

Stewardship in Biblical Perspective
“Lifestyle of Giving”
Genesis 4:1–7
Dr. Harry L. Reeder III
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Genesis 4:1–7 says [1] *Now Adam knew Eve his wife, and she conceived and bore Cain, saying, “I have gotten a man with the help of the LORD.”* [2] *And again, she bore his brother Abel. Now Abel was a keeper of sheep, and Cain a worker of the ground.* [3] *In the course of time Cain brought to the LORD an offering of the fruit of the ground, [4] and Abel also brought of the firstborn of his flock and of their fat portions. And the LORD had regard for Abel and his offering, [5] but for Cain and his offering he had no regard. So Cain was very angry, and his face fell.* [6] *The LORD said to Cain, “Why are you angry, and why has your face fallen? [7] If you do well, will you not be accepted? And if you do not do well, sin is crouching at the door. Its desire is contrary to you, but you must rule over it.”*

The grass withers, the flower fades, God’s Word abides forever and by His grace and mercy may His Word be preached for you.

This is our every member commitment Sunday. Our founding pastor and leaders of this church did two wise things. One is the officers of this church develop a budget for the use of this church to fulfill our mission which is for God’s glory Briarwood is committed to equipping Christians who worship God and reach Birmingham to reach the world for Christ. They tied to that our National Mission’s conference that gives you information of what is going on from our board directed ministries, our school, our church revitalization ministry and the five church planters that were brought in. This is the season where you as a member communicate to the officers what you anticipate your tithe (God’s tithe given through you) will be this year so that they then can take that and properly put together a budget.

Secondly, they put in place a policy where 50 percent of what is given in the tithe will go to missions, benevolence, mercy, church planting, church revitalization, etc. In other words it will go to causes outside of Briarwood to Birmingham, the state of Alabama and to North America. Our faith promise which we have in February, 100 percent of that goes outside of Briarwood. The deacons who are responsible for this entire process will always give me the theme each year and that will be what I preach on for that year. This past year our theme was Lifestyle of Evangelism and Discipleship and so stewardship, our giving, was also considered a lifestyle so that is what I am doing our study on today.

I want to take you to an important passage of Scripture that really affected me on the area of stewardship and giving. This passage made giving not just an event in my life but a part of my lifestyle. Before I get to this passage, there is also a way to look at stewardship through our time, talent and treasure. Time is something that is equal for everyone where we all have 24 hours in a day. We don’t all have the same gifts/talents or spiritual gifts and we don’t all have the same financial resources but we start with good stewardship by setting aside the Lord’s Day. The Lord’s Day is foundational to the right use of our time. The Lord says to labor six days and one day is used for worship, rest and renewal in and for the Lord which is the key to the other six days being used for the Lord. It is also a time we can commit to prayer.

In 2002 when I became the new pastor we instituted something new where we asked every new member to agree to pray every day for Briarwood to fulfill its mission and message and once a day at one of your meals to pray for the leadership in general and the preaching in

particular of the church. So as you pray for your physical food you pray also for the delivery of your spiritual food during one of your meals. We also encourage families to do this when their children are present so there is a place to commit to praying. The second part of the commitment is to get involved in ministry. Every one of you has a physical talent and a spiritual talent. There are 128 ministries at Briarwood that you can engage in with those talents and service.

In this study I want to look at this matter of a lifestyle of giving or stewardship. We will be taking a closer look at Genesis 4:1–7. When I was at a church in Charlotte, North Carolina a church planter called me and he said ‘Pastor we’re going to be having our first worship service and I have an idea I want to run by you. In the worship service we’re not going to take up an offering.’ I said ‘Really?’ He said ‘Yeah I’m going to tell them if they want to give something to feel free to mail it to us and we’re not going to take up an offering because we are here for you and not for your money. So what do you think about that Pastor?’ I said ‘I don’t really think much of it at all. I think I know what you’re trying to get at but what that conveys to me is not what your people think about the offering but how you wrongly think about the offering. Whoever said it was to get you money to begin with? By the way, you just got more spiritual than Paul who said on the first day of the week set aside and bring what you have purposed to give so now you put people in a place where they can’t do what Paul told them to do or our Lord through the Prophet says ‘shall I appear before the Lord empty handed.’”

