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## Interview with Paula Langguth Ryan, author of **GIVING THANKS: The Art of Tithing**

*What moved you to write this book back in 2005 —and what different perspective do you bring to the topic of tithing?*

I started out reading Catherine Ponder’s book, **Prosperity Secrets of the Ages** (it was life changing). It raised questions in my own mind about how it’s not just the act of giving that prospers you – it’s the attitude, it’s where you focus your attention, it’s the words you speak. And the universal theme I discovered was that it was all about saying “thank you.” Meister Eckhart said it best, “*if the only prayer you ever say is ‘thank you’ that will suffice*”. That will be enough. I began to realize there was an underlying message beneath the act of tithing which empowered that action – and this message was “give thanks.” I discovered an incredible secret. Tithing was simply about saying “thank you” to your spiritual source for everything you’ve already received. It’s all about acknowledging all the additional good that is already on its way to you.

Think of it this way. If you’ve ever had someone call you up or send you an email to tell you to be on the lookout for a package they’ve sent you, what’s your first reaction? Your initial reaction is to say “thank you” even though you haven’t actually received the gift yet. That’s part of what tithing is all about.

One of the very first books my father ever gave me to read was Dale Carnegie’s **How to Win Friends and Influence People**. That incredible book taught me the value of saying something nice to everyone you meet. Maybe it brought out the people-pleaser in me, but basically, that book formed my life every bit as much as Catherine Ponder’s book did.

I believe strongly that people have issues about giving and receiving that we all need to heal. We talk about wanting MORE out of life, or feeling like we don’t have ENOUGH, or that people aren’t nice enough, or kind enough, or generous enough – and what we forget is that we’re all inter-connected. Which means, basically, if you want MORE from other people or from the Universe, or God, or whatever you call your spiritual source, then you need to start giving MORE yourself.

*For many people, tithing is an emotionally charged topic. They see tithing as a scam to bilk congregants out of their money. What is it about tithing that makes some skittish?*

The media often highlight bad news – people taking advantage of other people in different ways. Tithing is a trust issue, and it can be a challenge to open up and trust that someone won’t slap you on the other cheek, for instance, when you turn the other cheek. As a society, we’ve been conditioned to not trust other people, especially when it comes to money matters. People are constantly reinforcing the message that other people will cheat you, or people of a certain ethnicity will shortchange you, or are lazy and won’t do the work you’ve paid them to do for

you. The message we've taken from this cultural conditioning, as far as tithing goes, is that tithing is about putting money in a preacher's pocket, for example. I think it's a very interesting phenomenon, because I never hear anyone complaining that tithing is prospering the rabbi, and the Jewish tradition of tithing predates the Christian tradition of tithing.

When it comes to tithing, there isn't a concrete "tit-for-tat" connection – I give you this and I get this in return. Often, where you tithe is completely disconnected from where your good then winds up coming from. For example, I was being of service earlier this week, and tithed of my time to help an injured friend who is a professional organizer who had a client. My friend's injury limited her abilities to be of service to the client. The client, in turn, bought me dinner last night. Then today, out of the blue, I was at the grocery store and a lady stopped me and asked if I wanted two sodas she'd gotten out of the machine, because she'd pushed the wrong buttons. I see those things as evidence of my tithe returning to me – people going out of their way to prosper me.

### ***What can spiritual leaders do to help people become more committed to tithing?***

All too often, spiritual leaders preach that God is the source of all good, but then tell a congregation that without its tithes the ministry won't survive. That's why I'm always delighted when ministers can work through their personal fear of not having enough. Then they can help their members open up to the possibility of giving and receiving greater abundance in their own lives. Ken Garfield, a columnist for the *Charlotte Observer*, recently did a wonderful job of revealing what I call the naked emperor of religion.

He shared a story of a friend who had a bad taste in his mouth when it came to tithing, from childhood issues. This friend went to a church where the minister encouraged everyone to tithe. What surprised him was that the minister told people they didn't have to tithe to the church and in fact encouraged them to give their tithe elsewhere that week. That minister knew that Spirit was the source of all the church's good, not the tithes from the congregants. I do my *Abundance IS Yours Intention Setting Support Groups* on a love offering basis and someone asked me, "what do you do if what people give you at the group doesn't cover your expenses?" This was a group I'd never met with before and I simply said, "I don't mean to offend you, but my good doesn't come from what *you* put in that basket. My good comes from God." Interestingly enough, to date, the amount I received from that night with those six people is more than I've received at every other *Abundance IS Yours Intention Setting Support Group*.

