



NAC-USA
DEVELOPMENT
INSTITUTE

**Giving
rooted in
the heart**

**Offering and
tithing**

**Love is the
foundation**

MIDWEEK SCRIPT

2017

October

Session 1 – Giving rooted in the heart

Welcome to our first small group session in October. This month, the focus of our sermon series is on our offerings, and in our midweek sessions, we will be discussing aspects of giving. In this session, we'll journey back to the early part of Genesis and learn from two brothers: Cain and Abel. Together we will come to understand that the focal point of our giving is not on *what* we give, but on the *manner* in which we give. Giving is a matter of faith rooted in the heart.

You may be thinking to yourself, "All I know about Cain and Abel is that Cain killed his brother." The Bible doesn't tell us much about the sons of Adam and Eve, but with what is written, we can learn a great deal about what matters most when it comes to giving. Listen to the beginning of their story found in Genesis 4: *Now Abel was a keeper of sheep, but Cain was a tiller of the ground. And in the process of time it came to pass that Cain brought an offering of the fruit of the ground to the Lord. Abel also brought of the firstborn of his flock and of their fat. And the Lord respected Abel and his offering, but He did not respect Cain and his offering. And Cain was very angry, and his countenance fell* (Genesis 4:2-5).

Here is what we learn from these verses. Abel was a shepherd and Cain was a farmer. At some point their parents taught them about worshipping God and that they should bring offerings to Him. Cain gathered up a portion of his crop to give to the Lord, and Abel gave from his labors as a shepherd and brought a firstborn of his flock to give to God. From these verses, we can deduce that both men presented to God an offering from the produce of their vocation. So why did God respect Abel and his offering and not Cain and his? Over the years, many have come up with theories about why, but the author of Genesis does not provide us with any further information. However, the author of Hebrews in the New Testament does.

In Hebrews 11:4, the Bible says, *By faith Abel offered to God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain, through which he obtained witness that he was righteous, God testifying of his gifts; and through it he being dead still speaks.*

From this verse we learn that God respected Abel and his offering *not* because of how good his offering was and how bad Cain's was. They both may have brought to the Lord the best they could. God respected Abel and his offering because of Abel's faith. Our emphasis always seems to be on the material or amount of offering given. How much money, time, energy, etc... What the story of Cain and Abel teaches us is that the emphasis should be on the heart. Cain's offering wasn't rejected because it was inferior to his brother's. His offering was rejected because of the condition of his faith and the manner in which he presented his offering.

This point is taught repeatedly in the Scriptures. There are three additional examples:

- In Proverbs 15:8 the Bible says, *The sacrifice of the wicked is an abomination to the Lord, but the prayer of the upright is His delight.* What's the difference between the wicked and the upright? It is what lives in their hearts!
- In 1 Samuel 15, the Bible tells us about a conversation between Samuel and Saul after Saul and his army destroyed the Amalekites. Saul had disobeyed God and spared some of the livestock. His excuse was that he was going to use them for a sacrifice to the Lord. Samuel said to Saul, *Has the Lord as great delight in burnt offering and sacrifices, as in obeying the voice of the Lord? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice* (1 Samuel 15:22). Here again we see the condition of the heart is paramount over our physical offering.
- And in 2 Corinthians 9:7 Paul wrote, *So let each one give as he purposes in his heart, not grudgingly or of necessity; for God loves a cheerful giver.*

Going back to Hebrews 11:4, there are two more things we can learn. The first is that Abel was commended as righteous because of his offering. The second is that Abel is still speaking to us because of his faith. How can this be? You probably already know that not one word from Abel's mouth is recorded in the Bible, yet his life speaks to us today as we learn from him and his offering. When we are obedient and give with a cheerful heart in faith and love, then we will be credible witnesses.

What's the condition of your heart? Does your faith speak? Does your faith and love for God prompt your giving?

We cannot become consumed with the substance of our giving and neglect the condition of our heart and our faith. Our giving is to be prompted by our love for God and our faith in Him. Hebrews teaches us that faith *is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen* (Hebrews 11:1). Our faith is in Jesus Christ! He is who we hope for. He is the greatest offering, and our offerings are to be a reflection of our heart's belief in Him and our love for God.

Session 2 – Offering and tithing

In our last small group session we learned about Cain and Abel, their attitudes toward offering, and the fact that the importance of giving is not so much in *what* we give, but the *manner* in which we give. It is clearly a matter of the heart and of our faith.

In today's session, we want to better understand where the word "tithing" comes from and what it means. Tithing literally means, "giving a tenth." We can find two references to tithing already in pre-Mosaic time. It was first mentioned in the account of Abraham, who won a decisive battle and gave a tenth of the spoils to Melchizedek as an offering of thanks (Genesis 14:18-20). It is mentioned again when God visited Jacob in a dream and assured him of His blessings, and Jacob realized how awesome His God is. God would be with him in his life, and Jacob promised to give Him a tenth (Genesis 28:20-22).

It is interesting to note that in the Mosaic Law there were three different methods of tithing for the people. A yearly tithe supported the Levites in exchange for their priestly service. The festival tithe was required for annual festivities, which were ordained by God. And every 3 years, there was a tithe to support the needs of the poor, strangers, widows, and orphans in their local towns.

