Series Road Map

**Series Overview:** Generosity Initiative: First. What it really is to give your FIRST and BEST to God and how we do that with our Time, Talents, and Treasures.

**Week Overview:** In Genesis 4 Cain and Abel set the stage of sacrifice and offering for us, and with the arrival of Jesus we should recognize that it is not about the thing we sacrifice, but about the heart behind our sacrifice.

**Grab the Room (Intro):** Personal Story about Selfishness

**Tension (whats the struggle):** Sinful desire to be selfish vs the call to a lifestyle of generosity.

**Text (+ Supporting Text):** Genesis 4:3-7, 1 Samuel 16:7, Romans 12:1-2

**THP**: **You are the FIRST and BEST that God Wants**

**Application (call to action)**: Gospel Presentation

Key

Scripture - highlighted yellow

Illustration/Video/Object Lesson

Personal Story

Intro: Selfish with my food.

The point is… I am selfish. At least with some things… And every one of us can identify something that we are selfish with. Big or small, it doesn’t matter. We all have something that we are selfish with.

And unfortunately, this is too often how we approach our faith… We live in such a selfish, self-centered, world that we don’t even recognize the lack of gratitude that we express when we put ourselves, our wants, our needs, our things, our entertainment, our pleasure… before God.

We are in a series called FIRST. And over the next few weeks we are focusing on Generosity. What it looks like to be generous. What it means to live a LIFESTYLE of generosity. We will talk about how we use our time, and how we give that time to God. And we will talk about our talents or abilities. And what it looks like to put them to work for God. And We will talk about our treasures. Our resources. The things we have that can be put to work for God and His Kingdom.

But FIRST… we need to understand what it means to give God your FIRST and your BEST.

In Genesis 4 we see the standard set for making sacrifice to God. And that really is what we are talking about right?!

Adam and Eve have had 2 sons, Cain and his younger brother Abel. Scripture says that Cain worked the soil. He was a farmer, he grew crops. And Abel kept the flocks. He was a shepherd, he looked after his family’s livestock.

Genesis 4:3-7

We pick up their story in verse 3… *In the course of time Cain brought some of the fruits of the soil as an offering to the LORD. And Abel also brought an offering—fat portions from some of the firstborn of his flock. The LORD looked with favor on Abel and his offering, but on Cain and his offering he did not look with favor. So Cain was very angry and his face was downcast.*

*Then the Lord said to Cain, “Why are you angry? Why is your face downcast? If you do what is right, will you not be accepted? But if you do not do what is right, sin is crouching at your door; it desires to have you but you must rule over it.”*

Cain and Abel, they roll up to the altar with their offerings… Cain has some fruits and Abel has selected the firstborn of his flock, slaughtered them as a sacrifice, and brought them as an offering to God. Now I don’t believe that it actually mattered that it was a fruit or an animal. I don’t think that the physical offering of one brother was necessarily superior to the other.

What mattered is this… Abel brought the BEST. He chose the very best and he took it right off the top. Before anything went back to him or his family at all. And he brought it straight to God. Because he recognized that without God. Without God’s love and mercy and generosity to him, there would be nothing to give.

Cain’s selfishness. His self-centeredness. His self-reliance. His lack of gratitude… all lead to being overcome by sin. He goes on to kill his brother in a jealous rage because God favored Abel’s sacrifice and not his own. He is cursed to be a restless wanderer. He is separate from God and it all started because he refused to give his first and his best to God.

God wasn’t looking for stuff from Cain or Abel. He wasn’t looking for the most impressive thing brought to the altar. He doesn’t look for a certain value placed on the offering that is brought to Him…

In reality he doesn’t need anything. He is God. The great I AM. He is the CREATOR of the universe. It is ridiculous of us to think that God actually needs a physical thing from us… But… he wants us. He desires us. And He wants our gratitude. And he wants our love and devotion. He wants our obedience. He wants our faith.

