

Sunday May 8, 2022  
 Lesson 10: Faithful Stewardship  
 Scripture: Deuteronomy 14: 22-29

**Context:**

We continue into our section unit focusing on the marks of discipleship and the spiritual disciplines to help us draw closer to God. These marks of discipleship and spiritual disciplines come from scripture, as we are given what we need to draw closer to God just as those before us have done. Today's focus is on generosity and how tithing brings us closer back to God.

The lesson comes from the book of Deuteronomy, a book which covers excerpts of the Israelites leaving Egypt to go and enter Canaan. Deuteronomy is the fifth and final book of the Torah/Pentateuch; its name (with Greek origins), means "second law" and succinctly summarizes its contents.<sup>1</sup> It is set when the Israelites are in the last stage of their journey and mostly contains a lengthy speech given by Moses before he dies. In literary genre, it is a farewell address, in which a notable leader speaks to their constituents before their death.<sup>2</sup> Moses wants the Israelites to both hear his affirmation of them, and yet also present the challenges and expectations they are to have in front of them moving forward.

The farewell address includes Moses naming what God has done and then pleads with the Israelites to remember their heritage and the covenant going forward. The style of Deuteronomy is best described as rhetorical and is intended to persuade and does so by repeated use of the same phrases and concepts.<sup>3</sup> Moses establishes how they have been chosen by God and thus there are commandments and ordinances they have been chosen to observe and follow.

Like the lesson last week, several of the commandments given are what would fall into the holiness code. The holiness code established means by which the people grow closer to God and are expected to fulfill the requests God has given to them. Today's lesson focuses on tithing, or the giving of the first fruits to give back to God.

Per the scripture, the people are expected to give a tenth of their fields back to God. This can of course be converted to gold, silver, or whatever currency they have available. The tithing goes on to support various important things to the Israelite community including supporting the widows, the orphans, and those in need. The tithe also allows for the Levites, the priestly tribe, to perform their office as they serve God in the Temple and in the local cities and towns at the various holy places. As everyone brings of their set aside tenth, they honor and glorify God. God's chosen people are expected to tithe and give back to God what already belongs to God.

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<sup>1</sup> Coogan, Michael D., ed., *The Old Testament: A Historical and Literary Introduction to the Hebrew Scriptures*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 177.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., 178.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

### **Application**

The image of the first fruits in this text has always led me to think of the season of Thanksgiving. One of my favorite images used to celebrate this time is a cornucopia, a horn where fruit and other foods are pouring out of this peculiar container. The image and the spilling out of the goods of course recognizes abundance and celebration. It is a time of feasting and of giving thanks to God for the food which supplies our tables.

In the case of first fruits and the cornucopia, we celebrate how God has given us so much, we should be more than excited and honored to give back to God the first fruits of our labor. The cornucopia of thanksgiving should overflow, and we should celebrate to give back to God a partial of the blessing God has given unto us. It is a privilege to be able to say thank you God and participate in this individual and corporate act of giving.

Tithing follows very much this format except with our financial gifts as representing the fruit in the cornucopia. When we tithe, ten percent as scripture gives us, we can say thank you to God for what God is doing in our lives and then furthermore to see how God has equipped us to take care of others in our communities and in our churches.

I think one of the healthiest indicators of a church's spiritual development is how they feel when it comes to talking about money and tithing. Often, the churches and members who show the most growth and development in their walk with Jesus will see conversations such as tithing and stewardship campaigns as part of one's walk with the Lord. They understand how everything God has given us already belongs to God and it is a privilege to be able to say thank you back to God.

What is interesting with this scriptural account of tithing and giving ten percent is we notice God does not give excuses for why people should not give or even to have strings attached when gifts are given. God expects the people to give of their first fruits and not the leftover fruit, or if there is enough. God invites the people to respond to this opportunity to give back to God and to let those offerings do the kingdom work which needs to be done.

For many American Christians, I think tithing can be a difficult topic to discuss if more so than any other because of the way our society works. We live in a world where self-sufficiency and the image of the self-made person permeate our self-understanding. We believe because we made this money due to our hard work, the money belongs to us first and foremost. We may even think as we give, it should give us power and the ability to determine how the money is spent or where it should go. While there certainly is something to be said for being represented in making decisions as we are invested, is it truly giving to God our first fruits if we have a list of strings attached?

Another reason why tithing might be difficult is because tithing might change our lives. If we give upwards of ten percent, it could cost us the extra trip we want to take or how extravagant our gifts to others will be. We might even have to do a better job of budgeting, so we must make ends meet. There might even be the call to reevaluate what we prioritize and ask where Jesus really is amid our daily living.

Yet I have never in my ministry, or my life, heard of someone bemoaning when they started to tithe ten percent of their income. If anything, I have seen them grow to trust the Lord and become involved in their church. They realize God has given them so much and now they have been given the opportunity to say thank you in their own way

and be blessed because of it. Giving the first fruits becomes a way to grow closer to God and to also bless others in the kingdom of God.

Does your church discuss tithing? How have you felt tithing transform your life and walk with our Lord? Why do you think God asks of us to give our first fruits? What can you say when people complain or whine about pastors who discuss tithing? How is tithing different than giving of your time?

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