

God's Plan for Prosperity

(Adapted from *Path to Righteousness* by Linda Poitras)

“Bring ye all the tithes into the storehouse, that there may be meat in mine house, and prove me now herewith, saith the Lord of hosts, if I will not open you the windows of heaven, and pour you out a blessing, that there shall not be room enough to receive it”
(Malachi 2:10).

Introduction

There are many new doctrines circulating in our world today, and millions of people are following them (Matthew 24:11). One of these is the “Doctrine of Prosperity.” People flock by the thousands to hear various speakers describe the latest “get rich quick” method. These speakers use the Bible in a twisted and perverted sense to accomplish their aims. They have forgotten one very important passage of Scripture, in their desire to see blessings with their natural eyes. Paul wrote to the church at Colosse: “*Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth*” (Colossians 3:2).

- Henry Ward Beecher said, “No man can tell whether he is rich or poor by turning to his ledger. It is the heart that makes a man rich. He is rich according to what he is, not according to what he has.”
- Solomon, the wisest of men, wrote in Proverbs 30:8-9: “*Remove far from me vanity and lies; give me neither poverty nor riches; feed me with food convenient for me; Lest I be full, and deny thee, and say, Who is the LORD? Or lest I be poor, and steal, and take the name of my God in vain.*”

If I keep these verses in my heart, I will have the proper attitude when I look for the blessings God has promised me. Not all prosperity takes the form of money. In his lesson “Stewardship – Pushing Until Prosperity Happens,” Rev. Jim Poitras writes: “God has many ways of causing His children to prosper, but not all prosperity is economic or financial. Spiritual prosperity is the most important.” Jesus concluded His parable of the rich man who ended up in hell by saying, “*...so is he that layeth up treasure for himself and is not rich toward God*” (Luke 12:21). True prosperity is an all-around success that includes:

- ☞ Being exalted (Deuteronomy 7:14; 28:13)
- ☞ Being successful in the home and workplace (Deuteronomy 28:3, 8-12)
- ☞ Having sound health for the whole family (Deuteronomy 7:15; Malachi 4:2)
- ☞ Enjoying protection and victory over one’s enemies (Leviticus 26:6-8; Deuteronomy 28:7)
- ☞ Childbearing and soundness (Psalm 113:9; Deuteronomy 7:14)
- ☞ Having favor with God and man (Leviticus 26:11-12; Deuteronomy 28:9-10)

How do we go about finding the prosperity that is God’s plan for our lives?

What About Tithes?

God has a special and beautiful plan for His people to be happy, enjoy abundance, and know His richest blessings. He gave this plan very early to the children of Israel – all the way back at the time of Abraham. How do you suppose Abraham knew to give a tithe after the Lord had blessed him and given victory in battle? Melchizedek was the first recorded priest of the most high God, and Abraham treated him accordingly. Genesis 14:20 says Abraham gave the priest “*tithes of all.*” Some say that tithing is no longer necessary because we are not under the Old Testament Law. Abraham paid tithes *before* the law.

Abraham is not the only example of tithing before the practice was defined. Abraham’s grandson, Jacob, also practiced tithing. When he was running from Esau, after God had visited him at Bethel, he promised God one-tenth of all his increase (Genesis 28:22). Where did Jacob learn about tithing? The Bible does not record this, but traditions were taught by the father of the family. The fact that Jacob knew about the practice tells us he had seen or heard of it before – probably from his father, Isaac, who had in turn learned it from his father, Abraham.

What are tithes?

Tithes are a tenth part of one’s income or substance, given to God in order to support the ministry. The Hebrew word for “tithe” (*ma’ser*) means “a tenth part.”

- 📖 When God set up the laws and ordinances that ruled His people, He established tithing as a means of financial support for the priesthood.
- 📖 In the Old Testament, the word “tithe” usually refers to the tithe given to the Levites for their service in the Tabernacle. The Lord spoke to Aaron and said, “*And, behold, I have given the children of Levi all the tenth in Israel for an inheritance, for their service which they serve, even the service of the tabernacle of the congregation*” (Numbers 18:21).

