

KINGDOM ECONOMICS VOL.1

First Fruits

AN APOSTOLIC PERSPECTIVE



RANDOLPH BARNWELL

FOREWORD BY THAMO NAIDOO

FIRST FRUITS



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AN APOSTOLIC PERSPECTIVE

RANDOLPH BARNWELL

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WRITING FORMAT

This specific publication is largely in STUDY MANUAL FORMAT. It is produced as a resource tool/aid for teachers and preachers of God's Word and for believers who adopt a more serious inquiry into the Scriptures. It aims to be as thorough as possible in presenting principles on the subject at hand, as the Spirit of God has illuminated and inspired the writer. The attempt is made to present a clear and accurate explanation of relevant passages of Scripture as the original text would suggest. For this reason, and where necessary, actual Hebrew and Greek words are cited together with their range of meanings, to validate a principle presented and also to provide further elucidation. The relevant Scriptural passages - both brief and lengthy ones - are presented and quoted in the manual as a key component of it.

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SCRIPTURAL REFERENCES

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Video Summations of each chapter in this book can be viewed on the “First Fruits Book” Playlist on Randolph’s Personal YouTube Channel:

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DEDICATION AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

My foremost thanks is to God, the Spirit of Truth, who is my greatest Teacher, for opening the eyes of my understanding to see the wonderful truths embedded within the written Word in reference to financial giving.

I am deeply grateful for the grace of God resident in certain individuals, whose revelation and knowledge of Kingdom Finances, first fruits in particular, have greatly helped to anchor and provide a broad and more accurate framework of understanding for me on this subject. These 'sent ones' are Apostles Thamo Naidoo, Dr. Sagie Govender, the late Frans Du Plessis and Dr. Stephen Everett. To these men of God, I offer my deepest gratitude.

I also offer my gratitude to many other servants of God who have in some way influenced my points of view on the subject of finances, either by their teaching or profound examples of giving. To these, I am also grateful. The bibliography at the back of this writing reveals some of these individuals.

I would like to thank my wife, Rene, who functioned as the primary editor of the content. I am grateful for your loving support, words of encouragement and the long hours that you have devoted to proofreading and editing. Sincere gratitude also to Anita Paul, Carol Moonsamy and Georgia Barnwell for proofreading the manuscript.

I dedicate this manual to my spiritual family at Gate Ministries Durban Central. Words fail to express my profound and sincere love for you all. Thank you for your partnership with me in executing the purposes of God globally. It is my highest honour and most humbling privilege to provide spiritual oversight to people of such remarkable Christ-like stature. May you all, together with those who read, study and obey the principles in this writing, come into a position of economic ascendancy and breakthrough.



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ENDORSEMENTS

There are times in the economy of God when our Father will open our eyes to behold wondrous things out of His Word. Over the last fifty years I have been privileged to have many such encounters. They came primarily by the Spirit of God, but also, through the instructions given by other trusted servants of God. However, 2006 was one of those extraordinary years for me. That was the year that the Father introduced, in a more profound manner, a concept that I thought I was well versed in, but in reality knew very little about.

It began this way. In January, the Father instructed me to sow my first honorarium that I received in ministry to two servants of God who had been very influential in my life. Prior to this, I had never received such a command from the Father. Puzzled and uncertain, I wondered what this was about. This action would require trusting the integrity of my Father, knowing He doesn't give commands without a clear objective in mind. Initially, He did not explain anything... He simply expected my obedience.

When I returned home and complied, the Father spoke to me and said, "Now, I'm going to explain to you what just happened!" It was at that time I received from the Lord a further understanding about "Biblical First Fruits." At first, it was only my plan to study this concept and practice it. It was not my intention to release this as a teaching throughout the body of Christ because I already suspected some of the repercussions from another teaching about giving. (And, yes, it happened as I thought.) However, I could not deny what Father was showing me.

I studied this concept daily, searching every scriptural text I could find. It became clearer and clearer that the body of Christ had made certain assumptions on this subject that were inaccurate. After nine months of searching the Scriptures and other relevant resources, it was now time to do something with what I had discovered.

That is when Thamo Naidoo asked me to come to South Africa to share in the Apostolic School of Ministry (ASOM). I agreed to this without knowing that this would be the first official time I would speak on the

First Fruits. I discussed and debated this matter with the Lord for sixteen hours on my flight from the USA to South Africa. My discussions, objections and excuses for not teaching on this mattered little with the Father. He expected speedy compliance to His commands without hesitation. I must say that reluctantly I submitted. This was not easy for me, but without a doubt, I'm glad I did.

Since that formidable time, noble and courageous servants, such as Pastor Randolph Barnwell, have accepted the challenge to provide much needed line upon line, and precept upon precept teachings on Biblical First Fruits. Pastor Randolph was in those early instalments as the Father taught us. Subsequently, he has produced a study guide that will assist one in understanding what God was saying to us then and now. It is evident that he openheartedly submitted himself to the grace of God to receive this heavenly download. At first, when new things are unveiled by the Spirit of God, books are written but rarely are study manuals created to allow us to ferret all the essentials on the subject.

That is why it is with great delight that I recommend this study guide because it eliminates that problem. If one chooses to read it with an open spirit and mind, one will receive the same benefit that the Bereans experienced in the book of Acts: "Every day they opened the scrolls of Scripture to search and examine them, to verify that what Paul taught them was true" (Acts 17:11b, TPT). This guide has soundness, and it equally has the ability to amplify, expand, and establish us in understanding. It is not for the curious thinker; it is for the serious seeker. In fact, one will be upgraded to a higher dimension of spiritual realities because this subject is larger than a few novel thoughts and ideas about money. It is an amazing revelation on who we are unto the Lord as we practice the tangibility of this truth in our giving. Let us comprehend this up front: God is the Greatest Gift and Giver, and we are His expression in the earth. So, to give something carrying the tag line of "first," this acknowledges the position we have given the Father in our lives. Additionally, when our hearts are totally given to please Him, whatever method or insight the Word of God reveals about giving is not a problem to us. So, certainly, every son of God should be open to learn and grow. It has always been incredibly astonishing to me what God will show us if we will be persistent seekers

of Him and His Word. The volume of the Book explodes with multiple layers of truth.

Pastor Randolph's study guide equips us with a tool to be that kind of seeker, if we choose to be. I implore you to set aside time to meditate carefully upon each lesson. As Paul, the apostle, said to his beloved son Timothy, "Your profiting will appear unto all!" Now, as you read and study, be courageous enough to cast down all preconceived notions and ideas. Don't assume anything! Read slowly, and then, go back and read again! Our greatest benefit does not come from scurrying through something. If we will follow this simple instruction, a great harvest of revelation and guidance awaits us. May all grace abound to each of you as you search out this beautiful truth.

*Dr. Stephen Everett | Kingdom Power and Wisdom Center
Cape Coral, FL. USA*

This precise and substantial volume on first fruits by Randolph Barnwell clears up many erroneous beliefs on first fruits and will certainly equip believers to advance kingdom purpose. Barnwell simplifies the complexities of an Old Testament type through a clear and honest analysis of the scriptures. As we are confronted with contradictions and false information about first fruits, Barnwell's spotlight on this principle will liberate many believers from economic bondage.

*Dr SY Govender | ABC Ministries
South Africa*

It is with gratitude to God for His grace upon Pastor Randolph Barnwell, that I write this endorsement for his work on the Kingdom Economics Series Volume 1: First Fruits: An Apostolic Perspective. What you hold in your hands is - in my estimation - probably one of the most accurate, practical, and well-balanced, documented representations, to date, from the Word on the principle of First Fruits.

As an avid and grounded Bible scholar and educationalist, Randolph is a skillful teacher and Spirit-inspired wordsmith. He fruitfully dips his

pen into the crystal-clear streams from God's Word, and plainly sets forth in our sight those eternal pathways which, in many circles, have long been forgotten.

When I consider his life and his ministry as an apostolically graced reformative teacher, Isaiah 58:12 comes to mind.

You shall raise up the foundations of many generations; And you shall be called the Repairer of the Breach, The Restorer of Streets to Dwell In. Isaiah 58:12 (NKJV)

Scripture is clear, we *cannot* serve both God and Mammon (Matthew 6:24). Through this sterling study, Randolph successfully addresses the prime question which stands central to our lives and motives, viz. "To whom are we enslaved?" In his own words, which few have been able to articulate as strikingly, ...

'Your financial behaviour is one of the most accurate indicators of one's spirituality. The management of your personal finances generally, and the practice of your giving specifically, provides incontestable indication of your love and devotion to God.'

May the eyes of your understanding be enlightened, as you study and enjoy First Fruits: An Apostolic Perspective.

***Dr. Ben Kleyhans (Ph.D.) | Touch The Nations Ministries
Pretoria, South Africa***

Pastor Randolph Barnwell, in his characteristic scribal anointing, has presented to us yet another masterpiece for the equipping of the body of Christ. With a very deliberate focus on the Holy Scriptures, he has been able to build his case, leaving no doubt in our minds concerning the eternity of the first fruit principle irrespective of dispensation or time frame.

FIRST FRUITS is an excellent, balanced and succinct study on the somewhat emotive subject of giving. The in-depth knowledge,

understanding and wisdom contained in this volume will enable many sons of God to perfect their obedience in the area of financial stewardship. The material contained in this study manual is a seed of reformation that will deliver the church from the darkness that has been cemented on earth by the religious traditions of men, who prefer their philosophies instead of the eternal word of God.

I highly recommend this study manual to every believer who desires to come to the full knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man who is an accurate representation of our heavenly Father.

*James N. Mbũgwa | Fountain Gate Church
Nairobi, Kenya*

“Also, Jonathan, David’s Uncle was a counsellor, a wise man, and a scribe: and Jehiel the son of Hacmoni was with the king’s sons.” 1 Chronicles 27:32

The grace gifts of wisdom, counsel and scribe are exceedingly rare and unique in the companies of men. These characteristics make one wise and proficient in accessing, articulating and writing the mind of God with simplicity and profundity. Pastor Randolph Barnwell is such a man. This present volume on the subject of “First Fruits: An Apostolic Perspective” is a stellar example of these qualities.

The general subjects of “giving, sowing, tithes, offerings and first fruits” are areas of great misunderstanding and therefore erroneous teaching presently. Pastor Randolph is therefore timely and even prophetic in his articulation of these subjects. His handling of the subject of first fruits is particularly noteworthy. Not only does he address the subject from the aspect of giving, but he also intertwines the all-important messages of giving and its relationship to the apostolic, spiritual fathers and sons, and the emerging reformation. This volume belongs on the desk of every present truth five-fold leader and should be mandatory in every training venue for apostolic and prophetic people.

Randolph does not simply tell you what to do about giving, he explains why you must give as a matter of loving God and building accurate kingdom lives and structures. The volume is laid out with an abundance of

scripture and the wise interpretation thereof as he ministers to us all in the spirit of a wise counsellor and master builder. Do yourself and those that you lead a favor; get a copy of this book as soon as possible and while you are at it, get a copy for your son, daughter, or mentee. When we get this area of giving right, the windows of heaven will open up in unprecedented ways.

*Apostle Eric L. Warren | Eric Warren Ministries
Charlotte, NC, USA*

I highly recommend 'First Fruits', an amazing writing by Pastor Randolph Barnwell. This is a must for all Pastors, leaders and every member of the Body of Christ. Poverty is a curse on creation, and it is our responsibility as the Body of Christ to set the nations free from this plague. Pastor Randolph Barnwell has put together a manual with timeless biblical truths and principles that will revolutionise any Christian and Church, and propel them to do great exploits for the Kingdom of God. This is a priceless manual and a great inspirational study for all who desire to "Be a blessing to the families of the earth". As you study these truths and apply them to your life, I believe that you will embark on a fulfilling journey of making poverty history, which is part of the great commission given to us by our Lord Jesus Christ.

*Dr Basil Tryon | New Covenant Fellowship
Durban, South Africa*

The subject content in this book on "First Fruits" giving is timely. Detail is given in the context of New Testament giving but which actually began in the Old Testament, as seen early in the book of Genesis in seed form and within 'the law of first mention'. There is endless debate on this subject and other matters on giving, but Randolph, a proficient teacher of the word, and who I have listened to, brings up the subject clearly and candidly gives it a New Testament relevance as an 'eternal principle' that does not cease with the Old Testament. The practical side of giving is also brought out. This is what matters, since fruit will be received as evidence

by all who do the Word and not just those who talk about it. Thanks Randolph, for a well-packaged treasure of the word on "First Fruits" as ably penned down in this book.

*Meshack Gachago | Senior Elder - King's Gate Church
Nakuru, Kenya (EA)*

This is an indispensable study manual that is authoritative yet easy to understand for anyone who desires to live their best life in God by understanding the principles of First Fruits. This exceptional work by Pastor Randolph Barnwell is a practical study guide for a student of the Word of God who desires a deeper and correct understanding of the principles of First Fruits. The author breaks down complicated theological theories, interprets scriptures and dismantles wrong beliefs into simple practical principles that are easy to understand and apply to our lives. I highly recommend every believer, bible scholar, leader and Pastor to get a copy of this manual. When you get a revelation of the principles taught in this manual, it will totally transform your financial life and make poverty history.

*Anu Padayachee | Minister, Businessman, Kingdom Financier
Durban , South Africa*



FOREWORD

In the Christian world, teachings and discussions on the subject of finance are not without controversy. Writing on first fruits is all the more controversial since the subject is relatively new to many. When a church leader chooses to write on the subject, levels of suspicion are raised. Questions have emerged about the legality of first fruits, the place and relevance it holds in the New Covenant lifestyle of believers, the motive of the writer, and other theological conundrums. Anyone who chooses to delve into teachings on finance should be competently aware of the field they are occupying and all the theological land mines they should cautiously work through. On the other hand, there are writers and teachers who are unaware of these theological obstacles or they just avoid being drawn into such discussions.

Randolph Barnwell is a very interesting person of note. He has not been academically inducted into the theologies of a rather complicated and complex Christian world. He has an uncomplicated approach to the Scriptures! If the Bible says something, then so be it! He has earned my admiration for teaching profound spiritual truths with simplicity and innocence. Biblical characters, like Ezekiel and Jeremiah, were mentally prepared for the opposition to their divine assignments. Similarly, Randolph has had his *heart* prepared to teach on the subject of finance. His intent is pure! His eyes are set like a flint on the Word of God. He writes and speaks of them as if they are incontrovertibly clear. For Randolph, the first fruits principles are “common sense” and should be lived out. Besides, he has tested these principles! They work! So why not share them with the world! He has subjectively encountered the leavening effects of the first fruits in his life, family and ministry and therefore feels strongly to enlighten others who could similarly experience transformation in their finances.

The first fruits principle is a harbinger, a forerunner embodying eternal principles. When embraced, they open up a spiritual treasure trove of insights into spiritual truths. Implementation of the principles can be transformative. But such abstract spiritual truths should first be understood

before they are practiced. When integrated, they can qualitatively impact personal, business and civic financial structures. This may lend to the understanding of the success of Abel, Abraham and many others in the Holy Scriptures.

In Hebrews 11:3 we read of the spoken Word (*rhema*) framing, readjusting and repairing the ages (*aion*) or periods of the worlds. Implied in this text, the elders who lived in each period of human history employed the Word to build (or rebuild and repair) the context of their existence. They used the *rhema* to address the dysfunctionalities in their context and thereby enjoyed success. The times (*aions*) we live in can be corrected by an accurate understanding of the Scriptures. From an economic point of view, our global financial systems are failed institutions. But for those who are in Christ, we have a *Word* from God on how to craft economic systems for sustenance and prosperity. By engaging the first fruits principles, we can live above the dire economic challenges of this present world order.

This book systematically sets out the Scriptures and their applications for overcoming financial lack. Study the teaching with a sincere heart. By adopting them, you will find success. Those who voluntarily engage the first fruits principles will enjoy immeasurable grace and provision.

Thamo Naidoo
Gate Global
Sandton | South Africa

INTRODUCTION

If anything has the potential of provoking a multitude of diverse responses from people in general, it is the subject of “MONEY”. This is even more the case within the Church of God. Many are immediately discomfited by any financial allusions and become indignant at the very mention of money in the Church. By and large, such responses are borne out of the appalling representation of some spiritual leaders who have abused and manipulated God’s people financially, to fuel their personal monetary greed. For others, their reticence regarding financial giving in the Church results from fear, conviction and for some, sheer ignorance regarding the scriptural position on finance. Few are aware of the vast coverage that the Bible gives to this topic. Sadly, much of the dis-ease, aggrievement and discomfort has been given credence, and can be attributed to the almost apologetic manner in which some ministers address it, or by the selfish and ungodly motivation with which some ministers teach it. Either way, we cannot ignore the sharp focus that Scripture gives to this subject, and its bearing on our relationship with God.

I am of the firm view that our attitude to and our handling of money, reflects our devotion to God and our levels of spiritual maturity, and is also indicative of how we perceive the Kingdom of God, which incorporates the Church. To live at a level of biblical financial accuracy demands that we bring our stewardship of finance and other material assets into alignment with the truth of God’s Word. There is no way that any son of God can maintain neutrality on the subject of finance. We can either honour God with our ‘substance’ or we can dishonour Him, and whether we are truly serving Him or mammon is evidenced in our financial behaviour.

In this writing, the first of a series of volumes still to be completed, I have endeavoured to systematise a series of teachings that are designed to empower believers in their understanding of ‘Kingdom Finance’ and the Economy of God.

Spiritual truth must be engaged with the mind of the regenerated spirit, and not with the unrenewed dimension of the soul. Spiritual realities must

be spiritually discerned by a 'spiritual' man and cannot be comprehended by both the 'natural' or 'carnal' man (1 Cor. 2:14; 3:1-3). Modernism and modernistic thought often conflicts with God's ideals. The principles set forth in this writing must be spiritually discerned with the mind of one's illuminated spirit. The divine dynamic vested in certain financial practices must be spiritually perceived, understood and obeyed. I entreat you to take the time to prayerfully study and ruminate over the principles presented in this writing, and to embark upon an obedient course of action. John 8:34 declares that, "you shall know the truth and the truth shall set you free". The truth does not set you free - it is the truth which you 'know' that sets you free. It is the knowledge of truth that is liberating. Whilst God's Word is light, it is the 'entrance' or 'unfolding' of this Word that grants us light and understanding (Ps. 119:130).

I desire that everyone who meaningfully engages in this writing, will come to a place of accelerated knowledge and reflexive obedience, which will translate into a lifestyle that is characterised by financial sustainability and blessing.

The reformation of the church is incomplete without a financial reformation also. The Church will not be completely free until it comes to a place of financial freedom, which I view as the confident ability to make decisions, not based on our lack or abundance of money, but by the principles of God's Word and leadership of the Holy Spirit.

In this writing, we explore first fruits - the first of three-fold giving - termed 'more excellent giving'. More excellent giving is comprised of first fruits, tithes and offerings. One cannot fully explore the matter of 'giving' in the Kingdom of God, without the necessity of understanding one's privileged position and status as a son of God, and the faithful and caring nature of God as your Father. Resultantly, issues of 'grace', 'trust' and 'honour' are key considerations when exploring the subject of finances. This is the fundamental bedrock upon which a lifestyle of financial giving in God's Kingdom is founded. Hence, I have devoted some coverage to these concepts in an elementary manner, as they are more comprehensively treated as separate topics in other writings¹.

This writing sets forth clear biblical principles that should govern first fruits giving in the Kingdom of God. First fruits giving is relatively new

to most sectors of the Body of Christ. Guidelines as to its administration are suggested. First fruits giving is part of our general disposition of giving financially unto the Lord, as our tangible expression of trust in and honour of Him. Biblically, it was the first example of giving by a human being to God, and thus occupies an important 'first' place in our understanding of giving generally. First fruits established a proper foundation for the practice of the tithe and other forms of offerings. This writing does not deal with tithes and offerings per se, but covers general principles regulating financial giving, some of which could be applied to tithes and offerings. Tithing and offerings will be addressed in forthcoming editions in this series on Kingdom Economics.

The Kingdom of God, financially, is driven by the principles of giving and receiving. One of the core aspects of the nature of God is that He is a giver, and this essential attribute within His character must be fully embraced and expressed within each son of God. Consistent obedience, from a sincere and pure heart to economic principles embedded in God's Word, will lead to a life of financial preservation, buoyancy and ascendancy in any economic climate. I pray that your life will be enriched as you study, practice and teach (Ezra 7:10) others these principles.

The great reformer, Nehemiah, after overseeing the rebuilding of the walls of Jerusalem, embarked upon a reformation of the spiritual, civic and cultural aspects relating to the personal lives and corporate community dynamics of the people in the city. An essential component of this reformation included a restoration of the practice of first fruits, tithes and offerings (Neh.10:35-39; 13:1-14), which were lost for more than seventy years in that time. Of all the various aspects of Nehemiah's reformatory work, he requested God to REMEMBER HIM, specifically for his restorative efforts of three-fold financial giving.

Remember me for this, O my God, and do not blot out my loyal deeds which I have performed for the house of my God and its services. (Nehemiah 13:14)

I pray this writing will assist to cast a solid foundation, upon which you can bring exactness to your financial giving. Key principles are repeated

more than once wherever they are applicable. The repetitious nature in parts of the writing is deliberate, in a bid to demonstrate the inter-relatedness of connected concepts, as well as for consolidating understanding.

Many of the principles set forth in this writing are built upon the foundation of apostolic teachings, which my spiritual father in Christ, Thamo Naidoo, has laboured in, not just on the subject of Economics, but a range of other subjects such as Grace, Righteousness, Fathering, The Kingdom of God, etc. All these subjects have a direct bearing on our understanding of Kingdom Economics. I would therefore greatly encourage the reader to access and study Kingdom Economics and the related subject matter via the specific links to the relevant websites in the Endnotes².

Abundant Grace be yours in the fullest measure,

Randolph Barnwell
Gate Ministries Durban Central
Durban | South Africa
December 2020



“Our attitude to money reveals
our attitude to God Himself.”

Derek Prince



You are Far Happier
Giving than Getting.

Acts 20:35 (TM)

Who Is Your Master?

Finances and financial considerations occupy a significant part of our lives. Your financial behaviour is one of the most accurate indicators of one's spirituality. The management of your personal finances generally, and the practice of your giving specifically, provides incontestable indication of your love and devotion to God.

Jesus highlighted the absolute impossibility of serving both God and mammon as masters.

“No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and wealth. (Matthew 6:24)

Mammon is a demonic spirit, which some believe may be a representation of satan himself, having power and authority in the realm of controlling people economically. Mammon is a satanic power that controls and enslaves men through the medium of money. Mammon is not money per se, but the evil spiritual power that works in people because of their attitude toward money. How you handle money, especially in reference to the issue of 'giving', will clearly indicate the degree of control or influence of mammon in your life.

Matthew 6:24 indicates the utter impossibility of serving more than one master. Jesus clearly emphasises that one cannot serve both God and mammon. You either hate and despise the one, or you love and hold onto the other. You cannot be neutral on this issue. The specific 'master' that

you love will highlight your hatred for the other, and the specific ‘master’ that you hold on to will reveal the one that you despise. Below is how the Message Bible communicates it:

“You can’t worship two gods at once. **Loving one god, you’ll end up hating the other. Adoration of one feeds contempt for the other.** You can’t worship **God and Money** both. (Matthew 6:24 - TM)

Matthew specifically places God first in the verse, who of necessity should pre-eminently be the object of our love and devotion. If this is true, then we should hate and despise mammon! This is key.

The converse is also true: if you highly apprise mammon, then you show contempt for God! The Greek word translated, ‘**hold to**’ (KJV) or ‘**be devoted to**’ (NASB) in Matthew 6:24, is ‘**antecho**’, which means to ‘**cleave to, or to hold on firmly to**’³.

Mammon would like for you to cleave to it by holding on tight to your money in a spirit of greed or a withholding spirit. Every time you release money, you testify to the fact that mammon has no control or mastery in your life. By this, you are declaring your utter contempt for that evil lord that enslaves men through finances. Simultaneously, you are exhibiting your complete love for and dependance on God as your source of all provision. Whenever you give, you are boldly testifying that God is your source and trust. When you refuse to give, you are indirectly placing trust in mammon.

Mammon, and not God, is to be despised. In the original Greek, the word ‘**despise**’ means ‘**to hold in contempt, to think lightly of, to neglect, not to care for**’⁴. Every time we disobey God by not complying with Kingdom principles regarding giving, we show contempt for Him. Our disobedience in financial giving depicts the fact that we esteem God lightly. No matter how you may verbally express your commitment to the Lord, and no matter how righteous you are in your behaviour in the various aspects of your life, your financial giving, performed in accordance with principles of God’s Word, becomes the true acid test and reliable indicator of the degree to which you truly honour the Lord.

Jesus uses the word ‘SERVE’ in respect to God or mammon: “you cannot ‘SERVE’ both God and mammon”. The Greek word for ‘serve’ is ‘*douleuo*’, meaning ‘to be a **slave** to’⁵. Enslavement to a spirit of mammon is burdensome and leads to the ensnarement of your will and your desire - you slavishly obey the dictates of this evil power. Amazingly, those who are enslaved by a spirit of mammon may be aware of the truth regarding financial giving to the Lord in reference to first fruits, tithes and offerings, and yet still fail to obey in this regard. On the other hand, being God’s ‘slave’ is powerfully liberating, as you, by your own volition, submit your will to the will of the Father.

Our attitude to money is particularly important in that it reveals our perspective of and devotion to God Himself. We are cautioned against the love of money.

¹⁰ For the love of money is a root of all sorts of evil, and some by longing for it have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs. ¹¹ But flee from these things, you man of God, and pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, perseverance and gentleness. (1 Timothy 6:10-11)

The love of money, and not money per se, is the source of every kind of evil. There is nothing intrinsically evil about money, but when it becomes the spur for all that we do or accomplish; when it occupies our every waking moment; or when we labour under the false notion that money ensures happiness, security and longevity, then it no longer can be described as a fascination with money, but a fixation. This implies enslavement to mammon.

God does not have an ‘opposite’ that has the inherent power or authority to rival Him in any respect. But, a mindset with its associate behavioural pattern, set in opposition to God’s principles as communicated in His Word, can give satan legitimate power and authority to control and influence our lives. For example, unforgiveness and bitterness gives ‘place’ to the devil to inflict us with bondage, and these dispositions block or prevent our reception and growth in the grace of God (Eph. 4:30-32;

Heb. 12:15). Similarly, the strength of satan's opposition to you, as God's son, is enhanced by the degree to which you serve 'mammon', by failing to comply with God's Word in respect to His financial principles. It is interesting to note that in Matthew 6:24, the devil per se is not set in contrast to God, but the spirit of mammon is. Obviously, mammon is a devilish or satanic spirit, but the unique emphasis placed here upon mammon, as a specific expression of the devil, is interesting in that it highlights for us a key area or avenue through which the devil seeks to control and influence people.

Economic freedom must become a reality for us to the point where we can make decisions without being dictated to by financial budgets or fiscal constraints, but that we act in obedience purely as a response to the Word of the Lord. Finances, or the lack thereof, seem to be the most significant singular factor that prevents many believers from pursuing the will of God for their lives.

The love of money is the root of all evil⁶ - that is, not money itself, but a particular devotion to or lust for it. Thus, when Scripture calls upon us to hate mammon, we are expected to loathe, despise and show contempt for the satanic force (master), whose objective it is to ensnare us by influencing our attitudes and behaviour regarding money in a manner that displeases God. We must detest mammon and not allow it to enslave us. Every son of God must acknowledge the claim of one of two masters in their lives - God or mammon. Here again, there is no neutral ground on this issue. It is not a choice as to 'whether we will serve' but **'WHO are we serving?'**

Note that both God and mammon are called 'masters'. The Greek word for 'master' is 'kurios', meaning, 'lord, master, owner'⁷

Whoever your master is, is your Lord and Owner. It is a scary thought that satan can lay claim to owning people because of their attitude to money. It is a glorious thought to think that God can lay claim to owning people too, because of their attitude towards money. **The particular principle you obey, testifies to the respective principality you worship.** When you obey a Kingdom financial principle vested in God's Word, it speaks to the fact that God is the dominant principality in your life. When you succumb to satanic principles like a love for money, greed, stinginess,

etc., it testifies that satan is the dominant principality controlling you.

Which 'Master' has control over you? It will be evident by which one you obey in respect to financial principles. You may claim devotion and submission to a particular Master, but this will be conclusively evidenced by which one you obey. The Master you obey, you are enslaved to.

Don't you realize that you become the **slave of whatever you choose to obey? (Romans 6:16a - NLT)**

The specific 'master' you obey, is the one you love and worship. Whatever you obey, you empower. Whomever you obey, you give tacit authority to own you. Obedience to biblical financial principles demonstrates that God is your Master, Lord and Owner.

Do you not know that when you **present yourselves** to someone as **slaves for obedience**, you are slaves of the **one whom you obey**, either of **sin** resulting in death, or of **obedience** resulting in **righteousness? (Romans 6:16 - NASB)**

Paul claimed that he was a willing 'bond-slave' or 'bond-servant' of Christ (Rom. 1:1; Gal. 1:10; Titus 1:1). By this, he meant that his ears were only open to listen to the voice of Christ and to willingly submit to the instructions and principles in that voice, without hesitation or question, even if it was in contradiction to prevailing inaccurate religious or worldly thought and practice.

For am I now seeking the favor of men, or of God? Or am I striving to please men? If I were still trying to please men, I would not be a **bond-servant of Christ. (Galatians 1:10)**

Every time we release finances by giving our money to God, we actively demonstrate the fact that mammon has no control over our lives. We offer tangible evidence that our devotion is to God, our MASTER, who also has rule over our personal finances. We are 'bond-servants' of Christ. Opportunities to accurately dispense and distribute Kingdom finances

provide the ideal context in which we can demonstrate the effortless giving disposition of our generous God.

Many people love the PERSON of Jesus and seek to draw near to Him. As soon as Jesus shares some of His PRINCIPLES with them, most then draw away (Read John 6:41-69). Some follow Him just to get their felt needs met but are unwilling to submit to the process of discipleship. They want the POWER, PROVISION and PROTECTION of Christ, without compliancy to His PRINCIPLES (Read Luke 17:11-14). To love Him is to also love His Word (John 14:23,24; 1 John 2:5). You cannot have one without the other.

A rich young ruler knelt before Jesus, calling Him, “Good Master” (KJV), here meaning ‘instructor’ or ‘teacher’. He enquired what he had to do to inherit eternal life.

¹⁷ As He was setting out on a journey, a man ran up to Him and **knelt before Him**, and asked Him, “**Good Teacher**, what shall **I do** to inherit eternal life?” ¹⁸ And Jesus said to him, “Why do you call Me good? No one is good except God alone. ¹⁹ “You **know the commandments**, ‘DO NOT MURDER, DO NOT COMMIT ADULTERY, DO NOT STEAL, DO NOT BEAR FALSE WITNESS, DO NOT DEFRAUD, HONOR YOUR FATHER AND MOTHER.’” ²⁰ And he said to Him, “Teacher, I have kept **all THESE things** from my youth up.” ²¹ Looking at him, Jesus **felt a love** for him and said to him, “One **thing you lack**: go and **sell all you possess and give to the poor**, and you will have **treasure in heaven**; and **come, follow Me**.” ²² But at these words he was **saddened**, and he went away **grieving**, for he was one who **owned much property**. (Mark 10:17-22)

Jesus listed six of the Ten Commandments, to which the man replied that he kept all of them from his youth. He claimed to obey the SIX commandments of the Law uttered by Jesus. “Thou shalt not covet”, one of the commandments, was not quoted by Jesus - and this was his problem. This man was covetous and a lover of money. Therefore, Jesus told him to

sell all he had and to give his money to the poor, thereby accruing treasures in Heaven, and then to follow him. The man could not do this, because he had great wealth and was saddened at the thought of parting with it. He had a lot of money, but really, his money had him. He became possessed by the things he possessed. He valued the preservation of earthly, temporal wealth and was willing to forgo eternal and incorruptible treasures in Heaven.

You see, he wanted eternal life from the Person of Christ, but was not willing to pay the price of obeying a Principle of Christ required to FOLLOW Christ. To follow Christ as a bond-servant requires embracing the totality of His Word. This man knelt before Jesus, symbolically indicating submission, but was only willing to submit to the person of Christ but not to the principles of Christ. He could kneel before Christ, but he could not follow Christ. This man wanted to follow Jesus but was governed by the spirit of Mammon, in that he was covetous and had a stingy disposition. Sadly, the same is true for many people today.

Before Jesus told him to sell all he had, the Bible says, “Jesus loved him” (v.21). But Jesus had to let him go because he refused to follow Jesus. Jesus loves you but can let you go if you, of your own decision, will not subscribe to His principles. The man went away grieving, still being very wealthy, but inwardly lacking contentment, completeness and a sense of Kingdom purpose for his wealth. Never trade inward peace for the accumulation and hoarding of money, but demonstrate your peace by using your money to give to the poor or to comply with biblical economic principles.

This verse also reminds us that the expectations which God lays on us, are not from an angry, vindictive or punitive mindset, but one of love and care. Note, “Jesus **felt a LOVE** for him”, and said to him, “One **thing you LACK**; go and **sell**”(v.21). The **LOVE** of Christ was able to perceive and address the **LACK** or deficiency in his life, to remedy it. True love is honest (Rom. 12:9; Prov. 27:5). Never perceive the financial principles of God in His Word as burdensome or arduous. NO, they are not, because they communicate to us how God loves us and wants the best for us. They are intended for our well-being and blessing, but also meant to test our love for Him and devotion to Him as our MASTER!

If, in reading this writing, the Holy Spirit highlights a ‘lack’ in your life in respect to financial giving, please know this: Do not feel condemned, because the fact that your deficiency is highlighted is indicative of just how much God loves you and desires rectitude in that area.

Also remember, that in the ‘**expectation** of God’ is also vested the ‘**empowerment**’ of God. By the **enabling** nature of His grace, God can **empower** you to do what He **expects** of you. The grace of God seeks to **resource** you to do what God’s principles **require** of you. Whatever God in His Word **commands** of you, His empowering grace will **capacitate** you for.

Note the latter part of Mark 10:21: “ .. and you will have **treasure in heaven**; and **come, follow Me.**” In the prelude to Jesus’ statement in Matthew 6:24, “You cannot serve two Masters”, is an encouragement to store up treasures in Heaven, which is incorruptible by earthly elements like moth and rust.

¹⁹ Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. ²⁰ But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys, and where thieves do not break in or steal; ²¹ for where your treasure is, there your heart will be also. (**Matthew 6:19-21**)

All expressions of financial giving accrue to your eternal and incorruptible treasures in Heaven. Always keep your eye on the eternal whenever you give in the natural. Giving in the natural domain has an increasing ‘storing’ and accrument counterpart in the unseen Heavenly realm. Do not count the cost naturally when you give, but pitch into what is being credited to your Heavenly account. So then, what is given naturally, is never lost at all! **Money may leave your hand as your give, but grace will never leave your life, a life that is by nature, eternal.** (More on this in chapter 23)

Also note Jesus’ statement, “**for where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.**” It is easy to locate where your heart is - by determining where your money goes. The destination of your finances reveal

the location of your heart. Said differently, the location of your heart is revealed by locating the destination of your finances. Money reveals the condition and priority of one's heart. Your treasure can never be where your heart is not already located. May our hearts be positioned in and prioritised towards God, His Kingdom, His Church, His plans and purposes, and we will find our finances where our hearts love to be.

The size and quality of the financial GIFT do not validate the GIVER. Rather, the GIVER validates his/her financial GIFT. God had positive regard first for Abel, and then for his offering.⁸ The state of the man determined the acceptability of his offering. God accepts my gift because I am accepted first. This is not meant to underplay the importance of WHAT we give - that too is important.⁹ But the spirit of purity of the giver is paramount over the actual gift itself. Also, Abel's first fruits were directed to the Lord because his heart was also directed to the Lord. You can never direct your money to where your heart is not already positioned.

¹ Now, brethren, we wish to make known to you the grace of God which has been given in the churches of Macedonia, ² that in a great ordeal of affliction their abundance of joy and their deep poverty overflowed in the wealth of their liberality. ³ For I testify that according to their ability, and beyond their ability, **THEY GAVE** of their own accord, ⁴ begging us with much urging for the favor of participation in the support of the saints, ⁵ and this, not as we had expected, but **they FIRST GAVE THEMSELVES TO THE LORD and TO US BY THE WILL OF GOD. (2 Corinthians 8:1-5)**

Note a three-fold process of 'GIVING' of the Macedonian Church. In verses 1-3, Paul highlights the extent of their liberal and joyous giving from their deep poverty. In verse 5, he indicates that this level of giving was a direct result of two things, viz. they had first given themselves to the Lord, and secondly, they had given themselves to PAUL and his associates. In sequence, this would be listed as follows:

- i) They **gave themselves to the Lord**, and
- ii) They **gave themselves to PAUL** and his associates
- iii) They **gave financially to the Lord, as He is represented in Paul** and his associates, who thus receive their gifts on behalf of the Lord, to whom they are already completely 'given'.

Our present problem in the church today is that we are trying to encourage people to give financially to God, when in the first place, they are not completely surrendered or 'given' to the Lord in their hearts. The failure to give is an indication of a much more serious spiritual problem. Your giving is an indicator of your spiritual position. When you are completely 'given' to God in your heart, you will have no problem giving your money to God or His representatives. The wise men who came to see Jesus, a young child, first bowed themselves to the ground and **GAVE THEMSELVES FIRST**, then they opened their gifts and presented these to Him.

After coming into the house **THEY SAW** the Child with Mary His mother; and **THEY FELL** to the ground and **WORSHIPED** Him. Then, **OPENING** their treasures, **THEY PRESENTED** to Him gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh. (**Matthew 2:11**)

When your heart is open to the Lord, so too will your financial treasures be. A withholding and stingy disposition is evidence of a closed heart. Before we get our financial giving right, we as sons of God, must get our hearts right.

Giving into the Kingdom of God also becomes an expression of spiritual warfare, in that we are asserting our dominance over evil forces that impoverish and ensnare men financially. By giving, we exhibit the victory of Jesus, who in His death on the cross, "disarmed the rulers and authorities, He made a public display of them, having triumphed over them ..." - Col. 2:15.

REFLECT

1. Can you, without question, by referencing the destination of your financial expenditure, give incontestable proof that you are not serving Mammon and are serving God?
2. Does financial disobedience to any one financial principle in your life, prevent you from fully following Christ?
3. Is your heart completely given to God? Can this be proven financially?
4. Is your heart completely given to your spiritual leader as the Macedonians were given to Paul?

“Spiritual laws operate in the spirit realm and are accessed through obedience in the natural realm.”

Clive Pick



My Kingdom is not of this World.

John 18:36a

God's Kingdom Economy

As sons of God, we have been delivered out of the control and the dominion of darkness and transferred or called into the Kingdom of his dear Son.

For He rescued us from the domain of darkness and **transferred us** to the **kingdom of His beloved Son**.
(Colossians 1:13)

So that you would walk in a manner worthy of the God who **calls you into His own kingdom** and glory.
(1 Thessalonians 2:12)

LIVING BY KINGDOM FINANCIAL PRINCIPLES

While we are in the world, we do not operate by its value systems. We are to subscribe to the value systems and operating dynamics of the Kingdom of God, and not to be 'conformed to this world'.

¹ Therefore I urge you, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, *which is* your spiritual service of worship. ² And **do not be conformed to this world**, but be **transformed by the renewing of your mind**, so that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect.
(Romans 12:1,2)

We are in the world but not 'of the world'¹⁰. Our most realistic and nearest frame of reference for functioning in life must be that of the Kingdom of God, and not the system of this present world or age. The Kingdom of God refers to God's right to rule, govern or regulate every aspect of our entire lives according to righteous principles contained and expressed in and through His Word. Sons of God have entered God's Kingdom and live by its principles and dictates. This Kingdom is an all-pervasive, superimposition of God's nature and will upon every expression of life, sector or domain on planet Earth and the entire created unseen, heavenly domain.

The present world system is often referred to as Babylon. **'Babylon' represents the worldly, political, economic and religious systems of government that are in direct opposition and contradiction to the spiritual operating systems of God's Kingdom.** The term 'Babylon' literally means **'confusion'** (by mixing)¹¹, as does the root word **Babel**, of which the native etymology is **'Babil'**, meaning **'the gate of God'**.¹² While 'Babel' has the potential to be an avenue through which God could find access, it has become the venue where satan has successfully brought confusion and misunderstanding regarding Kingdom principles and ways. Thus, it has become a gate for demonic spirits. The principles by which satan regulates the current world system is a figurative gate or portal, granting him access to influence and thus control human behaviour. For example - pride, carnal ambition and greed are satanic principles that drive men to fulfil their desires at any cost, even at the cost of violating God's principles.

Financial principles regulating and driving 'Babylon' are for the most part, diametrically opposed to that of the Kingdom of God. We, the church, must firmly resolve to be governed by the constitution of God's Kingdom, which is the Word of God, and not to be conditioned and influenced by inherited philosophical, humanistic, cultural and even errant theological positions, especially regarding issues relative to finance.

The word 'Kingdom' expresses God's sovereign rule and reign. God's Kingdom is an everlasting Kingdom in that it was pre-existent and is eternal. The mission of the Church presently is to establish God's Kingdom in the earth. "Let your Kingdom come"¹³ is our cry. This determines our ethic, ethos, motivation and is the foundation of all our activities. The

Church of God should be actively working towards the restoration of God's governance in the earth until all the kingdoms of the earth become the Kingdom of our Lord (Rev.11:15). Finances and the financial world represent a significant 'kingdom' that needs to be brought under the direct control and influence of the Kingdom of God. The name 'Babylon' is also transliterated as '**gates for demonic spirits**' - the portal through which demonic spirits operate in the earth through human agencies. Similarly, the Church is God's gate **of** Heaven (not '**to**' Heaven) and is the agency through which His Kingdom will become established in the earth. (Gen. 28:17-19)

Babylon's economy operates by certain norms, standards, values, ethics and principles. God's Kingdom operates by a different set of principles that are diametrically opposite and opposed to that of the world. Greed, avarice, cupidity, covetousness, materialism, excessive indebtedness, unbridled selfish expenditure and unacceptably high levels of income inequality, are some features of the world economy that are anti-Kingdom.

SUBSCRIBING TO GOD'S PRINCIPLES FOR ECONOMIC ASCENDANCY

When viewed from the state of an un-renewed mind, God's financial principles intended to position us upon a path of financial blessing, do not make rational sense. His ways are far above the ways of man (Isaiah 55:8,9).

At a Wealth and Business Seminar¹⁴, Dr. Elijah Morgan, an economist and servant of God, highlighted the following interesting points:

The nation of Israel, an Old Testament type of the church (Acts 7:38), was required to function economically by principles which God had set in place, principles which no other nation observed and principles which when strictly observed, would be key in ensuring that they as a nation would be far more financially blessed and provided for than surrounding nations. It seems, from a carnal human point of view, that God actually did everything in His power to keep the nation

poorer than their neighbours.

For example,

- Whereas other nations worked seven days a week, Israel was only required to work for six.
- They were also to work for six out of every seven years, and also not work in the fiftieth year.
- In the harvesting of their crops, they had to deliberately leave behind some corn (barley and wheat) for the widows, orphans and foreigners.
- They could only own a slave for seven years, after which he was given a choice as to whether he wanted to be released.
- In every seventh year and fiftieth year, all debt was to be cancelled.
- Besides all of this, they were instructed to GIVE to the Lord the first fruits and firstborn of their crops and livestock, thereafter ten percent of all income/harvest, and still willingly offer a range of offerings in specific seasons, or when a call was made.

In the natural, Israel was already severely disadvantaged by these divine regulations as compared to other nations, which had no such laws. Yet the promise of God to them was that HE, Himself, would personally see to it that they would never lack, but be economically sustained perpetually. Economic buoyancy and ascendancy were to be their portion. God's ways are truly above the ways of man.

⁵ If only you **listen obediently to the voice of the Lord your God**, to observe carefully all this commandment which I am commanding you today. ⁶ "For the Lord your **God will bless you as He has promised you**, and you **will lend to many nations**, but you will not borrow; and you will **rule over many nations**, but they will not rule over you." (Deuteronomy 15:5,6)

God wanted to distinguish His people from the rest of the peoples of

the earth, through their observance of His principles. The same still holds true for us today.

¹“Now it shall be, **if you diligently obey the Lord your God**, being careful to do all His commandments which I command you today, the Lord your God will set you high **above all the nations of the earth.** ²“All these blessings will come upon you and overtake you if you obey the Lord your God. **(Deuteronomy 28:1-2)**

Take the time to read the entire chapter of Deuteronomy 28. Unquestioning obedience to all of God's commands - all of them, and not just those in reference to their finances/harvest - was the key to Israel's success. The same is true for us today. Every son of God must bring his or her finances in line with God's Kingdom requirements, as well as simultaneously bring all other aspects of our lives in compliance with His righteous principles as communicated through His Word. Financial obedience does not displace the need for obedience in other areas of our lives. Likewise, obedience in all other areas of life does not exempt us from financial obedience (see Luke 11:42). Obedience in one area does not substitute for, or excuse, disobedience in another.

“But woe to you Pharisees! For you pay tithe of mint and rue and every kind of garden herb, and yet disregard justice and the love of God; but these are the things you should have done **without neglecting the others.** **(Luke 11:42)**

FINANCIAL VICTORY AND SONSHIP

Financial compliance to God's expectations is an issue that is a key aspect of mature spiritual and divine sonship. **The rich young ruler backed away from sonship because Jesus wanted Lordship over his finances (Mark 10:17-31).** When the Church globally aligns its finances with the Word of God, then we will be able to access our inheritance fully.

MONEY AND THE ESTABLISHMENT OF COVENANT

The intention of God to transfer massive amounts of wealth to the church is a vital necessity to provide acceleration to the establishment of the Kingdom of God in all the earth. 'Money' and the establishment of God's Kingdom, or the complete fulfilment of Covenant, are linked:

But you shall remember the Lord, your God, for it is He who gives you **power to get wealth**, that He may **establish His covenant** that He swore to your fathers ...

(Deuteronomy 8:18)

If money is intended for God's covenant, what is the covenant?

"God's covenant is to raise up a people in His image and likeness who will accurately represent Him and enforce His authority in all domains of the earth. God's covenant is the empowering of His people for the absolute release of the Kingdom in the affairs of man - His glory or nature will cover the whole earth. God's covenant involves a people that are aligned to Him and a world that must be redemptively impacted - influencing the entire course of life on the planet."
(Anderson Williams at a Seminar on Kingdom Business)

Wealth is meaningless if it is not linked to God's eternal purposes for the earth. In the Kingdom of God, the accumulation of wealth is not for the purpose of living luxuriously in a self-indulgent or carnal manner, but to fuel and facilitate the expansion of His Kingdom in the earth. You will assuredly be blessed personally and your life will be enriched, but there is a higher purpose for wealth, that being the expansion of the Kingdom of God throughout the earth.

Joseph used his wealth and authority, which his position of prominence afforded him, to facilitate the preservation of his brothers in whom the seed of God's purpose for the nation of Israel and the church was embedded, and to also fuel divine prophetic purposes vested within his father,

Jacob. Both his power and financial influence would be meaningless if he had not connected it to the divine will, encapsulated within his spiritual father and brothers¹⁵. The same holds true for us today.

“Spiritual laws operate in the spirit realm and are accessed through obedience in the natural realm” (Clive Pick). A young boy gave Jesus his two fish and five loaves in the natural, and ignited a process of miraculous increase and distribution, made possible by divine power in the spirit realm¹⁶. If you break a natural law, you will pay a penalty. Similarly, if you break a spiritual law or principle, you prevent God's blessing from coming to you because of disobedience. “The ‘money problem’ in the Church today is essentially an ‘obedience’ problem” (Clive Pick). To secure our inheritance in the Kingdom, we need mature ‘sons’ of God to demonstrate a lifestyle of effective productivity, stewardship, giving and distribution of finances. **Giving is not something you try - you must live it.** Every kingdom has a set of financial laws by which it functions. Because you and I have been “rescued from the domain of darkness and transferred to the kingdom of His beloved Son” (Col. 1:13), we now operate by the principles and precepts of Christ, our King, who exerts control and authority in this domain.

A LIFESTYLE OF FINANCIAL BREAKTHROUGH

Financial breakthrough is a process, rather than an event. It is the result of a lifestyle of consistent obedience to God's financial principles. Economic blessing is the reward of those who have chosen to walk the path of financial obedience. God is not haphazard nor random in His responses or interaction with us. He is a meticulous planner and leaves nothing to chance or coincidence. God responds positively to our financial obedience, **but His hand of blessing is constrained by our financial disobedience.** When we limit ourselves in financial obedience, we limit God in financially blessing us. The sooner we come to the place of financial obedience, the sooner we will know financial breakthrough. God only responds to what we do, not to what we intend to do. The faithful steward, who through active and wise utilisation of the five talents given to him, was commended for what was

DONE, not for what was ‘thought’, ‘planned’ or ‘intentioned’.

His lord said to him, ‘Well **DONE** good and faithful servant; you were faithful over a few things, I will make you ruler over many things. Enter into the joy of your lord. (**Matthew 25:21**)

2 Chronicles 7:14 encapsulates this:

IF My people who are called by My name **WILL** humble themselves, and pray and seek My face, and turn from their wicked ways, **THEN I WILL** hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin and heal their land. (**2 Chronicles 7:14 - NKJV**)

Note the cause and effect suggested by the words, “If my people will” on the one hand, and the divine response on the other, viz. “then I will”. God is pleased and activated by our financial obedience.

