

Obedience & Blessing

*What Scripture Teaches About Giving, Firstfruits,
and the Life God Blesses*

by Curtis Boozer, DMin

Five Movements in One Theme

1

**Devotion
to God First**

Deut 6 · Matt 22 · John 15

~7 min

2

**God Owns
the First**

Deut · Exod · Gen

~7 min

3

**The Tithe Is
Sacred Law**

Lev · Mal · 2 Cor

~7 min

4

**Give First,
Receive More**

Exod 23 · Prov 3

~7 min

5

**Surrender
Leads to Life**

Matt 16 · Gen 4

~7 min

MOVEMENT 1

Devotion to God: The Foundation of All Giving

Deuteronomy 6:4-5 · Matthew 22:36-40 · John 15:5

*"You cannot give rightly until you love rightly.
Devoted giving flows from a devoted heart."*

~7 minutes

Whole-Hearted Devotion — The Root of Generosity

"Love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength." — Deuteronomy 6:5

The Shema Deut 6:4-5

The foundation of Israel's entire covenant life was complete devotion to God — not partial, not occasional. Heart, soul, and strength. Nothing held back.

Jesus called this the greatest commandment — meaning it is the precondition for everything else a disciple does, including how they give.

The Great Commandment Matt 22:36-40

When asked to identify the greatest commandment, Jesus quoted Deuteronomy 6. Loving God with every part of oneself is not a starting point — it is the ongoing posture of a disciple.

Devoted disciples don't give out of duty or fear. They give because they love what God loves and trust what God says.

Abiding in Christ John 15:5

"Apart from me you can do nothing." Generous, Spirit-led giving is not a human achievement — it is the fruit of abiding in Christ.

When a believer is truly devoted — hearing God, walking with Him daily — giving becomes natural, even joyful. Devotion precedes obedience, and obedience unlocks blessing.

Discussion: How does your relationship with God shape the way you give?

Why Devotion Is Rare — and Why It Matters for Giving

The Culture Problem

Modern culture has cultivated an individualistic, self-focused worldview. People define truth for themselves, pursue comfort, and treat religious life as one option among many.

Research on discipleship consistently shows that even active church members struggle to describe what wholehearted devotion to God looks like in practice.

The Shema calls believers to love God with everything — but constant distraction, consumerism, and individualism pull against this kind of singular focus.

A disciple who is not devoted cannot give generously, because their resources, time, and attention are already spoken for by competing loyalties.

Devotion & Giving: The Connection

Giving is not fundamentally a financial discipline — it is a devotional one. The issue of money in Scripture is always downstream from the issue of the heart.

Jesus connects the two directly: where your treasure is, there your heart will be also (Matt 6:21). Giving reveals and shapes devotion simultaneously.

The Ten Commandments begin with God declaring Himself first (Exod 20:3). The Shema reinforces that God tolerates no divided loyalty.

A believer who gives the first of their income to God is not merely following a financial rule — they are making a declaration: God is first. That act of devotion is the foundation the rest of the blessed life is built upon.

Key Question: Is your giving a reflection of devotion, or a substitute for it?

MOVEMENT 2

God Owns the First

Exodus 12–13 · Genesis 4 · Joshua 6

*"The first belongs to God — not eventually,
not partially, but first."*

~8 minutes

The Firstborn Belongs to God

Exodus 12:7 & 13:2

Every firstborn belongs to God — this is established at the Passover.

The blood applied to the doorposts traced the shape of a cross, foreshadowing Christ as the ultimate firstborn Lamb sacrificed for redemption.

Key insight: God had a legal right to every firstborn. Israel's firstborns were spared not by merit but by the blood of a substitute.

Cain & Abel — Genesis 4:3-5

Abel brought the firstborn of his flock — and God respected his offering.

Cain brought an offering 'in the process of time' — implying it was not his firstfruits.

Key insight: God looks at the heart behind the gift. Timing is not incidental — it reveals whether God is truly first in our lives.

Discussion: What does it mean practically to give God the 'first'?

The First City: Jericho — Joshua 6:18-19

"Consecrated or Cursed — there is no neutral ground with the tithe."

Why All of Jericho?

Jericho was the first city — its spoils were the firstfruits of the Promised Land.

God's instruction: give Me the first city completely, and you may have everything else.

This required enormous faith — they had to trust before they possessed.

