GREATER SYDNEY

2023 Lighting Up All Corners

Tithe & Offerings Devotional Readings

GOD FIRST
ADVENTIST STEWARDSHIP MINISTRIES

Acknowledgement

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Dear Reader

If you've picked up this little book, then it looks like you may have been asked to announce the offering this Sabbath. Hopefully you are reading this before Sabbath morning and as a result have a little bit of time to prepare. Experience shows that taking a bit of time to think about and prepare how you are going to announce and encouraging giving each week makes a huge impact on the overall collection. Giving of offerings is an act of worship, a part of the service that is just as important as the singing, sermon and prayer yet it often gets neglected and becomes a bit of an afterthought.

A time of giving during the worship service allows a response that is sacrificial from those in the congregation. It reminds us that our ultimate dependence is on God and helps to empty us of self in preparation to hear the word and come into a deeper and closer relationship with God as we realise our reliance on Him.

We created this booklet in consultation with the local Church conferences to provide you with a starting point when it comes to announcing the offering. It has essential information about each of the different offerings as well as points of appeal and prayer. When it comes to announcing the local budget we have found that personal stories linking the mission of the local Church with the offering are the most effective, so we've provided you with opportunities to share what's happening within your particular local Church. Some of the devotional thoughts link to scripture, others use illustration and example as powerful tools to highlight the importance of giving. Either way we encourage you to 'make them your own,' share your own experience with stewardship or how the verse used in the reading has impacted you! Above all else prayer is the most important tool you have. Pray and ask for guidance as you prepare what you will say, submit yourself to Gods leading and He will give you the words to speak.

We thank you for your commitment to stewardship! We hope that this booklet can be a blessing to you and your congregation!

For more resources including promotional videos and to download the booklet as a pdf head to disciple.org.au/stewardship

The AUC Stewardship Team.

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GO
JANUARY

WEEK 1 • JANUARY 7, 2023

Local Church

Happy New Year! Did you make any New Year's resolutions? Some people don't make New Year's resolutions because they have tried making resolutions before and don't want the discouragement that comes from repeated failures.

And yet we make commitments and re-commitments all the time. Vibrant relationships involve commitments and re-commitments, including forgiveness when we mess up. Weddings call for commitments, and anniversaries spark natural moments of re-commitment. The start of a school year launches commitments for students, staff, and families.

Beginning a new year provides a natural time to make a commitment, or a re-commitment, to Jesus. Today, I'm inviting you to acknowledge explicitly that "all you are" comes from Jesus and give all you are back to Jesus. Let's actively symbolize this.

Please stand at this time. I know you're not accustomed to doing this during the offering—unless you're a deacon. But I'm asking everyone here to stand to their feet today for the offering. Yes, you.

Optional Activity: When the offering container comes to you, pass your tithe envelope or your cash around yourself from the front to the back and back to the front (demonstrate it in the front and have the deacons demonstrate it as well). (Alternate: place it over your heart and then raise it to heaven.)

Appeal: Take your tithe and offering, or phone if you're using egiving, and place it against your heart. Here we are symbolizing our full commitment to Jesus and not only giving our offering this morning but our entire self to Him. Let's commit and re-commit ourselves to Jesus as we start this New Year!

Prayer: Dear God, thank you for new beginnings. As we commit our tithe and offerings to you this morning may we also be reminded to re-commit ourselves to you. Amen.

Local Church:

In Christ's parable of the talents (Matt. 25:14–30), we learn that what we have comes from God. We then develop and use these gifts, and then we give an account to Christ when He returns. Not everyone receives the same talents or the same number of talents.

What talent(s) has God given you? Some might be obvious, while others could seem minor or even unimportant. Let's take a moment corporately to consider what God has given to each of us. You can do this on your own, as well. You might already have a clear answer or two from God, or maybe you need more time. Perhaps each of us should do this at least once a week.

However, the next question for us to consider would be, "What are you doing with what God has given you?" Yes, it comes from God, but He gives it to you to develop and to use for His glory and for the benefit of others.

Optional Activity: Every member here present, please hold out your hands in front of you, cupped together, demonstrating that you are receiving talents from God (demonstrate this posture as you speak and encourage listeners to participate actively).

Holding your hands cupped together in front of you, pray a short prayer, asking God what talents He has given you. And ask Him how He wants you to use them. I will finish with a blessing on our tithes and offerings and the way God is going to use your talents to advance His kingdom.

Appeal: Now consider, "What are you doing with what God has given you?" Let's pray together, thanking God for our talents, and asking His guidance for their use.

Prayer: Dear God, thank you for the gift of talents that we can use to serve you. May we use them, like this offering, to bring you glory. Amen.

WEEK 3 • JANUARY 21, 2023

SPD Strategy: Discipleship of Adventist Youth

3 John 1:2—"Beloved, I pray that you may prosper in all things and be in health, just as your soul prospers"

The focus of this year's Discipleship of Adventist Youth Offering is the development of an updated series of World Changer Bible reading guides. The new series will focus on the gospel as revealed in the prophetic truths gifted to the Seventh-day Adventist Church. The messages of Daniel and Revelation will be highlighted, along with the especially relevant news of the Three Angels Messages for these last days.

This new resource will raise our Adventist identity by equipping our youth with an easy-to-use guide for sharing Jesus' love, as revealed in Bible prophecy. As we have already seen with the World Changers Bibles Project, our youth and young adults across the South Pacific Division are willing and eager to share God's word with their friends and communities. God's Spirit is empowering them and thousands of lives are being changed, forever!

Thank you for giving generously to equip our young people with world-changing resources that will help to hasten Jesus' soon return.

WEEK 4 • JANUARY 28, 2023

Education Evangelism

Deuteronomy 15:8—"Be openhanded and freely lend them whatever they need."

It can be tempting to be tight fisted—after all, we've all seen how life and fortunes can change in an instant.

But God invites us to be giving and generous with each other, especially in pursuit of His kingdom. Evangelism and education are linked in so many ways. Sydney Adventist Schools are a refuge for students every day as they learn, pray, study, and play. And as they grow and become confident in themselves and their beliefs, they take important lessons home to their families and communities. Today's students will change the world for Jesus tomorrow.

All of this is made possible by your generous gifts toward Education Evangelism. Even the smallest gift can make a big difference when joined with the generosity of others. Carefully consider how much you can give toward our schools and our students for today and the future.

Appeal: In *Joy of Giving*, Ellen White says, "The one who stands nearest to Christ will be the who on earth has drunk most deeply of the spirit of His self-sacrificing love." Join me in drinking deeply from God's example of open-hearted generosity. Support Education Evangelism today so that our students can continue to learn and grow in our nurturing, eternally minded schools. Your joyful, generous gifts will give our students the even greater gifts of hope and a future lived in Christ's service.

Prayer: Father in Heaven, bless our gifts, our students, our schools, and our communities. Put Your hand on us and help us share Your message with those close to us and throughout the world. Amen.

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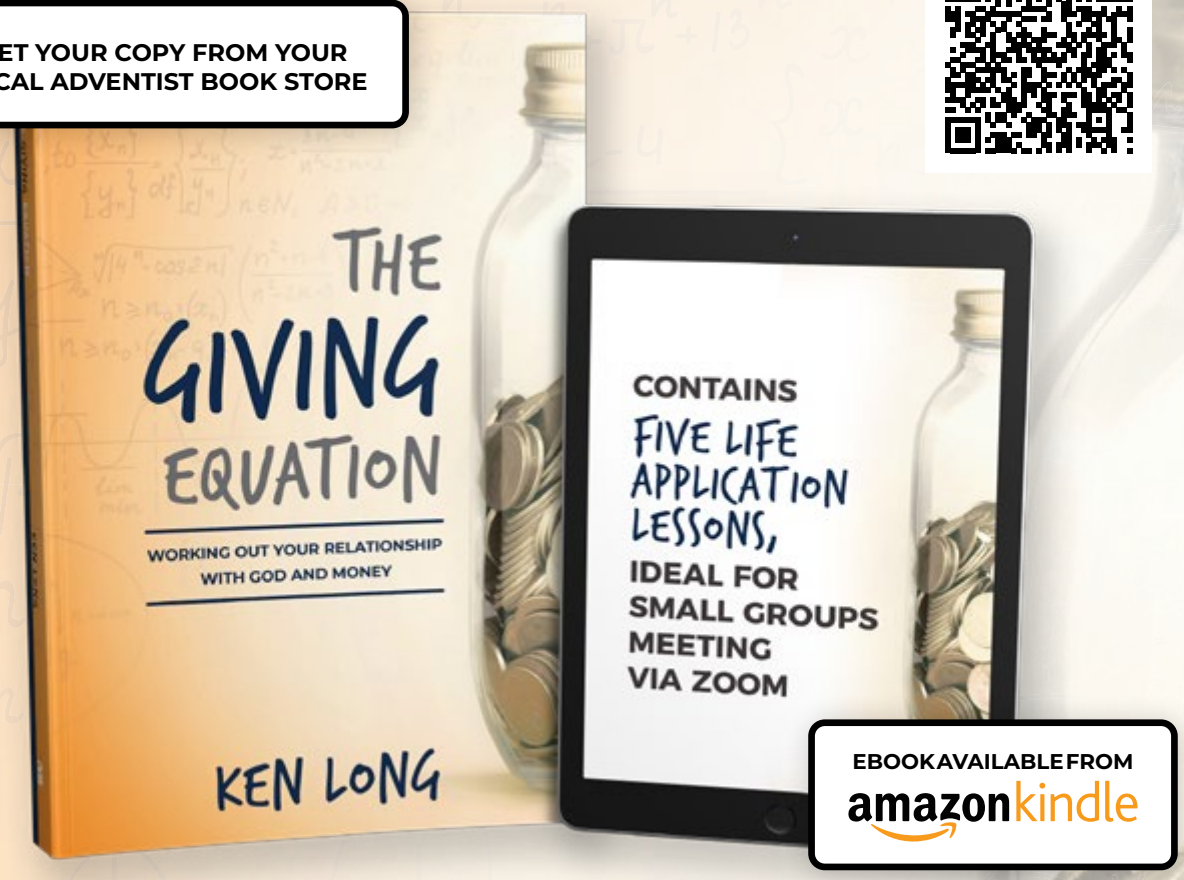

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THE GIVING EQUATION

WORKING OUT YOUR RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD AND MONEY

Ken Long is a highly experienced business consultant, based in Sydney, Australia. He holds a Doctorate of Business Administration, along with qualifications in Law and Commerce. Ken is a stewardship champion and is passionate about helping people understand how generous giving benefits them.

