

INTRODUCTION

No, I didn't lisp. I realize "The Eye of the Tiger" was a #1 song Survivor recorded in 1983 for Rocky III. And I know more recently Katie Perry sang that line in her hit song, "Roar." I'm sincere when I ask the question, "Do you have the eye of the Tither?" We're going to see that someone who tithes has a different way of looking at the world than someone who doesn't.

This past week the Powerball Lottery got into the hundreds of millions of dollars. There were three winning tickets. One of the winners who have come forward is a young woman from North Carolina named Marie Holmes. She has four children and one of them has cerebral palsy. She won \$127 million before taxes. When she was asked what was the first thing she was going to do with the money she said, "First I'm going to pay my tithe. I wouldn't have anything without God." In a related story, Marie's pastor had a heart attack when he heard she was going to tithe to his church.

During this series, we've been confessing five keys to unlock God's Treasure Truth. Let's read them together before we read the passage from Malachi.

1. God owns everything; He allows me to manage some of His wealth.
2. I can't take treasure with me to heaven; but I can send it on ahead.
3. My heart abides where I invest God's money.
4. I honor God when I give back to Him the first and the best.
5. The antidote for materialism is the joyful cycle of giving to receive to give even more.

Malachi 3:6-12. "I the Lord do not change. So you, O descendants of Jacob, are not destroyed. Ever since the time of your forefathers you have turned away from my decrees and have not kept them. Return to me, and I will return to you," says the Lord Almighty. "But you ask, 'How are we to return?' "Will a man rob God? Yet you rob me." "But you ask, 'How do we rob you?' In tithes and offerings. You are under a curse—the whole nation of you—because you are robbing me. Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse, that there may be food in my house. Test me in this," says the Lord Almighty, "and see if I will not throw open the floodgates of heaven and pour out so much blessing that you will not have room enough for it. I will prevent pests from devouring your crops, and the vines in your fields will not cast their fruit," says the Lord Almighty. "Then all the nations will call you blessed, for yours will be a delightful land," says the Lord Almighty.

In the Old Testament, the Israelites were required to give 10% of all their possessions to God's Work. The word "tithe" isn't a religious word, it's a math word. The word "quarter" means 25%. The word "half" means 50%. The word "tithe" simply means 10%. God wants every child of His to tithe. Let me share with you three truths you need to know to get the eye of the tither.

I. YOUR VISION DETERMINES YOUR VALUES

Our key passage for this series is found in Matthew 6 where Jesus said, "Don't store up treasures on earth." Earthly treasures are temporary and perishable. Fancy clothes get eaten up by moths; precious metal can rust away; and thieves will rip off anything they think is valuable. In the same

passage Jesus has something important to say about the eye of the tither. Eugene Peterson's Message paraphrase puts it this way: Jesus said, "Stockpile treasure in heaven, where it's safe from moth and rust and burglars. The place where your treasure is, is the place you will most want to be, and end up being. Your eyes are windows into your body. If you open your eyes wide in wonder and belief, your body fills up with light. If you live squinty-eyed in greed and distrust, your body is a dank cellar." (Matthew 6:20-22 MSG)

Jesus said there are two places where we can direct our vision. We can open our eyes in wonder to what God is doing and we'll be people of light. Or we can squint at all the stuff around us and try to hoard as much as we can. When it comes to managing the money God has entrusted to you, where is your focus?

A. An eye for this world's system: "Money is the key to happiness and security."

That's what most people are looking for: happiness and security. And they think money can buy it. Money can buy medicine, but not health. Money can buy a house, but not a home. Money can buy entertainment, but not happiness. Money can buy food, but not an appetite. Money can buy a bed, but not sleep. Money can buy a crucifix, but not a Savior. Money can buy the good life, but not eternal life.

B. An eye for God's Kingdom: "My hope is not in riches, but in the One who richly provides all things."

Jesus said you couldn't serve both God and Money. You will either focus on Money and what it can do for you, or you will focus on God and what He does for you. It's all a matter of your vision.

If you have the eye of the tither, you are constantly looking for ways God is at work in this world, and you join Him in what He's already doing.

John Wesley made a lot of money as a famous preacher and from the royalty of books. But he gave away most of his fortune. He once wrote: "Money never stays with me. It would me if it did. I throw it out of my hands as soon as possible, lest it should find a place in my heart."

John Wesley had the eye of the tither. Do you?

