

GLORY: *Illuminating Life with God's Virtue*

FAITH | **Time, Talent, & *Treasure***

Introduction: In line with Cornerstone's 2011 ministry emphasis, [*Imago Dei: Reflecting Jesus in All of Life*](#), this present series is a practical and in-depth exploration of how we are called to reflect God's GLORY -- the beauty and majesty of His character -- in every aspect of our lives. Basing on 2 Pe. 1:3-9, we have been learning about how faith is manifested in our work, in our relationships with family & friends, and in body & soul care. This morning we'll focus on how our faith should shape how we steward our God-given treasure, esp. with respect to the practice of tithing. Cornerstone has never been shy or apologetic about teaching this important subject; it's an integral part of being a Christ-follower, albeit producing uncomfortable feelings whenever the topic is raised.

Let me begin by saying this:

***There is a constant tug of war between
the Mighty \$ and the Mighty God!***

This is no surprise to all of us, and we might well be feeling the tension even now. In a recent book by Craig Groeschel's *The Christian Atheist*, ch. 10 is entitled "When You Believe

in God But Trust More in Money.," in which he describes how so many of us rationalize away our faith commitment. No wonder Jesus challenges us to decide whom we serve, God or Mammon. Billy Graham has insightfully reminded us:

If a person gets his attitude toward money straight, it will help straighten out almost every other area in his life.

Billy Graham

Let me share with you my dad's motto –

信 靠 順 服

Sohn Kao Sun Phook

Trust & Obey

主 賜 萬 福

Jeuw Chi Maan Phook

Grace Overflowing

心 滿 意 足

Sum Muoon Yee Jhook

Life so Blessed

What I remember about my father's faith and tithing:

Trust in God's timely provision, e.g., saw him praying in the middle of the night about money covering for our plane tickets home one summer.

Remain faithfulness in service and tithing, e.g., in spite of the many difficult and testing circumstances throughout his life, his tithing to God remained consistent as it was seen in the weekly practice of publishing the name and the amount of every donor every week. Dad was one of the highest givers; even with his modest income and financial commitment in paying for his children's education overseas, he continued to serve the denomination and even lost time and money while doing so.

Generosity, e.g., he often took opportunities to treat people lunch every Sunday after church service (pastors, guest speakers, less fortunate friends, etc.).

Realizing that his days on earth might not be long, dad told me at the hospital that he was at peace and ready to see his Heavenly Father face to face. He asked the family to remember these words: "Trust and obey, grace overflowing, life so blessed." My father remains as one of my heroes of faith to this day. Allow me to share with you key lessons & challenges of faithful giving I've learned from my dad and scriptures:

Our *attitude* in tithing is just as revealing as the *amount* we give.

Are you finding it difficult to tithe at the present time? I do, too! Many of us think, "When I have more, later, then I will tithe accordingly." More than often, our posture toward money and wealth is grasping, holding tight, or hoarding, which are outward gestures of our souls.

It's never easy to tithe when the belts are tight, when the economic forecast is uncertain, when our greed overshadows our generosity – but just like prayer, fasting, attentive to God's word, taking care of the poor & needy, tithing remains one of the **assumed, primary responsibilities** for God's people going back to Genesis [e.g., Cain & Abel].

What motivates us to tithe, i.e., assuming that we give anything at all? And what keeps us from giving a sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving?

Paul commended the Macedonian believers in 2C8:3-5:

2Cor. 8:3³For I testify that they gave as much as they were able, and even beyond their ability. Entirely on their own, ⁴they urgently pleaded with us for the privilege of sharing in this service to the saints. ⁵And they did not do as we expected, but they gave themselves first to the Lord and then to us in keeping with God's will.

Then Paul continues to encourage the Corinthian Christians to follow the Macedonians' example by reminding them of Jesus' own example:

^{2Cor.8:9}For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, so that you through his poverty might become rich... ⁷Each man should give what he has decided in his heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver...

^{2Cor. 9:12}This service that you perform is not only supplying the needs of God's people but is also overflowing in many expressions of thanks to God. ¹³Because of the service by which you have proved yourselves, men will praise God for the obedience that accompanies your confession of the gospel of Christ, and for your generosity in sharing with them and with everyone else.

Paul's overall message is clear:

Our tithing expresses our *gratitude* towards God's multiple blessing and *obedience* to His instructions; it's integral to being *living sacrifices*.

Again, tithing is ***an assumed regular practice*** of God's people throughout scriptures - not just giving time, talents, and performing tasks/Christian services; not just giving to support a local church budget, though this also has its rightful place in OT & NT.

