

OFFERTORY MOMENTS 2015

JANUARY 7

The celebration of a New Year's Day began in pre-Christian times, beginning with the Babylonians. It was declared to be January 1 by the Romans. January gets its name from **Janus**, the two-faced god who looks back into the old year and forward into the new. Janus was the patron and protector of gates and doors, and thus, of endings and beginnings.

New Year's resolutions were designed to help people close the door on past failures and open the door to new beginnings. We often joke about how quickly we abandon our resolutions to do better.

God did not just PROMISE to give us new beginnings. God actually GIVES us new beginnings in the gift of Jesus Christ. Now we respond to the amazing gift! We give our time, our talent and our money back to God.

Let us make and keep our resolution to give generously to God, who gives us life, love and opportunity. We now present God's tithes and our offerings.

JANUARY 14

(Today's Offertory Moments are left on the presenter's initiative. Consider the following instructions to personalize this moment for your congregation.)

Do a brief "State of the Church address" Talk about what was accomplished for the Kingdom in the year gone by. How many lives were impacted by the congregation? Did you distribute food, clothing or other resources to people in need? Did you Baptize and Confirm some? Did you participate in offerings for UMCOR, the Children's Home, the ministries in S. Sudan, or other missionary opportunities?

Take a few minutes to celebrate what giving does for people in need, and how our giving reaches people as in the Parable of the Sheep and Goats. What do we do for the "least of these?" Tell the stories of people your church has helped. What good things have come from your children's ministries, your youth, and your local missions? Then, unapologetically ask for continued gifts and demonstrations of generosity.

JANUARY 21

One prominent church leader says that most churches practice a seasonal "Lamentation of Desperation" about our stewardship and that we see our financial support of God's ministries as an "adjunctive" matter, meaning that money is separate from spiritual matters. But, he says, money is not adjunctive to the core values of discipleship, rather, it IS a core value of discipleship. He says further, "The well-worn phrase, 'All they talk about is money,' reflects at least two realities. One is that the speaker is not making the comment from a generous heart, and second, that the church has not effectively woven the message of stewardship into the expression of faith."

As a part of our expression of faith, we develop generous hearts and provide generous gifts to the God who gives us everything. Let's present God's tithes and our offerings this time.

JANUARY 28

When we join the United Methodist Church, we promise to support it with our PRAYERS, our PRESENCE, our GIFTS, our SERVICE and our WITNESS. Someone has pointed out that many people see this list as a multiple choice, from which we can practice any or some of the above, but not necessarily ALL. In fact, this list is an example of what it means to be true DISCIPLES of Jesus Christ...that we practice ALL the above. One way we practice discipleship is through our giving of our tangible gift through our money. We know for certain the value of these gifts. The Biblical standard is the tithe. We can grow in discipleship as we grow toward and beyond tithing.

Let us give generously to God as we present God's tithes and our offerings.

FEBRUARY 4

February 8 is Boy Scout Sunday. Across the United Methodist Church, literally thousands of churches sponsor Boy Scout Troops. Other thousands of laity across the church participate as leaders and even more people are former scouts. Our denominational support of Scouting, (including the Girl Scouts, as well,) is one of the ways we help make a difference in our communities and in the development of upstanding young men and women. Our presence in this place is a witness to the love of God and the service we provide to the needs of people nearby and across the world. When we give generously to these ministries, we serve God's ministries everywhere!

Let us now give generously as we present God's tithes and our offerings.

FEBRUARY 11

TO ALL RECIPIENTS OF OFFERTORY MOMENTS:

This week, we want you to know of a special opportunity for your church and its development of a culture of generosity!

On Saturday, April 11th at Concord UMC in Knoxville, and Sunday, April 12th at Pleasant View UMC in Abingdon, we will be honored by the visit of Bishop Robert Schnase of the Missouri Conference. He will be bringing a three-hour presentation on "*The Grace of Giving: Extravagant Generosity!*"

This event should be attended by pastors, finance chairs, council or board chairs, treasurers and lay leaders, plus any other church leaders interested in increasing the power of making disciples of Jesus Christ.