"Ken Long's insights into biblical stewardship are exciting, fresh, transformative and hope filled. The Giving Equation shows that we don't need to clutch our wallets, afraid of what we might lose, because giving has a lot to offer us. Filled with practical examples and illustrations from the Bible, this book will inspire individuals and families to better understand the heart of the Giver—and to give joyfully themselves! The more households there are living out this transformed mindset, the more powerful the impact of the church will be."
Christina Hawkins, Discipleship Ministries—Stewardship, South Pacific Division

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FEBRUARY

WEEK 5 • FEBRUARY 4, 2023

Local Church

We Seventh-day Adventists have a reputation of being faithful in returning our tithes to God, at least compared to most other Christian denominations. However, our tithing might contradict what's in our hymnal, and I'm talking about a well-known hymn. Either we need to change our giving or we need to change the lyrics in the *Seventh-day Adventist Hymnal*, specifically song #309.

Here's how the revised version of this song should go: "10% to Jesus I surrender, 10% to Him I freely give." Join me on the chorus, "I surrender 10%, I surrender 10%, 10% to thee my blessed Savior, I surrender 10%."

Something about that just doesn't sound right, does it? Jesus never asked us for 10%; He's always asked for everything. That's why the hymn goes, "All to Jesus I surrender, all to Him I freely give."

Yes, the Bible talks about a tithe being 10% as a practice of worship and reminds us that everything comes from God, but let's remember that everything belongs to God, including the local church offering. With what's left, I buy food to take care of my body or to pay my bills; even this belongs to Jesus. When we bring our offerings to God, we acknowledge that EVERYTHING comes from Him and we can trust Him to supply everything we need.

Appeal: Today I invite you to give everything to Jesus and allocate a portion of that to the offerings at this church as you actively worship God.

Prayer: Dear God, thank you that you gave your all for us, help us to give our whole self in return to you. Amen.

WEEK 6 • FEBRUARY 11, 2023

Disaster & Famine Relief

> Exodus 35:21—"Everyone came whose heart was stirred, and whose spirit was willing, and they brought the Lord's offering for the work of the tabernacle of meeting, for all its service ,and for the holy garments."

In an average year more than 300 disasters affect more than 200 million people – most of which are already living in poverty and disadvantage. Disasters like bushfires, flooding, cyclones and wars destroy homes and livelihoods, leaving millions of children, women and men without the most basic needs. They often need shelter, food, clean water, clothing, transport and the ability to rebuild their lives. And they can't do this without our help.

By supporting the Disaster and Famine Relief Offering today, you will help ADRA be ready to respond immediately to disasters both here at home and overseas. Your offering will help deliver emergency shelter, food, water, medical supplies and psychosocial support to those affected.

Prayer: Thank you Lord for being our refuge and strength in troubled times. Please open our hearts today to those who need hope in times of distress. Bless and multiply our offerings so that others can feel the comfort of your love when facing uncertain times. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

WEEK 7 • FEBRUARY 18, 2023

Local Church

2 Corinthians 9:6–7—"Remember this: Whoever sows sparingly, will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows generously will also reap generously... God loves the cheerful giver."

The law of sowing and reaping is very simple. One stalk of corn yields around four ears of corn. If I only sow three seeds of corn, I will enjoy about 12 ears of corn on the cob. But if I sow 100 seeds then I will harvest 400 juicy, sweet ears of corn that I can share with friends and neighbors or sell at the farmer's market. The more you sow, the more you will reap. The word is multiplication. What you sow, God multiplies. The Bible says that God is the One who makes the food grow. He is the One who multiplies the harvest, and God tells us that the more we sow, the more we will reap.

The law of sowing and reaping is true not only in agriculture but also in finances. Our passage today tells us that the more financial seeds you plant, the more He will prosper you. God's multiplication ensures that when you give generously, you will also reap generously; the Bible promises it.

Appeal: I invite you to be a cheerful giver and sow abundantly by providing for our local church budget.

Prayer: Dear God, help us to sow generously and be cheerful givers this morning. Bless the ministry of our local church as we work together to seek and save the lost. In Jesus' name, Amen.

WEEK 8 • FEBRUARY 25, 2023

Local Church

Perhaps the best-known text in the Old Testament book of Malachi is, "Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse." Malachi added God's challenge: "Test me... and see if I will not throw open the floodgates of heaven and pour out so much blessing that there will not be room enough to store it" (Mal. 3:10).

Today, some Christians promote the "Prosperity Gospel," which draws on verses like this. Give to God (or my church or ministry), and God will give you more money than you gave. Forget investing in the stock market or real estate; give your money to God and watch your bank account surge.

While God wanted to illustrate His blessing through material prosperity to the Israelites in Old Testament times, Christ certainly didn't exhibit lots of money. In the New Testament, Paul predicted that those who sowed sparingly would reap sparingly, while those who sowed generously would also reap generously (2 Cor. 9:6). However, Paul further explained that abundance would be in good deeds and righteousness (vv. 8–10).

Appeal: Have you put God to the test when it comes to blessings? What did you "sow" in the past? What will you "sow" this year? Are you prepared to receive God's blessings, whether they are financial or whether they come in another form—like faith, godliness, joy, fellowship, and love for God and others? Let's give to God and rely on him to provide the blessings in the forms He chooses and at the time He chooses.

Prayer: Dear God, help us to sow seeds that bring fruit of joy, love, peace and faith. Amen.

FOR GOD SO *loved* THE WORLD THAT HE *gave*

THE MESSAGE IS SIMPLE: LOVE GIVES

We can give without loving, but we can't love without giving.

When we love God we love His people,
His mission and His church, so we give.

THAT'S WHAT LOVE DOES.

We don't give to be blessed, we give because we are blessed. Because we are loved we love. God is love and we're created in His image, in the image of perfect love.

Thank you for your faithfulness in times of crisis. God's vital work for this time is moving ahead mightily **because you love.**

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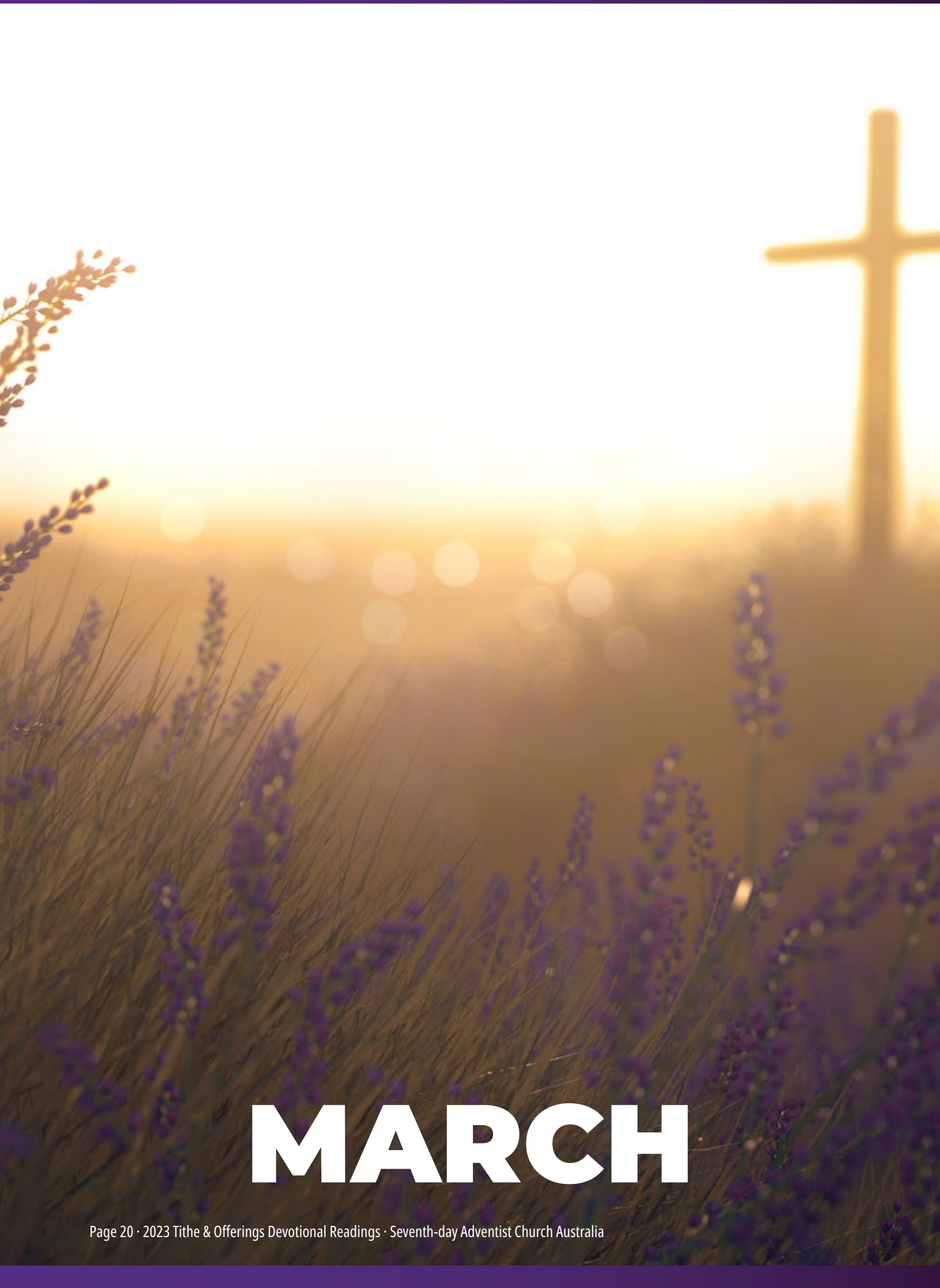

MARCH

WEEK 9 • MARCH 4, 2023

Student Scholarships: Sydney Adventist School Auburn

Acts 20:35—"The Lord Jesus himself said: 'It is more blessed to give than to receive."

When it comes to giving or receiving, most of us would rather get than give. That's just human nature. But God tells us that those who give—and give with grateful hearts—will get the biggest reward now and in Heaven. Today, we have a chance to give to the Greater Sydney Conference Scholarship Program to enable students to attend Sydney Adventist School Auburn (SASA). Focused on small class sizes and a warm, nurturing learning environment, Sydney Adventist School Auburn challenges students in prep to Year 6 to discover how their gifts and talents can help them serve God and their communities. Your generous gift today will help fund education scholarships so those students who wants to attend SASA can.

Appeal: Thanks to the support of our local churches, students' lives are changed every day in our Adventist schools. Please give generously today towards the Greater Sydney Conference Scholarship Program and show our students that we're behind them all the way.

Prayer: Dear Jesus, help us to have grateful minds and generous hearts as we share with these students a portion of what You've given to us. Help our gifts change lives for You, and change our lives as we practice intentional generosity in Your name. Amen.

WEEK 10 • MARCH 11, 2023

Adventist World Radio

Jeremiah 24:7—"I will give them a heart to know Me, for I am the Lord; and they will be My people, and I will be their God, for they will return to Me with their whole heart."

