



# THE SOWER

Volume 6, Issue 3

The Sower is the bimonthly newsletter of Spirit & Truth Fellowship International, a non-profit organization, and is published in Indianapolis, Indiana.

May/June 2004

## Giving in Response to a Blessing

*Dear Saint,*

God bless you! May our GREAT BIG WONDERFUL GOD pour out His blessings upon you and yours today.

As you know if you have been a part of Spirit & Truth/CES for a while, we very rarely make a strong "pitch" for financial assistance like many other ministries do, because we think it is important to demonstrate that we trust God for our provision. We do make known our needs, but apparently not often enough, in light of the fact that some people have gently chided us for not letting them know when we had a need. There are many who have concluded that we are well provided for financially and have no problems in that area.

Many have also pictured our Home Office as a large facility teeming with paid staff, because we seem to be able to accomplish a lot. The truth is, we do what we do with only six full time employees, three part-time, and a few occasional workers and volunteers. Our office is a small converted house that is now burgeoning with inventory, desks, a library, and more activities than space.

So while it is true that God's provision to us is faithful and often



### Home Office

2144 East 52nd Street  
Indianapolis, IN 46205  
888-255-6189 M-F 8:30 to 5  
Fax: 317-255-6249  
CES@CESonline.org  
www.CESonline.org

### Board of Directors

Mark (& Karen Anne) Graeser  
317-413-6028 (cell)  
Mark@CESonline.org

Tom (& Susan) Resner  
TomResner@sbcglobal.net

John (& Jenivee) Schoenheit  
812-333-3295 (Bloomington, IN office)  
JohnS@CESonline.org

Gary & Karen Theisen  
Theiphon@aol.com

### Fellowship Community Coordinator

Dan (& Lori) Gallagher  
Roseville, CA  
916-784-7117  
CESwest@rcsis.com

miraculous, and therefore we do indeed have our basic needs met, there is more to it than that. Therefore, we want to let you know our present financial situation and encourage you to consider giving to Spirit and Truth Fellowship International if you are not already a contributor.

As of this writing, we are in need of significant increase in the regular

In This Issue	Page
<i>Opening Letter</i>	1-3
<i>A Heart of Service</i>	3-4
<i>Reflecting on Funerals</i>	4-5
<i>Don't Blame God</i>	5
<i>Calendar Corner</i>	5
<i>Wish List</i>	6
<i>Outreach Program</i>	7
<i>Tithing vs. Giving</i>	7-9
<i>Praise Reports</i>	10
<i>Family News</i>	11
<i>International News</i>	12
<i>Upcoming Events</i>	13-17
<i>Sign Up To Be A Partner</i>	18

contributions we receive in order to consistently fund our basic infrastructure needs for equipment, publications, events, administrative functions, and salaries. We would love to have these needs covered by our Partnership Program, because we would know that committed members of our community were covering these needs so contributions from others could go to fund our various projects. If you are not yet a Partner in our work, we respectfully ask you to consider becoming one. The minimum level of donation is \$20 per month, in return for which you receive the Tape/CD of the Month and a 15 % discount on most items in our bookstore. There is no maximum level of donation for Partners (see the partnership form on page 18).

We try to keep an undesignated cash reserves/savings of about \$30,000 to cover the ebb and flow of our monthly account, but we sometimes dip well down into this account, depleting our reserves, and need a financial windfall to replenish it. This is one of those times, and the summer coming up is a time when contributions drop because of people's expensive activities during that time. Any contribution you can make is highly appreciated, and no contribution is too big or too small. We are more interested in the heart that motivates the gifts, and that giving is proportionate to ability. We are regularly moved by small contributions from people with giant hearts but small pocketbooks. We know that every gift we receive is a treasured trust that we must steward wisely. Your gifts are our lifeblood, and are deeply appreciated and needed.

Finally, we have it in our hearts to undertake many projects, itineraries, etc., that we will do only as we have the resources. We need significantly more resources before we are going to see much progress on those things. We are including a

Wish List (on page 6) in this issue of *The Sower* so you can pray for these things and consider helping us with some part of it (or if you just won the lottery, maybe all of it!).

At present, our Partners provide only about 50% of our basic operating budget, with the rest coming from other contributors, some regular and some not, as they are moved to give. We realize that it is God who ultimately provides, but as you know, He inspires people to be His intermediaries, and we hope this letter inspires you in that regard. If you have ever heard our teachings titled "The Joy of Giving" (May/June 91) or "Financial Stewardship" (Jan. 03) **you know that we teach emphatically that giving should be in response to a blessing and not manipulated by guilt or obligation.** We would rather do without than to employ such tactics to "fleece the flock." To whatever degree you appreciate and have been blessed by our work, our events, our counsel, or other contact with us, we respectfully ask that you consider helping us financially. This is a biblical concept (Gal. 6:6ff; Rom. 15:27ff, et al), and we believe that there is even greater blessing in giving as a response to a blessing.

If you give to our work, we would hope that it would also be because you share our sense that what we are doing is at least somewhere near the cutting edge of God's work in the world today, if not actually on it. That is *not* to say that we are better than any other Christians or Christian groups, or that we are the *only* ones on the cutting edge, but simply to point out that, for whatever reasons, what we are making available to people is uniquely helpful to people who are searching for answers. We say that because that is what people who find us and begin to be exposed to what we teach and how we are with them are telling us. Obviously we want to reach out to as many people as we can, with as much love and truth as we can, with as many

people to help us as we can get. That includes you.

