



The Arkansas Tithe Initiative: A New Way to Share Ministry



Our Tithing Tradition

What does Scripture say about Tithing?

Many scriptures address tithing beginning with Abraham in Genesis 14. As a biblical principle that Christians are called to follow (Leviticus 27:30, Nehemiah 10:35-37), tithing is a step towards spiritual maturity and to the experience of the fullness of God's blessings. The people of God gave a tithe to provide for the Priests and the relief of the needy. When Jacob made his covenant with God at Bethel it included a payment of tithes. The Pharisees even tithed a tenth of the herbs they used.

Giving a tithe is a fair and equitable way for individuals to financially support the local church and for local churches to financially support conference, jurisdiction and general conference ministries. The tithe assures that we are able to properly follow the command of Jesus to reach out and help the marginalized in our communities and around the world.

Christians confess that God is Creator of all things ("In the beginning..." Genesis 1:1) and that all things belong to God ("The earth is the Lord's and all that is in it." Psalms 24). Tithing is a response to that belief and to all that God means to us and has given to us.

The practice of tithing ultimately helps us keep our priorities and values in balance thus enabling us to live more fulfilled lives while the needs of all are cared for. As Jesus said in Matthew 6:21, "Where your treasure is, there your heart will be also." Tithing is a tangible demonstration of our trust and faith in God.

What did John Wesley teach about Tithing?

Several of Wesley's sermons well as the *Explanatory Notes Upon the New Testament*, detail his thoughts about our relationship to money and giving.

He understood the position of the church in this world in a radical way that is foreign to the prevailing church culture of today. For Wesley the ultimate concern was service to God and not creature comforts. He seemed to accept Paul's terminology that the church is an ambassador on earth for the Kingdom of Heaven as such was entrusted with resources to be used to benefit the Body of Christ and beyond.

Wesley's teaching on stewardship is more inclusive than the matter of funding church programs. It is surprising to see him refer to tithing as "the lowest rule of Christian prudence." Wesley felt that the Christian should not merely tithe but give away all extra income once the family and creditors were taken care of. He believed that **with increasing income, what should rise is not the Christian's standard of living but the standard of giving.**

Wesley's Three Rules

- **Gain all you can.**
Despite its potential for misuse, money in itself is something good. There is no end to the good it can do: "In

the hands of (God's) children, it is food for the hungry, drink for the thirsty, raiment for the naked. It gives to the traveler and the stranger where to lay his head. By it we may supply the place of a husband to the widow, and of a father to the fatherless. We may be a defense for the oppressed, a means of health to the sick, of ease to them that are in pain. It may be as eyes to the blind, as feet to the lame: yea, a lifter up from the gates of death!"

- **Save all you can.**
He urged his hearers not to spend money merely to gratify the desires of the flesh, the desires of the eye, or the pride of life. He cried out against expensive food, fancy clothes, and elegant furniture: "Despise delicacy and variety and be content with what plain nature requires."
- **Give all you can.**
One's giving should begin with the tithe. He told the one who does not tithe, "Thou dost undoubtedly set thy heart upon thy gold" and warned, "It will 'eat thy flesh as fire!'"

But one's giving should not end at the tithe. All of the Christian's money belongs to God, not just the first tenth. Believers must use 100 percent of their income as God directs.

And how has God directed Christians to use their incomes? Wesley listed four scriptural principles:

- Provide things needful for yourself and your family (I Tim. 5:8). The believer should make sure the family has "a sufficiency of plain, wholesome food to eat, and clean raiment to put on" as well as a place to live and enough to live on if something were to happen to the breadwinner.
- "Having food and raiment, let us be therewith content" (I Tim. 6:8). "Whoever has sufficient food to eat, and raiment to put on, with a place to lay his head, and something over, is rich," he said.
- "Provide things honest in the sight of all men" (Rom. 12:17) and "Owe no man anything" (Rom. 13:8). Wesley said the next claim on a Christian's money is the creditors. He adds that those who are in business for themselves need to have adequate tools, stock, or capital for the carrying on of that business.
- "As we have therefore opportunity, let us do good unto all men, especially unto them who are of the household of faith" (Gal. 6:10). After the Christian has provided for the family, the creditors, and the business, the next obligation is to use any money that is left to meet the needs of others.

In giving these four biblical principles, Wesley recognized some situations were not clear-cut. He accordingly offered four questions to help his hearers decide how to spend money:

- In spending this money, am I acting like I own it, or am I acting like the Lord's trustee?
- What Scripture requires me to spend this money this way?
- Can I offer up this purchase as a sacrifice to the Lord?
- Will God reward me for this expenditure at the resurrection of the just?