

Self-Examination

#0737

Study given by W.D. Frazee—December 28, 1957

God might bless us in examining our hearts both in retrospect and in prospect, looking over the past and looking into the future. God has seen fit to divide time and measure it in lengths in order that we might from point to point stop and look over what has been accomplished and what is ahead.

I would like to have us examine our relationship to God. I suppose that a year ago all of us made solemn vows of re-consecration to our Lord. It is well that we look back over the year and examine ourselves to see how those vows have been kept.

I am glad we all have access to the cleansing and covering blood of Jesus to deal with those mistakes which an enlightened conscience will surely discover.

“If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness” 1 John 1:8-9.

One of the things we should very definitely think of in our relationship to God is the matter of our tithes and offerings. I want to read something the servant of the Lord wrote:

“Let us each bring our souls to task. Let us review our own course during the past year and compare our life and character with the Bible standard. Let us see if we have brought all our offerings to God. I would do this for myself as an individual. It may be that I have been remiss during the past year. I know not when nor where. But to make sure that I have done my whole duty I will at the first of the year bring an offering to God to be appropriated as might seem best in one of the branches of His work” *Review and Herald*, January 18, 1882.

I think that is a wonderful spirit, don't you? Looking back over the year 1881, the Lord's messenger said she couldn't think of any time she had been remiss in tithes and offerings, but she felt she needed to bring a special offering just to be sure. I think that is nice. If that was in her heart, surely there ought to be in our hearts a spirit of examination to look over our records and see if we have turned in a faithful tithe, and have been faithful in our pledges and offerings. Don't you think so?

One of the reasons God has told us we should keep a personal account of our money is so we can be sure about our tithes and offerings. That is the only way we can be sure, isn't it? We have been told that bookkeeping is very important. We don't have to be CPA's or even institutional bookkeepers, but we can all have a place where we put down on the left hand side the money that comes to us and on the right hand side the money we pay out. As we do that, we can look back over a week or a month or a year and check to see what our income has been and what we have done with it.

Sometimes students feel that the amount of money they handle is so small that it doesn't make much difference. In a way, the smaller the amount of money you handle, the more you need to do that. The fellow who has a lot of money might be able to get along without careful accounting. But the less money we have the more carefully we need to account for every penny.

There is another reason poor students and other people need to be careful about it. God has promised to multiply as we add. If we will do what God has told us to do, and be faithful with the little He puts into our hands, He will put more into our hands. As we add He will multiply. So at the close of the year let's look back and see if we have been faithful in tithes and offerings.

Sister White mentions helping the poor and thinking of our obligations to others:

“Remember that if you have defrauded a neighbor in trade, or in any manner have deprived him of his own, or if you have robbed God in tithes and offerings, it is all registered in the books of heaven. Let those who have committed wrong give proof of their repentance by seeking to make full restitution. Let them in their after life give evidence of a genuine reformation, and they will assuredly enjoy the peace of heaven” *Ibid*.

Let us enter upon the new year with a clean record. What do you say? And if there are any of us who have not been keeping books with ourselves and the Lord, let's make a resolution that we will write down every penny that comes into our hands, and every penny that goes out.

Several years ago we had with us Brother Clark, a retired worker and minister who had spent many years in this cause both in the home field and in Africa. He was nearly ninety when he passed away. He is buried up here in the little cemetery. He showed me his account books. He told me that he had kept track of every nickel he had spent for forty years. Every nickel. It seemed to me that was a record of faithfulness.

The result was that the dear brother had a real sense of the value of money. When he came to us he was already in his eighties. He spent a number of years with us. He had the spirit to help in the Lord's work financially as well as in other ways. Though he handled a small amount of money at that time, he was always faithful with his tithes and offerings. He would go out in the ingathering work. He used to raise around \$100.

One day he conceived the thought that he should raise money to help us build our little sanitarium. Some of us were living in tents that summer while we were holding our institute here. Dear Brother Clark went from door to door and store to store raising money. He raised over \$1,000 to help build the sanitarium.

My point is, he had a sense of the value of a dollar and the value of a nickel. It came from being faithful with God in tithes and offerings, and keeping strict account of every nickel that came into his hands. May I earnestly recommend that to you?

Now let us read a wonderful promise to those who review their lives and find they have been robbing God through carelessness or plain selfishness:

“Bring ye all the tithes into the storehouse, that there may be meat in Mine house, and prove Me now herewith, saith the LORD of hosts, if I will not open you the windows of heaven, and pour you out a blessing, that there shall not be room enough to receive it” Malachi 3:10.

