

A BIBLICAL JOURNEY FROM OBLIGATION
— TO GENEROUS WORSHIP —

THE TITHE QUESTION

— 22 JOURNEYS THROUGH GOD'S WORD —

DISCOVER THE TRUTH
ABOUT BIBLICAL
GIVING AND
HOW TO
WORSHIP GOD
WITH A
GENEROUS HEART



DR. TIM W. GOULD

WE'VE BEEN ASKING THE WRONG QUESTION. MAYBE IT'S TIME TO ASK THE RIGHT ONE.

For generations, many Christians have been taught that the tithe is what we owe God, and the offering is whatever we choose to give on top of that. But what if that distinction doesn't come from the New Testament at all?

The Tithe Question invites you on a journey through Scripture—from Abraham to the apostles—to rediscover how God's people have given throughout history and what the New Testament actually teaches about generous, grace-filled giving.

IN THIS BOOK, YOU WILL:

- Explore 22 journeys through the Bible that reveal God's heart for giving
 - Understand the difference between Old Covenant obligations and New Covenant grace
 - Discover how the language of "tithing" became so common in the church
 - Learn how to give with freedom, joy, and worship in your heart
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The Tithe Question

*A Biblical Journey From Obligation to
Generous Worship*

By Dr. Tim W. Gould

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A Personal Invitation

Before you read another page, I'd like to ask one favor. Bring two things with you on this journey.

First, bring an open Bible. Second, bring an open heart. That's all I ask.

I'm not asking you to agree with me simply because I wrote this book. Actually, I hope you won't. Not until you've searched the Scriptures for yourself.

One of the greatest compliments anyone could ever give me isn't, "*I believed everything you wrote.*" It's this: "*You made me open my Bible.*"

If this book encourages you to spend more time reading God's Word than you otherwise would have, then it will have accomplished something worthwhile.

This book isn't about criticizing churches. It isn't about attacking pastors. It isn't about creating another debate among Christians.

Most pastors I know love Jesus deeply. They preach, teach, pray, counsel, visit hospitals, comfort grieving families, and faithfully serve week after week. Like every believer, they are students of God's Word, continually seeking to understand it more accurately.

This book simply asks us to do something together. Slow down. Read complete passages instead of isolated verses.

Ask honest questions. Allow the Bible to tell its own story. And then...follow wherever God leads. Even if that journey surprises us. Especially if it surprises us.

One more thing.

Please don't read this book looking for ammunition to win an argument. Read it looking for the Father's heart. Because if all we discover is another opinion about tithing, we've missed something much greater.

My prayer is that together we'll discover the heart of a God who has always desired faith over empty ritual... relationship over religion... and willing worship over reluctant obligation.

If we discover Him... this journey will have been worth every page.

So... pour yourself a cup of coffee. Open your Bible. And let's begin.

Journey One

The Question I Never Meant to Ask

"And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free." John 8:32 (KJV)

Let me tell you something about myself before we go any farther. I don't enjoy arguments. Now don't misunderstand me. I enjoy good conversations. I love sitting around a table with open Bibles. I enjoy hearing thoughtful questions. I appreciate people who challenge me to think.

But arguments? Not so much. If someone says, *"Let's debate theology."* My first thought is usually, *"How about we grill hamburgers instead?"*

Life is simply too short to spend all of it trying to win arguments. I'd much rather help people discover who God really is. Because when we truly see the Father's heart... everything changes.

At an early age I lived in Houston, Texas. Like many children, I have wonderful young childhood memories of church. Sunday School. Vacation Bible School. Old hymns. Friendly people.

And one very unusual memory. One Sunday morning my teacher held up a little red plastic lid from a butter container. I have no idea why she chose a butter lid.

Maybe it was the closest thing she could find. Maybe every great theologian secretly keeps butter lids in their desk. I honestly don't know.

But she held it up and said, "*Hell is like this circle. Once you cross over, you can never come back.*" Out of everything she taught that morning... that's the only thing I remember.

Funny how our minds work.

Sometimes one small moment stays with us for a lifetime. Not long afterward... our family changed.

My stepmother went to a neighborhood laundromat one afternoon. While she was there, a Jehovah's Witnesses struck up a conversation with her. One conversation became another. Another became a Bible study. Before long she had become deeply involved with the Jehovah's Witnesses.

Then our family became involved. Or at least.. we children were expected to. It created years of conflict inside our home.

Even today, members of my family remain within that organization, while others came to know Jesus Christ personally.

Watching all of this unfold planted a question deep inside my heart.

How can sincere people, all claiming to believe the Bible, arrive at such different conclusions?

That question never left me.

As I grew older, I began reading Scripture for myself. Not because I wanted letters after my name. Honestly... I had no idea I'd someday earn a doctorate in theology. I simply wanted to know one thing.

What does God actually say?

Not... *"What does my denomination say?"*

Not... *"What does tradition say?"*

Not even... *"What does my favorite preacher say?"*

Just... *"Father... what have You said?"*

That question quietly became the compass of my life.

Sometimes I discovered verses that confirmed what I already believed. Other times... God gently smiled and reminded me that I still had much to learn.

Have you noticed? God has an amazing way of correcting us without humiliating us. I'm thankful for that. Because I've needed it more times than I care to admit.

Years later... while studying Scripture... I stumbled onto a subject I never intended to question.

Tithing.

Now... before your blood pressure starts climbing... relax. Nobody is coming after your wallet.

At least not me.

And if you're already reaching for tomatoes... please keep holding them. You may decide they're better suited for a salad by the time we finish this journey.

Like most Christians... I simply assumed tithing was part of following Jesus. Why wouldn't I? Every church I'd attended taught it. Every Christian leader I respected believed it. I never questioned it.

Then one day... a very simple question crossed my mind.

Where does the New Testament actually command Christians to tithe?

Notice what I asked. Not... "*Where does the New Testament mention tithing?*"

Those are two very different questions.

Where does it actually command it? That one question quietly opened a door I never expected to walk through. It led me into years of study.

I studied Hebrew. I studied Greek. I studied church history. I read books written by people who strongly believed Christians should tithe. I read books written by those who strongly believed they should not. Sometimes I agreed. Sometimes I disagreed.

Often... I discovered both sides were making assumptions that the biblical text itself never made. That bothered me. Not because I wanted to prove anyone wrong. Because I wanted to understand God correctly.

Before we continue... I need to tell you something very important.

This is **not** a book against giving. Actually... my prayer is exactly the opposite. I hope that after reading this book you'll become more generous than you've ever been.

Not because someone pressures you. Not because someone frightens you. Not because you're afraid your washing machine will mysteriously stop working if you miss a week.

Yes... I've actually heard sermons that sounded suspiciously close to that. Apparently washing machines attend church now.

No...I want you to become generous because you've discovered something far greater than obligation.

Grace.

Fear asks, *"How little can I give and still keep God happy?"*

Grace asks, *"Father... after everything You've given me, how could I not respond?"*

Those are two completely different hearts.

And throughout this journey, I believe you're going to discover something beautiful. God has always been after the heart.

Always.

So here's my invitation. For just a little while... let's place our traditions on the table. Not throw them away. Just... set them there.

Let's open our Bibles. Let's read complete passages. Let's ask honest questions. Let's allow Scripture to tell its own story. And let's have enough humility to follow wherever God leads. Even if He surprises us. Especially if He surprises us.

Because every time God's Word has corrected me... I've never loved Him less. I've only loved Him more.

Coffee Break

May I leave you with one thought before we begin?

Please don't read this book looking for ammunition. Read it looking for Jesus.

If all we discover is another opinion about tithing... we've missed the point.

But if somewhere along this journey we discover the heart of a Father who has always loved His children, always pursued them with grace, and always desired faith before empty ritual... then every page will have been worth reading.

So... refill your coffee. Open your Bible. And let's begin.

Journey Two

What If We've Been Asking the Wrong Question?

"The unfolding of your words gives light; it gives understanding to the simple." Psalm 119:130 (NIV)

Can I ask you a question? Actually... it's probably the most important question we'll ask before we begin opening passages about tithing.

What if we've been asking the wrong question?

Most books about tithing begin with a debate. *"Should Christians tithe?"*

It's certainly an important question. But I don't think it's the first question.

Imagine walking into the middle of a movie. Everyone else knows the story. You don't. Within a few minutes you're whispering,

"Who's that?"

"Why are they fighting?"

"Wait... is he the good guy or the bad guy?"

Without the beginning of the story... the ending doesn't make much sense.

I think many of us have approached the subject of giving the same way. We've jumped into the middle of the Bible and immediately asked, "*Should I tithe?*"

Maybe... just maybe... we should back up and ask a different question. **"What story has God been telling all along?"**

The Bible isn't a collection of disconnected verses. It's one story. One Author. One plan. One Redeemer.

From Genesis to Revelation, God is revealing Himself. Little by little. Step by step.

Sometimes we wish God had simply handed us one chapter called, "*Everything You Need to Know About Giving.*" Wouldn't that have been convenient?

Instead... He chose to reveal truth over thousands of years. Why? Because that's often how God teaches.

He doesn't simply give us information. He forms us. He patiently reveals Himself. Then He invites us to trust Him.

Think about raising a child. When my wife's children were little, she didn't sit them down at five years old and explain everything she knew about life.

Honestly... they were probably more interested in whether dessert was included with dinner.

But, as they grew... the conversations grew. The lessons deepened. Their understanding matured.

In many ways, that's how God unfolded His revelation. He wasn't changing His mind. He was unfolding His plan. One step at a time.

That's why we're taking this journey together. Not because we're trying to avoid difficult passages. Believe me... we're going to discuss all of them.

Abraham. Jacob. Moses. The Law. The Prophets. Malachi. Jesus. The Apostle Paul. Hebrews. The storehouse. "Robbing God." The windows of heaven. The cheerful giver. And even some Church History.

We're not skipping any of it. If you've ever sat through a sermon and quietly wondered, "*But what about...?*"

Relax. We'll get there. I promise.

One step at a time.

Now let me ask another question. When you hear the word **tithe**, what immediately comes to mind? For most Christians, the answer comes quickly. "*Ten percent.*" That's true. The word literally means a tenth.

But here's the next question. **A tenth of what?** Income? Paychecks? Business profits? Birthday money? A tax refund? A Christmas bonus?

If your grandmother slips a twenty-dollar bill into your birthday card... does that become part of a tithe? If your teenage son earns twenty dollars mowing the neighbor's lawn... is he expected to give two dollars?

Those aren't trick questions. They're honest questions. And honest questions deserve honest answers.

I've learned something over the years. Whenever sincere Christians give very different answers to the same biblical question...it's usually a signal.

Not to argue faster. To slow down. Because somewhere along the way... we may have skipped an important step.

So that's exactly what we're going to do. We're going to slow down. Open our Bibles. Read complete passages. Ask honest questions. And allow Scripture to define its own terms.

One of the easiest mistakes any Bible student can make is assuming we already know what a biblical word means. Words matter. Definitions matter. Context matters. Vocabulary matters.

If we let modern ideas define biblical words... we'll eventually misunderstand biblical truths. God deserves better than that.

Have you ever played the old game called "Telephone?" One person whispers a message into someone else's ear. That person whispers it to the next.

By the time it reaches the last person... everyone is laughing because the message barely resembles what was originally said.

Traditions can sometimes work the same way. Now please don't misunderstand me. Tradition isn't the enemy. Some traditions are beautiful.

I love Christmas Eve candlelight services. I love hearing a congregation sing *Amazing Grace*. I love listening to children sing Christmas songs just a little too loudly and just a little off key. Those are wonderful traditions.

The problem comes when we can no longer remember whether an idea came from Scripture... or simply from hearing it repeated for generations. Those two are not always the same.

Please hear my heart.

This journey isn't about throwing traditions away. It's about gently asking, **"Where did this idea begin?"**

That's a healthy question. In fact, Luke commended people who asked questions like that. Listen to what he wrote.

Acts 17:11 (NIV)

"Now the Berean Jews were of more noble character than those in Thessalonica, for they received the message with great eagerness and examined the Scriptures every day to see if what Paul said was true."

Notice what made the Bereans noble. It wasn't skepticism. It wasn't arrogance. It wasn't because they

enjoyed arguing. They eagerly listened... then they opened their Bibles. They wanted to know whether what they had heard matched what God had said. That's exactly what I hope you'll do throughout this book.

Please don't believe something because I wrote it. Believe it because you've seen it in God's Word.

So where do we begin? Not with Malachi. Not with Paul. Not even with Abraham.

We begin with something even more basic. We begin by allowing the Bible to define its own words.

That may sound simple. But I've discovered that some of the most life-changing truths are hidden inside the simplest questions. And one of those questions is this...

What does the Bible actually call a tithe?

That's where our journey is headed next.

Coffee Break

May I encourage you with something before we continue? One of my favorite prayers has become one of the shortest. "I am open Lord...teach me."

I've prayed those words for years. Sometimes God teaches me something completely new. Sometimes He reminds me of something I'd forgotten.

Sometimes... He gently shows me that I wasn't asking the right question in the first place. I've never regretted

praying, "*I am open Lord, teach me.*" I hope you'll pray it too.

Not because of this book. But because I believe our Heavenly Father delights in teaching His children.

And I've discovered that every time He teaches me... I walk away loving Him just a little bit more.

So... refill your coffee. Keep your Bible open. Because in our next journey... we're going to meet a man named Abraham.

We'll discover the very first mention of a tithe in Scripture. And we'll begin to see a beautiful truth that will echo throughout the rest of this book: **God always gives first. His people simply respond.**

Journey Three

Abraham... Before There Was a Law

"Abram believed the LORD, and he credited it to him as righteousness." **Genesis 15:6 (NIV)**

If you've been waiting for Abraham... Congratulations. We finally made it.

Some of you have probably been thinking,

"Tim... we're two journeys into a book about tithing, and you still haven't mentioned Abraham!"

I know. That was intentional.

Before we could understand Abraham's gift... we first needed to decide something. Would we allow the Bible to tell its own story? Or would we jump ahead to conclusions before hearing the whole account?

Now... we're ready.

Whenever someone begins talking about tithing, Abraham usually enters the conversation almost immediately. And rightly so. The first mention of giving a tenth is found in his life.

But before we read the verses, we need to understand the story. Because Scripture was never intended to be read one verse at a time. It was written as history.

Real people. Real events.

A real God faithfully working through them all. So let's back up.

Abraham's nephew, Lot, had gotten himself into trouble. Again. If you've read much about Lot, you'll notice that trouble seemed to know his address.

Several kings had gone to war. Cities were conquered. People were captured. Among those taken captive was Lot and his family.

When Abraham heard the news, he didn't shrug his shoulders and say, "*Well... that's unfortunate.*" He gathered 318 trained men from his own household and set out to rescue his nephew.

Now let's pause for just a second.

Three hundred and eighteen men. Against armies that had just defeated several kings. Personally... I would've been looking for a different plan.

Maybe fasting. Definitely praying. Possibly running the other direction.

But Abraham picked up his sword.

Against all odds... God gave Abraham the victory. Lot was rescued. The captives were freed. The stolen possessions were recovered. Everything that had been taken...came home.

Don't forget that. The victory came first. Everything else happened afterward.