The reason the church planter and I worked our way through this was because there are some things that are very important to know about giving and I believe I can give you those through this text in Genesis. In Genesis 1 everything has been created. In Genesis 2 it has been explained how man was made – male and female – and why man was made, to be fruitful, multiply, to subdue and rule over the earth. In Genesis 3 there is the origin of the heavens and the earth, the origins of man and marriage and then comes the origin of sin and death is introduced into the culture. In that context there is a promise given that the woman is going to have a seed which is anticipating the virgin birth. Women don’t have seed but there will be a woman who will have a Seed and give birth to the One who will defeat Satan. That promise is given in Genesis 3:15.

Now we get to Genesis 4 and Adam and Eve are under the curse of sin and now they have children who are born with the curse of the original sin. Here we are given the trajectory of where original sin takes us unless it is confronted and defeated by God’s grace. In Genesis 4 Cain disregarded God in worship at an offering which led to his spiritual depression, his face fallen. This is not clinical depression. This spiritual depression led to anger and that led to murder. That led to God coming down in measured judgment upon Cain that did not lead to repentance but it led to generations of rebellion until we get to Lamech who writes songs about doing it ‘his way’ in his arrogance and he makes himself famous where he not only kills men but boys and he shakes his fist at God in arrogance. In other words, it’s a death spiral of a death culture inevitably unfolded from generation to generation, unless God intervenes.

Interestingly, Genesis 4 doesn’t start out in a hidden place concocting sin. The chapter starts out with the first recorded worship service in the Bible and we do know of at least two people who are in the worship service – Cain and Abel. Cain got his name from his mother as many first born sons do. She must have remembered the promise and anticipated that the Cain was the One. The meaning of the name Cain is ‘I’ve gotten a man child with the help of the Lord.’ Is this the supernatural birth of the Messiah? It is soon to be proven not so. Her second child is named Abel and this name means vapor, breath. As much as they missed the name of

Cain who was no Messiah, they named Abel correctly for his life was not long. It was just a breath, a vapor.

There are two different attendees to this worship service. There are two different offerings brought to this service. There are two different responses from God to the two different offerings and there are two legacies from the worshippers that are put in motion two trajectories from that point on to this day. Let's look a bit closer at the passage in Genesis 4:1-7 to see what we can learn.

Abel is a shepherd. Cain is a farmer. Now comes a time for a worship service. Cain brings an offering of the fruit of the ground. Cain brought an offering from his vocation and like Cain, Abel brought from his vocation, but Abel brought the first born of the flock and their fat portions. The Lord had regard (accepted) for Abel **and** his offering, but for Cain **and** his offering the Lord had no regard. Abel's offering is saying something about him and Cain's offering is saying something about him.

Some think the reason God regarded Abel's offering is that it was a blood sacrifice and Cain's wasn't. I don't think that's the right track here and I'll give you a couple of reasons why. This is a tribute offering. A tribute comes from the Lord and how He sustains you and that's why the text takes the time to let you know what their vocations were. The offering rightly comes from their vocation. The issue isn't that one is a grain offering and the other is a animal offering. The issue is more than that for it was right that they brought from their vocation.

We have a commentary on this from Hebrews 11:4 which says *[4] By faith Abel offered to God a more acceptable sacrifice than Cain, through which he was commended as righteous, God commending him by accepting his gifts. And through his faith, though he died, he still speaks.* Both are characterized as having sacrifices but one is commendable and the other is not. It wasn't his gifts that gained his commendation for his gifts manifested who he was and they became the occasion for God's commendation upon him. Do not miss that last sentence in this verse where it says Abel still speaks.

Abel comes by faith to bring his sacrifice which is commendable by his vocation and Cain brings his but it is not commendable. What is the key? One is that Abel's gift is by faith. Two, Abel's gift is sacrificial. His gift was the first born of the flock and then he brought the fat portions. He brought the first and the best. In Bible language, he brought the tithe and the offerings. The tithe is tenth of the first fruits of what God gives us, where we declare that's His. Before we get to that part in our service Bruce will say 'bring to God His tithes' which He has entrusted to me bring it to Him in worship as a statement of my heart by faith. It takes faith to set aside the first fruits, the tithe from the top.