REGISTRATION INFORMATION IS AVAILABLE AT generosity.holston.org

Please register for this important opportunity.

NOW...HERE IS THIS WEEK'S OFFERTORY MOMENT:

In the coming week, we will observe the birthdays of Presidents Washington and Lincoln. Both of these leaders set the standards of our presidency, and both made significant sacrifices in the service of our nation. We will also begin the season of Lent, with the observance of ASH WEDNESDAY on Feb. 18. Lent is the season when we remember the sacrifice of God who sent Jesus into the world, and the sacrifice of Jesus who gave his life to reconcile us to God. Here is a challenge to all of us. **Will you, during these next six Sundays, give a full tithe of your income to God through the church? Remember the words of the prophet Malachi, who teaches us, if we will tithe, that God will "open the windows of heaven for you and pour down for you an overflowing blessing."** If you will take this challenge, perhaps you will be blessed, through your giving, and you might make tithing a lifelong practice.

Let us give sacrificially as we present God's tithes and our offerings.

FEBRUARY 18

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On the back of a T-shirt were these words: "It's accrual world." The word "accrual" certainly describes life. We gather many things as we live. We accrue a family, even as we are born. We accrue friends. We may accrue siblings and cousins. We grow up and some people accrue a mate, and then, perhaps, children. We accrue jobs, careers, savings, and property. We accrue cars, houses and all that we would call "stuff."

Then, comes the time when we begin to divest ourselves of these accruals. We lose parents, friends and other loved ones to death. We finally have enough stuff, and we start to give some away. How much stuff do we need? How much money? How much property? There comes a time when giving is more blessed than receiving. Is now the time to consider giving back to God's work a lot of what we have accrued?

FEBRUARY 25

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In a great TV commercial, a popular insurance "icon" finishes a meal with his young son in a diner. They overhear a waitress sharing her many financial problems. The insurance icon leaves a one-hundred dollar tip with his payment. Outside the son says, "Dad, you left \$100 in there." The father says, "Yes, I did. It's all right." The son says, "I don't understand." The father says, "Don't worry. Someday you will."

Our prayer is that we can all learn the lesson of extravagant generosity, and give to the ministries of God's Kingdom so we can spread generous love to all people.

MARCH 4

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A noted writer has said, "*Our problem is not that we've tried faith and found it wanting, but that we have tried materialism and found it addictive, and as a result find following Christ inconvenient. We are human BEINGS, not human HAVINGS. God loves us for who we are, not what we have.*"

Let us now express our faith in Christ and God's love as we present God's tithes and our offerings.

MARCH 11

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In the ancient story in Genesis, Cain has killed his brother, Abel. God searches out Cain and asks him where his brother is. Cain responds, "Am I my brother's keeper?" The response is partly out of guilt, and partly out of the shirking of responsibility. Today, we may hear the same question, asked of us. "Where is your brother or sister? Where is your neighbor? Where is the effort to be helpful and compassionate toward those in need?" We can answer, "Am I anyone's keeper?" Or, we may respond with our generous, compassionate gifts to the work of God. When we give, we reach out to the forgotten and those in need of God's grace.

Let us give generously as we present God's tithes and our offerings.

MARCH 18

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In Matthew's Gospel, Pilate asks the crowd, "What shall I do with Jesus?" The crowd wants Jesus punished, even crucified. How do we answer that question today? What shall WE do with Jesus? We can ignore him. We can be skeptical about him. We can deny him. Or...we can follow him. We can hear and abide by his teachings. We can trust in him as God's son, and become his disciples. One way we can do this is by our generous and sacrificial gifts to the work of God's Kingdom.

Let us now present God's tithes and our offerings.

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In Luke's Gospel, we are told that Jesus "set his face to go to Jerusalem." His disciples warned him and discouraged him from this course of action. They feared to follow him, but he was determined to go, and they did follow him. Sometimes following Jesus is tough and risky. Sometimes it is costly. Yet, those disciples followed...how about us? Are we willing to follow, to sacrifice, and to give it our all? We have the opportunity to follow with our generosity and our gifts.

