

A GENEROUS LIFE – INTRO GUIDE TO TITHING

TOOL: INTRO TO TITHING

(Recommendation: Use this guide with your group to help create a foundational understanding of tithing.)

Built on scripture, this tool covers the background and fundamentals of the tithe so you can better understand the biblical concept and see how it might impact the way you view your finances today.

HERE'S HOW IT WORKS!

This guide uses scripture to provide insight and understanding of what tithing is, where the concept came from and why it's important for us to understand it as Christian today. By walking through this, people are challenged to think about giving and generosity as they are informed by what the Bible has to say about it.

SETTING THE FOUNDATION – TITHES VS. OFFERINGS

First, before we go anywhere together, let's make sure we understand what the word "tithe" actually means. Often people say, I'm going to give my "tithe" but based on the sole definition of the word, that may not be totally accurate. Additionally, you may also hear the word "offering" in a church setting. Both are biblical words and concepts, but it's important and worth pointing out that they aren't exactly the same thing.

So, to help us understand what might be meant by these words, let's review what the words mean:

- A "tithe" quite literally means a tenth, a fixed percentage or portion of one's income or increase. This is why you hear 10% as the number often talked about when people talk about giving – a tithe would be 10% of something.
- An "offering" is a vow or dedication to God typically outside of, or beyond, the tithe. This is a voluntary contribution that's not constrained by a set amount or fixed percentage.

BIBLICAL BACKGROUND AND HISTORY OF THE TITHE

To help us see where and how this idea was first introduced in the Bible, we are going to look at a lot of scripture together – so get your Bibles out and be ready to read some of the places we see this word show up. (If you're doing this with a group, I encourage you to read the Word aloud before making the observations together.)

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- Read [Genesis 14:19-20](#) and make observations as a group.
 - This is the very first place in the Bible we ever see the word “tithe”!
 - This takes place after Abram rescued Lot as he’s coming across the plains with lots of plunder and treasure from that journey.
 - In this story, Melchizedek gives a blessing that attributes Abram’s victory to the power of God. (Melchizedek is a very interesting character in the Bible that is worth looking into as well – some believe it was Jesus himself but what we know for sure is that he was no ordinary man and was a priest and king who’s name meant “King of Righteousness”.)
 - By Abram giving 10% (‘a tenth of everything’), he affirms the truthfulness of Melchizedek’s words and blessing.
- Now read [Hebrews 7:1-7](#) and make observations as a group.
 - In this text, Paul echoes the same story and the sentiment of the tithe though the reference of the collection of the tithe by the Levites.
 - Here, he makes the statement that the lesser is blessed by the greater.
- To keep going, read [Genesis 28:20-22](#) and make observations as a group.
 - This takes place after Jacob has his “Jacob’s ladder” experience at Bethel. It was a God moment that drove him to this response we just read.
 - Jacob made a vow to give God 10% of all his increase. He is acknowledging here that God is the giver of all, and his heart’s response is that is to give a tenth back to Him.

I want to pause here to make the point that these two instances (with Abraham and Jacob) are the first places we see the concept of tithing, and both took place BEFORE it was ever a part of the law. Since they were both led to give the tithe before it was ever a command, we can see that it was driven purely by their heart’s response to God. In these stories, it points to surrendered hearts.

However, we also know that tithing was a part of Old Testament law which was ushered in by the covenant made on Mount Sinai. Once the laws were in play, we see three types of tithes that were required by the people of Israel, each for a specific purpose. Let’s look at those together:

1. Levitical Tithe (Priestly Tithe) – Read [Leviticus 27:30-34](#)

- This establishes the principle of tithing as we most commonly think of it, requiring 10% of crops, livestock, and other produce (their increase) to the Levites/temple.

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- The act of this can also be found in other places in the Bible, including [Numbers 18:21](#), [Numbers 18:26](#) and [2 Chronicles 31:3-4](#). Read these to see this tithe in action.

2. The Feast Tithe (Eaten Tithe) – Read [Deut 14:22-27](#)

- This instructed the people to Set aside one-tenth of their crops each year and bring it to a designated place of worship and eat it there.
- This act would signify a complete dedication of that offering to God and allowed God's people to partake in a celebratory meal with their community, sharing the blessings from God.

