

Sermons on Malachi-Robert Morgan

Introduction - Robert J Morgan is the teaching pastor at [Donelson Fellowship in Nashville, Tennessee](#) and is well known for expository messages that are rich in excellent illustrations of Biblical principles.

Six Promises

- Malachi 3:10; 2 Chronicles 31:10; Proverbs 3:9-10; Proverbs 11:24-25; Malachi 3:10; Luke 6:38; 2 Corinthians 9:6-8

Suppose I were a farmer who, in the course of the year, harvested fifty pounds of corn. What should I do with it? Well, I could take some of it to the mill and have it ground up so we could have cornbread. Some of it could be cooked or canned for food. Some of it would go for the livestock, to keep our horses and cows alive. But if I were a wise farmer, before I did any of that I would take out the first five or ten pounds and set it aside as seed corn for next year's planting. Otherwise, I'd feast well this year only to starve to death next year.

The Bible teaches that the law of sowing and reaping is a law that is equally valid in the spiritual world as in the natural world, and several times the Bible applies it to the giving of our tithes and offerings.

When we talk about our tithes, we are talking about giving to the Lord and to his church the first ten percent of our income, whatever its source. The word "tithe" comes from the word for "tenth." It is a pattern among God's people going all the way back to the Patriarchs. Genesis 14 says that Abraham gave the priest Melchizedek a tenth of everything.

The word "offering" is typically understood to be any amount above that initial ten percent that you feel led to give to the Lord's work, to the church, and to the worldwide cause of the Gospel. We feel that we have a certain obligation to give to the Lord our tithes, but we want to give him more, we want to give him our offerings.

When we do so, it is akin to setting aside the first part of the harvest in order to insure future blessings and future sufficiency. Where do we read this in the Bible? In my message today, I'd like to show you six different passages which contain promises for those who are generous in their giving.

2 Chronicles 31:10

In 2 Chronicles 31, King Hezekiah found the work of God badly under-funded. The temple was in disrepair, and the nation had sunk into idolatry. But the king set out to promote a revival throughout his realm. Verse 3ff says:

The king contributed from his own possessions for the morning and evening burnt offerings and for the burnt offerings on the Sabbaths, New Moons and appointed feasts as written in the Law of the Lord. He ordered the people living in Jerusalem to give the portion due the priests and Levites so they could devote themselves to the Law of the Lord. As soon as the order went out, the Israelites generously gave the firstfruits of their grain, new wine, oil and honey and all that the fields produced. They brought a great amount, a tithe of everything. The men of Israel and Judah who lived in the towns of Judah also brought a tithe of their herds and flocks and a tithe of the holy things dedicated to the Lord their God, and they piled them in heaps. They began doing this in the third month and finished in the seventh month. When Hezekiah and his officials came and saw the heaps, they praised the Lord and blessed his people Israel.

Verse 9 says that when Hezekiah came and saw the abundance that had been released for the Lord's work he was amazed. He could hardly believe there were such revenues in all Israel, and he asked where in the world such provisions had come from. In verse 10, the chief priest Azariah answered: Since the people began to bring their contributions to the temple of the Lord, we have had enough to eat and plenty to spare, because the Lord has blessed his people and this great amount is left over.

When the people began bringing their contributions to the temple, the Lord began blessing them with abundance.

Proverbs 3:9-10

In Proverbs 3:9-10, this principle of giving-followed-by-the-blessing (sowing-followed-by-reaping) is stated like this—Honor the Lord with your wealth, with the firstfruits of all your crops.

We would say, "Honor the Lord with your money, with the first part of all your income." And the harvest promise follows in verse 10: Then your barns will be filled to overflowing, and your vats will brim over with new wine.

Proverbs 11:24-25

A few chapters over, there is a similar passage, Proverbs 11:24-25—One man gives freely, yet gains even more; another withholds unduly, but comes to poverty. A generous man will prosper; he who refreshes others will himself be refreshed.

Do you see the sowing/reaping concept here? John Bunyan, author of *Pilgrim's Progress*, once wrote a little couplet that went like this:

There was a man
Some call him mad;
The more he gave
The more he had.

Malachi 3:10

The last book in the Old Testament, Malachi, also brings up the sowing/reaping aspect of our tithes and offerings as we read these words: "Will a man rob God? Yet you rob me. But you ask, 'How do we rob you?' In tithes and offerings. You are under a curse—the whole nation of you—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 you will not have room enough for it. I will prevent pests from devouring your crops, and the vines in your fields will not cast their fruit," says the Lord Almighty. "Then all the nations will call you blessed, for yours will be a delightful land," says the Lord Almighty.

A couple of years ago, Katrina and I went to London for our 20th wedding anniversary, dearly hoping to attend Sunday morning services at Westminster Chapel where G. Campbell Morgan and Martin Lloyd-Jones had pastored. We started out bright and early, but were frustrated by the fact that portions of the subway were being repaired and we finally had to give up the whole thing.

I had hoped to hear the likes of R. T. Kendall who has served there as minister. I didn't get to hear Kendall that day but I can read his books. And his book on tithing is one of the best I've ever read. In it he tells how he himself first learned to tithe. Shortly after he and his wife were married they found themselves hopelessly in debt. Tithing seemed utterly impossible to them. Some of the bills could not be helped, and others were the consequence of imprudence. Kendall was engaged in secular work at the time, and one day he came home very, very discouraged. He fell on his knees in a sense of desperation, hoping that God would give him a ray of light that would help him through. There on the dining room table lay the large, white Bible his grandmother had given to him. He picked it up and opened it at random. Instantly his eyes fell on these words: "Will a man rob God?"

He didn't like what he found one bit, so he closed his Bible and sat down to watch the television (which he still owed for). But he was perfectly miserable. He knew that God wanted him to begin tithing, but he postponed it for a while longer; and in the meantime things went from bad to worse. "Although my wife and I were both working it seemed that paying our bills was like dipping a cup into the ocean of debt."

Then one day they made a turn. They took 10 percent of their income right off the top, making tithing the number one priority. He paid their bills with the remaining 90 percent.

"We were not out of debt in weeks but we were completely out of debt in less than two years, and those days became the happiest we have known."

Luke 6:38

Now let's turn to the New Testament, and we see the Lord Jesus himself picking up this same sowing/reaping theme, in Luke 6:38: Give, and it will be given you. A good measure, pressed down, shaking together, and running over will be poured into your lap. For with the measure you use, it will be measured to you.