“To ‘raise funds’ takes human perspiration and planning; to ‘release wealth’ involves spiritual authority borne out of consistent financial obedience” (Clive Pick). Babylon operates by buying and selling, whereas the Kingdom of God operates by giving and receiving. When the global Church comes to a place of financial obedience and maturity, then we will see a ‘financial reformation’, in which we will migrate from ‘**raising funds**’ to ‘**releasing wealth**’. This will initiate the accumulation of unparalleled volumes of finances utilised to facilitate Kingdom advancement, like it was in King Hezekiah’s day (2 Chron. 31).

PRESENT FINANCIAL BEHAVIOUR AFFECTS PROPHETIC DESTINY

The Scriptures contain many examples of how so many people’s spiritual journey and destiny in God were affected by how they handled their money, particularly in respect to the matter of giving. Financial attitudes affect spiritual destiny significantly. Financial and fiscal behaviour impacts

your future, either negatively or positively.

Negative examples exist in the persons of Cain, Achan, Gehazi, King Saul, Tobiah, the nation of Israel in times of spiritual slump, Judas, the rich young ruler, Ananias and Sapphira, etc.

Positive examples include Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Abel, Joseph, the widow of Zarephath, the Shunammite woman, David, Israel as a nation in times of spiritual reformation, Ruth, Josiah, Hezekiah, Jehoshaphat, Nehemiah, Ezra, Shebna, Jesus Christ, the wise men from the east who came to see Jesus, the woman who anointed Jesus with spikenard perfume, Joseph of Arimathea, Barnabas, Lydia, Onesiphorus and Epaphroditus, the Philippian church, the Macedonian church, etc.

The positive examples listed above functioned by Kingdom economic principles and were not just well taken care of materially but proceeded with rapid acceleration towards climaxing the will of God for their lives. Financial rectitude and accuracy in the Kingdom of God are not simply about giving per se. It concerns perfecting your obedience as you journey towards absolute maturity in God and has a huge impact on the degree to which you will reach fullness in executing the purposes of God attendant with your life.

The negative examples above prove that no matter how grand and strategic your calling and functional placement in God is, if you show disesteem for His financial principles, you will quickly lose your privileged position and be relegated to the fringes of His global purposes, or worst still, totally lose your Kingdom citizenship and relationship with God.

Many of these examples are presented as case studies in this writing, and some will be covered in subsequent writings to this one.

Our patterns of giving, work ethic, creative and industrious attempts at production for wealth creation, stewardship, management and administration of personal and corporate resources, unselfish distribution to the poor and those in need, etc. all need to come under the forensic examination of the Holy Spirit and be realigned to greater accuracy for greater effect.

Personal financial giving is the first and most elementary expression of financial obedience. The Scriptures offer many guiding principles for this domain of our financial lives. This specific writing deals primarily with first fruits giving.

As you, the reader, continue to read and study this writing, I trust you would receive the requisite grace to obey God's financial principles in His Kingdom, a Kingdom that is not of this world.

REFLECT

1. What is 'The Kingdom of God'?
2. What is the symbolic meaning of Babylon and is it well disposed towards God's Kingdom?
3. As God's son in God's Kingdom, does God have rule over your finances?
4. Do you understand that God's financial principles are not burdensome, but designed to activate and sustain a range of blessings in your life?
5. What is the inter-connectivity between wealth and establishment of God's Covenant?
6. Do you see the link between your financial behaviour and the potential to fulfill personal spiritual destiny and calling?

“When you give your tithe, you give out of your past;
when you give first fruits, you give into your future”

Thamo Naidoo



“... the storehouse for the offerings,
the firstfruits, and the tithes, ...”

Neh.12:44b (NKJV)

More Excellent Giving

The number three (3) is strongly associated with the being of God. God, as the One and only true God, and His purposes, are usually expressed or worked-out in terms of three-fold dimensions. Here are some examples:

- The Godhead : Father, Son, Holy Spirit
- Constitution of Man : Spirit, Soul, Body
- Three Patriarchs : Abraham, Isaac, Jacob
- Isaac's Prosperity : Became Rich, Grew Richer, Became Very Wealthy (Gen. 26:13)
- Israel's Process : Out of Egypt, Through the Wilderness, Into Canaan
- Tabernacle : Outer Court, Holy Place, Holy of Holies
- Singing : Psalms, Hymns, Spiritual Songs
- Feasts : Passover, Pentecost, Tabernacles
- Old Testament Divisions : Law, Prophets, Psalms
- Three Offices of Christ : Prophet, Priest, King
- Jesus : Way, Truth, Life
- The Kingdom : Righteousness, Peace and Joy
- Enduring Virtues : Faith, Hope, Love
- Prayer : Ask, Seek, Knock
- Harvest Yields : Thirty-fold, Sixty-fold, One Hundred-fold

In Biblical numerology, the number **‘three’** has tremendous **spiritual significance**. **‘Three’ indicates that which is solid, real, substantial, complete and entire.**¹⁷ Christ was raised on the ‘third’ day.

“The number ‘three’ (3) draws reference to that which has a **complete, divine or heavenly dimension** built into it.¹⁸ This signification is that all things which are **divinely patented** are stamped with the number three referring to **divine perfection and incorruptibility**”¹⁹ (Thamo Naidoo).

The arena of financial giving should be characterised by this divine quality of solidity, reality, completeness and incorruptibility. Giving should and does have a biblical three-fold strand to it. The three expressions of giving are **First Fruits, Tithes and Offerings**. For many years, the character of the giving of most believers has been two-fold, i.e., tithes and offerings. This two-fold expression of giving was influenced predominantly by one passage of scripture, viz. Mal. 3:8.

“Will a man rob God? Yet you are robbing Me! But you say, ‘How have we robbed You?’ In **tithes** and **offerings.**”
(**Malachi 3:8**)

For many years, the reference to first fruits in Prov. 3:9 was seen as synonymous with the tithe, but the scriptures clearly and repeatedly delineate between the two, and hence they are distinct practices.

The truth of first fruits is being restored to the Body of Christ, and this, along with ‘tithes’ and ‘offerings’, brings fullness and completeness to this facet of our relationship with God. This brings to bear upon our giving a sense of ‘divine perfection’, as God brings us to maturity in the realm of giving. God is three-fold, viz. Father, Son and Spirit. All that He does has a three-fold dimension to it, including the domain of giving.

THE EXAMPLE OF ABEL

Abel, on his part also brought of the **FIRSTLINGS** of his flock and of their fat portions. And the **Lord had REGARD for Abel AND for his offering.** (Genesis 4:4)

By faith Abel offered to God a **MORE EXCELLENT** sacrifice than Cain, through which he obtained witness that **he was righteous, God testifying of his gifts;** and through it he being dead still speaks. (Hebrews 11:4 - NKJV)

Abel offered the firstlings of all his flock as first fruits. The writer of the book of Hebrews describes his offering as God having high '**regard**' for it, and a '**more excellent**' (NKJV) or '**better**' (NASB) sacrifice.

The restoration of the practice of first fruits to the church will bring '**excellence**' to our giving.

Have I not written to you **EXCELLENT THINGS** of counsels and knowledge. (Proverbs 22:20 - NKJV)

Proverbs 22:20 speaks of '**excellent things**', which in the Hebrew ('**saliys**'), literally means '**three**' or '**third part**', or '**a triangle**' - thus implying '**THREE-FOLD THINGS**'.²⁰

We, with a '**better covenant**', enacted on '**better promises**', have been called to a '**more excellent**' ministry.

But now He has obtained a **more excellent ministry**, by as much as He is also the mediator of a **better covenant**, which has been enacted on **better promises.** (Hebrews 8:6)

The Greek word for '**excellent**' is '**diaphoros**', meaning '**surpassing**,²¹ **different, diverse, superior**'²².

'More excellent giving', a phrase coined by Thamo Naidoo, will include the giving of first fruits, tithes and offerings. Within 'offerings' is incorporated a range of diverse giving - like giving to the poor, to finance

Kingdom-related projects, etc.

A DISTINCTION BETWEEN FIRST FRUITS, TITHES AND OFFERINGS

For many years, many believers considered ‘first fruits and the ‘tithe’ as referring to the same thing, yet they are distinct and separate entities and expressions of giving to the Lord. Note the following Scriptures which delineate between ‘first fruits’ on the one hand, and ‘tithes’ on the other.

In the passage reflected below, Deut. 26:2-11 has reference to first fruits, and Deut. 26:12 refers separately to the tithe. Deut. 26:13-19 provides principles that should characterise both first fruits and tithes.

¹ “Then it shall be, when you enter the land which the Lord your God gives you as an inheritance, and you possess it and live in it, ² **that you shall take some of the FIRST of all the produce of the ground** which you bring in from your land that the Lord your God gives you, and you shall put it in a basket and go **to the PLACE where the Lord your God chooses to establish His name.** ³ “You shall go **to the priest** who is **in office at that** time and say to him, ‘I declare this day to the Lord my God that **I have entered the land** which the Lord swore to our fathers to give us.’ ⁴ “Then the **priest shall take** the basket from your hand and set it down before the altar of the Lord your God. ⁵ “You shall answer and say before the Lord your God, ‘My father was a wandering Aramean, and he went down to Egypt and sojourned there, few in number; but there he became a great, mighty and populous nation. ⁶ ‘And the Egyptians treated us harshly and afflicted us, and imposed hard labor on us. ⁷ ‘Then we cried to the Lord, the God of our fathers, and the Lord heard our voice and saw our affliction and our toil and our oppression; ⁸ and the Lord brought us out of Egypt with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm and with great terror and with signs and wonders; ⁹ and He

has brought us to this place and has given us this land, a land flowing with milk and honey. ¹⁰ ‘Now behold, **I have brought the first of the produce of the ground which You, O Lord have given me.**’ And you shall set it down before the Lord your God, **and worship before the Lord your God;** ¹¹ **and you and the Levite and the alien** who is among you **shall rejoice in all the good which the Lord your God has given you and your household.** ¹² ‘When you have finished paying **all the tithe of your increase** in the **third year, the year of tithing,** then you shall **give it to the Levite, to the stranger, to the orphan and to the widow, that they may eat in your towns and be satisfied.** ¹³ ‘You shall say before the Lord your God, **‘I have removed the sacred portion** from my house, and also have given it to the Levite and the alien, the orphan and the widow, **according to all Your commandments which You have commanded me; I have not transgressed or forgotten any of Your commandments.** ¹⁴ **‘I have not eaten of it while mourning, nor have I removed any of it while I was unclean,** nor offered any of it to the dead. **I have listened to the voice of the Lord my God; I have done according to all that You have commanded me.** ¹⁵ **‘Look down from Your holy habitation,** from heaven, and **bless Your people Israel, and the ground which You have given us,** a land flowing with **milk and honey, as You swore to our fathers.**’ ¹⁶ ‘This day the Lord your God commands you to do these statutes and ordinances. You shall therefore **be careful to do them with all your heart and with all your soul.** ¹⁷ ‘You have today declared the Lord to be your God, and that you would **walk in His ways and keep His statutes, His commandments and His ordinances, and listen to His voice.** ¹⁸ ‘The Lord has today declared you to be His people, a treasured possession, as He promised you, and that you should keep all His commandments; ¹⁹ and that He will set you **high above all nations** which He has made, for praise, fame, and honor; and that you shall be a consecrated people

to the Lord your God, as He has spoken.”

(Deuteronomy 26:1-19)

Under **Hezekiah's** reformation, the practice of both first fruits and tithes were restored. These were two separate dimensions of giving.

³ He also appointed the king's portion of his goods for the burnt offerings, namely, for the morning and evening burnt offerings, and the burnt offerings for the sabbaths and for the new moons and for the fixed festivals, as it is written in the law of the Lord. ⁴ Also he commanded the people who lived in Jerusalem **to give the portion due to the priests and the Levites, that they might devote themselves to the law of the Lord.** ⁵ **As soon as the order spread, the SONS of Israel provided in abundance the FIRST FRUITS of grain, new wine, oil, honey and of all the produce of the field; AND they brought in abundantly the TITHE OF ALL.** ⁶ **The sons** of Israel and Judah who lived in the cities of Judah also brought in the **tithe** of oxen and sheep, and the **tithe** of sacred gifts which were consecrated to the Lord their God, and placed them in heaps. **(2 Chron. 31:3-6)**

In the time of **Nehemiah's** reformation of the nation of Israel, three-fold, 'more excellent giving', was restored:

On that day men were also appointed over the chambers for the stores, **the CONTRIBUTIONS (i.e., OFFERINGS*), the FIRST FRUITS and the TITHES,** to gather into them from the fields of the cities the portions required by the law for the priests and Levites ... **(Nehemiah 12:44)** (*author's insertion)

This verse below clearly separates the tithe from the first fruits:

We will also bring **THE FIRST** of our dough, our contributions, the fruit of every tree, the new wine and the oil to the priests at the chambers of the house of our God, **AND the TITHE** of our ground to the Levites, for the Levites are they who receive the tithes in all the rural towns. (**Nehemiah 10:39**)

The **tithe** refers to the regular and systematic **giving of a tenth**, or **ten percent of one's gross week or monthly income**. The calculation of the tithe is easy - it is simply ten percent of your gross income for a specified period of time. The tithe is given recurrently whenever an income or a financial gift is received - it is ongoing so long as you are in receipt of some financial income, reward or blessing. "You do not need a revelation as to how much you should tithe. All you need is a calculator."²³ (Thamo Naidoo)

First fruits, in our modern contemporary day, generally refer to **the giving of the first week's income received within a specific calendar year**. (More details on this in chapter 6)

Offerings include a range of different types of free-will giving, the determination of which is influenced by specific principles as reflected in God's Word. For example, you give offerings (a) as you decide in your heart; (b) according to your ability; (c) beyond your ability; (d) as God has prospered you; (e) according to your faith; etc. (Read 2 Corinthians chapters 8 and 9).

The late Apostle Frans Du Plessis notes interesting differences between first fruits and tithes²⁴. He writes the following:

Yes, the giving of the first to God always determines what would happen to the rest. The difference between tithing and the giving of the first fruits is the following: With tithing you wait for the full harvest and then **calculate how much the tithe** will be. After giving the Lord's tithe, **you still have 90% left over** for yourself. This is not so with the **firstling, first born or first-fruits** offering. When the first fruits are ripening on the tree, or the firstborn of animals is given to God, it is **not only your first but also your 'only'**. After you have given it, there is **nothing left** - it is your **100%**. You have no natural

evidence that the full harvest would come in or that others would be born from the same womb. Although the tithe is always more than the first fruits in quantity (within a calendar year) the first fruits are the most holy offering (Rom.11:16). **It takes much more faith, love and commitment to give first fruits than tithing.**

‘When you give your tithe, you give out of your past; when you give first fruits, you give into your future’ (Thamo Naidoo)²⁵. Tithes are given after the total income is received within a designated period, for example, a month. So, the tithe looks back to what was received and honours the Lord with a tenth of gross earnings. Biblically, the tithe rebukes and restrains the devourer: “Then I will rebuke the devourer for you, so that it will not destroy the fruits of the ground; nor will your vine in the field cast its grapes,” says the Lord of hosts (Malachi 3:11).

First fruits are given as the first income is received within a designated period. First fruits look forward to anticipated ensuing harvests, from which one will continue to give tithes and offerings. **The tithe looks back in time to see what God HAS DONE, and so honours Him for that, whereas first fruits look forward into time, in faith, to what God WILL DO in your future.** Tithing looks back to your financial past. First fruits look forward to your financial future. **First fruits anticipate a future harvest; tithes protects that harvest.** First fruits and tithes were contemporaneous with each other and work hand in hand. The unique relationship between first fruits and tithing is hinted at in chapter 15 of this writing. A book on tithing will be released soon (check my website or social media pages for notification details). Both first fruits and tithes are ‘the Lord’s’ - belonging to Him and are ‘holy’ (Rom. 11:16; Num. 18:8-19; Lev. 29:24; Lev. 27:30). Reverence must always accompany their administration.

Note the plural form of each of these expressions of giving in Scripture, viz. first fruits, tithes and offerings - “probably suggesting that each category of giving is multifarious and not merely a singular act; the implication is that giving is an act of worship influenced by a lifestyle of continuous giving” (Thamo Naidoo)²⁶.

REFLECT

1. The three-fold nature of God's person, principles and processes is evident in the Bible. Does your giving have a three-fold or 'more-excellent' dynamic to it?
2. Can you demonstrate the distinction between the three categories of giving biblically?
3. The 'timing' of first fruits as compared with the timing of 'tithing', demands a particular mindset of the giver in reference to 'past' and 'future'. Clarify in your own mind, what thoughts should predominate within you whenever you engage in both of these practices at different 'times'.

“All financial giving in God’s Kingdom
is not a condition of our sonship,
but rather, a celebration of our sonship”

Sam Soleyn



Honour the LORD ... with
the best part of everything.

Prov. 3:9 (NLT)

What Are First Fruits?

First Fruits are one of the most powerful expressions of giving in Scripture. In the Bible, it is probably the first kind of offering given by a human, expressed in honour of or gratitude to God. Abel, by faith, offered the firstlings of his flocks to God. Thus, first fruits, in essence, are the foundation of all other offerings. It was practised many years before the practice of the giving of tithes. The first recorded giving of the tithe was Abraham's tithe to Melchisedek in Genesis 14, whereas Genesis 4 records the first example of the giving of first fruits.

^{2b} ... And Abel was a keeper of flocks, but Cain was a tiller of the ground. ³ So it came about in the course of time that **Cain brought an offering** to the Lord of the fruit of the ground.

⁴ Abel, on his part also brought of the **FIRSTLINGS** of his flock **and of their fat portions**. And the **Lord had regard for Abel AND for his offering;** ⁵ but **for Cain and for his offering** He had **no regard**. So Cain became **very angry and his countenance fell**. (Genesis 4:2b-5)

Both the tithe and first fruits were practised many years before the Law was given through Moses. Both kinds of giving were then entrenched within the law, and found unique expression under the New Covenant. We deal with Abel's first fruits in more detail later in this writing.

WHAT ARE FIRST FRUITS?

Three different Hebrew words indicate ‘first fruits’. The two primary words are ‘**bikkur**’ / ‘**bikkûriym**’ and ‘**reshityth**’ (translated ‘**choice**’). ‘**Bikkur**’ means ‘**first fruits, first-ripe fruit or hasty fruit**’²⁷. ‘**Reshityth**’ (pronounced ‘**ray-sheeth**’) means ‘**the first in time, place, order or rank: the beginning, the chief, the first part, or principal thing**.’²⁸ The third word, ‘**terumah**’, although not strictly translated as first fruits, can at times infer it. It generally refers to any kind of offering, including special tribute offerings, wave offerings, heave offerings, etc.²⁹

In ancient Israel’s agriculturally-based economy, first fruits refer to anything born, ripened or produced first. It was regarded as holy unto the Lord.

EXAMPLES:

- The firstborn of man and animals. (Lev.27:26; Num. 3:13)
- The first produce of the vineyard. (Lev.19:22-25)
- The first coarse meal. (Num. 15:20,21)
- The first of any kind of ‘increase’ or wealth acquisition. (Prov. 3:8,9)
- The first annual production of grain, wine, oil, sheared wool, honey and all the produce of the land. (Ex. 23:16; 34:22; Deut. 18:4; 2 Chron. 31:5)

So then, first fruits included the yearly first gathering of the ripened produce of the land **in honour of the fact that both the land and its produce belonged to the Lord**. The produce was **presented to the Lord** (Ex. 23:16, 19) in its **harvested state** or, in the case of some items, when the product had been **properly prepared**. For example, a man gave first fruits to Elisha consisting of twenty barley loaves of bread and fresh ears of grain.

Now a man came from Baal-shalishah, and **brought the man of God bread of the first fruits, twenty loaves of barley and fresh ears of grain in his sack.** And he said, “Give them to the people that they may eat.” (2 Kings 4:24)

Generally, first fruits were in themselves **indicative** and **representative** of the **entire harvest to follow.**

The word **‘first’** implies **the first in a series of successive or subsequent things.** The word **‘fruits’**, as gleaned from the discussion above, indicates some **form of harvest or reward from effort or labour applied.** First fruits would be the first reward received for efforts in the workplace or business.

A modern-day equivalent of this practice would be to **offer the first week’s income/turnover or financial reward received within a specific category, within a specific calendar year.** Suggested contemporary applications of first fruits are discussed later in this writing .

Annually, Israel celebrated seven feasts, which are generally classified into three broad feasts, viz. Passover, Pentecost and Tabernacles (refer to the tabular summary of these feasts at the end of this chapter). First fruits were offered during these feasts. In the **Passover Feast**, the first sheaf (called the **Sheaf of First fruits**) of a ripened and ready to be reaped barley harvest, was given to the priest, who **waved it in his house** - before the Lord - as a sign of the **coming and fuller harvests** in ‘Pentecost’ and ‘Tabernacles’. The first fruits offered in ‘Pentecost’ would indicate the quality of the harvest that would come in ‘Tabernacles’. The **‘sheaf of first fruits’** was essentially the **‘FIRST of the first fruits’**.

The first of the first fruits of thy land thou shalt bring into the house of the LORD thy God. (Exodus 23:19 - KJV)

The phrase ‘first of the first fruits’ suggest the first of a series of first fruits to be given. Note the plural form - ‘fruit**S**’. This suggests that first fruits are offered on more than one occasion in a particular year. At whatever time one receives some form of income in a specific category of income, or from a specific source of income, the first should be offered

as first fruits. Differing occasions when one should offer first fruits are suggested later in this writing.

Since the sheaf symbolically is representative of people (See Gen. 37:5-11), these first fruits, as is the case with any offering to the Lord, are symbolically **indicative of the totality and entirety of one's life and spiritual destiny.**

Seven weeks, or more exactly, fifty days after the **Feast of Sheaf of First Fruits** (part of **Passover**), the **Feast of Pentecost** (Feast of Weeks) commenced by the bringing of **two loaves baked from the wheat harvest.** These were given to the priest who would wave them before the Lord. In the **Feast of Tabernacles**, first fruits of the **oil and wine (vintage)** were offered as well. The following scripture indicates that in **all seasons of any kind of increase or harvest, first fruits were to be offered.**

¹² **All the best** of the fresh oil and all **the best** of the fresh wine and of **the grain**, the first fruits of those which they give to the Lord, I give them to you (*i.e., the priest**)

^{13a} "The first **ripe fruits** of **ALL that is in their land, ...** (**Numbers 18:12,13a**) (*author's insertion)

At no stage, in any of the feasts which Israel was to celebrate, were they to come before the Lord **EMPTY-HANDED.**

¹⁴ **Three times a year** you shall **celebrate** a feast to Me.

¹⁵ "You shall observe the **Feast of Unleavened Bread** (*i.e., Feast of Passover**); for seven days you are to eat unleavened bread, as **I commanded you**, at the appointed time in the month Abib, for in it you came out of Egypt. **And none shall appear before Me empty-handed.** ¹⁶ "Also you shall observe the **Feast of the Harvest** (*i.e., Feast of Pentecost**) of the **first fruits of your labors** from what you sow in the field; also the **Feast of the Ingathering** (*i.e., Feast of Tabernacles**) at the end of the year when you gather in the **fruit of your labors** from the field. ¹⁷ **Three times a year** all your males shall appear before the Lord God. ¹⁸ "You shall not offer the blood

of My sacrifice with leavened bread; nor is the fat of My feast to remain overnight until morning. ¹⁹ **“You shall bring the choice first fruits of your soil into the house of the Lord your God. “You are not to boil a young goat in the milk of its mother. (Exodus 23:14-19)(* author’s insertion)**

In all three feasts, note that no one was to appear before the Lord **‘EMPTY-HANDED’**. Appearing ‘empty-handed’ would be suggestive of the fact that God did not bless you. The fact that they were commanded to appear **‘full-handed’**, means that God’s blessings were presupposed if the people were obedient.

Note also that these feasts, whilst prescribed and mandatory, were to be **celebratory** in character: **“Three times a year you shall CELEBRATE a feast to Me” (Ex. 23:14)**. We do not offer first fruits because we ‘have to’, but because ‘we want to’. Whilst it is commanded, a spirit of legalism must not govern it, but rather joyous willingness in a spirit of celebration and honour of God as the source of all blessing, provision and productivity. Celebration must override the obligation to give. All giving to God, no matter what category, is to be done in celebration of one’s sonship identity in Christ and with a restful peace that God, your Father, will more than adequately provide for and take care of you.

“All financial giving in God’s Kingdom is not a condition of our sonship, but rather, a celebration of our sonship” (Sam Soleyn).

TABULAR SUMMARY OF ISRAEL'S FEASTS

Month	Feast	Scripture	Broad Categorization	Product
1 st month	1. Feast of Passover 2. Feast of Unleavened Bread 3. Feast of Sheaf of First Fruits	Lev. 23:4-5 Lev. 23:6-8 Lev. 23:9-14	Feast of Passover	Barley (Corn/Grain Harvest)
3 rd month	4. Feast of Weeks Also Called: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Harvest (Ex 23:16) • Day of First fruits (Num 28:26; Ex 34:22) • Week of the First fruits of the Wheat Harvest (Ex 34:22) • First fruits of Israel's labours (Ex 23:16) • Pentecost (Acts 2:1; 20:16; 1 Cor 16:8) 	Lev. 23:15-22	Feast of Pentecost	Wheat (Corn/Grain Harvest)
7 th month	5. Feast of Trumpets 6. Feast of Day of Atonement 7. Feast of Tabernacles Also Called: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ingathering (Ex 23:16) • Solemn Feast (Deut. 16:15) • Seventh Month (Neh.8:14) • Booths (Neh.8:14-15) 	Lev. 23:23-25 Lev. 23:26-32 Lev. 23:33-34	Feast of Tabernacles	Oil & Wine (Fruit Harvest)

REFLECT

1. We are required to seek **FIRST** the Kingdom of God. God must be first in all domains of our lives, including our finances and giving. Have you resolved to offer to God the first rewards of all your remuneration for your efforts in the workplace?
2. Does celebration override obligation in your financial giving?
3. Is there a multi-faceted expression to all of your giving to the Lord in respect to First Fruits, Tithes and Offerings?

First fruits is an eternal principle
inherent within the being of God.



For if the first fruit is holy,
the lump is also holy.

Romans 11:16

Gravity and Significance of First Fruits

First fruits, as a concept, has varied expressions and diverse applications. As a principle, it is multifaceted. Its complete essence or reality must be understood if we desire to know and actualise any one dimension of its expression. Whenever something has variegated dynamics to its nature, it is important to know its core and essence before understanding and applying any one expression. In this chapter, we seek to simply understand, as holistically as possible, some aspects of the gravity or weightiness attendant with first fruits as a divine and biblical principle. The practice of anything must be built on the principles that underpin it.

1. THE SERIOUSNESS OF FIRST FRUITS

You shall bring the **choice first fruits** of your soil into the **house of the Lord** your God. **You are not to boil a young goat in the milk of its mother.** (Exodus 23:19)

[See also Deut. 14:21; Exodus 34:26]

Note that the command to give the first fruits to God is further accentuated by a command **not to boil a young goat in the milk of its mother**. In reference to observing first fruits, this implies the following:

Milk is that commodity that **provides nourishment** to a young goat. Milk must not be used to boil or kill the goat. There is an implicit warning

not to misuse the intention of a thing, i.e., if milk is intended for the provision of nourishment and thus life, then it must not be used as a medium to facilitate death. Milk, a source of great nourishment, nutrition and immunisation against disease and illness, especially in infant humans and animals, is in this context of being boiled, misused, and this misuse results in death.

Symbolically applied to first fruit giving, the first fruits must not be abused or misused. Do not destroy or eat your first fruits yourself. Doing so will lead to 'death', symbolically, in terms of you not experiencing God's intended level of perpetual and sustained blessing on your life. **The practice of giving first fruits, intended for blessing, sustenance, provision, immunisation from economic famine, etc., can, if misdirected, abused or misused, result in the nullification of the very thing it was designed for.**

"It was a custom of the ancient heathens, when they had gathered in all their fruits, to take a kid and boil it in the milk of its dam (mother); and then, in a magical way, to go about and sprinkle with it all their trees and fields, gardens and orchards; thinking that by these means to make them fruitful, that they might bring forth more abundantly in the following year." [Dr Cudworth]³⁰

Heathen nations, after boiling a young goat in the milk of its mother, would sprinkle the milk on all their trees, believing that by this magical practice the trees would then produce a bountiful future harvest. This was an expression of trust in false deities, to the total disregard of Jehovah God, and it was their evil way of ensuring that their future harvest would be guaranteed.

So God, in instructing Israel to give Him the first young goat (and not to boil it as would the heathen nations), was signalling to His people not to place their trust in the realm of the demonic or worldly systems to ensure a blessing on their land, but rather by their offering of their first fruits to Him, they actively display their acknowledgement and utter dependance on Him to secure for them a bountiful future harvest. Deuteronomy 26 provides principles for Israel governing the administration of their first fruits and tithing. In obeying these practices, the people were boldly declaring to nations and the entire unseen spiritual realm, that the LORD

GOD is truly THEIR GOD in whom they TRUST.

“You have today **declared** the **Lord** to be **your God ...**”
(Deut. 26:17a)

First fruits is a bold, courageous and fearless demonstration of where one's trust lies. On the one hand, it signifies total dependance and faith in God, your Father. On the other hand, it denounces any reliance on this world system governed by satan. In chapter 3 of the book of Proverbs, the well-known command to, “Honour the Lord with your substance, with the first fruits of your increase” (Prov.3:9), is prefaced by a preceding and foundational command to, “Trust in the Lord with all of your heart” (Prov. 3:5). First fruits are indicative of one's total and complete trust in God. (More on the issue of trust later in this writing - see chapter 7)

2. THE SIGNIFICANCE OF 'FIRST'

2.1. TIMING - 'NO DELAY'

²⁹ “You **shall NOT DELAY** the **offering** from **your harvest and your vintage**. The firstborn of **your sons** you shall give to Me. ³⁰ “You shall do the same with your **oxen and with your sheep**. It shall be with its mother seven days; **on the eighth day you shall give it to Me.** (Exodus 22:29,30)

The Hebrew word for ‘delay’ is ‘ahar’ (achar) and means ‘to hesitate, tarry, to hold back, defer, to come too late’³¹. The giving of first fruits must not be ‘delayed’, i.e., timing is essential, as it represents the EARLIEST, RIPEST fruit - the first produce in a cycle or season of time where the land was worked. **You must not offer ‘later’ that which should have been ‘first’.** This is not to say that one should be legalistic about which month first fruits should be offered. You can determine what your first fruits month will be in a specific calendar year. For most people, it is January. For some, it will be that specific month in which they started

working, etc. Whatever time period represents your calendar year, ensure that at the start of that period annually, you give to the Lord your first fruits. The word 'first' highlights the importance of TIMING. God wants the **'first' - not the 'second' or 'third'**.

There should be no hesitation in our resolve to obey the first fruits command. Hesitation indicates doubt or double-mindedness.

⁶ But he must ask in faith without any doubting, for the one who doubts is like the surf of the sea, driven and tossed by the wind. ⁷ For that man ought not to expect that he will receive anything from the Lord, being a **double-minded** man, unstable in all his ways. (**James 1:6,7**)

To obey the practice of first fruits demands a singular mind, not a double mind. Double-mindedness indicates a war between the mind of your spirit and the mind of your soul. The mind of your soul must obey the leading of the mind of your spirit, which is generally inclined to obey and please God. (See more on this in chapter 23 of this writing)

In respect to animals, God expected that the firstlings be offered on the eighth day (Ex. 22:30). The number eight prophetically symbolises **'NEW BEGINNINGS'**. First fruits have the effect of breaking open a new era or epoch of God's grace, favour and goodness in your life.

Hezekiah **authoritatively called** for first fruits and tithes to be given.

⁴ **HE COMMANDED THE PEOPLE** who lived in Jerusalem to give **the portion due to the priests and the Levites**, that they might **devote themselves to the law of the Lord**.⁵ **AS SOON AS THE ORDER SPREAD**, the sons of Israel **provided in abundance** the **first fruits** of grain, new wine, oil, honey and of all the produce of the field; **AND** they **brought in abundantly the tithe of all**. (**2 Chronicles 31:4-5**)

Note, **AS SOON AS THE ORDER WAS GIVEN**, there was an **immediate and instantaneous** response of obedience from the people. It is important that first fruits be **given timeously** - obedience to this

principle must not be **delayed nor postponed**. Note also that Hezekiah, a great reformer, authoritatively administrated the restoration of financial obedience concerning first fruits, tithes and offerings. This was a **DIVINE COMMAND** and not a human suggestion. **The people's reflexive, obedient response is indicative of their esteem and honour to God, who is represented in and through the leadership of Hezekiah.** The serious and prompt observance of first fruits is borne out of honour for God, who is represented in and through authentic human leadership. More on this later in this writing.

At the **Feast of Pentecost**, when the first ripened wheat was brought, it was brought on a specific DAY called the **DAY OF THE FIRST FRUITS**. Here, one did not have the luxury of determining the day yourself, as it was already predetermined for you. Again, this highlights the crucial importance of timing.

‘Also on the **DAY of the FIRST FRUITS**, when you present a new grain offering to the Lord in your **Feast of Weeks**, you shall have a holy **convocation**; you shall do no laborious work.
(**Numbers 28:26**)

In our modern-day in some circles, a specific day is set aside for the reception of first fruits, usually within the first four or five weeks of a specific calendar year. Although practised by some, this is not prescriptive today, as many people might observe a different ‘first month’ in which their main first fruits are offered. Also bear in mind, that in Israel's agrarian economy, setting a specific day aside was easier, since the ripening of crops occurred in the same period for everyone.

One should not be dogmatic about the ‘day’ as much as the ‘attitude’ in which first fruits are offered. At the Feast of Pentecost, on the ‘day’ of first fruits, God also stipulated that the day should be a **holy convocation** for Israel. No hard work was to be done and a **sacred assembly** was to be observed, coupled with **reading from the Scriptures** - as indicated by the Hebrew word for ‘convocation’³².

This highlights the fact that the first fruits were not to be offered casually or simply as a matter of routine. A sense of fear and honour for God

was to accompany it as a deeply spiritual act. I advise that before you offer your first fruits, you spend time in prayer, Bible reading, meditation and then engage the act in a spirit of gratitude and honour. Again, this is not prescriptive - simply my recommendation. It has helped me to keep a holy and reverential perspective and attitude in reference to first fruits.

2.2. AN ETERNAL AND PRIMARY PRINCIPLE

The principle of first fruits finds its origins outside of time. It emanates from the realm of timelessness - the eternal dimension in which God resides. It was not spawned out of consideration of human interactions with God on Earth, because it existed as a principle within processes that were afoot even before time began. Thus, first fruits is an eternal principle and by that very nature, is enduring. There is an eternality attendant with first fruits. The eternal or unseen dimension must be our greatest reality, not the seen realm, which is temporal. The act of first fruits giving presently, is a continuum of an invisible and eternal reality. As will be demonstrated further on in this chapter, the creation of Heaven and Earth occurred in the **'beginning'**, which in Hebrew, translates as **'first fruits'**; and the **'beginning'** has nothing at all to do with time as we know it. Engaging in financial first fruits connects one to the realm of the unseen - eternity, and this eternal dimension presses into your temporality with Heaven's will and reward.

2.3. THE FIRST FRUITS PRINCIPLE IN THE ETERNAL GODHEAD

The nature of all persons in the eternal and timeless Godhead, have the principle of first fruits resident within them.

- The **Father is the progenitor**, the source of all life and a well-spring of purpose and blessing. The Hebrew word for 'father', **AB** (from which we get the derivative **'Abba'**), is first in the referencing in James Strong's numbering system for Hebrew biblical words - it is number 1 (H1)³³. This word also means **'foremost' or 'principal'**.

The very word 'Father' has embedded within it, the principle of 'first'. The Father is also 'first' as the functional head of deity, having a purpose, which the Son, empowered by the Holy Spirit, will carry out.

- The Son, Christ Jesus, is also the **firstborn Son** of His Father (Rom. 8:29), **firstborn from the dead** of all who have died (1 Cor. 15:23) and **firstborn in creation** - being chief of all created things (John 1:3; Col. 1:15), because all things were made by, for and through Him (Col.1:16; Rom. 11:36; Heb. 2:10). Jesus Himself said that He is the **FIRST, the BEGINNING and the ALPHA** (Rev. 1:11; 22:13).
- The Holy Spirit is also called the **first fruits** (Rom. 8:23), meaning that He has being given to us is a **pledge or guarantee** of our status of adoption into God's family as His sons, and is also a **down payment** of the fact that the fullness of Father and the Son also inhabit us (2 Cor. 1:22; 5:5; Eph. 1:13,14).

2.4. THE FIRST FRUITS PRINCIPLE IN MAN

Man has the principle of first fruits resident within him. Man was created on the sixth day. Ignoring the day seven rest principle for a moment, man was the last created item in the creation account, being created at the end of the sixth day. The last shall be first and the first shall be last (Matt. 20:16). "What God created last, was first on His mind" (Thamo Naidoo). So there is a 'firstness' to us as humans who are sons of God.

2.5. SONS OF GOD ARE THE FIRST FRUITS OF GOD AND FIRSTBORN SONS OF GOD

Sons of God in Christ are the corporate firstborn sons (Heb. 12:22,23; Rom. 8:28) and are the first fruits of God in creation (James 1:18) (The Greek word translated 'first fruits, **'aparche'**, implies **'beginnings'**³⁴). Part of our first fruit's identity demands a righteous lifestyle and separation from the world (Rev. 14:4). Being the apex of God's creation, who have the capacity to exactly represent God, we now push for the maturation of

our sonship, so that creation itself be fully restored to its original place. We are also His corporate firstborn sons in Christ.

¹² But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to myriads of angels,
²³ to the general assembly and **church of the firstborn** who are enrolled in heaven, and to God, the Judge of all, and to the spirits of the righteous made perfect. (**Hebrews 12:22,23**)

For those whom He foreknew, He also predestined to become conformed to the image of His Son, so that He would be the **firstborn among many brethren** (**Romans 8:28**)

In the exercise of His will He brought us forth by the word of truth, so that we would be a kind of **first fruits among His creatures**. (**James 1:18**)

Understanding who we are as a first fruit among creation is important to our actual practice of financial first fruits. I also believe that first fruits giving will grow as your revelation of your identity as God's firstborn or first fruit son grows. In this regard, I highly recommend an excellent writing by Rosh Peters called 'God's First Ripe Fruit'³⁵. Here are some thoughts I expressed in the preface of this book.

Christ Jesus is the first fruits of God. In Him, we His sons attain to all that He, the first fruits, represents. The firstborn sonship status and privilege of all sons of God is a truth in the process of recovery. Its full reinstatement into the mentality and behaviour of the church will signal the widespread and powerful corporate expression of both the nature and purpose of God in an unprecedented manner. Understanding who we are in Christ is critically essential to our efficient execution of His plans and intentions. Our identity, rooted in our comprehension of our placement in and patterning after Christ as the first fruits, is prerequisite to our exact representation of Him

both in character and function. This is true and essential to be manifested on a personal level, for it feeds into God's ultimate intent that it be corporate in its final presentation to the earth. The highest order of any spiritual principle in God is to become it. The principle of first fruits, before it is outwardly expressed, must BE a person. We are to become the embodiment of it ('Christ, the first fruits' - 1 Cor. 15:23; 'we, the first fruits of all creation' - James 1:18). When you have become the principle, to express it in its range of practical applications is both effortless and inevitable. You can only authentically exude that which you are. That we give practical expression to this is necessary. Attendant with the status of first fruit/firstborn is an expectation to model it in nature and function.

Practice flows out from identity. What I do emanates from an understanding of who I am. I do not do to establish who I am, but who I am determines what I do. The more your understanding of sonship identity grows, the more effortless and inevitable certain behaviours reflective of this identity will manifest.

The practice of financial first fruits will grow, become effortless and inevitable, when the principle of first fruits (firstborn) becomes more greatly cemented in us. Do not seek to practise first fruits coldly or clinically, without the practice reflecting who you are as the first fruits of God.

The point in highlighting all of the above is that we, who existed in God in spirit form before the worlds or time began, existed in a God, who is Spirit, whose entire being is first fruits in nature, character and quality. He predestined us to be adopted as His sons before creation.

The first fruits principle runs throughout the eternal dimension before creation, as part of our existence in spirit form as sons of God in Christ. It then, in time, in creation, is characteristic of us as sons of God. Further, this firstborn or first fruits dynamic in mature sons of God is all that creation itself hopes for - as a harvest of the revealing of the sons of God. The first fruits principle is not an invention of God in time. It is everything He was before time and will continue to be in and beyond time, particularly as expressed in and through His sons - you and I.

Is it no wonder that the first recorded offering given to God by a human was first fruits, when Abel gave the firstlings of his flocks to God (Gen. 4).

2.6. THE 'BEGINNING' IS NOT TIME-RELATED BUT PRIORITY-ROOTED

As indicated, one of the Hebrew words for first fruits is **resiyt** [Pronounced 'ray-sheeth'].

You shall bring the **choice first fruits** of your soil into the **house of the Lord** your God. (Exodus 23:19)

The Hebrew word for 'choice / first' is 'resiyt' (pronounced 'ray-sheeth') and has the following range of meanings: **the beginning, the first, the chief, the best, the first fruits**³⁶; **the point in time or space at which something started**; signifies the **highest of anything**, i.e., the **best** or **most excellent**, such as the **choicest parts** of offerings; designates the **earliest or first products or results** of something; it refers many times to the **first products of a harvest**.³⁷

Genesis 1:1a states that, "**In the beginning, God made the heavens and the earth**".

The word '**beginning**' is the Hebrew word '**resiyt**', which also translates as **first fruits**.

The word '**beginning**' is not time-related, since

- (1) Jesus is the 'Beginning' and He existed before time began and
- (2) Whilst earth was created on day three, the sun was created only on the fourth day in the creation account - so no concept of 'time', as in a 24-hour day, existed before this.

The word '**beginning**' does not so much denote the commencement of time, as much as it signifies the **priority and primacy of the firstness of a significant event or action**. The word 'resiyt' also means '**principal**

thing³⁸. The Hebrew mind is not as obsessed with the passage of ‘time’ per se, as people in the West are. The Hebrews focus more on **what happens in time as a priority - events and actions**.

Considering this, Jesus would say, “Before you bring your gifts to the altar, **FIRST** go make right with an estranged brother” (Matt. 5:23,24 - my paraphrase). The rightness of a restored relationship was prioritised **FIRST** above the offering of the gift. It is not what you did as an action in the chronological sequence of time that was important, but rather the priority attached to the specific action over and above other actions. Thus, reconciling with the brother was the greater priority than offering the gift, and this would then make the subsequent offering of the gift far more relevant, valid and powerful.

Gen. 1:1 could be paraphrased as follows:

At the highest priority or as a first concern, God primarily or pre-eminently created the heavens and the earth.

Referencing the ‘beginning’ as indicative of Christ Jesus, Gen 1:1 could be paraphrased as:

**In Christ Jesus, the first fruits or firstborn Son,
God made the heavens and the earth.**

Offering financial first fruits must never be seen as disparate from our identity as God’s firstborn or first fruit sons and its representation of being reflective of all who God is. We must give our first fruits from the foundation of this mindset.

The **creation of the heavens and the earth**, with all therein, including man (man was an extension of the earth, his physical body being made from the dust of the ground), would establish **the context and conditions** for God to execute multiple aspects of His multifaceted and diverse plans and purposes for humankind on the earth and all creation, visible and invisible. **Nothing else of His purposes could be initialised, until the act of creating the heavens and the earth (inclusive of man) was finalised.**

The act of creation was the initiation of a **series of events, all resulting from the initial creative act**. The giving of first fruits sets forth **the initial act**, which is the **first of a whole series** of other expressions of God's creative capacity and His power to sustain and perpetuate.

When the practice of the giving of financial first fruits is established as a first priority that is 'primary' in your life, you are symbolically establishing the ideal conditions and contexts for God to effect His plan and purposes for your life. Your personal 'beginning' starts with placing God first in observing first fruits giving. **What you do financially in practical obedience to biblical financial principles, has a preparatory effect for what God desires to do spiritually in your life - in respect to the fulfillment of His plans.**

First fruits is also the first of other acts of kindness and generous giving, and activates the reaping of tremendous blessings and rewards.

2.7. WISDOM REPRESENTS THE FIRST FRUITS

Wisdom is the **principal** thing; Therefore, get wisdom. And in all your getting, get understanding. (**Prov. 4:7**)

The word '**principal**' here is the Greek word '**resiyt**' meaning **first fruits**. Wisdom, who is Christ Jesus (1 Cor. 1:24,30), existed from before the preparations of the heavens (Prov. 8:27) and the foundations of the world (Prov. 3:19). Again, everything about the principle of first fruits reflects the unseen and eternal God and denotes wisdom.

2.8. FIRST FRUITS - A SOLID FOUNDATION

The word 'resiyt' is also used in the sense of setting forth a **foundation**.

"The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom"
(**Psalm 111:10**)

A reminder that the word beginning here is 'resiyt' - first fruits. The fear of the Lord is the first fruit of wisdom. Wisdom has fruits, one of which is the fear of or reverence for God.

Similarly, the foundation of a life of giving and thus blessing, is the offering of first fruits. This is wisdom. It sets forth a solid foundation in one's life of abundant giving. Anything built without a good foundation will not last. First fruits giving is radical and testifies to our utter dependance and acknowledgement of God as the only source of our supply and bounty.

2.9. THE FIRST LEAVENS THE REST

For if the **first fruit is holy**, the **lump is also holy** (**Romans 11:16 (a) - NKJV**)

If **the first piece of dough is holy**, the **lump is also** (**Romans 11:16 (a) - NASB**)

Whatever quality the first fruits are, the rest of the fruit will be likewise. The quality of the first piece of dough affects the quality of the rest of the lump of dough. This is akin to the principle of the smallest piece of leaven (yeast), which leavens the rest of the dough (1 Cor. 5:6; Gal. 5:9).

The 'first' sets the pattern for the 'rest' - the first is the catalyst that affects everything after it. If the idea of an expectant 'full harvest' is attendant with the giving of first fruits, and the first fruits are likened unto leaven or the first piece of dough that determines the state of the rest of the dough, then **first fruits have the effect of insidiously working its innate power throughout every other expression of giving**. If we seek **FIRST** the Kingdom and His righteousness, all things will be added to us (Matthew 6:33). **That which you do and seek FIRST will affect what THINGS will be added later**. Giving our first fruits to the Lord is a violent and radical demonstration of just how much we esteem and honour God and prioritise His Kingdom.

2.10. CHRIST, THE FIRST FRUITS OF THOSE WHO HAVE DIED

²⁰ But now Christ has been raised from the dead, the **first fruits of those who are asleep**. ²¹ For since by a man came death, by a man also came the resurrection of the dead. ²² For as in Adam all die, so also **in Christ all will be made alive**. ²³ But each in his own order: **Christ the first fruits, after that those who are Christ's** at His coming, ²⁴ then comes the end, when He hands over the kingdom to the God and Father, when He has abolished all rule and all authority and power. ²⁵For He must reign until He has put all His enemies under His feet. ²⁶ The last enemy that will be abolished is death. (1 Corinthians 15:20-26)

PRINCIPLES FROM THIS PASSAGE:

1. **All Spiritual Activity must have a Christo-centric Focus and Character.**

The fact that first fruits are a descriptor of Christ Himself, as well as offerings which we give to God, stresses the importance that our giving of financial first fruits must be thoroughly reflective of the nature and character of Christ in every way. First fruits offerings must also point to the person of Christ. Every time we give first fruits, we are portraying or representing something of the nature of Christ Himself as the firstborn Son in a series of other sons to follow (Rom. 8:28,29), the firstborn of all creation - the chief who is supreme above all things because He created all things (Col.1:15) and is the first fruits to be raised from the dead (1 Cor. 15:20).

2. **Within the First Fruits, is Already Present the Entire Future Harvest.**

The giving of financial first fruits bear prophetic significance of the master plan of God in raising Jesus from the dead, as the first in a series or harvest of sons that would follow in this same pattern. Within the giving of the first fruits, is representative of everything else that is to follow. Christ became the first person to be raised from the dead, having conquered the power and authority of death, and never to die again. In 1 Cor.15:23 quoted above, it is indicated that in the order of things, Christ had to be raised first, and after this, all those who are in Christ will be raised. **All those IN Christ ‘WILL BE’ or ‘ARE’ raised at the time that He is raised!** When Christ was raised from the dead, we were already raised with Him at that specific point in time, although we will be physically raised from the dead in the future. Christ, the first fruits from the dead, not only has futuristic implications for us that we WILL BE raised someday too, but at the precise moment of His resurrection from the dead, we are raised already. **Anything characteristic of first fruits secures IMMEDIATELY all it hopes to futuristically attain.** This reality has got to be **discerned by revelation** and so **practised by faith**, which demands **‘sight’ into something unseen.**

In Christ’s resurrection, it is not just Him that is raised, but He is prefiguring a prophetic pattern that all those who are IN Him, who have died, will also be raised from the dead one day. He is the first fruits from the dead - the first fruits of all those to come who shall be raised. **So, the principle of first fruits indicates that IN that which is given, is everything else that will follow in the same pattern.** So, when I give my financial first fruits to my spiritual father, literally I am prophetically giving everything I have, and figuratively giving all I will subsequently have. It is a prophetic picture of the totality of all that the original first fruits represent.

