

Ours is an astonishingly beautiful and immensely rich planet

After Yuri Gagarin, in 1961, became the first person to orbit the earth, American astronauts who traveled to the moon expressed awe at the exquisite “blue” beauty of planet Earth as viewed from outer space.

For ages, the Creator’s horn of plenty has provided for the needs of Earth’s inhabitants. It is not by inherent power, however, that the earth produces its bounties:

“The eyes of all look expectantly to You, and You give them their food in due season. You open Your hand and satisfy the desire of every living thing”
(Psalm 145:15-16).

While God actively sustains the entire universe, “it is in this speck of a world, in the souls that He gave His only-begotten Son to save, that His interest and the interest of all heaven is centered.”¹

In earlier lessons, we studied the huge investment made by the Creator to redeem and restore the human family to its original state. That state includes the attributes of love and generosity.

How does God incorporate us into what we can aptly call ...

THE LAW OF LIFE

1. On what divine trait of character was the entire creation founded?

He “*makes His sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust*” (Matthew 5:45). God’s “abundance mentality” is visible everywhere.

2. What principle underlies all creation?

Everything in nature *receives in order to give*. The ocean receives water from rivers, then releases it into the atmosphere through evaporation. The atmosphere releases the water as rain and snow over the land. Vegetation, animals, and man live from the water of rivers, streams, rain, and aquifers; and the overflow returns to the ocean. Such cycles are laws of the universe. *Sharing* is part of the law of life.

¹ Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, Pacific Press Publishing Association, c. 1898, p. 356.



3. What great changes came about because of sin?

“All flesh had corrupted their way on the earth.” After Adam sinned, God placed a curse on the earth: *“Because you ... have eaten from the tree of which I commanded you, saying, ‘You shall not eat of it’: Cursed is the ground for your sake”* (Genesis 6:12; 3:17). Besides becoming subject to physical degeneracy and death, man became self-centered and evil, too often abusing and wasting the earth and its resources (Romans 8:22).

4. What original human trait did God foster and teach?

“Freely you have received, freely give” (Matthew 10:8). Although man’s original generosity changed to greed and fear of not having enough, God will restore that which once was.

5. How did Jesus illustrate the result of generosity?

Jesus said: *“Unless a grain of wheat falls into the ground and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it produces much grain”* (John 12:24). *“Give and it will be given to you: good measure, pressed down, shaken together, and running over will be put into your bosom. For with the same measure that you use, it will be measured back to you”* (Luke 6:38). It may seem wasteful to bury edible seeds in the dirt, but this very act is an investment that produces a bountiful harvest. Likewise, generosity may seem foolish; but Jesus promises great blessings to givers and receivers.

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6. What great investment did God make to restore life to man?

“You were not redeemed with corruptible things, like silver or gold ... but with the precious blood of Christ” (1 Peter 1:18-19). God lovingly and generously planted His own Son in the “furrow” of the world to die. Now He offers to plant His character in each of us. His generous gift will result in a bountiful harvest of human beings restored to His image.

7. What means does He use to place His qualities of love and generosity in man?

“And the Lord said, ‘Who then is that faithful and wise steward, whom his master will make ruler over his household, to give them their portion of food in due season? Blessed is that servant whom his master will find so doing when he comes. Truly, I say to you that he will make him ruler over all that he has’” (Luke 12:42-44). When a person accepts and carries out the responsibilities God gives him, he becomes a participant in the divine cycle of life. God puts repentance and belief into his heart and commissions him to become a steward of not just the earth and its abundance but also of His plan for saving others from the power of the wicked one. God invites us to join Him in giving the good news of His plan to others, while He prepares their hearts to receive the gospel.

8. What gives us the ability to cooperate with God?

“Let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame” (Hebrews 12:1-2).

The process of restoration involves four steps:

- 1) We become aware of and are drawn by God’s generous character and love.
- 2) God plants His virtues in us when we communicate with Him through prayer, the study of His Word, and the contemplation of His works in the world around us.



- 3) At our invitation, His Holy Spirit guides our *actions*, forms our *habits*, and develops our *characters* in Jesus' holy *image*.
- 4) God imparts noble incentives, making us long to share His goodness with saints and sinners alike. Seeing the world in a brand-new way, we become sensitive to the needs of others, pleading with God to show us how to help meet their needs.

