



Two Offerings

Kicking It Off

Share about a time when someone's simple gift or gesture meant more to you than an expensive gift would have.

Read

James 1:16-18

Summary

You know that awkward feeling when someone talks about giving or tithing at church? Like suddenly everyone's checking their wallets and doing mental math? Well, here's the thing, we've got it backwards. Offering reminds me of the story of Cain and Abel. Both brought offerings to God, but only Abel's was accepted. The difference wasn't what they gave, it was why. Abel looked at his flock and thought, "God made all this possible. These animals, this land, everything good in my life comes from Him. So, I'm giving Him my best lamb, even though it's risky." He trusted God would take care of him and responded in worship.

Cain? He was doing spreadsheets in his head. "Okay, I need this much grain for my family, this much for next season, this much to sell... God can have whatever's left." He treated it like paying rent to a landlord instead of saying thanks to someone who gave him everything.

When you really believe God loves you and has already given you the ultimate gift through Jesus, you naturally want to give back in worship. It's like when your kid makes you breakfast, even if it's just cereal, and says "Thanks for everything, Dad." You don't care about the cereal. Your heart melts because they get it, they're grateful.

But when we try to earn God's love through our giving or our service, we're missing the point. That's exhausting. It's like trying to buy your parents' love with chores. They already love you! The chores are just how you show you appreciate them. Stop trying to impress God with your giving. He's already impressed, He sent His Son for you. Instead, look at your life, recognize the good stuff comes from Him, and respond with worship. Whether that's money, time, or service, when it comes from genuine gratitude instead of obligation, that's when giving actually feels good.

Discussion Questions

1. Was there anything from the sermon or the passage that stuck out to you?
2. When we truly believe that everything good in our lives comes from God, it changes how we view giving. What area of your life do you find hardest to see as a gift from God rather than a result of your own efforts?
3. Abel gave his first and best animals before knowing if his flock would produce more, while Cain calculated what he could spare. When have you experienced the difference between giving from fear versus giving from trust?
4. Sometimes we serve at church or give offerings thinking it will make God love us more. How do you personally struggle with trying to earn what God has already freely given?
5. Work was originally designed to be joyful partnership with God, but sin turned it into burdensome toil. How might viewing your daily work as worship change your attitude toward your job or responsibilities?

Significant Quotes from Sermon

"Faith will lead to action. It will lead to works. But works does not produce faith. My biggest argument, and if you disagree immediately that works can produce faith, faith is a gift from God. And whether or not you even agree with me, the whole point that I'm trying to get with this is that your faith is a gift."

"God loves you. Full stop. And if I need to preach this to you every single week, I will. God loves you. Period. God loves you. Exclamation point. God loves you. That's it. And then you should really just kind of relax in that. Rest in that. Argue in that."

"Abel was saying thank you to God. Abel was in faith saying, 'Lord, thank you for what you have given. All this land is yours. All of these animals are yours. Thank you.' And so here is my offering. And what does God do when you say thank you? He blesses you."

"Do the work if you are overwhelmed by the cross. If you are overwhelmed by the gift of God that He sent His son to die for you and you feel even an ounce in you that you are going to worship Him for the rest of your life and you make that commitment that you say, 'Lord, thank you for sending your son to die for me. I give you my life for now and forever.'"

Sermon Notes

James 1:16-18

16 Do not be deceived, my beloved brothers. 17 Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change. 18 Of his own will he brought us forth by the word of truth, that we should be a kind of firstfruits of his creatures.

