

**God comes First!**  
**Deut 26:1-11, Proverbs 3:8-10**

Friends, do you remember what it was like to when you began to get an allowance when you were a kid? It was like you had all of a sudden become that much older, you were more mature, and you had your own money now!

Maybe you had to do some chores around the house, wash the car, take out the trash; or whatever and then you received your money.

In order to get my allowance I had to clean out the garage each Saturday and clean the bathrooms – and when they were done and done properly! I would get my allowance.

My mom or dad would take some cash out of their wallet and I would get paid!

What a feeling - I had my own money to spend.

And later on when I was in high school, I used to work at McDonald's. And every other Thursday all of the employees would show up late in the afternoon and wait around the staff room for one of the managers to come out of the office and hand us our paychecks. And we'd all quickly open up the

envelopes to see what we'd earned, and how much tax had to come off and make sure that we weren't shortchanged any hours – again it was a great feeling, you got paid!

You had some money that you earned by putting in all those hours cooking fries and burgers in the past week. You earned it and now you could decide what you wanted to do with it – and often the first thing we would do with it was go shopping! Spend it

And when we were younger we could pretty much spend it on whatever we wanted – I remember my parents just shaking their heads in dismay when I showed them the \$110.00 pair of Nike Sneakers I had bought, the \$120.00 Aluminum Graphite composite Badminton racquet, or the fact that I paid \$50.00 for a Buckshot Sweatshirt – which was a sweatshirt that had been shot full of holes by a shotgun – but it was my money and I could spend it on whatever I wanted to.

But my choices left my parents wondering if any of the financial wisdom they had tried to instill in me was getting through – and now I'm reliving this scene all over again as my

daughter started getting an allowance and earning some babysitting money, and she's going shopping with it – and now I'm reliving it all over again but from the parental side.

And I had to break the news to my daughter – as my parents did to me – that a part of that money she earns belongs to God. I had to tell her that it is a good habit to get into giving God 10% of what you make – right away so that you don't spend it on other things!

And as much as my daughter loves God – hearing this news produced the same reaction I had when I first heard it – what? I owe God money!?! I thought this was all mine! You mean it don't have 20 dollars to spend – I only have 18!

Because friends, our natural tendency as sinful human beings is to be self-focused and not automatically think about giving back to God – in fact we often behave like the guy in the video!

And in fact if we're thinking on our feet we might even say – “God is spirit, what use would He have for pie! Or money, or

the grain and fruits which we read that the Israelites were required to give back?”

And friends you'd be right! The truth is that God doesn't need it.

But we need to understand that at the core of being a steward starts is the conviction, the belief, the commitment that we don't give because there are needs! - although it is commendable to support ministries we believe in, or give to charities that do work we think is laudable - we give because we first and foremost “worship” God through our act of giving!

Now this may stretch our understanding of worship a bit, because we may tend to think of worship only as a feeling of adoration which moves us to sing, or worship is that hour on Sunday morning where we “attend” church.

But friends a biblical understanding of worship also includes the act of giving – and it is the kind of giving which gives to God for no other reason than because He is God. And we

perform this act of giving right away – it’s the very first thing we do on payday! We give of our firstfruits.

This is what we see in the passage of scripture we read. God required the Israelites to give to him because He was their God – and He had done amazing things for them. Delivered them from slavery, and brought them into a land where they could prosper! They didn’t give because He had a particular need, or there was some cause they had to support – they just needed to give!

But it wasn’t mindless giving. When they presented the 10% of their firstfruits they were required to recite their history – to remind them and teach them why they did this. To correct them if they begin to feel that God was placing a burden on them, to prevent them from thinking this was to pacify or to bribe God for things or to somehow try and pay him back so they didn’t owe him anything.

No instead by reciting their history they would remember and learn that they gave 10% from their firstfruits, because God was God and He had acted on their behalf.

He had made them who they were – starting with their ancestor Abraham – a wandering Aramean – a nobody – who was blessed and became a great nation who was given land and security – everything the Israelites were, was because God had brought them there.

They would be reminded that there were no self-made success stories in Israel – and friends that reminds us that there are no self-made Christians in the church!

You know we have a term for self-made Christians – it’s ‘self-righteous’. And a self-righteous person sees no reason to give *to God* because they think are a good person from their own efforts – efforts that ironically could include things like “giving” to charity!

But a true believer, a true follower of Christ, says alongside the Israelite – I was nothing, and by God’s grace I am something – my savior was a nobody from Galilee, a Jew! He had to suffer and be ridiculed, he was given a disgraceful criminal’s death in order to achieve our freedom from sin and death – I am who I am today because of him – and I will inherit a new heavens and earth in the future – because of Him!

So the very first thing I do with my profits, with the fruit of my labor, on payday, is to “thanks” give at least 10% to Him.

