



Hi Everyone!

I hope you are all blessed by our current sermon series entitled “Level Up.” By now, you’ve repeatedly heard me discuss over the years parts of the Vision that God has given and promised to our LWCC family. Mathew, Mark, Luke, John, and Acts represent changed lives and mended hearts, marriages, and families in the Kingdom of our Father. But that will take all of us, making His house and vision a priority. As you know, when we make His house a priority, He promises to make our house a Priority. (Malachi 3:8-12) (Matt 6:33).

So, on February 13<sup>th</sup>, we will launch our annual special four-week season of sacrificial giving called our ***First-Fruit Offering***. If you’ve been here a while, you already know what I’m referring to.

We’ve done this for the last few years and have watched God do some amazing things in people’s finances and professions, as well as the finances and vision of LWCC.

For those new to the congregation, let me give a brief explanation. Our *First-Fruit Offering* is drawn from the Feast of First-Fruits found in Exodus 23, 34 and Leviticus 23. This was part of the Feast of Passover celebrated once Israel entered Canaan and began planting their own crops. At the Feast of First-Fruits, each family would harvest the first grain that would appear ripe and offer it to the Lord.

This offering was to ***represent the crops remaining in the fields*** that had yet to ripen. Thus, everything the farmer was hoping for in the coming year was represented in the ***First-Fruit Offering***, asking God for His provision and protection.

**Proverbs 3:9, 10 NKJV says *Honor the Lord with your possessions, And with the First-fruits of all your increase; so your barns will be filled with plenty, and your vats will overflow with new wine.***

We don't do this because we believe we are obligated to keep any part of the Old Testament law. We do it simply because ***it symbolizes the principles*** for giving found in **2 Corinthians 8-9**. (Read it).

These are the premier New Testament passages on giving. ***First-Fruits*** is an opportunity to present our personal and church finances to the Lord for His inspection.

It's an opportunity to examine whether or not we are growing in the ***"grace of giving"*** (2 Cor. 8:7) as we are instructed. It's an opportunity to stretch, and thereby strengthen, our faith in God to provide for our households in the coming year.

It is still true. The greatest growth that can take place in a church is not in attendance, buildings, or budgets, but in the level of faith, the ability to hear God speak, and a willingness to obey at all cost!

That is why we do this every year. We must grow in faith. If you don't stretch a muscle and put it under stress on a consistent basis, it will weaken. The same goes for faith! So how will we do this?

**First, we pray:** Spend time in prayer over the next few weeks asking the Lord to speak to you about how you've been handling your finances.

You may want to bring your checkbook, balance statements, bills, and giving records with you to your daily devotions and ask Him what He thinks. Next,

**Be willing to take action and make needed changes.** This may include beginning to flex in this area and give regularly or to begin tithing and putting God to the test. Lastly,

**Ask the Lord how much He wants you to give for a *First-fruits Offering*.** Then listen for an answer.

If you're married, spend time discussing with your spouse two things:

First, **what things would you ask God to do for you this year?**

Second, **what amount of money would He ask you to give over the next few weeks to sow toward your needs?**

Once you've decided, we will watch as the Lord enables us to give this offering. Let me offer some simple guidelines that may help you in this process:

1. Remember, **this should be above your regular giving** each month.
2. It should be ***reasonable and doable***. It will be doable because it will be in your possession now or during the next few weeks; however, if you are better able to give later in the year, that is not a problem.
3. While it will be reasonable, do-able, and in your immediate possession, it should be ***sacrificial***. Faith only grows when risk, vulnerability, and sacrifice are involved. David said in 2 Samuel 24:24... "I will not give that which cost me nothing,"
4. The Lord will ask you to give what you can give ***cheerfully***. Don't give if there is a hint of bitterness, cynicism, or suspicion. You may need to spend more time in prayer on other issues that are preventing you from growing in this grace.

Remember: *Whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows generously will also reap generously. Each of you should give what you have decided in your heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. And God is able to bless you abundantly, so that in all things at all times, having all that you need, you will abound in every good work. (2 Corinthians 9:6-8 NIV)*

5. **Unity** is more important than amounts. Don't be afraid or ashamed of giving a seemingly small or insignificant amount. Psalm 133 indicates that the Lord commands a blessing where there is unity, not where there are impressive amounts of money given. Man, not God, is impressed with large amounts of

money, and God is moved by faith, unity, and sacrifice. ***Whatever God asks you to give is sufficient.***

As I say every year, let's do this **together**. What encourages or discourages me the most is not the amount of money given but the percentage of the church family that participates. **More than anything else, we need the blessing of the Lord on our church, and, as always, that is in direct response to our decision to unite ourselves and serve the Lord together.**

I hope this helps you catch a vision for what we can accomplish together this year. To date, our ***First-Fruit Offerings*** have enabled us to complete several facility projects and to remain debt-free. We have met community needs as they arise and fund national and international missions projects. This year we will continue to focus on our local and foreign missions, including our benevolence needs and outreach programs, and modernizing and upgrading our facility and equipment as needed. All of these fall under our **Acts 1:8 mandate**. Let's continue this great tradition with increasing levels of faith, unity, and joy and see even more incredible things accomplished for the cause of Christ in our community and around the world!

I love being your pastor!

*Pastor Rick*