Jesus Christ, the faithful witness, the **firstborn** of the dead (**Revelations 1:5a**)

3. **Embedded in the truth that Christ has become the first fruits of all those who have died, is that HE became the first to be raised, indicative of a huge harvest of others in Him that will also be raised.**

The whole idea of first fruits is that it is **not the first and last offering**, but it is the first of many and more to come. It signifies the **hope of a much greater future harvest.**

4. **1 Cor. 15:24-26 describes the resultant effect produced because of Jesus becoming the first fruits, and thus all those who are in Him enter the same experience as Him in being raised from the dead.**

Christ will abolish all rule and authority, when through His church, He will completely subdue death, the last enemy, and then hand over the Kingdom to His Father. **Thus, a set of events are set in motion, bringing completion and finality to the will of God.** This is the power that first fruits release every time it is done. **It symbolically acts as a catalyst in bringing to finish or closure, specific aspects of the purposes of God in our lives.**

2.11. SEEKING FIRST THE KINGDOM OF GOD AND HIS RIGHTEOUSNESS

But seek **FIRST** His kingdom and **His righteousness**, and all these things will be added to you. (**Matthew 6:33**)

Convincing John that he needed to baptise Him, Jesus said that it must be so for Him to **FULFIL ALL RIGHTEOUSNESS** (Matt. 3:15). He wanted to do something outwardly in obedience to a requirement of God, His Father, to complete and express His inward righteousness.

Righteousness is compliance to God's predetermined, eternal standards for how all humankind should behave and function in all aspects of their lives. Righteousness demands an external, outward expression of obedience.

We, as sons of God, are positionally righteous before God, but must, as a result, practically live, behave and function righteously in compliance and obedience to all of God's righteous standards as contained and expressed in His Word (2 Tim. 3:16; Heb. 5:13; 1 John 3:7). God, who is righteous in all His ways, leads us in paths of righteousness (Psalm 23:3), i.e., in every conceivable department or path of our lives, God will guide us. In the financial department of our lives, God has predetermined protocol and practice, viz. first fruits, tithes and offerings.

To have 'all things added to us', Jesus said we must seek His Kingdom first AND His righteousness. His Kingdom refers to HIS right to rule and regulate our lives. How do we submit ourselves to God's rule? By seeking His righteousness first. You cannot seek His Kingdom first without seeking His righteousness first. Compliance with His righteousness and righteous standards of living is exactly how you seek His Kingdom first.

First fruits are the first biblical example of giving by a human in Scripture. It occurs before tithes and offerings. First fruits are a solid foundation to establish in one's financial life as an outward, obedient expression of "seeking first God's Kingdom and His righteousness".

The restoration and practise of first fruits to the Body of Christ is going to bring about a fulfilment and completeness to practical righteousness in the financial arena of our lives. It then becomes a tangible demonstration that God and His Kingdom are truly FIRST in our lives. **The observance of the practice of first fruits giving must be done within the general context and conviction of the fact that you seek FIRST the Kingdom of God.**

First fruits presently are one manifestation of the general principles of 'first things'. Finances represent a major part of our lives. God is not 'first' in our lives unless He is also 'first' in our finances. When the 'first' is observed, the rest follows. Financial disobedience potentially points to other spiritual problems in one's life. Financial faithfulness becomes an indicator of one's total inward commitment to God.

A Reminder: On the one hand, faithfulness in obedience to other general principles of God's Word does not substitute for your disobedience financially. In this regard, because money and finances significantly represent our lives (talents and abilities), your claim to be compliant to God's Word in other areas of your life, should then also be expressed through your financial obedience. On the other hand, you cannot hypocritically seek to obey God's financial principles, in a bid to substitute for your wilful disobedience in other areas not related to finance. Finances reflect your life and heart. Where your treasure is, there your heart will also be (Matt. 6:21). Your finances are an extension of you. So, one cannot seek to obey the practices of first fruits, tithes and offerings, without these practices being indicative of a heart and life that are totally devoted to God in all things.

Jesus chided the Pharisees and Scribes for giving tithes, yet neglecting the weightier matters of the law, i.e., mercy and justice. Their failure to prioritise God in those critical areas invalidated the giving of their tithes. **The giving of first fruits must be indicative of the fact that we seek God's Kingdom and His righteousness FIRST - that our entire lives, thoughts, actions, decisions, etc. are completely submitted to God's principles and ways of doing things.** First fruits giving, when practised from this foundation and context, then becomes meaningful, acceptable and releases the fullness of all the blessing and power inherent within it.

Note the context in which Matthew 6:33 is located:

²⁵“For this reason I say to you, do not be worried about your life, as to what you will eat or what you will drink; nor for your body, as to what you will put on. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing? ²⁶“Look at the birds of the air, that they do not sow, nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not worth much more than they? ²⁷ “And who of you by being worried can add a single hour to his life? ²⁸“And why are you worried about clothing? Observe how the lilies of the field grow; they do not toil nor do they spin, ²⁹ yet I say to you that not even Solomon in all his glory clothed himself like one of these.

³⁰“But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which is alive today and tomorrow is thrown into the furnace, will He not much more clothe you? You of little faith! ³¹“Do not worry then, saying, ‘What will we eat?’ or ‘What will we drink?’ or ‘What will we wear for clothing?’ ³²“For the Gentiles eagerly seek all these things; for **your heavenly Father** knows that you need all these things. ³³ “But seek **first His kingdom and His righteousness**, and all these things will be added to you. ³⁴“So do not worry about tomorrow; for tomorrow will care for itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own. **(Matthew 6:25-34)**

In seeking the Kingdom FIRST, Jesus is teaching us how to handle anxiety caused by worrying about our basic needs. When we desire to seek the Kingdom FIRST in reference to our finances, and thus embrace the practice of giving first fruits as part of our general overall commitment to placing God and His will FIRST in all we do, then we have positioned ourselves strategically to live free from anxiety as to whether our needs will be taken care of.

In a season of global economic disaster which lasted three and a half years, a widow made a cake of bread for the prophet Elijah FIRST, before desiring to use her last meal and oil to produce bread for herself and her child - refer to 1 Kings 17:8-15. This was a symbolic illustration of first fruits offering and the seeking of God’s Kingdom and His righteousness first. As a result, the blessing of God came upon her and her household, such that she was provided with daily bread for the entire duration of that economic famine. Her supply of meal and oil did not stop. No person who puts God first will be placed last on His agenda and His intentions to bless.

2.12. HONOUR - THE PRIMARY MOTIVATION FOR FIRST FRUITS

Honour the Lord with your possessions, And with the **first fruits** of all your increase **(Proverbs 3:9 - NKJV)**

The ultimate stimulus for the observance of financial first fruits, according to Proverbs 3:9, is to HONOUR God. Honour is based on an appraisal or estimate done within the mentality of the person and subsequently attaches 'value' or 'worth' to the person under consideration. God is incalculably worth far more than we could ever quantify in monetary terms. Yet, money and possessions are what we have, to give expression to the inward honour toward God.

God is represented in the spiritual leaders He places over our lives. These individuals are to be honoured, since they are reflections of the invisible God. When we receive these individuals in honour, we also receive God in honour. (More on this in chapters 8, 10 and 11)

Often when some embrace the doctrine of first fruits but fail to implement it, one of the possible reasons is a lack of honour for God and His delegated representatives in leadership. In such cases, the disobedience to first fruits points to a much more serious issue of disobedience, viz. dishonour for God and His leaders/servants. First fruits are not about finances per se, but is an expression of honour.

REFLECT

1. What do you comprehend of the absolute seriousness and gravity embedded within 'first fruits' as a principle?
2. 'First' is not 'second' or 'third'. First fruits have a sense of priority and exact timing attendant with it. Does the sense of Godly reverence and fear characterise your first fruit giving in respect to accurate and prompt timing? How exactly is this evidenced in financial behaviour?
3. Has the revelation that the first fruits principle is an intractably core facet of all three persons of the Godhead, fully settled in your understanding?

4. Understanding who we are as first fruit sons of God among creation is important to our actual practise of financial first fruits. How has your perception and standing of your identity as God's firstborn son in Christ, drive the reflexive, easy and inevitable obedience of the financial first fruit principle?
5. First fruit giving sets a 'beginning' and activates a subsequent series of unfolding processes and events relative to God's purposes for your life. Explain.
6. First fruits giving is a 'wise' act, full of wisdom, producing the fear of the Lord and establishing a solid foundation for all other expressions of giving. Elaborate on these thoughts.
7. Every practice we engage in must be reflective of Christ, the Firstborn Son. First fruits giving must have the character of Christ. Can you, from the scriptures, demonstrate a first fruit quality of Christ and how this quality should attend the giving of first fruits?
8. How is the giving of first fruits related to 'Seek first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness'? What is righteous about first fruits? How does first fruits provide proof that one's life and finances are under the righteous 'rule' of God?
9. How are honour and first fruits inseparably connected?

Whatever income represents to you the
'first' or 'earliest', should be given as first fruits.



If your eye is clear, your whole
body will be full of light.

Matt. 6:22b

Determination of First Fruits

In our modern economy, where most individuals are remunerated monthly or weekly, first fruits represent the **first weeks' income/turnover** in a specific calendar year. In addition to this, other instances in which first fruits can be offered in that same year will be referenced later in this chapter.

The calculation of first fruits is not as plain as the tithe, since we must apply what was practised within the context of a total and complete agrarian economy in biblical times to our modern monetary-based economy. I personally think that the Lord intended this seeming lack of a clear percentage to determine the first fruits, to be so, because He intended the **first fruits not to be governed by a calculator, but by your heart posture.**

Whilst **an absolute percentage defines the 'tithe' (10%), the determination of first fruits is largely governed by what comes in first or what the giver considers 'FIRST' - in terms of what income or turnover he/she has received. Legalism must not characterise the determination of first fruits, yet at the same token, the determination of the first fruits amount must not be governed by a stingy, frugal, poverty, fearful or faithless mentality.**

Having said that, below are some **suggested guidelines and examples**, which are **not prescriptive**, but **simply suggestive**, that will assist you to determine the amount of the first fruits. At the risk of sounding repetitious, I want to stress that these guidelines for calculating first fruits in our modern economy are not binding, as they are not emphatically stated in the Bible. First fruits as a principle is emphatically stated, but its

calculation and administration in our modern economy has to be applied with wisdom, being guided by biblical principles governing first fruits in particular, and biblical principles of financial giving in general.

The suggestions and examples illustrated below are gleaned from Apostle Frans Du Plessis' revelation and research into 1st century Jewish writings on the subject of first fruits. As Israel's economy started to shift away from agriculture to other areas like manufacture, etc., those individuals working and earning income in the now more diverse economy needed guidance as to what amount of their annual income would constitute first fruits. The Rabbis would say that, in the agricultural sector - farming, the first fruits would generally be one-sixtieth ($1/60$), one-fiftieth ($1/50$) or one-fortieth ($1/40$) of the total potential crop of a specific field or lot. One-fortieth would be the greatest and one-sixtieth the least. Here below is an extract from Apostle Frans Du Plessis' teaching notes on 'First Fruits'³⁹:

[Note: 'Terumah' here is the Hebrew reference for 'first fruits']

Rabbis measured a whole lot of fields and determined that between $1/40^{\text{th}}$ & $1/60^{\text{th}}$ of a crop came up first – this was determined as being the first fruits. As Israel moved from agricultural to vocational people they asked, "How can we honour Terumah with our wages?" Rabbis answered, "Between $1/40^{\text{th}}$ & $1/60^{\text{th}}$ of gross income, BUT $1/40^{\text{th}}$ is better than $1/60^{\text{th}}$ ". This **equates to 2.5% to 1.7% of annual income respectively**. In today's terms, this would be one week's salary or 2% of your annual gross income in the first month.

The Mishnah – Written about 180AD

This is partly Rabbinical law and partly rabbinical commentary on the OT Scriptures. The fourth volume is thick and focused all on Terumah. This indicates that Terumah was still being practiced by Jews beyond Jesus' time on earth. Hence it would have been "standard practice" during His time on earth.

Didache - The teaching of the twelve apostles to the first century church – not the Bible – but reliable writing. Didache 13 – the whole chapter is on the Terumah offering. This was written about 80AD.

Quote from Didache : “If you have a Pastor who is willing to live among you and teach you the Word and sow into your spirit, he is worthy of your Terumah. If you don’t have a Pastor who is worthy of your Terumah then give your Terumah to the poor. Whatever you do, don’t eat the first fruits.”

Hillel, who was in charge of the biggest rabbinical school in Israel, said, “If a person honours Terumah at 1/40th level, his eye is said to be **full of light**. If he honours Terumah at a 1/50th level his eye is said to be a **middling eye**. If he honours Terumah at a 1/60th level that person has an **evil eye**”.

For Normal Working Individuals: First fruits, in our modern economic context, refers to a minimum of **the first week’s income received in a specific calendar year**. One (1) out of fifty-two (52) weeks in a given calendar year represents 1.92%. In practical terms, for working persons, this translates to **approximately 25% of first gross monthly income - given once in a year, or roughly 2% (1.92%) of annual gross income**.

As indicated earlier in this writing, the Hebrew word, ‘Terumah’, also incorporates first fruits. Dr. Stephen Everett notes the following in his excellent and highly recommended writing, ‘The New Testament Principle of Stewardship’: “*Since the first fruits offering was a heave offering, the Hebrew word Terumah was connected. Terumah, the Hebrew word for heave offering, was built from the concept ‘Terei Mimeah’, which means “two out of a hundred or two percent.*”⁴⁰

For Businesses⁴¹: A business entity should honour the Lord with first fruits, tithes and offerings. The business owner(s) should observe tithing and first fruiting based on their share of dividends/profits received, as this is treated as personal income. For the business entity itself, first fruits translate to **approximately 25% of monthly turnover (sales/revenue)**

– given once in a year, or approximately 2% (1.92%) of annual total turnover (sales/revenue).

Many use the principle of **'profit' (either gross or net profit)** to determine their first fruits and tithe from a business. I personally do not suggest or advocate this. Here is the reason. A farmer in ancient Israel determined his first fruits easily. It was simply the first ripened products from the entire field or farm at harvest time. These products (and thus their associated market value) were given entirely as first fruits, without deducting any production costs like labour, rental, capital, interest, etc. For this reason, it is my view that **business revenue or total sales (turnover) is a more accurate representation of the business' activity** and performance in the marketplace, and hence should be used as the principle for determining both the business tithe and first fruits.

In whichever case - of a working individual, business owner(s) or business itself - the bedrock principle of first fruits is simply **'THAT WHICH COMES IN FIRST'** (the first week's income or turnover). Businesses having legal personality should observe first fruits and tithes as 'businesses'. If and when the owners of the business receive a monthly income, this is their personal income, and those individuals should also observe the personal offering of first fruits and tithes in the manner suggested above. The business, as a legal PERSON, should give first fruits determined by whatever indication of turnover comes in first in a specific calendar or financial year. (Many businesses use the tax year or financial year as their calendar year)

Below are two practical examples as **suggested** applications of the giving of first fruits from monthly income earned by an individual working for an employer⁴²:

[The 'R' in these examples refer to 'Rands', the currency of exchange in South Africa. Simply apply the corresponding values to the currency used in your country]

***Example 1:** Income in the first month of your calendar year or cycle

Gross Monthly Income of the First Month	=	R 20 000
Minus First Fruits		
(25% - applicable to first month only)	= -	<u>R 5 000</u>
Balance	=	R 15 000
Minus Tithe (i.e., 10% of R 15 000)	= -	<u>R 1 500</u>
Final Balance	=	R 13 500

Thus, total amount offered in the first month
 First Fruits (R 5 000) + Tithe (R 1 500) = R 6 500

***Example 2:** Income in the first month of your calendar year or cycle

Gross Monthly Income of the First Month	=	R 110 000
Minus First Fruits		
(25% - applicable to first month only)	= -	R 27 500
Balance	=	R 82 500
Minus Tithe (i.e., 10% of R 82 500)	= -	R 8 250
Final Balance	=	R 74 250

Thus, total amount offered in the first month
 First Fruits (R 27 500) + Tithe (R 8 250) = R 35 750

- * The examples above do not take into account '**offerings**', which is determined by the giver. Also, **these examples of first fruits only apply to the first month in a calendar year**, not every month, whereas the tithe and offerings apply every month.

A WORD OF CAUTION: Again, it must be stressed that one must not get too technical about this matter on the one hand, and yet on the other, there must not be a casual approach to it. **I personally know of individuals whose faith is at the level of giving their entire first month's salary as first fruits.** Others I know, as directed by the Lord, give more than this. If first fruits are new to you, start with offering the first week's income. Then

as your faith grows and the Holy Spirit leads you, you may increase it if you desire or as the Holy Spirit instructs and guides you to. Remember - this suggestion to increase it is not prescriptive, but a challenge.

FIRST FRUITS AND SPIRITUAL SIGHT OR LIGHT

Rabbis believed that the eye with more light offers the greater (1/40) instead of the lesser (1/60) portion of the field. One fortieth (1/40) equates to 2,5% of annual income or turnover. [The examples illustrated above are pitched at 1,92% (approx. 2%) of annual income which is (1/52)]. It is also my personal conviction that as your spiritual sight and degree of revelation grows, so too will your observance of first fruits grow in greater and more faith-filled financial expressions. Jesus hinted at this in Matthew 6:19-24 when, within the context of stating the impossibility of serving both God and mammon and directing your treasure to where your heart is, He also said:

²² “The **eye is the lamp** of the **body**; so then if your **eye is clear**, your **whole body** will be **full of light**. ²³ “But if your **eye is bad**, your **whole body will be full of darkness**. If then the light that is in you is darkness, how great is the darkness!
(**Matthew 6:22-23**)

May the determination of your first fruits be a function of the measure of light within your eye - your spiritual perception - from the Holy Spirit's illumination in your spirit, and not from the human intellect of your soul. (This portion of Scripture above is discussed in greater detail in Chapter 20)

FIRST FRUITS, FAITH AND OBEDIENCE

I maintain that first fruits grow as your faith grows. Abel offered the firstlings of his flock BY FAITH.

By faith Abel offered to God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain through which he obtained witness that **he was righteous**, ... (Hebrews 11:4a - NKJV)

Faith can, does and must grow in us progressively. When faith grows, obedience does too, for faith without obedient works is dead. “By faith Abraham, when he was called, obeyed ...” (Heb. 11:8a). Faith’s objective is to establish the principle of obedience solidly in our lives, where we do not negotiate obeying God, but simply do so reflexively. In obeying the principle of first fruits, Abel obtained a testimony that he was righteous. Righteousness is compliance with God’s predetermined, eternal standards for every aspect of living. The man who practises righteousness is righteous (1 John 3:7). Thus, obedience by faith to first fruits testifies of your righteousness as God’s son. (The crucial role that faith plays is discussed in chapter 19)

Do not be governed by mathematics when determining first fruits. It is fine to start there, but as you grow spiritually, allow the Holy Spirit to illumine your spirit. As your faith grows, so too will your obedience take on a more courageous and fearless dimension that will be reflected in increased levels of first fruits giving.

WHEN ELSE SHOULD FIRST FRUITS BE GIVEN?

Apart from honouring God with our first fruits annually at the beginning of a particular yearly cycle in the first month of that cycle, there are other instances when first fruits are offered during the course of that year. As stated in this writing, first fruits is plural, not singular.

The general principle is **whatever income represents to you the ‘first’ or ‘earliest’ should be given as first fruits**. Further to this, one could

apply the first fruits principle, **not just to the start of the calendar year**, but **whenever** one receives **the first part of a recurrent income** - in a **specific category**.

The first of all the **first fruits of EVERY KIND** and every contribution **OF EVERY KIND**, from all your contributions, ... (**Ezekiel 44:30a**)

Below are some **suggested** instances when first fruits should also be given. These are **not meant to be prescriptive**. They are just general guidelines. One must be governed by the spirit of willingness and generosity in giving. The 'spirit' of giving is greater than the 'law' of giving.

- The **first week's wages** in a **specific calendar year**. (25% of first monthly salary or 2% of annual income - as discussed earlier)
- The first week's salary received in a **NEW** job. (25% of first monthly salary or 2% of annual income)
- The **first commission** received if your remuneration is commissioned-based.
- The **first week's turnover** made in business. (25% of monthly turnover or 2% of annual turnover - as discussed earlier)
- The entire portion of a **salary increase** in the specific month of the increase only - once off, i.e., the portion of the salary increment.

And as soon as the commandment came abroad, the children of Israel brought in abundance the **first fruits of corn, wine, and oil, and honey**, and of **all the INCREASE of the field**; and the tithe of all things brought they in abundantly. (**2 Chronicles 31:5**)

Standard employment contracts have a salary increase clause. This usually applies annually. Therefore, in the first month when we receive the increase, **we give the entire portion of the increase to God as first fruits and give a tithe and offerings off the balance of the original salary prior to the increase. From the second**

month it is then part of our salary package and we begin to tithe off the new increased gross salary. The book of Proverbs reminds us to “**Honour** the Lord with your possessions and with **the first fruits** of all your **INCREASE**” (Prov. 3:8 - NKJV).

Example: If in a specific month you are earning R25 000, and you receive an increment of R1 500, thus giving you a new salary of R26 500, the amount of the increase, i.e., R1 500, should be given as first fruits in the month in which it is received - **once off** - not every month; 10% of the remaining R25 000, i.e., R2 500, should be given as a tithe. In subsequent months, the normal tithe (R 2650) plus offerings should be given.

The Hebrew word for ‘increase’ is ‘tebuah’, meaning ‘**a crop, a harvest, an increase, a revenue**’⁴³.

Whilst this word indicates produce or yield from the ground, it also refers to any increase or prosperity in general, e.g., as seen in **Proverbs 14:4b**: ‘... much **revenue** comes by the strength of the ox.’ The word ‘revenue’ in Hebrew is the same word ‘tebuah’ for increase above.

“... but **abundant** crops come by the strength of the ox.”
(Prov. 14:4b - ESV)

- **The first of any form of financial receipt within that calendar year, if that receipt of financial income is perpetual and recurrent**, i.e., there is anticipation or expectation that there would be future such financial receipts in that calendar year. Examples: the first honourarium; first financial gift received; the first sale made; the first commission; etc.

WHAT ABOUT BONUSES AND THIRTEENTH CHEQUES?

When you get your bonus, it is part of your salary package (it is not an increase) and you should tithe off it. This bonus represents a payment in recognition of your contribution by your employer, which in some instances, is not guaranteed, and thus should be regarded as a blessing from the Lord. In determining your first fruits, this bonus must therefore also be considered.

Consider the following example of a person earning a gross salary of R10 000 per month over 12 months, and in addition, receives a bonus in the form of a 13th cheque of R10 000. The annual gross salary would therefore be R130 000 (i.e., R10 000 X 13). If the first fruits are calculated as approximately 2% of gross annual salary, this amounts to R2 600.

REFLECT

1. First fruit giving is recommended as at least 2% of gross annual, or 25% of monthly income or turnover, based on estimates of the yield of farmers in biblical times. What is the general principle governing the determination of first fruits?
2. First fruits are always plural, i.e., there are many types of occasions when they should be given. Isolate the different instances when first fruits giving should be observed.

The 'trusting' man is a
'generously giving' man.



Blessed is the man who trusts in the Lord
And whose trust is the Lord.

Jer.17:7

Trust and Obey

Psalm 112 paints a portrait of an extremely generous man, whose giving, especially to the poor, expresses and establishes his inward righteousness. This man fears the Lord, i.e., has a deep reverence for God. His liberal giving of finances is further explained as being evidence of the fact that he TRUSTS the Lord, and hence does not fear bad news of any kind. The ‘trusting’ man is a ‘generously giving’ man.

He will **not fear evil tidings**; His **heart is steadfast, trusting** in the Lord. (**Psalm 112:7**)

Without a solid TRUST in God, we will not excel in financial giving of any kind, whether first fruits, tithes or a diverse range of offerings, to degrees that we should. Giving is about WHO we trust. Every time we give, we demonstrate where and in whom our trust lies.

Trust is an essential component of faith in God. Biblically, what does trust in God mean?

In Hebrew, the word ‘**trust**’ stems from two primary words. The first is ‘**aman**’, meaning simply ‘**to believe**’⁴⁴. The other is ‘**batah**’, meaning ‘**to rely on, depend on,**’ with the sense of **being completely confident and feeling utterly safe**’.⁴⁵

The Greek word for trust is ‘**pisteuo**’, meaning ‘**to believe, be convinced of something**; in a more specific way, “**to have faith**” in God.’⁴⁶

To trust God is to simply **believe Him, rely and depend on Him with unswerving faith, and have the accompanying sense of deep-rooted confidence and complete safety or security in Him.**

How do we express trust in the Lord? By obeying the principles of His Word.

He who **GIVES ATTENTION to the WORD** will find GOOD, and blessed is he who **TRUSTS in the Lord.**
(Proverbs 16:20)

Trust or faith in God is a belief in, dependance on and confidence in God, that is not just without solid foundation, but vested fully in principles and promises of God IN HIS WORD. You cannot say that you trust God without fully obeying His Word. Obeying His Word is how you trust Him.

Hezekiah's financial reformation is referenced in this writing. He called the nation back to observing first fruits, tithes and offerings. The basis of his authoritative call was that he TRUSTED GOD.

⁵ **He TRUSTED in the Lord God of Israel;** so that after him was **NONE LIKE HIM** among all the kings of Judah, nor any that were before him. ⁶ For **he CLEAVED to the Lord,** and **DEPARTED not from FOLLOWING him,** but **KEPT his COMMANDMENTS.** (2 Kings 18:5,6)

Hezekiah did the following:

- He trusted in God.
- The quality of his trust in God distinguished him from all other kings before and after him.
- He cleaved to the Lord.
- He never departed from following God.
- He kept God's Commandment or Word.

Your 'CLAIM' to 'TRUST' God will be evidenced and proven by how fervently you 'CLEAVE' to the PRINCIPLES of GOD'S WORD. You cannot say on one hand, "I TRUST GOD", yet on the other hand, you say "I will disregard God's will on various/specific matters". Show me how much you TRUST God by how you love God's WORD and OBEY IT.

This is how you CLEAVE to the Lord and DO NOT DEPART from Him.

FIRST FRUITS DEMONSTRATES TRUST IN GOD

One of the main references to **honouring God** with first fruits is found in Proverbs 3, in which this practice is prefaced by a command to first **trust in God with all your heart**.

¹ My son, do not **forget my teaching**, But let your heart **keep my commandments**; ² For length of days and years of life and peace they will add to you. ³ Do not let **kindness and truth leave you**; Bind them around your neck, Write them on the tablet of your heart. ⁴ So you will **find favor and good repute In the sight of God and man**. ⁵ **Trust in the Lord with all your heart And do not lean on your own understanding**. ⁶ **In all your ways acknowledge Him**, And He will make **your paths straight**. ⁷ **Do not be wise in your own eyes**; Fear the Lord and turn away from evil. ⁸ It will be healing to your body And refreshment to your bones. ⁹ **Honor the Lord from your wealth** And from the first of all your produce; ¹⁰ So your barns will be filled with plenty And your vats will overflow with new wine. (**Proverbs 3:1-10**)

Take the time to read Prov. 3:1-10 slowly and meditatively. **If you cannot fulfil Proverbs 3:1, you cannot do Proverbs 3:5, and thus, you fail to access the blessing of Proverbs 3:6**. You will therefore also **not be able to practise Proverbs 3:9** and consequently, **never experience Proverbs 3:10**. It all starts with Proverbs 3:1; get this right, and the rest will follow automatically.

Verse 1 references, "MY SON". In this whole passage, God addresses you as HIS SON. In other words, this is YOUR FATHER talking to you. He is your PAPA, your DADDY - and HE is simply asking you to:

- V.1:** Not forget His Word and principles but obey them
V.5: Trust Him with ALL YOUR HEART and ... **V.6:** ... in ALL YOUR WAYS
V.9: Honour Him financially in and with all your finances including first fruits

... AND GOD WILL ...

V.10 Burst your Barns and Overflow your Vats!

Verse 5 instructs us to trust in the Lord with our whole heart. This cannot be done without fulfilling the principles located in verses 1 to 4, which stress keeping the Word or commandments of God.

First fruits provide tacit evidence as to where our trust is. When we give first fruits, we are boldly declaring that we trust in God for our total welfare and well-being. Our trust is not in our jobs or people, but in God, our source of all blessing.

TRUST GOD AND NOT YOUR OWN UNDERSTANDING

Trust in the Lord with all your heart And do not **lean** on your own understanding. (**Proverbs 3:5**)

Proverbs 3:5-6 teaches that we cannot simultaneously TRUST God and LEAN on our own understanding. One of the two must give way to the other. **God desires that we trust Him totally and completely. God does not want to compete with human intellect or reasoning.** He desires that we trust Him and Him only, and that our trust is WHOLE-HEARTED.

Trust demands that we deliberately place our reliance and dependence on God in a particular matter, and not place great store by our own strength to accomplish a desired outcome. The issue of trust is about 'on whom' or 'on what' are you leaning or depending upon.

Our own understanding, specifically the mind of an unrenewed area of our human intellect and understanding, is no reliable foundation for us to

place our trust in. We are not called upon to abandon our understanding, but we are warned not to LEAN upon it.

DO NOT TRUST IN RICHES

Read through the following Scriptures, which warn us not to trust in earthly riches or wealth.

He who **trusts in his riches will fall**, But the **righteous will flourish like the green leaf.** (Proverbs 11:28)

If riches increase, do not set your heart upon them. (Psalm 62:10b)

And the one on whom seed was sown among **the thorns**, this is the man who **hears the word**, and the **worry of the world** and the **deceitfulness of wealth choke the word**, and it becomes **unfruitful.** (Matthew 13:22)

⁶ But **godliness** actually is a means of great gain when accompanied by **contentment.** ⁷ For we have brought nothing into the world, so we cannot take anything out of it either. ⁸ If we have **food and covering, with these we shall be content.** ⁹ But those who **want to get rich fall into temptation and a snare** and many foolish and harmful desires which plunge men into ruin and destruction. ¹⁰ For the **love of money is a root of all sorts of evil**, and some by **longing for** it have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs. (1 Timothy 6:6-10)

‘Longing for’ is framed as ‘coveted after’ in the KJV (v.10).

The Greek word for ‘**longing for**’ is ‘**orégo**, meaning ‘**to stretch oneself out in order to touch or to grasp something, to reach after or desire**

something⁴⁷; to covet, long after, desire, try to gain, be ambitious; to indulge in, to love⁴⁸.

The rich in this world are specifically instructed not to trust in their wealth, but in GOD, by being generous in giving and doing good, thereby storing up incorruptible treasures in Heaven.

¹⁷ Instruct those who are **rich in this present world** not to be **conceited or to fix their hope on the uncertainty of riches**, but **on God**, who richly supplies us with all things to enjoy.

¹⁸ Instruct them to **do good**, to be **rich in good works**, to be **generous** and **ready to share**, ¹⁹ storing up for themselves the treasure of a good foundation for the future, so that they may take hold of that which is life indeed. **(1 Timothy 6:17-19 - NASB)**

¹⁷ **Teach** those who are **rich** in this world **not to be proud** and not to **trust in their money, which is so unreliable**. Their trust should be in God, who richly gives us all we need for our enjoyment. ¹⁸ Tell them to **use their money to do good**. They should be **rich in good works** and **generous to those in need**, always being **ready to share with others**. ¹⁹ By doing this they will be **storing up their treasure** as a **good foundation for the future** so that they may experience true life. **(1 Timothy 6:17-19 - NLT)**

The rich are instructed to guard against pride and conceit. The rich are encouraged not to fix their hope or place their trust in money or riches, but in God, the source of riches. They are to do this by using their **wealth to do good works and sharing generously with the needy**- and to do all this with a 'READY' or willing mind.

Now whilst these commands apply to the rich, they do not exclude the not-so-rich or the poor. The point being made here is that those who are rich in good works and with generosity, helping the needy, are **testifying to their rich state**. I will challenge you to evidence your truly rich state by doing what is commanded here, no matter what your economic position is.

Riches are to be used to honour God and His servants financially, finance the growth of the Kingdom of God, the good of humanity, relief to the poor, etc. Wealth, although potentially useful and critically essential for the advance of God's purposes in the earth, if wrongly administrated with selfish and self-indulgent mentalities, is the most unreliable of things. Its only true purpose and value, spiritually, would be to the degree to which it is used to facilitate the movements of God's purposes.

IT IS POSSIBLE TO BE RICH IN MONEY IN THIS LIFE, AND NOT RICH TOWARD GOD.

But God said to him, 'You fool! This very night your soul is required of you; and now who will own what you have prepared?' **So is the man who stores up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God.**" (Luke 12:20,21)

It is also very possible to be financially rich in this world and to be simultaneously spiritually rich. Jesus said that with God, this reality is possible! (Matt. 19:24-26).

All giving, including first fruits, testify that you are TRUSTING GOD, and not trusting in your MONEY or WEALTH. When we give, we lay up treasures in Heaven and declare our richness toward God.

Many people love the book of Proverbs and use its many powerful principles of wisdom to condition their attitude and behaviour - and to enhance their personal success and effectiveness in this life. Proverbs 3:5 and 3:9 must also be installed into our lifestyles, viz. Trust God (v.5) and Honour Him with your wealth (substance) and the FIRST FRUITS of your increase (v.9). The twin issues of 'TRUST' and 'HONOUR' are key facets of first fruits. We express trust (faith) in God and honour Him by honouring those whom He has positioned as our spiritual leaders over us (1Thess. 5.12,13).

(Refer to chapters 10 and 11 for more on the issue of 'honour'; You may access a more comprehensive treatment on the subject of TRUST from my website⁴⁹.)

REFLECT

1. Trust in God is not some nebulous thing. It must be evidenced outwardly in practice. Biblically, how do we trust God?
2. Prov. 3:1-10 is a key passage when considering the issue of first fruits. The command to honour God with first fruits is in verse 9 and the associated blessing in verse 10. What bearing does verse 1 to 8 have on verse 9 and 10?
3. Trusting in riches is dangerous and hence not advocated. How do we, no matter our levels of income, actively demonstrate our non-reliance on wealth or money itself, but in Christ as our source?



First fruits are rooted
in the principle of honour.



Now a man ... brought the man
of God bread of the first fruits.

2 Kings 4:42a

To Whom Must First Fruits Be Given?

In the Old Covenant, tithes were given to the Levites. A tithe of this collected tithe was given to the High Priest. First fruits were also directed to the High Priest or the spiritual leader in a designated context (e.g., Elisha, a prophet, received first fruits - 2 Kings 4:42-44).

Note the following scriptures:

²⁰ Then the LORD said to **Aaron**: “You shall have **no inheritance in their land**, nor shall you have any portion among them; **I am your portion** and **your inheritance among the children of Israel**. ²¹ “Behold, I have given the **children of Levi all the tithes in Israel** as an inheritance in return for the work which they perform, the work of the tabernacle of meeting. (**Numbers 18:20-21**)

² that you shall **take some of the first of all the produce** of the ground which you bring in from your land that the Lord your God gives you, and you shall put it in a basket and go **to the place where the Lord your God chooses to establish His name**. ³ “You shall go **TO THE PRIEST** who is **in office at that** time and say to him, ‘I declare this day to the Lord my God that **I have entered the land** which the Lord swore to our fathers to give us.’ ⁴ “Then the **PRIEST shall take** the basket from your hand and set it down before the altar of the

Lord your God. (**Deuteronomy 26:2-4**)

Then the Lord spoke to Moses, saying, “Speak to the sons of Israel and say to them, ‘When you **enter the land** which I am going to give to you and **reap its harvest**, then you shall bring in the sheaf of the **first fruits of your harvest TO THE PRIEST. (Leviticus 23:9,10)**

¹ “The **Levitical priests, the whole tribe of Levi**, shall have no portion or inheritance with Israel; **they shall eat the Lord’s offerings by fire and His portion.** ² “They shall have no inheritance among their countrymen; the Lord is their inheritance, as He promised them. ³ “Now **THIS SHALL BE THE PRIESTS DUE FROM THE PEOPLE**, from those who offer a sacrifice, either an ox or a sheep, of which they shall give to the priest the shoulder and the two cheeks and the stomach. ⁴ “You shall **GIVE HIM THE FIRST FRUITS of your grain, your new wine, and your oil, and the first shearing of your sheep.** ⁵ “For the **Lord your God has CHOSEN HIM** and his sons from all your tribes, **to stand and SERVE in the name of the Lord forever. (Deuteronomy 18:1-5)**

³⁵ and that they might **bring the first fruits** of our ground and **the first fruits** of all the **fruit of every tree** to the house of the **Lord annually**, ³⁶ and bring to the house of our God the **firstborn** of our sons and of our cattle, and the **firstborn** of our herds and our flocks as it is written in the law, **FOR THE PRIESTS** who are **ministering in the house of our God.** ³⁷ We will also bring the **first of our dough**, our contributions, the fruit of every tree, the new wine and the oil **to the PRIESTS** at the chambers of the house of our God, and the **tithe of our ground to the Levites**, for the Levites are they who receive the tithes in all the rural towns. ³⁸ The priest, the son of Aaron, shall be with the Levites when the Levites receive tithes, and the Levites shall bring up the tenth of the tithes to the house of our

God, to the chambers of the storehouse.³⁹ For the sons of Israel and the sons of Levi shall bring the contribution of the grain, the new wine and the oil to the chambers; there are the utensils of the sanctuary, the priests who are ministering, the gatekeepers and the singers. **Thus we will not neglect the house of our God. (Nehemiah 10:35-39)**

On that day **men were also appointed** over the **chambers for the stores, the contributions (offerings*), the first fruits and the tithes**, to gather into them from the fields of the cities the **portions required by the law** for the **PRIESTS and Levites**; for Judah rejoiced over **the priests and Levites who served. (Nehemiah 12:44) (*author's insertion)**

“The first of all the **first fruits of every kind** and every contribution of every kind, from all your contributions, **shall be for the PRIESTS; you shall also give to the PRIEST the first** of your dough to **cause a blessing to rest on your house. (Ezekiel 44:30)**

MODERN DAY APPLICATION:

The High Priest is representative of the set-man or spiritual father. This individual is usually the senior elder (usually called “Pastor”) of a ministry. Levites symbolically have reference to ‘five-fold’ elders and other personnel who labour in the house of the Lord to ensure its effective and efficient functioning. Tithes are used to sustain all who are employed full time in the house of God.

First fruits, offered to the Lord, are given to your spiritual father or leader, as a representative priest of the Lord in your life. Many have problems with giving their first fruits to their spiritual father, yet if they were living in ancient Israel, they would have had to comply with a command to give first fruits to an individual, not an institution. Much of the difficulty that many have today with giving their first fruits to their spiritual

father has to do with their inability to regard their spiritual father as a representative of the Lord - refer to my audio series on Spiritual Fathering and Sonship available on my website⁵⁰. First fruits are not to be given to the 'Church' as an institution, but to the person whom God has called to be the primary grace that provides spiritual covering and nourishment to you. Most of the modern church still thinks institutionally. First fruits were never meant to be institutional in its enactment, but personal.

Israel, as a nation, was a first fruits representation. God wanted to use them as an example of a nation submitted to God and His principles, a privilege they lost because of disobedience and the ultimate rejection of Jesus Christ as Messiah.

“Israel *was* holiness to the LORD, The **first fruits of His increase.**” (Jeremiah 2:3a)

In the Old Covenant, the Levites eventually replaced the nation of Israel as the representation of the first fruits. This was due to the emotional trauma associated with offering the firstborn of human sons to the Lord for His service.

Now behold, **I Myself have taken the Levites** from among the children of Israel **instead of every firstborn who opens the womb among the children of Israel.** Therefore the Levites shall be Mine. (Numbers 3:12)

And you shall take **the Levites for Me** - I *am* the LORD - **instead of all the firstborn among the children** of Israel, and **the livestock of the Levites** instead of all the firstborn among the livestock of the children of Israel. (Numbers 3:41)

Take the Levites instead of all **the firstborn among the children** of Israel, and **the livestock** of the Levites instead of their livestock. The **Levites shall be Mine: I am the LORD.** (Numbers 3:45)

First fruits depicted ownership. Note what God said: “The Levites (first fruits) are MINE.” God takes personal possession of the first fruits. Like the tithe, the first fruits belong to the Lord. When you give your first fruits and tithes, you really have not given anything, since you have merely returned what rightly belongs to the Lord.

The Levites, which included the qualifying priests and High Priests who were from the tribe of Levi in the Old Testament, did not have any land apportioned to them as their inheritance in the land of Canaan (refer to Numbers 18:20,21). God said that HE is to be their inheritance. But to adequately sustain them so that their basic needs were taken care of, God ordained that the rest of all the tribes in Israel give their first fruits to the high priest and their tithes to the Levites, who also tithed a tithe (10%) of the collected tithe to the high priest.

The ministering priesthood, led by the High Priest and his family of sons, was thus part of the first fruits Levitical tribe, which were representative of the entire nation of Israel as God’s first fruits. This ministering priesthood was responsible for the spiritual care and well-being of the nation through their various services undertaken in the Tabernacles of Moses, David and Solomon. The head of this priesthood, the High Priest, received the first fruits by God’s sovereign decision. This was not left for people to decide the destination of their first fruits. These offerings were directed to a conduit, the spiritual leader, through which the grace and Word of God was transmitted to others in that specific context.

All spiritual households of faith have a primary individual responsible for the transmission of grace via the teaching and preaching of God’s Word. This individual should be the recipient of one’s first fruits. First fruits are given in honour of the Lord, represented in and through this individual’s life and work in the Kingdom of God.

Leaders of congregations/households of faith should be well remunerated in honour of the importance, weightedness and serious nature of their work. Apart from their regular salaries or wages which their ministries should provide to them, the first fruits directed to them is an additional portion due to them. This is patterned in the Old Covenant, where the High Priest received the first fruits plus a tithe of the collected tithes. There are important principles governing how this individual should administrate

and dispense the first fruits - these are discussed in the next chapter.

The ministry of God's Word, as an expression of the nurture for God's sons under one's oversight, is in my estimate, one of the most serious, noble and significant responsibilities and 'occupations' in this life. If you doubt my estimate, then just for one single week, remove all preachers from Earth ... and see what havoc will ensue. Thus, if you have an accurate, committed and sincere spiritual leader/father, who takes the responsibility of communicating God's Word seriously, and is doing everything in his/her power to facilitate your spiritual growth and development, it should be your highest honour to bless them financially to the best of your capacity.

A reminder of a quote from the Didache:

“If you have a pastor who is willing to live among you and teach you the Word and sow into your spirit, he is worthy of your Terumah. If you don't have a Pastor who is worthy of your Terumah, then give your Terumah to the poor. Whatever you do, don't eat the first fruits.”⁵¹

'Terumah' was one of the Hebrew words which incorporated a wide range of offerings and was also referable to first fruits.

Abraham directed his financial giving to Melchisedek, a priest of God, who functioned as Abraham's spiritual father (Gen.14). It is important that the first fruits be given to the correct person and must not be mis-directed. It must go to your 'Melchisedek' - the representative of Christ in your life. This person may re-direct the finances to wherever he deems necessary, e.g., to the poor, others in need, his own personal needs (See Deut. 18:8), etc.

SPIRITUAL LEADERS MUST BE FAITHFUL IN GIVING

All local churches or spiritual families need to be under the apostolic covering of legitimate apostles (apostolic fathers). The senior elder or spiritual father of the local household of faith should be in an active relationship

with this apostolic father.

A leader of a local congregation, in his personal capacity, should give first fruits to the apostolic leader that he relates to - i.e., his spiritual father in the faith. Also, the church corporately should practise the giving of first fruits from the corporate tithes and offerings collected - given upward to the apostle or person that provides spiritual oversight to the spiritual father of the house.

Spiritual leaders must be faithful in these things and demonstrate that, what is expected of the sons of God under their oversight, also applies to them, in reference to their relationship with their apostolic father. The level of giving by sons within the house will not rise above the level of faithful giving by the leader of the house. People are activated to give more by the example of giving they see in their leader, than by the teaching on giving taught by that leader.

Remember your leaders who taught you the word of God.
Think of all the good that has come from their lives, and
follow the example of their faith. (**Hebrews 13:7 - NLT**)

Leaders lead more by the practical correctness of their example than by the accuracy of their polished explanations.

THE FIRST FRUITS PRINCIPLE IS IMPORTANT TO OBEY, IRRESPECTIVE OF THE FINANCIAL STANDING OF THE LEADER

The financial standing of the person receiving the first fruits is to have no bearing at all on a decision to give first fruits to them. The observance of the biblical principle is what is important, not the economic status of the recipient. Note the following Scripture:

³ “These are the parts the priests may claim as their share from the cattle, sheep, and goats that the people bring as offerings: the shoulder, the cheeks, and the

stomach. ⁴ You must also give to the priests the first share of the grain, the new wine, the olive oil, and the wool at shearing time. ⁵ For the Lord your God chose the tribe of Levi out of all your tribes to minister in the Lord's name forever. ⁶ "Suppose a Levite chooses to move from his town in Israel, wherever he is living, to the place the Lord chooses for worship. ⁷ He may minister there in the name of the Lord his God, just like all his fellow Levites who are serving the Lord there. ⁸ **He may eat his share of the sacrifices and offerings, even if he also receives support from his family.** (Deuteronomy 18:3-8 - NLT)

The Principle is Clear: The present financial standing of the spiritual father does not determine whether or not you should offer him/her your first fruits. Honour the principle irrespective of his/her financial standing. Be faithful to be governed by biblical principles and not by your perception about the financial status of your spiritual father.

A Brief Case Study: After the defeat of the Midianites in Numbers 31, Moses commanded that the spoil or booty be collected, that half be given to the soldiers and half to the people. Of the half given to the people, one in 50 of every item collected was to be given to the Levites. Of the half given to the soldiers, one in 500 of every item collected was to be given to Eleazar the priest - i.e., to him personally - this was his.

Moses gave the levy which was the **Lord's offering to Eleazar the priest**, just as the Lord had commanded Moses. (Numbers 31:41)

Note the Principle: The phrase "**the Lord's offering to Eleazar**", indicates to us that offerings given to your **spiritual father/leader** are essentially **given to the Lord**.

To appreciate just how much Eleazar personally received, study the following table:

Item of Booty	Total Collected	↓		↓	
		Half to Soldiers	1 in 500 Given to Eleazar the Priest	Half to the People	1 in 50 Given to the Levites (Tribe of Levi)
Sheep	675 000	337 500	675	337 500	6 750
Beeves	72 000	36 000	72	36 000	720
Asses	61 000	30 500	61	30 500	610
Persons	32 000	16 000	32	16 000	320

HONOUR DRIVES THE GIVING OF FIRST FRUITS

Read Proverbs 3:9 in the following Bible versions:

NASB: HONOUR the Lord from your WEALTH and from the FIRST OF ALL your PRODUCE.

NKJV: HONOUR the Lord with your POSSESSIONS, and with the FIRST FRUITS of all your INCREASE.

KJV: HONOUR the Lord with thy SUBSTANCE, and with the FIRST FRUITS of all thine INCREASE.

Note that when we give our first fruits, we HONOUR the Lord. **First fruits is not about money per se. It is really about ‘honour’ for the Lord, represented in and through your spiritual father He has placed in and over your life.** Honour suggests that you, in your mind, have a high esteem which you ascribe to God and your spiritual leader.

The Hebrew word for ‘honour’ is ‘kabad’ meaning ‘to make heavy or weighty’⁵².

When applied to God, the word ‘honour’ represents a quality of high regard or great esteem ascribed to Him, by which He is recognised. When you honour someone, you regard and treat them with dignity, respect and distinction. It has reference to how one esteems God and His Word in your heart and mind, and often calls for doing something tangible to demonstrate this.

The principle of sacrifices and offerings given were indicative of honour.

You have not brought to Me the sheep of your burnt offerings, **Nor have you honored Me with your sacrifices. I have not burdened you with offerings**, Nor wearied you with incense. (**Isaiah 43:23**)

In Joshua 7:19, Joshua pleads with Achan (who sinned by taking the accursed thing from the enemy camp) to honour the Lord by confessing his sin (the Hebrew word for glory in this verse is ‘kabed’ meaning to honour).

And Joshua said unto Achan, My son, give, I pray thee, **glory** to the Lord God of Israel, and make confession unto him; and tell me now what thou hast done; hide it not from me. (**Joshua 7:19 - KJV**)

In this and similar circumstances, **“giving honour” always refers to doing something**; what Achan was to do was to tell the truth.

We either honour or dishonour God with our money, specifically how we handle our first fruits. The city of Jericho was to be a kind of first fruits given to God. Israel could not enjoy the spoil from the conquest of Jericho. They could enjoy the spoil of subsequently conquered cities as they would be directed. The spoil of Jericho was to be ‘devoted’ to the Lord. Specifically, Israel was not to touch any of the gold, silver, bronze or iron - this was to be preserved for the Temple.

