

Serving God In a Wanting World

By Earl Cooper, Ph.D.

*A four week devotional focused on
Biblical Stewardship*

For the purpose of. . .

Discovering God's divine economics.

Discovering the beauty of belonging to God.

Discovering the real meaning and value of dependence.

Discovering the riches of God's own resources.



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Serving God in a Wanting World
A study in Biblical Stewardship by Dr. Earl Cooper

“God or Money?”

Session One: The path to doing the will of God lies in an understanding of God’s view and purpose for possessions. Discover God’s “divine economics.”

Week 1, Day 1

There is no doubt that Africa has not seen the social prosperity that other continents have, where even the poorest in these societies have more than what the rest of the world can only dream of. K.P. Yohanna, in “Revolution in World Missions,” cites economist Robert Heilbroner, who describes the one billion hungry people in the Third World in comparison to the American family:

“We begin by invading the house of our imaginary American family to strip it of its furniture. Everything goes: beds, chairs, tables, television sets, lamps. We will leave the family with a few old blankets, a kitchen table, a wooden chair. Along with the bureaus go the clothes. Each member of the family may keep in his ‘wardrobe’ his oldest suit or dress, a shirt or blouse. We will permit a pair of shoes for the head of the family, but none for the wife or children.

We move to the kitchen. The appliances have already been taken out, so we turn to the cupboards ... the box of matches may stay a small bag of flour, some sugar and salt. A few moldy potatoes, already in the garbage can, must be rescued, for they will provide much of tonight’s meal. We will leave a handful of onions and a dish of dried beans. All the rest we take away: the meat, the fresh vegetables, the canned goods, the crackers, the candy

Now we have stripped the house: the bathroom has been dismantled, the running water shutoff, the electric wires taken out. Next we take away the house. The family can move to the tool shed Communications must go next. No more newspapers, magazines, books—not that they are missed, since we must take away our family’s literacy as well. Instead, in our shantytown we will allow one radio

Now government services must go next. No more postmen, no more firemen. There is a school, but it is three miles away and consists of two classrooms. There are, of course, no hospitals or doctors nearby. The nearest clinic is ten miles away and is tended by a midwife. It can be reached by bicycle, provided the family has a bicycle, which is unlikely.... Finally money. We will allow our family a cash hoard of five dollars. This will prevent our breadwinner from experiencing the tragedy of an Iranian who went blind because he could not raise the \$3.94 which he mistakenly thought he needed to receive admission to a hospital where he could have been cured.” Has reading this comparison caused your heart to want more?

Read Matt. 19:16-24 and answer the following questions:
What was the young man’s understanding of his own spiritual condition?

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Matt. 19

16 ¶ Now behold, one came and said to Him, "Good Teacher, what good thing shall I do that I may have eternal life?"

17 So He said to him, "Why do you call Me good? No one is good but One, that is, God. But if you want to enter into life, keep the commandments."

18 He said to Him, "Which ones?" Jesus said, "'You shall not murder,' 'You shall not commit adultery,' 'You shall not steal,' 'You shall not bear false witness,'

19 'Honor your father and your mother,' and, 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.'"

20 The young man said to Him, "All these things I have kept from my youth. What do I still lack?"

21 Jesus said to him, "If you want to be perfect, go, sell what you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow Me."

22 But when the young man heard that saying, he went away sorrowful, for he had great possessions.

23 ¶ Then Jesus said to His disciples, "Assuredly, I say to you that it is hard for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven.

24 "And again I say to you, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God."

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Although this man considered himself to be a religious person, he refused to follow Jesus. What was the obstacle in this man's way?

Jesus saw a major flaw in this man's heart condition. He considered himself obedient to the law, but his heart was captured by wealth.

What comment did Jesus make about the wealthy entering heaven?

What does that say about the possibilities of the people in any country who pursue money as a life goal?

The Christian must recognize the ever present dangers of any measure of prosperity. What warnings are presented in the following texts:

Matt. 6:24 _____

Luke 12:34 _____

These text present very real dangers to believers. There is the danger of the Bondage of labour, being a slave of money rather than a slave of righteousness as urged by Paul (read Romans 6:18). There is the danger of the Bondage of love; a heart captured by wealth rather than a heart captured by God (read Mark 12:30).

How did the following people fall into these dangers:

Ahab (1 Kings 21:4) _____

Achan (Joshua 7:1) _____

Gehazi (2 Kings 5:26) _____

Judas (Matt. 27:3-5) _____

All these men sold their souls for material gain: Ahab sold himself for a vineyard, Achan for a wedge of silver and a garment, Gehazi for silver and raiment, Judas for a bag of silver.

Have you evidenced these dangers in people you know? If so explain:

How has God spoken to you about the danger of possessions?

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Matthew 6:24 No man can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon.

Luke 12: 34 For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also

Rom. 6:18 And having been set free from sin, you became slaves of righteousness.

Mark 12:30 And thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength: this is the first commandment.

1 Kings 21:4 And Ahab came into his house heavy and displeased because of the word which Naboth the Jezreelite had spoken to him: for he had said, I will not give thee the inheritance of my fathers. And he laid him down upon his bed, and turned away his face, and would eat no bread

Joshua 7:1 But the children of Israel committed a trespass in the accursed thing: for Achan, the son of Carmi, the son of Zabdi, the son of Zerah, of the tribe of Judah, took of the accursed thing: and the anger of the LORD was kindled against the children of Israel.

2 Kings 5:26 And he said unto him, Went not mine heart with thee, when the man turned again from his chariot to meet thee? Is it a time to receive money, and to receive garments, and oliveyards, and vineyards, and sheep, and oxen, and menservants, and maidservants? 27 The leprosy therefore of Naaman shall cleave unto thee, and unto thy seed for ever.

Matt 27:3 Then Judas, which had betrayed him, when he saw that he was condemned, repented himself, and brought again the thirty pieces of silver to the chief priests and elders, 4 Saying, I have sinned in that I have betrayed the innocent blood....5 And he cast down the pieces of silver in the temple, and departed, and went and hanged himself.

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Week 1, Day 2

Jesus made it clear, either man would serve Him or serve money. Is it evident in West African society, who the majority serve? The Christian must recognize the ever present dangers of prosperity. The Christian must also recognize the destructive power of prosperity.

Read 1 Timothy 6:6-10 and circle each statement identifying the destructive power of prosperity.

In your own words, explain from the above exercise, what is at risk for the believer, in a prosperous society:

The destructive power of prosperity is evident. Your answers may be worded differently, but should include the following risk factors:

1. Not being contented with godliness. The danger here is taking our eyes off of eternity (6-8)
2. Being led by desire for wealth. Here the destructive power of temptation is pointed to as a snare that traps and kills spiritual passion. (9)
3. Developing a love for wealth. God describes this as the destruction of peace and comfort of soul as one is pierced with sorrows (10)

List where each of the risks cited above could lead a believer and those he/she could influence:

Helen Steiner Rice wrote this poem as a warning against the dangers and destruction of possessions:

Gold is cold and lifeless and can't see or hear,
And in the time of trouble it is powerless to cheer.
It has no ears to listen, no heart to understand,
It cannot bring you comfort or reach out a helping hand.

What has God said to you in this study? _____

Having studied the perils of prosperity, write out a prayer of commitment to serving the Lord rather than money, and commit this to the Lord.

1 Tim 6: 6 Now godliness with contentment is great gain. 7 For we brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out. 8 And having food and clothing, with these we shall be content. 9 But those who desire to be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and harmful lusts which drown men in destruction and perdition. 10 For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil, for which some have strayed from the faith in their greediness, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows.

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Week 1, Day 3

God made life a matter of choice. God or money. The Christian continues to face the issue of money versus God, especially living in the desired prosperity that Africa seeks. To be a useful, committed Christian in a such a society, a believer must have a complete change of mind. The influences and values of the world must be kept in check and the values and purposes of God must be cultivated.

God has a radically different perspective on prosperity and possessions, but in order to incorporate this perspective into the believer's life, a transformation must take place.

Read Romans 12:1-2. Here God presents the process necessary for Christian transformation of mind. Identify the phrases in the text that answer each of the following questions, AND, write out an explanation for what each of the phrases means.

1. What is the foundational motive for a believer's desire for transformation?

2. What first step is required for this transformation to take place?

3. How is this step of sacrifice described?

4. How is this expression of service described?

5. What conscious decision must continually be made for transformation?

6. What is the result of this transformation of mind?

The answers to the above questions are: the mercies of God, present your body a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable, reasonable, do not be conformed to the world, knowing God's will.

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Romans 12: 1 I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service. 2 And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.

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The transformation of the mind of the believer results in an ability to know the will of God. This passage describes God's will as good. This means something that brings about the best results. God's will is described as acceptable. This means that it is pleasurable, bringing satisfaction and joy. God's will is described as perfect. This means lacking nothing in quality or completeness. Doing God's will is all a believer ever needs.

Read Philippians 3:7-14 in the right margin and circle all the phrases that reflect Paul's life as a "living sacrifice" for Christ.

Write in your own words the one phrase reflecting life as a living sacrifice for Christ that is most meaningful to you . _____

How has God spoken to you in this study about offering yourself as a living sacrifice. _____

Week 1, Day 4

To be a useful, committed Christian in a prosperity desiring society, a believer must have a total commitment to Christ. In order to fully grasp the significance of divine economics, the Christian must also have a complete change of mind.

According to Colossians 3:10, how is the mind of a Christian renewed?

The Christian is transformed by the renewing of the mind through the knowledge of God. The knowledge of God comes from that special revelation of God known as Holy Scripture.

In Psalm 19, underline all the synonyms for Scripture (the different names of the Bible). Now go back and circle all the words that describe the nature of the Scriptures such as *perfect*. Finally, make a list of all the benefits of the Scriptures to the Believer.

According to 2 Timothy 3:16-17 what other benefits are derived from the Word of God.

God renews the mind of the Christian through the ministry of the Spirit as the Word of God is studied. This is a cooperative effort between God's indwelling Spirit and a Believer's disciplined labour. According to 2 Tim. 2:15, how is the disciplined student described.

Philippians 3: 7 But what things were gain to me, these I have counted loss for Christ. 8 Yet indeed I also count all things loss for the excellence of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them as rubbish, that I may gain Christ. 9 and be found in Him, not having my own righteousness, which is from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which is from God by faith; 10 that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death, 11 if, by any means, I may attain to the resurrection from the dead. 12 Not that I have already attained, or am already perfected; but I press on, that I may lay hold of that for which Christ Jesus has also laid hold of me. 13 Brethren, I do not count myself to have apprehended; but one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead, 14 I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.

Colossians 3:10 And have put on the new man, which is renewed in knowledge after the image of him that created him:

Psalms 19:7 ¶ The law of the LORD is perfect, converting the soul: the testimony of the LORD is sure, making wise the simple. 8 The statutes of the LORD are right, rejoicing the heart: the commandment of the LORD is pure, enlightening the eyes. 9 The fear of the LORD is clean, enduring for ever: the judgments of the LORD are true and righteous altogether. 10 More to be desired are they than gold, yea, than much fine gold: sweeter also than honey and the honeycomb. 11 Moreover by them is thy servant warned: and in keeping of them there is great reward.

2 Tim. 3: 16 All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness:

17 That the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works.

2 Tim. 2:15 Be diligent to present yourself approved to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth.

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The Christian worker who takes seriously the importance of God's word will discover the Bible to be invaluable for finding wisdom, experiencing joy, giving light, bringing warning. The study of the Word of God will provide doctrine - what to believe, reproof - a ground for tested convictions, correction – improvement of life and character, instruction - sound practical teaching.

