

# *Biblical Truths Guiding Tithers*

## **Firstfruits giving**

(Proverbs 3:9)



## **Proportionate giving**

(2 Corinthians 8:12)



## **Regular Giving**

(1 Corinthians 16:2)



## **Cheerful Giving**

(2 Corinthians 9:7)



Tithing is the practice of honoring God with one tenth of our incomes. Old Testament believers tithed under Law; New Testament believers tithe under grace. Should we give more or less under grace than under the law? Saved by grace through faith in Jesus Christ, you, a new creation in Christ, are empowered to give freely and generously. The tithe helps God's people answer the question, "How much should I give to God Who has given me not only this life but my eternal life to come?" However, while God is concerned about the proportion of your income that you give, He cares more about your motive for giving.



### **Tithing Acknowledges God as the Source of All Things**

Tithing is an indication that we recognize God's lordship of our lives and that we acknowledge His ownership of all that we have. By grace, we are enabled to believe that God is the creator and owner of everything. *"The earth is the Lord's*

*and the fullness thereof, the world and those who dwell therein..."* (Psalm 24:1). By grace, God gives us the ability to work and earn an income (Deuteronomy 8:18).

We give because God has first given to us. As we grow in our faith, our perspective changes from "How much should I give?" to "How much of God's money am I going to keep?" It is only by God's grace that we give and that we have money to give.

A tithe is giving to God our best, not our leftovers. Our giving may honor or dishonor Him. We can honor God and worship Him even if we give less than the tithe as we give willingly and cheerfully. However, we dishonor Him when we don't put Him first.

### **God's Word in the Book of Malachi**

Some of the strongest words in Scripture are found in Malachi 3:8: *"Will man rob God? Yet you are robbing Me. But you say, 'How have we robbed You?' In your tithes and contributions. You are cursed with a curse, for you are robbing Me, the whole nation of you."* Because they did not honor God with the first 10 percent of their crops, God told the people of Israel that they were robbing Him. God allowed His people to keep 90 percent for their needs, and His 10 percent would go to extend His kingdom.

The first chapter of Malachi tells us that God chastised the people of Israel when they offered Him their crippled and diseased animals. God is not honored when we give as an after-thought or when we give things of no value.



God doesn't need our money; His storerooms are filled. We are the ones who need to show our gratitude for what He has done and entrusted to us. God is the creator, controller, and provider of all things. We are managers of everything and the owners of nothing.

### **Is Tithing Relevant Under Grace?**

Has the death and resurrection of Jesus over sin and death eliminated the tithe? At the time of Jesus, tithing was both law and tradition. Jesus was born a Jew and taught the Jewish law by devout parents, so we can be certain

that He supported the tithe. He came to fulfill the law, not to break it.

In the example of the widow's mite (Luke 21:1-4), Jesus commended the widow for her trusting, generous, and loving action. She gave beyond the tithe. Jesus told Zacchaeus (Luke 19:1-10), who pledged to give half of his possessions to the poor, that salvation had come to him. Zacchaeus' new-found generosity was evidence of the changed condition of his heart.



Jesus had harsh words for hypocritical givers: *“But woe to you Pharisees! For you tithe mint and rue and every herb, and neglect justice and the love of God. These you ought to have done without neglecting the others”* (Luke 11:42). In this verse, Jesus condemns the Pharisees with their laws, because their hearts are not right. Jesus affirms their practice of

tithing but criticizes the hard attitude of their hearts.

Tithing is an outward expression of the conditions of our hearts. If we don't honor God with our firstfruits and proportionate giving, is God in control? Does our giving reflect our trust that He will provide? God will continue to love us even if we don't tithe. However, Scripture is clear about the importance of our giving generously, regularly, and not out of compulsion. God wants us to experience the joy of giving and to have our giving be a meaningful part of our worship of Christ. We need to be mindful that the lack of giving can be an obstacle to our spiritual growth.

Tithing helps us to develop a spiritual discipline of giving the first part of our incomes regularly. Through our tithing, we are reminded of who God is and who we are. The tithe is a spiritual discipline to help us submit our whole lives to the Lordship of Jesus. Tithing is an intentional act that reminds us of our relationship with Jesus, and it nurtures that relationship.

Please consider prayerfully giving a tithe on Tithing Sunday, June 10<sup>th</sup>. May God's grace in our lives be reflected in our giving.

# Tithing Sunday: 10% on 6/10



*“And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that having all sufficiency in all things at all times, you may abound in every good work”*  
(2 Corinthians 9:8).

# *Tithing Sunday: 10% on 6/10*

## **Time Line**

- April: Newsletter article
- May Newsletter article
- May 13 Bulletin message
- May 20 Bulletin message  
Lay reader talk
- May 27 Bulletin message  
Trifold brochure  
Lay reader talk  
Bible Study
- June: Newsletter article
- June 3 Bulletin message  
Lay reader talk  
Sermon  
Bible study
- June 10 **Tithing Sunday**  
Bulletin message  
Lay reader talk  
Sermon  
Bible study
- June 17 Celebration Sunday: Share how God's people responded to the challenge of tithing on June 10<sup>th</sup> (total dollars contributed and number of new tithers)
- June 24 Lay reader talk

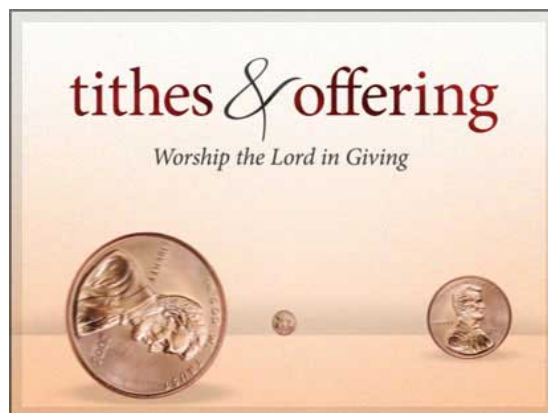


Newsletter article (April)

## Tithing Sunday: 10% on 6/10

Generous giving is a grace from God. St. Paul, writing to the Corinthians, gave an example of such grace, *"We want you to know, brothers, about the grace of God that has been given among the churches of Macedonia, for in a severe test of affliction, their abundance of joy and their extreme poverty have overflowed in a wealth of generosity on their part. For they gave according to their means, as I can testify, and beyond their means, of their own accord, begging us earnestly for the favor of taking part in the relief of the saints..."* (2 Corinthians 8:1-3). We don't read that an emotional appeal was made to these Christians, urging them to give. We don't read that, out of guilt, they reluctantly checked their pockets for spare change. We're informed that they existed in a state of *"extreme poverty"*; they weren't giving out of their abundance. Out of joy, they gave even beyond their means, because they were recipients of God's grace.

Are we also recipients of God's grace? What is our response to that grace? Perhaps, in our personal devotional time, we might do well to turn our attention from our supplications to concentrating on giving thanks for the blessings God has given us. Surely our lists would be long and continue to grow as the Spirit brings to our minds more and more events and circumstances for which we're grateful. **As we focus on our giving a tithe on Tithing Sunday June 10th**, let us pray for hearts like the Macedonians which were joyful in spite of circumstances and which responded in generous giving to the Lord and His people.