As Abraham returned from battle, two men came out to meet him. One was the king of Sodom. The other was Melchizedek, king of Salem and priest of God Most High.

The contrast couldn't be more striking. One represented the values of Sodom. The other represented the worship of the Most High God.

One conversation would center on possessions. The other would center on praise.

Sometimes the people we meet after a victory reveal what's happening inside our hearts. Abraham's meeting certainly did.

Let's read the account together. Not part of it. All of it. Because context matters.

Genesis 14:18-20 (NIV)

"Then Melchizedek king of Salem brought out bread and wine. He was priest of God Most High, and he blessed Abram, saying,

'Blessed be Abram by God Most High, Creator of heaven and earth. And praise be to God Most High, who delivered your enemies into your hand.'

Then Abram gave him a tenth of everything."

Let's slow down. Read those verses one more time.

Who receives the praise? Not Abraham. God.

Who is credited with the victory? Not Abraham. God.

Melchizedek doesn't congratulate Abraham for his military brilliance. He praises God for delivering Abraham's enemies into his hand.

That little detail is easy to overlook. But I think it's one of the most important parts of the story. Because before Abraham ever gave a tenth... he acknowledged that the victory belonged to God.

Now let me ask the question that changed the direction of my own study years ago.

Where did God command Abraham to do this?

Take your time. Read the chapters before Genesis 14.

You won't find a command. You won't find a law. You won't find a requirement. You won't find a penalty for refusing. The Bible simply records what Abraham did.

That doesn't mean the event is unimportant. Quite the opposite. It means we should be careful not to say more than Scripture says.

Whenever the Bible is silent... we should be careful not to speak too loudly.

What can we say with confidence?

We can say that Abraham had just experienced an overwhelming victory that he recognized came from God. We can say that Melchizedek blessed the Lord Most High. We can say that Abraham responded by giving a tenth.

Those are facts.

And those facts reveal something beautiful. Before the Law was ever given... before Mount Sinai... before Moses... before Israel became a nation... giving appears in Scripture as an act of worship flowing from faith.

Now before we move on, I want to address something that often happens whenever Abraham's tithe is discussed.

Some people immediately say, *"See! Abraham tithed before the Law, so every Christian should tithe today."*

Others respond just as quickly, *"No, it was only a one-time event, so it has nothing to teach Christians."*

May I suggest something?

Perhaps both sides are moving a little too fast. Remember... we're taking a journey. At this point in the

story, we don't yet know everything God is going to reveal about giving. We've only reached Genesis. The story isn't finished.

So instead of forcing Abraham's experience to answer every question, let's simply allow it to teach what it clearly teaches. And then... let's keep walking.

There is one more observation that captured my heart. Bible students often speak about the **principle of first mention**.

While it isn't a rule that determines doctrine, it is often helpful to notice how God first introduces an important subject.

So what is the first picture Scripture paints of giving a tenth? Fear? No. Obligation? No. A religious tax? No.

The first picture is a man whose heart has been overwhelmed by the goodness of God. His response is worship. I don't think that's accidental.

I think God is introducing us to something that He will continue developing throughout the rest of Scripture.

But don't miss something equally important. Abraham's gift wasn't a payment for the victory. It wasn't a fee. It wasn't a bargain.

It was a response.

God had already acted. God had already delivered. God had already provided. Abraham simply responded in faith.

That order matters.

In fact, I think you'll discover that it becomes one of the great themes of the entire Bible. God acts first. His people respond in faith.

Coffee Break

Can I leave you with a thought before we continue? I've noticed something over the years. Whenever we begin talking about giving, people naturally start thinking about percentages.

God seems to begin somewhere else. He begins with the heart.

That's true with Abraham. It's true with Jacob, whom we'll meet next. It's true under the Law. It's true in the teachings of Jesus. And it's certainly true in the letters of Paul.

The heart has always mattered to God. Maybe that's because He never really needed our possessions.

He wanted us. And once He has our hearts... everything else finds its proper place.

So... top off your coffee. Keep your Bible open. Because next we're going to meet a man who isn't celebrating victory. He's running for his life. He's sleeping on a rock.

And yet... he too is going to teach us something beautiful about faith, worship, and the God who always makes the first move.

Journey Four

Jacob's Promise

A Rock for a Pillow and a God Who Keeps His Promises

"Without faith it is impossible to please God..."

Hebrews 11:6 (NIV)

Have you ever noticed how different Abraham and Jacob are?

Abraham often appears calm and steady. Jacob... well... Jacob reminds me a little more of the rest of us.

He's complicated. Sometimes courageous. Sometimes fearful. Sometimes amazingly wise. Sometimes... not so much.

Actually, that's one of the reasons I appreciate him. The Bible doesn't hide the flaws of its heroes. It tells the truth. If Hollywood had written the Bible, everyone would've looked like a superhero.

God wrote something much better. He wrote the truth.

By the time we meet Jacob in Genesis 28, his life is a mess. He has deceived his father. Taken his brother's blessing. Broken trust within his own family. Now his brother Esau wants to kill him.

Jacob isn't traveling because he enjoys adventure. He's running for his life. No home. No family beside him. No certainty about tomorrow. No comfortable bed. Not even a pillow. Scripture says he placed a stone under his head and went to sleep.

I've stayed in some inexpensive, even cheap, hotels over the years... but I've never been handed a rock at the front desk and told to have a good night sleep!

That night... everything changed. Not because Jacob found God. Because God came looking for Jacob. That may be one of the most encouraging truths in all of Scripture.

Again and again, we see God taking the first step. He sought Adam in the garden. He called Moses from a burning bush. He interrupted Saul on the road to Damascus.

And now... He meets a frightened young man sleeping in the wilderness. Grace always seems to arrive before we expect it.

Let's read the story together.

Take your time. Notice who speaks first. Notice who makes the promises. Notice who takes the initiative.

Genesis 28:10-22 (NIV)

"Jacob left Beersheba and set out for Harran. When he reached a certain place, he stopped for the night because the

sun had set. Taking one of the stones there, he put it under his head and lay down to sleep.

He had a dream in which he saw a stairway resting on the earth, with its top reaching to heaven, and the angels of God were ascending and descending on it. There above it stood the LORD, and he said:

'I am the LORD, the God of your father Abraham and the God of Isaac. I will give you and your descendants the land on which you are lying. Your descendants will be like the dust of the earth, and you will spread out to the west and to the east, to the north and to the south. All peoples on earth will be blessed through you and your offspring. I am with you and will watch over you wherever you go, and I will bring you back to this land. I will not leave you until I have done what I have promised you.'

When Jacob awoke from his sleep, he thought, 'Surely the LORD is in this place, and I was not aware of it.' He was afraid and said, 'How awesome is this place! This is none other than the house of God; this is the gate of heaven.'

Early the next morning Jacob took the stone he had placed under his head and set it up as a pillar and poured oil on top of it. He called that place Bethel, though the city used to be called Luz.

Then Jacob made a vow, saying, 'If God will be with me and will watch over me on this journey I am taking and will give me food to eat and clothes to wear so that I return safely to my father's household, then the LORD will be my God and

this stone that I have set up as a pillar will be God's house, and of all that you give me I will give you a tenth.'"

Before we talk about the tenth... let's notice something even more important.

Who spoke first? God did.

Who made promises first? God did.

Who promised His presence? God did.

Who promised protection? God did.

Who promised to fulfill His covenant? God did.

Only after God spoke did Jacob respond. Don't rush past that. It's one of the most beautiful patterns in the entire Bible. God reveals Himself. People respond.

God gives grace. Faith responds. God makes promises. Faith answers.

That pattern begins in Genesis and continues all the way to the Cross.

Now let's talk about Jacob's vow.

Over the centuries, Bible scholars have understood these verses in different ways. Some believe Jacob was bargaining with God.

Others understand his words as the response of a man whose faith was beginning to grow after encountering God's promises.

Faithful Christians have held both views.

Rather than forcing the text to answer questions it wasn't written to answer, let's begin with what we know for certain.

Jacob encountered the grace of God. Jacob acknowledged that everything he would receive came from God.

Then Jacob said, *"...of all that you give me I will give you a tenth."*

Whatever conclusions we eventually reach, let's not overlook the heart of the passage. Jacob recognized God as the Giver. And that's where true worship always begins.

Now compare Jacob with Abraham. Abraham had just experienced an incredible victory. Jacob had no idea what tomorrow would bring. Abraham stood in triumph. Jacob lay on the ground with a rock beneath his head.

Different circumstances. Different personalities. Different moments in life. Yet both men shared something beautiful. Both responded to God in faith.

Neither account records God demanding a tenth. Neither presents giving as a religious fee. Neither suggests that God was selling blessings.

Instead, both stories reveal men responding to the goodness and faithfulness of God. That thread is too important to miss.

Because before we ever arrive at Mount Sinai... before Moses receives the Law... before Israel becomes a covenant nation... God is already teaching us something. Faith has always been the language of worship.

Here's something else that captured my heart.

Listen again to Jacob's words. *"...of all that you give me..."*

What a wonderful perspective. Jacob understood that everything ultimately came from God. His food. His clothing. His protection. His future. His family. His possessions. None of it existed apart from the gracious hand of God.

I wonder how much easier generosity becomes when we truly believe that.

After all... it's difficult to cling tightly to something you've already recognized belongs to Someone else.

Please don't miss where we are in the story. We're still in Genesis. We're still centuries before the Law. God is laying a foundation.

He's teaching us about faith. About worship. About dependence.

Soon... we'll arrive at Mount Sinai. The story is going to change dramatically. Not because God changes. But because the covenant changes.

And understanding that difference will become one of the most important discoveries in our journey.

Coffee Break

Can I share something that's encouraged me over the years? I love that God chose Jacob. And not after Jacob had everything together. Not after years of spiritual maturity. Not after he had earned God's favor.

God met Jacob while he was running. Maybe you feel a little like that today. Maybe life hasn't gone according to plan. Maybe you've made decisions you wish you could undo.

Take heart.

The God who met Jacob in the wilderness still delights in meeting people exactly where they are. He doesn't wait for perfect people. He transforms willing ones.

That gives me hope. I hope it gives you hope too.

The next journey... everything changes. We'll leave Genesis. And we'll arrive at Mount Sinai. The Law is about to be given. And with it comes one of the biggest questions in this entire journey.

Why did God establish the tithe as part of the Mosaic Covenant?

If we answer that question carefully... many of the pieces we've been collecting will begin falling beautifully into place.

Journey Five

Then Everything Changed

Welcome to Mount Sinai

*"The law was our guardian until Christ came that we
might be justified by faith."*

Galatians 3:24 (NIV)

We've been walking through Genesis together for several journeys now. Abraham. Jacob. Faith. Promises. Grace.

If you've been paying close attention... you've probably noticed something. Nobody has been commanded to tithe. Nobody has been threatened. Nobody has been told, *"If you don't give a tenth, you're robbing God."*

In fact... we haven't even arrived at the nation of Israel yet. That's because God is still building the story.

Now... everything changes.

Imagine reading a novel. For several chapters you're getting to know the characters. Then suddenly... the setting changes. The pace changes. Everything feels different. That's exactly what happens when we arrive at Mount Sinai.

Israel is no longer just one family. They have become a nation. God has delivered them from slavery in Egypt.

He has parted the Red Sea. Fed them in the wilderness. Provided water from a rock. Led them by a pillar of cloud during the day and a pillar of fire at night.

Again and again... God acted first. Israel responded.

Does that sound familiar? It should.

We've already seen that pattern with Abraham. We've seen it with Jacob. And now we see it with an entire nation. God always makes the first move.

When Israel arrived at Mount Sinai, something remarkable happened. God entered into a covenant with His people.

This covenant wasn't like the promises He had made to Abraham. It contained commandments. Responsibilities. Blessings. Consequences. It established Israel as a covenant nation under God's Law.

Everything about their national life would now be shaped by that covenant. Their worship. Their sacrifices. Their priests. Their festivals. Their dietary laws. Their civil laws. Their moral laws. Their relationship with God as a nation.

Everything.

If you've ever wondered why Christians don't offer animal sacrifices today... you're already recognizing that covenants matter.

The question isn't whether God's Word changes. It doesn't. The question is whether God administers His relationship with people differently under different covenants.

The answer is clearly yes. That's why we're taking this journey one step at a time.

Before we go any farther, I want to say something very important. Please don't think of the Law as something negative.

Sometimes Christians speak as though the Old Testament were God's "bad idea" and the New Testament became His "good idea."

Nothing could be further from the truth. The Law was given by a holy God. It reflected His holiness. It taught Israel what it meant to live as His covenant people.

Listen to what Paul wrote.

Romans 7:12 (NIV)

"So then, the law is holy, and the commandment is holy, righteous and good."

That's not the description of something evil. The Law was holy.

The problem wasn't the Law. The problem was the human heart.

A mirror can show me that my face is dirty. It just can't wash it. Likewise, the Law could reveal sin. It could never remove it.

Only Jesus could do that. And we'll get there. But for now... let's stay at Mount Sinai.

One of the greatest mistakes we can make is assuming every command God ever gave was intended for every person in every age. Think about Noah. God told Noah to build an ark.

I've never met a Christian who believes God expects us all to start cutting lumber and looking for two giraffes.

Why? Because we recognize that command belonged to a specific time and purpose in God's plan.

The same principle applies throughout Scripture. Some commands are universal. Some are covenantal. Some are directed to individuals. Some are directed to nations. That's why context matters.

Before asking, "*Does this apply to me?*" we should first ask, "*To whom was God speaking?*"

That's not avoiding the Bible. That's honoring it.

As we continue through the Law, you're going to notice something fascinating. God doesn't simply tell Israel, "*Give Me ten percent.*"

He carefully explains... what was to be tithed. Who received it. Why it was given. How it was used. When it was brought. Where it was taken.

The details matter. Very much.

Because if we allow Scripture to define the tithe instead of our assumptions... we may discover things we've never noticed before.

Now let me say something that I hope you'll remember for the rest of this book.

The Law didn't replace faith. It revealed what covenant faithfulness looked like for Israel.

Think about that for a moment.

Abraham responded in faith. Jacob responded in faith. Israel was called to live by faith as God's covenant people.

Faith has always mattered. The covenant changed. God's desire for trusting hearts never did.

That's a thread we're going to keep following all the way to Jesus.

Coffee Break

Can I share something that's helped me over the years? Whenever I read the Old Testament, I try to remember one simple truth. God wasn't writing random rules. He was revealing His character.

Every command teaches us something about the God who gave it. Sometimes it teaches us about His holiness. Sometimes His justice. Sometimes His mercy. Sometimes His desire to dwell among His people.

So when we begin reading about the tithe in the Law, let's resist the temptation to ask only, "*What do I have to do?*" Instead... let's ask, "*Father... what are You showing me about Yourself?*"

I've found that question almost always leads to a deeper answer.

Next time... we'll finally examine the Law's definition of the tithe.

Not what you've heard. Not what I've heard. Not what tradition says. We'll simply open the Scriptures and ask, **"How did God define the tithe?"**

And I have a feeling some of the details are going to surprise us.

Journey Six

What Did God Actually Call a Tithe?