Outline

1. Faith Transforms Work into Worship (Hebrews 11:1-4)
 - a. Faith is the foundation of our relationship with God
 - i. Faith is assurance of things hoped for, conviction of things not seen
 - ii. By faith we understand the universe was created by God's word
 - iii. What is seen was not made from things visible
 - b. Work was part of God's original design
 - i. Adam and Eve were created to tend the garden and care for creation
 - ii. Work was meant to be done in relationship with God
 - iii. Sin corrupted work into toil and sweat
 - c. Jesus redeems our work through the cross
 - i. Christ's death and resurrection defeat sin's effects
 - ii. For Christians, work can become worship again
 - iii. Faith transforms our labor into offering of thanksgiving
 - d. Abel's offering was accepted because it was done in faith
 - i. Hebrews explicitly states Abel offered by faith
 - ii. Faith produces works, but works cannot produce faith
 - iii. Works without faith follow Cain's pattern and lead to rejection
2. Faith Recognizes God as the Source of All Good Gifts (James 1:16-18)
 - a. Every good and perfect gift comes from the Father of lights
 - i. No variation or shadow of change in God's giving
 - ii. We were brought forth by the word of truth
 - iii. We become first fruits of His creatures
 - b. The M&M Sunday school lesson illustrates giving principles
 - i. All resources ultimately come from God
 - ii. Giving back to God isn't really giving away what's ours
 - iii. Understanding God's ownership changes our perspective on giving
 - c. Gratitude is the proper response to God's generosity
 - i. When we see good fruit in our lives, we should thank God
 - ii. Saying "thank you" is the heart of worship
 - iii. God blesses those who give with grateful hearts
 - d. The danger of thinking we produce through our own efforts
 - i. Cain's error: believing his work earned the harvest
 - ii. Pharisees' error: thinking good works produce God's favor
 - iii. Both missed that God is the source, not human effort
3. Faith Gives the First and Best Back to God (Genesis 4:3-5)
 - a. Abel gave firstborn and fat portions; Cain gave unspecified offering
 - i. First fruits are both chronologically first and best quality
 - ii. Abel's offering required risk and trust in God's provision

- iii. Cain calculated what he could afford after securing his needs
- b. The difference was heart attitude, not offering type
 - i. Abel: "Thank you for what you've given; it's all yours"
 - ii. Cain: Paying rent, giving from obligation and calculation
 - iii. God doesn't need our resources; He wants our trust
- c. First fruits giving demonstrates faith in God as provider
 - i. Requires giving before knowing the outcome
 - ii. Declares God, not our efforts, as our security
 - iii. Continues regardless of circumstances (drought or plenty)
- d. Warning against transactional faith
 - i. Not prosperity gospel: Abel was blessed then murdered
 - ii. God's blessings don't always match our expectations
 - iii. Faith trusts God's goodness even when His ways confound us

Notes

Do our actions produce faith, or does faith produce our actions? This question strikes at the very heart of what it means to follow Christ, and understanding the answer transforms not just our theology but our entire approach to worship, work, and giving.

Before we can understand the dynamic between faith and works, we must grasp a fundamental truth: every good gift comes from God. This isn't merely a pleasant religious sentiment, it's the bedrock upon which authentic Christian living is built. James tells us that "every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change." This divine generosity isn't abstract or distant. When we look at our lives, our families, our abilities, our relationships, everything good we see originates from God's hand. He is the source, the wellspring, the creator of all that is good in our existence. Understanding this changes everything about how we approach both faith and works. The creation narrative itself demonstrates this principle. God spoke the universe into existence through His Word, and as Hebrews reminds us, "by faith we understand that the universe was created by the word of God, so that what is seen was not made out of things that are visible." The Trinity was present at creation, the Father, the Son (the Word), and the Spirit hovering over the waters, all participating in this act of divine generosity that brought forth everything we know.

The story of Cain and Abel provides an illustration of how we respond to God's generosity. Both brothers brought offerings to God, yet one was accepted while the other was rejected. The difference wasn't in the type of offering, Abel's animals versus Cain's crops. The distinction lay in something far deeper: the heart behind the gift. Abel offered the firstborn of his flock and their fat portions. This detail matters immensely. The firstborn animals were typically the strongest, the healthiest, the most valuable. By giving these to God, Abel was taking a significant risk. What if his flock didn't produce more? What if disease struck? What if drought came? Despite these uncertainties, Abel gave his best and his first to God. This act required faith. Abel trusted that the God who created everything could provide for his needs. His offering was fundamentally an act of thanksgiving, a recognition that everything he had came from God in the first place. When we understand that all we possess originates from divine generosity, giving back to God becomes not an obligation but a natural response of gratitude. Cain's approach was radically different. He brought an offering, yes, but it lacked the element of faith that characterized Abel's gift. Cain operated from a mindset of calculation and control. He looked at his harvest and began dividing it according to his own logic: this much for my family, this much for profit, this much for next season's planting, and perhaps God can have whatever's left over. This calculating spirit reveals a fundamental misunderstanding