Indicate the measure of commitment you have to the serious study of God's Word.

Little Effort 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 Much Effort



What has God said to you about renewing your mind by studying the Word of God, and what will you do about it?

Week 1, Day 5

God's view of possessions and finances is radically different from the world's. Today's study will introduce the student to some of the unique perspectives that God gives toward possessions as a foundation for understanding the three major principles of possessions that will be studied in the weeks to come.

An introduction to Divine Economics

Match the verse references on the right to each of the following statements:

- _____ Health to earn and wealth to have are a gift from God – something I am given, not something that I earn or deserve, therefore my response should be gratitude.
- _____ God gives us the gift of earnings and wealth in order for us to give it away.
- _____ God measures our giving on the basis of what we keep, not what we give.
- _____ When we are generous with our gift of resources, God promises to provide in order for us to continue to be generous.
- _____ The greatest investment anyone can make is to give our gift of wealth toward eternity.
- _____ What we enjoy doing with our gift of wealth will indicate the direction of our heart.

God renews the mind of the Christian through the ministry of the Spirit as the Word of God is studied.

2 Cor. 9: 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.

Ecc. 5:19 As for every man to whom God has given riches and wealth, and given him power to eat of it, to receive his heritage and rejoice in his labour--this is the gift of God.

Mark 12:42 Then one poor widow came and threw in two mites, which make a quadrans. 43 He called His disciples to Himself and said to them, "Assuredly, I say to you that this poor widow has put in more than all those who have given to the treasury; 44 "for they all put in out of their abundance, but she out of her poverty put in all that she had, her whole livelihood."

1 Tim. 6:17 Command those who are rich in this present age not to be haughty, nor to trust in uncertain riches but in the living God, who gives us richly all things to enjoy. 18 Let them do good, that they be rich in good works, ready to give, willing to share, 19 storing up for themselves a good foundation for the time to come, that they may lay hold on eternal life.

Eph. 4:28 Let him who stole steal no longer, but rather let him labour, working with his hands what is good, that he may have something to give him who has need.

Luke 12:34 For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.

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The reference answers are in the following order: Ecc. 5:19, Eph. 4:28, Mark 12:42, 2 Cor. 9:6, 1 Tim. 6:19, Luke 12:34

In "Run with the Horses", Eugene Peterson writes about seeing a family of birds teaching the young to fly. Three young swallows were perched on a dead branch that stretched out over a lake.

"One adult swallow got alongside the chicks and started shoving them out toward the end of the branch--pushing, pushing, pushing. The end one fell off. Somewhere between the branch and the water four feet below, the wings started working, and the fledgling was off on his own. Then the second one.

"The third was not to be bullied. At the last possible moment his grip on the branch loosened just enough so that he swung downward, then tightened again, bulldog tenacious. The parent was without sentiment. He pecked at the desperately clinging talons until it was more painful for the poor chick to hang on than risk the insecurities of flying. The grip was released, and the inexperienced wings began pumping. The mature swallow knew what the chick did not--that it would fly--that there was no danger in making it do what it was perfectly designed to do.

"Birds have feet and can walk. Birds have talons and can grasp a branch securely. They can walk; they can cling. But flying is their characteristic action, and not until they fly are they living at their best, gracefully and beautifully.

"Giving is what we do best. It is the air into which we were born. It is the action that was designed into us before our birth. ... Some of us try desperately to hold on to ourselves, to live for ourselves. We look so bedraggled and pathetic doing it, hanging on to the dead branch of a bank account for dear life, afraid to risk ourselves on the untried wings of giving. We don't think we can live generously because we have never tried. But the sooner we start, the better, for we are going to have to give up our lives finally, and the longer we wait, the less time we have for the soaring and swooping life of grace."

It is evident that the focus of divine economics is giving not getting. This is radically different thinking that the world embraces, yet it is the avenue for blessings and security in Christ as the Christian seeks to serve Him in a prosperous society.

What has God taught you about divine economics?

As you complete this study, you will be challenged to think differently and act differently toward possessions than the world is accustomed to. Spend time in prayer asking God to give you a teachable spirit and a firm conviction to practice His own Principles of Possessions.

For additional daily studies, read a proverb each day for a month and identify all the verses that address finances, possessions, giving and money. Write out each verse in a separate book with room beside each verse for your own comments regarding the meaning of each text. Although not every chapter has reference to God's Divine Economics, you will be surprised how many do.

Giving is what we do best. It is the air into which we were born. It is the action that was designed into us before our birth

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“Who holds the Title Deed?”

Summary of discovered truth:

1. Session One - The path to doing the will of God lies in an understanding of God’s view and purpose for possessions. This was a discovery of God’s “divine economics.”

2. This Session -The path to peace of mind about possessions lies in our own attitude toward ownership.
Discover the beauty of belonging to God.

Week 2, Day 1

In a world that craves for material possessions, legalizes ownership, registers possessions and goes to war over real estate, the matter of ownership has taken on great proportions. Practically the first words a child says are “mine, mine, mine.”

In Lu.12:15, those who measure life by possessions are guilty of what sin?

Read Luke 12:16-21 and list all the dangers that abundance can lead to.

How would you rate your present attitude toward possessions? Draw a circle around the number that best describes you.

A Worldly Attitude 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 A Spiritual Attitude



In which direction are you going?

The Christian can get caught up too easily with a worldly attitude toward possessions. God settles the matter clearly. There are over twenty references in Scripture to indicate that as a believer ***I belong to God and all that I have belongs to God.***

Read the texts in the right hand margin and write a summary in your own words of what each texts states about our ownership.

Psalm 100:3 _____

Romans 14:7-8 _____

1 Cor. 6:19 _____

Luke 12:15 And He said to them, "Take heed and beware of covetousness, for one's life does not consist in the abundance of the things he possesses."

16 Then He spoke a parable to them, saying: "The ground of a certain rich man yielded plentifully.

17 "And he thought within himself, saying, 'What shall I do, since I have no room to store my crops?'

18 "So he said, 'I will do this: I will pull down my barns and build greater, and there I will store all my crops and my goods.

19 'And I will say to my soul, "Soul, you have many goods laid up for many years; take your ease; eat, drink, and be merry.'"

20 "But God said to him, 'Fool! This night your soul will be required of you; then whose will those things be which you have provided?'

21 "So is he who lays up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God."

*I belong to God
and all that I
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Psalms 100:3 Know ye that the LORD he is God: it is he that has made us, and not we ourselves; we are his people, and the sheep of his pasture.

Romans 14:7-8 For none of us lives to himself, and no man dies to himself. For whether we live, we live unto the Lord; and whether we die, we die unto the Lord: whether we live therefore, or die, we are the Lord's.

1 Cor. 6:19 What? know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost which is in you, which you have of God, and you are not your own?

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Week 2, Day 2

God clearly states that a believer's life belongs to God. By the blood of Christ, God purchased the believer and, although setting them free, He calls each believer to a unique slavery.

To what is the believer called to be an instrument of? (Romans 6:13)

What do you think it means to be an instrument of righteousness?

No one is free. Even after salvation a person can be a slave of sin or a slave of righteousness. God makes life a matter of ownership. The believer's call to be a slave of righteousness means to acknowledge God's ownership of our lives and be yielded to His will in every area. The acknowledgement of God's ownership of ourselves has unique implications in the things we possess.

What three things does God say are a gift from Him in Ecc. 5: 18-19?

According to 1 Samuel 2:7, who sets the measure of our individual wealth in this world? _____

Underline the words in verse 8 that indicate what the promised inheritance is for those who accept the ownership of God even to the extent of world poverty.

As God's purchased possession, we not only are owned by Him but all that we have is owned by Him. God sets the level of our individual wealth in this world.

Read Phil 4:11-12. Underline the words that indicate what Paul's experience with wealth was. Paul experienced times of abundance and times of want. Circle the words that indicate Paul's attitude throughout these times. Paul is a great example of what it means to yield all ownership to Christ. Are you willing to accept worldly poverty for the cause of Christ. Have you yielded the "title deed" of your life and all your possessions to Him?

What did God say to you about the ownership of your life?

What will you do about it?

Romans 6:13 And do not present your members as instruments of unrighteousness to sin, but present yourselves to God as being alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness to God.

Ecc. 5:18 Here is what I have seen: It is good and fitting for one to eat and drink, and to enjoy the good of all his labour in which he toils under the sun all the days of his life which God gives him; for it is his heritage.

19 As for every man to whom God has given riches and wealth, and given him power to eat of it, to receive his heritage and rejoice in his labour--this is the gift of God.

1 Sam2: 7 The LORD makes poor and makes rich; He brings low and lifts up.

8. He raises the poor from the dust And lifts the beggar from the ash heap, To set them among princes And make them inherit the throne of glory.

Phil. 4:11 Not that I speak in regard to need, for I have learned in whatever state I am, to be content:

12 I know how to be abased, and I know how to abound. Everywhere and in all things I have learned both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need.

13 I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.

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Week 2, Day 3

The Christian relationship of servant to master is expressed in Jesus' parable of the talents (Matt. 25). Match the terms with who or what they represent:

- | | |
|---------------------|-----------------------|
| ___ The Christians | a. the travelling man |
| ___ Our possessions | b. the servants |
| ___ The Lord | c. the talents |

Open your Bible and read the remainder of the parable (Matt. 25:16-30). The point of this parable is to understand a basic principle of Christian living: **God holds his children responsible for all that He gives them (money, abilities, time) and they will give an account one day.**

This is called the Principle of Stewardship. In the Old Testament God called Israel to care for their flocks, their land, their material resources as a matter of stewardship. He gave them specific instruction regarding the care of fields (giving the land its Sabbath rests), the care of slaves, and the importance of giving to God the tithe of the harvest. Because Israel were poor stewards they lost what was given and forfeited many blessings. It is significant to remember that Israel's captivity by the Babylonians and Persians lasted 70 years, one year for every sabbatical rest they denied the land in the 490 years of occupation.

The New Testament outlines the many areas of stewardship that believers will be accountable for. Match the areas listed with the verses in the margin. (It is recommended that you look each verse up and review the context of the passages).

- | | |
|----------------------|-------------|
| Pastoral ministry | 1 Cor. 4:1 |
| Spiritual gifts | 1 Pet. 4:10 |
| Time | Titus 1:7 |
| Exercised liberty | Rom. 14:12 |
| Message of Christ | Heb. 13:17 |
| Exercised leadership | Col. 4:5 |

Underline the word in 1 Cor. 4:2 that defines the principle "required" of believers being accountable to Christ for all God has given.

According to this verse, the Christian Principle of Ownership is based upon the Principle of _____.

Circle the word in the text that identifies the responsibility of the believer as a steward of God's gifts.

The parable of the talents and the text of 1 Cor. 4:2 affirms that God is not interested in how much we have, He is only interested in how faithful we will be with what He has given us.

What did God say to you about the Stewardship of your life?

What will you do about it?

Matt. 25:14 "For the kingdom of heaven is like a man traveling to a far country, who called his own servants and delivered his goods to them. 15 "And to one he gave five talents, to another two, and to another one, to each according to his own ability; and immediately he went on a journey.

God holds his children responsible for all that He gives them (money, abilities, time) and they will give an account one day

1 Corinthians 4:1 Let a man so account of us, as of the ministers of Christ, and stewards of the mysteries of God.

1 Peter 4:10 As every man hath received the gift, even so minister the same one to another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God.