Let's Let the Bible Define Its Own Terms

*"Every word of God is flawless; he is a shield to those who
take refuge in him."*

Proverbs 30:5 (NIV)

Have you ever noticed how easy it is to assume we know what someone means before they've finished speaking?

I've done it more times than I'd like to admit.

My wife has started telling me something, and halfway through the sentence I've already decided I know where she's going, and interrupt her. The problem is... many times I did not! (I know I can't be alone in this!?)

She gently reminds me, "*Tim... let me finish.*" That's usually good advice.

You know... I think we've sometimes done the same thing with Scripture.

We hear the word **tithe**... and before God finishes explaining it... we've already decided what it means.

Maybe... just maybe... we should let Him finish.

We've finally arrived at the place where God Himself defines the tithe under the Mosaic Covenant. Not a preacher. Not a denomination. Not a theologian. God.

That means we need to read carefully. Very carefully. Because definitions matter.

Imagine buying a house. The contract says, "*The refrigerator stays with the house.*" On moving day the seller points to the dishwasher and says, "*That's what I meant.*" You'd probably smile and say, "*No... the contract says refrigerator.*"

Words matter. Definitions matter. Vocabulary matters. Especially when God is the One giving them.

Let's begin where the Law first gives us a formal definition.

Leviticus 27:30–32 (NIV)

"A tithe of everything from the land, whether grain from the soil or fruit from the trees, belongs to the LORD; it is holy to the LORD.

Whoever would redeem any of their tithe must add a fifth of the value to it.

Every tithe of the herd and flock – every tenth animal that passes under the shepherd's rod – will be holy to the LORD."

Let's slow down. Read those verses again. What words keep appearing? Grain. Fruit. Trees. Herd. Flock. Animals. Produce.

The text is wonderfully specific. God isn't speaking in vague generalities. He's defining the covenant tithe.

Now let's address something that we promised we would never ignore.

Money existed. Absolutely. People bought land. People paid debts. People conducted business. Silver and gold were well known in the ancient world.

So let's be very careful. The question is **not** whether money existed.

The question is this: **When God defined the covenant tithe, what did He identify as the tithe?**

That's an entirely different question. And it deserves an honest answer.

Notice something fascinating in verse 31.

God says, **"Whoever would redeem any of their tithe must add a fifth of the value to it."**

Wait a minute. Redeem it? Why would someone redeem part of the tithe?

Because in certain situations a person could substitute money for part of what was being presented—but doing so came with an additional twenty percent.

That's an important detail. It tells us that God distinguished between the tithe itself and redeeming the tithe. The distinction matters.

We'll come back to it.

Now let's keep reading. One passage rarely tells the whole story. God continues explaining the tithe in Deuteronomy.

Deuteronomy 14:22-26 (NIV)

"Be sure to set aside a tenth of all that your fields produce each year.

Eat the tenth of your grain, new wine and olive oil, and the firstborn of your herds and flocks in the presence of the LORD your God at the place he will choose as a dwelling for his Name, so that you may learn to revere the LORD your God always.

But if that place is too distant and you have been blessed by the LORD your God and cannot carry your tithe (because the place where the LORD will choose to put his Name is so far away), then exchange your tithe for silver, and take the silver with you and go to the place the LORD your God will choose.

Use the silver to buy whatever you like: cattle, sheep, wine or other fermented drink, or anything you wish. Then you and your household shall eat there in the presence of the LORD your God and rejoice."

This passage is beautiful. Notice what God did **not** say. He didn't tell the Israelites to take silver to the sanctuary as the finished tithe. He told them that if the journey was too long, they could convert the tithe into silver for transportation.

When they arrived... they used the silver to purchase the appropriate food and drink so they could rejoice before the Lord.

God wasn't changing the definition of the tithe. He was providing a practical solution for travel.

Isn't that just like God? Even His commands reveal His kindness.

Now someone may be thinking, "*Tim... why are we spending so much time on these details?*" Because details matter. If we skip over them, we'll eventually build conclusions on assumptions instead of Scripture.

And we've promised each other something from the beginning of this journey. We're going to let the Bible speak before we do.

As I studied these passages years ago, I noticed something that surprised me. God didn't simply command a percentage. He described a covenant system. Who gave. Who received. What was included. How it functioned. Where it was taken. Even what happened if travel became difficult.

The tithe wasn't an isolated command. It was woven into the life of Israel as God's covenant nation. That observation became one of the turning points in my own study.

Please don't misunderstand what I'm saying. I'm not asking you to draw conclusions yet. We're not finished. We've only gathered evidence.

Like putting together a puzzle, we've found several important pieces. We're simply placing them on the table. The picture is still developing.

Coffee Break

Can I leave you with one thought? I've discovered that one of the greatest acts of worship isn't singing. Or praying. Or even giving.

It's allowing God's Word to say exactly what God intended it to say. Nothing more. Nothing less.

That requires humility. Sometimes it means admitting, "*I never noticed that before.*" I've said those words many times over the years. And every single time... God has been a patient Teacher.

Maybe that's why I love studying the Bible so much. Every page reminds me that the Author knows infinitely more than the student. And somehow... He still invites us to sit down and learn.

What a gracious Father.

Next time... we're going to ask another important question. If this was the covenant tithe... **why did God establish it?**

Who benefited? Who received it? What purpose did it serve within Israel?

As we'll soon discover... the answer is much bigger than simply supporting the priests.

And once we understand its purpose... many other passages begin making much more sense.

Journey Seven

Why Did God Establish the Tithe?

Understanding God's Purpose Before Drawing Our Conclusions

"I give to the Levites all the tithes in Israel as their inheritance in return for the work they do while serving at the tent of meeting."

Numbers 18:21 (NIV)

Have you ever assembled something without reading the instructions? Go ahead... be honest. I have.

You dump all the pieces onto the floor. Confidently begin putting everything together. Thirty minutes later... you discover three screws sitting on the table. Somehow... they seemed important.

My wife has gently reminded me more than once, *"Maybe you should read the directions first."* (She knows I mostly just look at the pictures) She's usually right.

The same thing can happen when we study Scripture. Sometimes we're so eager to answer a question that we skip something even more important. The purpose.

Before asking, *"Does this apply to me?"* we should first ask, *"Why did God establish it in the first place?"*

Purpose always helps us understand commands.

So... why did God establish the tithe? Let's let Him answer.

When Israel entered the Promised Land, every tribe received an inheritance. Well... almost every tribe. One tribe was different. The tribe of Levi.

The Levites were set apart to serve in the Tabernacle and later the Temple. While the other tribes farmed fields... raised livestock... harvested vineyards... and passed their land from generation to generation... the Levites received something different.

Actually... Someone different. Listen carefully.

Numbers 18:20-21 (NIV)

"The LORD said to Aaron, 'You will have no inheritance in their land, nor will you have any share among them; I am your share and your inheritance among the Israelites.

I give to the Levites all the tithes in Israel as their inheritance in return for the work they do while serving at the tent of meeting.'"

Did you catch that word? **Inheritance**. Don't rush past it. It's one of the most important words in this chapter.

Every tribe received land. Except Levi. God said, *"I am your inheritance."* Then He provided for them through the tithes of Israel.

The tithe wasn't created because God needed food. Or because heaven had a budget problem. It was God's

provision for those He had called to full-time service under the Old Covenant.

That tells us something beautiful about God. When God calls people to a task... He also provides for them.

Think about that throughout Scripture.

He fed Elijah by ravens. He provided manna in the wilderness. He filled empty jars of oil. He multiplied loaves and fish. Again and again... God proved Himself to be a Provider.

The tithe became one of the ways He chose to provide for the Levites because they had no tribal inheritance like everyone else.

Now let's keep reading. Because God explains even more.

Numbers 18:24 (NIV)

"Instead, I give to the Levites as their inheritance the tithes that the Israelites present as an offering to the LORD. That is why I said concerning them: 'They will have no inheritance among the Israelites.'"

There it is again. Inheritance. Twice.

God wants us to understand that connection. The tithe wasn't floating by itself. It was connected to Israel's covenant life. To the land. To the priesthood. To the Levites. To worship. To God's provision.

It's all connected.

Now here's something I find fascinating. Even the Levites tithed. Many people have never noticed that. Listen carefully.

Numbers 18:25–26 (NIV)

"The LORD said to Moses, 'Speak to the Levites and say to them: "When you receive from the Israelites the tithe I give you as your inheritance, you must present a tenth of that tithe as the LORD's offering."'"

Isn't that interesting? The Levites received the tithe... and then they tithed from what they had received.

Why? Because giving has always been part of worship. No one was exempt from acknowledging God's provision.

Now let's pause.

I don't want us to miss the bigger picture. Remember where we've been. Abraham. Jacob. Now Moses.

Notice something. God hasn't changed. He is still the Provider. He is still the One who gives first. His people are still responding.

The covenant has changed. The administration has changed. But God's character hasn't changed at all.

That thread continues beautifully.

Now... someone may be thinking, "*Tim... are you saying pastors shouldn't be supported today?*" Absolutely not. Please don't jump ahead.

In fact... the New Testament clearly teaches that those who preach the gospel should be supported. We're going to spend an entire journey on that.

It's important. Very important. But here's the question we're asking right now. **Did God establish the Old Testament tithe for a purpose?**

The answer is clearly yes.

And understanding that purpose helps us avoid confusing one covenant with another before we've even reached the New Testament.

I want to point out one more thing. Notice what God didn't say. He didn't say, "*I'm establishing the tithe because ten percent is the universal standard for every believer throughout all time.*"

Instead... He explained exactly why He gave it. The Levites had no inheritance. The tithe became God's appointed means of providing for them while they served the nation.

That's not my opinion. That's God's own explanation. And I think we should always let God explain His own commands whenever He chooses to do so.

As I studied these passages during in my lifetime, I found myself slowing down. The more I read... the more I realized something. The tithe wasn't just about giving. It was part of an entire covenant system that included priests... Levites... sacrifices... festivals... the Tabernacle... and eventually the Temple.

Remove it from that setting... and you risk misunderstanding why God established it in the first place.

That's why context matters. Always.

Coffee Break

Can I tell you something I love about our Father? He never asks His people to provide for His work because He can't.

Instead, He invites His people to participate because they need Him.

God could have dropped manna into the Levites' front yards every morning. He'd done something very similar before.

Instead... He chose to involve His people in His provision. What a privilege!

I've learned something over the years. God rarely needs what I have. But He often uses what I have to shape my heart.

Maybe giving has always been more about transforming the giver than enriching the Receiver.

After all... the One who owns the cattle on a thousand hills has never been short on resources.

As we continue our journey, we're going to discover something many Christians have never been taught. There wasn't just one passage about the tithe. There were multiple instructions, given for different purposes within Israel's covenant life.

Understanding those passages together will help us see a much clearer picture. And once we see the whole picture... we'll be ready to ask one of the biggest questions in the entire book: **How many tithes were there?**

Believe it or not... the answer may surprise you.

Journey Eight

One Tithe... or More?

Seeing the Whole Picture

"Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a worker who does not need to be ashamed and who correctly handles the word of truth."

2 Timothy 2:15 (NIV)

Have you ever worked on a thousand-piece puzzle? At first... nothing makes sense. You find a blue piece. A green piece. Something that might be a tree... or maybe a turtle. Who knows? Then little by little... the picture begins to appear.

I've discovered that studying Scripture can feel the same way. If we pick up only one puzzle piece... we'll never see the whole picture.

That's why we've been taking this journey slowly. Every passage matters. Every detail matters. Because every piece belongs somewhere.

As we finished our last journey, we discovered something important. God established the tithe for a purpose. It wasn't random. It wasn't arbitrary.

The Levites had no inheritance in the land. God provided for them through the tithes of Israel. That much is wonderfully clear.

But now another question naturally follows. **Was there only one instruction concerning the tithe?** Or did God give Israel additional instructions for different occasions within their covenant life?

Let's open the Bible and find out.

The first thing we notice is that Scripture describes different uses of the tithe.

We've already read about the tithe given to support the Levites. Now let's return to a passage we looked at briefly in our previous journey.

This time... let's slow down.

Deuteronomy 14:22-27 (NIV)

"Be sure to set aside a tenth of all that your fields produce each year. Eat the tenth of your grain, new wine and olive oil, and the firstborn of your herds and flocks in the presence of the LORD your God at the place he will choose as a dwelling for his Name, so that you may learn to revere the LORD your God always.

But if that place is too distant and you have been blessed by the LORD your God and cannot carry your tithe (because the place where the LORD will choose to put his Name is so far away), then exchange your tithe for silver, and take the silver with you and go to the place the LORD your God will choose.

Use the silver to buy whatever you like: cattle, sheep, wine or other fermented drink, or anything you wish. Then you

and your household shall eat there in the presence of the LORD your God and rejoice."

Let's stop right there. Did you notice something surprising? God actually instructed the worshiper to enjoy this celebration before Him.

If the journey was too long to transport the produce or livestock... they could convert the tithe into silver. Travel. Arrive at the place God chose. Then use that silver to purchase food and drink for a joyful celebration before the Lord.

That's probably not the picture many of us grew up hearing. Honestly... it wasn't the picture I can ever remember hearing either.

Yet there it is. Right in the text.

Notice something else. This wasn't permission to spend the money on whatever happened to catch their eye during a shopping trip. The silver served a purpose. It made transportation practical.

Once they arrived, it was used to purchase the food and drink that would be enjoyed in the Lord's presence as part of covenant worship.

Even God's practical instructions pointed His people toward worship.

Now let's keep reading.

Just a few verses later, we find another instruction.

Deuteronomy 14:28–29 (NIV)

"At the end of every three years, bring all the tithes of that year's produce and store it in your towns, so that the Levites (who have no allotment or inheritance of their own) and the foreigners, the fatherless and the widows who live in your towns may come and eat and be satisfied, and so that the LORD your God may bless you in all the work of your hands."

Once again... let's slow down.

Who is mentioned? The Levites. Foreigners. The fatherless. Widows.

God's heart shines through this passage. The tithe wasn't merely about sustaining worship. It also expressed His care for the vulnerable.

Throughout Scripture, God consistently reveals His compassion for those who could easily be overlooked. The widow. The orphan. The foreigner. Again and again... God reminds His people not to forget them.

That tells us something beautiful about His heart.

Now... this is where Bible students sometimes begin using different terminology. Some describe these passages as referring to multiple tithes.

Others understand them as different applications of Israel's tithing system within the Mosaic Covenant.

Whichever terminology you prefer, everyone must wrestle honestly with these passages. They are all part of God's revealed instruction.

Our responsibility isn't to force them into a system. Our responsibility is to let each passage contribute its part to the picture.

As I worked through these texts during my research, I found myself asking a simple question. **Why do we often quote one passage while overlooking another?** That's not a criticism. It's an invitation.

If we want to understand God's instruction concerning the tithe, we should welcome every passage He gave us. Not just the ones that are already familiar.

Notice something else that has quietly followed us throughout this journey. God's instructions always had a purpose. Support the Levites. Celebrate before the Lord. Care for the vulnerable.

Each instruction revealed something about God's character. His holiness. His provision. His generosity. His compassion.

The tithe was never merely an accounting system. It was woven into Israel's covenant life as a reflection of the God they served.