Let's do it, as we present God's tithes and our offerings.

APRIL 1

Easter Sunday is the most celebrated day in Christianity. It is the day of the fulfillment of God's promise to us. Christ is alive! God's work in Christ is done through us, as we serve the needs of the world. In this celebration, let us be joyful in our giving, that God's spirit continues to live and the Grace of Christ abounds in the world. In thanksgiving for God's great gift, we now return God's tithes and our offerings.

APRIL 8

Randy Alcorn, in his little book, *THE TREASURE PRINCIPLE*, says, in regard to the scripture in II Corinthians 9. "God loves a cheerful giver," "The more we give, the more we delight in our giving - and the more God delights in us. Our giving pleases us, but more importantly, it pleases God." Then he says, "If we don't give, we're robbed of the source of joy God instructs us to seek."

Let us find the joy God chooses for us, as we give joyously and generously, and present God's tithes and our offerings.

APRIL 15

Well-known author and speaker, Tony Campolo tells of visiting Haiti with his seventeen year-old son. As they walked down a street in Port-Au-Prince they were surrounded by impoverished, raggedy children, begging for pennies. Tony said to his son, "Don't give them anything. If you do, they won't let up till they've taken every dime we have."

Tony's son responded, "So?" Tony says, "My son's response was letting it be known that being a Christian is to render all of life's resources to meet the needs of others in the name of Christ."

We, who have so much, are asked by God to give generously to meet the needs of others. Let us give generously as we present God's tithes and our offerings.

APRIL 22

Randy Alcorn quotes a friend who told him, "We're most like God when we're giving." Then he follows, "Gaze upon Christ long enough and you'll become a giver. Give long enough and you'll become more like Christ." That should be what it is all about, that we want to be more like Christ.

Let's try this giving, so we can receive, grow in and share the grace Christ offers. Let us now present God's tithes and our offerings.

APRIL 29

St. Francis of Assisi, whose name Pope Francis has taken, was known for his vow of poverty. He once said, "We should preach the Gospel all day long, if necessary, use words." How do we do that today? How can we live in such a way that people see the spirit of Jesus in us? One way we can do that is by our generosity and our giving to the work of Jesus in the world.

Let's preach the Gospel by our generous and sacrificial giving. We now present God's tithes and our offerings.

MAY 6

An old song called "The Old Lamplighter" reminds us that before electricity, there were candle posts on street corners. At dusk, a Lamplighter would go around and light the candles, the early version of streetlights. A young boy was sick and bedridden. From his bedroom he watched the Lamplighter doing his work. He told his mother, "There's a man outside, punching holes in the dark!"

That is what we do when we give to the work of God's Kingdom. We punch holes in the dark. As the words of the song say it, about the Lamplighter, "he makes the world a little lighter, where ever he may go."

Let's make the world a little lighter and punch holes in the darkness as we give God's tithes and our offerings.

MAY 13

In Livermore, CA, there is a light bulb in a Fire Station which has been burning since 1901, making it the longest burning bulb in the world. Only during rare power outages, and once when being moved to a new home in a new Fire Hall has it ever NOT been burning. In John's Gospel, we learn that the Word was made flesh, and lives among us. John says, "In him was life, and that life was the light of all mankind. The light shines in the darkness and the darkness has never been able to put it out."

We are here because of God's gift of light to the world. How can we help keep the light shining brightly? We can give of our resources, our efforts, our witness, and our offerings. Let's give generously to keep the light shining.

MAY 20

In Victor Hugo's great work, *Les Miserables*, Jean Valjean has been befriended by the bishop. Valjean steals the Bishop's silver dinnerware. When Valjean is captured and headed for jail, the bishop hands over the silver candlesticks and tells the police he GAVE the silver to Valjean. Valjean asks the bishop why he did this. In the novel, the bishop replies, "Life is for giving." In the wonderful musical, the bishop sings, "I have bought your soul for God."

And so it is for us. Life IS for giving. Consider how much we have received. And consider that what Jesus has done is to buy our souls for God. We can respond with a spirit of giving and living lives of generosity.