One of the biggest things that makes us unique is our understanding of "The Secret," with all its practical relevance to healthy and fruitful Christian living. This indispensably vital truth was buried shortly after the death of the Apostle Paul by about 70 AD and remained virtually unheard of until the 1800s when John Darby began to bring it to light. Although this magnificent truth is still a secret to most believers today, it is central to our teaching. Our next major writing project is a book on the administrations in Scripture, which we pretty much have in our hearts, and long to produce when we get the time to write it. We would appreciate your prayers for this project, for it seems that the Adversary has been successful in hindering it thus far.

As you know, we are right smack in the middle of a spiritual war. Obviously, the Enemy of God hates the truth of His Word that we are making known and is doing all he can to stop us. He doesn't need a Harvard Economics Degree to know that one of the most effective ways to stop us is to keep money from coming to us. The less money, the fewer employees and less work produced, the fewer the translations of our work into other languages, the more restricted the outreach and the fruit, and the more people he keeps in darkness and bondage. Ditto for the opposites of those things.

At present, no one in Spirit & Truth can travel as extensively as we would like for a number of people to do, but God is using our three websites to reach many people around the world. Yes, we would love to be able to hire others to do the administrative work that Mark, John S., and John L. are now required to do so they can be freed up to travel, teach, and write. But we want to see many other people also out and about

proclaiming the Good News of Jesus Christ and the integrity of our Father's Word. As do you in your family economics, we live day by day with the tension of desiring to walk through the many doors opening for us in the ministry, and the limitations of the resources necessary to do so.

Well, that's about all for now. Thanks for bearing with us and reading this letter. We love you and look forward to meeting as many of you as we can at our various events. We long to be with you to hear how God has led you to be a part of our fellowship, and to explore the many ways that we may be of mutual benefit to one another. These are truly exciting times to be alive, and this is an exciting ministry to be associated with. We hope you will stick around so that statement will live for you as it does for us. Thank you for all you do for our God and our Lord, and may God bless you.

In his service,

*Mark Graeser, John Schoenheit, Tom Resner, & Gary & Karen Theisen*

The Board of Directors

P.S. Most all charitable organizations encourage their supporters to include them in their will or to use other financial tools such as a living trust to contribute to their work. To the best of our recollection, we have not mentioned that to date, but we know that it makes sense and is a practical means for you to bless this ministry if you are so inclined. You can name the beneficiary as either Spirit and Truth Fellowship International or Christian Educational Services.

We encourage you  
to read and study  
"Tithing vs. Giving" on page 7

## ***Work For God A Heart Of Service***

Hey to all, Bob Maffit here, a volunteer staffer for Spirit & Truth. I've been putting in many hours helping to edit the Spirit & Truth books, and it has been a great privilege to play a part in making these wonderful works available to people. As I've been laboring in relative anonymity, I've been thinking about what it means to serve the Lord.

It seems that at every Spirit & Truth function I have attended someone there has complained about what awful thing or things the last ministry they were involved with did. Some have said: "I worked for many years for them, and what good did it do me?" "I gave so much time and money to them, and they wasted it." I am in the same category, and, if you are, I think I can share some things that will help us get past our past.

In a previous ministry, I started working full time after being disability retired from the U.S. Army. With my "paycheck" coming from the government, I worked for free for more than three years, and after that was paid \$360 a month for the next eleven years. My wife and my children also worked there and never received a dime. We worked for God and His Son Jesus. I did not work only for the ministry, but felt that what I was doing was for God and the Lord. Maybe some of the following verses and thoughts about that kind of service will bless you.

### **Romans 1:9a**

God, whom I serve with my whole heart...

Paul knew who he served, and later wrote about the right attitude of service:

### **Ephesians 6:7**

Serve wholeheartedly, as if you were serving the Lord, not men.

No matter what ministry we are working for, our hearts must be committed to serving the Lord Jesus and not men or our service is in vain. Service from the heart to the Lord is God's will, and is often mentioned in the Church Epistles.

### **Colossians 3:24b**

...It is the Lord Christ you are serving.

Jesus Christ is the Lord, the Head of his Body, and each and every one of us is a very important part of that Body. No one in the Body is any more important to God than you or I. We are to serve one another in love, which is how the Body of Christ is to work together, just as your body parts work together. Ever try to scratch your nose without using your hands or arms? It's a little difficult to do.

We need every part to operate properly and service the rest of our body. The Body of Christ is the same. We must all work lovingly together and thereby "serve one another in love" (Gal. 5:13c) so that we are prepared "for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up" (Eph. 4:12).

Here again we see service to the Body, which is also service to the Lord, since he is the Head of the Body. And consider this classic verse:

### **Colossians 3:23**

**Whatever** you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for men,

I encourage you to get yourself a copy of CES' book, *The Christian's Hope: The Anchor of the Soul* and read pages 113-117, which covers the rewards you earn as you serve the Lord with the attitude he asks of us. It is a wonderful book on what the Bible really says about Death, Judgment, Rewards, Heaven, and the Future Life on a Restored Earth.

In regard to feeling bitter about giving money to a ministry that you think wasted it, let us once again allow the Word to speak:

**2 Corinthians 9:7**

Each man should give what he has decided in his heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver.

