

Teaching Children to Tithe

Teaching children to tithe is an important part of their faith education that we often overlook. Giving to God is a core value of our faith that should be taught early and reinforced often.

The most common way that I see tithing taught to children is simply by grownups giving children a quarter to put in the offering plate. This is all right for very young children because it gives them an opportunity to participate. But this may not send the right message to elementary school children.

First, the money wasn't theirs to begin with, so they do not feel the satisfaction of it being a personal gift to God.

Second, it does not teach proportionality in giving or the idea of putting God first in our finances.

We want to teach children to be intentional about their giving. But our adult understanding of tithing can be too complex for children. For example, children are not generally taught to figure percentages until their middle-elementary-school years. So teaching younger children to calculate a percentage tithe is not age appropriate.

When our son was five, we started to teach him about giving using "money jars." We have three jars sitting on his dresser that are labeled "Money for God," "Money to Save," and "Money to Spend."

He gets a two-dollars-per-week allowance. We give it to him as a dollar bill and 4 quarters; that way one quarter can be given to the God jar, one to the savings jar, and the rest in the spend jar.

On Sunday, he takes the quarter from God's jar, and takes it to church. He fills out the offering envelope and proudly makes his offering at church.

As we implemented the jar system we discussed the following things with him:

1) God made everything, so everything is God's.

Even us. We are God's creation. We are thankful that God created everything. God has given us so much that we want to give back to God, too.

2) We want to think about God first.

So, the first jar we put money in will be the "Money for God" jar.

3) We give to God because we love God.

We also show God our love by going to church, praying, and doing good for others. In fact, when we give money to the church, it helps the church do the things God has asked the church to do. It helps the church teach people about God so that other people can know that God loves them, too.

The jar method seemed to teach what we think is most important for a child to know about giving to God.

This article is by Dan Pezet, a United Methodist pastor in the Alabama-West Florida Conference, and appeared in Leading Ideas February 1, 2012. It is adapted from his blog at www.churchandtea.com. Used by permission.

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