Before we move on, I want to make something very clear. At this point, we are still describing the Old Covenant. We have not yet arrived at Jesus. We have

not yet arrived at Pentecost. We have not yet opened Paul's letters.

We're still gathering puzzle pieces. Resist the temptation to jump ahead. The picture will become much clearer if we allow God's story to unfold in the order He revealed it.

Coffee Break

Can I share something that's made me smile more than once during this study? Sometimes people imagine God as if He were constantly trying to take something away from His people.

Then I read passages like Deuteronomy 14. God tells His people to gather before Him. Celebrate. Eat together. Rejoice in His presence.

What a picture! Our Father isn't opposed to joy. He's the Author of it.

Maybe that's one reason the enemy works so hard to make following God seem burdensome.

But the more I read Scripture... the more I discover a Father who delights in being with His children. A Father who provides. A Father who invites. A Father who rejoices over His people.

I don't know about you... but that's the kind of Father I want to know better.

As we continue our journey, we're about to arrive at one of the most frequently quoted passages in the entire Bible concerning tithing. Many Christians can quote pieces of it from memory. Some have heard it preached dozens of times. Others have never studied the entire chapter.

Before we get there... let's make ourselves one promise. We'll read **all** of it.

Not just the verses that support one viewpoint. Because every verse deserves to be heard. And every verse points us one step closer to Jesus.

Journey Nine

The Storehouse

More Than a Building

"Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse, that there may be food in my house."

Malachi 3:10a (NIV)

If you've spent much time in church... you've probably heard the word **storehouse**.

Sometimes it's used almost as another name for the local church. *"Bring your tithe into the storehouse."*

For many Christians, those two ideas have become almost inseparable. But here's the question we've been asking since Journey One. **What did the Bible mean when it used that word?**

Not... *"What have I always heard?"* Not... *"What does my denomination teach?"* Simply... *"What does Scripture say?"*

Because words matter. Especially when God chooses them.

Imagine someone invited you to dinner and said, *"Meet us at the barn."* You arrive at their barn expecting a meal... only to discover they were talking about a

restaurant named "The Barn." Context changes everything.

The same is true when we read the word **storehouse**. Before deciding what it means today... we should first understand what it meant to the people who first heard it.

The word itself gives us a clue. A storehouse was exactly what its name suggests. A place to **store** something. Not a mystery. Not a symbol. A storage place.

But what was being stored? Remember what we've already learned. The tithe that God defined consisted of grain... wine... olive oil... fruit... herds... and flocks. If those were the things being brought... then those were the things that needed to be stored. That seems wonderfully simple.

Listen to what we read in the days of King Hezekiah.

2 Chronicles 31:11-12 (NIV)

"Hezekiah gave orders to prepare storerooms in the temple of the LORD, and this was done. Then they faithfully brought in the contributions, tithes and dedicated gifts."

Notice the word. **Storerooms**. Physical places. Real rooms. Built to receive what the people were bringing.

That shouldn't surprise us. If thousands of Israelites were bringing grain... olive oil... wine... fruit... and

animals...you wouldn't need a filing cabinet. You'd need storage. Lots of it.

Nehemiah describes something very similar.

Nehemiah 10:37-38 (NIV)

"Moreover, we will bring to the storerooms of the house of our God, to the priests, the first of our ground meal, of our grain offerings, of the fruit of all our trees and of our new wine and olive oil. And we will bring a tithe of our crops to the Levites, for it is the Levites who collect the tithes in all the towns where we work.

A priest descended from Aaron is to accompany the Levites when they receive the tithes, and the Levites are to bring a tenth of the tithes up to the house of our God, to the storerooms of the treasury."

Again... what's being brought? Ground meal. Grain. Fruit. Wine. Olive oil. Crops. The storehouse wasn't an abstract concept. It served a very practical purpose. It held the provisions God had instructed Israel to bring.

As I studied these passages during my studies, something struck me. The storehouse wasn't important because of the building itself. It was important because of what it represented.

God was providing for those who served Him. He was ensuring there would be food for the Levites, the priests, and, at the appropriate times, for those in need.

The storehouse was one more expression of His faithful provision.

Now let's pause for just a moment. Does that mean the local church today isn't important? Of course not.

The New Testament places tremendous importance on the local church. We'll spend several journeys exploring that. But before we make applications to today, we first need to understand yesterday.

Otherwise... we risk asking the Old Testament to answer New Testament questions before we've even reached the New Testament. That's exactly what we've promised not to do.

Remember our "Jesus glasses?" Let's put them on for a moment.

When I think about the storehouse, I'm reminded that God has always desired His people to have what they needed. He filled storehouses. He filled barns. He filled jars with oil. He filled nets with fish.

And ultimately... He filled an empty tomb with hope. The details may change throughout Scripture. The Provider never does.

Coffee Break

Can I ask you something? Have you ever thanked God for providing something so ordinary that you almost overlooked it? A loaf of bread. A roof over your head.

A steady paycheck. A friend who called at just the right time.

Sometimes we wait for miracles while quietly forgetting the thousands of daily provisions God places into our lives.

Maybe that's one reason the Old Testament spends so much time talking about grain... wine... oil... and harvests.

Every basket of grain reminded Israel of the God who had sent the rain. Every healthy flock reminded them of the God who had watched over them.

Provision wasn't just about survival. It was about remembering.

I wonder how much richer our worship would become if we remembered more often.

As we continue our journey, we are approaching one of the most quoted—and most misunderstood—passages in the entire discussion of tithing.

It's a passage that has inspired generosity. It has also produced confusion.

Before we open it, I want us to make one promise. We'll read every verse. We'll honor the context. And above all... we'll keep our Jesus glasses on.

Because if Jesus really is the fulfillment of the Law and the Prophets, then even Malachi is ultimately pointing us to Him.

Journey Ten

"Return Unto Me"

The Heart Behind Malachi's Message

"Return to me, and I will return to you, says the LORD of hosts."

Malachi 3:7 (KJV)

For many Christians... the book of Malachi has become almost synonymous with one subject. Money.

Mention the name "Malachi," and someone will almost certainly quote, *"Will a man rob God?"* I've heard that verse preached more times than I can count. I have even preached on it.

Maybe you have too. Sometimes those sermons inspired generosity. Sometimes they inspired guilt. Sometimes... they inspired fear.

But years ago, while studying Malachi for myself, I noticed something I had somehow overlooked.

The first message of Malachi isn't, **"Bring the tithe."** The first message is, **"Return unto me."** That changes everything.

Let's remember where we are in God's story. We're standing near the close of the Old Testament. Israel has

returned from captivity. The Temple has been rebuilt. The sacrifices have resumed.

Outwardly... things appear religious. But inwardly... their hearts have drifted.

The priests are offering blemished sacrifices. The people are dishonoring marriage. Justice has been neglected. Their worship has become routine. Their covenant relationship with God has grown cold.

The neglected tithes weren't the disease. They were one symptom of a much deeper problem.

That's the setting of Malachi.

Before we read chapter three... listen to how the entire book begins.

Malachi 1:2 (KJV)

"I have loved you, saith the LORD."

Stop there. Don't rush. Those are God's opening words. Not, "I am angry." Not, "You disappoint Me." Not, "You owe Me." His first words are, **"I have loved you."**

That is the heartbeat of the book. Everything else grows out of that relationship.

Now let's read the passage together. Not one verse. Not one phrase. The conversation.

Read Malachi 3:6–12 (NIV).

"I the LORD do not change. So you, the descendants of Jacob, are not destroyed.

"Ever since the time of your ancestors you have turned away from my decrees and have not kept them. Return to me, and I will return to you," says the LORD Almighty. "But you ask, 'How are we to return?' 'Will a mere mortal rob God? Yet you rob me. "But you ask, 'How are we robbing you?' "In tithes and offerings.

You are under a curse--your whole nation--because you are robbing me. Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse, that there may be food in my house. Test me in this," says the LORD Almighty, "and see if I will not throw open the floodgates of heaven and pour out so much blessing that there will not be room enough to store it. I will prevent pests from devouring your crops, and the vines in your fields will not drop their fruit before it is ripe," says the LORD Almighty. "Then all the nations will call you blessed, for yours will be a delightful land," says the LORD Almighty.

Now let's notice something. What is God's first invitation? Not... *"Bring Me money."* His first invitation is, **"Return unto me..."**

That word "return" tells us everything.

You don't tell strangers to return. You tell family. You tell people who belong. You tell people whose relationship has grown distant. God wasn't chasing their wallets. He was pursuing their hearts.

Then comes the question everyone remembers. **"Will a man rob God?"** Honestly... that's a shocking question.

Israel answers with another question. **"Wherein have we robbed thee?"** God answers, **"In tithes and offerings."**

Now... let's stop before we rush ahead.

Remember everything we've learned during the last several journeys. Who is God speaking to? Israel.

Under which covenant? The Mosaic Covenant.

What had that covenant already established? Blessings for covenant faithfulness. Consequences for covenant unfaithfulness.

None of that begins in Malachi. Malachi is reminding the people of a covenant they had already entered generations earlier.

That matters. It matters a great deal.

Can I ask you an honest question? Have you ever walked away from a sermon on Malachi quietly thinking "I'd better tithe... ...or God might curse my finances."

Maybe nobody used those exact words. But that's how you felt. Almost as though God were saying, "Pay Me... ...and I'll protect you."

May I gently suggest something? I don't believe that's the Father Malachi is revealing. Not at all.

Think about it.

What kind of father demands payment before he'll protect his children? Not a loving father.

Imagine a little boy coming to his dad and saying, "Dad... there's someone outside trying to hurt me." The father doesn't respond, "Did you pay me this week?" Of course not. He runs to protect his son. That's what fathers do.

How much more... our Heavenly Father?

So why does God speak so strongly in Malachi? Because this isn't about buying protection. It's about a broken covenant relationship.

The covenant already contained blessings and curses. God wasn't inventing a new threat. He was calling His covenant people back to Himself.

Notice the order. Relationship first. Obedience second. Return first. Restoration follows. That's always been God's heart.

There's another beautiful truth hiding in this passage.

God says, "**Prove me now...**" Some translations say, "*Test me.*" This is one of the very few places in Scripture where God invites His covenant people to

test His faithfulness within the covenant He established.

Notice what He doesn't say. He doesn't say, "See if I become faithful." God was already faithful. Always had been. Always would be.

Instead, He invites Israel to trust the covenant promises He had already made to them. That's very different from saying, "Pay Me and I'll love you." He already loved them.

Remember the opening words? **"I have loved you..."** Never lose sight of that.

As I studied Malachi during my research, I found myself asking a question that changed everything. What if the tithe wasn't the central issue? What if the real issue was a heart that had drifted away from God?

Suddenly the entire book made more sense. Their sacrifices reflected their hearts. Their marriages reflected their hearts. Their justice reflected their hearts. Their giving reflected their hearts. Everything pointed to the same problem. They needed to return to God.

And isn't that the message of nearly every Old Testament prophet? Isaiah. Jeremiah. Hosea. Joel. Amos. Again and again... God says, "Come back."

The invitation has always been relational before it was ever financial.

Coffee Break

May I tell you what I love most about this passage? Not the storehouse. Not the windows of heaven. Not even the promise of blessing.

My favorite words are the simplest ones. **"Return unto me."** Those four words reveal the Father's heart.

Our God isn't standing at the door waiting to turn His children away. He's standing at the door calling them home.

That's the God I meet throughout Scripture. The God who sought Adam in the garden. The God who pursued Israel through the prophets. The God who welcomed the prodigal son with open arms. The God who sent His own Son while we were still sinners.

That's not a God demanding protection money. That's a Father pursuing His children.

And I don't know about you... but that makes me love Him even more.

Next time... we're going to turn a corner in our journey. For the first time... we're going to hear Jesus speak about the tithe.

And here's the question we'll carry with us: **When Jesus spoke about tithing... who was He speaking to, and where were they standing in God's unfolding story?**

As we've learned from the very beginning... context changes everything.

Journey Eleven

When Jesus Spoke About Tithing

Reading the Gospels Through the Right Covenant

*"But when the set time had fully come, God sent his Son,
born of a woman, born under the law."*

Galatians 4:4 (NIV)

Have you ever walked into the middle of a conversation? You hear one sentence... and immediately form an opinion. Then someone says, "Wait... you missed the first part."* Suddenly everything changes. Context has a way of doing that.

The same thing happens in Scripture.

Many people read something Jesus said about tithing and immediately conclude, *"There it is! Case closed!"* But before we decide what Jesus meant... let's remember the question we've been asking since Journey One. **Where are we in God's story?**

Jesus had not yet gone to the cross. The empty tomb was still ahead. Pentecost had not yet come. The church had not yet been born. The New Covenant had not yet been inaugurated through His blood.

Jesus was ministering to Israel. A people living under the Mosaic Covenant. That's incredibly important.

In fact, Paul reminds us of it.

Galatians 4:4 (NIV)

"But when the set time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under the law."

Jesus didn't come to ignore the Law. He came under it. He fulfilled it perfectly.

That means when we hear Jesus speaking to the Pharisees about tithing, we should remember who His audience was and what covenant they were living under.

One of the most frequently quoted passages is found in Matthew 23. Let's read it carefully. Not just one sentence. Let's notice the conversation.

Matthew 23:23 (NIV)

"Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You give a tenth of your spices--mint, dill and cumin. But you have neglected the more important matters of the law--justice, mercy and faithfulness. You should have practiced the latter, without neglecting the former."

At first glance, someone might say, "There it is. Jesus told people to tithe."

Well... let's slow down.

Who was Jesus talking to? The Pharisees. What were the Pharisees? Leaders within Israel.

Under what covenant were they living? The Mosaic Covenant.

What does Jesus call the things they neglected? **"The weightier matters of the law."**

Notice that word. **Law.**

Jesus isn't introducing a new covenant command here. He's rebuking leaders who claimed to keep the Law while completely missing its heart.

Think about what they were doing. They carefully counted tiny garden herbs. Mint. Dill. Cumin.

Imagine sitting at your kitchen table counting individual leaves. "One for me... one for God... one for me... one for God..."

They were incredibly careful about outward details. Yet they neglected justice. Mercy. Faithfulness.

Jesus wasn't impressed.

Can I say something that really challenged me? Jesus didn't criticize them for caring about details. He criticized them because they cared about the small things while ignoring the biggest things.

Imagine polishing the chrome on your car every Saturday... while never changing the oil. Sooner or later... the shiny car isn't going anywhere.

That's exactly what had happened spiritually. Everything looked religious. But the engine of the heart had stopped running.

Notice something beautiful. Even here... Jesus brings the conversation back to the heart. Justice. Mercy. Faithfulness. Those aren't financial words. They're heart words.

They reveal what God had always desired. From Abraham... to Jacob... to Moses... to Malachi... and now... to Jesus. The heart has always mattered most.

Now here's an important question. Does Jesus affirm the tithe in this passage? Yes.

But remember where we are. He is speaking to people who are still living under the Mosaic Covenant.

If Jesus had told them to ignore the Law before fulfilling it... He would have been encouraging disobedience to the covenant under which they were living.

Instead... He calls them to obey it rightly. Not merely outwardly. But from the heart.

Something else has captured my attention over the years.