Newsletter Article (May)

### **Tithing Sunday: 10% on 6/10**

Faith empowers us to give generously. What we do with our money is a reflection of the condition of our hearts. Our willingness to give is an indicator of where the priorities in our lives are. Tithing (giving ten percent) is a statement of faith. Because our hearts are filled with the love of Christ, His love is visible in what we do and give. As Christians today, we are motivated for stewardship by the gift of God's grace through His Son. Our giving can have no greater foundation than the Gospel of forgiveness.

In the coming weeks, we will be challenging you as members of our church, to grow in the grace of giving by giving a tithe (one-tenth of your income) on Sunday June 10th. Giving is an important part of our worship and praise of Christ. The Apostle Paul said, *“On the first day of every week, each of you is to put something aside and store it up, as he may prosper...”* (1 Corinthians 16:2). Our regular, proportionate giving gives our Lord honor and gratitude for Who He is and what He has done.

Tithing is given to us as a guide for proportionate giving. For New Testament Christians, tithing is an expectation rather than a command. For some of us, tithing is already a reality and, by God's grace, you may be called to achieve an ever higher level of giving. For many others, the tithe will be a leap of faith. In Ephesians 3:20-21, Paul's words promise us that our faith in God to enable our giving is well-placed. *“Now to Him Who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to His power that is at work within us, to Him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen.”*

Take this challenge to give 10% on 6/10 to God in prayer. May our love for the Lord be reflected in our giving.

Newsletter article (June)

### **Tithing Sunday: 10% on 6/10**

For the past few weeks, we've talked a lot about tithing leading up to the challenge to give a tithe on Sunday June 10<sup>th</sup>. We've learned that Old Testament believers were commanded to give a tithe, whereas New Testament Christians are also called to give faithfully and generously, but the tithe is only encouraged (Matthew 23:23), not commanded.

During our recent focus on tithing, we've learned that the Bible says a lot about giving. Solomon, the writer of Proverbs said, *"Honor the Lord with your wealth, and with the firstfruits of all your produce; then your barns will be filled with plenty, and your vats will be bursting with wine"* (Proverbs 3:9-10). In the New Testament, the Apostle Paul encouraged us to bring our tithes and offerings to the house of God on a regular basis, *"On the first day of every week, each of you is to put something aside and store it up, as he may prosper, so there will be no collecting when I come"* (1 Corinthians 16:2). Jesus said, *"It is more blessed to give than to receive"* (Acts 20:35).

Giving is not a natural inclination. Because of our self-interests, we are inclined to take care of ourselves first and others second. If we rely on our own strength to give, we are likely to hoard what we have. Our heavenly Father knows that our giving helps us break the grip that money may have over us. When we give our first and best to the Lord, we show that our faith and trust are in Him rather than in our money and possessions. It is true that the tithe is no longer commanded, but it can serve as a meaningful guide for what we should give proportionately.

God wants us; He wants the givers, not just the gifts from the givers. He doesn't need our gifts, but we have a need to give. By God's grace, we are enabled to give because of Who God is and what He has done for us. *"For God so loved the world, that He gave His only Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life"* (John 3:16). We can love *"because He first loved us"* (1 John 4:19). As recipients of God's grace and love, we are empowered to share God's gifts with Him and others. May God enrich us as we grow in the grace of giving not only during our tithing Sunday but in the future.

## Bible Study 1

### *What Is Tithing?*

**Prayer:** Dear Lord, we pray that You will bless us with faithful and giving hearts so that we may joyfully return to You a portion of what You have already given to us. Please bless our study as we study Your Word as it relates to giving. Amen.

#### **Objectives of this Study:**

Helping God's people...

- understand the meaning and blessings of tithing.
- understand the difference between giving our tithes and giving our offerings.
- understand the different tithes given in the Old Testament.

#### **Introduction**

Throughout Scripture, God exhorts His followers to give generously to those in need and to His Church. Giving is an expression of our faith in, our love for, and our gratitude to the Lord for who He is and all that He has done for us through His Son Jesus. Tithing is the practice of honoring God by faithfully giving one tenth of our incomes to Him. Certainly we can honor and worship God even if we give less than the tithe as we give willingly and joyfully through faith. The tithe, however, is a meaningful benchmark and a Biblically based guide for our giving—a goal both to attain and surpass. With God's help, we can make a commitment to begin the journey of faith and become tithers and even go beyond the tithe. As our trust and faith in the Lord grow, so will our giving.



In the Old Testament, the tithe was given from everything produced by the fields, the flocks, and the herds. One tenth of what was produced from a harvest, fruit from the trees, and the raising of animals was acknowledged as holy (Leviticus 27:30). The tithe was to be taken off the top, from the firstfruits of one's labor, not from the leftovers. The giving did not represent the giving of something that belonged to the people, but rather, the tithe was the portion God commanded to be returned to Him and an acknowledgment that everything that was harvested or raised already belonged to the Lord. Tithing was the minimum amount required in God's Word. The Bible doesn't equate the tithe with the ultimate goal in giving, but only the starting point.

As New Covenant Christians we are not required to tithe, but many Christians have reclaimed the tithe. Tithing is a spiritual discipline prompted by love as an act of worship and praise to the Lord.

When we tithe out of faith with love and gratitude for our Savior, we honor the Lord. If we tithe out of duty or as a way to earn our salvation, the tithe is a meaningless empty gesture, just like all good works done apart from faith. Outside of a relationship built on faith in Jesus, tithing has no purpose. The tithe acts as a benchmark or a guide for our giving, and, in a miraculous way, as we act on that benchmark, the tithe, our faith matures, and we are changed from being takers to being givers. Through faith, we give joyfully and generously. We stop saying, "Do I have to give?" and begin saying, "I want to give."



## Questions for Discussion:

1. Who taught you the importance of giving to the Lord?
2. How would you contrast the motivation for giving the tithe between the Old and New Testaments?
3. If God's people are no longer commanded to tithe, why do people continue to tithe or even give beyond the tithe?

## Tithes and Offerings

Often in church worship folders, we see the words "tithes and offerings" when the offering is to be received. The words "tithes and offerings" refer to two different types of giving.

### Tithes:

The word "tithe" refers to our ongoing contributions. We may be giving less or more than the tithe, but our regular contributions to our churches are necessary in order for our churches to minister to the church and those outside the church. The Apostle Paul clearly sets forth New Testament truths regarding giving. He writes, "*On the first day of every week, each of you is to put something aside and store it up, as he may prosper*" (1 Corinthians 16:2). The first truth is that of regular giving—Paul mentions weekly. God expects us to give on a regular basis from the incomes we receive. When we commit to tithing, God's check is the first check written from our incomes, whether it's weekly, twice a month, or monthly.

A second truth is stated in these words "*each of you.*" No one is too poor to give something. Any gift given with the proper motive is valuable in God's sight. "*For if the readiness is there, it is acceptable according to what a person has, not according to what he does not have*" (2 Corinthians 8:12).

We are also directed to give proportionately of our earnings, which is a third truth. Paul's words are "*as he may prosper.*" The tithe provides a benchmark for proportionate giving.

### Offerings:

In contrast to tithes, offerings are special gifts made on an irregular basis. Offerings are those gifts that we give above our regular contributions. Offerings are for special needs and purposes. For example, offerings may be collected for individuals within a church who need financial support due to job losses or health issues. Offerings may be collected for missionaries or physical changes or maintenance to a church building. Our offerings may go to needs within our churches, or they may be directed outside of our churches.