The Israelites were a farming people, so their tithes were usually in the form of farm produce, or every tenth animal.

- 📖 At harvest time, the tithes were brought to the Tabernacle, and later, to the Temple in Jerusalem.
- 📖 If a person lived far from the “storehouse,” the law allowed him to convert his tithe into money and travel with it to pay his “tithe.”

One-tenth of the general tithe went directly to the High Priest (Numbers 18:21-28).

Who received the tithes?

The Levites were set apart from the other tribes in Israel. They were not to labor in the fields or among the herds, but were to devote their efforts to the service of God in the Tabernacle. In order to perform their duties properly, God provided a living for them in the tithe. When Israel forsook God, tithing stopped. Then the Levites had to make a living somewhere else, so they

went to the fields. *“For the Levites and the singers, that did the work, were fled every one to his field”* (Nehemiah 13:10).

What were the first fruits?

Not only did God expect a tenth of all the increase in Israel, He required the first fruits. God promised the Levites, *“All the best of the oil, and all the best of the wine, and of the wheat, the firstfruits of them which they shall offer unto the LORD, them have I given thee. And whatsoever is first ripe in the land, which they shall bring unto the LORD, shall be thine”* (Numbers 18:12-13).

God did not want the leftovers. He demands the best we have. We should give the Lord the first fruits of our labor too. We should pay tithes *before* other bills are paid. It will amaze us how God blesses our increase if we practice putting Him first.

“The first fruits belong to the Lord. That is why we should pay our tithes first. We then ensure God’s blessings on the remaining ninety percent. If we spend it all before we pay our tithes, there is nothing for God to bless.”
(T. F. Tenney)

What About Tithing Today?

Tithing was considered as a tax in some of the early churches. In the real sense, tithing expresses the character and personality of God, demonstrated by the act of giving. *“For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten son, that whosoever believeth in him, should not perish, but have everlasting life”* (John 3:16).

The writer of Hebrews tells us how it all fits together to become the special practice that God intended.

- 📖 His plan was for us to honor Him with our first fruits in the understanding that He gave us what we have and it all belongs to Him. *“The earth is the LORD’s and the fullness thereof; the world, and they that dwell therein”* (Psalm 24:1).
- 📖 In return, He planned to bless His people in a way they could not contain – true prosperity (Malachi 3:10).
- 📖 Hebrews 7:2 says: *“To whom Abraham gave a tenth part of all; first being by interpretation King of righteousness, and after that also King of Salem, which is, King of peace.”* The beauty of this verse is simple, yet easily overlooked. When we tithe to the “King of Righteousness,” He is also, after that, called the “King of Peace.” Most people clamoring for wealth are not happy, and do not have peace. When we give our tithe as God intended, we are giving them to the One who grants us peace.
- 📖 Tithing, which comes from the spirit of giving, invokes the blessing of God to ensure genuine prosperity. *“The blessing of the LORD maketh rich and addeth no sorrow”* (Proverbs 10:22).

A Commitment to Obedience

1 Samuel 15:22 is a special Scripture whose principle is followed throughout the Word of God: *“And Samuel said, Hath the LORD as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices as in obeying the voice of the LORD? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams.”*

God is still looking for people who will obey His Word. He tells us the true test of our love for Him will be proven by our obedience. *“Jesus answered and said unto him, If a man love me, he will keep my words: and my Father will love him, and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him. He that loveth me not keepeth not my sayings: and the word which ye hear is not mine, but the Father’s which sent me”* (Luke 14:23-24). This is a strong statement. No matter what we say, if we do not obey God’s sayings, we do not love him.

The unfortunate idea of millions of people is that “tithing” is a voluntary relinquishing of something valued. In the sight of God, it is the key to free His children from financial and health problems. God has *always* wanted His children to be happy, healthy, and full of the good things they need. But they persist in disobedience.

