

First Fruits

The Bible has quite a bit to say about the topic of first

- Some Bible teachers say there is a principal of “firsts”
- Putting God first in everything in our lives whether our time, talents or possessions is very important

Starting with our money and giving what we do with the “first fruits” affects every aspect of our lives

If you want to have a *God Blessed Life* you must put *God First*

Malachi 3:8–11 (NKJV)

⁸ “Will a man rob God? Yet you have robbed Me! But you say, ‘In what way have we robbed You?’ In tithes and offerings. ⁹ You are cursed with a curse, for you have robbed Me, *even this whole nation.* 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.* ¹¹ “And I will rebuke the devourer for your sakes, so that he will not destroy the fruit of your ground, nor shall the vine fail to bear fruit for you in the field,” Says the LORD of hosts;

- Did God Change?

Malachi 3:6 (NKJV)

⁶ “For I *am* the LORD, I do not change;

God Rewards Good Stewardship

Hebrews 11:6 (NKJV)

⁶But without faith *it is* impossible to please *Him*, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and *that* He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him.

- God is a rewarder
- God *rewards* faithful living according to His principles

1 Corinthians 3:8 (NKJV)

⁸Now he who plants and he who waters are one, and each one will receive his own reward according to his own labor.

The Bible is clear that we are not saved by good works but we are in fact saved for good works

Ephesians 2:8–10 (NKJV)

⁸For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; *it is* the gift of God, ⁹not of works, lest anyone should boast. ¹⁰For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.

- We must distinguish between belief and behavior
- Our belief determines where we will spend eternity
- Our behavior determines how
- God is going to reward us for our behavior or our good works

God not only rewards us in eternity but in this life as well

Mark 10:29–30 (NKJV)

²⁹ So Jesus answered and said, “Assuredly, I say to you, there is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or father or mother or wife or children or lands, for My sake and the gospel’s, ³⁰ who shall not receive a hundredfold **now in this time**—houses and brothers and sisters and mothers and children and lands, with persecutions—**and in the age to come**, eternal life.

- God is going to reward us, not only in the age to come, but now in this time as well

Just prior to the parable of the talents Jesus is talking about His unexpected return

Matthew 24:45–47 (NKJV)

⁴⁵ “Who then is a faithful and wise servant, whom his master made ruler over his household, to give them food in due season? ⁴⁶ Blessed *is* that servant whom his master, when he comes, will find so doing. ⁴⁷ Assuredly, I say to you that he will make him ruler over all his goods.

- Who is that faithful and wise servant?
- Jesus is still asking that question today
- When He returns, he wants to find us doing a good job with the things He has entrusted to us

Where Is Your Heart?

Matthew 6:21 (NKJV)

²¹ For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

Luke 16:11 (NKJV)

¹¹ Therefore if you have not been faithful in the unrighteous mammon, who will commit to your trust the true *riches*?

- God uses money to test our hearts
- Money tests stewardship and trustworthiness
- We are stewards of the money we are given
- God sees the purchases we make everyday
- Money goes up and down – God stays the same
- Money is more than just a means of buying things
- “Where you treasure is” – **Matthew 6:21**

God Wants to Bless Us with More

Genesis 12:2 (NKJV) Speaking to Abraham

² I will make you a great nation; I will bless you and make your name great; And you shall be a blessing.

- God desired to bless Abraham so he could be a blessing to others
- The same is true for you and me today

2 Corinthians 9:8 (NKJV)

⁸ And God *is* able to make all grace abound toward you, that you, always having all sufficiency in all *things*, may have an abundance for every good work.