If you gave, and still give, with that mindset, you fulfill your responsibility. And God says He will bless you back in many ways. And certainly there was much good that came from my previous ministry, and many people's lives were changed for the better by the truth they heard there.

In closing, I am truly sad for whatever hurt anyone suffered in the past, but let us consider that all the ministries in our past were steppingstones to where we are now, and to a much better future.

**Ephesians 4:32**

Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you.

Let's not let the hurts of the past stop us today. Let's not allow our gifts and callings to go to waste. This wonderful ministry needs every believer involved with us to fulfill his unique potential so that we can bring the truth of God's Word to a dying world. We need you!

If you have never taken an "up close and personal" look at Spirit and Truth Fellowship International, I encourage you to do so. Be like the Bereans in Acts 17:11, who "searched the scriptures daily, whether those things were so."

With a commitment to excellence,

*Robert (Bob) P. Maffit Jr.*  
North Street, MI

***Reflecting on Funerals***

[The following is an excerpt of a reflection paper written from the perspective of his "faith tradition" that Mark Graeser wrote for his *Intro to Pastoral Care and Counseling* class after visiting a funeral home.]

In the past I have been more dismissive about funeral homes, primarily because of my theological position concerning death. I have been put off by the clinical, generic character of such places for remembering and honoring the dead. After visiting one and speaking at length with the director I can appreciate the value that they have in providing pastoral care for families suffering the loss of a loved one, especially for families without a church affiliation.

Nevertheless, I can't help thinking that there might be a better venue to honor a person's memory, perhaps at their own home or a place that was meaningful to them, like their church, a lake, a football stadium, or a park (weather permitting). Funeral homes reflect the way we have dealt with death in our culture, that is, by compartmentalizing it by having a particular place dedicated to dispatching the departed. More creative ways should be considered to honor the deceased as a particular person in the choice of the memorial venue itself, rather than relying on the traditional and more impersonal setting.

I find offensive the notion that the dead are in a "better place," which I see as more Platonic than Christian. Exuding his presentation was the funeral director's blithe assumption that death is not so bad because of course we Christians believe that the dead have gone on to their reward and are in heaven. I find this very popular idea to seriously interfere with authentic grieving, because it feels selfish to mourn the loss of another

who is now "in a better place." This bromide may work when the deceased is "old and full of days," as the Bible describes the death of the aged. It is another thing when one dies in the prime of their life or as a child. In our faith community, we are trying not to fear death nor dismiss it at the expense of the hope of bodily resurrection and the value of this life.

My faith tradition sees our hope as the personal return of Jesus Christ and the resurrection of our bodies at that time. We do not see "the immortality of the soul" taught anywhere in Scripture, and have a hard time thinking that we should be OK with death because it represents some kind of graduation to a higher consciousness and eternal state of being. This is one way that the Western world has sanitized death and made it more palatable, but at the expense of true engagement in the reality of death and the urgent need we have of a Savior, without whom we have no hope of eternal life.

Based on our perspective of Scripture, we see death as "sleep" (1 Thess. 4:13-18). a biblical euphemism that takes away the sting of death without sanitizing it as something that puts the person in a "better place." I don't know of anyone who loves life who prefers sleep to being awake. Yet sleep is a temporal condition from which we awake, and therefore we need not fear it as must those who have no hope beyond the grave.

When we do a funeral, we emphasize the need for grief because the person is lost to us and to God. Scripture says, "precious (costly) in the sight of the Lord is the death of his saints" (Ps. 116:15). We also believe that God grieves with us when we lose someone, and that is hard to get to if you are taught that God "took the person home," another horrible euphemism that I find completely non-comforting. God

loved my loved one, so God "took her" to be with Him. How can that not diminish my love for God if I think that He has so little regard for what matters to me? It is hard to love one who has no regard for us or our feelings, even if it is God. Thankfully, God makes it clear in His Word that He loves us and is always trying to do His best for us. Jesus, who always did the will of God, modeled this kind of love, and never caused anyone to die just so his Father could have "another rose petal in heaven."

Please visit [TruthOrTradition.com](http://TruthOrTradition.com) for more in-depth research articles or see our book, *Is There Death After Life?*

### **HAVE YOU READ Don't Blame God! (LATELY)?**

The following is an unabashed endorsement of the above book, and a heartfelt exhortation for you to purchase it, read it (or read it again), and give it to others.

Recently, one of us here in the office was given a daily devotional titled *Streams in the Desert*, compiled in 1925 by Mrs. Charles E. Cowman in memory of her husband. It is oriented to helping people deal with the trials and tribulations of life. With all due respect to its numerous contributors, many words of whose are most powerful and pertinent, few of them seem to have understood that it is not *God* who is responsible for the tragedy that befalls us in life.

How sad that this misunderstanding has permeated Christianity for centuries. Certainly the question of where God stands in regard to evil, sin, and suffering is absolutely *vital* to the quality of one's love for and trust in Him, and thus the quality of one's whole life. If God causes, or even "allows" evil

and tragedy (in the sense that He could stop it but chooses not to), how can one really rely on Him for all good things, and deliverance from bad things?

The familiarly juxtaposed words "good" and "evil" should help make clear this biblical truth. Take out an "o" from "good" and you have GOD. Add a "d" to "evil" and you have the DEVIL. God is good and the Devil is evil (bad). It is Satan who brings evil and suffering, and, as the properly translated NIV rendering of Romans 8:28 says, **in all things** God works for the good of those who love Him.