Achan secretly took a Babylonian garment, two hundred shekels of silver and a bar of gold weighing fifty shekels. In essence, **that which was reserved to be first fruits to the Lord, he took for himself and hid it in**

his tent. For this, he suffered a judgement of death. When we touch the Lord's portion, we incur judgement on ourselves. In what way? This sin of Achan negatively affected the potential success of subsequent battles - read Joshua 7 and 8. **The neglect of the first fruits practice can impede the experience of your potential future harvest in God.**

Proverbs 3:9 explains how we can bring honour to the Lord - by giving him the first fruits of our substance. The Hebrew word for 'substance' is the word 'hon' which means 'wealth or sufficiency'⁵³. The way in which you honour God with your wealth is by giving Him the 'first fruits'.

'Honour' is akin to the word 'glory'. Glory is always 'ascribed' to another. It must be perceived or recognised. Financial first fruits are based upon a perceived recognition of the grace and glory carried within one's spiritual leader, from whom you derive direct, positive spiritual benefit and impact through the Word that is taught.

Many times, where honour is lacking, first fruits observance will be difficult or non-existent. I have observed, on the other hand, that where there is a strong spirit and disposition of honour for one's spiritual leader, that not only will the observance of first fruits be easy, but it will also be inevitable. Further to this, I have seen that where honour is sincere and strong, how God supernaturally provides a faith capacity and the necessary provision to the person who observes the practice. **The real issue is not money, but honour.** Money is only used as a means or vehicle to express the honour, since money represents a significant feature of our lives.

Paul argued that ministers of God who dispense of spiritual things should also reap material things.

⁷ Who at any time serves as a soldier at his own expense? **Who plants a vineyard and does not eat the fruit of it? Or who tends a flock and does not use the milk of the flock?** ⁸ I am not speaking these things according to human judgment, am I? Or does not the Law also say these things? ⁹ For it is written in the Law of Moses, "**You shall not muzzle the ox while he is threshing.**" God is not concerned about oxen, is He? ¹⁰ Or is **He speaking** altogether **for our sake?** Yes, for our sake it was written, because the **plowman ought to plow in** hope,

and **the thresher to thresh in hope of sharing the crops.** ¹¹ **If we sowed spiritual things in you, is it too much if we reap material things from you?** ¹² If others share the right over you, do we not more? Nevertheless, we did not use **this right**, but we endure all things so that we will cause **no hindrance to the gospel of Christ.** ¹³ Do you not know that those who perform sacred services eat the food of the temple, and those who **attend regularly to the altar** have **their share from the altar?** ¹⁴ So also the Lord directed **those who proclaim the gospel** to get their **living from the gospel.** ¹⁵ **But I have used none of these things.** And I am not writing these things so that it will be done so in my case; for it would be better for me to die than have any man make my boast an empty one. (1 Corinthians 9:7-15)

Now Paul argues, whilst the ox is threshing, do not muzzle its mouth, but by implication, let him eat freely, for he is labouring for your good. Many believers have a false notion that for a spiritual leader to be spiritual, they need to be poor. They falsely equate spirituality with poverty. They would readily receive profound grace and truth from the mouth of the spiritual leader, yet would not desire for the same individual to eat and be nourished financially too, by virtue of the work they do. This equates to 'muzzling the ox', which we are instructed not to do.

On the other hand, some ministers abuse the privilege of being financially sustained by the Church and fleece their flocks for personal financial enrichment. This is carnal and ungodly and should not be evident in the Kingdom of God. Yet we do see it. In the next chapter, I provide strong caution to spiritual leaders not to abuse first fruits for self-indulgent greed. Do not allow the fact that some leaders abuse the context of the church to feed their personal greed, to tempt you to discount the biblical validity of the right and privilege of spiritual leaders to receive financial sustenance/ blessings from those they minister to.

Paul did not insist upon this right with the Corinthian church for various reasons (e.g., false apostles in Corinth were abusing the church, and he wanted to distance himself from anything that would remotely associate

himself with these false apostles in that specific context). Nevertheless, he made the point that it is his right (1 Cor. 9:12). In fact, Paul stated to the Corinthians that he ‘robbed’ (a figure of speech) other churches by receiving wages from them, to serve the Corinthians, i.e., other churches in other areas, like the Macedonians from Philippi had to supply his need.

⁷ Or did I commit a sin in humbling myself so that you might be exalted, because I preached the gospel of God to you without charge? ⁸ I **robbed other churches** by taking wages from them to serve you; and when I was present with you and was in need, I was not a burden to anyone; ⁹ for when **the brethren came from Macedonia they fully supplied my need**, and in everything I kept myself from being a burden to you, and will continue to do so. (**2 Corinthians 11:7-9**)

Paul stayed for a long time at Corinth - eighteen months to be exact. In this time, he worked hard as a tent maker to sustain himself, so as not to be a burden to the Corinthians, and to distance himself from the exploitative financial behaviour of false apostles in the Corinthian church. He did the same in Thessalonica (1 Thess. 2:9). The fact that he worked, for this reason, did not discount his right to receive financial support from them - but he did not insist upon this right. In 2 Cor 11:9 above, he states that when the brethren came from Macedonia, they supplied his need. These ‘brethren’ were Silas and Timothy, who would have brought with them financial gifts for the apostle, such that he was able to turn his attention more to preaching God’s word, his chief priority.

But when Silas and Timothy came down from **Macedonia**, Paul began **devoting himself completely to the word**, solemnly testifying to the Jews that Jesus was the Christ. (**Acts 18:5**)

It is my view that ministers of God’s Word called to this function on a full-time basis, should receive more than adequate financial remuneration for their labour in the Kingdom of God, so that they could give themselves undistractedly and entirely to the study and ministry of God’s

Word. Paul maintained in 2 Cor. 9:14, that those who preach the gospel should live off the gospel.

Further, spiritual leaders, whether in full-time employment in the church or not, should receive the first fruits from those to whom they provide spiritual oversight, covering and nourishment.

Paul echoes his sentiments regarding remuneration rights of servants of God in **Galatians 6:6**.

Let him who receives instruction in the Word [*of God*] share all good things with his teacher [*contributing to his support*] (**Galatians 6:6 - AMP**)

Those who minister in the ‘**word and doctrine**’ (preaching and teaching) are worthy of **double honour**, which contextually is an above-average expression of financial reward.

The elders who rule well are to be considered worthy of **double honor**, especially those **who work hard at preaching and teaching**. For the Scripture says, “You shall not muzzle the ox while he is threshing,” and “The laborer is worthy of his wages.” (**1 Timothy 5:17,18**)

‘Double honour’ denotes an above-average honour, expressed in financial terms, as suggested by the reference to ‘wages’ in the text above.

Nehemiah brought many reforms to Israel after he rebuilt its walls in fifty-two days. Part of these reforms included a financial reform in re-establishing the practice of first fruits, tithes and offerings, like King Hezekiah did many years before him.

On that day **men were also appointed** over the **chambers for the stores, the contributions (offerings*)**, the **first fruits and the tithes**, to gather into them from the fields of the cities the **portions required by the law** for the **PRIESTS and Levites**; for Judah **rejoiced** over the **priests and Levites who served**. (**Nehemiah 12:44**) (*author's insertion)

The ease with which people obeyed the command to give was borne out of their sincere JOY over the reinstatement of the entire priesthood. The restoration of the priesthood activated the restoration of the giving that related specifically to sustain the priesthood. The people “rejoiced over the priests and Levites who served”. Joy and willingness must always characterise any form of giving to God and His servants. Do you rejoice over your spiritual leader and others who ‘serve’? This joy will express itself in honour financially too. Rejoice over your spiritual leader.

REFLECT

1. First fruits are directed to the individual who provides spiritual oversight and nourishment to you through the impartations of grace via constant teaching and preaching of God’s Word. Validate this principle biblically.
2. Adequate financial reward commensurate with the nobility and gravity of the role of servants of God, who labour in doctrine, is biblical. They are to be honoured financially. Ruminant over how financial honour, inclusive of the giving of first fruits, is a fitting gesture to spiritual leadership.

First fruits given in a spirit of honour by the giver,
must be administrated honourably by the receiver.



Taking precaution so that no one will discredit
us in our administration of this generous gift.

2 Cor. 8:20

Management of First Fruits

First fruits are given from one individual to another individual (the recipient being one's spiritual leader/father). Biblically, this giving is not institutional in the sense that it is directed to a corporate organisation. One's understanding of the principle will determine how one enacts the principle. When I offer first fruits, I intend for this money to go to my spiritual father, to be administrated by him at his sole discretion. I am completely trusting of his Christ-like character and uncompromising integrity in financial matters - thus there is no reservation in my heart when money leaves my hand and goes into his/her hands or leaves my bank account into his/her account or an account managed by him/her.

Some recommend that it is wise for churches to open a first fruits account, in which all monies given to the spiritual father can be deposited. Receiving first fruits in this fashion should be a decision of the spiritual father. This suggestion does create a sense of honesty, openness, transparency, accountability and responsibility in the way the monies are used. If the spiritual father chooses to administrate the reception of first fruits in this fashion, then the management and administration of this account should be the sole preserve of the spiritual father, since the giving of first fruits are directed to him. Where there is concern that accountability structures should be put into place, this should not be to the point where the spiritual father cannot singularly determine how the funds should be spent. To reiterate, **first fruits are a personal matter, not an institutional one.**

How should the first fruits be spent by the spiritual father? This is left entirely to his discretion. Biblically, he is permitted to use it for his personal needs (not greed).

Yes, I am giving you all these holy offerings that the people of Israel bring to the Lord. They are **for you** and your sons and daughters, **to be eaten as your permanent share**. This is an eternal and unbreakable covenant between the Lord and you, and it also applies to your descendants.” (**Numbers 18:19 - NLT**)

They shall eat equal portions, except what they receive from **the sale of their fathers’ estates**. (**Deuteronomy 18:8 - NASB**)

He shall be given his share of the sacrifices and offerings as his right, **not just if he is in need**. (**Deuteronomy 18:8 - Living Bible**)

Wisdom demands that the first fruits portion also be used for other matters, and not just solely for the personal needs of the spiritual leader. It is recommended that first fruits are also used and distributed for **those who have desperate needs or to facilitate the spiritual development of the people**. Although not strictly a first fruit offering, money laid at the apostles’ feet was used to meet the needs of the people:

³² And the congregation of those who believed were of one heart and soul; and not one of them claimed that anything belonging to him was his own, but all things were common property to them. ³³ And with great power the apostles were giving testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and **abundant grace was upon them all**. ³⁴ **For** (*i.e., because* *) **there was not a needy person among them**, for all who were owners of land or houses would **sell them and bring the proceeds of the sales** ³⁵ and **lay them at the apostles’ feet**,

and they **would be distributed to each as any had need.**
 (Acts 4:32-35) (*author's insertion)

Money placed 'at the feet' symbolically alludes to finances providing accelerated momentum to the purposes of God. Spiritual fathers must distinguish between money placed 'at their feet' as compared to money placed 'in their hands' (not literally, but figuratively). Spiritually attuned spiritual fathers will always distribute first fruits wisely and will **not be governed by a love for money**, which causes **selfish indulgent expenditure** of divine resources **in the face of overt dire needs of their people**. One of the requirements for eldership and thus for spiritual fathering is that the person must be **free from the love of money** (Titus 1:7). Paul warned us also not to **'peddle the Word'** (2 Cor. 2:17). Preachers are not to be spiritual hucksters, using deceptive and/or flamboyant tactics in their preaching, with the deplorable motive of exacting finances from God's people for personal enrichment, whilst simultaneously impoverishing the flock of God without concern for their well-being.

For a bishop must be blameless, as a steward of God, not self-willed, not quick-tempered, not given to wine, not violent, **not greedy for money** (Titus 1:7 - NKJV)

For we are not like many, **peddling the word of God**, but as from sincerity, but as from God, we speak in Christ in the sight of God. (2 Corinthians 2:17 - NASB)

In 2 Kings 4:38-44, we read of how **Elisha** used first fruits, comprised of twenty barley loaves given to him during a season of famine, to satisfy the hunger of one hundred of his spiritual sons. The **corporate need in a time of famine took precedence over everything else**, and Elisha wisely and caringly **prioritised the broader need above his own**. Grace multiplied the loaves, since one hundred men ate twenty loaves to more than their satisfaction and still had some left over (Bear in mind that a 'loaf' here was more like a bread bun or bread roll - and not our typical loaf of bread today). Twenty multiplied by FIVE equates to one hundred. Five is

the number of grace. **First fruits in the hands of a spiritually sensitive spiritual father who, led by the Holy Spirit, wisely administrates and distributes it, has the potential to release a flow of grace that will multiply the resource, making it useful and beneficial far beyond its absolute capacity.** (Refer to chapter 17, ‘Supernatural Corporate Provision’ for more on this)

THE ABUSE OR UNWISE USE OF FIRST FRUITS BY A LEADER

Spiritual leaders who abuse the first fruits solely for extravagant and excessive personal expenditures in the face of the dire needs of their people, will have to give an account to God for this behaviour. The first fruits finances must not be irresponsibly spent. The spiritual father should be free from the love of money and should not have a materialistic or covetous spirit.

As much as there is tremendous blessing associated with first fruits on the part of the GIVER of first fruits who **gives this in honour** of the Lord represent in his leader, there is also a potential severe judgement attendant with it on the part of the **RECIPIENT**, if the money is not managed and **spent in a way which ultimately honours the Lord**. Greed, self-indulgence and indifference to the dire needs of others must not govern the administration of first fruits giving.

A BRIEF CASE STUDY OF THE ABUSE OF FIRST FRUITS SOLELY FOR SELFISH, CARNAL INDULGENCE

The sons of Eli, the High Priest, were chided by the Lord for abusing the first fruits. It must be understood that these sons or leaders were essentially backslidden, not even “knowing the Lord”:

Now the **sons of Eli** were **worthless men**; they **did not know the LORD**. (1 Samuel 2:12)

These were inaccurate leaders, not even in a relationship with God Himself. They are also described as ‘worthless’ fellows”. The Hebrew word for ‘worthless’ is ‘eliyyaal’ (Belial), meaning ‘**base, without profit, good for nothing**’⁵⁴. This word often suggests a **strong immoral component** and the concept of **wickedness** (Job 34:18; Prov. 6:12; Nah. 1:11)⁵⁵.

Other uses of the word ‘worthless’ in the Bible, suggest the following about it and thus the sons of Eli. They were wicked to the **core and satanic** - they were literally ‘sons of Belial” (2 Cor. 6:15-16). They **abused and misused leadership power and privilege** to satisfy **carnal selfish desires**. Their intention is to **lure and seduce large groups away from the Lord**, and/or from the position of exactness (Deut. 13:12-15). They had **overriding and flagrant disregard for rules of social engagement** - again purely for carnal gratification of base needs (Judges 19).⁵⁶

Note how their abuse of first fruits is described:

‘Why do you **kick at My sacrifice** and **at My offering** which I have commanded *in My dwelling*, and honor your sons above Me, by **making yourselves fat with the choicest (or first*) of every offering** of My people Israel?’
(1 Samuel 2:29) (*author's insertion)

The Hebrew word for ‘kick’ is ‘baat’, meaning ‘**kick out; disdain; scorn**’; it refers to a **disrespectful attitude and unholy actions**’.⁵⁷

Greed and covetousness must not be present in those who receive first fruits. A **respectful** and **fearful** attitude is essential in the **handling of the first fruits** received. The very thing designed to bring blessing can result in a curse and judgement if not handled with righteousness and integrity. Eli’s sons ‘fattened’ themselves. This speaks of the **unbridled and undisciplined use of the first fruits**. They used it beyond the satisfaction of their need and went into excessive, personal indulgent abuse of it. This, from a spiritual position, is where they were backslidden. For this, they were severely judged. First fruits, as is the tithe, is a holy offering and as such, a deeply reverential disposition must be present in both the one giving it and the one receiving it.

THE HANDLING OF FIRST FRUITS MUST BE SEEN TO BE HONOURABLE

The administration and distribution of first fruits by the spiritual father or set man must be done so with caution and wisdom, and be **SEEN to be honourable, both before the Lord and men**. Caution must be exercised to not present a self-indulgent, greedy, prideful, excessively lavish lifestyle, especially in the face of dire needs of those you give oversight to.

²⁰ taking precaution so that no one will discredit us **in our administration of this generous gift**; ²¹ for we have regard for **what is honorable, not only in the sight of the Lord, but also in the sight of men.** (2 Corinthians 8:20-21)

Although this reference quoted above refers to a relief offering sent for a specific purpose in mind, and has no bearing on first fruits, the principle of doing “**what is honorable, not only in the sight of the Lord, but also in the sight of men**”, contained in it is still a prudent one to observe when handling first fruits.

GIVING TO THE POOR

A portion of first fruits should be directed to the poor, within the household of faith and beyond it, as determined by the spiritual leader. The Apostle Paul was extremely concerned for the poor.

They only asked us to **remember the poor** - the very thing **I also was eager to do.** (Galatians 2:10)

I encourage you to listen to my teaching on giving to the poor, available in four audio sessions on my website - refer to links in endnotes⁵⁸.

2 Corinthians chapters 8 and 9 are two chapters dealing with financial giving. Many principles can be gleaned from these chapters and applied to any expression of giving to any person. But, the primary focus of these

chapters was the collection of finances for the believers who were in need in Jerusalem. These were largely given by the churches in Macedonia to Paul and his associates (like Timothy and Titus) for the administration and management of the same. The management, administration and distribution of these funds was an apostolic function. Mature, spiritual apostolic fathers like Paul, engaged in the receipt of finances collected for the express purposes of disseminating these to believers in specific jurisdictions where there was a need. I reference this here to demonstrate that spiritual leaders also have a responsibility in this matter of giving to the poor. It is my view that the first fruits received by a leader be also used to minister to the needs of the poor and the disadvantaged.

I personally believe that all churches should help the poor in some way, either financially or through the distribution of food, clothing and other necessary items where the need is dire. Specific individuals should be assigned to lead and manage this under the oversight of the spiritual leader. This is on a local church level and financed through a portion of the tithes and offerings collected.

On a broader corporate church level, a leading apostolic spiritual father over a clan of spiritual families can and should also administrate (through delegation) the collection of finances specifically to help certain sectors of the church which may be in need - just as the Macedonians gave to assist those in need at Jerusalem under Paul's administration.

¹³ For this is not for the ease of others and for your affliction, but by way of **equality** - ¹⁴ at this present time **your abundance** being a **supply for their need**, so that **their abundance** also may become a **supply for your need**, that there may be **equality**; ¹⁵ as it is written, "He **who gathered much** did not have **too much**, and he who **gathered little** had **no lack**." (2 Corinthians 8:13-15)

Apostles and leading spiritual fathers at any level should delegate this function, as they should give themselves completely to the Word and to prayer (Acts 6:4).

REFLECT

Wisdom and godly fear must accompany the management and distribution of first fruit funds. Deeply consider the suggested protocols and biblical principles in reference to this. As a leader, is your management and dissemination of first fruits honourable before the Lord and men?



First fruits bring divine
preservation, protection and provision.



This is an eternal and unbreakable
covenant between the Lord and you.

Num. 18:19b - NLT

Partaking of Grace - Covenant of Salt

Giving financial gifts to one's spiritual father is a biblical way for you to access and thus be a partaker of the grace of God given to him or her to steward. This includes the giving of first fruits. The next chapter, *Accessing Grace Through Financial Giving*, deals more fully with the issue of grace relative to financial giving.

Scripturally, first fruits given to one's spiritual oversight are part of an **'everlasting covenant of salt'** between God and **His servants who represent Him in fatherly leadership of people**. Read the following passage carefully in which God is addressing Aaron, the High Priest, within the context of him receiving first fruits.

⁸ **Then the Lord spoke to Aaron**, "Now behold, I Myself have given **you charge of My offerings**, even all the holy gifts of the sons of Israel **I have given them to you as a portion and to your sons** as a perpetual allotment. ⁹ **"This shall be yours** from the most holy gifts reserved from the fire; every offering of theirs, even every grain offering and every sin offering and every guilt offering, which they shall render to Me, **shall be most holy for you and for your sons**. ¹⁰ **"As the most holy gifts you shall eat it**; every male shall eat it. It shall be holy to you. ¹¹ **"This also is yours**, the offering of their gift, even all the wave offerings of the sons of Israel; I have given them to you and to your sons and daughters with you as a perpetual

allotment. **Everyone of your household who is clean may eat it.** ¹² “All the **best of the fresh oil** and all the **best of the fresh wine** and of the grain, the **FIRST FRUITS** of those which they give to the Lord, **I HAVE GIVEN THEM TO YOU.** ¹³ “The **first ripe fruits** of all that is in their land, which they bring to the Lord, **shall be yours;** every one of your household who is clean may eat it. ¹⁴ “Every devoted thing in Israel shall be yours. ¹⁵ “Every first issue of the womb of all flesh, whether man or animal, which they offer to the Lord, **shall be yours;** nevertheless the firstborn of man you shall surely redeem, and the firstborn of unclean animals you shall redeem. ¹⁶ “As to their redemption price, from a month old you shall redeem them, by your valuation, five shekels in silver, according to the shekel of the sanctuary, which is twenty gerahs. ¹⁷ “But the firstborn of an ox or the firstborn of a sheep or the firstborn of a goat, you shall not redeem; they are holy. You shall sprinkle their blood on the altar and shall offer up their fat in smoke as an offering by fire, for a soothing aroma to the Lord. ¹⁸ “**Their meat shall be yours;** it shall be yours like the breast of a wave offering and like the right thigh. ¹⁹ “**All the offerings** of the holy gifts, which the sons of Israel offer to the Lord, **I have given to you** and your sons and your daughters with you, as **a perpetual allotment. IT IS AN EVERLASTING COVENANT OF SALT** before the Lord to you and your descendants with you.” (Numbers 18: 8-19)

Note that all the offerings mentioned in this passage, including first fruits, are to be an EVERLASTING (unending) COVENANT OF SALT before God to all priests and their sons (v.19). Priests were in full-time employment in spiritual service to the people. **This today would represent those who have committed themselves primarily to care for and minister spiritually to God’s people.** God made a covenant with the High Priest and his family who represented the spiritual leadership of Israel, and this eternal covenant would perpetuate to all whom God would raise up as fatherly leaders in the future, even through to our modern day.

This 'Covenant of Salt' is described within the context of Israel offering first fruits to the High Priest. First fruits are given by the people to their spiritual leader and God Himself describes it as an 'Everlasting Covenant of Salt'. Note the word 'it' in verse 19 above. The word 'it' refers to all the offerings mentioned in the passage, including first fruits. This may have several applications, one of which is presented here below.

Firstly, the term '**covenant of salt**' largely indicates '**a perpetual ordinance**'⁵⁹. This figurative form of expression was founded on the **conservative property of salt**, which keeps meat from corruption; and hence it became **an emblem of inviolability and permanence**.⁶⁰ It is a common phrase among the oriental people, who consider the **eating of salt a pledge of fidelity**, binding them in a **covenant of friendship**. Thus, a '**covenant of salt**' came to be considered equivalent to an **indissoluble covenant, or inviolable contract**.⁶¹ Implied is a strong and firm pledge of loyalty and subscription to all the biblical protocols and principles attendant with the relationship between a spiritual leader and those he leads.

Secondly, **salt** symbolically also alludes to **God's grace**.

Let your speech always be with **grace**, as though seasoned with **salt**, so that you will know how you should respond to each person. (**Colossians 4:6**)

In oriental contexts, tradition has it that, when two people get married, they would each bring their own bag of salt to the priest, who would empty both bags of salt into his own bag and shake it - thus mixing the two bags, fusing them into one, so that the salt of the man and the woman become so mixed that it would be impossible to separate the salt into the original bags.

By equating the first fruits to a Covenant of Salt, I have paraphrased below what I believe God is saying to the High Priest and thus to all spiritual leaders over God's flock today:

“My grace to lead and form My people fully into My image and accomplish My purposes, has been given to you to steward and impart to them. My people will recognise and highly regard My grace in you. This grace is designed for their development in my ways and character, and progression in the execution of My will. They will then honour Me represented in you, by giving to me their first fruits which I have sovereignly elected to be channelled to you. This is so because you are my representation as ‘father’ in their midst. My eternal covenant with my people to access and participate in My grace vested in you, is a Covenant of Salt, a covenant inviolable and unbreakable. As they honour me through the giving of first fruits, My grace is imparted to them and becomes inseparably mixed into their lives, granting them My divine enablement and capacity to represent Me exactly as My sons in their respective spheres of their vocation, and to be successful in all of My purposes attendant with their lives.”

When you give first fruits to your spiritual father, it becomes an expression of your committed relationship with him/her as a spiritual son. It is also emblematic of the fact that your spiritual father’s grace and anointing is mixed into your life, thereby flavouring your life with that which God has richly endowed him/her. **In this, there is participation, partnership, preservation, protection, privilege, pledge of commitment, etc.** By giving first fruits, you become a **partaker of the grace of God** operative within your spiritual father.

An Aside: After Elisha received the double portion of the fathering grace from his spiritual father, Elijah, he cured the diseased waters of the city of Jericho (2 Kings 2:19-22). He did so by pouring salt at the spring, which was the source of the city’s water supply. This emblematically highlights how grace, vested within authentic apostolic-prophetic type leaders, can bring healing or accuracy to the doctrine (waters) a city is exposed to, such that the spiritual well-being of everyone in the city will be secured. But, **it is not just ‘grace’ that salt alludes to here, but the**

strong connection and joining to grace. This implies recognition and honouring of that grace.

It is the grace of God resident and expressed through the doctrine of authentic spiritual leaders that is able to cure the contamination of cities and individuals. I have personally seen how my connection to my spiritual father, including expressions of honour through first fruits, is the 'salt' that is able to arrest and destroy attempts of satanic contamination and dilution in my belief system.

In 2 Kings 4:38-44, the meal (doctrine) of Elisha was able to stop the effect of poison in a pot of stew prepared for one hundred of his spiritual sons. In the same context, immediately afterward, a man came to present his first fruits to Elisha in the form of 20 loaves of barley bread with fresh ears of grains. Elisha gave the bread to his spiritual sons to eat along with the stew. First fruits were consumed simultaneously with food laced with the meal (doctrine) of Elisha, whose effect was to neutralise poison. Here we see the first fruits principle in the same context as persons connecting to the grace communicated through doctrine, as having a preserving and protecting effect in our lives (more on this in chapter 17).

REFLECT

The scriptures specifically highlight the giving of first fruits as equated to the 'Covenant of Salt' in ancient times. This, amongst other things, implies an inseparable mixing into one's life of the grace of God vested in and stewarded by one's spiritual father. Is there evidence of the 'grace' that attends your spiritual father, powerfully at work within your life? If so, in what respect?

One may partake of the grace of God
stewarded by one's spiritual leader.



“ you all are PARTAKERS
of GRACE with me.”
(Phil. 1:7c)

Accessing Grace Through Financial Giving

The subject of God's grace is given brief treatment here, but is more comprehensively explored in a teaching series available on my website, as well as Thamo Naidoo's website - refer to endnotes for specific links⁶². Grace is far more expansive than the limited understanding of it as simply 'unmerited favour'.

The issue of 'financial giving' can never be adequately addressed without significant reference to the issues of 'spiritual fathering' and 'divine grace'. A principle that must be accurately understood is that one may be a partaker of the grace given to someone else, especially your spiritual father in the Lord. Your relationship and connectedness to your spiritual father is a vital factor that determines your capacity to partake of the grace of God given to him/her. Your support and loyalty to your spiritual father is essential for participating in the divine resource of grace given to them by God. Your consistent obedience to the Word of the Lord that they carry and dispense is a vital factor that will ensure a continuous flow of the grace of God in and through your life. Further to this, one must partner with your spiritual father financially, to receive and function in the privilege of the grace deposit of God in his/her life. Apart from other expressions of financial honour, as and when led by God to do, first fruits are one of the systematic ways we can do this.

Grace is the anatomical and compositional constituent make-up of God, who is Spirit. This grace is communicated through His Word. This Word became flesh and became visible, portraying the glory of God, full of

GRACE and truth. Grace is that divine property within God that presses to be seen in human vessels, to put on display the glory of God.

Here is a profound explanation of grace offered by Thamo Naidoo⁶³.

“Grace is that divine invisible, immaterial property or veritable substance in the Godhead that empowers you to function as a representation of God, and also resources you, thus enabling you to function in a particular way to get work done according to the plan of God.”

God’s grace is the substance and property by which God, as a Spirit being, is constituted. This divine, supernatural endowment or deposit is imparted to a person, enabling that person to (1) become all that God has destined them to be, and (2) empowers them to successfully execute His will upon the earth. It bestows upon the recipient enablement, empowerment, favour, acceptance and privilege, causing joy and contentment as one develops into the fullness of one’s predetermined identity as a son of God.

The grace of God nurtures us into all we are to be as God’s sons, in nature and character, and empowers or fuels our functionality. Grace makes us and grace enables us. It configures our identity as God’s sons and empowers the efficient execution of God’s unique assignment attendant with our lives.

There are many biblical ways to access a consistent supply of grace to one’s life. One of the various avenues for accessing and partaking of God’s grace is through the medium of financial giving. Financial offerings given to one’s spiritual father in the Lord is an important avenue for accessing more grace. It should be the privilege and delight of spiritual sons to honour their spiritual fathers in this way.

Note: ‘APOSTOLIC GRACE’ : Every believer needs to be exposed to and access ‘Apostolic Grace’, i.e., the unique grace configuration given to authentic apostles to distribute to the Body of Christ. Such apostles are fatherly in disposition. Every spiritual father or head of a household of faith needs to be connected as a spiritual son to an

apostolic father, for this grace to be communicated to them and their households of faith. This subject is given thorough treatment in a document, 'Partaking of Apostolic Grace', freely available on my website⁶⁴.

ACCESSING GRACE THROUGH FINANCIAL GIVING

Giving financially or materially to your spiritual father is one of the most tangible ways you express your honour and commitment to him as a representation of God. The **primary motivation** in giving in this regard is to **be obedient to God** by financially honouring those who teach you and have oversight over you in the Lord. This act of obedience brings to bear upon the giver, a bestowal of the unique configuration of God's grace attendant with the one who receives the financial gift. It also opens to the giver, access to the multifaceted grace of God. Let us thoroughly examine these principles in the Scriptures.

HONOUR THROUGH FINANCIAL GIFTS

The expression of honour through the giving of finances is biblical. One of the practical ways in which we express honour to our spiritual fathers in the Lord, is to give financially to them. Recall that according to Proverbs 3:9, the first fruits is primarily an expression of honour to our spiritual leader, and thus becomes a powerful means of accessing the grace of God vested in and communicated through them.

Those who sow into your life spiritually should reap from you materially. This is a very well-established biblical principle:

If we **sowed spiritual things** in you, is it too much if we **reap material things** from you? (1 Corinthians 9:11)

The **one who is taught the word** is to **share all good things** with the one who teaches him. (Galatians 6:6)

The Greek word for ‘share’ is ‘**koinoneo**’, meaning ‘**to communicate, distribute, impart**.’⁶⁵ The Greek word for ‘good’ is ‘**agathos**’, meaning ‘**something useful and profitable, beneficial**.’⁶⁶

In this verse, the one who is taught through consistent and systematic teaching is called upon to ‘share’ or ‘distribute’ ‘GOOD’ things (which is anything useful, profitable or beneficial) to the one who has taught him. Elders (spiritual fathers or shepherds having oversight of the church) who **WORK HARD at preaching** and teaching should be given **DOUBLE HONOUR**, which Paul in the next verse defines in financial terms (1 Tim. 5:17-18)

¹⁷ Let **the elders** that rule well be counted worthy of **double honour**, especially they who **labour in the word and doctrine**. ¹⁸ For the scripture saith, Thou shalt not muzzle the ox that **treadeth out the corn**. And, The labourer *is* worthy of his reward. (1 Timothy 5:17,18 - KJV)

¹⁷ Elders who do their work well should be **respected and paid well**, especially those who **work hard at both preaching and teaching**. ¹⁸ For the Scripture says, “You must not muzzle an ox to keep it from eating as it treads out the grain.” And in another place, “Those who work deserve their pay!” (1 Timothy 5:17,18 - NLT)

¹² But we request of you, brethren, that **you appreciate those who diligently labor among you**, and have charge over you in the Lord and **give you instruction**, ¹³ and that **you esteem them very highly** in love **because of their work**. Live in peace with one another. (1 Thessalonians 5:12,13)

²⁶ For Macedonia and Achaia have been **pleased to make a contribution for the poor** among the **saints in Jerusalem**.

²⁷ Yes, **they were pleased to do so**, and they are **indebted to them**. For if the Gentiles have shared **in their spiritual things**, they are **indebted to minister to them also** in

material things. ²⁸ Therefore, when I have finished this, and have put **my seal** on **this fruit** of theirs, I will go on by way of you to Spain. (**Romans 15:26-28**)

The believers in Macedonia and Achaia prepared material goods to be given to those saints who were poor in Jerusalem. It pleased these Gentile Christians to help those at Jerusalem, and besides, they were indebted to them, for the church at Jerusalem was the centre from which the gospel had been spread abroad.

Paul argues that believers in Macedonia and Achaia had an obligation to do this, since Jerusalem represented the well - the source of spiritual nourishment from which they drank. The Greek word translated 'indebted' essentially means to owe someone - and alludes to a moral obligation to fulfil this.

Paul, therefore, makes it plain and thus establishes an important principle: The source from which you derive spiritual nourishment and covering, should be the source to which you must seek to minister materially or practically. There was no coercion brought to bear upon these Gentile Christians to do this to the Jews at Jerusalem. It was spontaneous, natural and reflexive. The Scripture says that they were PLEASED to do this.

The Greek word for **pleased** is '**eudokeo**', and has the following range of meanings: '**to be well-pleased, to think it good; it means to think well of something by understanding not only what is right and good, as in 'dokeo', but stressing the willingness and freedom of an intention or resolve regarding what is good.**'⁶⁷

Note also that this contribution to the Jews is described as a '**ministry unto them**'. Giving financially and otherwise must not be seen as some act that is not spiritual in nature, but as a spiritual ministry.

Those who labour with sincere diligence, not being slothful in the execution of their divine assignment as preachers and teachers of the Word, are deserving of double honour and high esteem, manifested or expressed in financial or material terms. They labour with the eternal riches of Christ and prepare people for eternity. This is a high calling.

FINANCIAL HONOURING ESTEEMS AND RECOGNISES 'GRACE'

It is important to understand that this labouring to the point of fatigue in these things, is not a work of the flesh based upon human potential or toil. Paul argued that he worked hard in the gospel, even harder than other apostles, yet he qualified this by saying that it was really the grace of God working in him and thus his 'hard' work was simply an expression of the grace of God in him.

But by **the grace of God** I am what I am, and His grace toward me did not prove vain; **but I LABOURED even more than all of them**, yet not I, **but the GRACE OF GOD with me.** (1 Corinthians 15:10)

So then, when we acknowledge and give honour to our spiritual leader, who labours diligently in preaching and teaching (doctrine), we are **acknowledging** and **esteeming the grace of God** in them that is being manifested through them. It goes way beyond just esteeming the person who is giving you instruction; it is a greater acknowledgement of the spiritual resource, the divine deposit of gifting and grace given by God to the person. **Thus, when you minister financially or practically to the needs of this individual, you are honouring Christ in him or her.**

In the book of Malachi, God chided the priests for their failure to honour him as Father.

“**A son honors *his* father, and a servant his master. Then if I am a father, where is My honor? And if I am a master, where is My respect?**” says the LORD of hosts to you, **O priests who despise My name.** But you say, ‘How have we despised **Your name?**’ “**You are presenting defiled food upon My altar.** But you say, ‘How have we defiled You?’ In that you say, ‘**The table of the LORD is to be despised.**’ (Malachi 1:6,7)

This failure to honour the fathering principle within God, is directly described in terms of the quality of offerings and sacrifices they made to God. They offered lame, blind and sick animals - deficient offerings - thus clearly demonstrating their dishonour for the 'name' or nature of God, who describes Himself as a "Great King" (Malachi 1:14).

"But cursed be the swindler who has a male in his flock and vows it, but sacrifices a blemished animal to the Lord, for I am a great King," says the LORD of hosts, "and My name is feared among the nations." (Malachi 1:14)

God describes Himself as the **"the Lord of Hosts"** twenty-four times in the book of Malachi. God rebukes the priests for despising His name. His name is His nature - His essence - His being - His character. The deficient nature of their offerings indicated and pointed to their poor and inaccurate estimation of the Lord. The poor quality of their offerings was symptomatic of a lack of honour within themselves. **Financial gifts give expression of the degree to which you honour.**

The quality of your financial offerings given to your spiritual father in the Lord, too, gives tangible expression to the degree of your honour of him/her and of your estimation of the nature and character of the 'fathering grace' within his/her life.

The Lord chides the priests, in saying that such deficient offerings would not even be fit for their governor, yet they bring it to the Lord.

"But when you present the blind for sacrifice, is it not evil? And when you present the lame and sick, is it not evil? Why not offer it to your governor? Would he be pleased with you? Or would he receive you kindly?" says the LORD of hosts. (Malachi 1:8)

The real cause of these deficient offerings was actually the state of the lives of those who offered it in the first place. **The gift does not validate the giver, but the giver validates the gift.** Your gift becomes acceptable because you are acceptable. So, **deficient gifts become reflective of the**

state of the one who gives that gift.

To address this problem is not to correct the quality of the gifts offered, but to really address the inner conviction and internal spiritual state of those who give. If the inward spiritual state or condition of the offerer is adjusted and corrected, then the gift offered will naturally be of an acceptable quantity and quality.

The issue then about financial offerings being reflective of honour for one's spiritual father has got to, of necessity, begin in the heart of the spiritual son. If there is no heart-felt gratitude, respect and sincere honour, then this would naturally not proceed to manifest itself outwardly in terms of financial giving.

**HONOUR THROUGH FINANCIAL GIFTS IS
A BIBLICALLY VALID WAY OF ACCESSING
THE GRACE OF GOD ENTRUSTED TO ONE'S
SPIRITUAL OVERSIGHT**

In honouring the grace of God in the person by sowing financially into his/her life, you become the beneficiary or recipient of God's grace given to that person to steward. Let us examine how this principle was expressed through the Philippian church.

THE EXAMPLE OF THE PHILIPPIAN CHURCH:

For it is only right for me to feel this way about you all, because I have you in my heart, since both in my imprisonment and in the defense and confirmation of the gospel, **you all are PARTAKERS of GRACE with me. (Philippians 1:7)**

How did they become partakers of the grace of God in Paul? By sowing financially into his life and ministry.

¹⁵ You yourselves also know, Philippians, that at the first preaching of the gospel, after I left Macedonia, **no church SHARED with me in the matter of giving and receiving but you alone;** ¹⁶ for even in Thessalonica **you sent a gift more than once for my needs. (Philippians 4:15-16)**

Note the word, ‘**partakers**’ (Phil. 1:7) and the word ‘**shared**’ (Phil. 4:15):

The Greek word for ‘**partakers**’ is ‘**sugkoinōnós**’, meaning, ‘**a partaker together with others, a fellow or joint partaker, a sharer with**’⁶⁸. The Greek word for ‘**shared**’ is ‘**koinoneo**’, meaning ‘**to communicate, distribute, impart**’.⁶⁹ Both these Greek words are built up from the noun, ‘**koinonos**’ (a **companion, partner**).⁷⁰

In essence, Paul is saying that this church shared in God’s grace given to him. They partook of this grace, not just in the sense that they were blessed or built up by his ministry, but that this grace was imparted to them - i.e., the abilities and enablement which God had endowed to him, was now also given to them - so that they could function on the same level or frequency as he did. How did they access this level of impartation? By connecting with and giving to him financially.

We give first fruits in acknowledgment of the grace of God in our spiritual leader. By this, we then become partakers of divine grace given to them. We become recipients of the grace of God in them.

Note the following verses:

¹⁷ Not that I seek the gift itself, but **I seek for the profit which increases to your account.** ¹⁸ But I have received everything in full and have an **abundance; I am amply supplied,** having received from Epaphroditus what you have sent, **a fragrant aroma, an acceptable sacrifice, well-pleasing to God. (Philippians 4:17-18)**

In thanking them for consistently giving to him (note v.16 ‘more than once’), Paul explains his motive. He says that he is not **seeking** (in the Greek it means to ‘**crave, search for, seek diligently**’⁷¹) the gift but

rather he is seeking or craving **‘for the profit that would increase to their account’**. He says that he is doing so, not to extract further gifts from them so that his future needs will be met, but he is truly seeking for ‘profit’ or FRUIT that will be credited to their account.

The Greek word (**karpos**) for **‘profit’** here means **‘fruit’**. Metaphorically, it refers to **‘deeds, works or conduct’**⁷²(see Matt. 3:8; 7:16, 20; 21:43). Fruit is the external, outward evidence produced as a result of invisible processes at work within a tree. Paul, by using this idea, is saying that **the financial and material gifts of the Philippian Church will cause the invisible, unseen grace processes of God at work within them, to be manifested outwardly in terms of specific obedient deeds, works, conduct and operations of life**. This is a powerful thought. **There is a level of fruitfulness in our deeds, works and conduct which will only be accessed through our financial giving, which unlocks grace.**

Also, Paul says that this fruit will **INCREASE TO THEIR ACCOUNT**. The acts of gracious giving of the Philippian church, resulting in further fruitful works and conduct, will **INCREASE**. **Their giving did not in any way impoverish them**. It actually set them up for increase. Their acts of giving are registered in Heaven’s account as a credit entry, not a debit entry.

The Greek word for **‘increase’** here is **‘plenazo’**, which means **‘to have or cause to have much, or more than enough’**⁷³, **to super-abound’**⁷⁴.

Note that Paul describes their financial giving as **a fragrant aroma, an acceptable sacrifice, well-pleasing to God**. We are a priesthood unto God and are required to offer up spiritual sacrifices. If we were priests under the Old Covenant, we would have offered up animal sacrifices. But now under the New Covenant, we are to offer up **SPIRITUAL sacrifices**:

you also, as living stones, are being built up as **a spiritual house for a holy priesthood**, to offer up **spiritual sacrifices acceptable** to God through Jesus Christ. (1 Peter 2:5)

Here is a brief list of some **acceptable spiritual sacrifices** identified in the Scripture:

- | | |
|---|------------------|
| 1. Joy | Psalm 27:6 |
| 2. Thanks | Hebrews 13:15 |
| 3. Praise | Hebrews 13:15 |
| 4. Our Lives / Bodies | Romans 12:1,2 |
| 5. Doing Good | Hebrews 13:16 |
| 6. Fellowship | Hebrews 13:15 |
| 7. Material and Financial Assistance to Ministers | Philippians 4:18 |

In Philippians 4:18, Paul regards financial giving to spiritual leaders as an acceptable New Covenant sacrificial offering unto the Lord. God always responds to the principle of acceptable sacrifice. Paul describes the effect that this offering has on God, viz., “a fragrant or sweet aroma, well-pleasing to God”. The **financial and material gifts given to Paul in the seen realm on the earth had an effect upon God in the unseen realm**. This is also seen in how Cornelius’ almsgiving to the poor and prayer came up before God as a memorial, and resultantly, God upgraded him and his household by sending the apostle Peter to his home to preach the gospel and baptise them with the Holy Spirit and in water (See Acts 10). Giving of ANY KIND unlocks grace and positions one for spiritual upgrade.

In the next verse, Paul describes the response of God to the Philippians’ financial gift as follows:

And **my God will supply all your needs** according to His riches in glory in Christ Jesus. (**Philippians 4:19**)

The phrase ‘**all your needs**’, literally should be read, ‘**every need of yours**’. ‘Every need of yours’ does not just include physical or material needs, but spiritual, emotional, marital, etc.

Note the emphasis on **MY** God. Paul does not say, ‘GOD will supply your needs’ or ‘OUR God’, but he deliberately emphasises **MY** God. Here he is referring to the quality of relationship and favour he personally had with God. By pronouncing this blessing, he is symbolically bringing to

bear upon the Philippian church a response from God that would otherwise have been his privilege only. But now, through their giving, they have accessed and thus became privy to the benefits that Paul enjoyed by virtue of the specific level or quality of his relationship with God.

This is also seen in the book of Ruth. When Ruth said to Naomi, “**Your God will be my God**” (Ruth 1:16), she did not just want to serve the God of Israel as opposed to the gods of Moab (Ruth 1:15), but she was reaching out after the richness of the relationship that Naomi, as a spiritual father, enjoyed with God. As a spiritual son, Ruth accessed spiritual and natural benefits and advantages because of her pursuit after and practical support of Naomi, her spiritual father. She migrated from ...

- Being a widow to a married woman.
- Being unable to give birth to a child in the ten years in the land of Moab, to giving birth to a significant son (Obed) in Bethlehem.
- From gleaning in a field to owning that field.
- From begging in a field to employing others to work her fields.
- From poverty to prosperity.
- From a Moabitess to being part of the lineage and ancestry of our Lord Jesus Christ.

God supplied all her needs according to His riches in glory in Christ - but her relationship to and support of Naomi was a vital key to all of this.

The dimension from which the Philippian church’s needs will be supplied is described as ‘**riches in glory in Christ Jesus**’. They accessed what was in Christ Jesus by giving to the Apostle Paul, Christ’s representative. The principle here is very plain: **your posture of giving to your spiritual father has a significant bearing on the degree to which your needs will be supplied.**

Note the context of the Philippian Church’s relationship with Paul, as an Apostolic father.

¹ Paul and Timothy, bond-servants of Christ Jesus, To all the saints in Christ Jesus who are in Philippi, including the overseers and deacons: ² **Grace to you** and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. ³ I thank my God in all **my remembrance** of you, ⁴ always offering **prayer with joy** in my **every prayer for you all**, ⁵ in view of **your participation** in the gospel from the first day until now. ⁶ For I am confident of this very thing, that **He who began a good work in you will perfect it until the day of Christ Jesus**. ⁷ For it is only right for me to **feel this way about you all**, because **I have you in my heart**, since both **in my imprisonment and in the defense and confirmation of the gospel, you all are partakers of grace with me**. ⁸ For God is my witness, how **I long for you** all with the **affection of Christ Jesus**. (Philippians 1:1-8)

Paul speaks in intensely affectionate terms to the Philippians, e.g.

- “I thank God when I remember / think of you” [verse 3]
- “When I pray for you, I pray with joy in my every prayer for you” [verse 4]
- “I have you in my heart” [verse 7]
- “I long for you all with the affection of Christ Jesus” [verse 8]

Paul’s sincere and heartfelt affection was completely extended to this church. They, too, displayed their deep affection and love for Paul, practically demonstrating this in part by their financial support of him in an incredibly significant way, and standing with him in the most difficult times of his ministry. Thus, there was an absolutely sincere and significantly deep level of the spiritual ‘father-son’ relationship between them and the attendant divine purpose. This context is important to understand.

Against this backdrop, and within this father-son framework of profound love and affection, Paul imparts GRACE to them - see **verse 2 : ‘Grace to you’**. In verse 6, Paul expresses an unusual confidence in the fact that the work that God had begun within the Philippians, will certainly be

completed and brought to finish. In verse 7, he justifies exactly why he is so confident of the way he feels about the Philippian church, viz. he has them in his heart and more importantly, **THEY HAD BECOME PARTAKERS OF GRACE WITH HIM**. The confidence of Paul expressed in verse 6 is justified and validated by the action of the Philippian church in verse 7, in that they partook of the grace of God in Paul. In essence, Paul is saying that this church shared in his grace - they partook of his grace, not just in the sense where they were blessed or built up by his ministry, but that his grace was imparted to them - i.e., the divinely given abilities which God had endowed to him was now given also to them - so that they could function on the same level or frequency as he did.

As an example of this, at one time Paul expressed his passion to complete his divine assignment, saying “**so that I may finish my course and the ministry**” (Acts 20:24). At the close of his ministry, he confidently asserts the fact that this desire of his had been fulfilled, saying “**I have finished**” (2 Tim 4:7). Since the Philippians partnered with him and partook of God’s grace in him, he was also thoroughly convinced that the work God had started in them would be **completed to the finish**. Here is how Paul expressed this confidence in the **Message Bible** phrasing - “There has never been the slightest doubt in my mind that the **God who started** this great work in you would **keep at it** and **bring it to a flourishing finish** on the very day Christ Jesus appears” - **Phil. 1:6**. The ‘finishing’ quality and power inherent with the grace of God given to Paul was now fully functional in the lives of the Philippian saints and Paul attributes this to their participation (through their financial gifts) in the grace given to him.

When we partner financially with our apostolic oversight, the strength and pre-eminent features of the unique grace of God they steward, will start to be evident in us too. This is priceless.

THE GRACE OF GIVING ACCESSES, NOT JUST GOD'S GRACE STEWARDED BY YOUR SPIRITUAL FATHER, BUT ALSO 'ALL GRACE' FROM GOD

When you are complete in the GRACE OF GIVING, and thus give liberally to your spiritual father, you tap into his/her unique and individual primary grace. As stated earlier, giving into the life and ministry of your spiritual father causes you to be a partaker of the grace endowment given to him/her by the Lord. Thus, you yourself need to be complete, without deficiency, in the grace of giving to partake of the GRACE of the one to whom you are giving.

Beyond this, there is also another 'grace' blessing that goes beyond the grace of the one to whom you are giving. When you give to your spiritual father and thereby become a partaker of the grace stewarded by him/her, you are also given '**ALL**' GRACE from the '**God of ALL GRACE**'. Note the following two Scriptures:

After you have suffered for a little while, **THE GOD OF ALL GRACE**, who called you to His eternal glory in Christ, will Himself perfect, confirm, strengthen and establish you. (1 Peter 5:10)

As each one has received a special gift, employ it in serving one another as good stewards of **THE MANIFOLD GRACE OF GOD**. (1 Peter 4:10)

Note that God is the God of ALL grace and that this grace is MANIFOLD grace which we must steward. The stewarding of this grace is done in terms of the sense of responsibility with which we do so when we use our gifts in serving each other.