- God wants to bless us so we are ready to do every good work!
- Having an abundance is only possible when we are good stewards of the blessings God has given us

We must never allow reward to be our primary motive to give

- Yet, we cannot ignore the fact that God wants to reward us

When we allow God to work in our hearts, our primary motivation becomes giving for the sheer joy of giving

- Helping for the sheer satisfaction of helping
- When we live this way, we are imitating our Father God

Paul was about to send a couple of helpers to the Corinthians Church to collect a special offering for the suffering Macedonian Church

2 Corinthians 9 – *My paraphrase*

- *He says: you said you wanted to give an offering*
- *I've been bragging about your generosity*
- *Don't embarrass yourselves, and me, follow through!*
- *Paul is commending them for their willingness to give, and takes the opportunity to teach on giving*

2 Corinthians 9:6–8 (NKJV) The Cheerful Giver

⁶ But this *I say*: He who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and he who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully. ⁷ So let each one *give* as he purposes in his heart, not grudgingly or of necessity; for God loves a cheerful giver. ⁸ And God *is* able to make all grace abound toward you, that you, always having all sufficiency in all *things*, may have an abundance for every good work.

- These people were already givers
- They were about to make a sacrificial offering
- Sow sparingly – reap sparingly
- Sow bountifully – reap bountifully

Luke 6:38 (NKJV)

³⁸ 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.”

- Again, our motivation is not reward
- The Spirit of God wants to free us from the fear of giving, showing us that God is a rewarder
- God wants us to give as we purpose in our hearts
- When we give “in secret” He rewards “openly”
– **Matthew 6**

2 Corinthians 9:7 (NKJV)

⁷ So let each one *give* as he purposes in his heart, not grudgingly or of necessity; for God loves a cheerful giver.

- You are the only person who can decide your level of giving
- It's between you and the Spirit of God

2 Corinthians 9:7 (NIV)

⁷ Each of you should give what you have decided in your heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver.

God is not looking for tithes, offerings and gifts that are given *“reluctantly or under compulsion”*

- The blessed life is an overflow of cheerful giving
- There is a “Joy” in giving!

The only way to become a cheerful giver is for God to do a work in your heart

- We need a reconciliation with God and our finances

It comes down to the heart

- Remember: God is *able* to make *all grace* abound
- How often? – Always!

When we give cheerfully God is able to make all grace abound towards us, so we always have abundance so that we never have need

Philippians 4:19 (NKJV)

¹⁹ And my God shall supply all your need according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus.

- There is a difference between *wants* and *needs*
- God doesn't promise to meet every passing whim or fancy
- Money is never our sufficiency, God is!
- There is a level beyond sufficiency – Abundance!
- We will be tested at this level

It's one thing to have just enough to meet your needs, but the real heart test comes when we get a little extra

- When I get a little extra, do I pay down debt or buy a new rifle or set of golf clubs?
- We are tested with *need* as we trust God for our sufficiency
- We are tested with *greed* when we move into the area of abundance
- When we pass this test, we can now move into the highest use of money, *seed*

How do you view money?

- Do you see it as something to meet your *need*?
- Do you see it as something to satisfy your *greed*?
- Or do you see it as God giving you *seed*?

I believe there is a sweet spot that God wants us all to live

Proverbs 30:8–9 (NKJV)

⁸ Remove falsehood and lies far from me; Give me neither poverty nor riches— Feed me with the food allotted to me; ⁹ Lest I be full and deny *You*, and say, “Who *is* the LORD?” Or lest I be poor and steal, and profane the name of my God.

- Don’t allow me to have need or to be tempted with greed, that’s wisdom
- Can God meet your need without money?

1 Kings 17:6 (NKJV) God provides for Elijah

⁶ The ravens brought him bread and meat in the morning, and bread and meat in the evening; and he drank from the brook.

- God didn’t need money to provide, He just needed a couple of ravens
- They didn’t just bring him bread, they brought him steak

He also brought him cake

1 Kings 19:5–6, 8 (NKJV)

⁵ Then as he lay and slept under a broom tree, suddenly an angel touched him, and said to him, “Arise *and* eat.” ⁶ Then he looked, and there by his head *was* a cake baked on coals, and a jar of water. So he ate and drank, and lay down again.

⁸ So he arose, and ate and drank; and he went in the strength of that food forty days and forty nights as far as Horeb, the mountain of God.