Achan's Fatal Error

Achan took what was consecrated to God — and it brought a curse on all Israel.

The very item that was meant to honor God became the source of defeat when misappropriated.

Application: What is 'consecrated' when given becomes a curse when kept.

Reflection: Have you ever experienced blessing turn to burden when you held back?

MOVEMENT 3

The Tithe Is Holy and Non-Negotiable

Leviticus 27:30 · Malachi 3:6,8-9 · 2 Corinthians 13:1

*"The tithe is not a suggestion. It is not a relic.
It is a permanent, sacred claim God places on the first tenth."*

~8 minutes

The Legal and Theological Case for the Tithe

"All the tithe of the land, whether of the seed of the land or of the fruit of the tree, is the LORD's. It is holy to the LORD." — Leviticus 27:30

Leviticus 27:30

The tithe is declared holy — meaning set apart and consecrated to God. It does not become holy when we give it; it already is holy. Keeping it is not a neutral act — it is taking what was never ours.

Malachi 3:8-9

God uses the word 'robbery' — the strongest possible language. The tithe that is withheld does not just miss a blessing; it actively invites a curse. God is clear: 'You are cursed with a curse, for you have robbed Me.'

God Does Not Change

Malachi 3:6 — 'I am the LORD, I do not change.' If God does not change, then the principle of the tithe did not expire at the cross, any more than the prohibition against adultery or stealing expired under grace.

Key Question: If God does not change, what does that mean for how we approach the tithe today?

MOVEMENT 4

Give God the First — Receive Overflowing Return

Exodus 23:19 · Proverbs 3:9-10

*"It's not enough to give — the manner, the moment,
and the destination all matter to God."*

~8 minutes

Priority + Place + Promise

PRIORITY

Exodus 23:19

"The first of the firstfruits" — not the tenth portion of the firstfruits, not the last portion. The very first. God specifies not just the amount but the order.

PLACE

Exodus 23:19

"...you shall bring into the house of the LORD your God." The firstfruit tithe belongs specifically to the local church — not scattered to various ministries at the giver's discretion.

PROMISE

Proverbs 3:9-10

"Honor the LORD with your possessions, and with the firstfruits of all your increase; so your barns will be filled with plenty, and your vats will overflow." The promise is attached to the obedience.

Practical Application: The first check you write after each paycheck should be the tithe — to your local church.

MOVEMENT 5

Surrender Leads to Life, Not Loss

Matthew 16:25 · Genesis 4:3-5

*"What we give to God, we never truly lose.
What we withhold from God, we will always lose."*

~8 minutes

The Counterintuitive Logic of the Kingdom

"For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me will find it." — Matthew 16:25

Matthew 16:25 — Applied to Finances

Jesus' principle of losing life to find it applies directly to how we hold money.

What we surrender to God is redeemed — it is never truly lost.

What we grip tightly out of fear is ultimately lost anyway.

Deuteronomy 28 promises that the obedient person's hands will be blessed in everything they touch — the surrender is never the end of the story, it is the beginning of God's provision.

Abel — Genesis 4

Abel's gift was relational before it was material — God's acceptance came first.

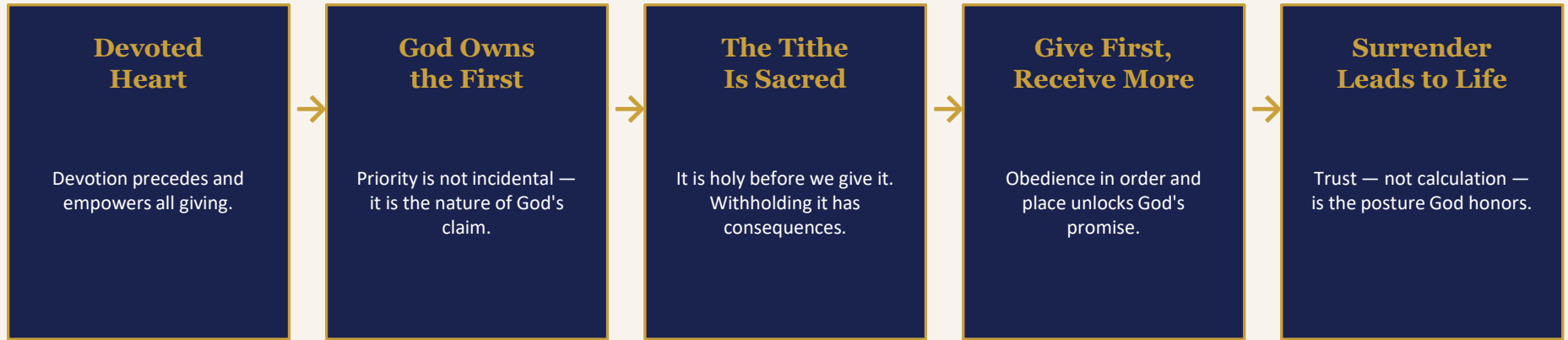
He gave his best without knowing what the return would be. That is faith.

