyed my father's ministries.

After I graduated from high school, I enrolled in a state university in my city to study medicine. My ambition was to become a medical doctor. I took an entrance exam on some subjects, and everything went well. I was pretty sure that I could answer the exam questions correctly. Then something happened that changed all my plans. The final exam, which was the aptitude test, was scheduled for Sabbath. To complete the entrance exam, I had to take that last test; otherwise, I would fail. However, since it fell on Sabbath, I had no choice but to miss it. At that point I began to feel called by God to enter ministry, so I enrolled at the Adventist University of Indonesia and studied theology. So here I am today, an ordained pastor for 40 long years. God's plan was not my plan. He didn't call me to help people to heal physically; He invited me to help them find a spiritual healing through Jesus Christ.

THE BLESSINGS. As an ordained minister of the church, my father led many souls to Jesus and His truth. He is resting now in the grave, awaiting the Master's call to raise him up and receive a reward, but his legacy remains strong. At a young age, God also called me into ministry, to continue what my father had done. I became a pastor, and I love doing what he did—spreading the gospel message to the world. It is my passion to bring as many souls as possible to Jesus Christ and to be ready for His soon coming. It is a real blessing to me to be His minister of the gospel.

BLESSED TO BE A BLESSING. I have proven true the Bible verses in Genesis 12:2, 3: "I will bless you"; "you will be a blessing"; and "all peoples on earth will be blessed through you" (NIV). My father and I have been blessed by being ministers of God and part of His salvation, but also a blessing to the many people we have served and with whom we have shared the gospel message. When they accepted salvation through Jesus Christ and surrendered their lives to be baptized, they were blessed through our ministries.

Throughout my 45 years of ministry I have conducted hundreds of evangelistic meetings and 59 Revelation Seminars. Thousands have heard the gospel message, and thousands have been baptized and brought to the cross. God had blessed me with the ability of preaching, and

as a result, many people had been blessed through me and my ministry.

4. "I WILL MAKE YOUR NAME GREAT"

Proverbs 22:1 says, "***A good name is more desirable than great riches***" (NIV). It is a reality of life that a good name is important. A good name means a good reputation, which is of greater value than wealth. A good name is true riches, and this is what God promised to Abraham in Genesis 12:2: "***I will make your name great***" (NIV).

Abraham's name was great. He was called God's friend in James 2:23: "***And the scripture was fulfilled that says, 'Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness, and he was called GOD'S FRIEND'***" (NIV).

God made another a promise to Abraham in Genesis 17:5: "***'No longer will you be called Abram; your name will be Abraham, for I have made you a FATHER OF MANY NATIONS'***" (NIV). What an amazing promise, that his descendants would eventually comprise many nations. Wikipedia lists 206 states as members of the United Nations.

(https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_sovereign_states). They are Abraham's descendants. God continued His promise in Genesis 13:16: "***And I will make your descendants as the dust of the earth; so that if a man could number the dust of the earth, then your descendants also could be numbered***" (NJKV). In March 2018, the official world population was an estimated 7.46 billion people, as written by Matt Rosenberg in ThoughtCo (<https://www.thoughtco.com/current-world-population>). Can the dust be numbered? It's beyond one's imagination!

Another name was given to Abraham in Romans 4:11: "***So then, he is the FATHER OF ALL WHO BELIEVE***" (NIV).

Galatians 3:9 says, "***So those who rely on faith are blessed along with Abraham, THE MAN OF FAITH***" (NIV).

Genesis 15:6 says, "***Abram believed the Lord, and he credited it to him as RIGHTEOUS-NESS***" (NIV). Abraham had a close relationship with God, and God considered Abraham's faith as righteousness. Because Abraham trusted God and obeyed Him, God regarded Abraham as a righteous person despite his imperfections and frailties as a human being.