Too many Christians have simply given up trying to understand the age-old questions relevant to the problem of evil, saying things like: "God's ways are higher than our ways, and His thoughts higher than our thoughts." For the record, that is Isaiah 55:9, and if you read a few verses ahead of that, you see that it is referring to "the wicked." It has nothing to do with believers not being able to understand what God has revealed in His Word.

Yes, our understanding is limited, but only to the revelation we find in the Word. As Deuteronomy 29:29 says: "The secret things belong to the Lord our God, but the things revealed belong to us and to our children forever, that we may follow all the words of this law." Clearly, it must be possible to understand and act upon whatever is in God's Word.

In light of how few believers through the centuries have had access to sound teaching regarding this crucial subject, think of the privilege we have today to offer people the truth of God's Word, in particular by way of the book, *Don't Blame God!* Many readers have testified that its contents have revolutionized their relationship with our heavenly Father.

*Don't Blame God!* is only \$12, plus S&H. When you read it, please let us know what you think about it.



## 2004 Calendar Corner



### July 23-25\*

*Midwest Regional Conference*  
Pokagon State Park, IN

### July 25-30\*

*Family Camp*  
Pokagon State Park, IN

### August 13-15\*

*Praise & Worship Conference*  
Dallas, TX

### August 26-29

*Singles Conference*  
Bloomington, IN

### August 20-22\*

*West Coast Live Out Loud  
Teens & Twenties Conference*  
San Jose, CA

### ~~August 27-29~~

**(has been moved to Nov. 5-7)**  
*New England Regional Conference*  
Manchester, MA

### September 23-26

*Servant/Leader Conference*  
Indianapolis, IN

### October 6-10

*Fall Men's Conference*  
Bloomington, IN

### October 22-24

*Northwest Regional Conference*  
Portland, OR

### November 5-7

*New England Regional Conference*  
Manchester, MA

### November 12-14

*West Coast Women's Conference*  
San Jose, CA

### December 30 to January 2

*Midwest Live Out Loud  
Teens & Twenties Conference*  
Kalamazoo, MI

Register online at  
[www.CESonline.org](http://www.CESonline.org)  
or

call us toll free at:  
888-255-6189 M-F 8:30 to 5

# Wish List

## *Testimonies From The Outreach Program*

Dear Saint,

When I recognized God's prodding to embark on the Outreach Program I was excited yet sad. I was leaving, my family, my job, my college, and my friends, everything I knew and loved. I had to see if this God I just might want to serve for the rest of my life was really a personal Father who would lead me in a good way. So I let go of security to travel to an undisclosed region of the country and trust God for my needs.

It was the best decision I have ever made.

Everyday I grow more in love with my Father and Jesus Christ. They have shown me that my heart truly matters to them. I have seen God's provision for physical and emotional needs. He has counseled me, supplied my needs, and has shown me that there are people that need to walk in this same freedom. Many people cringe at the name of Jesus Christ because of the twisted representation the world has offered of him. My job is to speak the truth.

"You're the only Christian I've ever liked," was said to me by a dear friend I recently helped introduce to the Lord. I'm glad I was where God wanted me to be. This is my calling and this trip has been an open door for the Lord. The growth I have experienced in a mere five months has been life-changing. The power of God is more real to me and His love is more tangible. I'm sold. I can't wait to see where God takes me next!

*Gayle LaValley*  
Bloomington, IN

Dear Saint,

I really came on the Outreach Program with virtually no expectations. A few goals that were short lived due to either lack of importance, or lack of ability to fulfill them during this seven month period. The growth experienced during these seven months cannot be gauged or explained, just know saying yes to God's call, changed my life.

Between the change in location, environment, and family life. I have learned what it is like to live in a truly loving family. A godly family, this doesn't mean silent submission or no rough times. This means a family clinging to the love of God for their survival. We have been bombarded with attacks on all levels, yet, we never took out our anger on each other.

My main praise report, is me finally feeling loved. I have finally begun to feel worthy of His abundant grace. Now my joyful nature is well served for I truly feel the joy and love for my savior. I would just like to say if anyone, has ever, is being, or is ever called by the Lord. Don't treat it like a telemarketer, pick up and go with it. For he will provide in ways you will never fathom.

*Jason Amato*  
Bloomington, IN

For more information on the  
Outreach Program please contact  
Nancy Berwid at:  
mender4@aol.com  
or  
call the Home Office at:  
888-255-6189, M-F 8:30 to 5

## *10% ?*

### *Tithing vs. Giving*

**Q:** Most churches I have been to teach rather emphatically that Christians should "tithe," that is, give 10% of their income to their church. I have even heard some ministers say that if you don't tithe, God will not bless you. What does the Bible say about financial giving?

**A:** "What does the Bible say?" is always the "bottom line" in life, but that vital question needs a qualifier: "To whom?" The Bible, the Word of God, most certainly does speak about financial giving, and a good case can be made that it is one of the five most basic activities for a Christian, the others being prayer, Bible reading and study, fellowship with other Christians, and telling others the Good News about Jesus Christ.