He wants us to trust him so much that we will willingly offer him the best of us and that we will offer that to him before we give it to anyone or anything else. That’s what Abel understood. And later in the Old Testament that is what Abraham understood when he was asked if he was willing to give up his own son Isaac as an offering. Or when people like Daniel or Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego gave up their freedom. Or when David offered up his sling…

Offerings or Sacrifices have never been about appearance, or quantity, or monetary value…

In 1 Samuel 16, the prophet Samuel goes to Bethlehem to Jesse’s house to anoint a new King for Israel. And when he gets there, he sees Jesse’s son Eliab, and he is physically impressive. He is tall, he is strong, he is good looking, and Samuel thinks to himself, “that’s him, that’s our next king!” but in verse 7 God says *“Do not consider his appearance or his height, for I have rejected him. The LORD does not look at the things people look at. People look at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart.”*

We are talking about your heart. We are talking about you, in your heart, being absolutely willing to give God your FIRST and your BEST every single day. Because **You are the FIRST and BEST that God wants.**

God didn’t want Abel’s sheep. He wanted Abel. God didn’t want Cain’s fruit. He wanted Cain. ALL of Cain. Everything about him. His WHOLE LIFE. His love, his time, his talents and gifts and abilities. His BEST effort. His heart. His mind. His soul. His strength. EVERYTHING.

And God wants You. Because You are the FIRST AND BEST. You are the most important thing he has ever made. **You are the FIRST and BEST that God Wants.**

God wants you SO MUCH, that he would literally make a sacrifice to have you. Think about this… God literally sacrificed his son. Willingly gave you the best. Willingly gave you his one and only son, Jesus. Sent him straight down from heaven, perfect and blameless, just to have you. Just to know you.

And in return our offering is very simple. Give ourselves back to him.

God has the entire universe at his disposal. Everything in it was created by him and belongs to him. And his greatest desire is that YOU would want to be in a relationship with him.

So what does it mean to really give God your First and Best if you are the First and Best that God wants?

First…

It means that we need to give him our heart. Not just raise our hand and pray a prayer. Maybe that is where we start, but it can never be where we stop.

He wants to have a relationship with you. He wants to call you son or daughter. He doesn’t just want a phone call at Christmas. He wants to go deeper with you EVERY DAY.

He wants you to know his word. He wants you to know his voice. He wants you to be able to feel his presence. He wants you to be in tune with his spirit.

Second…

It means that we need to give him our life.

Romans 12 says *“Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God’s mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God…”*

Paul is writing to the Romans and saying, “now that you have given God your heart, you have to live like it.” The lifestyle you live. The more you love God through your actions, rather than just your words, the greater sacrifice that your life will be.

He goes on in verse 2 and says “Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed…”

Don’t let sin overcome you like it does the world. Don’t let your selfishness, your self-centeredness, your self-importance, self-reliance, your lack of gratitude, your sin… trap you in the same patterns as the world. Walk with the same love and mercy and generosity that has been given to you through Jesus.

Third…

It means that we need to give him our stuff.

EVERYTHING that we have comes from God. Our Time. Our Talents… the gifts and abilities that we have. Our Treasures… the resources, possessions and security that comes from those things.

God has been more generous to us than we can possibly comprehend, and He has set an example of how to make sacrifice for us through Jesus. And just like the widow that drops just 2 seemingly insignificant coins into the offering plate at the temple in Mark Chapter 12, we are called to give back to God and his kingdom. And we should do it with glad hearts and out of gratitude for what God has given to us and the sacrifice that Jesus has made for us.

**You are the FIRST and BEST that God wants.**

And over the next few weeks we are going to dive into living generously. What it looks like to really give our Time, our Talents, and Our Treasures. And how we can give him the First and the Best of all of those. And on the last week of the series, we are going to bring every campus together to worship together. And we will spend time together making commitments with those things.

But tonight, we want to close with opportunities to give Him our heart and our life…

Have you given yourself to Christ?

Have you committed your whole life to living in a way that is different from the rest of the world?

Gospel Presentation (will script)

Worship for close.