

When is it a Tithe?

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Don's official title at our church was usher, but his mission was to never hand out a bulletin, never pass the plate, and never ring the bell. Not that he was bad at those things. He just preferred that someone else do them. Don rejoiced to watch eight-year-old Garrett greet people with bulletins, when his granddaughter collected the offering, and when ten-year-old Liliana yanked on the rope to ring the church bell. He taught each child old enough to show even an ounce of interest how to go about the tasks with care, faithfulness, and joy.

Don wasn't merely keeping the children busy. He was stewarding their hearts. **The children were not observers; the day they belonged was now.** Don was catechizing and ushering in the next generation of those willing to faithfully serve.

This very thing is the call given in Deuteronomy 11. God calls his people into a covenant of sacrificial love and obedience. He revealed to Israel who he is and delivered his people from slavery, showing he is a God who honors his promises and does not forget his people. In return, we are to love the Lord our God with all our heart, all our soul, and all

our might. Central in this passage is the message to teach our children to do likewise. **We love the God we serve, we rejoice, and we invite the youngest and smallest among us to love, learn, serve, and rejoice.**

It's tempting to cast stewardship as an adult topic, but it is part of worship — part of remembering with all our senses who God is and what he has done. Children who help set the altar for Holy Communion begin to understand that they, too, are gathered to God's table. Children whose voices join the choir not just sometimes but throughout the year begin to understand that they, too, are among the saints who gather around the throne of Christ. Children who welcome friends and strangers at the doors of the church begin to understand the ways baptism equips them for the Great Commission. Children who have the opportunity to give an offering at Sunday School begin to feel God's own generosity and understand what it means to return that to him. Those moments of liturgy and catechesis shape who we are and how we understand God's generosity.

By Don's own admission, it took

fifty years for him to realize the joy of giving to the church. He did give money — more than ten percent! — but it wasn't a tithe: "It might as well have been a membership fee. It hadn't hit my heart yet." Don's tithing began when he began to recognize the lessons he wrote upon the hearts of the next generation. He eventually realized that the same God who freed Israel from slavery and each of us from the bondage of sin and death was freeing him to imperfectly and enthusiastically give everything he had. **His giving became not about a percentage, but about the Lord our God, who brought us into the promised land of grace and forgiveness and invites us to receive and give the joy of participating in the justice, mercy, and faithfulness of our Lord. When that hits your heart, no matter how old you are, that's when you begin to tithe.**

We teach each other to tithe at home and away, in the morning and in the evening, in the rituals and in the life of the church. In this, our God writes his promise upon our hearts and the hearts of our children — a promise that his generosity endures from age to age.

