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Bridgeway Community Church
Series: “The Better Gift”
November 20, 2022

**THE BETTER GIFT:
“Giving From Your First”**

Praise the Lord, Bridgeway!

Blessings to all of you on-line, here in the house in Columbia and in the house at our Owings Mills Reisterstown campus. I will see you’ll live on stage next week at the OMR campus.

Today I am starting a new 3 week series entitled THE BETTER GIFT

- **Today’s title** is *Giving From Your First*
- **Next week:** *Giving from Your Faith*
- **Following week:** *Giving Beyond Your Fears*

Let’s pray...

I. INTRODUCTION

Once upon a time there were two brothers who were bringing their offerings to Lord in what could be seen as the very first worship service in the bible.

When it was time to give an offering the older brother brought some of the grain he had leftover from his work out in the field to the Lord as his offering.

The younger brother brought some fatty meat from the very first cut of his animals.

In an agrarian and farming culture, wealth and earnings came through the ownership of animals, land, and crops produced from the earth.

This was their currency of the day. Therefore, offerings were given from whatever harvests were produced in the fields. This is the very first story about giving to God in worship that we see in all of the bible.

Bible Quiz Question:

What were the two names of the two brothers in this story?

- A. Starsky & Hutch
- B. Cain & Abel
- C. David & Jonathan
- D. James & John

Who said A? B? C? Or D?

The correct answer is **(B) Cain & Abel**.

Besides Adam and Eve, this is the first interaction we see between family members and is the first interaction we see between human beings outside of the Garden of Eden.

Cain and Abel were the sons of Adam and Eve mentioned in Genesis 4 after Adam and Eve were kicked out of the Garden of Eden because of sinning against God as recorded in Genesis 3.

As the story goes both brothers brought an offering to God, but only one of them brought “the better gift” (hence, the title of our sermon series).

II. GENESIS 4

Let’s read from **Genesis 4:1-12** where we find the story recorded.

What we see here is a key observation I’d like to highlight:

- God’s favor is poured upon those who give of their **FIRST FRUITS (Genesis 4:4-5)**
 - *“But Abel brought fat portions from some of the FIRSTBORN of his flock. The Lord looked with FAVOR on Abel and his offering. But Cain and his offering he did not look with FAVOR...” (NIV84)*

We see that this idea of *Giving to God from your First* is not only the precedent that we find from the very first offering of Cain & Abel, but was the normative pattern for God’s people all throughout the scriptures.

- **Nehemiah 10:35** - “*We obligate ourselves to bring the FIRSTFRUITS of our ground and the FIRSTFRUITS of all the fruit of every tree, year by year, to the house of the Lord...*” (ESV)
- **Ezekiel 44:30** - “*And the first of all the FIRSTFRUITS of all kinds, and every offering of all kinds from all your offerings, shall belong to the priests. You shall also give to the priests the first of your dough, that a BLESSING may rest on your house.*” (ESV)

When you bless the man/woman of God, you and your household will be blessed.

When you bring your firstfruits to the house of the Lord, your house is blessed.

Transition:

The passage I would like to spend the rest of our time on today is Proverbs 3:9-10

- **Proverbs 3:9-10** - “*Honor the Lord with your wealth with the FIRSTFRUITS of all your crops; then your barns will be filled to overflowing, and your vats will brim over with new wine.*” (NIV84)

Questions:

Do you want to be Healthy, Wealthy and Wise?

Who here wants to be Healthy, Wealthy and Wise?

Who here doesn't want to be Healthy, Wealthy and Wise?

Today let's talk about how to be Healthy, Wealthy and Wise in a godly way.

Turn with me to **Proverbs 3**...

III. PROVERBS 3

In the book of Proverbs we are taught wisdom in poetic and pithy ways.

- Chapter 1 - *Embrace the Wisdom of God*
- Chapter 2 - *Benefits of Heeding God's Wisdom*
- Chapter 3 - *Embracing God's Wisdom can Lead to a Healthy, Wealthy and Wise Life*

Chapter One:

We are exhorted in Chapter 1 to *Embrace the Wisdom of God*.

We also see the warnings against rejecting God's wisdom.

- In fact, it says in **Proverbs 1:22** – *"How long will you simple ones love your simple ways? How long will mockers delight in mockery and fools hate knowledge?" (NIV84)*
- In **Proverbs 1:32-33**. Wisdom is speaking, saying this:
 - *"For the waywardness of the simple will kill them, and the complacency of fools will destroy them, 33 but whoever listens to me will live in safety and be at ease, without fear of harm." (NIV84)*
- It is wise to listen to & embrace wisdom:
 - Don't be Simple
 - Don't be a Fool
 - Don't be Complacent
 - Don't be a Mocker

Chapter Two:

We are taught in Chapter 2 that *There are Benefits to Heeding God's Wisdom*.