By the time Jesus arrives on the scene, tithing had become a matter of meticulous calculation.

Yet the very people who were the most precise with percentages were often the least compassionate toward people.

That's sobering. Apparently... it's possible to be mathematically correct... and spiritually empty.

Jesus wasn't looking for better accountants. He was looking for transformed hearts.

Coffee Break

Can I share something that's made me smile? I imagine one of the disciples watching this conversation. Maybe Matthew. Maybe Peter. Listening to Jesus rebuke the Pharisees. Then quietly realizing... "He's never satisfied with outward obedience alone."

That's true for giving. It's true for prayer. It's true for forgiveness. It's true for everything.

Jesus always takes us beneath the surface. He isn't merely changing behavior. He's transforming hearts. Honestly... I'm thankful for that.

Because changing behavior is hard enough. Changing hearts... only God can do. As one of my favorite pastor says often, "I can't. God can. I think I'll let Him."

As we continue our journey, we're about to cross one of the greatest turning points in all of Scripture. A

cross. An empty tomb. A risen Savior. And the birth of a New Covenant.

Everything we've studied so far has been leading us there. The question is no longer, "What did Abraham do?" Or, "What did Moses command?" Or even, "What did Jesus say before the Cross?"

Now we'll begin asking, **"How did the apostles teach the church to give after the resurrection?"**

That... is where our journey is headed next.

Journey Twelve

The Cross Changed Everything

The Birth of the New Covenant

"Likewise also the cup after supper, saying, This cup is the new testament in my blood, which is shed for you."

Luke 22:20 (KJV)

Have you ever watched a movie where everything suddenly made sense in one scene? For nearly two hours you've been collecting little clues. Some don't seem important. Others seem completely unrelated. You sit wondering, "Where is this going?" Then... suddenly... everything comes together. You find yourself thinking, "*How did I miss that?*"

That's how I feel when I read the New Testament. The Old Testament gives us thousands of clues. Sacrifices. Priests. Altars. Passover. The Tabernacle. The Temple. The Law. The prophets.

For centuries... God was painting a picture. Then one Friday afternoon... the picture stepped out of the frame.

His name was Jesus.

Jesus didn't come simply to improve the old system. He came to fulfill it.

Listen to His own words.

Matthew 5:17 (NIV)

"Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them."

Those words are incredibly important. Jesus didn't treat the Law as a mistake. Neither should we. He fulfilled it.

Every sacrifice pointed to Him. Every priest pointed to Him. Every Passover lamb pointed to Him. Every drop of blood whispered His name long before Bethlehem.

When we put on our Jesus glasses... we begin seeing Him everywhere.

On the night before His crucifixion... Jesus took a cup in His hands. His disciples had no idea history was about to change forever. Then Jesus said something remarkable.

Luke 22:20 (NIV)

"In the same way, after the supper he took the cup, saying, 'This cup is the new covenant in my blood, which is poured out for you.'"

Did you notice those words? **New Covenant.** That wasn't just poetic language. Jesus was announcing something the prophets had promised centuries

earlier. A New Covenant. Not another revision of the old one. A new one.

Jeremiah had already spoken about it. More than six hundred years earlier. Listen carefully.

Jeremiah 31:31-33 (KJV)

"Behold, the days come, says the LORD, that I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel, and with the house of Judah:

Not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day that I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt...

But this shall be the covenant that I will make... I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts..."

Did you catch that? **"Not according to the covenant..."** God Himself said the coming covenant would not be the same as the one made at Sinai.

That's not Tim Gould talking. That's Jeremiah. Centuries before Jesus was born.

Now everything we've studied begins fitting together. Abraham. Jacob. Moses. The Levites. The Temple. The sacrifices. The storehouse. Malachi. None of those were accidents.

They were chapters in God's story. Every one of them leading to Jesus.

I love how Augustine once summarized it: "*The New Testament is in the Old concealed; the Old Testament is in the New revealed.*"

Whether readers remember Augustine or not, I hope they remember the truth. God has been telling one story all along.

Now let's ask the obvious question. If Jesus established a New Covenant... what does that mean for believers today?

That's the question we're about to spend several journeys answering. Not by guessing. Not by tradition. By opening the New Testament and listening to the apostles.

Because here's something I've discovered. The apostles spent far more time teaching Christians **how to give** than they did telling them **how much to give**.

That observation changed my own study. I think it may change yours too.

Please don't misunderstand me. The New Covenant isn't less demanding than the Old. In many ways... it's far more searching.

The Law said, "*Do not murder.*" Jesus said, "*Don't hate.*" The Law addressed adultery. Jesus addressed lust. The Law regulated actions. Jesus transformed hearts.

Do you see the pattern? Grace doesn't lower the standard. Grace changes the person.

The same thing begins happening when we study giving. Under the Law, Israel had covenant obligations.

Under grace... God begins transforming hearts.

We're about to discover something beautiful. The New Testament doesn't produce stingy believers looking for the smallest acceptable percentage. It produces generous believers overwhelmed by the grace they've received.

Why? Because the Cross changes everything.

Coffee Break

Can I tell you what amazes me most about the Cross? It isn't just that Jesus died. It's why He died. He wasn't collecting a debt. He was paying one. Mine. Yours. Ours.

The greatest act of giving in human history wasn't ten percent. It was one hundred percent.

God gave His Son. Jesus gave His life. The Holy Spirit gives new life. Our God has always been the greatest Giver.

Maybe that's why generosity becomes such a natural response for those who truly understand the Gospel.

Not because someone pressures them. Because they've been overwhelmed by grace.

As we continue our journey... we're finally arriving where many readers have been waiting since page one. The New Testament church. Acts. The apostles. Paul. Grace. Generosity. Freewill giving. Cheerful giving.

We'll ask one simple question. **When the apostles taught Christians about giving... what did they actually teach?**

I have a feeling the answer is going to surprise some readers. But more importantly... I think it's going to help all of us fall even more deeply in love with the generosity of our God.

Journey Thirteen

A New Kind of Giving

When the Church Was Born

"And all that believed were together, and had all things common."

Acts 2:44 (KJV)

Imagine being there. Jerusalem. The day of Pentecost. The city is overflowing with visitors from every corner of the known world.

People speaking different languages. Families gathered for the feast. Then suddenly... everything changes.

A rushing mighty wind. Tongues like fire. The Holy Spirit fills the believers. Peter stands and preaches. Thousands believe. The Church is born. History changes forever.

Think about that for just a moment. Everything we've studied until now has been leading to this day.

Abraham never saw it. Jacob only dreamed about promises that pointed toward it. Moses foreshadowed it. The prophets longed for it. Jesus purchased it.

And now... through the Holy Spirit... the Church comes to life. This is no small transition. This is the beginning of something entirely new.

If someone were to ask, "*What did the very first Christians do?*" Where would you send them? I would send them to Acts.

Not because Acts tells us everything. But because Acts shows us the Church in its infancy. New believers. New joy. New purpose. New life.

So let's watch carefully.

Read **Acts 2:41-47 (KJV)**.

"Those who accepted his message were baptized, and about three thousand were added to their number that day.

They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. Everyone was filled with awe at the many wonders and signs performed by the apostles. All the believers were together and had everything in common. They sold property and possessions to give to anyone who had need. Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved."

As you read... notice what captures Luke's attention. Their devotion. Their fellowship. Their prayers. Their worship. Their generosity. It's a beautiful picture.

Luke tells us, **(Acts 2:44–45, KJV)**

"And all that believed were together, and had all things common; And sold their possessions and goods, and gave them to all men, as every man had need."

Let's pause. Did you notice something? Nobody told them to calculate ten percent. Nobody reminded them about Malachi. Nobody mentioned the storehouse.

Instead... something extraordinary happened. People simply began caring for one another.

Now let's be careful.

Some people read these verses and conclude Christians should sell everything they own. Others dismiss the passage entirely because it makes them uncomfortable. I think both reactions miss Luke's point.

Luke isn't establishing a legal requirement. He's describing what happened when thousands of hearts were transformed by the Holy Spirit. There's a difference between describing an event and prescribing a command.

That's an important distinction whenever we study Acts.

Why were believers so generous? Because they had suddenly discovered something priceless. Jesus was alive.

The Messiah had come. Their sins had been forgiven. The Holy Spirit now lived within them.

When that reality captures your heart... possessions begin losing some of their grip.

That's not because someone demanded generosity. It's because grace produces generosity.

Luke continues the story a couple of chapters later.

Read **Acts 4:32–37 (NIV)**.

“All the believers were one in heart and mind. No one claimed that any of their possessions was their own, but they shared everything they had. With great power the apostles continued to testify to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus. And God's grace was so powerfully at work in them all that there were no needy persons among them. For from time to time those who owned land or houses sold them, brought the money from the sales and put it at the apostles' feet, and it was distributed to anyone who had need.

Joseph, a Levite from Cyprus, whom the apostles called Barnabas (which means ‘son of encouragement’), sold a field he owned and brought the money and put it at the apostles' feet.”

Again... notice what Luke emphasizes. Unity. Love. Open hands. No one claimed that what they owned belonged exclusively to themselves.

Those with land sometimes sold it. Those with resources shared them. Those with needs were cared for. It was a beautiful expression of Christian family.

Here's something I find fascinating. Read through Acts carefully. You won't find the apostles standing before the church saying, "Beginning next Sunday... everyone owes ten percent."

Instead... you'll find believers responding freely to needs around them. Giving wasn't disappearing. If anything... it was increasing. But something had changed. The motivation.

Think back to everything we've learned. Abraham responded after God's blessing. Jacob responded after God's promise. Israel gave under the covenant God established. Now the Church responds to the greatest gift ever given. The crucified and risen Christ.

Do you see the progression? God has always moved first. His people have always responded.

The Cross simply reveals His generosity more clearly than ever before.

Can I make an observation? The first Christians didn't appear to ask, "*What's the minimum I have to give?*"

They asked a completely different question. "*Who needs help?*" That's a remarkable shift.

The conversation moved from percentages... to people. From obligation... to opportunity. From calculation... to compassion. That doesn't diminish giving. It elevates it.

Now don't misunderstand me. This doesn't mean churches no longer needed financial support. They certainly did.

Missionaries traveled. Pastors served. Widows needed care. The poor required assistance. We're going to study all of those things in the coming journeys.

But before the New Testament talks about methods... it introduces us to a new motive. Love. Grace.

The transforming work of the Holy Spirit.

Coffee Break

Can I ask you a personal question? When was the last time you gave simply because your heart overflowed?

Not because someone asked. Not because a budget required it. Not because you felt guilty. Just because you saw a need... and wanted to reflect the generosity of Jesus.

Those moments have become some of my favorite memories. Not because of the amount I gave.

Honestly... I've forgotten most of the amounts. But I still remember the joy.

Maybe that's because generosity leaves a deeper imprint on the heart of the giver than on the pages of a bank statement.

God has a wonderful way of using generosity to make us a little more like His Son.

As we continue our journey, we're going to meet a man named Paul. He'll spend years organizing one of the largest relief offerings recorded in the New Testament.

And here's what's fascinating. He'll write chapter after chapter about giving... without once appealing to fear.

Instead... he'll point believers to something infinitely greater. The grace of God revealed in Jesus Christ. And I have a feeling that's exactly where our Father wanted the conversation to end all along.

Journey Fourteen

One Offering That Changed the Church

Paul's Collection for the Saints

"Now about the collection for the Lord's people: Do what I told the Galatian churches to do."

1 Corinthians 16:1 (NIV)

Have you ever noticed how easy it is to miss something simply because it's spread across several books of the Bible?

Imagine reading only one chapter of a mystery novel. You'd know a few facts but you wouldn't know the whole story.

That's exactly what happens with Paul's collection for the believers in Jerusalem.

Most Christians know it existed. Few realize how important it became. Paul mentions it in Romans. He mentions it in 1 Corinthians. He returns to it in 2 Corinthians. Luke even records part of the story in Acts.

When you gather all those pieces together... you discover this wasn't just another offering. It became

one of the greatest demonstrations of Christian unity in the New Testament.

Let's begin with Paul's instruction to the church in Corinth.

Read 1 Corinthians 16:1-4 (KJV).

"Now concerning the collection for the saints, as I have given order to the churches of Galatia, even so do yourself. Upon the first day of the week let every one of you lay by him in store, as God has prospered him, that there be no gatherings when I come. And when I come, whomsoever you shall approve by your letters, them will I send to bring your liberality to Jerusalem. And if it be needed that I go also, they shall go with me."

Notice several things immediately. First... Paul calls it **"the collection for the saints."** Not the temple tax. Not the Levitical tithe. Not the storehouse offering. A collection. For believers in need.

Already we can hear the language changing.

Second... Paul tells each believer to set something aside on the first day of the week. Notice what he says. **"...as God has prospered him..."** I love that phrase.

Paul doesn't begin with a percentage. He begins with God's provision. Sound familiar?

We've seen that pattern before. Abraham responded to God's blessing. Jacob responded to God's promise. The early church responded to God's grace.

Now Paul reminds believers to respond according to how God has prospered them. God still moves first. His people still respond.

Third... Paul wanted the money gathered ahead of time. Why? So there would be no pressure when he arrived. That detail says something beautiful about Paul's heart.

He wasn't interested in emotional manipulation. He wasn't planning a dramatic fundraising speech. He wanted thoughtful... planned... willing generosity.

I wonder if we could all learn something from that.

Now let's move to Romans.

Paul is nearing the end of his third missionary journey. Listen carefully.

Read Romans 15:25–27 (NKJV).

"But now I am going to Jerusalem to minister to the saints. For it pleased those from Macedonia and Achaia to make a certain contribution for the poor among the saints who are in Jerusalem. It pleased them indeed, and they are their debtors. For if the Gentiles have been partakers of their spiritual things, their duty is also to minister to them in material things."

Notice what Paul says. The Gentile churches had freely chosen to help Jewish believers suffering in Jerusalem. Think about how remarkable that is.

People from different cultures. Different languages. Different backgrounds. Different histories. All united by one Savior. The offering became much more than financial assistance. It became a testimony that the Gospel had created one family.

I love Paul's words. He says the Gentiles were "**pleased**" to do it. Not pressured. Not threatened. Pleased. That single word says a great deal.

Apparently... Christian generosity wasn't something Paul had to drag out of believers. It flowed naturally from hearts transformed by grace.

As I studied these passages during my research, something struck me. Paul had countless opportunities to settle the question of tithing once and for all.

Think about it. Here he is... raising money across multiple churches. If ever there were a moment to write, "Every Christian should tithe." This would have been it. Yet he doesn't.

Instead... he speaks about willingness. Planning. Prosperity. Love. Unity. Grace. That observation deserves careful thought.

Now please don't misunderstand me. I'm not suggesting Paul cared less about giving than the Old Testament. Quite the opposite.

In many ways... he expected even greater generosity. But the motivation had changed. The Cross had changed everything.

Believers weren't simply supporting a system. They were caring for brothers and sisters whom they had never even met. That's remarkable.

There's another detail I don't want us to overlook. Paul also established accountability. He wasn't going to carry the offering by himself. Representatives from the churches accompanied it. Why? Integrity.

Paul understood something every ministry should understand. Whenever God's people entrust resources to spiritual leaders... those resources deserve careful stewardship.

