

How to Teach God’s People to Tithe

Joe McKeever, crosswalk.com

Expecting people to turn loose of a hefty portion of their hard-earned income, even for the greatest cause in the world, without their being taught how to do this and especially why—is not unlike pitching your kid in deep water and expecting him to swim for the simple reason that doing so is in his best interest.



God’s people must be taught to tithe.

Now, for those wishing to quibble about a) whether the [Bible](#) teaches tithing, b) whether it’s in the New Testament, or c) whether we’re being legalistic, may I suggest they skip this article.

This is for church leaders who believe that Jesus is Lord of everything, that He has given to the church—His body—the ministry of reconciliation, and that He expects His disciples to give regularly, generously, and proportionately to fund that work.

This is all about stewardship. “It is required of stewards that each one be found faithful” (1 Corinthians 4:2).

This is for church leaders who believe that giving a minimum of one-tenth of their income to the Lord’s church is a) scriptural, b) necessary to support the work, and c) an essential part of growing in Christlikeness.

What we are not saying: We are not suggesting the church require tithing of its members, that they keep records on who is tithing and who isn’t, or that the tithe is the beginning and the end of anything. It’s one aspect of a healthy Christian’s discipleship. One. Aspect. Of. A. Healthy. Disciple.

My grandson Grant McKeever gave me a memorable illustration of why tithing must be taught.

My 7-year-old grandson had become enamored with money. When he saw the plastic cup in my bedroom overflowing with coins, he asked about it. I told him I empty my pockets each night and drop the coins there. Sometimes I put it in the church mission offering, sometimes I give it to someone in need. Various things.

An idea occurred to me.

“Grant, would you like to have that money?” His eyes bugged out. “Yes!” I said, “Well, have a discussion with your parents on what to do with it. When they say it’s okay, I’ll bring this money to your house.”

That night, he called. “Grandpa, I’m ready.” Next day, I drove over and presented Grant with the sackful of coins.

He and his dad sat on the floor and counted it all out, putting it into stacks of one dollar. It came to \$33 and some cents, as I recall. They had decided that 10 percent would go into the church bank, 10 percent into Grant’s savings bank, and the rest would go into his personal bank for whatever he wished to buy.

Okay, fine. No problem.

What happened next was so comical.

A half-hour later, as I was preparing to leave (after playing with Grant’s 4-year-old twin sisters), I glanced down the hall and saw him on the floor with the three banks. As he was depositing the tithe into the church bank, he would slowly and carefully pick up a coin, hold it in his hand a moment, and then as he dropped it into the slot, in the saddest voice you will ever hear, said a mournful, “Bye-bye.” Another coin into the slot, “Bye-bye.”

It was killing this kid to give the Lord a tithe.

And yet, an hour earlier, he had nothing. I had given every dime of it to him.

Sound familiar?

We humans are so acquisitive, so grasping and greedy. The heart is a rebel and it wants everything for itself.

That’s why our hearts must be disciplined and tamed. We must be taught to do the right thing.

Here then are my suggestions on how to teach the members of your church to give one-tenth of their income to the Lord Jesus through the church, and to keep it up, either until Jesus comes or comes to take them...

1) First, the pastor should tithe.

We cannot lead people to do what we aren't. If I'm not giving at least a tithe of my income to the Lord through my church, I have no business bringing a sermon on the subject and urging others to give.

I've heard of pastors excusing themselves from giving to the Lord's work because, "I live from the offering." "Everything I do is for the Lord." Sorry, friend. That will not fly. To prove that, stand in the pulpit next Sunday and announce that you yourself are not going to tithe, but everyone else should. If you still have a job at the end of the day, I'd be surprised. Even the most immature of God's children know hypocrisy when they see it.

2) The pastor should preach a few sermons on tithing. He should be as clear as it's possible to be. Be positive, scriptural, practical, and grace-ful (i.e., not harsh but sweet-spirited).

Do not stress the obligation of it, turning it into something legalistic. Emphasize that by tithing I honor Christ, fund His work, control my own materialism, and lay up treasure in [Heaven](#) (Matthew 6:19-20). When I tithe, I'm able to help others deal with their bondage to debt and materialism. I liberate myself to preach on giving.

I suggest you not bury this tithe-teaching in a sermon on stewardship of time, talent, and a lot of other things. The more obscure we make the tithe-lesson, the fewer people will get the point. You cannot be too clear for some people.

Make it plain what God wants, what Scripture teaches, what the work needs, and what you are asking of them. (This is not the place to go into which scriptures to teach; there are books galore and plenty of help on the internet for that.)

