



STEWARDSHIP

Vol. 9 Edition 7 - August 2017



Tithing and the Mission of the Church

by Timothy Brooks, lead pastor at South Portland Church of the Nazarene in Maine (originally published on [The Foundry Community](#))

There is a growing sentiment that tithing—giving a minimum of 10 percent of your income as an act of worship—is an outdated practice based on Old Testament laws and regulations that do not match up with the New Testament or today’s culture. And that sentiment is spot on! If one were to read the book of Acts, for example (see 2:44 or 4:32), one would find that trust in the Spirit was so profound among early believers that they practiced giving 100 percent of their income to the church and trusting God and the people of God to provide!

Well, it turns out that most people aren’t too keen on that system either. Yet pastors and church boards are stuck trying to run church ministries, pay pastoral salaries, involve themselves in the local community, support denominational endeavors, and maintain buildings and facilities with dwindling finances. These days, even dedicated members of local churches think 10 percent is an oppressive amount. I suspect they’re correct. Ten percent is a large-enough chunk of money that you notice it’s missing when you run your budget. Giving such a large percentage takes nothing less than an act of faith.

The New Testament considers Abraham to be a person of such faith. When both Christian and Jewish people think of Abraham, they think of faith personified. Much of

this designation is rooted in his willingness to sacrifice his son Isaac at the peak of Mount Moriah. But what if Abraham didn't go to the top of the mountain with the intent to kill Isaac? What if he went in faith, trusting that God would provide an alternate sacrifice?

Abraham had journeyed with God for decades by this time in his story. When God asked Abraham to go, Abraham went, and God provided. When Lot took the better way, Abraham was rewarded. When Abraham defended the people of Sodom and Gomorrah, God listened. When God promised descendants, Abraham received. So perhaps it's feasible to imagine that, when God asked him to go to the top of the mountain with his son—who was a laughably lavish, late-in-life gift—Abraham didn't go to do the absurd in mourning. Perhaps he didn't wrestle with whether he should listen to God's call on his life. Perhaps, instead, his journey of faith led him to believe this God of love would provide the sacrifice along the way. That does not mean sacrificial giving is not hard, but it could mean that God does not ever ask us to give outside of divine partnership with us.

When tithing becomes a regular practice in their lives, God's nearness becomes even more evident to them.

Certainly the testimonies of those I have pastored live up to the idea that God gives to us as we partner with God. A couple in my church recently decided, against all mathematical and budgeting rationale, to begin tithing rather than simply giving. Within two months of this response to God, the wife received a raise beyond the extra they were giving. Another couple began tithing at \$10,000 a year. After the first year, when they admitted they were terrified to begin giving at that level, their tax refund came back in the amount of one dollar above what they had tithed for the year—which they took as affirmation of God's providence.

People like this are modern Mount Moriah stories. They have student loans, children, bills. God is asking to give from the care for their families, and over and over there is a ram in the thicket for them. They respond to God's call to give out of a trust that they have developed in their journeys with God. When God asks them to give, they do so because God has always provided more than they could see on their own. When tithing becomes a regular practice in their lives, God's nearness becomes even more evident to them.

Beyond journeying and partnering with God, there is an even more tangible reason to give a tithe: the church. The church is the body of Christ, the hope of the world, the mission of God. The church is not the peddler of God's plan and mission for salvation; the church is God's plan and mission for the salvation of the world. Jesus said, "For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also" (Matthew 6:21). So rarely do we Christians recognize that we often think our treasure is better served in our bank accounts than in God's mission for the world. We assume our needs and struggles are our own responsibility and that God's responsibility is to maintain the church. Yet this is so rarely how God works.

It is hard to live in faith, it is hard to give sacrificially, and it is easy to decide to help yourself.

God, by testimony of Scripture and church history, invites God's people to partner in faith and trust with God's works in and for the world. God does not force his will upon people but calls people to be faithful even to the point of absurdity. As hard as this is to fathom, we come to see that God's work is astounding through faithful people who are

willing to sacrificially trust and partner with God. So, when considering tithing, we really must ask: is our heart in our own bank account, or is our heart in the mission of the church? If we are not tithing, we must begin to ask if we are more interested in self-sufficiency through our own power or if we are truly invested in sacrificially giving to mission of God for the sake of the world. Which is the yearning of your heart?

As a pastor, tithing strikes me as controversial because it is hard. It is hard to live in faith, it is hard to give sacrificially, and it is easy to decide to help yourself. But the testimonies of those who live in the power of faith remain strong reminders of God's providence. Those who live in radical trust of God tend to be those most in tune with God's presence. Perhaps the presence of God is the true treasure for which our hearts yearn. Such is life with a God whose kingdom is opposed to the structures of this world.

Most likely God is not asking you to bring your firstborn to the top of a mountain, but the absurdity of what God is calling us to do continues to boggle our rational minds. Yet the continued testimony of those with whom I have journeyed is that God's providence and presence are far sweeter than the feelings of personal achievement or accumulation. Perhaps we should be old-fashioned enough to trust God and the church with our tithe—because maybe God is serious when he promises to “throw open the floodgates of heaven and pour out so much blessing that there will not be room enough to store it” (Malachi 3:10). Perhaps, too, those blessings will be more than financial blessings.



ECFA offers ChurchEXCEL as free resource subscription

If you previously subscribed to the Evangelical Council for Financial Accountability (ECFA) Silver Subscription program, you may already be familiar with the great resources they offer Nazarene churches. ECFA recently updated their resources and now offer ChurchEXCEL as a free resource subscription for churches. Available through Pensions & Benefits USA, churches enrolled in the subscription receive access to ECFA's knowledge center library, webinars, ebooks, tax guides, and much more.

[Click here](#) to read more about this valuable resource and sign up for your free subscription.



Video: The Invested Life

Bill McCoy sensed a call to medical missions more than 30 years ago through the influence of John Crouch. Today, Bill serves at Kudjip Nazarene Hospital in Papua New Guinea alongside Mark, John's son. [Click here](#) to read more.



Nazarene churches establish more than 100 schools in DRC

Today, there are 110 schools sharing the gospel and educating students in the seven Nazarene districts of the Democratic Republic of Congo. [Click here](#) to read more.



Quote: Martin Luther

"I have held many things in my hand, and have lost them all; but whatever I have placed in God's hands that I still possess."