Generosity and accountability are not enemies. They belong together. I appreciate that about Paul.

Can I pause for a moment? Imagine being one of those believers in Corinth. You hear that Christians hundreds of miles away are suffering. You've never met them. You may never meet them. Yet because they

belong to Christ... their need becomes your concern. That's the Gospel.

The Gospel tears down walls. It creates family where there once were strangers. No government program can produce that. Only Jesus can.

Coffee Break

Have you ever helped someone you'll probably never meet? Maybe through disaster relief. A missionary. A child sponsorship. A food pantry.

You send the gift. Someone else receives the blessing. You may never know their name. But God does. I love that.

Sometimes the greatest acts of generosity happen quietly. No applause. No recognition. No plaque on the wall. Just one believer helping another because Jesus changed their heart.

I have a feeling heaven keeps much better records than we do.

As we continue our journey... we're about to open what I believe are the two greatest chapters on Christian giving in the entire New Testament.

Second Corinthians chapters 8 and 9. These chapters have no equal. Here we'll discover that Paul never motivates believers by fear. He points them to grace. He points them to Jesus.

And in one unforgettable sentence... he summarizes the Gospel in a way that forever changes how we think about generosity.

I honestly believe these next two journeys may become the very heart of this book.

Journey Fifteen

Grace Giving

When Jesus Becomes the Measure

"For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that, though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, that you through his poverty might be rich."

2 Corinthians 8:9 (KJV)

I have a question for you. When was the last time someone motivated you by reminding you of Jesus? Not by reminding you of your obligation. Not by reminding you of your guilt. Not by reminding you of what you hadn't done.

Simply... by reminding you of Jesus. My brother-in-law has done that for me.

And that's exactly what Paul does in 2 Corinthians. I think it's one of the most beautiful chapters in the entire New Testament.

We've already seen Paul organizing a collection for struggling believers in Jerusalem. Now he writes to the Corinthians.

He could have taken many different approaches. He could have reminded them of promises they had made. He could have compared them to other

churches. He could have pressured them. He could have quoted Malachi.

Instead... he talks about grace.

Before we look at what Paul says to Corinth... he points them toward another group of believers. The churches in Macedonia.

Read **2 Corinthians 8:1-5 (NKJV)**.

"Moreover, brethren, we make known to you the grace of God bestowed on the churches of Macedonia: that in a great trial of affliction the abundance of their joy and their deep poverty abounded in the riches of their liberality. For I bear witness that according to their ability, yes, and beyond their ability, they were freely willing, imploring us with much urgency that we would receive the gift and the fellowship of the ministering to the saints. And not only as we had hoped, but they first gave themselves to the Lord, and then to us by the will of God."

As you read... notice what surprises you. These believers weren't wealthy. They weren't giving because life had become easy. Paul says they were experiencing **"a great trial of affliction."** He says they were in **"deep poverty."**

Yet somehow... they became examples of extraordinary generosity. How?

Paul gives us the answer. They weren't first moved by money. They were first moved by God.

Listen carefully. "...*first gave themselves to the Lord...*" (**2 Corinthians 8:5, NKJV**) There it is. The secret. Before they gave an offering... they gave themselves.

I've come to believe that's the order God has always desired. He never wanted our money before He had our hearts. He wanted us.

Think back over everything we've studied. Abraham. Jacob. Israel. Malachi. The early church. Can you see the thread?

God always pursued hearts. Giving simply revealed where those hearts already were.

Paul is saying the very same thing. The Macedonians first surrendered themselves to Christ. Everything else followed naturally.

Now we arrive at what may be my favorite verse in this entire study.

2 Corinthians 8:9 (KJV)

"For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that, though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, that you through his poverty might be rich."

Notice what Paul does. He's writing about an offering. But instead of talking about percentages... he talks about Jesus. Instead of calculating ten percent... he points to one hundred percent. The greatest act of

generosity in history wasn't an amount. It was a Person.

Jesus gave Himself. Completely. Willingly. Joyfully. Out of love. Paul's message is breathtaking.

If you want to understand Christian generosity... don't begin with a calculator. Begin with the Cross.

Can I pause here for just a moment? Imagine being one of the Corinthians hearing this letter for the first time. Perhaps you're expecting Paul to say, "Here's the amount I expect." Instead, he says, "Look at Jesus."

That changes the entire conversation. Not because giving becomes less important. Because Jesus becomes more important.

There's another phrase in this chapter that deserves our attention. Paul says, "*I speak not by commandment...*" (**2 Corinthians 8:8, KJV**) That caught my attention years ago.

Paul is encouraging generosity. He is urging believers toward sacrificial love. Yet he carefully explains that he is not issuing a command demanding a specific amount. Instead... he appeals to love.

Think about that. The apostle had authority. Yet he chose persuasion over pressure. Grace over guilt. Invitation over intimidation. That tells me something about the heart of the New Covenant.

Please don't misunderstand Paul. He isn't lowering the standard. If anything... he raises it.

Where the Law could require a gift. Grace transforms a giver. That's a completely different thing. One can produce outward obedience. Only the other can produce joyful generosity.

I think that's why Paul spends so much time talking about Christ. Because once you've truly seen the generosity of Jesus... giving begins to feel less like losing something... and more like reflecting Someone. That's a profound difference.

Coffee Break

Can I tell you something that has challenged me personally? I've caught myself asking, "Lord... how much should I give?" More than once.

But over the years... I've sensed Him quietly asking me a different question. "Tim... how much of your heart belongs to Me?"

That's a much harder question. Because once the heart belongs to Him... the wallet usually follows. Not because it has to. Because it wants to.

I've discovered something. Jesus isn't after ten percent. He's after one hundred percent of me. And strangely enough... when He has all of me... I stop worrying so much about percentages.

As we continue our journey... Paul isn't finished. In the next chapter he gives us one of the clearest descriptions of Christian giving found anywhere in Scripture. You'll discover words like... **purpose. cheerfulness. generosity. abundance.**

And perhaps the most liberating truth of all... God isn't looking for reluctant givers. He's looking for joyful ones.

I honestly believe Journey Sixteen may become the chapter readers return to again and again.

Journey Sixteen

The Cheerful Giver

Giving That Makes the Father Smile

"Every man according as he purposes in his heart, so let him give; not grudgingly, or of necessity: for God loveth a cheerful giver."

2 Corinthians 9:7 (KJV)

Have you ever received a gift from someone who clearly didn't want to give it? You know the look. The forced smile. The reluctant handoff. The expression that says, "Well...I guess I had to." You almost feel guilty accepting it.

Now compare that with someone who is genuinely excited to bless you. Their joy becomes part of the gift itself.

The gift may cost the same. But it feels completely different.

I think that's exactly what Paul wants us to understand. God has always cared about the heart behind the gift.

As we begin Journey Sixteen, remember what Paul has been talking about. He's still encouraging the Corinthians to participate in the offering for the

believers in Jerusalem. The subject hasn't changed. But now... he turns from logistics... to the heart.

Read 2 Corinthians 9:6-15 (KJV).

"But this I say: He who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and he who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully. So let each one give as he purposes in his heart, not grudgingly or of necessity; for God loves a cheerful giver. And God is able to make all grace abound toward you, that you, always having all sufficiency in all things, may have an abundance for every good work.

As it is written: 'He has dispersed abroad, He has given to the poor; His righteousness endures forever.'

Now may He who supplies seed to the sower, and bread for food, supply and multiply the seed you have sown and increase the fruits of your righteousness, while you are enriched in everything for all liberality, which causes thanksgiving through us to God. For the administration of this service not only supplies the needs of the saints, but also is abounding through many thanksgivings to God, while, through the proof of this ministry, they glorify God for the obedience of your confession to the gospel of Christ, and for your liberal sharing with them and all men, and by their prayer for you, who long for you because of the exceeding grace of God in you. Thanks be to God for His indescribable gift!"

Take your time. Notice the words Paul repeats. **Purpose. Cheerful. Grace. Abound. Thanksgiving.** Those words tell us where Paul's heart is.

One verse has become famous. And rightly so. "*Every man according as he purposes in his heart, so let him give...*" Stop there for just a moment.

Notice where Paul begins. The heart. Not the wallet. Not the percentage. The heart. That shouldn't surprise us anymore. We've seen this pattern all the way through Scripture. Abraham. Jacob. The prophets. Jesus. Now Paul. God has always begun with the heart.

Then Paul says something remarkable. "**...not grudgingly...**" The word paints a vivid picture.

Imagine someone sighing as they write a check. "Well... I suppose I have to."

Paul says... that's not the spirit of Christian giving. Then he adds another phrase. "**...or of necessity...**"

In other words... not because someone has backed you into a corner. Not because you feel manipulated. Not because you're afraid something bad will happen if you don't.

Think about that. Paul could have appealed to guilt. He doesn't. He could have appealed to fear. He doesn't. Instead... he appeals to something far greater. A heart transformed by grace.

Then we come to one of my favorite statements in all of Scripture. "**For God loves a cheerful giver.**" I have to confess something. For years I focused almost entirely on the word **giver**.

Then one day... I noticed another word. **Cheerful**. Why would God care whether someone is cheerful? Because the attitude reveals the heart.

Imagine your child coming to you on your birthday. "Dad... I bought you something." Then under his breath the son mutters, "I really wanted to keep the money." The gift suddenly isn't about the gift anymore. It's about the relationship.

Our Heavenly Father has never been interested in reluctant children. He delights in willing ones.

Can I ask you something? When you picture God watching His children give... what expression is on His face? Is He standing in heaven with folded arms... checking percentages? Or is He smiling as He watches His children become more like His Son?

I know which picture I see when I read this chapter.

Notice what Paul says next. God is able... to make **all grace abound**. I love that phrase.

Paul doesn't promise believers they'll all become wealthy. He promises something better. God's grace will always be sufficient. He'll provide what His children need to accomplish what He calls them to do.

That shifts our confidence away from our bank account... and back to our Father.

As I studied this chapter during my research, one observation kept returning. Paul never motivates generosity by threatening believers.

Instead... he keeps reminding them who God is.

The generous God. The faithful God. The God who supplies seed to the sower. The God who multiplies righteousness. The God who receives thanksgiving when His people become generous.

Notice the direction. The offering begins in one believer's heart. It ends in worship to God. That's beautiful.

There's another phrase I don't want us to overlook. Paul says their generosity would cause many people to give thanks to God.

Did you catch that?

The offering wasn't ultimately about money. It became worship.

One believer gives. Another believer's need is met. That believer thanks God. The Gospel is displayed. The Body of Christ is strengthened. God receives the glory. That's much bigger than writing a check.

That's Kingdom work.

I wonder if this is why Paul never starts with percentages. Percentages can measure money. They can't measure love. They can't measure sacrifice. They can't measure compassion.

Only God sees those things. And thankfully... He's much better at reading hearts than spreadsheets.

Coffee Break

Can I share something I've learned the older I've become? The happiest generous people I've ever met were rarely the wealthiest.

Some of them lived on very little. Yet somehow... they always seemed rich. Not because of what they owned. Because of what owned them.

Or perhaps I should say... what **didn't** own them.

Their possessions had lost their grip. Their hearts had discovered something greater. Jesus.

Maybe that's the secret Paul was trying to teach us all along. Generosity isn't measured by how much leaves your hand. It's revealed by what has already happened in your heart.

As we continue our journey... we're going to answer a question many readers have been wondering about since Journey One.

If the New Testament emphasizes grace giving... does that mean churches shouldn't support pastors?

Absolutely not. In fact... the New Testament speaks clearly about caring for those who faithfully labor in teaching and preaching.

The difference isn't whether they should be supported. The difference is **why**. And that's exactly where our journey is headed next.

Journey Seventeen

Supporting Those Who Feed Us

Why the New Testament Encourages Generosity Toward Spiritual Leaders

*"Even so the Lord ordained that they which preach the
gospel should live of the gospel."*

1 Corinthians 9:14 (KJV)

Let me begin with something that I hope is crystal clear. I love pastors.

Not because they're perfect. They're not. Neither am I.

I love them because week after week they open God's Word. They pray. They counsel hurting families. They visit hospitals. They preach funerals. They celebrate weddings. They answer late-night phone calls. They often carry burdens very few people ever see.

If you've ever had a faithful pastor... you've experienced one of God's precious gifts.

So before we go any farther... please hear my heart. Nothing in this book is meant to discourage churches from supporting faithful pastors. Quite the opposite.

I believe Scripture teaches they should.

The question is... how does the New Testament teach it? Let's allow Paul to answer.

Read 1 Corinthians 9:1–18 (NKJV).

“Am I not an apostle? Am I not free? Have I not seen Jesus Christ our Lord? Are you not my work in the Lord? If I am not an apostle to others, yet doubtless I am to you. For you are the seal of my apostleship in the Lord.

My defense to those who examine me is this: Do we have no right to eat and drink? Do we have no right to take along a believing wife, as do also the other apostles, the brothers of the Lord, and Cephas? Or is it only Barnabas and I who have no right to refrain from working? Who ever goes to war at his own expense? Who plants a vineyard and does not eat of its fruit? Or who tends a flock and does not drink of the milk of the flock?

Do I say these things as a mere man? Or does not the law say the same also? For it is written in the law of Moses, ‘You shall not muzzle an ox while it treads out the grain.’ Is it oxen God is concerned about? Or does He say it altogether for our sakes? For our sakes, no doubt, this is written, that he who plows should plow in hope, and he who threshes in hope should be partaker of his hope. If we have sown spiritual things for you, is it a great thing if we reap your material things? If others are partakers of this right over you, are we not even more?

Nevertheless we have not used this right, but endure all things lest we hinder the gospel of Christ. Do you not know that those who minister the holy things eat of the things of the temple, and those who serve at the altar partake of the

offerings of the altar? Even so the Lord has commanded that those who preach the gospel should live from the gospel.

But I have used none of these things, nor have I written these things that it should be done so to me; for it would be better for me to die than that anyone should make my boasting void. For if I preach the gospel, I have nothing to boast of, for necessity is laid upon me; yes, woe is me if I do not preach the gospel! For if I do this willingly, I have a reward; but if against my will, I have been entrusted with a stewardship. What is my reward then? That when I preach the gospel, I may present the gospel of Christ without charge, that I may not abuse my authority in the gospel."

Take your time. Paul builds his argument carefully. Notice how often he uses illustrations. A soldier. A farmer. A shepherd. Each one benefits from his labor. Paul's point is simple.

Those who devote themselves to serving others are ordinarily supported through that work. That principle makes perfect sense.

Then Paul reaches back into the Old Testament. He quotes Deuteronomy.

"You shall not muzzle an ox while it treads out the grain"

At first... that sounds like an unusual verse to quote while talking about pastors. An ox? Really?

But Paul isn't interested only in farming. He's interested in the principle behind the command. God cares about those who labor. If He cared about an ox... how much more does He care about those who faithfully labor in proclaiming His Word?

Then Paul says something beautiful.

1 Corinthians 9:14 (NKJV)

"Even so the Lord has commanded that those who preach the gospel should live from the gospel."

There it is. Simple. Clear. Biblical.

Those who faithfully preach the Gospel should be supported.

