

**1 Vision Area**

1st Fruits

**The Big Picture**

At times, we perhaps look at the idea of giving our firstfruits almost in the same way that we view paying taxes: it is a necessary evil that is a part of doing business. If we look closely at what Scripture says about firstfruits, however, we discover that the giving of firstfruits is a response, not a “requirement.” Today we will look at how knowing the story of God’s and actions in our lives rescue help shape the response we have to Him.

**Biblical Text**

Deuteronomy 26.1-11 (NIV)

**Preparing for the Lesson**

This week begins a two-part lesson. We will use the first half of the Deuteronomy text this week, then conclude with the latter half of the text, as well as use some additional examples to support it. In a nutshell, we are trying to communicate this week that knowing the story of God in our lives is crucial to a good understanding of giving our firstfruits. Next week we want to try and broaden the idea people may have of what it means to give our firstfruits.

A couple of background thoughts to help frame today’s text. In the Pentateuch, the first five books of the Bible, Deuteronomy serves to recap the story of God in the lives of His people. Moses is preparing to hand off his leadership to Joshua and is encouraging the people through a renewing of the covenant. This covenant reminds the people of what God has done, but also gives them guidelines as to how they are to live in the land they are about to possess. This is where our story appears; it is a description of how the people are to live.

The idea of rehearsing the story of God’s working in the lives of His people is a common one in the Old Testament. This is especially true at times of renewing the covenant. The people share with one another the ways God has shown Himself strong—the Biblical writers often use phrases like “mighty hand” and “outstretched arm” such as we find in today’s text—and has rescued His people. He has, if you will, proven His right to be their God. The people recognize their dependence on Him, even if they quickly forget this.

Therefore, there really is no point in rejoicing or even giving our firstfruits if we do not first recognize our dependence on God. We too often are like Jimmy Stewart saying grace in the movie *Shenandoah*: “Lord we cleared this land, we plowed it ... but we thank you just the same anyway...”

The other thing we need to see in this text, which is seen all throughout the Biblical texts on firstfruits, is that our giving of our firstfruits is a response to God, not a requirement that is done thoughtlessly. It is fairly easy to just skim our 10% (studies will show that it is a lot lower than 10%, by the way) off the top and hand it over without any recognition of God’s working. Too often, we do not even give our firstfruits, but our leftovers. This is what lead to the first murder in the Bible (see the story of Cain and Able in Genesis 4) and is often brought up by the prophets (Malachi is a great example of this, for instance) as one of the shortcomings of the people of Israel.

*(Continued on page 2)*

## Preparing for the Lesson

Today's lesson will attempt to help us see and begin to develop a story to recite God's working in our lives. I believe this is the first step in truly understanding how to give our firstfruits.

Although there are several questions that lead up to it, the main point of the lesson today is to begin to craft a narrative of God's actions in our lives. If we can get people thinking and speaking about God's working, then we have accomplished our job. However, some people are very uncomfortable talking about "God working." It is not that they do not believe He works or that they are unfaithful people, but using the language of God acting in our lives is often foreign to our vocabulary. Be aware of this possible hesitancy and be sensitive to people who are uncomfortable with this.

## Possible Lesson Outline

A good ice-breaker question might be: What do you think of when you think of firstfruits? You might even set this up as a word association type scenario, that is, say: "Tell me the first thing you think of when I say this word." I am curious how many people think only of money and am wondering how many people will bring up the idea of it being a response to God, verses the "tax" idea mentioned above.

Spend some time discussing the questions.

Conclude with some time to discuss Question 7.

Ask people to spend time this week continuing to think about what God has done for them. People may want to keep notes of things they think about so they will be able to share those things next week when they come back.

Conclude with a prayer.

## For the Kids

On one level, we may assume that talking about God working in our lives is something conceptually too advanced for children. And that may in some ways be correct, but it is also very short-sighted. If you have ever listened to your children pray, you discover that children have this innate sense about God in their lives that adults seem to "grow out of."

Be sure to include your children in this lesson. Let them hear the ways the adults talk about God at work. Ask them to share how they see God in their own lives. Their answers will probably surprise you.

## Spiritual Formation / Worship

Psalm 78 is a great example of a recitation of God's great actions in the lives of His people. It also is a reminder that such a rehearsal shares these great things from generation to generation (v 4). I would love to take the time to read the entire psalm during group this week, but I recognize time constraints will probably prevent that. So, instead of your group reading it, let me encourage you personally to spend some time this week reading and re-reading this psalm. Just the act of reading it, I believe, will help set your heart on a life that gives firstfruits to God.

## For Next Week

Continue to think about the things that God has done in your life. If it would help you, get a piece of paper or a notebook and record the things you think of throughout the week. Next week, we will begin our discussion by sharing the things we thought about this week in preparation for the second half of this lesson.

## Discussion Questions

1. Three times in the first 3 verses of this passage, the writer of Deuteronomy references something God has done for His people. What is that? How does knowing where your “stuff” comes from change your perspective of how you use it?
2. How can we do a better job of recognizing the gifts of God in our lives?
3. Although many times the people of Israel forgot it—or chose not to remember it—the land they were in was a promise of God from long ago. How well do we remember the promises of God for us? What are some of those promises?
4. The people are told to bring a basket of their firstfruits and place it before the altar of God (v 4). What are some ways we bring our firstfruits before God? (NOTE: *We will discuss bringing our firstfruits and our response to God much more next week. This question, although a key part of today’s text, is designed to bring up the idea, not cover the topic in its fullness.*)
5. “With a mighty hand and an outstretched arm” were phrases the Biblical writers often used to describe the power of God, primarily during time of His rescuing His people. How does seeing the power of God give us a better understanding of what it means to give our firstfruits?
6. How important is the recitation of God’s actions in the lives of the people to their firstfruit offerings? Why?
7. If you were in the shoes of the Israelites ready to give your basket of firstfruits, what would you say in your recitation of the story of God in your life? Spend some extended time discussing these things with your group.

## For Further Reading/Study

A link to the Jimmy Stewart prayer in Shenandoah mentioned above:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XbZUufk7KYQ>

## What’s Next

We will continue to look at the Deuteronomy 26 passage, moving from understanding what God has done to responding to that understanding.