Let us now give generously of God's tithes and our offerings.

MAY 27

What do we think about money? Some people say it is unimportant. Others say it is enormously important. Some try to divide spiritual reality from material reality. Jesus didn't make this distinction. By his teachings he helps us to see that our attitudes about money and its use and misuse has a lot to do with our relationship with God and the quality of our lives. Someone has said that a close examination of our checkbook or our credit card statement would reveal a lot about our priorities in life.

Is our money important to God? Does our money BELONG to God. Do we return the tithe of our money to the one who makes it possible for us to earn money? Let us now honor God as we present God's tithes and our offerings.

JUNE 3

Billy Graham once said, *"The key of the selfish, unregenerate person is to GET. The key of the dedicated Christian should be to GIVE! Jesus said "Give, and it shall be given unto you; good measure, pressed down, and shaken together, and running over." In The Message, by Peterson, the last of this quote is, "Giving, not getting, is the way. Generosity begets generosity."*

No matter how much we GET, it never seems enough. But when we GIVE generously, it is richly satisfying, and our generosity becomes a way of life.

Let us give generously as we present God's tithes and our offerings.

JUNE 10

The writer Herb Miller mentions the power of a dash. As in, "Born this year, DASH, died this year." The dash represents an entire life. He then talks about how to make that DASH more significant, through our habit of generosity. Through generous giving, we can experience an abundant life of joy and meaning. Through our giving, we protect ourselves from being owned by our possessions.

With generosity we can grow spiritually and create a meaningful DASH. Let us give generously as we present God's tithes and our offerings.

JUNE 17

Rick Warren, the noted author and pastor says this. "The purpose of tithing is to teach you to always put God in first place in your life. The way I use my money and the way I use my time tells what is first place in my life." If we are willing to put God first, it will show in our generous giving, moving toward the tithe and beyond. And the testimony of thousands of generous people is that generosity produces joy.

Let us be joyful in our generosity, and put God first, as we give God's tithes and our offerings.

JUNE 24

A pastor by the name of Esther Lense mentions that the tithe in the Old Testament was to be used to support the Levites and priests. Then she says, *"But...and this is a very big BUT indeed...this wasn't the chief purpose of the tithe. The chief purpose was to teach the people the proper way to show reverence to the Lord. This wasn't to be a grudging, 'well-if-I-have-to' sort of giving, but a joyous giving. A giving of all that we have, all that we are, in gratitude to God for the things God has given so freely to us."*

Unless we are ungrateful to God, the practice of tithing is still relevant in our lives. Let us give generously as we present God's tithes and our offerings.

JULY 1

When we celebrate our nation's birthday, we think of the sacrifices made by so many to bring us this country, and to preserve its heritage. We consider the heritage we will pass on to those who come after us. May we be willing to make sacrifices and to be generous with our gifts, our energy and our witness, so that our heritage will be one of helping to build a great future for others?

Let us demonstrate our gratitude to God and to all who have brought us to this place, as we present God's tithes and our offerings.

JULY 8

ISAIAH 56:6

In the Old Testament book of Isaiah, we hear the words of the prophet saying, "Seek the Lord while he may be found!" Wait a minute! Does that mean that God may not always be available? That God might "hide" from us? Then we hear the words, "Call upon him while he is near." So, does that mean that God might not always be near? How can that be? Someone has said, "*If you feel at a distance from God, who moved?*"

We want to be near to God, don't we? How can we do that? There are many ways. One way for SURE for us to be closer to God is through our generosity and our tithing, and giving beyond the tithe. "*God loves a cheerful giver.*" Giving is not the ONLY way to be closer to God, but it is certainly a sure way to do it.

Let's be joyful as we present God's tithes and our offerings.

JULY 15

In the Bible, the word, "LOVE" appears 714 times. That sounds like a lot. But, the word, "GIVE" appears 2,172 times! What does that tell us? Maybe it suggests that we need to think about LOVE as a reason to GIVE. When we love someone, we are happy to give them gifts, because the giving makes us joyful and happy. God's gifts to us are too numerous to name...but life, and peace and salvation are special gifts.

