

Putting God First Study
Lesson 3: THE LAW of FIRST THINGS
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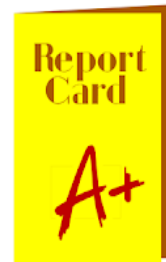


A Bible Study Series of
The Mt. Zion Missionary Baptist Church
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The Law of First Things

Introduction: My husband’s parents used to tell him that being your best in school could be a C grade and if it were a C, which had to be the absolute best he could have done. Likewise, they also said if he earned an A but did not do his best, they would still be displeased. Their point was that regardless of the grade, the issue was had you done your best?

Most of us grew up in families where parents regularly pushed us to be our best. Perhaps your parents were the ones who pushed you to be your best in school or in some other activity you did. The push came in the way of questions such as “Is that your best?” or “Is that the best you can do?” When these questions are asked, the purpose is for self-evaluation to determine the quality of what had been done. The people of God have the same requirement to present God with more than just unintentional gifts, actions, or attitudes which do not represent who we serve. We serve an excellent God. We are called to be our best. This expectation extends to our vocation, the exercising of our spiritual gifts, the ways in which we present ourselves, how we parent our children, and even how we give to God. Putting God First includes presenting Him with our best in every area of our lives.



The following lesson is intended to help students understand that as God, the first of everything in our lives, He can request anything of us. In turn, our response to Him should be to honor Him with our best. With this in mind, we will study Cain and Abel’s sacrifice to God. Enjoy the lesson!



Key Verse: Genesis 4:1-6

4 ¹Adam made love to his wife Eve, and she became pregnant and gave birth to Cain. She said, “With the help of the LORD I have brought forth a man.” ²Later she gave birth to his brother Abel. Now Abel kept flocks, and Cain worked the soil. ³In the course of time Cain brought some of the fruits of the soil as an offering to the LORD. ⁴And Abel also brought an offering—fat portions from some of the firstborn of his flock. The LORD looked with favor on Abel and his offering, ⁵but on Cain and his offering he did not look with favor. So, Cain was very angry, and his face was downcast. ⁶Then the LORD said to Cain, “Why are you angry? Why is your face downcast? ⁷If you do what is right, will you not be accepted? But if you do not do what is right, sin is crouching at your door; it desires to have you, but you must rule over it.”

Definitions:

Tithe= 1/10 of what is earned

Background on the current text

In Genesis Chapter 4, we learn about the first recorded children in the Bible: Cain and Abel. After Adam and Eve committed the first sin and were banished from the Garden of Eden, they continued with life. We can deduce that the events surrounding this story occurred *after* Adam and Eve sinned, for two reasons: 1) after the Creation, many theologians agree that Genesis is written in chronological order, and 2) the actions that transpire demonstrate that sin had already entered the world.

Cain was a farmer and Abel was a shepherd, and after some time working in their respective vocations, both brought gifts to the Lord. As we will learn, Cain and Abel had hugely different approaches in their giving, and God's response to each of them was also different.

I. The Importance of the First

What we do with our first is an indication of what we value. If we jump out of bed just in time to go to work, it might suggest that we value sleeping until the last minute. If we immediately save a portion of our paychecks before spending on anything, we could say that we value having a nest egg. From how we start our days to how we use our finances, and everything in between, our first is often representative of what we value most.

Because God desires to be first in our lives, He values what we do with the first. This is seen throughout the Bible where a higher value is often placed on the first. For example, the firstborn child often received twice the inheritance as the other children. In Exodus, when God told Pharaoh through Moses to "let My people go," the final plague was to strike down every firstborn throughout Egypt.

In 1 Samuel 1-2, after years of being barren, Hannah finally gave birth to her first child, Samuel, who she promised to give back to the Lord. In Leviticus 27:26, as God revealed the Law to Moses, God said, “No one, however, may dedicate the firstborn of an animal, since the firstborn already belongs to the Lord; whether an ox or a sheep, it is the Lord’s.” The ultimate example of the value that God places on the first is in sending His firstborn Son, Jesus, as the only One who could be an adequate sacrifice for our sins.

One of the ways that we show God that we honor Him is in our giving. In Genesis 4: 3-4, we see that both Cain and Abel offered gifts to the Lord. *What do we see that was similar and different about the brothers’ offerings?* We see that Abel gave “fat portions” that were from the “firstborn” of his flock: a clear indication of care and thoughtfulness in the gift he brought to the Lord. On the other hand, the writer describes Cain as having “brought *some* of the fruits.” Not his first; not his best; likely, not even of high quality. Just *some*. In the same way, in verses 4b and 5 we see that because Abel gave his first and his best, God is happy with Abel’s offering and displeased with Cain’s “some fruit.”

- How do you feel if/when someone gives you a halfhearted gift? Why?
- When you give to God, are you giving Him your best, or are you, like Cain, merely giving Him “some”?
- How does the above answer indicate your relationship and attitude towards God?

We demonstrate that we are giving our best by giving what He requires. Thankfully, we do not have to second-guess what God wants because He explicitly outlines for us what He desires. We learn in Malachi 3:10 that we are to give him our tithe, which is a 10th of what we earn. From scriptures such as Exodus 23:16, Proverbs 3:9, and Ezekiel 44:30, we can consider this tithe to be a type of *first fruit* intended to be set aside first (yes, even before bills and groceries).

The way we use God’s resources indicates who is first and what is most important to us!

Our struggle with giving will always reflect our struggle with the issue of First. If we have not given all of ourselves to God (Romans 12: 1-2) and made him FIRST in our lives, then we will resist making the decision to honor God in our giving. This struggle will be seen in how we utilize God's resources of time, talent, and treasure.

II. The Blessing in the First

As we learn to put God first, we come to understand one of the key laws of God's Kingdom: He blesses us when we put Him first. In Matthew 6:33, Jesus teaches a series of lessons about kingdom principles to the large crowds of people who followed Him. In one of those lessons, He shows the people how God has every resource beyond what we can imagine and thinks of every detail with excellence- so much so that He adorns the flowers with beautiful shapes and colors just because He can (Matthew 6:28-29).

He finishes the message letting the people know that because God always does wonderful things, we can completely trust Him to also provide for us everything that we need, with the only condition that we seek Him first. Jesus says "But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well." We are to put our first priority on seeking the things of God and when we do, all of the other "things" come as a result. But what are these things? Simply put, they are all the things that we concern ourselves with, and worry about, and that if we are not careful, can take first place in our time, our finances, our minds, and our focus.

- How does seeking God first reorganize how you run your life?
- What does it mean to God when are disobedient while at the same time saying to Him, "Well you know my heart?"

Quick Activity: In the following space write down how you manage the gift God has given to you. Then answer the question at the end. Where do you need to improve? Where are you doing your best?

I Give God First in the Following Gift Areas by:				
Gift of Time	Gift of Resources 1/10 th????	Gift of Health	Gift of Talent	Gift of Salvation

- How can you make sure these areas are handled with your best?
- Which area is most difficult for you?

Conclusion: Learning to put God first can be one of the most challenging asks as we grow in our faith. However, as we practice it and submit our first to God, it is also one of the most rewarding components of being a child of God. When we put the Lord first, we experience His favor and His provision.

Something to Ponder:

- What things are you tempted to put before the Lord?
- What concerns do you have about trusting God with your first?