

Escalon Presbyterian

# Stewardship



**First Fruits Sunday**

The Covenant Order of Evangelical Presbyterians

# First Fruits Sunday

## Stewardship at EPC

First Fruits Sunday at EPC is a Sunday devoted to Christian stewardship. It is not a fundraising event, or a plea for the church to meet budgetary goals. The importance of this annual Stewardship focus is to devote ourselves to the biblical call to give generously and grow spiritually as a response of faith to the provisions of the Lord.

First Fruits Sunday is a normal worship service in which we hear together God's Word and respond as a family of faith in bringing forward First Fruits commitment cards. These cards are 1) your personal giving commitment for the coming year - kept confidential by the treasurer and can be amended at any time and 2) the means by which we as a church family responsibly plan for the coming year by stewarding with financial integrity the congregation's faithful giving. Following worship we gather together as God's people around a meal and celebrate the First Fruits of God's harvest.

Escalon Presbyterian Church has been blessed by faithful giving of those who trust in Jesus Christ and believe in the mission of our church for over a century. As always, glory be to God for the harvest he brings to fruition - for which we are ever grateful.

We offer these biblical principles of giving to help you "give what you have decided in your heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver" (2 Corinthians 9:7).<sup>2</sup>

# Biblical Principles of Giving

## Who We Are

### Giving Should Be Proportional

☞ *The guideline of the tithe* - In the Old Testament, believers were required to give a tenth of their income to the support of the ministry and the needs of the poor. Though the New Testament does not specifically mention the tithe, it does not disband it either, and through Jesus' teachings as well as the letters of the apostles, the NT encourages more sacrificial giving, not less.

*The guideline of sacrifice* - Paul says about the Macedonians, "they gave as much as they were able and even beyond their ability" (II Corinthians 8:3). That means they gave in proportions that caused sacrifices in lifestyle.

*The guideline of responsibility* - Christians are to give "according to their ability" (Acts 11:29). There are seasons to economic life. There are economic responsibilities to our families and to our debts. In many cases, good planning over time will be necessary to move our giving into biblical proportions while honoring our legal and personal financial obligations.

### Giving Should Be Joyful

Paul says that the difference between moralists (those who think God accepts them for their good works) and Christians (those who know they are sinners saved purely through grace) is that Christians want to give as generously as they receive (2 Corinthians 8:8-9). Thus, "giving sacrificially" somehow becomes "giving joyfully."

## **Giving Should Be Consistent.**

Paul directed the Corinthians to set aside a portion for giving each week (1 Corinthians 16:1-2). We are called to set aside for giving on a consistent basis, which requires that we plan ahead. We should allow the church to help with reminders and encouragement.

### **Planning for Giving**

Evaluate your own heart with regard to your financial resources. What percentage of your income is going to: a) God's causes - church, Christian ministries, b) to people in need - outside your family. Are you moving towards more generous, joyful giving? Read Matthew 6:19-34; I Timothy 6:6-10; II Corinthians 8:1-15; 9:6-15. Do you need to re-evaluate your giving in light of God's Word?

☑Do you have a regular plan of giving? If not, then follow these three steps. Families should do this together.

1. Decide what percentage of your income you will give to the Lord's work this year.
2. Now ask two questions: Is this a sacrificial figure? On the other hand, is it a responsible figure?
3. Now set aside the Lord's portion first whenever the money is received. This is the First Fruits of the harvest we have received from Him.

Prayerfully distribute the money among Christian and needy causes as you see fit.