Can we love God by our gifts? Will we?

Let's give generously in love to God's work, as we present God's tithes and our offerings.

JULY 22

John Wesley taught...

*"Do all the good you can;
By all the means you can;
In all the places you can;
At all the times you can;
To all the people you can;
As long as ever you can."*

How can we do good? One way for sure is through our giving. When we give, lives are changed, people are transformed and circumstances are improved.

Let's give generously to the work of God's Kingdom as we give God's tithes and our offerings.

JULY 29

God does not want us to give until it hurts. God wants us to give until it feels GOOD! God is the ultimate giver of the gifts we have, and as we receive God's Grace, we can give back to God and others. Our best giving comes from the top, what the Bible calls the "First fruits." Poor giving comes from the leftovers.

Putting God first causes our giving to make us feel GOOD! So, let's do it. Let us give God our good gifts as we present God's tithes and our offerings.

AUGUST 5

A Christian minister named T. O'Hallaran has written this. *"Christ founded the church to preach to the world and to minister to the needy in God's name. Whenever we give to the church we are doing this work for Christ. We do not give to the church because we expect to receive anything in return. We give to the church because that is what God wants us to do with our time, talents and money."*

Our generous gifts make a difference. Let us share what God has enabled us to receive as we present God's tithes and our offerings.

AUGUST 12

In the Bible, the words "Goodness" and "Generosity" are closely tied together. They are almost used as synonyms, and various translations use the words interchangeably. Most of us want to do good, don't we? We want to be considered by others to be "Good." How can we accomplish this? One way is through our generosity, with time, talents, and very much so with our money. Let's do good by God as we present God's tithes and our offerings.

AUGUST 19

In Eugene Peterson's version of the scripture, *The Message*, we read from I TIMOTHY 6:17-19. *"Tell those rich in this world's wealth to quit being so full of themselves and so obsessed with money, which is here today and gone tomorrow. Tell them to go after God, who piles on all the riches we could ever manage — to do good, to be rich in helping others, to be extravagantly generous. If they do that, they'll build a treasury that will last, gaining life that is truly life."*

Let us gain life that is truly life through our generosity, as we present God's tithe and our offerings.

AUGUST 26

Think of some of our Biblical heroes. Jacob the deceiver; Moses, the murderer; Rahab the prostitute; David the adulterer and murderer; Peter the denier; Thomas the doubter; and Paul the persecutor. And yet, God used all these flawed people to do great things for the Kingdom. Can God use us, as flawed as we are? Of course! When we make ourselves available to the will of God, God can redeem our flaws and use us for good. When we also respond with our generous gifts, God can multiply our gifts for great good.

Let us make our generous gifts available to God as we present God's tithes and our offerings.

SEPTEMBER 2

In Colossians 3:23 we find these words. "Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for men. Since you know that you will receive an inheritance from the Lord. It is the Lord Christ you are serving."

As we celebrate Labor Day, we dedicate our labors and the labors of all who serve. For innumerable workers make life livable for others.

As we work together, we are rewarded with resources, including money. Now, we share those gifts with God, as we give a worthy portion back to the work of God's Kingdom. Let us now present God's tithes and our offerings.

SEPTEMBER 9

Bishop Robert Schnase writes, in a devotional book, *“The practice of tithing...becomes a way of putting God first, an outward sign of an inner spiritual alignment. Tithing challenges us to ask ourselves, ‘Is my giving generous, or merely expedient? Do I give for practical reasons, to help the church or for spiritual reasons to nourish my spirit?’”*

Then he says, *“The practice of tithing is not merely about what God wants us to do, but about the kind of person God wants us to become.”*

If we are not tithing, can we move in that direction? If we are, can we move beyond the tithe? We do this to nourish our spirit. Let us feed our souls as we present God’s tithes and our offerings.

SEPTEMBER 16

Renowned guitarist Chet Atkins, way back in 1954 once said, “The kid from Memphis...he’s a passing fad. He won’t last.” Of course, he was referring to the young Elvis Presley. And that prophecy was proved to be way off base.