Some will come to me and say 'Harry the tithe is Old Covenant, not New Covenant for the ceremonial use of the tithe has been done away with in Jesus, just like circumcision and the Passover.' I say to that 'Yes and no.' Yes, the ceremonial tithe has been done away with for the Hebrew had three tithes that they would bring which would amount to one third of their income for life and that has been done away with but the tithe as a principle predates Moses and postdates Moses.

Here we see in Genesis 4 the tithe and offerings being brought. In Genesis 14, hundreds of years before Moses, Abram comes to give thanks to the Lord by bringing the tithe before King Melchizedek. After Jesus comes in Matthew 5 through 7 Jesus teaches us in the beatitudes about giving and says 'Don't tithe, pray or fast like the Pharisees' but He is not doing away with these things for He comes back and says 'When you pray... When you fast... When you tithe.' Paul tells us when he talks to the Corinthians (II Corinthians 8:3) that they brought according to and

beyond their means. According to their means is the tithe and beyond their means is the offering. If I make \$100 then my tithe is \$10 and that is according to the means that God has given to me for it is proportionate giving.

Then they gave beyond their means. The tithe isn't really giving because it belongs to the Lord and that's why God puts in the language in the Bible of 'do not rob the Lord' by not bringing the tithe into the storehouse (Malachi 3:8–12). If I didn't get you a birthday gift then I didn't rob you. The nature of a gift is something you are giving to somebody that they don't have but if I keep something from you that is yours then I rob you. If I don't give you something that isn't yours to begin with then you may not think well of me but I haven't robbed you. The tithe is the Lord's and it belongs to Him. We are to bring it into the temple of the Lord which is the New Covenant of the gathered church for worship. We are to give it in praise to God and trust Him as to how He distributes it in the context of the leadership of the church. So I rejoice in what I'm doing as I bring the tithe and offerings in worship.

So we see that the tithe predates and postdates Moses and it's in the writings of Paul. Randy Alcorn says 'The tithe is kind of like the training wheels of stewardship' for it's the starting place and this is what it teaches you. Then you begin to pray about the offerings and how you can give those which will become the lifestyle that you see embedded with Abel. So Abel by faith had developed a lifestyle of giving and such a lifestyle that when the worship time came he had saved the first born just for that purpose.

If there was a first born then there were others. He had the first born because he had purposed to give it. He had saved it because he knew it belonged to the Lord. Then from the rest of everything else he had he brought the offerings – the fat portions. I'd like to explain this. Back then when it came to an animal fat was good and I know in this day and age it isn't considered good anymore. The fat portions was the best part of the animal. Even back in the 18th and early 19 century a person who lived on a farm who had a cow would cut the fat portions off when they would eat it and it was known as 'fatback.' My grandmother would use that fatback to make the best green beans and would use fatback everywhere she possibly could to make something taste better.

It even went beyond there for people would take fatback and hang it in front of the hearth where it would constantly sizzle. When people came to visit you would offer them a piece of that fat and you would all together 'chew the fat.' I say this reverently for when Abel comes to worship he brings the tithe and then as he brings the offering in says 'God, let's chew the fat. I want to bring the fat portions to You.' He not only brought the first that he saved but he brought his best to God by faith.

Cain didn't do this. He brought *some* of the fruit of the ground. This is like someone thinking 'do I have anything left to give this time.' There is a big difference between ignoring and leftover and intentionally lifestyle, first fruits, first born, tithe and offerings. That is where Cain was and the result of Cain was a legacy of thoughtless worship that when it is not accepted as true worship by the Lord leads him, not to repentance but to spiritual depression (not clinical depression for that's another issue). That spiritual depression led him to anger then to murder and then from generation after generation that gloried in its violence which you can read in the rest of Genesis 4. It became a death culture and a death spiral.

