

F E B R U A R Y 1 8 / 1 9

# TITHING AS AN ACT OF WORSHIP

*Tithing is both a biblical principle and  
an act of worship.*

## KEY VERSE

*Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse, so that there may be food in My house, and put Me to the test now in this," says the Lord of armies, "if I do not open for you the windows of heaven and pour out for you a blessing until it overflows. (NASB)*

**MALACHI 3:10**

## THINGS TO KNOW

- Tithing is first mentioned in Genesis 14 when Abram (Abraham) gave a tenth of everything to Melchizedek, the king of Salem and high priest.
- The Hebrew word, *Ma'aser* is translated as "tithe" and means "tenth."<sup>1</sup>
- Tithes are the first fruits of what is to come.<sup>2</sup>

## OUTLINE

1. Response
2. Trust
3. Honor

## SETTING THE STAGE

Tithing is not a new concept in the modern church. It is not designed simply to meet the financial needs of the church budget. The act of offering God a gift from the first fruits was noted as early as Genesis 4 when Able offered some of the firstborn cattle and fat portions to God (Genesis 4:4). The word “tithes” was used for the first time in Genesis 14 with Abraham, then known as Abram. The specific word *tithe* is used 27 times in the Old Testament. The word *tithe* is not used in the New Testament, though the principle is clear.

Instead, the New Testament writers use the words *offering* and *giving* in stories and teachings by Jesus and Paul. In fact, there are stories of those who gave much more than a mere ten percent in the New Testament. In Mark 12:41-44, Jesus shares the story of one woman who gave out of poverty, not wealth. While sitting in the treasury area, He observes the offerings of those who gave large amounts of money to the offering of this poor widow who only gave two very small copper coins, noting they gave out of their surplus, but she gave all she owned.

Though the word “tithes” is not prominent in the New Testament, Jesus made it clear that giving is a matter of the heart. Whether it be ten percent or a hundred percent, it is to be presented with the right motives. Tithing and giving to the Lord has been and always will be an act of worship. There is nothing outdated about tithing, giving, or presenting an offering to God.

## INTRODUCTION

Our church has two primary pillars, Worship and Bible Study. It is hard to say one without the other. It sets Second Baptist apart from many other churches in our city and around the country. It does not matter the age, demographic, marital status, educational level, or family background; everyone is welcomed and encouraged to be an active part of Worship and Bible Study at Second Baptist Church.

When Worship and Bible Study are mentioned, thoughts and images immediately come to mind. For people who are part of Bible Study, there are images of coffee and refreshments, conversations about weekly activities, and seeing friends you may only see at church. Perhaps there would be images of a classroom layout and where “your chair” is located. You might think about your class director or a poignant lesson from your teacher. Images might include the records table, greeters at the door, and weekly announcements. All of these are components of the Bible Study experience at Second Baptist.

Many people immediately think of the music and sermon when thinking about a worship service. Some would think of the songs they like, noting the lyrics, melody, and emotion. Others would immediately think of the sermon, noting the series topic, illustrations, specific Bible verses, and delivery style. Others would also add prayer to the list of worship service components. All of these things come to mind when people think of worship.

However, there is something more, something different yet vital to worship. It is giving. When we give our tithes and offerings, it is not just about collecting money. It is not just about the

monetary amount. When we give our tithes and offerings, it is an act of worship. In fact, it could be considered one of the purest and most personal ways we worship God through our tithes and offerings. It is a response, an act of trust, and a picture of honor.

## 1. RESPONSE

The last book of the Bible gives us a picture of eternal worship.

