

Although our ADMIN Team and Church Council have designated this Sunday as “Prove the Tithe” Day, I want to write this week about the other end of the phrase, “*tithes and offerings*” (Malachi 3:8).

It's interesting to me that “offering” or “offerings” appear in the NIV more than a thousand times, beginning in Genesis 4:3, while “tithe” or “tithes” appear only thirty-four times, beginning in Leviticus 27:30. Rabbi Bernstein told me this afternoon that the Jewish offering most applicable to Christians may be the “freewill” or “heartfelt” offering, which appears first in Leviticus 7:16.

So what's the difference between “tithes” and “offerings”? As I'm sure you know, a tithe is the presentation of the *first* tenth of one's “income,” which in the agrarian biblical times had to do with grain harvested from the fields, fruit harvested from trees, and animals born into flocks and herds (Leviticus 27:30-32). The central idea in tithing is the acknowledgement that all such increase is the gift of God, and that we are stewards of God's resources.

Leviticus 1-7 gives the most detailed explanation of the five major categories of offerings, each of which was an **outward expression of inward devotion**, and all but one of which required blood sacrifice. The central ideas behind the various offerings had to do with atonement for sin, request for forgiveness, restitution for wrongs done, gratitude for God's blessings, and heartfelt desire for fellowship with God.

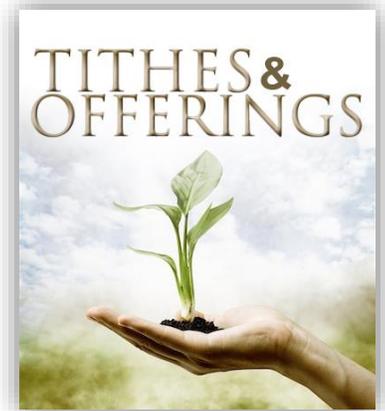
Unlike some of the ancient Jewish sacrificial offerings, Christian offerings to God are not in any sense efforts at securing God's forgiveness, since Jesus “*sacrificed for [our] sins once for all when he offered himself*” (Hebrews 7:27). **Christians make offerings to God for four main reasons:** (1) gratitude for God's blessings; (2) heartfelt desire for fellowship with God; (3) to relieve human suffering in Jesus' Name; and (4) to participate in the expansion of God's Kingdom through gifts that help to carry out Jesus' Great Commission.

Since God's instruction to Israel was that tithes were to be brought to the Tabernacle (and later to the Temple), tithes are generally made today through the local church as the current location for the worship of God. While offerings can be—and often are—made through the local church, I think most would say that offerings can be appropriately made to Kingdom causes of any sort.

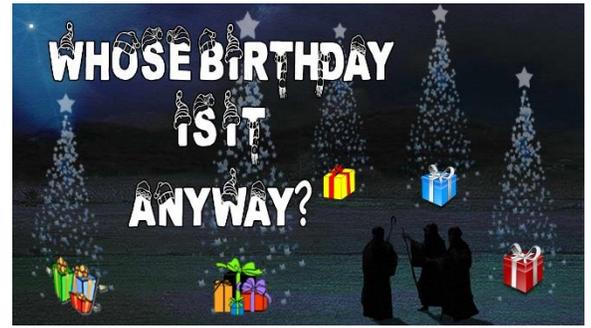
I don't remember where I first heard it, but the following distinction between tithes and offerings has been helpful to me:

1. If you're controlling where your money goes, such as a designated offering for missions or in a memorial gift, that's an *offering* (Deuteronomy 12:6; Malachi 3:8).
2. If you're not controlling where your money goes, such as in undesignated gifts to the church's general budget, that's a *tithe* (Nehemiah 10:38; Malachi 3:10).

Having said all that, I'd like to make some suggestions for your consideration as we head into Advent. One way to avoid some of the frivolous spending that will begin in earnest on Friday is to make the first and largest gift you give to anyone this CHRISTmas (including yourself) the gift you give to Jesus to advance His Kingdom on earth.



While there is certainly no shortage of worthy causes to which to contribute, Baptists tend to associate our special offerings at CHRISTmas and Easter with the support of missionary causes—that is, to persons and groups whose purposes are explicitly related to the work of sharing God’s love through Jesus with the world. Southern Baptists tend to associate CHRISTmas missions giving with the “Lottie Moon Christmas Offering for World Missions,” while Cooperative Baptists (national CBF) focus on the “Global Missions Offering” during the same time.



I’m not sure what our tradition has been here at CBF in Columbia, but my own preference is to make special missions offerings at CHRISTmas and Easter to the CBF in Atlanta (Cooperative Baptist Fellowship), with which many of my own friends are affiliated (Jill and I also make regular offerings above the tithe to a number of other Christian ministries around the world).



CBF-Atlanta has provided a “Gift Catalog” by which you can give to specific missional needs that touch your heart. Dozens of choices are presented, with amounts from \$2-\$1,000, and with a “project number” for each so you can know that your gift is going to meet that particular need. You can download the catalog at www.thefellowship.info/giftcatalog, and we have a number of hard copies available in the office during the week or at the kiosk on Sundays.

We also have four major projects underway through our congregation that could become the beneficiaries of your missional offerings as we close out the year:

1. The first project is already completed, and that was the provision of **TWENTY Thanksgiving baskets** to families in our area last weekend!!!
2. I hope you’re aware of our special emphasis on funding at least **one well a year through World Vision**. We’re working on our third well in **Ghana**, one of the most water-challenged countries in Africa, and we’re within \$1,000 of our goal!
3. We’re just beginning our push to provide Christmas gifts for about a dozen families with at least one incarcerated parent through **Prison Fellowship’s Angel Tree Project**.
4. And the fourth project is our developing partnership with Kittamaqundi Community Church in their efforts to create a new and sustainable paradigm for helping to end homelessness, starting right here in Columbia. The project is called “**Help End Homelessness Howard County**” (HEHHC), and I’ve attached a PowerPoint presentation that explains more about this effort.



Finally, I've listed below some of the major events happening at CBF during Advent so you can invite your friends!

Happy Thanksgiving!

Dave



<i>Wednesday, November 27</i>	No evening activities
<i>Sunday, December 1</i>	ADVENT 1: Before Bethlehem, Part 1 Annual Business Meeting, 5 p.m.
<i>Wednesday, December 4</i>	December Birthdays <i>Metropolitan Christmas Art Show (Ben Davis)</i>
<i>Sunday, December 8</i>	ADVENT 2: Before Bethlehem, Part 2
<i>Tuesday, December 10</i>	Meditative Worship & Communion, 5:30-7 p.m.
<i>Wednesday, December 11</i>	Caroling <i>The Two Christmas Stories (Ben Davis)</i>
<i>Sunday, December 15</i>	ADVENT 3: Christmas Cantata: <i>There is Peace in the World Tonight</i>
<i>Monday, December 16</i>	<i>The Star of Bethlehem</i> film in the chapel, 7 p.m. Unlock the Mystery of the World's Most Famous Star
<i>Wednesday, December 18</i>	Christmas Caroling . . . and More!
<i>Sunday, December 22</i>	ADVENT 4: How God Speaks to Us
<i>Tuesday, December 24</i>	CHRISTmas Eve Service, 6:30 p.m. <i>Remembering the BB & B</i>
<i>Sunday, December 29</i>	Dr. Lee Lykins, DDS (I'll be here, but Dr. Lykins will be speaking. He's one of my closest friends ☺)
<i>Wednesday, January 1</i>	Offices closed
<i>Sunday, January 5</i>	<i>A Clean Slate</i>

