

# CHAPTER 1

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## *My Story for Writing this Book*

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*And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free*  
(John 8:32 NKJV).

**T**he words, *The Truth Will Set You Free*, proclaimed by Christ centuries ago changed my life forever in unimaginable ways. What I painfully know is this: searching for and discovering truth can separate people, destroy friendships, and throw unsuspecting believers into exile from institutional Christianity.

The truth that set me free is what I learned about a century's old teaching called tithing. My quest for truth begged for an answer to the proverbial sixty-four thousand dollar question. Does the modern day multifaceted tithing system have any resemblance to biblical tithing? The

hermeneutical and exegetical answer based on the land, the language and the literature of the biblical Hebrew Israelites is no! God never issued a new commandment to convert the orthodox biblical food tithe into money as a method to support the New Testament church in age of grace. The change of economic systems across history from agricultural to monetary did not cause God to change his holy food tithe to money.

I practiced the tax-deductible greenback tithing system for 30 years. After extensive research on the subject and prayer, I discovered Christ never endorsed tithing as a command or a principal for New Testament/ New Covenant believers. When I peeled back the tithing onion in biblical and secular history, shock and dismay beat upon my theological head like a 2x4. When I regained consciousness, it was apparent Christ never endorsed money tithing as many modern preachers assert. The Savior followed 613 instructions of the Law and the only authentic stipulated tithing law He endorsed was the tithe the Bible emphatically claims are eatable items such as crops, cattle, herd, flocks and sheep. In Jesus' own words, in Matthew 23:23, he acknowledges that the Pharisees tithed mint, rue and cumin, which were eatable items and yet somehow people assume money is implied? The bottom line; tithing is not money, but food and Yahweh never commuted the food tithe to money in the 1<sup>st</sup> century nor the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Defining the authentic biblical tithe to include non-food sources is not mentioned in the Holy Scriptures. To command the tithe of money is "teaching for doctrines the commandments of men" (Matthew 15:9). Also, tithing money violates what Yeshua said, "Thus have ye made the commandment of God of none effect by your tradition" (Matt 15:6). The New Testament has no tithing commands; however, you will find much concerning abundant giving from the heart.

I knew that my decision to switch from tithing to giving from my heart carried a cataclysmic risk. Looking back at the process of what I learned about tithing, fear struck me because now I had to face reality and

the truth. In many ways, I was unprepared for the consequences of what would happen to my family or me emotionally and spiritually as a result of not tithing anymore. I somewhat understood that my decision to abandon tithing would put me in the crosshairs of the institutional church, but it still was heartbreaking once I changed. People who say that tithing is a non-negotiable command or principle jump to conclusions because they often assume that non-tithers are selfish and have no desire to support the church. That is a persistent lie told every day about non-tithers.

Some might say I made too much of the tithing issue and created a mountain out of molehill because the stats on money tithing overall have remained in the single digits for years among tithing churches across all denominations with non-denominational churches having slightly higher tithing percentages. What is important is that opponents of money tithing have been speaking up against the doctrine since the first century. The question is, if money tithing is biblical and accurate beyond doubt, why has there been disagreement among tithing and non-tithing believers for centuries? Bible students must answer that question for themselves. And as one of them, I decided to write a book to answer the tithing questions that people silently think about.

I wrote this book to begin the healing process resulting from the pain I suffered, and to help others understand what true giving is so they can avoid experiencing similar situations in their Christian journey. While writing this book, I had to commit my pain and emotions to a safe room and only allow them out when necessary. This permitted me to concentrate and study tithing without my emotions and biases to cloud my research and interpretation. Now that the work is done, it's time to open the floodgates of my heart to examine the events of this experience and grow from it.

It is painful and hard to say that my former church leadership shoved aside my giving convictions and opted for money involving tithing over a personal relationship. The elephant in the room became mandatory tithing.

The basis for relationships and memberships and even serving in church leadership hinges on whether you tithe faithfully. That hurts people. My money had a relationship with my former church and in my reality right or wrong—as a person—I was not in the picture, but money was. According to today's standards, I wasn't rich, but I tithed and gave in a generous fashion to the church and often to my detriment.