## Questions for Discussion:

4. What is the distinction between tithes and offerings?
5. Read Exodus 25:1-2 and 1 Chronicles 29:3-6. What moved the people to give offerings for the Tabernacle and the Temple?
6. What are three giving truths found in 1 Corinthians 16:2?

## Tithes One, Two, and Three

God's people in the Old Testament gave more than one tithe. The first of these was God's tithe, a tithe for the support of God's house and work (Leviticus 27:30-33; Numbers 18:21-26). The second tithe was a festival tithe (Deuteronomy 12:5-19; 14:22-27). The festival tithe was to be brought to the religious center

and there eaten in a ceremonial feast marked by an expression of religious joy. The final tithe was a tithe of mercy for those less fortunate. This tithe was made every third year and was made as a tithe for charity (Deuteronomy 14:28-29; 26:12-15). Put the three tithes together and you get total contributions of 23 1/3 percent annually.

### **Thank Goodness God Is Not a Tither**

God didn't give us a tenth of what He had. God did not have ten sons from whom He gave one to the world for its salvation. God did not decide to give one tenth of His possessions for people to use in order to sustain life. He gave us 100 percent because, *"For God so loved the world that He gave His only Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life"* (John 3:16). God is a God of love Who withholds nothing from us. *"He Who did not spare His own Son but gave Him up for us all, how will He not also with Him graciously give us all things?"* (Romans 8:32). He also promises never to leave us or forsake us (Hebrews 13:5). Even though He gives us 100 percent, He seeks only a partial return from us. How can we withhold gifts from our Heavenly Father Who gives and keeps on giving?

### **Questions for Discussion:**

6. Read Genesis 28:10-22. Jacob promised to give God a tithe under what condition? What appears to be his motivation?
7. Read Amos 4:1-5. What did the prophet Amos warn concerning tithing?
8. Read Malachi 3:8-10. What were the people doing that caused God to chastise them through Malachi? How were they robbing God?
9. Read Malachi 3:10-12. What does God promise for those who faithfully give their tithes and offerings? Express these blessings in terms of your life today.
10. What is something new about tithing that you learned from this study?

**Closing Prayer:** Dear Heavenly Father, we thank You for the time that we've had today to study Your Word. May Your Word strengthen and empower us to be generous. In Jesus' precious and holy name we pray. Amen.

## Bible Study 2

# Whose Money Is It Anyway?

**Prayer:** Dear Heavenly Father, You call us to live lives of gratitude, yet we are prone to take for granted all of our wonderful blessings. Forgive us and enable us to be faithful with the blessings that You have entrusted to us. Give us joyful, giving hearts. Amen.

### Objectives of this Study:

Helping God's people

- understand that God is the creator and source of all things.
- understand that through our giving we are merely returning to God.
- understand how foolish we can be in God's eyes.

### God Is the Source

It is so easy for us to have the attitude that we, rather than God, own the things we possess. Each of us may believe that it is my car, my house, my computer, and my money. After all, didn't our hard work and sweat make it possible for us to acquire all that we have? Since our names are on the titles of our cars and houses, doesn't that mean that we own those things? Only through the faith that God gives us are we able to understand and accept the words of Psalm 24:1: *"The earth is the Lord's and the fullness thereof, the world and those who dwell therein."* As King David said in his prayer: *"For all things come from You, and of your own have we given you"* (1 Chronicles 29:14). We read in Haggai, *"The silver is Mine and the gold is Mine," declares the Lord of hosts* (Haggai 2:8). As stewards, we merely manage what He entrusts to us. God has not relinquished His ownership.

While still retaining His ownership, God has given us the ability to acquire and possess many things. Moses reminded the Israelites of this reality: *"Beware lest you say in your heart,, 'My power and the might of my hand have gotten me this wealth' You shall remember the Lord your God, for it is He Who gives you power to get wealth, that he may confirm His covenant that He swore to your forefathers, as it is this day"* (Deuteronomy 8:17-18). Along with all His gifts, including our bodies and our intelligence, God adds to them our desire and ability to work. It is only by God's grace that we possess anything.

How we answer the question regarding the ownership of our money is a pivotal question in our lives. Will we acknowledge God's ownership and control? If we see our possessions as belonging to ourselves, we develop an attitude that leads us to be less willing to give than those who see themselves as managers rather than owners. This attitude can even develop into a selfish habit of hoarding our wealth. Through the working of the Holy Spirit, we can receive the strength to turn the control of our money over to the Lord.

Maintaining a proper view of money and possessions and managing them in God-pleasing ways are serious challenges that face all Christians. By God's providence, people have and make different amounts of money, but we all have to deal with the same questions:

- What do I do with my resources?
- How should I spend my money?
- What percentage is the Lord calling me to give?

These questions test our faith and walk with the Lord. When God's ownership is acknowledged, financial decisions become spiritual decisions. Through God's gift of faith, we are equipped and enabled to have a proper view of money and to give generously. As recipients of God's gifts, we understand that, through our tithing, we are merely returning to Him what He has already given to us.

## Questions for Discussion:

1. In what ways will the perspective of ownership affect the use of your money?
2. How can society influence how you use and give your money?
3. How did the following people view the ownership of their money?  
Rich Young Ruler (Luke 18:18-25)      Poor Widow (Luke 21:1-4)  
Barnabas (Acts 4:36-37)      Ananias and Sapphira (Acts 5:1-11)

## Is God Calling Us Foolish?

In the Parable of the Rich Fool found in Luke 12:13-21, Jesus taught a lesson about the importance of acknowledging God's ownership of our possessions and the damaging effects of being greedy for more. In the parable, Jesus told about a successful farmer who had so much excess grain that he decided to tear down his existing barns to build bigger ones so he could store it. His sin was not in protecting his investment by building bigger barns. His sin was his failure to acknowledge God as the provider and owner of all that he had, his indifference to those in need around him, and his greed for more. Because he placed his trust in himself and his possessions instead of God, Jesus called him a "rich fool." The farmer's self-centeredness and selfishness are revealed in his repeated use of the words "I" and "my." His life was centered only on himself.

The Rich Fool never discovered the real meaning of life. As Proverbs 28:11 states, "*A rich man is wise in his own eyes,*" but to Jesus the wealthy farmer was a fool. Jesus said, "*For what does it profit a man to gain the whole world and forfeit his soul?*" (Mark 8:36). The material goods that the Rich Fool passionately pursued were left to others when God took his life. What foolishness! Of what value was his wealth to him when God appeared and said, "*Fool! This night your soul is required of you and the things you have prepared, whose will they be?*" (Luke 12:20). The Rich Fool saw his wealth as his own and didn't even acknowledge God. He lost all his wealth, which was the focus of his life, and forfeited his soul as well.

In our own lives, are we building bigger barns so that God is calling us fools? Our "barns" may not store grain; they might hold our luxury cars, the mansions we live in, the retirement accounts we're funding. Regardless of what it is we hold dear, if we fail to acknowledge that God is the owner and in control of our lives and if worldly pursuits have become overly important, the label of "fool" is applicable to us. We may not be as rich as the Rich Fool, but we can still be fools.

## Questions for Discussion:

4. What was the attitude of the Rich Fool toward his possessions? (Luke 12:13-21). What does his use of the pronouns "I" and "my" reveal about him?
5. Was it okay for him to be building bigger barns? Why? Why not?
6. How can you tell if things are becoming too important?
7. Read Matthew 6:33. How does this verse help you put things in perspective?
8. What are some ways that you can be trustworthy with worldly wealth?
9. Which of your possessions is most difficult for you to relinquish to God?

