



## **Rule 4 for Gaining Financial Happiness**

### **What Command of God Bothers You?**

When I entered college, the pastor of my church taught about something I never gave much thought. He explained that ten percent of all we earned was God's. He shared a scripture verse that indicated that if we did not give Him that ten percent, then we were stealing from the Lord and we were no better than someone who robs a bank. It shook me when I considered the audacity of actually robbing God. Not out of guilt or to get some kind of reward but because I was for the first time in my life genuinely developing a deep love and faith in Christ, I began to give ten percent of everything I earned to the Lord in my offerings at church. This was pretty easy when I lived at home and had no real debts but when I went away to college, living without any financial support from my parents and working minimum wage jobs, it was a huge challenge to continue giving God ten percent of my income. What helped me was never seeing my entire paycheck as what I had to live on but the paycheck minus the ten percent. I remember having not a single dime in my pocket one week without the money to buy groceries and out of the blue an elderly widow who I just met once before I went away to college sent me a check for fifty dollars. I am convinced that the best financial decision you can make is to be certain that ten percent of all you earn you return to God.

I heard of a young woman who in 2012 was drowning in debt. She also was in the worst romantic relationship of her life that drained her financially. God was speaking to her heart to just start tithing. So, in late October 2012, she gave in. She put 10% of her bi-weekly gross pay in the offering plate. And as long as she lives, she says she will never forget what happened the next week. She went to the website for her apartment complex to pay her rent, which was due on November 1st. She usually paid \$880. Well, that day it said amount due: \$535. She thought there must be a mistake. The young woman sat there for like 30 minutes talking to herself. Should she call and ask management if it's right? Or should she just pay it and act like nothing happened? The woman called the office at her apartment and spoke to a leasing agent. She said she was calling to check to see if the amount she owed was correct. The leasing agent looked at her account and said, "Yup, your remaining balance is \$535." The young woman hung up, paid \$300 less in rent and screamed "Thank you, Lord!" She remained consistent, paying tithes biweekly. The blessings were unreal. She had raises at work and more money in her bank account than she ever before had.

There is a provocative statement in the book of Proverbs that needs to be considered for anyone wanting to have financial happiness. **The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, and knowledge of the Holy One is understanding.** (Proverbs 9: 10 NIV) Now I have seen this Hebrew term translated fear rendered respect and that is doing this reminder a disservice. The teaching here is much deeper than that. What is called wisdom is the understanding that God is above all and it is a major mistake to not do what He says. There is a follower of Mohammed in the Philippines who regularly messages me on Facebook mocking Christ and His salvation. I think he is making a huge mistake. Granted it is not the norm in life, rarely do we see such obvious statements by God in real time but the account of Elisha being ridiculed by a band of teens is something to consider. As Elisha was traveling by foot, he was suddenly confronted. **From there Elisha went up to Bethel. As he was walking along the road, some youths came out of the town and jeered at him. "Go on up, you baldhead!" they said. "Go on up, you baldhead!" He turned around, looked at them and called down a curse on them in the name of the Lord. Then two bears came out of the woods and mauled forty-two of the youths.** (2 Kings 2: 23-24 NIV)

Admittedly we may not have witnessed anything quite as dramatic as this but I have experienced something much like this more than once so I cannot say God does not still respond this way to His people being mocked or His word rejected. An example honored greatly in the Bible of someone who took seriously the majesty of God is described in Genesis. After Abraham won a great victory over the army that had been ravaging the region and had captured Abraham's nephew, Abraham and his men gained all the riches the defeated army had acquired, he was greeted by the King of Salem, Melchizedek who is a picture of Christ. The king blessed Abraham as God's representative. **"Blessed be Abram by God Most High, Creator of heaven and earth. And blessed be God Most High, who delivered your enemies into your hand."** (Genesis 14: 19-20 NIV) How did Abraham respond to this blessing? He immediately gave God's representative ten percent of all he had.

The Proverbs has this command and promise attached. **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 NIV) When we say we love the Lord and have nothing but devotion to Him, it must mean that the Lord gets the first part of all you earn. The ramifications of this were huge. In an ancient agricultural society the first fruits were the very first part of the crop. There was though no guarantee that you would get any more than the first fruits. A locust plague could come and destroy the rest of the crop. A huge storm might blow through and ruin what you were counting on to get along. Withering heat that destroyed the rest of the crop was a possibility. The first fruits did not guarantee second fruits or third. It was a tremendous act of faith for a people who depended on their crops for survival to give their tenth to the Lord at the very beginning. The Lord honors that sort of faith and you can count on Him to bless you far beyond what you give Him when you do so.

Let us now turn to one of the more thought-provoking promises found in all the Bible regarding your finances. **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.** (Malachi 3: 10 NIV) When the Bible here says "bring", it is in fact a command. You either choose to do it or you reject the command. To not bring the tithe to God is described as stealing from Him. **"Will a man rob God? Yet you rob me. "But you ask, 'How do we rob you?' "In tithes and offerings.** (Malachi 3: 8 NIV) This is almost inconceivable! To not bring your tithe to the Lord is outright stealing from God. That should send shivers down the back of any Christian who believes God is real and rules over the universe. But there is more here!

Built within this command of God is a call to test His faithfulness. Find out just how good and trustworthy the LORD is. Tithe and see if He takes care of you and in fact blesses you. It's as simple as that. If you don't tithe you are literally stealing money from God. What is more, you are not giving yourself the opportunity of discovering just how much God can bless you. If you look at the Bible and study those who were leading voices among God's people, you discover who was one of the most miserable of them all. It was Solomon, the wealthiest man on earth while he lived. Clearly money did not bring him happiness. God is not promising you riches if you tithe. He is saying you will be blessed if you tithe and that is far more important. One of the wealthiest men ever, John D. Rockefeller Sr. often shared the most important financial decision he ever made. It happened when Rockefeller was young and as a boy had to work to support his mother. His salary was \$1.50 per week. When he brought the money home to his mom, she put it in her lap and told him that it would make her very happy if he gave a tenth of it to the Lord. So, that is what he did and from that day forward he tithed every dollar the Lord gave him. He noted that if he had not tithed the first dollar he made, he would not have tithed the first million dollars he made. Try an experiment. Give God back ten percent of everything you receive and discover the happiness available to you financially!