### ***Some people truly want to tithe but there isn't enough money left over to include tithing in their budget. What advice do you have for people who are afraid to tithe?***

My first advice is to put tithing to the test for 30 days, like I did. I can, however, understand how overwhelming a fear of trying to make ends meet can seem. If fear is keeping someone immobilized, it's more important to start than to be tithing a full 10% and stressing yourself out. I do a sermon lesson called *Embracing Your Abundance*, where I encourage people to remember

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how much they currently give at their place of worship each week, if they attend services somewhere. If you give \$5 or \$10 or \$20 for example, calculate how much that amount is of your weekly income. If you make \$500 a week and you give \$5, then you're tithing 1%. So start telling yourself that from now on you're going to tithe 1% of whatever abundance comes to you. \$5 is always going to be 1%, on the other hand, gives you room to grow.

Each week, or each month, at whatever pace you're comfortable, stretch that percentage. If you increase 1% every month, within one year, you'll be tithing a full 10% and your life will have changed in incredible ways. Or find a *Giving Thanks Tithing Mastery Study Group* (check for them online at [www.PaulaLangguthRyan.com/art-of-tithing](http://www.PaulaLangguthRyan.com/art-of-tithing)) and you can get the same results in 10 weeks!

### ***What tithing traps do people sometimes fall into if they are tithing and don't see any results?***

I actually have a David Letterman-like list of top ten ways people sabotage their success when they tithe. Whenever a client gets stuck, the first thing I do is have them run down the list, to see if they're getting in their own way anywhere. Chances are, anytime you find yourself spinning, or feeling like you're not seeing results in your life, even though you're tithing diligently in all seven areas (see **Seven Ways to Tithe**), you're doing one of these ten things (See **Ten Ways People Sabotage Their Success**):

### ***You keep saying that tithing isn't just about money. What other types of tithing can people do?***

I personally believe, and have seen the importance of this concept: there are 7 ways to tithe (See Paula Langguth Ryan's **Seven Ways to Tithe**). Whatever you tithe is what you get back. For instance, people always ask me, 'well, I donate a lot of my time – doesn't that count?' and I tell them that donating time absolutely counts – and will result in you having more time to do the things you love to do. However, most people misunderstand what it means to tithe of your time for example. Tithing of your time isn't about giving time to a charitable cause or doing service at your place of worship. Tithing of your time means you are mindful of and a good steward of your time and you put God first in everything you do. With prayer, with mindfulness. The first part of every hour, for example.

This is true for the other six ways to tithe as well. I teach a really cool workshop called "*Tithe the Way Jesus Tithed*" or "*Master the Art of Tithing*" that explores this in greater detail.

### ***Will tithing of your time and these other areas help you prosper financially as well?***

It will if you're being mindful when you tithe your time. If you're tithing with the thought that, "*they better really appreciate all I'm doing for them*" or "*God better really crack me off some prosperity for putting Spirit first!*" then you're not really tithing. You're investing your time in order to gain appreciation or gain prosperity, to be rewarded in some way. Remember: tithing is

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about giving thanks for what you've already gotten. Tithing of your time is your way of giving thanks for the 24 hours you're given every day.

***One of the lists in your book is the benefits of tithing. Can you share those with us?***

Absolutely! There are so many incredible benefits of tithing. The six major ones are:

1. Increased wisdom and good judgment.
2. Increased health.
3. Increased wealth and a greater ability to meet expenses and reduce debt (often through the reduction of those expenses).
4. Increased fulfillment in relationships.
5. Increased spiritual understanding.
6. A willingness to let go of your expectations of what you believe you desire – so you can become open and receptive to receiving what you truly need.

***When some people tithe, they don't see any increase in income – what would you say to them about how exactly tithing is prospering them?***

The results you may be getting from tithing could include the courage to release things that have been standing in your way, letting go of old resentments, old feelings of inadequacy. It might be a sense that you're leading a charmed life, like good is just attracted to you. Like the lady who gave me the Sundrop sodas this morning, or the air-conditioner repair man who suddenly appeared in my parking lot when I went downstairs to see if I could jump start my car after I left the lights on and drained the battery one rainy Sunday. You find you're in the flow. You worry less about money. You're more open and receptive to other people and less fearful. You begin to see the good in everything that happens.

***You talk about recognizing the good in events as a major part of tithing. How are we supposed to find the good in things like a car accident, illness or a job loss that strikes our family?***

Sometimes it's hard to recognize good in events that appear to be "happenstance" or beyond our control. And it's often even harder to recognize the good in events where it appears that someone else is doing something "bad" to us. A car accident or an illness or even a job loss might be an opportunity for us to slow down and reflect on what direction our life is taking. It might be an opportunity for us to decide "do we want to do the same old same old, or do we want to step out with courage to do something we've always wanted to do." At some point, and it's usually after

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a loss of some sort, we reach this place of awakening where we find it's harder to stay closed off and out of integrity with ourselves than it is to finally open up and let go and become fully, authentically ourselves. It's like our fears reach this point where either we breakthrough and even breakdown or we cease to exist.

