

THE JOY OF TITHING

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I want to quote a text today from scripture, 2 Corinthians 8:9 “For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor that you through his poverty might become rich.” The whole nature of Christ becoming man is involved with the theme of giving.

At Christmas we're always thinking of giving. And was mentioned this morning, many of you have already done your Christmas shopping for the year. As a minister at this time I'm kind of in between seasons. I want to preach Christmas messages, yet I also want to get you ready for the new year. And I also want to finish Ephesians. The way I'm going to do that is next Sunday is going to be a Christmas message, the Sunday after that is going to be a New Year's message as we finish Ephesians by looking at the armor of God that he wants us to wear. This Sunday I want to combine a little bit of what is involved with Christmas as well as the little bit of what is involved in our priorities for the new year and talk about a sensitive theme: the Joy of Tithing.

This is completing eleven years of pastoring here. I've been your pastor for eleven years. Some of you haven't been in the church that long. Baptism in those eleven years I've had the opportunity to preach two sermons on tithing. This is the third. It's not because right now there's some critical emergency that's necessitating me preaching on this. But because more and more I've been impelled in my spirit that by my lack of saying anything about this from time to time, some of you may be missing out really on both the will of God and really some of the blessings God wants you to have. So I wanted to kind of share today on the subject of tithing and proportional income. The tithe of course represents ten percent of our income.

I want to deal with tithing from the standpoint of the joy that comes into our lives as we follow the Lord in tithing.

The first joy of tithing is knowing that we are doing the will of the Lord. The scripture is very explicit. For example Malachi 3 “Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse.” And a multitude of other scriptures could be quoted which would indicate that doing God's will, one of the aspects of doing God's will is tithing.

I just say that whenever we do the will of God in any area of our life it produces joy in our life.

Last Sunday night Wes was with us and shared the tremendous story of his healing. One of the persons that he talked about that was instrumental in getting him to the place that he needed to be when he was prayed for was a young man by the name of Bob Winer. Bob used to be the unconventional youth minister at the church that Wes pastored and now is the president of Maranatha ministries which has college ministries on campus all over the United States and beginning to go all over the world. Bob Winer is a person who has the unusual sensitivity to doing the will of God and knowing God's voice. Wes was relating to me a couple of stories about Bob that to me expressed this matter of exhilaration when we're doing God's will.

When Bob was a young Christian working for him, been saved a little over a year and he would just do radical kinds of things of faith. He was dating this young girl who was very much in love with him but he wasn't sure whether he should be single and minister to the Lord in that way or

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be married. Wes kept trying to encourage him to ask her out. Wes was trying to foster the relationship a little bit. One day Wes said to Bob, "I want you to call Rose up and take her out to lunch." He gave Bob the name of the place, a place on the Long Beach shoreline, a nice expensive restaurant to take her out to lunch. So he calls up Rose and she agreed. Then Bob comes to Wes, "My car's in the garage. Would you mind if I took the church van?" And Wes said go ahead and take it. As Bob gets in the church van he bows his head and says "Lord, my pastor has told me to take Rose out to lunch today. But you know I have no money and you know that I've tried to be a faithful servant and whatever my pastor tells me to do I try to do." That's how naïve and simple his faith was. "So, Lord, if you want me to take Rose out, I'm going to get her now and the pastor even told me the restaurant I was supposed to go to. Would you supply the funds for that to be possible?"

He was driving down the road and suddenly a woman was in the middle of the street waving her hands, "Stop! Stop!" So Bob pulls the van over and says, "How can I help you?" She said, "I'm terrified of snakes and a snake has crawled up on the porch of my house. If you'll just get out and kill it, I'll give you some money." He said, "Praise God!" She gave him a hoe. He went up on the porch and hacked the head of the snake off, got his money and took Rose out to lunch.