Notice something. Paul doesn't appeal to the Levitical tithe here. He appeals to a broader biblical principle. God provides for those He calls into His service.

That principle has been with us throughout the Bible. The way it is expressed changes. God's faithfulness does not.

Now here's something that has always fascinated me. Paul immediately says he has not exercised that right in certain situations. Why?

Because he didn't want anyone accusing him of preaching for money. Think about that. Paul defends the right of ministers to receive support... while

personally choosing at times to lay aside that right for the sake of the Gospel.

What a remarkable heart.

That teaches us something important. Supporting pastors is biblical. Sacrificial ministry is biblical. Neither truth cancels the other.

Sometimes pastors receive support. Sometimes missionaries choose to make tents. Sometimes churches are strong enough to provide fully. Sometimes they simply aren't.

The New Testament gives us principles... not a rigid formula.

Paul returns to this subject again in another letter.

Read 1 Timothy 5:17-18 (NIV).

"The elders who direct the affairs of the church well are worthy of double honor, especially those whose work is preaching and teaching. For Scripture says, 'Do not muzzle an ox while it is treading out the grain,' and 'The worker deserves his wages.'"

Notice what he writes.

"The elders who direct the affairs of the church well are worthy of double honor, especially those whose work is preaching and teaching"

The word **honor** certainly includes respect. But in this context it also includes material support.

Paul even quotes Scripture to make his point. Again... the emphasis isn't obligation. It's appreciation. Those who faithfully labor among God's people should be cared for by God's people.

That seems both reasonable...and loving.

Another beautiful passage appears in Galatians.

Read **Galatians 6:6 (NIV)**.

“Nevertheless, the one who receives instruction in the word should share all good things with their instructor.”

Paul again encourages believers to share with those who teach them God's Word. Notice the relationship? Teacher. Student. Family. Partnership. This isn't a tax. It's a community.

The Gospel creates relationships where believers gladly care for those who invest spiritually in their lives.

As I studied these passages during my research, something became increasingly clear. The New Testament never abandons generosity toward spiritual leaders. Not once.

In fact... it assumes God's people will gladly support faithful ministry.

But the motivation has changed. The language has changed. The covenant has changed.

Instead of pointing believers to a required percentage... Paul points them to gratitude... partnership... love... and the advance of the Gospel.

That's a beautiful progression.

May I say something that I hope encourages every pastor who someday reads this book? Your calling matters. Deeply.

Never measure your ministry by a paycheck. The One who called you sees every unseen sacrifice. Every late-night prayer. Every difficult sermon. Every tear shed with grieving families. Every quiet act of faithfulness.

Your Heavenly Father keeps better records than any church finance committee ever could.

I hope that's an encouragement.

Coffee Break

Can I tell you one of my favorite memories? I've watched churches quietly bless pastors who never asked for anything. A surprise offering. A handwritten note. A vacation. A gift card tucked inside a Bible. The amounts didn't matter nearly as much as the love behind it.

I've also watched pastors quietly give away far more than anyone ever knew.

That's the beauty of the Body of Christ. Sometimes the shepherd feeds the sheep. Sometimes the sheep feed the shepherd.

Either way... Jesus is caring for His flock. And I know He smiles every time His people care for one another.

As we continue our journey... we're going to visit one of the shortest stories in the Gospels. Just a few verses. A widow with two tiny coins.

It's one of the most quoted passages on giving. It's also one of the most misunderstood.

Together... we'll slow down. We'll read the whole context. And once again... we'll put on our **Jesus glasses**.

Because I have a feeling Jesus was teaching something far deeper than the size of a gift.

Journey Eighteen

The Widow's Two Mites

What Was Jesus Really Teaching?

"They all gave out of their wealth; but she, out of her poverty, put in everything--all she had to live on."

Mark 12:44 (NIV)

Some stories in the Bible are so familiar that we stop seeing them. The widow's two mites may be one of them.

Ask almost any Christian what this story teaches, and you'll probably hear something like this: *"God doesn't measure the size of the gift. He measures the heart of the giver."* That's true. Absolutely true.

But I wonder... is that all Jesus was saying?

Let's slow down.

Remember our promise from Journey One? We're going to read the whole story. Not just the ending.

Before Jesus ever noticed the widow... He was talking about someone else. The religious leaders. Listen to His warning.

Read Mark 12:38-40 (NIV).

"As he taught, Jesus said, 'Watch out for the teachers of the law. They like to walk around in flowing robes and be greeted with respect in the marketplaces, and have the most important seats in the synagogues and the places of honor at banquets. They devour widows' houses and for a show make lengthy prayers. These men will be punished most severely.'"

Notice His words. **"Watch out for the teachers..."** Then Jesus describes them. They loved recognition. They loved honor. They loved important seats.

And then He says something shocking. **"...they devour widows' houses..."** Stop right there.

Those words should make us uncomfortable. Who was being harmed? Widows. Jesus wasn't criticizing widows. He was defending them.

Now don't lose the context.

The very next event is the widow placing her two mites into the Temple treasury. That's not an accident. Mark intentionally places these stories together.

First... Jesus condemns leaders who exploit widows. Then... a widow appears. Context matters.

Let's read the account.

Read Mark 12:41-44 (NIV).

"Jesus sat down opposite the place where the offerings were put and watched the crowd putting their money into the temple treasury. Many rich people threw in large amounts. But a poor widow came and put in two very small copper coins, worth only a few cents. Calling his disciples to him, Jesus said, 'Truly I tell you, this poor widow has put more into the treasury than all the others. They all gave out of their wealth; but she, out of her poverty, put in everything--all she had to live on.'"

Picture the scene. Jesus is sitting opposite the treasury. People are bringing their offerings. Some are wealthy. Some are not.

Many large gifts are being placed into the offering chests. Then quietly... almost unnoticed... a widow approaches.

She places in two mites. The smallest coins in circulation. Financially... they hardly seem significant. Yet Jesus notices her. Of course He does. Jesus always notices people everyone else overlooks.

Then Jesus says something remarkable. **"this poor widow has put more into the treasury than all the others..."**

Do you notice what Jesus does? He doesn't measure dollars. He measures sacrifice. The wealthy gave from abundance. She gave from poverty. He sees what no one else can see. The heart.

But here's the question I've wrestled with for years. Is Jesus praising the Temple system... or is He exposing it?

Remember what He just said moments earlier. The religious leaders were **devouring widows' houses**. Now we immediately see a widow giving everything she has.

Then in the very next chapter... Jesus predicts the destruction of the Temple. That sequence has always caused me to slow down.

Some faithful Bible scholars understand this passage primarily as an example of sacrificial faith. Others see it as part of Jesus' broader condemnation of a corrupt religious system that had failed to protect the very people God loved.

Personally... I believe there is truth worth considering in both observations.

Jesus certainly honored the widow's faith. He also had already condemned leaders who exploited vulnerable people. Neither truth should be ignored.

Here's what I know with certainty. Jesus saw a woman everyone else overlooked. He knew her circumstances. He knew her heart. He knew the cost of her gift. He saw her faith.

That has always comforted me. Because sometimes... our greatest acts of obedience go unnoticed by

everyone except Jesus. And honestly... He's the only One whose opinion ultimately matters, right?

This story also reminds me of something we've discovered throughout our journey. God has never evaluated generosity the way people do.

People tend to see amounts. God sees surrender. People tend to see numbers. God sees trust. People tend to compare gifts. God examines hearts.

That has been true from Abraham... to Jacob... to the prophets... to Jesus... and it remains true today.

Can I gently offer another thought? Sometimes this passage has been used to encourage people to give beyond what wisdom or Scripture would recommend. I've even heard believers made to feel guilty because they couldn't give "like the widow."

I don't believe that's Jesus' intention. Remember... Jesus never manipulated people into generosity. He invited them into a relationship with the Father.

There's a difference. A very important difference.

The widow wasn't trying to impress anyone. She probably assumed no one even noticed. Except... Jesus did.

Isn't that just like Him? He notices cups of cold water. He notices sparrows flying. He notices tears being shed. He notices lonely widows and He notices you.

That truth has encouraged me more than once in my life.

Coffee Break

May I tell you something that has become more precious to me over the years? When I was a young minister, I used to think God was mostly impressed by big things. Big ministries. Big offerings. Big accomplishments.

The older I get... the more I think God delights in faithfulness. A quiet prayer. An encouraging word. A meal delivered to someone who is hurting. A note written to a discouraged pastor. A child sharing a toy. A widow giving two tiny coins. None of those things make headlines. But every one of them catches Heaven's attention.

As a Texan, it is hard to admit this, but, maybe greatness in God's Kingdom has never been measured by size. Maybe it's always been measured by love.

As we continue our journey... we're going to revisit a familiar friend. Abraham. Not because we've forgotten him. Because now we've walked through the entire story.

We've seen Genesis. The Law. The Prophets. Jesus. The early Church. Paul. Grace. Now we're finally prepared to ask one of the biggest questions in this entire book.
What should we learn from Abraham today?

This time... we'll answer that question while wearing our **Jesus glasses**. And I have a feeling we'll see him more clearly than ever before.

Journey Nineteen

Looking at Abraham Again

What Does His Example Really Teach Us?

*"And he believed in the LORD; and he counted it to him
for righteousness."*

Genesis 15:6 (KJV)

We've come a long way together. When we first met Abraham back in Journey Three, we intentionally resisted the temptation to draw immediate conclusions.

Instead...we simply watched. A victory. A priest named Melchizedek. A tenth. An act of worship. Then we kept walking.

Now... after traveling through the entire story of Scripture... it's time to return. Not because we've forgotten Abraham. Because now we can finally see him in the light of everything God revealed afterward.

I think that's exactly how God intended His Word to be read.

Have you ever worked on a jigsaw puzzle? Sometimes the very first piece you place doesn't make much sense. I know it doesn't for me. Seeing all those scattered pieces make my head swim. I stare at the pile trying to

pick just one piece to begin. My wife is gifted at this game, I am not.

Staring at that one little piece, I have not clue where it goes. Then... hours later (for me at least) ...I suddenly realize exactly where it fits.

Nothing about the piece changed. My perspective did.

That's how I feel about Abraham. Genesis hasn't changed. We have. We've now seen the whole picture.

Let's remind ourselves what actually happened. Abraham had just returned from rescuing Lot. God gave him victory. Melchizedek praised God Most High. Then Abraham gave a tenth.

Notice something. We've now walked through twenty centuries of biblical history. Not once has Scripture ever suggested Abraham was paying God for protection. Not once does the text describe his gift as a religious tax. Not once does it say he was establishing a universal command for every believer throughout history.

The text simply records what he did. That's still true.

So... what does Abraham teach us? More than I realized when I first began studying this subject.

First... he teaches us that faith responds to God's grace. Remember the order? God gave the victory. Abraham responded. God acted first. Faith answered.

That pattern has followed us from Genesis all the way to the Cross. It never changed.

Second... Abraham teaches us that worship is joyful. Nothing in Genesis suggests reluctance. Nothing suggests fear. Nothing suggests calculation.

He isn't trying to earn God's favor. He already has God's favor. His giving becomes an act of gratitude. That sounds surprisingly familiar. Doesn't Paul say something very similar?

Grace first. Response second.

Third... Abraham reminds us that God deserves the glory.

Remember Melchizedek's words? He didn't congratulate Abraham. He praised God. How easy it is to forget that.

Sometimes we celebrate the generosity of God's people while forgetting the generosity of God Himself. Abraham never made that mistake. He knew exactly where the victory had come from.

Now let's ask the question we've been carrying since Journey Three. Does Abraham's example become a command for Christians? That's an honest question. One that deserves an honest answer.

The New Testament certainly points us back to Abraham many times.

Paul speaks about his faith. James speaks about his obedience. Hebrews celebrates his trust in God.

But here's something fascinating. When the apostles use Abraham as an example for the Church... they consistently point us to his faith. Not to his tenth. That observation deserves careful thought.

Read Paul's words.

Romans 4:3 (NKJV)

"For what does the Scripture say? 'Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness.'"

Notice what Paul emphasizes? Faith.

Again. Abraham becomes the father of all who believe. His confidence in God. His willingness to trust God's promises. His obedience flowing from faith.

Those are the themes the New Testament returns to over and over again.

That doesn't diminish Abraham's gift. Far from it. It places it in its proper setting. His tenth becomes one beautiful expression of a much deeper reality. A heart that trusted God.

And once again... we find ourselves back where we've been throughout this journey. The heart. Always the heart.

There's another lesson Abraham teaches me personally. He held his possessions loosely.

Think about that. He had just recovered enormous wealth from battle. He could have clung tightly to it. Instead... he recognized something. Everything he possessed ultimately belonged to God.

I wonder what would happen if every Christian truly believed that. Not because someone demanded it. But because they actually believed it.

Would generosity become easier? I think it would.

Can I share something that has changed my own thinking? Years ago... I spent a great deal of time asking, "What percentage should I give?"

Today... I find myself asking a different question. "Father... what would most honor You?"

Those aren't identical questions. One seeks a minimum. The other seeks a relationship.

And relationships have always been at the heart of God's dealings with His people.

Please don't misunderstand what I'm saying. I'm not suggesting percentages are wrong.

Some believers joyfully choose ten percent. Others give much more. Others, because of hardship, can only give a little for a season.

The New Testament consistently calls us to generosity that flows from faith, love, and wisdom. The amount may differ. The heart should not.

Coffee Break

Can I tell you what I admire most about Abraham? It isn't the tenth. It isn't the victory. It isn't even his courage.

It's this: When God called... he trusted. Sometimes he stumbled. Sometimes he waited impatiently. Sometimes he made painful mistakes. Sound familiar? Yet through it all... he kept learning to trust the God who had first trusted him with His promises.

That gives me hope. Because I still have a lot to learn; just ask my wife! Maybe you do too? Thankfully... our Father has always been patient with people who are still growing.

We've reached a remarkable point in our journey. We've walked from Genesis to the New Testament.

Now... only one major question remains. After everything we've studied... after every passage we've opened... after every covenant we've explored... **What should Christians believe about tithing today?**

That's where we're going next. Not with anger. Not with debate. Simply with open Bibles... and our Jesus glasses firmly in place.

Journey Twenty

So...How Did We Get Here?

When the Language of Giving Changed

"Prove all things; hold fast that which is good."

1 Thessalonians 5:21 (KJV)

Can I make you a promise before we begin? This chapter isn't about proving anyone wrong. It's about asking an honest question.

How did sincere Christians, who love the same Savior and read the same Bible, arrive at such different conclusions about giving? History has a way of doing that.

If you've ever inherited your grandmother's famous recipe, you know what I mean. Ask three grandchildren for the recipe... and you'll probably get three slightly different versions. Nobody intended to change Grandma's recipe. Each generation simply passed along what it received.

Church history sometimes works the same way.

Before we go any farther... let me say something that has become very important to me. **Tradition is at its best when it points us back to Scripture. It is at its worst when it asks Scripture to submit to tradition.**

I love many traditions. Some have deeply shaped my walk with Christ. But every tradition—including the ones I grew

up with and even the conclusions I've reached—must always be willing to sit beneath the authority of God's Word.