Here is a list of the "great names" given to Abraham:

- God's friend
- Father of many nations
- Father of all who believe
- The man of faith
- A righteous man

THE REASON FOR THE CALL

Why did God choose Abraham to carry out His plan? Genesis 18:19 says, “***For I have chosen him, so that he will direct his children and his household after him to keep the way of the Lord by doing what is right and just, so that the Lord will bring about for Abraham what he has promised him***” (NIV). God chose Abraham because He wanted him to be a role model to his children and his household and direct them to keep God’s law and obey His commands, as well as to do the right and just things in God’s eyes and man’s.

Genesis 26:5 supported the reason for the call: “***Because Abraham obeyed me and did everything I required of him, keeping my commands, my decrees, and my instructions***” (NIV). God knew that Abraham was a man of obedience, and so by choosing Abraham He wanted him to be an agent of change; and because of his great faith and confidence in God, Abraham did his best to accomplish all God’s commands. He also directed his children to follow God in the pathway of life.

CONCLUSION

1. **God has an excellent plan for you.** Jeremiah 29:11 says: “ ‘***For I know the plans I have for you, declares the Lord, plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future***’ ” (NIV).
2. **God has a purpose for your life.** Whether you are a child, a youngster, an adult, or even an older adult, when God calls you to serve Him, never turn the call down because God has a purpose for your life.
3. **Have faith and trust in God’s promises.** Romans 1:17 says, “***For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith; as it is written. ‘The just shall live by faith’***” (NKJV). We must have faith in God because through faith, we are justified and will receive the rewards and promises He made to Abraham. He will fulfill His promise in His time. Further, Galatians 3:9 says, “***So those who rely on faith are blessed along with Abraham, the man of faith***” (NIV). We will be blessed for practicing our faith.
4. **Be obedient to God’s words and commands.** 1 Samuel 15:22 says, “ ‘***Does the Lord delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices as much as in obeying the Lord? TO OBEY IS BETTER THAN SACRIFICE’*** ” (NIV). God expects obedience from us. When we exercise our faith by obeying God’s command, He will be delighted, and we will receive rewards from Him.
5. **God will protect us in our life’s journey.** Genesis 12:3 says, “ ‘***I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse***’ ” (NIV). This is a promise of His protection to those who love and obey Him.
6. **When you are blessed, be a blessing to others.** Genesis 12:2 says, “ ‘***And I will bless you; . . . and you will be a blessing***’ ” (NIV). When God blesses you, you are to be a blessing to others. People will be blessed by your ministry and service, and God’s name will be praised throughout your life. Please answer the following questions:

1. Have you ever been blessed today?
2. Are you aware that God has been blessing you?
3. As a blessed individual, what should we do in return?
4. Do you want to receive more blessings?

As we conclude the sermon today, let me share with you some KEYS to opening the flood-gates of heaven and receiving more blessings from God.

“I PROMISE” CARD

- Allow time to distribute the “I PROMISE” Card.
- Each member receives one card.
- The “I PROMISE” card is a key resource that helps members and leaders make a commitment to putting God first in their lives.

INSTRUCTION ON “I PROMISE” CARD:

- Each person will receive one card.
- After reading each point on the card, you will put a check mark on each box.
- At the end of this presentation, write your name and the date on the card.
- Detach the bottom part of the card and give it to the usher to be collected.
- Keep the card as a reminder of your commitment.

READING THE CARD:

1. “To set apart the first moments of each day to commune with the Lord through PRAYER, through the study of the Bible, the Spirit of Prophecy and the Sabbath School lesson, and in FAMILY WORSHIP”—by establishing the habit of putting God First in every aspect and every respect of life.
2. “To IMPROVE my RELATIONSHIPS: growing in faithfulness, forgiveness and loving by principle”—becoming more faithful to God, to my spouse, to my family, my church, and my work.
3. “To establish one new HEALTHY HABIT, to better serve the Lord with my mind”—example: exercise faithfully, walk 10,000 steps a day, drink enough water, etc.
4. “To offer one day (or evening) each week to work for God, spreading the good news to others through Bible studies, small groups, etc. (TMI)”—Dedicate one day every week to GOD’s work through teaching, preaching, healing and serving.
5. “To KEEP the SABBATH, preparing for it accordingly on Friday, keeping its limits, right thoughts and activities”—Observe GOD’s holy Sabbath day in a full course from sundown Friday through sundown Saturday.
6. “To FAITHFULLY RETURN the Lord’s TITHE (10% of my income)”—Honor GOD’s ownership by returning 10 percent of my income.
7. “To dedicate a regular percentage (_____%) of my income as a freewill offering to the

Lord”—This promise card is a reminder that when you are giving your tithes and offerings; you should do so based not on emotions, or feelings, or promotion talks on special projects or a specific regular amount, but on a proportion or percentage of any income, previously established between you and God.