One early morning on the island of Mindoro, Philippines, Jaslene* was making her family's breakfast. Suddenly gunfire shattered the peace. Her husband, Antonio, raced into the house, grabbed his gun, and began shooting back. Government soldiers had ambushed them because they were rebel fighters.

Jaslene grabbed her children and raced into the forest, where they hid in the bushes until the shooting stopped. Jaslene and her children slipped back home. They learned that Antonio had been killed by the soldiers. Jaslene's heart pounded with hatred. She decided to raise her children to fight and avenge their father's death.

When the oldest boy reached 13, he joined the rebels. Jaslene taught the younger children how to survive in the jungle, how to forage for food, and how to shoot to kill.

One day Jaslene was listening to her radio while she worked. The strains of a song touched her heart: "Coming again, coming again, Jesus is coming again!"

The speaker spoke about Jesus, the kind and loving Saviour. Fascinated, Jaslene stopped to listen. Her heart warmed as she heard that God loved her and offered her forgiveness. Soon she accepted Jesus as her Saviour and tried to forgive her enemies. Her children followed her example, and soon they all were baptised.

One day Jaslene met the speaker of Adventist World Radio. Tearfully, she asked him, "Pastor, why did it take you so long to come and tell us this good news about God? If only you had come before my husband died. He would have given up his fighting before it was too late." Then she added, "This broadcast must go to other villages in the mountains! They need to hear about Jesus before it is too late for them!"

Jaslene and her children have found joy and forgiveness to replace the hatred in their hearts. They encourage their friends to trade their bullets for Bibles and find that Jesus brings true joy and meaning to their lives, delivered to them on the airwaves of AWR.

Our lives have been changed by the Saviour, and we can show our gratitude and love by giving our offerings to Him faithfully. Our Promise offerings are gifts to God, not to the church, to use in reaching people for the Saviour in every part of the world.

**Names have been changed.*
Duane McKey is president of Adventist World Radio.

WEEK 11 • MARCH 18, 2023

Local Church

Sometimes when people go to visit another person or family, they take a gift for the host. Were you invited for a special dinner? Then take a pie or a bouquet of flowers. Were you invited on Saturday night for some table games? Maybe you'll take some snacks—sweet, salty, or healthy! This simply demonstrates good manners. The gift isn't more than the meal you receive, but it acknowledges a relationship that isn't merely one-way. Good relationships involve both give and take.

When David successfully took the ark of the covenant to Jerusalem, he gave everyone in Israel gifts of food, with a much larger gift to God. David also gave his music leader a song, found in both Ps. 96 and 1 Chron. 16, which includes this modern way of singing it:

Bravo, God, Bravo!
Everyone join in the great shout: Encore!
In awe before the beauty, in awe before the might.
Bring gifts and celebrate,
Bow before the beauty of God,
Then to your knees—everyone worship! (Ps. 96:7-8 MSG)

Appeal: We have come to worship God at His house on this Sabbath. This includes bringing our gifts and celebrating in worship. No, we don't give as much as God gives us, but we give because that's part of the relationship we have with our great God and part of the worship we practice each week. God, please accept our gifts at this time.

Prayer: Dear God, Bless our humble offering we give to you today in Jesus' name, Amen.

WEEK 12 • MARCH 25, 2023

Local Church

What does it mean to be independent?

Some might compare this to a child growing up and becoming independent of one's parents—something pseudo or fabricated until there's financial independence as well. But at what stage do we every truly reach independence? Even as adults we become dependant on our jobs and incomes, on banks and lending institutions as well as other people for not only our livelihood but our wellbeing.

For our kids and young people, they often can't wait until they grow up and stand on their own—how does this compare to our relationship with God? When do we declare our independence from Him? Is this something we forge, or is it merely fictitious? Does our increase in responsibility release God to care for others who need Him more?

Consider ancient or more recent history, and you'll find throughout earth's orbits around the sun that our "independence" from God might find a place in our imagination, but not in reality. Can you change the earth's rotation, add 100 years to your life, make an actual sunset rather than just paint it on canvas, answer the individual prayers of billions of people each day, put your finger on sub-atomic particles, or change a heart of stone to a heart of flesh?

You don't need to. God remains in control and invites you to be "interdependent" with Him rather than "independent" of Him. Stewardship recognises that true independence comes by being completely dependent on the ONE from whom all life and blessings flow.

Appeal: As you return your tithes and offerings today, be reminded that each and everything comes from our Creator God and every act of giving is an expression of our dependence upon Him.

Prayer: God help us to relinquish control of our lives and be "interdependent" with You. Amen.

"Test me in this"
says the Lord Almighty.
(Malachi 3:10)

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"A Biblical, easy-to-read overview of God's will for His tithe."

Reid's new e-book covers the tithe basics—percentage, place and purpose—and also looks at touchier issues such as: Tithe & Other Ministries, Problems in the Ministry or Conference, and Ellen White's Use of the Storehouse. At just over 50 pages, Reid has really packed a lot into this excellent resource. It's a great read for anyone who is genuinely seeking to follow God's will in the calculating, returning and use of tithe.

~Julian Archer, Stewardship Director, South Pacific Division

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ST. MARK
brethren, or sisters, or
father, or mother, or wife,
or children, or lands, for
my sake, and the gospel's,
30 But he shall receive a
hundredfold now in this
time, houses, and breth-
ren, and sisters, and
mothers, and children,
and lands, with persecu-
tions; and in the world to
come eternal life.
31 But many that are
first shall be last; and the
last first.
32 ¶ And they were in
the way going up to Jeru-
salem; and Jesus went be-
fore them: and they were
amazed; and as they fol-
lowed, they were afraid.
And he took again the
twelve, and began to tell
them what things should
happen unto him,
33 Saying, Behold, we
go up to Jerusalem; and
the Son of man shall be
delivered unto the chief
priests, and unto the
scribes; and they shall
condemn him to death,
and shall deliver him to
the Gentiles:
34 And they shall mock
him, and shall scourge
him, and shall spit upon
him, and shall kill him;
and the third day he shall
rise again.
35 ¶ And James and
John, the sons of Zebe-
dee, come unto him, say-
ing, Master, we would
SAUDI ARABIA
YEMEN
SOMALIA
Cape Town
Port Elizabeth
CROZET ISLANDS

APRIL

WEEK 13 • APRIL 1, 2023

Student Scholarships: Macarthur Adventist College

Hebrews 13:16—"Do not forget to do good and to share with others, for with such sacrifices God is pleased."

It is our privilege and honour to share what we have with others, and there's no sweeter feeling than setting children on a path to Jesus. That's our opportunity today. Macarthur Adventist College helps teach children to love God in a safe, nurturing, and Christ-centred school. Pre-Kindy through Year 12 students learn important values, including resilience, respect, attitude and responsibility, alongside textbook information, growing them into conscientious and caring community members. You can impact their lives today and in the future by generously supporting the Greater Sydney Conference Scholarship Program, which allows students to attend Macarthur Adventist College and our other schools regardless of their financial situation.

Appeal: It's up to you to give our students the lifelong gift of Adventist education. Every generous donation over $2 is tax deductible, and you can continue to support our schools throughout the year through e-Giving. You can change a life today by sharing what you can.

Prayer: Dear God, teach us what it means to be cheerful givers as we act as Your hands, giving Your students the opportunity to study and learn in Your Adventist schools. Be with us, and be with all of Your children this school year and beyond. Amen.

WEEK 14 • APRIL 8, 2023

Hope Channel: Cipriano's Second Chance

Jeremiah 17:14—"Heal me, Lord, and I shall be healed; Save me and I shall be saved, for You are my praise."

My name is Cipriano. When I was 25 years old I lay in bed dying from alcohol addiction. I thought my life was over. As a child I was bullied by older boys and they introduced me to their dark music and alcohol. Before long I was addicted to alcohol.

I quit school when I was 15 and went to work, but everything I earned went to buy alcohol. The next five years were the darkest years of my life. I became everything I hated. I was depressed and suicidal. The only thing I hated more than myself was my addiction.

I realized I was killing myself. I stopped drinking and went home to my Christian grandparents. They welcomed me with love. My withdrawals were terrible, and my grandmother knew that my life was hanging by a thread.

Fearing I would die, my grandmother prayed and talked to me about Jesus. My grandfather set a television by my bed and I watched a program called Hope Sabbath School.

As I listened, it helped me focus on God's Word and I felt the Holy Spirit working in my heart. Hope Sabbath School became my church. God healed me and gave me a second chance at life. God answered my grandparents' prayers and I have a new life in Christ.

As I listened, it helped me focus on God's Word and I felt the Holy Spirit working in my heart. Hope Sabbath School became my church. God healed me and gave me a second chance at life. God answered my grandparents' prayers and I have a new life in Christ.

Thank you for giving generously to today's Hope Channel offering so that more lives like Cipriano's can be saved.

God healed me and gave me a second chance at life. My heart is now filled with God's grace and love. God answered my grandparents' prayers. They and Hope TV opened my heart to God's love and brought me new life in Christ.

WEEK 15 • APRIL 15, 2023

Local Church

Can you outgive God?

This idea is that when you give something to God, He gives you more than you gave to Him.

But does it work? If you give God a dollar, or $100, or $1,000 or $100,000, will you get back more than you gave to God?

For some of us, just paying our bills is a great accomplishment. Others have extra or prioritize investing in a retirement account, real estate, or the stock market, hoping they will get back more than they put into their investment. Often it works, although sometimes it doesn't.

Can you outgive God?

Remember, whatever we give actually came to us from God, the original Giver (James 1:17 says: "Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father..."). God started this by giving us something to give—like a parent giving a child something to put in the offering plate.

When Jesus told the parable of the talents (Matt. 25:14–30), it seemed clear that He expected us to take what He gave us and put it to use—to yield even more than He gave. When those recipients gave an account of what their master had given them, commendation went to those who invested, and the master gave them even more.

Appeal: Today I invite you to take what God has given you and give it to Him; then let Him give you more—whether that's money, opportunities, talent, heart, love, or life. You can't outgive God, but it's great to try!

Prayer: Dear God, help us to recognise that all we have comes from you, help us to release to you for Your glory. Amen.

WEEK 16 • APRIL 22, 2023

Local Church

2 Corinthians 9:7—"Each of you should give what you have decided in your heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver."

The one thing that stands out in this Bible verse is that it doesn't give us an option NOT to give. The Bible takes for granted that we are going to give. The issue is how much have you decided to give? Zacchaeus gave 50% of his wealth. The poor widow gave 100% of what she had—two copper coins. Barnabas sold a field he owned and provided for the preaching of the gospel. The people of God have been giving for the Lord's work throughout history. God's children don't spend all their income on themselves but think of sharing their wealth for the preaching of the gospel.