II. THE TITHE IS GOD'S METHOD TO PUT YOU ON THE PATH TO A LIFE OF GENEROSITY

Giving God a tithe didn't start with the Law of Moses, Abraham tithed to Melchizadek, who is a type of Jesus, centuries before the Law was given. Jacob also tithed. Then, Moses included it as a law for the Israelites. We don't live under the law, because we are New Testament believers. Jesus only mentioned tithing once, and He didn't dismiss it. In Matthew 23 He was speaking of the Pharisees and how they were careful to tithe even the herbs in their gardens, but they missed more important things like justice, mercy, and faithfulness. Then Jesus said, they SHOULD have tithed, but also paid attention to more important spiritual truth.

So let me trace the Biblical history of tithing for you in five words. Abraham commenced tithing. Jacob continued tithing. Moses commanded tithing. Malachi confirmed tithing. And Jesus commended tithing. Who am I to cancel it? We may think tithing is a place where only really mature Christians reach, but Jesus said it is a minor part of our walk with God but it is a part of our faithfulness. He said unless our righteousness exceeded the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees we would never see heaven.

Randy Alcorn wrote: "Tithing isn't the ceiling of giving; it's the floor. It's not the finish line of giving; it's just the starting blocks. Tithes can be the training wheels that launch us into the mind-set and habits of grace giving." (*The Treasure Principle*, p. 64)

But giving isn't about obeying a law. It's about honoring God. Solomon wrote some very wise words in the third chapter of Proverbs. "Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make your paths straight." (Proverbs 3:5-6) We're all familiar with that, but you have to keep reading to find out HOW you show your trust in the Lord. "Honor the Lord with your wealth, with the firstfruits of all your crops; then your barns will be filled to overflowing, and your vats will brim over with new wine." (Proverbs 3:9-10)

At this time, the Israelites' economy was based on agriculture. So a farmer would look through his flock. If he had 200 sheep, he would select the best twenty and give them to the priests at God's Temple. If he took the lame and runts, it would have dishonored God. He gave the first and the best. If a man owned a vineyard, he would pick the 10% of his very juiciest grapes first and deliver them to the Temple. If he showed up with baskets of small, sour, hard grapes, he would have dishonored God.

One of the biggest mistakes we make as managers is we use all of God's money to pay our monthly bills and then we look to see what is leftover. If there is anything left over, we might give God some of it. God deserves more than your leftovers. If you have the eye of a tither, you honor God by giving Him the first and the best that you have.

In Malachi, God charges the Israelites with robbing Him because they were shorting Him on tithes and offerings. A tithe was the first tenth, and offerings were gifts given over and above the tithe. Have you been robbing God?

Randy Alcorn wrote: "If the Israelites could rob God with insufficient tithes and offerings, can't we do the same today? Some say, 'We'll take this gradually. We're starting at 5%.' But that's like saying, 'I used to rob six convenience stores a year. This year, by His grace, I'm going to rob only three.' The point is not to rob God less—it's not to rob God at all!" (*The Treasure Principle*, p. 65)

If there was a \$6 million robbery in Tyler this next week, do you think it would make the front page of Tyler Paper? Do you think it would be the lead story on all the local news stations? It might even make CNN or Fox News. \$6 million is a lot to steal.

So, let's do the math. We have about 7,500 family units in GABC. But almost half of those never

attend or give a penny. Last year we had about 3,900 families who did give something and I mentioned a couple of weeks ago that the median gift is about \$20 a week. So let's just figure what would happen if these 3,900 giving families tithed their income based upon the median family income in Texas (\$54,027). Now I suspect most of our families make far above the median, but we'll use that. The result would be over \$21 million. Our 2015 budget is \$15 million. Based on this calculation, we should give at \$21 million, so there may be about \$6 million our folks are holding back from God. Of course, we don't have any evidence to convict anyone—but I'm praying that the Holy Spirit will convict anyone who may be involved.

I'm not telling you this to make anyone feel guilty. I don't want you to miss out on the absolute blessings that God wants to pour into your life when you have the eye of a tither. We aren't under law; we're under grace. I don't give a tithe and offerings to God because He commands it. I do it because I love Him. There's also a law in Texas that says parents have to care for their children—feed, clothe, and protect them. But you don't do that because the law says you must. You do it because you love them.