Titus 1:7 For a bishop must be blameless, as the steward of God; not self-willed, not soon angry, not given to wine, no striker, not given to filthy lucre;

Romans 14:12 So then every one of us shall give account of himself to God.

Hebrews 13:17 Obey them that have the rule over you, and submit yourselves: for they watch for your souls, as they that must give account, that they may do it with joy, and not with grief: for that is unprofitable for you.

Colossians 4:5 ¶ Walk in wisdom toward them that are without, redeeming the time.

1 Corinthians 4:2 Moreover it is required in stewards, that a man be found faithful.

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Week 2, Day 4

Faithful stewardship has its own rewards, this is a promise of God. The faithful stewards in Matt. 25 received several rewards. Underline each and write them out in your own words.

King Hezekiah was a faithful leader in Judah. Underline the words that describe his faithful ministry in 2 Chor. 31:20.

Hezekiah's ministry was good – meaning *excellent and valuable*

Hezekiah's ministry was right – meaning *upright or righteous*

Hezekiah's ministry was true – meaning *reliable and faithful*

Notice that the King did this “before the Lord” and “with all his heart.” A faithful steward is only interested in pleasing his master. The good stewards were rewarded with the “well done” of their master, Hezekiah received the commendation of the Lord

On the scale provided circle your estimation of your own stewardship. Ask God to help you be honest. Thank Him for your strengths and ask him to strengthen your weaknesses:

Poor and invaluable -1-2-3-4-5-6-7-8-9-10 - *excellent and valuable*

Wrong motives - 1-2-3-4-5-6-7-8-9-10 - *upright or righteous*

Unreliable - 1-2-3-4-5-6-7-8-9-10 - *reliable and faithful*

The first and the greatest reward of the faithful steward is God's own praise, to be found when we meet Him face to face. As Christians God assures us that we will never stand before Him in judgement of our sins. This Jesus did in our place. Romans 8:1 makes this truth abundantly clear. Circle the words of Rom. 8:1 & 2 that testify of the believers escape from the judgement of sin.

For the believer there is no condemnation, there is in its place freedom. Yet, God does speak of an assessment of faithfulness in which His praise will be forthcoming or denied. Circle the words in 1 Peter 1:7 and 1 Cor. 4:5 that describe the possible assessment of faithfulness for the believer..

The faithful steward looks toward the praise of his master more than any thing else. Even as Jesus was privileged to hear from heaven the voice of the Father saying “This is my beloved son in whom I am well pleased”, so every faithful steward of Christ will be rewarded.

What did God say to you about the ambition of your life?

What will you do about it?

Matt. 25:21 His lord said unto him, Well done, thou good and faithful servant: thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things: enter thou into the joy of thy lord.

23 His lord said unto him, Well done, good and faithful servant; thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things: enter thou into the joy of thy lord.

2 Chor. 31:20 Thus Hezekiah did throughout all Judah, and he did what was good and right and true before the LORD his God.

21 And in every work that he began in the service of the house of God, in the law and in the commandment, to seek his God, he did it with all his heart. So he prospered.

*Well done good
and faithful
servant, enter in!*

Rom. 8:1 There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus, who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit.

2 For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has made me free from the law of sin and death.

1 Peter 1:7 That the trial of your faith, being much more precious than of gold that perishes, though it be tried with fire, might be found unto praise and honour and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ:

1 Corinthians 4:5 Therefore judge nothing before the time, until the Lord come, who both will bring to light the hidden things of darkness, and will make manifest the counsels of the hearts: and then shall every man have praise of God.

Serving God in a Wanting World

Week 2, Day 5

The first and greatest reward of the faithful steward is God's own praise, to be found when we meet Him face to face.

Faithful stewardship has a very practical reward for the present as well. For all that acknowledge the ownership of person and possessions to God, there is a deep sense of peace when that ownership is handled faithfully.

Job is another example of a faithful steward. What commendation did He receive from the Lord?

As a faithful steward, God had chosen to bless Job with great material wealth. This wealth obviously did not detract from Job's commitment to being a servant of righteousness. God's description of Job indicates that he took seriously his stewardship, that he cared for all God gave him with diligence and reliability. Nevertheless, God allowed Satan to reduce Job to poverty, all his children died, all his possessions were destroyed. Underline the words of Job in 1:21 that expresses his response toward the loss.

Although he grieved for the loss, and had to bear the misdirected judgement of his "friends" **he had peace about the loss.**

Acknowledging God's ownership of our person and our possessions with resolve to be a faithful stewardship is a walk in faith. It is expressing trust in God to do what he wills to do, believing that the face to face meeting will be the place of reward. Job evidenced this in his own life. Read Job 23:10.

How did Job express His faith in God?

How did he describe the outcome of His trust?

According to Isaiah 26:3, what does God promises to provide to the faithful steward who trusts in God?

For the believer today who has put complete trust in God, peace can prevail. Read Phil. 4:6-7 and list the conditions for that peace.

There have been times in my life when our vehicle broke down, requiring the use of savings to repair it, or when plans had to be forfeited because of adverse circumstances. In all these the Principle of Ownership has availed a peace of mind. I am God's, all that I have is God's, all that I want is to please Him. If he chooses to add to or take away His blessings, I can find peace in trusting His judgement. As His child I can share in prayer my concerns and even my desires, but ultimate peace comes as I affirm His ownership and my trust in His judgment.

Job 1:1 There was a man in the land of Uz, whose name was Job; and that man was blameless and upright, and one who feared God and shunned evil.

2 And seven sons and three daughters were born to him.

3 Also, his possessions were seven thousand sheep, three thousand camels, five hundred yoke of oxen, five hundred female donkeys, and a very large household, so that this man was the greatest of all the people of the East.

Job 1:21 And he said: "Naked I came from my mother's womb, And naked shall I return there. The LORD gave, and the LORD has taken away; Blessed be the name of the LORD."

22 In all this Job did not sin nor charge God with wrong.

Job 23:10 But he knows the way that I take: when he hath tried me, I shall come forth as gold.

Isaiah 26:3 You will keep him in perfect peace, Whose mind is stayed on You, Because he trusts in You.

Phill. 4: 6 Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God;

7 and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.

Serving God in a Wanting World

“Who holds the Title Deed?”

Summary of discovered truth:

1. Session One - The path to doing the will of God lies in an understanding of God’s view and purpose for possessions. This was a discovery of God’s “divine economics.”

2. This Session -The path to peace of mind about possessions lies in our own attitude toward ownership. This was a discovery of the beauty of belonging to God.

In this margin write out any especially meaningful verses that you have study in this session and memorize them. Try writing them out in your own words or writing a prayer relating to the point of each verse.

Personal Assessment.

Have you ever got past the "This is mine and That is God's" stage in your Christian growth? If not you are a candidate for emotional insecurity. Worry and heartache over material things can take a heavy toll on the Christian.

If you want access to peace of mind then accept the Principle of Ownership and practice the principle of stewardship. Yield yourself and all you have to God, transfer the title deeds of your life to Jesus Christ for His keeping and purposes.

Take time to assess what God has taught you in this session.

In order for you to get the larger picture of what God is saying to you personally, look back and record what God said to you as you completed each day’s study?

God has a procedure from Proverbs 16, to follow when seeking to plan changes.

3 Commit your works to the LORD, And your thoughts will be established.

In prayer commit your God directed thoughts and desires to Him, asking Him to clarify your thinking and help you formulate a plan of action to embrace the Principle of Ownership.

9 A man's heart plans his way, But the LORD directs his steps.

Trust God that as you work out the plan He has formulated in your mind, He will open the doors close the doors and direct your steps.

What steps is God leading you to take?

Serving God in a Wanting World

“My First is My Faith”

Summary of Discovered Truth

1. Session One – The path to doing the will of God lies in an understanding of God’s view and purpose for possessions. This was a discovery of God’s “divine economics”

2. Session Two – The path to peace of mind about possessions lies in our own attitude towards ownership. This was a discovery of “the beauty of belonging to God.”

3. Session Three – The path to finding God’s provision for life lies in our own commitment to honouring Him first and foremost. This is the discovery of the real meaning and value of dependence.

Week 3, Day 1

If your house is anything like ours, we could be cut off from society for a month and get by with the store of provisions in the freezer and pantry. Living from day to day is only experienced in our home by my mother’s shared memory of war time England, of food rations and existence on such delicacies as turnip soup, beet casserole and horsemeat .

God’s wonderful blessings have been taken for granted all too often in North America, yet His plan has not changed. God desires His people to acknowledge their complete dependence upon Him.

Read the Lord’s prayer (Matt. 6:9-15) and write the phrase that best expresses a believer’s dependence upon God.

In what time frame was that dependence expressed? _____

God desires His people to acknowledge their daily dependence upon Him. Read Exodus 16:15-19. The wilderness experience of “manna from heaven” is a model passage for understanding daily dependence upon God. Notice the care God took in giving instructions.

1. Each family was to take only enough for each member’s need.
2. Each family was to collect the manna each day.
3. Each family was to use all they collected and look to God to provide for the next day. They were not to “store up” except for the Sabbath.
4. Each family had occasion only in the morning to collect.

Comment on the following verses relating to dependence upon God.
Psalm 23:1

Psalm 34:10

Psalm 37:18-19

Matt.6:9 "In this manner, therefore, pray: Our Father in heaven, Hallowed be Your name.¹⁰ Your kingdom come. Your will be done On earth as it is in heaven.¹¹ Give us this day our daily bread.¹² And forgive us our debts, As we forgive our debtors.¹³ And do not lead us into temptation, But deliver us from the evil one. For Yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen.¹⁴ "For if you forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you.¹⁵ "But if you do not forgive men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.

Ex. 16:15 So when the children of Israel saw it, they said to one another, "What is it?" For they did not know what it was. And Moses said to them, "This is the bread which the LORD has given you to eat.¹⁶ "This is the thing which the LORD has commanded: `Let every man gather it according to each one's need, one omer for each person, according to the number of persons; let every man take for those who are in his tent.'"¹⁷ Then the children of Israel did so and gathered, some more, some less.¹⁸ So when they measured it by omers, he who gathered much had nothing left over, and he who gathered little had no lack. Every man had gathered according to each one's need.¹⁹ And Moses said, "Let no one leave any of it till morning."

Psalm 23:1 The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want

Psalm 34:10 The young lions lack and suffer hunger; But those who seek the LORD shall not lack any good thing.

Psalm 37:18 The LORD knows the days of the upright, And their inheritance shall be forever. ¹⁹ They shall not be ashamed in the evil time, And in the days of famine they shall be satisfied.

Serving God in a Wanting World

Isaiah 33:15-16

Luke 12:29-30

Where do you look for provision – around to present resource or up to God? In what way does your family acknowledge its dependence upon God?

- giving thanks before meals
- thanking God for blessing during family devotions
- giving testimony to others of God's provision of job, home, etc.
- asking God to meet the needs of the family during family prayer.
- other _____

Week 3, Day 2

As God prepared Israel to enter the promised land, a place of abundance and blessing, He established a principle to ensure their continued acknowledgement of dependence upon Him.

Read Ex. 23:16,19; Ex. 34:19-20, 26; Lev. 23:10

What did God command the people to do? _____

God commanded Israel to commit the first fruits of every blessing to Him. All they had was a gift from Him. He asked them to acknowledge this by committing the first and best to Him. This included all the first born livestock, all the first of the crops and all the first born male children. He made provision for the redemption of the children, but Israel was to acknowledge this principle. This is called the Principle of First Fruits.