We find three biblical principles of giving in this passage. First, you need to decide how much you are going to give. We need to plan in advance what we are going to give to God. Second, don't give reluctantly or under compulsion. The opposite of a cheerful giver is a sad and ornery giver. God doesn't want you to give because you are being pressured to give. Third, God loves a cheerful giver. God wants you to give from the heart, willingly and cheerfully. Are you happy that you can contribute to God's remnant church?

Appeal/Prayer: Today, I encourage you to provide for your local church expense and give, not reluctantly but cheerfully. Father in heaven, bless the lives of the people here today as they provide for our local church by giving cheerfully to preach the gospel in our part of the world. In Jesus' name, Amen.

WEEK 17 • APRIL 29, 2023

Local Church

Using God First Commitment Cards

Please note: This offering reading makes use of the "God First: I Promise Cards" and you will need to plan to make sure you have plenty available for the service. These cards are available free of charge from your local Conference Stewardship Director.

At this time during our worship service, we typically collect money, whether that's cash in the offering plate or through the egiving app and webpage. Some people give each week as part of their worship to God. Others give once a month or once every pay period. Some give online, and still others do a combination, maybe planning in advance so they can participate at this moment rather than just reaching for some spare change or the customary dollar.

Optional Activity: This week we're going to add more options! We have a simple card for each person. You can fill this out now and put it in the offering, or you might choose to think about it longer and give it at the end of today's church service. (Ask for the cards to be distributed at this time. You will need to plan in advance to have these ready now. Four different versions of the card are available.)

Appeal: The card lists the 7 different stewardship commitments, encouraging us to give our whole lives to Jesus. What will you give to God today? Whatever you check, you'll need to ask yourself the specific amount(s) and how you will do that. Use this card to communicate with God about your relationship with Him and your gift(s) today.

Prayer: Dear God, we offer these cards to you this morning as a tangible expression of the commitment within our hearts to give all of ourselves to you. Amen.

MAY

WEEK 18 • MAY 6, 2023

South Pacific Record

Psalm 27:10—"When my father and my mother forsake me, then the Lord will take me up."

Did you know that Adventist Record is celebrating its 125th anniversary this year? Throughout its long history, Record has been committed to keeping the Adventist community in the South Pacific Division informed, nurtured, educated and inspired by sharing news, theological and devotional content.

But Adventist Record is no longer just a magazine! It's also a website, that is updated daily, a social media presence across various platforms, it has released books and is continuing to find new ways to keep our diverse community connected. Record also provides training and support for writers and communicators across the Division. And all of this is only possible because of the church's generous support. By giving to the Adventist Record offering you ensure that we can continue to tell our stories, connect our family and share our hope. Thank you for your support.

If you haven't already done so, ask God what percentage of your income He would have you regularly give as a Promise offering to strengthen the missionary work of the church around the world. He has challenged you to "be content with such things as you have. For He Himself has said, 'I will never leave you nor forsake you'" (Heb. 13:5 NKJV). Trust Him, obey Him, and watch as He blesses you!

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Local Church

You have, at your control, the power to increase or decrease your love for God. The same can be said about your love for this church—you have the power to increase or decrease your love for it.

How?

Jesus stated it plainly in Matt. 6:21: "Where your treasure is, there your heart will be also."

Here's how the Amplified Bible explains it: "Where your treasure is, there your heart [your wishes, your desires, that on which your life centres] will be also."

Let me explain it this way. God has set things up so that your heart will follow wherever you make your investment. If you neglect your friends or family, your love for them will diminish. If you invest more time and money with them, your love for them will grow! The same is true with your love for God and His church. Your love for God and His church increases as you place your treasure—your money, time, skills, and service—with God and His church.

Appeal: I can testify today that it works this way for me. How about you? The amount of time you spend at work or school, on a hobby, or virtually anything will impact how important that is to you. Your heart follows where you place your treasure. Today I'm inviting you to increase your love for God and for His church. And you can do that simply by giving at this time.

Prayer: Dear God, may our hearts be given over fully to you, increase our capacity to give and to love. Amen.

WEEK 20 • MAY 20, 2023

SPD Strategy: Comprehensive Health Ministry

Deuteronomy 6:7—"You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, when you walk by the way, when you lie down, and when you rise up."

Championing Christ's ministry: In John 5:6, we see God's desire to make people whole, "When Jesus saw him lie, and knew that he had been now a long time in that case, he saith unto him, Wilt thou be made whole?" The Adventist Health Department's focus is three-fold.

1. Improving health outcomes by equipping all members with evidence-based resources to champion Christ's ministry of whole-person health.

2. To be a leader in Lifestyle Medicine through the ELIA digital platform, research and Lifestyle Medicine Centre that can be a blueprint to roll out to other locations.

3. By 2025, the Seventh-day Adventist Church will be known in the community for whole-person health through our 400 local Wellness Hubs and clinics across the South Pacific.

Thank you for partnering with us today so that we can be the hands and feet of Jesus.

Sharing our faith is the best way to grow our church and build our own faith. And by regularly giving our Promise offerings we are helping to build the church in large cities and tiny villages in the jungle of Papua New Guinea. Let's give regularly and liberally to finish the work around the world.

**The Health offering will be 50% for the local conference health department to support their health initiatives, and the other 50% for Adventist Health initiatives, ELIA Wellness in Australia and New Zealand, and the 10,000 Toes campaign in the Pacific.*

WEEK 21 • MAY 27, 2023

Local Church

Even though the Bible says, "It is more blessed to give than to receive" (Acts 20:35), sometimes it's just not possible to give. Let's illustrate this because it might help each of us when it comes to the part of our worship service where we can receive a blessing, but only if we give.

Optional Activity: (You will need to have a collection of small objects in a sack with you to do this illustration. Invite someone to join you in the front for a "living illustration." You can ask the person in advance or take a chance and invite someone on the spot. Often this makes a great opportunity to bring a young person on the platform to participate actively in the church service.)

(Say to the volunteer who has joined you in the front of the church:) I'm going to ask you to hold out your hand and clench your fist (demonstrate for your volunteer). Good! Just hold it there as together we illustrate the statement, "When you clench your fist, no one can put anything in your hand" (Alex Haley quote). Another way of saying it is, "A clenched fist won't give, and can't receive."

Let's try it. I have something in this sack to give you. How does this work when your fist is clenched? (Pull out one of the objects, like a golf ball, ping pong ball, apple, etc.) With a closed fist, you can't receive my gift.

Let's try it again, but this time release the fist and open your hand. What a difference that makes! But I have more! Can you receive more? Let's try. It might work only if you give what you have received.

Appeal: Today I invite you to open your fist—to give. Only then will you be able to receive.

Prayer: Dear God, help us to give with not just open hands but open hearts. Amen.

SEVEN DAYS THAT MAKE A DIFFERENCE

STEWARDSHIP WEEK OF REVIVAL 2023

We encourage each local church to dedicate one week in 2023 to be a week of prayer to nurture God's stewards for their journey to eternity.

Visit https://stewardship.adventistchurch.com/sword/ (or scan the QR code) to download your free PDF booklets.

Also available in French and a special version just for kids!

/GCSTEWARDSHIPMINISTRIES

GOD FIRST
ADVENTIST STEWARDSHIP MINISTRIES

JUNE

WEEK 22 • JUNE 3, 2023

Student Scholarships: Hurstville Adventist Primary School

Proverbs 22:9— "The generous will themselves be blessed"

You've got to give to receive. It sounds counterintuitive, but it's true. The more we give, the more we get back, especially when it comes to supporting our students in Sydney Adventist Schools. What starts as a small gift today can change the world tomorrow through the life of a student who comes to love Jesus. Today we have the opportunity to support Hurstville Adventist School and the staff and students there. Hurstville students in pre-Kindy to Year 6 depend on our generosity to support them and their school, where they learn important lessons along with Christian values, including how to use their unique gifts and talents to serve God and others. Be as generous as you can, supporting the Greater Sydney Conference Scholarship Fund, which allows students of all income levels to get the best education for today and the future.

Appeal: Show the students at Hurstville Adventist School just how much we care about them and their ability to access a quality Adventist education. Your generous gift today will give them the Christian education that can change their lives and their futures.

Prayer: Dear Lord Jesus, You've given us a chance to prove how much we love and support Your children. Thank You for Hurstville Adventist School, Your teachers, and Your students. We're honoured to have a part in their success. In Your name, amen.

WEEK 23 • JUNE 10, 2023

Pacific Adventist University

> Proverbs 27:9—"Ointment and perfume delight the heart, And the sweetness of a man's friend gives delight by hearty counsel."

Pacific Adventist University, also known as PAU, is located in a peaceful rural setting, 21 kilometres outside of Port Moresby, the capital of Papua New Guinea. The 48-hectare campus is set in a beautifully peaceful environment with water-lily lakes, bird life, rolling lawns and gardens.

PAU's motto is 'Educate to Serve' and since its founding in 1984 with just 20 students, today almost 1,500 students are trained for service every year. PAU was recently asked by the government to try and double its size—as soon as possible!

With an emphasis on online digital technology in the post-pandemic era, PAU plans to establish an Online Digital Education Centre to leverage the use of technology and to enhance student learning. The centre will also build PAU's capacity to develop course materials and curricula using Augmented Reality which will enhance the teaching experience, support skills training for digital teaching and learning, and provide professional development training for teachers and students.

It's all a massive, faith-filled undertaking, but with God's help through your generosity today, PAU will continue to be at the forefront of training people for God's work around the Pacific and beyond. Thank you for your support.

WEEK 24 • JUNE 17, 2023

Local Church

Scripture gives us many reasons to be thankful, such as these:

"I will extol the Lord with all my heart in the council of the upright and in the assembly...The works of his hands are faithful and just; all his precepts are trustworthy" (Ps. 111:1, 7).

"It is good to give thanks to the LORD. . .. O LORD, what great works you do! And how deep are your thoughts. Only a simpleton would not know, and only a fool would not understand this" (Ps. 92:1, 5–6 NLT).

"Praise be to the Lord, for he has heard my cry for mercy. The Lord is my strength and my shield; my heart trusts in him, and he helps me. My heart leaps for joy, and with my song I praise him" (Ps. 28:6–7).

Appeal: Research shows that practicing gratitude can dramatically change our perspective and our sense of peace and happiness in life. We have experienced God's abundant blessings in so many ways. So today, join me in giving thanks to God—not just as a one off but as a daily habit. Let's give to God from an abundant heart of praise and thanksgiving today!

Prayer: Dear God, help us to build habits of thankfulness and to cultivate gratitude for all you've given us. Amen.