The Greek word for 'manifold' is '**poikilos**', meaning '**variegated**,⁷⁵ **many-coloured**⁷⁶, **divers**⁷⁷. Some synonyms for this word would be, '**varied, multifaceted and many-sided**'.

Thus, God's grace is vast, having diverse and varied expressions. God's 'ALL' grace is 'MANIFOLD' grace - it is not one dimensional nor static

but has many faces and manifestations.

Now listen to what Paul says of the grace of giving - not just accessing God's grace in the spiritual father but also unlocking the '**ALL**' **grace or MANIFOLD grace of God in your life** - see 2 Corinthians 9:8.

⁶ Now this I say, he who **sows sparingly will also reap sparingly**, and he who sows **bountifully will also reap bountifully**.⁷ Each one must do **just as he has purposed in his heart, not grudgingly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver**.⁸ And God is able to make **ALL GRACE abound to you**, so that **always** having **all sufficiency in everything**, you may have **an abundance for every good deed**.
(2 Corinthians 9:6-8)

Contextually, the giving spoken of in the passage above, is giving to the poor. To the measure that you sow, you will reap. If you sow financially, you will not only reap financially in proportion to that which you have sown, but you will also reap non-monetary blessings as well. Paul here describes it as **ALL GRACE**, which is the multifaceted or many-sided grace of God.

LET US EXAMINE 2 COR 9:8 MORE THOROUGHLY:

The blessings promised to those who give is an all-embracing one, covering all aspects of our lives, not only our material needs.

'And God is able to make **all** grace abound to you; that ye, **always (or at all times*)** having **all** sufficiency in **all** things, may **abound** to every (**all***) good work.' [*Author's Insertion]

Two key words in this verse are '**ALL**' and '**ABOUND**'.

'**All**' (inclusive of '**always**') **occurs five times**. Five is the number of **grace**.

- Note:**
1. **ALL GRACE**
 2. **AT ALL TIMES**
 3. **HAVING ALL SUFFICIENCY**
 4. **IN ALL THINGS**
 5. **FOR ALL GOOD WORK**

This covers all expressions of grace for literally everything we will have or need to do - at whatever time.

The word **'abound'**/ **'abundance'** occurs twice. If you have all that you need in all things, at all times, to abound to every good work, there is absolutely no room for unsupplied need anywhere in your life. 'The Lord is my Shepherd, I shall not lack' (**Psalm 23:1**).

The Greek word for **'abound'** is **'perisseuo'** and has the following range of meanings: **'to be abundantly furnished; to be or have more than enough; an exceeding measure, something above the ordinary; to be in excess, exceed in number or measure; to be left over, remain, exceeding a number or measure which marks fullness'**.⁷⁸

We get the word **'abundance'** from **'abound'**. Its Latin origin indicates that **'abundance'** speaks of **'a wave that overflows'**.⁷⁹ A thing has no abundance until it overflows. This is God's level of blessing to His children who give. God gives you abundant, overflowing grace so that in all things, at all times, you will overflow or abound in every good work. Again, it must be stressed, that this level of abundance will be manifested, not just materially or financially, but will also characterise your operation in and execution of the will of the Lord for your life generally.

Note the Principle: If you excel in the GRACE of giving, then God is able to make ALL GRACE abound to you. When you are a faithful giver of finances to God, His servants, His church, etc., **He does not make all money abound to you, but all grace.** More grace is what you need, because within the economy of grace, this grace has the capacity to bring to you everything you would need for living, including financial provision, and in particular, every possible resource for fulfilling your assignment in God.

GRACE COULD BE PERCEIVED AS AN ECONOMY OR SPATIAL SPHERE OF EXISTENCE

Grace is the person of God, not just a concept. In Christ we live, move and have our being. We live life in HIM by faith, as we are already crucified with Him in His death. He is in us and we are in Him. He is full of grace, and thus we live in the substance which He is full of and by which He is comprised, viz. grace.

Our initial salvation experience is described as ‘an introduction or entrance INTO GRACE’. Having entered the Kingdom of God, a realm of grace, we are required to STAND in it.

Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom also we have obtained our **INTRODUCTION** by faith **INTO THIS GRACE** in which **WE STAND**; and we exult in hope of the glory of God. (**Romans 5:1,2**)

Salvation by grace (as unmerited favour) is only your INTRODUCTION or ACCESS (see KJV) into grace. Access into THIS GRACE is BY FAITH in CHRIST JESUS, by whom we are justified and therefore enjoy peace with God. The text above describes the entire state of being justified by faith and enjoying peace with God through Jesus Christ, as ‘**THIS GRACE**’. Into ‘this grace’ we are INTRODUCED or have ACCESS. The term “**THIS**” in the phrase ‘**this grace**’ implies **GRACE is a state of being or a state of life/existence into which we are assimilated and within which we are designed to function**. Paul believed this, as is also evidenced in 2 Cor. 1:12.

For our proud confidence is this: the testimony of our conscience, that in holiness and godly sincerity, not in fleshly wisdom but **IN the GRACE** of God, we have conducted ourselves in the world, and especially toward you. (**2 Corinthians 1:12**)

Grace is an economy that one enters. It is an economy intended to preserve, protect and provide for every conceivable need relative to God's will for our lives as His sons.

GRACE TO SERVE GOD ACCEPTABLY IS ESSENTIAL IN A SEASON OF GLOBAL ECONOMIC DESTABILISATION

God is shaking every system on the earth today. This global destabilisation of economic, political, religious, climatological and national governmental systems and structures is a divine initiative, and is part of God's end-time agenda. He is doing the shaking, not the devil. In this context, the process of God's purposes attendant with His Kingdom being established through the church across every domain of life, will accelerate rapidly to maturity and finish. As such, the grace of God will be unusually heightened, as it will be a fundamentally critical ingredient of our ability to walk through a global crisis on the one hand, and simultaneously climax His purpose and will on the other. These sentiments are expressed in the verses below:

²⁶ whose voice then shook the earth; but now He has promised, saying, **"YET ONCE MORE I SHAKE NOT ONLY THE EARTH, BUT ALSO HEAVEN."** ²⁷ Now this, "YET ONCE MORE," indicates the **removal of those things that are being shaken**, as of things that are made, that the things which cannot be shaken may remain. ²⁸ Therefore, since **we are receiving a kingdom which cannot be shaken, LET US HAVE GRACE**, by which we **may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear.** ²⁹ For our God *is* a consuming fire. (Hebrews 12:26-29 - NKJV)

Here in Hebrews 12:28, 'grace' includes the attitude of 'gratitude' and expressions of thanksgiving, as it is so translated in the NASB version of the Bible. I have demonstrated in this writing that in times of economic crisis, the financial obedience of sons of God before and during these times, is critical. We must be faithful to observe 'more excellent giving',

viz. first fruits, tithes and offerings. Giving in this fashion supernaturally immunises us from the negative ravaging effects of global economic recessions and depressions.

Now we understand that it is not the giving per se that is the focal issue, but the GRACE dynamic that is unlocked in our lives because of our giving. We give, not to access more money, but to access more grace.

“When we give, God is able to make ALL GRACE abound to us. The text does not say He is able to make all money abound to us. But when you have all grace, in that grace, you will have everything else you require for life and godliness.”
(Thamo Naidoo)⁸⁰

In the ‘ALL GRACE’ of God, there is provision for every material and financial need we may have. When God shakes the earth and the systems of the world are destabilised, God’s grace in you will be the stabilising factor by which YOU, in His KINGDOM, CANNOT BE SHAKEN!

When you consider the whole issue of ‘giving’ in general, and first fruits in particular, keep your eye on two issues:

- The **increased GRACE** it will access. The seed of money generates a **harvest of GRACE**.
- Further, all financial seed sowing also generates a **harvest of RIGHTEOUSNESS** (2 Cor. 9:10).

Grace and righteousness go hand in hand. ‘Grace’ reigns in ‘righteousness’ (Rom. 5:17). Grace produces righteousness and requires righteousness for it to thrive or grow in. Grace and righteousness result as harvests from the giving of first fruits. For Abel’s first fruits, God testified that he was righteous - Heb.11:4 (Refer to chapter 13 for a discussion on righteousness which is the fruit of giving). Abraham was grace-enriched and offered Isaac as first fruits, and by this act of obedience, was reckoned righteous by his ‘works’ - not only by his ‘belief’ (compare Rom. 4:1-25; Gal.3:6 and James 2:21-24). See more on this issue in chapter 23.

REFLECT

1. Is your understanding of God's Grace complete and accurate? Can you explain how it is far more than 'unmerited favour'?
2. Honouring a spiritual leader who works hard at preaching and teaching, is about honouring the grace of God within them, which allows them to do what they do. Is your estimate of the worth or value of the grace of God in your spiritual leader, an accurate one?
3. Partaking of the grace of God given to your spiritual leader, and the 'ALL' grace of God, is a reality and process that must be activated in our lives. One of the ways we do this is through finically honouring them. Demonstrate how the Philippian Church did this.

The reformation of the Church is incomplete
without a financial reformation.



As soon as the order spread, the sons of Israel
provided in abundance the first fruits ...
and they brought in abundantly the tithe of all.

2 Chron. 31:5

First Fruits, Grace, The Apostolic and Fathering

Many refer to the present season in which the church finds itself, as the 'Apostolic Season' or 'Apostolic Reformation', a time in which every inaccurate or deformed teaching and practice is being corrected and 'reformed', or brought back to God's original intent and design. It is therefore no surprise that the practice of first fruits has been restored to the church in our day.

Apostolicity is the single pursuit for the return of the church to biblical authenticity. It is a restoration of the original blueprint and eternal plan of God for the Church and for the Church's stewardship of His creation (Kingdom). Apostolicity is the pursuit of spiritual originality, genuineness, reliability and authenticity. Apostolicity seeks to discover and import into the church, the divine blueprint or pattern. "Thy will be done on Earth as it is in Heaven", is the Apostolic cry. (Thamo Naidoo)⁸¹

The word 'apostle' means 'sent one'. An apostle is sent by God to represent HIS interests and will in and to the Church. Apostles are given to accuracy and authenticity in this regard. They have a strong focus on biblical accuracy and are Christo-centric, i.e., they seek to align the belief and behaviour of the Church to be reflective of the nature and purpose of Christ, the head of the Church. Together with prophets, they represent

the foundation of the Church, Christ Jesus, Himself (Eph. 2:20). Upon apostolic grace and doctrine, which seeks to establish Christ as the cornerstone, the church is built (1 Cor. 3:10-15). Apostles are ranked first for functional effectiveness amongst the other ascension gift ministries - first in that they set doctrine and patterns, according to which other ascension gifts are meant to operate within (1 Cor. 12:28). Not everyone is an apostle, and neither can anyone aspire to be one. This calling is sovereignly determined by God. Yet, all believers are to be apostolic in thinking and function. We are to be authentic, rooted in accurate apostolic doctrine, representing God exactly in the world in all spheres in which we function, presenting both the character and purpose of Christ to a dying and sinful world.

The responsibility of determining doctrine is that of authentic and Holy Apostles. The early church continued steadfastly in the Apostles' doctrine.

They were **continually devoting** themselves to the **apostles' teaching** and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. (**Acts 2:42**)

Apostolic doctrine is the first of four principles that define the church, an apostolic community.

Presently, apostles are revealing truths previously hidden from or lost to the church. The responsibility for decoding the mysteries locked in God's Word, and making them understandable, is specifically that of holy apostles and prophets, under the leadership of the Holy Spirit.

⁴By referring to this, when you read you can **understand my insight** into the **mystery of Christ**, ⁵which in other generations was not made known to the sons of men, as it has now been revealed to His **holy apostles and prophets in the Spirit**. (**Ephesians 3:4,5**)

This includes the understanding and practice of first fruits giving. The first fruits principle has been lost to the church for many years. Most

believers practise tithes and offerings; some - only offerings. The recovery and restoration of the first fruits coincided with the restoration of authenticity to the Body of Christ in our day. In South Africa, at least within the circle of apostolic relationships I am a part of, this occurred in 2006. There is a tremendous flow of the grace of God released through apostolic fathers in our present day. It takes Apostolic authority, grace and anointing to restore lost truth to the Church.

First fruits are given by a spiritual son to his/her spiritual father in the Lord. Spiritual fathers impart grace to their spiritual sons through the release of the Word of the Lord unto them. In Scripture, there is a great correlation between the principle of 'first things', the 'apostolic', 'grace-impartation' and 'spiritual fathering-sonship'. Some of this correlation is already alluded to in this writing.

HERE ARE A FEW MORE CONNECTING THOUGHTS:

- **The church** is called the 'church of the **FIRST**-born' (Hebrews 12:23).
- **The church** is built on the **foundation of APOSTLES** and prophets (Eph.2:20). It is to apostles and prophets that God's mysteries are revealed (Eph. 3:5). The apostolic ministry is set **FIRST** in the church in respect to function, to establish proper doctrinal foundations (1 Cor. 12:28).
- **Abraham**, 'the **FATHER** of all those who believe' (Rom. 4:11), was willing to offer his **FIRST**born son, Isaac (Gen. 22).
- Abraham, who was rich in **GRACE**, offered Isaac, a representation of first fruits. Abraham reaped a huge harvest - a nation, and ultimately, Christ and the Church. All giving, including first fruits, is administrated from the richness of grace within one's spirit. In Abraham, this was indicated by the name change from Abram to Abraham, which required the insertion of the fifth letter of the Hebrew alphabet - 'hey' - the number five being indicative of grace. But also, first fruits are a powerful means of accessing more 'GRACE', especially 'apostolic grace' from one's apostolic fatherly

oversight. Isaac, meaning 'laughter', which typifies joy as an expression of grace, is also thus a symbolic representation of grace.

- **At the exodus of Israel** from Egyptian bondage, the 'Passover' was inaugurated. The **FIRST**born of every Egyptian household died because their doorpost did not have the blood of a lamb smeared on it. The firstborn of every house of Israel was preserved - and so the nation of Israel, God's corporate firstborn, was delivered from long-standing bondage (Ex. 4:22-23; Jer. 2:3). Within the principle of 'firstborn', 'first things' and 'first fruits', is protection, preservation and deliverance. The firstborn principle represented the strength of a nation. In smiting Egypt's firstborn, God completely destroyed the power of Egypt as a nation (Psalm 136:10).
- **Joseph** is an **Apostolic** type, in that, although he was sold by his brothers, he was really 'SENT' by God to Egypt. He also embodied both the 'sent' apostolic dimension and the principle of '**FATHERING**' - he fathered Pharaoh (Gen. 45:8) and functioned as a father over his brothers when they came down to Egypt (Gen. 43:29).

Joseph modelled **sonship** very well, submitting to his father, Jacob's, prophetic directives for his life (Gen. 48). He offered his first two sons, Manasseh and Ephraim, as **symbolic first fruits** to Jacob, and they were reckoned as Jacob's sons, not Joseph's (Gen. 48:5). He sowed his sons as first fruits seeds and he **reaped double portion**, because, although there is not one tribe named after Joseph, there are two of the tribes named after his sons, Ephraim and Manasseh. Receiving 'double portion' established Joseph's identity as **firstborn son** in his family, replacing Reuben as firstborn because Reuben slept with his father's concubine (1 Chron. 5:1). Again, we see a son giving first fruits to his spiritual father within an Apostolic culture and reaping a double portion harvest.

Further, **Ephraim**, who replaced Manasseh as **firstborn** (Gen. 48), is often used in Scripture as a general descriptor incorporating **all the tribes of the nation** of Israel, besides the tribe of Judah. Here we see the representative dynamic of one who was offered as first fruits. In the 'first' (Ephraim), the entire harvest (Israel) is represented. First fruits always represent a greater, fuller harvest.

- **The tribe of Judah** is a most accurate representation of the apostolic spirit (1 Chron. 2:3ff; Matthew 1:1ff; Judges 1:1) and occupies a '**FIRST**' position in dispensing God's purposes within the nation of Israel.
- **The spirit and grace configuration of Elijah** restores the principle of **SPIRITUAL FATHERING AND SONSHIP** (Malachi 4:5,6) and this restoration will end the curse attendant with the earth, thus igniting the restoration of 'all things' (Matt. 17:10-11; Mark 9:11-12). In Matthew 17:11, Elijah is indicated as coming '**FIRST**'.
- **Elijah** is also a representation of the **Apostolic** - in that he is 'sent'. So, he incorporates the Apostolic and the principle of Fathering. He requested of a widow to give him bread **FIRST**, before she fed herself and her son, and so facilitated God's supernatural provision for them throughout the famine that persisted in Israel at the time. (1 Kings 17:1-16)
- God's original plan for Israel's conquest of the land of Canaan, after journeying away from Egypt, was to enter Canaan from the south, through taking the hill country of Hebron, **FIRST**. **Twelve spies** spied out the 'Promised Land' around the region of **Hebron**. The number twelve, symbolically, indicates an **apostolic** or governmental position. Israel could not take Hebron, because ten spies, beset by a lack of faith, infused the people with fear and unbelief. The specific time of year in which this occurred was at "the season of the **FIRST** ripe grapes" (Num. 13:20b).

Forty years later, God would lead Israel to conquer the land, entering it from the east by attacking Jericho - but this was God's secondary plan - the first was Hebron. Hebron denotes, 'confederation; conjunction; alliance; associating; joining together; union; company' (Smith and Cornwall, 1988). It is a significant symbolic spiritual location, pregnant with a range of important spiritual principles. Among these principles are the **recognition of credible Apostolic leadership** and the perfecting of relationships (David was anointed king of Judah and Israel at Hebron). Symbolically, God intended that all the principles bound up within 'Hebron' are to be secured **FIRST** as first fruits, before the rest of God's vast

purposes, symbolised by the rest of the land of Canaan, would be secured.

- **JERICHO**, the **first city** to be taken when the conquest of Canaan began, was a type of first fruits. Jericho was a fortified city that marked the '**entrance**' into the land of Canaan, a land of God's promise of abundance. One of the meanings of 'Jericho' is '**sent**'⁸²- which highlights the apostolic principle (apostle means 'sent one'). Another meaning of Jericho is 'let him smell it' or a '**fragrant place**'⁸³. Herein is implied that first fruits ascend to God as a sweet and pleasant worshipful fragrance (cf. Acts 10:4 and Phil. 4:18) and that the huge degree of success attendant at Jericho is but only a 'smell' - a hint or an indication of the greater and more abundant harvest or levels of conquest to follow.

A reminder too, that all the spoil was not to be touched or used by the people of Israel but set aside as devoted unto the Lord. They could enjoy the spoil of subsequent victories from their conquest of other cities and lands, but not of Jericho - this was God's. When we offer the first fruits to the Lord, subsequent harvests are ensured.

- The following scriptures further link the concepts:

²³ 'When you **enter the land and plant** all kinds of trees for food, then you shall count their fruit as forbidden. **Three years it shall be forbidden to you**; it shall not be eaten. ²⁴ 'But **in the fourth year all its fruit shall be holy**, an **offering** of praise to the Lord. ²⁵ 'In the **fifth year you are to eat of its fruit**, that **its yield may increase for you**; I am the Lord your God. (**Leviticus 19:23-25**)

¹ "Then it shall be, when you enter the land which the Lord your God gives you as an inheritance, and you possess it and live in it, ² that you shall **take some of the first of all the produce** of the ground which you bring in from your land that the Lord your God gives you, and you shall put it in a basket and go **to the place where the Lord your God chooses to establish His name**. (**Deuteronomy 26:1-2**)

¹⁷ Then the Lord spoke to Moses, saying, ¹⁸ “Speak to the sons of Israel and say to them, **‘When you enter** the land where I bring you, ¹⁹ then it shall be, that **when you eat of the food of the land**, you shall **lift up an offering** to the Lord. ²⁰ **‘Of the first** of your dough you shall lift up a cake **as an offering**; as the offering of the threshing floor, so you shall lift it up. ²¹ **‘From the first** of your dough you shall give to the Lord an offering **throughout your generations. (Numbers 15:17-21)**

When, on entering the land, there were already in existence crops and trees, then the first part of the harvest was to be given to the Lord as first fruits.

On entering the new land and having planted new crops and trees, Israel was forbidden from the fruit thereof in the first three years. **The number three represents that which is ‘solid, real, substantial, complete and entire’.** ⁸⁴ The first three years after planting a new crop indicates that this crop and its yield have come to a position of completeness.

In the fourth year, the entire harvest of fruit was given to the Lord - ‘its fruit shall be holy’. **‘Four’ indicates an apostolic emphasis.** ⁸⁵ The giving of first fruits prophetically suggests one is subscribing to apostolic principles, to that which is genuine and authentic, existing in the mind of God and communicated in and through His Word for His people. It also denotes **a new apostolic order or season** in one’s life.

In the fifth year, they were able to eat the fruit, obviously observing first fruits giving as well, so **‘that its YIELD may INCREASE for you’.** **‘Five’ is the number of ‘grace’.** ⁸⁶

Greater and more substantial grace is imparted to those who give first fruits. When grace is present in your life in a significant way, then your YIELD or harvest in all you do is dramatically increased. Ruth’s impoverished and purposeless life was profoundly altered to one of unparalleled fruitfulness and purpose, by the reception of grace from Naomi. This increased grace in her was a result of her faithful obedience to Naomi, and in particular her honour of her, through the giving of her substance gleaned in Boaz’s field. The phrase, ‘Ruth the Moabitess’, occurs five times

in the book of Ruth and five symbolically denotes 'grace'. The root meaning of Naomi (pleasant, agreeable) is 'grace'.⁸⁷ Grace from the spiritual father (Naomi) is released to the spiritual son (Ruth), when the spiritual son ministers financially to the spiritual father. (See more on this in chapters 11 and 23).

TYPES AND SHADOWS OF FIRST FRUITS

In summary, below is an overview of some symbolic types and shadows of first fruits. Some of these are referenced and explained in subsequent chapters in this writing:

- **God** gave His first begotten Son, Jesus Christ, the Firstborn or first fruits.
- **Abel** offered the firstlings of his flock.
- **Abraham** offered his first and only son, Isaac.
- **Joseph**, firstborn son in his family, was 'sent' as a first fruits son to preserve the harvest of his family and the church today.
- **Joseph offered his first two sons** to his father Jacob, as Jacob's sons.
- **Hebron** was God's initial choice of the representation of the first fruits in the conquest of Canaan.
- Israel offered **Jericho** as the first city in the conquest of Canaan.
- **Ruth** offered Obed as a first fruit son to Naomi.
- **Hannah** offered her firstborn son, Samuel, in priestly and prophetic service.
- **Israel** gave the first ripened products.
- **Israel** gave the firstlings of their flocks.
- **The Levites**, given to the service of the Lord, were symbolic of the first fruits representing the firstborn sons of all of Israel.
- The **Widow at Zarephath** gave her bread to Elijah first.
- The **man from Baal-Shalishah** offered Elisha first fruits.
- A **boy offered** Jesus his 'only' lunch - symbolic of first fruits, for after he gave, he had nothing left, as farmers in agricultural Israel after they gave their first fruits.

REFORMATION AND FIRST FRUITS

Whenever Israel went astray and away from God, God would raise up a reformer to bring greater alignment of the nation back to the ways of God. In these times, very often a call was made to return to the practice of three-fold giving, viz. first fruits, tithes and offerings. In times of national spiritual decline, giving ceased. At times, because of the judgement of economic famine on the land, no harvest was produced, and thus no offerings could be given (Joel 1:10-12). The ministering priesthood suffered and was to a large extent non-functional, except for a few who remained faithful (Ezek. 44). An integral phase of the reformational processes of God is to bring His people to accurate patterns of giving and financial stewardship, reflective of accurate lifestyles, to restore His people financially, not just 'spiritually'. The link between 'reformation' and 'more excellent giving' is illustrated in the reformations under Hezekiah and Nehemiah.

Hezekiah:

³ He also appointed the king's portion of his goods for the burnt offerings, namely, for the morning and evening burnt offerings, and the burnt offerings for the sabbaths and for the new moons and for the fixed festivals, as it is written in the law of the Lord. ⁴ Also **HE COMMANDED THE PEOPLE** who lived in Jerusalem to give **the portion due to the priests and the Levites**, that they might **devote themselves to the law of the Lord**. ⁵ **AS SOON AS THE ORDER SPREAD**, the sons of Israel **provided in abundance the first fruits** of grain, new wine, oil, honey and of all the produce of the field; and they **brought in abundantly the tithe of all**. ⁶ The sons of Israel and Judah who lived in the cities of Judah also brought in the **tithe** of oxen and sheep, and the **tithe** of sacred gifts which were **consecrated to the Lord their God**, and **placed them in heaps**. ⁷ In the third month they began to make the **heaps**, and finished them by the **seventh month**. ⁸ When Hezekiah and the rulers came and saw the heaps, **they**

blessed the Lord and His people Israel. ⁹ Then **Hezekiah questioned** the priests and the Levites **concerning the heaps.** ¹⁰ Azariah the chief priest of the house of Zadok said to him, “Since the contributions began to be brought into the house of the Lord, **we have had enough to eat with plenty left over,** for the **Lord has blessed His people,** and **this great quantity is left over.**” ¹¹ Then Hezekiah commanded them to **prepare rooms** in the house of the Lord, and they prepared them. ¹² They faithfully brought in the contributions and the tithes and the consecrated things; and Conaniah the Levite was the officer in charge of them and his brother Shimei was second. **(2 Chronicles 31:3-12)**

Nehemiah:

³⁵ and that they might **bring the first fruits** of our ground and **the first fruits** of all the **fruit of every tree** to the house of the **Lord annually,** ³⁶ and bring to the house of our God the **firstborn** of our sons and of our cattle, and the **firstborn** of our herds and our flocks as it is written in the law, **for the priests** who are **ministering in the house of our God.** ³⁷ We will also bring the **first of our dough,** our contributions, the fruit of every tree, the new wine and the oil **to the priests** at the chambers of the house of our God, and the **tithe of our ground to the Levites,** for the Levites are they who receive the tithes in all the rural towns. ³⁸ The priest, the son of Aaron, shall be with the Levites when the Levites receive tithes, and the Levites shall bring up the tenth of the tithes to the house of our God, to the chambers of the storehouse. ³⁹ For the sons of Israel and the sons of Levi shall bring the contribution of the grain, the new wine and the oil to the chambers; there are the utensils of the sanctuary, the priests who are ministering, the gatekeepers and the singers. **Thus we will not neglect the house of our God. (Nehemiah 10:35-39)**

On that day **men were also appointed** over the **chambers for the stores, the contributions (offerings*), the first fruits and the tithes**, to gather into them from the fields of the cities the **portions required by the law** for the **priests and Levites**; for **Judah rejoiced over the priests and Levites who served.** (Nehemiah 12:44) (*author's insertion)

¹⁰ I also discovered that **the portions of the Levites had not been given them**, so that the **Levites** and the singers who performed the service had gone away, **each to his own field.** ¹¹ **So I reprimanded the officials** and said, “**Why is the house of God forsaken?**” Then I gathered them together and **restored them to their posts.** ¹² All Judah then brought **the tithe of the grain**, wine and oil into the storehouses. ¹³ In charge of the storehouses I appointed Shelemiah the priest, Zadok the scribe, and Pedaiah of the Levites, and in addition to them was Hanan the son of Zaccur, the son of Mattaniah; for they were considered reliable, and it was their task to distribute to their kinsmen. ¹⁴ **Remember me for this**, O my God, and do not blot out my loyal deeds which I have performed for the house of my God and its services. (Nehemiah 13:10-14)

A careful study of the details in the above scriptural passages highlights the following points or features in these financial reformations:

- A restoration of called/set-apart ones (the priests) to focus solely, without distraction, on their respective functions and responsibilities, without care for their personal welfare, since this was more than adequately taken care of.
- A re-prioritisation in the nation of the welfare and upkeep of the ministering priesthood.
- A renewed understanding in the people of the essential nature of the ministering priesthood.
- A resurgent joy and honour, expressed financially, for those with spiritual responsibility.

- A call to return to accurate giving - three-fold giving, viz. first fruits, tithes and offerings.
- A re-adjustment of the mindset of the people back to God's principles governing finances.
- A spirit of joy and willingness that characterised the giving.
- A vastly significant and notable increase in the quantity of what was offered.
- A spirit of extreme generosity and liberality in the givers.
- An administrative procedure set in place for effective management and distribution of the funds.

The result of the financial reformation under Hezekiah was that there was no lack between specified harvest periods.

⁶ The sons of Israel and Judah who lived in the cities of Judah also brought in the **tithe** of oxen and sheep, and the **tithe** of sacred gifts which were **consecrated to the Lord their God**, and **placed them in heaps**. ⁷ In the third month they began to make the **heaps**, and finished them by the **seventh month**. (2 Chronicles 31:6,7)

Note, it took four months to collect and count the offerings which were taken at the start of the third month (Pentecost). By the seventh month, the collection, counting and recording of the offerings taken were completed; yet by this seventh month (Tabernacles), would be the start of the wheat harvest, of which first fruits would again be offered. This is a powerful illustration of the principle of the "ploughman will **overtake** the reaper and the treader of grapes him who sows seed" - (Amos 9:13a).

May we too, in our day, experience such a financial reformation within the hearts of God's people. This reformation necessitates a renewed mindset in reference to the role of those called to the ministry of God's Word, who provide spiritual nurture and care for God's flock - and the attendant honour that accompanies this. May there never be any lack in the house of God. May there never be any lack to finance the vast and variegated

purposes of God. May your personal life and the corporate church of God be characterised by perpetual and sustained harvests, even through seasons of trial and testing.

REFLECT

What is the relationship between each of the following?:

- First Fruits and Apostolicity
- First Fruits and Apostles
- First Fruits and Reformation
- First Fruits and Spiritual Fathering
- First Fruits and Grace
- First Fruits and Firstborn Sonship

Financial first fruits generate
harvests of grace and righteousness.



Now He who supplies seed to the sower and
bread for food will supply and multiply your
seed for sowing and increase the
harvest of your righteousness

2 Cor. 9:10

Respect and Regard by God

Abel offered the **FIRSTLINGS** of his flocks to the Lord. He gave God the best and choicest, the firstborn of all his flocks. This was his first fruits. For this, Genesis 4:4 indicates that he recruited the ‘regard’ (NASB) or ‘respect’ (NKJV) of God Himself, who ‘accepted’ (NLT) him and his first fruits, looking upon the man and his first fruits with ‘favour’ (NIV).

^{2b} ... And Abel was a keeper of flocks, but Cain was a tiller of the ground. ³ So it came about in the course of time that **Cain brought an offering** to the Lord of the **fruit of the ground**. ⁴ Abel, on his part also brought of the **FIRSTLINGS** of his flock **and of THEIR FAT PORTIONS**. And the **Lord had REGARD for Abel AND for his offering**; ⁵ but **for Cain and for his offering** He had **no regard**. So Cain became **very angry and his countenance fell**. (Genesis 4:2b-5)

Some believe that God rejected Cain’s offering because it was the product of the ground and that Abel’s offering is accepted because it required blood sacrifice - the killing of the animals, thus prophetically pointing toward the death of Christ. This was not necessarily the case. It is rather the **internal state or condition of the person making the offering that becomes reflective in the quality of the actual offering itself**, that was the important issue.

Names in Scripture are more than personal pronouns used to identify people but highlight either aspects of character or destiny. The name ‘**Cain**’ means ‘**possession, acquisition, fabrication, I have gotten**’.⁸⁸ His name

implies the following - **“to be man-made or self-made”**. Symbolically, ‘it has got to do with a position of **independence, self-sufficiency, of self-made accomplishments**, motivated by a **heart of pride and self-centredness**’. (Thamo Naidoo)

The name **‘Abel’** means **‘a breath, vanity, vapour, withering, fading away’**.⁸⁹ This name echoes the sentiment - **“I am nothing”**. (Thamo Naidoo)

Cain becomes the possessor of land - he works with the earth - **“but he becomes possessed by the things he is meant to rule”** (Thamo Naidoo). Cain gave an offering - **a token of what he thinks God is deserving of**. Abel, in himself, regards himself as nothing, indicating a posture of **humility** and utter **dependance on God**. Cain, as his name suggests, owned everything, whereas Abel owned nothing and so gave God everything, typified in the best, the **FIRST** of his animals as representative of himself - a more excellent offering. First fruits offered to the Lord demonstrate an inward humility of heart in the giver, laying no great store in his own capacity to secure or sustain his well-being by reliance on his own ability and talents or this world’s system. It is a courageous offering that testifies to utter dependance on God for provision, protection and preservation, economically and otherwise.

The presentation of an offering can either be the start of great blessing or the commencement of your demise. Because of inaccuracy in the realm of presenting an offering to God, the offering of Cain is rejected. The domain of financial offerings is the context in which one can either find great favour and acceptance with God, or rejection from Him - dependent upon the internal state of the person making the offering.

Many in the global Church struggle with the whole idea of giving financially to God, His servants, His Church and Kingdom. Then there are those who give. The first group needs to be activated to financial obedience in respect to giving. The second group are already giving, but now God is refining and tweaking internal attitudes that govern giving. Cain gave of the fruit of the ground and was rejected. In the New Testament, Ananias and Sapphira gave and were judged with death. That you are giving financially, even first fruits, is not in and of itself okay. What is critically important, is that you give with **the correct motivation** and with the

right disposition of heart.

In Hebrews 11, Abel is listed **FIRST** in the list of faith heroes and his offering is described as **'more excellent'** (NKJV) than that of Cain. Thus, the first recorded biblical offering that was acceptable to God was first fruits.

By faith Abel offered to God a **MORE EXCELLENT** sacrifice than Cain, through which he obtained witness that **he was righteous, God testifying of his gifts; and through it he being dead still speaks.** (Hebrews 11:4 - NKJV)

The Greek word for **'more excellent'** is **'pleion/pleion/pleon'**, meaning **'greater or superior both in quantity and quality'**.⁹⁰

The NASB describes Abel's offerings as **'BETTER'** than that of Cain's.

By faith Abel offered to God a **BETTER** sacrifice than Cain, through which he obtained the testimony that he was righteous, God testifying about his gifts, and through faith, though he is dead, he still speaks. (Hebrews 11:4 - NASB)

The Greek word for **'better'** is **'polus/polos'**, meaning **'many, much, large'**.⁹¹ Thus, Abel's offering was **far superior** to that of Cain's, both in **quantity and in quality**. In describing Cain's offerings, the Hebrew word, **'minchah'** is used, meaning, amongst other things, **'a donation'**.⁹²

On the other hand, Abel's first fruits is described as the 'firstlings' of his flock. **'Firstlings'** is the Hebrew word, **'bekor'**, meaning **'firstborn** or **'chief'**.⁹³ In addition, the Scripture records that besides the 'firstlings of his flock', Abel also offered **'of their fat portions'**, which is the Hebrew, **'cheleb cheleb'**, meaning **'the richest, choicest or finest part'**.⁹⁴

God does not deserve a 'donation'. He deserves our best - the first fruits, the choicest or finest part of all our income.

Thus, Abel offered to God the best or choicest part of his flock, namely the firstborn. Cain offered a donation. Great care and thought were taken by Abel in what he presented to God, while it seems that Cain

gave no proper consideration in what he presented to God. Humble Abel gave from the motivation of massive honour for and dependance on God. Prideful Cain gave a donation with the idea of independance of God and thus displayed dishonour for Him.

Take note also that Hebrews 11 indicates that Abel offered his firstlings and their fat portions **BY FAITH**. Faith has got to do with an accurate, penetrative and insightful 'perspective' of God, His will, principles and purposes on the earth. We walk by faith and not by sight. Faith involves prophetic sight into an unseen reality. It is rooted in a Word from God - and this proves that Abel's relationship with God was active and vital and that his communication with God was relevant and current. Without faith it is impossible to please God. Faith and the desire for active, accurate obedience must characterise first fruits giving.

Abel's firstling offering **set a foundation and pattern** for many 'first-born-son' offerings that would take place in the future, e.g. Abraham's intended sacrifice of Isaac, and the ultimate of all - the 'only begotten of the Father, our Lord Jesus Christ' - being offered as the Firstborn Son on the cross to atone for the sin of the whole world. **Abel 'SAW' something by faith within the offering he was presenting to God.** His was the 'first', indicative of a harvest to come - that would bring with it the realisation of God's redemptive will and salvation purpose for all humankind. Prophetic 'sight' and understanding are essential when we offer first fruits. We have got to see the significance and weightedness attached to what we are presenting to the Lord.

There is far more than meets the eye in the giving of first fruits. You might even be blissfully unaware of the strategic significance of the act as it pertains to your life, family and your immediate and distant future. I have in my own life and family seen this principle work. My two eldest sons, upon their commencement of secular employment, both willingly observed the first fruit principle from their first salaries in honour of me as the representation of Father God in their lives. They were not instructed by my wife or I to do so. Their conviction to obey was borne out from their observation of us, their parents, consistently practising the principle. Some things are more 'caught' than 'taught'.

Leaders, as well, must demonstrate faithfulness in their obedience to the first fruits principle if their people are to consistently do the same. Leaders lead more by the correctness of their practical lifestyle example, than by the accuracy of their polished verbal explanations. (Cf. Study: 1 Chron 29:1-9; 2 Chron 35:7 and 2 Chron. 30:24 - where kings gave from their own personal possessions - not from the national treasury, and activated others in giving.)

A careful analysis of Abel's first fruits recorded in Genesis 4, together with the commentary on it by the writer of the book of Hebrews, reveals the following blessings of first fruits:

- Regard by God
- A Righteous Witness or Testimony by God
- Transcending Human Limitations

1. REGARD BY GOD

The Scriptures teach that God had **regard or respect first for Abel**, the man, and **then for Abel's first fruits** - and then God counted him as righteous. The man was regarded or respected first; then secondly, his first fruit gifts were. This order is important. The man's gifts are accepted because the man is accepted. Acceptance or regard by God of the gifts is dependent on the acceptance and regard by God of the man. The gift does not validate the giver; rather, the giver validates the gift. In this case, Abel's gift was accurately representative of the placing of God **FIRST** in his life. His gift reflected the state and quality of his internal state of heart. Because of this, Abel is regarded as 'righteous' before the Lord. Thus, his gift was of superior quality and quantity than Cain's.

The word '**regard**' is interesting. It is the Hebrew word, '**sa'ah**', meaning 'to **gaze at**; implies - to **inspect**, consider, **compassionate**⁹⁵; to look with **favour**; to look on something with **approval**, to **accept** it; to look at **intently** (cf. Job 7:19; Ps. 39:13); to look at with **high regard** and **appreciation**.⁹⁶

The word 'regard' implies that Abel's first fruits recruited the 'gaze' of God. This was not a cursory glance or casual perusal. It was an intense look and a look of intent. God did an appraisal of both Abel and his offering, and after assessing the man and his gift, granted **approval, acceptance and appreciation with respect**. His life and his first fruits recruited the favour and favourable gaze of the Lord. Also, as the word 'regard' suggests, God looked with compassion on Abel.

What God saw was not just a man who obeys Him, trusts Him and honours Him, but saw in Abel and his first fruits, something that was so like Himself. Not only is the first fruits principle strongly innate to the character of the triune God as explained in chapter five, but God would in time also offer His own Firstborn (first fruit) Son, our Lord Jesus Christ. This is also symbolically depicted in Abraham's willingness to offer his only son, Isaac, as a first fruits offering to God. All human actions of sons of God are to mirror the nature and character of God. First fruits giving certainly does.

Abel's first fruits were a tangible indication that he placed God FIRST in his life generally. **One should not practise first fruit giving if this first fruits is not an expression of the fact that in your entire life, you place God and His Kingdom first - in ALL you do.** He whose offering is exactly representative of his spiritual state and devotion, will reap the REGARD of the Lord - a favourable and approving response from the Lord.

A Brief Aside: As God rejected Cain's offering, so did Elisha, a representation of God in the context in which he functioned, refuse a financial gift from Naaman, because he perceived that even though the God of Israel healed Naaman, he was still focused on using his position and resources to facilitate and support the worship of Rimmon, an Assyrian deity/idol (2 Kings 5:15-19). Spiritual fathers or leaders must know when to accept and when not to receive first fruits from people. Leaders cannot accept an offering which God in the spirit has rejected. We must accept that which God accepts and reject that which God rejects. We cannot bless that which God looks upon with disapproval and disfavour. To favour that which God frowns upon equates to not representing God exactly in that context. Having said this though, always be led by the Spirit and always

seek to administrate these matters with grace, mercy and with a view to redemption of the one whose offering in your spiritual perception is not acceptable to God. Consider that in the case of God's rejection of Cain's offering and Elisha's disapproval of Gehazi's acceptance of Namaan's gift, that in both cases, there was offered to them an opportunity to repent and remedy their disposition and behaviour. Again, act with grace and mercy.

2. A RIGHTEOUS WITNESS BY GOD

As indicated earlier in this writing, **righteousness is compliance to God's predetermined, eternal standards for how all humankind should behave and function in all aspects of their lives.** Righteousness must be practised and expressed outwardly in terms of obedient behaviour in all respects, including financial giving. In Heb. 11:4, Abel, by virtue of the offer of the firstlings of his flocks, 'OBTAINED A WITNESS or TESTIMONY THAT HE WAS RIGHTEOUS'. The text then says, "GOD TESTIFYING ABOUT HIS GIFTS".

God looked at what he gave and made a conclusion about the man, because what the man gave was thoroughly reflective of the man. Abel is considered as being compliant to God's Heavenly design (righteousness) based on the assessment of what he gave. Again, note the emphasis: God testified about Abel's gifts and thus Abel obtained a witness from God that he was righteous. What Abel gave, provided evidence of his already inward state of righteousness. It is one thing for another human to applaud our giving, but it is more significant when God does so, and He does so, not being impressed by the gifts itself per se, but the fact that these gifts denote, magnify and speak clearly of our inward righteous state.

God is purifying His church, so that, like the priesthood in the days of Malachi, we too might **offer to the Lord offerings in 'righteousness'** (Malachi 3:3). The accuracy of our financial giving, in respect to its expression, attitudes and motives governing giving as reflected in Scripture, must reveal our righteous disposition of heart, and indeed evidence it. Money reveals much of a man's heart. Money measures the man - its absence or abundance reveals the true state of his heart. We can, by

how we administrate money, demonstrate righteousness.

Many scriptures connect financial giving and the condition of righteousness. Here are a few examples:

Sow with a view to righteousness, Reap in accordance with kindness. **(Hosea 10:12)**

An increased measure of the grace of God is a great benefit of financial giving - especially giving to one's spiritual leader and to the poor. All giving accesses greater grace. Grace reigns through or in righteousness, according to Romans 5:21. The Lord gives grace and glory, withholding nothing from those who walk uprightly (righteously) - according to Psalm 84:11. Noah was a righteous man and found grace in the eyes of the Lord (Gen. 6:8). Grace also is attracted to a righteous condition. Grace is the initiator of positional righteousness and also requires practical obedience in which to grow. So, giving expresses righteousness, to which grace will be attracted.

2 Corinthians chapters 8 and 9 speaks about financial giving, especially to the poor, and the attendant blessings.

⁶ Now this I say, he who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and he who **sows bountifully will also reap bountifully.** ⁷ Each one must do just as he has purposed in his heart, not grudgingly or under compulsion, for **God loves a cheerful giver.** ⁸ And God is able to make **all grace abound to you,** so that always having all sufficiency in everything, you may have an abundance for every good deed; ⁹ as it is written, “**He scattered abroad, he gave to the poor, His righteousness endures forever.**” **(2 Corinthians 9:6-9)**

The well-known promise in verse 8, “And God is able to make all grace abound to you”, associated with financial giving, is followed immediately in the next verse with, “AS IT IS WRITTEN”, which is another way of saying, “because of this truth”. Because of what truth? Well, verse 9 clearly spells it out: “He scattered abroad, he gave to the poor, His righteousness endures forever.” In other words, **God is able to make all grace abound**

to the righteous man, who has demonstrated this righteousness in how he has given.

Verse 9 is a quote from Psalm 112. Take the time to read Psalm 112 meditatively and note the strong correlation between the righteous man and his financial behaviour.

¹ Praise the LORD! How blessed is the man who fears the LORD, Who greatly delights in His commandments. ² His descendants will be mighty on earth; The generation of the upright will be blessed. ³ **Wealth and riches** are in his **house**, And **his righteousness** endures forever. ⁴ Light arises in the darkness for the **upright**; *He is* gracious and compassionate and righteous. ⁵ It is well with the man who is **gracious and lends**; He will maintain his cause in judgment. ⁶ For he will never be shaken; The **righteous** will be remembered forever. ⁷ He will not fear evil tidings; His heart is steadfast, trusting in the LORD. ⁸ His heart is upheld, he will not fear, Until he looks *with satisfaction* on his adversaries. ⁹ He has **given freely to the poor**, His **righteousness endures forever**; His horn will be exalted in honor. (Psalm 112:1-9)

Back to 2 Corinthians 9:

⁹ as it is written, “He scattered abroad, he gave to the poor, His righteousness endures forever.” ¹⁰ Now He who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will supply and **multiply your seed for sowing** and **increase the harvest of your righteousness**; ¹¹ you will be **enriched in everything for all liberality**, which through us is producing thanksgiving to God. (2 Corinthians 9:9-11)

The sower (giver) is promised more seed to sow. **God does not supply seed to a non-sower.** While He gives bread to the eater and seed to the sower, when the sower sows, **God multiplies the seed sown**, because in that seed is bread. In multiplying seed, some of which will be used to sow

again, the scriptures indicates that God will **INCREASE THE HARVEST OF YOUR RIGHTEOUSNESS**, and then you will be enriched in all things for the purpose of generous giving again.

When we give financially to God, we do not only get provision of finances or our needs met as a reward, but of even greater benefit is a **HARVEST OF RIGHTEOUSNESS. ABUNDANT GRACE would then “reign in” and attend this righteousness** (Rom. 5:21) and this brings an **ENRICHMENT** in one’s life, not only benefitting you privately but also adequately resourcing you to sow generously and liberally again. See endnotes for details to my study highlighting the general benefits of righteousness.⁹⁷

“2 Corinthians 9:8 does not say God is able to make all money abound to you. No, God makes ALL GRACE abound, because when you have grace, you will have everything else you need” (Thamo Naidoo). Grace looks for righteousness as its context to ‘reign’ and grow in. So express your righteousness by your generous giving disposition, and attract greater grace to your life.

After the Parable of the Unrighteous Steward, Jesus made the following conclusory remarks:

¹⁰ “He who is faithful in a very little thing is faithful also in much; and he who is unrighteous in a very little thing is unrighteous also in much. ... ¹³ No servant can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will be devoted to one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and wealth.” **(Luke 16:10,13)**

After saying, “He who is faithful in a very little thing is faithful also in much”, Jesus, using the conjunction “AND” continues, “He who is unrighteous in a very little thing is unrighteous also in much.” The point is: Jesus is suggesting that faithfulness in financial matters is equated to righteousness, and unfaithfulness in financial stewardship is equated to unrighteousness. He finishes up with the caution of not serving two Masters (God and Wealth or Mammon). Here we observe again the relationship between righteousness and financial faithfulness.

The Apostle Paul warned Timothy to be careful of the **love of money** on the one hand, but rather to **pursue righteousness** on the other.

⁹ But those who want to **get rich fall into temptation and a snare and many foolish and harmful** desires which plunge men into ruin and destruction. ¹⁰ For the **love of money** is a root of all sorts of evil, and some by longing for it have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs. ¹¹ But **flee from these things, you man of God, and pursue righteousness**, godliness, faith, love, perseverance and gentleness. (1 Timothy 6:9-11)

Abraham was justified and declared righteous, both by believing God and by doing the works of obedience. It is important to consider that when the Scripture indicates that **Abram's belief, without works, rendered him righteous**, it was in reference to his response to believing God's Word that he would be a **father of many nations** (Rom. 4:1-25; Gal. 3:6). This was the beginning of Abram's journey with God - he was justified by faith (belief).

But, when the Scripture indicates that **Abraham's works also justified him** (James 2:21-24), it was in respect to God's Word commanding him to **sacrifice his only son Isaac**, something which occurred when he was possibly between seventeen and thirty years old. Isaac, Abraham's first and only son from God's perspective, is symbolic of first fruits. By this offering, he too, like Abel, was considered righteous. This first fruits representation in Isaac unlocked the revelation of God as 'Provision' (Jehovah Jireh). Although given to Abraham, this revelation was accessed by Isaac too, who willingly laid his life down to be sacrificed. That revelation of God as Provision indelibly marked Isaac's mind and life as well. Isaac never had a provision issue, and even in a time of famine, he sowed and in the same year reaped a one hundredfold harvest, which is the maximum potential harvest reapeable. First fruits giving performed as an expression of righteousness, recruits more grace and unlocks the provision dimension of God in your time, potentially to the next generation, if that generation follows God and obeys His principles.