Wes told me that just a month ago Bob was in Beverly Hills and he was walking down the street and he felt the Holy Spirit saying, "Call the president of the Jewish Youth League and tell him about me." Bob said to himself, "I don't know the president of the Jewish youth league and I don't know if there is a Jewish Youth League." But he felt this strong impression of the Spirit to do this.

So he goes over to a pay telephone booth, gets out the phone book and starts looking under synagogues. He finds a synagogue close to where he is. He leaves the phone booth, walks over to the synagogue. As he was going up the steps there was a little sign that said, "Dance. Jewish young league." So he walks in and there's a dance going on in the synagogue social hall. He looks in the room and there's a whole group of people. He sees a person in the distance and the Holy Spirit said, "That's the one. Go tell him." So he walks in the room. "Are you the president of the Jewish Youth League?" The young man said yes. "God has sent me here to tell you about Jesus Christ." *He has what? Are you one of those Jews for Jesus freaks?* He said, "I'm not a freak but I am a Jew for Jesus." The guy swore at him and said to get out.

So Bob is turning around. He's just about at the door. Again the Holy Spirit stops him and says, "You go back to him and you tell him three things..." The young man had told Bob he kept the law of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. He didn't need Jesus. *You go back to him and tell him, one, you do not keep the law of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. Two, you are living with a woman who is not your wife. Three, yesterday you both found out that she was expecting and you are considering having an abortion.* He fought for a moment with that impression. Turned around. Walked back across the dance hall went up to the president of the Jewish youth league and he said, "God has sent me here to tell you three things." He didn't pause so the young man couldn't interrupt him. He said, "One you do not leave according to the laws of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Two, you are living with a woman who is not your wife. Three, you found out yesterday that she was pregnant and you are considering having an abortion and you don't know how to handle it." The guy turned white as a sheet: "My God! Nobody in the world knows that! What else did God tell you to tell me?" He said, "What I told you in the beginning. God sent me here to tell you about Jesus Christ." The president of the Jewish youth league stepped up to the mike, stopped the music and said, "There's a guy here that God has sent to tell us about Jesus Christ.

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I'm going to let him speak." Whereupon Bob proceeded to give a 20-minute gospel testimony of Jesus Christ, finished with an altar call and 12 people came down and gave their lives to Jesus Christ in a Jewish synagogue.

Incredible. You say, "Boy! I'd like to be led like that!" I'm convinced that not all of us are led that way. But there is a possibility for us to be sensitive that we can be led that way.

I've used these stories of illustration because when Bob stepped out, he knew the Holy Spirit was speaking to him. He stepped out, he obeyed that word and it brought great results and it brought great joy. I use a story like that alongside a story of tithing because I think it's a similar principle. Whenever we step out to do the will of God in whatever area it is God releases things and brings a consequent joy. It is good within our spirit. We didn't see how we could do it. It seemed irrational to do that. But if it was God's will, God was in it and it brings joy. We take seriously God when he speaks. Whether it is intuition voice of the Holy Spirit or whether by the Holy Spirit his written word.

Some Christians have been led to doubt the word of God on tithing because others have said, it's just an Old Testament requirement and doesn't apply to now and maybe it's really not God's will after all. But that line of thinking really doesn't stand up for several reasons. Jesus approved tithing in Matthew 23:23 he tells the Pharisees that they ought to have tithed baptism they also should have practiced justice and mercy and faith. He doesn't say, practice justice, mercy and faith but it doesn't matter if you tithe. He says these also ought you to have done.

Abraham in Hebrews 7 paid tithes to Melchizedek long before the Old Testament law was ever given. Illustrating that tithing was not a principle of the law but tithing is an eternal principle and it's related to faith because Abraham the man of faith paid tithes to Melchizedek who is a representative of Christ.

If the people of the Old Testament tithed to keep an institution going like the law and the tabernacle and did it joyfully and gladly and responsibly to the Lord how much more ought we in the new age to pick up the spirit of joy and giving to the Lord because we now have a better covenant and a better priesthood and we have a better gospel.