CLOSING PRAYER:

Dear Heavenly Father, we acknowledge You as our Creator and the Owner of everything. We recognize that everything we have comes from the outpouring of Your generosity to give. Help us to have a more profound sense of gratitude and appreciation to You, by returning the tithe that belongs to You, and to give in proportion to the blessings we have been receiving, to reflect our love for You and Your work. Please accept our tithes and offerings to be used effectively to carry out the mission of Your church in the world. For we ask all these mercies in the wonderful name of Jesus. Amen.

CHILDREN'S STORY

Faithfulness in Giving

by Johnetta B. Flomo

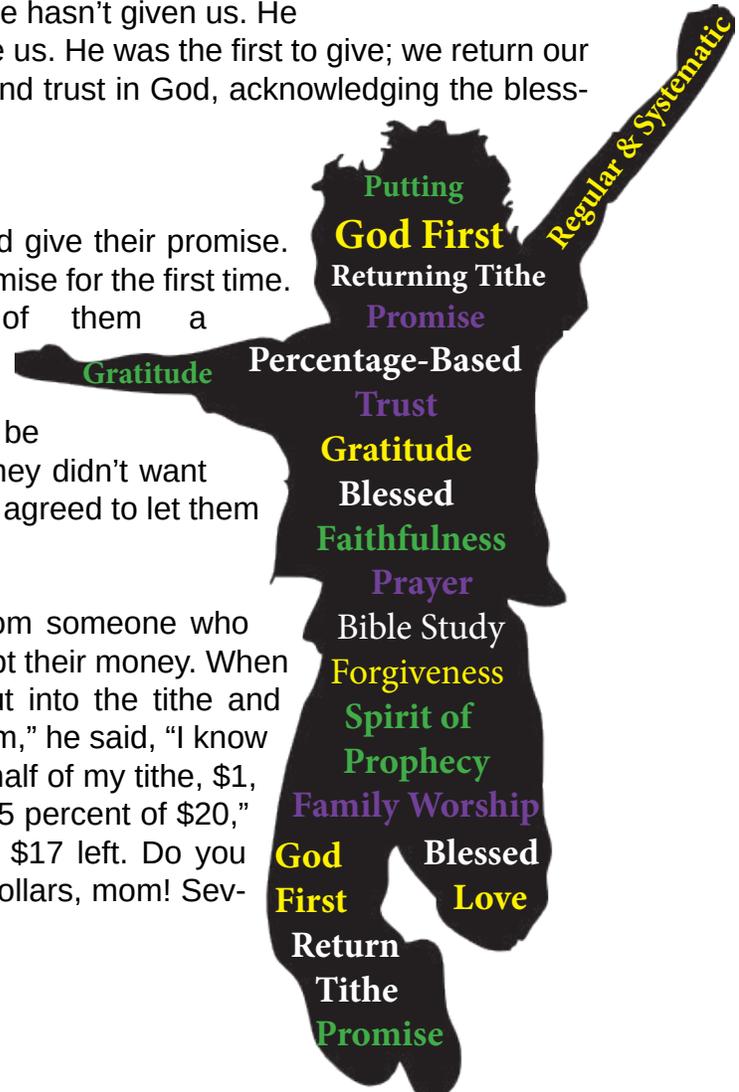
Good morning, boys and girls! This morning our story is about a mother and her two children. Teah (age 11) and Josie (age 6) had been very excited to get baptized. They were happy to publicly declare their love for Jesus. For almost two years they had requested to be baptized, but their parents felt they needed to first study the church's beliefs and understand what they were getting into. So, each night, their mother would read the Seventh-day Adventist beliefs to them and they would discuss what they understood about the beliefs.