I think that is wonderful. And remember, whenever God gives you a blessing that there is not room enough to receive, he does not want you to do like the man in the parable. When God blessed that man, he said he would have to pull down his barns and do what? When God gives you a blessing so big you can't receive it, He wants it to overflow so others can receive it.

There are poor and needy, and instead of filling up our pockets and bank accounts with vast amount of worldly riches, God wants us to remember the poor and needy as well as the mission fields. Notice what the servant of the Lord says:

“If any of you, my brothers and sisters, are convicted that you have failed to render to God the things that are His, if you have not kindly considered the wants of the poor, or if you have withheld from any man his due, I entreat you to repent before the Lord, and to restore fourfold” *Review and Herald*, January 18, 1882.

We are to think not only of the wants of God's cause, but of the poor and needy. Ah, but somebody says, How can I with a very limited income pay tithes and offerings, and help the poor and needy, and have any left for myself?

Well, it does require some careful thought. But God's plan of benevolence has in it some elements of simplicity which ought to be greatly appreciated by all of us.

Our benevolence is to be systematic and proportionate. That means that no matter how rich a man may be, he can afford to pay tithe, for the tithe is ten percent. And no matter how poor a man may be, even if he has only a dime, he has a tithe. How much is it? One penny. But is it just as much a tithe as the tithe on a million dollars would be for the rich man? Is the poor man paying tithe when he pays a penny? Yes.

I have seen coming in the church treasurer's office an envelope with a penny in it. A penny tithe. Is it worth it? Does Jesus think so? Those two mites the widow gave back in the temple measured in our money less than a penny. But Jesus said she had given all. So our tithes and offerings are to be systematic. They are to be proportionate. And that makes it possible for the poor as well as the rich to have a part.

I would like to have us think about our relationships to one another. Let us notice the exhortation of the apostle Paul.

“And grieve not the holy Spirit of God, whereby ye are sealed unto the day of redemption. Let all bitterness, and wrath, and anger, and clamor, and evil speaking, be put away from you, with all malice: And be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you” Ephesians 4:30-32.

The only time you have a chance to forgive somebody the way God for Christ's sake has forgiven you is when they do something bad and mean to you without a cause. When we have hurt somebody and they give back as good as we sent, we can't forgive them the way God forgave us for Christ's sake. We ought to forgive them and seek forgiveness ourselves. Shouldn't we? But the only time we get a chance to forgive others as Christ has forgiven us is when we are unjustly treated without any cause whatsoever. Sometimes people think that is an excuse or reason for withholding forgiveness. Not so. “Be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you.”

Friends, this is the last Sabbath of the old year. I have to remember that some who were with us 52 weeks ago are not with us tonight. We have some dear ones sleeping up on the hill tonight who were here with us in vesper service enjoying fellowship with us a year ago. I wonder who it will be this year? And I think of it not that it might be me, or you might think it might be you. I think will it be some brother or sister that I have said some unkind word to, or cherished some suspicion about, or said some unfavorable word about. Is that something to think about?

Let me tell you an experience I had. It happened quite a number of years ago. Time passes so fast. I was visiting in a distant state with a friend of mine. I spent a number of days in his home, visiting with his family. I had been with them many times.

The last night I was there it happened that this brother and his wife and I had driven home from some meeting in his car, and the three of us were sitting in the front seat. As we got to the house and pulled into the garage I said, “Would you folks mind sitting here for a little while before we go in? I have something on my heart I want to share with you. I have been with you for several days, and I must tell you something. I think you know me well enough that you will let me say it. If in any way it should offend you, I know you will forgive me. I love you both and have loved you for years. I have sat in your home for several days and listened to you talk to

each other in front of the children. It makes me feel bad the way you talk to each other. I know you love each other, but sometimes you don't talk like it."

I just opened up my heart to them. I said, "Time is passing, and if Jesus doesn't come soon one or the other of you is going to stand by the casket while the other one is laid away, and it is going to break your heart if it happens while you are in this state of mind."

I made an appeal to them. They didn't get angry with me. They didn't get offended. I believe God used it to bless them. It wasn't very long after that when one of them was taken to the hospital with a serious emergency. I am sure the Lord brought it to their minds.

Why is it that sometimes we give short words, frowns, perhaps sullenness to those closest to us, to those we love the most? Oh, in Jesus' name I plead with you, let this be the last year we ever do anything like that. What do you say? Let's be done with it. If there is anyone who ought to have sweet, kind looks of love, it is those who are nearest to us—the husband, the wife, the parents, the children, the brother, the sister.

There is a little verse that again and again goes through my mind. Let me share it with you.

"Life is too brief between the budding and the fading leaf,
Between the sowing and the golden sheaf for hate and strife.
We have no time for malice or for grief,
Therefore with love make beautiful the deed.
Fast speeds the night."