FIRST FRUITS ACTIVATES A RIGHTEOUS OR JUST RESPONSE FROM GOD

By faith Abel offered to God a better sacrifice than Cain, through which he obtained the testimony that he was righteous, God testifying about his gifts, and **through faith, though he is dead, he still speaks.** (Hebrews 11:4)

Within the context of speaking about Abel's first fruits, Hebrews 11:4 states that Abel, **"though being dead, yet still speaks"**. The literal and contextual interpretation and meaning of this verse is that his blood cried out to the Lord. Most believe this cry was one of vengeance on his brother, but the scriptures say nothing about this - it simply says his blood cried out to the Lord.

He said, "What have you done? The voice of your brother's blood is crying to Me from the ground. (Genesis 4:10)

I believe it was a cry for justice and not vengeance per se. Within the **justice of God, is mercy that triumphs over His judgement** (James 2:13). The cry for justice is evidenced by **God's just or righteous response** in applying the appropriate repercussions on Cain for his actions, and still lacing it with grace and mercy (see Gen. 4:15 - God set a protective mark on Cain and instituted a sevenfold vengeance on anyone who kills him). **Righteous Abel cried out for a righteous response from God.**

The **blood of Jesus** also speaks, but it speaks **better things than the blood of Abel.**

To Jesus the Mediator of the new covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling that speaks better things than that of Abel. (Hebrews 12:24)

The blood of Jesus cried out for justice too. His blood appealed to His Father to accept His death as the just penalty for the sin of all humanity, and hence the Father must forgive those who repent of their sins and

receive them as sons in His spiritual family. Cain got what he deserved, with some expression of grace and mercy - his brother's blood crying out for justice. We did not get what we deserved, receiving a super-abundance of grace and mercy, being completely freed from the death penalty of sin for all eternity. The blood of Jesus cried out too for justice, but HE fulfilled God's appropriate judgement of death on sin, by taking that sin and punishment upon Himself - in our place. In this respect, the blood of Jesus speaks 'better' than that of Abel's.

3. TRANSCENDING NATURAL OR HUMAN LIMITATIONS

First fruits practised in your present time communicates a standard of honour for others in future generations to follow.

Note how Heb. 11:4b is framed in these different Bible versions:

God testifying about his gifts, and **through faith**, though he is dead, he still speaks. (**Hebrews 11:4b - NASB**)

God testifying of his gifts; and **through it** he being dead still speaks. (**Hebrews 11:4b - NKJV**)

And **through his faith**, though he died, he still speaks. (**Hebrews 11:4b - ESV**)

It is through faith that Abel offered the firstlings of his flocks and obtained a testimony of righteousness. Through this faith expressed in the righteous giving of first fruits, Abel, being dead, STILL speaks. Abel's death has not stopped his speaking. What this man did in faith, still speaks to us today. Faith is one of three unending and eternal virtues (1 Cor. 13:13). One aspect of the eternal nature of faith is this: what the person of faith does in time, speaks even beyond the lifespan of the person.

Deeds of faith-filled obedience communicate lessons in trust, belief and honour of God. Abel, the **first human** to honour God with **first**

fruits, is the **first man** to be described as a **man of faith**, establishing a powerful standard for us to emulate. He is still speaking to us today, actively seeking to persuade us to also honour the Lord with the first fruits of all our increase.

Hebrews 11:4 has many prophetic interpretations, of which I provide two here below:

- **First Fruits Break Natural Limitations**

Abel's blood cried out for an appropriate righteous response from God. The capacity for Abel to STILL SPEAK, even though dead, is referenced in the same context of the mention of his first fruits in Heb. 11:4. The dead cannot speak in the natural, yet Abel, being dead, still speaks. The act of speaking requires 'life' and not 'death'. Death indicates an end to all human living and functionality. Abel's voice and function continues beyond death. **The one whose first fruits finds acceptance and regard from the Lord, will begin to operate beyond the limitations of what his human potential or natural circumstances dictate and prescribe.**

- **First Fruits Depict Death to Self-Preservation or Self-Interest**

Abel, symbolically, is 'dead to himself', thus he can speak. We must become dead to self, dead to the preoccupation with personal security and dead to the unnatural pursuit of wealth and carnality. We must, in a spirit of abandoned financial obedience to every financial principle of the Kingdom of God, express our thankful acknowledgement of His empowerment, provision, and utter dependance on Him. By this, we allow God to amplify and extend our VOICE - our influence - to realms, places, jurisdictions and people we may not physically venture to or physically encounter.

REFLECT

1. Consider Abel and his first fruits gifts to the Lord. What made him and his gifts recruit the favourable gaze and acceptance by God?
2. Faithful financial obedience in respect to giving, provides both proof of righteousness and produces a harvest of righteousness. Elaborate this thought, anchoring it biblically.
3. In what respect does Abel, though being dead, still speak to this generation?

Leaders represent all whom they lead presently
and those still to come, when they
give in a spirit of strong representation.



Serve from your best and
your home will be blessed.

Ezek. 44:30b (TM)

Blessings on You and Your House

The book of Deuteronomy provided clear guidelines to Israel for the observance of first fruits, tithes and offerings when they would enter their Promised land. Upon offering these, the offerer is to make declarations, part of which is a faith-filled belief, appropriation, assertion and thus activation of Divine blessing.

Look down from Your holy habitation, from heaven, and **bless Your people Israel**, and **the ground** which You have given us, **a land** flowing with milk and honey, as You swore to our fathers.’ (Deuteronomy 26:15)

A BLESSING ON YOUR HOUSE

The first of all the **first fruits** of every kind and every contribution of every kind, from all your contributions, shall be for the priests; **you shall also give to the priest the first** of your dough to **cause a blessing to REST on your house**. (Ezekiel 44:30)

‘Rest’ is the Hebrew word, ‘nuah’, meaning ‘to settle upon; to fall upon; to dwell’.⁹⁸

In the verse above, a benefit of observing the practice of first fruits is that 'A BLESSING WILL REST ON YOUR HOUSE'. The word 'rest' suggests a permanent settling. There will be an abiding blessing that permanently rests on everyone associated with that 'house' presently and in the future. First fruits have the effect of **anchoring the blessing**. Those in the 'house' of a father or leader (natural or spiritual), are blessed in that the first fruits given **maintain the blessed state of the house**. 'House' may refer to one's biological family unit and one's spiritual family.

An interesting picture of the **representational capacity of a leader** generally, and his giving specifically, is painted for us in **Levi's placement in Abraham**. When Abraham gave tithes to Melchisedek, a High Priest of God (Gen.14), it is said that Levi - although not yet born until hundreds of years later - was already in the loins of Abraham, suggesting that Levi, too, gave tithes to Melchisedek. The Levites, who received tithes from all the tribes of Israel, gave a tithe of this collected tithe to the High Priest in their day.

And, so to speak, through Abraham even Levi, who received tithes, paid tithes, for he was still in the loins of his father when Melchizedek met him. (**Hebrews 7:9,10**)

When Abraham offered tithes to Melchisedek, he did so in representation of all the tribes in the nation of Israel. Recall that the Levites represented all other tribes as the first fruits of God (Jer. 2:3a; Num. 3:12,41,45). When God saw the Levites, he saw the nation. As 'father' of the nation of Israel, Abraham represented the Levites, who were in his loins when he tithed to Melchisedek. In the act of tithing, Abraham thus represented the entire nation, since the Levites represented the whole nation.

The principle to be understood and applied is that a leader has very strong representation in his financial giving. The quality and strength of this representation would depend upon the heart of commitment of the leader towards those he leads. Leaders possess the capacity to 'hold the people in their hearts'. Paul said to the Philippians, "I have you in my heart" (Phil. 1:7). Paul also indicated that in sending Onesimus back to Philemon, he was 'sending his own heart' (Philemon 1:12). The High

Priest wore a breastplate, on which was engraved all the names of the twelve tribes of Israel, suggesting that he carried the entire nation within his heart. Thus, when he stood before God, God did not only see him but all whom he represented (Ex. 28:12,29). I want to encourage leaders to carry people in their heart as Moses carried Israel in his bosom (Num. 11:12).

Every time you, as a leader, observe any form of giving, especially first fruits, condition your heart and mind to do so representatively of all the people you lead and carry **within your heart** presently. Do the same for all you carry **within your loins**, who are yet to manifest in the future, even beyond your time. I have practised this principle, as encouraged by and modelled before me, in the person of Thamo Naidoo, my spiritual father. I have observed marvellous results in some of the people I lead. Those who were financially disobedient to any form of giving, now enjoy a measure of financial protection and providence. They also have a change of heart, starting to order their steps in compliance with God's financial principles.

As a spiritual leader, the blessings of first fruits contained in Ezekiel 44:30 that 'rests' on your house, is a reality now and in the future. This 'rested' blessing abides and prevails. Every time we prepare to offer our first fruits, my wife and I make a habit of first praying together. This prayer is done very seriously, in absolute reverential fear and honour of the Lord. The prayer is extremely worshipful and full of gratitude. In the prayer, we affirm that in our first fruits giving, we are representing all the spiritual sons (including our biological family) that He has given into our care to steward. Each time we do so, we sense such immeasurable grace and peace for our lives and those under our spiritual oversight. The issue of representation also assists us as leaders to remain sober and circumspect in our administration of first fruits, each time we give or receive it. The holiness of the act accentuates in our minds. Representation helps to heighten our sense of responsibility for God's people. We observe the principle of first fruits, not just for our own sakes, but also for the sake of those we lead.

The Message Bible renders the latter part of Ezekiel 44:30 as follows: **"Serve from your best and your home will be blessed."** This blessing transcends issues of provision and protection. It includes a blessing on the quality of relationships in that house and the specific intention or will of

God attendant with those relationships.

'House' also alludes to the principles of the spiritual father-son dynamic. These relationships are blessed and are used by God to accomplish His global intent. The correlation between first fruits and how the blessing of God persists in a spiritual father-son relationship to accomplish His will, must be spiritually and prophetically understood.

May the blessing of God attendant with first fruits always 'fall, settle, dwell and REST' on your house.

REFLECT

Heads of Households, both naturally and spiritually, through the giving of first fruits, confer a spiritual blessing on their house, i.e., on all in the household who are under their oversight. Discuss the implications of this principle of the obedience or disobedience of the first fruits principles by ...

- (a) a husband/wife.
- (b) the spiritual father of a Church, in his/her personal observance of the principle from private income.
- (c) the spiritual father, as a representative of the Church, in respect to the corporate Church's practise of the principle toward the apostolic leader to whom it relates.

Bursting Barns and Brimming Vats



First fruits anticipate future harvests.
Tithing protects those harvests.

Plentiful Barns and Overflowing Vats

In terms of Proverbs 3:9, when we honour the Lord with our wealth and first fruits, the resultant manifestation of the Lord's response is described in Proverbs 3:10, i.e., plentiful barns and overflowing vats.

Honor the Lord from **your wealth** and from the **FIRST OF ALL your produce**; So your **barns will be filled with plenty**, and your **vats will overflow with new wine**.
(Proverbs 3:9,10)

Those who 'HONOUR' God, will also be HONOURED by God.

"... those who honour Me I will honour..."(1 Sam. 2:30b)

Proverbs 3:9,10 describes a two-fold blessing on the giver of first fruits:

a) **Plentiful Barns**

'Barns' is the Hebrew word, '**asamim**', meaning '**places for heaping together**'.⁹⁹

Crops from a successful harvest were heaped up in barns for the present and future food supplies. The promise of the Lord here is that these places where we heap up supplies to provide **sustenance for our physical and material well-being**, will be 'filled with plenty'. This applies to

present and future needs.

In Hebrew, ‘**plenty**’ is ‘**saba**’, denoting ‘**satiety or plenty**’¹⁰⁰ This speaks of an **overflowing abundance**. It not only indicates an **abundance, fullness or plentifulness**, but also absolute **satiating** and **satisfaction or contentment**. The Hebrew word for ‘**filled**’ is ‘**male**’, which not only means “to be full, to be complete, to fulfil, to finish”, but also “**to satisfy**”¹⁰¹.

One of the promises on obedience in the well-known chapter comparing obedience versus disobedience is:

The Lord will **command the blessing upon you in your barns** and in **all that you put your hand to**, and He will **bless you in the land** which the Lord your God gives you.
(Deuteronomy 28:8)

SYMBOLIC APPLICATION:

Barns stored grain that was used to make bread. This has reference, not just to your physical needs, but also to the Word of God, the Bread of Life. You will always have ‘grain’- the grace vested in God’s Word that is able to build you up. You will receive spiritual sustenance and nourishment from the Word of the Lord.

b) **Your Vats (Presses) will Overflow with New Wine**

The promised blessing in Proverbs 3:9 is that our vats (‘presses’) will burst with NEW WINE. ‘Vats’ or ‘presses’ refers to winepresses. A winepress was a stone vat in which grapes were pressed, releasing its juice. Each vineyard typically had its own winepress, in the form of a square basin. Grapes were heaped up in the winepress and then crushed by men and women who leaped and danced on the crop (Jer. 48:33). The juices flowed out of the vat and were collected in clay jars or new wineskins. **Presses indicate the means by which grapes were converted to grape juice and then ultimately to wine**. Without the press, there would be no conversion to juice nor wine. In other words, the press indicates **the means by**

which the fruit of our labour is put to further and greater usefulness or productiveness.

Note the emphasis on **'new wine'** in Prov. 3:10. The primary difference between 'new wine' and 'fermented wine' is that the former is **produced by a vine** and the 'pressing' in the vats, and the **latter by a process of fermentation**. **Isaiah 65:8** indicates that the "**new wine is found in the cluster**". So 'new wine' is unfermented grape juice, i.e., that which is found in the cluster. New wine is the **pure blood or juice of the grape**, whereas fermented wine is the product of a fermentation process rather than the product of a vine.

The one who gives first fruits can thus appropriate for himself, not only financial well-being (barns filled with plenty), but is also promised a blessing on the **productive use of the finances** - such that many needs will be met. Implied in this whole idea is that God will bless anything or any means used by the person to convert one thing into something that would be of greater value and usefulness. In other words, **any engagement in the workplace or at creative, entrepreneurial or business endeavours will be crowned with success.**

New wine, naturally speaking, is used to describe wine that has started a fermentation process toward a more mature state of good quality wine. The fermentation process is initially quite volatile and potent. This is why **'new wine' cannot be put into old wineskins** - the wineskins will burst - being unable to contain the intensity of the fermentation process.

Hence, in Proverbs 3:10, a promise is made to the giver of first fruits that the **rate of change, particularly in the earliest stages of a process of production, will be intense and accelerated**. He who offers first fruits will walk into certain realms of reward, blessing and heightened productivity that is usually associated with a long process of development or maturation, but he does so in an instant or within an extremely short period of time (Hence - 'acceleration').

SYMBOLIC APPLICATION :

Both water and wine are symbols of God's Word. Water is symbolic of the cleansing dynamic and characteristic of the Word of God (John 15:3; Eph.5:26). Wine is symbolic of the revelatory and illumination dimensions and effects of God's Word. In John chapter 2, Jesus converted water into wine. The 'water of the Word' becomes the 'wine of the Word', i.e., the cleansing dynamic in God's Word is the basis for its revelatory or illuminatory potential in our lives - the more we are cleansed by the 'water', the more we see through the 'wine'. The wine of the revelation from the Word has a positive, intoxicating effect on our entire perception, behaviour and lifestyle, and we begin to live our lives being highly influenced by the quality of the revelation we receive. Our spiritual sight, perception or comprehension, is like that of Judah's, viz. 'eyes red with wine' - i.e., brilliant or darkly flashing in a good sense¹⁰² (Gen. 49:12 - KJV).

The giver of first fruits is ideally postured to access greater revelation from the Father. Revelation (wine) will burst forth and overflow in your life. This revelation will affect your spiritual sight and will condition your outward behaviour. Jesus said that if you are unfaithful with handling money, how can God entrust to you the true riches of the Kingdom.

The relationship between financial giving and the degree of spiritual sight or revelation is hinted at by Jesus in Matthew 6:22,23 and explained more in chapter 20 of this writing.

Melchisedek, a priest of God, functioned as Abraham's spiritual leader and served him bread and wine. Abraham honoured Melchisedek financially with his tithe from the huge spoil he attained after defeating the alliance of kings who had taken Lot captive. Bread is symbolic of the nurturing quality of God's Word (Luke 4:4). Although only recorded once in scripture in Genesis 14, this exchange of bread and wine, with pronounced blessings and the giving and receiving of the tithe, was probably a regular occurrence between Abraham and Melchisedek. The infrequency with which something is referenced in scripture does not necessarily indicate it was infrequently practiced (John 21:25). The point to highlight is this: The grace of God is imparted through the speaking forth of God's cleansing, nurturing, maturing and revelatory Word. This process is facilitated


in a culture where God is honoured through his representative leaders receiving honour on God's behalf.

TITHES PRESERVE THE HARVEST WHICH FIRST FRUITS ANTICIPATE AND ACTIVATE

As indicated earlier in this writing, first fruits and tithes are a powerful duo, working hand in hand. Tithing brings a preserving and protective dynamic on your finances and every other category of your life. One of the blessings of tithing is that the devourer, representative of satan, will be rebuked by God, the Lord of Hosts, Himself.

¹⁰ Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse, so that there may be food in My house, and test Me now in this," says the Lord of hosts, "if I will not open for you the windows of heaven and pour out for you a **blessing until it overflows.** ¹¹ Then I will **rebuke the devourer** for you, so that it will **not destroy the fruits of the ground; nor will your vine in the field cast its grapes,**" says the Lord of hosts. (Malachi 3:10)

Two specific works of the enemy against your life will be rebuked, and these rebukes by the Lord against the works of the enemy, are intended to ensure the two-fold first fruits blessing promised in Proverbs 3:10:

- a) **Mal. 3:11a** 'he shall not **destroy the fruit** of your **grounds**'

[Prov.3:10 - Your barns filled with plenty]

The word 'destroy' suggests a corrupting or decaying influence upon crops or harvest. Satan's intent is to reduce or completely obliterate our financial blessing. Farmers, whose fruits of the ground were destroyed, would be devastated. Their fields were fruitful and productive and would come to 'harvest', but they could not partake of and enjoy the fullness of the fruits of the harvest, if the 'devourer' destroyed the fruits of the

ground. God wants us to enjoy all the rewards of our labour and to be well-nourished and economically sustained. Concerning tithing, Deuteronomy 14:29 (KJV) says that “the Lord thy God may bless thee in all the work of thine hand which thou doest”. **Tithing prevents the fruits of the ground from being destroyed, therefore the ‘barns are filled with plenty’ as promised because of first fruits giving.**

b) **Mal. 3:11b** ‘neither shall your vine **cast her fruit** before **the time** in **the field**’ (KJV)



[**Prov.3:10** - Your **vats overflowing** with **new wine**]

A vine is a plant on which grapes grow. Fruit ‘cast before the time’ refers to grapes that fall off the vine before the time of harvest. They would fall to the ground and not be used. This too indicates that the person, the owner of the vineyard, does not enjoy the full potential fruit of his labour. All the time and energy spent in tending the vine for a harvest of ripe juicy grapes, is in vain and wasted. Now the blessing of God here, is that **your vine will cast her fruit at the right time and season in which it could be put to further productive use**, e.g., the production of grape juice, wine and other related products. **The preserving dynamic of tithing in that “vines will not cast their fruit before the time”, will ensure the blessing of the first fruits, by your “vats overflowing with new wine!”** You will see the expected positive result or outcome attendant with every financial seed sown.

The ‘blessed man’ of Psalm 1 ‘brings forth fruit in his season; his leaf also does not wither, and whatever he does prospers’ (Psalm 1:3). Leaves that usually wither in the dry autumn season, are indicative of general national economic depression or recession. But even in these economically difficult periods, the ‘leaf’ of the son of God who meditates on and obeys God’s principles in His Word, does not wither. May this be true of you and I.

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE TITHE AND THE FIRST FRUIT

In Chapter 3 we have already noted the following: **The tithe looks back in time to see what God HAS DONE, and so honours Him for that, whereas first fruits look forward into time, in faith, to what God WILL DO in your future.** Tithing looks back to your financial past. First fruits look forward to your financial future. **First fruits anticipate and activate a future harvest; tithes protect that harvest.** These principles are also demonstrated earlier in this chapter.

As already indicated in this writing in chapters 8 and 14, the Levites replaced the entire nation of Israel (the other eleven tribes) as God's first fruits. The Levites always had a representative character and quality. If we consider them as 'first fruits' and they gave tithes in and through their prophetic positioning in Abraham (Heb. 7:9,10), then we could say that "first fruits gave tithes" - in a manner of speaking. The implication, amongst other possible applications, is that one should tithe off the harvests that result because of one's faithfulness in giving first fruits. Also implied is that one is only able to tithe because one has a harvest, which was guaranteed by the offering of the initial first fruit in that period. Selah.

REFLECT

1. Proverbs 3:9,10 are key verses, citing 'plentiful barns' and 'overflowing vats' as two blessings on first fruits. Consider both the natural and spiritual application of both these and the degree to which they are evident in your personal life.
2. Compare the timing of and blessings on first fruits and tithing. Can you observe the powerful interaction between the two forms of giving in your life?



Giving first fruits is a legacy
you leave for future generations.



Boaz and Ruth's first fruit represented in Obed
bore a harvest of Jesus and His Church.

Migration from Reward to Inheritance

Read through the entire book of Ruth. Ruth is described as a spiritual son to Naomi, who thus is depicted in the book as a spiritual father to her (Ruth 4:15).

May he also be to you a restorer of life and a sustainer of your old age; for your daughter-in-law, who loves you and is **better to you than seven sons**, has given birth to him. (**Ruth 4:15**)

As a spiritual son to Naomi, her spiritual father, Ruth is consistently concerned for Naomi's welfare and the purposes of God attendant with her. She gleans in Boaz's field from the start of the barley harvest (Passover) up until the end of the wheat harvest (Pentecost). **One** ephah or measure of barley is gleaned at her first gleaning (Ruth 2:17).

She prioritised the need of Naomi and would always bring back an 'offering' to her. Even upon her receipt of **six** measures of barley at Boaz's threshing floor, she is instructed by Boaz (representative of Christ) not to return to her mother-in-law (spiritual father) empty-handed (Ruth 3:15,17). **One plus six equates to seven**, the number of completion, perfection and rest. She has now reached completion, perfection and rest in the extent of her reward from the Lord because of her perpetual and consistent acts of obedience to and support for her spiritual father, Naomi.

In Ruth chapter 4, she is brought into marriage with Boaz and now owns the field that she once gleaned in - she has come into her inheritance.

She migrates beyond the realm of 'sowing and reaping' to that of active appropriation of her inheritance in the Lord. To reap, you must sow - and this we will always do, so long as the earth remains - Gen 8:22. But living in one's inheritance is a step up from sowing. Now, **when we do sow, it is from a disposition of one who is fully aware of his inheritance in Christ Jesus. To activate your inheritance, you must come into a mature state of sonship, characterised by perfected obedience in all domains - including financial obedience.**

Furthermore, the male child, Obed, born to Ruth and Boaz, was figuratively offered to Naomi as a first fruit son, in that the child is not accorded as her own, but the son of Naomi (according to Levirate law). Obed's son was Jesse, the father of David, from whose line Jesus Christ would be born. Yet, in the genealogical record of Jesus recorded in Matthew 1:5, Obed is referenced as Ruth's son. What we learn from this is that **what we give sacrificially, from Heaven's perspective, never leaves us.** Also, Ruth produced something (a son) which would be given to and accorded to her spiritual father in honour. This son produced Israel's greatest king in David, who in turn, down his hereditary line, produced God's great Son, our Lord Jesus. And from Jesus, many other sons of God would be born into the large spiritual family of God, the Church, throughout the ages to the present day and beyond. Herein, we see the **power of one single first fruit offering.** It will **bring blessing to you in your time and even beyond, to successive generations.** Ruth's firstborn son was given symbolically as first fruits, and like Abel, though she is dead, yet she still speaks.

Redemption is a powerful theme in the book of Ruth. The words, 'redeem', 'redeemer' and 'redemption' together occur twenty times. Scriptures teach that redemption is past, present and future - God has redeemed us (in our spirit); He does presently redeem us (in our soul); and He will yet redeem us (physically in our body). **God's redemptive work will be swiftly facilitated when we also bring perfection to the area of our financial giving in reference to our spiritual fathers, by observing the practice of first fruits.**

Principles already explained in chapter eleven, in reference to Ruth's accessing of profound grace stewarded by Naomi, merits brief repetition here:

When Ruth said to Naomi, “**Your God will be my God**” (Ruth 1:16), she did not just want to serve the God of Israel as opposed to the gods of Moab (Ruth 1:15), but she was reaching out after the richness of the relationship that Naomi, as a spiritual father, enjoyed with God. The God of Paul supplied the needs of the Philippians, as they excelled in the grace of giving, especially to Paul, their spiritual father: “**MY God** will supply **your need**” (Phil. 4:19). The God of Naomi, too, supplied the need of Ruth. (Refer to chapter 11 where this principle is more thoroughly explained)

As a spiritual son, Ruth accessed spiritual and natural benefits and advantages because of her pursuit after and practical support of Naomi, her spiritual father. She migrates from:

- Being a widow to a married woman.
- Being unable to give birth to a child in ten years in the land of Moab, to giving birth to a significant son (Obed).
- From gleaning in a field to owning that field.
- From begging in a field to employing others to work her fields.
- From poverty to prosperity.
- From a Moabitess to being part of the lineage and ancestry of our Lord Jesus Christ.

God supplied all her needs according to the riches in glory in Christ - but her relationship to and support of Naomi was a vital key to all of this.

On her re-entrance into Bethlehem with Naomi, she had serious financial lack. She had a personal economic famine, yet she was focussed enough to observe honouring her spiritual father. The next two chapters illustrate further how financial faithfulness and obedience in seasons of private or widespread economic crisis, can activate divine sustenance and blessings in these times.

[The book of Ruth is more thoroughly explored in my study manual, *‘Spiritual Fathering and Sonship’*].¹⁰³

Note and Reminder: While I have singled out Ruth's honour of Naomi through practical support and first fruits, these principles must be understood within the totality of Ruth's overall compliance to all the instructions of Naomi in other areas of her life. This is a reminder that financial obedience should be an expression of your commitment to also obey God in other areas of your life. Financial obedience does not substitute for disobedience in other areas. Conversely, obedience in other areas does not excuse financial disobedience. We must seek to bring 'completeness' to expressions of obedience in all areas of our lives (2 Cor 10:6).

REFLECT

The example of Ruth's total redemptive process must be understood within the context of her relationship to Naomi as her spiritual father. A central facet of this relationship was her consistent practical honour of Naomi. This included her sustained giving to Naomi. Ruth's redemption and restoration is an amazing one. Read the entire book of Ruth, noting the details of expressions of honour of Ruth to Naomi, and seek to implement these in your life in your relationship with your spiritual father.

Singular obedience has a
positive corporate effect.



THEY ate and had some left over.

2 Kings 4:42a

Supernatural Corporate Provision

Through God's supernatural power, the faithful giving from one singular person has the capacity to exponentially multiply and meet a huge corporate need.

THE EXAMPLE OF THE MAN FROM BAAL-SHALISHAH

A particular man offered first fruits of twenty barley loaves and fresh ears of grain to the prophet Elisha during a time of economic famine, with amazing results.

³⁸ When Elisha returned to Gilgal, there was a **famine in the land**. As the **sons of the prophets were sitting before him**, he said to his servant, "Put on the large pot and boil stew for the sons of the prophets." ³⁹ Then one went out into the **field** to gather **herbs**, and found a **wild vine** and gathered from it his lap full of **wild gourds**, and came and sliced them into the pot of stew, for they did not know what they were. ⁴⁰ So they poured it out for the men to eat. And as they were eating of the stew, they cried out and said, "O man of God, there is death in the pot." And they were unable to eat. ⁴¹ But he said, "**Now bring meal**." He threw it into the pot and said, "Pour it out for the people that they may eat." **Then**

there was no harm in the pot. ⁴² Now a man came from Baal-shalishah, and **brought the man of God bread of the first fruits, twenty** loaves of barley and **fresh ears of grain in his sack.** And he said, “Give them to the people that they may eat.” ⁴³ His attendant said, “What, will I set this before a hundred men?” But he said, “**Give them to the people that they may eat,** for thus says the Lord, ‘They shall eat and have some left over.’” ⁴⁴ So he set it before them, and **they ate and had some left over,** according to the word of the Lord. (2 Kings 4:38-44)

Elisha instructed that a pot of stew be made for one hundred of his spiritual sons, the ‘sons of the prophets’, who were under his direct oversight. So here we have the context of a spiritual father with his spiritual sons. Food is symbolic of doctrine. The imagery of the pot of stew could allude to doctrine being prepared to be imparted to sons. One of the prophets, not being instructed to, went out into an open field and gathered wild gourds to add to the stew. These turned out to be poisonous and it poisoned the entire pot of stew. The term ‘wild’ suggests that the gourds were unknown and untested, and thus considered unfit for human consumption. This symbolises erroneous doctrine which some spiritual sons go out looking for, without the awareness of their spiritual oversight, to add to the already tested and tried blend of doctrine provided by their spiritual fathers. This contaminates the entire pot - the entire body of doctrine. A little leaven leavens the entire lump.

Elisha threw meal into the pot to arrest the poison and thereby neutralising its lethal effect. It was the meal from the hand of Elisha that prevented the poison in the stew from killing the sons of the prophets. Meal was fine flour used as a basic ingredient for bread, and thus represents the WORD OF GOD which comes from Elisha, the spiritual father, over the sons of the prophets. Greater care and obedience are required from sons in heeding the words released from their spiritual father. This will arrest the attempts of the enemy to poison them, intending to potentially negate the fulfilment of their calling and assignments in God.

This was a context in which Elisha trained other prophets, fine-honing and sharpening their prophetic capacity and obviously imparting grace through God's Word. This context would no doubt provide a source of tremendous spiritual nourishment and spiritual enrichment to the nation.

To this rich spiritual reservoir of grace, within an environment of fatherhood and sonship, a man gave 20 loaves of bread and a sack of fresh grain as first fruits to Elisha, the man of God. Realising the need for food because of the famine in the land, Elisha instructs that the 20 loaves be distributed among the one hundred men. The bread multiplied and there was even some left over. First fruits in the hands of an anointed and spiritually sensitive leader will ensure that the needs of the people are met. Imagine if this man withheld his first fruits. The principle here is that the receipt of first fruits by your spiritual father, has the capacity to release an abundant supply, both naturally and spiritually, upon the entire corporate community of true sons in the house. One man's first fruits met the needs of a whole group of people, when this offering was channelled to and through the accurate recipient, who was not governed by personal greed, but sensitive enough to realise this should be distributed to a corporate context in deep need.

The man who gave these first fruits to Elisha was from **Baal-shalishah**, which means '**thrice-great lord**'¹⁰⁴ - hence a reference to first fruits as reflective of the triune nature of God and a key facet and foundational component of three-fold giving.

The number **20** is significant. It denotes **expectancy**. 20 is one short of 21. $21=3 \times 7$; **3** denotes **divine perfection**; **7** denotes **spiritual perfection**¹⁰⁵. Hence, his first fruits were an expression of his level of **expectancy** that **divine and spiritual perfection** is pursued.

What is amazing about this narrative is that this man from Baal-Shalishah had **first fruits to offer in a time of famine!** Famine suggests that there are no crops to harvest in the first place, yet this man had a harvest, from which he is offering his first fruits. This man probably practised the giving of first fruits perpetually, and the associated first fruits blessing kept him well provided for during depressed economic times.

Also, this man models the principle that **economic recessions/famines are not legitimate reasons to stop giving, especially first fruits.**

His economic context and external conditions did not dictate his financial behaviour - his understanding of biblical principles did. During periods of personal, local, national or global economic collapse, your commitment to observe first fruits and other expressions of giving must be maintained in a spirit resolved to obey God as His bond servant, with great faith and without fear. This is key to your spiritual and financial well-being, as well as that of others.

Your singular obedience to the first fruits principle could very well be the act that sustains a host of other sons during times of economic famine (as reflected in the narrative above). One person's financial obedience can supply a multiplicity of needs. Our personal and private obedience must be done with a corporate mindset.

This man's first fruits more than simply preserved the physical lives of the one hundred sons of the prophets. There was also preservation of what they represented as a prophetic company. If these sons of the prophets, together with Elisha, had starved to death, the prophetic dimension stewarded by Elisha would have ceased. This had to be sustained and was so, through one man's first fruit offering. We are doing something far more than natural when we give first fruits; we are establishing protective mechanisms around key facets of spiritual realities, some of which we might be unaware of.

This miracle is the Old Testament counterpart of the miracle of the 'Feeding of the Five Thousand' in the New Testament. In both instances, an offering from a person to God activated the supernatural multiplication of what was given, and the abundant provision for a significantly large corporate need.

In both instances, the administration of the resource offered was done by sincere apostolic-type father figures. Elisha functioned in double the fatherly grace of his spiritual father, Elijah. The twelve apostles who distributed the bread and fish to heads of households sitting in groups of fifty on a hill, were also types of apostolic fathers, ministering grace to other fatherly heads who led their households.

REFLECT

The account of the first fruits offered by the man from Baal-shalishah is a powerful case study. What key principles can you extract from this?

Giving is God's training to wean us off dependency on this world's unstable and unreliable economic systems.



Do not FEAR ... make me ... FIRST.

1 Kings 17:3

Financial Sustenance in Economic Crisis

The global economic climate is known for its volatility. History proves that widespread economic disaster, affecting every nation, is not a far-fetched reality. At any one point in time, many nations experience financial recession or depression. The scope and duration of these conditions are progressively increasing, as financial greed and indiscipline on personal and corporate levels escalate. In these times, God has promised to faithfully care for and provide for His sons, who remain loyal in their obedience to the righteous principles of His Word.

We, His sons, must at all times be faithful to God's economic principles, both in seasons of economic buoyancy or economic depression. Particularly in difficult times of financial crisis - personally, nationally or internationally - we should never stop being faithful to obey God's principles in respect to giving our first fruits, tithes and offerings. Our obedience is not contingent upon positive or negative external factors, but on our internal commitment to principles and our love and obedience for God.

National economic famine was often a methodology employed by God to get the attention of the nation of Israel whenever they would go away from serving Him by not adhering to his righteous principles (Deut. 11:8-17; 28:38-40). It seems that once provision dries up, people are more prone to give consideration to their sinful ways or wrong priorities and are more inclined to repent and seek restoration with God (1 Kings 8:35-40; Haggai 1 and 2). When God stops supply, people turn to Him. At times,

if we in our personal lives, experience sustained and serious economic lack, resulting from our wilful and flagrant disobedience to God generally, not just financially, we should stop and take the time to assess our relationship with God. We should draw closer to Him and adjust our behaviour to a more intense and sustained pattern of obedience to His Word.

On another level, at times we, the church, will have to go through significant economic depressions, which are initiated by God in a particular region, because He, as He has done with the ancient nation of Israel, is shaking systems, including the economy, as part of His overall judgement. There is a divinely initiated global shaking when these times occur - read Hebrews 12:26-28. During these times, God is faithful to take care of His sons who are faithful to Him, whilst He is judging the worldly context in which they live.

At God's leading, Elijah pronounced an economic famine on Israel before King Ahab, a famine that lasted three and a half years.

Now Elijah the Tishbite, who was of the settlers of Gilead, said to Ahab, "As the Lord, the God of Israel lives, before whom I stand, surely there shall be **neither dew nor rain these years**, except by my word. (1 Kings 17:1)

This was part of God's judgement upon wicked King Ahab and unfaithful Israel. But Elijah himself, together with seven thousand others of the people of Israel, were faithful to the Lord God. All those who lived in Israel would have had to endure the ravaging effects of the famine. God's faithful people needed to understand that this famine was not because of them - it had nothing to do with them, but God was judging a wicked leader and a wicked religious system. They could not even pray against the famine or ask for rain, for that would have been counterproductive to God's will. Yet, God took care of the faithful who had to go through a famine that He initiated. This is evidenced in the record of how God took care of and adequately provided for Elijah, a widow and her son. This widow obeyed God in the famine by giving of her substance 'FIRST', to honour God represented in Elijah. To me, she was a powerful example of one who 'seeks FIRST the Kingdom of God and His righteousness', and

indeed 'all things' were added to her.

Take the time to read this scriptural passage meditatively.

⁸ Then the word of the Lord came to him, saying, ⁹ "Arise, go to Zarephath, which belongs to Sidon, and stay there; behold, **I have commanded a widow** there to **provide** for you." ¹⁰ So he arose and went to Zarephath, and when he came to the gate of the city, behold, a widow was there gathering sticks; and he called to her and said, "Please get me a **little water in a jar**, that I may drink." ¹¹ As she was going to get it, he called to her and said, "Please bring me a piece of bread in your hand." ¹² But she said, "As the Lord your God lives, **I have no bread, only a handful of flour in the bowl and a little oil in the jar; and behold, I am gathering a few sticks that I may go in and prepare for me and my son, that we may eat it and die.**" ¹³ Then Elijah said to her, "**DO NOT FEAR**; go, do as you have said, but make me a little bread cake from it **FIRST** and bring it **out to me**, and afterward you may make one for yourself and for your son. ¹⁴ "For thus says the Lord God of Israel, '**The bowl of flour shall not be exhausted, nor shall the jar of oil be empty, until the day that the Lord sends rain on the face of the earth.**'" ¹⁵ So she went and **did according to the word** of Elijah, **and she and he and her household ate for many days.** ¹⁶ **The bowl of flour was not exhausted nor did the jar of oil become empty, according to the word of the Lord which He spoke through Elijah.** (1 Kings 17:8-16)

Note that Elijah requested to be given the piece of bread 'FIRST'. This symbolically alludes to the first fruits principle. Honouring Elijah **FIRST** by giving him first the bread that she made, secured for her an unending supply of flour and oil throughout the three-and-a-half-year famine. The observance of the first fruits practice will immunise you from lack in times of economic recession or economic depression. This is another powerful example of how seasons of economic hard times are not justifiable

reasons to stop one's obedience in giving first fruits, tithes and offerings. Many argue that they cannot afford to give. The truth is - **you cannot afford NOT to give. Giving is God's methodology to wean you off dependency on this world's systems and principles, or your ingenuity or opinion, and to implicitly trust God, your Father.** This widow had to abandon her plan of using her last flour and oil to make bread for her and her son. Even in her own words, if she did so, ultimately after eating, they would have both perished, since it was her last. But she obeyed God in using her last meal and flour to make bread to honour Elijah - and she did this 'first'. When you offer your 'LAST' as 'FIRST' to God, God will place you first in receipt of His favour and blessing. No person who places God first in all things will be placed last on His agenda.

Note in verse 9, that God informs Elijah that He had already commanded the widow to feed him. When she encountered Elijah, it was no surprise to her that he asked her to first make bread for him. This woman did not reveal to Elijah that God had instructed her to feed him. Instead, being gripped by FEAR, she immediately discounts her ability to adequately feed Elijah, as well as herself and her son (verse 12).

In getting her to obey what God originally instructed her to do, Elijah challenges her not to fear, because fear prevented her from responding in faith and obedience to the Word of the Lord to feed Elijah. Whenever God speaks to us to give financially and otherwise to His servants or His work, we must not consult with our resources to determine whether we will obey. We must, in simple faith, obey what the Lord directs us to give, and this becomes the catalyst that ignites a perpetual supply for us, especially in times of famine or economic recession. Because of her ultimate obedience in feeding Elijah first, she is sustained throughout the famine, her flour and oil never ceasing. **The paralysis produced by fear that results in disobedience, must be overcome by faith-filled obedience.** Banish all fear and give in faith in obedience to His Word.

So, release your finances in faith. An important principle of faith is that it is **not based on sight** (2 Corinthians 5:7: For we walk by faith, and not by sight) **or on physical circumstances, but only on the word or promise of God.** Faith involves sight into the eternal, unseen realm. Spiritual unseen realities prompt faith to obey God. It is not influenced by earthly

or natural considerations. When adverse personal, national or international economic conditions militate against our giving to God, we must not be governed nor dictated to by it. Do not permit your spiritual condition and behaviour to be altered by and acclimatised to earthly and natural considerations. First fruits are to be administered without fear of dire economic conditions, but in strong faith and obedience, prompted by a deep love and honour for God, the source of all provision, preservation and protection. The next chapter deals briefly with overcoming financial fear.

HONOUR ACCESSES DIVINE INTELLIGENCE AND WISDOM FOR ECONOMIC CRISES

Those who are faithful in observing God's Kingdom financial principles will be preserved in economic crisis. You will come through it and God's purposes attendant for your life will not be compromised, but will accentuate. In 2 Kings 4:8-37 is the well-known account of the Shunammite woman, who displayed noteworthy honour toward Elisha, who often frequented her city, Shunem. She built a fully furnished upper room for him to lodge whenever he came into the city. This demonstrated her high levels of honour for the man of God. She elevated Elisha in her mind, according him great value in his representation of God in their lives and in the city. She brought structural adjustment to her home by building him an upper room. Radically altering the architecture and structure of her home speaks to the permanence of her internal disposition of honour towards Elisha. This was not momentary or fleeting, but an abiding characteristic feature in her and her families' life. She placed high premium and value on the one who carried and stewarded God's grace, positioning him above her and not below her. Dr Sagie Govender teaches, "Grace flows gravitationally downward". This woman became the recipient of significant grace. The building of the upper room for Elisha is not first fruits per se, but could be symbolically representative of first fruits, in that, ...

- (1) It reflected honour for Elisha - and honour and first fruits are inseparable,
- (2) She was the FIRST person in the city of Shunem to respond honourably in this way.
- (3) Her womb was supernaturally opened and God gave her a son, her firstborn.
- (4) She was the FIRST to be informed of an impending seven-year economic famine.

God's nature as a preserver was evoked upon her personal experience. She was not just informed of the looming famine but was given wisdom as to what to do to survive the famine. She received divine intelligence and divine wisdom.

Further to this, she supernaturally received favour from the king after the famine was concluded. Her property was restored to her. She also received from the king, all the profit she would have received had there not been a famine (2 Kings 8:1-6). All this blessing was as a result of her ministering financially and practically to Elisha and his servant. God protects and preserves 'givers'. He provides adequately for their long-term sustainability.

REFLECT

1. Financial giving must be upheld, even in times of economic crisis. Have you been consistent in your giving, despite economic circumstances?
2. God's expectations on us are never designed to disadvantage us in any way, but to benefit us, even if by all natural reckoning, an obedient action might seem to threaten our well-being. Have you ever experienced this in respect to God's principles of financial giving of first fruits, tithes or offerings? What has been your experience as you resolved to obey God anyway?

Financial fear paralyses financial giving.



Farmers who wait for perfect weather never plant.
If they watch every cloud, they never harvest.

Ecc1.11:4 - NLT

Fearless, Faith-Filled First Fruits

First fruits are probably the most courageous and daring expressions of all forms of financial giving. It literally takes great courage and faith to obey. Your love for and honour of God, His Word and His servants, has got to be strong. Your faith must be strong and robust too. As a bond servant of Christ, your obedience must be reflexive and reflective of your internal steadfast and resolute commitment to please Christ, your Master.

Generally, two broad **factors prevent complete financial obedience**, viz. the **love of money and the fear of not having enough money**. Of these two, I think the latter is probably the most powerful force in robbing God's people of the total blessing associated with financial obedience. When we are governed by a spirit of poverty, lack and the fear of not having enough resources for our personal needs, we evidence an orphan mentality that is in contradiction to the assured mindset we should have as sons of God - that God, our Father, will take good care of us, especially when we obediently subscribe to His righteous principles.

The spirit of fear will force you to find seemingly valid justifications for your non-observance of financial giving, especially first fruits.

DO NOT FORGET GOD

When Israel offered their tithes and first fruits as laid out in Deut. 26, they were commanded to make this declaration:

I have not eaten of it while mourning, nor have I removed any of it **while I was unclean**, nor **offered any of it to the dead**. **I have listened to the voice of the Lord my God; I have done according to all that You have commanded me.**
(Deuteronomy 26:14)

No excuse or reason for not offering the tithe and first fruits was good enough. The offerer had to ensure that no domestic need (even like a funeral), nor external circumstance, no matter how urgent, painful or traumatic, was reason enough for them not to observe the first fruits and tithe. They would also declare that in doing so they would not **'FORGET THE LORD'S COMMANDMENTS'**. Note the previous verse before Deut. 26:14 referenced above:

You shall say before the Lord your God, **'I have removed the sacred portion** from **my house**, and also have given it to the Levite and the alien, the orphan and the widow, according to all Your commandments which You have commanded me; I have not transgressed or **forgotten any of Your commandments.** (Deuteronomy 26:13)

Note here above that the tithe (as is the first fruit) is regarded as 'the sacred portion', which must be removed from your house and given to God. Another term for sacred is holy, which means something separated unto God for sacred use as opposed to common use. The first fruits and tithes are not for our common use but are to be directed toward God for holy use. Someone once said, "Money is called filthy lucre or unrighteous mammon, but it becomes holy lucre and righteous when given to God."

Faithfulness in financial giving in the text quoted above is equated to not forgetting God. **When is God forgotten? God is forgotten whenever His principles are no longer adhered to.**

Beware that you **do not forget the Lord your God by not keeping His commandments** and His ordinances and His statutes which I am commanding you today. **(Deuteronomy 8:11)**

Any expression of disobedience, including the non-observance of the first fruits, tithes and offerings, would equate to 'forgetting God'. We factor God out of our minds and lives when we disobey His commandments. Many people would not readily admit that they 'forget' God, but the measure of remembering Him is simply gauged by the degree of obedience to His Word.

"In giving Hannah a son, Samuel, the Bible clearly indicates that it was so, because "the Lord REMEMBERED HANNAH" (1 Sam. 1:19). Hannah's giving of Samuel back to the Lord was her REMEMBERING THE LORD." (T.D. Jakes) To Hannah, Samuel represented a first fruit offering, since he was her firstborn son. When God remembers us and answers our desperate cries, we often forget Him by failing to give back to Him expressions of our honour and gratitude. Remember God when He remembers you!

GIVE IN AND BY FAITH

The righteous or the just live by faith. **Faith is an unshakeable belief in God, that He is your Father who will adequately take care of you and reward you as you diligently seek Him, especially in respect to your obedience to all His principles.** Without faith, it is impossible to please God. Everything we do and the way we function as believers must always be according to the principle of faith. Our financial giving, too, must be conducted in and by FAITH. As already indicated in this writing, the ultimate purpose of faith is to bring us to a place of instantaneous

obedience to God and His Word.

BY FAITH Abel **OFFERED** to God a better sacrifice than Cain, through which he obtained the testimony that he was righteous, God testifying about his gifts, and **THROUGH FAITH**, though he is dead, he still speaks. (**Hebrews 11:4**)

Abel offered first fruits by faith. All offerings to God, including financial offerings, must be given by faith. Hannah's faith is to be applauded, not so much for the fact that she could trust God for a son, but more so that her trust in God was profoundly displayed in her courageous and faith-filled giving of Samuel to God as first fruits. (More on this in chapter 23)

Faith is expressed by works or practical obedience. It is always rooted in a positive response to the Word of the Lord. Faith comes by hearing God's Word. Faith does not consider natural circumstances for it to act. We walk by faith and not by sight - 2 Cor. 5:7. So when God calls upon us to give even 'beyond our ability' (2 Cor. 8:3), it requires a faith-filled response.

One of the greatest factors eroding faith-filled obedience is an **undue focus on natural, outward circumstances or phenomena** that directly oppose or militates against the conviction and action that faith seeks to produce.

Abraham did not 'consider' the deadness of his wife's womb when God promised him that he would become a father of many nations (Rom. 4:16-21). His immediate external circumstance did not condition his true inward reality. He became convinced that God calls things that 'are not' as though they 'are'.

God chooses to describe our current reality based upon what He has already accomplished from before time began. Faith propels our sight to focus on that which is already done, even though the physical evidence of it is absent. Faith requires active obedience and a movement towards the accomplishment of the thing that His Word or commandment has determined or mandated for us.

FEAR - AN ENEMY OF FAITH

The opposite of faith is not 'unbelief'. Unbelief simply indicates the absence of faith. Fear is the opposite of faith. Fear neutralises the expression of faith. God requires us to have faith for Him to move on our behalf. The devil requires fear for him to operate effectively in the lives of people. What faith is to God, fear is to the devil. One of the most powerful hindrances to giving lavishly is 'financial fear', or fear of needs not being met.

An undue focus on natural circumstances, which usually erodes faith, produces FEAR, UNBELIEF and DOUBT - all these are enemies of faith. In reference to biblical principles of financial giving, many believe the truth of them, and may even have no trace of doubt regarding the working of the principles, yet may be bound by FEAR and are thus paralysed to venture forth to obey the principles. Giving financially presupposes that the giver has no insecurity about God's capacity to provide, protect and sustain. **Fear causes people to be gripped by a withholding spirit rather than by a spirit of generous giving.**

Fear, unlike faith, is preoccupied with the current negative external state of affairs. These instil a sense of insecurity. Faith is focussed on the faithfulness of God's person or nature, the integrity of His biblically rooted principles, the reliability of His promises and the urgency of His purpose to be done. Thus, faith acts and obeys God's Word, in defiance of negative natural circumstances, because it has sight into a completely higher realm of understanding. As already indicated in this writing, spiritual sight - the measure of light and understanding in your 'eye' (your spirit), will propel your obedience to seemingly difficult commands of God. We need to shut the eye or mind of the unrenewed areas of our soul that tends to rival our commitment to obey God. First fruits, as indeed does all other expressions of financial giving, require fearless, faith-filled obedience.