- Understanding the fear of the Lord (**Proverbs 2:5**)
 - *"Then you will understand the fear of the Lord..." (NIV84)*

Quote:

**"If you fear the Lord, you will not fear *anyone* else...
If you don't fear the Lord, you will fear *everyone* else."**

- Understanding the fairness of the Lord (**Proverbs 2:9**)
 - *"Then you will understand what is right and just and fair- every good path." (NIV84)*
 - What is "just", what is "right" and what is "fair" becomes clearer

Chapter Three:

When we get to Chapter 3, we learn that
Embracing God's Wisdom Can Lead to a Healthy, Wealthy, and Wise Life.

- Wisdom speaks in **Proverbs 3:1** – *"My son, do not forget my teaching but keep my commands in your heart..."* (NIV84)

IV. 3 WAYS TO BE HEALTHY, WEALTHY & WISE IN A GODLY WAY

1. Remember the Wisdom of the Word you were taught (Proverbs 3:1)

Remember what I taught you & keep my commands in your heart (NIV84)

- Don't forget the lessons you learned (in BridgeKids, Sunday School, at home growing up, or in bible class from years ago, etc)
- Rehearse them in your mind.

James 1:22-26 - it's like looking into a mirror and forgetting what you see without making changes...

- *"Do not merely listen to the word and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says. 23 Anyone who listens to the word but does not do what it says is like a man who looks at his face in a mirror 24 and, after looking at himself, goes away and immediately forgets what he looks like. 25 But the man who looks intently into the perfect law that gives freedom, and continues to do this, not forgetting what he has heard, but doing it – he will be blessed in what he does."* (NIV84)

Two Benefits to Keeping God's Commands in your Heart...

A. *A Prolonged life* (3:2a)

B. *A Prosperous life* (3:2b)

- *"For they [God's commands] will prolong your life many years and bring you prosperity."* (**Proverbs 3:2** NIV84)

Questions:**Does anyone want a prolonged quality of life?****Does anyone want a prosperous life?**

What kind of prolonged life?

- One of love & faithfulness! (**Proverbs 3:3**)
 - Keep love & faithfulness close to you
 - Love & faithfulness *towards God & towards others.*

Question:**How do I keep them close?****Answer:*****Bind them around your neck and write it on the tablet of your heart (3:3b NIV84)***

Wear love & faithfulness as a necklace.

For example, I wear a white necklace of beads that my wife strung up for me. It is closer to me than the ring on my finger. When you put your hand on your heart, that means you treasure something or someone deep inside.

God wants us to treasure and cherish his commands that way.

Neck + Heart = LIFE

Missionaries tell us that in some cultures they accept Jesus Christ as their Lord and savior not in their hearts, but in their neck.

- The neck was seen as the place where life was held.
- If you hang or choke someone around the neck, life will flow out of them.
- If someone's heart stops beating, they will die.
- So, the neck and the heart equal life.

The author of Proverbs is teaching us that God's wisdom is life for us.

When we embrace the wisdom of God we can have a prolonged and prosperous life.

- Teach these to your children, and your children's children! (**Deuteronomy 6:7**)
 - *"When you sit at home"*
 - *"When You walk along the road"*
 - *"When you lie down"*
 - *"When you get up"* (**Deuteronomy 6:7**)
- *"Train a child in the way he should go and when he is old he will not turn from it."*
(**Proverbs 22:6 NIV84**)

If we want to be Healthy, Wealthy and Wise in a godly way, then live according to God's Wisdom by doing 3 things:

1) Remember the Wisdom of the Word you were Taught (3:1a)

2) Revere The Wisdom of the Word in your Heart (3:1b)

3) Resolve Within Yourself to Keep Love & Faithfulness Close to You (3:3)

- Remember the wisdom of the word in your HEAD
- Revere it in your HEART!
- This will produce a prolonged & prosperous life.

Question:

What kind of prolonged life do we want to live?

Answer:

One of love & faithfulness!

V. REVIEW

3 Ways to be Healthy, Wealthy and Wise in a godly way according to Proverbs 3:

1. *Remember the wisdom of the word [in your head] (3:1a)*
2. *Revere the wisdom of the word [in your heart] (3:1b)*
3. *Resolve Within Yourself to Keep Love & Faithfulness Close to You (3:3)*
 - *“Let love and faithfulness never leave you; bind them around your neck, write them on the table of your heart.” (Proverbs 3:3)*

This is a personal commitment you have to make within your own heart of hearts. Love and faithfulness is not always easy or natural. In fact, you want to know what *is* natural?