**Closing Prayer:** Lord, forgive us for allowing the things of this world to become overly important to us. In the name of the One Who died for us, Jesus. Amen.

## Bible Study 3

### *Why Tithing Is Relevant Today*

**Prayer:** Lord, Your gifts to us never stop coming. We thank You for the most indescribable gift, the gift of Your Son, Jesus. May Your love and generosity empower us to honor You with our lives and blessings. Help us to grow in our generosity so we can experience the wonderful joy in giving. We ask that You bless this study as we discuss how important it is that we give our first and best to You. In Your precious name we pray. Amen.

#### **Objectives of this Study:**

Helping God's people

- understand that Jesus affirms the tithe.
- Understand that the tithe incorporates giving truths.

#### **What Does Jesus Say about Giving?**

In contrast to the Old Testament where tithing is often referenced, tithing is rarely mentioned in the New Testament. In one instance, while not negating the importance of the tithe, Jesus stressed to the Pharisees that the inner motive is what matters, not the outward act. He said, *“Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you tithe mint, dill and cumin, and neglected the weightier matters of the law—justice, mercy and faithfulness. These you ought to have done, without neglecting the others.”* (Matthew 23:23). Jesus was critical of the Pharisees who tithed but only in a legalistic and hypocritical way, keeping the letter of the Law, but ignoring the Spirit of it—the practice of justice, mercy, and faithfulness. He affirmed the tithe but not for the reasons the Pharisees were doing it. Jesus did not suggest that the Pharisees stop tithing. Instead, He attacked their self-righteous motivation for tithing. Tithing is pleasing to God only when it is done out of love and faith within a relationship with Jesus.

#### Jesus said . . .

*“Everyone to whom much was given, of him much will be required; and from him to whom they entrusted much, they will demand the more”* (Luke 12:48). Jesus is saying that God expects more from those to whom He has given more. Those with large incomes and wealth are obviously more able to give more than those with less. Tithing on a small income such as \$15,000 is much more difficult financially than tithing on a \$250,000 income.

#### Jesus said . . .

*“Truly I tell you, this poor widow has put in more than all of them. For they all contributed out of their abundance, but she out of her poverty put in all she had to live on”* (Luke 21:1-4). Jesus, who had been watching, said that the widow *“put in more than all the”* rich people even though she gave only *“two very small copper coins.”* How could this be so? Because she gave out of her poverty; she gave God all the money she had for her basic necessities. Jesus commends giving that affects one's lifestyle. If we choose to give only from our surplus, we are missing Jesus' message on giving.

#### Jesus said . . .

*“It is more blessed to give than to receive”* (Acts 20:35). We give because God first gave to us. *“For God so loved the world that He gave...”* (John 3:16). Through the working of the Holy Spirit in our lives, we are empowered to give, and God Who has already given us so much gives us even more blessings for our faithful giving. One of the blessings that we receive through our giving is the true joy that comes from giving. There is joy in receiving gifts but even more joy in giving them.

#### **Questions for Discussion:**

1. What are some right and wrong motives for giving?
2. Read Matthew 23:23. What was the point that Jesus was making about tithing?
3. What can the lack of giving represent?

## **The Tithe Encompasses God's Giving Truths**

When we tithe, we use the giving truths that God has given to us to follow.

Priority Giving: We are to give to God first. God commands His people: "*The best of the firstfruits of your ground you shall bring into the house of the Lord your God*" (Exodus 23:19). In a non-agricultural society, rather than bringing in our crops, we give from the firstfruits of our income.

Proportionate Giving: The Apostle Paul wrote, "*For if the readiness is there, it is acceptable according to what a person has, not according to what a person does not have*" (2 Corinthians 8:12). We are called to respond to give from the blessings God gives. Checking our wallets to see what we have available to give on Sunday morning as the offering plates are passed is contrary to the giving that Scripture commands. What we give is to be predetermined and intentional. In our planning, the tithe acts as a guide.

Regular giving: Paul wrote, "*On the first day of every week, each of you should set aside and store it up, as he may prosper...*" (1 Corinthians 16:2). In both the Old and New Testaments, God asks for disciplined and regular giving. Moses said, "*They shall not appear before the Lord empty-handed*" (Deuteronomy 16:16).

## **Is God Calling You to Tithe?**

The portion of your income that you give to the Lord is between you and Him. As you spend time reading God's Word and in prayer seeking His guidance, He will guide you in what you can and should give. Your spiritual maturity and your financial situation are major determinants in deciding what you give. Because God knows your spiritual and financial situations, He will not call upon you to give more than you are able.

## **Questions for Discussion:**

4. Why is faith a bigger factor in your giving than your financial condition?
5. It has been said that tithing is a spiritual discipline that helps you stay connected to the Lord. How?
6. Read 2 Corinthians 8:1-7. Why were they able to give so generously? What does it mean to give yourself to the Lord?
7. Read Proverbs 3:9-10; Malachi 3:10; Luke 6:38; 2 Corinthians 9:6. What does God promise to those who give to Him faithfully and generously?
8. In what ways do your spending and giving reflect your values?
9. What do the giving truths discussed above direct you to do?
10. Should you give more or less under grace than under the Law? Why?

**Closing Prayer:** Lord, we thank You for this study and the opportunity to grow in Your Word as it applies to our giving. Help us to commit our lives and resources to serve and honor You. Grant us the faith that empowers us to seek Your will for our lives. In Your name we pray. Amen.

## Bulletin Messages

Sunday May 13th

### **Tithing Sunday: 10% on 6/10**

As God's people, we give because God gave to us first through His creation and then through the most indescribable gift—the gift of His grace through His Son, Jesus. As created and redeemed people, we give

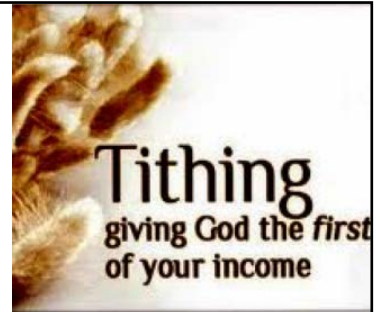
out of gratitude and thanksgiving for His lavish love for us. Our giving honors and worships our Lord. Giving supports His Church, spreads the Gospel, and helps those in need. **To help all of us grow in the grace of giving, we are encouraging everyone to give 10% on 6/10 (tithe on Sunday, June 10).** When we give faithfully and generously, God promises to bless us spiritually. May God grant us all giving and generous hearts.



Sunday May 20th

### **Tithing Sunday: 10% on 6/10**

As Christians, we need and desire spiritual disciplines. The tithe is a spiritual discipline that helps us put our lives under the lordship of Jesus. As New Testament Christians, we acknowledge that all we have are blessings from God. However, while we confidently proclaim that 100 percent belongs to the Lord, we may struggle with deciding what dollar amount to write on our checks to the Lord through our church. The tithe is a benchmark that helps us determine a proportionate amount to give. To help us grow in the grace of giving and to give proportionately, we are designating **Sunday June 10<sup>th</sup> as Tithing Sunday**. May God grant us all the desire to embrace the discipline of tithing.