WEEK 25 •JUNE 24, 2023

Local Church

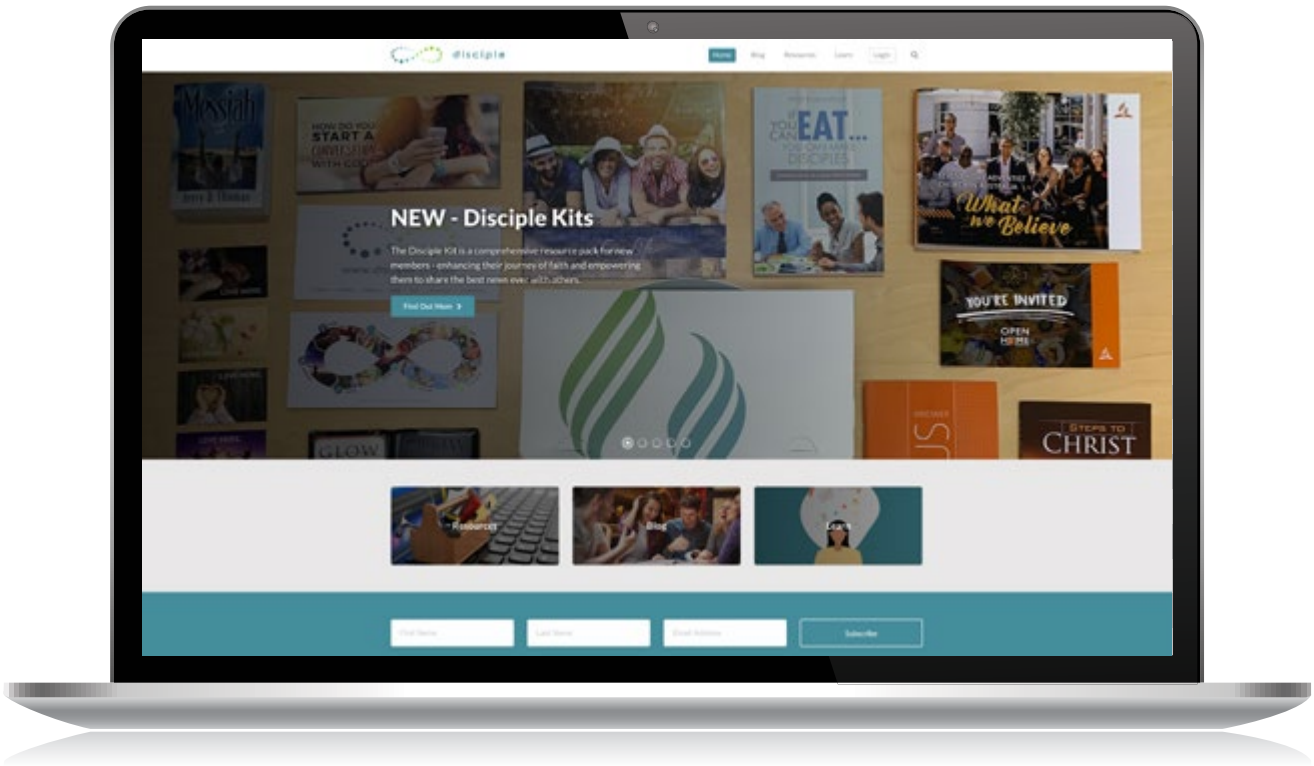
Some people receive a regular income for their work, such as pastors and teachers, bank tellers and other hourly or salaried employees. They can plan accordingly. Their tithe remains constant, and their offerings might also be constant, even though some expenses might fluctuate while others remain steady. Other people might get paid in bursts with irregular amounts each time—like farmers who harvest their crops, salespeople on commissions, restaurant waiters, and Uber/Lyft drivers. Their tithes and offerings fluctuate, just like their income.

The Jews gathered for three major religious festivals each year in Old Testament times. According to Deut. 16:16-17, "no one should appear before the LORD empty-handed: Each of you must bring a gift in proportion to the way the LORD your God has blessed you." Notice this last sentence, "Each of you must bring a gift in proportion to the way the LORD your God has blessed you."

How much has God blessed you? Bring God a gift in proportion to His blessing. Tithing makes that pretty simple—one-tenth of your paycheck. The same can be said of your offerings—give in proportion to the way God has blessed you.

Appeal: Maybe we need to pause and count our blessings! Don't give what you "can't" or merely give what you "can." Instead, give according to God's blessings to you.

Prayer: Thank you, God, and please accept our gifts to You today, just as You have blessed us. In Christ's name, Amen.



disciple.org.au

Visit our page to obtain your free resources for your church or small groups.

JULY

WEEK 26 • JULY 1, 2023

Local Church

At grocery store check-out lines, you'll find an array of items for impulse buying. They hope you will add additional items to your cart while you wait in line.

The same thing happens with online purchasing. When you select something, SHAZAM! everyone else who made that same purchase ALSO bought this item or these two items. Just "click here" to add them to your virtual shopping cart. How many times have you purchased more than you intended simply because of impulse shopping?! Me too!

While impulse shopping might be fun (or hazardous), the Bible suggests a different way of giving. Don't base it on how well I do the offering call. Paul instructed the believers in Corinth to make plans and take action each week, at the start of the week. We call this "planning" or "systematic benevolence"—giving regularly as a lifestyle.

Appeal: Paul wrote, "On the first day of every week, each one of you should set aside a sum of money in keeping with your income, saving it up, so that when I come, no collections will have to be made" (1 Cor. 16:2). Because Paul didn't come by the Corinthians' church each Sabbath, the people started each week by putting God first with their personal giving. You might have a container where you put your offering as you start each week, and then bring it to church on Sabbath and give it to God, just as you planned.

Prayer: Dear God, help us to be intentional and thoughtful with our giving. Amen.

WEEK 27 • JULY 8, 2023

World Mission Budget: Where Do the Offerings Go?

Proverbs 3:9-10—"Honour the Lord with your possessions, and with the first-fruits of all your increase; So your barns will be filled with plenty, and your vats will overflow with new wine."

Do you know where your regular mission offerings go to? You may be surprised to learn that they help to support the work of 400 missionary families around the world.

In fact, seventy percent of the weekly mission offerings go to support missionaries and the international work of the church. While our tithes help pay the salaries of missionaries, our missionary offerings help provide the buildings and equipment the missionaries need to carry on their work.

The remaining money helps various institutions and agencies that serve the world church. For example, it helps the compassionate medical mission work of Loma Linda University, the outreach of Adventist World Radio, and the humanitarian ministry of the Adventist Development and Relief Agency.

In fact, 70 percent of the weekly mission offerings go to support missionaries and the international work of the church.

In recent years, millions of people from challenging areas of the world have found salvation in Jesus. Thanks to your offerings, thousands of new Adventist congregations have been established in under-reached areas and among new people groups.

Two-thirds of the world's population is still waiting to experience the refreshing news about Jesus. Your ongoing support of the Mission of the church through your regular and systematic offerings helps to grow and sustain new work throughout the world. Please keep this life-giving river flowing. Thank you for giving to world mission again today.

In recent years, millions of people from challenging areas of the world have found salvation in Jesus and have joined the Seventh-day Adventist Church. Thanks to your offerings, thousands of new congregations have been established in under-reached areas and among new people groups. But after these new believers have been baptised, how are they nurtured? How do we make sure that their new faith is strengthened and that they grow as disciples? Sixty-six percent of the world's population is still waiting to experience the refreshing news about Jesus. Your ongoing support of the Mission of the church through your regular and systematic offerings, called "Promise", will help grow and sustain new work throughout the world. Please keep this life-giving river flowing.

WEEK 28 • JULY 15, 2023

Student Scholarships: Wahroonga Adventist Primary School

Psalms 37:26—"They are always generous and lend freely; their children will be a blessing."

Children are a blessing, and today we have the opportunity to share financial blessings with children wanting to attend Wahroonga Adventist School. Serving students in pre-Kindy to Year 12, Wahroonga Adventist School is three smaller schools joined on one campus. Pledging "Nurture for Today, Learning for Tomorrow, Character for Eternity," the school's motto explains that teachers care for students' mental, physical, social, and spiritual needs, raising them with the skills they need for life and eternity. But Christian education is expensive, and we can't do it without you. So give generously today to the Greater Sydney Conference Scholarship Fund, which helps students from all backgrounds attend an Adventist school.

Appeal: Give our children a lifetime of blessings by generously donating towards Adventist education today. You can contribute here and through e-Giving; every donation over $2 is tax deductible. Show our children how good it feels to be loved and supported in God's name.

Prayer: Dear Lord, help us to give generously and lend freely to Your children today. And as You give us generous hearts, may we show our students how much we love and support them. In Your name, Amen.

WEEK 29 •JULY 22, 2023

Union Global Partnership Project: AUC & Southeastern Asia Union Mission

Colossians 3:12—"Therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, put on tender mercies, kindness, humility, meekness, long-suffering."

The Union Partnership Offering will be used to strengthen the mission work of the Southeastern Asia Union Mission, which includes the 190 million people living in Thailand, Laos, Cambodia and Vietnam as well as Timor Leste Mission. The key projects include sponsoring mission teams from Australia, sending two volunteer English Language teachers to Laos and sponsoring of theology, teaching and business studies students who can then practically support the gospel work in their homelands. Please give generously so that the good news of Jesus' soon return can be shared across this vast region.

Besides our individual missionary work, God asks us to worship Him with our tithes and our regular and systematic offerings, called "Promise." Those funds will be used to provide light for those who are still spiritually impaired around the world. Let us join Jesus' army!

WEEK 30 • JULY 29, 2023

Local Church

Through the spirit of generosity we partner with God in funding the mission; God loves a cheerful giver. Returning tithe and giving offerings are part of our worship relationship, a joyful expression of our praise, love, and gratitude.

"'And now I bring the firstfruits of the soil that you, Lord, have given me.' Place the basket before the Lord your God and bow down before him. Then you and the Levites and the foreigners residing among you shall rejoice in all the good things the Lord your God has given to you and your household" (Deut. 26:10, 11).

"God imparts His gifts to us that we also may give, and thus make known His character to the world. Under the Jewish economy, gifts and offerings formed an essential part of God's worship. The Israelites were taught to devote a tithe of all their income to the service of the sanctuary. These were the means for supporting the ministry of the gospel at that time. God expects no less from us than He expected from His people anciently. The great work for the salvation of souls must be carried forward. In the tithe, with gifts and offerings, He has made provisions for this work" (Christ's Object Lessons, p. 300).

Appeal: I invite you today to participate in this "essential part of God's worship" as you faithfully return to God what belongs to Him.

Prayer: Dear God, today we want to partner with You as we provide for Your work of saving souls in this Conference. In Jesus' precious name, AMEN!