9. What special system of giving did God establish to further the interests of His cause on Earth?

"Bring all the tithes into the storehouse, that there may be food in My house, and prove 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" (Malachi 3:10). The tithe is one-tenth of our income. God asks us to set that part aside for Him. Then He promises all of Heaven's blessings on top of the nine-tenths that He provides us to sustain ourselves and our families.² Furthermore, He even tells us to prove for ourselves that He keeps His promises!

10. Why does God want us to give the tithe and offerings to Him?

It is not *"as though He needed any thing."* *"The world is Mine,"* He says, and *"the silver . . . and the gold [are] Mine"* (Acts 17:25; Psalm 50:12; Haggai 2:8). King David repeated that fact after he had collected materials to build the temple in Jerusalem; he said to God: *"All things come from You, and of Your own we have given You"* (1 Chronicles 29:14). God is the Creator of all things. He owns everything. Nothing we call ours is really ours. Everything, even we ourselves, belong to Him. We are simply stewards of His goods—not owners. But man was created to be a co-worker with God; and our joyful, unselfish participation in the Creator's great purposes gives a sense of satisfaction and purpose such as nothing else in life can. Unselfish service to others is the key to happiness and a window into the mind of God.

11. What do faithful stewards do?

"After a long time the lord of those servants came and settled accounts with them" (Matthew 25:19). Stewards, realizing their accountability to the owner of the prop-

² The system of giving tithes and offerings was established by God Himself and was practiced by His faithful people from the earliest time. Abraham, the "father of the faithful," gave tithe to Melchizedec, the priest of the Most High God (Genesis 14:18-20). Jacob promised God the tithe (Genesis 28:20-22). Jesus Himself confirmed the importance of paying tithe (Matthew 23:23).


³ Those who receive their wages from the tithe and are employed in spreading the gospel also pay tithes and offerings.

erty they manage, find great joy and fulfillment in the faithful discharge of their duties and in giving a good account to their Lord.

12. For what purpose is the tithe given?

“Behold, I have given the children of Levi [the priests] all the tithes in Israel as an inheritance in return for the work which they perform.” “The Lord has [ordained] that those³ who preach the gospel should live from the gospel” (Numbers 18:21; 1 Corinthians 9:14). We pay our tithes to God (Hebrews 7:8) by giving it to the stewards of His funds, the treasurers of His church. They use it to pay the salaries of those who devote themselves to the sacred work of carrying the good news of salvation to the world.

13. What does God ask from us besides the tithe?



All human activities involve the expenditure of time, effort, energy, and resources. We also have the opportunity to partner with God in other aspects of service (Psalm 96:8), such as building and maintaining churches, assisting the poor, and printing and distributing literature. He asks us to help with these things as He has prospered us (1 Corinthians 16:2), according to our ability, and always with a loving, willing heart (2 Corinthians 8:12). *“God loves a cheerful giver”* (2 Corinthians 9:7); and He knows that *“it is more blessed to give than to receive”* (Acts 20:35), because He made us that way! He takes our systematic gifts⁴ and prayers and multiplies them for the salvation and blessing of the human family.

14. What other blessing is there in giving tithes and offerings?

“Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal; but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also” (Matthew 6:19-21). In eternity, besides the joy and satisfaction of meeting those in His kingdom who were rescued by Jesus with our cooperation, we will receive “social security benefits” infinitely greater than those of any earthly plan. On the New Earth, God’s children will live forever in a manner that the Bible describes as being far beyond what one can imagine!

“For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for your sakes He became poor, that you through His poverty might become rich.” 2 Corinthians 8:9

⁴ “Systematic benevolence” means to give regularly, from personal conviction and principle, rather than from mere feeling or only in response to public appeal.

What about ...

How GOD'S OWNERSHIP AFFECTS YOU?

