



January, 2012

Called by God and sent by the Living Christ, we the Northwest Regional Christian Church intentionally engage with one another rejoicing in our diversity and shared gifts, deepening our spiritual life, building true community, acting courageously in ministry and mission, and sharing God's good news with a fresh voice and a new song. We seek to "do justice, love kindness and walk humbly with our God." (Micah 6:8)

STEWARDSHIP

Bring the full tithe into the storehouse, so that there may be food in my house, and thus put me to the test, says the Lord of hosts; see if I will not open the windows of heaven for you and pour down for you an overflowing blessing.' —Malachi 3:10

"Pay yourself first" is a popular bit of financial advice. It refers to the idea of having part of each paycheck automatically transferred into savings or an investment account as a way of ensuring that you keep your commitment to investment. However, for us as Christians, a better aphorism might be, "Pay God first." Over and over, the scriptures speak about dedicating the first fruits of what you receive to God.

As Christians, we are generally less focused on religious laws we must follow in the way that our Jewish and Muslim sisters and brothers are. Instead, Jesus called us to focus on the spirit of the law more than the letter of the law—usually in a way that is even more demanding on us. But we do have spiritual practices that support us in living as people of God. One of those is the practice of tithing.

Tithing is first referenced about Abraham, following a military victory, in Genesis 14:18-20: "And King Melchizedek of Salem brought out bread and wine; he was priest of God Most High. He blessed him and said, 'Blessed be Abram by God Most High, maker of heaven and earth; and blessed be God Most High, who has delivered your enemies into your hand!' And Abram gave him one-tenth of everything."

If we think of our giving to church as part of our overall spiritual practice, it shifts our relationship with giving. We are expressing gratitude to God for the abundance God has blessed us with.

My personal experience has been that tithing is more a gift to me than a giving up. It has changed my relationship with money, and I feel far wealthier now than I did before I began it. I currently give 8% of my income as a pledge to my church, 1% to the Northwest Region, and 1% to my church by purchasing and giving things the church needs. Above this, I give to a variety of non-religious charities. I contribute to the general church only through my contributions to the Disciples Mission Fund. I would encourage every Disciple to contribute to their region about a tenth of what they contribute to their church, whether by direct contribution or through the special offerings.

I feel it is important that congregations, too, tithe, and I know that many of them do. Sending at least 10% of a congregation's income to support the larger church, through region, Global Ministries, and ministries of the general church, lets us join forces to accomplish together things beyond the capacity of any single congregation.

For someone who is not doing it, the idea of tithing is frightening. Many of us feel that we are barely scraping by as it is, and it's not clear what we could give up to allow us to tithe. There is certainly an element of trust in God in taking this step. For those willing simply to take the leap, I suspect you will be surprised at how God opens doors for you and enriches your life. But for those not quite ready to take that step, a good practice is simply to decide to contribute 1% more of your salary this year than last year. In other words, if your family income is \$50,000, and you have been contributing \$100/month to your church, by adding 1%, or \$500/year, your new contribution would be just under \$142/month.

Many of us feel shy about asking for money in church, and so "stewardship moments" are often safe and generic. But if we shift our perspective from thinking that we're trying to get something for our church, to realizing we are trying to help congregation members by encouraging them to be better Christians and to lead more of the abundant life God has planned for them, it may change the way we approach these conversations.

Certainly stewardship is about much more than money. We are called to be stewards of God's creation, of our vocation, of our church. As Disciples, we recognize that the earth and all it contains, and our very life itself, are all gifts from God, and we model our life and our stewardship on the life and teachings of Jesus Christ. Through this model of stewardship, we build up the Realm of God that Jesus initiated on earth. Being a Disciple means offering our very life to God. Dedicating our material well-being to God and in service to our love of our neighbors is only one way of expressing this, but it is an

important one, and for many of us, may help us to understand more fully the other aspects of what it means to be a follower of Jesus.

View the entire blog at <http://musingsonmission.disciplesnw.org/>

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