

1 Vision Area

1st Fruits

The Big Picture

When we understand that God has given us the things we have—financial things and our abilities—it changes how we approach giving our firstfruits to Him. What are your firstfruits ... and how do you offer them?

Biblical Text

Deuteronomy 26.11-15 (NIV)

Preparing for the Lesson

This week concludes our lessons on firstfruits and my hope is that last week we laid a base for understanding the importance of giving our firstfruits as a response to God that enables us to determine to act differently this week. I think most of us understand the importance of giving our firstfruits. The struggle, I have found, is actually doing so. Perhaps within the safety of a group such as yours, people will be more willing to be vulnerable and allow group members to encourage them to do better.

Scripture is full of examples of God's people offering their first fruits. Because of this, you may want to use some of the passages listed below (or come up with some of your own) to help your discussion about this idea.

Genesis 4.1-16 Cain kills his brother Abel because he was angry that God looked favorably upon Abel's sacrifice of his firstfruits versus Cain's sacrifice of *some* of the fruits of the soil. The issue was not an animal versus something grown, the issue was that Cain did not offer his best to God.

Deuteronomy 16.9-17 This passage echoes some of the ideas seen in today's text. Specifically, the people are told to take care of the aliens, fatherless, and widows. This text also points to the importance of recognizing that what is given to God is really nothing more than what He has already given first to the people. In verse 16, we discover that no one should appear before God without something to offer, which leads me to believe that 1) God always gives us things we are able to offer "back" to Him and 2) our lives should always be focused on returning what God has given us.

2 Samuel 24.18-25 In 2 Samuel 24, David counts his men, which was David relying on his might and power instead of God's. (If you remember the story of Gideon in Judges 7, God actually reduces the number of men Gideon has in order to show God's strength.) David is told to build an altar on the threshing floor of Araunah, who actually offers to give David the land for his use. David responds "I will not sacrifice to the Lord my God burnt offerings that cost me nothing" (2 Samuel 24.24). I hope the power of such a statement does not escape you. David's concern is not that he shows how rich he is or how much he spent on his offering, but that an offering made to God is something that should have value. What sort of statement does it make to God if David were to just give Him

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Preparing for the Lesson

something that was free? I think if we were to look back at Genesis 4; we might consider it would have been looked upon very poorly.

Acts 5.1-10 Another negative example of how not to give, Ananias and Sapphira are struck down not because they gave less than the value of the land they sold, but because they tried to keep a little for themselves while still being seen as giving the entire sum of the sale price.

These and other passages that you might use during your lesson are further examples of how giving and firstfruits is viewed in scripture. The important aspect of these is that giving of our firstfruits is important to God and it is something we should be doing as part of our worship to Him.

There is, however, I think an additional aspect we must be careful about. Often times we equate giving of our firstfruits solely with the idea of giving money. As long as we give “ten percent,” our thinking goes, we have accomplished what we are supposed to be doing. I think this may be somewhat short-sighted and miss the fact that our lives and what we do with our lives may be more of a firstfruit than the money we make. (Jesus’ story of the widow’s mites is a good example here, I think.) In real terms, someone who has an ability to do fix-it-up jobs around a house may be refusing to give his firstfruits by not using that ability to help some of the older members of the congregation when they are in need. Or someone who has experience or training in teaching may determine giving of his or her firstfruits needs to incorporate that training in some way for the Kingdom. I am hopeful that as we explore this today, we will begin to enumerate ways we can give our firstfruits that goes beyond just giving of our money.

Possible Lesson Outline

I think I would start with the ice-breaker question: Describe a time when you were at your absolute best. Be prepared for people to hesitate on answering the question. We at times have a hard time thinking of “our best” but I think it also helps open out thinking as we explore the idea of giving our best to God.

If you asked your group to think about their “God Story” last week, spend a few minutes asking them to share what they discovered this past week. This is Discussion Question #1.

Read the text for today. Discussion Questions #2 & 3 apply to this text.

If you want, you may want to read & review the additional texts found above, or add your own for discussion here.

The remaining discussion questions (#4 on) deal with an application of the texts we read today.

Close your time in prayer.

Discussion Questions

1. Last week we discussed having a “God Story” to recite the things that God and done and to help us understand why giving our firstfruits is important. What is your “God Story?”
2. If I was to tell you this week we our discussion topic was on giving, your excitement for our discussion time would probably be somewhat underwhelming. Why does God call His people to “rejoice” in verse 11 even as he tells them to bring their gifts to Him?
3. Why are giving to the Levites, the foreigner, the fatherless, and the widow important for God’s people in Deuteronomy 26? Who are the Levites, the foreigner, the fatherless, and the widow for us today?
4. What are the firstfruits you give to God? Be specific on what they are and how you give them.

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Discussion Questions (cont.)

5. How can the way you live your life day-in and day-out be a firstfruit to God?
6. What are some of the ways we can shift from thinking about money (tithes) as firstfruits to thinking about our lives, our jobs, where we live, how we live, etc. as firstfruits? Come up with as many different ways you can think of firstfruits besides money.
7. What is one way you can do a better job of offering your first fruits to God this week?

What's Next

This week marks the last week for the 1 Vision curriculum. Next week I encourage you to spend some time in celebration with your group prior to the holidays.