Oh, yes, it is coming on. And think of it. If the dear one you are tempted to be unkind to, to be impatient with, is a trial to you, listen. Think what it would be to follow the casket up the little trail that leads up there under those oak trees. Ah friend, what you would give to take back those words, those frowns.

I thank God for the love we know and have experienced, but I want to tell you, we shall never be fitted for heaven until heaven's love is in our hearts. When that happens, when we love others as Jesus loves us, then we are ready for heaven.

"When we love the world as He has loved it, then for us His mission is accomplished. We are fitted for heaven, for we have heaven in our hearts" *The Desire of Ages*, page 641.

I like that, don't you? It is a beautiful statement. That same love which is to be in the home in those more intimate relationships is to be defused throughout the church. Somehow I believe that if that love glows bright upon the altar fires of our homes, it will shine through the windows and illuminate all around. Don't you think so?

That's what Jesus said. Men don't light a candle and put it under a bed or under a bushel. They put it on a candlestick so it gives light to all who are in the house. And they that come in will see the light. Ah, if our homes are filled with that

love, it will be shining out through the windows of the soul. Our eyes will reveal that light. The windows of our relationships will reveal that light of love. When the church is filled with that love as it was on the day of Pentecost, the latter rain is going to fall as it fell back there.

So let us review our lives and see if there is one bit of discord, one bit of variance, one bit of misunderstanding or evil surmising. Tell me, can those things be gotten rid of? Yes they can. If they can't, then Jesus made a mistake in the twelve men He picked for apostles. Every one of them during the three and a half years they were with the Master were suspicious, and gave cause for suspicion among their brethren. And there were at times quite a strife among them as to which should be the greatest. There were undercurrents of criticism and faultfinding and bickering. Yet Jesus kept on patiently working with them. From time to time they were lifted to heights of spiritual elevation, and then they would descend into the plain of common bickering and strife.

But the last night He was with them before the crucifixion, when He had planned with such loving thought to give them a closing hour of fellowship and a vision of the future that would strengthen them, He found them gathering in the upper chamber with that spirit of strife coming out here and there. In the very way they seated themselves at the table they exhibited it. What did each one of them want to be? First. And first meant next to Jesus. It is too bad when in the world we exhibit those selfish human traits of ambition and selfish strife. But it is a pity when the work of God is contaminated with those things. Yet it happened to the very men God had chosen.

It should be an encouragement to us. If you find strife, animosity, failure in your life, let it not discourage you. You may be like Peter or James or Thomas.

God forbid that any of us should be like Judas. But could Judas have been reclaimed? Was he almost reclaimed, nearly ransomed? Ah, things quivered in the balance.

My point is, everyone of us here, no matter what our failures and mistakes have been this past year, can come under the cleansing blood of Jesus this evening. We can close this year as if we had never make any mistakes. Is that the Gospel? Well, it is good news then, isn't it?

You remember what Jesus did. He didn't argue with them about their selfishness. He didn't rebuke them in the sense of standing there as He chased those robbers from the temple. He quietly gave them that sweet and loving demonstration in the washing of their feet. It melted the hearts of all except Judas, and it almost got him.

Ah friends, if we will let Jesus wash our hearts as He washed the feet of those disciples, He will say to us as He said to them, "Ye are all clean."

There is something about that which always gladdens my heart. Jesus didn't say they were in a pitiful condition and He hoped that in a year from then they would be on higher ground. No, He didn't say that. He didn't tell them to go back to their

homes and spend a couple of weeks in special prayer and study and then come back and get together. Now there may be times for all that. My point is that the Lord Jesus Christ changed and transformed the hearts of those men so He could say to those who had been polluted with the dust of sin and strife, "You are all clean." And He did it within an hour. That gives me courage. I am so glad for that.

It is another example of what we call creative thought. Many a time I am thankful we are not evolutionists. I am glad we don't have to think we have to progress about as slow as this world is supposed to have progressed. Think back through the millions and millions of years that the evolutionist sees to bring man from the slime pit to the present showing. I say I am glad we do not believe in any such nonsense. But we do not believe in it spiritually either. We believe that the Spirit of God is able to do His work of transforming the heart and forgiving sin now. He spake and it was. He commanded and it stood fast.

Don't misunderstand me. There is a place for spiritual growth. Peter tells us to grow in grace. Jesus teaches the lesson of the sowing of the seed and the springing up of the plant. We are all growing in grace as we let Jesus work with us. The forgiveness of sin is not of that nature. The cleansing of the heart from sin, the acceptance of the soul before Christ, is something that can take place in a moment as the life is surrendered to God. So as we look back over our record this year, if there be ought of variance, ought of disagreement in the home, in the church, in the community, oh, let us know and believe that it is by no progress of evolution, but by the creative work of the Spirit of God that thing is to be changed.

