

FACTORS OF FAITHFULNESS

DISCUSSION GUIDE FOR SMALL GROUPS

LESSON FIVE: FAITHFUL IN STEWARDSHIP

MALACHI 3:7-12

MAIN POINT

God calls us to be faithful stewards of the things He has given.

INTRODUCTION

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

- Though the United States is the wealthiest nation in the world, do you think most Americans feel rich? Why or why not?
- There are more than 2000 verses in Scripture that deal with money and possessions? Why does God care so much about money?
- Given how much God cares about money, why do you think we don't like to talk about it much in the Church?

If we are going to have a biblical perspective on money and stewardship, we must first realize that money isn't important to God because He needs it. Money matters to God because money reveals what has first place in our hearts. Tithing is God's method, given to believers, to show what comes first to them. It's the primary way we manage His resources, which He has lent to us.

UNDERSTANDING

Unpack the biblical text to discover what the Scripture says or means about a particular topic.

Have a volunteer read Malachi 3:7-12.

If you add up the verses in the New Testament that deal with faith, there are about 500 of them. If you add up the verses in the New Testament that deal with prayer, there are about 500 of them also. If you add up the verses that deal with stewardship, there are more than 2,000 of them. God is interested in our stewardship—how we acquire and use our money. One of the great tests of our

spirituality and how much we love God and how much we believe the Word of God is stewardship.

- In what ways is failing to tithe robbing God?
- Why did God point out failure to practice the discipline of tithing as evidence that His people had turned away from Him? Why would tithing be a way to return to God?
- What happened to the people of Malachi's day because they didn't steward God's resources well? (See Malachi 3:9,11.)

The people's unfaithfulness in giving revealed weaknesses in their lives. They were greedy, they didn't trust God to provide, they denied the truth that all things belong to Him, and they failed to obey His commands. Not tithing was a symptom of something greater: spiritual apathy. Had their hearts been right with God, they would have given gladly and generously. In fact, their failure to live by God's statutes was the very reason they were struggling with difficult times. They were suffering under "a curse" because they—the "whole nation"—were robbing God (Malachi 3:9).

- How is giving the tithe (literally "a tenth") an act of faith?
- What do you show that you believe to be true about God when you give the first tenth to Him?

Because the people failed to tithe, God reminded them that He was their Provider, and that everything they had belonged to Him. He cursed the land with a "devourer" that ruined crops and vineyards (Malachi 3:11). The practice of tithing is an act of obedience, an expression of devotion to the Lord. It also shows that God owns everything; we are merely stewards of what He has entrusted to us. It expresses faith in God as Provider and shows that we trust Him to meet our needs with what remains. The Lord did not command tithing to harm or hinder His people. He loves us and always wants the best for us. God is not raising money; God is growing Christians. God wants us to grow in the grace, knowledge, and love of Him through our stewardship.

Have a volunteer read Malachi 3:10-12.

- What stands out the most to you about these verses on tithing?
- What's the result for those who tithe according to these verses?

- Why does it take faith to give to the Lord in this way?
- What does a faithful giver believe about God? How does that belief affect giving?

Your finances are either blessed or cursed by God, and you are the one who makes the choice. When we believe in the goodness of God and that He can be trusted not only to provide but to provide more than we need, we won't have trouble with tithing 10 percent of our income to the local church. But the really great news from this passage is that no one can outgive God. He is going to pour out His blessings on those who give their hearts to Him.

- Share about a time in your life when you experienced God pouring out His blessings on you when you fully surrendered your finances to Him.
- Are God's blessings always financial? Why or why not?
- What are some of the blessings we have in Christ because of our relationship with Him? Read Ephesians 1:3-14 for insight.

God told the people to bring their tithe to the "storehouse." A storehouse in biblical times was a place in the temple for storing grain and food offerings that were given as tithes. The priests then lived off of what was in the storehouse. Tithing was giving back to God what already belonged to Him so that His work through the temple and the priests might continue. God promised that, as a result, He would open the windows of Heaven and pour out His blessings on them.

- Why are these standards the same for Christians today?

APPLICATION

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

- How has giving to the Lord made an impact in your life?
- How should the awareness that everything we have belongs to God affect the way we give to Him?
- What are some ways you might remind yourself of how much God has already given you in Christ?

PRAYER

Pray that God would create in every member of your group the kind of heart He is looking for, and thank God for the great blessings that come from financial responsibility and tithing.