God continues to call His children to belong to His assembly of faithful givers. *“Gather my saints together unto me; those that have made a covenant with me by sacrifice...Offer unto God thanksgiving; and pay thy vows unto the most High: And call upon me in the day of trouble; I will deliver thee; and thou shalt glorify me”* (Psalm 50:5, 14-15).

When you study God’s relationship with the children of Israel, it is clear the source of their woes and suffering. Most people blame their mishaps, tribulation and upheavals on the devil. God claims responsibility in His Word for these perils and explains His actions as the direct result of *disobedience* on the part of His beloved children. *“Ye looked for much, and lo, it came to little; and when ye brought it home, I did blow upon it. Why? Saith the LORD of hosts. Because of mine house that is waste, and ye run every man unto his own house”* (Haggai 1:9). Why had God’s people lost His blessings? Why do we not have them today?

- Because of self-seeking lives, and
- Because of very little interest in God’s goals and purposes

Why Give Tithes?

It already belongs to God. The key to prosperity is given to those who believe that what they give comes from God. Everything, even our breath, is given by God. *“But who am I, and what is my people, that we should be able to offer so willingly after this sort? For all things come of thee, and of thine own have we given thee”* (1 Chronicles 29:14).

We do not want to be cursed. *“Ye are cursed with a curse: for ye have robbed me, even this whole nation”* (Malachi 3:9). Many cultures and countries of the world understand what it means to have a curse placed on an individual by demonic powers. How many of us understand about the curse we place on *ourselves* when we fail to obey God’s Word?

- 📖 Poverty is a curse in many parts of the world, but God never intended it to be so. The deceiver has blinded our eyes and made us believe we “cannot afford” to pay tithes. We cannot afford NOT to. Haggai 1:6 tells us what happens when we fall into this “I cannot afford” trap. *“Ye have sown much, and bring in little; ye eat, but ye have not enough; ye drink, but ye are not filled with drink; ye clothe you, but there is none warm; and he that earneth wages earneth wages to put it into a bag with holes.”*
- 📖 When God branded His people as robbers:
 - He was drawing their attention to the fact that all they had was from His divine treasury.
 - They had no right, even as His children, to disburse these funds without recognizing Him as the owner.
 - The Creator does not expect the creature to pay for the benefits of His grace. That is why He says *bring* and not *pay*. What you bring honors the Lord, but He does not rely on that to consolidate His position as God, for He cannot deny Himself.
 - All God wants is for His children to demonstrate His quality of giving, as He did when He gave His blood for our redemption.
 - Tithing gives us protection from the devourer, the one who would take our blessings from us by sickness, trouble, and lack of food and shelter. God has promised to make us a blessed people when we commit ourselves to obedience to His Word. *“And I will rebuke the devourer for your sakes, and he shall not destroy the fruits of your ground; neither shall your vine cast her fruit before the time in the field, saith the LORD of hosts. And all nations shall call you blessed: for ye shall be a delightsome land, saith the LORD of hosts”* (Malachi 3:11-12).

What is the Difference in Tithes & Offerings?

When the people asked God, *“Wherein have we robbed thee?”* He answered, *“In tithes and offerings.”* Are not “tithes” and “offerings” the same thing? Absolutely not! They are both an important part of God’s financial plan, but their purposes in the work of God differ. They should never be joined or confused.

- There were many types of offerings in the Old Testament – those for peace, sin, trespass (or guilt), thanksgiving, fellowship, and many more (Leviticus 1-7).
- These offerings were either fulfilled or changed by the New Covenant. In the New Testament, we find different examples of offerings, such as those taken for the needy saints in Jerusalem (Romans 15:25-27).
- Today when we give from a heart of love, our offerings support many worthy causes in the church.
- The tithe is God’s perfect plan for supporting the ministry of the church. Offerings should be given over and beyond the tithe as God prospers us. Never keep your tithe and divide it, calling a portion “offerings.” You are cheating God when you practice this.