I would like to be very practical. It happens often that there are difficulties because there is something wrong on both sides. I remember a little proverb I learned when I was a little boy:

Two it takes to make a quarrel.
One can always end it.

That is the point. The very fact that it takes two to make a quarrel proves that it can be ended by one. Bless the Lord you can end the quarrel. I do not mean you can control what the other does, but there can be no quarrel if you withdraw from it.

I was interested in the statement where the messenger of the Lord says, "If you have committed one wrong and they twenty, go to that one and confess that one wrong of which you are guilty as though you were the chief offender. Take him by the hand. Let your heart soften under the influence of the Spirit of God. Ask him to pray with you."

Ah, precious experiences come that way. If thy brother sin against thee, go and do tell him his faults? If you have any faults, tell your faults to him first. If you can't think of anything you have done that makes that barrier, there is no quarrel as far as you are concerned. But there may be a thorn sticking in his heart, put there by the enemy. Some misunderstanding. Some difficulty. Ah, go to him and say, Brother, what is the matter? Have I done something? What is the difficulty? How can we get together?

As you appeal to him and open the way for reconciliation, God's Spirit is at work. I would rather know what we are studying out of the Bible and the Spirit of Prophecy than to know all that the psychologists and analysts know about how the mind works. I would rather know just what we are studying.

I am not trying to depreciate any true science. I am simply telling you that the Spirit of God knows more about how to win friends and influence people than all the great men of the world. And unless we have in our hearts the spirit of true unselfish love, all that kind of thing is simply a smooth scheming way to get our way. And if there is anything that is despicable to me it is selfishness that is smooth and uses politeness and courtesy to get what it wants. I despise it.

The thing we are studying is entirely different. It is the work of the Spirit of God to melt hearts together in true love and sympathy. I have found that when two people, with all their talking and apologizing and trying to get together, can't, the thing they need to do is get down and pray together. There are times when about all that two people can do is kneel down and say, Dear Lord, You see that with all our effort we can't get together. We are in a mess, dear Lord. We are in a hard place. We do not want to be like this. Blessed Jesus come and help us and draw our hearts together, and reveal what we need.

Do you think God will hear a prayer like that? I tell you, we sometimes need some of the desperate earnestness of that man who appealed to Jesus to heal his boy. He cried out with tears, "Lord, I believe. Help my unbelief." We are told we can never perish when we do that. Never.

Tell me friend, are you really anxious to be in unity with others? Well, Jesus is anxious for you. The great burden of Jesus' prayer was that His followers might be one as He and the Father are one. And we are told that we are to learn to answer that prayer of Jesus. Think of it. Of all the prayers we long for Him to answer, here is one prayer He is longing for us to answer. Can we do it? Only as we seek Him with all our heart.

When disunity hurts us as it hurts Him, we will be praying for unity the way Jesus prays for unity. We may have to endure as Jesus endured the misunderstandings that pierced His heart, but we will never get hardened and calloused. God never wants us to get a turtle shell on us so we are immune to what goes on about us. He wants us to have not thin skins but tender hearts. He wants us to have spirits that respond to the needs and woes and sins of those about us. "Be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you."

These are some of the things that are upon my heart as we enter into the holy hours of last Sabbath of the year. As we look back, what is our relationship to God? Is there anything we need to make right with God? Are there any vows of consecration we have failed in? Are there any resolutions of service or devotion that need to be renewed? Are there any tithes or offerings we have failed to bring? Is there anything in our relation to God personally that the Holy Spirit brings to mind?

Then our relationship to others. Husbands with wives and wives with husbands. Parents with children and children with parents. Brothers with sisters. How is it? Have our homes been a little bit of heaven? God forbid that any of that other place should be in them. Oh, that our homes may indeed be a little heaven to go to heaven in.

Is that something to write poetry about and sing about, or can it be? Brethren and sisters, I know it is true. I have tasted it. It is no idealism that is out of reach. Right here in this world we can have a sweet, happy, loving time. We may need to sacrifice our own dignity. We may need to get down on our knees with God and with one another and say that we have sinned and failed. But the purest joy springs from the deepest humiliation.

In the church as well, whatever of wrong or selfishness or misunderstanding, it can all be washed away in the precious blood of Jesus.

Our heavenly Father, we thank Thee for speaking to our hearts tonight through Thy Word. As we see the blessed Jesus ministering to His disciples through word and work, through loving entreaty and tender ministry, Oh, we long to be like Him. Tonight as we enter into this service of meditation and response, may the Spirit of God be upon all our hearts. We ask in Jesus' name. Amen.

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