I have been doing a series on I Peter where Christians suffer for righteousness sake and here Abel gets killed simply for worshipping. Abel suffered for God's sake, for righteousness sake and this runs throughout all of history. Yet as we saw in Hebrews 11 Abel's offering was received by faith, died but he still speaks today. This is what we have the privilege to do in

worship which is to proclaim to the world how great our God is by faith as we bring His tithe and His offerings.

Secondly, we see how those resources are used and we get the opportunity to speak for Jesus through our missionaries in prisons, on campuses, through church planters and those who revitalize churches time and time again. We get to continue to speak for the Lord and with the Lord and join the voice of Abel who still speaks today.

So when I tithe here are five things that it allows me to do. One, giving allows you to participate in worship. Two, giving allows you to prepare for worship. Three, giving is instruction to the worship. Four, giving is bringing adoration to God and five, giving allows us to participate in the Great Commission.

The first one is a lifestyle of giving is not only a mark of true worship, but also marks our true worshippers. This is a personal pastoral statement; I understand the necessity and advisability of electronic giving and I'm not opposed to it. I would ask for you to keep even a small amount out of the tithe, like \$5 so that when that offering comes up you have something to put in it in the worship time. I love that moment when we stand to praise God from whom all blessings flow and we bring up the offering together as we are saying 'God here is a statement by faith for You have the first fruits and You have me.' I didn't just haphazardly come into worship today. I plan this. I set aside the first fruits, the tithe by His grace because I love Him.

My name may be on a bunch of deeds or bills of sales or certificates but I want God to know that I don't own a single thing. I'm just a steward and He owns it all. This is the way that God allows me to tell Him that and then I look forward to how He is going to use it and multiply it. We give proportionally according to our means, then we give sacrificially and then watch what God does. I love the song that say 'little is much when God is in it.' We are just to be faithful.

So when I tithe here are five things that it allows me to do. One, giving allows you to participate in worship. Two, giving allows you to prepare for worship. Three, giving is opportunity you get to instruct your heart about what is really important, in worship and who owns what. Four, giving is the opportunity for us to bring adoration to God, to tell Him we don't love money which is the root of all sorts of evil but we love Him and only want to serve Him, not mammon and we'll use mammon to serve Him. Fifthly, giving allows us to participate in the Great Commission as we get the opportunity to speak out for Him and leave a legacy for Him now and into all eternity.

The second takeaway is our giving not only reveals the heart and instructs the heart, but it also will be manifested in our subsequent lifestyle, the decisions we make in life. Look at Cain's and look at Abel's. Abel still speaks.

This applies to everyone reading this. Apply this to your walk with the Lord. Perhaps you might be thinking 'I'm not walking with the Lord yet.' There is another verse about Abel in the Bible found in Hebrews 12:24 which says *[24] and to Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel.* The blood of Abel cries out from the ground but there is the blood of another that speaks a better Word. Abel's blood cried out for God to bring judgment but the blood of another stained the ground of Calvary and that's Jesus. His blood cries out 'Forgive them, all who come to Me.'

In this study you have heard why we want to be good stewards and it's because Jesus and His blood cries out for us. We don't do this to be saved or to buy salvation or to pay back our Savior. We do this because we love Him. He gave Himself and I rejoice in the privilege to tell others about that Gift with a tithe and an offering and then to tell Him by faith 'Jesus I am yours

and You are mine. Here with this listen to me for all I have is Yours for You are all mine.' Let's pray.

Prayer:

Call upon the Lord to bless the tithe and offerings you give in this coming year and to use it. Lord, here is Your tithe. I look forward to how You will guide me in offerings (fat portions). I trust You Lord. This is the only thing in the Bible that God says to test Him in. God forbids us to test Him except for one thing. God says in Malachi 3:10 to test Him in this and watch what He will do. Lord, by faith we put You to the test that You will take this and use it for Your glory. We consecrate it. Multiply it, even as you did fishes and loaves. May many feast off of Jesus through its right use. Please guide our officers Lord, that they will exercise Biblical stewardship to keep us on mission and on message. Then every time I bring the tithe hear me Lord, I love You because You first loved me, in Jesus' Name, Amen.

Power Point

LIFE TAKEAWAYS

A Lifestyle of giving is not only a mark of true worship, but also marks out true worshippers.

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