of our relationship with God. Cain treated his offering like rent payment to a divine landlord rather than a grateful response to a loving Father. He saw his work, his sweat, his effort as the primary factor in his harvest's success, with God as merely a distant figure who might deserve some acknowledgment.

Here lies the crucial distinction that shapes everything else: faith produces works, but works cannot produce faith. This isn't merely a theological nicety, it's a practical reality that affects how we live every day. When we have genuine faith, when we truly trust that God loves us, provides for us, and has saved us through Christ, that faith inevitably produces action. It's like a spring that cannot help but bubble forth water. The person who genuinely believes God is the source of all good gifts will naturally want to thank Him. The person who truly grasps the magnitude of salvation will inevitably worship. But the reverse isn't true. We cannot work our way into faith. No amount of religious activity, moral behavior, or sacrificial giving can generate genuine trust in God. This is Cain's error and the error of the Pharisees who came later. They believed that if they just did enough, gave enough, sacrificed enough, then God would have to bless them. They turned faith into a transaction, worship into a business deal.

One of the most transformative insights we can grasp is that work itself was part of God's original design for humanity. Adam and Eve weren't created for leisure; they were made to tend the garden, to name the animals, to be active participants in God's creation. Work wasn't a punishment, it was a privilege, a way of partnering with God in caring for His world. Sin corrupted this beautiful design. What was meant to be joyful collaboration became toilsome labor. The sweat of our brow replaced the joy of our hearts. Work became something we endure rather than something we offer to God as worship. But here's the remarkable truth: Jesus came to redeem not just our souls but our work. Through His death and resurrection, He defeated sin and its effects. For those who follow Christ, work can once again become worship. The key is faith, trusting that God is the one who gives us strength, ability, and opportunity to work. When we work from this foundation of faith, our labor becomes an offering of thanksgiving rather than a burden we must bear.

The Pharisees represent the ultimate expression of Cain's error. They were moral, religious, and hardworking. They followed the rules, made sacrifices, and appeared righteous. Yet Jesus reserved His harshest words for them. Why? Because they had reversed the equation. They believed their works could produce God's favor, that their righteousness could earn His blessing. This Pharisaical spirit is surprisingly easy to fall into, especially within religious communities. We begin keeping score: How much do I give? How often do I serve? How does my devotion compare to others? We start thinking that God owes us something because of our faithfulness, that He should bless us

because we've been so good. This attitude poisons everything it touches. It turns worship into performance, service into competition, and giving into a business transaction. It makes us judgmental toward those who seem less committed and resentful when God blesses those we deem less deserving. Most tragically, it blinds us to the reality that everything we have, including our ability to serve and give, comes from God's grace.

Understanding that God loves us, period, full stop, no qualifications, revolutionizes how we approach life. We don't work to earn God's love; we work because we're already loved. We don't give to gain God's favor; we give because we've already received His ultimate gift in Christ. This truth liberates us from the exhausting treadmill of trying to earn what's already been freely given. It frees us from comparing ourselves to others or keeping track of our spiritual accomplishments. Most importantly, it transforms our motivation from fear and obligation to joy and gratitude. When we truly grasp grace, Sunday school teaching stops being a duty and becomes a privilege. Serving at church events stops being about meeting quotas and becomes about sharing the love we've received. Financial giving stops being about percentages and becomes about expressing thanks for God's overwhelming generosity. The principle of first fruits that Abel demonstrated requires us to give before we know the outcome. It means tithing from our paycheck before we're sure all our bills will be paid. It means volunteering our time before we know if we'll have enough for ourselves. It means opening our hearts in love before we know if that love will be returned. This kind of giving requires faith because it acknowledges that God, not our own efforts, is our true security. When we give our first and best to God, we're declaring that we trust Him to provide for our needs. We're stating that His kingdom matters more than our comfort, that His glory is worth more than our security. The world calls this foolishness. The calculating spirit of Cain says to wait until we have abundance, then give from our excess. But faith operates differently. Faith gives in lean times and fat times alike because it recognizes that God's faithfulness doesn't depend on our circumstances.

