

Give to God First
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We are in a sermon series entitled The Journey to Financial Freedom. We found a biblical definition of financial freedom in 2 Corinthians 9:8 in the Amplified version:

God is able to make all grace (every favor and earthly blessing) come to you in abundance, so that you may always and under all circumstances and whatever the need be self-sufficient (possessing enough to require no aid or support and be furnished in abundance for every good work and charitable donation).

- Financial freedom means all your needs are met.
- Financial freedom means you are self-sufficient and require no financial aid or help from anyone else.
- In fact, financial freedom means that you have such abundance that you are the one who is able to help others who are in need.

We learned that there are many mile markers on the road to financial freedom, but the starting place is God's Word. Proverbs 3:1-2 says

My son, do not forget my teaching, but keep my commands in your heart, for they will prolong your life many years and bring you prosperity.

Prosperity is another word for financial freedom! All your needs are met and you are able to be a generous giver.

We've talked about the first two mile markers on the road to financial freedom. The first mile marker we saw was that we must take the slow road to financial freedom. Proverbs 13:11 says

Dishonest money dwindles away, but he who gathers money little by little makes it grow.

The point is that financial freedom is a journey that takes work and self-discipline over time. It's a journey that you must commit to. But if you stay on the journey, you will reap the rewards! You can be financially free!

Mile marker 2 is – Recognize that God owns everything.

Psalm 24:1 says: *The earth belongs to God! Everything in all the world is His!*

To become financially free we must realize God owns everything and we are stewards who manage God's resources. God will hold us accountable for how we manage His resources.

The third mile marker on the road to financial freedom is: Give to God First.

God wants to be first in our lives. If you don't know the Ten Commandments, let me tell you the first one. You find it in Exodus 20:3 where God says:

Thou shalt have no other gods before Me.

In other words, God wants to be first in our lives. How do we put God first in our lives? There are many ways. Here are some questions to help determine if God is first in your life:

- Do you make time for God – prayer, Word, church?
- Do you go to God as a last resort or the first resort?
- Do you consult God BEFORE you make decisions or decide for yourself and then ask Him to bless your decision?
- How do you spend your time and money?
- Do you give to God first or do you only give Him leftovers?
- When you have the opportunity to stay out late on Sat. night, but have to miss church on Sunday, what do you do?
- Do you go through the motions at church or do you really enter in to praise and worship and the presence of God?
- When God's word says not to do something that you want to do, what do you do?
- Do you do these things because you want to or you have to?

Here's the big question: Is there anything you would not be willing to give up for God?

I ask you: is God really first in your life? Is God really your first priority? Is He really your first love? Really? In Revelation 2:3-5, Jesus said:

You have persevered and have endured hardships for my name, and have not grown weary. Yet I hold this against you: You have forsaken your first love. Remember the height from which you have fallen! Repent and do the things you did at first.

In these verses, Jesus rebuked a church for leaving their first love. We tend to think of first love as puppy love. But the Greek word for "first" in this verse is: protos (pro'-tos); which means "foremost (in time, place, order or importance)."

So, first love is not just first in time, but first in importance. What has first place in your heart and life? What is most important to you? What is your main priority? The word priority means "the fact or condition of being prior; to take precedence or go before in time, place, order, rank or importance."

In other words – that which comes first!

Our priorities show what is important to us. Maybe you're asking yourself "How can I know what my priorities are?" One way to tell is to examine two things – your calendar and checkbook. How you spend your time and your money shows your priorities.

I know we have to spend the majority of our time at work to make a living. But do you do that as unto the Lord? Do you do it for His glory?

I know we have to spend most of our money on our family. But God says to give to Him first. That is called the principle of first fruits. Proverbs 3:9-10 says:

Honor the Lord with your possessions, and with the firstfruits of all your increase; So your barns will be filled with plenty, and your vats will overflow with new wine.