The day of their baptism was scheduled, and many friends and family members were invited. They gathered around the baptismal pool to witness this joyous occasion. At the end of the church service, they went home to celebrate the occasion. During the celebration, friends and family gave Teah and Josie monetary gifts. They had so much money that their mother decided to deposit the money in her bank account.

During the week, they sat with their mother and discussed how they would spend the money. Mom taught them the giving principles of Malachi 3:10-12 and John 3:16. God requires that we return 10 percent of any increase as our tithe and also choose a fixed percentage as our promise (percentage-based offerings) to give Him. If we are faithful in doing that, He has promised to bless us. God does not expect us to give what He hasn't given us. He loves us so much that He gave His only Son to save us. He was the first to give; we return our Tithe and give our **promise** as an act of worship and trust in God, acknowledging the blessings we have already received.

Teah and Josie were eager to return their tithe and give their promise. They looked forward to returning their tithe and promise for the first time. The following Sabbath, their mother gave each of them a check, representing the amount they needed to put into their tithe and promise envelope, but they were sad. Teah and Josie wanted to feel the money and be in charge of their own tithe return and promise. They didn't want their mother to do the calculation for them. So, she agreed to let them have all future cash increases.

Two weeks later, they each got twenty dollars from someone who couldn't attend their baptism and this time, they kept their money. When their mother asked Teah how much he would put into the tithe and promise envelope at church, he surprised her. "Mom," he said, "I know I have to return \$2 for tithe but I also want to give half of my tithe, \$1, for promise." "A dollar for promise? That would be 5 percent of \$20," their mother said. "Don't worry, Mom. I will have \$17 left. Do you know how much I could do with \$17? Seventeen dollars, mom! Seventeen!" he said.



Their mother smiled; she had four powerful and valuable lessons to teach them.

1. Tithing and giving promise is a personal commitment to God. It is an agreement between God and an individual, not God and a group. Tithing is personal.
2. It is only after you return your tithe that you give something to God. The tithe belongs to God.
3. Promise is your predetermined offering, based on a fixed percentage of our income. We must decide, in advance, the percentage we are willing to give to God for promise. In 2 Corinthians 9:7, we are told, "So let each one give as he purposes in his heart, not grudgingly or of [a]necessity; for God loves a cheerful giver" (NKJV). Teah chose to give 5 percent; Josie gave 3 percent.
4. Finally, once we are faithful in returning our tithe and giving our regular percentage-based promise, we can do so much with what we have left. We just have to manage the 90 percent left wisely.

Teah was fortunate to find his video game on sale. He bought it for \$9 instead of \$18, and still had money left. Josie bought a pair of earphones for \$8, a shirt she loved for \$4 and kept the rest of her money in her green piggy bank. Kids, when we are faithful to God, He blesses us in more ways than we can imagine. May the Lord help us to return our faithful tithe and promise, which is a dedicated percentage of our increase as our regular freewill offering. Who would like to pray?