Friends this is one of the reasons why we worship on Sunday Morning – it’s the first day of the week and we *give* the first portion of the day to God by coming to worship him. By the way if we gave 10% of our week to God – we’d need to give 16.8 hours – which is roughly the amount of hours we’re awake on a Sunday

Now friends, I know it’s hard for us to hear that God requires us to give to him. Somehow it rubs us the wrong way, or maybe we think this is just proof that the church is only interested in getting our money, or perhaps we worry that this could turn into legalism.

But if we truly realize how much Christ has blessed us, and we’ve experience His grace and mercy and salvation – we’ll realize being a Steward is about gratitude!

However...If the fact that Christ has saved us aren’t enough to motivate us – and if we’re honest often times sometimes it isn’t, because we still wrestle with our sinful nature – God

gives us additional motivation in that He has set up this world to reward giving!

Proverbs 3:8-10 tells us about this – Honor the Lord with your wealth, in other word Give to God. What happens – well when you do this... then your barns will be filled to overflowing and your vats with new wine! When we give to God it increases the blessings we receive from Him!

That’s how the world generally works and you don’t need to be a Christian to recognize this. Some of our own sayings reflect this truth as well right? – “what goes around comes around;” and “you only get what you give”

And friends, God does this because we need reassurance that there will be enough – that He is not out to ruin us. Because in our sinful nature we get afraid, we worry, and we will come up with all sorts of excuses why we can’t give God at least 10% of our firstfruits.

And often they aren’t excuses like – *“I want to spend all my money on a solid gold toilet with a mother of pearl and diamond inlay on the toilet seat for my master bathroom”*

No, most of the time they are good excuses – take a look at this list I found on the internet

Common excuses for not tithing....

- In January because of Christmas bills due.
- In February because business is slow.
- In March because of the March break trip.
- In April because taxes are due.
- In May because we still owe taxes.
- In June because we're saving up for vacation.
- In July because we're away on vacation.
- In August because of upcoming school expenses.
- In September because of dance and hockey fees.
- In October because we need new winter clothes.
- In November because the car needed repairs.
- In December because we gave a sizeable donation of toys to Samaritans Purse.

Now all of these excuses are “good” things, nothing opulent or ridiculously extravagant...

But, we offer them as excuses because we're afraid that if we give away *some* of our money we won't have enough to meet *all* our needs!

But what does Jesus say to us about this - *So do not worry, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them. But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. (Matthew 6:31-33)*

That's the good news folks – Seek first God's kingdom... give at least 10% *first* – and all that you need to live will be given to you as well! (*Granted you will go through times of testing to see if you really love God or you just love his providing, but proving faithful through those times of testing will result in more blessing as well – Think of Job who after being tested received 7x more than what he lost*)

So friends, when we make a commitment to give at least 10% to God, it shows that you really trust **God** – not the economy or your job, but you trust God to provide. It shows that you really

believe that *all* you have comes from God – and not from your hard work and creativity. It shows that you know you are a servant of the Master and that you are not mastered by His gifts. It shows you are a Steward!

I want to conclude this message by pointing out what the result of tithing can be – and remember tithing is giving to God – not giving to needs! But... God will do things with the gifts you give him, and that should motivate us to give as well.

When the Israelites gave their tithe, God used it to provide for those whom He had put in charge of taking care of the tabernacle or the temple – the Levites, and He also instructed that the tithe was to be used to make sure that immigrants were taken care of.

This is why verse 11 in our passage today says “the Levites and the foreigners among you shall rejoice”

You see friends, when God comes first – everyone benefits!

That’s the way God designed things to work.

I want to end by sharing with you a story of how one church discovered this for themselves....

### **Tithing, And Didn't Know It**

The day the church treasurer resigned the elders of a small rural church asked the local grain elevator manager to take over the vacant position.

He agreed on two conditions; that no monthly treasurer's report would be given for the first year. And that no questions be asked about finances during that year. The elders were surprised but finally agreed since most of them did business with him and they knew he was a trusted man.

At the end of the year he gave his report:

The church’s mortgage of \$228,000 has been paid. The minister's salary had been increased by 8%. The Presbyterian Sharing and PWS&D commitments have been paid 200%. There are no outstanding bills and there is a cash balance of \$11,252!

Immediately the shocked congregation asked, "How did you do it? Where did the money come from?"

He quietly answered: "Most of you bring your grain to my elevator. Throughout the year I simply withheld ten percent on your behalf and gave it to the church in your name. You didn't even miss it!"

"Do you see what we could do for the Lord if we were all willing to give at least the tithe to God, who really owns it?" So the new treasurer had made his point.

Friends, do we get it? More importantly – will we give it?

Amen.