

Discussion Guide

Why Give?

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

- Giving is one of those touchy subjects. Why might this be so?

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.)

- Using the notes, explain the context of the tithe.
- Read Deuteronomy 14.22-29 aloud, slowly. Pause and read the text once more, seeking to imagine yourself hearing it for the first time as Moses speaks to you.
- What was it like for you to imagine yourself listening to Moses as you heard this text? What, if anything, stood out to you? Could you elaborate?
- What purposes does God have for the things we give him (tithe)?
- What seems to be most important to God in his command to give?
- What reasons have you been given to encourage you to give (tithe)? Are these similar or dissimilar to those provided by Moses?

- Consider the reasons provided by people and by Moses. What kinds of responses do they elicit in you? Could you elaborate?
- In the end, God wants us, not our money. He just has to go through our wallets to get to us. Why might this be the case?
- Many times we do not feel we are able to give (tithe). Why might this be the case?
- Read Malachi 3.6-12.
- What does God say to the idea that we are not capable of giving? Do you find God's words easy or difficult to accept? Could you explain?
- What might it look like to begin moving to a consistent pattern of giving or to a deeper commitment to giving? What if anything, keeps you from taking these steps?
- Consider closing in prayer, offering yourselves to God, asking for grace to give yourselves more fully to God.

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 early 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 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 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 (Malachi 3.6-7). The giving of 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 rescind the command to give the tithe but assumed its value, reminding his audience to recognize the purposes of God behind the tithe (Matthew 23.23-24; Luke 11.37-42).

The Text **Deuteronomy 14.22-29:** ***Giving and engaging with God***

The book of Deuteronomy is Moses' rehearsal of the Law as the people of Israel prepare to enter the Land of Promise (Deuteronomy 1.3-5). The generation of Israelites who had received the Law had died in the forty years of wandering, and a new generation was preparing to enter the land of Canaan. Therefore, this new generation needed to be reminded of the covenant the people of Israel had made with God. The book of Deuteronomy is important because it not only serves as a reminder of God's commands, but it expounds upon many of God's commands, providing insight into God's reasoning for the various laws.

In verse 22, Moses states the command of God to set aside a tenth (tithe) of all they produced (Numbers 18.21-25; Leviticus 27.30-33). While God had stated that the tithe was to be given to the Levites for their provision (Numbers 18.21-25) and that the tithe was to be used to support the religious system (Leviticus 27.30-33), no further instruction or explanation was given in the Law concerning God's intentions for the tithe. Here, Moses expands upon the command to tithe, noting that God's primary intention for the tithe was to create sacred space so that people might experience God in corporate worship.

According to Moses, the tithe was to be collected throughout the year, but then it was to be carried to the place of worship as a means of supporting the worship experience. The specific worship

experience in mind is not stated, but it is clearly a feast, the typical corporate worship experiences of the Israelites. The explicit purpose for using the tithe in this manner was to support the experience of God's presence so that the Israelites might learn to relate to God properly; that is, the tithe was used to create a corporate worship experience so that the Israelites' might align themselves properly with God.

God was not particularly concerned with the specifics of how the tithe was to be used beyond the provision for the corporate worship experience. Should someone not be able to bring the physical tithe—fruits and vegetables—to the place of worship, he could sell his tithe for money and then use the money to support the corporate worship experience. Moses goes on to indicate that God's intention was not just to provide for the worship experience of the one who was tithing, but the tithe was meant to support the worship experience of those who were not capable of tithing because of their lack of the means to generate income (Levites).

Moses concludes his explanation of the tithe by noting a secondary intention for the tithe. Every third year, the Israelites were to gather their tithes into their own towns and use the tithe to provide for the needs of those who were in the greatest need. It is hard to miss the inclusive intentions for the tithe, both in the provision of food and the provision for worship. The tithe was given to ensure that all people were able to experience God's care and presence.

Malachi 3.6-12: *God wants us, not our money*

The book of Malachi is a prophecy written sometime after the return of Ezra (458 B.C.). The Temple has been rebuilt and the process of sacrificing has begun once more. However, there seems to be something of a religious malaise which had developed among the Israelites during their captivity, a malaise which Malachi addresses.

Malachi begins to move to the conclusion of his prophecy in chapter 3 by stating that God is unchanging. Because God is unchanging, the people of Israel have not been destroyed. God has remained faithful to his covenant promises even though the Israelites have not been faithful to their promises. God's sole desire is that the Israelites would return to him. God explicitly

that he feels that the Israelites have robbed him. Within the context, the robbery is of themselves. By not fulfilling their covenant promises, the people of Israel have withheld themselves from God. He envisions their return to take place as the Israelites fulfill their obligation of giving the tithe (Numbers 18.21-25; Leviticus 27.30-33). Somehow in giving their tithe, the Israelites are giving themselves back to God. This occurs because with the tithe, the Israelites are providing for the corporate worship experience. Thus, with the giving of the tithe, they were making space to experience God's presence. Malachi seems to imply that the people of Israel did not feel they could tithe. Perhaps they did not think they could afford it in the process of rebuilding the land after their return from captivity. However, God states that if they would trust him and give, then they would experience his abundant provision.

Real life with Blake:

Why do we give? Honestly, for a number of years, I gave because I thought it was my duty. God said I should give, and so I will give. The trouble with that approach was that it became very easy to justify not giving. "God, things are tight this month. You understand." "God, this is a good thing too. You understand." In my justifying, I thought I was simply holding back my money, something God didn't need anyway. I have come to understand that I was right and wrong. I was correct that God doesn't need my money. In fact, he isn't even interested in my money. I was wrong, because in holding back my money, I was holding back more than my money. I was holding back the very thing God wanted the most: me. God wants me to give, not because he wants my money, but because he wants me. He just understands that he needs to go through my wallet to get me. God intends that my giving provide for the very thing which turns me back to him, worship. Giving prepares me for that worship experience because my giving creates an intentional need, a gap between what I have and what I need. Thus, I am ready to run to God. I need to run to God. When I do, I find him waiting, waiting to receive what he really wanted, me.

Real life with you:

Why do we give? This is the question so many of us ask every time the plate passes us on Sunday morning? Do we give because we have to give? Do we give to support a building? Do we give to pay salaries? Why do we give? I suppose we could trace some of the reasons we give back to each of these and more, but the real reason we give goes much deeper. We give because in our giving we give ourselves to God. God really isn't interested in our money. He is interested in us, but he knows us well enough to know he has to go through our wallets to get us. He instructs us to give so that we will have what we need for the corporate worship experience, the very thing which re-centers us around the one who made us. He asks that we give because it creates a need, a need which drives us to the worship experience hungry and thirsty for the one we meet there. As we come, he is waiting, not to receive our money but to receive us. This week, consider your pattern of giving and the pattern of giving God encourages in Scripture. Talk with God about the possibility to moving toward giving in a way which is in keeping with the pattern he describes. Talk to him about your fears, your needs, your desires. Talk about a plan to start giving. As you do these things, you are well on your way to giving what he wants most, you.



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