

Taking Care of God's Gifts After Eden



SABBATH—JANUARY 27

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S LESSON: Isaiah 22:14–18; 1 Corinthians 4:1, 2; Colossians 2:2, 3; Ephesians 6:13–17.

MEMORY VERSE: “But we speak the Good News because God tested us and trusted us to do it. When we speak, we are not trying to please men. But we are trying to please God, who tests our hearts” (1 Thessalonians 2:4, ICB).



As good managers for God, our eyes turn away from the things on this earth to look at God and His work.

ADAM AND EVE'S first job included stewardship. Stewardship is the special work we do as Christians to protect and take care of everything God gives us. God gave Adam and Eve the Garden of Eden to take care of and enjoy. They also ruled over all God made on earth (Genesis 2:15). Adam and Eve owned none of it. Instead, God made them managers.

This week we will look more carefully at what it means to be good managers on a planet that is damaged by sin. Adam and Eve were managers of this earth. We, too, are managers of this earth. But the earth today is very different from the one Adam and Eve first enjoyed.

What does the Bible say about being good managers? Some people in the Bible show what it means to be a good manager. What can we learn from them about being good managers? First, our understanding about what is important in life changes. Our eyes turn away from the things on this earth to look at God. God trusted Adam and Eve with a special work. He trusts us with special work too. But that work changed after the Fall in Eden. We continue to be managers of this earth. But God also made us managers of His truths. We must share His truths with other people.

MANAGERS IN THE OLD TESTAMENT (Isaiah 22:14–18)

The word “manager” is used only a few times in the Old Testament. In most verses, it comes from the word picture that means someone who is “over [in control of] the house.” That person is the “steward” (NKJV) or “manager” (NIRV) (Genesis 43:19; read also Genesis 44:1, 4 and 1 Kings 16:9). Managers had many tasks. Those tasks included taking care of their master’s business and belongings. Managers also did whatever their masters asked them to do. The meaning of the word “manager” in the Old Testament can be found by looking at the behavior of managers and at their work. Managers cannot be separated from their work. What they do shows who they are.

What makes a good manager? The Old Testament is clear: (1) A manager’s job was very important (Genesis 39:4). It included many duties. Managers were chosen because of their skills. They received respect and trust from their masters for getting the job done. (2) Managers knew that they did not own the things they managed (Genesis 24:34–38). That is the big difference between a manager and an owner. Managers understood they were servants. (3) What would happen if a manager stole from his or her owner? Then the trust between them would be broken. And the manager would lose his or her job (Genesis 3:23; Hosea 6:7).

Read Isaiah 22:14–18. These verses describe a time when King Hezekiah ruled over God’s people. During that time, Shebna was the king’s manager and treasurer. A treasurer controls how money is saved and spent. Treasurers and managers need to be unselfish and not filled with pride. But Shebna wanted more than he should have. What happened to Shebna when he wanted more than he should have?

“The job of a manager is one of great respect because his master trusts him. But imagine what would happen if the manager acted in a selfish way? Or if he took the money he made from trading his master’s things and used it for what he wanted? Then this manager would have destroyed the trust his owner placed in him.”—Ellen G. White, *Testimonies [Messages] for the Church*, volume 9, page 246, adapted.

How can we better understand the important idea that we are managers of everything we own in this life?



What would happen if a manager stole from his owner? Then the trust between them would be broken.

MANAGERS IN THE NEW TESTAMENT (Titus 1:7)

Yesterday, we learned about managers in the Old Testament. Today, we study what the New Testament says. The two Greek words for “manager” in the New Testament are (1) *epitropos* and (2) *oikonomos*. *Epitropos* appears 3 times, while *oikonomos* is used 10 times. Both words mean jobs with important duties that owners gave to managers.

Both Testaments talk about the work that managers do. The New Testament gives examples of this work. And it tells us that owners trusted their managers a lot (Luke 12:48). The New Testament talks about the type of person a manager must be (1 Corinthians 4:2). The idea of a manager is almost the same in both Testaments. But the main idea from the Old Testament is that God owns everything we have. The New Testament shows us that the idea of a manager means much more than taking care of someone else’s things.

In Luke 16:1–15, Jesus tells the picture story about a manager who cheats his master. This story is more than just a tale about a manager who escapes ruin. Instead, Jesus uses this picture story to help us understand how to be a good manager. Jesus also uses the story to give advice on how to escape spiritual ruin, too. A wise manager will get ready for Jesus to come back (Matthew 25:21).



A wise manager will prepare for the future of Jesus’ return (Matthew 25:21).

Read 1 Corinthians 4:1, 2; Titus 1:7; and 1 Peter 4:10. What do these verses tell us about managers and taking good care of all that God trusts us with?