The question must be: "What does the Bible say TO CHRISTIANS about financial giving?" Why? Because what God says to *Christians* about financial giving is different than what He said to the *Jews* of the Old Testament about it. The sad news is that today very few Christians understand the difference, and, as a result, many are unnecessarily living under emotional and financial stress. For a more detailed exposition of this subject than we can set forth in this FAQ, I recommend our 90 minute tapes titled *The Joy of Giving* (May/ Jun 91), and *Financial Stewardship* (Jan. 03), as well as a book we carry titled *The Tithing Dilemma*, by Ernest L. Martin.

And, as is so often the case in examining a biblical issue, that takes us to the subject of *the administrations in Scripture*. Unless we understand what parts of God's Word are written to Jews, what parts are written to Gentiles, and what

parts are written to Christians, we can neither understand nor apply its truths in our daily lives. What parts of the Bible are written to you?

We are currently living in what the Bible calls the Administration of the Secret (Eph. 3:9), which began on the Day of Pentecost (Acts 2:1ff) and will conclude with the Rapture of the Church (all living and dead Christians meeting the Lord in the air—1 Thess. 4:13-18). The primary curriculum for Christians (i.e., people born again of God's incorruptible seed) is found in the Church Epistles: Romans, 1 & 2 Corinthians, Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, and 1 & 2 Thessalonians. It is there that we must look to find God's specific directions for us today, and the issue of financial giving is given two chapters worth of ink in 2 Corinthians 8 & 9.

There are also some pertinent verses in other Epistles, and the message of Scripture to Christians is that because of the finished work of Jesus Christ, we do not live under the Mosaic Law, during which tithing was instituted and commanded as part of the Law. Therefore, *tithing as a commandment of God has no relevance to believers today.*

At this point, it is important to distinguish between tithing and giving. Although *tithing* per se is not relevant to Christians, *giving* most certainly is. As a member in particular of the Body of Christ, **each Christian is to determine in his own heart how much he gives and where he allocates his resources** among his brothers and sisters in Christ (2 Cor. 9:7). The Epistles metaphor by which material giving is strongly encouraged is that of sowing and reaping—the more you sow, the more you reap (2 Cor. 9:6). “Tithing” is never mentioned.

We are working on a booklet on this subject, and it may be titled, *In*

*Response to a Blessing*, because that is the biblical basis for giving. Under the Law, Jews were to give out of their produce, that is, what the Lord had provided for them. Just like the Word says, “We love God because He first loved us,” so *we give because God has given to us*. When we understand what God has done for us in Christ, and that the material blessings we have come from Him, and that He promises to bless us back for what we give, giving cheerfully is a joy.

Even in the Old Testament, believers understood that when they gave to God, they were opening a door, if you will, for Him to bless them in return. This is, of course, still true, but the idea has been distorted by some Christians who teach that one must give to God before God can bless him. Thus, too many Christians are *giving in order to get*. No, God always gives first.

Making known the truth about this subject is critical, because the vast majority of Christians is told, and thus believes, that it is God's will for them to “tithe,” which means to give one-tenth of what they earn. Many of the more “fundamental” Christian groups are adamant about this, and accompany this exhortation with a warning that failure to tithe will result in consequences of various kinds, usually having to do with a lack of prosperity.

In many groups, this has become little more than ecclesiastical extortion, with church leaders using the lever of people's sincere desire to do what God says is right to squeeze money out of them. Such leaders proclaim that what God says is right is that you give at least ten percent of your income—to their organization. As a result of such pressure, financial giving has, for too many Christians, become a joyless, mechanical act of “bribing” God to avoid the consequences of not giving, and an attempt to earn His favor (something they already have!).

For many other Christians who once gave cheerfully, financial giving is no longer an act at all. They have stopped doing it altogether, either because they got sick and tired of the pressure being applied to them, or they really could not afford to tithe, or they saw the money they gave misused and feel that they were cheated when they did give.

If you feel that the above describes you, take heart, because you can be set free by the truth of God's Word. Then you can also share with others the treasure you have found. In our economically driven world of today, having the right attitude about money and material things is a huge asset in life. Knowing and practicing what God's Word says about financial giving will enable you to experience *the joy of giving*, and it will enable others in the Body of Christ to experience the joy of receiving and therefore having their needs met, so that together we can reach out with the Good News of God to a dying world.

A study of the Old Testament will show that tithing was instituted as part of the Mosaic Law to Israel. Some Christians point to Genesis 14 and/or 28 in a misguided attempt to prove that tithing was instituted prior to the Mosaic Law and is therefore relevant to Christians today. Their rationale is that because Abram gave ten per cent of the spoils of war to Melchisedek, and because Jacob chose ten per cent as the amount to give to God for watching over him on his journey, this is the prescribed amount God would have all people give. This is not sound biblical scholarship.

The Genesis 14 record takes place approximately 2000 years after Adam and Eve, and during all those years there is no biblical reference to tithing. Nor is there any record that Abram ever tithed as a result of some biblical law that told him to do so,

and he certainly was “making money!” When he did give one tenth, it was not of the increase of his flocks and herds, which was the tithe prescribed by the Law, but rather of the spoils of war that he had gained by defeating the army from Mesopotamia.

In Genesis 28, Jacob told God that *if* He would keep him safe on his journey, keep him clothed and fed, and bring him home safely, he would give God a tenth of what he had. That was certainly not the Mosaic tithe, which was commanded whether or not those things happened. Both Jacob and Abram gave in response to a blessing.