CHILDREN'S STORY

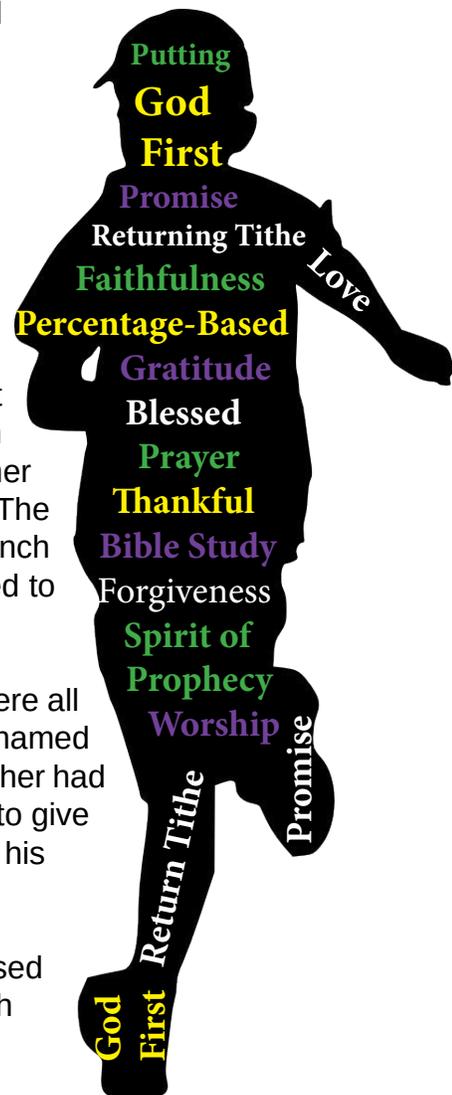
Putting God First

(For younger children, ages 0-5)

Good morning, boys and girls. Today our story is about a boy who put God first. Early one morning, a little boy skipped up the path away from his home. He was certain it would be an exciting day. A great preacher was in town and scheduled to speak from a boat overlooking the sea. The day was going to be long, but the boy's mother had prepared a good lunch for him. As he sat on the grass near the preacher, the boy was amazed to hear the stories told and the lessons filled his heart and mind.

There were many people listening to the preacher that day and they were all hungry. At the end of the day, the boy was prepared to eat when a man, named Andrew, noticed him and took him to meet with the preacher. The preacher had asked for someone to find food for the people. Andrew asked the boy to give his lunch to the preacher and without hesitation, the boy stretched out his little basket of food toward the preacher.

The preacher raised the boy's basket of food toward heaven and blessed it. The boy listened carefully and watched as his lunch was shared with



the crowd of hungry people. All he had in his basket were some bread and fish. Was that enough to feed everyone? Yes, five thousand men, plus women and children, ate lunch that day. What a blessing it was!

Imagine how happy he felt going home that evening! Not only did he marvel at the things he had heard and the strange miracle that happened to his lunch, but he was glad that he saw the need and that he had something to share.

He had given his lunch away to the preacher, expecting to be hungry. However, he and those listening to the preacher had plenty to eat with over 12 baskets of leftovers.

Oh, how the words of this preacher resounded in his ear. "Give and it shall be given to you." Luke 6:38

"But seek ye first the kingdom of God and His righteousness and all these things shall be added unto you." Matthew 6:33

Kids, we can learn five things from this little boy.

1. The little boy chose to put God first. You can also put God first by *studying your Bible and reading your Sabbath School Quarterly everyday, before playing or doing other things. You can put God first by *returning your Tithe and Promise before any other expense.
2. The second lesson learned today is that the boy donated his gift without hesitation.
3. He gave Him all he had.
4. His gift to the preacher was used to blessed others.
5. In the preacher's hands, his gift was multiplied and he could have more than before.

Would you like to give what you have to the preacher, Jesus?

Would you like to give him your life? Do you

want Him to take away self from your life

and help you think about using what you have to bring others to

to put

God first in our lives like this little boy did.
Amen. Who would like to pray?



ACTIVITY–GROUP DISCUSSION

What Does the Bible Say About Money?

(Could be done as an afternoon session activity)

Ask the church members to split into groups of four to six. Give each team two sheets of paper, a marker, and a list of six Bible verses. Ask the groups to read and study these verses and write down what they learn. Reassemble the groups and discuss, in general, the Bible verse(s) that struck them the most and why. (All Bible texts in this section are taken from the King James Version.)

“Let your conversation be without covetousness; and be content with such things as ye have: for he hath said, I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee” (**Hebrews 13:5**).

“Wealth gotten by vanity shall be diminished: but he that gathereth by labor shall increase” (**Proverbs 13:11**).

“Labor not to be rich: cease from thine own wisdom” (**Proverbs 23:4**).

“But they that will be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and hurtful lusts, which drown men in destruction and perdition” (**1 Timothy 6:9**).

“The blessing of the Lord, it maketh rich, and he addeth no sorrow with it” (**Proverbs 10:22**).

“He that loveth silver shall not be satisfied with silver; nor he that loveth abundance with increase: this is also vanity” (**Ecclesiastes 5:10**).

