



Series: StewardSHIFT (Part 3)
Speaker: Rhordan Wicks

INTRODUCTION

We learned in Part 1 of this new series that God wants to bless us. There is no dispute to this statement. But the intention of God for this blessing is not just to stop with us like a reservoir, but it is for others to be blessed. The blessing instead should be like a river flowing to others. God bless us to be a blessing for others.

In Part 2, we learn that God is the Actual Owner of everything we have. We are only God’s stewards or managers of the gifts and talents God has given to us. God has given us many gifts, which include our abilities, money, time, etc. God wants us to be faithful and hardworking stewards, not wicked and slothful ones.

In the final part of this series, we learn to ‘Put God First’. In today’s world, we tend to put ourselves first. But as God’s people, He honours those who put Him first. The preacher covered these 3 points:

- 1. The command of the first fruits
- 2. The blessings of the first fruits
- 3. The practice of the first fruits and its application to our daily lives.

Jesus is our role model by putting the Father’s will first before Himself. He gave Himself to be the sacrificial lamb to die for our sins even before we decided to accept Him to be our Saviour. How else should we respond but to put God first? In doing so, we shift from “*what’s left to God first*”. Giving God first requires faith in trusting God for our harvest and fruitfulness.

DISCUSSION

1. The idea or mentality of “putting ourselves first” is prevalent today. We hear sayings like “Make yourself a priority” or “If you don’t put yourself first, you will end up last”. This is different from self-care. A recent study published in *Psychological Science* suggests that people across the globe are becoming more individualistic over time. Individualism, as opposed to collectivism, relates to how independent and self-reliant (and self-centred) people are. For example, social media, while it connects us to others, may lead to greater self-centeredness as much of social media is “all about me.”

What will the rise of self-centeredness lead to in our society? Share some possible outcomes.

2. The command of the first fruits. In the books of Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy, Moses stated the significance of the first offering on at least 13 occasions (Lev 23:10, Exo 23:19, 35:26). The offerings and sacrifices in Israel’s sacrificial system are different from the gifts and offerings we make today to God’s work. However, giving our first fruits to God is still applicable.

- i. Read Exodus 13:1-2. Since God owns everything, why is the firstborn so important to God? (Note: See context in Exodus 13:3-14).

- ii. Read Exodus 23:19 and Deuteronomy 26. What is the principle of the first fruits? What is the intention of God in stipulating the firstfruit offering in the Old Testament?

3. The blessing of the first fruits. Proverbs 3:9-10 is a promise from our God when we honour Him with our wealth and our first fruits.

- i. What does this tell you about our God?

- ii. Can you think of when you gave God your first fruits? Was it easy to give, or you had your reservations? How were you blessed in return?

4. The Practice of First Fruits. In the story of Cain and Abel (Genesis 4:1-6), *“the LORD looked with favour on Abel and his offering, but on Cain and his offering he did not look with favour”*. “ Hebrews 11:4 says, *“By faith, Abel offered God a better sacrifice than Cain did”*.

- i. Why did God favour Abel’s offering over Cain? What does this tell you about the hearts of Abel and Cain towards God? What is the lesson we can learn from this story?

- ii. In the New Testament, the term first fruits takes on a symbolic meaning. In 1 Corinthians 15:20, Paul mentions Christ as the *“first fruits of those who have fallen asleep.”* Jesus

was God's first fruit—his one and only son and the best that humanity had to offer. God gave Jesus, who was raised from the dead, up for us in the same way that we will give the best we have for Him.

What does the giving of first fruits practically look like in today's context? What does putting God first look like for you?

WHAT WILL YOU DO

While the Israelites practised the giving of first fruits as instructed, Jesus has fulfilled the law, and thus, it is not required of us under the finished work of Jesus. That said, you can still offer it of your own will and not under compulsion by the law or guilt. Deciding to give a portion or all of your income to God as a sign of honour is willful giving and is between you and God. God loves a cheerful giver (2 Corinthians 9:6-7).

As we wrap up this series, would you reflect on your stewardship of the resources God has given you?

How have you been managing your finances? Do you need to re-organise your finances and give to God first?

How are you doing with your time? Are you prioritising time for God daily?

How are you stewarding your gifts, talents and abilities? Is your motivation for personal gain or goals? Are you willing to use your gifts, talents and abilities to fulfil your kingdom assignments?

Let us all put God first and not give Him our leftovers. He deserves our all.

MEMORY VERSE

Honour the Lord with your wealth, with the first fruits 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 (NIV)