Even in regard to Israel, for whom the tithe was specifically instituted, nothing was said about it until the beginning of the second year of their exodus. Prior to that, in Exodus 25, for the building of the Tabernacle, Moses instructed the Israelites to give “as their heart prompted them.”

The tithe was basically on animal and agricultural products, and was paid in kind (i.e., the product itself). If one did not wish to pay his tithe in agricultural products, and decided to give money as a substitute, he was penalized and had to add a fifth part of its estimated value to the amount he paid (Lev. 27:31). Such a law was obviously not intended to encourage payment of the tithe in money.

The main purpose of the tithe was to support the Levitical priesthood. The Levites were responsible to minister to the people, and were prohibited from owning land, which obviously limited the ways in which they could earn income. God’s plan was that their support came from those to whom they ministered, much like the direction of Scripture for the Church today (1 Cor. 9:1ff; Gal. 6:6ff, etc.). The tithe also provided welfare for

widows, orphans, etc.

One reason why there was no command to tithe until the Mosaic Law was that until then there was no Tabernacle (Tent of Meeting) and no Temple, no regular sacrifices commanded (the daily sacrifices alone commanded by the Law required more than 700 animals a year), and no class of Levitical priests to support. None of these would be relevant to a Christian today, even if they did exist.

Should a Christian today tithe? One is free to give 10% if he chooses, but we are not commanded to give any particular percentage or amount. Sad to say that many Christians, once misled and often emotionally coerced into tithing, stopped giving altogether when they learned the tithe is not required. 2 Corinthians 9:6 and 7 make it clear that the more generously we “sow” with the right attitude, the more abundantly we will reap.

For some believers who do not earn much, giving generously may not mean a large amount. For others, it may mean millions of dollars, and far more than 10%. Each Christian’s situation is different, and that is why God does not prescribe specific amounts that we should give, but allows us to make our own decisions. Remember, we are “fellow laborers” with Him, and He loves to work with us in determining how much and to whom we should give, and He loves to bless us with more so that we can give more. That kind of giving makes for an exciting element of the Christian life.

You may say, “Well, what about Malachi 3:6-10? That says people who do not tithe are ‘robbing God.’” Those verses have been used innumerable times to prod Christians into giving, but wait a moment—TO WHOM is Malachi written? Well, in verse 9 of chapter 3 it says “the whole nation” is under a curse. What nation? The USA? No, the book of Malachi is specifically addressed to the nation of *Israel*, and more specifically to the priests (see

1:6,10-13; 2:1,7 and 8) who were badly mistreating God’s people. To use verses from Malachi as if they are talking to Christians is at best poor scholarship and at worst dishonest.

So what *should* Christians do about financial giving? 2 Corinthians 8 and 9 is the first place to go to find the answer to that question, and the heart of the message there is expressed in 9:7: “Each man should give what he has decided in his heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver.” If, for you, that’s ten per cent, great.

Beyond that, Scripture directs us to give to those who are genuinely ministering to our spiritual needs. When we do, we are making a sound investment in (that is, sowing into) a work that is bearing good spiritual fruit. Although there is no way we can help everyone who asks us, we are also encouraged to give to those in need, and we can seek the Lord for wisdom in doing so.

For a Christian, giving from the heart is all about knowing that we have a great, big, wonderful God, and also understanding who we are *in Christ*. Speaking of the attitude of the believers in Corinth about financial giving, Paul said: “This they did, not as we hoped, but even beyond that, first they gave their own selves to the Lord, and to us, by the will of God” (2 Cor. 8:5). As Christians, each of us has been “bought with a price.” *We* (let alone our material possessions) don’t even belong to ourselves. When you know that you belong to the Lord, and that everything that you have belongs to the Lord, and that he is responsible to keep his promises to care for you, then you can truly be a cheerful giver.

## *Praise Reports*

*The following are praise reports from some of the prayer requests we receive.*

Dear Sower,

I want to contribute a small sample of what God has been doing as our faithful Intercessor Team labors together with Him and our Lord in the concerns of this great family. I am VERY grateful for the prayer warriors who are "on their knees" daily for our ministry, and who have been for the several years that this prayer chain has been active.

*Janet Speakes*

Dear Sower,

**The Eagle has landed!!** And brought with him soldiers from Iraq!!!

They arrived in Lawton yesterday (5 April 04) about 3pm. The plane flew over the hanger we were in, everyone cheered!

He (**Daniel Keaton**) kept asking his Dad, "Am I really home?"

We want to thank our wonderful family, friends and all of the people who don't even know us or Daniel, who prayed constantly for him!!

I know he could not have made it without your prayers. It is so nice to be part of the family of God!!! Because you have so many nice brothers and sisters!!! You guys are God's best!!!! Thank you again from the bottom of our hearts!!

Randy, Bernadette, Matthew and Daniel Keaton.  
Bartlesville, OK

Dear Sower,

My nephew was hit by a wheel that came off from a passing truck while riding his motorcycle to work this morning. He was taken by ambulance to the local hospital where he lives in Arizona. Upon arrival, it was decided that the physical trauma and injuries he suffered were too great for the smaller hospital to deal with. He was quickly air-lifted to a much larger and better equipped hospital in Tucson, which is a little more than an hour away by car.

Upon his arrival at the hospital in Tucson, nothing could be found wrong with him. No broken bones, no lacerations, not a scratch. Nothing. The doctors there were pretty incredulous, and kept him most of the afternoon doing tests for internal injuries. They found none.

