



## Notes on Giving

### *Dr. John Allen shares his personal and Biblical beliefs on giving*

When it comes to living as the people of God, the Bible addresses money and giving more than any other subject. The word translated “to give” in all its forms is the most frequently used word in the New Testament.

Yet giving is also one of the most controversial subjects in the modern church, and I get more questions on it than any other topic.

#### **Why give?**

It seems to me the Bible says so much about giving for two reasons:

First, God has created us in God’s generous and caring image. We were created to give ourselves away to others.

Second, we live in a broken world where our self-centered desires try to dominate. We live in tension between what God has created us to be and what the world is trying to shape us to be.

Provisions for offering the tithe (giving 10 percent of your income), are first found in Deuteronomy. The tithe is an offering that acknowledges God’s ownership of creation. It is to support the Old Testament Temple, and later, the New Testament Church. Undoubtedly, the tithe is an outward testimony that all possessions belong, ultimately, to God. You can find more about the origins of the tithe in *Leviticus 27:30-33; Numbers 18:21-32; Deuteronomy 12:1-18, 14:22-29, 18:1-4, and 26:12-15.*

The two most prominent texts regarding tithing are Amos 4:4 and Malachi 3:8-10. Amos refers to the importance of the generous, grateful spirit that is necessary when giving the tithe. Malachi deals with the reluctance of giving the tithe, comparing it to stealing from God. Both warn of severe consequences that undermine our relationship to God and our genuine caring relationships with others.

In the gospels, Jesus calls for an offering even greater than the tithe, basing his call on the attitude behind the sacrifice, rather than the legalism of the tithe. Jesus says, “Go sell what you possess and give it to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me.” (*Matthew 19:16-22*)

The apostle Paul spells out what is clearly a spiritual law of return. He compares giving to the harvest, writing, “...the one who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and the one who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully.” (*2 Corinthians 9:6*). Paul continues by pointing out the importance of giving with a cheerful heart (*2 Corinthians 9:7*).

Both Jesus and Paul point to the dangers inherent to reliance upon the structures of this world rather than on God. They would ask, “Are you dependent on God?” and “Why?”

#### **What to give?**

For my wife Tanya and I, deciding what to give has been a journey of sorts. I was taught about giving and tithing to the church as a child, and in college, I began to experiment with how much I gave. Though I found giving to be a very rewarding experience, I was not as regular as I should have been.

Early in our married life, Tanya and I committed to become regular givers to the work of the church. It took us almost five years to reach giving 10 percent of our income to the church.

Our commitment to tithing has grown out of our understanding of the Biblical mandate for tithing. Biblically, the tithe is figured on first fruits, before anything else is purchased or paid. So we believe that when the Bible speaks of giving “first fruits,” it means we should give 10 percent before anything else is taken out.

Another of the problematic questions about giving is whether giving to other organizations in the community are considered part of the tithe. There is no real clear answer in the Bible, but some passages refer to an “offering” that would be taken for the poor or for rebuilding the temple. Many believe this indicates the first 10 percent was to be given to the temple or church, and then other groups, causes or projects are over and above the tithe.

Sacrificial giving requires a deep faith and trust in God. Will God be faithful to us as we have been faithful to God? The answer is yes.

Tanya and I are far from perfect in our commitment to God. But as we have made a “God honoring” commitment, so God will honor us. We have never been without food, transportation, health care, or opportunities for our children to grow intellectually, artistically, or athletically. Our children will finish college and we will not have borrowed one dime. We own our home. But more than what has happened to us financially, we have received more blessings than I can count in so many wonderful ways.

No matter how you feel about the logistics of how our giving should be determined, the Bible is full of passages on the importance on generous sharing. God wants us to be dependent on Him. Money and possessions can get in the way of our faith. Giving focuses our lives on something other than self.