One of the most insidious corruptions of faith is turning it into a prosperity equation: if I give this much, God will bless me that much. This isn't faith; it's manipulation. It's trying to control God through our actions, to obligate Him to respond according to our expectations. True faith recognizes that God's ways are not our ways. Sometimes He blesses Abel, and Abel is murdered by his brother. Sometimes He allows His faithful servants to suffer while the wicked prosper. Faith trusts God's goodness even when His ways confound our understanding. This doesn't mean God doesn't bless His people. He does, abundantly. But His blessings often come in forms we don't expect or recognize. The blessing might be character growth through trial, deeper intimacy with

Him through suffering, or impact on others we won't see until eternity. Faith trusts that God knows best how to bless us, even when His blessings don't match our requests.

At its core, worship is simply saying "thank you" to God. It's recognizing His goodness, His provision, His salvation, and responding with gratitude. This can take many forms: sung praise, acts of service, financial giving, or simply a whispered "thank you" in the quiet of our hearts. What matters isn't the form but the heart. God isn't impressed by the size of our gifts or the impressiveness of our service. He's moved by the faith behind them, the trust they represent, the love they express. A widow's two pennies given in faith mean more to Him than a wealthy person's large donation given from obligation. This is why forced giving, manipulated offerings, and guilt-driven service are so contrary to God's heart. He doesn't want our reluctant compliance; He wants our grateful hearts. He doesn't need our resources; He wants our trust. He doesn't demand our service; He invites our participation in His work.

James makes a remarkable statement: through the gospel, we become "a kind of first fruits of his creatures." We're not just called to give first fruits; we become first fruits ourselves. God offers us to the world as examples of His transforming grace, as evidence of His love, as instruments of His peace. This identity shapes how we live. We're not trying to earn something from God; we're displaying what He's already done. We're not working for our salvation; we're working from our salvation. We're not giving to gain God's attention; we're giving because we have His attention, His love, His very Spirit dwelling within us. This perspective transforms mundane activities into sacred ones. Teaching children becomes planting seeds of eternal significance. Serving at community events becomes demonstrating God's love to a watching world. Even our daily work becomes a platform for displaying the excellence and integrity that flow from a heart transformed by grace.

The gospel invites us into a completely different way of living. Instead of the exhausting effort to earn God's favor, we're invited to rest in His accomplished work. Instead of the anxiety of never knowing if we've done enough, we're offered the security of His unchanging love. Instead of the burden of religious performance, we're given the freedom of grateful response. This doesn't mean passivity. Faith without works is dead because genuine faith cannot help but respond to God's grace. But it means our activity flows from assurance rather than anxiety, from gratitude rather than guilt, from love rather than law. The question isn't whether we'll work, serve, and give. The question is why. Will we operate from Cain's calculating spirit, trying to manage our relationship with God through careful allocation of resources? Or will we embrace Abel's trusting heart, giving our first and best because we know the God who gave everything for us? The choice we make determines not just our actions but our entire experience of the

Christian life. One path leads to exhaustion, resentment, and spiritual pride. The other leads to joy, freedom, and ever-deepening intimacy with the God who loved us first and loves us still. The invitation stands before us: to stop trying to fund God's work through our efforts and instead to worship Him through our trust. To stop calculating what we can afford to give and start celebrating what He's already given. To stop working for His love and start working from His love. This is the heart of true offering, the essence of living faith, the path to authentic worship. In the end, it all comes back to this simple truth: God loves you. Not because of what you've done or what you'll do, but because He is love. And when that truth grips your heart, everything else, works, worship, and willing sacrifice, flows naturally from that inexhaustible spring.