Conclusion

The purpose of the Lord's calling is to give life – not just ordinary life, but abundant life – here on earth for His people (John 10:10). He wants us to show forth His glory. The only way is to bless His work with our substance, recognizing that it all comes from Him. Then, He can open the windows of heaven and bless us as He always planned. We also receive our eternal reward joyfully, knowing we have done and given our best while on earth.

The *Full Life Study Bible* gives us a good lesson on the “Stewardship of Money.” Let us live by these seven important principles found in the New Testament church, striving to be the best stewards we possibly can of God's blessings.

- 📖 We must remember that everything we have belongs to the Lord. What we possess is not ours, but is what God has entrusted to us. We have no rightful ownership of our possessions. *“John answered and said, a man can receive nothing, except it be given him from heaven”* (John 3:27).
- 📖 We must decide within our hearts to serve God and not money (Matthew 6:19-24). The Bible makes it plain that any greed is a form of idolatry (Colossians 3:5).
- 📖 Our giving must be:
 - To advance the kingdom of God, especially the work of the local church and the spreading of the gospel throughout the world (1 Corinthians 9:4-14; Philippians 4:15-18; 1 Timothy 5:17-18).
 - To help those who are in need (Galatians 2:10; 2 Corinthians 8:14).
 - To lay up treasures in heaven (Matthew 6:20).
 - To learn to fear the Lord (Deuteronomy 14:22-23).
- 📖 Our giving should always be in proportion to our income. In the Old Testament the tithe amounted to one-tenth. Giving less than that was disobedience to the law of God and robbing Him (Malachi 3:8-10).
- 📖 The New Testament requires our giving to be in proportion to what God has given us (1 Corinthians 16:2; 2 Corinthians 8:3, 12).
- 📖 Our giving should be voluntary and generous. This practice is taught in both the Old Testament (2 Chronicles 24:8-11) and New Testament (2 Corinthians 8:1-5, 11-12).
 - Do not hesitate to give sacrificially (2 Corinthians 8:3) for that is the spirit in which Jesus gave Himself for us.
 - The sacrifice involved is far more important to God than the monetary value of the gift (Luke 21:1-4).
- 📖 Our giving should be cheerful (2 Corinthians 9:7). Both the example of the Israelites in the Old Testament (Exodus 35:21-29; 2 Chronicles 24:10) and the Macedonian Christians in the New Testament (2 Corinthians 8:1-5) serve as models.
- 📖 God has promised to reward us according to how we have given to Him (Deuteronomy 15:4; Malachi 3:10-12; Matthew 19:21; 1 Timothy 6:18-19).

Why not follow God's plan for prosperity?

1. Give a brief explanation of the "Doctrine of Prosperity." _____

2. Write out one verse of Scripture (with proper reference) that proves the Doctrine of Prosperity is not biblical. _____

3. List the six (6) things included in true prosperity and all-around success. Give Scripture reference for each.

- 1) _____
- 2) _____
- 3) _____
- 4) _____
- 5) _____
- 6) _____

4. Give two (2) examples of tithing being practiced BEFORE it was actually defined and commanded for God's people. Support each example with Scripture reference.

- 1) _____
- 2) _____

5. What are tithes? Support your answer with Scripture. _____

6. Explain the difference between "tithes" and "firstfruits." _____

7. Given the following Scripture references, what does each passage tell us about how the practice of tithing and firstfruits fits together to form tithing in the church today?

Psalm 24:1 _____

Malachi 3:10 _____

Hebrews 7:2 _____

Proverbs 10:22 _____

8. List and explain two (2) reasons why we give tithes to God. Be sure to support your answers with Scripture.

1) _____

2) _____

9. List seven (7) important principles of giving as found in the New Testament church about striving to be the best stewards possible of God's blessings. Support each with Scripture.

1) _____

2) _____

3) _____

4) _____

5) _____

6) _____

7) _____

10. What does "obedience" have to do with tithing? _____

Additional Notes