

## The Lord Watches Over Us

When I first came to the Seventh-day Adventist Church everything was new to me. I practically had no Christian experience. Some of my friends identified themselves as Christians but I didn't see much religion in their lives. Because my mother and father were atheist Christianity was not taught in our home.

But the Lord was drawing me to Himself. When I was 26 years old I began to read the Scriptures. I had been raised as an atheist but now I wanted to learn if there was a God. But I wondered, "How can I do that?" One method I used was this: If there is a God, let me do what is written in the Bible and evaluate what happens. I could talk about many subjects today but I want to talk about money.

Perhaps I heard my first sermon on tithes and offerings a few months after I came to church. I had not been baptized. This famous verse was included in the sermon:

Malachi 3:10 Bring all the tithes into the storehouse, That there may be food in My house, And try Me now in this," Says the LORD of hosts, "If I will not open for you the windows of heaven And pour out for you *such* blessing That *there will not be room enough to receive it.*

The Lord Himself was inviting me to test Him. Amazing! O.K. Let's see. At that time I was working for a large contractor as a project engineer. I was single. Family support was out of the question. So I was keeping a very careful budget for myself. My rent was this much. My car payments were this much. Food, electric, water, insurance, retirement and savings, even entertainment was all in the budget and I kept it. If my entertainment budget finished and my friends invited me to the pool hall, without borrowing from another category, for example the food category, I wouldn't go. I would say, "I don't have the money."

My budget was full. How could I give tithes? And the amount seemed so large to me. Monthly \$225! Where would I find the money? I looked at my budget. My rent was a must. The car payment was a must. Insurance was a must. Food, electric, water were a must. My entertainment budget was \$80. But that wouldn't cover \$225. What else was there? I looked and there was retirement and savings. For this I was reserving \$200. I didn't want to cut this because I saw a lot of people in bad shape when they lost their job. I didn't want to be in that shape. Plus, retirement doesn't come out of the blue. However early you start saving, that is how well it will turn out. What should I do?

Actually it would be better if I didn't go to the pool hall because it didn't harmonize with Christianity. There was beer, loud music and immoral pictures on the wall. O.K. let me not go there. The cinema was the same. What would I see at the cinema? Besides violence, sex, and swearing there wasn't much. It was not conducive to a spiritual life. Plus I was supporting with my money Hollywood which produced these things.

O.K., now I decided to give my \$80 entertainment money as tithe. Then I cut my retirement money and gave that.

It went like that and I didn't feel much of a loss. In the meantime I was baptized. When it came time for a yearly increase in salary I bargained for a good increase but it certainly didn't make up for a \$225 tithe payment. Plus my tithe amount increased.

In the following Autumn there was a call for offerings to ADRA. ADRA is the development and disaster relief agency of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. I wanted to give a significant amount but my income was fixed. How could I give a good amount of money? My goal was \$1000. My prayer was like this: "Lord, if you give me a side job I will give all the money to ADRA." I didn't tell anyone about my prayer but at work a woman and her husband wanted their house painted and were looking for a painter. "I will do it" I said. On Sundays and after work during the week I was painting. From that job I got another one. And another one. In the end I was able to give the \$1000. After I gave the money the offers for painting jobs stopped. I was learning from the Lord. The Lord was providing work to give money to others, that is for goodness.

From a money standpoint I did not experience a big difference. The tithe system is not a lottery system. If you give your tithe then later you will win the lottery and you will be rich. There is nothing like that.

When the building project I was working on finished, I would have to move to another city. The company I worked for built high-rises. The time that I would need to move was approaching. But I loved my church family and I didn't want to leave them. Plus the construction business was dirty business. There were unethical things and I didn't want to be in these money games. Along about that time a church member suggested that I open my own company. We talked and I opened a small gutter company. I had the money I had saved and I started like that. Because it was my own business I could keep Sabbath and there wouldn't be any dirty money business.

Just at that time the economy in America crashed and there was a big recession. When I found work everything was fine. For example, I could do two houses a day. With that much work I could make \$50,000 per year. But I couldn't find two jobs a day. I could barely find two jobs a week. In those days there were telephone yellow pages ads. I bought an ad and my monthly payments were \$680. But there was no work. The money I had saved dwindled and finished. In a short time I couldn't pay my rent. I sold my television, my stereo, and in the end my sofa and chairs. Finally I couldn't stay in my own house, I rented a room from a church member. All this time I was paying my tithe.

One Sabbath I went to church and my friend was making the call for the tithes. He said, "You cannot out-give God." The first thing that came to my mind was, "I am doing it. I am giving my tithe and yet every day I am becoming poorer. My savings are gone. My furniture is gone. My house is gone." Then my friend said, "You cannot out-give God because He already gave you

His Son.” I was embarrassed. Of course he was right. God is giving me eternal life and what am I giving to Him? In comparison my tithe is a ridiculous sum.

In the middle of the winter there was no work. The telephone didn’t ring. It didn’t matter whether there was work or not I still had to pay the \$680 ad payment. At the church a call came. Singles Ministries was going to Mexico to build a church building. Those who joined in would gather a certain amount of money to donate. We would buy our own plane ticket and go there and do construction for two weeks. I wanted to do that. But I didn’t have money. I prayed about it. I spoke with a few people and I got some money from them. But it wasn’t enough. I needed more money to join this project.

