When you have entered the land the LORD your God is giving you as an inheritance and have taken possession of it and settled in it, ^{2} take some of the first fruits of all that you produce from the soil of the land the LORD your God is giving you and put them in a basket. Then go to the place the LORD your God will choose as a dwelling for his Name ^{3} and say to the priest in office at the time, "I declare today to the LORD your God that I have come to the land the LORD swore to our ancestors to give us." ^{4} The priest shall take the basket from your hands and set it down in front of the altar of the LORD your God. ^{5} Then you shall declare before the LORD your God: "My father was a wandering Aramean, and he went down into Egypt with a few people and lived there and became a great nation, powerful and numerous. ^{6} But the Egyptians mistreated us and made us suffer, subjecting us to harsh labor. ^{7} Then we cried out to the LORD, the God of our ancestors, and the LORD heard our voice and saw our misery, toil and oppression. ^{8} So the LORD brought us out of Egypt with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm, with great terror and with signs and wonders. ^{9} He brought us to this place and gave us this land, a land flowing with milk and honey; ^{10} and now I bring the first fruits of the soil that you, LORD, have given me." Deuteronomy 26:1-10 NIV

Priorities… all of us have them. There is a quote I like to use once in a while and it goes like this "we make our decisions and our decisions make us". The same is true for the priorities in our lives. If something is high on our priority list, we will take a lot of time with it, put forth our best effort and hopefully receive a benefit from that priority. Conversely, if something is low on our priority list, it will take up less attention in our lives--any benefit from it is pretty small.

The worship and acknowledgement of Yahweh as the source, the originator of all good things for the people of Israel was to be their highest priority. In fact the Book of Deuteronomy highlights that priority over and over again. Perhaps one of the greatest blessings for the people of Israel was that they would no longer be a nomadic people, but a settled one, and the biggest benefit of that was that they could grow their own crops. So here the ceremony of the First Fruits is indicated as an acknowledgement of that blessing since it comes from the God who they worship, and the God who brought them out of Egypt.

Note the priority of the "first fruits". They are not to wait until later in the harvest, or after the Harvest is done, they are to bring "the first fruits" of the ground. I've talked with farmers in other congregations, and when harvest time is here, you don't stop once you begin. So obviously the priority of acknowledging God first is far more important than any inconvenience to the harvester since it is God who is the real source.

One of the ways our spiritual life can be nurtured today is the priority we place on God and on the church in our lives. That is no easy task. True, we all don't have crops to bring in, but we do many priorities; family, friends, sports… taking kids to sports, devoting ourselves to our jobs to make ends meet. The list could go on and on.

Over and over again I read that there is a real "spiritual hunger". In talking to folk, they acknowledge their belief in God, and the need to act on it. Yet when it comes to priorities, somehow the need gets placed down the line, and they never really experience the benefit of it because they haven't really made it a "top priority"

As long as Ancient Israel put God as the "highest priority" their lives were blessed.

Where is God, worship, even participation as well as financial giving as "first fruit" priorities in your life? To be sure, we're not talking something that is easy to do, and we may feel "inconvenienced" by it.

But Jesus himself reminds us "But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well." (Matthew 6:34 NIV)

Take the challenge of "first fruits"

Pr. John Van Haneghan