

## LEADERS GUIDE: Firstfruits Giving

*NOTE: The goal of having a Bible study woven into worship is to have the opportunity to apply the truths proclaimed in the sermon in very specific ways. These studies have been designed and tested so that they can be completed within fifteen minutes. However, that will probably mean varying from normal pedagogical practice. For example, take the first question, which asks people to share what comes to mind when they hear the word stewardship. Depending on the number of people in worship and the makeup, it might be that no answer is quickly forthcoming. In that case, the teacher might provide the answer to keep things moving. E.g. "You might think stewardship is about money. Or maybe you remember the catechesis breakdown of 'time, talents, and treasures.'" Typically in a Bible study, the teacher wants to avoid doing all the talking. To fit this study within the scheduled time, it is advisable for the teacher to provide answers more quickly, if needed to keep things moving along.*

*Throughout the Leader's Guide you will see images of PowerPoint slides, indicating when the teacher would advance the slides. It is not necessary to use the PowerPoint files to use the Bible study, however.*

### I. INTRODUCTION

- ? What comes to mind when you hear the word "stewardship"? When you heard that we would be talking about stewardship for three weeks, what was your response?

*Answers will vary. The point of the question is many people probably have a negative reaction when they hear the word stewardship, as they typically equate it with "money talk."*



It is easy to think of "stewardship" as being a discussion about money. Consider the following quote:

*Stewardship isn't a subcategory of the Christian life. Stewardship is the Christian life. After all, what is stewardship except that God has entrusted to us life, time, talents, money, possessions, family, and his grace? In each case, he evaluates how we regard what he has entrusted to us—and what we do with it.*

*(Randy Alcon in Money, Possessions, and Eternity, p. 140)*

*We tend to compartmentalize our lives. Take time. There's work time, family time, exercise time, church time, and the all important "me time." God would have us remember that every second of our lives belong to him. We do the same with money. We think that some of our income is for bills. Some is used for fun: hobbies, vacations, and the like. Some money is returned to God as an offering. But God would have us remember that every penny we have is really his. All our time... All our wealth... It is ALL to be managed for his glory.*

Stewardship = Management of the **TOTALITY** of the  
**TIME + TALENT + TREASURE + TRUTH**  
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*Note the inclusion of "truth," i.e. God's Word. This is an oft forgotten aspect of stewardship! We are to manage the promises of God.*

? If “stewardship is the Christian life,” why will a modern stewardship study need to focus on money, perhaps more than ever before in history?

*First, we are incredibly prosperous. We have luxuries—air conditioning, cell phones, means of transportation—that King David never enjoyed. The temptation to fall in love with this world, in that sense, is as great as it has ever been.*

*Second, more than ever, the mechanics of life are intertwined with finances. There was a time when to get food, you needed to have a good harvest... needed your livestock to reproduce. Now, you just need money and a grocery store. There was a time when your retirement plan was to have children who took care of you, letting their elderly mother and father live with them. Today, 401K plans and retirement homes are more the norm. Education was at one time entirely free for the vast majority of people. Today, college is often stressed, and rarely can one go that route without massive expense. More of our life is dependent upon money today than in previous generations.*

### Psalm 20:7

*Some trust in chariots and some in horses, but we trust in the name of the LORD our God.*

? Complete: Stewardship does not just give the LORD honor. It demonstrates that we TRUST him.

*Most people are familiar with the “trust fall” teambuilding exercise. An individual holds their arms out and then falls backwards, into the arms of a teammate. The goal is to not let your knees buckle or throw your hands back, proving you trust the person will catch you. God wants us to trust him. Offerings do that. We trust that God is going to continue to provide for us. We trust that we can be generous, because he will continue to care for us.*



## II. FIRSTFRUIT BASICS

The focus of firstfruits giving is not the AMOUNT but the ATTITUDE.



### Proverbs 3:9

*Honor the LORD with your wealth, with the firstfruits of all your crops; then your barns will be filled to overflowing, and your vats will brim over with new wine.*

? When God calls for firstfruit giving in that passage, what is the amount he asks for?

*In this verse, he does not specify any amount.*

### Deuteronomy 26:8-10

*So the LORD brought us out of Egypt with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm, with great terror and with miraculous signs and wonders. He brought us to this place and gave us this land, a land flowing with milk and honey; and now I bring the firstfruits of the soil that you, O LORD, have given me.*

? Again, no amount is stipulated for this firstfruit offering. What is stressed is the attitude. How would you characterize the attitude of the Israelite when he brought his firstfruits offerings?