III. THE ONLY PLACE IN THE BIBLE GOD INVITES YOU TO TEST HIM IS IN THE AREA OF YOUR MANAGEMENT OF HIS MONEY

There are many places in the Bible where we read God tests us. But can we test God? When Satan was tempting Jesus in the wilderness, Jesus quoted Deuteronomy 6:16 and said, "You shall not put the Lord your God to the test." But there is one and ONLY one place in the Bible where God says, "Okay, your turn. Now, I'll let you test me in one area." The Bible says, "'Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse, that there may be food in my house. Test me in this,' says the Lord Almighty, 'and see if I will not throw open the floodgates of heaven and pour out so much blessing that you will not have room enough for it. I will prevent pests from devouring your crops, and the vines in your fields will not cast their fruit,' says the Lord Almighty." (Malachi 3:10-11)

Again, it's not just about tithing. That's the starting place for a life of generosity. Let me share four Biblical principles of generosity with you.

A. Generosity involves a relative proportion

"...bring the full tithe." The wrong way to give to God is for a pastor to say, "Okay, this Sunday, everyone needs to make a \$1,000 offering to God." Why? For some people, that's a drop in the bucket. You'll blow more than that going to a Cowboys game. For others, \$1,000 might represent most of your fixed income. So the idea of giving a percentage reflects the wisdom of God. This is also taught in the New Testament. Paul wrote, "Now about the collection for the Lord's people...On the first day of every week, each one of you should set aside a sum of money in keeping with his income." (1 Corinthians 16:1-2). If God has blessed you with more income, then you should be giving more to his work. Jesus taught that if you are faithful with a little, He'll trust you with more and more to manage.

B. Generosity is directed to a specific place

"...into the storehouse." God's storehouse is where God's ministry takes place. In the Old Testament context, it was the Temple. You say, "Pastor, there is no Temple today." Well, friend, you're wrong. There is a temple today. The Bible says of the Church, "You [plural] are the temple of God" (1 Corinthians 3:16). In the New Testament age, the local church is God's storehouse. God expects you to bring His tithe to His storehouse—the church. God's house isn't a building; it's the church, the Body of Christ. In Ephesians 2:19 the Bible says we are members of God's household.

My family has always practiced storehouse tithing. That is, we give at least 10% of our income to the budget of Green Acres Baptist Church. I have it set up to pay automatically in my online banking. Then over and above that tithe, we are able to give to the building fund, or missions, or to other wonderful ministries in East Texas. There's nothing wrong with designating your offerings, but I believe the place for your tithe is to the basic budget ministry of your local church.

C. Generosity funds a spiritual purpose

"...that there may be food in my house." In the Old Testament, the tithe went to provide food and living expenses of the priests who worked full time in the ministry. They carried out God's Work in God's House. The church exists for no other reason than to share God's love with people here and around the world. So, when you give to the GABC budget, you're paying salaries, paying for utilities, and you're funding over 300 different ministries. And for every \$1 you give to the budget, we invest 30 cents of that in Missions, taking the Gospel to people around the world.

You may be saying, "Pastor, I hear what you're saying. But I just can't afford to tithe. I can barely pay all my bills as it is!" I understand. The key to being a good money manager for God is to adopt a financial plan that will enable you to honor God, and to get out of debt.

For years, my wife and I have practiced something called the 10-10-80 financial plan. It's really simple. It means the first 10% of your income is given joyfully to God. The next 10% is saved faithfully for your future. The Bible warns against hoarding, but it commends wise saving. If you will start disciplining yourself to save, you'll find you can pay cash for those items you would otherwise have to borrow money to purchase. Then, you must arrange your lifestyle so the remaining 80% can be used frugally for your living expenses. If you are in financial trouble it's because you are trying to support a lifestyle beyond 80% of your income. With discipline, you can manage to live on 80% of your income. It may mean you have to sell your house and buy a smaller one, or get rid of three car payments, or cancel the most expensive cable package. But it will be worth it to be able to honor God and to learn what it means to get out of debt and stay out of debt. If God is first in your life, then you'll want to honor Him with your firstfruits.

D. Generosity results in a supernatural provision

"...see if I will not throw open the floodgates of heaven and pour out so much blessing that you will not have room enough for it." God can only prove to you that He will fulfill this promise if you put Him to the test. In order for that to happen, you've got to start tithing. For over 30 years,

I've issued a tithing challenge. Here it is. If you aren't yet tithing, start now and try tithing for six months. Make sure the very first payment you make each month is to God's work, give Him the first and the best and give it joyfully. If at the end of August your life isn't more BLESSED than you are now, come see me and tell me. And if it's true, then I'll close this book and retire from preaching. Because if Malachi 3:10 isn't true, how can we be sure that John 3:16 is true? I'm not worried because I've issued that challenge for over 25 years and I've never had a single person report that God lied.