Some people say, "Well, I know that I should be giving and tithing, but this isn't a good time for me to begin." Well, recently I read the book *Tortured for Christ* by Richard Wurmbrand. For many years he was in and out of miserable Communist prisons because of his faith in Christ. He was often tortured, and on some occasions he nearly starved to death. But the principle of tithing was so internalized in his heart that when he was given one slice of bread a week and dirty soup every day, he faithfully tithed from it. Every tenth day he gave his soup to a weaker brother, and every tenth week he took his slice of bread and gave it to one of his fellow prisoners in Jesus' name.

We have to begin where we are in the matter of tithes and offerings. After all, it is when we are in the greatest straits that we most need sow our seed corn the coming harvest. To put it differently, someone once said, "Give God what is right—not what is left."

2 Corinthians 9:6-8

The final passage on this theme that I'd like to show you is from the book of 2 Corinthians. Paul devoted two chapters, chapter 8 and 9, in this book to the whole subject of Christian giving and stewardship. These chapters contain some of the most powerful thoughts in the Bible regarding the giving of our tithes and offerings to the Lord. Right in the middle of it he brings up this same theme—sowing and reaping—and he applies it to giving.

/Remember this: Whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows generously will also reap generously. Each man should give what he has decided in his heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that in all things at all times, having all that you need, you will abound in every good work

(2 Corinthians 9:6-8).

This morning some of you brushed your teeth with Colgate Toothpaste. The Colgate-Palmolive Company is one of the oldest in America, going back nearly 200 years. It was started by a young man named William Colgate. He left home at 16 years of age to seek his fortune, and everything that he owned in this world was tied in a bundle that he carried in his hand. But as he walked along on his way to the city, he met an old neighbor, the captain of a canal boat, and the words the old man spoke to him on that day stayed with him his entire life.

"Well, William, where are you going?" asked the canal boat captain.

"I don't know. Father is too poor to keep me at home any longer, and says I must make a living for myself now." William went on to say that he had no skills; that he didn't know how to do anything except make soap and candles.

"Well," said the old man, "let me pray with you and give you a little advice."

There in the pathway, the two of them—a teenager and an old man—knelt down and the man prayed earnestly for William. Then, rising up, the boat captain said this: "Someone will soon be the leading soap maker in New York. It can be you as well as anyone. I hope it may. Be a good man; give your heart to Christ; give the Lord all that belongs of Him of every dollar you earn; make an honest soap; give a full pound; and I am certain you will yet be a prosperous and rich man."

When William arrived in New York, he had trouble finding a job, but he followed the old man's advice. He dedicated himself to Christ, joined a church, began worshipping there, and the first thing he did with the first dollar he earned was to give ten percent of it to the Lord's work. From that point on, he considered ten cents of every dollar as sacred to the Lord. In fact, he soon began giving 20 percent of his income to the Lord, then he raised it to 30 percent, then to 40 percent, then to 50 percent. And late in his life, he had become so successful that he devoted the whole of his yearly income—100 percent of it—to the Lord.

And even today, this very morning nearly 200 years later, some of you brushed your teeth or washed your faces with products from that young man's factory.

Why don't all of us tithe? With all of these promises in the Bible, why aren't we all tithing? Whatever would keep us from beginning today? Think of it as the firstfruits, the seed-corn, the basis of future blessing, even as the Bible says:

Honor the Lord with your wealth, with the firstfruits of all your crops. Then your barns will be filled to overflowing, and your vats will brim over with new wine.

A TENT, A TITHE AND A JAR FULL OF PENNIES

cp Malachi 3:10

A week or so ago, Corey Hawkins and I attended the National Pastor's Convention in California, and one of the speakers was a brilliant academician named Dallas Willard. Dr. Willard is one of America's premiere philosophers and he serves as Professor in the School of Philosophy at the University of Southern California in Los Angeles. He has taught at the University of California since 1965 and has served as the director of the School of Philosophy there. He has published widely in the areas of epistemology and philosophy, and I'm happy to say he is also an outspoken Christian who has written a series of award-winning books on Christianity and spiritual formation. Dr. Willard lectures around the world and his ministry is touching thousands of people. Since I've been home I've had the opportunity to talk further with Dr. Willard by telephone, and I asked him about the early influences that helped mold his life. He told me about growing up in a Christian home, and he spoke of how very meaningful and important were the children's ministries of the church where he grew up. The Sunday School and the Vacation Bible Schools that he attended when he was a child taught him the importance of memorizing Bible verses to keep his mind sharp and to teach him about the Lord and the life of discipleship. Those Bible lessons and Bible verses he learned as a child in Sunday School left an indelible and everlasting impression on him, and it contributed to the ministry he has today.

After hanging up the phone, I began picturing in my mind's eye the boys and girls in our Sunday School, and the ones in our children's ministries, and I said to myself, "This building program we're going into—it's not a matter of putting up a few walls or renovating a few rooms. It's not a matter of raising some money. It's really about reaching a thousand children for Christ, knowing that by reaching just one boy or girl, we may be touching a million lives."

I can honestly tell you that my vision for this church right now isn't just a small matter of building or renovating our facilities—at least, not as an end to itself. It's so we can reach a thousand children for Christ, and to touch a thousand homes—and in so doing, to indirectly, through the multiplication of time and discipleship, to change a million lives for the kingdom over the next generation.

We'll be ministering a generation and two generations and three generations from now—should our Lord tarry—if we are good

stewards of what He has given to us today.

And so today, I'd like for us to begin a brief series of Bible studies and Sunday sermons on the subject of the five great stewardship campaigns of the Bible, looking to see if perhaps the Lord doesn't have a word for all of us there. The first great biblical stewardship campaign is described for us in Exodus 24 and 25. In Exodus 24, the children of Israel are encamped at Mt. Sinai, and the Lord is giving Moses the instructions he needs to develop this unorganized assortment of newly-liberated slaves into a great nation. At Mt. Sinai, God gave Moses the law, the Ten Commandments, and the instructions for building the Tabernacle. Let's begin reading in Exodus 24:9:

Moses and Aaron, Nadab and Abihu, and the seventy elders of Israel went up and saw the Lord of Israel. Under His feet was something like a pavement made of sapphire, clear as the sky itself. But God did not raise His hand against these leaders of the Israelites; they saw God, and they ate and drank. The Lord said to Moses, "Come up to me on the mountain and stay here, and I will give you the tablets of stone, with the law and commands I have written for their instruction.