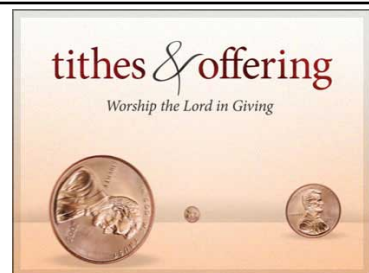


Sunday May 27th

### **Tithing Sunday: 10% on 6/10**

God continuously invites us into a close relationship with Him. In order to express our gratitude to our Heavenly Father and to affirm that relationship, we give cheerfully, regularly, and proportionately of our firstfruits. As a benchmark for our giving, we use the tithe, which is one-tenth of our earnings. Tithing symbolizes the importance that we place on our relationship with the Lord.

**We are designating Sunday June 10<sup>th</sup> as Tithing Sunday.** We are encouraging our members to prayerfully consider giving to God through our church a tithe on that Sunday. May our faithful and generous giving help us all experience an even closer relationship with Jesus.



Sunday June 3rd

## **Tithing Sunday: 10% on 6/10**

Of all the verses that speak to the topic of tithing, Deuteronomy 14:22-23 NIV may set forth the most convincing argument for tithing. *“Be sure to set aside a tenth of all that your fields produce each year. Eat the tithe of your grain, new wine and oil, and the firstborn of your herds and flocks in the presence of the Lord your God at the place He will choose as a dwelling for His name, so that you may learn to revere the Lord your God always.”* Giving the tithe helps us to learn to honor and



revere God. Tithing is a reminder of Whose we are and why we are here. The tithe is instituted so that we may put God first in all things. May God’s blessings be with us as we learn to revere the Lord through our giving. **We are making Sunday June 10<sup>th</sup> a special day of giving by identifying that Sunday as Tithing Sunday.** Please prayerfully consider giving a tithe on that Sunday and the Sundays that follow.

Sunday June 10th

## **Tithing Sunday: 10% on 6/10**

Today is Tithing Sunday, when we are asking our members to give a tithe or one-tenth of their income. One of the reasons for tithing is that we can be kept from an intimate relationship with God while easily giving excessive attention to our possessions. Tithing is a discipline that pares away our obsession with things and frees us for a closer relationship with God. Tithing is an act that recognizes, first, that the things we accumulate do not bring happiness, and second, that a relationship with God and His creation is an enduring value and brings endless joy. Tithing gives evidence that we have our priorities straight. God’s wisdom leads us to discover that things of this world have no lasting value. May God grant such wisdom and strength to keep Him first in our hearts and our pocketbooks.



Place in the worship folder on either May 20, 27, or June 3.

### **The Tither's Surprises**

Tithing is the practice of honoring God by faithfully giving one tenth of our incomes to Him. The Christian who begins to tithe will be surprised:

1. At the amount of money he has for the Lord's work.
2. At the extent to which his own spiritual life deepens.
3. At the ease with which the nine-tenths that remains meets his own financial obligations.
4. At the ease with which he can give even more than one-tenth.
5. At the way in which tithing prepares him to be a faithful and wise steward over all his possessions.
6. At himself for not beginning to tithe sooner.

We pray that our **Tithing Sunday, June 10th** will be a blessing to you as we focus on God's Word regarding our giving.

If space is available, you may want to use some of the following in your worship folders:

**The tithe (giving one-tenth) is a guide to proportionate giving.**

“Every tithe of the land, whether of the seed of the land or of the fruit of the trees, is the Lord's; it is holy to the Lord.” (Leviticus 27:30).



**The giving of 10 one-tenth goes all the way back to the time of Abraham. Tithing is a guide for us as faithful stewards.**

“On the first day of every week, each of you is to put something aside and store it up, as he may prosper...” (1 Corinthians 16:2).



**To be prudent and wise with the money you earn, develop a plan to manage and give it wisely.**

“By wisdom a house is built, and by understanding it is established; by knowledge the rooms are filled with all precious and pleasant riches” (Proverbs 24:3-4).



**Giving generously to God is an act of worship and thanksgiving for all that God has done and entrusted to us.**

“Each one must give as he has decided in his heart, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver” (2 Corinthians 9:7).

**Generosity**  
changes everything

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## Lay Reader Talk (May 20<sup>th</sup>)

### **Tithing**

Over the next few weeks, we are going to be offering talks on tithing leading up to Tithing Sunday on June 10<sup>th</sup>. This morning I'd like to read a letter that a pastor received from one of his members. This is not a letter from a member here at our church, but, because the letter deals with the subject of tithing, I believe it is an appropriate letter to read.

Dear Pastor,

It has been a few months since I came to see you at your office to discuss one of the most difficult subjects my wife and I have ever struggled with, the subject of tithing. During these past months, and especially these past few weeks, the Lord has been telling us to step out in faith and tithe. We had many questions such as, "How can we afford to give 10% when our finances are in such a mess and we don't have the money to give?" We recently realized that our finances are in the state that they are because we haven't given that area over to the Lord. It has been difficult giving up that control. On Sunday three months ago we gave our first tithing check. Surprisingly to us, your sermon was titled that morning "Trust". It spoke directly to our hearts about the very issue God had been dealing with us. God also spoke to us that day through one of our devotional readings, which stated that "trust" involves letting go and knowing God will catch you. Well, pastor, on the following Wednesday the Lord showed us that by obeying Him and trusting Him He will be faithful to us. My wife received a surprise pay raise at work, which became retroactive for the previous four months. Therefore, she not only received a larger paycheck that day; she received an additional check, which included her retroactive pay raise. This is definitely God's message that He is pleased with our obedience and now has control of our finances. Thank you, pastor, for your words on this difficult and often sensitive subject. With much love,

Signed \_\_\_\_\_

Tithing is more an issue of trust than money. God knows that the most difficult area for us to turn over to Him is our finances. Therefore, He says to us in Malachi 3:10, "*Bring the full tithe into the storehouse, that there may be food in My house...until there is no more need.*"

God's message is clear. All we have to do is put our trust in Him, because He has given us a promise. The question for us is, can God trust you and me to obey Him? God may not provide so quickly financially as he did the couple in the letter, but, if we trust in Him, He promises to provide for our needs and to bless us.

Lay reader talk (May 27<sup>th</sup>)

## **Tithing –Is It for You?**

Before I share a few thoughts to encourage you to prayerfully consider tithing, I want to clarify first what tithing is. Perhaps you understand it to mean the giving of one-tenth of your income to the Lord. That's true. We receive a different and truer perspective, however, when we think of it as follows: It is the returning to the Lord one-tenth of all you have received from Him. When our focus is on what we have received both spiritually and physically from God rather than what we're encouraged to give Him, joy and gratitude replace that sense of obligation.

When we tithe, our thinking gets straightened around. We begin to put God in first place, and ourselves and our families, our needs and wants, fall into place behind the first priority.

When we place our tithes into the offering plate as an act of worship, we are not just giving money; we are witnessing to our faith in God. We are agreeing with Him that He can take care of us, that He won't let us flounder on our own, and that He will always be with us to provide for our needs.

We are saying to our fellow believers that we join with them in supplying the financial needs of our congregation so that the Word of God might be proclaimed, so that our church workers might be supported, so that those in need can receive help, so that our souls might be fed and nurtured, and so that the lost may hear the Gospel message.

When the tithe is practiced, a desire for even greater generosity fills us, for God doesn't have just the tithe, He now has the tither as well.

To help you grow in the grace of giving, you are encouraged to give ten percent of your income on Tithing Sunday, June 10<sup>th</sup>. Many of you are already tithing so this will be just a regular offering for you but for others this will be a special day in your journey as stewards to give back to God one-tenth of your income. God's people don't give to be blessed, but God's Word does promise that those who give faithfully and generously will be blessed.

