

Christian Life Center, A Foursquare Church | 951.689.6785

THE BLESSING OF THE FIRST

Honoring God with what He gives and trusting Him for what we need.

Proverbs 3:9-10 *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*.

1. **Throughout the Word of God, we see a "simple" but powerful principle: putting God first**. Everything we have comes from Him, and when we give Him the first of what He's given us, we are declaring our trust in Him. Tithing and giving are more about our hearts than our finances! God wants us to live with the confidence that He knows our needs and that He is more than able to provide. Our responsibility is to honor Him with what He gives us and trust Him for what we need.

2. **The first mention of "the Tithe**," the portion of God's provision that belongs to Him. In Genesis 2:15-17 God said to Adam that he could eat of all the trees in the garden but not to eat from the one tree in the middle of the garden. He also told them the consequence would be death.

3. **Recognizing God's faithfulness**, Abraham tithed to Melchizedek, the priest of God Most High (Genesis 14:18–20; Hebrews 7:1–10). Jacob, in anticipation of God's provision and protection, made a commitment to give God a tenth of everything He would give him (Genesis 28:20–22). Both preceded the giving of the Law.

4. **The Tithe of the Land of Promise**. Joshua 6 and 7, The story of the fulfillment of the land God promised to Israel begins in Joshua 6 when God detailed how they were to begin the conquest. The Firstfruits of the land was to be the fortified city of Jericho, the first city conquered in Canaan. God told Joshua that Israel was not to touch the devoted things in the city of Jericho. <u>These were dedicated/devoted to the LORD</u>.
   - **The command** - When God finally brought Israel to the boundary of Canaan, He commanded them to take the fortified city of Jericho and utterly destroy it. The words God used were. *"…the city and all that is in it are to be devoted ("accursed" in the KJV) to the LORD."* (Joshua 6:17). This act dedicated the first victory entirely to God.
   - **The consequences** - God was establishing the principle of "the first" with the new generation of warriors and clearly stated the consequences for disobeying His command in Joshua 6:18-19 *But keep away from the devoted things, so that you will not bring about your own destruction by taking any of them. Otherwise you will make the camp of Israel liable to destruction and bring trouble on it. All the silver and gold and the articles of bronze and iron are sacred to the LORD and must go into his treasury.*

- **The blessing for obedience** - This is seen in the promise to Joshua and Israel in Joshua 1:1-5 where God literally would give them the Land of Promise, a very large area! But it had to be carried out His way.

PRINCIPLES OF THE TITHE

God has given us a powerful principle by which to govern our finances and experience His Divine abundance! This is found in the last Old Testament book of Malachi.

Malachi 3:10-12 *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.* (LORD Almighty is Jehovah Sabaoth, the Captain of the armies of Heaven)

1. **The foundation of the Tithe is ownership and stewardship.**
   - God is the Owner of all things; I am the manager over what He has given me. (Luke 6:46-49; Psalm 24:1)
   - God deserves the very best. When I give the "first fruit," or first ten percent of my income, I am declaring that He deserves the very best and that He is the Source of everything. (Proverbs 3:9; Malachi 1:6)
   - I cannot out give God. (2 Corinthians 9:6)

2. **The Tithe was a principle before the Law.**
   - Abraham tithed and Jacob committed to tithing long before the giving of the Mosaic Law.
   - Jesus spoke about tithing while emphasizing the more important matters of justice, mercy and faithfulness (Matthew 23:23).

3. **The definition of the Tithe is a tenth.**
   - Leviticus 27:32 *Every tithe of the herd and flock—every tenth animal that passes under the shepherd's rod—will be holy to the LORD.*
   - Less than ten percent is not a tithe and anything over and above ten percent is an offering. The tithe is a fixed percentage that does not change.

4. **The Tithe belongs to God.**
   - Leviticus 27:30 *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*.
   - When we tithe, we are giving back to Him what is already His.

5. **The responsibility of the Tithe and faithful obedience.**
   - The LORD makes a strong statement in Malachi 3:8, saying that to hold back the tithe is to rob Him! (John 10:1, 10; 12:6)
   - The consequence of this behavior was illustrated in the account of Achan as he kept back a portion of the spoils from Jericho in Joshua 7.