Then Moses set out with Joshua his aide, and Moses went up on the mountain of God. He said to the elders, "Wait here for us until we come back to you. Aaron and Hur are with you, and anyone involved in a dispute can go to them." When Moses went up on the mountain, the cloud covered it, and the glory of the LORD settled on Mount Sinai. For six days the cloud covered the mountain, and on the seventh day the LORD called to Moses from within the cloud. To the Israelites the glory of the LORD looked like a consuming fire on top of the mountain. Then Moses entered the cloud as he went on up the mountain. And he stayed on the mountain forty days and forty nights.

It was during these forty days and forty nights, as Moses was atop Mount Sinai, that God gave him the blueprints for a remarkable tent that we call the Tabernacle. This is a very intriguing subject to me, and a couple of years ago, I prepared and preached a series of messages on the Old Testament Tabernacle. It is so very important in the Scripture that fifty chapters in the Bible are devoted to it. Why so much emphasis? It is because every detail of this tent points to Jesus Christ. The book of Hebrews says that the Tabernacle served as a pattern for heavenly truth. Every aspect of the Tabernacle points to some truth about the Person and work of Christ.

Let's continue reading in chapter 25:

The LORD said to Moses, "Tell the Israelites to bring me an offering. You are to receive the offering for me from each man whose heart prompts him to give. These are the offerings you are to receive from them: gold, silver and bronze; blue, purple and scarlet yarn and fine linen; goat hair; ram skins dyed red and hides of sea cows; acacia wood; olive oil for the light; spices for the anointing oil and for the fragrant incense; and onyx stones and other gems to be mounted on the ephod and breastpiece. Then have them make a sanctuary for me, and I will dwell among them. Make this tabernacle and all its furnishings exactly like the pattern I will show you."

Several years ago, a company asked me to prepare a series of studies on the major stewardship campaigns in the Bible, and I discovered something that I did not previously know. There are two ways of giving to the Lord in the Bible. The first is by our weekly tithes and offerings, and that is one of the most important disciplines in the Christian life. I had a young couple that go to another church in our area tell me something very interesting recently. They had not been tithing because their finances had been so tight. In fact, never in their marriage had they felt they could consistently tithe because of their distressed finances. Some weeks they weren't sure where the groceries were coming from. Other weeks, they couldn't put gasoline in the car. Their family members had told them, "Don't dare tithe. You can't afford to tithe. It takes every penny just to pay the bills." But things grew worse and worse, and this couple found themselves under incredible stress.

Then one Sunday, the pastor of their church was away, and the associate pastor spoke on the subject of tithing. He said something to this effect: "If you are having financial difficulties, you can not afford not to tithe. God cannot bless you if you aren't honoring Him by returning to Him a small portion, a tithe, a ten percent, of what He is giving to you. It is an act of faith on your part. It's an act of love. It's an act of obedience." The associate pastor quoted Malachi 3:

Bring all the tithes into the storehouse, that there may be food in My house, and try Me now in this," says the Lord of hosts, "if I will not open for you the windows of heaven and pour out for you such blessing that there will not be room enough to receive it" (NKJV).

This couple came under great conviction about this matter. They decided that very week to begin tithing, but they said, "It was the hardest step of faith we've ever taken." As soon as they began tithing, they both told me, their financial situation began reversing itself. Work prospects improved dramatically. And two weeks later they wrote another tithing check, and their second tithing check

was 243 percent more than their first check due to the increase in their income.

I've always believed this is the basic way in which the Lord sustains His work on this earth—through the regular week-in, week-out tithes and offerings of His people. That's the first way in which we're to give to the Lord. But there is a second way. And we have it here in this passage. Sometimes God puts an opportunity in our pathway.

God Puts the Opportunities in Our Pathway

Five times in the Bible there were special occasions that called for something more, for special opportunities arose to expand the Kingdom in quantum leaps, to do something for God that could not be accomplished without special gifts above and beyond the tithe, and it called for a special season of stewardship. The first of these five occasions in the Bible was right here in our text today, in the building of this Tabernacle.

I believe the Tabernacle was a miniature scale model of the real temple of God that is eternal in the heavens. And God gave Moses a vision for building that structure here on earth and making it the center of Jewish religious life.

You may remember when I preached a series of messages on the Tabernacle that this portable tent was by no means ordinary. When I use the word "tent," it really doesn't convey what we're talking about here. One Old Testament scholar calculated the amount of gold, silver, precious stones, wood, leathers, tapestries, and fabrics contained in the Tabernacle. For example, Exodus 38:24 says that the gold used in the Tabernacle was over 29 talents. In other words, there were 2,842 pounds of gold in the Tabernacle. Gold is currently valued at about \$550 per ounce, which means that the total value just of the gold would be nearly sixteen million dollars. The value of the other materials would probably double that, for there were five tons of silver, four tons of brass, and an assortment of jewels, fine woods, and rich tapestries. So it was no little vision and no little tent. In today's terms, this was nearly a \$40 million project!

What if I stood up here today and tried to persuade our church to adopt a forty million dollar building project? And think about this—the Israelites were now a nation of unemployed workers. They'd all just lost their jobs! And yet God said, "I want you to build a tent for me. And, by the way, it's going to cost forty million."

You know, God does not always call on us to do things cheaply. He understands that in this world it is going to take a certain amount of money to fulfill His purposes, plans, projects, and programs. So the Lord gave Moses a vision, but it had a high price tag. How could a bunch of newly-liberated, unemployed slaves afford that kind of vision? Where would those sorts of resources come from? Applying this to ourselves, we could ask, "How can we generate the resources to do what God is calling us to do as a church?"

God Puts the Money in Our Pockets

That brings me to the second point. When God puts a special opportunity in our pathway, he puts the money in our pockets. God never gives vision without provision. He anticipates the need and meets it in advance. As someone once said, "God's work done in God's way will always have God's resources."

Look with me at Exodus 3. This is the chapter in which God appeared to Moses in the burning bush, appointing him to return to Egypt and deliver His people from slavery. God made Moses one promise that we frequently overlook. It is in verses 21ff: And I will make the Egyptians favorably disposed toward this people, so that when you leave you will not go empty-handed. Every woman is to ask her neighbor and any woman living in her house for articles of silver and gold, and for clothing, which you will put on your sons and daughters. And so you will plunder the Egyptians.