All of a sudden, in the middle of the winter, the telephone began to ring. For two weeks I was full. So much work. I worked so hard. I earned enough money and went to Mexico and joined the project. I came home again. The telephone didn’t ring. There was no work.

The Lord could have made my business successful any time He wanted. He showed that to me. In the middle of the winter He provided work. But He wasn’t doing it continuously. Why? I was giving my tithe. I was not receiving the blessing that I wanted from the Lord. That is my business was not successful. But wasn’t going to Mexico a blessing? Yes. But I wanted a successful business.

Summer came and in July work opened up. I calculated that that month I earned about \$10,000. I said, “At last things are going well. I will begin to earn some money now.” One evening while going home a lady ran a red light and hit my truck. It was totaled. There was no way it would be repaired. Finished. My work also finished. The truck was a must for my business. I borrowed a truck and tried to use it but it didn’t have a ladder rack. It wasn’t enough. I bought a second hand truck and outfitted it. But it turned out to be a bad vehicle. It was always in the repair shop. While work was available I couldn’t do it because I had no truck. In one month I lost that whole \$10,000. I was giving my tithes faithfully but everything was going bad.

Tithe is not the lottery.

I wasn’t happy. Gutter work was not forthcoming and I was cleaning gutters. There is no money in it. Jesus was about to return to this world and I was working 70 hours a week and becoming poorer all the time. Something is wrong with this picture! I thought, “What am I doing here?” From a financial standpoint I couldn’t contribute much by way of tithes and offerings. As an elder in the church it was either difficult or impossible to go to prayer meeting. I couldn’t visit church members. Pitiful! I was very unhappy.

One Sabbath a man came to church. In Sabbath School I was leading out. After the program he approached me. “What do you do for a living?” I told him. “Have you ever thought about working as a colporteur?” I said, “No.” He said, “Come with me one night and try it out.”

We went from door to door trying to sell Bibles and books about our faith. It was very different from construction. But was it possible that the Lord was not blessing my business because He was calling me to change my occupation? I didn't understand.

I went into that book business and the first month was not bad. At least I was doing a spiritual work. My time was not in vain. But the next month went badly. And the third month also. It continued like that. I was a terrible salesman but I was working as hard as I could.

My coworkers were looking at me cross as if I was not successful because of laziness. I was unhappy again.

Singles ministries prepared a program. Participants would go to a state park for the weekend. There was a dam and a lake, which meant there were water sports. There was horseback riding and other entertainments. Of course for Sabbath there would be special speakers. I wanted to go and I went.

On Sabbath they sent around the offering plate. When it came to me I opened my wallet and there was \$3 in it. That was it. Maybe I had \$45 in the bank. That was it. My whole fortune. I gave my \$3. There was a man sitting next to me named Todd. Later he spoke with me, "How are you, what do you do for a living, how is it going?" I told him.

The weekend finished and I went home and Monday I needed to go to the gas station. I thought, "I don't have any money in my wallet. If I use my card I can fill my tank. But I need to leave a little money in my account. What shall I do? How will I eat today?"

In the Sates you pump your own gas. Afterwards I went into the market to pay. I opened my wallet to get out my debit card and there was a paper in my wallet. What is that? What could it be? I gave all my money to the church. I took out the paper. It was a check! Without asking, Todd wrote a \$50 check and while I was sleeping he put it in my wallet. I would eat that day.

One Thursday I had no sales. It was late and in Atlanta, after noon on Friday, the next day, no one would be home. Friday night was Sabbath. Can't sell then. I had no money. I didn't even have any gas. I wouldn't even be able to go to church! What would I eat? Pitiful!

Thursday night at 9 pm was my last chance. It was late but I thought I would try. I knocked on the door and someone came to the door. It was very dark. There was no light. There was a bad smell coming from the house. It was a burnt smell. The one who came to the door was Mexican. I showed him the card he had mailed in. He said, "Our house burned. We lost nearly everything. This is my friend's house." In the entrance there were piles of plastic bags full of clothes with a heavy burned smell. I felt very sorry for them. After saying a few things I went to my car. I just sat there. I didn't go anywhere. I was out of energy. Of course they couldn't buy anything. But what will I do?

“I don’t have money. At least the couple I rent a room from could take me to church because I have no gas. Besides a little oatmeal I don’t have any food. But what else can I do. I did the best I could. But it didn’t happen! It didn’t happen!

While I was thinking that, in the dark there came a tapping sound on my window. I lowered my window and it was the Mexican man. “Do you have a Bible?” “Yes” I said. “Can I see it?” I only had a big family Bible. But it was expensive. “How much?” “\$35.” “What is this book?” I said, “Desire of Ages.” “How much?” “\$5.” “What is this book?” “Bible Readings for the Home.” “How much?” “That is also \$5.” He asked about another book.

“I’ll take all of them” he said.

He gave me \$50 and took the books. I was shocked. I bought gas, a little food and when I went to church on Sabbath, as always, I gave my tithe. The money was gone. Monday the cycle continued.

Later, I returned to college. When Melek came to the States she had two suitcases and a daughter. I could put all my possessions in the back of my truck. After we got married, we stayed in someone’s basement. There was one bed and we gave that to our daughter. We took the cushions from the couch and spread them on the floor. And that is how we slept. For one and a half years we ate beans and rice every day. Every day. I could tell more stories. But let me say, as did Jesus’ disciples:

Luke 22:35 And He said to them, "When I sent you without money bag, knapsack, and sandals, did you lack anything?" So they said, "Nothing."

The Lord is looking out for you.