Lay reader talk (June 3<sup>rd</sup>)

## **The Tither: God's Partner**

We are asking all of our members to consider prayerfully giving a tithe or one-tenth of your income next Sunday, June 10<sup>th</sup>. Certainly it is true that New Testament Christians are not commanded to tithe, but, throughout the Bible, Old and New Testaments, there are indications given by God Himself that the tithe is what God expects from each of us.

To those who do tithe, God gives even greater blessings. Ask a longtime tither if he plans to quit tithing, and the answer is invariably, "Never. Why would I want to miss out on God's blessings?" Hence the phrase, "Once a tither, always a tither."

What are those blessings? One comes in the form of joy in knowing that we have helped others and honored God through our giving. Another is the new attitude that God develops in us, a higher concept of life, a concept of being in partnership with God Himself.

We realize, of course, that God doesn't need our money, but He asks us to give it, so that we might have a part in the great work of bringing the Gospel to all the world. When God is my partner, I have a partner Who is almighty, all wise, all loving, and all faithful. Though I may have to endure trials and suffering, even then I will rejoice for God is with me working all things for my good (Romans 8:28).

As we exercise the faith to tithe, an even deeper faith grows as we look confidently toward the future, both on earth and in Heaven. This confidence we can help to bring to others as we faithfully tithe from the blessings God has entrusted to us.

Lay Reader Talk (June 10<sup>th</sup>)

## **Giving your Firstfruits**

Today is tithing Sunday, and we are asking our members to consider prayerfully giving a tithe or one-tenth of our incomes. When we tithe, we are giving God our firstfruits which God commands throughout Scripture. The word firstfruits is not a word that is used much today, but it was a common term used in a farming society in Biblical times when people depended heavily on the harvest. If the harvest was poor, the year would be a hungry one. If the harvest was good, they might be able to put some away for a bad year.

How would you react if your very life depended on the harvest? I suspect we might be reluctant to give any of it away. After all, what if there isn't enough? What if next year is worse? Especially, if I give away the very first part that I bring in, what if something happens (hail, flood, pillage) to the rest before I can gather it? We would want to save everything we could until we were certain that we were safe.

God knew that, but He commanded the Israelites to demonstrate their trust in Him. After all, if He could give them the first bushel of wheat, then He could provide them with the next nine bushels too. God commanded the Israelites to give Him the firstfruits of their harvest so that they would learn to trust Him – and so that they would show all of the people around them who was most important in their lives, and who was the true God Who provided their daily bread.

Very few of us are farmers today, and the sources of a modern farmer's income are often not dependent on a single crop. Yet, we still receive blessings from God, and God still wants us to show that we realize where our blessings have come from. He still wants us to show that we trust in Him for all we need. He still asks for our firstfruits.

Today the harvest of your work may come every Friday, or once or twice a month. But God still asks us to take from what we have been given and give back. He expects us to use His gifts to us to give glory to Him.

Lay Reader Talk (June 24)

## **Developing the Right Perspective**

On Sunday June 10<sup>th</sup>, we were challenged to give a tithe. By God's grace many of us gave above and beyond our weekly contributions and some of us for the first time gave a tithe. In the past few weeks, we've learned that tithing helps us acknowledge that God is the owner and all of life depends on Him. He controls all things and sustains all things. He wants us to trust in Him and through our giving we give evidence to that trust.

Giving is a challenge because we live with one of two perspectives: a worldly or an eternal perspective. Living with a worldly perspective implies that we "*store up for [ourselves] treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal*" (Matthew 6:19). Our culture tells us that the more things we own the happier we will be. If we take notice of that perspective and we live with a focus on the here and now, the things of this world become our treasure. With the attention on earthly treasures, our interest is in acquiring and hoarding treasures rather than giving them. In contrast, when we live with an eternal perspective, we store up our treasures in Heaven (Matthew 6:20-21).

By God's grace, we can break the grip that money and things can have over us and give cheerfully. By His grace, we can be freed from a worldly perspective which focuses on accumulating more and more treasures here on earth and that prohibits us from becoming generous givers.

Through faith, God enables us to see life from an eternal perspective which acknowledges Him as the source of all things. Understanding that God is the creator, owner, and controller of "*the world, and all who live in it*" (Psalm 24:1) motivates us to give to Him. Living with an eye to eternity changes our perspective regarding how we view and manage our money. From God's perspective, money should be used as a tool to help the needy and extend His kingdom. Not only is money to be used to provide for our needs, it should also be used to fund the mission efforts of telling others about Jesus' love.

As we spend time reading God's Word, praying to Him, and developing an eternal perspective, God will change us into generous people who honor Him by giving our first and best.

## Sermon for June 3, 2018

### Sermon: “A Tip or a Tithe”

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

The Word of the Lord for this stewardship education Sunday as we focus on tithing as New Covenant Christians is taken from Genesis 28:10-22. In verses 20-22, we read as follows:

*“Then Jacob made a vow, saying, “If God will be with me and will watch over me on this journey I am taking and will give me food to eat and clothes to wear so that I return safely to my father’s house, then the Lord will be my God and this stone that I have set up as a pillar will be God’s house, and of all that You give me I will give You a tenth.”*

Lord, sanctify us in truth. Your Word is truth.

A minister was walking along the beach on day and stumbled upon a lamp. Picking it up and wiping it off caused the lamp to shake and smoke, and a genie came out. The genie thanked the minister for this new-found freedom after years of captivity and offered him one wish.

The minister immediately said, “I’ve always wanted to visit the Holy Land, but I am afraid of flying and I get seasick just thinking about boats. So could you build a highway across the ocean so that I could drive to the Holy Land?”

The genie looked at him in surprise and shock and replied, “You must be kidding. Do you realize the engineering challenges that would have to be overcome to achieve that feat? Even I have limitations. Can’t you think of anything else to wish for?”

The minister thought for a few minutes and then said, “Okay, I know what I want. I wish for all the members of my church to become tithers.” To that the genie replied, “Do you want that to be a two-lane or four-lane highway?”

A couple invited some of their close friends to go with them to a popular restaurant. Both the food and service were great. When they had finished their meal and conversation, the host wrote out the tip on the credit card slip. As they left, the waiter gave them a warm and friendly smile implying that the tip was good and generous. This scene is played out in restaurants all across our country. The standard tip seems to be hovering around 20 percent or more.

As the couple who paid for the dinner was filling out their offering envelopes, it dawned on them that they paid a waiter for an hour or two of service four times what they were giving God in their weekly envelope. They gave the waiter the tithe and more, but to God they gave leftovers. There lies an irony that we make such a limited and poor response to God for all His goodness, mercy, grace, and love throughout our lifetimes and beyond, into eternity.

That perhaps is why a wise person once said, “Surely there is something wrong with our standard of values, when we compare what we spend for incidentals or amusements and what we return to almighty God.”

A tip or a tithe? For Jacob there was no hesitation about what his response to God's abiding presence would be. For us it seems to have become a more difficult decision. Jacob's story, you remember, is not about a saint so holy that he awakes to find himself in the presence of God because of his good actions. It is the story of a scoundrel who awakes with a startling sense of wonder as he realizes that God had visited him in his dreams in spite of all the mistakes he had made.