You might say, Are you saying if we're not tithing we're out of God's will? I'm not so much saying that but I think the word of God is saying that. In that area of your life if you're not tithing you would be out of God's will. Malachi says, "Will a man rob God? Yet you even rob me?" It's a sense that if we do not tithe we're taking away from God what is rightfully his.

So there's a joy in knowing that we're in God's will when we're tithing.

The second joy of tithing is knowing that the needs of the Lord's word will be fully met as we all tithe. Malachi 3:10 talks about "That there may be food in my house." The whole imagery is if we don't tithe God's house is poor. The storehouse is empty. What's God talking about? The whole principle of the tithe is based on the fact that God owns everything. He owns the cattle on a thousand hills and all the gold under the hills. But he doesn't use that wealth for his own good. He leases it to us and in effect, if you want to think of it in southern California rental terminology the tithe is our lease payment on what God has given to us. It's our way of saying, "God, you've given all of this to us. Now we want to see your work and your cause prosper."

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Malachi's point was that God was poor amidst plenty and Malachi was in the embarrassing position of having to ask on behalf of God payment on a note that was due.

God has designed his work to function on the tithe. I'm convinced of that. I'm convinced that God has a lot of things in mind for this congregation. One of which involves the tithe of the people. God has certain ministries for this church to do, both here at home and all over the world. It's when we all are tithing that God's perfect will can be manifest in this area of our congregational life. But to the extent that anyone of us or any number of us withholds the tithe is like putting our hands around the neck of the ministry and choking it. The ministry of the church. There is a sense in which when we withhold we're clogging the arteries or we're choking off the potential that God wants and his full purposes cannot be released because he designed for this church. To really operate off the tithes of his people. And giving the tithe, all of us giving the tithe, then frees the church to do all the ministry, which God is calling it to do. And there's joy in knowing that. The joy of tithing that knowing that then we're seeing God's work really prosper as we tithe.

The third joy of tithing is knowing that my faith in the Lord will grow when I tithe. Malachi premises that the floodgates of heaven will open to us and Jesus also says, give and it will be given to you. We need to be very careful not to make tithing texts kind of Christian Las Vegas slot machines. Put your tithe in the box and out will spring all kinds of things. There's a hundred fold teaching going on right now which says that give to God and he's morally obligated to return to you a hundred fold. It's taught in very high-pressure terminology.

Friends, don't believe everything you hear. I recall the story of a radio evangelist who was saying you need to give to this ministry because God has promised that if you give it will be given back to you double, triple three times as much. So practice your faith and give. This person sat down and wrote a very simple letter and said, "I am not enclosing money as you have asked. I thought I would give you an opportunity to demonstrate what you have been teaching. I am in need of a hundred dollars. And I'm sure if you and it to me, the Lord would return to you two and three fold." That was a rather witty remark.

People who teach the hundred fold doctrine ought to pay their employees of their organization a hundred fold and really try God out themselves instead of asking everybody else to do it.

I got a letter recently from one of the organizations, an underground ministry organization. The leader of the organization was saying to me as a personally typed computer letter. I saw your face last night as I prayed. They were praying for me and they had seen my face. And they wanted me to send money because they had seen my face in their prayers. I thought this is the lowest of the low. This is what gives the whole church a bad name.

So I did something I probably shouldn't have done but I wrote a letter back to the person: "I am intrigued by the fact that God showed you my face the other night when you were praying and you've written me a letter. Before I give any money to your organization, would you please tell me what my face looks like?" I figured he may have seen me on TV or something and he actually would know and then I really would be in trouble. But I got back another personally typed computer letter, which evidently means he received more than one letter in the same nature. It said, I didn't actually see your face. I saw a composite of face of which I'm sure yours was one among them.