And that's just what happened. Look at Exodus 12: During the night Pharaoh summoned Moses and Aaron and said, "Up! Leave my people, you and the Israelites! Go, worship the LORD as you have requested. Take your flocks and herds, as you have said, and go. And also bless me." The Egyptians urged the people to hurry and leave the country. "For otherwise," they said, "we will all die!" So the people took their dough before the yeast was added, and carried it on their shoulders in kneading troughs wrapped in clothing. The Israelites did as Moses instructed and asked the Egyptians for articles of silver and gold and for clothing. The LORD had made the Egyptians favorably disposed toward the people, and they gave them what they asked for; so they plundered the Egyptians.

Here is the great principle: The Lord places in our hands the resources of the world. Deuteronomy 8:18 says: But remember the LORD your God, for it is He who gives you the ability to produce wealth.... All we have is His and it all comes from Him. The Bible teaches that the earth is the Lord's and everything in it (Psalm 24:1).

He gives and gives and gives to His people. Why? Why do we have the money we have? Some of you may have stocks and

bonds. Why does God give us those things? The mutual funds? The saving accounts? The houses and lands and possessions?

To put it differently, why did God allow the Israelites to plunder the Egyptians? Why did He make the Egyptians so favorably disposed toward the Israelites, and why did He want this group of ex-slaves to have so much wealth?

The Lord wasn't as interested in giving them a lavish lifestyle as He was in giving them the resources for the building of the Tabernacle. He was planning ahead. He was entrusting the Israelites with the material needed for His special tent.

He was putting the needed resources in their pockets and purses in advance. God could have sent the gold and silver and precious stones down from heaven just as He sent the manna. He could have airlifted the timber and linen. It could have arrived by parachute. But He loves it when His people are involved, when they are His channels for doing His work, so He entrusts the resources to us. Everything we need for our ministries—every dollar and every penny—has already been provided. It is in our billfolds and bank accounts right now. His provision for His vision is given in advance. That leads to my final observation: God puts the willingness to give in our hearts.

God Puts the Willingness in our Hearts

Each of us has a decision to make, and we should make it without coercion or human pressure, for I believe God will prompt us. But we must have willing hearts. Look again at our text in Exodus 25: The LORD said to Moses, "Tell the Israelites to bring me an offering. You are to receive the offering for me from each man whose heart prompts him to give...

And in Exodus 36 we see the result: They received from Moses all the offerings the Israelites had brought to carry out the work of constructing the sanctuary. And the people continued to bring freewill offerings morning after morning. So all the skilled craftsmen who were doing all the work on the sanctuary left their work and said to Moses, "The people are bringing more than enough for doing the work the LORD commanded to be done." Then Moses gave an order and they sent this word throughout the camp: "No man or woman is to make anything else as an offering for the sanctuary." And so the people were restrained from bringing more, because what they already had was more than enough to do all the work.

It's wonderful when God's people have promptable hearts. Our consultant, Mark Brooks, told our stewardship team the other day about a church with which he worked on a campaign like ours. In that church was a teenager girl, a freshman or a sophomore in high school, and she was a cheerleader at her school, a much-coveted position. When the church had a financial need for a larger facility, she wanted to be a part of it; and as she prayed, she devised a plan. She gave up cheerleading, which was a great personal sacrifice; and for three years, she took the money she would have given for her uniforms and all the expenses and gave it to the Lord; and she was also able to work and give additionally. And she did not have a moment of regret, for she was doing something of lasting value for Christ.

I heard of another church that had a campaign like ours, and one young lady lived alone in a condominium, and her income was limited. As she prayed, the Lord gave her an idea, and she took in a roommate; and for three years, she gladly gave the rental money she received to the Lord, doing something of lasting value.

I read about another woman, a single parent with three small children, who worked out of her home as a beautician. She decided to give her tips to the campaign. It was the modern equivalent of the widow's mite, but it enabled her to be a part of something that would change the world for many years to come.

There was one family I read about in Sioux Falls, South Dakota. The children had saved coins in a large glass jar for three years to help pay for a family vacation at Disney World. But during the church's stewardship campaign, the children came to their parents and told them they wanted to contribute their jar of coins to the project. The astonished parents said "Okay," and they made their own sacrificial gift out of gratitude to God for their children's generosity.

A pastor from a financially-strapped rustbelt parish in the Midwest said recently that one of his wealthiest parishioners stopped him after church and said, rather heatedly, "Father, don't give me that stuff about prayer. Tell me how much I should give, and I'll give it to you." Considering the circumstances, the pastor's response was courageous. He said, "That would be very difficult for me to do, because the decision about how much you should give is between you and God. All I'm asking you to do is to make your own prayerful decision out of gratitude to God for all the blessings in your life." According to this pastor, the man paused a minute and then said, "Okay." Afterwards he made a financial commitment that the pastor said was much larger than anything he would have dared to ask for.[1]

Isn't it wonderful that I don't have to tell anyone what to give? It's not my job to prod or pressure; but it's my job and yours to pray; and it's the Lord's job to prompt. I just know we have a world to reach, and all through the years God has provided the tools for us;

and I believe He'll do the same now. We have a great opportunity in our pathway. We have the money in our pockets. We have the prompting of God in our hearts. And In Christ, we have all we need

Just Try It, And See If God Doesn't Bless You

2 Corinthians 8:1-5

Malachi 3:10

Recently I read how the beautiful, old Roman Catholic Cathedral in Santa Fe, New Mexico was financed. It seems that Archbishop John B. Lamy ran out of money while the cathedral was only half completed. This was when Texas and New Mexico were still frontier areas, sparsely populated, and with limited prosperity. Archbishop Lamy was heartbroken because the building of this edifice was his lifetime dream, but no one was willing or able to loan him the money.

In one moment of crisis, he had to have \$2000, or abandon the whole project. As the archbishop traveled about his territory seeking funds, he came into the parish of Father Robert Garrassu, a local priest. The archbishop shared his burden with Garrassu. It wasn't a rich parish, and a continued drought had brought cattle and sheep close to starvation. Yet the priest's heart went out to his superior, and his mind raced to find a solution. At length, he asked the archbishop, "How much money have you at this moment?" "Only a few dollars."

"Let me have them, then, and take care of my parish for a few days," said Father Garrassu.

A few days later the priest returned with a bag containing two thousand dollars. The archbishop was astounded and wanted to know who had loaned or given such a large amount. But Father Garrassu told him that the donors wished to remain anonymous. Archbishop Lamy took the money and finished building the cathedral in Santa Fe.

It was not until some years later that the truth came out. The local priest, Father Garrassu, had been a card shark prior to his conversion to the Roman Catholic priesthood. For one time and one time only he reverted to his old skills and won the \$2000 playing poker with the army officers at Fort Union.

