Here are some things to keep on your radar:

**Thanksgiving week and the Holidays:** As we enter the holidays you might want to think about having a night of fellowship and sharing a meal together. I know every year my group has a Friendsgiving where we eat, laugh and share together. You should also be thinking about how your group can continue to show compassion to someone during the holiday season.

**Seed Money:** For the next several weeks we will be in a series about money, contentment and our hearts. I’m sure many of us have heard these principles and truths over and over. Don’t let your hearts and group become weary in practicing and growing in our knowledge and attitude toward money and possessions.

**Attendance:** Thanks for taking attendance every week. We are almost at 100% of our leaders taking attendance and communicating with us. Please keep it up.

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**MAIN POINT**

God expects His people to be disciplined in all areas of life, including giving.

**INTRODUCTION**

As your group time begins, use this section to introduce the topic of discussion.

1. Did you grow up in a house where tithing was common? If so, what did you learn observing this pattern in your parents’ lives? If you grew up in a house where tithing wasn’t common, did you see your parents give to any other causes? What were they?
Unpack the biblical text to discover what the Scripture says or means about a particular topic.

Read Malachi 3:6-9.
This passage contains a sobering message. God spoke through Malachi to tell the Israelites that they deserved total destruction. Why had the end not come for them? They deserved to be destroyed for their failure to love and follow the Lord, but God spared them because they were the descendants of Jacob, and He had promised to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob to bless all nations through their descendants. Instead, God once more was offering the Israelites an opportunity to repent and to receive His blessings. The Lord pointed to a particular way the people should return to Him. They needed to stop robbing Him.

2. In what ways does a failure to give a tithe “rob God”?

3. Why did God identify a failure to tithe as evidence that His people had turned away from Him?

4. Why would tithing be a way to return to God?

5. Do you think there is a curse associated with our failure to tithe today? Why or why not?

The Hebrew word translated tithe literally means “a tenth.” The practice of tithing demonstrates several important aspects of God’s people’s relationship with Him. (1) It is an act of obedience, an expression of devotion to the Lord. (2) It acknowledges that God owns everything; we are merely stewards of what He has entrusted to us. (3) It expresses faith in God as Provider, trusting Him to enable us to meet our needs with what remains. One major lesson He teaches us through the discipline of giving is that He is the Owner of all things. To fail to tithe is to miss His blessing of the joy of giving. He may use varied means to discipline us and to teach us the importance of acknowledging through tithing that He owns all we have.

Read Malachi 3:10-12.
The Lord instructed the people what to give, where to give, and why they should give. They were not merely to bring a nominal offering but to bring the whole tenth. Tithing is the biblical standard for believers’ giving.

6. What are the implications of God’s demand for the “whole tenth”? Where is the tithe to be given? Why? Why would these standards still be important for Christians to follow?
7. God told Israel that other nations would bless Israel because of Israel’s obedience in tithing. How does our obedience with the tithe cause others to praise God and His church?

Tithing is neither legalistic nor pre-gospel, pre-Christian, or sub-Christian. Rather, giving the whole tithe is a measure of a believer’s obedience to God, faith in God, and love for God. Jesus gave His all for us, and He asks us to give all we have and are to Him. The purpose of tithing is twofold. Today, the tithes and offerings of God’s people provide support for the churches’ ministers and its ministries. Another purpose of tithing is to bring the giver into a closer relationship with God.

APPLICATION

Help your group identify how the truths from the Scripture passage apply directly to their lives.

When we acknowledge that God is the Creator and Owner of all, we accept our stewardship of time, talents, possessions—all we have and are. God gives us the means to provide food, shelter, and clothing. He also gives us talents and spiritual gifts with which to do His bidding. He provides time to do everything He wants us to do. If we have trouble finding time to do what we know God wants of us, we are operating on our own agenda, not His.

8. What does our attitude about giving reveal about our relationship with God to others?

9. For those in the group who tithe and give regularly, what encouragement can you share with the group about your experience. If you are someone who doesn’t tithe, share with the group what is holding you back?
COMMENTARY

MALACHI 3:6-12

3:6. This verse contains a sobering message. The LORD spoke through His prophet to tell the Israelites that they deserved total destruction. The word translated perished has the root meaning of end. Why had the end not come for them? Not because the Israelites had done anything to deserve God’s mercy. On the contrary, they deserved to be destroyed for their failure to love and follow the Lord. They had been spared because they were the descendants of Jacob, and God had promised to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob to bless all nations through their descendants. The Lord does not change. Because God may always be relied on to keep His promises, the people had not perished. Instead, the Lord once more was offering the Israelites an opportunity to repent and to receive His blessings.

3:7. The Lord consistently had been faithful to the people through whom He had chosen to send His Messiah into the world. Nevertheless they habitually had turned away from His statutes (laws) generation after generation—since the days of your fathers. The Israelites knew the commandments of God, but they had not kept them. Is that not true of many of us? We have read and heard the Bible taught and preached quite a bit. We know what the Lord expects of us. The question each of us must answer is: Am I obeying or ignoring what God’s Word has instructed me to do?

God entreated the people to return to Him. If they would repent of their stubborn rebellion, He promised to return to them. The unchanging God of their fathers had not changed in His love for His people. They had turned away from Him. He invited them to come back to the receptive arms of the One Who loved them and would forgive them.