NOT being loving and NOT being faithful!

All of this will produce a prolonged & prosperous life.

Transition:

Allow me to make one more observation from the text of Proverbs 3

In this chapter there are 3 "THEN" statements.

- **Proverbs 3:4 NIV84** - “THEN you will win favor and a good name in the sight of God and man.” (**PROMOTION**)
- **Proverbs 3:10 NIV84** - “THEN your barns will be filled to overflowing, and your vats will brim over with new wine.” (**PROSPERITY**)
- **Proverbs 3:23 NIV84** - “THEN you will go on your way in safety, and your foot will not stumble;” (**PEACE**)

I want to focus the rest of my time on the 2nd "THEN". I encourage you to study the other two on your own...

"THEN, your barns will be filled to overflowing and your vats will brim over with new wine."
(Proverbs 3:10 NIV84)

- Can someone say, "**Overflow**"?
- "**Over**" is used twice in this verse - "**Overflowing**" & "**brim over**"

Water Illustration:

pour water into a vessel and watch it overflow into another vessel.

WRONG WAY:

- Pour water into 5 glasses (taxes, rent, utilities, credit cards, groceries)
- Then pour the left over water into the offering to God

RIGHT WAY:

- Pour water into the offering to God, then into the 5 glasses (taxes, rent, utilities, credit cards, BUT not enough left for groceries)
- Story of a friend from church texting to invite you out for dinner. Then at dinner they mention that their family is going on vacation and have a bunch of groceries that are going to spoil, and they ask if you know anyone that can use the groceries.

Main Point:

God will take care of whatever your needs are when you put him first!

God took care of the groceries in a way that you didn't even see coming.

- *"Seek FIRST the kingdom of God and his righteousness and all these things will be added to you." (Matthew 6:33 NIV84)*

How does this overflow take place?

Check out **verse 9**...

- *"Honor the Lord with your wealth, with the FIRSTFRUITS of ALL your crops." (Proverbs 3:9 NIV84)*

“THEN!”

“THEN!”

Can someone say, “*THEN*”...!?

Some of you are crying out to God, “WHEN, Lord, WHEN”???

God is ANSWERING YOU BACK BY SAYING, “*THEN*”!!

Honor me with the first fruits of your wealth and THEN, THEN, THEN...

- ***THEN*** your barns will be filled to overflowing.
 - We want the overflow without the giving of the first fruits.
 - We want to reap a harvest without sowing a seed.
 - We want to receive blessings without being a blessing.
 - We want God to bless us, but we don't ever want to bless God.

Question:

What would happen if people just blessed God with an offering out of gratitude instead of with an attitude!?

What would happen if God's people got excited about being generous?

OVERFLOW is your promise.

Some of you are experiencing not overflow, but *underflow*.

Some of you are experiencing *no flow*.

God says in **Proverbs 3:5-8:**

- *"Trust in the Lord with ALL of your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in ALL of your ways acknowledge him, and he will direct your path.*

7 "Do not be wise in your own eyes; fear the Lord and shun evil. 8 This will bring health to your body and nourishment to your bones." (NIV84)

Question:

Do you want to move from No Flow to Overflow?

Do you want to move Underflow to Overflow?

THEN...

- STOP being a wise guy! (wise in your own eyes - verse 7)
- START obeying verse 10!

"Honor the Lord with your wealth, with the first fruits of all your crops..."

THEN...

*Then your barns will be filled to overflowing and your vats will brim over with new wine!
(NIV84)*

VI. PRACTICAL APPLICATIONS

1. START with your first! (*It is a better gift. Ask Abel!*)

- Start with getting things in priority order...
- *"Seek FIRST the kingdom of God and his righteousness and all these things will be added to you."* (Matthew 6:33 NIV84)

2. START with a tithe (10%) or at least start with something and grow from there.

- Forget the amount if that's the only thing that's jamming you up.
- I don't know 1 person who gives to the Lord who regrets it, but I know several people who do not give to the Lord and they regret it regularly.

3. TAKE ADVANTAGE OF THE "1st of the Year Opportunity" we are giving you.

- January 1st - "First Fruits Offering" Ceremony of Dedication
- You can give now, November 20, 2022 until January 31, 2023

- I am declaring this our First Fruits season (*there will be envelopes and communication cards on January 1st*)
 - The amount doesn't matter.
 - This is not about the money.
 - It's about the priority!
 - It's about telling God that you are trusting Him for your provision for the next year

People have asked what we are going to do with the money. I don't know. There is no plan.

This is about God and the offering He puts on your heart. It is not about what we are going to do with the money, it is about what God is going to do within you because you dedicated this offering to Him at the beginning of the year!

AMEN?