Now, you know from my sermon a few weeks ago that I don't believe in gambling. Furthermore, I don't know how to play poker. So that system isn't going to work for us here. If we're going to pay for our buildings, and finance our ministries, and proclaim the Gospel far and wide, we must have to have another plan. What could it be? It takes a good deal of money to carry on the ministries of a church. Should we set up some kind of profitable business venture on the side? Should we have a never-ending series of rummage sales? Should we ask the government for a charitable entitlement? Should we establish membership dues or charge for our services? Should we sell tickets to our services?

How is the Lord's work on this earth to be financed? There is only one way set forth by God in the Scriptures. He has chosen to depend upon the free will tithes and offerings of His people.

Malachi 3:10 says: 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 you will not have room enough for it.

1 Corinthians 16:2 says: On the first day of every week, each one of you should set aside a sum of money in keeping with his income....

Jesus said, It is more blessed to give than to receive.

And 2 Corinthians 9:7 says: Each man should give what he has decided in his heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver.

The Churches of Macedonia

As we review this subject in the Bible, we often run across short and pithy truths and commandments, but there is one place in Scripture where there is a longer, two-chapter explanation of the giving process. In chapters 8 and 9 of 2 Corinthians, Paul talks at length about the importance of the financial support of the ministry. The immediate context has to do with a fund-raising campaign Paul is heading up to help the impoverished Christians of Jerusalem and Judea. Because of persecution and political upheaval, the church in Jerusalem was in deep need. But in dealing with this immediate concern, the apostle Paul also set forth principles that are transferable to every situation involving Christian giving and stewardship. In so doing, he used the churches of Macedonia as an example to the Corinthians. Macedonia was and is an area in the north of Greece. This was the area of Europe first evangelized by the apostle Paul. The churches of the Philippians, the Thessalonians, and the Bereans were in this area. These churches were young and, in some cases, struggling. But they knew something about stewardship, and Paul used them as an example to spur the Corinthians on to faithfulness in the giving of their tithes and offerings.

We don't have time to study all the way through these two wonderful chapters, but this morning I'd like to look at the first five sentences of this section, and at the way Paul begins his discussion. In 2 Corinthians 8:1-5, he shares this unique view of Christian giving and stewardship:

/And now, brothers, we want you to know about the grace that God has given the Macedonian churches. Out of the most severe trial, their overflowing joy and their extreme poverty welled up in rich generosity. For I testify that they gave as much as they were able, and even beyond their ability. Entirely on their own, they urgently pleaded with us for the privilege of sharing in this service to the saints. And they did not do as we expected, but they gave themselves first to the Lord and then to us in keeping with God's will.

/Giving is an Act of Grace

There are five sentences here that establish the biblical perspective on giving. The first sentence tells us that giving is an act of grace. This is perhaps the most unusual usage of the word grace in Scripture. We're familiar with the word grace, and we often sing about God's amazing grace: how sweet the sound that saved a wretch like me. But here, Paul used the word grace as a kind of synonym for the giving of our tithes and offering. Verse 1 says: And now, brothers, we want you to know about the grace that God has given the Macedonian churches.... And he is referring to their habits of giving.

Look down at verses 6-8: So we urged Titus, since he had earlier made a beginning, to bring also to completion this act of grace on your part. He is referring to the financial gift he was expecting from the Christians of Corinth. He called their gift, this act of grace. He goes on to say: But just as you excel in everything--in faith, in speech, in knowledge, in complete earnestness and in your love for us--see that you also excel in this grace of giving.

In verse 9, he tells us that giving is an act of grace that mirrors the grace of God Himself: But you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for your sakes He became poor, so that you through His poverty might become rich.

Giving is the result of God's work of grace in our lives. We are not givers by nature. We are sinful, selfish, self-centered, and stingy. Spending and consuming comes easily to us, and the credit card companies and the advertising agencies take advantage of these spiritual tendencies of our hearts. That's why, despite the prosperity of our times, so many Americans are mired in debt.

But as we grow in the grace of Jesus Christ, we become more like Him. We understand the value of sacrifice and self-denial. We grow concerned about the souls of men and women, and we come to understand that giving is God-like. Our most familiar verse in the Bible says, "God so loves the world that He gave...." And the overflow of God's grace in our lives is to make us into givers.

In writing of her years in China, Southern Baptist missionary Bertha Smith tells of a time when Dr. Wiley Glass, missionary educator, was kneeling during a prayer meeting service at a large city church in China. Mr. Wang, the church treasurer, was kneeling nearby. Suddenly the Chinese gentleman was overcome with emotion and cried out, "Lord, have mercy on me! I've stolen! I'm a thief! I have stolen from God!"

In astonishment, Dr. Glass said to himself, "Not you, Brother Wang; surely not you! All these years you have been such a trustworthy, devoted deacon, faithful trustee of the seminary, and upright Christian gentleman. You just could not have taken money from the church treasury!"

After a while, Brother Wang got control of himself enough to say, "I have not paid my tithe to the Lord! According to His Word, I have stolen it from Him!"

The Chinese keep accurate household and personal accounts. Brother Wang counted up his tithe from the time he became a Christian, more than twenty years before, subtracted from it the total amount contributed to the church, and had left such a debt that he had to sell some land in order to pay it. What a flame he became for the Lord after he became altogether right with him.

What had happened to him? He was growing in grace, growing in Christ, and as a result he responded to the convicting power of the Holy Spirit in this matter. Giving is an indication that the grace of God is working in our lives. It is an act of grace.

Giving Doesn't Depend on Prosperity

The second verse adds another dimension to our view of stewardship: Giving doesn't depend on prosperity. Referring again to the churches of Macedonia, Paul continues in verse 2: Out of the most severe trial, their overflowing joy and their extreme poverty welled up in rich generosity.

In other words, what can we say about these churches in Macedonia who had made such significant contributions to the Lord's work? Were they rich? Were they enjoying a period of prosperity? No. They were going through a severe trial, yet they possessed overflowing joy. They were living in extreme poverty, yet somehow all this resulted in a richness of generosity that served as an example and as a rebuke to other churches in the Roman world.

When I was very young, the pastor of my church in Elizabethton, Tennessee, was Bob Hill's uncle, Harvey Hill, who went to be with the Lord just a few weeks ago. Before his death, he wrote out his life's story, and I found it very interesting reading. Near the beginning of the book, Harvey said that when he and his wife Sylvia were married, they didn't have a penny. It was during the depression, and not many people had a car. They walked to church and to work and to visit with friends, and they lived from hand to mouth. One day the pastor of their church bluntly asked Harvey and Sylvia if they tithed, that is, if they were in the habit of giving at least ten percent of their income to the Lord. "No," said Harvey, "we can't afford it."