AUGUST

WEEK 31 • AUGUST 5, 2023

Local Church

In Psalm 84:1, 2, David tells us how much he loves to be in the presence of God in His temple. He says, "How lovely is Your tabernacle, O LORD of hosts! My soul longs, yes, even faints for the courts of the LORD; My heart and my flesh cry out for the living God." Still later in the chapter, David again declares, "Blessed are those who dwell in your house, they are ever praising you." And finally in verse 10 David continues the theme, "Better is one day in your courts than a thousand elsewhere; I would rather be a doorkeeper in the house of my God than dwell in the tents of the wicked."

David loved to experience the presence of God in His Temple. It was there he communed with God, brought his praises, his offerings and his sacrifices.

Today, the offerings that we have brought as our act of worship will be for our church. With God's blessings, it will support our local ministries that others too might come and enjoy the blessings of God's house.

Appeal: Local Church Budget includes expenses such as Sabbath School, Outreach, Evangelism, Youth Ministries, Community Services, Electricity, etc. (You may want to address some of the specifics regarding your local situation).

Prayer: We present these gifts to You because we love You. Bless Your church we pray in Jesus name, Amen.

May we be a church that allows You to work in and through us.

SPD Strategy: Comprehensive Media Evangelism

> Romans 1:16-17—"For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes, for the Jew first and also for the Greek. For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith; as it is written, 'The just shall live by faith.'"

Media presents the church with significant opportunities to connect with our communities. Whether it be through broadcast media, social media, radio or print, these are all avenues by which we can share the good news of Jesus Christ with a large and unknown viewership as well as our neighbours and friends.

Adventist Media, based in Sydney, shares God's love through Bible lessons, books and magazines, by broadcast television, social media and individual contact. Our mission is to share the good news with everyone in the South Pacific Division, from every nation, tribe, people and language. Together we can reach people with content that enlightens, that invigorates, that transforms. Together with God's help, we can make a difference for eternity.

Today's Media Evangelism offering will provide much needed resources to support the production of short film clips for social media, the broadcast of Hope Channel and provide resources for ministries such as the Hope Discovery Centre which works directly with media contacts.

Your generous support will help the church with its mission of engaging, equipping and evangelising through media. Thank you.

WEEK 33 • AUGUST 19, 2023

Union Offering: Mamarapha

> 1 Timothy 6:18,19 NIV "Command them to do good, to be rich in good deeds, and to be generous and willing to share. In this way they will lay up treasure for themselves as a firm foundation for the coming age, so that they may take hold of the life that is truly life."

Mamarapha College is a tertiary education institution owned and operated by the Australian Seventh-day Adventist Church and is recognised by the General Conference of Seventh Day Adventists as an accredited mid-level institution with AA accreditation. Mamarapha is an RTO (Registered Training Organisation) that offers nationally accredited qualifications ranging from Certificate II to Advanced Diploma courses in Indigenous Studies, Indigenous Pastoral Ministry and Lifestyle Health Promotion!

But this is not all that Mamarapha offers... Our students are inspired and encouraged to live as members of God's kingdom on earth, in:

- being disciples of Christ
- reflecting Jesus
- serving with Christ
- going beyond with Jesus

Our goal is to continue adding to the good work of training our First Nations people in reaching their own people. We acknowledge this is done only by God's enabling, for it is He who grows us into unity with Him, so that united with Him, we may work well to bring flavour (salt) and God's light to the communities we are a part of - till He comes.

Mamarapha web page: https://mamarapha.adventist.place

Your generous giving today will support the work of Mamarapha in intentionally growing and spreading God's kingdom in First Nations communities throughout Australia, even ones that most Australians do not know exist.

Prayer: Dear Father, we say "thank you" for Your good and perfect work to bring all people into a saving relationship with You, because You love us. Today we focus on what You are doing through Mamarapha College and we have opportunity to support Your work in the lives of Your First Nations people. We ask that You greatly bless what is given through the generosity of Your people in Australia, that it will help fulfil Your purpose for Mamarapha now and in the future. We trust and pray for this in the name of Jesus, Amen.

Food Ministries—Community Engagements

Matthew 6:11—"But Jesus said, 'Give us this day our daily bread…' "

There is no better way to meet people than by offering them food, and there is such joy in simply giving someone something to eat.

Churches members and ADRA volunteers are finding that the provision of food to people in need is a highly effective engagement strategy. It opens both hearts and conversations with grateful recipients and provides opportunities to get to know people in the local area. Volunteers soon become familiar with people who come regularly, and they develop trusting relationships that can lead to sharing causes and solutions for food insecurity. It is not uncommon for beneficiaries to join the ranks of our volunteers and be doubly blessed.

In recognition of the need and effectiveness of food ministries, two conference trucks provide the necessary transport for food provisions. But keeping vehicles on the road costs money for registration, insurance and maintenance. Today's offering is dedicated to this highly effective method of showing local people that our churches and the ADRA centre care about their struggles in these tough times.

Prayer: Our Father in Heaven, thank you so much for generously providing for our needs. Your kindnesses remind us how much you care about the ordinary but necessary things in life like food. Please teach us how we can win hearts through food services, bringing glory, praise and honour to Your holy name. In the precious name of Jesus, we pray. Amen.

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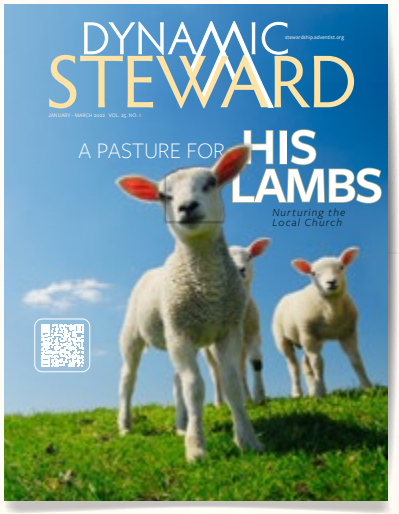

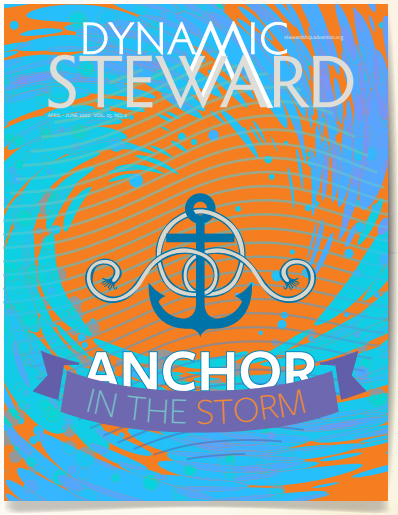

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GOD FIRST
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SEPTEMBER

WEEK 35 • SEPTEMBER 2, 2023

Local Church

When does Spring begin? That probably depends on where you live in Australia. Most schools have spring time holidays, with students and families heading to warm climates after cool winters.

Some places are already experiencing warmer temperatures and signs of new life on trees and shrubs—plants that may have looked lifeless during the winter months. Of course, many places in Australia won't have signs of Spring for another week or two, or maybe a month or two, but Spring will come, and the miracle of rebirth reminds us of the new birth Christ offers each of us.

What does this have to do with our call for the offering this Sabbath? At least two things.

1. Seasons change. Systematic giving to God remains a good practice for prioritizing God and living for Him on a regular basis. However, seasons can affect your giving pattern, sometimes resulting in smaller gifts and sometimes resulting in larger gifts. What season are you in right now? And when have your giving seasons changed?

2. God gives new life. We might think primarily about money when it comes to tithes and offerings—our gifts to God, but God continues to be the One who first gives to us. Even when it seems like we have little or nothing, God gives new life!

Appeal: Whether Spring has arrived, or you hold to its promise to arrive soon, respond now to God's gift of new life for you.

Prayer: Dear God, may we be faithful to you in every season. Amen.

WEEK 36 • SEPTEMBER 9, 2023

Annual Sacrifice

> Proverbs 6:6-8—"Go to the ant, you sluggard! Consider her ways and be wise, which, having no captain, overseer or ruler, provides her supplies in the summer, and gathers her food in the harvest.."

If you could save someone's life by risking yours, would you do it? If this person were a stranger, would you risk your life to save them? If you could make a difference in someone's life by giving up something you enjoy for one day or one week, would you do it? What would you give up? A favourite meal? A new pair of shoes? A day's income? Think about what you can give up this week so that someone you don't know can be introduced to Jesus.

Today is a special or 'sacrificial' offering day. It's for a mission offering that is given at the prompting by the Holy Spirit. It is in addition to, or beyond, our regular and systematic offerings.

Whatever you give today, your sacrificial offering will be used to tell others about Jesus. And just think: Your sacrificial offering could make it possible to meet the person you sacrificed for in heaven! You can determine what you will sacrifice. Or ask God what He wants you to sacrifice for Him this week beyond your regular tithe and offerings.

In Hebrews 13:16 Paul says that our sacrifices are pleasing to God. So let us ask the Lord to bless our offerings of sacrifice today so that they multiply and help Global Mission pioneers to reach the unreached.

Appeal: God has many plans to reach others for His kingdom. Let's do our part to be ready when the opportunity comes to reach out for God today.

WEEK 37 • SEPTEMBER 16, 2023

Local Church

According to 2 Cor. 9:7, "God loves a cheerful giver." That raises two questions: 1. Does God love you? *(wait for response)*; and 2. Are you a cheerful giver? *(wait for response)*.

Hopefully the message you receive here each Sabbath is that God loves you. Are you also a cheerful giver each Sabbath? We're about to give you the opportunity to be cheerful!

Some here may have grown up listening to Christian singer Steve Green's children's songs, including "God Loves a Cheerful Giver," with the opening line being, "God loves a cheerful giver, Ha, Ha, Ha, Ha, Ha!"

(Play song. https://youtu.be/-UZ9td0LBpM) (2-minute song)

The lead-in to the song challenges the idea of "giving 'til it hurts" by referencing 2 Cor. 9:7, "Each of you should give what you have decided in your heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver."

Instead of "giving 'til it hurts," try "giving 'til it tickles!"

Maybe we should try it this week. Instead of solemnly passing the offering plate, smile as you give. Or try laughing! Now that could be fun!

Yes, God loves you! And God invites you to be a cheerful giver. Let's give until it tickles—Ha, Ha, Ha, Ha, Ha!

WEEK 38 • SEPTEMBER 23, 2023

Local Church

Imagine being called by God to build a large boat. Noah, responded to God's instruction and because he did, he and his family along with the animals were saved from the flood waters. What a day of rejoicing that must have been when Noah was able to open the doors of the ark and once again walk on solid ground.

The Bible tells us that one of the first things he did was to present a sacrifice offering to the Lord. God kept His promise and Noah responded by bringing the Lord an offering. Think about all the times the Lord has brought you through a difficult time in your life. He is and always has been faithful. This is the time of our service where we worship through giving. We return to Him His tithes, and our offerings of thanksgiving. Today's offering is designated to support the local ministries of our church. Thank you for your continued faithfulness in giving to God and His work.

