

The STEWPOT

A POTPOURRI OF PRACTICAL IDEAS *to help you become a better steward*

JANUARY 2021 • VOLUME 26, ISSUE 1

THE LITTLE GIFTS

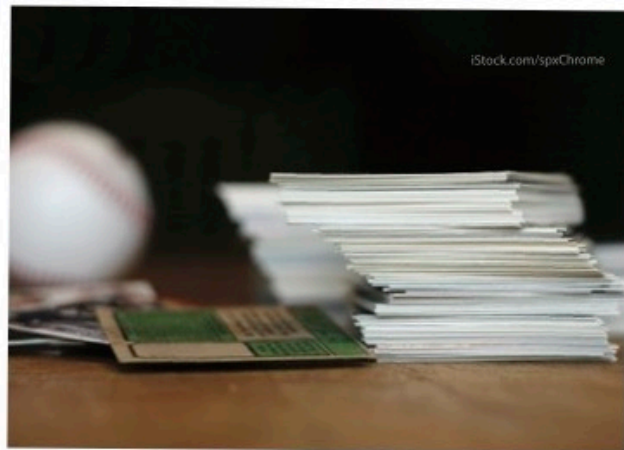
BY MICHELE STOTZ

When I was hired to work in a baseball/basketball card shop in college, my first day on the job focused on the quality of the cards. “Modern-day cards aren’t worth anything unless they’re in pristine condition,” the shop owner told me. Therefore, whenever I opened a brand-new pack of cards, I immediately slid each one into a card protector to ensure its corners remained sharp.

I eventually started collecting basketball cards myself and shared my new hobby with my mother’s first-grade class during one of my trips home. One little boy in particular, Armando, got very excited and overflowed with questions.

A couple months later, I returned to my mother’s classroom and Armando bounded up to me clutching something in his hands. “It’s a present for you!” he declared enthusiastically. He handed it over with a beaming smile. He’d obviously wrapped this small gift himself using newspaper, complete with gaping holes and multiple layers of tape oriented in various directions.

I took my time opening the delicate packet, and inside I found a single basketball card. It was a common card—probably worth a cent or two in perfect condition—



“It’s a present for you!”

STEWARDSHIP is a total lifestyle. It involves our health, time, talents, environment, relationships, spirituality, and finances.



Over the years, I've come across many people who have said things like: "I don't make as much as other people. How can my miniscule tithes and offerings even make a difference?"

and this one was dirty with rounded corners and a tear on the side.

"Do you like it?" he asked expectantly.

"I love it!" I told him. "In fact, it's now my favorite card!" And I meant it. All these years later, it remains my favorite card—not because of its "book value," but because of the excited and generous spirit in which it was given.

"Small but Faithful"

Over the years, I've come across many people who have said things like: "I don't make as much as other people. How can my miniscule tithes and offerings even make a difference?"

When I hear this, I can't help but smile, because I've seen firsthand exactly what all those seemingly small gifts can do. In fact, if a missionary hadn't shared a set of Bible studies—which cost less than \$1—with my grandparents many decades ago, I wouldn't even be here today.

In recent years, as I've had the privilege of working for some cutting-edge Adventist media ministries, I've been blown away by what I've seen and heard: prisoners giving their lives to Christ after using printed Bible studies, young girls rescued from human trafficking and introduced to a new life in Jesus, entire communist rebel villages laying down their guns in exchange for Bibles, people joining the church from

all corners of the globe after attending online meetings, assassins renouncing their line of work after listening to cell phone evangelism content, and so much more. Throughout all of it, one of the most common refrains I've heard from church leadership is, "This couldn't happen were it not for those small, faithful gifts."

Of course, I've also seen larger gifts accomplish incredible things, but I've found that it's the combination of the two that really empowers the church to finish the work.

The Widow's Mite

In Mark 12:41-44 and Luke 21:1-4, we read the story of the Widow's Mite.

When we hear this story, the focus is often (understandably) on the sacrifice of this humble woman. But as we dive even deeper, additional encouraging details begin to appear, and Ellen White describes it beautifully in *The Desire of Ages* (pages 615-616):

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But Jesus understood [the widow's] motive. She believed the service of the temple to be of God's appointment, and she was anxious to do her utmost to sustain it. She did what she could, and her act was to be a monument to her memory through all time, and her joy in eternity.

When we read about the widow in Mark and Luke, we see her as a meek figure, which makes the words in that last line such a beautiful contrast as her act becomes a *monument* pointing toward eternal joy. The passage continues:

The little duties cheerfully done, the little gifts which make no show, and which to human eyes may appear worthless, often stand highest in His sight. . . . When Jesus said of the widow, she "hath cast in more than they all," His words were true, not only of the motive, but of the results of her gift. . . . The influence of that little gift has been like a stream, small in its beginning, but widening and deepening as it flowed down through the ages.

Did you catch that last bit about "the results of her gift"? Her offering—which was far less than any "small" amount we've ever given—has now carved a deep and wide path *through the ages!*

"It's All About Where You're Looking"

Years ago, a friend encouraged me to take a motorcycle training course, just to learn the basics even though I knew I wouldn't be buying a bike. On my first day, I felt a growing trepidation as I got used to the handlebar controls and started tentatively zooming around the parking lot.

"If you just keep your eyes focused on where you want to be, that'll get you there."



After a couple hours, it felt like I was finally getting the hang of it. But then at the end of the day, we were tasked with driving in a straight line, which sounded easy enough but proved anything but. The instructor stood off to the side, shouting words of encouragement, but every time I attempted to follow the bold line in front of me, I veered off and started heading straight toward him. I felt more and more discouraged—not to mention nervous that I might hit my instructor!

After a couple attempts, he walked over to me to share a few words of wisdom. He leaned down with a smile and said, "It's all about where you're looking. Instead of focusing at the end of the straight line, you're looking at me. If you just keep your eyes focused on where you want to be, that'll get you there."

That sounded way too easy to be true, but I decided to give it a shot anyway. And you know what? He was right. On the next try, I never deviated from that line.

Rather than being distracted and looking at what we may think of as our "small" contributions, it's far more effective (not to mention fun) to look to where we'll be when we see the full results of them. And as we think about the ripple effects of our own widow's mites, we can feel some of that heavenly joy today!



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Michele Stotz, a graduate of Pacific Union College, is communication director for Adventist World Radio at the General Conference. She previously served as public relations director for the Voice of Prophecy and It Is Written. She also appears on the *Discovery Mountain* podcast as "Miss Michelle."

Distributed by:
Northeastern Conference
Stewardship Ministries
Director: Feron Francis

Produced by:
Pacific Union Conference
Stewardship Department
Design: Stephanie Leal
Editorial: Bernard Castillo