Lift your voices with loud and happy words of praise and thanksgiving to our God, the mighty father of our Lord Jesus Christ!!

Something big happened in Arizona today. If you raised a prayer for Andy, you were part of it. I and all of my family send you our deepest and most heart-felt thanks.

Thank you, and thank God for His awesome love and power. I know our Lord Jesus has been on the job too.

I believe we experienced a miracle today. I also believe that it was a direct result of the quantity and intensity of the prayers that many of you walked boldly into the throneroom of God with.

Eddie DeBruhl  
Weaverville, NC

Dear Sower,

I would like to take this opportunity to say thank you for all your prayers. I asked you a while back to pray for my Mom **Naomi**, who had a brain tumor removed and her sight has been affected. I just wanted you all to know how much peace it gave me to be able to ask you to pray for her, and what a wonderful support this is. Thank you for your continued prayers in this regard.

Linda Fish  
Burradoo, Australia

Dear Sower,

Update on baby **Shanai**. She is weighing in at 3lb, 6oz. She has a projected going home date of about two weeks. She has flourished in the prayers for her growth. It is looking really good for her at this time.

My co-worker (Aunt **Malissa**) is very blessed. She was honest with me the other day saying that she did not think that the baby would "make it." She was just so very tiny--but now she is growing....Yeay, God!!!

Barb

If you would like to be on the Intercessor Team and participate in this awesome work, please contact Janet Speakes at:  
speakesjr@aol.com  
or  
call the Home Office at:  
888-255-6189, M-F 8:30 to 5.

GOD IS GOOD!!!

## *Family News, Views, and Feedback*

*Do you have something to share with the Spirit & Truth family of believers that would edify, encourage, and inspire? If so, send it to us and we may publish it. To contact anyone of these folks, contact us and we will forward it on.*

*(We reserve the right to edit for readability and length, and unless you tell us otherwise, we will print your name, city, and state.)*

Dear Sower,

I wanted to thank you all for the Footsteps of Paul tour, and give you a little feedback. The trip certainly included a lot more than I was expecting, in several categories. I did not realize in looking at the original itinerary just how many places we were going to visit, nor their great historical and biblical significance. We really maxed out on tour sites, which was an exciting adventure to me. I did not expect to have so many knowledgeable guides along with us, either. It was fascinating to hear from some of the professionals who study archeology, history, architecture, etc., and to gain insight from their perspective.

I especially found value in the sites where there is strong evidence to back the biblical records. Finding the parts of the *Bema* at various sites was a thrill. Walking up onto Mars Hill, which is still labeled as such on the current maps, was quite a rush, knowing the Apostle Paul did his excellent Acts 17 exposition there. Right next to Mars Hill, we saw the Acropolis with the Parthenon and other ancient temples to Greek gods and goddesses. Paul would've seen these temples in his day in much better condition, as they were the high-point focus of the city and their worshipers.

No wonder the spirit of God was stirred up in him (Acts 17:16) by all the evidence of idolatry. What a great proof of the Scripture that we were able to see with our own eyes today! Yet another fantastic attestation to Scripture was the Latin

inscription found in the agora (marketplace) of ancient Corinth saying that Erastus purchased the street with his own money. I've already witnessed to some folks, showing them the picture of the inscription, and told some believers about this, citing the Scripture verses in Acts 19:22, Romans 16:23, and 2 Timothy 4:20 ("Erastus stayed in Corinth.."). These are some thrilling finds, I tell ya.

One of the big blessings to me was interacting with some of the locals along the way, both in traveling and in visiting each area. I was able to speak the Word to many people, and find out what things were like for them spiritually and church-wise. I found that to be a good way of really getting to know the areas. You can look around and see some places and get wonderful explanations, but there's nothing like talking with those that actually live there. It increased even more so my awareness that "the harvest is plentiful but the workers are few."

Everywhere I go, I find people that are unaware of the greatness of our God and our Lord! We have so much that they need. And there's nothing like seeing someone's eyes light up when they see someone who really believes and is excited about God and the Bible! Sometimes it got to me that I couldn't stay there and help them out. Well, maybe...

I was in awe of the diversity and uniqueness of the believers who went on the trip. What a strengthening experience, loving one another and being able to spend two whole weeks together. We were able to minister to

each other, learn together, sharpen iron with iron, laugh together and find out more about the greatness of this Secret and the one Body.

Last, I want to mention that the teaching of the Word was superb. John Schoenheit did some very thought-provoking and inspiring teachings in some important biblical settings. It was far from just academic knowledge, but pointed toward how we can utilize this experience and information to more fully understand spiritual truths and then kick it up a notch (or two or three) in our own lives and reach out to a dying world that desperately needs what we have. Christianity has to go way beyond academics!

We were also able to rub shoulders with Peter Miano (our tour guide), and receive some teaching and insight from him, which was another illustration of the Body functioning together to build itself up. This all was certainly adding fuel to my fire.

To Dan Gallagher, Jenivee Schoenheit, and Billy Darr, thank you for keeping things in motion and being there when any needs arose. I sure appreciate your loving hearts and the servant-leader examples that you are.

May we all continue to rise up to our full potential, to what Christ Jesus has called us to be, and rock this world like never before!

