

# HILARIOUS GENEROSITY

A Tried-and-True Plan That Still Works

*Selected Scriptures*



## LET'S BEGIN HERE

For many centuries, God's people remained obedient to a financial plan that was guaranteed to succeed. This plan became the norm for all who walked in obedience to their Lord. When the Law of Moses became the Jews' guidebook for life, this arrangement became an obligation, not an option. It was known as "tithing," which is defined as "a tenth of one's income."<sup>1</sup> In biblical days, it would include a tenth of a farmer's crops or a tenth of the wage an employed person earned. As long as God's people were obedient and sustained their commitment to this God-ordained plan, God's favor rested on them. In addition to this plan, there were "freewill offerings" given for special projects and specific needs, which were provided over and above the obligatory tithe. While the New Testament does not include direct commands that God's people tithe, it is worth noting that we are never commanded to *not* tithe. We do find, however, references to special offerings for specific projects. These New Testament passages suggest that early Christians gave offerings over and above their regular financial giving. We could even assume that tithing was so ingrained in the New Testament believers' lifestyles, nothing more needed to be written regarding it—though, under grace, giving a tithe was no longer an *obligation* but an appropriate *starting point* for all who wished to cultivate the habit of joyful generosity. Let's examine this tried-and-true plan.



## LET'S DIG DEEPER

### 1. A Required Plan: The Ancient Hebrews

In preparing to formulate a personal plan for giving, let's examine the practices of those who lived in biblical times. Was there a prescribed pattern of giving in those days? We can answer that question by first looking at the lives of ancient Israelites.

#### *Tithing Practiced Before the Mosaic Law*

Tithing (returning one-tenth of one's income to God) was the normal practice of giving in the Old Testament. It was prescribed in the Mosaic Law (Leviticus 27:30–33; Numbers 18:26), but tithing started long before God chiseled His commandment into stone at Mount Sinai. God's people practiced tithing as far back as Abraham's day.



## Quotable

*When you  
put your budget  
together, put  
God's portion first  
to make giving to  
Him a habit.*

— Charles R. Swindoll



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#### *Tithing Required Under the Mosaic Law*

Though the Hebrews were obligated by the Law to tithe, God never intended tithing to become a mere act of duty. Let's take a look at another passage in the Old Testament.

“I have given them the Israelites' tithes, which have been presented as sacred offerings to the LORD. This will be the Levites' share. That is why I said they would receive no allotment of land among the Israelites.” (Numbers 18:24)

The Hebrews, then, not only showed their obedience to God by tithing, their giving provided for the Levites.

## 2. A Similar Plan: Century-One Believers

As the New Testament opens, God's people are struggling under the heavy burden of “pharisaism” —the stringent, Spirit-choking interpretation and application of the Law. Jesus' ministry of grace and freedom came as a refreshing balm to those weary from the strain of guilt imposed by pharisaic legalism.

Though Jesus renounced the pharisaic method of tithing (among other things!)—which had become heartless, legalistic obligation (Matthew 23:23–24)—He never rescinded tithing as a legitimate method of consistent giving (5:17). In fact, money was crucial for the survival and functioning of the early church.

#### *Systematic Giving Expected* (1 Corinthians 16:1–4)

The apostle Paul didn't prescribe a percentage of gross income. Yet he did support the deliberate, consistent setting aside of funds for the work of the ministry—in this case, helping the church at Jerusalem.

#### *Spontaneous Offerings Encouraged* (Acts 2:43–45; 4:36–37)

Just as Israel supplemented their tithes with one-time gifts for special projects, so the early church supplemented their systematic giving with special offerings.

## 3. A Joyful, Generous Plan: Christians Today

Giving is a very personal matter—it comes down to our individual relationships with the Lord. That's why Paul exhorted the believers at Corinth (and all of us too!) to “each decide in your heart how much to give” (2 Corinthians 9:7). It comes down to a matter of the heart . . . it comes down to how we live out our confidence in the Lord.



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## LET'S LIVE IT

From these principles of giving found both in the Old Testament and in the New Testament, some overarching applications seem fitting for all of us.

First, *giving a tenth of our income is a very good place to start*. Starting with a tenth of our annual income, then dividing it by 52 weeks or 12 months provides an excellent starting point in developing a consistent giving plan that not only puts us in line with biblical principles but demonstrates our commitment to be obedient to the Lord. Also, giving provides a powerful antidote for the toxins of greed and materialism. And it grows our faith as we trust the Lord to provide for us.

Second, *giving regularly and consistently is an excellent habit to continue*. Committing to the habit of giving helps to train us to release our resources—time, giftedness, and money—back to the Lord. Letting go of things, especially things we no longer need or that could be of much greater use to others, goes a long way in developing a sense of contentment and gratitude for what we've been given. And other people will be encouraged and helped as we do.

Finally, *giving regularly and consistently puts us on a path toward living a generous life*. God owns everything. He owns our time, our abilities, our homes, and our investments. He owns our retirement accounts, our children and grandchildren, and ultimately our futures. So why not offer back to Him, both willingly and generously, everything we have? It really is the only worthy response for those of us who have received such grace and generosity from Him.

**What could you do to begin to put a regular and consistent giving pattern in place?**

**If God is anything, He is wonderfully consistent. Across the span of thousands of years, bridging two testaments, He has asked His people to live in submission to Him and to joyfully and generously give to Him out of the abundance of what He has given us. And that giving, God tells us, is not only a responsibility; it is an act of worship. Therefore, we as God's people are to have no more sour attitudes! No, none of that. We must reach into our treasure boxes and pull out our gifts to the Lord . . . because it is the very least we can do in return for God's gift to us in Christ.**

### ENDNOTE

1. Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary, 11th ed. (Springfield, Mass.: Merriam-Webster, 2007), "tithe."



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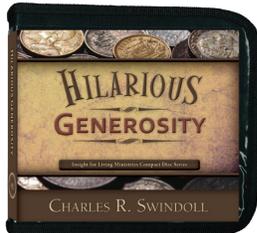
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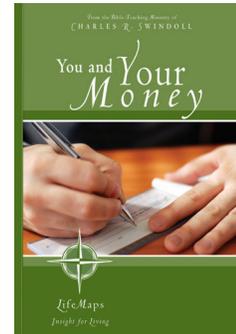
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