“Honor the Lord with thy substance, and with the first fruits of all thine increase” (**Proverbs 3:9**).

“Better is little with the fear of the Lord than great treasure and trouble therewith” (**Proverbs 15:16**).

“Render therefore to all their dues: tribute to whom tribute is due; custom to whom custom; fear to whom fear; honor to whom honor” (**Romans 13:7**).

“And he said unto them, take heed, and beware of covetousness: for a man’s life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth” (**Luke 12:15**).

“But who am I, and what is my people, that we should be able to offer so willingly after this sort? for all things come of thee, and of thine own have we given thee” (**1 Chronicles 29:14**).

“How much better is it to get wisdom than gold! and to get understanding rather to be chosen than silver!” (**Proverbs 16:16**).

“Charge them that are rich in this world, that they be not high-minded, nor trust in uncertain riches, but in the living God, who giveth us richly all things to enjoy” (**1 Timothy 6:17**).

“For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also” (**Matthew 6:21**; read passage, Matthew 6:19-33). How does this relate to worrying and the way we invest our money?

“The desire of a man is his kindness: and a poor man is better than a liar” (**Proverbs 19:22**).

“His lord said unto him, “Well done, thou good and faithful servant: thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things: enter thou into the joy of thy lord” (**Matthew 25:21**).

“Remove far from me vanity and lies: give me neither poverty nor riches; feed me with food convenient for me” (**Proverbs 30:8**).

“Treasures of wickedness profit nothing: but righteousness delivereth from death” (**Proverbs 10:2**).

“Wilt thou set thine eyes upon that which is not? for riches certainly make themselves wings; they fly away as an eagle toward heaven” (**Proverbs 23:5**).

“A little that a righteous man hath is better than the riches of many wicked. For the arms of the wicked shall be broken: but the Lord upholdeth the righteous” (**Psalms 37:16-17**).

“For this cause pay ye tribute also: for they are God’s ministers, attending continually upon this very thing” (**Romans 13:6**).

“A good name is rather to be chosen than great riches, and loving favor rather than silver and gold” (**Proverbs 22:1**).

“Riches profit not in the day of wrath: but righteousness delivereth from death” (**Proverbs 11:4**).

“I have rejoiced in the way of thy testimonies, as much as in all riches” (**Psalms 119:14**).

“The rich man’s wealth is his strong city, and as an high wall in his own conceit” (**Proverbs 18:11**).

AFTERNOON SEMINAR

Is Money the Problem?

John D. Rockefeller, Sr. was one of the wealthiest men who ever lived.

After his death, someone asked his accountant, “How much did John D. leave? We know he was an immensely wealthy man.”

And the accountant answered, “Everything.”

“Money never made a man happy yet, nor will it. The more a man has, the more he wants. Instead of filling a vacuum, it makes one.”—Benjamin Franklin

“Don’t tell me where your priorities are. Show me where you spend your money and I’ll tell you what they are.”—James W. Frick

“Money may be the husk of many things but not the kernel. It brings you food, but not appetite; medicine, but not health; acquaintance, but not friends; servants, but not loyalty; days of joy, but not peace or happiness.”—Henrik Ibsen

“Money is only a tool. It will take you wherever you wish, but it will not replace you as the driver.”—Ayn Rand

“Do all the good you can, by all the means you can, in all the ways you can, in all the places you can, at all the times you can, to all the people you can, as long as ever you can.”—John Wesley

Is money a problem? No. Money is not the problem.