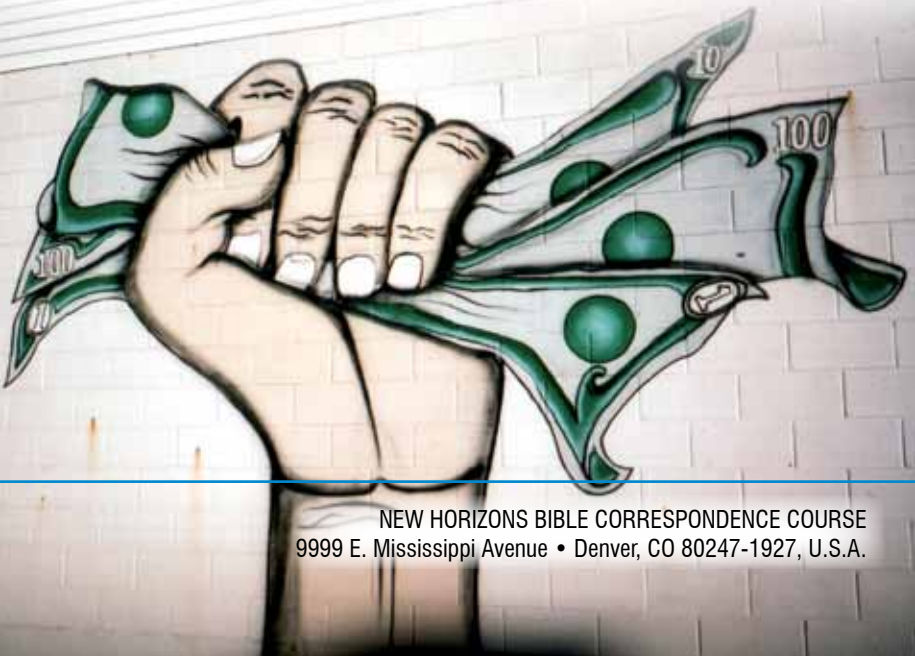
“I feel robbed.” “I am losing control.” “I feel insecure.” “Why am I afraid of participating in God’s plan of systematic benevolence?”

Feelings are powerful, and the unknown is always scary—no matter how much assurance we have that the outcome will be good. From birth to death, we repeatedly venture into the unknown, both voluntarily and of necessity. We generally discover that our ventures were safe. When we decide to trust God, to believe that His ways and plans are right and safe, we make very special experiences in following Jesus into the unknown in spite of our feelings. This is how we grow in confidence not only in Him as our Saviour, Friend, Father, and Lord, but also in what He does for and through us.

Entering into partnership with God never means losing control of one’s life. When we sense and respond to His great love, He actually becomes a part of us (He calls it “abiding” in us). Then He gives us His mind and restores us into His image.

God gives everyone the power to obey Him as a reponse of love. In addition, there is infinite freedom, joy, and satisfaction in being transformed into a brand-new person in the image of God. Imagine! God does all of that for us, and we are the ones who are blessed by the benefits of being in harmony with the law of life and thus with Him.

While God will certainly deal justly with those who choose not to accept His offer of salvation, what is He preparing for those who lovingly abide by His law of life? What wonders await them in heaven and on the New Earth? See Lesson 26, “To Be, or Not to Be.”



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REVIEW QUESTIONS



Please answer the following questions—and send them back so we can help you with any misunderstandings. Note that multiple-choice questions may have more than one correct answer. *Circle the letters of all correct answers. T/F stands for “true or false.”*

1. **The law of life, *receiving to give*, is nature’s expression of God’s generous character (T/F).**
2. **Man was created to be the independent owner of his own goods (T/F).**
3. **When Adam and Eve sinned, their characters were unaffected (T/F).**
4. **When a farmer puts a portion of his grain into the ground, he is ...**
 - a) investing the seed to obtain a great deal more at harvest time.
 - b) irresponsibly throwing away food his family needs for survival.
 - c) actively providing for future need.
5. **“God lovingly and _____ planted His own Son in the ‘furrow’ of the world to die. Now He offers to plant His _____ in each of us.”**
6. **After sacrificing His Son, why did God decide to share with man the responsibility of helping to save his fellow human beings?**

7. **Paying tithe ...**
 - a) means we acknowledge that all our possessions are God’s and that we are stewards of that which He has entrusted to us.
 - b) is to pay one tenth of our income to support the stewards of the gospel.
 - c) provides funds to build and maintain churches.





8. What does God ask of us besides paying tithe?

9. If we faithfully use our resources to work with God for the salvation of mankind, He ...

- a) will provide riches and luxuries for us to show off to our friends.
- b) will open the windows of heaven to provide us with more than we need.
- c) assures us of eternal blessings far beyond those of any earthly system.

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