How did Abraham acknowledge the principle of first fruits? (Gen. 14:18-20)

How was Joshua called to acknowledge the principle of first fruits in battle? (Josh. 6:19) _____

Is. 33:15 He who walks righteously and speaks uprightly, He who despises the gain of oppressions, Who gestures with his hands, refusing bribes, Who stops his ears from hearing of bloodshed, And shuts his eyes from seeing evil: 16 He will dwell on high; His place of defense will be the fortress of rocks; Bread will be given him, His water will be sure

Luke 12:29 "And do not seek what you should eat or what you should drink, nor have an anxious mind.³⁰ "For all these things the nations of the world seek after, and your Father knows that you need these things

Ex. 23:16 "and the Feast of Harvest, the firstfruits of your labors which you have sown in the field; and the Feast of Ingathering at the end of the year, when you have gathered in the fruit of your labors from the field. 19 "The first of the firstfruits of your land you shall bring into the house of the LORD your God.

Ex.34:19 "All that open the womb are Mine, and every male firstborn among your livestock, whether ox or sheep.²⁰ "But the firstborn of a donkey you shall redeem with a lamb. And if you will not redeem him, then you shall break his neck. All the firstborn of your sons you shall redeem. And none shall appear before Me empty-handed.... 26 "The first of the firstfruits of your land you shall bring to the house of the LORD your God. You shall not boil a young goat in its mother's milk."

Lev. 23:10 "Speak to the children of Israel, and say to them: `When you come into the land which I give to you, and reap its harvest, then you shall bring a sheaf of the firstfruits of your harvest to the priest.

Gen. 14:18 Then Melchizedek king of Salem brought out bread and wine; he was the priest of God Most High.¹⁹ And he blessed him and said: "Blessed be Abram of God Most High, Possessor of heaven and earth; ²⁰ And blessed be God Most High, Who has delivered your enemies into your hand." And he gave him a tithe of all.

Josh. 6:19 "But all the silver and gold, and vessels of bronze and iron, are consecrated to the LORD; they shall come into the treasury of the LORD."

Serving God in a Wanting World

Long before God gave the commandments to Israel, His people were practicing the principle of First Fruits. Abraham gave 1/10 of the spoils of war to the priest of God. Joshua was commanded to give all the spoils of Jericho, the first town to be defeated, to God.

In the place of abundances, blessing and victory, simple dependence can be misplaced. How is this demonstrated in the parable of the rich farmer in Luke 12:16-21? _____

The rich farmer did not acknowledge His dependence upon God. When abundance came, he saw only the opportunity for leisure and recreation. His store was his security. The present was his focus. He lost sight of God. How might things have been different if the farmer had kept the Principle of First Fruits? _____

What has God said to you about living with abundance and acknowledging dependence upon Him? _____

Week 3, Day 3

Keeping the Principle of First Fruits is a matter of obedience to God's command. There are over 30 references in Scripture to the mandate of God's people to acknowledge that we belong to God and we must commit to Him the first and best of all He supplies.

Review the following verses that address the Principle of first Fruit and match the text to the context.

Gen. 28:22	Wisdoms Advice
Ex. 22:29	Israel's command
Gen. 14:20	A Christian's duty
Prov. 3:9	Abraham's gift
Matt. 6:33	Jacob's promise

For Israel, first fruit living meant tithing the first of each of their harvests, it meant donating the first of their livestock, it meant dedicating the redemption price of their first born sons.

Read Mal. 3:6-10. Israel was charged with disobedience, of "going away from God's ordinances." What did God call this sin? (v.8)

What was the consequence of their sin? (v.9)

The book of Malachi is a sad commentary of Israel's cold heart toward God. Because of disobedience, they missed God's rich blessing and faced years of leanness of soul and substance. Four hundred years later, their hearts were still calloused in their rejection of Christ.

As with the Principle of Stewardship, the Principle of First Fruits has its greatest reward in the approval of God for simple obedience. There is nothing greater in life than knowing that we are doing just what God wants us to do.

Luke 12:16 Then He spoke a parable to them, saying: "The ground of a certain rich man yielded plentifully.¹⁷ "And he thought within himself, saying, 'What shall I do, since I have no room to store my crops?'¹⁸ "So he said, 'I will do this: I will pull down my barns and build greater, and there I will store all my crops and my goods.'¹⁹ 'And I will say to my soul, "Soul, you have many goods laid up for many years; take your ease; eat, drink, and be merry."²⁰ "But God said to him, 'Fool! This night your soul will be required of you; then whose will those things be which you have provided?'²¹ "So is he who lays up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God."

Genesis 28:22 "And this stone which I have set as a pillar shall be God's house, and of all that You give me I will surely give a tenth to You." Exodus 22: 29 "You shall not delay to offer the first of your ripe produce and your juices. The firstborn of your sons you shall give to Me.

Genesis 14: 20 And blessed be God Most High, Who has delivered your enemies into your hand." And he gave him a tithe of all.

Prov. 3:9 Honor the LORD with your possessions, And with the firstfruits of all your increase;

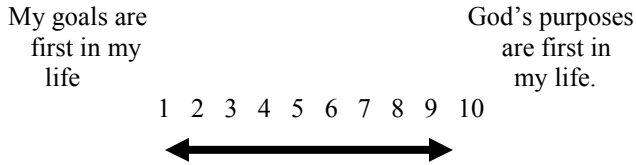
Matt. 6: 33 But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you.

Mal. 3:6 "For I am the LORD, I do not change; Therefore you are not consumed, O sons of Jacob.⁷ Yet from the days of your fathers You have gone away from My ordinances And have not kept them. Return to Me, and I will return to you," Says the LORD of hosts. "But you said, 'In what way shall we return?'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.

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And there is nothing more tragic in life than disobeying God and falling into complacency. This leads to a calloused heart and leanness in life.

How would you rate your commitment to first fruit living.



How would you rate your life before God?



Week 3, Day 4

First fruit living is not without present promises because it is a life of faith.

Go back to Mal. 3:6-10 and underline what God promised Israel if they would return to first fruit living (v.10)

What does God promise to do for all who honour Him with first fruit living (Prov. 3:9-10) _____

This is not just an Old Testament promise. Read Matt. 6:19-34 and answer the following questions.

Where will a person's heart be? (v.21) _____

What two choices of service do believers have? (v.24) _____

List the things God says his servants should not worry about? (v. 25,31) _____

What does God promise to provide his servants? (v.33) _____

What is the condition of God's promise in verse 33? _____

Prov. 3:9 Honor the LORD with your possessions, And with the firstfruits of all your increase; 10 So your barns will be filled with plenty, And your vats will overflow with new wine.

Matt. 6:19 "Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal;20 "but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal.21 "For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also. 22 "The lamp of the body is the eye. If therefore your eye is good, your whole body will be full of light.23 "But if your eye is bad, your whole body will be full of darkness. If therefore the light that is in you is darkness, how great is that darkness!24 "No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will be loyal to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon.25 "Therefore I say to you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink; nor about your body, what you will put on. Is not life more than food and the body more than clothing? 26 "Look at the birds of the air, for they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they?27 "Which of you by worrying can add one cubit to his stature? 28 "So why do you worry about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin;29 "and yet I say to you that even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these.30 "Now if God so clothes the grass of the field, which today is, and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will He not much more clothe you, O you of little faith? 31 "Therefore do not worry, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?'32 "For after all these things the Gentiles seek. For your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. 33 "But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you.34 "Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about its own things. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble.

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Review your comments on the verses relating to dependence on God (Day 1). There is a co-relation between dependence of God and first fruit faith.

God obligates Himself to meet the needs of His children when they obey Him and live by first fruit faith.

Read Psalm 37:25 and underline the words that describe David's experience of God's promised provision.

Psalm 37:25 I have been young, and now am old; Yet I have not seen the righteous forsaken, Nor his descendants begging bread.

Have you experienced a unique provision of God in your life.

Yes No

If yes, explain _____

What did God say to you in today's study? _____

What action does He want you to take?

Week 3, Day 5

In Session 2 we discovered the Principle of Ownership which calls for stewardship living. In this session we have examined the principle of First Fruits which calls for First Fruit Faith.

The Principle of Ownership calls for a conscientious transfer of title deed of our person and our possessions to God with a sense of responsibility to exercise a steward's care over all God's gifts – time, abilities, health and strength, and wealth.

The Principle of First Fruits calls for a conscientious commitment to returning the first and best of God's gifts back to Him. For Israel, who brought the first of their harvest and flocks, this is an expression of faith in God to continue to provide for them. This is an expression of faith in God today as well. In actuality, OUR FIRST in giving IS OUR FAITH in living in dependence upon God or "OUR FIRST IS OUR FAITH"

To put God's righteousness first means to give God's purposes the first and best of our time, our abilities, our health and strength, and our wealth.

Check where you agree with the following statements.

First Fruit living in respect to time for every believer means:

I give to God the first portion of my day in prayer and devotion

I give God the first day of the week in worship and praise.

I give God a measurable portion of my time each week in Christian service.

*Our first in giving is our
faith in living in
dependence upon God.
Or
Our First is Our Faith.*

Serving God in a Wanting World

First Fruit living in respect to abilities for every believer means:

I offer my abilities to God for His use in the church, or on the mission field.

I discover my spiritual gift and surrender it to God for His use and glory.

I give God the glory for any gifts and abilities He has blessed me with.

First Fruit living in respect to wealth for every believer means:

I give the first portion of my earnings (wages) to God.

I give the first portion of my increase (gifts, interests) to God.

I give generously to those in need.

Other _____

Go back to these statements and circle the one's you are faithfully exercising.

Before God called Israel to First Fruit Faith, He called them to something more meaningful which would make such expression of faith a simple daily step. Read Deut. 6:4-5 and circle the words that identify God's call in their life.

First Fruit living is an expression of obedience to God. It is an expression of faith that stems from a *love* of God which naturally desires to put Him first in everything. I have discovered that when I am reluctant to live First Fruit Faith, it is because my love for God has slipped out of place for love of self. It is then that I take a fresh look at the cross.

In comparison to God's love for me on Calvary's cross, no expression of First Fruit Faith can match that love. Surrender seems easy when the cross is kept in the foreground.

Open your Bible to Mark 15 and read the entire chapter with a view to God's love for you..

What does your expression of First Fruit Faith tell you about your love for God?

Review

Living the Principle of Firstfruits provides the blessing of obedience and the promise of provision.

Take time to review the week's study and answer the following.

What has God said to you in this Study?

What action does God want you to take in living "First Fruit Faith"?

Where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.

Deut. 6:4 "Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one! 5 "You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength.

God is in the business of stretching our faith. His greatest pleasure is in his children drawing close to him in total daily dependence.

Serving God in a Wanting World

“Finding the New Testament Altar”

Summary of Discovered Truth

1. Session One – The path to doing the will of God lies in an understanding of God’s view and purpose for possessions. This was a discovery of God’s “divine economics”

2. Session Two – The path to peace of mind about possessions lies in our own attitude towards ownership. This was a discovery of “the beauty of belonging to God.”

3. Session Three – The path to finding God’s provision for life lies in our own commitment to honouring Him first and foremost. Discovery the real meaning and value of dependence.

4. Session Four - The path to discovering God promised prosperity lies in our own willingness to sacrifice for him. Discover the riches of God's own resources.

Week 4, Day 1

Read Ecclesiastes 11:1-6. Imagine this common scene in ancient Israel at sowing time. The produce of the previous harvest has been reduced to a few bags of grain standing in the corner of your single room abode. From these bags your family has taken grain and ground it to flour, the only source of your daily bread. As your family of seven or eight gather around for their meal, you give thanks to God for His provision. Mealtime is filled with laughter and family fellowship. Afterward, the older children depart to the fields for a day’s labour. The task at hand is to make a raised furrow around each plot that has been carefully worked by hand. Next, each plot is to be flooded from the ditch running with water from the artesian well.