The pastor said, "Just try it and see if God doesn't bless you." Harvey and Sylvia were struck by that challenge, and they agreed to try. From that day until their deaths within a few weeks of each other 70 years later, they never failed to bring God their tithes and offerings.

And that's what I'd like to say to you today: "Are you tithing? Try it, and see if God doesn't bless you." In Malachi 3, the Lord says, "Prove me now, and see if I will not open the windows of heaven and pour out on you a blessing you cannot even have room enough to receive."

Giving Should Not Be Limited By Our Ability

The third sentence--verse 3--tells us that giving should not be limited by our ability. Sometimes someone will say something like this to me: "I'll try to the best of my ability." Well, you know, when it comes to the Lord's work, we aren't to operate on the basis of our ability. We're to operate on the basis of His ability. Look at the way it's put in verse 3: For I testify that they (these Macedonian churches) gave as much as they were able, and even beyond their ability.

Skip down to chapter 9, verse 8: And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that in all things at all times, having all that you need, you will abound in every good work.

And verses 10-11: Now He who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will also supply and increase your store of seed and will enlarge the harvest of your righteousness. You will be made rich in every way so that you can be generous on every occasion....

We aren't to give to the best of our ability. We're to follow the leading of the Lord and give according to His ability. Are Christians in America doing that today? Well, according to the most recent statistics produced by the George Barna Research Group, only eight percent of born-again Christians tithed from their income in 1999. Sixteen percent of all born-again Christians gave no money at all to churches in 1999.

Giving Is Something We Get To Do

But let's move on. The fourth sentence in the opening paragraph of 2 Corinthians 8 gives us our fourth principle: Giving is something we get to do. Look at verses 3-4: Entirely on their own, they urgently pleaded with us for the privilege of sharing in this service to the saints.

The churches in Macedonia begged Paul to let them have the joy and the honor of financially participating in God's work. They viewed it as a privilege, as something they got to do.

Suppose someone you trusted completely came to you with a sure-fire offer, saying, "We're starting a new company with contracts and customers already in place. We need investors, but it is the best investment in the history of business and commerce. We can guarantee that if you invest a hundred dollars now, you'll be a millionaire within a few months." And suppose you knew that it was failsafe and true. You'd say, "Here, take two and three hundred dollars. Let me see if I can come up with a thousand dollars."

Well, when we invest in the Lord's work, it extends His Kingdom to the ends of the earth, populates heaven for all eternity, and results in dividends that will outlast this life, outlast this world, outlast time, and be paying returns into infinity. It is the best investment opportunity in the universe. Jesus said, "Lay up treasures in heaven, where moth and rust do not corrupt, and where thieves do not break in and steal."

Giving is a reflection of our personal commitment to God and to His church.

Finally, giving is a reflection of our personal commitment to God and to His church. In verse 5, Paul says: And they did not do as we expected, but they gave themselves first to the Lord and then to us in keeping with God's will.

Think of your check stubs in the same way you would think of a barometer in connection with the weather. It is an indicator or reflection or gauge of where you are spiritually. In other words, the reason the Macedonians gave to the Lord with consistently and generosity was because their giving was predicated and preceded by a total-life commitment to the Lord Himself and to His work.

During the Christmas holidays of 1925, Isobel Kuhn visited friends in St. Louis; then in January, 1926, she returned to her studies at the Moody Bible Institute of Chicago. She found a letter from someone who had been supporting her financially, but who was now sick and unable to continue the support. Isobel was totally unprepared for this, for she had given up a good part-time job to pursue her studies full time. Now it looked as though she would have to find a job and try to make do. As she pulled out her money purse, she found that she had just enough to pay the first month's board at Moody, with just eleven or twelve dollars left over.

She sat down to look at her accounts, and suddenly she saw something that made her go cold. In the Christmas rush, she had forgotten to tithe from her last income.

She thought to herself, "What should I do? Let the tithe continue to slide for a while? I pondered a moment. What came first in life anyway? 'Oh, Lord, You come first,'" she whispered and resolutely set aside the tithe.

That left her with just two dollars for a month's carfare and incidentals--and she still had no job.

The Institute's Employment Bureau found her two jobs, as waitress at two restaurants, but the pressure of the work began to wear down her health. By February, her friends were becoming concerned, for she was thin, fatigued, and appeared to be near the breaking point. She privately prayed, "Lord, is it Thy will that I have a breakdown?"

But one evening shortly after, she was called over to the reception room to meet an old friend, a fatherly gentleman who was in Chicago for a speaking engagement, and knew of her. "How is it, Isobel?" he asked, "You look tired. Not working too hard, are you?" "Perhaps I am," she replied, and proceeded to tell him of her circumstances, that the lady who had been supporting her had stopped due to illness.

"Well, Isobel," said the man, "isn't it wonderful that stop isn't in the Lord's vocabulary? He never gets sick and He never forgets our needs and He is never at the end of His resources." He proceeded to pass along to her a check from a lady in his church who had been burdened to help a Moody student. It was for \$200! Because of that gift, Isobel was able to give up one of her jobs and devote herself again to her studies. With that and other gifts, she was able to pay her way through both the winter and spring semesters.

Giving is an act of grace. It doesn't depend on prosperity and shouldn't be limited by our ability. It is a privilege--something we get to do--and a reflection of our own personal commitment to Christ and to His Kingdom.

Just try it, and see if God doesn't bless you

Malachi 3:10-12

I NEED HELP WITH MY TITHING

We've begun a series of messages of the subject: "I Need Help ASAP!" Today's installment is entitled, "I Need Help with My Tithing."

What is tithing? Tithing is the habitual practice of giving to the Lord at least ten percent of our income. In the Bible, Abraham was the first to practice this habit in Genesis 14. The concept of tithing is seen from that point throughout the Old Testament; and the New Testament affirmed it, not as a law to be obeyed, but as a pattern to be followed and as a starting point for our giving to the Lord's work.

This is perhaps the most important subject facing Christians in the United States today, because God only designed one system for financing His work on earth—the generous, open-hearted, open-handed gifts of His people.

This is absolutely amazing to me. When Jesus Christ ascended to heaven at the end of the Gospel era, He set in motion the greatest mission and the greatest enterprise the world would ever know. He established a channel through which all the world would eventually hear the Gospel of Jesus Christ. He established a company of believers that is larger and greater than any other company or corporation in history.