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We do have this problem many times with giving. We have the mystical idea that if we drop something in the contribution God is waiting to start the printing presses to start money rolling out to us. Sometimes quite frankly tithing doesn't in the initial stage work that way. I've known people who have begun tithing and then the next week they've had a flat tire. Other people God has given enormous raises. I think it cuts both ways. So when I preach on tithing I simply have to be honest. But I have to be honest with the theme that when I tithe my faith is going to increase.

I remember talking to my mom when I was younger. Most of you know I was brought up in a Christian home, a missionary's home. My parents have always tithed. They were absolutely fanatical about it. Mom especially. I'd come home from high school or my first year or two at a Christian college. I knew all the answers to everything! I knew by them that tithing, I thought, was an Old Testament principle. So I'd tell mother. "What are you tithing for anyway? What's it ever gotten you?" And I'd kind of dig at her. She would very faithfully say "The Lord has always faithfully taken care of me and we just ought to give." I'd say, "If the Lord's always taken care of you why don't you have more of this world's goods?" and if anybody deserved this world's goods it was my mother. Mother would say, "The Lord has many ways of giving back to us. I'm content. This is what the word teaches and I'll tithe." At that time I had all kinds of judgments on tithing. I didn't have the money. The preacher made more than I did. It was an Old Testament concept. They wouldn't miss my little tithe anyway. But mom just kept on giving and giving beyond the tithe. I began to realize as I grew a little bit more mature in my Christian faith that God made it up to mother in more ways than our financial. She did never lack.

In fact, one time she was on the mission field, her and her sister in her single days of being a missionary. They were out in a place where they needed to get back to another town and they didn't have the money. They kept counting and counting the money in their purses. Every time they counted they were a dollar short. Finally as the train was just about ready to pull out and they still hadn't bought their ticket my mom and her sister just prayed again, Lord we need this money. They counted their money again and suddenly the extra dollar was there. My mother to her dying day always felt that God made that extra special dollar.

I at times had a little bit of a question mark on that story. Until when I was in seminary in my senior year I found my 1956 Pontiac which always got 16 mpg suddenly one month when I was most in need financially and would put a dollar of gas in the tank and then drive as far as I could and then get off the freeway. I drove between Los Angeles and Pasadena all the time to work in a church there. I'd drive as far as I could on a buck then pull off and put more in. I always kept records. That month I got 30 mpg in a car that always got sixteen before. Then sixteen after that. So I know that God has special times when he intervenes financially.

But God made it up to my mother in so many other ways. Her life was a beautiful, lived out demonstration of the grace of God. And God gave her three wonderful children, of which I am one!

Tithing involves us in a practical demonstration of my God will supply all your need. And tithing really matures our faith. When you begin to tithe it's hard because you haven't developed the disciple. There would be whole months. And even in the first years, you'll fight whether or not to sometimes go off the tithe or to keep going. But you learn. After a while you learn such a

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discipline that you actually live better on the 90% than you lived on the 100% before. God actually helps you to live better on the 90%.

Tithing is an absolutely mystical experience. There's no reason in the world why it ought to work but it does.

The fourth joy of tithing is seeing the Lord's word really prosper.

Not only will the Lord's work be met as we've seen in point two but it will prosper. "Where your treasure is, there will your heart be also." Malachi talks about bring the whole tithe into the storehouse. "Whole" means undivided. That means not partialing it up or cutting it up in different parts. And storehouse means the place where you receive your ministry from.

There is a sense where many Christians today take their tithe and partial it out to this organization and that organization. I agree that there are all kinds of needs in the body of Christ and we ought to be supporting as many as the Lord lays upon our heart.

There's a real difference between tithing and giving. It seems to me that the scriptures teach as "tithe" as giving something, which is undivided. We don't have discretionary control over that. We give that. Then in addition to any tithe, if we want to give elsewhere we give beyond that.