The word "possessions" means wealth or money. Increase means income. So, God is saying whenever you make any income – give to Him first. That includes your pay, any bonus, any income from any source – the firstfruits belong to God.

In other words, He wants us to give to Him first, not after we pay everything else, buy what we want and then give God the leftovers. In Matthew 6:24, Jesus said:

No one can serve two masters. Either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and Money.

Jesus is saying there cannot be two number 1's in your life! It's either God or something else. He goes on to say in Matthew 6:25-33

Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more important than food, and the body more important than clothes?

Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they? Who of you by worrying can add a single hour to his life?

And why do you worry about clothes? See how the lilies of the field grow. They do not labor or spin. Yet I tell you that not even Solomon in all his splendor was dressed like one of these.

If that is how God clothes the grass of the field, which is here today and tomorrow is thrown into the fire, will he not much more clothe you, O you of little faith?

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.

God is saying if we put Him first in our lives, He will take care of the rest! Our part is to seek first the kingdom of God.

The kingdom of God is not a place. As Jesus said in Luke 17:21

The kingdom of God is within you.

The kingdom of God is the king's domain. It's where the king rules and reigns. We seek first the kingdom when we submit to the lordship of Jesus Christ – when we obey His word – when we seek His face – when we follow His ways – when we love Him most. In other words – when we put God first!

We don't have to fear putting God first. He is good. When we put God first – when He is our first love – when we seek first His kingdom - He takes care of everything else.

So many people today think they can love God and live like the devil.
They think they can love God and hate people.
They think they can love God and live in unrepentant sin.
They think they can love God and not give. But Jesus asked in Luke 6:46

Why do you keep calling me 'Lord, Lord!' when you don't do what I say?

Jesus told us how to know if we really love Him in John 14:15

If you love Me, keep My commandments.

And one of His commands is to give. I'm not talking about tithes and offerings this week – I'll talk about that next week. I'm just talking about the heart of giving. I know we have to sort out what is Old Testament and what is New. But today I am just talking about what Jesus said about giving. He said in Luke 6:38

Give, and it will be given to you. A good measure, pressed down, shaken together and running over, will be poured into your lap. For with the measure you use, it will be measured to you.

Acts 20:35 says:

Remember the words of the Lord Jesus, that He said, "It is more blessed to give than to receive."

It's obvious that Jesus taught we should all give. That's one of the ways we put God first and one of the ways we show our love.

Think about it. One of God's essential attributes is love. God is love. How do we know God is love? Because He said it and because He shows it. How does He show it?

John 3:16 says *For God so loved that He gave...*

1 John 3:16 says *This is how we know what love is: because Jesus gave up His life for us.*

Romans 8:32 says *He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things?*

I want you to understand that God holds nothing back when it comes to giving! First – He gave you life! Second – He gave you eternal life. To do that – He had to make the ultimate sacrifice – the biggest gift ever – the life of His only begotten Son Jesus Christ!

But in addition to that – He freely gives you all things! James 1:17 says

Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and comes down from the Father of lights.

John 3:27 says

A man can receive nothing unless it has been given to him from heaven.

Get the point? God is a giver and every good thing in your life is a gift from your heavenly Father!

God is an extravagant giver and since we were created in His image – we too should be extravagant givers who give to God first! This principle goes all the way back to the beginning. The first offering in the Bible is found in Genesis 4:3-5

It came to pass that Cain brought an offering of the fruit of the ground to the Lord. Abel also brought of the firstborn of his flock and of their fat. And the Lord respected Abel and his offering, but He did not respect Cain and his offering.

What was the difference in these offerings? Abel brought the firstborn – the firstfruits – to the Lord. Cain just brought “an offering.”

If you think God does not care about what I give or how much I give or where I give – you’re mistaken. God wants you to give to Him first. So many people get it backwards – “Lord, if you bless me I’ll give.” “Lord, if I win the lottery, I’ll tithe.” No! God says give to Him first and then you will be blessed with more!