How is such an enterprise to be funded and financed?

The Bible only has one plan. God wants to give His people a regular income so that we might give a portion of that income back to Him for the financing of His global work. That is the only system He has ever devised for supporting His great enterprise on this earth.

The Bible encourages us to give at least ten percent of our income to the Lord's church; but the average Christian in America has seen fit to give only 2.6 percent. Out of every dollar God sends into our pockets, the average Christian in America gives just over two pennies back to Him.

Sometime when I look at those numbers, I feel a little like the great British preacher, Charles Haddon Spurgeon. There's a new little biography of Spurgeon that has just been published by Clive Anderson. I ordered a copy from England and thoroughly enjoyed reading it. In this biography, Clive Anderson tells of a time when Spurgeon spoke to a group of people and he was trying to raise money for the ministries with which he was involved. At the end of his talk, he took his hat and passed it around for the offering. No one put anything into the hat, and when it came back to Spurgeon it was empty. The people there wondered what Spurgeon would do next. He prayed, saying: "I thank You, O Lord, that at least these old skinflints have given me my hat back."

Well, today, I'd like to show you two sides of the coin when it comes to the giving of our tithes and offerings. Heads and tails. Let's begin with tails—tightfisted people forfeit God's blessings.

Tightfisted People Forfeit God's Blessings

I'd like to give you a great example of this in the Old Testament. In the entire troubled history of the Jewish People, there has never been a more tragic day than the one that occurred in 587 B.C. for King Nebuchadnezzar and the armies of the Babylonian Empire. Look at the last paragraph in the book of 2 Chronicles:

And the Lord God of their fathers sent warnings to them by His messengers, rising up early and sending them, because He had compassion on His people and on His dwelling place. But they mocked the messengers of God, despised His words, and scoffed at His prophets, until the wrath of the Lord arose against His people, till there was no remedy.

Therefore He brought against them the king of the Chaldeans, who killed their young men with the sword in the house of their sanctuary, and had no compassion on young men or virgins, on the aged or the weak; He gave them all into his hand. And all the articles from the house of God, great and small, the treasures of the house of the Lord, and the treasures of the king and of his leaders, all these he took to Babylon.

Then they burned the house of God, broke down the wall of Jerusalem, burned all its palaces with fire, and destroyed all its precious

possessions. And those who escaped from the sword he carried away to Babylon, where they became servants of him and his sons until the rule of the kingdom of Persia, to fulfill the word of the Lord by the mouth of Jeremiah....

For seventy years the city of Jerusalem lay barren, the temple in ruins, and the Jewish people exiled. And then, just as Jeremiah had predicted, after seventy years a remnant of Jewish people were allowed to return to Jerusalem. Look at verses 22-23:

Now in the first year of Cyrus king of Persia, that the word of the Lord by the mouth of Jeremiah might be fulfilled, the Lord stirred up the spirit of Cyrus king of Persia, so that he made a proclamation throughout all his kingdom, and also put it in writing, saying: "Thus says Cyrus king of Persia: All the kingdoms of the earth the Lord God of heaven has given me. And He has commanded me to build Him a house in Jerusalem which is in Judah. Who is among you of all His people? May the Lord his God be with him, and let him go up!

And thus ends the book of 2 Chronicles. There follows immediately the book of Ezra, and this is the book that tells of the exciting journey of the remnant of the Jews, how they found their city of Jerusalem in ruins, how they cleared away the rubble from the ruins of the temple, and how they began to rebuild the house of God. This is the work that God had ordained and commanded for that generation, and they set to it with all their hearts. But there were problems and many discouragements. Most of all, there was opposition from the Palestinians, and there came to be governmental interference.

And look at what happened at the end of Ezra 4: Thus the work of the house of God which is at Jerusalem ceased, and it was discontinued until the second year of the reign of Darius king of Persia.

In between chapters 4 and 5, eighteen years pass. Eighteen years in which the Jewish people were living in Jerusalem, going about their lives, building up their homes, establishing their careers—and utterly neglecting the work on the house of the Lord.

Added to that was the fact that these proved to be lean years, hard years. They remnant sowed their crops, but the harvest was meager. They suffered from drought and famine. They earned money, but they it seemed they had holes in their pockets. They had clothing, but they couldn't stay warm. They had food, but they couldn't seem to get full.

But then God sent two men to them, to preachers, two prophets. Look at Ezra 5: Then the prophet Haggai and Zechariah the son of Iddo, prophets, prophesied to the Jews who were in Judah and Jerusalem, in the name of the God of Israel who was over them. So Zerubbabel (the governor) the son of Shealtiel and Jeshua (the high priest—the religious leader) the son of Jozadak rose up and began to build the house of God which is in Jerusalem; and the prophets of God were with them, helping them.

And by the next chapter, the temple had been finished and dedicated to the Lord—and it was in this rebuilt temple—the Second Temple—though it was later renovated by Herod that Great, that Jesus Christ was dedicated as an infant. It was here that He worshipped and preached and performed His miracles and proclaimed His truth.

What message could so inspire the people of God? What sermon could have moved them to jumpstart their work? What could Haggai and Zechariah have said that brought such a revival to the Jewish remnant? Haggai began his preaching ministry among them by preaching on the theme of stewardship. Stewardship!

Turn with me to his book—it's near the end of the Old Testament—and look at how he begins. Let me read this to you in the new paraphrase by Eugene Peterson called the Message:

The people procrastinate. They say this isn't the right time to rebuild my Temple, the Temple of GOD.... How is it that it's the 'right time' for you to live in your fine new homes while the Home, GOD's Temple, is in ruins...? Take a good, hard look at your life. Think it over.

You have spent a lot of money, but you haven't much to show for it. You keep filling your plates, but you never get filled up. You keep drinking and drinking and drinking, but you're always thirsty. You put on layer after layer of clothes, but you can't get warm.

And the people who work for you, what are they getting out of it? Not much—a leaky, rusted-out bucket, that's what. That's why GOD-of-the-Angel-Armies said: "Take a good, hard look at your life. Think it over."

Then GOD said: "Here's what I want you to do: Climb into the hills and cut some timber. Bring it down and rebuild the Temple. Do it just for me. Honor me. You've had great ambitions for yourselves, but nothing has come of it. The little you have brought to my Temple I've blown away—there was nothing to it.

