

## 240.2: Tithing (D&C Gospel Doctrine Lesson 17)

### The Law of Tithing and the Law of the Fast

Hook	This very well may end up being the most illuminating, paradigm shifting episode of Engaging Gospel Doctrine yet. Listen with an open mind and heart, and I think gospel principles will fall into place in a way you may have never considered.
Goal	Class members should better appreciate the blessings of sacrifice and giving money to build up the kingdom of God, better understand the definition and purpose of tithing, and especially the relationship between tithing and giving to care for those in need.
Overview	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Tithing in the Church</li><li>• Tithing in Church history (discussion of readings)</li><li>• Tithing in the Bible</li><li>• Fasting</li><li>• Fast offerings</li><li>• Responsible, effective giving</li></ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>•</li></ul>

#### • **Tithing in the Church**

"Pay your tithes and offerings. Do what you can and more. And the Church/kingdom/God will always, reliably make up the difference and care for you"

"Tithing", Encyclopedia of Mormonism

A 1970 letter from the First Presidency stated that notwithstanding the fact that members should pay one-tenth of their income, "every member of the Church is entitled to make his own decision as to what he thinks he owes the Lord and to make payment accordingly" (Mar. 19, 1970; cf. Doxey, pp. 16, 18). Hence, the exact amount paid is not as important as that each member feels that he or she has paid an honest tenth. (point toward discussion)

President Gordon B. Hinckley spoke of the deep respect the Council on the Disposition of the Tithes has for tithing funds:

"I keep on the credenza behind my desk a widow's mite that was given me in Jerusalem many years ago as a reminder, a constant reminder, of the sanctity of the funds with which we have to deal. They come from the widow; they are her offering as well as the tithe of the rich man, and they are to be used with care and discretion for the purposes of the Lord. We treat them carefully and safeguard them and try in every way that we can to see that they are used as we feel the Lord

would have them used for the upbuilding of His work and the betterment of people” (in Conference Report, Oct. 1996, 69; or Ensign, Nov. 1996, 50).

What are tithing funds used for?

Elder Dallin H. Oaks explained: “[Tithing] funds are spent to build and maintain temples and houses of worship, to conduct our worldwide [missionary work](#), to translate and publish scriptures, to provide resources to redeem the dead, to fund religious education, and to support other Church purposes selected by the designated servants of the Lord” (in Conference Report, Apr. 1994, 46; or Ensign, May 1994, 35).

Jana Riess:

I do know one thing: the world would change tremendously if more Christians would tithe. This month I revisit Christian Smith’s book *Passing the Plate: Why American Christians Don’t Give Away More Money*. Its research is a big fat indictment of Americans who, by just about every standard of measurement, don’t give much money to charity. It surprises me because I had always heard that Americans were some of the most generous people in the world. If that’s true, then the world is in serious trouble. The book makes some surprising conclusions about generosity. You’d think that people who earn higher salaries would give a higher percentage of their income than those lower on the totem pole. After all, these folks have a sizeable amount left over after paying for the basics of food, shelter, and clothing, right? Wrong. Those who earn more than \$70,000 a year contribute, on average, only 1.2 percent of their income, which is half of the percentage contributed by those who earn under \$10,000 a year. Giving goes down even further in those who earn more than \$100,000 a year. It’s kind of crazy, actually: the wealthier we become, the more we forget the poor. What’s especially depressing about these statistics is that because of something that sociologists call the “social desirability bias”—our innate desire to look better in the eyes of others than we actually are—many if not most of us actually overestimate how much we donate to charity. “It turns out that people have a tendency to say they give more money than it appears they actually do,” the authors conclude. To me, the most exciting part of Christian Smith’s book is the opening chapter, which dares to dream about what could be accomplished if American Christians decided to tithe 10 percent of their after-tax income to the charities of their choice. There would be an estimated \$46 billion—that’s billion with a B!—every year for philanthropy. The authors parse that out into dream piles: \$4.6 billion could clothe, house, and feed every single refugee in Africa, Asia, and the Middle East; \$350 million could provide scholarships for seminarians in the developing world. American Christians’ tithing could provide free eye exams and glasses to every child in poverty! We could make sure every person on the planet has access to clean water! I know the authors are just playing Fantasy Philanthropy here, but it’s exciting to start the book with a vision of the way things could be if Christians were more kingdom oriented, rather than the shabby state of things as they are.

Riess, Jana (2011-09-24). Flunking Sainthood: A Year of Breaking the Sabbath, Forgetting to Pray and Still Loving My Neighbor (Kindle Locations 2729-2750). Paraclete Press. Kindle Edition.

## **Go over reading**

**History of Tithing** (Quinn piece)

**Tithing in the Bible** (from ABD)

**Fasting in the Bible**

**Take home message and giving responsibly**

(BBC, Choosing between Charities)

Choosing between charities

There are various ways in which we can distinguish between charities on the basis of the cause they're promoting.

One ethicist has suggested that the following principles might guide our giving. The list is based on the fundamental principle that:

- The most morally important action is to save life  
If you agree with that then the rest follows quite naturally:
- Giving to 'luxuries' (charities that support cultural activities like the arts) is less morally valuable than giving to charities that save life or provide other necessities for life
- It's morally better to give to charities that help those in the greatest need
- When choosing between such charities we should prefer those that offer the greatest certainty that our gifts will get to the people in the greatest need, and will really help those people
- It is not morally better to focus on the needs of those in our own group or country over others - the only relevant criteria are the relative need of recipients and the efficiency of delivery

This list could be adapted for other starting goals: for example, to create a world where a certain bad thing (**war**, rape, etc) does not happen, one can focus one's efforts on the methods most likely to have the greatest impact.

**Drawback**

The list sets out criteria by which we can rank and evaluate charities, but does not help with that process.

This may have the indirect effect of challenging a common preference to give money rather than time, by instead making us consider and research our giving.

## **Resources**

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<http://www.scientificamerican.com/article.cfm?id=how-intermittent-fasting-might-help-you-live-longer-healthier-life>

### **Recommended Resources**

#### **Tithing**

<http://eom.byu.edu/index.php/Tithing>

<http://lds-church-history.blogspot.com/2010/12/lds-history-summary.html>

<http://www.patheos.com/blogs/kiwimormon/2012/07/new-zealand-mormon-church-finances-a-case-study/>

#### **Fasting**

#### **Charity**

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/ethics/charity/choosing.shtml>

kiva.org

<http://www.gatesfoundation.org/>

<http://www.charitynavigator.org/>

Interesting insight into early Christian practice: Didache 13.