

*Text: 1 Corinthians 16:1-2*

*Theme: First and Proportional*

Paul wrote to the Christians in Corinth, **“Now about the collection for God’s people: Do what I told the Galatian churches to do.”** Paul was in the middle of collecting a big offering for the people in Jerusalem. He wanted all the congregations to participate, so he shared some of the most practical giving advice in the Bible. He said: **“On the first day of every week, each one of you should set aside a sum of money in keeping with his income.”**

If you can believe it, we’re going to spend the whole message just talking about that one verse! The first words that jump out at me are, **“Each one of you should set aside a sum of money.”** How many people were to participate in the offering? **“Each one of you.”** The way the IRS works today, you can earn quite a bit of money before you’re expected to pay income taxes. That’s not the way God works. Giving to God isn’t just for the rich or well-off. It’s for **“each one of you.”** Every single person has been blessed by God with something. So, every single person has something to give, including **“each one of you!”**

Here’s how: **“On the first day of every week, each one of you should set aside a sum of money.”** Sometimes you hear the excuse, “If I give my money to God, I won’t have anything left!” God doesn’t ask you to give everything to him. What he asks you is to give to him first. God knows you’re not King David with billions of dollars. He knows that you need money for lots of things. That’s why he gives you money! God doesn’t ask you for all, but he does ask you for first. On the first day of the week, before everything else, the Christians were to set a sum of money aside for God. God loves to hear people say, “You first!”

That’s how God asks us to give. For us today, it might not be every Sunday, but with every blessing, God wants us to say back to him, “You first!” When your check gets deposited in the bank, say to God, “You first!” Before the bills. Before the mortgage. Even before the IRA. “You first!” Earlier you heard God’s promise in the verse of the day: **“Honor the Lord with your wealth, with the firstfruits of all your crops; then your barns will be filled to overflowing, and your vats will brim over with new wine” (Proverbs 3:9-10).** God doesn’t ask you to give him everything. He asks you to trust him enough to give to him first.

Do you like leftovers? I really do, except for leftover taco salad. Meat, sauce, cheese, lettuce, chips—all together: good! The leftovers—not so much. We’ve learned that you must eat it all the first day. Old lettuce and soggy chips and once melted cheese all stuck together—it’s the same stuff, same ingredients, but it just isn’t the same. What is it we’re offering God? “You first” or “Here’s the leftovers”? Even if, in the end, it might be the same stuff, it’s not the same. “You first” and “leftovers” are a world apart.

What’s amazing is that God is the one Father who never gives us leftovers. Remember how I said that God commanded his people to give the firstfruits? That’s exactly what God has done. God gave us his firstborn. He gave us Jesus. **“For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but**

**have eternal life” (John 3:16).** A confirmation student asked, “If Jesus was innocent, why did he die?” That’s a good question! Jesus died because he put you first. For every time I’ve put me first, Jesus took my place before God and said, “You first!” Then he died to forgive my sins on the cross. God invented the phrase “You first!” God has put you and me first, even when it came to his own Son. So how can we not say to God, “You first!”

“God first.” But how much? That’s the other big question, right? How much should I give? Here’s what God says: **“On the first day of every week, each one of you should set aside a sum of money”**—now here’s the key—**“in keeping with his income.”** God doesn’t give a number, because every person is different. He doesn’t want us to compare. He doesn’t want us to give what somebody else gives. He wants us to look at what he’s given us and give in keeping with our income. So how much? Give your best, in keeping with what you have. It’s going to be different for each of us, but the attitude is the same. God first. My best...not leftover taco salad.

Let’s think a little more about that phrase **“in keeping with his income.”** God is a big believer in percentage giving. In the Old Testament, he gave his people a percent—ten percent or a “tithe.” That was the law for the Israelites. Ten percent of crops, herds, fruit, everything. They were to look at what God had given them and give back ten percent. Some churches demand ten percent today. The problem is that the tithe is part of God’s Old Testament laws meant just for the Israelites. If a church demands ten percent today, it should also have daily sacrifices, celebrate the Sabbath, and not eat pork, because all those laws go together. Today God doesn’t demand ten percent, but he still tells us to give a percent **“in keeping with his income.”**

I know God has your heart. You love Jesus. You want to give back to God. So how much? Remember this: “God first. My best.” I can’t tell you what your best is, other than that God wants you to think percentages. He wants you to look at everything he has given you and decide what percent you want to give back to him. That means our offerings will change. Sometimes our incomes go up. Sometimes they go down. So will our offerings to God. If you don’t know where to start, try using that ten percent as a guide. If you make \$50,000 a year, ten percent would be about \$100 a week. If you make \$100,000, it’d be \$200 a week. If you make \$20,000, it’d be \$40 a week. Could you give that much? Could you give more than that? I’m not telling you that’s what you must give. I just want you to think about it. What’s my percentage right now? Does that put God first? Is that my best? Of am I giving God leftover taco salad?

King David’s best was five billion dollars, as we heard last week. In our Gospel lesson we heard of a widow whose best was two little coins. People mocked her, but when Jesus saw her, he praised her in front of everyone. The widow gave a few pennies. David gave five billion dollars. In God’s sight, they both gave exactly the same! This is what makes God’s way of giving offerings so great. He doesn’t want you to compare yourself to anyone else. He doesn’t hold everyone to the same standard, because he has blessed us all in different ways. He just reminds us that every person has been blessed. Everyone has something to give. God first. My best. Not leftover taco salad. Amen.