

## THE IMITATION OF CHRIST?



Plaque reads: 'St. Paul's Pillar', Paphos, Cyprus (photo: David Neal)

\*St. Paul's pillar, Paphos – caution required that this is the exact pillar etc.

*“Look carefully then how you walk, not as unwise but as wise, making the best use of the time, because the days are evil. Therefore, do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is.” Ephesians 5:15-17*

Dateline: Paphos, Cyprus

As I look out over the calm rippling Mediterranean Sea, I'm reminded of a visit Paul made to the then capital of the island around AD 47. On arrival, Paul notices how the city people are full of praise and worship – to Aphrodite, the goddess of love. But amazingly, as soon as the news gets out he's in the city, Sergius Paulus, the Roman proconsul, sends a summons to meet up. Is Paul in trouble? No, far from it, as Sergius wants to hear about Jesus – the Christ. What a thrilling opportunity for Paul to share the Good News with such a person of influence. As they talk together, Paul enthusiastically shares how Jesus lived, how he died (tread carefully Paul), and how he rose again, resurrection – the jewel in the crown for Paul! The governor's astonished, believes, and becomes a follower. That's the good news.

The bad news is that Pafitis Jews weren't too pleased with the new preacher in town. They showed their displeasure by tying him to the marble pillar pictured above\*, handing out 39 lashings for being a troublemaker (ref:2 Corinthians 11:24).

Fast forward to AD 60, and Paul's now in a Roman prison cell. It's not where he wants to be but is his lot for putting God first. Nor will it stop him sharing the Gospel and building up the church. If he can't preach in the market square, he'll do it by letter, in this instance to Ephesian believers. The matter continues to be urgent, because there are many who still do not realise the lengths God went to, to lavish his grace and mercy on them through Jesus Christ.

*“Look carefully then how you walk.”*

“Watch your step” (The Message) because the church is God's new society, radically different from the world.

“Walk in love, as Christ loved us.” (5:2). There's a link to the Sermon on the Mount here. Jesus says, “The Kingdom of Heaven is like...” follow me, become my disciple, my apprentice (I do, you watch, you do).

*“not as unwise, but as wise.”*

The times are evil, says Paul, but for the Christian, instead of hatred and evil doing, be wise and live a life of love, grace, and mercy, copying the example of the Master.

*“making the best use of time.”*

Because the days are evil, even more necessary to put the time to good use. Live like the pagans, and the cause of God goes nowhere. On a table near me, are three bottles of unopened wine, graciously provided by the hotel as a gift, to help Marci and I celebrate a special wedding anniversary. Paul's clear advice about drinking parties still holds true today - a waste of time and don't get drunk. Rather, “be filled with the Spirit.” (5:18). Like the humour Paul!

“Therefore, do not be foolish.”

“Use your head.” (The Message). What causes us to all too frequently cave in to peer pressure? We gossip, seek revenge, get jealous, laugh at dodgy jokes, live for the moment, behave as if ‘it’s all about me’. Don’t be so foolish...

“but understand what the will of God is.”

What does God want of me, for my life, my family, my job, my resources, my church? The most difficult words in the Lord’s Prayer to say is “Your will be done.”

As we study this week about ‘The Habits of a Steward’, ponder this thought. Is today’s Adventist risk averse to imitating Christ, fearing a works righteousness faith? Sure enough, we must reject the 15<sup>th</sup> century sacramental theology of Thomas à Kempis, and likewise the early 20<sup>th</sup> century sinless perfection theology of M. L. Andreasen.

But Paul says, “Be imitators of God, as beloved children.” (5:1). And that’s the key to the matter, “as beloved children.”

1. *Earthly pleasures vainly call me,  
I would be like Jesus;  
Nothing worldly shall enthrall me,  
I would be like Jesus.*

*Be like Jesus, this my song,  
In the home and in the throng;  
Be like Jesus, all day long!  
I would be like Jesus.*

James Rowe, 1911 Public Domain

Full lyrics and details of song: [http://library.timelesstruths.org/music/I\\_Would\\_Be\\_Like\\_Jesus/](http://library.timelesstruths.org/music/I_Would_Be_Like_Jesus/)

However busy your day preparing for Sabbath, do take a few moments to listen to this beautifully reflective instrumental “I would be like Jesus.” <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MxvPGWFCw4Y>



## LESSON 12. THE HABITS OF A STEWARD BY JOHN MATHEWS

Stewardship Ministries videos of the Sabbath School Adult Lesson Study Guide for the 1st Quarter of 2018 by John Mathews, author of the lessons. Use these ...

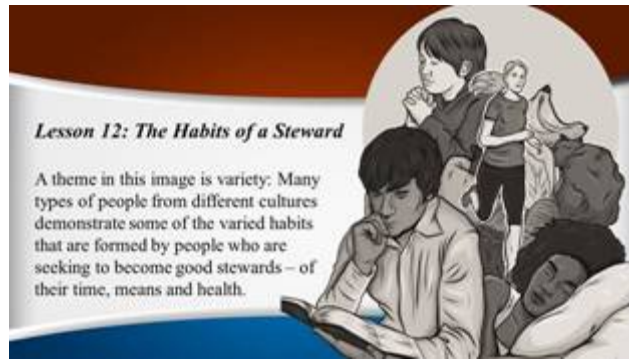
WATCH VIDEO

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For previous lessons, see: <https://stewardship.adventist.org/online-videos?channel=1326917&video=247368489>

**From South Pacific Division Stewardship Ministries, comes another lesson commentary:**





**Lesson Notes (attached)**

• **5 Q's for Life Change (attached)**

As we are studying about the habits of a steward, there's a reference from Ellen White I find most helpful. "*We have many lessons to learn, and many, many to unlearn.*" Worth keeping in mind in the context of this week's study from Ephesians 5:15-17.

From this week's study: Faithful stewards have the following characteristics:

1. They put God first in every aspect of life.
2. They live life in the expectation of Jesus' soon return in glory.
3. They use time wisely.
4. They commit body, soul, and spirit to God so that He will keep them in optimal spiritual, mental, and physical health.
5. Their lives are controlled, at all times, by the Holy Spirit.
6. They walk with God.

**AND FINALLY .....**

Seven Habits of Highly Effective Stewards:

1. **Be thankful** – live with thankful hearts. I Thessalonians 5:18 & Colossians 3:23-24 (NRSV)
2. **Trust God to provide** – abandon worry and trust God in all aspects of life, even daily living. I Timothy 6:17 (NRSV)
3. **Be content** – seek God's guidance to want what we have, not what we don't. Hebrews 13:5 (NRSV)
4. **Be a faithful example** – model good stewardship for our children, and a godly perspective on life. Deuteronomy 6: 6,7 (NRSV)
5. **Live within your means** – refrain from comparing ourselves to those who have more. Philippians 4:12-13 (NRSV)
6. **Give time and talent** – see that we are uniquely made and are called to share with others. I Peter 4:10 (NRSV)
7. **Give treasure** – prayerfully make wise spending decisions that support the Lord. Proverbs 3:9 (NRSV)

*Best wishes for a peaceful Sabbath.*

*David*

David Neal | Stewardship Director

*Faithful stewardship – more than a merely optional Christian grace.*