

Lesson 5

That's Right, He's First

As you may recall from last week's Lesson 3, we said there were only **four options** when it comes to managing resources, specifically money. **We can spend it, hold it, multiply it, or give it.** What about losing money or having our resources stolen? Sure, those things happen. Sometimes it is through our own carelessness that they do happen, but often those events happen outside of our control. So, for the purposes of this study, let's stick with the four major options we've mentioned. **Would you agree with me that the most popular option is the one that I listed first: spend?** It is definitely the most popular option, because for most people it is viewed as the most fun. Later lessons in this study will highlight that it is also the option which can cause the most pain.



I suggest the listed order of the options (spend, hold, multiply, give) presents a perfect opportunity to apply one of Jesus' stated principles: the first shall be last, and the last shall be first.

In keeping with that principle, **let's rearrange the order like this: give, spend, hold, multiply.**

This way, **GIVE** becomes first. As you will soon see, Scripture is very clear on why that should be the case.

Entire books have been written on why we should be generous people. Countless sermons have been preached on the reasons and need to tithe. You probably receive as much mail as I do from dozens of ministries and organizations pleading their case as to why we should single them out for support. It is never ending. But we still have to live, right? We have to pay the bills, buy the groceries, keep clothes on the kids – the list is almost endless. In Week 1, we learned and have accepted the fact that everything we have belongs to the Lord. At the same time, He's put us where we are, and there are daily and monthly obligations that require money. **So how do we balance everything?** How do we arrive at the point where we have both money to give and money to support our needs? It should come as no surprise that there is an answer to that question, and Scripture provides it.

Scriptural Foundation

Proverbs 3:9 provides the key. “Honor the Lord from your wealth, and from the first of all your produce, so your barns will be filled with plenty and your vats will overflow with new wine”.

Before you get hung up on the barns and vats reference, let's look at the fundamental principles listed in the first two phrases of the proverb.



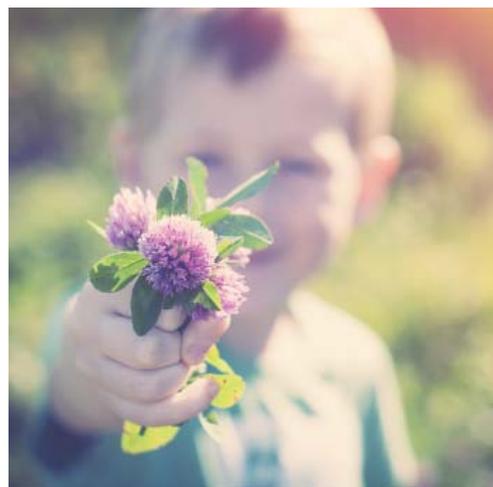
First, we are to honor Him. We honor Him by acknowledging Him as the source of all that we receive and by giving Him our first. **Simply stated, we honor Him first by Him being first.** When we get to Week 3 in this study, we will discuss very specifically how to set up a monthly allocation or spending plan. To track with the principle established in Proverbs 3:9, we will make sure that the Lord is first on the list in our money allocation. We honor Him this way. The problem for many families is that the Lord is moved to the bottom of the list. He receives whatever is left over after all of the other obligations are met. That attitude or approach is a direct violation of scripture. When I counsel people who are under heavy debt or massive car payments they can't afford, I'm never surprised when I see their almost nonexistent giving levels.

It's clear to me from Proverbs 3:9 that if I honor Him by giving Him the first (it's called the first fruits principle), then He says to me that the barns and vats will be in good shape. Obviously, most of us don't deal with barns and vats as they did in Biblical times, but what would the text look like in 21st century language? Barns were where they stored the harvested crops; vats were where they stored the harvested, processed grapes. Where do we store the products of our labor today? Banks and houses. So, **what would Proverbs 3:9 look like in today's language?** How about this:

**“Honor the Lord by giving Him priority in your financial management.
If you do that, you won't have to worry about your bank account and your
stuff - He'll see that all of your needs are met, and you will have abundance!”**

Please don't misunderstand this principle. We don't give to get. Receiving is not our motivation for giving as you will see in later lessons. But there is a spiritual principle at work when we honor Him with our first fruits. He, in turn, seeing our obedience is delighted to bless our efforts. We can then honor Him even more.

It took several years for me to understand and apply the principle of Proverbs 3:9. Once I grasped it and once I applied it to our financial management, I never looked back. He has always provided. We have never had a financial need that was not met, and, as a matter of fact, there has been abundance. I could tell you story after story after story of major expenses that have been met simply because we took Him at His word and followed His guidance to put Him first.



Too simple, you say? Or maybe you say, “Sounds good and I believe it, but I scored in the red on the Financial Condition and Stress Meter. If I wrote a check to the church at the first of the month, it would bounce. How do I get there?”

You get there the same way the guy ate the elephant – one bite or one step at a time. **Your very first step** is to make the decision to take the Lord at His word and honor Him with your finances. You will have more specific guidance on how to set up your plan in later lessons, but for now begin by giving the first to Him. You may start with a dollar or thirty one dollars, or whatever amount can be identified that doesn’t cause you to miss a payment or generate a foreclosure or repossession notice. Once you have your heart right, and once you have made the commitment to honor Him with your first fruits, you will be amazed at how He will guide you in getting the remainder of your finances in order.

Your next questions may be, “How much should I give, and to whom do I give it?” The Lord will clearly answer those questions in the next lesson, but for now let’s get our head around Proverbs 3:9.



REFLECTION: Once again, prayerfully read Proverbs 3:9. Ask the Holy Spirit to give you a clear understanding and conviction of His desire expressed in this scripture. Then ask yourself these questions: Is the Lord really a priority in my financial life? Do I start the month or the year thinking about giving to Him, or am I more concerned with making the house payment, car payment, paying bills, buying groceries, entertaining myself, etc.? Is there a connection between my attitude toward honoring Him with the first fruits and my bank balance and overall financial condition (either positively or negatively)? Identify and prepare to discuss with your group the

scripture, statement or concept that was most meaningful to you in this lesson. **Record your thoughts:**



ACTION STEP: Your first step must be making the decision to honor Him first. If you are not at that point yet, go back to the reflection section. Spend time in prayer until the Lord shows you that His promise is true. If you are diligent in your prayer, He will bring your understanding in line with His desire for your life. Once you have made the commitment to honor Him first, determine an amount to give to Him off the top from your next paycheck (before other obligations are met), and then do it. Continue tracking your daily expenses using the spending areas listed on page A-4.

Enter the amount here: _____



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