“And why...? Because while you’ve run around, caught up with taking care of your own houses, my Home is in ruins... Because of your stinginess. And so I’ve given you a dry summer and a skimpy crop. I’ve matched your tight-fisted stinginess by decreeing a season of drought, drying up fields and hills, withering gardens and orchards, stunting vegetables and fruit. Nothing—not man or woman, not animal or crop—is going to thrive.”

The people of the remnant weren’t devoting their resources to the work of God or to the House of the Lord; they were spending everything on themselves. And as a result, the blessing of God had been withheld from their lives. Tightfisted people forfeit God’s blessings.

Openhanded People Experience God’s Blessing

The flip side of the coin, however, is that openhanded people experience God’s blessing. Do you realize that virtually every commandment in the Bible related to giving and stewardship has a corresponding promise? Let me give you five quick examples.

- Proverbs 3:9-10: Honor the Lord with your possessions, and with the firstfruits of all your increase. In other words, we are to honor—to worship—God. How do we do it? We honor and worship Him in many ways, but one way is certainly with our money and with the first part of our income. The promise: So shall your barns be filled with plenty, and your vats will overflow with new wine.
- Proverbs 11:24-25. This passage shows us the two sides of the stewardship coin as clearly as any passage in the Bible. It is comparing tithing and giving with the sowing of seed by a farmer. There is one who scatters, yet increases more; and there is one who withholds more than is right, but it leads to poverty. The generous soul will be made rich, and he who waters will also be watered himself. What does that mean? Let me read it in the New International Version: “One man gives freely, yet gains even more; another withholds unduly, but comes to poverty. A generous man will prosper; he who refreshes others will himself be refreshed.”

Two of my best years as a young man were spent in Graduate School at Wheaton College outside of Chicago. One of the trustees at Wheaton and one of its principal backers for many years was a man named Robert Nicholas. He was a very successful business owner in the Chicago area, and a highly respected community leader. He was a man who believed in tithing and in giving far beyond the tithe, and the reason he believed that went back to this verse in the book of Proverbs.

Robert Nicholas had grown up in Ontario, and as a young man he had migrated to Chicago. Robert was hardworking and industrious, and soon he was earning far more than he had ever dreamed about. He wrote to his parents, telling them of his good fortune.

His father wrote back in a lengthy letter, warning him of the dangers of money. Be cautious and wise, he said. Give to the Lord. Some people are financially blessed so as to be generous in the Lord’s work. And don’t forget Proverbs 11:24, a verse Mr. Nicholas prominently quoted in his letter to Robert: “There is one who scatters, yet increases more; And there is one who withholds more than is right, But it leads to poverty.”

The verse had its intended effect. Robert began giving his tithes and offerings to the Lord. Joining a nearby Methodist church, he worked in the Sunday School and witnessed to friends. Within five years, he purchased his own hardware store in nearby Oak Park and soon built it into one of the strongest businesses in Illinois. His leadership in Oak Park brought in department stores, banks, and schools. He advised and aided nearby Christian colleges, and helped finance many projects for the Kingdom. Many missionaries and mission boards, churches, and students received aid from him, the gifts often coming anonymously. His life overflowed because he never forgot his father’s counsel from this verse in the book of Proverbs. Scattering leads to increasing more, but withholding brings poverty.

- Malachi 3:10-12: Bring all the tithes into the storehouse, that there may be food in My house, and try Me now in this, says the Lord of hosts, if I will not open for you the windows of heaven and pour out for you such blessings that there will not be room enough to receive it.
- Luke 6:38: Give, and it will be given to you: good measure, pressed down, shaken together, and running over will be put into your bosom. For with the same measure that you use, it will be measured back to you.
- 2 Corinthians 9:6-8: 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 of

every good work.

I could quote other verses to you to show you the preponderance of this promise in the Bible, but I had to cut out other quotations due to time. Perhaps these will suffice to make the point: Tightfisted people forfeit blessings, but generous people claim and receive them. Tithing is one of the greatest secrets and most wonderful habits of the Christian life.

Perhaps you're saying, "Well, how do I begin? I'm in such a terrible financial shape now, how can I possibly begin? I can't pay my bills right now!"

Well, there's two ways to begin. There's the little faith way and the great faith way. Little faith says, "I don't have a whole lot faith in God's ability to keep His promises about finances, but I know I need to begin proving Him, so I'm going to begin with three percent, then to five percent, then move to seven percent, and then move to the tithe. It might take a year or so to get there, but I'm going to start right now as best I can."

Well, that's better than nothing.

But great faith says, "God has told me to test Him and to prove Him in this, and so I am. I'm going to start tithing from my next paycheck, and then I'm going to see how He begins to bless me and meets my needs."

In my preparation for this sermon, I came across the name of a man who has done much to promote tithing in the United States. His name was Thomas Kane. Many years ago, he began to tithe of his income, and after five years of trying it, he noticed that his business and his finances had undergone a decided change for the better. He began asking others if they had a similar testimony, and he collected story after story that was similar to his own. So he wrote a little pamphlet, a tract, and sent it across the United States to churches and to pastors. In it he said, "My belief is that God blesses in temporal as well as spiritual things the man who honors Him by setting apart a stated portion of his income. I have never known an exception. Have you?"

Millions and millions of copies of this little tract spread around the world. Years later, he wrote a book entitled "The Biography of a Tither," in which he said that he received thousands of replies to that little tract, but not one person ever wrote telling him that tithing didn't work for them. "The negatives," he said, "are nonexistent."

I can also tell you by personal testimony that this is true. Katrina and I just celebrated our twenty-eighth wedding anniversary. When we were first married, we didn't have a great deal. We both worked in department stores. She worked in a discount store selling cloth and fabric, and I worked at J. C. Penney's in the women's shoe section. We lived in a Presbyterian Manse in exchange for my preaching for them. But from the very beginning, to the best of my knowledge, we have tithed from every paycheck we have ever received. And today we are committed to give beyond the tithe on an ongoing basis. I can't wait to get to heaven and to see how the Lord has used the money we've been able to invest through the years in His Kingdom. But I have a feeling that when I do, I'll wish I had done so much more.

And let me say that ninety-five percent of what we give to the Lord, we do so through this church. Why? Because I believe in its ministries. I believe in its mission. I believe in its missionaries. I believe in the multitudes the Lord is going to reach through us. And I believe we can do so much more as a church if only we had more funding. I've given the best years of my life to the ministry of this church in the will of God, and I believe the Lord has great things in store for us in the future. He wants to use us to change the world, and I'm so thankful to be able to invest in God's kingdom through the ministry of here and around the world.