Todd Hamilton  
Rockland, ME

## *News and Feedback from our Spirit & Truth International Community*

Dear Sower,

Your messages and these articles you're regularly sending are really a light and a candle for my foot on my path through the wilderness of this world. I hope this doesn't sound pathetic, but the truth is that, although there are some doctrinal points upon which I don't agree with the Biblical Unitarians, I really find spiritual nourishment reading this materials from you. I don't feel alone any longer, I'm not afraid I could be a Heretic any more.

Well, there are Unitarians in Romania as well, but they are more the Universalist kind. Besides, while I am a Romanian-speaking Romanian, the Unitarian Church in Romania is made, almost entirely, by believers from the Hungarian minority, due to the circumstances that marked the spreading the ideas of the Reformation in the territory that today is Romania.

The Reformation had a powerful impact on the area called Transylvania, where many Hungarians, Germans, and Slovaks converted to Protestantism (in the form of the Lutheran, Reformed Calvinist and Unitarian Churches), while other remained Roman-Catholic.

The Transylvanian Romanians, most of them illiterate and kept in ignorance as simple peasants and serfs enslaved by the powerful German and Hungarian landowners, were Greek Orthodox and preferred to stay that way, apparently being too addicted to the mystical character of the religious services in the Romanian Orthodox Church. Despite their poor condition in that time, they

were also afraid to lose their ethnical identity since, in Eastern Europe, religion have much too often been associated with nationality. So the Romanians remained tighter to the orthodox traditions.

Later on, some of them became united with Rome, either entirely, becoming 100% Roman-Catholics, or partly, becoming Greek-Catholics (meaning Orthodox traditions and inner organization but under the authority of the Pope and accepting the communion with unleavened bread and the belief in the Purgatory and Filioque).

All the other Romanian-inhabited provinces during that time were Orthodox (excepting the Jewish and Muslim inhabitants). Only later on, starting with the nineteenth century, went some Romanians over to the new-coming Evangelical Free Churches (Baptist, Brethren, Adventist, Pentecostal, Nazarene, New-Apostolic, Mormon, etc.). Anyway, the majority of Romanians today still confess themselves to the Orthodox Church.

I am myself one quarter Hungarian, after my grandmother, but, unfortunately, I don't speak that language and, until a couple of years ago, it was virtually impossible to find any materials from the Unitarian Church written in Romanian. On the other side, there are other non-Trinitarian Christian fellows, like Jehovah's Witnesses for instance. Well, the problem is that, although I believe they have done excellent deeds for the glory of the One Almighty God (only if we take regard to the "restoration" and honoring the holy and divine Name of God and also the upholding of the pure belief in the only One God).

I reject many of their basic beliefs. Besides these congregations, there are many well-meant Trinitarian Christian brothers but I feel I can't have a true communion with them any longer because of the different spirit of worship. That is why I have become an eager reader of your Internet site ([BiblicalUnitarian.com](http://BiblicalUnitarian.com)) and I hope to keep in touch with you, while praising the LORD for his guidance. Now, this was quite a long letter.

Thank you again and God bless you !

Radu Ciumara  
Romania

## *A Very Special THANK YOU!!!*

To Lilian Campbell and her daughter Mara Ginocchio of Argentina for their ongoing translation work, and to our wonderful network administrator, Amy Stinson.

Their labor of love has made possible a Spanish version of [TruthOrTradition.com](http://TruthOrTradition.com)

Visit  
[TruthOrTradition.com/Spanish](http://TruthOrTradition.com/Spanish)

Share it with **EVERYONE** you  
know who reads Spanish!!!

# Attention All Singles!!!

Spirit & Truth Fellowship International cordially invites you to Camp Vision, in Bloomington, IN for a weekend of fellowship and fun (from Thursday, August 26, 8 a.m. to Sunday, August 29, noon). The registration cost is \$100 (includes food & lodging). The theme is "Free to Serve," and we will explore how unmarried believers can uniquely serve the Lord. The theme verses are 1 Peter 4:10-11.

One thing we will do during the weekend, as our gift to Camp Vision, is to construct and install a "camp style" Welcome Sign and Messaging Board at the Fox Hollow Rd. entrance to the camp.

Recreation plans include, but are not limited to: hiking, canoeing, and swimming in nearby parks, shopping or sightseeing in Bloomington, on grounds sports such as basketball, volleyball, ping pong, and whatever else is available (campfires!).

For more information, contact the Home Office at 888-255-6189, M-F 8:30 to 5 or e-mail us at [JesusCES@aol.com](mailto:JesusCES@aol.com)

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## Other Upcoming Events

### Midwest Regional Conference & Family Camp

**Pokagon State Park, IN**

Friday, July 23, 7:30 p.m. to Sunday, July 25, 12 noon (Weekend)

Sunday, July 25, 7 p.m. to Friday, July 30, 12 noon (Family Camp)

(see enclosed flyers)

### Praise & Worship Conference

**Dallas, TX**

Friday, August 13, 7:30 p.m. to Sunday, August 15, 12:30 p.m.

(see enclosed flyers)

### West Coast Live Out Loud Teens & Twenties Conference

**Pokagon State Park, IN**

Friday, August 20, 4 p.m. to Sunday, August 22, 1 p.m.

(see enclosed flyers)



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## Tithing vs. Giving

Be sure and read pages 7-9 for the answer!

For more information on all of our  
events you can visit our website at:

[www.CESonline.org](http://www.CESonline.org)