“It is the love of money that the word of God denounces as the root of all evil. Money itself is the gift of God to men, to be used with fidelity in His service. God blessed Abraham, and made him rich in cattle, in silver, and in gold. And the Bible states, as an evidence of divine favor, that God gave David, Solomon, Jehoshaphat, Hezekiah, very much riches and honor.”—Ellen G. White, *Counsels on Stewardship*, p. 139

The love of Money:

1. Prevents the development of Christian Character.—Ellen G. White, *Counsels on Stewardship*, p. 22.
2. Prevents the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on the individual or the church.—*Ibid*, p. 52
3. It holds back the work of God.—*Ibid*, p. 554
4. It contributes to self-gratification.—*Ibid*, p. 289

The Real Problem

“Some love this world so much that it swallows up their love for the truth. As their treasures here increase, their interest in the heavenly treasure decreases. The more they possess of

this world, the more closely do they hug it to them, as if fearful their coveted treasure would be taken from them. The more they possess, the less do they have to bestow upon others, for the more they have, the poorer they feel. O, the deceitfulness of riches! They will not see and feel the wants of the cause of God.”—Ellen G. White, *Spiritual Gifts*, vol. 2, p. 267.

Satan knows that if he can cause man to focus his attention on the perishable things of this world, his viewpoint will become blurred and he will fail to see the eternal riches of the world to come—”When the young man came to Jesus and said to Him, “Good Master, what good thing shall I do, that I may have eternal life?” (Matthew 19:16) Jesus gave him his choice, to part with his possessions and have eternal life, or retain them and lose it. His riches were of greater value to him than the heavenly treasure. The condition that he must part with his treasures and give to the poor in order to become a follower of Christ and have eternal life, chilled his desire; and he went away sorrowful.”— Ellen G. White, *Testimony Treasures*, vol. 1, p. 127.

“I saw that God could rain means from heaven to carry on his work, but he never would do this. It is contrary to his plan. He has entrusted men on earth with sufficient means to carry forward his work, and if all do their duty there will be no lack.”—Ellen G. White, *Spiritual Gifts*, vol. 2, p. 267.

“So let each one give as he purposes in his heart, not grudgingly or of [a]necessity; for God loves a cheerful giver.”—2 Corinthians 9:7,NKJV.

The problem is selfishness.

Wake Up

Satan says, “Go, make the possessors of lands and money drunk with the cares of this life. Present the world before them in its most attractive light, that they may lay up their treasure here, and fix their affections upon earthly things. . . . The more means they obtain, the more they will injure our kingdom by taking from us our subjects. Make them care more for money than for the upbuilding of Christ’s kingdom and the spread of the truths we hate, and we need not fear their influence; for we know that every selfish, covetous person will fall under our power, and will finally be separated from God’s people.”—Ellen G. White, *Testimonies to Ministers and Gospel Workers*, pp. 472-474.

The church must wake up to reality and recognize the true problem as it is - a spiritual one. The church is a soul-winning agency. Financial support for its spiritual program is a blessing when it is a result of personal commitment. To give of ourselves is pleasing to God. “Unselfish devotion and a spirit of sacrifice have always been and always will be the first requisite of acceptable service. Our Lord and Master designs that not one thread of selfishness shall be woven into His work.”—Ellen G. White, *Christian Service*, pp. 242.

“Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal; but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.”—*Matthew 6:19-21, NKJV.*

“If God has blessed us with prosperity, it is not that our time and attention should be diverted

from Him and given to that which He has lent us. The giver is greater than the gift. We have been bought with a price, we are not our own. ***Have we forgotten that infinite price paid for our redemption? Is gratitude dead in the heart?*** Does not the cross of Christ put to shame a life of selfish ease and indulgence? ... We are reaping the fruits of this infinite self-sacrifice; and yet, when labor is to be done, when our money is wanted to aid the work of the Redeemer in the salvation of souls, we shrink from duty and pray to be excused.”—Ellen G. White, ***Counsels on Stewardship***, p. 20.

“We belong to God; we are His sons and daughters, —His by creation, and His by the gift of His only-begotten Son for our redemption. “Ye are not your own; for ye are bought with a price: therefore, glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God’s.” The mind, the heart, the will, and the affections belong to God; the money that we handle is the Lord’s. Every good that we receive and enjoy is the result of divine benevolence. God is the bountiful giver of all good, and He desires that there shall be an acknowledgment, on the part of the receiver, of these gifts that provide for every necessity of the body and the soul. God demands only His own. The primary portion is the Lord’s and must be used as His entrusted treasure. The heart that is divested of selfishness will awaken to a sense of God’s goodness and love, and be moved to a hearty acknowledgment of His righteous requirements.”—***The Review and Herald***, December 8, 1896.