And we should give to God first – no matter what our financial situation! No one is exempt from the principle of giving to God first.

In 1 Kings 17, a famine was in the land and God sent Elijah to a brook where birds fed him. Then the brook dried up. Then God sent Elijah to a certain town. He said *I have commanded a widow in that place to supply you with food.*

So Elijah obeyed. He found the widow and asked her for food.

"As surely as the Lord your God lives," she replied, "I don't have any bread — only a handful of flour in a jar and a little oil in a jug. I am gathering a few sticks to take home and make a meal for myself and my son, that we may eat it — and die."

Isn't that just like God? There's a famine in the land, the provision God made for you dries up, so God gives you another provision – a widow.

So all the way there you're imagining who this widow's husband was. Surely he was a rich lawyer or doctor or a farmer with a lot of land. She must have a big inheritance if God is sending me to her.

Then you get there and NO – this can't be her. Is there another widow? This one's got nothing and she's making her last meal before she dies! I would've said, "Just go ahead and eat... I'll find something else."

But Elijah said to her:

Don't be afraid. Go home and do as you have said. But first make a small cake of bread for me from what you have and bring it to me, and then make something for yourself and your son.

For this is what the Lord, the God of Israel, says: 'The jar of flour will not be used up and the jug of oil will not run dry until the day the Lord gives rain on the land.'" She went away and did as Elijah had told her. So there was food every day for Elijah and for the woman and her family.

The prophet said – feed me first. Give first. Give out of your need. And when she did, God miraculously provided for her every day. This story shows us three things.

First – poor people are not exempt from giving.

Secondly - this poor widow gave all she had to the man of God in obedience to the word of the Lord. And she gave to him first. This shows we should give to God first.

Thirdly – this widow had to have great faith to give her last food. I want you to know that giving is always an act of faith.

Deuteronomy 14:23 in the Living Bible says:

The purpose of tithing is to teach you always to put God first in your lives.

Now different people respond to these kinds of messages differently. Some say, "All the church wants is my money so I'm not giving it.

To which I say "Okay - don't give. God doesn't need your money – He'll provide for us – We'll love you anyway. But understand you will miss out on a blessing. That's your choice."

But let me say this - We can say we are believers all day long, but James says we show our faith by our works. The Phillips translation of 2 Corinthians 9:13 says:

Your giving proves the reality of your faith.

The New Living Translation says:

For your generosity... will prove that you are obedient to the Good News of Christ.

You see I know that non-givers think: "I can't afford to give." But I also know what givers think: "I can't afford not to give." We believe God is more than enough and He's promised to bless those who step out in faith and give.

I pray for a church where 100% of God's people walk in the outpouring of blessing that is commanded on givers. Remember the principle of sowing and reaping. You must sow seed first before you reap a harvest.

So - I'm asking you to make another commitment today.
I've asked you to commit to getting financially free.
I've asked to commit to doing it God's way.
I've asked you to commit to being a good steward of God's resources.
And today I'm asking you to commit to give to God first!

When we give to God first:

- our money will go farther and our needs will be met
- our praise will be higher and our commitment will be deeper
- we will love God more and love money less

When we give to God first:

- We'll be the head, not the tail
- We will lend, not borrow
- We'll be at the top, not the bottom

When you give to God first:

- you humble yourself and you end up exalted
- die to yourself and receive more life
- you empty yourself and get filled with God's blessings

When you give to God first:

- the more you give, the more you receive
- you lose your life and find it
- God opens doors no man can shut and closes doors no man can open

When we put God first, He brings:

- Calm to storms
- Blessing out of curses
- Success out of failure

When we put God first, He makes:

- The weak strong
- The foolish wise
- The sad joyful
- The poor rich
- The impossible possible!

When we give to God first – when He is our first love – when we seek first His kingdom – He takes care of everything else!

Will you make the commitment to give to God first?

If you haven't already done so, will you put God first by giving Him your life?