It's funny how when you only preach three sermons about tithing in eleven years you get a little rusty yourself. As I was preparing this sermon I thought, "Lord, I'm not doing myself what the scripture here is saying." Every month I'm required as a minister to give a small amount to the ministerial body of which I am a part – the Assemblies of God. I just have taken that out of my tithe. Here it says the whole tithe into the storehouse. Oh oh! Now I'm going to have to go on faith because what I need to do from now on is to not bust that tithe up but to bring it wholly undivided into the storehouse, which is the church where I belong. Then to find ways of meeting that other obligation beyond that.

The whole tithe. Don't take five dollars of your tithe and send it to this radio ministry and ten dollars and send it to that television ministry or whatever. But take the whole and give it undivided. Then that is God's program for the local church of which you're a part. So that this local church can have a viable ministry in its setting. As we do that God will take care of other ministries and we will take care of as a church as well to be generous with other ministries.

If you're not tithing, you might say how do you begin tithing? Let me share some real easy steps with you.

First settle the matter in your heart that you're going to tithe.

Second, figure out what ten-percent of your gross paycheck is. The next time you get paid what is ten percent of it.

The third step, the first thing you do when you get the paycheck, make out your tithe check first.

The first three steps. Figure out that you're going to tithe. Secondly, figure out what your tithe would be. Third, when you get paid, the first check. You know why the first check? Because it's a strange law of divine economics. If we put tithing as a last priority you will never have

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money to tithe. That's the honest to goodness truth. Every time I've done that, I haven't had money to tithe. If you move it to first, it's amazing what happens. Putting the Lord first in all things.

Fourth, I would say about tithing, there will never be a good time to start tithing. Just like there's never been a good time to build a church. This is the worst possible time to be under construction while we're in a recession. The economy's shaky, the interest rates were screaming off the wall just six months ago. All this kind of thing. It's the worst possible time. There's never a good time to build a church. Ten years ago we looked at churches our size being built for less than a million dollars and ours is between two and 2½ million dollars. We say, If we had only built ten years ago. We'd have saved all that money. But ten years ago a million dollars was impossible. And ten years from now if the Lord carries it'll be five million dollars and we'd look back and say, We should have built then. There's just never a good time to build.

When you're a kid and you start getting the fifty cents a week allowance and you start tithing with a nickel of it. If you're faithful in a little God can make you faithful over much.

The fifth thing is make out a budget that tells you how you can spend the other 90%.

Sixth, if you don't know how in the world you can tithe on your income we have some deacons and some pastoral staff members who are available to work with you and show you how it can be done on your budget. You can simply call the church office or call me personally and we will have a deacon or a staff member serve as a financial counselor to you for three months and work with you and help you with your finances and set up a budget for you. At the end of three months after tithing and working with financial counseling if you are worse off after three months because you tithed then we'll be glad to refund at your request all your tithe. We'll make it painless. We believe in that so much that if you're willing to get financial counseling if you honestly don't see how it can be done, we're willing to commit and say we believe so much that God is in this that we would see that you get it returned.

Seventh, don't designate your tithe. Don't say, I like this project and I like that project. Give your tithe undesignated.

Eighth, don't withhold your tithes because you feel that they're too small or they're too big. Both sides of the church. Somebody will say, I'm only making five bucks a week. What's fifty cents? There are kids here who are making a dollar a week or fifty cents a week. What's that? It's as we all participate. God has a tithing principle for us all. Not equal gifts of equal sacrifice.

Others may say, I make too much. If I tithe to the local church, they'd get so much money they wouldn't know what to do with it. I promise you. If we get more than we know what to do with we'll give it to missions. We'll keep it streaming out there. At least in the local church you have accountability and you can ask where your funds go. You can look at the total church budget and you can examine the books any time you want.

Ninth, starting with the tithe develop your disciple and faith going beyond the tithe. This is where many of you are involved in missions and the building program. God is meeting you at a level even beyond that. It's kind of fun to see how much you can live on and how much more you can give to the Lord. That's when giving really gets exciting.