2) Have your teachers bring a lesson on tithing.

Don't just assign this and leave it there, or you will end up with a huge mess. Find a great Bible study lesson on tithing and call a meeting of your teachers. Give the material to them, and then you teach it to them, pastor. Answer their questions. Make sure each one is supportive of this. Give them a lesson plan, and ask every class to teach this on the same Sunday.

If you have teachers who do not tithe, or if some of your teachers are reluctant to teach such a lesson, an alternative would be to bring everyone into the sanctuary one Sunday and have your best teacher lead the session.

3) In the worship service, interview a few longtime tithers.

Nothing convinces the wavering like hearing from friends who get this right. Prayerfully choose the best examples in the church.

We are not suggesting you ask for “their tithing testimonies.” Do that, pastor, and you might not get your pulpit back before mid-afternoon. (I speak from experience.) By interviewing them, you control the microphone, you ask the pertinent questions and you keep them focused.

Limit the questions to three or four. For instance: a) How long have you been a tither? b) Tell us about when you started to tithe; was it hard? c) What would you say to those who want to tithe but say they cannot afford it?

4) Keep stressing that tithing is NOT just about meeting the church’s expenses.

Many mistakenly think if we’re meeting the budget, there is no need to preach on money. Such thinking ignores the constant threat of greed and worldliness to God’s children. We have to keep teaching the principles of faithful giving and obedient stewardship if we are to make healthy disciples.

5) The single most important point to make in encouraging new tithers is this: Getting started is hard because it’s of faith.

Doing anything by faith is difficult. And that is by intent. (We’ve all heard the illustration of the kid helping the butterfly as it emerged from the chrysalis. By sparing it the struggle, he sentenced it to an early death.) “Without faith, it is impossible to please God” (Hebrews 11:6).

Faith means “Obeying Jesus regardless of what we have in the bank, what my job status is, what the doctor says about my health, or how I feel today.” Obey the Lord regardless.

Someone says, “We’re going to start tithing just as soon as we get our bills paid and have a little extra.” I tell them that is not going to happen. They will arrive in old age without ever doing what the Lord asked. Their will go into eternity with huge regrets over good intentions they never carried out.

This is why the tithing interviews must constantly stress that getting started was hard. The next year was still difficult, but after that it got easier and easier (because they were making adjustments to their living style).

God likes it to be difficult to start. Only those who truly believe in Him will obey. The rest will sit around, waiting for it to get easy.

We should admit that as a general rule, tithers will not have as big a house or luxurious a car as non-tithers. That ten percent can make a big difference in our standard of living. But what we will have is a thousand blessings from a) having honored the Lord, b) having funded his work worldwide, c) having rearranged our priorities and not let money dominate us, and d) having laid up treasure in Heaven.

What exactly is “treasure in heaven”? My answer: I don’t have a clue. But the Lord who promised it is in charge of fulfilling it. We can trust Jesus.

It’s like His promise in Luke 14:14. “You will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous.” What does He have in mind? He alone knows. We can trust Him.

6) Encourage your people to “try the tithe” for a certain period of time. “Just to see.”

In Malachi 3:10, the Lord invites His people to “prove me” (or “test me in this way”—HCSB) by bringing “all the tithes into the storehouse.” I suggest you take Him up on that.

What will tithers see at the end of the trial period? It will vary by individual. Some will get material blessings, and will find, as the saying goes, that “an obedient 90 percent goes farther than a disobedient 100 percent.” Others will find a deep peace and satisfaction from honoring the Lord in this way.

How long should the test period last? At least for a season (3 months). In one church, I challenged our people to make this a “summer blessed” and to tithe for the summer months. At the end of the summer, I promised (with the full support of our leadership) we would refund the offerings of anyone who wanted his offerings returned. Throughout the summer, the offerings increased, going way above the church budget. At the end of the summer only one man asked for a refund.

7) There must be some method for people to make a commitment to begin to tithe.

I have no suggestion on which way is best, whether a signed card or a prayer at the altar, or something else. Prayerfully ask the Lord and meet with your leadership team to make this decision.

A final note...

A former minister said the passage in Malachi 3 is one of the most mis-used passages in Scripture. Whether he’s right or wrong, I know a couple of things about this...

—In withholding their tithes, God said His people were robbing Him (Malachi 3:7ff.)

–A motive for giving the tithes, God said, was “that there might be food (literally “bread”) in my house” (Malachi 3:10). It is no stretch to see this as meaning provisions for His people and His work.

–As with any other Old Testament scripture directed toward Israel, we must exercise care in applying it to us. But the spiritual lessons are solid and God is faithful.