

Tithes and Offerings: What's the Difference?

Churches often use the phrase “tithes and offerings,” but what is the difference between the two? Simply stated, a “tithe” refers to the regular giving of a tenth of one’s income, while an “offering” is a gift given above and beyond regular giving.

In the Old Testament, the tithe was a regular part of worship among God’s people. It provided for the ministry of the Levites, supported worship, and helped meet the needs of the community. Offerings were often given in addition to the tithe for particular acts of worship, special needs, or specific purposes. That same distinction can still be helpful for Christians today.

A tithe represents our regular, planned giving to the local church. It reflects the principle that we intentionally set aside a portion of what God has provided and return it to him as an act of worship.

An offering is additional generosity prompted by a particular opportunity or need. It might support missions, help a family in crisis, provide for a special ministry initiative, or advance another kingdom purpose like church planting.

The New Testament places strong emphasis on both regular giving and responsive generosity. Paul instructed believers to set aside resources regularly in 1 Corinthians 16:2. At the same time, the early church repeatedly responded to specific needs with extraordinary generosity. Acts 4:34–35 describes believers willingly giving resources so that those in need could be cared for. In 2 Corinthians 8 and 9, Paul encouraged churches to contribute generously toward relief for other believers.

Neither tithes nor offerings should be given merely out of obligation. Christian giving is an act of worship. Paul writes, “Each one must give as he has decided in his heart, not reluctantly or under compulsion” (2 Corinthians 9:7).

A helpful way to think about the distinction is this: Tithing builds the regular habit of generosity. Offerings give us opportunities to respond generously when God places particular needs before us. Both are expressions of worship and faithful stewardship, and both remind us that our resources ultimately belong to God and that we have the privilege of using them for his glory and the good of others.

Key Scriptures

Leviticus 27:30 – The tithe belongs to the Lord.

Deuteronomy 14:22–29 – Tithes supported worship and cared for those in need.

1 Chronicles 29:6–14 – God’s people give willingly and recognize that everything comes from him.

Acts 4:32–35 – The early church responds generously to practical needs.

1 Corinthians 16:1–2 – Giving should be regular and intentional.

2 Corinthians 8:1–5 – Believers give generously and willingly.

2 Corinthians 9:6–8 – God desires cheerful, willing generosity.