You wait in prayer at the anticipated announcement that your plots are covered in 2 or 3 inches of water. You wait in prayer because you know that your next step is one of faith. It is now that you must take all but the smallest amount of that precious grain to the fields, and scatter it over the water. This is sowing day, and you are literally taking the bread from your table and casting it upon the waters in trust that God will return another harvest.

God is in the business of stretching our faith. His greatest pleasure is in his children drawing close to him in total daily dependence. Having learned the blessings of First fruit faith and its promised provision, God calls his own to experience sacrifice, and find the blessing of abundance. God is continually challenging his children to a deeper call of Faith. This is living out the principle of sacrifice. There are over 30 references in Scripture referring to God's call to sacrifice.

Read 2 Corinthians 8:1-4 and answer the following questions:

What commendable action had the churches of Macedonia taken? (v. 2).

In what personal state were these churches in when they acted so generously? (v.2).

Ecc. 11: 1 Cast your bread upon the waters, For you will find it after many days. 2 Give a serving to seven, and also to eight, For you do not know what evil will be on the earth. 3 If the clouds are full of rain, They empty themselves upon the earth; And if a tree falls to the south or the north, In the place where the tree falls, there it shall lie. 4 He who observes the wind will not sow, And he who regards the clouds will not reap. 5 As you do not know what is the way of the wind, Or how the bones grow in the womb of her who is with child, So you do not know the works of God who makes everything. 6 In the morning sow your seed, And in the evening do not withhold your hand; For you do not know which will prosper, Either this or that, Or whether both alike will be good.

God is continually challenging his children to a deeper call of Faith. This is living out the principle of sacrifice.

2 Cor. 8: 1 Moreover, brethren, we make known to you the grace of God bestowed on the churches of Macedonia: 2 that in a great trial of affliction the abundance of their joy and their deep poverty abounded in the riches of their liberality. 3 For I bear witness that according to their ability, yes, and beyond their ability, they were freely willing, 4 imploring us with much urgency that we would receive the gift and the fellowship of the ministering to the saints.

Serving God in a Wanting World

The churches of Macedonia had supplied Paul with a generous gift to pass on to the other churches. They had done so in the midst of great poverty themselves. God had moved them to self-denial, to personal sacrifice for the work of Christ.

What was the first step in their self-denial for Christ? (v. 5).

The principle of sacrifice is rooted in the nature of self-denial. Self-denial grows out of a meaningful walk with God.

How did Jesus model self-denial?

2 Corinthians 5:21 _____

Galatians 3:13 _____

Rom. 5:8 _____

Have you ever sacrificially given to the Ministry of Christ?

YES

NO

If yes, comment on how you felt after the sacrifice _____

The churches of Macedonia experienced an abundance of joy in their sacrifice. The true measure of self-sacrifice is in the joy God supplies at it's giving.

What has God said to you about the spirit of self-denial?

What will you do about what he has said?

Week 4, Day 2

The topic of the sacrifice produces thoughts of Old Testament altars where God's people offered to their respective sacrifices as they walked before God in the faith. Although Christ fulfilled the Old Testament sacrificial system as the lamb of God. Sacrifice is still on the agenda of life for God's people.

From the following verses, identify the New Testament sacrifices God calls Christians to make.

Romans 12:1-2 _____

Hebrews 13:15 _____

Hebrews 13:16 _____

2 Cor. 8: 5 And not only as we had hoped, but they first gave themselves to the Lord, and then to us by the will of God.

2 Cor. 5:21 For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

Gal. 3:13 Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the law, having become a curse for us (for it is written, "Cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree"),

Rom. 5:8 But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

*The true measure
of self-sacrifice is
in the joy God
supplies at it's
giving.*

Rom. 12: 1 I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service. 2 And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.

Heb. 13:15 Therefore by Him let us continually offer the sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of our lips, giving thanks to His name.

Heb 13:16 But do not forget to do good and to share, for with such sacrifices God is well pleased.

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Read Luke 14:26-28. Jesus stated that this principle of sacrifice grows out of a total commitment to Him. It is a condition of true discipleship. In Jesus concluding remarks, what does verse 28 suggest to you?

Living the life of obedience regarding the principals of ownership, firstfruits, and sacrifice is a choice. What, in your opinion, might prevent a believer from making that choice? _____

Do you know Christians who are models of self denial?

YES

NO

If so, what do you admire about their lives? _____

What has God said to you in this study? _____

Week 4, Day 4

The principle of sacrifice says: "I will do without that the work of God may go on." In Day 1 we discovered how God brings joy to those who respond to His leading with self sacrifice.

Read the following verses and list the other personal results of sacrificial giving.

2 Corinthians 9:10 _____

Matthew 10:42 _____

Mark 10:30 _____

Luke 14:13-14 _____

Although your answers may be different, the list of results should include the following:

A confirmation of spiritual maturity through the responsibility of greater possessions (2 Cor. 9:10)

A confirmation within the believer's heart that God's approval awaits. (Matt. 10:42).

A confirmation of belonging to the greater family of God with anticipation of a shared future. (Mark 10:30).

A sense of security through investment in eternity. (Luke 14:14).

Luke 14: 26 "If anyone comes to Me and does not hate his father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, yes, and his own life also, he cannot be My disciple. 27 "And whoever does not bear his cross and come after Me cannot be My disciple. 28 "For which of you, intending to build a tower, does not sit down first and count the cost, whether he has enough to finish it ----

*I will do
without that the
work of God
may go on.*

2 Cor. 5:10 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,

Matt. 10:42 "And whoever gives one of these little ones only a cup of cold water in the name of a disciple, assuredly, I say to you, he shall by no means lose his reward."

Mark 10:30 "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.

Luke 14:13 "But when you give a feast, invite the poor, the maimed, the lame, the blind.14 "And you will be blessed, because they cannot repay you; for you shall be repaid at the resurrection of the just."

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Mark 10:30 _____

Luke 14:13-14 _____

The Principle of Sacrifice privileges the Believer with God's promise of prosperity. This is first the personal prosperity of a "hundred fold" blessing of belonging to the household of God and having the security of a church family that cares and shares.

How was this evident in the following texts:

Acts 2:44-45 _____

Philip 4:18-19 _____

With the Principle of Sacrifice God also promises eternal prosperity.

Circle the words of promised eternal prosperity in the following text:

Luke 14:13-14 "But when you give a feast, invite the poor, the maimed, the lame, the blind. "And you will be blessed, because they cannot repay you; for you shall be repaid at the resurrection of the just."

Can you see a relationship between the lifestyle evident in Luke 14:13-14 and the promise of Proverbs 22:5-9? If so, explain the relationship.

I still remember going with my father to deliver bags of potatoes from our garden and meat from our freezer to a poor neighbourhood family. I saw God's care and love in action and remember the joy that such sharing brought to others and ourselves. One of the greatest present blessings of "eternal prosperity" is our children's acceptance of the Lord and earthly walk with Him. A sacrificial and generous heart has a true and lasting affect on our children, as it did me. It is God's love in action.

Finally, the Principle of Sacrifice privileges the Believer with material prosperity. What is the purpose of such as evidenced in 2 Corinthians 9:11? _____

Living the Principle of Sacrifice has great rewards. Ignoring the Principle has great danger. What warning should be taken from the Ezekiel 16:49 regarding ignoring sacrificial generosity?

Mark 10:30 "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.

Luke 14:13 "But when you give a feast, invite the poor, the maimed, the lame, the blind. 14 "And you will be blessed, because they cannot repay you; for you shall be repaid at the resurrection of the just."

Acts 2: 44-45 "Now all who believed were together, and had all things in common, 45 and sold their possessions and goods, and divided them among all, as anyone had need."

Philip 4:18-19 "Indeed I have all and abound. I am full, having received from Epaphroditus the things sent from you, a sweet-smelling aroma, an acceptable sacrifice, well pleasing to God. And my God shall supply all your need according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus."

Pro. 22:5-9 "Thorns and snares are in the way of the perverse; He who guards his soul will be far from them. Train up a child in the way he should go, And when he is old he will not depart from it. The rich rules over the poor, And the borrower is servant to the lender. He who sows iniquity will reap sorrow, And the rod of his anger will fail. He who has a generous eye will be blessed, For he gives of his bread to the poor."

2 Cor. 9: 10-11 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, while you are enriched in everything for all liberality, which causes thanksgiving through us to God.

Ezekiel 16:49 "Behold, this was the iniquity of thy sister Sodom, pride, fulness of bread, and abundance of idleness was in her and in her daughters, neither did she strengthen the hand of the poor and needy."

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God warns His children of the dangers of self indulgence that a lifestyle of “ignoring sacrificial generosity” produces. Sodom cared little about the poor and needy. Their self-centredness led to self indulgent idleness which in turn led to deplorable sexual self gratification. The slide to immorality begins with the pattern of selfishness. This is evidenced in the moral slide of our present society, and the great danger that presents itself to all of God’s children when living carelessly in a prosperous society.

What has God said to you in a study? _____

*The slide to
immorality
begins with the
pattern of
selfishness.*

Review

Take a moment to write out your own explanation of each of the Biblical Principles including the promised blessings, and comment on what changes God has brought about in your life as a result of this study.

Principle of Ownership

Explanation _____

Comments _____

Principle of Firstfruits

Explanation _____

Comments _____

Principle of Sacrifice

Explanation _____

Comments _____

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Example of the principle of Firstfruit

The Miracle of Mizoram Missions

(By Lorry Lutz, Partners International Mission)

From an isolated state of India sandwiched between Bangladesh and Burma a great mission movement has sprung from a people who were once headhunters. By 1985 ninety-six percent of these nomadic people had embraced Christ. But their journey was not an easy one.

The 1960 “bamboo flowering” harvest stirred up discontent in the hearts of dissidents who felt not enough had been done to avert the problem of poverty. Murmurings and grumblings fed the discontent of the agitators, and by 1966 an armed uprising was staged to gain political independence from India. Although Christians were involved in the insurgency, the Mizo church officially discounted violence as a solution.

Communal living enforced

To control the rebels and to improve intelligence in the rugged mountain territory, the hapless Mizos were herded into communal villages—in what was called “village groupings.” Before the insurrection Mizo villages were located on hill-tops, 50—300 families in a village depending upon the arable land within reach. Since there is no level area large enough for a regulation football field in all of Mizoram, tillable land is always a serious consideration.

Now the people were hastily corralled, allowed to take only as much as they could carry. Near one village the army was ambushed and several men killed, including a pastor. The closest village was held responsible and within 24 hours the entire population had been moved. Houses and churches were burned to the ground, and a lifetime of toil disappeared in flames.

In some “village groupings” free rations were distributed for a time, but after a few months the people had to fend for themselves. The families put up rough shelters from whatever materials they could salvage. With so many more people living in one area, many had to walk long distances to their fields. But with curfews requiring that they be in the village between dusk and dawn, their hours to work were cut short by the time it took to walk back and forth, and there was a constant food shortage.

Foreign missionaries evicted

In the midst of this the remaining foreign missionaries in the territory were given their “quit order.” But on that very day in 1968 the indomitable Mizo church commissioned two new missionaries to start work in the Mikor Hills of Assam. By 1976 there were 31 workers.

