

Chapter 1

My Story for Writing this Book

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

The 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 1st century nor the 21st 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.