The body of Christ has an annoying nasty little secret that's swept under the carpet of religion and hates to admit: some pastors and churches befriend rich people, while the poor are considered an embarrassment because they have no money. In some cases, this is true and it reminds me of a comment that came from a friend who stated, because you were one of the top givers, you perhaps bought your leadership position or title. In changing your giving theology, you were no longer a valuable cash flow asset and that perhaps hastened your removal from leadership. From that experience, I can only conclude that it was not about a relationship, Christian brotherhood or sisterhood or love. When I changed my theology on giving, I became a threat to the bottom line of the weekly cash flow program. If a person gives money absent of percentage, why are people so afraid? My giving convictions had to take a back seat and become secondary to the tithing truths the Scriptures actually teach. All I wanted was to follow my personal giving convictions as God revealed. Several years of service, fellowship and breaking bread together with fellow believers ended as if someone blew out a match. Friendships, connections and relationships were sacrificed on the altars of the tithing doctrine to ensure a continuous cash flow. To stimulate dialogue about the subject, I sent my original tithing study to my ex-pastor hoping he would respond with a theological rebuttal to all 116 tithing power point slides. I welcomed a response and a discussion, but I knew it was over when I received no reply. His silence and lack of feedback were the final nails in the coffin that left me feeling I had disappeared from the face of the earth.

The Bible says, “Parties are made for having a good time, wine adds cheer to life, and money has an answer to everything,” (Ecclesiastes 10:19, The Jewish Bible). I know churches need money to operate and it is money that answers all their needs. All businesses need money and the church is no exception. My position has never been not to support the modern-day institutional church business. If you are a member of something, like the church, or the YMCA, you pay to support it with tax-deductible giving. That’s not a problem because the tax code allows individuals to deduct giving up to a certain limit. Do some people need to give, fifteen or twenty percent of their income to non-profits like a church to lower their taxable income to avoid a huge tax bill? The answer is yes, but that’s a financial decision every church member privately makes based on his or her budget. So the word tithe does not apply here because it does not refer to money.

We can argue the theological and hermeneutical relevancy of the 10 percent mandate just as it has been done since the first century until the end of the world. However, what brought many tears to my eyes over the years is how so-called people of the way (Christians) whom you’ve spent time fellowshiping with recklessly decide to sequester themselves from you? How does one handle being stoned with a life sentence of silence by former Christian friends, associates and pastors who no longer fellowship with you because you give from the heart? My question is: Why was my desire to not be driven by a dogmatic 10 percent doctrinal mandate so repugnant to those who are not free to give without a percentage? The answer to that question is an individual affair because giving is a personal and private matter like Yeshua said in Matt. 6:1, “Be careful not to parade your acts of Tzedakah (alms, charity, giving) in front of people in order to be seen by them! If you do, you have no reward from your Father in heaven” (The Jewish Bible). Some tithe teachers and tithers love to parade their works of tithing before men. Even though Jesus forbade acts of selfish self-promotion,

many tithers love putting themselves on display like Pharisees to shame others who give differently.

Aftermath my experience and excommunication from the institutional church, I have struggled to find answers as to how to process the pain. My hurt has found me struggling to follow the Hebrew writer who said, “*See to it that no one misses the Grace of God and that no bitter root grows up to cause trouble and defile many*” (NIV). Dealing with the reckless and inconsiderate actions of so-called believers has tempted me to paint pastors with a broad brush. Not painting pastors with a negative opinion is difficult especially when you have no trust and a sense self-protection against those you believe have harmed you in the past. When Torah teachers, scribes, priests and religious leaders could not handle what Stephen said about them and their theological positions concerning the law, here is how they responded in Acts 7:54, “*When they [scribes, priests, Torah teachers, elders] heard these things, [what Stephen said about them] they were cut to the heart, and they gnashed at him with their teeth*” (NKJV). As a result of Stephen’s message, they could not accept the truth and in verse 59, the text states, “*...they stoned Stephen...*” and the last words from Stephen’s lips as religious leaders murdered him in cold blood were, “*...Lord do not charge them with this sin...*” Wow! When my supposed brothers and sisters in Christ are cut to the heart because I choose not to follow the money tithing law, they may murder me with words, stone me with silence, exile me, excommunicate me, and utter unsavory words with nasty looks—I will look to the Father above like Stephen to fight against the root of bitterness. When they gnash their teeth at me with venomous verbal assaults that my tithing theology is from the devil, my response must be Father forgive them and don’t lay it to their charge because they know not what they do.

Years ago, I agonized over my decision to divorce tithing. It was an open and honest deliberate communication process. The tithing doctrines have been a financial debacle for many people who are unaware of its true

meaning. Across the annals of Christendom from the sixth century until now, the way tithing has been taught has left a trail of tears, pain, persecution and damaged lives.