Appeal: Local Church Budget includes expenses such as Sabbath School, Outreach, Evangelism, Youth Ministries, Community Services, Electricity, etc. (You may want to address some of the specifics regarding your local situation).

Prayer: Thank You Lord. We praise You for Your faithfulness and give to You as our act of worship. Bless these gifts we pray, In Jesus name, Amen.

WEEK 39 • SEPTEMBER 30, 2023

Local Church

What does it mean to work? In Australia many of our states and territories celebrate labour day by taking time off from work. The history of Labour Day in Australia spans over a century. It is an important annual event that remembers those who struggled and succeeded to ensure decent and fair working conditions in Australia. During the mid to late 1800s the working day was long and arduous, where some employees would work up to 12 hours a day, six days a week.[1] In more recent times our working conditions are much better, even some companies are considering moving to a 4 day work week! It's ironic that we would celebrate good working conditions by taking time off from work!

Does that seem wrong, or is it actually right—in a counter-intuitive way? Is it like:

Laughing so hard that you cry;
Letting something go and then finding it returns to you on its own;
Saying, "It doesn't matter" when it really matters a lot;
Being groggy because you've slept so much;
Teaching people a lesson, but they learn nothing at all;
Hiding something from people so well than that you can't find it yourself;
Getting ahead because you helped so many get ahead of you;
Standing tall before others because you kneel before your Maker;
Giving away what you have and finding you have more than you had at the start.

Appeal: Those who think Labour Day is for working need a new perspective because it's the holiday given for the work you've already done. When we put it in spiritual terms, it means we give to God and others because we've already received so much from both God and others. Our offering today provides the opportunity for you to do it!

Prayer: Dear God, thank you for already doing the work of our salvation. As we worship you through giving today may we be reminded of all you've already done for us. Amen.

https://www.timeanddate.com/holidays/australia/labour-day

Tither
Honor the LORD
with your wealth,
with the firstfruits
of all your cro
Proverbs 3

OCTOBER

WEEK 40 • OCTOBER 7, 2023

ADRA Community Projects

> John 15:16—"You did not choose Me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit, and that your fruit should remain, that whatever you ask the Father in My name He may give you."

In every community, there are people struggling to get by and falling through the cracks. ADRA, in connection with Adventist Churches, has over 100 volunteer-run projects in Australia that feed, clothe, house, connect and empower people to overcome hardship and crisis and get back on their feet.

Today's offerings will support ADRA Community Projects in Australia to provide community meals, free counselling services, crisis support, and disaster response. Each project is run in partnership with a local Adventist Church and is a tangible way for us to connect with our local communities and be the hands and feet of Jesus. Give generously today to help others live as God intended.

Prayer: Dear God, thank you for the opportunity to be your hands and feet in our local context. We pray for the ministry of ADRA in Australia and New Zealand, lead and guide the leadership, staff and volunteers that come in contact with the support that ADRA provides. Bless our giving this morning and multiply it for your glory. Amen

WEEK 41 • OCTOBER 14, 2023

Local Church

When was the last time you've gone for a checkup? On a scale of one to five, (five being the best), how would you rate your overall health? We hope and pray that all of us might experience good healthy bodies. Paul describes the church as the body of Christ. It is made up of many parts, but forms one body. Just as we need good physical health, we also desire good spiritual health. It is our goal that each one in the body of Christ is fed proper spiritual food, exercising discipleship and the gospel commission, resting in Jesus and living in the hope and joy we share.

Our offerings today will support our local body of Christ, the Church. Please consider ways that you can contribute your time, energy, gifts and funds to make our church the best it can be.

Appeal: A Healthy, local church is vital. Local Church Budget includes expenses such as Sabbath School, Outreach, Evangelism, Youth Ministries, Community Services, Electricity, etc. (*You may want to address some of the specifics regarding your local situation).*

Prayer: Lord, we thank You that we can come to You anytime knowing that Your presence is among us. You are the head, and we are your body. We pray today that You will empower us, strengthen and heal us. Bless the gifts we have brought for our worship in giving today. Bless the ministries of Your Church. May Your will be done among us today and always, In Jesus name we pray, Amen."

(Contextualize the prayer to suit the specific needs and assigned projects for your congregation)

WEEK 42 • OCTOBER 21, 2023

Student Scholarships: Hills Adventist College

Psalms 112:5—"Good will come to those who are generous and lend freely."

Whether you have a lot or a little, generosity feels good to both the giver and the receiver. Today, our offering will support students at Hills Adventist College. For almost 60 years, generations of students and their families have been blessed by the quality Christian education, personalised instruction, and individual care they've received at Hills Adventist College. Investing in our students and their futures is vital. The Greater Sydney Conference Scholarship Program allows families of all income levels to enrol their children into our Adventist schools. Today, you can help grow that fund and help even more students find the joy in Jesus. All donations over $2 are tax deductible, and you can even donate through e-Giving.

Appeal: Let's be generous and give what we can towards scholarships for our students at Mountain View Adventist College. It's our privilege and honour to share with them our love, support, and prayers.

Prayer: Dear God, help us show the students of Hills Adventist College how much we love and support them and their educational endeavours. Open our hearts, open their minds, and help us all to find the path You want for us. Amen.

WEEK 43 • OCTOBER 28, 2023

Local Church

Have you ever stood close to a lighthouse? Or better yet, have you ever seen the powerful light that a lighthouse produces as it shines abroad? There's nothing better than to see a lighthouse while in the midst of a storm. It provides a sense of assurance and hope. John describes Jesus as the 'True Light' that gives light to everyone in this dark world. In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus describes His followers as the 'light of the world', suggesting further that they should shine their light before men, that they may see their good deeds. This world needs light! Jesus and his followers are that light.

Today, as we worship through giving, the funds we collect will go towards ministries of our local lighthouse, our church. Of course that's not just for the needs of our building, it is also for our ministries. We are the church, a lighthouse on a hill that cannot be hidden.

Appeal: Let our church family be a light of love to our community. Local Church Budget includes expenses such as Sabbath School, Outreach, Evangelism, Youth Ministries, Community Services, Electricity, etc.

Prayer: Lord, You are the true light. Without You we are in darkness and we cannot see our way. Continue to guide and direct us through this journey that we, along with many others in our community, may see You face to face. Bless these gifts we bring to You as our worship. We pray in Jesus name, Amen.

(Contextualize the prayer to suit the specific needs and assigned projects for your congregation)

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STEWARDSHIP

NOVEMBER

WEEK 44 • NOVEMBER 4, 2023

Local Church

The story is told in Luke 5:1-11, of Jesus teaching by the Sea of Galilee as the crowd pushed in around Him. He noticed two boats on the shore and decided to speak to the crowd from the one belonging to Simon Peter. After Jesus finished speaking he asked Simon to go out into deep water and lower his net for a catch.

Simon Peter, an experienced fisherman, could have come up with quite a few good reasons why he did not want to do that. He simply pointed out that he had been working hard all night and hadn't caught anything. And then he said something profound to Jesus, "because You say so, I will let down the nets.

The Bible tells us that they caught so many fish it not only broke their nets, it almost sunk the other boat that came to help them. Peter responded and God blessed them. The same is true today. As we continue with our worship in giving, from week to week, let's bring the whole tithe into the storehouse just because God said so. And see if God will not open the floodgates of heaven and pour out so much blessing that you will not have room enough for it.

Prayer: Lord, give us the faith we need to respond to You in all things. Teach us to trust and obey because You said it. Thank You for Your continued faithfulness in blessing our time, talents, temple and treasure that we offer to You today.

WEEK 45 • NOVEMBER 11, 2023

World Mission Budget (Unusual Opportunities)

Deuteronomy 16:17—"Every man shall give as he is able, according to the blessing of the Lord your God which He has given you."

God works in wonderful ways to open doors to spread His message of love and faith around the world. Have you ever wondered what happens when outreach programs are successful way beyond expectations? Suddenly existing churches overflow and new churches must be built, rented, or purchased quickly. But that costs money.

When an unexpected opportunity opens, allowing the Church to reach out to an otherwise unreachable region of the world, how does the Church provide the funds to make such a giant step for God?

Years ago, God impressed Church leaders to collect an Unusual Opportunities Offering. This special offering is collected just once a year. Today is a new opportunity to build up that fund so that the church is ready when God says "yes" to our prayers.

Perhaps you remember when the Soviet Union broke into numerous countries in the early 1990s and hundreds of ministers were able to enter this vast region to share God's love with millions. The cost of the outreach and follow up was high, but funds from the Unusual Opportunities fund helped make it all possible. This unexpected evangelistic success has been repeated many times in places like Rwanda, Brazil and Papua New Guinea.

God has mighty plans to reach others for His kingdom. Thank you for generously doing your part today to ensure that the church is ready when the opportunity comes to care for the next unexpectedly-abundant harvest.

In Hebrews 13:16 Paul says that sacrifices are pleasing to God. So, let us ask the Lord to bless our offerings of sacrifice so that they multiply and help Global Mission pioneers reach the unreached.

WEEK 46 • NOVEMBER 18, 2023

Student Scholarships: Mountain View Adventist College

Matthew 6:21—"For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also."

What do you treasure most? In the Greater Sydney Conference, we especially value our children and their futures. One way we can show our love and support is through funding the Conference Scholarship program that supports all of our local Adventist schools. Education is expensive, and not all families can afford to send their children to an Adventist school like Mountain View Adventist College. That's where we come in as a church family. Our generous gifts today will support the students, teachers, academics, music, sport, and spiritual opportunities at Mountain View Adventist College, building young people for Jesus. Let's let our hearts be our guides as we support our greatest treasures.

Appeal: No one should have to miss out on a great, godly education because of financial need. Give generously today, putting your treasure and your heart into Mountain View Adventist College and God's children there.

Prayer: Dear Lord, You've given us so many good things in life. Help us to be generous today as we share our gifts with Your students at Mountain View Adventist College. Give us grateful hearts as we show them how much we care. Amen.

Local Church

It's that time of year when school graduations take place. You, or someone close to you, may have already celebrated this milestone, or perhaps it's just around the corner.

Graduations matter! They mark a significant accomplishment—the culmination of years of study, hard work, and hopefully, worthwhile education along the way. The regalia might look funny, but it represents something. For some, graduation is a miracle they once thought might be impossible. For others, it's the expected result from their investment.

And then what?

The day after graduation might mean starting a job or maybe continuing with more schooling. Time marches on. Even with photos and video clips of graduation, you must still face another day. As you look back, one question that often surfaces is, "Was it worth it?" Did all the time and money and study pay off, or was it merely a passing chapter of life with little to show for all the investment made?

That's true for all of us, whether or not we're formally graduating.