3. The Charity Tithe (Poor Tithe) – Read [Deut 14:28-29](#) and [Deut 26:12](#)

- This instructed the people to set aside a tenth of their produce every third and sixth year of a seven-year cycle, so it could be given directly to the poor, widows, orphans, and foreigners within their community.
- This command shows God's heart for social welfare within a community.

Through these tithes that were a part of the law, we see how that God used the concept of "tithing" to put in motion a discipline that would honor Him and benefit His people.

There is often a debate around whether the tithe is still required today because we are not under the law and instead operate under the New Covenant (made through Jesus). However, as you work to come to your conclusion on what you think about the tithe, I want to resurface the point that we saw tithing before it was ever even required by the law – as an act that came out of the overflow of Abraham and Jacob's heart in response to God. Additionally, as we work through this, let's look to see what else we can learn about the concept.

While there isn't much in the New Testament on the specific topic of tithing, I do want to drive home the point that there is a TON that speaks to giving, generosity, and stewardship. We won't be drilling into those in this guide, but I encourage you to look at all of the places we are given instructions regarding those topics as I think it will speak to the heart of the matter as well.

But back to tithing in the New Testament, there is one place it's mentioned in red letters, spoken by Jesus Himself – so, let's look at that together:

- Read [Luke 11:42](#) and [Matthew 23:23](#) and make observations as a group.

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- Jesus is calling out the Pharisees (operating under the law) and addresses a heart issue they had regarding justice, mercy and faithfulness.
- However, in these verses I also think it's worth pointing out that He makes it clear that they should be found doing both the tithe and those things.

God is always after our heart! And typically, His rules, methods, and ways of doing things will challenge the innate desires of our flesh. Our finances are just one of the many things He desires to have lordship over – for His glory and to help us live fully surrendered.

ADDITIONAL SCRIPTURE THAT EMPHASIZES GIVING TO GOD:

When the Bible talks about giving to God, it instructs us to give our “first fruits” – meaning the stuff right off the top. The book of Proverbs alone references “first fruits” 22 times so we can conclude that this means something to God! Contextually, they were a part of an agricultural culture, so they knew that when things were harvested the first fruits of that is what God was talking about.

In the Old Testament when tithes were referenced as going to the “storehouse” (where tithes were collected) it would be the equivalent of the local church in today's culture.

Another point that is really cool and important to highlight on the topic comes from the book of Malachi.

- Read [Malachi 3:8-12](#) and make observations of the text as a group.
- Here we see that it is possible to rob God of tithes and offerings.
- God also tells us to test Him in this and promises blessing in return.
- This is the only place in the entire Bible that God invites us to test Him (and in fact, the Bible also says that people should not test God in other ways).

This concept of tithing was so God-designed that He promises to back it in powerful ways! He promises blessings will follow our obedience in this.

GOD'S HEART FOR US ON THE MATTER:

As a reminder, when God sets up a principle, it's for US – not for Him. Since He already owns everything on earth, He doesn't need our money or stuff but the design of this (as with all principles He outlines for us in the Word) are for our GOOD.

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Through the act of tithing, it will grow us in several ways but here are some you should talk about and discuss as a group. Read each of the below areas of growth and as a group talk about how you think God will grow you in these as you become a giver:

- Accountability
- Discipline
- Honesty (typically no one knows if/how you participate in this but God)
- Diligence
- Faithfulness
- Trustworthiness
- Freedom (having a spirit of generosity sets us free from an addiction to things and stuff)

The rest of the New Testament doesn't talk about percentages or amounts, but it does talk a ton about money and stewardship! Remember that God is always after our hearts and by being obedient and generous with our money, we have an opportunity to honor Him and express our trust in Him in a unique way.

Read [Luke 16:10-13](#) and [Matthew 6:19-21](#) as a group and make some final observations together.

A recent study showed that only 5% of churchgoers tithe in America. (Just imagine how much more the church could impact our world if that number were larger!) However, another interesting stat was that of people that do tithe, 77% of them actually give more than 10%. This indicates that those who live generously, likely grow even more generous.

ADDITIONAL TIPS AND TRICKS:

- Share personal God stories about giving and generosity – how have you seen Him show up in your own lives as you 'test' Him in your finances.
- Ask each other if/how God might be speaking to you in all of this.
- Ask if there any action you think God wants you to take in your finances.