“Should I open my heart to the Holy Spirit so that every part of me will wake up? Yes, God has trusted me with all these things. I belong to Jesus. I am employed by Him in His work on earth. And I am a manager of God’s loving-favor.”—Ellen G. White, *Fundamentals [Basics] of Christian Education*, page 301, adapted.

In Luke 12:35–48, Jesus says that the people waiting for His Second Coming are “servants [managers].” The wise servant is ready. But the evil servant stops caring about his duties because his Master has not come back. The evil servant is unkind to people around him. He is no longer an example for good works or a manager of God’s loving-favor.

As Seventh-day Adventists, we often find it hard to live with this idea of a “delay.” How can we avoid behaving the same way as the disloyal servant in Luke 12:45?

**MANAGERS OF THE IMPORTANT MYSTERIES
OF GOD
(1 Timothy 3:16)**

Read Colossians 2:2, 3 and 1 Timothy 3:16. What do these verses mean by the word “mystery” (NlrV)?

Zophar the Naamathite says to Job, “Can you understand the secrets of God?” (Job 11:7, ICB). The word “secrets” also can be written as “‘mysteries’ ” (NlrV). “Mystery” means “something not known or that is difficult to explain.” It also can mean “something kept secret.” Yes, the mysteries of God are written down in the Bible. But it is impossible to understand them fully. That is why they are “mysteries.” We can understand them only when God’s Spirit makes them known to us and helps us understand them.

What does Deuteronomy 29:29 say about the things God makes known to us?

We are managers of things we do not fully understand. We know only what the Holy Spirit and the Bible tell us. So, our first duty is to live “as servants who are owned by Christ. It is our job to share the secrets of God” (1 Corinthians 4:1, NLV).

God wants us to protect, teach, and care for the truths He gives us. We take care of His truths by obeying them and teaching others to do the same. How we honor His truths is the highest form of serving Him. It means we are “hold[ing] on to the deep truths of the faith” with a heart that says we are right with God (1 Timothy 3:9, NlrV).

We are human. So, how can we really know God? The chance to know Him is the biggest mystery of all. God’s plan to save us is impossible for us to understand fully. After all, who can know fully why the One who made us (John 1:1–3) would come down to this earth in a human body? Who can know why He would die for our sins? The things God did for us are mysteries. They never can be known fully by anyone made by Him. Even angels study to understand the mystery of why Jesus came to earth (1 Peter 1:12). But what we know of the mystery causes us to praise God for loving us (read Revelation 5:13). We praise God that Jesus is our “hope of glory” (Colossians 1:27, NlrV) to come.

God chose you to be a servant of the Good News about Jesus. What duties come with that job?



Even angels study to understand the mystery of why Jesus came to earth (1 Peter 1:12).

GUARDING SPIRITUAL TRUTH (Ephesians 6:13–17)

Often, we think of the gifts God gives us as the stuff we can see and touch. And that is true. But there is much more that God gives us. He also gives us gifts we cannot see or touch (1 Peter 4:10). God gives us these gifts to help us become unselfish and loving. These gifts help us to become the same as Jesus. God also gives us these gifts to make us better people. This fact makes these spiritual treasures worth far more than any other gifts God gives us. So, we must take care of them even more carefully than we take care of the gifts we can see and touch.

Read Ephesians 6:13–17. What gifts do these verses say God gives us? Why is it so important to take care of them?

“God gives you the gift of eternal [everlasting] life” (Romans 6:23, NIV). All that this life offers cannot give us this gift that God offers to us in Jesus. The gift of everlasting life is the most valuable thing we own. We must always remember that this gift is real. Then we will be better managers of the other things God gave us.

“The stories about Bethlehem and the Cross show how good it is to win the victory over evil. They teach us how all our blessings are gifts from God. They are part of His plan to save us.”—Ellen G. White, *Education*, page 101, adapted.

We have the gift of everlasting life only because Jesus paid the price for it. Paul says: “In Christ [Jesus] we are set free by the blood of his death. And so we have forgiveness of sins because of God’s rich grace [loving-favor]” (Ephesians 1:7, ICB). What wonderful news! We are forgiven! The gift of everlasting life is ours. But it is ours only because God gives it to us. So, we must guard this gift carefully. We must “wear the full armor [battle suit] of God” (Ephesians 6:11, ICB) at all times. Then Satan cannot steal our gift of everlasting life from us. He can take this gift from us only if we let him steal it. How do we let him steal it from us? We let him steal it when we do not obey “the teaching of God” (Ephesians 6:17, ICB). So, our best protection is to obey the truth God gave us.



