Bethel South Sermon Notes – *"First Things First"*

Speaker: Ps Doug

Series: Open Hands

Scriptures: Genesis 4:3–5, Genesis 14:18–20, Exodus 13:1–13, Colossians 1:15, Malachi 3:6–12

Main Idea

What we put first reveals what we truly trust. God calls us to honor Him with the first and best of everything He has entrusted to us—not because He needs our resources, but because putting God first is an expression of faith, reverence, and obedience. When we allow God's Word to shape our thinking instead of the fear-driven messages of the world, we can live with greater freedom, peace, and confidence in His provision.

Who Is Discipling You?

Every day, we are being influenced by the voices around us.

News broadcasts, social media, political conversations, and economic headlines constantly remind us of rising costs, financial uncertainty, and fears about the future.

But these fears aren't new. Previous generations faced similar concerns about inflation, interest rates, and global instability.

The circumstances may change, but the messages remain remarkably similar.

The question isn't whether you're being discipled. It's who or what is discipling you.

When we continually feed on fear, we begin adopting a mindset of lack and insecurity.

We start believing there won't be enough, that everything depends on us, and that God's provision cannot be trusted.

Over time, those beliefs begin shaping our decisions.

Breaking free from this mindset requires more than hoping circumstances improve.

It requires repentance and obedience—turning away from fear-driven thinking and aligning our lives with God's Word.

The Principle of First Things First

Throughout Scripture, God establishes a principle of honoring Him with our first and best.

This principle didn't begin with the Mosaic Law.

In Genesis 4, Cain and Abel both brought offerings to God.

Cain brought an offering from the produce of the ground, while Abel brought from the firstborn of his flock and their fat portions.

The sermon highlights the contrast between an offering that reflected intentional honor and one that did not demonstrate the same priority.

Abel's offering represented giving God the first and best.

Later, in Genesis 14, Abraham gave a tenth to Melchizedek—centuries before the Law was established.

These examples reveal that honoring God with our first is presented as more than a religious obligation.

It is a principle of honor, reverence, and recognizing God as our provider.

Giving God our first communicates that He holds first place in our lives.

Three Truths About Putting God First

1. The First Belongs to the Lord

In Exodus 13, God declares that the firstborn belong to Him.

The first was to be consecrated.

Consecration means setting something apart from common or ordinary use and dedicating it exclusively to God.

The principle is that what belongs to God should be treated as holy rather than ordinary.

When we give God our first, we acknowledge His ownership and authority over everything we have.

This extends beyond finances.

God deserves the first of our time, attention, energy, and priorities.

Putting God first isn't simply about what we give. It's about recognizing who everything belongs to.

2. First Fruits Are Either Sacrificed or Redeemed

Under the instructions given in Exodus 13, certain firstborn animals were sacrificed, while unclean animals were to be redeemed with a lamb or otherwise dealt with according to God's command.

Ps Doug connected this biblical pattern to the principle of tithing.

The tithe—the first 10%—is presented as an act of consecrating the first portion of our increase to God.

The sermon teaches that honoring God with the first brings His blessing upon what remains.

Rather than waiting to see what is left after every expense, putting God first requires us to trust Him before we know how everything will work out.

Faith gives God the first. Fear waits to see what's left.

Tithing becomes an expression of trust that God is our provider and that His ways are greater than our own understanding.

3. Jesus Is Our Ultimate Redeemer

The principle of redemption ultimately points us to Jesus.

Colossians 1:15 describes Jesus as the firstborn over all creation, and John the Baptist identifies Him as the Lamb of God.

Humanity could not redeem itself.

We needed a Redeemer.

God responded by giving His very best—His Son.

Jesus became the perfect sacrifice through whom we could be redeemed.

Ps Doug described Jesus as God's ultimate demonstration of giving first.

God didn't hold back His best from us.

If God was willing to give His Son for our eternal salvation, we can trust His heart toward us in our everyday needs.

Our generosity is ultimately a response to the generosity God has already demonstrated.

Four Responses to Tithing

Ps Doug identified four common attitudes people have toward tithing.

1. Those Who Have Never Been Taught

Some believers are new to faith and have never been discipled in biblical generosity.

They may simply need teaching and understanding about why giving matters.

2. The Tippers

Others participate in church life and benefit from the ministry but have not taken ownership of supporting their spiritual family.

Giving remains occasional rather than a consistent expression of commitment.

3. The Faithful Tithers

These believers have made honoring God first a settled conviction.

They have learned to trust His provision and experience peace through obedience.

Rather than seeing tithing as something they cannot afford, they believe they cannot afford to stop putting God first.

4. Those Who Reject Tithing

Others believe tithing no longer applies under the new covenant.

As described in the sermon, this position can lead some people to give only what remains or what feels comfortable, rather than intentionally honoring God first.

The challenge is to honestly examine whether our financial decisions are being directed by God's Word or by our desire to remain in control.

Bring the Tithe Into the Storehouse

Malachi 3 challenges God's people about withholding what belongs to Him.

God instructs them to bring the whole tithe into the storehouse and invites them to test His faithfulness.

The passage describes God's promise to open the floodgates of heaven and pour out blessing.

Ps Doug emphasized that the storehouse represents the spiritual family where believers are planted, taught, and cared for.

Tithing is therefore not only an individual act of worship but also a way of supporting the ministry and mission of the local church.

The invitation in Malachi is ultimately an invitation to trust God's unchanging character.

God is faithful, and He does not change.

Rather than allowing financial fear to determine our obedience, we are challenged to put Him first and trust His provision.

Three Ways to Respond

1. Repent

Repentance means turning away from a way of thinking or living that is contrary to God's Word.

Ask yourself whether fear, self-reliance, or a mindset of lack has been directing your financial decisions.

Have you been allowing the world to shape your beliefs about provision more than Scripture?

Repentance requires more than recognizing a problem.

It requires a change of direction.

2. Consecrate Your First

Putting God first should become a pattern that shapes every area of life.

Give Him the first of your day through prayer and Scripture.

Prioritize gathering with your church family.

Honor Him with the first 10% of your financial increase, as challenged in the sermon.

Consecration is not simply about giving something away.

It is about intentionally setting apart what belongs to God.

What we put first reveals what we value most.

3. Let Scripture Disciple You

We cannot expect to live with faith if we continually allow fear to shape our thinking.

The messages we consume will influence what we believe.

Instead of allowing economic headlines, uncertainty, and worldly perspectives to determine our decisions, we must allow God's Word to establish our convictions.

Let God's promises become louder than the world's predictions.

Final Challenge

Who or what has been discipling your thinking about money?

Have you allowed fear, uncertainty, or the desire for control to determine what you give God?

The principle of first things first calls us to stop negotiating with God and begin trusting Him with what belongs to Him.

Repent of fear-driven thinking.

Consecrate the first of your time, attention, and finances.

Allow Scripture to reshape your understanding of provision.

God has already demonstrated His faithfulness by giving His very best through Jesus.

Now we have the opportunity to respond with trust and obedience.

Put God first, surrender what you've been holding onto, and trust His unchanging faithfulness.

Discussion Questions

1. Ps Doug asked, “Who is discipling you?” What voices most influence the way you think about money, security, and God's provision?

2. What does the principle of giving God our “first and best” reveal about the connection between generosity, honor, and the fear of the Lord?

3. How does recognizing Jesus as our ultimate Redeemer change the way we view giving and trusting God with our resources?

4. What is the difference between giving out of obligation and giving from a heart of faith and reverence? How can we examine our own motivations?

5. Where might fear or the desire for control be keeping you from putting God first, and what practical step of repentance or obedience could you take this week?