3:8. The Lord pointed to a particular way the people should return to Him. They needed to stop robbing Him. “In what way do we rob You?” Indeed, how can a human being rob God? Beware of taking lightly the Lord’s answer. He declared the Israelites were robbing Him in the tenth. The tenth means “the first 10 percent of one’s increase.” “Every tenth of the land’s produce, grain from the soil or fruit from the trees, belongs to the LORD; it is holy to the LORD” (Lev. 27:30). After all, how could withholding the tithe be robbing God unless people were keeping for themselves that which belonged to God in the first place? They also robbed God in the contributions. That term indicates offerings aside from the tithe. These were some of the sacrifices mandated in the law and were given to the Lord as a part of the temple worship.

3:9. Withholding tithes and offerings was not isolated to a few individuals but was characteristic of the whole nation. The people as a whole were suffering under a curse. In their case, those effects evidently were drought, crop failures, and famine (3:10-11) as God’s disciplinary punishment for their sins.

The Lord did not command tithing to harm or hinder His people. He loves us and always wants the best for us. One major lesson He teaches us through the discipline of giving is that He is the Owner of all things. To fail to tithe is to miss His blessing of the joy of giving. He may use varied means to discipline us and to teach us the importance of acknowledging through tithing that He owns all we have.

3:10. The Lord instructed the people what to give, where to give, and why they should give. They were not merely to bring a nominal offering but to bring the whole tenth. Tithing is the biblical standard for believers’ giving. While believers may fall short of biblical standards, the biblical standards remain. We violate God-
given Scripture if we imply that giving less than what God requires is acceptable and pleasing to Him. Tithing is an act of obedience to God.

Some people object to tithing because Malachi wrote in the Old Testament era. They say that they are excused from tithing because they are under grace, not the law. True, we are saved by grace through faith, not by keeping the law. However, Jesus died on the cross to save us from our self-centered sins, not to save us from tithing. He strongly upheld the law as the standard for how we should live (Matt. 5:17-20). Tithing is neither legalistic nor pre-gospel, pre-Christian, or sub-Christian. Rather, giving the whole tithe is a measure of a believer’s obedience to the Lord, faith in the Lord, and love for the Lord. Jesus gave His all for us, and He asks us to give all we have and are to Him. He is Lord over the 90 percent as much as over the 10 percent.

The Lord also instructed His people where they should bring their gifts to Him. They could not use their tithes in any way they chose and then claim to be obedient. They were to bring the tithe into the treasure house. This was the treasury of God’s temple. Tithes were used to provide the needs of those responsible for maintaining and leading in worship of Almighty God.

Some church members express dissatisfaction over their church’s use of funds and make that an excuse for not bringing their tithes to the Lord’s house. Others claim to satisfy the requirement to tithe by giving their tithes to religious or benevolent causes outside the church. Individuals indeed should give over and above their tithes to good, godly causes as they are able. That does not substitute for giving their tithes to support the work of Christ through His church.

The purpose of tithing is twofold. Giving through the local church provides for the work of the gospel ministry. Malachi wrote that the Lord viewed this as supplying food for His house. In the days of the temple, the priests and Levites were to receive their living from the meat and grain offerings that people sacrificed to the Lord, as well as from the money that was given. Today, the tithes and offerings of God’s people provide support for the churches’ ministers and its ministries.

Another purpose of tithing is to bring the giver into a closer relationship with God. The LORD of Hosts, the faithful God of the covenant, invited the people of Malachi’s day to prove Him in this matter of giving tithes. He wanted them to test His faithfulness. If they would tithe, He would provide abundantly for them.

The nation of Israel was experiencing famine from drought and lost crops. God would open for them the windows of heaven and pour out blessing for them until no more room for them could be found. This may mean all kinds of blessings, but Genesis 7:11 uses the same Hebrew term here translated the windows of heaven to describe rain. This probably was a promise of drought-breaking rain that would bring abundant crops. That understanding is supported by verse 11.

3:11. The Lord not only would ensure the growth of crops but also the harvest—I will rebuke the devourer for you, pests that would consume the crops before the harvest. In addition, the vine in the field will not be barren. No blight would ruin the harvest. The curse under which the people were living would be lifted and they would experience anew the blessings of God.

Some people have assumed that this Scripture is a guarantee that everyone who tithes will be rewarded financially. That is an assumption that makes two serious errors. First, giving to get is investing, not giving. The notion of giving to get contradicts the very meaning and spirit of giving. We should give for the joy of giving to our gracious and loving Lord, not in hope of a material return on our investment.
The second error is a failure to realize that the promised blessings may or may not be material in nature. Yes, verse 11 indicates that the Lord promised material blessings to the Israelites of Malachi’s day. We all can affirm confidently that God meets the needs of His faithful children (Matt. 6:33). Nevertheless, financial prosperity may not be the kind of blessing each person most needs. Jesus owned virtually nothing (Matt. 8:20), told a rich ruler to sell all he had (Luke 18:22), and warned against greed and thinking material possessions are the main thing in life (Luke 12:15). We can trust our Heavenly Father’s love and wisdom. As we are faithful to Him, He will provide for us exactly the blessing we need.

3:12. As God abundantly would meet the needs of the faithful Israelites, they would gain a reputation among all the nations as being fortunate. No longer would they be seen as a weak and pitiful remnant who had returned to huddle in their ruined and ravaged homeland. The entire world would see their nation as a delightful land. God’s promised blessings were not only for His people’s sake but also for the sake of other nations. He wants all peoples to know Him as the true Lord God Almighty.

When we faithfully meet God’s standard of giving by tithing our incomes to the church, we too experience God’s blessing. We will learn by experience the joy of giving. Our faith will be strengthened, and lost people who observe our relationship with God may be drawn to Him as well.