

THE TITHE IN THE LIVES OF GOD'S PEOPLE

In I Chronicles 29, King David tells all of the officials of Israel, gathered at Jerusalem, about his provisions (freely given from ancestral houses and leaders of the tribes) for building a holy house for God. His son, Solomon, who at this time was still young and inexperienced, would build the Temple. David concludes by blessing the Lord and presenting his offering with these words in verse 14:

But who am I, and what is my people, that we should be able to make this freewill offering? For all things come from you, and of your own have we given you.

These last words are familiar to us, like the words of the traditional Lord's Prayer, surviving from the Elizabethan Church and making their way into contemporary worship services. Through various revisions of the *Book of Common Prayer* (until 1979), the people's offerings have been brought before the Holy Table with these words: "All things come of thee, O Lord, and of thine own have we given thee." They express the fundamental understanding of stewardship in the scripture: everything we have, everything in creation, comes from and belongs to God, and our offering to God is "giving back" a portion in gratitude and thanksgiving.

The portion that we give back is often spoken of as the "biblical tithe" of 10% of our earnings or possessions. The first mention of the tithe in scripture occurs in Genesis 14:18-20, when Abraham encounters Melchizedek, who blesses him after a significant military victory; then Abraham "gave him one tenth of everything." The important issue in this passage is *why* Abraham gave—out of genuine thanksgiving. Other passages in the Torah, listed below, address how the tithe was to be offered in ancient Israel.

By the time of Jesus, the tithe was deeply ingrained in faithful living, so much so that it had become a kind of legal obligation. Jesus went beyond this formality to teach that tithing without mercy and love is meaningless and to promote sharing all of what we have with the poor, the sick, orphans, and the elderly.

This sharing all things in common became the practice of the early Church, as we see in the book of Acts. Such sharing eventually returned to the concept of "tithing" a tenth of all land or produce for supporting the common life of the Church. In the Church of England, traditionally, these tithes once received were divided by canon into four parts: between the bishop, the clergy, the fabric of the church, and the relief of the poor. Over time these divisions developed variously, but the tithe itself long remained a point of law and a direction in the *Book of Common Prayer*. Never, in this sense, has the tithe been a part of the Episcopal Church in the United States of America, although our offerings are conventionally divided in a way approximating the original four-way split.

As Christians, looking to Jesus Christ as our Lord and seeking to follow in his way, we seek to be "converted," as he asks us to be. Our conversion is from earning

(continued on reverse)



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to letting go, from ownership to stewardship. The first step in our conversion is acknowledging that what we have, much or little, is God's gift to us. The next step is letting go after working hard, "joyful giving" with open hearts and hands.

Here are some passages from the Bible for you to read and prayerfully consider as you respond to your call to stewardship.

- ❖ I Chronicles 28 and 29 recount David's instructions concerning the Temple and his praise to God. Reflect on David's life and leadership and what his example here offers us in our life as the church.
- ❖ Here are several passages from the Old Testament that deal with how the tithe is to be accomplished. Consider how they might be translatable into the terms of our lives. Genesis 14:18-20; Leviticus 27:30-32; Numbers 18:21-25.
- ❖ These passages from the Old Testament convey the context of the tithe. Consider what they tell us about where and how our offerings are to be made. Deuteronomy 12 and 14; 2 Chronicles 31:5-6; Nehemiah 10:35-39.
- ❖ Read Matthew 23 and Luke 11 and consider what Jesus is teaching about "conversion" in understanding of the tithe.

How are you developing your sense of the tithe in your life?

STEWARDSHIP CAMPAIGN OVERVIEW

SUNDAY, OCTOBER 18

THE TITHE IN THE LIVES OF GOD'S PEOPLE

Presented by Dean Gibson

MONDAY, OCTOBER 18 THROUGH SATURDAY, OCTOBER 31

STEWARDSHIP VISITS BEGIN

SUNDAY, OCTOBER 25

PROPORTIONAL GIVING AS

OUR FAITHFUL,

GROWING RESPONSE

SUNDAY, NOVEMBER 1

INGATHERING &

CELEBRATION

STEWARDSHIP PRAYER

Almighty God, your loving hand has given us all that we possess; give us grace to become faithful stewards of your bounty and to honor you by returning to you what is needed for the growth of the mission entrusted to us as Christ Church Cathedral; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.