Selfishness is a disease that affects the poor and wealthy alike. If we give ourselves first to God it will then be possible for us to starve selfishness through a total commitment of time, talent and treasure. The management responsibilities of Christian stewards involve the total life. “God calls for what you owe Him in tithes and offerings. . . . Empty the heart of selfishness and brace the mind for Christian activity. If you are in close connection with God, you will be willing to make any sacrifice to place eternal life within the reach of the perishing.”—Ellen G. White, ***Counsels on Stewardship***, p. 48

Money can be a problem

Money has become the symbol of comfort and status. We live in a world of things and money, all of which must be dedicated to God. “God’s people are called to a work that requires money and consecration. The obligations resting upon us hold us responsible to work for God to the utmost of our ability. He calls for undivided service, for the entire devotion of heart, soul, mind, and strength.

“There are only two places in the universe where we can place our treasures - in God’s storehouse or in Satan’s; and all that is not devoted to God’s service is counted on Satan’s side, and goes to strengthen his cause.” —Ellen G. White, ***Counsels on Stewardship***, p. 35.

Money is not THE problem

In reality the lack of money is not the real difficulty of the church. Insufficient funds are symptomatic of a dual problem:

1. Selfishness.
2. Resultant into lack of spirituality.

“Selfishness, the sin of the world, has become the prevailing sin of the church. In sacrificing Himself for the good of men, Christ strikes at the root of all selfishness. He withheld noth-

ing, not even His own honor and heavenly glory.”—Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 5, p. 204

“There is means enough in the hands of believers to amply sustain the work in all its departments without embarrassing any, if all would bear their proportional part.”—Ellen G. White, *Testimonies to the Church*, vol. 3, p. 410.

Will you allow Him to fulfill His promises to you in Malachi 3:11, 12? He says, ““And I will rebuke the devourer for your sakes, so that he will not destroy the fruit of your ground, nor shall the vine fail to bear fruit for you in the field,” says the Lord of hosts; “And all nations will call you blessed, for you will be a delightful land,” says the Lord of hosts” (NKJV).

The Lord suggests to us to give proportionally on tithes and offerings. Have you already decided a percentage to set apart as offerings? If you have not yet decided, you may decide now. Put God First and not selfishness. Will you trust God today?

FACTS ABOUT MONEY

1. To supply our _____ .

Helpful hints: Matt. 6:26, 28-30
 1 Tim. 6:8
 Col. 2:10
 John 15:5
 Heb. 13:5

2. To give _____ .

Helpful hints: Ps. 37:7
 1 Tim. 6:9, 17
 Phil. 3:7-8

3. To help _____ .

Helpful hints: Rom. 12:13
 2 Cor. 8:14
 Titus 2:14
 2 Cor. 9:8, 11

4. To demonstrate the _____ of _____ .

Helpful hints: Acts 5:12-14
 1 Kings 18:21-40
 Mal. 3:10
 Ps. 66:18
 Ps. 50:15

ANSWERS: 1. Basic Needs 2. Direction 3. Others 4. Power of God

GOD FIRST

I PROMISE:



To **SET APART** the first moments of each day to commune with the Lord through **PRAYER**, the **STUDY** of the Bible, the Spirit of Prophecy and the Sabbath School lessons, and in **FAMILY WORSHIP**.



To **IMPROVE** my **RELATIONSHIPS**: growing in faithfulness, forgiveness and loving by principle.



To **ESTABLISH** one new **HEALTHY HABIT**, to better serve the Lord with my mind: _____



To **OFFER** one day (or evening) each week to **WORK** for God, spreading the good news to others through Bible studies, small groups, etc. (TMI).



To **KEEP** the **SABBATH**, preparing for it accordingly on Friday, keeping its limits, right thoughts, and activities.



To **FAITHFULLY RETURN** the Lord's **TITHE** (10% of my income).



To **DEDICATE** a percentage (____ %) of my income as a regular **OFFERING** to the Lord.



WITH GOD'S HELP: _____ DATE: _____