When events happen that involve other people, it's easy to blame them and choose to be a victim instead of choosing to be happy. It's only when we can recognize that we choose to allow events to happen to us that we can break out of that victimhood. A lot of people tell me, *I didn't choose to be assaulted as a child, or choose to be battered as a wife, or choose to be raped or whatever, but on one level we did.* And I don't mean that to be cruel or insensitive. The truth is, we chose survival over fighting back at that moment. We chose having abusive adults around us over having no adults around us, or an abusive spouse over the unknown of being on our own. There is incredible empowerment that bursts forth when we can recognize that we made the conscious choice to survive. We consciously chose to stay in that situation until we reached a point where we were capable of consciously choosing something different.

***Some people aren't currently earning any money. How do you tithe on 10% of nothing?***

Start by tithing 10% of whatever you have on hand. And start tithing daily from whatever you do receive. If you receive concrete items, then tithe from possessions you do have. And begin tithing in the other five ways as well. So often, when we feel down and out, or we're worried about money, we start closing in, we start looking for ways we can take or "get" rather than receive, we start looking for "what's in it for me", and we start reacting out of fear. Ask yourself, every time you're faced with a decision: *"how would I respond to this if I wasn't afraid that it would take away from me somehow, if I wasn't afraid of losing something?"* Make your choices from a place of love instead of from a place of fear.

***One of the most controversial parts of Giving Thanks is the "letting go of guilt gifts" section. Can you explain the importance of this concept?***

I sent my mother a copy of *Giving Thanks* and those who have read it, or have heard me speak, know I share "mom stories" frequently. She recently sent me a question about the letting go of guilt gifts section! Letting go of guilt gifts is a concept that requires us to risk "disappointing another in order to be true to ourselves" as Oriah Mountain Dreamer says in *The Invitation*.

My mother told me a story of a crocheted blanket my great-grandmother gave her. It didn't match her colors, but she kept it all these years and now, in her new home in Tennessee, it matches, and she uses it every night when she sits on the couch. I, on the other hand, don't do "crocheted" items very well – so I would have given that blanket away and passed it along to someone who wanted it, or who could use a blanket. I would have gotten joy from the gift and I would have gotten joy from sending the gift out to be used, knowing that all these years it was being used, and not in storage somewhere. By the same token, I do have a box of items and

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artwork stored in my closet that are for my Mission Style home, when I'm ready to manifest that in my life, which I have held onto for years, because they do feed my soul.

You see, when we hold onto things out of guilt, instead of because we truly want to have these things in our lives (and these could be material items, or commitments, or even relationships with people who are energy drains in our lives) we are taking up precious room that could be filled by the things we say we really want.

***When someone tithes and becomes fearful about the money they've just spent, what are their choices, and what impact do those choices have on their prosperity?***

As I point out in the book, when fears come up around tithing, you basically have three choices. You can stay with the suffering and feed the fear. You can do something that causes the fear to be masked so you don't experience it now. Or you can stay present, acknowledge the fear, face it head on and allow it to be transformed and to transform you. It's all about allowing you fear to feed your courage and help it grow.

***If you could break the art of tithing down to a three-step process, what are those important three steps people should take?***

1. Give joyfully and cheerfully, tithing in all seven ways as I outline in the book, as a way of simply giving thanks for what you've already been given.
2. See the good in everything – don't look for it, and don't find it, simply see it – it's like Jesus and his prospering and healing power. He didn't look for health, or find the health in someone, he simply saw them as whole, healed and healthy. He didn't look for a way to find more fish and bread, he simply saw the loaves and fishes as “enough” – and they were. What you see is what you're going to get in your life.
3. Release your attachment to how your good comes to you. Begin to recognize all the little ways you're prospered. A client of mine once invited 20 friends to help her clean her boat in preparation for moving to Florida. Friends showed up, but she was upset that not one of the 20 people she invited had shown up to help her, so she called me to help her release the resentment she was experiencing. So I had her count the people who HAD shown up – and there were 20 people who had shown up. Your good doesn't always – actually, it doesn't usually – come the way you think it's going to come. When you release your attachment to how it comes to you, you allow yourself to be pleasantly surprised and prospered! The Olympic sailing team I coached had their boat delayed in France by a longshoreman's strike. And another country's team lent them their boat to compete. They said if I'd told them “how” a sailing boat would have shown up they would have never believed me.

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So release your attachment, despite appearances and watch what happens. No matter what “appears” to be happening, keep affirming the good in the situation and it is amazing how many times the “obstacle simply dissolves.

*If people want to get a copy of Giving Thanks how can they?*

They can either get a copy from their spiritual home, or go online and order it through CM Press ([www.paulalangguthryan.com](http://www.paulalangguthryan.com)). You can buy a paperback or you can get a free e-book copy – there’s even a free 10 week graduated tithing class and a “*Giving Thanks Tithing Mastery Study Guide*” you can download if you want to create a study group!

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