

# 10 for 10

## TEN WEEKS OF ENHANCED GIVING: WEEK 3

**A biblical concept that is ripe for the picking.**

### God Puts the “First” into Firstfruits

The biblical word “firstfruits” isn’t used very often today. The rich biblical meaning is often lost on modern American churchgoers. In the Bible, the word firstfruits usually appears in contexts that deal with giving. In an agricultural society (like that of Bible times), people literally lived or died by the harvest. If the harvest was poor, the coming year would be a long and hungry one. If the harvest failed, people died of famine. If the harvest was good, one might be able to store something away for a bad year. How would you view life differently if your life literally depended upon the harvest standing out in the field? “Daily bread” would be far more precious!

If we lived or died by the harvest in the field, it stands to reason that we would be reluctant to give away any of the harvest! After all, what if there isn’t enough? What if next year is a poor year? Worse yet, what if I gave away the first part of the harvest and then some disaster—hail, flood, fire, or war—destroys the rest before it can be gathered into the barn? Our knee-jerk reaction would be to scrimp, save, and store away every last grain of wheat until we were absolutely certain that we would be safe, warm, and well-fed today, tomorrow, and next year!

God knows and understands our human desire for security. The One who designed the human stomach knows our need to eat! To help his people avoid hoarding bodily blessings while ignoring spiritual needs, God commanded the Israelites to give him the firstfruits of

their harvest. In giving their firstfruits, the people were putting God first in a most tangible way. In requiring the firstfruits, God provided his people with annual reminders that man “does not live on bread alone.”

We tend to be a congregation of “city slickers” instead of farmers. Today our “harvest” may come by check or direct deposit every Friday, every 15th and 30th of the month, or once a month. No matter what our method of payment, the biblical principles remain the same: God still wants to teach us that every one of our blessings comes from God. God still asks us to give him our first and our best. He still wants us to demonstrate that we trust in him for all we need—not in theory, but in everyday practice. Giving God our first and best—in firstfruits fashion—is a tangible way to show God that he really does come first in our lives!

In summary: Offering our firstfruits is more about attitude than agriculture. It is more about God being our priority than it is about our property. It is about being who we really are: The firstfruits of all creation (James 1:18), blessed with the firstfruits of the Spirit (Romans 8:23) and rejoicing in Christ, the firstfruits of all who have fallen asleep (1 Corinthians 15:29)!

### The Hopelessness of Hedonism

### We Want Things, but Need Hope!

“A few years ago I saw a commercial that depicted a baby being born, and then in thirty seconds it fast-forwarded through the child’s entire life until before you knew it he was old and gray and hunched over, and finally he fell down and crashed into a grave.

### Questions to Ask God about Giving

**Q:** When I make a list of all the assets you’ve entrusted to me and ask what you want me to give away, is there anything I’m leaving off the list? Is there anything that I’m treating as “untouchable,” as if it were mine and not yours? Do things like my retirement funds belong to you? What doesn’t?

**Q:** Do you want me to set a basic level of income and assets to live on, then give away whatever you provide beyond that—regardless of the percent?

**Q:** How can I be certain that assets you’ve entrusted to me will serve you after my death? If I want money to go to your kingdom later and it’s more than I need at the present, why wouldn’t I give it now?

(Adapted from Alcorn, p. 218)

## QUOTABLE QUOTES

“We always pay dearly for chasing after what is cheap.” – Aleksandr Sozhenitsyn

“He that serves God for money will serve the devil for better wages.” – Sir Robert L’Estrange

## Special Ministries

### Compassion

Jesus said that people would know we are his followers by our love. Special Ministries cultivates the kind of love that is not content to ignore the spiritual needs of the one lamb who is deaf, has a developmentally disability, is deployed with the military, or is incarcerated.

We help WELS members identify people who might not receive the gospel without a special adaptation or effort. When we focus on the needs of a survivor of abuse or the needs of a blind man, we discover that God has also given them gifts to serve in the body of Christ.

The people we serve also can be a blessing to their fellow Christians. In these ways, Christ uses our mission offerings to extend his love and your love to others as we learn to serve one another in love.



The words flashed across the screen: “Life is short. Play more Xbox.” Really? Is that the best we’ve got? Life is short, and it’s fragile. Is the answer really just to play more Xbox—to distract yourself and try not to think about it, to plug into an Xbox experience machine because there’s nothing you can do about it anyway?

The future that the Bible offers is so very different:

“Look! God's dwelling place is now among the people, and he will dwell with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. ‘He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death’ or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away” (Revelation 21:3-4 NIV).

Hedonism (the eager pursuit of material pleasures) fails, and we know it fails... And yet, if we are brave enough to consider the questions and answer them honestly, how much of our lives are lived worshipping at the altar of pleasure? What percentage of our lives are spent plugged into the experience machine? Who is getting hurt in the process?

There is only one who offers a change of heart: the God of Christianity. He promises, “I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh” (Ezekiel 36:26 NIV).

### From Luther’s Large Catechism

## I Believe in God the Father, Creator...

Here much could be said if we were to describe how few people believe this article. We all pass over it; we hear it and recite it, but we neither see nor think about what the words command us to do. For if we believed it with our whole heart, we would also act accordingly, and not swagger about and boast and brag as if we had life, riches, power, honor, and such things of ourselves, as if we ourselves were to be feared and served. This is the way the wretched, perverse world acts, drowned in its blindness, misusing all the blessings and gifts of God solely for its own pride, greed, pleasure, and enjoyment, and never once turning to God to thank him or acknowledge him as Lord or Creator.

Therefore, if we believe it, this article should humble and terrify all of us. For we sin daily with eyes, ears, hands, body and soul, money and property, and with all that we have...Yet Christians have this advantage, that they acknowledge that they owe it to God to serve and obey him for all these things.

(Kolb-Wengert, p. 433)

In Christ, we have a heart—filled with hope!

(Adapted from *Jesus Among Secular Gods*, pp. 202-204)

### Learning from the mistakes of others

## How Not To Give

### The Situation

Bob and Ellen are in their early fifties. Ellen says, “For years we overspent on all sorts of luxuries. We’re only twelve years away from retirement and we haven’t saved a thing. To make matters more interesting, we still have two kids in college.”

“We’d like to give to church,” Bob explains, “but Scripture teaches we have to take care of our family first. After the boys are done with college, we’ll start to give.”

### The Problem

Bob and Ellen are keeping what belongs to God in order to make up for their lack of discipline and poor planning. Their first debt isn’t to their children’s education, it’s to their God who graciously gave them their children! If they weren’t worried about tuition, they would likely come up with another excuse because they have no standard of giving. Simply put, the things of life rather than the Creator of life have practically come first in their lives.

(Freely adapted from Alcorn, p. 190)