



BALANCED

**GOING DEEPER  
DISCUSSION GUIDE**

**January 26, 2014**

# Discussion Guide

## Greenbacks and ham, Sam I am

*Malachi 3.8-12; Deuteronomy 14.22-29*

### Connecting:

45 minutes

(The following questions are intended to provide your group with a way of connecting with one another so that you might partner in the work God is doing in your lives.)

- In what ways did God move in your life this week? In what ways did you respond to him?
- What was your biggest challenge this week? In what ways, if any, did you invite God into this challenge?
- How honest have you been with us? (Graciously thank group members for their honesty if they answer that they have held back.)

### Getting Started:

10 minutes

- When you hear the word “tithe” what feelings, if any, arise in you? Could you elaborate?

### Diving Into the Text:

60 minutes

(The following questions are intended to provide your group with a simple road map through the text. Feel free to use these questions in ways that best fit your group and the dynamics of your own meeting.)

- Use the notes to explain the context and background of the tithe.
- Read Deuteronomy 14.22-29 aloud slowly.

- In the Law, God commanded his people to set aside a tithe (tenth) of all they produced. What were God’s intended purposes for this tithe?
- When you consider these purposes, what seems to be most important to God?
- Read Malachi 3.6-12 aloud slowly.
- Malachi discusses the tithe within the context of God’s deep desire to be in a restored relationship with his people. In what ways does Malachi propose the tithe as a means of supporting one’s relationship with God?
- In your mind, what are the common perceptions today about tithing? Where might these ideas come from? In what ways, if any, are these ideas similar or dissimilar to God’s purposes for tithing?
- In what ways, if any, do God’s stated purposes for tithing challenge or confirm your own feelings about tithing? Would you explain?
- Would you say that tithing is easy or difficult for people? Why might this be?
- Is tithing easy or difficult for you? What encouragement, if any, do you find in God’s stated purposes concerning tithing?
- Sit with God, holding the tithe and your participation before him. Allow him to speak to you. Share what God says with your group.

## Context and Background

### *Tithe*

The term "tithe" literally means a tenth. The giving of the tithe to one's superior is an ancient concept, finding a place in many ancient cultures, not just the biblical context (Genesis 14.20; 28.22). Within these ancient contexts, the giving of the tithe seems to be a means of granting the honor, thanks, and respect worthy of one's superior. The tithe could also be given as a means of supporting ancient religious cults; that is, the tithe increased the treasuries of the gods. God maintained the ancient cultural giving of the tithe in the Mosaic Law but gave it new meaning. Rather than simply a gift to honor one's superior, God commanded the Israelites to give a tenth of all that they had for religious and social needs. Within the Law, this giving of the tithe was to function on a three year cycle. During the first two years, a tenth of all that the land produced was to be set aside and used for the maintenance of the Jewish religious system (Leviticus 27.30-33; Numbers 18.21-25; Deuteronomy 14.22-27). In the third year, a tenth was to be set aside as a means of providing for those who could not provide for themselves (Deuteronomy 14.28-29). While one might perceive the tithe to be something which God commanded as a duty, the tithe was actually God's gift to people, a means of providing an opportunity to meet with God. In giving the tithe, people were not giving money to God but themselves to God (Malachi 3.6-7). The tithe created space in which the Israelites might trust and depend upon God (Malachi 3.10-12). Further, the tithe was not used by God but set aside so that it could be consumed by those who gave it for the purpose of meeting with God in the experience of worship (Deuteronomy 14.23, 26). During his ministry, Jesus did not revoke the giving of the tithe but assumed its value, only reminding his audience to recognize the

purposes of God behind the tithe (Matthew 23.23-24; Luke 11.37-42).

## The Text

### **Malachi 3.6-12:**

#### ***God wants us, not our cash***

In the prophecies of Malachi, we discover a series of sermons directed to the Jewish people at a stage in their history in which they were callous to God and the life he desired for them. This callousness is likened with a breaking of the covenant (Malachi 2.10-16), which seems to be equated with a rejection of God through a rejection of the life he desired for them, a life revealed in the Mosaic Law (Malachi 3.7). God's message through Malachi is that his greatest desire is for his people to return, to renew their relationship with him (Malachi 3.7).

Malachi notes that one means of returning to God is the giving of the tithe (Malachi 3.7-8). It seems that the people of God had stopped giving a tenth of all they produced as commanded in the Law (Leviticus 27.30). In refusing to give this tenth, the people were withholding their very selves from God. In giving the full tithe, there would be food in God's house. This food which is being withheld was for the specific purpose of supporting corporate worship experiences in which people experienced and came to know God (Deuteronomy 14.22-27). This food, when given, was also to be used to support those who could not support themselves. Thus, to withhold the tithe was to hinder the personal experience of God in worship and his gracious provision. Second, in giving the tithe, the people of God would create space in which they had to rely on God as they would be choosing intentionally to live on less. God promises to fill this space with his provision and protection (Malachi 3.10-12), furthering

the idea that the failure to give the tithe works against the personal experience and knowledge of God.

**Deuteronomy 14.22-29:**  
***Giving to experience God***

In Deuteronomy 14, Moses provides one of the most explicit instructions concerning God's intentions for the tithe. The tithe (tenth) is an ancient concept. (See Tithe.) In the Law, God commands his people to collect a tithe and notes that the entire tithe belongs to him (Leviticus 27.30-33). Unlike other religious systems which collected similar tithes for the purpose of increasing the holdings of the god, God's commands center upon the needs of his people and their experience of his presence. The collection of the tithe supports the corporate worship experience of those who produce it as well as those who have no ability to produce similar provisions (Deuteronomy 14.26-27). In this corporate worship experience people come to know and experience God (Deuteronomy 14.23). Secondly, the collection of the tithe provides for the physical needs of those who cannot provide for themselves (Deuteronomy 14.28-29).

**Application:**

Tithing. It is an off-putting concept to many of us. That God would command us to give a tenth of all we earn to him feels like something between the levying of a religious tax and a divine shakedown. However, the tithe is not about God, nor is it about his desire for our resources. The command to tithe is the expression of God's desire for us. When we tithe, we provide for the corporate religious experience. In these corporate experiences we come to know and experience God personally. With the tithe, we also provide for those who cannot provide for themselves; that is, we become conduits of God's grace and presence for those in need. Finally, with the tithe we intentionally create space in which we force ourselves to rely on God so that we might experience his protection and provision in ways that build our faith. Some might think that tithing is God's means of getting at our cash but it seems that the tithe is rather God's means of getting at us.

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