FEARLESS GIVING PRESERVES US IN TIMES OF GLOBAL ECONOMIC DISASTER

This passage in Ecclesiastes referenced below, hints at the fact that our sustained and unimpeded financial giving is in part motivated by the fact that ‘misfortune’ may occur on the earth, and that our financial behaviour in respect to giving is not to be regulated by the negative conditions or indicators of economic recession or depression.

¹ **Cast your bread** on the surface of the waters, for **you will find it** after **many days**. ² **Divide your portion to seven, or even to eight**, for you do not know what **misfortune may occur on the earth**. ³ If the clouds are full, they pour out rain upon the earth; and whether a tree falls toward the south or toward the north, wherever the tree falls, there it lies. ⁴ **He who watches the wind will not sow and he who looks at the clouds will not reap**. ⁵ Just as you do not know the path of the wind and how bones are formed in the womb of the pregnant woman, so **you do not know the activity of God who makes all things**. ⁶ **SOW YOUR SEED in the morning and do not be idle in the evening**, for you do not know whether **morning or evening SOWING will succeed**, or whether both of them alike will be good. (Ecclesiastes 11:1-6)

Verse 2 indicates that we must give (‘divide’) portions to seven, and preferably to eight. The number seven denotes perfection, completion or rest. Giving to seven denotes a giving that is ‘perfect’, i.e., thoroughly compliant to all biblical principles governing giving. Seven also symbolises ‘rest and completion’. When you come into rest regarding financial obedience, you are at peace with compliance to all biblical financial principles. From this disposition, you can start to go beyond seven to ‘giving to eight’. The number eight indicates ‘new beginnings’. It is a step beyond seven and requires or presupposes seven to attain eight. This would equate to giving ‘beyond your ability’ (2 Cor. 8:3) - which implies making serious sacrifices in some expressions of financial obedience. This is going beyond

what is required - beyond the law to being governed by the Spirit in your giving. **As we bring perfection to our giving in obedience, we will enter rest financially and can look forward to 'new beginnings', especially as God brings us through difficult economic seasons personally or globally.**

In verse 4 above, there are two things that prevent the sowing of financial seed, viz. watching the wind and looking at the clouds. Israel was an agricultural community, so references to the wind and clouds speak of economic indicators. Modern day equivalents would be salary, interest rates, inflation rates, share prices, etc. **You cannot and must not determine your commitment to obeying God's financial principles based upon prevailing economic conditions in your life personally, in your country nationally or the world globally.** Hence verse 6 encourages us to sow perpetually in the morning and evening of each day - symbolising that financial sowing ought to be consistent - a lifestyle, rather than an occasional event. Giving is not something to try; giving is someone you are. Giving is a lifestyle you live and is not event-dependent or an event in and of itself.

Do not regard the economic winds of recession and the clouds of need and poverty but open your hand and release even the little financial seed you have, in obedience to the commandments of God, and observe how great an abundant harvest the Lord will bless you with. The reason provided for excelling in financial giving in Ecclesiastes 11:2 is, "you do not know what misfortune will come upon the earth". Again I reiterate, that **financial obedience is God's system of immunising His sons from the ravaging effects of domestic or global economic disaster.**

Economic recessions and depressions are also times in which we should heighten our resolve to give and by God's grace seek to excel more in it - by faith. Every new level of harvest demands a new level of seed. I encourage you to trust God that you will break your current level or capacity of giving and access a new domain of harvest, which is not just financial. As sons of God, we are to be principled people. External economic conditions do not determine our obedience financially, but God's principles, which do not change with circumstances.

ISAAC SOWED IN FAMINE

Abraham, the father of faith, was required by God to offer Isaac as first fruits (refer to Gen. 22). This offering is truly characteristic of first fruits because Isaac represented his only son, his firstborn by Heaven's reckoning. Isaac fully complied with Abraham's intent to offer him as a sacrifice. He is a very co-operative first fruits offering. He walked to the place where he willingly laid down his life to be sacrificed (as Jesus would many years after him). **All financial giving must be uncoerced and flow freely and willingly, being borne from an internal conviction, established by revelation.**

Isaac is thus the embodiment or personification of the first fruits principle. As he lay on that altar to be sacrificed, Abraham was stopped, and was shown the **provision of the Lord** in the lamb which was caught in a bush. Further, a revelation that **GOD IS PROVISION** ('Jehovah Jireh') was unveiled to both Abraham and to Isaac. First fruits unlock the **provision of God and the revelation that God IS PROVISION.**

Isaac, the personification of the first fruits principle, never knew lack, nor had a fear of not having provision in his entire life. Economic famine naturally brings fear and uncertainty and might cause some to enter financial disobedience. But he, without being dictated to by fear, sowed in a time of famine and reaped one hundredfold in the same year.

¹² Now **Isaac sowed** in that land and **reaped** in the same year **a hundredfold**. And **the Lord blessed** him, ¹³ and the **man became rich**, and **continued to grow richer** until he **became very wealthy**; ¹⁴ for he had possessions of flocks and herds and a great household, so that the Philistines envied him. **(Genesis 26:12-14)**

Isaac's willingness to lay himself down as a first fruits offering set a foundation in his life, such that any sowing of seed on his part will be guaranteed a harvest - as evidenced in the scriptural passage above. One hundredfold harvest is the highest potential harvest anyone could receive from seed sown. It is literally one hundred TIMES the original seed sown.

What is amazing is that Isaac sowed in a time of famine. Farmers do not sow seeds in famine, for that would be futile, as the natural conditions of no water would kill the seed. That would be a total waste to sow seed in famine. But Isaac sowed. I believe that this was so because he was the representation of the first fruits principle. He became the first fruit, so any further sowing of financial seed generated a hundredfold increase. **Become the EMBODIMENT of the first fruit principle that you seek to ENACT so that subsequent financial seed sowing will be blessed with a hundredfold return - even in times of economic famine.**

First fruits break the natural limitations that negative conditions in the earth place on our need to be well provided for, especially in seasons of economic famine. Again, this a reminder that the unsatisfactory or negative external conditions of economies do not dictate or determine whether we sow or not.

SOW IN TEARS BUT REAP IN JOY

¹ When the Lord brought back the **captive ones of Zion**, We were like those **who dream**. ² Then our **mouth was filled with laughter** and our **tongue with joyful shouting**; Then they said among the nations, “**The Lord has done great things for them**.” ³ **The Lord has done great things for us**; We are **glad**. ⁴ Restore our captivity, O Lord, As the streams in the South. ⁵ **Those who sow in tears shall reap with joyful shouting**. ⁶ **He who goes to and fro weeping, carrying his bag of seed, Shall indeed come again with a shout of joy, bringing his sheaves with him.** (Psalm 126:1-6)

The psalmist here celebrates the return to Zion from Babylonian captivity (v.1-3) and prays for full and complete restoration in Zion (v.4). Verses 5 and 6 describes the process of this restoration, viz. sacrificial sowing.

Psalm 126 is part of the ‘Songs of Ascents’, a group of 15 Psalms (Ps. 120-134) classified according to the titles, ‘Psalms of Degrees or Ascent’. These were sung at the beginning of the worship services at the temple

and by those who were traveling up to Jerusalem three times a year, to celebrate the three broadly designated feasts, viz. Passover, Pentecost and Tabernacles. At these feasts, various offerings were offered. So, this song would be sung en route to Jerusalem. There, SEED would be SOWN - first fruits, tithes and offerings - and done sacrificially (in 'tears' symbolically), but also in celebration of the anticipated joyful harvest. Thus, the song sung would fuel faith and commitment to the process of journeying toward a place of obedience.

The reference to '**sowing in tears**' does not refer to sowing with grief, grudgingly or out of compulsion. Rather, it refers to sowing when it is difficult to do so and when your natural circumstances dictate that you should not be sowing. **The sowing is still cheerful and willing, yet it demands tremendous sacrifice.** The promise is then made that those who sow in this manner will come again rejoicing, bringing in the **sheaves of an abundant harvest with them.**

Psalm 126 was also sung in celebration of the great things God had done for them in delivering them from Babylonian Captivity (verse 1-4). Financial giving in any form is a symbolic celebration of God's goodness, salvation and deliverance in our lives.

THE MAN FROM BAAL-SHALISHAH GAVE ELISHA FIRST FRUITS IN A TIME OF FAMINE

As referenced earlier in this writing, a particular man gave first fruits within the context of widespread famine, with amazing results - 2 Kings 4:38-44. (Refer to chapter 17)

FEAR PREVENTS THE RELEASE OF FINANCES

During seasons of economic famine, people generally do not give. These seasons represent the greatest opportune times in which to give rather than to slacken off. Isaac's natural environment of economic famine did not affect his culture of sowing seed. He functioned by principle and

not by prevailing external conditions. He was never need-oriented and never doubted God's capacity to provide for him. All this was founded in that experience of obedience of him and his father on Mount Moriah, where he became an incarnation of the first fruits principle. Instead of diminishing in terms of resources in a season of famine, he increased exponentially, in total contradiction and defiance to his natural depressed economic environment. Isaac transitioned from being need-focussed to being principle-fixated.

When your present conditions are not ideal nor conducive for you to sustain your commitment to God's financial principles, I encourage you to **maintain your obedience 'presently', because you are sowing into your 'future' and establishing a solid foundation for the preservation of God** to be your reality in times of widespread global economic crisis.

In the Parable of Talents recorded in Matthew 25, the servant who buried his talent did so because of FEAR.

'And **I was afraid**, and went away and **hid your talent** in the ground. See, you have what is yours. (**Matthew 25:25**)

One talent was equivalent to fifteen years wages of labour. The servant with five talents made five more talents and the servant with two talents made two more talents. Both servants received rulership positions from their master. The servant with one talent buried his money, for FEAR that he would not be able to duplicate or multiply it. He had a fear of parting with money. To those servants who put the money to wise use, more was given to them – because they proved that money could 'flow' through them and was not going to be 'dammed up' in them. To release finances into the Kingdom of God, you cannot be governed by fear.

APOSTOLIC COMMAND BROKE THE SPIRIT OF FEAR IN THE WIDOW OF ZAREPHATH

The widow of Zarephath's first fruits to Elijah was discussed in the previous chapter. The 'last' oil and meal she used to make bread for Elijah 'first', symbolises the first fruit, in that after she gave, she would have nothing left - she gave her all. She almost did not obey God to give because of famine and fear. These two combinations, famine and fear, are lethal in paralysing sons of God with financial disobedience. It was the WORD (Doctrine) from Elijah, an apostolic-prophetic type, that broke the fear in her and brought her to a place of obedience to a clear command of God (refer to the previous chapter). As you read, hear in your spirit, God's apostolic Word breaking fear in you to obey God's financial principles.

The name '**Zarephath**' means '**place of refining; smelting house for melting and refining metals**¹⁰⁶. God is refining or purifying our financial obedience. God requires total honour from us financially. He wants pure and unadulterated financial mentalities and patterns of financial obedience. In this place, this widow's house was detoxed from a spirit of fear, which probably dominated and pervaded the entire land, as the ravaging effects of the famine intensified.

Proceed in fearless faith and obey God's financial principles.

REFLECT

1. God is forgotten whenever His principles are no longer adhered to. Have you forgotten God, based on the biblical definition of forgetting God?
2. Two opposing factors influence our obedience to God, viz. faith and fear. Faith propels obedience, whereas fear's intent is to paralyse our will, thus negating obedience. Have you ever had to contend with these conflicting factors when considering your intention to obey God's financial principles? To what degree did each factor prevail based on 'where' your focus was?
3. Negative economic conditions are no grounds to withhold any form of financial giving. This sounds ludicrous. Demonstrate the validity of this view biblically.

“The light one holds about giving will indeed
determine to what degree one gives.”

Dr. Stephen Everett



If your eye is clear, your whole
body will be full of light.

(Matt. 6:22b)

Greater Spiritual Sight and Eternal Riches

Rabbis taught that if you gave one-fortieth (1/40) of the total harvest of your fields as first fruits, as opposed to the smaller amount of one-sixtieth (1/60), then your eye would be full of light. Jesus alluded to something similar when He taught that we cannot serve both God and Mammon.

¹⁹ “Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. ²⁰ “But store up for yourselves **treasures in heaven**, where neither moth nor rust destroys, and where thieves do not break in or steal; ²¹ for where **your treasure is, there your heart will be also.** ²² “The **eye is the lamp** of the **body**; so then if your **eye is clear**, your **whole body** will be **full of light.** ²³ “But if your **eye is bad**, your **whole body will be full of darkness.** If then the light that is in you is darkness, how great is the darkness! ²⁴ “No **one can serve two masters**; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to one and despise the other. **You cannot serve God and wealth.** (Matthew 6:19-24)

The Greek word for ‘clear’ is ‘haploos’, and has the following range of meanings: ‘single, i.e., not complex, easy, used of the eye as *not seeing double* as when it is **diseased**; when the eye accomplishes its purpose

of **seeing things as they are**, then it is *haploús*, **single, healthy, perfect; singleness, simplicity, absence of folds**.¹⁰⁷

A derivative of the Greek word, ‘haploos’ is ‘haplōs’, meaning ‘**bountifully**’.¹⁰⁸

Eyes generally allude to ‘spirit’. For example, the Lamb has ‘seven eyes’, which are ‘seven Spirits of God’ (Rev. 5:6; Isaiah 11:2). The clear or single eye is the ‘lamp’ of the body, and the reference to a lamp is a reference to the ‘spirit of man’.

The **spirit of man** is the **lamp of the Lord**, searching all the innermost parts of his being. (**Proverbs 20:27**)

A clear eye is full of light. A clear spirit that is ‘sincere’ and ‘singular’, i.e., **singularly devoted to serving God, or being conditioned/infused by God alone, is laced with illumination from God through the revelation of light in His Word.** His Word is light and its entrance or unfolding brings light and understanding. This clear eye or spirit is informed and empowered by the Word of God.

Thus, the **single or clear eye** refers to a spirit immersed in **REVELATION and ILLUMINATION - full of LIGHT and UNDERSTANDING - as well as SINCERITY**, but also refers to **GENEROUS and BOUNTIFUL** giving.

Here is a reminder of what Hillel¹⁰⁹ said regarding first fruits:

Hillel, who was in charge of the biggest rabbinical school in Israel, said, “If a person honours Terumah at 1/40th level, his eye is said to be **full of light**. If he honors Terumah at a 1/50th level his eye is said to be a **middling eye**. If he honors Terumah at a 1/60th level that person has an **evil eye**”.

The KJV uses the word ‘evil’ instead of ‘bad’ in Matt. 6:23.

The Greek word for ‘bad/evil’ is ‘poneros’, meaning ‘**evil in a moral or spiritual sense, wicked, malicious, mischievous**’.¹¹⁰ The root word is ‘penes’ meaning ‘**starving, indigent-poor**’¹¹¹ (see Prov. 28:22).

A human spirit (eye) that is ‘evil’ or ‘bad’ is full of darkness, lacking divine light from God’s Word. Thus, there is an **absence of purity, sincerity and singular devotion.** It is diseased, not healthy. It **does not have honourable and pure motives** in what it does, even in its seemingly outward expressions of obedience. There is always a hidden agenda or dishonourable motive.

As the Hebrew root word (**penes**) for **‘evil/bad’** suggests above, the ‘bad’ spirit is beset by a **poverty mindset.** This manifests in a **miserly, stingy, withholding, selfish and greedy mentality.** Thus an ‘evil eye’, as compared to a ‘clear eye’, evidences itself by not giving generously but meagrely. It looks for legitimate ways to give the minimum, or the least, and does not venture to opt for giving the most. I encourage you to have a clear eye that gives willingly and generously and thus gives tacit proof that God is your Master, as you lay up treasures for yourself in Heaven, which are not subject to decay (no rust or moth).

Note the context of this passage above: in verses 19-21, Jesus speaks about finances; in verse 22-23, He speaks about degrees or levels of spiritual sight dependent upon the measure of light or darkness in one’s eye; then in verse 24, He speaks about the impossibility of serving God and wealth (mammon).

The condition of your ‘eye’ / ‘spirit’ will determine the degree of spiritual illumination and light in you. The eye - our spirit in us, is to be pure, without malice or mischief, not seeking to hypocritically present a picture of being devoted to God, whilst harbouring a hidden agenda that seeks to appease the fallen nature.

The eye is also often used to indicate one’s understanding and mindset (e.g. the eyes of your understanding being enlightened - Eph.1:18). If one’s mind is single, clear, free from diseased thinking (especially in reference to finances), pure, void of trying to find the speck in someone else’s eye, then one’s capacity for prophetic and spiritual sight is increased. The converse is true for the bad or evil eye condition. Interestingly, this discussion is sandwiched between two points made about finances and one’s attitude towards it.

How you handle your finances will indicate much about your devotion to God. Where your treasure is, there will your heart be also. The location of your money will bring revelation of the location of your heart.

The measure of your revelation or illumination will determine the quantity and quality of your giving. But also, your handling of finances will either have a positive or negative effect on your measure of revelation and spiritual insight. Financial faithfulness positions one to receive more grace, as indicated earlier in this writing.

“Therefore if you have not been **faithful in the use of unrighteous wealth**, who will **entrust the true riches to you?** (Luke 16:11)

Faithfulness in handling wealth qualifies one for stewardship of eternal riches. If you cannot trust God with your money, how can God trust you with His truth and revelation?

May the light in our spirits, and resultantly our compliant souls, increase. May this light direct our financial obedience in first fruits, tithes and offerings. May we receive custody of stewarding eternal riches, the truth and revelation of God’s Word. This must be our prayer.

REFLECT

It is an amazing thing that Jesus compared how we give to the measure of light, illumination and revelation in our spirits (eyes). The first provides evidence of the second. The connectivity of these two issues elevates the significance of financial faithfulness as a spiritual act, not merely a natural one. The clarity, sincerity and generosity of your spirit determines your financial giving. To what degree does this thought register within your mind when you plan on obeying God in respect to giving first fruits, tithes and offerings?

“If the wisdom of the book of Proverbs
applies to all of life, then surely its financial wisdom
relative to first fruits giving should be noted and obeyed.”

Dr Sagie Govender



Am I expressing merely a human opinion,
or does the law say the same thing?

(1 Cor. 9:8)

First Fruits - A Valid New Testament Practice

Is first fruits a valid practice for us today? Was it practised before the law? Is it law-based and law-conditioned? How vast is the principle of first fruits? Were first fruits practised in the New Testament by Jesus or by the early church? Was it practised under the law and thus not applicable under 'grace'? Is it conditional on changes in Covenants? Is it obsolete? Has God done away with the principle as it applies financially? These important considerations are the focus of this chapter.

Here below are **seventeen reasons** why I believe first fruits is a legitimate, valid and relevant biblical practice for the present Church today. Some of these overlap with one leading into or having a bearing on the other.

1. The Principle of First Fruits is Inherent within the Godhead

Any spiritual practice we adopt must be biblically rooted and biblically relevant. Anything biblically rooted can be anchored solidly within the nature and character of God Himself, for God and His Word are one. First fruits is a principle firmly embedded within the very fabric and essence of God the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit (Refer to point 2.3. in Chapter 5, for more on this).

As sons of God, our behaviour and practice must thoroughly reflect the person of God in every way. Our observance of financial first fruits must not only be bolted upon the revelation of Scripture, but must also emit out

from the unchanging nature of our God Himself. In my estimate, there is nothing about the observance of financial first fruits that contradicts or violates the being of our God. Rather, the nature of God is communicated powerfully through it.

2. The Principle of First Fruits is an Eternal One

What we do in time must be rooted in eternity if it is to have any enduring significance. As citizens of the Kingdom of God, we live in this temporal world of time, space and matter. However, our primary point of reference for existence is that we live 'in Christ' and are seated 'with Christ' outside of this world, seated far above powers and principalities (Eph. 2:6). We set our minds on things above and not on things of the earth (Col. 3:1,2). Heaven, not Earth, frames our dominant mindset and reality. Consequently, our dominant spatial sphere of existence is the unseen realm and not the seen realm, is Heaven and not Earth, is 'eternity' and not temporality. Hence, obeying the first fruits principle must be motivated primarily by the eternal nature of it. There is an eternality associated with first fruits. It is not time-related, nor time-conditioned. No matter what era in time we live, religious tradition, different doctrinal perspectives or diverse worldly views on a biblical principle, should not shape our belief and behaviour in reference to it, but the fact of its enduring and ageless quality.

This brief extract from point 2.2. in chapter 5 merits repetition here:

The principle of first fruits finds its origins outside of time. It emanates from the realm of timelessness - the eternal dimension in which God resides. It was not spawned out of consideration of human interactions with God on Earth, because it existed as a principle within processes that were afoot even before time began. Thus, first fruits is an eternal principle and by that very nature, is enduring. the creation of Heaven and Earth occurred in the 'beginning', which in Hebrew, translates as 'first fruits'; and the 'beginning' has nothing at all to do with time as we know it.

The eternality of the principle of first fruits must be regarded and appreciated in 'time'. Connect any expression of 'first things' - like 'seek first' the Kingdom, or 'first go make right with your brother before offering your gift at the altar', including 'honouring God with your 'first' fruits - to the timeless and imperishable character of 'first fruits' as a general principle.

3. The Principle of First Fruits is Mentioned First in Respect to Giving

First fruits giving was the first kind of giving by a human to God in the Bible, mentioned in Genesis chapter 4. The hermeneutical principle of '**law of first mention**' is an important one. It refers to the first time (chronologically) an idea, word or doctrine is mentioned in the Bible, usually setting the standard for how it would be interpreted throughout the Bible, even though there would, on occasion, be progressive elements attached to its understanding and practice unveiled as time proceeds. When it comes to patterns of financial giving, the first type of giving engaged by men toward God is a first fruit offering. Absolutely nowhere in the New Testament is it commanded NOT to be practised. Hence, its continuance is inherently implied.

4. The Principle of First Fruits is The First Act in Men Applauded by God

As indicated, the first mention of giving, in honour to God, is first fruits by Abel. It is also the very first behaviour in men lauded and applauded by God, who looked with favour and respect upon Abel's offering of the firstlings of his flocks, highly regarding both him and his gifts (Gen. 4:4; Heb.11:4). Abel is also the first to be listed among all the Old Testament 'heroes of faith' in Hebrews chapter 11. The very first example of faith recorded in that chapter is not faith to do something for God, nor to receive something from God, but faith to offer something to God that was completely reflective of God Himself. Selah.

Consider the flow of thought in the first four verses of Hebrews chapter 11.

¹ Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen. ² For by it the **men of old gained approval**. (*“Good report” in KJV*) ³ By faith we understand that the **worlds were prepared by the word of God**, so that what is seen was not made out of things which are visible. ⁴ By faith **Abel offered to God a better sacrifice** than Cain, through which he obtained the **testimony** that he was righteous, God testifying about his gifts, and through faith, though he is dead, he still speaks. (**Hebrews 11:1-4**)

Note:

- Verse 2: By faith, men gained approval or a good report from God.
 Verse 3: By faith, we accept the truth that God made everything by His Word.
 Verse 4: By faith, Abel offered first fruits.

In verse 2, we see faith-filled human actions gained approval by God - God witnesses to or testifies to it. The same word is used in verse 4 concerning God witnessing to Abel's first fruits. In verse 3, we understand that God created everything "in the beginning", literally read as "in the first fruits" - as a primary priority - as first, before successive waves of further plans and purposes start to be activated. Abel's offering of his first fruits is thus part of an unending continuum of God's nature, God's creative initiative in creating all things and God's progressively unfolding purposes.

So, we today, continue this timeless and prioritised tradition, founded in God Himself and expressed in and through His creative acts.

5. The Principle of First Fruits is not Law-based

First fruits giving predates the 'law' and the 'tithe' by thousands of years. It was the most natural response of Abel to God. The fact that it was observed before the law implies that it is 'without law' - i.e., it is not 'law-based'. This dismantles the anti-first fruits argument that it was practised under the law, and because we are no longer under the law, we do not need to observe it. Many fail to consider this particularly important fact - that although first fruits was required in the law, it did not originate in the law. Its commencement in human history predates the law. Its reality in eternal history is dateless, as explained earlier. It is not a function of time nor 'Covenants'.

6. The Principle of First Fruits Is Now a More Substantive Reality from its Shadow in the Law¹¹²

Many argue that first fruits giving, as well as tithing, were practices under the age of the law and is not relevant for today. The law was the schoolmaster which led us to Christ, so that we might be justified by faith.

²³ But before faith came, we were kept under the law, shut up unto the faith which should afterwards be revealed. ²⁴ Wherefore the **law was our schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ**, that we might be justified by faith. ²⁵ But after that faith is come, we are no longer under a schoolmaster. ²⁶ For ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus. (Galatians 3:23-26 - KJV)

Now, through faith in Christ, we are no longer under the law - our tutor or schoolmaster. The law could not save us. While we are no longer under the law, we do not set aside the principles of the law that relate to our morality and righteous behaviour. All that Gal. 3:23-26 teaches, is that the requirements of the law, without Christ, were impossible to fulfil and place us in right standing with God. But Christ came to fulfil the law, pay the price for our redemption, and through faith in Him we are able,

as sons of God, to come into His grace and its enabling power and fulfil the requirements of the law.

The law was our training ground (tutor or schoolmaster) pointing us to Christ, the fullness of all things. In the natural, a schoolmaster trains you for your destiny by installing within your mentality and behaviour, certain elementary principles, upon which are further laid greater and more profound principles for effective function in life. Then, when one successfully functions effortlessly and seamlessly in the execution of a particular task or skill, those principles installed are functional. For example, when you studied at university, principles learned from elementary school or high school are automatically functional. The basic arithmetic principle of one plus one equates to two is presumed, assumed and subsumed into and is an essential component of a Professor of Mathematics' breakthrough in some difficult historical mathematical problem. Things learned in the past are critical building blocks for present and future success. Nothing learned within one's foundation is discounted or cancelled.

This analogy is also true with reference to the Old Testament system of giving as a 'shadow' of greater things to come. The Old Covenant covers the entire books of the Old Testament as well as the synoptic gospels - Matthew, Mark and Luke - which focus on the earthly life and ministry of Jesus Christ. The New Covenant really commences with the death, burial, resurrection and ascension of Jesus Christ. It is reasonable to consider the New Covenant starting with John's gospel, since John presents the pre-existent and eternal nature of Christ, and he demonstrates this through seven carefully selected miracles. Jesus thus lived under the Old Covenant before He died and would have had to be subject to its laws, including the giving of first fruits, tithes and offerings. He Himself said He did not come to destroy the law, but to fulfil it.

The New Covenant contains the substance of what the Old Covenant embodied as the shadow. When the substance is attained, the shadow is presumed, assumed and subsumed within the substance. When the substance replaces the shadow, the substance is more substantial than the shadow, as the shadow becomes fulfilled within the substance. Thus, threefold giving inclusive of tithes, first fruits and offerings, evidenced within the Old Covenant as a shadow, finds its continuation and substantive expression in

our present time. “When one is trained by the Law in ceremonial giving, the habit is inculcated whereby one has developed a disciplined lifestyle of orderly and liberal giving.” (Thamo Naidoo)¹¹³

Under the law in the Old Covenant, the representation of the sheaf of first fruits, which the High Priest waved before the Lord on behalf of the giver, was meant to reflect the life of the giver. The first fruits were emblematic of the life of the giver of the first fruits. This was a shadow of the greater and more substantive reality that would persist in the New Covenant. Now we, by virtue of the shed blood of Christ and our reconciliation to God as His sons, are the firstborn or first fruits of God, just as Christ is. Thus, representative strength of the financial first fruits is far **greater** in us, than it was in the Old Covenant.

7. The Principle of First Fruits is a Moral Issue

The thoughts on this point are gleaned from a teaching presented by Dr. Sagie Govender at the forum he leads. When reference is made to the ‘law’ that existed in the Old Covenant, many fail to make a critical distinction between the Moral law, Ceremonial law and Civil law. Not all these laws are obsolete for New Testament believers. To say that the law is archaic and no longer relevant under ‘grace’ is unbiblical. You need to be specific as to which aspect of the law you are referencing.

The **Moral Law** is encapsulated in the so-called ‘Ten Commandments’ and these are still relevant for us today (except the Sabbath ‘day’ as an observance - but the Sabbath ‘principle’ subsists). Jesus said that He had not come to destroy the law but to fulfil it. By this, He was primarily referring to the Law - as in the Ten Commandments.

The **Ceremonial Law** referred to other laws relating to the celebration of the feasts, special religious days, a range of animal sacrifices and offerings, principles regulating the functioning of the priesthood, vestments, dietary guidelines, etc. All the ceremonial laws find their fulfilment in Christ.

The **Civil or Judicial Laws** helped deal with disputes between their citizens as well as to enforce the morals of the people.

Of these three categories, the Moral Laws of God are those which accurately reflect the character of God - these are not abolished and still apply to us today. Since the first fruits and the tithe are holy and belong to the Lord, they are the Lord's and not ours. The withholding of the tithe is clearly indicated as robbing or stealing from God (Malachi 3:8,9). The same would apply to First fruits. First fruits and tithes are holy and belong to the Lord (Number 18:12,28; 27:30; 31:41; 27:30). They are God's and not ours. Not to give them to God is to take possession of that which belongs to another. This is thievery. Thievery is a moral issue, and thus a violation of the moral law - "Thou shalt not steal". Hence first fruits and tithing, categorised under Ceremonial Laws, are not ceremonial per se but moral.

The celebration of the three broadly categorised feasts (Passover, Pentecost and Tabernacles) of the Old Testament are forbidden for they are fulfilled in Christ (Col. 2:16,17). However, the principles associated with these feasts are still relevant.

[I would encourage you to study Dr. Sagie Govender's treatment of the law under the heading 'Hyper-Grace and The Law'. See link in endnotes for enquiries]¹¹⁴

8. The Principle of First Fruits in the New Covenant is Informed by Old Covenant Principles

Paul used the principles which were espoused and operative in the law as a basis for establishing financial behaviour. This is evidenced in 2 Cor. 8 and 9. He extracted principles from the Old Covenant and applied them to his context - and ours today.

EXAMPLES:

- In calling for equality and the removal of lack among the saints in 2 Cor. 8:13-14, He anchors his call in a principle from Ex. 16:18.
- His teaching of sparing versus bountiful sowing in 2 Cor. 9:6 is extracted from Prov. 11:24 and Prov. 22:9.

- His argument in 2 Cor. 9:8 for 'all grace' attending the liberal giver, such that every good work is adequately supplied for, is founded upon Psalm 112:9.
- In 2 Cor.9:10, he states that God does indeed give seed to the sower because he knows this from Isaiah 55:10.
- He is aware that financial seed sowing increases the fruits of righteousness in 2 Cor 9:10, because this is hinted at in Hos. 10:12.
- He expects New Testament giving not to be done grudgingly in 2 Cor.9:7, because his knowledge of the examples of willing and generous giving recorded in Deut.15:10 and 1 Chron. 29:17 inform him so.
- He knows that God loves a cheerful giver - 2 Cor. 9:7 - because Ex. 25 and 1 Chron. 29:3 allude to it.

The Old Covenant educated Paul on principles of acceptable giving to God. With divine wisdom, he applied it to his context. Similarly, there is no contradiction in looking at the practice of first fruits in the Old Covenant, and with wisdom seek to apply its modern-day counterpart. Informed by the instruction in Proverbs, which is part of the Old Covenant, to "honour the Lord with ... the first fruits of all your income" (Prov. 3:9 - AMP), we can, under Apostolically directed wisdom, find practical and appropriate expressions of doing exactly this.

9. The Principle of First Fruits and the Tithe are Nowhere Commanded NOT to be Practised in the New Testament

Many people focus on the fact that first fruits and tithes are not explicitly commanded by Jesus or any of the Apostles, like Paul, in the New Testament, yet they fail to stress also that the discontinuance of these practices is not equally commanded anywhere in the New Testament.

Absolutely nowhere in the New Testament is first fruits or tithing discounted or prohibited. There were many prescribed religious practices that Israel as a nation was commanded to observe. Three significant practices were firstly - animal sacrifices, secondly - the practice of circumcision, and thirdly - the three-fold practice of first fruits, tithes and offerings. The Apostle Paul powerfully refutes the practice of physical circumcision (Gal.

5:6) as a requirement for salvation. The writer of the book of Hebrews powerfully argues for the discontinuance of animal sacrifices (Heb. 10:4-7) to atone for sin. Both these practices, predated the law, were confirmed in the law, and were contemporaneous with first fruits and tithing, yet nowhere does Paul or any other New Testament writer outrightly and categorically argue for the setting aside of the practice of first fruits or tithing. A very deliberate and specific case is made for the invalidity of physical circumcision and animal sacrifices, but not for the tithe or first fruits. In the context of the non-mention of its discontinuance, we should embrace the authority and Holy Spirit-inspired nature of 'all' Scripture, as our court of appeal.

The anti-first fruits case for using the argument that circumcision and animal sacrifices, like first fruits, predated the law too, and yet was discontinued in the New Testament, thus holds no weight, since the discontinuance of the former two (circumcision and animal sacrifice) are directly referred to, but not first fruits (or the tithe for that matter).

The fact that the examples of first fruits giving predominate in the Old Testament does not preclude the practice today. The fact that some righteous practice, referenced in the Old Testament, is not referenced in the New Testament, and the New Testament does not outrightly advocate its discontinuance, implies it is a valid New Testament practice.

10. The Principle of First Fruits is not Invalidated by the Fact That it is not Directly Referenced in the New Testament

Failure to record and reference biblical truth or practice, in segments of biblical or Church history, does not invalidate that truth or practice. Consider that the failure to understand, believe and thus observe a particular biblical truth or concept in certain epochs of biblical or Church history, did not make those truths or concepts invalid. It simply means they were lost to that era because of spiritual blindness or blatant disobedience.

The fact that the ministry of Apostles or the manifestation and operation of the Gifts of the Holy Ghost were at certain seasons not embraced as legitimate, did not render these things as illegitimate. Church history demonstrates to us that, very often, what man rejects as improper is what

God regards as acceptable. What man regards as impermissible, could very well be what God considers good and proper.

At times it was God's prerogative as to when to restore a particular truth that became lost to the church. A biblical practice that is eternal and thoroughly reflective of the divine nature, is thus also non-original to nor a function of either Old or New Covenants. The practice can apply to the Covenants, but find their origins outside of them. Thus, the arguments refuting the practice of first fruits, which use the law as the basis for the argument, holds no water, since the practice is not rooted in the law.

11. The Principle of First Fruits, like the Tithe, Belongs to God and is to be 'Rendered' to God.

Jesus was living physically within a time in which the requirements of the law applied. So we assume then that first fruits, tithes and offerings were practised by Him and His disciples. Far from promoting the discontinuance of the tithe, Jesus insisted that the tithe not be neglected (Matt. 23:23; Luke 11:42). If His position was pro-tithe, He certainly would have been supportive of first fruits, since first fruits predated the tithe and was also contemporaneous with it, although He did not make a clear reference to it.

Again, the fact that it is not mentioned by Him in respect to financial offerings, does not suggest He did not practise it or that its practise is not valid for us.

Jesus insisted on honouring Caesar with taxes, based on the principle that Caesar's likeness and inscription was engraved onto the coin. In the same context, He enforced the necessity to '**render to God the things which are God's**' (Matt. 22:21).

And He said to them, "Whose likeness and inscription is this?" They said to Him, "Caesar's." Then He said to them, "Then render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's; and to God the things that are God's." And hearing this, they were amazed, and leaving Him, they went away. (Matthew 22:20-22)

The word ‘render’ in Greek is ‘*apodídōmi*’, meaning ‘**to give or to do something necessary in fulfilment of an obligation or expectation**’¹¹⁵. It thus implies ‘**honour**’, and the book of Proverbs clearly indicates that first fruits bring honour to God (Prov. 3:9,10). This word also means ‘**to give back**’. Both first fruits and the tithe belong to the Lord and must be ‘given back’ to Him. In fact, everything we have is the Lord’s, and these are but symbolic expressions of the totality of our lives.

Also, what things are God’s which need to be rendered to Him? This references us, as sons of God, who are made in the image and likeness of God. The image and inscription of Caesar on the coin determined that the coin be directed to Caesar in taxes. Similarly, Jesus is stating that if God’s image and likeness is stamped on humankind, especially His sons, then our devotion is to be directed to God, whose image we bear.

Now, money reflects a person. As indicated already, our worth, our values and internal heart disposition are often evidenced by where our finances are directed, for where “your treasure is, there will your heart be also”. So, rendering to God what is His can refer also to our finances directed to God, for His image in our beings can be expressed in our workplaces and businesses, not just through our Christ-like attitude and behaviour, but also through our various skills and talents employed in the workplace, for which we are remunerated. Remember, to work is a gift from God (Eccl. 3:13; 5:19; Gen. 2:15). Our work equates to our worship of God (Matt. 4:10), and so we work diligently as unto the Lord (Col. 3:23,24).

Further, if we are to render to God the things which are God’s, then the Bible clearly indicates that both first fruits and tithes belong to the Lord (Number 18:12,28; 27:30; 31:41; 27:30) and any offering given to God’s Kingdom for any purpose, is the “Lord’s offering or contribution” (Exod. 35:5,21).

12. The Principle of First Fruits was Contemporaneous with the Tithe

Some believe in tithing, but not first fruits giving. First fruits and tithes are two principles that co-existed before the law, within the law and beyond the law. They are a powerful duo that work in seamless synchrony. As

already indicated in this writing, the first fruits anticipate a future harvest, which the tithe protects from the devourer. In chapter 3 of this writing, I have demonstrated the distinction between the two - they are not synonymous, and yet co-existed. If one believes in and practises tithing, then you should do the same for first fruits as well. Anti-tithers are usually also 'anti-first fruits'. Pro-tithers are usually also pro-first fruits. These two forms of giving were among three patterns of giving, viz. first fruits, tithes and offerings. To embrace the validity of the tithe and not the first fruits would be inconsistent.

13. The Principle of First Fruits is Part of the 'Inspired Scriptures'

All Scripture, including the Old Testament, is inspired by God and everything written in the Old Covenant was written as examples, templates and patterns for our learning and instruction.

All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; so that the **man of God may be adequate**, equipped for every good work. (2 Timothy 3:16,17)

Now these things happened as **examples for us**, ... (1 Corinthians 10:6a)

Now these things **happened to them as an example**, and **they were written** for our **instruction**, upon whom the ends of the ages have come. (1 Corinthians 10:11)

For **whatever was written in earlier times** was **written for our instruction**, so that through perseverance and the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope. (Romans 15:4)

When Paul wrote 2 Tim. 3:16a, i.e., "ALL Scripture is inspired by God", the actual 'scripture' he was referring to here was the Old Testament, since much of what we consider as the New Testament had not yet been

written. In Luke 24, Jesus explained Himself, i.e., ‘led Himself out’ of the “law, prophets and psalms”, terms which are essentially a reference to the entirety of the Old Testament. By doing so, Jesus thus demonstrates the importance and relevance of the Old Testament.

The New Testament was canonised in 325 AD. So, for more than three hundred years, the early church did not have access to the 66 books of the ‘Bible’ as we do today. They probably had access to the entire Old Testament scriptures, oral traditions and limited access to some New Testament books like the four gospels, and possibly a few of Paul’s and other New Testament writer’s epistles. The point is that the ‘scriptures’ which the early church relied upon were largely the Old Testament ones. Patterns of giving like first fruits, tithes and offerings would have been gleaned from these. This undoubtedly would have provided structure to their giving, not in a legalistic fashion, but governed by grace and willingness in the giver.

The Old Testament pattern of giving included first fruits, tithes and offerings. This gave structure and order to their giving. Jesus endorsed the tithe in Matthew 23:23. Paul speaks extensively about giving offerings to the Lord, to the saints, to the poor and to servants or ministers of God. Set men or spiritual fathers, the Old Testament equivalent of which would be the High Priest or Levites within the context of our present discussion, received financial support in the New Testament. It would not be an inaccurate assumption that this would include first fruits, since these offerings were designed to provide adequate financial support for the servants of God.

14. The Principle of First Fruits is Part of the Relevant and Applicable Wisdom From the Book of Proverbs

Dr. Sagie Govender¹¹⁶ makes a relevant point here:

“**The Book of Proverbs** contains **principles of wisdom by which we should live**. Proverbs 3:9 teaches that we should honour the Lord with our first fruits. Those who easily dismiss first fruits offering as irrelevant for New Testament believers because it predominates in the Old Testament, readily use other principles of wisdom from the book of Proverbs from

which to base their mentality and behaviour on. If the wisdom of the book of Proverbs applies to all of life, then surely its financial wisdom relative to first fruits giving should be noted and obeyed. Those who do not embrace first fruits giving on the basis that it was a law-based practice (a view easily dismantled), must demonstrate how they practise Prov. 3:9 financially.”

Rejecting the validity of the practice of first fruits today would also mean discounting the practical wisdom in the book of Proverbs.

15. The Principle of First Fruits is by Faith, an Eternal Abiding Virtue

The PRINCIPLE of FAITH both ignited and characterised first fruits giving, even before the law was given. It was offered by Abel, employing the principle of faith, which finds expression in obedience (works). Faith comes by hearing God’s Word (Rom. 10:17). If faith comes by hearing God’s Word, and Abel offered the firstlings of his flocks by faith, it therefore implies God instructed him to do so. Paul and others correctly argued that the principle of ‘faith’, specifically faith in Christ Jesus, as opposed to keeping the works of the law, is what saves us. Here, the principle of faith is set in contrast to that of works of the law.

Faith was a core catalyst that ignited acts of giving and other expressions of obedience in the Old Covenant - as recorded for us in the book of Hebrews 11. Thus, the principle of faith, which outworks itself through obedience, is today still present in our lives and thus manifests itself in giving, as the nation of Israel gave. Abel’s first fruits was ‘BY FAITH’. No law was present, only the principle of faith, which is not based on external or natural things, but prophetic sight into the unseen, eternal realm. We walk by faith and not by sight, for the things which are seen are temporal, but the things which are unseen, are eternal. Faith also connects us to the eternal. First fruits, as a principle, is an eternal principle.

Also, **faith is the substance of God Himself** - the essence of His being (akin to grace and glory). Faith’s presence in our lives is the person of God in our lives. Faith is far more than trust and confidence in God or the capacity to believe Him. When the person of God is powerfully present within us, our capacity to trust Him, believe Him and express confidence

in Him, is simply a natural outflow of this. Thus, by FAITH, Abel offered first fruits to God, i.e., on the basis of and from the nature of God within him, he offered it. It was literally God giving through him (Cf. "It is God who worketh in you" - Phil. 2:12,13).

16. The Principle of First Fruits Embodied in Christ and Us, is to be Expressed Through Us

Christ is indeed the fulfilment of the principle of first fruits, and so too are we, His church, the church of the firstborn (first fruits). Everything in God, every actual or natural expression of spiritual realities, will ultimately find fulfilment and expression in a 'person'. The 'Word' must become flesh.

For example, we are a 'song unto God' before we actually sing to the Lord - God is more impressed by the song emitted from our righteous lifestyles than our actual vocal singing. Yet this does not negate the necessity to sing. The fact that we live a 'fasted life' according to Isaiah 58, emphasising justice, mercy, equity, charity, etc. does not set aside the need to physically fast by abstaining from food. The fact that we are to pray without ceasing (1 Thess. 5:17), thus denoting that our spirit man is consistently in communion with God even when we are asleep, does not discount the need to set aside actual times of physical prayer. Also, recall that Paul encourages us to BE thankful (Col. 3:15), suggesting that gratitude is an internal disposition or state of being. But he also exhorts us to GIVE thanks (Col. 3:17). In other words, outward thanksgiving is the reflexive act of one who is internally thankful. What you ARE, you can and must EXPRESS.

Similarly, the fact that we are the first fruits of God in Christ, does not cancel the necessity for us to practise the giving of first fruits. In fact, because we are a first fruits reality internally, we easily express it in the form of first fruits giving outwardly. Thus, first fruits are borne out of a revelation as to whom God made you to be in Christ as His firstborn son. As firstborn sons, the principle of FIRST-ness is important to us, e.g. we seek FIRST the Kingdom of God and His righteousness. Thus, we give financial first fruits out from an understanding of our identity "in celebration of who we are as firstborn sons in Christ and not as a condition of

it” (Sam Soleyn). The giving does not establish or determine who we are; rather, an already cemented and entrenched understanding of who we are prompts the giving.

But when we do give in this fashion, the actual giving of the offering testifies to the state and quality of the offerer. The gift does not validate the giver, rather the giver validates the gift, i.e., the gift is acceptable because the giver is acceptable. The giver cannot accrue acceptance with God based solely on the gift offered, yet the gift offered is necessary to amplify and testify of the quality of the giver. What you offer and how you offer it to God typifies something of you and what you represent. Abel, the man, ‘obtained a witness’ of his righteousness through that which he offered. God testified of his gift, i.e., God endorsed his state through his offering.

By faith Abel offered to God a **more excellent sacrifice** than Cain, **through which** he obtained witness that he was righteous, **God testifying of his gifts**; and through it he being dead still speaks. (**Hebrews 11:4**)

Abel is the first to offer first fruits in Scripture and is listed first in the Hebrews 11 record of faith heroes, thereby setting forth a foundation and pattern for all those who would follow him. Abraham, whose steps of faith we are commanded to emulate (Rom. 4:12), offered Isaac as his ‘firstborn’ - a kind of first fruits given to God. We, as the ‘Church of the firstborn’ (Heb. 12:23) and the ‘firstborn sons of God in Christ’ (Rom. 8:29), ought to live in the power and principle of ‘first things’, seeking ‘first His Kingdom’, and the actual giving of first fruits become a tangible demonstration of this position in the Spirit. Practical outward demonstrations of spiritual positions are necessary.

17. The Principle of First Fruits is Part of Giving by Grace

The primary argument raised against the validity of first fruits and tithes is that we are under ‘Grace’ and not ‘Law’, and as such, all giving is without any structure and is left purely to the decision of the giver, as to when and how he should give - all this ‘by grace’. There is structure to giving, and

structure provided for us by the giving patterns of the Old Covenant do not suggest legalism, but rather they denote discipline. Paul argued for regular and systematic giving (See 1 Cor. 16:1-2). The threefold nature of giving - first fruits, tithes and offerings - provide structure and disciplined order to our giving.

The following principles of giving, viz. 'as you decide in your heart' (2 Cor. 9:7), 'according to and beyond your ability' (2 Cor. 8:3), and 'as God has prospered you' (1 Cor. 16:2), all relate to the category of 'offerings' and not to first fruits and tithes per se, even though these principles could apply to first fruits and tithes. The first fruits amount is the first indication of income, usually the first week in a calendar year, and the tithe is simply ten percent of gross earnings. When it comes to offerings (inclusive of almsgiving or giving to the poor), you can, under the leadership of the Holy Spirit, give according to the principles governing offerings highlighted here in the scripture cited above.

All giving must be prompted, activated and administrated in the power of the grace of God. Refer to chapter 23 which discusses the critical connection between 'Grace' and 'Giving'. Grace is greater than law. Whilst specific guidelines are provided in this writing regarding how to administer one's first fruits, they are just that - 'guidelines' or 'suggestions'. As I have grown in my understanding and faith relative to first fruits, my giving of first fruits has transcended beyond giving the first weeks' income as first fruits. In fact, I am aware of some people who give between 30% and 50% of their income away as first fruits. The point I want to make is this: if you reject the validity of first fruits giving as relevant for today, but also embrace 'grace giving' as opposed to 'law-based giving' as an argument, then grace-based giving by far exceeds anything in quality or quantity which law-based giving requires.

Under 'grace', Jesus and other New Testament writers, in citing certain practices relative to specific Old Testament laws, always RAISED the requirement or standard relative to that issue.

Examples:

- The physical act of adultery under the law was condemned, but under

- ‘grace’, the man who lusts after a woman in his heart - is guilty of adultery, even without physically committing the act (Matt. 5:27).
- Under the law we are told, ‘Thou shalt not steal’ (Ex. 20:15), but under grace, this is maintained and re-echoed, but with an additional requirement given by Paul, viz. to also work and practise generous giving (Eph. 4:28).
 - The definition of murder is extended to hating or been angry with your brother in the New Testament (Matt. 5:21-22; 1 John 3:15), and not just physically killing someone as in the Old Testament.
 - Under grace, we are to go two miles with someone who forces us to only go one mile under the law (Matt. 5:41).
 - The law gave permittance to hate an enemy under certain conditions, but under grace, we are to love our enemies and bless and pray for our persecutors (Matt. 5:43-45).
 - The command to ‘love your neighbour as yourself’ (Lev.19:18) under the law, is upgraded under grace, to ‘love each other as I have loved you’ (John 13:34).
 - In the law, the practice of offerings is held in high regard, but under grace, Jesus insisted that offerings are only valid and acceptable to God, when given within the context of right or restored brotherly relationships (Matt. 5:23,24).

Thus, we can conclude that all giving under grace should then exceed that of the law in quality and quantity. Our righteousness, which is by faith in Christ Jesus, and thus our outward expression of righteous acts, must exceed even that of the Pharisees and Scribes (Matt. 5:20). Jesus did not come to abolish the law but to fulfil it (Matt. 5:17) and commended anyone who keeps the commandments of the law and teaches others to do the same, as great in the Kingdom of God (Matt. 5:19).

Thus, anyone who believes that the Old Testament practice of first fruits is obsolete, must then also practically demonstrate how their financial giving far exceeds the Old Testament expression of this practice.