Jacob was in a bit of a jam because the choices he had made turned out to be selfish, calculating, and dishonest. His conniving had caught up with him. He had deceived his aged father, cheated his brother Esau, and was running for his life to escape the consequences. It is on the first night of his flight into the wilderness that he finds himself pursued not by Esau but by the grace of God. He has a vision of a ladder to heaven with angels ascending and descending. The Lord stood beside him and said, "*Know that I am with you and will keep you wherever you go...*" (Genesis 28:15). In amazement Jacob murmurs, "*Surely the Lord is in this place; and I did not know it*"

Jacob's situation is symbolic of the human condition threefold:

- a wrong relationship with things of this world
- a wrong relationship with people through deceit and dishonest dealing
- a wrong relationship with God by not acknowledging His presence and through our disobedience.

Yet, because of his vision, Jacob begins to see all he is and has are gifts from God. He promises to use the stone which was the pillow for his head as the foundation for a pillar in the building up of God's house. Then he says, "*...and of all that You give me I will give full tenth to you*" (verse 22). Here is one of the Biblical affirmations for what is known as a tithe.

We usually think of the tithe as that form of legalism that is no longer part of our lives as New Covenant Christians. The general assumption in many quarters of the church today is that the tithe is an expression of archaic demand, not the grace-filled redemption of the liberating Christ. Instead of a threatening ultimatum upon a fearful people or a capricious requirement for impoverished nomads, the tithe was a plan for salvation and security for a precarious, fragile nation. It set Israel apart from the barbarous and callous cultures that sought to engulf and destroy them in the land of promise. It was a gift from, rather than an extraction of, gifts. Douglas Johnson in his insightful work *The Tithe: Challenge or Legalism?* insists: "that the tithe of the Old Testament is a testimony to the interconnectedness of people and God. It incorporates a cycle of giving and receiving and using. It signifies a relationship that can't be content with using a strict formula from the past. The tithe, like the message of the Old Testament is a living witness of God." Tithing therefore is not driven by legalistic compulsion, but rather arises as the spiritual response of a thankful soul.

I realize that for many this topic is about as welcome as a snowstorm in June. The Biblical concept of the tithe is often understood as an ancient, archaic, legalistic intrusion into our lives, which is compulsory and restrictive, painful to ponder, and inappropriate for pastors to preach.

Hearing about it hits home. We are like the farmer who was asked if he had 200 cows would he give 20 to God? "Yes, of course!" he said. "If you had 100 cows would you give ten to God?" I most certainly would," was his response. "If you had ten cows would you give one to God?" "Now that's not fair," he said, "You know I have only ten cows!"

Our faith does not deny that economics has a place in the human condition. By the same token, it was Martin Luther who said that a religion that gives nothing, costs nothing, and suffers nothing is worth nothing.

Tithing places before us a standard by which we may center our lives in gratitude to God. Tithing doesn't have anything to do with a raising a budget or supporting a program. It has everything to do with making a spiritual response to God. Jacob's story is timeless and relevant because it describes how this impoverished soul chose to respond.

Tithing is not a barter with God. It is not a financial contract assuring an increase in profits if one participates. It isn't a mathematical formula for assuring the presence of God, nor a clever device for lining the coffers of the church. Tithing is essentially and fundamentally a testimony of faith in the creativity and goodness of God. What we do with what we have can be an outward and visible sign of God's inward and redeeming grace alive and well within us. This is when the distribution of what we have becomes sacramental.

Do you know that studies actually verify that the more money we make the smaller percentage we give to the church? That's right! In other words, the biggest percentage givers to our church are those who have the smallest incomes. I don't say that to embarrass anyone. It's a fact. The biggest percentage givers in our church are not the big-salaried people with fine jobs, as you might guess, but the average member. In some instances you would be thrilled to know what some of our retired people are giving, and others who are on limited incomes.

Many will be able to identify with the story of a man who had pledged years prior to tithe all that he made to the work of the Lord. His first week's paycheck was \$200 and so he tithed \$20 that week. As he grew older and more prosperous, he got \$1000 a week, then \$2000 a week—over \$100,000 a year. All during that time he continued to tithe, until he finally rose to almost \$200 a week. Then one day he called his pastor and said, "I've got to talk to you." The pastor came to the man's beautiful home. They had a good time talking about old times, and finally the man came to the point. "Do you remember that promise I made years ago to tithe? How can I get released from it? It's like this," the man continued. "When I made that promise I had to give only \$20, but now I'm giving nearly \$200 a week to fulfill that pledge."

The old pastor thought for a moment, and then said to his friend, "I'm afraid we cannot get you released from that promise, but there is something we can do for you. We can kneel and ask God to shrink your income so you can afford to tithe \$5 once more."

Does your giving resemble a tip or a tithe? In the context of your own relation to God in Christ, you must decide. This is my prediction: if you do decide to accept the tithe as a standard, you will be beginning a grand Christian adventure in faith. When the tithe is practiced, a desire for even greater generosity fills you for God doesn't just have the tithe; He now has the tither as well. Furthermore, you will be amazed as to how happy you are living on the other nine-tenths.

Therefore, as I use God's word for my guide. I find that the principle is valid as a starting point in my faith journey. In giving a proportion, using the tenth as a guide, I can be spiritually comfortable knowing that I have not robbed God. Moreover, I have been emotionally comfortable knowing that,

no matter how large a budget our church may have, my share of the burden is simply God's share of my income. Finally, I have been physically comfortable, knowing from experience that our household gets along better on the nine-tenths of our blessings than we ever could with one-tenth more without God's benediction.

I am asking you to consider prayerfully giving a tithe on Sunday, June 10th. If you are already tithing or giving above the tithe then that Sunday will be no different, but for many it can be the start of something new and exciting in the journey as God's steward. It is my prayer that God will give you the strength to take a leap of faith in your giving and start giving God your first and best.

Our giving expresses our gratitude for Who God is and what He has done for us especially through His Son, Jesus. How blessed we are to have a God Who loves us and watches over us. In spite of all our blessings, we give less than we should, but God forgives us. He is patient with us, and He keeps moving us along our journeys as God's stewards.

May the Lord's blessings be with you as you steward the many blessings that God entrusts to your care.

## Sermon for “Tithing Sunday” June 10

### “How to Be Rich toward God”

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

We have identified this Sunday as **Tithing Sunday**. I pray that what we’ve shared on tithing these past few weeks has been educational and enlightening.

Our text for today is Luke 12:13-21: Especially verse 21 which reads, *“This is how it will be with anyone who stores up things for himself but is not rich toward God.”*

In our text, a man asks Jesus to command his brother to divide the family inheritance with him. Jesus ignores the argument and instead uses this situation to teach a vital lesson on the subject of greed. *“Watch out! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; a man’s life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions.”*

Jesus goes on to tell the story of an extremely successful and wealthy farmer. His fields produce abundant crops. He loves his work; he is energized by it; everything he does seems to turn to gold! I don’t know what opportunities he had to develop his spiritual life, but apparently he considered doing bigger and bigger deals a more valuable use of his time and energy than seeking God! This is an easy pattern to fall into, is it not?

The farmer’s fields continue to produce spectacularly! His operation grows beyond his wildest dreams. Eventually, he has to tear down his barns and build bigger ones to hold all his grain and goods! Bursting with satisfaction, he exclaims, “I’ve got tons of money in the bank; my future is secure; now I’ll eat, drink and be merry!”

Then God said, “You fool!”

This is shocking! A fool? At his funeral, everyone said, “He was a genius, a shrewd business man, a wise investor!” God called him a fool not because he was doing anything evil but because of his greed and being totally self-centered.