In his mission report in 1978, Rev. V. L. Zithango reported the following:

Mizo missionaries serving in Cachar, Assam	27
Mizo missionaries in the Mikor Hills	38
Mizo missionaries serving in Manipur (work begun in 1913)	49
Total	114

The Zoram Baptist Mission, which represents a smaller and poorer church, has more than 20 missionaries working Among tribes in Assam, Tripura, and other nearby areas.

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New converts baptized by the missionaries in 1978 totaled 432, and plans were underway to send a registered nurse to India, to support a doctor under the Bible and Medical Missionary Fellowship, and to build a hostel in Aizawl for students coming from the mission fields to study in Mizoram.

Poverty no limitation

All this from a country that is one of the poorest in the world and cannot even provide sufficient food for itself in the foreseeable future. Mizoram has no industry, limited natural resources, one main road from Assam which is tortuous, unpaved and dangerous, no airports, no access to the sea. The society is entirely dependent upon its own subsistence farming and cottage industries such as weaving cloth.

Vanalal Ngkaha, well known Mizo evangelist who was named “Man of the Year of 1975,” says the Mizos have risen above their poverty in a remarkable way. “It is the only state in India where there are no beggars or homeless person. He is convinced that Christianity’s effect upon society is the only cure for India’s poverty as well.

In spite of their poverty the Mizo church has given generously to missions. In 1978 the missionary offering alone totaled more than \$100,000.

How does this church, so limited in resources and so young in its history, give so generously for the spread of the gospel? Their ingenuity surfaces in the simple, practical methods they have devised to raise funds for their churches.

Ingenious fund raising

The early missionaries must receive some credit for training the people to give and to develop an independent spirit. But the church leaders have also devised creative ways to challenge the Mizos, who have a Spirit-given concern for the lost.

In the few cities government officials and teachers give regularly in an “envelope system” reminiscent of churches around the world. But in the country the people give one tenth of their produce to the pastoral funds, to care for their local needs, and all mission funds are extras. There are several ways they have learned to do this:

Church families are challenged to set aside one stick of firewood each day. The women of the church collect these at the end of the month and the proceeds from their sale are given to missions. “Visits to mission fields” are planned—the family will set aside the funds needed to travel to a specific field (usually a tribal area within several hundred miles from Mizoram). They will bring enough rice or other produce to last for the period of time they would be at the mission station. Church families then meet together, bringing their supplies—but rather than traveling to the field, they donate them [their supplies] to missions, and spend the time together in prayer and sharing.

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Handful of Rice

The women had devised another method of raising missionary funds. When they cook rice, they measure out what is needed for the family, and then take back one handful and place it in a special container. At the end of the month this rice is taken to the church where it is sold for missions. This amount is hardly noticed by the family, but when it is done twice a **day by every** Christian family for a whole year, the total amount becomes enormous. In 1991 almost 7,000,000 rupees was provided for missions this way in the Presbyterian church alone.

Of course these projects aren't always profitable. Zairema tells of one firewood collection that turned into a debacle. In this case, the women who are responsible for gathering the family firewood went out to gather fuel for a whole day, planning to sell it for missions. But on this particular day there was plenty of wood in the village. It was selling at 90 pieces for a rupee (about 12 cents). Thus by the time they paid for refreshments, their net profit for the day was three cents.

In spite of this the heart for missions is there —the concern for the millions without Christ just across the border in greater India. While the Mizo choir was in the United States in 1978 exciting news reached them. The Zoram Evangelical Fellowship, which sends missionaries into other parts of India to work with existing organizations, sent its first workers into Kashmir. A mother with two teenage children was commissioned and sent to accompany another single missionary. Mrs. Lalringliana's husband had also applied, but due to certain circumstances his departure had to be delayed for a year. But she felt so burdened and concerned that the door to Kashmir — a Muslim state —might be closed soon, that she begged to be sent ahead of her family, trusting them to the care of the church. Since that time the rest of the family has joined her, and the others are waiting to go.

Example of the Principle of Sacrifice

When Things Seem Impossible JOHN 6:5-14

(Charles Stanley, *In Touch*, December, 2005, p.36.)

Years ago, our church was preparing to purchase some costly property, and our desire was to accomplish the transaction without going into debt. One week away from the deadline, we had accumulated less than half the money-raising the rest seemed impossible. I mentioned our need to the congregation, and after the first service, a young couple came up and gave me the husband's wedding ring to use toward the payment. They insisted I take the band in spite of the fact that they were barely getting by and had a baby on the way. During the second service, I pulled out the ring and told about this couple's sacrifice. Then the most amazing thing happened. People started streaming down the aisle and giving all kinds of thingsboats, houses, jewelry, cars, etc. At the end of that service, we had exactly the amount we needed. Nothing is impossible for our heavenly Father. He used an inexpensive ring to raise over 2 million dollars in one day, just as He once borrowed a sack lunch to feed 5,000 people. We often make the same mistake as the disciples in today's passage.

We ask the wrong question: "What am I going to do?" Instead, we should ask the right one: "Lord, what are You going to do?" God has a plan to guide us safely through every seemingly impossible situation, if we but trust Him instead of our own resources. Look to your Father for whatever you need, whether it is 2 million dollars or next month's rent. He has promised to provide for His children.

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First fruits and Tithes

First-fruits

The first-fruits of the ground were offered unto God just as the first-born of man and animals. The law required,

1. That on the morrow after the Passover Sabbath a sheaf of new corn should be waved by the priest before the altar #Le 23:5,6,10,12 2:12
2. That at the feast of Pentecost two loaves of leavened bread, made from the new flour, were to be waved in like manner #Le 23:15,17 Nu 28:26
3. The feast of Tabernacles was an acknowledgement that the fruits of the harvest were from the Lord #Ex 23:16 34:22
4. Every individual, besides, was required to consecrate to God a portion of the first-fruits of the land #Ex 22:29 23:19 34:26 #Nu 15:20,21
5. The law enjoined that no fruit was to be gathered from newly-planted fruit-trees for the first three years, and that the first-fruits of the fourth year were to be consecrated to the Lord #Le 19:23-25 Jeremiah #Jer 2:3 alludes to the ordinance of "first-fruits," and hence he must have been acquainted with the books of Exodus, Leviticus, and Numbers, where the laws regarding it are recorded.

Ex. 23: The institution of the sabbatical year, #Ex 23:10-11. Every seventh year the land was to rest; they must not plough nor sow it at the beginning of the year, and then they could not expect any great harvest at the end of the year: but what the earth did produce of itself should be eaten from hand to mouth, and not laid up. Now this was designed,

1. To show what a plentiful land that was into which God was bringing them—that so numerous a people could have rich maintenance out of the produce of so small a country, without foreign trade, and yet could spare the increase of every seventh year.

2. To remind them of their dependence upon God their great landlord, and their obligation to use the fruit of their land as he should direct. Thus he would try their obedience in a matter that nearly touched their interest. Afterwards we find that their disobedience to this command was a forfeiture of the promises, #2Ch 36:21.

3. To teach them a confidence in the divine Providence, while they did their duty—that, as the sixth day's manna served for two day's meat, so the sixth year's increase should serve for two years' subsistence. Thus they must learn not to take thought for their life, #Mt 6:25. If we are prudent and diligent in our affairs, we may trust Providence to furnish us with the bread of the day in its day.

Ex 34: The three feasts are here mentioned, with their appendages.

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1. The passover, and the feast of unleavened bread, in remembrance of their deliverance out of Egypt; and to this is annexed the law of the redemption of the first-born, #Ex 34:18-20. This feast was instituted, #Ex 12:13, and urged again, #Ex 23:15.
2. The feast of weeks, that is, that of pentecost, seven weeks after the passover; and to this is annexed the law of the first- fruits.
3. The feast of in-gathering at the year's end, which was the feast of tabernacles (#Ex 34:22): of these also he had spoken before, #Ex 23:16. As to those laws repeated here (#Ex 34:25-26), that against leaven relates to the passover, that of the first-fruits to the feast of pentecost, and therefore that against seething the kid in his mother's milk in all probability relates to the feast of in- gathering, at which God would not have them use that superstitious ceremony, which probably they had seen the Egyptians, or some other of the neighbouring nations, bless their harvests with.

Duet 1 This chapter gives an account of the provision made for the priests and Levites, with the reason of it, #De 18:1-5, of allowance of a country Levite to minister at Jerusalem, and take his portion with the rest, #De 18:6-8. The first-fruits which arose within such a precinct were brought in, as it should seem, to the priests that resided among them, for their maintenance in the country; the first of their corn and wine for food, and the first of their fleece for clothing (#De 18:4); for the priests who were employed to teach others ought themselves to learn, having food and raiment, to be therewith content. The first-fruits were devoted to God, and he constituted the priests his receivers; and if God reckons what is, in general, given to the poor, lent to him, to be repaid with interest, much more what is, in particular, given to poor ministers. There is a good reason given for this constant charge upon their estates (#De 18:5), because the Levites were chosen of God, and his choice must be owned and countenanced, and those honoured by us whom he honours; and because they stood to minister, and ought to be recompensed for their attendance and labour, especially since it was in the name of the Lord, by his warrant, in his service, and for his praise, and this charge entailed upon their seed for ever; those who were thus engaged and thus employed ought to have all due encouragement given them, as some of the most needful useful members of their commonwealth.

Tithes

Gen 14:20 “And he gave him tithes of all.” There are those who understand that the tithes were given to Abram; but the Apostle speaks otherwise, in declaring that Levi had paid tithes in the loins of Abram, (#Heb 7:9), when Abram offered tithes to a more excellent Priest. And truly what the expositors above-mentioned mean, would be most absurd; because, if Melchizedek was the priest of God, it behoved him to receive tithes rather than to give them. Nor is it to be doubted but Abram offered the gift to God, in the person of Melchizedek, in order that, by such first-fruits, he might dedicate all his possessions to God. Abram therefore voluntarily gave tithes to Melchizedek, to do honor to his priesthood. Moreover, since it appears that this was not done wrongfully nor rashly, the

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Apostle properly infers, that, in this figure, the Levitical priesthood is subordinate to the priesthood of Christ. For other reasons, God afterwards commanded tithes to be given to Levi under the Law; but, in the age of Abram, they were only a holy offering, given as a pledge and proof of gratitude. It is however uncertain whether he offered the title of the spoils or of the goods which he possessed at home. But, since it is improbable that he should have been liberal with other persons' goods, and should have given a very a tenth part of the prey, of which he had resolved not to touch even a thread, I rather conjecture, that these tithes were taken out of his own property. I do not, however, admit that they were paid annually, as some imagine, but rather, in my judgment, he dedicated this present to Melchizedek once, for the purpose of acknowledging him as the high priest of God: nor could he, at that time, (as we say,) hand it over; {1} but there was a solemn stipulation, of which the effect shortly after followed.

Gen 28:22 "And this stone which I have set for a pillar." This ceremony was an appendage to divine worship; for external rites do not make men true worshippers of God, but are only aids to piety. But because the holy fathers were then at liberty to erect altars wherever they pleased, Jacob poured a libation upon the stone, because he had then no other sacrifice to offer; not that he worshipped God according to his own will, (for the direction of the Spirit was instead of the written law,) but he erected in that place a stone—as he was permitted to do by the kindness and permission of God, which should be a testimony of the vision. Moreover, this form of speech, that the stone shall be Beth-el, is metonymical; as we are sanctioned, by common usage, to transfer to external signs what properly belongs to the things represented. I have lately shown how ignorantly posterity has abused this holy exercise of piety. What next follows respecting the offering of tithes, is not a simple ceremony, but has a duty of charity annexed; for Jacob enumerates, in a threefold order, first, the spiritual worship of God; then the external rite, by which he both assists his own piety, and makes profession of it before men; in the third place, an oblation, by which he exercises himself in giving friendly aid to his brethren; for there is no doubt that tithes were applied to that use.