His surrender was met with God's respect — not just of the offering, but of Abel himself.

The blessing in this movement is not always financial. It begins with God's favor — and that is worth more than any return.

Question: What would it look like in your life to give before you know the outcome?

The Unified Thread



*The obedient person puts God first, gives what is asked, and trusts the outcome — and God responds with blessing that exceeds what was surrendered.
This is not a transaction. It is a relationship rooted in faith.*

Deut 14–28 · Exod 12–23 · Gen 4 · Josh 6 · Lev 27:30 · Mal 3 · 2 Cor 13:1 · Prov 3:9–10 · Matt 16:25

You cannot outgive God. The question is not whether He will respond — it is whether you will trust Him first.

Three Personal Questions

To Close in Reflection

1

Is God truly first?

Not in priority of affection only, but in the order of your financial decisions?

2

Is the tithe going to God's house?

Are you bringing your firstfruits to the local church where you are planted and fed?

3

Do you trust Him with the outcome?

Giving in faith means writing the check before you know how the month will end.

"Honor the LORD with your possessions, and with the firstfruits of all your increase." — Proverbs 3:9

Key Hebrew Words Behind the Text (Old Testament)

HEBREW WORD · REFERENCE · DEFINITION

שמע SHEMA <i>Deut 6:4</i>	"Hear" — a call to total, attentive obedience; the name of Israel's foundational confession of faith. It is not passive hearing but a summons to whole-life response.
אהב Ahav <i>Deut 6:5</i>	"Love" — covenantal, volitional love; not merely emotion but loyal, committed devotion chosen and sustained regardless of circumstances.
לב Levav <i>Deut 6:5</i>	"Heart" — the seat of will, thought, and desire; the innermost self from which all decisions flow. God requires the whole of it, not a portion.
נפש Nephesh <i>Deut 6:5</i>	"Soul" — the whole living being; breath, life-force, and entire personhood. Nothing of the self is excluded from devotion.
מעוד Meod <i>Deut 6:5</i>	"Strength / Abundance" — might, force, and material resources. Jewish tradition understood this specifically to include wealth and possessions.
בכור Bekhor <i>Exod 13:2</i>	"Firstborn" — the first to open the womb; the one who carries the right of preeminence. God's claim on the firstborn is the basis of the firstfruits principle.
ראשית Reshit <i>Exod 23:19</i>	"First / Best" — the beginning portion, the choicest; used of firstfruits given to God. It carries both priority and quality — not what remains but what is finest.
בכורים Bikkurim <i>Exod 23:19 · Prov 3:9</i>	"Firstfruits" — the earliest ripened produce, presented to God before any personal use. The act consecrates the entire harvest that follows.
קדש Qodesh <i>Lev 27:30</i>	"Holy / Set Apart" — the tithe is declared holy before it is given. We do not make it holy by our act of giving — we are acknowledging what God has already claimed.
מעשר Ma'aser <i>Lev 27:30 · Mal 3:10</i>	"Tithe" — a tenth; a fixed proportion designated as belonging to God. Its regularity and precision signal that this is not generosity but acknowledgment of ownership.
קבה Qaba <i>Mal 3:8</i>	"Rob / Defraud" — to cheat or steal; used only here and in Prov 22:23 in the entire OT. The rarity of the word underscores the severity of withholding the tithe.
כבוד Kabad <i>Prov 3:9</i>	"Honor" — to give weight to, to treat as heavy and significant; to esteem above oneself. Honoring God with firstfruits is a declaration of His supreme worth.

Hebrew definitions drawn from Brown-Driver-Briggs (BDB) Hebrew Lexicon

Hebrew Insights for Giving

Meod includes wealth

When Deut 6:5 calls for devotion with all your 'strength,' Jewish interpreters consistently understood this to include material possessions — linking devotion to God directly to generosity.