That has been the heartbeat of this entire journey. Not, "*What have we always believed?*" But, "**What does the Bible actually say?**"

One of my favorite childhood games was called **Telephone**. One person whispered a sentence into another person's ear. Then another. Then another. By the time it reached the last person... "*The little brown dog chased the rabbit*" had somehow become... *a pretty young girl lost her jacket*"

Now before anyone panics... I'm not comparing church history to a playground game. God's Word has never changed. Not one verse. Not one promise.

But words... and the way we use them... sometimes do.

Walk into almost any church next Sunday. At some point you'll probably hear these familiar words. "**Let's receive our tithes and offerings.**" I've heard that phrase thousands of times. Maybe you have too.

For years... I never questioned it. Why would I? Everyone said it. Then one day I asked myself something embarrassingly simple. **Why do we say both?**

If the tithe **is** my offering... why separate them? If an offering is something different... what exactly is the difference? Without realizing it, many Christians have inherited an unwritten definition.

It usually sounds something like this. The tithe is what I owe God. The offering is anything extra I choose to give after I've met my obligation. Think about that for just a moment. Where does the New Testament ever make that distinction?

That's an honest question. Not a trick question. Just... an honest one.

As I began reading the New Testament again... something surprised me. The apostles repeatedly used words like... giving, sharing, generosity, grace, helping, providing, offerings. But they never seem to divide Christian giving into two categories: Required giving... and optional giving.

That observation made me stop. Not because it instantly answered every question. Because it made me ask better ones.

The first Christians gathered in homes. There were no church buildings. No construction loans. No capital campaigns. No sound booths. And thankfully... no committee meetings arguing over the color of the carpet. (Although I'm fairly certain those meetings appeared shortly after the Book of Acts.)

Their giving was refreshingly simple. Someone had a need. Someone else met it. Missionaries traveled. Churches helped. Widows were cared for. The poor were remembered. Giving flowed naturally from grateful hearts.

As Christianity spread... churches became more organized. Pastors devoted themselves to teaching. Missionaries

traveled farther. Congregations grew. Buildings eventually became necessary. All of that makes perfect sense.

But gradually... church leaders began looking back to the Old Testament as a model for supporting ministry.

The Levites had been supported through the tithe. The Temple had been maintained through God's provision.

Little by little... the vocabulary of **tithing** became more common in Christian life.

Centuries later... another significant change occurred.

In much of Europe... church and government became closely connected. In many places... tithes were no longer simply encouraged. They were required by law.

By then... the conversation looked very different from the voluntary generosity we read about in Acts and the letters of Paul. History had influenced vocabulary. Vocabulary had influenced theology. And theology had influenced generations of Christians.

By the time of the Protestant Reformation... much of that vocabulary had already become deeply rooted. Some Reformers questioned it. Others retained it. Many believed tithing was still a helpful pattern for Christian giving.

And as the Gospel spread throughout the world... that language spread with it. Eventually... it became so familiar

that very few Christians stopped to ask, "*Why do we use this word?*" Honestly... neither did I.

Please hear my heart. This chapter is not an attack on pastors. I've known many faithful pastors who use the word **tithe** because that's simply the language they inherited. Most sincerely love Christ. Most sincerely love their churches. Most sincerely desire to encourage generosity. I respect them.

This isn't about motives. It's about vocabulary. And vocabulary matters. Because vocabulary can shape theology.

Imagine if next Sunday your pastor stood up and said, "Let's worship the Lord through our giving."

Or... "Let's present our offerings to the Lord."

Or... "Let's thank God by giving back a portion of what He has graciously entrusted to us."

Would the amount people gave necessarily change? Maybe. Maybe not. But I wonder if the heart behind the giving might.

Instead of asking, "*Have I met my obligation?*" perhaps we'd begin asking, "*How can I worship my generous Father today?*" That is a profoundly different question.

If this journey has taught me anything... it's this. Words matter. Not because words save us. Jesus does that. But words shape the way we understand Him.

Perhaps it's time to recover the beautiful New Testament language of... grace, generosity, sharing, offerings, and giving. Not because those words are more modern. But because they are the words the Holy Spirit chose to inspire.

Coffee Break

Can I make one request? Please don't finish this chapter, walk into church next Sunday, and announce to your pastor, *"Technically...that's not a tithe."* Especially if he's carrying hot coffee!

Instead... thank him for faithfully preaching Christ. Pray for him. Love him. Then go home... open your Bible... and keep studying. Because this book has never been about winning an argument.

It's been about helping ordinary Christians become extraordinary students of God's Word. And there's a big difference.

We've now walked through Scripture... and history. Only one question remains. Knowing everything we've learned...

How should followers of Jesus live today?

Let's finish our journey.

Journey Twenty-One

So... What Do We Do Now?

Living Generously Under Grace

"Stand fast therefore in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free..."

Galatians 5:1 (KJV)

Well... here we are. Twenty One journeys later. We've walked through thousands of years of biblical history together.

We've stood beside Abraham. We've listened to Jacob. We've climbed Mount Sinai. We've followed Israel into the Promised Land. We've stood outside the Temple with Malachi. We've listened to Jesus. We've watched Him die. We've celebrated an empty tomb. We've witnessed Pentecost. We've followed Paul across the Roman Empire.

And now... we've arrived at the question many people asked before they ever opened this book. So... **what should Christians do?**

Before I answer that question... let me answer another one. **What have we actually learned?**

We've learned that Abraham gave a tenth. Freely. Joyfully. Before the Law.

We've learned that Jacob made a promise flowing from faith.

We've learned that the Mosaic Covenant established a detailed tithing system for Israel. We've learned why God established it. We've learned who received it. We've learned what the storehouse was. We've learned that Malachi was calling a covenant nation back to God.

We've learned that Jesus spoke to people living under the Law.

We've learned that the Cross inaugurated the New Covenant. We've learned that the apostles taught believers to give generously... cheerfully... purposefully... and out of gratitude for Christ.

That's quite a journey.

So... after studying all of those passages... what do I believe? I believe every Christian should be generous. Not occasionally. Not reluctantly. Generously.

I believe every Christian should support the work of the Gospel. I believe faithful pastors should be cared for. Missionaries should be sent. The poor should be remembered. Widows should not be forgotten. Churches should be equipped to proclaim Christ.

The New Testament leaves no doubt about those truths.

But here's where my own study led me. After examining every passage I could find... I do not believe the New Testament commands Christians to live under the Mosaic law of tithing.

Instead... it consistently calls believers to something both simpler... and, in many ways, more searching. A life transformed by grace. A heart surrendered to Christ. Generosity that flows from love rather than obligation.

That conclusion wasn't one I reached quickly. It grew slowly... one passage at a time.

Now let me say something that is very important. If you joyfully choose to give ten percent... God bless you. There is absolutely nothing wrong with that.

In fact... for many believers it provides a wonderful starting point for disciplined generosity.

If that's the conviction God has placed on your heart... give joyfully. Give thankfully. Give as an act of worship.

But I would also say this. Please don't measure another believer's faithfulness solely by whether they give ten percent.

The New Testament repeatedly points us toward the heart. Some believers can joyfully give far more. Others may be walking through seasons of unemployment... illness... or overwhelming hardship.

Our Father sees circumstances that no one else can see. He judges with perfect wisdom. We do not.

Can I tell you something I've learned over the years? Legalism always asks, "*What's the minimum?*" Love asks, "*How can I bless?*" Those are very different questions. One is trying to satisfy a requirement. The other is responding to a relationship. I believe the Gospel always moves us toward the second question.

Sometimes people ask me, "Tim... how much should I give?" My answer today is different than it would have been years ago.

I would encourage you to begin by asking God something even more important. "Lord... what would You have me do?" Then... listen. Pray. Study. Seek wise counsel. Give intentionally. Give consistently. Give joyfully. And trust the Holy Spirit to shape your heart.

Because the same Spirit who convicts us about sin... also teaches us generosity.

There's one more thing I don't want you to miss. Throughout this entire journey... God has always been the first Giver.

Before Abraham ever gave a tenth... God gave a promise. Before Israel ever brought a tithe... God gave them a land. Before the Church ever shared an offering... Jesus gave His life.

That's the pattern. God gives first. His people respond. Everything else grows from that truth.

Coffee Break

May I ask you a question? If tomorrow every discussion about tithing disappeared... would you still be generous? Would you still want to help the poor? Support your church? Encourage missionaries? Bless your pastor? Care for a struggling family?

If the answer is yes... then perhaps grace has already accomplished what the Law could never do. Not because someone required generosity. Because Jesus changed your heart.

And honestly... I think that's been the Father's desire all along.

As we close this journey, I don't want to leave you with a percentage. I want to leave you with a Person.

Jesus.

The One who left heaven. The One who became poor for our sake. The One who gave His life so that we might have eternal life.

If His love has captured your heart... I believe generosity will follow. Not perfectly. Not always easily. But increasingly.

Because that's what grace does. It changes us from the inside out.

Journey Twenty-Two

The Father's Heart

The Greatest Giver of All

"For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son..."

John 3:16 (KJV)

We've finally reached the end of our journey. Or perhaps... the beginning of yours.

When I first started studying this subject decades ago, I thought I was writing about tithing. Somewhere along the way... I realized I wasn't. I was discovering something much bigger.

I was discovering the heart of the Father.

Think back over everything we've seen together. Before Abraham ever gave a tenth... God gave him a promise. Before Jacob ever made a vow... God promised, **"... I am with you and will keep you wherever you go"** (*Genesis 28:15, NKJV*)

Before Israel ever brought a tithe... God delivered them from Egypt. Before there was a Tabernacle... God provided manna. Before there was a Temple... God provided a sacrifice. Before there was a Church... God sent His Son.

Do you see the pattern? God always gives first.

Always.

Maybe that's why I've fallen in love with this story. Because the Bible has never really been about what we give to God. It's always been about what God has given to us. Everything else is simply our response.

When I was younger... I sometimes imagined God as constantly asking, "What are you going to give Me?"

The older I've become... the more I hear Him asking something entirely different. "Will you trust Me?"

That's been His invitation from Genesis to Revelation. Trust Me. Walk with Me. Know Me. Love Me. Everything else grows from there.

Think about the greatest verse most of us memorized as children.

John 3:16 (KJV)

"For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life."

Notice the first great act. God... gave. He didn't loan His Son. He didn't rent Him. He didn't send Him with conditions attached. He gave. Completely. Freely. Lovingly. Sacrificially.

Every conversation about Christian generosity must begin there. Because if it begins anywhere else... we've started in the wrong place.

The Cross forever changed the way I think about giving. I used to ask, "What belongs to God?" Now I ask, "What doesn't?"

If Christ has redeemed me... if every breath I take is a gift... if eternity itself has been purchased for me... then how could I ever say, "This part is mine"?

Paul understood this beautifully. **"You are not your own. For you are bought with a price..."** (*1 Corinthians 6:19-20, KJVR*)

Everything I have... my family. My home. My career. My time. My resources. Even my next heartbeat... is ultimately a gift from Him.

That realization doesn't make me feel guilty. It makes me grateful.

One of the greatest surprises of this journey has been discovering that God has never been after my wallet. He's been after my heart. Not because He needs it. Because I need Him.

Jesus once said, **"For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also."** (*Matthew 6:21, KJV*)

For years I thought He was talking about money. Now I think He was talking about love. Whatever captures

our treasure... captures us. Jesus wasn't trying to take something from us.

He was trying to rescue us from loving the wrong things.

May I tell you something this journey has taught me? I no longer want to ask, "How little can I give and still satisfy God?" I want to ask, "Father... how can my life reflect Your generosity?" That's a completely different question.

And frankly... it's a much more joyful one.

Some of you reading this book will continue giving ten percent. Wonderful. Do it joyfully.

Some of you will discover God leading you to give much more. Wonderful. Do it joyfully.

Some of you are walking through seasons where simply paying your bills is an act of faith. Don't lose heart. Your Father knows exactly where you are. He has never measured your faithfulness by comparing your gift to someone else's. He sees your heart. Just as He saw Abraham. Just as He saw the widow. Just as He sees you today.

Before we say goodbye... I want to leave you with one final picture. Imagine standing before Jesus one day.

I don't think the first question will be, "Did you calculate every percentage correctly?" I think we'll fall at His feet overwhelmed by something far greater.

Grace.

We'll finally see the nail scars. We'll understand, in a way we never could on earth, what it cost Him to redeem us. And I have a feeling that in that moment... none of us will wish we had loved Him less. None of us will wish we had trusted Him less. None of us will wish we had been less generous.

Because we'll finally see the generosity that changed the universe.

One Last Cup of Coffee

Before you close this book... can I ask one final favor? Don't remember me. Remember Jesus.

If something in these pages encouraged you... thank Him. If something challenged you... take it back to His Word.

Open your Bible. Read it again. Wear your **Jesus glasses**. Ask the Holy Spirit to help you see the Father more clearly than ever before.

If I've accomplished anything... I hope it isn't that you agree with every conclusion I've reached. I hope it's that you leave this journey loving Jesus more than when you started.

Because if that happens... every hour spent writing... every hour you spent reading... will have been worth it.

A Final Prayer

Father,

Thank You for walking with us through these pages.

Thank You for Abraham's faith, Jacob's promise, Moses' faithfulness, the prophets' courage, the apostles' teaching, and above all, for Your Son.

Thank You for being the greatest Giver.

Teach us to love You more than possessions.

Teach us to trust You more than wealth.

Teach us to see people the way You see them.

Give us hearts that are generous because You have been generous to us.

Help us never to use Your Word to win arguments while losing love.

May our lives point others to Jesus.

And when our journey on earth is finished... may we hear the words every child longs to hear:

"Well done, thou good and faithful servant..."
(*Matthew 25:21, KJV*)

We ask it in the precious name of Jesus.

Amen.

Epilogue

As I close this book, I find myself smiling.

Not because I finally answered every question. I didn't.

There are faithful Christians who love Jesus deeply and understand some of these passages differently than I do.

I respect them. I've learned from many of them.

But if this journey has taught me anything, it's this: The center of the Bible is not the tithe. The center of the Bible is not the Law. The center of the Bible is not even giving.

The center of the Bible is Jesus Christ.

Everything before Him points toward Him.
Everything after Him points back to Him.

So if you remember only one sentence from this entire journey...I hope it's this:

God has always given first.

Before you ever loved Him... He loved you. Before you ever gave to Him... He gave His Son for you.

And before you ever took your first step toward Him... He was already running toward you with open arms.

So keep your Bible open. Keep your heart soft. Keep your eyes on Jesus. And don't ever take off your **Jesus glasses**.

Because when you read the Scriptures through Him... you don't just discover what God asks of His people.

You discover **the heart of the Father**.

A Personal Note

If you've read this far... thank you.

We've spent a lot of time together. More than twenty journeys.

My prayer has never been that you would agree with every conclusion I've reached.

My prayer is that somewhere along this journey you fell more deeply in love with Jesus and discovered the generous heart of the Father.

If this book has encouraged you, challenged you, or caused you to open your Bible with fresh eyes... then every hour spent writing it has been worthwhile.

Until we meet someday in Heaven...

keep reading God's Word.

Keep asking good questions.

And whatever you do... don't ever take off your **Jesus glasses**.

Your fellow traveler,

Tim