We must “wear the full armor [battle suit] of God” (Ephesians 6:11, ICB) at all times. Then Satan cannot steal our gift of everlasting life from us.

How do we put on the “full armor [battle suit]” of God that Paul writes about in Ephesians 6:13–17 (ICB)? How do we take good care of this armor?

OUR DUTY AS GOD’S SERVANTS (2 Corinthians 5:10)

So far, we learned that managers are servants who take care of the things God gives them. Wise managers also are willing to accept what happens because of the choices they make. Responsible managers also understand the connection between the choices they make and what happens next because of those choices. So, good managers always think carefully about their choices and accept what happens because of those choices. Wise managers make decisions that will help their Owner [God] succeed.

“God wishes for us to be connected to Him. It is important to God that we understand what it means to be responsible for our choices and to accept what happens because of our choices. God wants us to depend on Him. God also wants us to learn how much we need to trust Him to guide us. God gives His gifts to each person. God made every person a manager of His holy gifts. God trusts each person to use these gifts in this life in the way God chooses. Each person must give a report to God of how he used those gifts in this life.”—Ellen G. White, *Testimonies [Messages] for the Church*, volume 7, page 176, adapted.

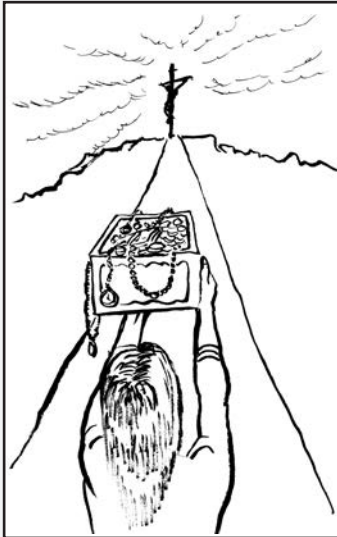
Managers do not give their duties or their work to other people. Instead, they gladly do the work God gives them. As God’s managers, we are responsible to God. We show other people we are God’s managers when we are kind to them (Genesis 39:9 and Daniel 3:16). We will do the work God gives us to do. We will do it to the best of our abilities. Success in God’s eyes depends on our having faith and pure hearts. Success does not depend on our brains or skills.

Read 2 Corinthians 5:10. This verse is talking about how everyone who has ever lived must stand before God to be judged. How does that truth help us to be good managers?

Bible thinkers and those who study the meaning of life have argued for hundreds of years about the topic of free will. Free will is the power to choose how we live our lives. The Bible is clear: humans have free will and free choice. After all, how could God judge us at all if we did not have free will and free choice? It makes no sense for us to be judged if we cannot decide how we will live. So, we are responsible for making the right decisions in everything we do. That work includes being loyal managers of all God’s gifts to us.



Good managers always think carefully about their choices and accept what happens because of those choices.



So, a manager is someone trusted with something that has great value and worth. But this thing does not belong to the manager.

ADDITIONAL THOUGHT: The word written as “manager” in the Old Testament does not come from just one Hebrew word. Instead, it comes from the words: *asher al bayt*. Together, these words mean “the one who is on, or in control of, a house.” So, Genesis 43:19 can be written as: “So the brothers went to the servant in control of Joseph’s house” (ICB). Now let us say that the word “house” also includes “family.” Then what could be worth more to a person than his or her home? So, a manager is someone trusted with something that has a lot of value and worth. But this thing does not belong to the manager. In many ways, this fact makes his or her job more important. Indeed, we must be even more careful with things that are not ours.

This same idea about managers is found in the New Testament, too. “The New Testament takes the ideas about managers in the Old Testament and connects them with the ideas and words used to describe managers in the first 100 years after Jesus. In this way, the New Testament helps us understand better what it means to be good managers of God’s property and His gifts to us. The two Greek words most often used to talk about managers are *oikos* and *oikia*. They mean ‘house.’ And the Greek word *oikonomos* means the person who is in control of the house. He is the manager. *Oikonomia* is another Greek word that means having ‘control over the house.’ ”—*Handbook of Seventh-day Adventist Theology [Study of God]* (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald® Publishing Association, 2000), page 653, adapted.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- ① Adam refused to accept the blame for eating the forbidden fruit. Instead, what did Adam say to God when God asked Adam what he did (Genesis 3:12)? This story shows that we often blame other people for our bad choices. How can we learn to stop blaming other people for our mistakes?
- ② Think more about the idea that God makes us managers of spiritual things. What does that idea mean? How can we take care of things we cannot see or touch?
- ③ God made us managers of the truths given in Revelation 14:6–12. What are those truths?
- ④ Why is it so important to trust in and believe in spiritual things we do not fully understand?