**REVELATION 4:9-11** *Whenever the living creatures give glory, honor, and thanks to the one seated on the throne, the one who lives forever and ever,<sup>10</sup> the twenty-four elders fall down before the one seated on the throne and worship the one who lives forever and ever. They cast their crowns before the throne and say,<sup>11</sup> Our Lord and God, you are worthy to receive glory and honor and power, because you have created all things, and by your will they exist and were created.*

When these twenty-four elders see the One seated on the throne, they worship by falling down, kneeling before the One seated on the throne. When the crowned elders prostrate themselves before God and cast their crowns at His feet, they worship Him, humbly acknowledging His sovereignty and His right to receive worship. Casting their crowns at His feet symbolizes the willing subjection of their power to His superior authority.<sup>3</sup> Casting their crowns before the Lord was an act of giving and offering to the Lord what they had. There was an understanding of the holiness and worthiness of the Lord.

Worship is not just for the hereafter but also for the here and now. There is a realization that everything we can see, touch, taste, hear, and smell was created by God. Everything we have belongs to God. God is worthy of our worship.

Worship is to be our response to who God is.

**NEHEMIAH 9:6** *You, Lord, are the only God. You created the heavens, the highest heavens with all their stars, the earth and all that is on it, the seas and all that is in them. You give life to all of them, and all the stars of heaven worship you.*

**PSALM 95:6** *Come, let's worship and bow down; let's kneel before the Lord our Maker.*

**PSALM 132:7** *Let's go to his dwelling place; let's worship at his footstool.*

Let's consider three components of a worship service: 1) the singing, 2) the prayer, and 3) the sermon. Singing is worshipping and praising God through music. Throughout Scripture, we see singing and music as part of worshipping God. It is in the Psalms and the books of the Prophets. It is also part of the Upper Room experience with Jesus and His disciples singing a hymn. The early church would sing praises to God as an act of worship.

Prayer is worshipping and communicating with God through spoken word or even silence. Prayer can be personal or unifying corporately. It is a time to cry out to God, adore God, and confess to God as an act of worship.

The sermon is a way to worship God by studying His Word. The first thing God's people did when they returned to Jerusalem after being in exile for seventy years was to read aloud corporately God's Word. The early church would regularly read God's Word as an act of worship.

But there is one more part of worship that we do every single week, and yet we may not initially think about it as true worship. It is the giving of our tithes and offerings. Some may think of it as incidental. Sometimes it is reduced to the phrase "passing the plate." But make no mistake; it is an act of worship.

And the giving of tithes and offerings provides for the music to be sung, prayers prayed, and sermons to be preached. It is the component of Worship that allows the children's ministry to thrive, the student ministry to go to Beach Retreat, and the buildings to be air-conditioned.

But beyond the monetary side, which helps the church be the church in a very logistical and practical way, it is an act of worship that is a response to who God is, what God has done, and what God will do in the future. From the days of the Old Testament, giving was an act of worship. It is nothing new. It is not something we came up with in the modern church. It was a way for the people of God to "worship" God in response to God being God.

In Genesis 13, the Lord blessed Abraham (then called Abram) with the land "*as far as the eye could see*" and the promise that he would be blessed with so many descendants that they could not be numbered (Genesis 13:15-16). Abraham's response to that news was to build an altar to God. A place to worship (Genesis 13:18). Everywhere Abraham traveled, he would first build an altar and then pitch a tent. Abraham's top priority was always to worship God first and foremost, not as an afterthought.

In the very next chapter in Genesis 14, we see that Abraham's nephew Lot was taken captive by the kings fighting against Sodom and Gomorrah, so Abraham led his small army (only 318 men) to rescue Lot. The Lord allowed Abraham to defeat his enemy even with such a small number of men in his army. Not only did Abraham rescue his nephew Lot, but he also brought back all the goods that had been stolen. The king of Salem celebrated with them.