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Tenth or eleventh, tithe regularly and twelfth, begin where you are. Don't try to get caught up on the last five years or ten years... just start out. If you'll start out the Lord, if he wants you to get caught up, he'll show you how to do that down the road.

You'll always be welcome at this church whether you ever give a dime or not. That's not the point. In fact, I as a pastor, for these eleven years have chosen not to know who gives what. So that I don't know. That means I can look you square in the eye, every one of you, and I can preach on this fairly knowing that I'm not picking on anybody, I didn't go over the donation roster. I have the freedom of conscious to be able to do that. We want to make it between you and the Lord.

But I'd like for you to really test the Lord in this area and set your priorities. God is calling us as a whole body to a new level of ministry in these coming months. It's going to take all of our participation, not only in the area of giving financially. But even go beyond giving financially to major investments of our time and our talent as the Lord may lead us.

When we think about tithing we have to think about the Lord's giving to us. This Christmas again we consider what the lord has done for us. You know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ. God is a giving God. That's why as Christians we have such an emphasis upon giving. We're not motivated to give to the Lord out of a sense of obligation to his law. We're motivated to give out of a great sense of his love. He left everything for us. He gave us salvation. More than any one of our aspect of our money God first wants our life. He wants all of our life. In Jesus' only coming you see a beautiful demonstration of the principle that it's more blessed to give than to receive. The person who gives will have a return to him. Until Jesus came to this earth God did not have the family of sons and daughters that he now has in us. But because Jesus himself came and gave himself for us the Lord's investment has been returned a thousand, a hundred thousand a million fold because now there are we people in the kingdom of God. A result of Christ's giving.

Love the giver. Do nothing out of a sense of wooden obligation. But do whatever you do whether it's giving financially, whether it's giving your time, your talent, your love, your time with other people. Give it all joyfully because it is in the very character and nature of God to give to us.

Father, we thank you for these moments we've had to worship you and to come upon your word again. We realize, Lord, that tithing is such an act of faith. Because we look at our budget and we don't see possibly how in the world it can be done. Yet Lord, this is the plan you've given in your word and this is the plan whereby the needs in your house have always been met. It's also your plan for this local body. Help us all, Lord, to see what our particular responsibility is to ministry in this area. Not just to this church, Lord. For if we only gave money to a church that somehow doesn't seem to be going far enough. But really help us to see what placing gifts before you mean as we give to our local fellowship. That it means that we as a body can be strengthened and ministries can be loosened to bring your name to this community and to strengthen and edify your church. Lord, you know that right now as we look at the 1982 church budget we have been wrestling with new things that need to be done and yet at times too the shortage of funds to do them. Lord, we believe that it is your perfect will for us all to participate in the tithe so that there will not be a thing lacking in your heart for the ministry of this church. We want to say with our tithe and with our offerings that we love both you and we love the ministry that you've given to us here. Lord,

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encourage our faith. Encourage our discipline. Whatever it takes. But help us in this area of our life to begin walking obediently to you. Then Lord, we thank you most of all for the gift that you have given to us. The gift of salvation. That you loved us so much you gave your only Son that when we believe in you we do not perish but we have the gift of everlasting life. We praise you for that. At this Christmas, Lord, as we come into these last few days of getting ready for Christmas we pray, Lord Jesus, that if there are people here who haven't yet felt the real spirit and meaning of Christmas that these next few days would be filled with joy. Filled with your presence. And give us, Lord, meaningful ways to reach out and love members of our family and love other people that we want to somehow show love to. And be honored and glorified in all of our Christmas. Encourage those who are sorrowful and Lord, help us at this Christmas time to be especially sensitive to others who need our encouragement and strength, our love and support. Lord, we ask this in your name and we're persuaded that you're able to do whatever your word proclaims we are to do. You're able to do back to us abundantly and above all that we ask or think or say. In the name of our Lord. Amen.