Notice that the world looks at things in a much different way than God does. Our Lord goes on to say, *“You fool! This very night your life will be demanded from you!”*

The question, then, is what good did his barn full of grains and goods do him then? What good did all his business deals do? He invested prime time and energy in storing up mountains of riches, but he had invested nothing in what mattered the most, and he stood before God empty-handed. He had vast barns and resources, but his spiritual bank account was empty. He was only storing up treasures on earth.

Jesus concludes, *“This is how it will be with **anyone** who stores up things for himself but is not rich toward God.”*

So here is what is important: we need to be rich toward God! What does that mean? It simply means to invest our lives into a relationship with God! We spend so much time and money investing in education, work, friends, families, pleasures, and we may be rich in these things, but are we rich toward God? Jesus taught, *“Store up for yourselves treasures in heaven...”* (Matthew

6:20). A disciple, one who is learning to be more like Jesus, needs to learn to invest his life in loving God and meeting the needs of others.

An important way for us to be rich toward God is to give faithfully and generously. To be rich toward God in our giving, we need to ask: “What is God asking me to give?” Giving one tenth or tithing was the amount given in both the Old and New Testaments. However, because of the freedom Jesus won for us through His life and death, we are no longer bound to Ceremonial Laws. So as New Covenant Christians, what is an appropriate percentage of our incomes to give that would show our gratitude to God for Who He is and what He has done for us through His Son Jesus? We are not commanded to tithe, but, just as Jesus encouraged the Pharisees to continue their tithing (Matthew 23:23), we are encouraged to use the tithe as a guide for our giving. It is important for us to remember that the amount or percentage we give is less important than our attitudes and motives for giving. God is honored even if we give less than the tithe when we give our gifts cheerfully and faithfully. Through the working of the Holy Spirit, we can grow in our giving so that we not only become tithers, but even go beyond it.

Embedded within the principle of tithing are giving principles found in Scripture that help us to be RICH TOWARD GOD.

1. We are rich toward God when we give to God **first**.

Exodus 23:19: *“Bring the best of the firstfruits of your soil to the house of the Lord your God.”*

In a non-agricultural society, rather than bringing in our crops, we give from the firstfruits of our income. We are to honor our commitment to God **before** buying the things we desire. Our great God Who gave His best does not value leftovers.

Our greediness can cause us to spend everything and be rich in possessions, but not have any left over to give. Budget the money to give to extend God’s Kingdom FIRST. That is not to be touched! If we do not budget and become intentional about our giving, we will end up giving haphazardly to God, and He will receive our leftovers.

How much should be budgeted?

For an answer to that question, we should understand, as I shared earlier, that the tithe acts as a benchmark for us. Though tithing is not commanded in the New Testament, many Christians see tithing as a healthy goal.

In 1 Corinthians 16:2 the Apostle Paul wrote: *“On the first day of every week, each one of you should set aside a sum of money in keeping with his income . . .”*

Jesus said in Luke 12:48: *“From everyone who has been given much, much will be demanded.”*

The greater the income you have, the more you are expected to give!

2. We are rich toward God when we **give generously**.

2 Corinthians 9:11: *“You will be made rich in every way so that you can be generous on every occasion, and through us your generosity will result in thanksgiving to God.”*

You might reason: “I’ve worked up to tithing, and now I can coast!” Not really! Ten percent is not the goal. Giving generously by God’s grace is the goal!

In Ephesians 4:28 Paul wrote: *“He...must work, doing something useful with his own hands, that he may have something to share with those in need!”*

The reason you have what you have is not just to experience a higher standard of living, not to buy a bigger house and bigger cars, but to have a higher standard of giving. God doesn’t prosper your business so that you can buy newer furniture, but God wants you to share some of those blessings so that you can have a greater impact on spreading the Gospel!

When we get a raise, we normally think, “Now I can afford that 50 inch TV.” We ought to think differently! A raise, now I can **give more!** In other words, having an \$80,000 salary does not have to be accompanied by an \$80,000 lifestyle. We need to think as disciples and ask ourselves, “How do I honor God by my lifestyle and my giving? How can I be rich toward God?” Someone once said that giving a tithe is greed insurance.

What is a generous percentage of your income? If you live in poverty, three percent may be generous; if you are wealthy, 30 percent may not be generous. If our mortgage payments, or any other payments, are so high we cannot afford to give generously, we may need to downsize!

Now, you should know that the Bible is not teaching us not to invest or prepare for emergencies and retirement, etc. We are to plan wisely for the future. Nor is the Bible teaching that we can’t have luxuries. I Timothy 6:17, 18: *“Command those who are rich in this present world not to be arrogant nor to put their hope in wealth, which is so uncertain, but to put their hope in God, Who richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment. Command them to do good, to be rich in good deeds, and to be generous and willing to share.”*

We need to keep a balance. We are to enjoy the pleasures of life as gifts from God and to be generous in giving.

3. We are rich toward God when we **give cheerfully**, *“...for God loves a cheerful giver”* (2 Corinthians 9:7).

The Greek: *hilaros*. God loves a hilarious giver! The church should never make people feel guilty about giving. We give under God’s grace and grace never threatens or condemns.

The principles of giving generously and cheerfully are beautifully illustrated in the following story:

Two brothers shared a field and a mill, and each night they evenly divided the grain they had ground together during the day. One brother lived alone; the other had a wife and large family. The single brother started thinking, “It isn’t really fair that we divide the grain evenly, because I only have myself to care for and my brother has children to feed.” So each night he secretly took some of his grain to his brother’s granary to see that he was never without.

The married brother said to himself one day, “It isn’t really fair that we divide the grain evenly, because I have children to provide for me in my old age, but my brother has no one. What will he do when he is old?” So every night he secretly took some of his grain to his brother’s granary. As a result, both of them always found their supply of grain mysteriously replenished each morning.

When we generously give our firstfruits to God with a proper attitude (cheerfully), we become rich toward God. So how much should we give? Well, here's the bottom line: God is pleased when we give our gifts from loving and thankful hearts. He wants us to give cheerfully and faithfully. The tithe acts as a Biblical benchmark and, if need be, an encouragement for us to grow in our giving.

Very few of us give as generously as we should; I know I don't. Very few of us obey God in any area as we should: Bible study, prayer, spiritual gifts, loving others – I don't do any of that very well, yet God still loves me. Even if you didn't give a cent, God would not love you any less. Christ died for all our sins, including our lack of generous giving! The Bible says, "*But God demonstrates His own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us*" (Romans 5:8). Christ effected the redemption of all mankind in that act of sacrifice. Therefore, we now count ourselves "*dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus*" (Romans 6:11), and the Holy Spirit working through Word and Sacrament, continues His work of sanctifying us.

As we grow as disciples, as we understand more and more what God has done for us in Christ, as we see the infinite love of God shown to us by the death of His Son, as we see that Jesus gave Himself, we are prompted by the Holy Spirit to respond by sharing the resources that God has given us to meet those in need. By God's grace given freely to us, we don't have to continue living as selfish people. God will transform our selfish hearts into hearts filled with a desire to share.

We give because it is a visual expression of the depth of our relationship with God, our maturity as disciples, our understanding of what is really important in life. It is becoming rich toward God!

May the power of the Holy Spirit work in us so can be generous people who are rich toward God.

And now may the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in the true faith until life everlasting. Amen.