Blog

Most of us see our work week as separate from our Sunday worship. We compartmentalize the sacred and the secular, placing our jobs in one box and our faith in another. But what if that division isn't biblical? What if our work was meant to be worship?

The first recorded act of worship after Eden teaches us this truth. Two brothers brought offerings to God. One was accepted, the other rejected. The difference between them shows us how faith transforms our daily labor into holy worship. Genesis 4 introduces us to Cain and Abel, the first children born into a broken world. Cain worked the soil as a farmer. Abel kept flocks as a shepherd. Both had respectable occupations. Both knew to bring offerings to God. Yet when they came to worship, something was different between the two. "The Lord looked with favor on Abel and his offering, but on Cain and his offering he did not look with favor." Some have suggested God preferred animal sacrifices over grain offerings. But that can't be right. The Levitical law later welcomed both types of offerings. Others propose Abel's offering was simply larger or more expensive. But the text doesn't support that interpretation either.

The book of Hebrews gives us the answer. "By faith Abel offered God a better sacrifice than Cain did." Faith made the difference. Not the substance of the offering, not the size, not the cost, but faith. Abel's work became worship because faith infused everything he did. Abel didn't have a more spiritual job than Cain. Shepherding wasn't inherently holier than farming. Both brothers worked with their hands in creation. The difference was that Abel's faith transformed his labor into sacred offering. Every lamb he raised, every pasture he led them to, every predator he fought off, all of it was done with God in view. His offering was simply the culmination of faith-filled work.

Faith doesn't create a hierarchy of careers where missionaries rank above mechanics. Faith doesn't separate ministry from marketplace. Instead, faith sanctifies whatever work we do, transforming routine tasks into acts of worship. The teacher grading papers can worship through excellent assessment. The accountant balancing books can worship through faithful stewardship. The nurse changing bedpans can worship through compassionate care. When faith enters our work, the ordinary becomes offering.

James, the brother of Jesus, helps us understand what animated Abel's faith. In his letter, James warns, "Don't be deceived, my dear brothers and sisters. Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, who does not change like shifting shadows." This passage appears in a discussion about temptation and testing. James wants to make something crystal clear. While temptation comes from our own desires, every good thing in our lives comes from God. The Greek uses two

different words here. The first word emphasizes the act of giving, God's generous nature. The second emphasizes the gift itself, complete and lacking nothing. Together, they declare that God is both the ultimate giver and the source of every perfect gift.

Abel understood this. When he looked at his flock, he didn't see the fruit of his own labor. He saw gifts from God. Those lambs didn't exist because Abel was a skilled shepherd. They existed because God gave life, provided pasture, sent rain, and blessed reproduction. Abel's offering acknowledged this reality. He was simply returning to God a portion of what God had already given him. This changes everything about how we view our possessions and achievements. Your salary isn't primarily the result of your hard work. It's a gift from God who gave you ability, opportunity, and breath to work. Your talents aren't self-developed skills. They're gifts discovered and stewarded. Your family, your health, your time, none of it originates with you. All good gifts come from above.

When we recognize God as the source, gratitude becomes our natural response. And gratitude naturally leads to giving. Cain missed this completely. When he brought "some of the fruits of the soil," he acted out of duty, not devotion. He saw his produce as the result of his own effort. He planted, he watered, he harvested, so he owned the results. His offering was a religious tax, a transaction to keep God satisfied. There was no gratitude because there was no recognition of God as the source. This attitude infects many of us today. We show up on Sunday and drop something in the offering plate because that's what Christians do. We volunteer occasionally because the church needs helpers. We read our Bibles when we can squeeze in the time. But these actions flow from obligation, not overflow. We're paying our religious dues rather than responding to God's generous grace.