Many people who attend seminary and other Bible theology schools know the truth about tithing. But because of wrong giving concepts and the fear that congregations will not give to support churches, leadership must deploy a powerful weapon of mass destruction called fear as a motivating factor to encourage giving. What works better than a curse from God torn from the context of Malachi 3:8-10 and given new meaning to ensure a continuous cash flow? Or perhaps the opposite: a promise of receiving unimaginable riches from God for handing over 10 percent. It is as if God is a mob boss, breaking legs and cracking knees and the only way to receive His protection and to prevent calamity in your life is to cough up 10 percent. I know people will say they tithe out of love as a response to how God has blessed them. However, that giving decision is personal. I also say that people who give money irrespective of percentage see God's blessings too. So what is the incongruity here? It is not because people pay ten percent that's important. It's a matter of giving from your heart irrespective of percentage. Coughing up 10 percent of my paycheck out of fear of a curse from Malachi Chapter 3 for 30 years destroyed the Holy Spirit's role in my giving life. Percentage giving turned me into a grudging giver for 30 years, which the Bible warns us not to do. Now that I'm free to give, I know giving by percentage is a curse for me.

Today, since the spirit of truth has set me free to give, my cheerful heart responds to charity needs starting at home and spreading abroad. I no longer walk in agonizing giving fear. I no longer am a grievous compulsory 10 percent giver but a cheerful responsible freewill giver. Right now you be asking what is a responsible freewill grace giver. It means that giving and the giver should always avoid giving to the point of creating a dependency on charity. Giving until it hurts is not in the Bible. You can never be

cheerful about giving if after you give, you need to ask for help to pay bills, buy food or medicine. If you give this way, you have violated Paul's giving instructions in 1 Timothy 5:8.

The journey from tithing to giving is an understatement. In fact, giving from my heart is more difficult than giving 10 percent. You might say, "Well, how is that possible?" When I gave a tenth of my income, I felt no additional obligation to give beyond that because I met the tithing law of Malachi 3:10. Without a doubt, tithing is of the Law, even in Matthew 23:23, no matter how it is twisted and flipped out of its agricultural context and redefined as cash. Now that no New Testament 10 percent is required, God can call upon me to give in many more ways than money.

When I began this journey to learn more about orthodox biblical tithing, I followed the example of Yeshua (Jesus) who said, "*You search the Scriptures, for in them you think you have eternal life; and these are they which testify of Me*"(John. 5:39, NKJV). Every verse of the first five books of the Bible bears witness to the Messiah. John 5:39 is profound in that my search discovered the tithe also bears witness to Christ because the tithe was eatable. Also, by Christ comparing himself to a lamb as the sacrifice for the world, it meant He became the final perfect tithe type and shadow as the holy Lamb of God that redeemed us from the foundation of the world. As the tithe lamb of God, Jesus ended the Levitical tithing system at the Cross and it remains non-transferrable to the New Testament Ekklesia. Although, the Levitical tithing system ended at the cross, many Hebrews continued practicing tithing after Jesus' death until the Jewish Temple's final destruction in AD 70.

Let me return to what Jesus said. Search the Scriptures. What did Jesus mean when he made this statement. The word search is not just flipping, turning or reading biblical text. The word search in the Greek is "*ere-unao*." Search means to investigate. Much like a crime scene investigator, I inspected the word tithe to determine its truth as it is taught today. In



my analytical search, I could not find one verse that spoke of tithing as money. In fact, the opposite happened, I discovered money being used for offerings. When I applied Jesus' words to search the Scriptures, I uncovered the truth through investigation. The truth is, the tithing verses in the Tanaka (old Testament) testify of Christ himself. Searching the Scriptures through investigation will get you in trouble with religion, tradition and established customs. Throughout the searching process, I wondered what would I find? What would happen if I found Scriptures that disagreed with current doctrine? How would I react? Would I stop studying? Should I talk with others about it? How would people treat me? Would I dismiss my findings as unimportant and go with the flow and not upset the church tithe system? I answered the questions by deciding not to tithe anymore. Instead, I started giving from my heart. Here is what happens when you dig beneath the surface of Scripture as Christ commanded; you become a detective and an inquirer for truth. I was shocked that in all my years as a believer and because I never truly searched; I submitted my life to many doctrinal teachings that robbed me of a deeper revelation and relationship with the Messiah.

