

## January 2016 – (dot)Stewardship



### First Fruits, Regular Fruits

Life was cyclical on the small farm where I was raised, and each season of this life cycle offered fresh, new delights. Peas, lettuce and wild mushrooms were the tasty springtime first fruits. The summer yielded a schedule of strawberries in June, tomatoes in July, corn in August and pumpkins in the fall. Even the winter had its tasty treats with smoked ham and snow-ice-cream.

If you haven't tried snow ice cream, please allow me to share my mom's recipe. Take a big bowl of fresh snow, add a bunch of sugar and vanilla, stir it up, and then stir in just enough milk that it's a little too thick to be slurped through a straw. It's an annual tradition that no family with children, or taste buds, should miss. It's a first fruit of winter that's sure to produce a that's-what-I'm-talking-about moment!

Of course, life is now vastly improved by hydroponic vegetables. And I admit that fresh, leafy green lettuce grown in vitamin water in a greenhouse is tasty in my winter salad! I'm amazed that I can buy a plump, juicy, fresh, red strawberry in Kansas City almost any day of the year. The first fruits have become the regular fruits. And first fruits really should be regular fruits, as regular as a paycheck! Proverbs 3:9-10a says, *"Honor the Lord with your wealth / with the firstfruits of all your crops; / then your barns will be filled to overflowing."*

As Christians, we acknowledge the Lord as the provider of all by offering Him the first fruits. The multiplication of first fruit offerings is a biblical theme that appears repeatedly throughout the scripture. Abraham was willing to give Isaac – his first son – to the Lord, and that opened the Lord's blessing to literally millions of descendants. In John chapter six, Jesus received a gift, only five barley loaves and two small fish, and multiplied it to feed thousands. The Lord is still in the business of multiplying first fruits!

It's January, a great time to get your church on track. I challenge you to ask your parishioners to give the first ten percent of their first paycheck in 2016. Then, offer the challenge to give Him the first ten percent – at least! – of their second paycheck. If your church is already a strong tithing church, challenge them to do more. Then establish a pattern together for the church: There will be no increase without gratitude for the Lord's provision. When we prove that the Lord is first in our lives, we give Him the opportunity to richly bless!

Dr. Mark Lail – Stewardship Ministries Director, Global Ministry Center, Church of the Nazarene

## How pastors should measure success



The call from God into full time pastoral ministry or missionary work is a wonderful and yet overwhelming call. Dr. Howard Culbertson helps us understand the model that Jesus sets out for us.

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## Quotes: Phineas Bresee



*“We are to come to God with such trustful heart obedience that to any promise of God applicable to our condition we say an unequivocal and unlimited yes.”*