

Happy New Year! Next week we begin a series going through Philippians. This Sunday I want to briefly share something related to New Year's and then give an opportunity for you to share a testimony as we look back at the past year and look ahead to the year to come. You should always have a Bible, something to write with, and something to write on, so that you can take note of those things you feel God is impressing on your heart.

In Matthew 5-7 is a long collection of Jesus' sayings known as the Sermon on the Mount. Halfway through, Jesus says these words to the gathered crowd:

Matthew 6:24-34 - *"No one can serve two masters. Either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and Money. ²⁵ "Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more important than food, and the body more important than clothes? ²⁶ Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly **Father feeds them**. Are you not much more valuable than they? ²⁷ Who of you by worrying can add a single hour to his life? ²⁸ "And why do you worry about clothes? See how the lilies of the field grow. They do not labor or spin. ²⁹ Yet I tell you that not even Solomon in all his splendor was dressed like one of these. ³⁰ If that is how God clothes the grass of the field, which is here today and tomorrow is thrown into the fire, will he not much more clothe you, **O you of little faith?** ³¹ So do not worry, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' ³² For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them. ³³ But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. ³⁴ Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own.*

This is not Bobby McFerrin's "Don't worry, be happy." Yes, Jesus tells them not to worry, but there is a call to do more than just stop worrying. Jesus tells the listening crowd that he knows that they are anxious about having material things, but that the antidote to worrying is not to try to stop worrying, but to seek first God's kingdom and his righteousness, to prioritize God and His will in your life and in this world. He tells them that people everywhere are so worried about food and drink and clothing, about providing for themselves or their family, but that God loves us and knows what we need. And if we will put God first and live for Him, then He will take care of our needs. Once again, the promise is: you put God first, and He will take care of your needs.

My challenge to you for 2023 is simple. What is it going to look like for you to put God first, to seek first His kingdom and His righteousness?

This question calls to mind a principle from the Bible that goes way back to Exodus called the first fruits. Remember that they were an agrarian society, and throughout the first books of the Bible, you see again and again God's command to the Israelites to bring to him the firstfruits of the crops they sow in their field. They were to bring the first crops to the priest before sowing anything else.

Exodus 23:16 – “Celebrate the Feast of Harvest with the **firstfruits** of the crops you sow in your field.”

Leviticus 23:9-10 - The LORD said to Moses, ¹⁰ "Speak to the Israelites and say to them: 'When you enter the land I am going to give you and you reap its harvest, bring to the priest a sheaf of the first grain you harvest.

Ezekiel 44:30 - The best of all the **firstfruits** and of all your special gifts will belong to the priests. You are to give them the first portion of your ground meal so that a blessing may rest on your household.

And this Proverb, which summed up the principle well:

Proverbs 3:9-10 - Honor the LORD with your wealth, with the **firstfruits** of all your crops; ¹⁰ then your barns will be filled to overflowing, and your vats will brim over with new wine.

What was the purpose of this principle?

- 1) A recognition that everything belongs to God
- 2) Gratitude for His provision and gifts
- 3) A display of trust in Him

We no longer live in an agrarian society, but the principle still remains. As we see in Matthew 6, Jesus still calls us to seek God first and trust Him with the rest. To choose not to live for money or run after our own needs and desires but to prioritize Him is to:

- 1) Recognize that everything belongs to God

1 Corinthians 4:7 - For who makes **you** different from anyone else? What **do you** have that **you** did not receive? And if **you** did receive it, **why do you boast** as though **you** did not?

2) Show our gratitude for His provision and gifts

James 1:17 - Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights, who does not change like shifting shadows.

3) Display our trust in Him

Matthew 6:31-34 - So do not worry, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them. But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own."

Psalm 50:9-10 - I have no need of a bull from your stall or of goats from your pens, ¹⁰ for every animal of the forest is mine, and the **cattle on** a thousand hills.

So how do we give God our first fruits practically? How do we seek first His kingdom? Think time, talent, and treasure.

Time. How do you give your time to Him?

Begin the day with Him. Return to Him at regular times throughout the day.

Luke 10:38-42 As Jesus and his disciples were on their way, he came to a village where a woman named **Martha** opened her home to him. ³⁹ She had a sister called Mary, who sat at the Lord's feet listening to what he said. ⁴⁰ But **Martha** was distracted by all the preparations that had to be made. She came to him and asked, "Lord, don't you care that my sister has left me to do the work by myself? Tell her to help me!" ⁴¹ "**Martha, Martha,**" the Lord answered, "you are worried and upset about many things, ⁴² but only one thing is needed. Mary has chosen what is better, and it will not be taken away from her."

Or think of the disciples at Pentecost. You can do nothing apart from His Holy Spirit. Give Him your time and see how He can order your steps and give you more time than you could if you just did your own thing.

Talent. Use the gifts He has given you to serve others.

1 Peter 4:10 - Each one should use whatever gift he has received to serve others, faithfully administering God's grace in its various forms.

Do not just give all of your abilities to the world. There are many opportunities here at NewLife

Treasure.

2 Corinthians 9:6-8 Remember this: Whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows generously will also reap generously. ⁷ Each man should give what he has decided in his heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. ⁸ And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that in all things at all times, having all that you need, you will abound in every good work.

When we give our firstfruits, it shows that we can be trusted with more.

Takes a lot of trust to give God the first of our time, talent and treasure. Where do we find this trust?

1 Corinthians 15:19-23 - If only for this life we have hope in Christ, we are to be pitied more than all men. ²⁰ But Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. ²¹ For since death came through a man, the resurrection of the dead comes also through a man. ²² For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive. ²³ But each in his own turn: Christ, the firstfruits; then, when he comes, those who belong to him.

Jesus is the firstfruits of the Father. He gave us His best.

Romans 8:31-32 - What, then, shall we say in response to this? If God is for us, who can be against us? ³² He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all-- how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things?

And we have the Spirit

Romans 8:22-23 - We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time. ²³ Not only so, but we ourselves,

*who have the **firstfruits** of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies.*

He gave His Son, and He gave His Spirit. So we can trust Him and give Him our firstfruits.

How will you put God first this year?