"and of all that thou shalt give me," I will surely give the tenth unto thee; for the support of his worship; for the maintenance of such that were employed in it; for the provision of sacrifice, and for the relief of the poor, or for any use or service in which God might be glorified: this was imitated by the Heathens in later times, who gave the tenth of their substance to their gods, Jupiter, Hercules, and others {w}.

"I will surely give the tenth unto thee," to be laid out in thy service, and for sacrifices, and for the use and benefit of those who shall attend upon sacred things; as also for the relief of the poor and needy, whom God hath substituted in his room, and to whom part of the tithes were to be given by a following law, #De 14:28,29.

A tenth of the produce of the earth consecrated and set apart for special purposes. The dedication of a tenth to God was recognized as a duty before the time of Moses. Abraham paid tithes to Melchizedek #Ge 14:20 Heb 7:6 and Jacob vowed unto the Lord and said, "Of all that thou shalt give me I will surely give the tenth unto thee." The first Mosaic law on this subject is recorded in #Le 27:30-32 Subsequent legislation regulated the destination of the tithes #Nu 18:21-24,26-28 De 12:5,6,11,17 14:22,23 The paying of the tithes was an important part of the Jewish religious worship. In the days of Hezekiah one

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of the first results of the reformation of religion was the eagerness with which the people brought in their tithes #2Ch 31:5,6 The neglect of this duty was sternly rebuked by the prophets #Am 4:4 Mal 3:8-10 It cannot be affirmed that the Old Testament law of tithes is binding on the Christian Church, nevertheless the principle of this law remains, and is incorporated in the gospel #1Co 9:13,14 and if, as is the case, the motive that ought to prompt to liberality in the cause of religion and of the service of God be greater now than in Old Testament times, then Christians ought to go beyond the ancient Hebrew in consecrating both themselves and their substance to God. Every Jew was required by the Levitical law to pay three tithes of his property

1. one tithe for the Levites;
2. one for the use of the temple and the great feasts; and
3. one for the poor of the land.

Lev 27: And all the tithe of the land We close here with the tithe. The tithe was the owning of the sovereign rights of God as to all their possessions. Ten we have seen to be the measure of capacity, and so of responsibility; of which one part given up owns divine sovereignty. This is the tithe; and here too God will have His claim. When this is accomplished the full blessing will have come. For God to have His own means all holiness, all joy, all stability. God shall be God, all and in all: and that is, as it were, the definition of the eternal state in the last book of Scripture. Let us remember that even now there is an application of this, which is not confined to Israel: "Bring Me all the tithes into the storehouse, that there may be meat in My house, and prove Me now herewith, saith the Lord of Hosts, if I will not open the windows of heaven, and pour you out a blessing, that there shall not be room to receive it." #Mal 3:10.

What, then, shall be the final blessing, when this is everywhere in fact accomplished? What tongue can speak aright the overflowing, eternal blessedness? And this too is not left to the weakness of man's "vow" to bring to pass. The arm of Him, who bringeth salvation is that which shall accomplish it, and the day predicted hastens fast.

Lev 27: 30. And all the tithe of the land, &c.] Of which there were various sorts, the first tithe, the tithe out of the tithe, the second tithe, and the poor's tithe, which are generally reduced to three,

“ The first tenth part of all increase I gave to the sons of Aaron, who ministered at Jerusalem: another tenth part I sold away, and went, and spent it every year at Jerusalem.”(Tobit 1:7)

so Maimonides {p} says,

“ after they had separated the first tithe every year, they separate the second tithe, as it is said #De 14:22,23; and in the third year, and in the sixth, they separate the poor's tithe, instead of the second tithe.”

so that, properly speaking, there were but two tithes, though commonly reckoned three; the tithes of all eatables were given to the Levites every year, and a tenth part of that

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given by the Levites to the priests, and the second tithe was eaten by the owners; instead of which, according to the above writer, in the third and sixth years it was given to the poor, and called theirs; of this second tithe, Jarchi interprets this law, and so does Maimonides {q}:

[whether] of the seed of the land, [or] of the fruit of the tree, [is] the Lord's: is to be given to him as an acknowledgment of his being the proprietor of the land, and that all the increase of it is owing to his blessing, and therefore is given in way of gratitude to him: the former of these takes in all sorts of corn that is man's food, as wheat and barley; and the latter wine and oil, and all sorts of fruits that are eatable; for it is said to be a general rule, that whatever is for food, and is preserved (having an owner, and not being common), and grows up out of the earth, is bound to tithes {r}:

[it is] holy unto the Lord; the first tithe was eaten by the priests and Levites only, and the other before the Lord in Jerusalem only, and that by clean persons. Something of this kind obtained among the Heathens, it may be in imitation of this, particularly among the Grecians; Pisistratus {s} tells Solon, that everyone of the Athenians gave a tenth part of his inheritance, not to me, says he, who was their governor, but for public sacrifices, and the common good, and when engaged in war, to defray the charge of it; and so, by the oracle of Apollo, the Corcyraenans were directed to send to Olympia and Delphos the tenth part of the produce of their fields {t}; and by the same oracle, the island of the Syphnians, in which was a golden mine, were ordered to bring the tenth of it to the same place {u}. So the Pelasgi {w} in a time of scarcity vowed the tithes of all their increase to the gods, and having obtained their wish, devoted the tenth of all their fruits and cattle to them.

New Testament Application

Matt. 6:33 The kingdom of God, and his righteousness, in this verse, are terms comprehensive of whatsoever appertaineth to the honour and glory of God, either as means, or as the end. Let your principal care and study be how to get to heaven, and how to promote the kingdom of God in the world; to bring your hearts into subjection to the will of God, that the kingdom of God may be within you, and how to bring others to the obedience of faith and of the will of God. And for the things of this life, it shall fare with you as it did with Solomon, #1Ki 3:12, who asked not riches and honour, but had them. You shall have for your necessities, #Ps 37:4 Mr 10:30 1Ti 4:8.

It is not that we are to seek first the kingdom of God and then these things; but seek ye first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all the rest will come. This is the great summing up. Strictly speaking, it has to do only with the subject of the present section—the right state of the heart with reference to heavenly and earthly things; but being couched in the form of a brief general directory, it is so comprehensive in its grasp as to embrace the whole subject of this discourse. And, as if to make this the more evident, the two keynotes of this great sermon seem purposely struck in it—"the KINGDOM" and "the RIGHTEOUSNESS" Of the kingdom—as the grand objects, in the supreme pursuit of which all things needful for the present life will be added to us. The

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precise sense of every word in this golden verse should be carefully weighed. "The kingdom of God" is the primary subject of the Sermon on the Mount—that kingdom which the God of heaven is erecting in this fallen world, within which are all the spiritually recovered and inwardly subject portion of the family of Adam, under Messiah as its Divine Head and King. "The righteousness thereof" is the character of all such, so amply described and variously illustrated in the foregoing portions of this discourse. The "seeking" of these is the making them the object of supreme choice and pursuit; and the seeking of them "first" is the seeking of them before and above all else. The "all these things" which shall in that case be added to us are just the "all these things" which the last words of #Mt 6:32 assured us "our heavenly Father knoweth that we have need of"; that is, all we require for the present life. And when our Lord says they shall be "added," it is implied, as a matter of course, that the seekers of the kingdom and its righteousness shall have these as their proper and primary portion: the rest being their gracious reward for not seeking them. (See an illustration of the principle of this in #2Ch 1:11,12). What follows is but a reduction of this great general direction into a practical and ready form for daily use.

Mt.23: 23. We have much the same #Lu 11:42, only there it is, Ye tithe mint and rue and all manner of herbs, and pass over judgment and the love of God. It is manifest by our Saviour's words in the latter part of the verse,

these ought ye to have done, that he doth not blame the Pharisees' exactness in tithing mint, anise, rue, cummin, and all manner of herbs; but their neglecting the weightier matters of the law, faith and love to God, judgment and mercy. The Levites having no inheritance: God ordained tithes for their maintenance; of which also the poor were to have a share, #Le 27:30 Nu 18:24. The Pharisee boasted, #Lu 18:12, that he paid tithe of all he possessed. Christ here acknowledgeth that the Pharisees were exact in their paying tithes; but he blames them,

1. For their partiality, neglecting the weightier things of the law.
2. For their hypocrisy; they were only exact in these little things, that they might be taken notice of as scrupulous observers of the Divine law; while they omitted those things, which were of much more weight, which he reckoneth up: faith, by which some understand faith in God, but the most, faithfulness, and sincere and honest dealings with men, in opposition to fraud, and cheating, and circumventions.

Judgment, by which he means justice, giving to every one what is their own.

Mercy, by which he means a charitable behaviour, in helping such as are miserable and afflicted.

Love to God, which is the true root, out of which all things should flow, and is indeed comprehensive of all our duty toward God, as well as the root of all our good works towards men.

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INTRODUCTION TO 1 CORINTHIANS CHAPTER 16

In this chapter the apostle,

I. Gives directions about some charitable collection to be made in this church, for the afflicted and impoverished churches in Judea, #1Co 16:1-4.

II. He talks of paying them a visit, #1Co 16:5-9.

III. He recommends Timothy to them, and tells them Apollos intended to come to them, #1Co 16:10-12.

IV. He presses them to watchfulness, constancy, charity, and to pay a due regard to all who helped him and his fellow labourers in their work, #1Co 16:13-19.

V. After salutations from others, and his own, he closes the epistle with a solemn admonition to them, and his good wishes for them, #1Co 16:20-24, to the end.

Ver. 1.

In this chapter Paul closes this long epistle with some particular matters of less moment; but, as all was written by divine inspiration, it is all profitable for our instruction. He begins with directing them about a charitable collection on a particular occasion, the distresses and poverty of Christians in Judea, which at this time were extraordinary, partly through the general calamities of that nation and partly through the particular sufferings to which they were exposed. Now concerning this observe,

I. How he introduces his direction. It was not a peculiar service which he required of them; he had given similar orders to the churches of Galatia, #1Co 16:1. He desired them only to conform to the same rules which he had given to other churches on a similar occasion. He did not desire that others should be eased and they burdened, #2Co 8:13. He also prudently mentions these orders of his to the churches of Galatia, to excite emulation, and stir them up to be liberal, according to their circumstances, and the occasion. Those who exceeded most churches in spiritual gifts, and, as it is probable, in worldly wealth (see the argument), surely would not suffer themselves to come behind any in their bounty to their afflicted brethren. Note, The good examples of other Christians and churches should excite in us a holy emulation. It is becoming a Christian not to bear to be outdone by a fellow-Christian in any thing virtuous and praise-worthy, provided this consideration only makes him exert himself, not envy others; and the more advantages we have above others the more should we endeavour to exceed them. The church of Corinth should not be outdone in this service of love by the churches of Galatia, which do not appear to have been enriched with equal spiritual gifts nor outward ability.

