

I. Introduction

A. We love the functional and definitive

1. Nothing wrong with that but sometimes functional and definitive leaves us short on heart
2. We can live by behaviors but our hearts are not driving these behaviors.

B. Stewardship series... but don't walk out yet

1. I tithe. I actually go above. Not bragging, just communicating.
2. This is not about tithing. I want to add a perspective that I believe most of us miss.
3. I want to focus on stewardship from a perspective of God's heart, your heart, and our relationship.

\*\*Give me your attention over the next few weeks, then you and the Holy Spirit can decide what you think.

II. Part 1: God's intention for your life (Ephesians 4:11-16)

A. God's design for every Jesus follower

1. Every believer called to grow to full maturity
2. Body of believers experience unity

B. Evidence of God's work in our lives ...

1. Christlikeness (v. 13)
2. Stability (v. 14)
3. Truth packaged in love (v. 15)
4. Cooperation packaged in love (v. 16)

\*\*All those who follow Jesus are called to these things. We are responsible to grow to maturity in all areas of our lives. This is the normal process of going from a child to an adult. That includes our stewardship of what God has given us!

III. Part 2: Giving, Gifts, and Generosity (Genesis 4:2b-5)

A. Core story: Plastic Donuts

1. Me and my kids
2. Play kitchen and plastic food
3. Fake donut but genuine reaction
  - a. It made sense - the heart was fully in it.
  - b. There was joy and love from both perspectives.

\*\*The Point: This is how our giving/gifts must feel from God's perspective. Our gifts are like these plastic donuts but like a child's gift that moves a father, our gifts move God and really get His attention!

B. Where is my attention?

1. Looking up or looking down?
  - a. Is my focus on what I'm giving up and how others might perceive it (real or in my mind)?
  - b. Is my focus on Papa's reaction? Is He excited? Is He happy? Does He want more? Does He invite me to sit on His lap?
2. Pondering God's reaction or occupied with my own feelings on the subject?
  - a. Feel better about myself? Transaction? Keeping God off my back?
  - b. Want to see what He does which will either give me great joy or great sadness

#### C. Acceptable Giving (Genesis 4:2b-5)

1. "In the course of time ..." (v. 3)
  - a. First recorded offering but not indication that it was the first gift
  - b. Offering may have been customary learned from Adam
2. Offerings given from vocations (vs. 3-4)
  - a. Cain: brought some of the fruit from the ground; not the first-fruits, however
  - b. Abel: brought the firstborn of the flock
3. God's response (vs. 4-5)
  - a. Not dust to the nature of the gift (grain or animal) but the integrity of the giver
  - b. The worshipper and his offering are connected as one
  - c. Abel's = acceptable; Cain's = not acceptable
4. Cain v. Abel
  - a. Cain: issue of affection and trust; retained the best for himself
  - b. Abel: offered in faith and trust; gave the best to God

\*\*The faith of Abel was the weight which added value to his offering.

5. Cain's response (v. 5)
  - a. Anger v. Repentance
  - b. Q: How do I react when my gift is rejected? Who am I focused on? Why am I giving? Answers may be ugly.

#### IV. Take-Aways

- A. Reality of stewardship (giving, gifts, and generosity)
  1. From the very beginning, God showed interest in the gifts of His children
  2. God responds to the gifts of His children.
  3. Not all gifts are the same to Him.
- B. "Acceptable"
  1. Our concept: suitable, able to be tolerated or allowed
  2. God's concept: either/or; acceptable or not acceptable (Psalm 19:14; Isaiah 58:5)

"Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable in your sight, O Lord, my rock and my redeemer." (Psalm 19:14)

"Is such the fast that I choose, a day for a person to humble himself? Is it to bow down his head like a reed, and to spread sackcloth and ashes under him? Will you call this a fast, and a day acceptable to the Lord?" (Isaiah 58:5)

3. God's economy

a. Acceptable expresses delightful, surprising, perfect, tearful, proud, ecstatic happiness.

b. The acceptable standard is a very favorable one!

\*\*Our gifts are more than functional or practical or duty - they can please our Papa in Heaven and more deeply connect His children to Him.

\*\*one last story ... Christmas

V. Challenge

A. Have you ever thought about how you make God feel?

1. Imaging the illustration

2. Place yourself in both positions

3. What does the Bible teach about you and God?

B. Practice this perspective this week

\*\*Next week I want to unpack four things from Scripture about acceptable gifts.