

Sabbath School Today **With the 1888 Message Dynamic**

Stewardship: Motives of the Heart **Lesson 12. The Habits of a Steward**

Here is a thought suggested by our Adult Sabbath School Lesson Quarterly, from the 1888 perspective. We've often heard it said that although Christ gets us started, we must keep on flying on our own, keeping up our speed or we will crash. I must "read the Bible, pray, and witness," in order to retain salvation. These are the very things I find difficult to do.

It is good to read the Bible, pray, and witness, but doing these things as works is not the way to retain salvation. If it is true that God takes the initiative in our salvation, it is equally true that He maintains the initiative. In other words, once you begin the Christian life, the Lord does not back off like a car salesman when you have bought your car, leaving you to struggle thereafter on your own. Struggling on our own discourages us and hardens the heart.

The Good Shepherd still takes the initiative in looking for His lost sheep. He still keeps knocking at the door of the heart. "He who has begun a good work in you will complete it until the day of Jesus Christ" (Phil. 1:6). Never are we to think that our divine Friend becomes indifferent toward us.

How did Jesus in His humanity maintain His closeness to His Father? He was human, He had only 24 hours a day as we have, He was busy as we are, and He needed sleep as we do. He gives us a surprising insight into His devotional life: *the Father maintained the initiative*. Speaking of His prayer-and-Bible-study life, Jesus said in the prophecy, "The Lord God has given Me the tongue of the learned, that I should know how to speak a word in season to him who is weary. He awakens Me morning by morning, He awakens My ear to hear as the learned" (Isa. 50:4).

His Father wakened Him morning by morning that He might listen and learn. The Lord promises nourishing food to all who "hunger and thirst for righteousness" (Matt. 5:6). Since there is only one kind of righteousness (by faith), what the Lord means is that a lifelong hunger for more and more righteousness by faith is *happiness*. You are hungry to learn more and more, never satisfied with what you learned yesterday any more than you are satisfied with the food you ate yesterday.

We don't eat our daily food because the Bible tells us to; we eat because we are hungry. The Bible reveals a loving heavenly Father and Saviour and Holy Spirit eager to maintain connection with us. He continually invites us to come to "breakfast," but of course if we are not hungry, we won't go.

This is what the Lord gives to those who hear and believe the good news. They want more, just as when you taste something delicious, you want more. They don't have to set their alarm clocks to wake up in time, or force themselves to read and pray as a "work."

It is easy for us to turn a devotional life into a works program. Note how Jesus responded to His Father's daily initiative to awaken Him "morning by morning" to "learn": "The Lord God has opened My ear; and I was not rebellious, nor did I turn away" (Isa. 50:5).

How often we have been "rebellious" and turned away from His knocking at our door in the mornings! Sometimes it's because we have stayed up to watch the late show on TV, depriving ourselves of proper rest and making ourselves deaf to His appeals. (There is a reason why Scripture says that the day begins at sunset!)

To awaken in our souls that hunger and thirst is the purpose of the 1888 message of Christ's righteousness.

The gospel is the bread of life; and once you taste it, you will ever after want to "eat" without being forced to do so. What joy! Always to be hungry and thirsty for more. The world's amusements all lose their appeal when you "taste" the gospel for what it is. Many are now testifying that that hunger has been aroused in their souls by hearing or reading the 1888 message truths.

Suppose you keep trying but don't get that "hunger"?

This is not to say there is never a time for force-feeding. A sick person must temporarily be fed intravenously. But that is not the healthy way to live. And we never find health by taking pills and capsules instead of wholesome food. Five or ten minutes of hurriedly forced Bible study and a casual prayer are not adequate spiritual nourishment.

If you get sick with the flu, don't you take a day off from school or work to stay in bed and recuperate? Why not take a day off for fasting and prayer? Not seeking the Lord as though He were trying to hide from you, but taking the time to listen to Him as He seeks you.

There are times when a wise doctor keeps a patient in a coma on intravenous feeding; but normally a healthy person eats because he's hungry, not because of stern cold duty. Your problem may not be that your 24-hour day is too short (that would be God's fault). Probably good sincere people have pounded into you a wrong idea of God.

God is not waiting for you to maintain a relationship with Him; He wants you to know He is maintaining a relationship with you. It all begins with His initiative, not yours. He wants you saved more than you want to be.

—Paul E. Penno

Notes:

Pastor Paul Penno's video of this lesson is on the Internet at:

<https://youtu.be/u4wpM1LaMJo>

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