No one more than me wanted my tithing research to be wrong so that I could be accepted back into the fold by my brothers and sisters in Christ who disingenuously dismissed me as an aberration and a nuisance, but it did not turn out that way. As I studied the sacred text, I asphyxiated on tithing verses to find answers to prove myself wrong. However, I continued the journey for truth and discovered in Acts 17:11, that searching the Scriptures is a common practice to get at the truth of what people teach and say. When Paul finished teaching the Jewish believers of Berea, they told Paul, "...they eagerly welcomed the message, checking the Tanakh (first five book of the Bible) everyday to see if the things Paul taught were true..." (Complete Jewish Bible). In KJV it says, "...*they received the word with all readiness of mind and searched the Scriptures (first five books of*

*the Bible) daily, whether those things were so.”* The believers in Berea were astute investigators of every word Paul spoke. In Greek, *searched* in verse 11 means “*anakrino*.” As a verb, it is an action word that encourages one to scrutinize, investigate, interrogate, judge, determine, and examine. Search sometimes means to ask questions. In order for the truth to set me free on tithing, I became like the Bereans and searched the Scriptures daily concerning the 30 years of tithe indoctrination. I did not just flip pages, read text, or blindly accept tithe teaching like I did in the previous years. I went on a trek into the Word by asking multiple questions of every tithe teaching I heard. To maintain the integrity of the word *searched* in Acts 17:11, I put the modern tithe teachings under the light of scrutiny, investigation, interrogation, judgment and examination. Then I determined that the tithe teaching as propagandized in the Body of Christ today is unscriptural because it is not a commandment of God, but a tradition of man that has been elevated to commandment status. After being lulled to sleep for 30 years on searching the Scriptures, Acts 17:11, served as a wake up call for me.

Going against tithing put my honor and life at stake. When the tithe dollar is the sole source of income for a church, I suspect the doctrine can become so radicalized by those financially vested and who insist tithing is not negotiable perhaps have the propensity to commit murder when the bottom line is threatened. Our innocent Savior was beaten, whipped, and killed by the Romans because His teachings disturbed many of the religious leaders of the day. I should not feel alone but sometimes I do. My position as an Elder in my church was on the chopping block. However, titles no longer mattered; I was only interested in the truth. I told God-the-Father, all I want is truth about tithing and if it cost me everything, so be it. No one knew that I contemplated becoming an agnostic in the aftermath of my decision. I thought about walking away from God and my faith over the tithing events I experienced and the subsequent tithing discoveries found

in the Scripture. But, before I took that step to walk away from my Savior, I considered what the Bible said in Proverbs 25:2, “...but the honor of Kings is to search out a matter” (KJV). So in searching out the matter of tithing, I learned more about God’s love in the Tanakh and even more about Christ than I had ever known before in my entire life. The word *search* in Proverbs 25:2 is the Hebrew word “*chaqar*” (Strong’s #2713). It means to search, to penetrate and to examine intimately and thoroughly. So when Proverbs says, “search out a matter,” I knew I had to become intimate with the word *tithe* and dig deeper into its meaning as if I was in love with the word. The only way to dig past the surface of popular *tithe* teachings and unearth subterranean biblical *tithe* truths lost on modern Christianity, I embarked on a two-year trek to understand the Hebrew and Greek for *tithe* in Israel’s history.

I learned from my investigation that the prospect of receiving 10 percent is a key motivator for some people pursuing religious education to enlist themselves into ministry without a call from God. That may be my opinion, but do your own observation. The prospect of amassing wealth and riches is a motivation for people to enter the ministry. Because many are called and few are chosen, the few who are not called or chosen, call themselves. In my opinion, some could not cut the mustard in the business world of secular work and choose preaching as an alternate career. Further, with the 10 percent *tithe* option and the potential for wealth and the lure of filthy lucre, making money through a preaching career is an irresistible salivating lifestyle to pursue, especially if you are good at it. When you add the ingredient to co-opt the Levitical *tithe* from the Tanakh to make it fit into the New Covenant, a person has to depend on his or her own ingenuity, cunning and craftiness to make *tithing* work outside of the Law where it was never authorized. Now don’t assume that I believe money is unnecessary in doing church business because money is vital. Some churches are doing the right thing. Nevertheless, Scripture should never be taken out

of context and redefined to fulfill a so-called pastoral or church vision. If you like a specific church, give enough money to make sure the ministry is supported. That's the bottom line and it comes with no promises other than what giving principles the New Covenant restates from the Old Testament.