**GENESIS 14:18** *Melchizedek, king of Salem, brought out bread and wine; he was a priest to God Most High.<sup>19</sup> He blessed him and said: Abram is blessed by God Most High, Creator of heaven and earth,<sup>20</sup> and blessed be God Most High who has handed over your enemies to you. And Abram gave him a tenth of everything.*

This is the first time in Scripture we see the giving of a "tenth of everything." The Hebrew word there is *Ma'aser* and it means "tithe or tenth."<sup>4</sup> This was a time of victory for Abram (Abraham) and his family. They had just overcome an enemy against all odds. There was a blessing from the king, Melchizedek, who was also a priest. And instead of having an attitude of "what is in it for me," Abraham (Abram) gave a tenth of all he had in response to what God had done. Jewish people commonly practiced tithing as an act of worship in the ancient Near East at this time (Genesis 28:22).<sup>5</sup>

It was an act of worship in response to God's goodness and faithfulness. He set forth a pattern, a model of what it looks like to give to God as an act of worship. He did not do this begrudgingly. He did it without hesitation, and though it does not use the phrase, more than likely, he did it with a cheerful heart.

There was a gratitude for what God had done that could not be satisfied with mere words. Abraham felt the appropriate response in this situation was to tithe. It was an act of worship and thanksgiving. There were no strings attached. Abram did not negotiate for another victory down the road. He wanted to give a tenth of all he had to the Lord from the heart.

The next time we see tithing in Scripture is in Genesis 28 with Abraham's grandson, Jacob. It is obvious that tithing had become a habit of the family, a lifestyle of worship by giving back to God that which He had provided. In this chapter, Jacob dreams about a ladder; it is where we get the term Jacob's ladder. He placed a stone on the ground, laid his head down, and went to sleep and dreamt about a ladder reaching up to heaven.

In the dream, Jacob heard these words from the Lord,

**GENESIS 28:15-22** *Look, I am with you and will watch over you wherever you go. I will bring you back to this land, for I will not leave you until I have done what I have promised you."*

<sup>16</sup> *When Jacob awoke from his sleep, he said, "Surely the Lord is in this place, and I did not know it."* <sup>17</sup> *He was afraid and said, "What an awesome place this is! This is none other than the house of God. This is the gate of heaven."*

<sup>18</sup> *Early in the morning Jacob took the stone that was near his head and set it up as a marker. He poured oil on top of it <sup>19</sup> and named the place Bethel, though previously the city was named Luz. <sup>20</sup> Then Jacob made a vow: "If God will be with me and watch over me during this journey I'm making, if he provides me with food to eat and clothing to wear, <sup>21</sup> and if I return safely to my father's family, then the Lord will be my God. <sup>22</sup> This stone that I have set up as a marker will be God's house, and I will give to you a tenth of all that you give me."*

Notice Jacob sees everything he has as a gift, a provision from God. Food, clothes, shelter, and safety all come from the Lord.

And in response, Jacob makes a vow, a commitment in verse 22. He says, *"This stone that I have set up as a marker will be God's house, and I will give to you a tenth of all that you give me."*

In another translation, we see that the Hebrew word for this place was Bethel (House of God). It was deemed a place of worship. And as an act of worship, Jacob tithed, committing for it to be a lifestyle, *"I will give to you a tenth of all that you give me."* The verb is future tense. Jacob set a benchmark from that moment on to do what his father and grandfather must have taught him. He would be a man who tithed both now and in the future. It would become his plan of action for the rest of his life.

Matthew Henry comments on these verses, "Let us then remember our "Bethels," how we stand engaged by solemn vows to yield ourselves to the Lord, to take Him for our God, and

to devote all we have and are to His glory!”<sup>6</sup> Tithing is an act of worship in response to God, but also an act of worship by trusting God for all that is to come; all that we have is from God.

## 2. TRUST

In the New Testament, we have a beautiful picture of what it looks like to trust God through giving.