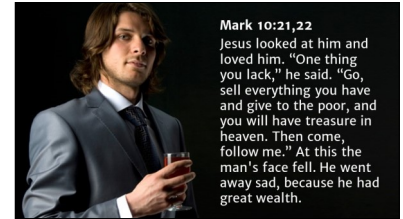
*There's gratitude at God's mercy: saving Israel from Egypt, providing for them generously by giving them "a land flowing with milk and honey." He understands all he has was given to him by God.*

### Mark 10:21-11

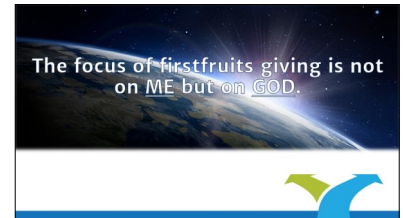
Jesus looked at him and loved him. "One thing you lack," he said. "Go, sell everything you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me." At this the man's face fell. He went away sad, because he had great wealth.

? This man had claimed to follow all of God's law. Was God actually *first* in his life? Give the reason for your answer.

*No. Money came first. This is evidenced by the fact that when presented with a choice—being near the Son of God or his wealth—the young man wanted the wealth more. Oh, the struggle we all face! We will follow Jesus, but to a point. We will be his disciple, so long as it is easy. But when he asks us to trust him... to let go of our love of this world... to make sacrifices... there is a temptation to go "away sad." This often happens when Jesus tells us how to think about money. Christ, help us!*



The focus of firstfruits giving is not on ME but on GOD.



### Genesis 1:1

*In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.*

### Psalms 24:1

*The earth is the Lord's, and everything in it, the world, and all who live in it; for he founded it on the seas and established it on the waters.*

? Do you believe the passages above are literally true? If so, how does that have to affect the way you approach stewardship?

*That question perhaps sounds snarky, but it gets back to part of stewardship being managing TRUTH. Are those passages truth? Of course! If so, they should affect the way we view life. The money in my wallet is not mine. The wallet is not even mine. It all belongs to God. I am to manage it for his glory. What we are about to see is that is how God manages things—for OUR glory and well-being.*

### John 1:2

*He [Jesus] was with God [the Father] in the beginning.*

### John 3:16

*For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.*

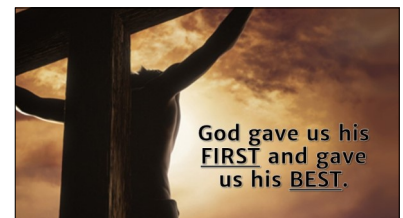
### Romans 5:8

*While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.*

? What do these passages teach us about how God gives.

*John 1:2 echoes Genesis 1:1 with "In the beginning..." Jesus is eternal, like the Father. Thus he is his first child. But God gave him up for us. He did so, though "we were still sinners." Jesus alone lived the beautiful, perfect life God wanted humanity to live. But God sacrificed that life so that sinners might go free. This helps us conclude that...*

God gave us his FIRST and gave us his BEST.



## Romans 7:18

*For I know that good itself does not dwell in me, that is, in my sinful nature. For I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out.*

## Galatians 5:24

*Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit.*

? These passages teach:

- Through my sinful nature, **GREED** assures that God will always come anywhere but first.
- Through the Spirit we are **EMPOWERED** to give in a way that glorifies God – Creator, Savior, Spirit. As God's children, he comes first!



*Firstfruits giving is impossible for our Old Adam. It was the sermon theme: giving to God makes no sense! But when we were baptized, God placed his Holy Spirit inside us. When God asks the Christian to do something, the Christian never says, "That's impossible." We say, "With your Spirit, I can do all things you ask, Lord." That includes firstfruits giving.*

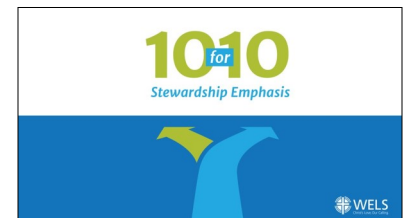
## The Challenge

If you are not in the spiritual habit of giving to the Lord first, it is time to reconsider that habit. The First Commandment dictates that we are to *fear, love, and trust in God above all things*. Firstfruits giving helps us do exactly that. It tangibly puts God first.

*Imagine telling your wife that you love her and cherish her, but instead of taking her out for your anniversary you buy yourself a new putter. You can say she comes first. How you use your money makes it tangible to her... and to you.*

## III. NEWS AND NOTES

- Every member will receive a *10 for 10* commitment card. Keep it in a safe place and begin to pray about it. Do not fill it out yet! Instead, invest yourself in praying about why you do or do not practice firstfruits giving this first week. If you do, is your attitude correct? If you do not, ask yourself: does God ever command something that isn't meant to be a blessing for me? "*Honor the LORD with your wealth, with the firstfruits of all your crops; then your barns will be filled to overflowing, and your vats will brim over with new wine*" (Proverbs 3:9-10). That's God's promise to you!
- Over the next couple weeks, we will talk about how to respond to God's love and grace in our stewardship. At the end of this three week emphasis members will be asked to fill out those cards, which are a ten-week giving plan.
- Additional devotional material has been/will be shared. Read. Ponder. Pray.



*The 10 for 10 program provides various ways to share these devotional materials: print, e-mail, snail mail. Communicate with the people where they can expect to find their devotional materials.*