Paul teaches that tithing is ...

A Privilege

Out of gratitude & thanksgiving

Expression of generosity & covenantal obedience

A Testimony of the Good News & our praise

Our acts of giving back to God and meeting needs of faith communities are about faith expressing itself in faithfulness, fulfilling vows & commitment. Listen to the teaching in OT:

^{Num. 30:2}When a man makes a vow to the LORD or takes an oath to obligate himself by a pledge, *he must not break his word but must do everything he said*.

^{Ps. 116:12}What shall I return to the LORD for all his goodness to me? ¹³I will lift up the cup of salvation and call on the name of the LORD. ¹⁴*I will fulfill my vows to the LORD in the presence of all his people*.

At this moment it might be appropriate for all of us ...

To **pause and count all the valuable/lasting gifts or "blessing" we received from God**. If we were to give each item a price tag, what would be the **total value** of all the blessings and how **much does it cost God?**

A lot of people are willing to give God the credit, but not too many are willing to give Him the cash.

Anonymous

Regarding fulfilling the vows we'd made to God, what about our Bridges pledges, our individual and collective vows we made to God? Instead of the potential need of going back to renegotiate our loan payment with the bank, should we not fulfill our vows so that "men will praise God"?

This might well be an opportunity to rate your faithfulness/obedience in a scale of 1[defiant]-5[discipline]?

Personal Faithfulness-Obedience Scale

1	2	3	4	5
Defiant	Passive	Occasional	Intentional	Discipline

This leads to the next key component of faithful tithing:

An auditing of our *spending habit* is more revealing than our participation in *religious activities*.

Paul reminds the young Timothy and those believers in Ephesus in 1Tim.6-10:

¹Tim. 6:⁶But godliness with contentment is great gain. ⁷For we brought nothing into the world, and we can take nothing out of it. ⁸But if we have food and clothing, we will be content with that. ⁹People who want to get rich fall into temptation and a trap and into many foolish and harmful desires that plunge men into ruin and destruction. ¹⁰For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil. Some people, eager for money, have wandered from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs.

It is instructive to underline that the intended audience here in his passage is **not pagans or people who care less about God, but Christ-followers and even those who were church leaders and active participants of religious events or activities.** Essentially what Paul is saying is this: **"Be content and live in accordance with your faith commitment. Keep your heart at the right place, for where your treasure is, there is your heart also. Beware of the dark side of money."**

Coupled with what we've just learned from Paul in 2Cor.8-9 we are faced with this truth:

Our *tithing* expresses the depth of our *relationship* with God.

Our regular practice or non-practice of tithing reflects the depth or the superficiality of our faith, the maturity or immaturity of our “growing-into-the-likeness of Jesus”, the integrity or inauthenticity of what we profess with our words.

Are you growing in faith journey, experiencing more and more God’s sovereign power and timely provision? Mark Buchanan identifies a particular mindset or behavioral pattern that often deters us from deepening our relationship with and experiencing the reality of God (cf. *Your God is too Safe*, p.39):

“I have little interest in knowing the will of God concerning my windfalls, but much interest in having the provision of Christ in my pitfalls. I want to be rescued but not bothered, comforted but never disrupted, soothed but not disturbed.”

Sometimes it is more accurate to say that our faith is more about ***our desire to manipulate the deity for personal gains or comforts rather than an outward display of our trust in God as ones bearing His image.***

Paul teaches about godliness with contentment in the passage from 1T6:6-8. Ah, contentment, that sounds familiar, doesn’t it? **Having faith – believing and acting accordingly in obedience - in God’s timely provision for what we need, instead of preoccupying ourselves to**

acquire and manage excess, thus worshipping the gifts and not the Giver.

Someone said in humor, “In [the book of] Revelations we read of a book which no man could open. Some believe that was the **pocketbook.**”

What possesses us is more revealing than what we possess. And what possesses us is revealed in **how we handle money**, esp. in relation to the issue of tithing and stewardship.

One of the most practical exercise we might consider implementing is to **monitor our expenses for one month and check how the “discretionary funds” were spent**, i.e., the amount left after all the basic necessities are taken care off.

Another might be checking all the **“impulse-purchasing” we do within the month.** Here we are **not against acquiring good quality materials or catching a good sale per se but encouraging all of us to being “wise consumers.”**

Yet another consideration is to make a list of all the **cultural expectations or peer pressure** which might have influenced our spending; evaluate each item according to biblical values or God’s eternal purposes.

Along this line of thoughtful spending, we have another key lesson about faithful tithing:

The *God-honouring distribution* of our financial resources must be *wisely deliberated*.