In the Apocrypha, we can read the story of Tobit. It illuminates the attitude of this God-fearing man. It portrays timeless principles of faith, which we can also learn. Let us look at just a few examples from his life:

- First, Tobit practiced what the Israelites were asked to do. He supported God's house by giving a tenth to the sons of Aaron, who served in Jerusalem. He gave another tenth every year when he went to Jerusalem. Lastly, he gave a tenth to the needy, as his mother had taught him, because he was left as an orphan when his father died (Tobit 1:7-8).
- Second, Tobit was moved by the suffering and tragedies of others and helped wherever he could (Tobit 1:16-18).
- Third, during his own personal hardship, he worshiped and praised God (Tobit 1:11-12).
- And finally, Tobit transferred his wisdom and principles of faith to his son. His own experiences and his beliefs became a foundation for his son, Tobias, who in turn shared his own inheritance once he experienced God's help and support.

One could see this as a story of a man who was rewarded and blessed by God because of his offerings. This is also an understanding that we might have learned from our forefathers. However, let us look at it from a different perspective. Tobit loved God so much that he wanted to find a way to express his thankfulness while supporting the house of God and the festivities, as well as caring for the needy. God measured Tobit's willingness to give, regardless of the amount. Tobit was not limited by the tithing tradition of his time; he simply gave three tithes because he perceived a great need when visiting Jerusalem.

Tobit's principles and faith were also a great example for his son, thus creating a foundation for Tobias as he experienced the help of God in his own life. Tobias was willing to share one-half of his inheritance with the angel Raphael in gratitude for his help (Tobias 12:1-5). This can work the same way in our lives as well. Our faith and desire to serve God and others can be a unique example for our children and families when they see our love for God, our commitment to Him, and all He has done and will do for us in our lives. Our love for Him will urge us to do the utmost possible within our means.

In the New Testament, tithing is neither explicitly requested nor extensively commented on. However, Jesus was not afraid to speak about tithing. He told the Pharisees that their tithe of mint, rue, and herbs meant nothing if they did not abide by justice and love God first and above all (Luke 11:42). As with Cain and Abel, in our previous session, it's not what you give, but that you offer it with the right heart.

Tithing has prevailed within most Christian denominations in various forms and shapes, even until today. Tithing serves the mission of our church in helping to finance church buildings and programs, such as minister development and the FaithArc.

While our seasons of life may change and, likewise, our ability to offer, let us make sure that the desire to please God and our willingness to express our love and adoration for Him will never change.

Session 3 – Love is the foundation

This month we have looked at instances of giving that have come out of the Old Testament. So what does the New Testament have to say about giving? In Matthew 25 Jesus gives us perspective on this topic: *...For I was hungry and you gave Me food; I was thirsty and you gave Me drink; I was a stranger and you took Me in; I was naked and you clothed Me; I was sick and you visited Me; I was in prison and you came to Me* (Matthew 25:35-36).

When we read these verses, we can see that Christian giving is about more than just money. When we determine what we have to give, we can look at everything in our lives as something that can be used to serve God and others: our time and attention, our possessions and money, even our energy. In these verses from Matthew 25, the giver took the time and effort to fulfill all of the other person's exact needs. This is a sign of care and love for the person in need.

Our giving, whether it is to the Church or to someone in need, should always be motivated by love – our love for God and our love for our neighbor. When love is our foundation, we can have a completely new perspective on giving. It is no longer just focused on putting some money in the offering box or making our yearly visit to help in the soup kitchen. Instead, it becomes about investing in relationships. We love God, and so we want to invest in our relationship with Him and the future of His church. We love our neighbor, and so we want to invest in our relationships with them. When our relationships with others are based on love and they function the way God intends them to, we flourish and can bring glory to Him.

We demonstrate our love for God and others when we give. Our guiding example for how to love is God Himself, because God *is* love. It follows, then, that He should also be our example for how to give. God is always the giver. He gives without calculation. He gives without expecting anything in return. He gives because He loves us. God's giving and love is perfectly displayed in Jesus Christ. Throughout Jesus' life, we see the compassion and love that He had for the needs of those around Him. He gave everything, ultimately His life, because He loved God. He is the embodiment of God's love towards us. So, if we truly have the love of God, then we also have to be those who give it. We should remember the words of the Lord Jesus: *It is more blessed to give than to receive* (Acts 20:35). Don't let yourself be limited in honoring God and demonstrating your compassion towards the needs of others.

Thinking about God's love for us stirs up wonderful feelings. He is the only one who is able to perfectly love us, even with our weaknesses and imperfections. He is the only one who can perfectly forgive us over and over because of His love for us. Knowing this, we cannot help but feel joy and love in return. So why should these feelings of love prompt us to give?

Again, we can look to Jesus' words to help answer this question. In John 13, He says, *A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another* (John 13:34).

However, we do not love others only out of obedience to a command, but we also love them out of the overflow of the love that God has poured into our hearts. When we know and experience the love of God, we cannot help but share it with each one that we meet. Our offerings and our giving demonstrate this love that we feel. We have an opportunity to express this love in the upcoming Thanksgiving season through our individual Thanksgiving offerings. Humbleness also prompts our giving. We recognize that we are unworthy to receive all that God has given us, and so, in humbleness, we respond in love towards our God and our neighbors. This type of love prompts us to give freely from what we've been blessed with. We choose to give because of His amazing love and grace.

Individually, and as a congregation, we can see and respond to the needs of the Church and also the needs of others with the compassion and love of God. Together, we can share God's merciful love with the world, which we ourselves received freely and undeservedly through Christ.