2 Corinthians 9:10–11 (NKJV)

¹⁰ Now may He who supplies seed to the sower, and bread for food, supply and multiply the seed you have sown and increase the fruits of your righteousness, ¹¹ while you are enriched in everything for all liberality, which causes thanksgiving through us to God.

- There is a proper order
- God doesn't supply seed to the keeper

When you think that someone else is a giver because they have money; You've got it backwards

- That guy has money because he's a giver
- Some people want God to bless them but they won't get their heart right
- God will multiply the seed you *have* sown
- You will always *reap* more than you *sow* when your heart is right about finances and giving

Psalms 126:5–6 (NKJV)

⁵ Those who sow in tears shall reap in joy. ⁶ He who continually goes forth weeping, bearing seed for sowing, shall doubtless come again with rejoicing, bringing his sheaves *with him*.

- We are not talking about perfection in your finances
- We are talking about a heart that is reconciled to God's principles of stewardship, tithing, giving, sowing and reaping

Tithes – Offerings – Extravagant Offerings

John 12:1–8 (NKJV)

12 Then, six days before the Passover, Jesus came to Bethany, where Lazarus was who had been dead, whom He had raised from the dead. ² There they made Him a supper; and Martha served, but Lazarus was one of those who sat at the table with Him. ³ Then Mary took a pound of very costly oil of spikenard, anointed the feet of Jesus, and wiped His feet with her hair. And the house was filled with the fragrance of the oil. ⁴ But one of His disciples, Judas Iscariot, Simon's *son*, who would betray Him, said, ⁵ "Why was this fragrant oil not sold for three hundred denarii and given to the poor?" ⁶ This he said, not that he cared for the poor, but because he was a thief, and had the money box; and he used to take what was put in it. ⁷ But Jesus said, "Let her alone; she has kept this for the day of My burial. ⁸ For the poor you have with you always, but Me you do not have always."

- What a graphic contrast in two hearts towards giving
 - The heart of Mary
 - The heart of Judas
- An equivalent of an entire years' worth of wages
- Imagine taking your gross annual income, buying a bottle of perfume and then emptying it on someone's feet
- It is all gone – you will never get it back!
- Why did Mary do this?
- Why did it bother Judas so much?
- Hint: it's not about the money

Wherever you find generosity you will find selfishness battling for control

- Each one of us needs to take a deep, hard inward look
- Am I generous or am I selfish?
- Judas didn't care about the poor
- He used to take what was in the box – **John 12:6**
- Judas pretended to care about others while thinking only about himself
- A spirit of envy not compassion prompted his comment

Contemporary envious remarks:

- *“How could anyone in good conscience drive a car that expensive?”*
- *“She sure could have helped a lot of people for what she spent on that coat.”*

The “Money Box” was the “Offering Box”

- Jesus was and itinerate preacher
- People supported Him and the disciples – **Luke 8:1-3**
- How could anyone do that?
- People rob God all the time – **Malachi 3:8**
- Hey, don't blow that money on a building or the Pastor
- Give it to the poor
- Selfishness tries to get the focus off self by pointing out the “extravagance” of others

Remember Generosity is not about the amount but the heart

Luke 21:1–3 (NKJV)

21 And He looked up and saw the rich putting their gifts into the treasury, ² and He saw also a certain poor widow putting in two mites. ³ So He said, “Truly I say to you that this poor widow has put in more than all;

- A generous heart stems from a grateful heart
- Every gift has a purpose
- Don’t underestimate the difference you can make

Mary was able to anoint Jesus’ body for burial

Mark 14:8 (NKJV)

⁸ She has done what she could. She has come beforehand to anoint My body for burial.

- When we give obediently and extravagantly at the prompting of the Holy Spirit, we have no idea the real significance of the gift
- God knows
- God has a purpose for every gift and he will reward

Matthew 26:13 (NKJV)

¹³ Assuredly, I say to you, wherever this gospel is preached in the whole world, what this woman has done will also be told as a memorial to her.”