REFLECT

1. Do you value the whole book of Proverbs for its practical wisdom for effective living in Christ today? Have you also embraced the financial wisdom offered to honour God with your wealth and the first fruits of all your increase, as stated in Prov. 3:9?
2. First fruits are not 'time'-related, 'testament'-related, 'covenant'-related, or 'law'-related. It is an eternal principle finding its genesis before time, in the Person of God Himself. The eternality of first fruits informs our observance of it today. Have you fully processed this thought? Are you, in the New Covenant and under grace, convinced of the validity of first fruits?



The understanding of the substantive and comprehensive nature of first fruits as a principle, adds to the profundity of its financial application.



For if the firstfruit is holy, the lump is also holy;
and if the root is holy, so are the branches.

(Rom. 11:16 - NKJV)

Principles of First Fruits in the New Testament

The New Testament has no direct references to the practice of first fruits financially, but as indicated in the previous chapter, neither does it discount it. Please refer to the previous chapter which deals with the validity of the practice of first fruits for New Testament believers, and hence for us in our modern-day.

The New Testament is awash with the principle of first fruits applied variously - to Christ, to the Holy Spirit, to us as sons of God individually, and to the church corporately. What is true to the principle of first fruits, can be extrapolated to characterise any expression or practice of the principle. In this chapter, we explore some New Testament realities of first fruits, and in some instances, export the inherent principle and apply it to a financial administration. This then becomes, not a literal interpretation of original thought, but a prophetic or symbolic application financially.

The Greek word for **'first fruits'** is **'aparche'**, meaning **'a beginning of sacrifice'**.¹¹⁷ This word is also used of **'persons superior in excellence to others of the same class'**.¹¹⁸

In the New Testament, the principle of first fruits is employed to symbolically indicate various spiritual realities. This highlights just how significant the principle and practice of first fruits is. Also, as demonstrated in this writing, the giving of financial first fruits, in itself, points to other spiritual principles, e.g., the giving of first fruits by Abel testified to the quality of his faith and his internal state of righteousness.

By faith Abel offered to God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain, through which he obtained witness that he was righteous, God testifying of his gifts ... (**Hebrews 11:4**)

The feeding of the five thousand took place within the context of a young boy GIVING his lunch into the hands of Jesus. The miraculous was activated, and during a process of active distribution to meet an urgent need of hunger, the fish and loaves multiplied. This miracle, ignited by an act of GIVING, was to activate and cement a truth much greater than simply the fact that Jesus is miraculous and has the power to meet people's needs. He ultimately wanted to reveal His nature as **'Bread of Life'** to them and the **'bread which came down from heaven'**. Yet many followed Him only for the fish and loaves, and completely missed the whole point. Works of God must also reveal the Word of God; **God's 'performance' - what He does, must always reveal God's 'person' - who He is.**

Similarly, in reference to first fruits, if you fail to **see and comprehend the greater and extended application of the principle**, you may choose not to observe the practice, or otherwise, you may engage in the practise of the principle but not with complete revelation and understanding of the **total spiritual ambit and realities it incorporates.**

The application of the first fruits principle in the New Covenant refers largely to **'people' being a manifestation of the principle.** This was also true in the Old Covenant, e.g., Jeremiah 2:3a indicates that **"Israel was holiness to the LORD, the first fruits of His increase"**, and later the tribe of Levi (Num. 3:12,41). As already indicated earlier in this writing, during the Feast of the Sheaf of First Fruits, the first sheaf of ripened barley was waved by the priest before the Lord. The 'sheaf' is indicative of PEOPLE, as is evidenced by the interpretation of Joseph's dream. (Gen. 37:5-11). **First fruits represent the totality and entirety of one's life, spiritual purpose and prophetic destiny.**

Here below are seven New Testament references to first fruits. Study them and allow the Spirit of Truth to lead you into the truth that each contains. Brief treatment of these is given here.

- (1) If the **first piece** of dough is holy, **the lump** is also; and if **the root** is holy, **the branches** are too. (**Romans 11:16 - NASB**)

For if the **firstfruit** is holy, the lump is also **holy**; and if the root is **holy**, so are the branches. (**Romans 11:16 - NKJV**)

Christ is the first constituent of the 'dough'; we, the church, are the 'lump'. Christ is the root and vine; we, the church, are the branches. **First fruits, symbolically, are the root of our giving that gives rise to the branches** - i.e., provides structure and form to other expressions of giving. Branches are the part of the tree on which the fruit is borne - hence first fruits provide the capacity for fruit-bearing, reaping the many blessings attendant with giving.

Here again is a reminder that anything 'first fruits' is a HOLY offering (Num. 18:8-19; Lev. 29:24; Lev. 27:30).

- (2) For those whom He foreknew, He also predestined to become conformed to the image of His Son, so that **He would be the firstborn among many brethren.** (**Romans 8:29**)

But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to myriads of angels, to the general assembly and **church of the firstborn.** (**Hebrews 12:22,23a**)

Our representation as the firstborn sons of God is discussed in chapter 5. Access a fuller treatment on 'FIRSTBORN SONSHIP' via study notes and audio teachings freely available on my website¹¹⁹.

- (3) In the exercise of His will He brought us forth by the **word of truth**, so that **we would be a kind of first fruits** among **His creatures.** (**James 1:18**)

'We' in the verse above refers to us, the sons of God, the apex of God's creation, made in His image and likeness. 'His creatures' is a reference to

the rest of the creative order. We will be the first fruits of total redemption, then after us the rest of creation, which groans for this. When the 'first' comes into full redemption, the rest follows automatically. The rest of creation longs for the total redemption and manifestation of the mature sons of God, and this triggers a process of redemption across all of creation. When the first is rightly positioned, the rest of the harvest follows in the same order.

- (4) Also greet the church that is in their house. Greet **Epaenetus**, my beloved, who is **the first convert** to Christ from Asia. **(Romans 16:5)**

Now I urge you, brethren (you know the household of **Stephanas**, that they were **the first fruits of Achaia**, and that they have devoted themselves for ministry to the saints) **(1 Corinthians 16:15-16)**

Epaenetus, meaning 'laudable',¹²⁰ and the Household of Stephanus, meaning 'crowned',¹²¹ were the first converts in Asia and Achaia respectively. They were thus representative of the quality of converts to follow from this region - this quality being 'rulers' (crowned), 'laudable' and 'devoted to the ministry of the saints'.

Corinth was in the province of Achaia. The Corinthian church was instructed by Paul to submit to the household of Stephanus because of their diligent work in devoting themselves to the ministry of the saints (1 Cor.16:16). No doubt, the calibre of the grace of God in Stephanus, a spiritual son of Paul and a first fruit convert from Achaia, would be that of the Corinthians as well - at least those in submission to him. What is true of the first fruits, becomes true of the harvest.

- (5) And not only this, but also we ourselves, **having the first fruits of the Spirit**, even we ourselves **groan** within ourselves, **waiting eagerly** for our adoption as sons, **the redemption of our body**. **(Romans 8:23)**

The phrase 'first fruits of the Spirit' refers to the down-payment or guarantee of the Spirit, i.e., the Spirit **with measure** - but this is a foretaste of the fullness of the Spirit **without measure**. The fullness of a dimension is unattainable without first experiencing the 'first' phase or expression of that dimension. I trust that you can see the relevance and application in reference to giving financial first fruits.

As referenced earlier in this writing, in chapter 5, the first fruits of the Spirit also alludes to a guarantee that we will attain the fullness of our adoption as sons of God, including reaching immortality of the body. This also references that the fullness of the Father and Son will also be a reality within every son of God who is a part of the corporate Body of Christ.

- (6) But now Christ has been raised from the dead, the **first fruits of those who are asleep**. For since by a man came death, by a man also came the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, so also **in Christ all will be made alive**. But each in his own order: **Christ the first fruits, after that those who are Christ's** at His coming. (1 Corinthians 15:20-26)

Refer to notes on this verse in chapter 5.

- (7) These are the ones who have **not been defiled** with women, for they have kept themselves chaste. These *are* the ones who follow the Lamb wherever He goes. These have been **purchased from among men as first fruits** to God and to the Lamb. (Revelations 14:4)

Refer to notes on this verse in chapter 5. The phrase 'not been defiled' allude to personal practical purity. First fruits have the capacity, not just to be depictive of the purity of our lifestyles, but it also has the potential to be representative of the purest, undefiled financial offering we give.

REFLECT

First fruits are not just about finances. The financial expression of first fruits must be viewed against the backdrop of the profundity and all-encompassing nature of first fruits as applied in the New Testament. Often the giving of financial first fruits is indicative of significant spiritual realities and principles. In what respects can you connect first fruit giving with principles of first fruits as applied in the New Testament?



What gives?
Grace!



Complete this grace in You.
2 Cor. 8:6b

The Grace of Giving

Paul taught that giving is a GRACE. He devoted two complete chapters to the subject of giving in 2 Corinthians, viz. chapters 8 and 9 (apart from his discussion of finances in 1 Cor. 9 and 16; and 2 Cor. 11). In these two chapters, the word GRACE appears seven times. Seven indicates perfection. You will never attain perfection in financial giving until you function completely in the GRACE of GIVING. ‘Grace’ empowers functionality and obedience. Every obedient action in us is an indication of the grace of God at work. Financial obedience occupies an incredibly unique place in this principle, because, as will be demonstrated in this chapter, financial giving itself flows forth from the resident grace of God in you, communicates grace to the recipient, and accesses more grace to you, the giver.

INCOMPLETE GRACE IN GIVING

¹ Moreover, brethren, we make known to you the **GRACE OF GOD bestowed on the churches of Macedonia:** ² that in a great trial of affliction the abundance of their joy and their deep poverty abounded in the riches of their liberality. ³ For I bear witness that **according to their ability**, yes, and **beyond their ability**, they were **freely willing**, ⁴ imploring us with much urgency that **we would receive the gift** and the fellowship of the ministering to the saints. ⁵ And not only as we had hoped, but they **first gave themselves to the Lord**, and **then**

to us by the will of God. ⁶ **So we urged Titus**, that as he had begun, **so he would also COMPLETE THIS GRACE in you as well.** ⁷ **But as you abound in everything** - in faith, in speech, in knowledge, in all diligence, and in your love for us - **see that you abound in this grace also.** ⁸ I speak not by commandment, but I am testing the sincerity of your love by the diligence of others. ⁹ **For you know THE GRACE OF OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST**, that though He was rich, yet for your sakes He became poor, that you through His poverty might become rich. **(2 Corinthians 8:1-9)**

The Corinthian church was tremendously gifted in spiritual gifts (see v.7), but they lacked in excelling in the area of giving. Paul praises the Macedonian churches for their abundant giving from their condition of severe poverty (see v.2), and even going beyond what they were capable of doing (verse 3a) in a posture of unforced willingness (verse 3b). In verse 1, he describes why they could operate at this level, by drawing attention to the fact that it was the **GRACE OF GOD** that was bestowed upon them. This church had the **GRACE OF GIVING**. Grace is a divine enablement or empowerment from God which causes us to function effectively in some dimension of His will.

The Corinthian church lacked this grace of giving, or more accurately, were incomplete in this grace of giving. Paul decided to send to them his spiritual son and fellow-worker, Titus, who would, when he comes, **COMPLETE** this grace of giving within the Corinthians. Titus had the capacity to activate this grace within the hearts of the Corinthians.

The grace of giving must be **COMPLETE**. The Greek word for ‘**complete**’ is ‘**epiteleo**’, meaning ‘**to finish, complete, perfect**’.¹²² This word, ‘**epiteleo**’, is made up of two words, viz. **teleo** which means ‘**complete**’ and ‘**epi**’ which generally is a prefix designed to **intensify the meaning** of the word to which it is attached. The manner of its usage suggests the **actual practise or permanence of an action** - with the idea that each **expression of the practice strengthens that disposition**. It calls for the **consistency and regularity** of the thing to be done. The more faithfully you practise generous financial giving, the more ‘**complete**’ you become

in it. Functioning in completed grace in financial giving is evidenced by the unbroken consistent obedience therein. As indicated earlier in this writing, **giving is not something you try; it is something you live.** Giving is not so much an activity you do, as much as it is the person you are.

Titus had earlier begun to teach the grace of giving and encouraged the Corinthians to excel in it. Now Paul sends him again to them to COMPLETE it. This would occur in two ways:

- a) An impartation of the grace of giving from Titus to them.
- b) Their commitment to obey or enact it by obediently doing it consistently.

A year prior to the writing of 2 Corinthians, they had promised Paul a gift, but had not fulfilled the actual doing of it.

¹⁰ I give my opinion in this matter, for this is to your advantage, **who were the first to begin a year ago** not only to do this, but **also to desire to do it.** ¹¹ **But now finish doing it also,** so that just as **there was the readiness to desire it,** so there may be also the **completion of it by your ability.** (2 Corinthians 8:10,11)

¹ For it is superfluous for me to write to you about this ministry to the saints; ² for **I know your readiness,** of which I boast about you to the Macedonians, namely, that Achaia has been prepared since last year, and your zeal has stirred up most of them. ³ But I have sent the brethren, in order that our boasting about you may not be made empty in this case, so that, as I was saying, you may be prepared; ⁴ otherwise if any Macedonians come with me and find you unprepared, we - not to speak of you - will be put to shame by this confidence. ⁵ So I thought it necessary to urge the brethren that they would go on ahead to you and **arrange beforehand your previously promised bountiful gift,** so that the same would be **ready**

as a bountiful gift and not affected by covetousness. (2 Corinthians 9:1-5)

A deficiency in giving indicates a deficiency in grace. Usually, generous giving is illustrative of an abundance of grace.

WHAT GIVES? GRACE GIVES! AT THE HEART OF GRACE IS A STRONG DESIRE TO GIVE GENEROUSLY

The Greek word translated grace is ‘**charis**’, which also indicates that the recipient of grace will overflow with unpretentious joy and the person will have a strong desire to express this grace in generous giving. Any claim to having grace will manifest itself in certain ways, e.g., joy, rest, absence of striving, etc. One sure manifestation of grace would be a willingness to give AND to give generously at that. **At the heart of God as a gracious God, is a strong desire to give.** ‘Charis’ is explained in more detail in my teaching on Grace, available on my website. A particular aspect of the meaning of this word stresses the “**absolutely free expression of the lovingkindness of God to men, finding its only motive in the bounty and benevolence of the giver**”.¹²³ God gives bountifully and benevolently because He is a God of grace. **If we are to fully understand giving generally and financial giving specifically, we need to understand that all forms of giving are borne out from the core nature of God’s grace within us. Giving is an expression of grace.**

Grace is rich and super-abundant within God. This is the character and quality of grace. Its store is inexhaustible. Financial giving must flow out of this super-abundant grace for your giving to be reflective of that grace. At times, financial giving is poor, deficient or meagre because it is not given with the mindset of the giver giving it out from the vastness of grace.

Obviously, as grace increases, so will your financial giving. To increase your capacity to give, you should start being aware that you give because of God’s grace and out from God’s grace, a grace that always seeks not just to give, but to do so as generously as possible. You know your grace in giving is maturing when you migrate away from a consideration of

giving the least possible offering, to a strong desire to always give the most extravagant offering.

GRACE BREAKS NATURAL LIMITATIONS ON GIVING

The one thing about the grace of God is that it causes you to function **beyond your natural human limitation or inclination**. Thus, if **you tap into the power and potential of the grace of God within you and give out from that dimension, it will raise the character, frequency, quality and quantity of your financial giving**.

Paul referenced the effect of the grace of God upon the Macedonian churches. He cites specifically how they gave financially.

¹ Now, brethren, we wish to make **KNOWN** to you the **GRACE** of God which has been given in the churches of Macedonia, ² that in a great ordeal of affliction their abundance of joy and their deep poverty overflowed in the wealth of their **LIBERALITY**. ³ For I testify that according to their ability, and beyond their ability, **THEY GAVE** of their own accord. (**2 Corinthians 8:1-3**)

In the passage of Scripture above, the effect of the grace of God produced in the Macedonians was firstly, an abundant joy, despite intense sufferings and trial, and secondly, a liberal/generous giving from extreme poverty. Paul states clearly that his purpose was to demonstrate some of the effects of the grace of God upon the Macedonian churches. Their giving was characterised by giving generously from deep poverty, according to their ability and even beyond their ability. A poor community of saints out-gave a comparatively rich Corinthian context, simply because of the abundant grace resident upon them. The Corinthian church lacked the grace of giving whilst the churches of Macedonia excelled in the grace of giving. Giving generally, according to one's ability, i.e., what you are able to give, requires grace at work. Giving beyond what you are humanly inclined towards or capable of, i.e., giving beyond your ability, requires an

increased grace dimension. This dimension of abundant grace was on the Macedonians.

The degree of generosity that was characteristic of the giving of the Macedonians was not because of their condition or context. Their condition and context was one of great affliction and deep poverty. Neither of those two conditions inhibited or reduced their giving. Their lavish giving defied their context. Why? How could they operate like this? The answer is simply - by GRACE.

Grace causes us to give way beyond the limitations of our capacity, the state of our bank balances or the size of our income. The Macedonians gave according to their ability and even beyond their ability.

GIVING FROM GRACE SUFFERS NO LOSS

The grace of God is the essence of the nature of God as a Spirit being. God as Spirit, wanted to exhibit His glory demonstrably through creation. All creation, but primarily man, would be the means through which God would do this. Thus, God would be seen and known through man, His son. To accomplish this, God invested within man, a dynamic that is most like Himself, namely, spirit. The **compositional make-up of spirit is grace**. So, the creation of man indicates to us how God, who is Spirit, full of grace, GAVE from out of Himself as Spirit into the body of a man. This spirit in man, which came from God, is also comprised of grace. The point of all of this is that grace seeks to express itself. For this to happen, God had to give out from Himself to man. Grace gives!

But, when God gave spirit to man out from His own being as Spirit, He was not diminished by the quantum of spirit He gave out. This is because things in the realm of the spirit do not operate quite like the natural realm. In the natural realm, whenever you give something away, you are lessened by what you have given and are somewhat in a disadvantaged position. But in the spirit realm, whenever you give out from yourself from that platform in you that is spirit and full of grace, you are never decreased or diminished by what you have given out. In the realm of spirit, things know no reduction.

Hence, it is particularly important when you give financially, that you employ your grace-filled spirit to dictate and direct the decision and act of giving, and not the unrenewed dimension of your soul. Give out from the platform of grace within your spirit. The spirit has a mind, but your soul has a mind too, and sometimes they may be in conflict as to whether you should give financially or not and/or the amount you should give. The mind of your spirit must lead and direct the mind of your soul. Do not permit the mind of your soul to rebel against what you perceive is the right thing to do in your spirit. The soul must bow to the spirit in you. Grace must lead the way, and grace beckons to always give. It is grace's nature!

A double-minded man is unstable in all his ways:

⁶ But he must ask in faith without any doubting, for the one who doubts is like the surf of the sea, driven and tossed by the wind. ⁷ For that man ought not to expect that he will receive anything from the Lord, ⁸ being a **double-minded** man, unstable in all his ways. (**James 1:6-8**)

Double-mindedness alludes to doubt or hesitation and always results whenever the mind of your soul refuses to comply with the intentions of the mind of your spirit.

THE GRACE OF OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST

As mentioned, the word GRACE appears seven times in 2 Corinthians 8 and 9. 'Grace is the opposite to 'Law'. The Law is binding and brings bondage. **Grace is liberating and flows freely.** **John 1:17** teaches that the Law was given through Moses, but GRACE and truth came through Jesus Christ. In His death on the cross, Jesus made available the gift of grace given to all men. **This grace must also be operative in the giving of our finances.**

The law of Moses imposed requirements upon man, which man, with a fallen sinful nature, was unable to observe. But by the grace of God, man is able to receive a new nature and experience of the new birth, affording

him the enabling and empowering capacity of this same grace to overcome the fallen nature. Grace saves you from sin and grace empowers you to overcome sin. The sin you could not overcome by your own works, grace allows you to conquer through the meritorious work of Jesus Christ on the cross. Now saved and a son of God, man can do good works, not to earn salvation or growth in maturity in Christ, but to express the power and potential of the grace by which he is initially saved and in which he progressively grows.

⁸ **For by grace you have been saved through faith;** and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; ⁹ **not as a result of works,** so that no one may boast. ¹⁰ **For we are His workmanship,** created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them. **(Ephesians 2:8-10)**

Our good works do not earn salvation, but once we are saved by grace, good works should demonstrate salvation by grace. To the degree that you permit and co-operate with God to work within you, to that degree will you walk in the works He has pre-ordained for you, works that then require very little of your own human effort as much as it relies on the enablement by grace that God gives.

¹² So then, my beloved, just as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, **work out your salvation with fear and trembling;** ¹³ **for it is God who is at work in you,** both to will and to work for His good pleasure. **(Philippians 2:12,13)**

We are required to work out our own salvation in fear and trembling, simply because God is already working within us. We work because He is already at work. We must realise that the work of financially obeying God must not be by our own works, but by the grace of God itself - by the already present working of God in us. Just discern this and co-operate with it.

We do not give financially to earn 'points' with God. We give as an

expression of the grace of God within us. The inevitability of grace is that it seeks to give from within itself, outwardly. Thus, all giving must initiate in and be expressive of the grace of God. Our giving, like any good work, becomes testimony to our salvation and is a vital component of our obedience to God, an obedience prompted and empowered by grace, and an obedience essential for our progressive maturation into the fullness of the image of Christ.

My point in rehearsing this is simply to highlight that grace does not just save but enables our obedience in every aspect of life, including our financial giving.

In exhorting the Corinthian church to **abound in the grace of giving**, Paul draws from the **example of Jesus Himself**:

For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for your sakes He became poor, that you through His poverty might become rich. (2 Corinthians 8:9)

The grace of giving resident in Jesus Christ Himself had no problems impoverishing Himself to enrich others. GRACE does not count the cost - it simply acts in obedience. The specific facet of grace residing in Jesus Christ knew how to place the needs of others above His own. **The claim to have this grace by a believer is not valid unless that believer, in his financial and material giving, knows how to inconvenience him/herself to convenience others.** Grace gives! Not to give because of a covetous spirit, is disgrace.

New Testament giving in a spirit of grace as opposed to the Old Testament law, by far exceeds the requirements of the law. When determining your first fruits or tithe, do not be governed by a calculator, but be governed gracefully by the spirit of liberal, willing and cheerful giving.

LOVE AND GRACE PROMPT GIVING

LOVE and GRACE should activate and be the spur for all forms of giving. The Corinthians lacked both, and particularly in respect to grace which is expressed in and through giving. Thus, Paul would spend a whole chapter on principles of the LOVE of God in 1 Corinthians 13, and two whole chapters on principles of financial giving in 2 Corinthians 8 and 9. The benedictory valediction of Paul to them in his second letter is hence deliberate and significant:

The **GRACE** of the **Lord Jesus Christ**, and the **LOVE** of **God**, and the **fellowship** of the **Holy Spirit**, be with you all.
(2 Corinthians 13:14)

From God the Father, Paul imparts His love. From the Lord Jesus Christ, Paul imparts His grace. Nothing specific is highlighted as imparted from the Holy Spirit in this verse. All Paul mentions is the fellowship of the Holy Spirit. The Spirit is the Person or means through which the love of the Father and the grace of Jesus Christ is received. Both the love of God, the Father, and the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the Son, find their expression in demonstrable giving.

Paul specifically imparted the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ when he closed the letter because the grace of Jesus Christ is a grace that knows how to give, even by impoverishing itself to enrich others. Grace gives without counting the cost to itself. Grace gives unselfishly. When 'grace' gives, it places priority on the need of the other. Grace is willing to inconvenience itself to convenience others.

What allowed Jesus to give up His riches, become poor for our sakes, that we might become rich? The answer is simple - His grace. **Grace incorporates an ability or power to act in a particular fashion. It embraces a willingness to suffer personal loss so that others might gain.** This gift of grace must be the platform from which we give, especially when we give to others.

JESUS TASTED DEATH BY GRACE

In the garden of Gethsemane, Jesus had a momentary weakness in asking His Father to take away the cup of suffering associated with the crucifixion of the cross that He was to bear. His mind and flesh could not endure it. But, because of His overriding passion and delight to do His Father's will, He quickly adjusts His position, declaring, "Not my will but yours be done". I believe it was in this very declaration, that the Father endowed Jesus with an unusual deposit of grace to be able to go to the cross. Jesus then was able to obey his Father and 'TASTED DEATH' by the power of the 'GRACE of God':

¹⁰ But we do see Him who was made for a little while lower than the angels, namely, Jesus, because of the suffering of death crowned with glory and honor, **so that BY the GRACE OF GOD**, He might **TASTE DEATH** for everyone.

¹¹ For it was fitting for Him, for whom are all things, and through whom are all things, in bringing many sons to glory, to perfect the author of their salvation through sufferings. **(Hebrews 2:10,11)**

It was grace that enabled Jesus' obedience in His death on the cross. Grace too, will enable every dimension of your own obedience. When you feel you CANNOT, the grace of God in you says you CAN - by grace. Perhaps you are facing some requirement of God upon your life, something God is expecting you to do that may seem so difficult in your human strength. When you heard that command of God, in that command is not just God's **EXPECTATION** for you, but also in it, is God's **EMPOWERING** grace, which when you rely on, will cause you to obey God daringly and courageously. What God **COMMANDS** you to do, He will also **CAPACITATE** you to accomplish. God always **RESOURCES** you with GRACE to do what His word **REQUIRES** of you. Grace will always enable you to do what God's Word demands of you. These principles must also be applied to your financial obedience of first fruits, tithes and offerings.

A BOY GAVE TWO FISH AND FIVE LOAVES BY GRACE

In Luke 9:10-17, we have the account of the so-called 'Feeding of the Five Thousand'. A lad offered his two fish and five loaves of bread to Jesus, who blessed it and gave it to the twelve apostles to distribute to the crowds, sitting in groups of fifty on the hillside. Everyone ate to their heart's content, and afterward, there were twelve baskets of bread left-over. This entire miracle all started with a boy giving up his lunch to Jesus so that a corporate need could be met. Young boys are generally perpetually hungry and will not readily part with their lunch. So as young as he was, there was something beyond human consideration that was prompting his sacrificial and generous gift to Jesus of his lunch. It is nothing else but the 'grace', symbolically embodied in the bread and fish.

Bread symbolically indicates God's Word, which biblically is full of grace. There were five loaves, with five being the number representative of grace. Fish also typifies grace. Grace is the composition of God's being as Spirit. The transmission of grace is via God's Word, which Jesus said is 'spirit and life'. The destination of grace is our spirits (Gal. 6:8). After His resurrection, in a glorified body as spirit, Jesus ate fish. Symbolically, fish is the food of spirit (not literally but figuratively). The point is: fish alludes to the spirit and the compositional configuration of spirit is grace.

Therefore, the bread and the fish refer to grace. This boy, when he gave the bread and fish, was able to give from the platform of 'spirit'. Hence, his giving was easy and inevitable - it was effortless. Also, what he gave was not a distribution so much of bread and fish per se, but an expression of grace. Jesus blessed what he gave, thereby imparting HIS grace into what was given. Then, what was given, exponentially increased. Think of it like this. When you give finances, you are distributing grace, because your money flows forth from the grace of God within you. When blessed by God, this then can exponentialise and meet a host of needs.

Recall that when grace gives, grace is not diminished by what it gives. The boy gave but was not diminished nor disadvantaged by what he gave. In fact, I suspect, he probably ate more bread and fish than what he originally had.

HUMBLE ABEL ATTRACTED GRACE, AND FROM GRACE HE GAVE FIRSTLINGS BY FAITH

Abel's first fruits has been mentioned in this writing repeatedly. The meaning of Abel's name, '**a breath, vanity, vapour, withering, fading away**'¹²⁴, denotes **humility**. Humility is a grace magnet, while pride is a grace repellent. God gives grace to the humble, but actively resists the proud (James 4:6; 1 Pet. 5:5). The meaning of Cain's name, '**possession, acquisition, fabrication, I have gotten**'¹²⁵, suggests pride, and thus he is grace-deficient, as contrasted with Abel, who is grace-sufficient. It is no wonder that Abel can give the best from his flocks as first fruits to the Lord, whereas Cain simply gave a 'donation'. What we give to God will testify to the quality of grace within our spirits. When substantial grace is present, generous giving will be unavoidable.

Also, what the person of grace gives, that individual is never disadvantaged by what is given. This is seen in Abel, that even though he is murdered by Cain, he being dead, still speaks. The taking of his life did not limit his influence. He still speaks to us today through the power of his faith-filled obedient giving of first fruits. (See more details on this in chapter 13)

GRACE-ENRICHED ABRAHAM OFFERED ISAAC AS FIRST FRUITS

In Scripture, Abraham is upheld as a great example of faith, especially in respect to faith resulting from or made functionally possible by the power of God's grace. Abram was promised that he would be a father of nations. He tried to produce a son (Ishmael) in his flesh through impatience. God changed his name to Abraham, denoting an insertion of divine grace, as the name change from Abram to Abraham demands the insertion of the fifth letter of the Hebrew alphabet, 'hey'. Five is the number of grace.

Thus, **Abraham has more grace than Abram**. Abram produced Ishmael, but Abraham produced Isaac. **Faithless works produced Ishmael, but Grace-filled faith produced Isaac**. Having greater grace,

Abraham could, with the internal insertion of God's essential nature within him, from that foundation, exercise confident belief and trust in God that He would certainly bring to pass all that He said He would do. Abraham has more grace than Abram, hence Abraham has more faith than Abram. Faith results from grace.

Abram got it wrong; Abraham got it right. Abram pursued the 'thing', i.e., a son; Abraham pursued the 'grace', and the thing which he was promised and desired, materialised. Never seek to generate outwardly anything of the promise of God if you have not secured the associated grace of the person of God inwardly. **ABRAM** sought the '**PROMISE of God**' and carnally produced Ishmael to indicate the stature of a claim to 'faith'. But faith did not produce Ishmael; flesh did. **ABRAHAM** sought the '**GOD of the promise**', and through the power of grace, the God of grace produced through him and Sarah, the promised son, Isaac.

NOW, what grace produced, grace was able to freely give up. Abraham later was willing to sacrifice the 'PROMISE' (Isaac) to express loyalty, devotion and unswerving obedience to GOD, who had promised and ensured the fulfilment of the Promise. When we truly understand the revelation that all we have is as a result of God's enabling and empowering grace, then we will have no issues to give away what we have, because we could not have generated what we have alone, apart from the ability which God's grace affords. Again, let me repeat - what grace generates, grace effortlessly can give away.

Abraham was not reduced in any way by the giving of Isaac, for Isaac was preserved, and would give birth to a son, Jacob. Jacob had twelve sons, all of whom became twelve tribes, constituting the structure of the nation of Israel. Abraham sowed one son and reaped a whole nation. But not just one nation, for through the tribe of Judah, Christ would come and give birth to the Church, consisting of millions of sons of God throughout the ages, including you and I. Abraham reaped many nations. Indeed, his prophecy that he would father many nations came to pass. Abraham would not have become a father of many nations if he was not willing to offer his only son as a first fruits offering. And he did this BY GRACE.

Grace looks beyond the immediacy of the potential initial pain associated with costly giving, to the joyous reward of multi-faceted harvests, viz. righteousness, grace, provision and so much more. Grace allows us to give first fruits and other expressions of giving that cost us greatly, for the resultant joy attendant with the blessing and harvest we reap, by far outweighs the painful cost. We may sow in tears but will reap with joy (Psalm 126:5).

GRACEFUL NAOMI IMPARTED GRACE TO RUTH, WHO GAVE HER SON AS FIRST FRUITS

Frequent reference has been made in this writing to the 'father-son' relationship between Naomi and Ruth (consult chapters 11,12 and 16). Ruth offered her firstborn son, Obed, as first fruits to Naomi - reflected in Obed being placed on Naomi's lap and considered a son of Naomi, and not of Ruth. As already indicated, this son, Obed was a significant son, in that he was the grandfather of King David, from whose line Christ, the Messiah, and ultimately the Church (i.e., you and I) would emerge. First fruits, represented in Obed, brought a huge and bountiful harvest historically through the ages.

Now, **the root meaning of Naomi (pleasant, agreeable) is 'grace'**.¹²⁶ Grace from the spiritual father (Naomi) is released to the spiritual son (Ruth), when the spiritual son obeys the Word of God voiced through the father, and ministers financially to the spiritual father, as proven in chapters 10 and 11 of this writing. The phrase 'Ruth the Moabitess' occurs five times in the book of Ruth. Five is the number of grace. Ruth's entire person and life becomes 'salted' and saturated with the divine grace of God stewarded by Naomi. From this reservoir of powerful grace within her being, she can effortlessly part with her firstborn son and regard him as really being born to Naomi. Only grace can do that. Grace gives! Grace beckons to give. First fruits giving, like all forms of giving, is virtually impossible without the grace of God activating the giving. Also, although she gave Obed to Naomi, Heaven's records still accord Obed as her son (Matt.1:5). What you give may leave your life but will never leave your legacy.

GRACIOUS HANNAH GAVE SAMUEL AS FIRST FRUITS

The name Hannah has everything to do with 'GRACE'. Here is the range of meanings attached to her name: **'gratuitous gift, i.e., grace, mercy; gracious; graciousness; favour. bestowed; she was gracious'**¹²⁷.

Hannah was barren and could not conceive. The Lord supernaturally healed her barrenness, answering Hannah's desperate cry for a son. Hannah, in pleading to the Lord for this son, stated that she would give the boy back to the Lord, in the service of the Lord.

Then she made a vow and said, "O Lord of hosts, if You will indeed look on the affliction of Your maidservant and remember me, and not forget Your maidservant, but will **give** Your maidservant **a male child**, then **I will give him to the Lord** all the days of his life, and no razor shall come upon his head. (1 Samuel 1:11)

This offering of Samuel to the Lord represents her first fruits, because it was Hannah's firstborn son. The grace of God in Hannah was the principle that activated and administrated the giving of the gift. Hannah requested a son, only to give him back again. She desired something to come to her, so that she could release it from her. She had 'faith' to both receive from the Lord and to give to the Lord. This is the nature of grace. Sadly, the modern church only employs faith to receive from God, but not to give to God. Abel GAVE first fruits by faith. Faith, a consequence of grace, excels in giving.

Why release Samuel when he represented an answer to a desperate cry and need for a son? Hannah wanted to honour God with the first fruits of her increase. The Lord remembered her in giving her a son; now she remembers the Lord by the observance of first fruits. Prophetically, she probably knew that she would have more children after this - she actually had five more (2 Sam. 2:21). Five is the number of grace. What grace gives, grace never loses. When she gave Samuel, she was not childless, because God broke the condition of barrenness and established within her womb a reproductive capacity, that would have ensured she would

produce five more sons. Samuel was the seed that gave rise to a harvest of five other sons.

Hannah herself was also a representation of a 'firstborn' or first fruits reality. This is seen by the fact that whenever her husband prepared his family to give offerings to the Lord, he would give his first wife, Peninnah, her sons and Hannah portions to offer, but he gave Hannah 'double portion' - twice more than he did to Peninnah and her sons. Thus, Hannah would offer twice more than the others (1 Sam. 1:1-5). The concept of 'double portion' attends a firstborn son. So prophetically, in receiving a double portion, Hannah is symbolised here as a firstborn or first fruits principle. Now, she was the embodiment of the principle of first fruits before she expressed this practically in giving her firstborn son. Who she was, governed what she gave. The giving of first fruits always points to a greater reality and highlights our identity and status as God's firstborn sons in Christ Jesus. When you are the thing, to express it is a matter of course, not coercion; it will be effortless, not painfully hard; it will be 'joy', and not a 'job'; and it will be inevitable - you cannot help but give expression to that which you have come to embody.

Samuel was more than just an ordinary son. He was a key judge, the last in a succession of judges from the book of Judges, and a prophet to the nation of Israel. Hannah's desperate cry to the Lord was not so much to fulfil her personal need, or for personal relief or satisfaction, but to fill up a major deficiency in Israel. Samuel would become a significant prophet of God, who would rise to judge the spiritual inaccuracy of his day, close the era of the judges, and usher in the era of the monarchy by anointing Israel's first two kings, in the persons of Saul and David. Jesus would ultimately come from David's line. Hannah (grace) sought the KINGDOM of God FIRST. Her prayer was not first focussed on her personal need, but the need of the broader Kingdom of God at that time. She prayed for something that would benefit the Kingdom, not herself personally per se.

Hannah gave Samuel to Eli, the functioning High Priest at that time. Here is another example of first fruits being directed toward the priest, one's spiritual oversight.

Consider that Samuel, a first fruits representation, anointed David as king, the grandson of Obed, who too, was a first fruits representation. The

first fruits principle continues throughout history to our present day. We, a first fruits company in Christ, seek the Kingdom of God and His righteousness first. God's purposes are secured and all things are added to us.

CHURCHES WHICH BECOME STRONG HOUSES OF GRACE AND GRACIOUS GIVING

Begin to think of the church, the body of believers, as a **'House of Grace'**.

Solomon had **twelve** deputies over all Israel, who **provided for the king and his household**; each man had to provide for a month in the year. These are their names: . . . **Ben-deker** in Makaz and Shaalbim and Beth-shemesh and **Elonbeth-hanan**. (**1 Kings 4:7-9**)

Ben-deker ('son of Deker') was one of King Solomon's twelve deputies or commissaries who provided for the king's needs, and that of his house, in one of the twelve months of the year. As indicated, he had jurisdiction over four cities, one of which was Elonbeth-hanan.

The name **'Elonbeth-hanan'** means **'oak of the house of grace; might of the house of the gracious giver'**¹²⁸. As the name suggests, Elonbeth-hanan was a source of generous or gracious giving. Grace certainly will manifest itself in extreme generosity. The name also carries within it the idea of a **HOUSE OF GRACE**. This city represented a source of great supply to King Solomon - it was the **'OAK of the House of Grace'**. Oak is suggestive of **great strength**. Herein lies a key principle: **Churches or Spiritual Households should be well-springs of the grace of God that consolidates the strength of the broader Kingdom of God**. These churches, infused by apostolic grace through covenantal connections to Apostolic fathers, are bountiful outlets and expressions of grace to the world.

May our churches be strong 'Houses of Grace' with an ample supply of Christ-like nature, presence, purpose and provision. Spiritual fathers are fathers of grace, which they, from a loving and generous heart disposition,

impart grace to sons in their houses. The reception of this grace by sons, who love and honour their spiritual father and each other, will make the house, a house of grace. From this grace-filled and grace-enriched environment, will emerge sons of God whose giving is 'gracious' and generous.

EARNESTLY DESIRE THE GRACE GIFT OF GIVING

We are all expected to operate in the grace of giving. But there are some whom God has given an added measure of grace in the area of giving - these have the GIFT OF GIVING. Just like the person who has the gift of faith has more faith than the person without the gift of faith, the person with the gift of giving has a greater capacity to give than the one without the gift of giving.

⁶ Since **we have GIFTS** that differ **according to the GRACE given to us**, each of us is to **exercise them accordingly**: if prophecy, according to the proportion of his faith; ⁷ if service, in his serving; or he who teaches, in his teaching; ⁸ or he who exhorts, in his exhortation; **he who gives, with LIBERALITY**; he who leads, with diligence; he who shows mercy, with cheerfulness. **(Romans 12:6-8)**

Paul here exhorts us to use these gifts according to the grace given to us. The phrase 'exercise them accordingly' in verse 6, means that we ought to use/operate in these gifts according to the measure of God's grace that He has given for this specific operation.

For some of these gifts, Paul describes the spirit of grace in which the gift should operate, e.g., the gift of prophecy should be functional in accordance with the measure of faith the person has; cheerfulness must characterise the operation of the gift of mercy, etc. In terms of the gift of giving, LIBERALITY must characterise the grace gift of giving. As previously stated, grace flows freely and effortlessly and is lavish in expressions. The Grace GIFT of giving must be exercised with liberality.

In this specific verse, the word **'liberality'** does not simply mean **bountifulness**. The Greek word is **'haplotes'** (from 'haplous' - not having an ulterior or double motive) and means the following: **'simplicity, purity, sincerity, faithfulness, plenitude (completeness, fullness)¹²⁹; singleness, mental honesty¹³⁰; the virtue of one who is free from pretense and hypocrisy¹³¹; not self-seeking, openness of heart manifesting itself by generosity¹³².**

It refers to faithful acts of kindness in giving, arising out of proper motivation. It does contain the element of bountifulness and generous giving but stresses that this must emanate from a sincere and pure motivation, with no hidden motive.

So we have urged Titus, who encouraged your giving in the first place, to return to you and encourage you to finish this ministry of giving. Since you excel in so many ways - in your faith, your gifted speakers, your knowledge, your enthusiasm, and your love from us - I want you to excel also in this gracious act of giving. **(2 Corinthians 8:6,7 - NLT)**

My prayer for you and I is that God's amazing grace would be evidenced in how we honour God by engaging in three-fold giving of first fruits, tithes and a range of offerings. When we give by grace, we will not come to a place of disgrace. May we all excel in the grace of giving.

Great grace, abundant peace and immeasurable mercy from God the Father, Christ Jesus our Lord, and the seven-fold Spirit of God, be yours in ever-increasing dimensions.

REFLECT

1. Does the Grace of God motivate and propel your financial giving?
2. Whenever we give out from the economy of God's Grace, we are not economically disadvantaged, for grace is the constituent element of spirit, a realm that does not decrease, even when it gives out from itself. To what extent is this principle a reality in your life?
3. All expressions of financial giving should flow out from the grace of God in us. To what degree are your expressions of financial giving directed by grace in your spirit, rather than primarily by the human reasoning of your soul?
4. How is giving an expression of humility to which grace is attracted?

OTHER RESOURCES FROM RANDOLPH

Watch Randolph's and the Gate Ministries Durban Central's Facebook, Instagram and Twitter accounts for timeous notifications of new publications.

The following Titles are available in **Audio** and **PDF Study Note formats** from **www.randolphbarnwell.com**:

- Primacy of the Word of God
- Gathering to Hear the Word
- Spiritual Man
- Prosperity of the Soul
- Meditation
- Lift Up your Head
- Open Doors
- Passover Principles (A)
- Passover Principles (B)
- Fasting
- Spiritual Fathering & Sonship
- Grace Part A - Meaning, Effects and Primary Modes of Impartation
- Grace Part B - Humility, A Grace Magnet
- Grace Part C - Pride, A Grace Repellent
- Grace Part D - Growing in Grace Through Submission
- Grace Part E - Grace Manifests as Favour
- Grace Part F - Impartations of Grace
- Grace Part G - The Effects of Grace
- Grace Part H - Grace Reigns Through Righteousness & Integrity
- Strengthen Yourself By Strengthening Your Leader
- Marriage
- Kingdom Economics
- Dating and Courtship

- Firstborn Sonship
- Stages in Development of Sonship
- Healing the Wounded Soul - Overcoming Emotional Hurt
- Thanksgiving, Praise and Worship
- The Faithfulness of God and His Sons
- Principles in People Procuring Property
- The Gate of Fatherly Leadership
- Repentance
- Faith
- Forgiveness
- Healing Principles
- The Power of Decree
- The Baptism in the Holy Spirit

Some of the above titles can be viewed on the **Gate Ministries Durban Central YouTube Channel**, as well as on **Randolph Barnwell's personal YouTube Channel**:

- www.youtube.com/gateministriesdurbancentral
- www.youtube.com/randolphbarnwell

FREE ACCESS TO THE FIRST FRUITS AUDIO BOOK

The Audio Book of this writing can be purchased on Amazon. You may also freely access the Audio Book from **www.randolphbarnwell.com**: click the Resources Tab; select Audio Books; select 'First Fruits'. Audios can be listened to online or downloaded.

ABOUT RANDOLPH BARNWELL

Randolph is happily married to Rene since September 1990. He has three sons [Matthew, Liam & Luke], one daughter [Rae], a daughter-in-law [Lauren] and a grandson [Levi]. He has been serving the Lord since 1982 and has been engaged in active ministry since 1990. He has served in various leadership capacities within the context of local church and the community in which he grew up.



He is a qualified teacher/educator and taught at high school level for seventeen years, before entering full-time ministry as the Senior Elder of a local church, Eternal Sound Ministries, which he planted in Durban in September 2005. The church was later renamed 'Gate Ministries - Durban Central' in September 2013.

The church is apostolic-prophetic in emphasis and functions with the following mandate, viz. to mature all people into the fullness of Christ, to facilitate the accomplishment of the eternal purposes of God, to accurately reflect God's image and glory, and to reconcile all things in Christ, both visible earthly and invisible heavenly realms.

Randolph fulfils a spiritual fathering function to his own household of faith, as well as providing spiritual oversight to a few churches globally.

The primary expression of the grace of Christ in Randolph is that of teaching with an apostolic-prophetic emphasis. He is focused on the development of various resources, which capture and document eternal, un-altering principles for effective functioning in life, to swiftly accomplish personal and corporate divine destiny. To this end, he records audio teachings in series format, writes study manuals, books and produces musical products. He is passionate about capturing principles of God's Word musically.

OVERSIGHT AND ACCOUNTABILITY

Randolph and the church he provides spiritual fathering and leadership to, relates and is accountable to his spiritual father, Thamo Naidoo, a bond-servant of Christ, who does the work of an Apostle. Thamo Naidoo is the Senior Elder of Gate Ministries Sandton (www.thamonaidoo.com).

CONNECT AND CONTACT

Freely downloadable spiritual resources, in various formats, designed for your spiritual growth and enrichment, are available from my website - www.randolphbarnwell.com. The easiest and most efficient way of receiving notifications of new resources from Randolph added to his website, is to 'follow' him on Instagram (IG) and Facebook (FB). On FB, follow 'Randolph Barnwell Ministry Page' (not his personal page which limits friends), or the 'Gate Ministries Durban Central' page on FB/IG - see links below. On these pages, notifications of the most recent Audios, YouTube Videos, PDF Documents and Books will be posted as they become available. In addition, you will also easily access regular inspirational and encouraging short posts.

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(2) Personal Page : www.facebook.com/randolph.barnwell

Twitter : https://twitter.com/R_Barnwell

Instagram : <https://www.instagram.com/rbarnwell/>

YouTube : Two YouTube Channels (Subscribe and Click Notification Bell)

1. Gate Ministries Durban Central -
www.youtube.com/gateministriesdurbancentral

2. Randolph Barnwell - www.youtube.com/randolphbarnwell

Sound Cloud: soundcloud.com/randolph-barnwell

Scribd : <https://www.scribd.com> (Search for Randolph Barnwell)

iTunes : <https://podcasts.apple.com/za/podcast/randolphbarnwell-com/id1438462473>

MINISTRY DETAILS



Gate Ministries Durban Central

Email: info@gatedc.co.za

Access more information about our ministry via these links :

<http://randolphbarnwell.com/gate-ministries.html>

Facebook Page: <https://www.facebook.com/GateMinistriesDurbanCentral/>

Instagram: <https://www.instagram.com/gate.ministries.durban.central/>

YouTube Channel: www.youtube.com/gateministriesdurbancentral

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ENDNOTES

INTRODUCTION

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 - Principles Governing Fathering - 7 Audio Sessions <https://thamonaiddoo.com/?s=fathering>
 - Grace - 5 Audio Sessions <https://thamonaiddoo.com/?s=grace>
 - Righteousness - Audio Sessions 1 to 23 <https://thamonaiddoo.com/?s=righteousness>

Randolph Barnwell Website: www.randolphbarnwell.com

At the time of this writing the website is being upgraded. Hence no specific links are cited. Simply 'search' for the relevant topic:

- Kingdom Economics : More than 50 Audio Sessions.
- Grace : Scroll Down to Grace Parts (A) to (H). Multiple Audios Session with accompanying PDF Study Notes Documents
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“Financial obedience to God’s revealed economic principles in His Word, is how we provide incontestable evidence to our claim that He is absolute MASTER and LORD of our lives. First fruits giving is a tangible indicator of our firm resolve to 'Seek first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness'. God is not ‘first’ in our lives, unless He is also ‘first’ financially.”

- Randolph Barnwell

The principle of first fruits is eternal in nature, having its genesis in the being of God Himself. It has been perpetually practised throughout human history as one of the most courageous acts of financial obedience, denoting complete trust in and honour of God as Provider. Randolph unpacks the underlying architecture of first fruits and answers questions like:

- Are first fruits and tithes the same or distinct expressions of giving?
- How are first fruits determined in our modern economy?
- What is the underlying philosophy governing the principle and practise of first fruits?
- What promises attend the practise of first fruits?
- Is fruit fruits valid for sons of God today?
- What is the interconnectivity between first fruits and the apostolic, the spirit of reformation, spiritual fathering, righteousness, honour, trust and grace?

“The first fruits principle is a harbinger, a forerunner embodying eternal principles. This book systematically sets out the Scriptures and their applications for overcoming financial lack. Study the teaching with a sincere heart. By adopting them, you will find success. Those who voluntarily engage the first fruits principles will enjoy immeasurable grace and provision.”

- Thamo Naidoo



Randolph Barnwell is the Senior Elder of Gate Ministries Durban Central, an apostolic-prophetic church in Durban, South Africa, and is passionate about the maturation of all people into the fullness of Christ, the facilitation of the accomplishment of the eternal purposes of God, the accurate reflection of God’s image and glory, and the reconciliation of all things in Christ. He fulfils a spiritual fathering function to his own household of faith, as well as providing spiritual oversight to a few churches globally.