How can we tell a passing fad from the real thing? We can rely on our experience of God’s grace, and we know that when we give generously to God’s work, we make a lasting contribution that can never be diminished. Let’s give to something that HAS lasted, and WILL last, as we participate in God’s Kingdom through God’s tithes and our offerings.

SEPTEMBER 23

A wealthy businessman gave a large gift to a church. The church misused the gift in a selfish manner. The businessman was asked about his response. He said, “My gift to the church was between me and God. What they chose to do with it is between them and God.”

Our gifts to God’s work are between us and God. It’s not about the church’s needs or the budget or the deficit, but it’s about our spiritual growth in generosity. It is up to us to be prayerfully sure that our gifts are worthy of being presented to God.

Let’s be generous in presenting worthy gifts as we offer God’s tithes and our offerings.

SEPTEMBER 30

In Eugene Peterson’s translation of the scripture, *THE MESSAGE*, we find this passage in I John 3:17-19. *“If you see some brother or sister in need and have the means to do something about it but turn a cold shoulder and do nothing, what happens to God’s love? It disappears...My dear children, let’s not just talk about love; let’s practice real love. This is the only way we’ll know we’re living truly, living in God’s reality.”* That’s what we want isn’t it? To know we’re living truly and living in God’s reality?

We can do that by our gifts; God’s tithes and our offerings, and reach out to people in need. Let’s do that now.

OCTOBER 7

During a church “children’s sermon,” a teacher set out ten pennies before the children. She said, *“God gives us the ability to work and earn money. Whenever we do that, we receive pay, and that is represented by these ten pennies. Then, God says that we can keep nine of the pennies for ourselves. And we give one of the pennies back to God.”* One of the children responded, *“Poor God!”*

When we think about tithing, we often only consider how large that seems. But we keep 90% for ourselves! That seems pretty generous of God, who loves us and provides for us. Let’s give the ten percent to our loving God, as we present God’s tithes and our offerings.

OCTOBER 14

Bishop Robert Schnase says, in his book, *FIVE PRACTICES OF FRUITFUL LIVING*, “Giving assists us in our quest for God; whether giving aids us in our relationship with God or not depends upon our inner attitude.” For most of us, it is difficult to give, for fear that we won’t have enough for ourselves. But the scriptures assure us over and over again that when we are generous, we will have enough. We may not have opulence, but we will have enough.

Let’s trust God’s assurance and give generously, and let our attitude be thanksgiving in generosity, as we give God’s tithes and our offerings.

OCTOBER 21

In *THE MESSAGE*, Eugene Peterson’s translation of the Bible, we find, in I Timothy 6:6-8 “A devout life does bring wealth, but it’s the rich simplicity of being yourself before God. Since we entered the world penniless and will leave it penniless, if we have bread on the table and shoes on our feet, that’s enough.”

Do we believe that? Do we ever have enough? Can we rise above our fear of poverty to recognize our abundance? If we can, let’s return generous offerings to God who allows us to earn and prosper, as we present God’s tithes and our offerings.

OCTOBER 28

Chris Willard and Jim Sheppard have written a book called *CONTAGIOUS GENEROSITY*. They say, “The practice of generosity is God’s gift to us; it helps us resist the snare of consumption and the idol of greed. The lure of wealth and possessions can consume us, and the best way to fight our own lusts and desires is to pursue a lifestyle of generosity. If Jesus is Lord, then we must learn that all that we have, are, and ever will become is a gift from God. That means we are responsible for sharing with the world the gifts we are given.”

May we share generously as we present God’s tithes and our offerings.

NOVEMBER 4

A young single mother who often had financial struggles was challenged to commit to tithing. She says this: “I had no idea how this would fit in my budget. I was quite frightened and concerned about this. I hardly ever made it to the end of a given month without a financial mini-crisis of some sort. How could this possibly work? What if I was not able to keep this commitment? Tithing depended on my faith.”