James continues, "He chose to give us birth through the word of truth, that we might be a kind of firstfruits of all he created." We aren't just recipients of God's gifts. We ARE God's gift. He made us His firstfruits, the first and best of His new creation. If we understand what firstfruits means, this changes everything about how we give.

The biblical concept of firstfruits is richer than most realize. In Hebrew, the word carries both chronological and qualitative meaning. Firstfruits were the first to ripen, yes, but they were often the best fruits too. The plant puts its initial energy into those first fruits. They receive the best nutrients and grow in optimal conditions. (I'm no farmer or gardener, but that's what I read)

When God commanded Israel to bring firstfruits, He was requiring both priority and quality. They couldn't wait to see how the entire harvest turned out before deciding what to give. They had to mark the first fruits while still on the vine and bring them when ripe. This required faith. What if the rest of the harvest failed? What if those first fruits were the only good ones? Giving firstfruits meant trusting God for what remained. Look

carefully at Abel's offering. Genesis tells us he brought "fat portions from some of the firstborn of his flock." Notice the precision. He brought firstborn, the chronologically first. But he didn't stop there. He also brought fat portions, the qualitatively best parts. Abel understood that God deserved both priority and excellence.

This wasn't about earning God's favor. Abel knew he couldn't buy blessing with a better offering. Rather, his careful selection revealed his heart. He valued God supremely, so he gave God the supreme portion. He trusted God completely, so he gave before seeing what remained. He loved God deeply, so he delighted to bring the best.

Cain's offering lacks all these markers. The text simply says he brought "some of the fruits of the soil." No mention of first. No mention of best. No mention of careful selection. He grabbed whatever was convenient and called it worship. His offering revealed his heart just as clearly as Abel's did. God was an afterthought, not the first thought. God was an obligation to manage, not a Father to honor.

We face the same choice every day. Will we give God our firstfruits or our leftovers? This applies to every area of life. Consider your time. Do you give God the first hour of your day when your mind is sharp and your energy is fresh? Or do you try to squeeze in a quick prayer before bed when you're exhausted? The principle of firstfruits says God gets priority, not just presence.

Think about your talents. Do you deploy your best creativity and skill for God's purposes? Or does the kingdom get whatever energy remains after you've given your best to your career?

The firstfruits principle means writing the tithe check first, not seeing what's left at month's end. It means budgeting generosity before entertainment. It means viewing giving not as losing money but as investing in eternity. When we give firstfruits, we declare that God is our source and security.

James says WE are God's firstfruits. Through Christ, God has made us the first and best of His new creation. We're the preview of coming attractions, the down payment on redemption, the first harvest of resurrection life. God gave His first and best (His Son) to make us His first and best (His children). This identity should shape our giving. We give firstfruits because we ARE firstfruits. We give the best because we've received the best. We prioritize God because He prioritized us. Our offerings aren't attempts to earn what Christ has already accomplished. They're expressions of gratitude for grace already given.

The story of Cain and Abel warns us what happens when we forget this. After God rejected his offering, Cain had opportunity to repent. God even warned him, "If you do what is right, will you not be accepted?" But Cain's pride couldn't handle the correction.

Instead of examining his heart, he eliminated his brother. When worship becomes mere religion, it breeds resentment, not relationship.

We see this pattern today. People who give out of duty often become bitter. They keep mental ledgers of their sacrifices. They resent others who seem to give less. They use their giving as leverage for influence. They want recognition and control because their giving costs them rather than blesses them. This is Cain's spirit, alive and unwell in our churches.

But Abel still speaks. Though he died, his faith-filled offering continues to testify. It speaks of work transformed into worship. It speaks of recognition that leads to response. It speaks of firstfruits given freely because all fruit comes from God. It speaks of faith that gives the first and best, trusting God with the rest.

This message is especially vital in our compartmentalized age. We've divided life into sacred and secular realms. Church activities are spiritual. Everything else is worldly. But Abel knew nothing of this division. His shepherding was spiritual. His offering was simply the overflow of a life lived before God.