

I wonder if this is an appropriate question to ask. Do I need to become a member of a church and to tithe regularly to become welcomed at a church? I found this Chinese Church through a very kind Christian women who helped me patiently grow my faith. Only problem is, I kind of get the sense that I don't belong because I am not a member. One of the elderly women leaders insinuated that I must become a member of the church. I can't afford to tithe because I almost lost my business when I became ill. And also, since 9/11 my business took a drastic nose dive. When my papa had cancer I donated \$500 for the pastor to pray for my dad. And I noticed the change in attitude, the pastor's wife became welcoming towards me. I stopped attending church after papa died. Partly because I didn't want to donate any more money after papa died. And partly because I am afraid the pastor's wife will expect me to continue my donations. I don't even make enough to pay my rent most months at my business. I actually make less than minimum wage. It makes more sense to apply for Medicaid than to continue paying for catastrophic insurance. I am ashamed I failed at business and ashamed I can't afford to become a Baptist Christian. Help.

Giving

Believers in the Lord Jesus should become regular attendees of a church and tithe (Lev 27:30–33, 1 Co 16:1, 2; 2 Cor. 8, 9.). It is said that the last part of person to get saved is his wallet. Fear of tithing (e.g. believing we cannot afford to tithe or that God will not take care of us if we part with our money) is a lack of faith.

God does not need our money. He owns the cattle on a thousand hills (Ps 50:10). All the world and everything in it belongs to him (Re 5). He can do all things without our financial assistance but he asks us to trust him. When we tithe we demonstrate trust in him and his provision for us.

In Malachi chapter 3 God challenges the believer to try him in this:

Bring all the tithes into the storehouse,
That there may be food in My house,
And try Me now in this,"
Says the LORD of hosts,
"If I will not open for you the windows of heaven
And pour out for you such blessing
That there will not be room enough to receive it. Mal 3:10

Allen Radmacher focuses in on this word *try*:

(Heb. *bachan*) (3:10; Gen. 42:15, 16; Ps. 26:2; Jer. 9:7)...This Hebrew verb means "to try," or "to put to the test" (Job 23:10; Ps. 139:23; Zech. 13:9). The word can mean "to test" in the sense of separating or discriminating one thing from another (Job 34:3). When this word is used to depict God's "testing" of people, it means the proving of individuals in such a way that their faith becomes more established (Ps. 66:10–12; Jer. 17:10; 20:12). Malachi's challenge to the Israelites to try God is a rare instance in which people are encouraged to test the faithfulness of the Lord (3:10)....¹

¹ Radmacher, E. D., Allen, R. B., & House, H. W. (1999). *Nelson's new illustrated Bible commentary* (Mal 3:9–11). Nashville: T. Nelson Publishers.

We are not promised health or wealth but God does promise to provide us enough grace to get through life's struggles (2 Co 12:9, Mt 28:20). Believers are not under the tithe system today but Adrian Rogers challenged us: "Would you let a Jew under law give more than a Christian under grace? That is a disgrace to grace."

The apostle Paul wrote: So let each one give as he purposes in his heart, not grudgingly or of necessity; for God loves a cheerful giver (2 Co 9:7-8).

God knows that we struggle but our brothers and sisters in the Lord struggle, as well. As an earthy father would want his children to care for one another when in need, we are to remember the poor and not rationalize away our responsibility toward them (Deut 15:9).

The best giver in all the bible was a poor widow:

And He looked up and saw the rich putting their gifts into the treasury, and He saw also a certain poor widow putting in two mites. So He said, "Truly I say to you that this poor widow has put in more than all; for all these out of their abundance have put in offerings for God, but she out of her poverty put in all the livelihood that she had." Lk 21:1-4

Maybe her left hand didn't know what her right hand was doing (Mt 6:3) but someone noticed—the creator of all the world (Jn 1:1-3). If one has only a penny to give, he can give a penny. He should give *something*.

Choosing a church home

Choosing a church is an important decision. Look for a bible church that teaches the bible book by book—verse by verse. If a believer remains in the word himself (the sign of a true believer [Jn 8:31]) the Holy Spirit will guide him to the right church (Jn 16:13, 1 Co 2:10-16; 1 Jn 4:1-6).

When we decide to make a church our own, certain responsibilities come with that. As Christ disciples we are responsible to other disciples (e.g. tithing, corporate praise and worship, service, bible study, small accountability groups, etc.). The church equips us for the work of the ministry so that we can equip others (Eph 4:12). Spiritual people reproduce themselves--Christ disciples make more Christ disciples (Mk 16:15).

Joining a church is not an expense. We cannot afford *not* to be in church! Heb 10:25. There is no such thing as Lone Ranger Christianity. The church—an organic body of believers worldwide—functions together. Some are the hands that help. Others are the feet that go to distant places to share the gospel. Each member of the body of Christ has a gift and each member is necessary for the body to function well: But now indeed there are many members, yet one body. And the eye cannot say to the hand, "I have no need of you"; nor again the head to the feet, "I have no need of you." (1 Co 12:20-21). If a member of the Christ does not attend then the body must do without him and then we all suffer.

Christianity is about giving not getting. When we: demonstrate faith in the Lord, care for our brothers and sisters and share our time, talents and treasures with them, we experience joy.

Jesus said:

“Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal; but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also (Mt 6:19–21).