Regarding the collection at Corinth for the needy Christians in Jerusalem, Paul suggested in 1C16.1-3:

¹Cor. 16:1 Now about the collection for God's people: Do what I told the Galatian churches to do. ²On the first day of every week, *each one of you should set aside a sum of money in keeping with his income*, saving it up, so that when I come no collections will have to be made.

Regular, consistent, and thoughtful steps are recommended to be taken at Corinth. Here we are instructed to develop **intentional planning and deliberation** of financial giving. If Paul's advice here to the Corinthians' response to a crisis in the Jerusalem church commands such thoughtful deliberations, how much more should Christ-followers at individual local churches plan to give tithe and to meet specific and ongoing congregational needs!

Regular tithing practice liberates us to from the tyranny of greed/materialism and empowers us to move toward a life of godly contentment and simplicity, while enriching us with our experiences of God's sovereign power and provision.

The challenge and wisdom of God's word are clear:

"Faith without works" is faith with no accountability!

"If you fail to plan, you plan to fail."

[At this moment I would like to remind those who consider Cornerstone their family our present need, i.e., weekly receipt required is \$17,800 – and if you turn to the back page of the worship folder, you'll notice the total short fall thus far.

Moreover, you might want to consider signing up for EFT and you can pick this form up at the Welcome Kiosk or contact Ben.

However, I want to underscore that one must understand that tithing is not just about financial support of the church and as a response to meeting needs in crisis, but a discipline to develop, for if we practice regular tithing, there'd be no crisis but more resources to fulfill our vision & mission God entrusted to us and bring multiple blessings to people in our community and beyond instead.]

At this point I would like to remind you about **the guiding principle and benchmark God expects from His people**, as they tithe as their expression of gratitude for how He pours out daily blessing to them and how they remain faithful in fulfilling their covenantal responsibilities:

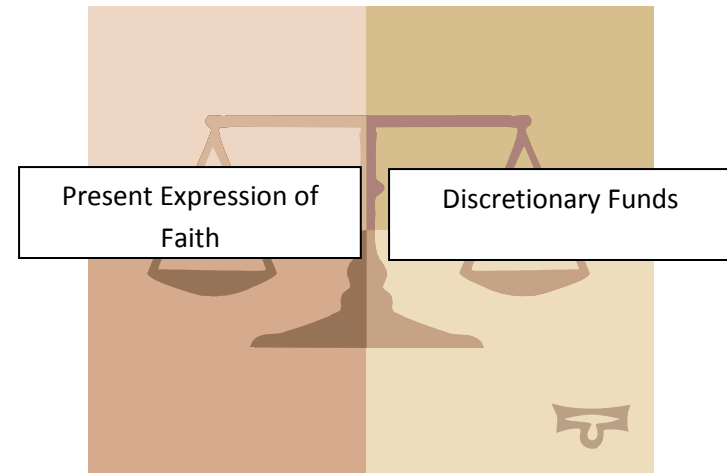
^{Lev. 23:10} Speak to the Israelites and say to them: When you enter the land I am going to give you and you reap its

harvest, bring to the priest a sheaf of the first grain you harvest.

Deut. 14:22 Be sure to set aside a tenth of all that your fields produce each year.

Are you giving God your “first fruit” or only what you can spare? There’s no doubt that it’s challenging to tithe when we have less. But let me say this, it is extremely challenging when we have more. We wouldn’t sweat giving a dime to God at all when we have a loonie; we give more thought putting a \$10 bill in the offering bag when we have a \$100; we would think really, really hard before slapping down \$1,000, even when we have \$10,000; and we would probably cringe from giving \$100,000 when we have a million. There’s no problem getting some loose change from the jar to give God a token; the principle of “first fruit” and “10%” challenges us to give God first before keeping up with our lifestyle, purchasing the toys we want, and putting any savings in rrsp.

10% Gross Income - \$ of Present Annual Tithing
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Present Faith Expression



Gleaning from these passages we might conduct a reality check w.r.t. our present faith expression in terms of tithing.

After comparing our “present faith expression” with the use of our “discretionary funds”, we might have to **adjust our spending habits so that our giving will be aligned with our faith commitment.**

Conclusion: The nature of our faith is never static; our faith/belief is dynamic – it can move forward or backward, increase or decrease, stretch/expand or shrink, deepened or uprooted. With respect to tithing, the strength of our faith comes from obedience, doing what is in accordance with God’s will and trusting in His promises of meeting all our needs. Martin Luther has certainly made an important point when he said, “There are three conversions necessary: the conversion of the heart, mind, and **the purse.**”