

Understanding what it means to be a good steward of God is an important part of our life in Christ at Church of the Messiah. A good summary of one of our foundational values states:

“We believe we are entrusted by God, individually and as a church, to be God’s stewards. We prayerfully and faithfully manage God’s gifts of time, talent (spiritual gifts), and money for His Kingdom. The Biblical tithe is the basis of our monetary giving to the church. Members discover and use their spiritual gifts, their talents and time for building up Christ’s body.”

Our concept of stewardship is not limited to our use of money. It involves much more. However, the Bible addresses the issue of our finances over 600 times. Jesus talked more about money than anything else except the Kingdom of God. What does the scripture say about stewardship? It can be summarized as follows:

God is the giver of all that we have. What we possess is not earned, but is a gift of God. In the wilderness before they entered the land of milk and honey and gained riches beyond anything they had known before, the people of Israel heard this warning from Moses, “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” (Deuteronomy 8:17-18). Or as Paul put it, “What do you have that you did not receive? If then you received it, why do you boast as if it were not a gift?” (Corinthians 4:7).

We are accountable to God for what we do with what He has given us. We are stewards not owners. Jesus told the story of a master who entrusted three of his servants with his wealth, giving to one five talents (each talent

was worth about 20 years’ wages), to another two talents and to the third one talent. After a time, the master came to settle accounts with them. To two of the servants who wisely used the talents he said, “well done, good and faithful servant; you have been faithful over a little, I will set you over much; enter into the joy of your master.” But to the third who hoarded the talents he said, “You wicked and slothful servant...! So, take the talent away and give it to him who has the ten talents” (Matthew 25:14-30). Or as Paul tells us, “It is required of stewards that they be found trustworthy” (1 Corinthians 4:2).

One aspect of being a trustworthy steward is giving. Our giving is a part of God’s will for us and a sign of our faith and love for God.

Jesus said, “Fear not, little flock, for it is your Father’s pleasure to give you the kingdom. Sell your possessions and give alms; provide yourselves with purses that do not grow old, with a treasure in heaven that does not fail, where no thief approaches and no moth destroys. For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also” (Luke 12:32-34).

God wants us to give in thankfulness and joy. Paul writes, “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 8:1-4).

God has given to each member of his church spiritual gifts to be used for the common good of the church (1 Corinthians 12:7). We are not to be ignorant about our gifts (1 Corinthians 12:1) but should use them in ministry so that the church will grow and so that others will come to know Christ. “Each one should use whatever gift he has received to

serve others, faithfully administering God’s grace in its various forms” (1 Peter 4:10). So, we are called to give the money we receive and give of our time and talents as well.

As we give, we are called to tithe, to return to God at least 10% of what He gives us. “All the tithe of the land, whether of the seed of the land or of the fruit of the trees, belongs to the Lord; it is holy to the Lord” (Leviticus 27:30). Jesus said, “Woe to you Pharisees, because you give God a tenth of your mint, rue and all other kinds of garden herbs, but you neglect justice and the love of God. You should have practiced the latter without leaving the former undone” (Luke 12:42).

Questions and Answers About Tithing

What is tithing? Tithing is returning to God 10% of our income as a way of expressing our joy and thanksgiving for all that the Lord has given to us. The Bible poses the question, “What shall I give to the Lord for all His bounty to me?” (Psalm 116:12). The Bible’s answer is for us to offer our very lives to the Lord and then to offer the tithe as a sign of our faith, love, and obedience to God.

What is the Biblical basis for tithing? Tithing goes all the way back to Abraham, who offered 10% of all that he had to God. Abraham had experienced such blessings and had such love for God that he freely gave a tithe to show his thankfulness. God then commanded all His people to tithe. The tithe is to be taken “off the top”: the first ten percent is holy and belongs to the Lord. (Leviticus 27:30). The tithe is important for us spiritually, and it is also God’s way of meeting the costs of building and maintaining the house of worship, supporting the priests, and caring for the poor.

What was Jesus’ attitude toward tithing? Jesus did not belabor the issue of tithing, because He assumed that His people would already be tithing. Jesus spoke against those

who were so wrapped up in calculating their tithe that they had no concern for those in need around them. Instead, He taught the importance of tithing with a generous and compassionate heart (Matthew 23:23).

Does this call to tithe apply to the 21st Century Christian? Yes! Throughout history, the Church has affirmed the tithe as the standard for Christian giving. The Episcopal church at every level (international, national, diocesan and parish) has stated the tithe to be the standard for its members. At Church of the Messiah, members are committed to returning to God the Biblical tithe as a minimum. Many individuals and families of our parish are tithing and discovering the joy and freedom from anxiety about possessions that God promises to those who trust him.

“God is able to provide you with every blessing in abundance, so that you may always have enough of everything and may provide in abundance for every good work” (2 Corinthians 9:8).

How do I figure a tithe? Some have asked if the tithe is before or after taxes. In Biblical terms, even under the stiff taxes of the Roman Empire, God’s tenth came first. That is still the call for us today. The tithe is for the spread of Christ’s Kingdom. The prophet Malachi told the Israelites to “bring the whole tithe into the storehouse so that there would be food in my house” (Malachi 3:10). The storehouse would have been the treasury of the sanctuary. Since the local church is the primary vehicle for the spread of the Gospel and the making of disciples, we give our tithe to the church so that God’s work can be carried out.

How do I decide what to give? The first thing to do is pray. Pray with your family and ask God to guide you. God is concerned about your attitude toward giving. As St. Paul puts it, “Each one must do as he has made up his own mind,

not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver” (2 Corinthians 9:7). God does not want us to give begrudgingly, but freely, joyfully, and thankfully because of our great love for Him. In giving our money back to God we start with the tithe. In addition to this we give alms, gifts, and special offerings when we can and when the Lord asks us (2 Corinthians 8:1-24).

How do I tithe? The best way to tithe is to just do it and trust God to do his part. Anyone with income can tithe because we give 10% of what we have. Some people start by giving a smaller percentage and then in a matter of two or three years increase their giving until they reach the tithe. But whatever you give, it is a matter between you and God. It is a spiritual matter which expresses itself physically in who we are and how we trust and love God. In Malachi, 3:10, the Lord says, “Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse, that there may be food in my house. Test me in this,” says the Lord Almighty, “and see if I will not throw open the floodgates of heaven and pour out so much blessing that there will not be room enough to store it”.



STEWARDSHIP IS A SPIRITUAL MATTER

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