“I’ve been tithing now for ten months, almost a year, and I have kept up with my pledge. I’m not sure how it has happened, although I’ve heard the term “God’s Economy,” and that might explain it. I am no richer this year than I was last year. I haven’t won the lottery, or suddenly been able to afford new things. But I have grown in my walk with Jesus and my relationship with God, in Christian fellowship, and this, I believe, is what tithing is all about. I began to see my offering as an act of faith, a response to Jesus, and part of my relationship with God.”

For this young woman, tithing was transformational. It can be for us, as well, to help US grow in our walk with Jesus and OUR relationship with God.

Let us now present God’s tithes and our offerings.

NOVEMBER 11

There are many choices available to us in life. One is to believe in God and be faithful. Another is to be forgiving toward others, as we hope they will be forgiving toward us. Still another is to be thankful. In this month when we experience the Thanksgiving holidays, we would do well to examine our many blessings and be truly thankful to all those who have made our lives possible.

We can give God thanks through our generosity to the work of God’s Kingdom. Through our gifts, the lives of others are transformed, so let us thankfully give God’s tithes and our offerings.

NOVEMBER 18

This week we will pause for one of our favorite holidays...Thanksgiving. There will be feasts, shopping, football and family gatherings. Some will overindulge. Some will be sad because they have none of these opportunities. Some will remember lost loved ones no longer with them.

But let us all be thankful for the blessings that are given to us by a loving God, who wills us to be faithful, compassionate, generous and loving. Let's do this by presenting God's tithes and our offerings.

NOVEMBER 25

As soon as Thanksgiving has come and gone, we are quickly in the mood and preparation for Christmas! This anticipation and preparation sometimes blocks out the significance of the holiday...that God so loved the world that he sent Jesus to be with us, to teach us, to show us the way of grace and humility and generosity.

As God is generous to us, we are called to be generous to the work of God in the world. Let us do this as we present God's tithes and our offerings.

DECEMBER 2

The season of Advent reminds us of the coming of Christ. We approach this season with anticipation in hope that God's love for all the world can be realized, shared and experienced. We can help that to happen as we share our gifts, so that the work of God's kingdom...the work of God's will being done on earth as it is in Heaven, can be reality.

Let us give to the work of the kingdom as we present God's tithes and our offerings.

DECEMBER 9

What does it mean to say "Merry Christmas?" In the medieval origins of this saying, "Merry" meant, "Strong and in control of one's environment...even to the synonym of 'mighty.'" This would be seen in the tale of Robin Hood and his "Merry" men.

When "God Rest Ye Merry, Gentlemen" was written, the sense of the song was to say, "God grant you strength, contentment and comfort." Being Merry wasn't being giddy with happiness, but being able to be protected and content in one's situation.

So, we wish you a "Merry" Christmas, and in our comfort, strength and well-being, let us give generously to the work of God's Kingdom, as we present God's tithes and our offerings.

DECEMBER 16

In many, many households on Christmas morning, there will be presents opened, with paper and ribbon scattered around the room. There will be joy and happiness with gifts and new "things." For children, the delight will be highly anticipated. For adults, the greater joy may be, not receiving gifts, but in giving them, and seeing the delight of those who receive. But the real joy of Christmas is not in the presents that are wrapped in paper and tied up in ribbons. The real joy is the PRECENCE of the spirit of Jesus, who came as a child, but grew to a life of giving, even the giving of his life.

We have received much. Let us also give, as we return to God God's tithes and our offerings.

DECEMBER 23

Christmas Day has come and gone, but the season of Christmas is still with us. We bask in this season of generosity and good will. The extended season of Christmastide, lasting until Jan. 6, reminds us that the spirit of Christmas is not a date on the calendar, but a desired state of continued outreach and peace.

Let us continue to be generous as we share God's tithes and our offerings.

DECEMBER 30

As we come to the end of a year and look toward a new year, we think of memories and the chance for new beginnings. We may remember joys and celebrations in the last year. We may have regrets and losses to also fill our memories. But a new year is here, and we sense the hope for good things to come.

As we begin another year, let us resolve to step up into a new attitude of generosity, as we present God's tithes and our offerings.