Instead I get dozens of emails like this one from Janice: "On December 30, I ordered my end-of-year medications and the amount was higher than usual, but I continued with the order. They arrived on December 31. I went to GABC online to donate my final tithe for the year. I was hesitant for a moment wondering how I could handle this tithe with the larger amount going to the pharmacy. I resolved that I would trust God, and I could manage my deficit until the next payday.

Today, New Year's Day, I opened the medication order from December 30. I could not believe my eyes. The receipt showed that the amount for the medication was NOT the larger amount that I had expected. The medication total was LESS the exact amount of my church offering! I had an enormous sense of gratitude and thankfulness to God. What a wonderful way to begin a new year by having my Heavenly Father acknowledge my faith with His provision. It's going to be an awesome year!"

CONCLUSION

John Reynolds gave a hundred dollars when the offering plate was passed on that Sunday morning. "I'll see you in heaven," he whispered softly. Some people seated nearby overheard John and thought, "John Reynolds is getting old." Later when they told their friends what old John had said they laughed and said, "He'll find that money in a lot of places, but he'll never see it in heaven."

And John Reynolds soon died and went to heaven all aright. No one doubted he would. Those attending his funeral knew he was united with his Master—but certainly not with his money.

Of his \$100 gift, \$70 never even got out of John's town. Some of it ended up in the power company's account; the church used a lot of electricity. A service station owner pocketed a little of the money after the pastor bought gas for his car.

That \$30 which left John's hometown went to some strange places. Part of it went to Nashville, to buy workbooks for Bible study classes. A small amount went to a nearby college Baptists owned. And some of John's offering went to theological seminaries where they paid seminary professors' salaries. Several dollars were soon in a bank being exchanged for peculiar looking foreign currency. Missionaries spent this money to carry the Good News to people who had never heard about Jesus.

It would be difficult to say exactly where John's entire offering went. Not that detailed records weren't kept, it just scattered to so many different places. But one thing was certain to John's

friends—none of it got to heaven. But they were wrong. Time is irrelevant in heaven, so within a very short time, John enjoyed every penny of his investment in God's work.

The first returns came in dramatic fashion. One day in heaven a man warmly embraced John and said, "Thank you! Thank you! Thank you!" It seems this man had been a pretty lonely fellow down on earth. He didn't have much to do with other people. That was the before he saw the church lights one Wednesday evening at John's church. "I was awful lonely and tired of life," he told John. "I just went inside the church to get out of the dark for a while. Before I left the darkness had gone out of me."

"Hmmm" John thought. "I guess I got more out of paying the light bill than the power company did." John was greeted next by the man who used to run the local service station where John's pastor bought gas. He told John that the pastor was real friendly and always talked to him when he paid for his gas. "The preacher invited me to church, and I heard the Gospel and gave my life to Jesus."

Soon it was a steady stream: Men, women, boys, girls won to the Lord by church planters just out of seminary. People from every tribe and nation who spoke of being led to Christ by missionaries. All of them had a big "Thank you" for John.

John is still enjoying his return on his investment in the Kingdom of heaven. Yet there are some people who still think John wasted his money by putting it in the offering plate, especially when all it went for was to pay electricity bills, salaries, and other such ordinary things! But John was storing up treasure in heaven. John Reynolds had the eye of the tither. Do you?

OUTLINE

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2. *I can't take treasure with me to heaven; but I can send it on ahead.*
3. *My heart abides where I invest God's money.*
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"'Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse, that there may be food in my house. Test me in this,' says the Lord Almighty, 'and see if I will not throw open the floodgates of heaven and pour out so much blessing that you will not have room enough for it. I will prevent pests from devouring your crops, and the vines in your fields will not cast their fruit,' says the Lord Almighty." *Malachi 3:10-11*

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"Now about the collection for the Lord's people...On the first day of every week, each one of you should set aside a sum of money in keeping with his income." *1 Corinthians 16:1-2*

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"...into the storehouse."

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"...that there may be food in my house"

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"...see if I will not throw open the floodgates of heaven and pour out so much blessing that you will not have room enough for it."

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For the Joy...
Pastor David Dykes



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