**MARK 12:41-44** *Sitting across from the temple treasury, he watched how the crowd dropped money into the treasury. Many rich people were putting in large sums.<sup>42</sup> Then a poor widow came and dropped in two tiny coins worth very little.<sup>43</sup> Summoning his disciples, he said to them, “Truly I tell you, this poor widow has put more into the treasury than all the others.<sup>44</sup> For they all gave out of their surplus, but she out of her poverty has put in everything she had —all she had to live on.”*

A nameless poor widow touches the heart of God. She provided an example to the disciples and to us of what worship looks like through giving. Although she gave out of a purse lacking in coins, she gave out of an abundance of faith. She did not know what tomorrow would hold, but she did not want to miss out on today's opportunity to worship God through giving.

Unlike this widow, we tend to focus on what we “do not have” instead of what “we do have.” Perhaps we focus on how much we used to make. Or we focus on what we could make in the future. We even think about what we should make. All those mindsets reflect an attitude of “what is in it for me?”

Unlike those rich people who were putting in large sums of money out of surplus, the widow gave out of her poverty. Her attitude was simple and pure, “what is in it for God?” She had a completely different attitude. She had a pure attitude of worship.

We often hang on to our earthly blessings with a tight fist. We focus on what we can do with our money instead of what He would have us do with His money. For the widow, she did not see those two coins as her money. She saw them as God's blessing. This unnamed widow gave what she had back to God, knowing that it was His first. With a humble spirit, a grateful soul, and a heart of trust, she willfully offered those coins as an act of worship.

Notice Jesus shifted from being an observer to being a teacher. He did not want the disciples to miss the lesson this unnamed widow had unintentionally given. She did not have a surplus of money but had a surplus of trust. In the words of Jesus, *“For they all gave out of their surplus, but she out of her poverty has put in everything she had —all she had to live on.”*

Abraham, Jacob, and the widow lived at different times. Abraham was abundantly wealthy. Jacob had plenty of everything beyond measure. The widow was living in poverty. And yet, there was a common thread among all of them. They each worshipped God through giving as a response and an act of trust. Tithing was and is a way to honor God.

### 3. HONOR

A familiar verse to many people is found in the book of Proverbs, chapter 3 written by Solomon.

**PROVERBS 3:5-6** *Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and do not rely on your own understanding; 6 in all your ways know him, and he will make your paths straight.*

Trusting is an intentional step that truly honors God. With the people we have discussed so far, Abraham, Jacob, and the unnamed widow, there was a trust in the Lord they each had with all their hearts. They did not lean on their own understanding. Each of them willfully chose to acknowledge God by their acts of worship. God directed the paths of Abraham and Jacob and their lineage. It was a heritage that lasted to the days of the unnamed widow in that temple, giving out of her poverty, trusting and honoring God with all she had.

Some people read Proverbs 3:5-6 stopping at the end of verse 6; however, if you continue to read through verse 9 you will find this concept of honoring God with your resources:

**PROVERBS 3:9** *Honor the Lord with your possessions and with the first produce of your entire harvest.*

Verse 9 applies the principle of acknowledging the hand of God in the financial side of life. To “know” God in our financial “ways” is to honor Him. <sup>7</sup> When we trust the Lord with all our heart, we can honor the Lord with all we have.

Paul tells us in 2 Corinthians,

**2 CORINTHIANS 9:6-7** *Now this I say, he who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and he who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully. <sup>7</sup> Each one must do just as he has purposed in his heart, not grudgingly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver.*

When we give from our heart, we are giving from a sense of joy, not a sense of responsibility. Joyful giving is contagious and produces more joy! The amplified version of verse 6 above explains *God delights in the one whose heart is in his gift*. Honoring God with our tithes and offerings both delights Him and brings delight to us as we give cheerfully.

Notice honoring the Lord is not an afterthought with leftovers. There is an intentionality of honoring God by giving the first produce of the entire harvest. It is a predetermined choice in this process of honoring God this way. This offering, tithe, and gift to God is an opportunity to give back to God as an act of worship. Recognizing that every good gift is from God (James 1:17), there is nothing we have or earn that God does not provide or allow.

The tithe we offer God as a gift is not just about money. It is about the heart as we trust and honor God. Jesus taught this truth in the sermon on the mount recorded in the Gospel of Matthew.