Appeal: What do you have to show for the investments you've made? God repeatedly reminds us to invest in Him and in others for eternity. Is it worth it? It actually turns out to be more than a passing chapter of life. It is life—and eternal life at that. The investment of our time, temple, talent, and treasure (the pillars of stewardship) pays off when we take it to graduation and beyond. Keep these things in mind as we worship God through our giving this morning. The offering that is collected today and via egiving will invest in the ministries of our local Church and as a result impact the lives of others for Jesus.

Prayer: Dear God, help us to be faithfully focused on you. Amen.

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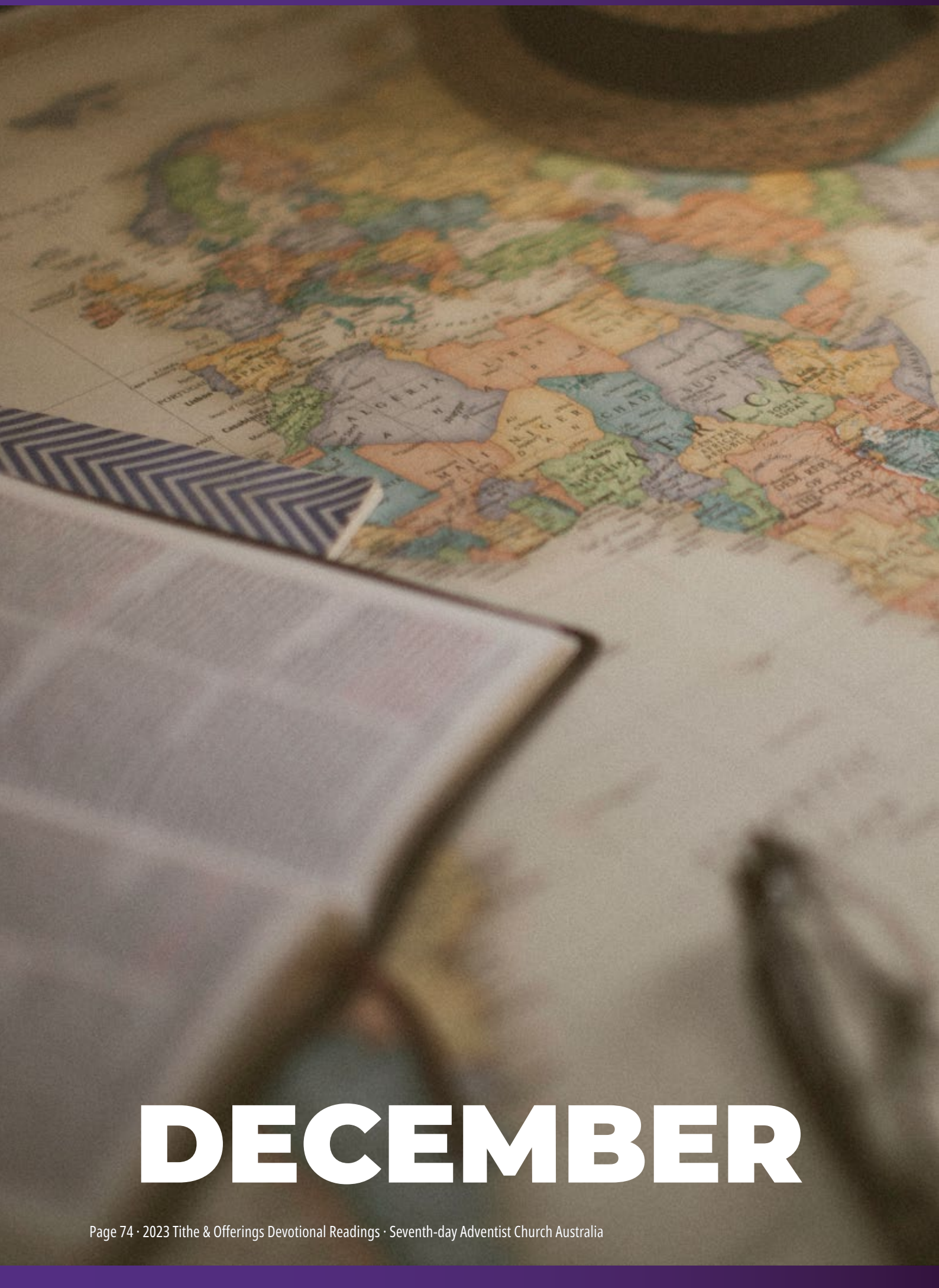

DECEMBER

WEEK 48 • DECEMBER 2, 2023

Local Church

December starts off the Christmas season in earnest for many people, even if merchants have been pushing the need to buy gifts for weeks already.

What makes the Christmas season special for you? Is it the music, the decorations, special foods, family gatherings, or the gifts—what you might receive, as well as what you might give?

Gift-giving can be problematic. What if someone gives you a gift, but you don't have one to give in return or vice versa?! Which matters more: the amount of money you spend on the gift or giving a "perfect gift" to a particular person? Let's reverse that; what if someone gives you a gift and it's not something you've ever wanted or will ever use? Should you put on a happy face and say something like, "How can I ever thank you enough for this gift?"

Each Sabbath we collect an offering as you give your gifts to God. We don't limit this to the Christmas season because Christmas happens every time we come to church. We come to worship the greatest gift of all time—the gift of God coming to this earth in the form of Jesus Christ.

Appeal: Our gifts, whether they are wrapped in beautiful Christmas paper or given as cash or checks or through online giving with a credit card, show our thankfulness to God. So, "Merry Christmas!" And let's take this opportunity to give our gifts to God.

Prayer: Dear God, may our giving remind us of the greatest gift you gave to us. Amen.

WEEK 49 • DECEMBER 9, 2023

SPD Strategy: Mission to the Cities

Psalm 103:2-3—"Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all His benefits: Who forgives all your iniquities, Who heals all your diseases."

"When talking to Jonah, God said, "Should I not pity that great city Nineveh?" And Ellen White wrote that, "the work in the cities is the essential work of this time." When she wrote that in 1910 the population of New York city was even smaller than Sydney is today!

Reaching the cities is possible. Because with God, all things are possible. Through your gifts of time, talents, prayer and financial support the cities are being reached. If you have a desire to reach cities for God, please visit missiontothecities.org where you can find inspirational and practical resources such as:

- 11 Ways to Serve Your City's Most Vulnerable Residents
- 6 Mobile Ministry Ideas for Your City
- 7 Outside-the-box Urban Centre of Influence Ideas, and
- The compilation book 'Ministry to the Cities' by Ellen White.

Thank you for your love-driven desire to reach the cities with the good news of God's love. Your offering today will be used carefully and prayerfully to make disciples in the largest mission field in the South Pacific Division, our major cities. Please give as God challenges you. Thank you.

WEEK 50 • DECEMBER 16, 2023

Local Church

The Christmas story of Christ's birth in a stable includes visits by local shepherds and Wise Men from far away.

The shepherds, although the low-class people of Bethlehem, played a vital role for God's people. Jerusalem, located only five miles (eight kilometers) from Bethlehem, needed "spotless lambs" for daily sacrifices and many more during festivals like the Passover. These shepherds took care of the little lambs to ensure they would be pristine enough for sacrifice. Maybe that's why the angelic host appeared to the shepherds in Bethlehem, giving them a personalized invitation to visit the spotless Lamb of God who would take away the sins of the world. However, the shepherds had no gift for Baby Jesus. Instead, they joyfully proclaimed His arrival to the world (Luke 2:16–18).

The Wise Men represented the other end of the social and economic spectrum. Even though they were part of the wealthy intelligentsia, they still found themselves drawn to something far greater than themselves. Following the star, they came to Jerusalem (Matt. 2:1) and directly to the temple (Desire of Ages, p. 60), asking, "Where is the newborn King of the Jews?" Prejudiced and defensive religious leaders could point the Magi to nearby Bethlehem, but they refused to go there themselves. However, the Wise Men went. In fact, "wise men still seek Him." And they worshiped and gave gifts.

Appeal: This Sabbath you're invited to worship and to give gifts, just like the Wise Men thousands of years ago. You can give your offering and tithe through the collection bag or via the egiving app or website.

Prayer: Dear God, thank you for the gift of your son. Help us to share that gift with others. Amen.

Fund for Needy Persons

Luke 6:38 —"Give and you will receive. Your gift will return to you in full—pressed down, shaken together with room for more, running over, and poured into your lap. The amount you give will determine how much you get back."

The Rohega family* fled to Australia because of religious persecution and have been here for almost two years. They rent a tiny apartment in the poor part of town, where George, the father of three, has been working as a labourer while their application for citizenship is processed. As the family are not eligible for Centrelink benefits, rental arrears soon accumulated after George lost his job. Although he now has another job, the family is unable to catch up on their arrears and have received an eviction notice. From their FFNP application, it is clear that they are financially sustainable, so a three-week rent ($1,290) allocation will save their home and let this family know that they have a God and community that cares.

Dedicated to the poor amongst us, the GSC Fund for Needy Persons (FFNP) charity helps families over a crisis so that they can retain their dignity while they get back on their feet. Most funds help single mothers catch up on rental arrears after sickness, financial breakdown, abuse or desertion. As allocation encourages independence, applicants are told up front that FFNP assists only once and are assisted with budgeting.

Jesus understands the plight of the homeless, saying, "Foxes have dens and birds have nests, but the Son of Man has no place to lay His head."

Prayer: Oh God, how wonderfully generous You have been to us. You have given us blessing on top of blessing—more than enough—and we praise and thank You for Your kindness. Today, as we return a little of this kindness into Your storehouse, we ask that You multiply it for the uplifting of Your great name, so that Your name is honoured above all other names and those who struggle can share in Your generous bounties. In the wonderful name of Jesus, we bring this petition to You this morning. Amen.

** Possible scenario.*

WEEK 52 • DECEMBER 30, 2023

Local Church

A wise person once said if you want to see what someone truly values, look at his bank and credit card statements. What would your bank statements say? If someone were to look at where you spent your time and energy and money, what would they conclude were your priorities? Is it family? Holidays? Work? Paying the bills?

The Bible calls us to put God as our number one priority. Seek His Kingdom first and let God worry about the rest. Every time we pause in our worship service to shift our focus to giving we are declaring that God is the number one in our life, that all other things are secondary.

As we pause this morning to return our tithes and offerings let's take some time to reflect on our priorities and ask ourselves if God really does come first in our lives.

Appeal: God is calling us to put Him first in all aspects of life, including our relationships, and even finances. And we put God first in our finances when we set apart His tithe and our offerings, even before any other expenses are met. God's assurance is that all the other things we need "shall be added to you" (Matt. 6:33).

Prayer: Dear God, we recognise You as our heavenly Provider and Sustainer. Please teach us to put You first in every area of life and accept the tithes and offerings that we bring today, after recognising that You care for us. Amen.

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