

Tithing. We have all heard the word and we know it means giving ten percent. While all of creation belongs to and we owe our entire existence to God, in an attempt to clarify what is expected, the Old Testament directs each of us is to tithe one tenth of our harvest, our income, to the work and kingdom of God. Nice idea, but an authentic read of scripture requires a bit more consideration.

There are over 100 scripture passages about tithing. Churches have a history of quoting from a few of these passages every year as part of their annual pledge campaign, often including a reference to Luke 21, which begins with Jesus calling out the wealthy who tithe from their abundance while lifting up the widow who gives her entire livelihood to the temple.

At Chandler UMC we are committed to hearing the entire story in context.

- From the beginning of his ministry Jesus promotes consistency, that saying one is “of God” is demonstrated with how one acts toward others, how one cares for the vulnerable, how one acquires money, and what one does with money. In Luke 12, Jesus announces that what we do with our treasure reveals where our heart is. The context for this discussion is consistency between what we say as people of God and what we do.
- Immediately prior to Jesus’ comment at the Temple treasury, he condemns religious leaders who feign piety, accept admiration, and steal from poor people under the pretext that they should give money to get a blessing. Jesus is going after religious leaders who reduce widows to poverty by encouraging them to make pious donations beyond their means. Rather than commending the widow's generosity, Jesus is condemning both the social system that rendered her poor and the deceptive religious doublespeak that conditioned her to believe if she gives more she will get a blessing from God.
- We should be cautious about hearing Jesus' statement as an endorsement of the widow's action because it is not followed by his usual comment, *“Go, and do likewise.”*

- As Jesus makes his way out of the temple area some of his disciples marvel aloud at how the temple was adorned with beautiful stones and statues dedicated to God. Jesus said to them, "These beautiful buildings will one day be knocked down."

This is how this passage directs our thinking about faithful giving.

- We are not to give or encourage others to give beyond our means.
- We are not to give or encourage others to give out of a sense of guilt.
- Giving is not making a deal with God to magically get something we want.
- Buildings are only buildings. We are not to give toward building a personal monument.
- We are to order our lives in a way that puts God first in all things.
- Intentional giving creates the conditions for ministry to happen through our church, buildings, staff and programs.
- We could also notice that in response to people of means giving from their abundance that Jesus also did not say, "Go and do likewise" which indicates that our giving does need to be more than from our abundance while not to the point it impoverishes.
- Finally the church is to make a connection between abundance and poverty, by directing our mission giving through social services while also focusing our advocacy toward a social system that alleviates suffering.

Our worship and learning, building and staff, exist for the purpose of making God's way consistent and visible at Chandler UMC, and nothing else. This is our thinking and rationale and faith behind the invitation to be intentional about giving generously and even sacrificially.

We hope you see yourself as part of vital, life changing ministry at Chandler UMC.