As I compiled my tithing study in power point, I often wondered what would become of my ties to the church. I cannot say, at this time, that I will return to the church institution as a member. And if the stipulation for returning to the church requires a tenth of my income with the understanding that I must reject the truth I have learned about tithing and giving, then I guess my status is a permanent visitor. Christian sheep are notorious for killing their wounded sheep instead of pouring in the oil and the wine. Like the *certain man* who went on a journey from Jerusalem to Jericho in Luke 10:33, I went on a tithing study journey. This *certain man* came upon thieves and they stripped him, beat him and left him for dead. A Levite and the priest passed him by never taking into account this man's needs. The Levite and the priest were to represent God's compassion but ignored him by not uttering a single word of inquiry as to the wounded man's condition. Like the *certain man*, my fellow x-church cohorts and friends stripped me of fellowship and connection and beat me with harsh words, banished me through direct and indirect excommunication, exile, silence and tore me from a seven year connection all because I gave in a different way. They relegated me to a footnote in the history of their lives leaving me on the side of the road to die in pain like the Levite and priest left the battered man. As the story goes, a Samaritan came and did what the religious folks did not do and poured in oil and wine into the beaten man's wounds. Instead of oil and wine for wanting to give freely from my heart, I received judgment, curses, and wrath because of my theological enlightening experience. In the end, I began questioning if any good Samaritans were left in the body of Christ.

To this day, I admit that I gave financial and emotional access to people who did not have my best interest in mind. In the end, religious institutions that depend solely on the tithe for their total existence and livelihood at the expense of faith, love and charity will kill you for money. That's a tragedy and a disgrace to giving from the heart. It is also an affront to the entire body of Christ since the first century believers in Acts started the New Testament church with grace giving and freewill giving knowing God himself is the founder of giving from the heart.

Thinking about this journey and what happened, I can honestly say I would do it all over again. More than 30 years ago while laying in my Army bunk bed in Germany, and reading the Bible, I wrote a prayer to God; I told Him that if He ever revealed truth to me on my journey as a believer, I would follow Him even if it cost me my life. My tithing decision may not have cost me my physical life, but it has cost me in many other ways. The sad point is, my oldest son—who grew up in church in his formative years—cautioned me not to make too much of my tithing position. He thought my life might somehow be in danger and asked me to stay quiet and not write a book about tithing because he felt concerned for my safety. Despite everything, no one can ever take away my deliverance from mandatory tithing and the astounding liberation and heartfelt compassion that has gripped my heart as a free-will responsible giver in helping the poor, orphans, hungry, strangers, and widows, and even churches. I have started a new journey on learning how to give from the heart rather than from a mandated percentage. For those who give 10 percent from the heart, don't begrudge or hate others who give from the heart and ignore percentages because giving is a matter of the heart not percentages.

For God so loved the world, so let us all love like Jesus who responded with these words in Mark 12:28-33:

*And one of the scribes came, and having heard them reasoning together, and perceiving that he had answered them well, asked him, **Which is the first commandment of all?** And Jesus answered him, The first of all the commandments is, Hear, O Israel; The Lord our God is one Lord: And thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength: this is the first commandment. And the second is like, namely this, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. There is none other commandment greater than these. And the scribe said unto him, Well, Master, thou hast said the truth: for there is one God; and there is none other but he: And to love him with all the heart, and with all the understanding, and with all the soul, and with all the strength, and to love his neighbour as himself, is more than all whole burnt offerings and sacrifices (KJV).*

From the mouth of the Savior, love is the priority, not tithing. Even the scribe admitted that burnt offerings and sacrifices wouldn't satisfy; only love satisfies. Tithing is not a part of the two greatest commandments and there were 613 commandments in the Old Testament. Further, it will be love that sustains the body of Christ, because if tithing becomes the greatest commandment, love will cease and the body of Christ will perish. For God so loved the world that He gave. The text did not say He loves us because we tithe. So let love be the motive for giving as the Lord leads. If love tells you to give three, five, seven, nine or 10 percent, it is OK with God as long as your gift is from the heart. If you give 10 percent and you get this feeling that it's out of a sense of duty or necessity, you might as well keep it in your pocket. The tithe can never be defined as money because the Bible never defines tithing as money. The evidence of this book leads to one conclusion—you never robbed God. Instead, you may have been the victim of a theological Ponzi scheme concocted in the 6<sup>th</sup> century. So if tithers are not kleptomaniacs or God robbers then who is. You must decide based

on the truth you research for yourself. But that can only happen when you decide to seek out and understand the definition of the title.

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