Qodesh precedes the gift

The tithe is holy before you give it (Lev 27:30). Withholding it is not simply failing to be generous — it is retaining something that was never yours.

Bikkurim consecrates all

The firstfruits offering in Exod 23:19 and Prov 3:9 worked on the principle that the first portion set apart for God sanctified the remainder. Giving first is an act of faith that releases the rest into blessing.

Qaba is a rare word

God chose an unusual word for robbery in Mal 3:8 — used only twice in the OT. The strength of the language signals that this is not a mild oversight but a serious breach of covenant.

Key Greek Words Behind the Text (New Testament)

GREEK WORD · REFERENCE · DEFINITION

ἀγαπάω Agapao <i>Matt 22:37</i>	"Love" — self-giving, unconditional love that chooses the good of another regardless of feeling or return. The same love with which God loved the world (John 3:16).
καρδιά Kardia <i>Matt 22:37</i>	"Heart" — the center of spiritual life; will, emotions, and moral reasoning combined. In NT usage it encompasses the whole inner person, not just emotion.
ψυχή Psyche <i>Matt 22:37 · Matt 16:25</i>	"Soul / Life" — the inner person and the seat of personhood. In Matt 16:25 it is the very thing one loses by clinging to it, and finds by releasing it to God.
διάνοια Dianoia <i>Matt 22:37</i>	"Mind" — understanding and reflective thought. Jesus added this to the Shema, emphasizing that devotion to God must be intellectually engaged, not merely emotional.
μένω Meno <i>John 15:5</i>	"Abide / Remain" — to stay, dwell, continue in a place. Describes a permanent, ongoing relational connection to Christ. Giving that flows from abiding is fruit, not labor.
καρπός Karpos <i>John 15:5</i>	"Fruit" — the natural result of abiding; the output of a healthy vine-branch relationship. Giving is fruit, not root — it flows from devotion rather than producing it.
ἀπόλλυμι Apollymi <i>Matt 16:25</i>	"Lose / Destroy" — to ruin completely; what happens to the life (and resources) clutched rather than surrendered. The paradox: holding on is what causes the loss.
εὕρισκω Heurisko <i>Matt 16:25</i>	"Find / Discover" — the one who surrenders life and wealth to God finds it returned and redeemed. The surrender is never the end — it is the beginning of God's provision.
πρωτότοκος Prototokos <i>1 Cor 15:20</i>	"Firstborn" — Christ as the preeminent one. The OT firstborn principle finds its ultimate fulfillment in Him — the Lamb who redeems all other firstborns.
ἀπαρχή Aparche <i>Rom 11:16</i>	"Firstfruits" — the NT term echoing bikkurim; the first portion that consecrates the whole. Paul uses it for Christ's resurrection as the firstfruits of all who will rise.
δεκάτη Dekate <i>Heb 7:2,4,6,8,9</i>	"Tithe" — a tenth. Used in Hebrews to show that Abraham tithed to Melchizedek before the Mosaic Law existed, establishing tithing as a pre-Law principle.
ἡλαρός Hilaros <i>2 Cor 9:7</i>	"Cheerful" — glad and joyful; the root of the English word 'hilarious.' God loves a cheerful giver. This cheerfulness is the natural expression of a devoted heart — not a command to manufacture joy.

Greek definitions drawn from Bauer-Danker-Arndt-Gingrich (BDAG) Greek Lexicon

Greek Insights for Giving

Dianoia: the mind matters

Jesus expanded the Shema in Matt 22:37 by adding 'mind' (dianoia). Devotion to God is not merely felt — it is thought through. Informed giving is an act of the renewed mind.

Psyche in Matt 16:25

The same word for 'soul' appears in both the Great Commandment and the surrender paradox. The soul devoted to God is the soul that is found — the soul withheld is the soul that is lost.

Aparche: Christ as firstfruits

Paul's use of aparche for Christ's resurrection (1 Cor 15:20) elevates the firstfruits principle to cosmic significance. Our giving participates in the same logic: the first given to God consecrates everything that follows.

Hilaros: joy is the goal

The NT vision of giving ends not with obligation but with joy. Hilaros — cheerful, even hilarious — is the emotional state of a giver whose devotion is genuine and whose trust in God is settled.