

My Journey to Tithing

By Steven Simpkins

Over the years I have sat through many sermons on tithing. Sometimes my impression was that the pastor felt awkward about bringing up the subject, as if he were wearing a clothespin on his nose and carrying a long pole with a dead skunk attached on the other end. He wanted the whole stinky business of a tithing sermon to be done and over. When the sermon ended you could sense the relief of finishing an unpleasant task.

Other sermons bordered on scary. A preacher would proclaim boldly that the congregation needed to take the leap of faith and tithe. The problem was the person in the pulpit didn't know what it looked like at the bottom of my checkbook. In those days my financial condition was foggy at best. He might as well have told me to stand on the edge of a cliff where the bottom was hidden by a fog. I don't like the idea of cliff diving in the first place. When what is below is hidden by a fog, the idea of leaping off a cliff becomes terrifying. As much as I wanted to tithe and felt guilt about not tithing, the idea of "blind faith" giving did not feel right.

Knowingly giving money you don't have and expecting a big return from God seems reckless and is inconsistent with what Scripture teaches. I have seen the consequences of others who gave recklessly. When I was a young teenager, some really good people took a leap of what they thought was faith and wrote checks to the church for money that was not in their bank account. I am not sure who gave them that idea. I do remember that God didn't make it to the bank to deposit the money into their accounts that week. The checks bounced.

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I was overwhelmed with the feeling that there had to be something much different than "blind faith" giving. Too often I have heard sermons about what we are supposed to do without direction on what steps are needed to reach the destination. It is like telling somebody to go to a faraway city without a

compass direction, map, or any idea of how to start the journey. I looked at my bank statements, considered what was preached, and the math just didn't add up. There wasn't much hope that I could get there without a dramatic change of circumstances. I decided that I needed to go to God and His Word to find what God expected. I needed to seek direction on how to get to the place financially that He intended. It took time to grasp God's plan. He had to take me to a spiritual financial woodshed in order to finally get this through my thick head. It wasn't a change of circumstances that I needed; instead, I needed to change how I responded to my circumstances.

I decided to take a closer look at tithing and see how it fit into my Christian life. I knew that tithing was about giving a tenth of my income and something to do with firstfruits. I needed to consider broader implications. Specifically, I wanted to know how tithing fits into my life and what God expected. In my personal time with God, Proverbs 4:26 had reminded me that I should ponder the direction of my life. I realized tithing was never meant to be about giving what I don't have; it is about joyfully giving from what I have produced in my life. I also never felt good about using credit cards in giving to the church. In Proverbs 22:7 was a reminder that if I borrowed money, I would

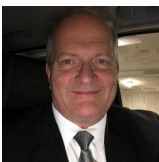
be giving the lender power over me. I would be relinquishing control over part of my life. I would be borrowing from my own future in more than interest.

I also considered the “leap of faith” concept. I grew up in church hearing and reading about paths, walking, ways, steps, and following others as they followed Christ. The Bible has numerous references to these words. When I looked up “leap” in regard to faith, I found nothing to support that idea. The first step in a new journey could feel like a leap, but it is actually just a beginning step. I was ready to look at my map after establishing a clear understanding that tithing would be a journey.

Previously I had thought of tithing as a standalone task for Christians. But tithing is only a single element in being a good steward. Stewardship is being a manager of my whole life and other things besides just tithing. It includes being stewards of God’s Word, of my resources, and my time. It also has to do with being a caretaker of others around me. I am expected to grow as a Christian (2 Peter 3:18

and Hebrews 5:12-14). Since tithing is a part of the Christian life, it is also an area where I can grow in my faith.

The first step in gaining my freedom to tithe was becoming a steward/manager. Becoming a committed steward changed far more than just my ability to tithe. The steps to tithing also brought personal and financial freedom. I developed a budget. I began by figuring out my income, my debts and expenses, and minimizing wasted use of money. I built an emergency fund of \$500.00 to be prepared for an unexpected crisis. I planned my giving to the church and worked at eliminating the smallest debt first. As a debt was eliminated I increased my church giving and worked to pay off the next smallest debt. Eventually it led to giving more and paying off my debt, including my car payment. I am in the process of building an emergency fund with six months of living expenses. Part of my joy is being able to tithe plus give to a visiting missionary or secretly helping someone in need. It has been a long journey, but well worth it.



Steven Simpkins was born in Nashville, Tennessee, and raised in nearby Ashland City, Tennessee. He graduated from Cheatham County High School, attended Belmont University and David Lipscomb University, and is currently working on a degree from Welch College. He served as a volunteer and then bi-vocational youth minister for approximately 20 years.