

Why We Give (Apostle's Notes)

Understanding the dynamics of Harvest

The biblical concept of harvest encompasses both the literal gathering of crops and a wealth of metaphorical meanings, ranging from divine provision and human response to judgment and spiritual harvest. Here's a more accessible breakdown of these themes, making it digestible for those learning about the concept of harvest in the Bible:

Literal Harvest: A Time of Gathering and Joy

- **Biblical Context:** The harvest season was marked by the gathering of grain and fruit, starting with an offering of the first ripe ears of corn to the Lord on the 16th day of Abib (around April), coinciding with the feast of Passover and concluding with Pentecost, spanning seven weeks (Leviticus 23:9-14; Exodus 23:16).
- **Significance:** This period was a time of joy and celebration, reflecting God's provision for His people (Psalms 126:1-6; Isaiah 9:3). The practice of offering the first fruits to God acknowledged His role in providing the harvest and symbolized the people's gratitude.

Human Response and God's Sovereignty

- **Participation:** In an agrarian society, planting and reaping were acts of faith and reliance on God's control over the harvest time (Jeremiah 5:24; Amos 4:7). Offerings from the harvest (Exodus 22:29) and festivals like the Festival of Harvest or Firstfruits and the Festival of Booths were significant times for thanking God for His blessings.
- **Rest and Reflection:** Even during the busy harvest season, the Sabbath rest was observed, keeping the focus on God's provision and sovereignty (Exodus 34:21-22).

Provision for the Community

- **Sharing with the Poor:** The laws about leaving some of the harvest for the poor (Leviticus 19:9; 23:22) exemplify the Bible's concern for social justice and community care, encouraging generosity and consideration for the less fortunate.

Acknowledgment of the Lord's Role

- **Recognition and Consequences:** Failure to recognize God's part in the harvest could lead to crop failures, seen as a divine response to Israel's disobedience or lack of faith (Isaiah 17:11; Amos 4:7; Haggai 1:6).

Metaphorical Uses of Harvest

- **Positive Imagery:** Harvest metaphorically represents God's blessings, such as Israel being called God's first fruits (Jeremiah 2:3) or believers reaping a spiritual harvest of righteousness (2 Corinthians 9:10).
- **Judgment:** Often, the harvest imagery is used to depict judgment. Prophets spoke of God destroying the harvest as a form of judgment (Isaiah 18:4-6; Jeremiah 12:13), and Jesus used harvest parables to describe the last judgment (Matthew 13:30, 39; Revelation 14:15), illustrating the ultimate accountability to God.

Simplified Understanding

- **Harvest as Provision and Joy:** At its most basic, the harvest in the Bible symbolizes God's provision for His people, a time for joy, thanksgiving, and celebration of God's faithfulness.
- **Human Responsibility:** It also involves human effort in planting and reaping, highlighting the partnership between divine provision and human stewardship.
- **Community Care:** The practice of sharing the harvest with the poor underscores the biblical principle of community support and generosity.
- **Spiritual Reflection:** Observing rest during the harvest and offering the first fruits to God are acts of worship and acknowledgment of God's sovereignty.
- **Metaphorical Meanings:** Beyond the literal gathering of crops, harvest imagery in the Bible teaches about spiritual growth, divine judgment, and the importance of readiness for God's ultimate reckoning.

In summary, the concept of harvest in the Bible is rich with layers of meaning, offering insights into God's character, human responsibility, community ethics, and the spiritual journey.

In Christianity, the practice of giving tithes and offerings is deeply tied to the concept of extending one's heart to God and to others. Tithing, which traditionally involves giving one-tenth of one's income to the church, and offering, which can be any voluntary gift over and above the tithe, are both seen as tangible expressions of faith, love, and trust in God. They are also considered acts of worship and gratitude, reflecting the giver's recognition of God's sovereignty and generosity. Here's how this practice connects with the broader Christian principle of extending the heart:

The Point of Tithes and Offering and tying it to the Harvested

understanding

1. Acknowledgment of God's Provision

- **Proverbs 3:9-10 (NIV):** "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."
- Giving tithes and offerings is a way to acknowledge that everything we have comes from God. It's an act of gratitude, recognizing God as the source of all blessings and extending our hearts in thanksgiving.
- **Harvest as a Symbol:** The act of offering the first fruits during the harvest (Leviticus 23:9-14) was an ancient way of acknowledging God's provision. It recognized that the bounty of the earth was a gift from God.
- **Tithes and Offerings:** Similarly, when Christians give tithes and offerings, they are acknowledging that all they have, including their financial resources, comes from God (Proverbs 3:9-10). This act of giving is a modern expression of gratitude, mirroring the thanksgiving shown through the offering of the first fruits.

2. Trust and Dependence on God

- **Malachi 3:10 (NIV):** "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 there will not be room enough to store it."
- This act of giving is also a demonstration of trust in God's provision. It reflects a heart that relies on God, not just for the material needs but also for spiritual and emotional sustenance.
- **Harvest as Trust:** The agricultural cycle required trust in God for rain, growth, and a successful harvest. This dependence is encapsulated in the reliance on God's timing and provision (Jeremiah 5:24; Amos 4:7).
- **Tithes and Offerings as Trust:** When Christians bring their tithes and offerings, they are expressing trust in God's ongoing provision (Malachi 3:10). Just as the farmer trusts in God for the yearly harvest, believers trust God with their finances and future needs, demonstrating a deep spiritual reliance.

3. Love and Compassion for Others

- **2 Corinthians 9:6-7 (NIV):** "Remember this: Whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows generously will also reap generously. Each of you should give what you have decided in your heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver."

- Tithes and offerings support the work of the church, including its charitable activities. Through these contributions, Christians extend their hearts to their community and the world, fulfilling the command to love one's neighbor by providing for spiritual and physical needs.
- **Harvest and Community:** Laws about leaving some of the harvest for the poor (Leviticus 19:9; 23:22) showed compassion and care for the less fortunate within the community. The joy of harvest included sharing God's provision with others.
- **Tithes and Offerings as Compassion:** In giving tithes and offerings, Christians extend their love and compassion to others (2 Corinthians 9:6-7), supporting the church's missions and charitable activities. This mirrors the communal aspect of the harvest, where the abundance provided by God is shared with those in need.

4. Cultivation of Generosity and Spiritual Growth

- The practice encourages believers to cultivate a generous spirit, which is a key aspect of Christian discipleship. It's about letting go of material possessions in favor of spiritual treasures and aligning one's priorities with God's kingdom.
- **Matthew 6:21 (NIV):** "For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also."
- This verse underscores the intimate connection between one's treasures (what we value and invest in) and one's heart. By directing resources towards God's work, believers align their hearts with divine purposes.
- **Harvest as Spiritual Reflection:** The harvest time was not only about physical reaping but also spiritual reflection on God's goodness and the importance of generosity. The festivals associated with the harvest were times of thanksgiving and spiritual renewal.
- **Tithes and Offerings as Spiritual Acts:** Giving is a form of spiritual discipline that encourages generosity and aligns believers' hearts with God's purposes (Matthew 6:21). It reflects a commitment to spiritual values over material wealth, fostering growth in faith and character.

Conclusion

Tithes and offerings are not merely financial transactions; they are spiritual acts that reflect the extension of the heart towards God and others. They embody trust, gratitude, obedience, and compassion—core values that underpin the Christian faith. Through this practice, believers participate in God's work on earth, supporting the church's mission and demonstrating love in action. It's a profound way of living out the commandment to love God with all one's heart, soul, and mind, and to love one's neighbor as oneself.

The connection between the biblical imagery of harvest and the practice of tithes and offerings is profound. Both concepts emphasize the recognition of God's provision, the importance of trust and dependence on Him, the call to love and compassion for others, and the cultivation of a generous spirit. Through the act of giving, Christians today participate in a timeless cycle of faith, gratitude, and community support that echoes the agricultural rhythms of planting, growing, and harvesting. This cycle not only sustains physical life but also nurtures spiritual growth and communal bonds, reflecting the heart of Christian discipleship and worship.