**MATTHEW 6:21** *Where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.*

It always comes back to the heart. It comes back to the relationship with God. It comes back to worship. And it is never too late to begin this relational act of worship called tithing as a way to honor God.

In the days of the prophet Malachi, the people of Israel, God's chosen people, had strayed away.

**MALACHI 3:7** *"Since the days of your ancestors, you have turned from my statutes; you have not kept them. Return to me, and I will return to you," says the Lord of Armies.*

*Yet you ask, "How can we return?"*

They had come to the point of "how shall we return?" Is it too late? God could have said they needed to go to the synagogue every week. God could have instructed them to pray more and read Scripture more. But God chose to respond to them this way,

**MALACHI 3:8-12** *"Will a man rob God? Yet you are robbing me!" "How do we rob you?" you ask. "By not making the payments of the tenth and the contributions. <sup>9</sup> You are suffering under a curse, yet you—the whole nation—are still robbing me. <sup>10</sup> Bring the full tenth into the storehouse so that there may be food in my house. Test me in this way," says the Lord of Armies. "See if I will not open the floodgates of heaven and pour out a blessing for you without measure. <sup>11</sup> I will rebuke the devourer for you, so that it will not ruin the produce of your land and your vine in your field will not fail to produce fruit," says the Lord of Armies. <sup>12</sup> "Then all the nations will consider you fortunate, for you will be a delightful land," says the Lord of Armies.*

The way to honor God is to be honest with God about our finances. The people of God were withholding their tithes from God, and there were consequences. God challenged them to honor Him with their tithes, to test Him. Tithing is based on a relationship. God trusts us to manage the resources we have. God asks us to trust Him with the tithe that we present. If we give a tithe – that is, 10% of our income or assets – to God, it is not as if the remaining 90% is yours to do with as you please. It all belongs to God, but He allows us to manage the remaining 90% directly. <sup>8</sup>

As we respond to God, He responds to us. As we trust God, He trusts us. And as we honor God, He honors us. Tithing is a wonderful barometer of our relationship with God, not based on guilt or even obligation, but on a heart of worship.

## CONCLUSION

Much of our Worship is corporate. We sing corporately. We have prayers that are corporate for all who are present and prayers that are personal. The sermons are preached corporately to the entire congregation. But one part of Worship is very personal; it is giving. By design, it is between you and God. In fact, Jesus would call out the Pharisees when they brought public attention to their tithes and offerings. So though this lesson is taught publicly, your response to this lesson is private.



Notice how the Apostle Paul recognizes the importance of tithes, offerings, and giving to be private and personal in this passage we looked at earlier. To the church at Corinth, he wrote these words of instruction.

**2 CORINTHIANS 9:6-7** *The point is this: The person who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and the person who sows generously will also reap generously.*<sup>7</sup> **Each person should do as he has decided in his heart**—not reluctantly or out of compulsion, since God loves a cheerful giver.

This is a personal decision between you and God. Remember, tithing is not exclusively about money but provides an opportunity to worship God by entrusting Him with what He has entrusted to you. It is truly at the heart of worship.

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<sup>1</sup> [www.biblstudytools.com/lexicon](http://www.biblstudytools.com/lexicon)

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.ministrymaker.com/facts-about-tithing>

<sup>3</sup> [www.soniclight.com/revelation](http://www.soniclight.com/revelation)

<sup>4</sup> [www.biblstudytools.com/lexicon](http://www.biblstudytools.com/lexicon)

<sup>5</sup> [www.soniclight.com/genesis](http://www.soniclight.com/genesis)

<sup>6</sup> <https://biblehub.com/commentaries/genesis/28-20.htm>

<sup>7</sup> [www.soniclight.com/proverbs](http://www.soniclight.com/proverbs)

<sup>8</sup> <https://enduringword.com/bible-commentary/malachi-3/>