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II. The direction itself, concerning which observe,

1. The manner in which the collection was to be made: Every one was to lay by in store (#1Co 16:2), have a treasury, or fund, with himself, for this purpose. The meaning is that he should lay by as he could spare from time to time, and by this means make up a sum for this charitable purpose. Note, It is a good thing to lay up in store for good uses. Those who are rich in this world should be rich in good works, #1Ti 6:17,18. The best way to be so is to appropriate of their income, and have a treasury for this purpose, a stock for the poor as well as for themselves. By this means they will be ready to every good work as the opportunity offers; and many who labour with their own hands for a livelihood should so work that they may have to give to him that needeth, #Eph 4:28. Indeed their treasury for good works can never be very large (though, according to circumstances, it may considerably vary); but the best way in the world for them to get a treasury for this purpose is to lay by from time to time, as they can afford. Some of the Greek fathers rightly observe here that this advice was given for the sake of the poorer among them. They were to lay by from week to week, and not bring in to the common treasury, that by this means their contributions might be easy to themselves, and yet grow into a fund for the relief of their brethren.

" Every little,"

as the proverb says,

" would make a mickle."

Indeed all our charity and benevolence should be free and cheerful, and for that reason should be made as easy to ourselves as may be. And what more likely way to make us easy in this matter than thus to lay by? We may cheerfully give when we know that we can spare, and that we have been laying by in store that we may.

2. Here is the measure in which they are to lay by: As God hath prospered them; ti an euodwtai, as he has been prospered, namely, by divine Providence, as God has been pleased to bless and succeed his labours and business. Note, All our business and labour are that to us which God is pleased to make them. It is not the diligent hand that will make rich by itself, without the divine blessing, #Pr 10:4,22. Our prosperity and success are from God and not from ourselves; and he is to be owned in all and honoured with all. It is his bounty and blessing to which we owe all we have; and whatever we have is to be used, and employed, and improved, for him. His right to ourselves and all that is ours is to be owned and yielded to him. And what argument more proper to excite us to charity to the people and children of God than to consider all we have as his gift, as coming from him? Note, When God blesses and prospers us, we should be ready to relieve and comfort his needy servants; when his bounty flows forth upon us, we should not confine it to ourselves, but let it stream out to others. The good we receive from him should stir us up to do good to others, to resemble him in our beneficence; and therefore the more good we receive from God the more we should do good to others. They were to lay by as God had

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blessed them, in that proportion. The more they had, through God's blessing, gained by their business or labour, their traffic or work, the more they were to lay by. Note, God expects that our beneficence to others should hold some proportion to his bounty to us. All we have is from God; the more he gives (circumstances being considered), the more he enables us to give, and the more he expects we should give, that we should give more than others who are less able, that we should give more than ourselves when we were less able. And, on the other hand, from him to whom God gives less he expects less. He is no tyrant nor cruel taskmaster, to exact brick without straw, or expect men shall do more good than he gives ability. Note, Where there is a willing mind he accepts according to what a man hath, and not according to what he hath not (#2Co 8:12); but as he prospers and blesses us, and puts us in a capacity to do good, he expects we should. The greater ability he gives, the more enlarged should our hearts be, and the more open our hands; but, where the ability is less, the hands cannot be as open, however willing the mind and however large the heart; nor does God expect it.

3. Here is the time when this is to be done: The first day of the week, *kata mian sabbatwn* #Lu 24:1, the Lord's day, the Christian holiday, when public assemblies were held and public worship was celebrated, and the Christian institutions and mysteries (as the ancients called them) were attended upon; then let every one lay by him. It is a day of holy rest; and the more vacation the mind has from worldly cares and toils the more disposition has it to show mercy: and the other duties of the day should stir us up to the performance of this; works of charity should always accompany works of piety. True piety towards God will beget kind and friendly dispositions towards men. This commandment have we from him that he who loveth God love his brother also, #1Jo 4:21. Works of mercy are the genuine fruits of true love to God, and therefore are a proper service on his own day. Note, God's day is a proper season on which to lay up for charitable uses, or lay out in them, according as he has prospered us; it is paying tribute for the blessings of the past week, and it is a proper way to procure his blessing on the work of our hands for the next.

INTRODUCTION TO 2 CORINTHIANS CHAPTER 8

In this and the following chapter Paul is exhorting and directing the Corinthians about a particular work of charity—to relieve the necessities of the poor saints at Jerusalem and in Judea, according to the good example of the churches in Macedonia, #Ro 15:26. The Christians at Jerusalem, through war, famine, and persecution, had become poor, many of them had fallen into decay, and perhaps most of them were but poor when they first embraced Christianity; for Christ said,

“ The poor receive the gospel.”

Now Paul, though he was the apostle of the Gentiles, had a tender regard, and kind concern, for those among the Jews who were converted to the Christian faith; and, though many of them had not so much affection to the Gentile converts as they ought to have had, yet the apostle would have the Gentiles to be kind to them, and stirred them up to contribute liberally for their relief. Upon this subject he is very copious, and writes very

affectingly. In this eighth chapter he acquaints the Corinthians with, and commends, the good example of the Macedonians in this work of charity, and that Titus was sent to Corinth to collect their bounty, #2Co 8:1-6. He then proceeds to urge this duty with several cogent arguments, {#2Co 8:7-15} and commends the persons who were employed in this affair, #2Co 8:16-24.

Ver. 1.

Observe here,

I. The apostle takes occasion from the good example of the churches of Macedonia, that is, of Philippi, Thessalonica, Berea, and others in the region of Macedonia, to exhort the Corinthians and the Christians in Achaia to the good work of charity. And,

1. He acquaints them with their great liberality, which he calls the grace of God bestowed on the churches, #2Co 8:1. Some think the words should be rendered, the gift of God given in or by the churches. He certainly means the charitable gifts of these churches, which are called the grace or gifts of God, either because they were very large, or rather because their charity to the poor saints did proceed from God as the author, and was accompanied with true love to God, which also was manifested this way. The grace of God must be owned as the root and fountain of all the good that is in us, or done by us, at any time; and it is great grace and favour from God, and bestowed on us, if we are made useful to others, and are forward to any good work.

2. He commends the charity of the Macedonians, and sets it forth with good advantage. He tells them,

(1.) They were but in a low condition, and themselves in distress, yet they contributed to the relief of others. They were in great tribulation and deep poverty, #2Co 8:2. It was a time of great affliction with them, as may be seen, #Ac 18:17. The Christians in these parts met with ill treatment, which had reduced them to deep poverty; yet, as they had abundance of joy in the midst of tribulation, they abounded in their liberality; they gave out of a little, trusting in God to provide for them, and make it up to them.

(2.) They gave very largely, with the riches of liberality, {#2Co 8:2} that is, as liberally as if they had been rich. It was a large contribution they made, all things considered; it was according to, yea beyond, their power, {#2Co 8:3} as much as could well be expected from them, if not more. Note, Though men may condemn the indiscretion, yet God will accept the pious zeal, of those who in real works of piety and charity do rather beyond their power.

(3.) They were very ready and forward to this good work. They were willing of themselves, {#2Co 8:3} and were so far from needing that Paul should urge and press them with many arguments that they prayed him with much entreaty to receive the gift, #2Co 8:4. It seems Paul was backward to undertake this trust, for he would give himself to the word and prayer; or, it may be, he was apprehensive how ready his enemies would

be to reproach and blacken him upon all occasions, and might take a handle against him upon account of so large a sum deposited in his hands, to suspect or accuse him of indiscretion and partiality in the distribution, if not of some injustice. Note, How cautious ministers should be, especially in money-matters, not to give occasion to those who seek occasion to speak reproachfully!

(4.) Their charity was founded in true piety, and this was the great commendation of it. They performed this good work in a right method: First they gave themselves to the Lord, and then they gave unto us their contributions, by the will of God, {#2Co 8:5} that is, according as it was the will of God they should do, or to be disposed of as the will of God should be, and for his glory. This, it seems, exceeded the expectation of the apostle; it was more than he hoped for, to see such warm and pious affections shining in these Macedonians, and this good work performed with so much devotion and solemnity. They solemnly, jointly, and unanimously, made a fresh surrender of themselves, and all they had, unto the Lord Jesus Christ. They had done this before, and now they do it again upon this occasion; sanctifying their contributions to God's honour, by first giving themselves to the Lord. Note,

[1.] We should give ourselves to God; we cannot bestow ourselves better.

[2.] When we give ourselves to the Lord, we then give him all we have, to be called for and disposed of according to his will.

[3.] Whatever we use or lay out for God, it is only giving to him what is his own.

[4.] What we give or bestow for charitable uses will not be accepted of God, nor turn to our advantage, unless we first give ourselves to the Lord.

Conclusion

It is evident that the first fruit offerings were primarily produce from the land but did include the offering of livestock when referring to offerings of the feasts of Israel. These feasts were a celebration of God's care and blessings upon Israel and had significance in the call to remembrance of various historical events that marked God's choice of and provision for His people. The underlying principle of firstfruit offering was an expression of dependence upon God, expressed in presenting to God the *very first* of His provision back to Him. This was an expression of faith not in the produce of the land or in the abundance of cattle but in the provider – The Lord God.

Tithing was clearly the pattern of giving for the people of God long before the Mosaic law. Although the laws of tithing introduced to Israel encompassed many things, the fundamental principle was the same as for the firstfruits - an expression of dependence upon God, not upon wealth or the spoils of war, but in the provider – The Lord God.

Christ's reference to "seeking first the kingdom of God" has various suggested applications. Nevertheless, Jesus addressed this Sermon on the Mount to his disciples and the host of people that followed him to hear his teaching, the great majority, if not all of

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which, were Israelites. In view of this it would seem probable that the very reference to “first” would have brought immediately to mind the many references in the Scriptures to first fruits.

The texts referring to offering in the Epistles to the Corinthians merits special consideration. Corinth was a Grecian city, on the isthmus which joins the Peloponnesus to the mainland of Greece. It is about 48 miles west of Athens. The ancient city was destroyed by the Romans (B.C. 146) and that mentioned in the New Testament was quite a new city, having been rebuilt about a century afterwards and peopled by a colony of freedmen from Rome. It became under the Romans the seat of government for Southern Greece or Achaia #Ac 18:12-16 It was noted for its wealth, and for the luxurious and immoral and vicious habits of the people. It had a large mixed population of Romans, Greeks, and Jews. When Paul first visited the city (A.D. 51 or 52) Gallio, the brother of Seneca, was proconsul. Here Paul resided for eighteen months #Ac 18:1-18 Here he first became acquainted with Aquila and Priscilla, and soon after his departure Apollos came to it from Ephesus. After an interval he visited it a second time, and remained for three months #Ac 20:3 During this second visit his Epistle to the Romans was written (probably A.D. 55) Although there were many Jewish converts at Corinth, yet the Gentile element prevailed in the church there. Even with this fact, it is clear that the Jewish segments within the early church carried great influence because of the privilege of having God’s Word. This was certainly the case with the church of Antioch where confusion over the role of the law within the early church was evident (see Acts 15). With this in view, it seems evident that the teaching regarding offering in 1 Cor. 16 and 2 Cor. 8, when addressing the need to help the poor and share with other suffering saints, would also be in the context of understood Old Testament first fruit offering and tithing.

Although the church was clearly taught that the Mosaic Law is not binding in its formality, Christ Himself taught that the principles of the law are applicable to His kingdom of all ages (see Mat. 5:43-44). With this in view, we apply the principles of first fruit offering and tithing to believers today. The pattern of first fruit offering presenting ***the principle of priority*** – an expression of dependence upon God, expressed in presenting to God the ***very first*** of His provision back to Him, an expression of faith not in the possessions but in the provider – The Lord God. The pattern of tithing presents ***the principle of obligation***, that the amount to be offered was a minimum of one tenth of God’s blessings, again an expression of dependence upon God, an expression of faith not in the possessions but in the provider – The Lord God.