6. **God uses the Tithe as a means to pour out His abundance to us** (Malachi 3:10). He actually invites us to prove His Word and then experience blessing to such a degree that "there will not be room enough to receive it."

7. **The Lord promises to protect what He has provided** (Malachi 3:11). God promises divine protection as part of His covenant regarding the tithe. If we are faithful to give God the tithe, God is faithful to protect what He has given you!

FOUNDATIONAL PRINCIPLES OF STEWARDSHIP

Biblical principles that position us to receive God's blessing.

Deuteronomy 28:1-14 ...*The LORD will open the heavens, the storehouse of his bounty, to send rain on your land in season and to bless all the work of your hands. You will lend to many nations but will borrow from none... If you pay attention to the commands of the LORD your God that I give you this day and carefully follow them, you will always be at the top, never at the bottom.*

1. **Who's in charge?**
   - God is the Owner of all things, I am the manager over what He has given me.
   - Stewardship deals with the person, not the purse.
   - 1 Chronicles 29:10-18; Psalm 24:1, 50:10; Haggai; Luke 6:46-49

2. **Who's number 1?**
   - When we give the Firstfruits, or first ten percent, we are honoring Him and declaring that He is the Source of everything.
   - Proverbs 3:9-10; Malachi 1:6; Colossians 1:15-18

3. **Cheerful attitude**
   - Stewardship begins with loving, not giving. We can give without loving but we cannot love without giving.
   - 2 Corinthians 9:7; Romans 12:1; John 3:16

4. **Faithful in little, faithful in much**
   - Stewardship in our tithing and giving deals with our present resources. To increase, we must be a faithful steward over what we have today.
   - Matthew 25:21; Luke 16:10-12

5. **Give and grow**
   - Biblical stewardship produces growth. By using our faith, our faith grows; by using our spiritual gifts, we grow and mature spiritually.
   - Genesis 12:2; Matthew 25:19-23; Luke 17:5-6; 2 Corinthians 9:10-11

6. **The river**
   - We must be a river of resources, not a reservoir. God will continue to give to us what He knows will flow through us.
   - Proverbs 11:25; 22:9

7. **God's "big shovel"**
    - We cannot out give God!
    - Luke 6:38; 2 Corinthians 9:6

A FEW OTHER IMPORTANT PRINCIPLES

1. **When my faith in an All-Powerful and All-knowing God waivers** concerning provision, I turn to His Word and renew my commitment to stand firm and believe.
    - Ephesians 3:20 *Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us…*
    - Psalm 37:25 *I was young and now I am old, yet I have never seen the righteous forsaken or their children begging bread.*

2. **Sowing and reaping**, God enlarging our store of seed (the part they kept to plant again)
    - Galatians 6:7-9 *Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, that he will also reap. 8 For he who sows to his flesh will of the flesh reap corruption, but he who sows to the Spirit will of the Spirit reap everlasting life. And let us not grow weary while doing good, for in due season we shall reap if we do not lose heart.*
    - 2 Corinthians 9:6-11

3. **The widow of Zarephath**, the oil and flour did not deplete during the famine.
    - 1 Kings 17:7-17

4. **Giving to the poor who cannot repay…**
    - Proverbs 19:17 *He who has pity on the poor lends to the LORD, and He will pay back what he has given.*
    - Luke 14: 12-14 *Then He also said to him who invited Him, "When you give a dinner or a supper, do not ask your friends, your brothers, your relatives, nor rich neighbors, lest they also invite you back, and you be repaid. 13 But when you give a feast, invite the poor, the maimed, the lame, the blind. 14 And you will be blessed, because they cannot repay you; for you shall be repaid at the resurrection of the just."*

5. **The widow and her small sacrificial offering** meant more to Jesus than the offerings others gave out of their abundance.
    - Mark 12:41-44

6. **God loves it when we give out of a heart of love and worship**. The woman in Matthew 26 held nothing back but poured out her very best on Jesus. This deeply moved Him.
    - Matthew 26:13 *Truly I tell you, wherever this gospel is preached throughout the world, what she has done will also be told, in memory of her.*

Important note: Many of us have gone through or are going through tough financial times, and tithing may seem impossible. Start where you are! Set aside a portion for God before anything else, be consistent, and work toward giving the full tithe. Remember, He said to "test Him" in this, and watch Him bless your life in different ways! **We serve a BIG God! And can never outgive Him!**