

Session 2 Leader Guide

Read

When you were in school, did you ever arrive at a class only to find that the rest of the students were pulling out pencils, preparing to take a test you had forgotten about? After you realized the teacher was giving a test, were the first words out of your mouth: "What Test?" Many people don't realize this, but tithing represents a test for every believer.

The word translated "tithe" in the Bible actually means "tenth" or "a tenth part." Many people don't know that the number ten, as used in the Bible, has rich symbolic significance. Just as recurring numbers such as seven and forty carry special meaning, the same is true with the number ten.

The authors of the Bible consistently associated the number ten with "testing." For example, in the book of Exodus, God tested Pharaoh's heart with ten plagues or signs. God delivered His standard of righteousness, which tests our conduct, in the form of Ten Commandments. The children of Israel experienced ten specific tests or trials while wandering in the wilderness. In the book of Genesis, young Jacob worked for his future father-in-law Laban. During that season, God tested Jacob's loyalty and character ten times in the form of unjust changes in his wages. And the first chapter of the book of Daniel, he is tested for ten days. This pattern continues into the New Testament. In Matthew 25, ten virgins are tested for their preparedness. Revelation 2:10 mentions ten days of testing.

With this biblical pattern for the number ten, we shouldn't be surprised to learn that tithing or giving one-tenth of our increase back to God, tithing, represents a key test for us as God's children. But it also represents a test for God! The prophet Malachi said that the Lord declares:

Malachi 3:10 - Bring all the tithes into the storehouse, that there may be food in My house, and try Me now in this," Says the LORD of hosts, "If I will not open for you the windows of heaven and pour out for you such blessing That there will not be room enough to receive it.

This passage about tithing is the only place in the Bible where we are encouraged to "test" God. At the same time, the tithe represents the ultimate test for the heart of the believer.

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The Bible delivers a clear message about tithing. Moses said, "All the tithe of the land, whether of the seed of the land or of the fruit of the tree, is the Lord's. It is holy to the Lord" (Leviticus 27:30).

However, today some believers argue against tithing because they say it is a part of the Old Covenant Law, which God replaced with the New Covenant. Yes, tithing was a part of the Law. However, the Bible shows that the principle of the tithe existed hundreds of years before the Law even existed. It is a principle of God, not simply an Old Covenant Law. In Genesis 14, Abraham paid a tithe (one tenth) of everything he gained in battle to Melchizedek (an Old Testament type of Christ). In Genesis 28, Jacob told God he would give Him a tenth of all his increase. The Patriarchs (early fathers of Israel) understood and honored the principle of tithing long before the Law was written. In the next session, we will look at an example that happened hundreds of years even before these instances.

Not only is tithing a clear biblical principle that existed long before the Law, but the New Testament also mentions it. Jesus himself, when talking to the Pharisees in Luke 11, told them that although they tithed on their herbs, they neglected the weightier matters of the Law. Jesus continues by saying: "These you ought to have done, without leaving the others undone" (Luke 11:42). Jesus told them that they should both tithe as well as address the weightier matters of the Law. If Jesus says we should tithe ... we should tithe.

Malachi quoted another strong statement from the Lord:

Malachi 3:8-9 - Will a man rob God? Yet you have robbed Me! But you say, 'In what way have we robbed You?' In tithes and offerings. You are cursed with a curse, for you have robbed Me, Even this whole nation.

God not only says that we can rob Him when we don't give tithes and offerings, but He also says we are cursed with a curse. This matter is obviously serious to the Lord. Yet some believers resist this teaching and argue that New Testament believers can-not possibly experience a curse in their finances because Jesus bore the curse of sin for us all on the cross. There is indeed a wonderful spiritual truth in Paul's words to the Galatians:

Galatians 3:13-14 - Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the law, having become a curse for us (for it is written, "Cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree"), that the blessing of

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Abraham might come upon the Gentiles in Christ Jesus, that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith.

Certainly, Jesus bore more than we can possibly imagine on the cross. Yet, it is still possible to experience the effects of the curse, even though Christ took those effects fully upon Himself. We must all appropriate or take possession of by faith what Jesus did for us on the cross. And when we do not, we continue to experience some of the effects of the curse.

If we disobey God's Word as believers, we can and do experience the negative consequences of sin. This truth applies to our finances just as surely as it applies to anything else in our lives. Can we, if we are in willful violation of God's principles of first fruits and the tithe, see our finances come under a curse? Yes, we can.

The Ten Commandments are the foundation of the Old Covenant Law. If you break one of those Old Covenant commands and murder someone, you would still experience consequences. If you commit adultery, there will be consequences. Even though Jesus redeemed us from the curse of the Law, we still see that consequences remain for living against God's principles.

God gave the command that all His people are to tithe; how-ever, with our obedience also comes a blessing. The believer's tithe helps support the work of the church, the priest, and the ministry to people. The place where we receive our "spiritual food" is the place where we are to pay our tithes. You would never go to a restaurant and eat a meal, and then leave without paying the bill. Yet people who don't tithe come to the church and eat a "spiritual" meal, and leave without paying the bill, so to speak. Practically speaking, it is the tithe that allows pastors and ministers to spend their time pre-paring spiritual meals and feeding the people.

In the Bible, the church is referred to as the bride of Christ. What if Jesus gave you one thousand dollars a week, but asked you to give ten percent to His bride while he was away. Would you do it? How would Jesus see the person who gave what He asked to His bride? What about the person who gave extra? What about the person who gave less, or not at all? Tithing is personal to Jesus because it is for His bride.

Obeying God's Word through tithing breaks the curse and invites God's blessings and provision for our lives and finances. It is a test. Will you pass the test?

Discussion

1. Many believers struggle when it comes to tithing. Why do you think this happens? What are some of the barriers or misunderstandings that hinder believers from tithing?
2. Through disobedience to God's principles, it is possible to step out from under God's protective umbrella of favor and protection. Perhaps you have experienced that in some area of your life other than finances. If you are comfortable talking about it, what were the consequences and what did you do to realign your life with God's Word and will?
3. Have you tended to view tithing as a burden or a benefit? What practical steps could you take to keep the benefits of tithing in mind?
4. The author of Hebrews suggests that when we tithe here on earth, Jesus spiritually receives those tithes in heaven (Hebrews 7:8). How does that knowledge influence the attitude of your heart as you bring your tithes and offerings to God?
5. Read Deuteronomy 26:1-2 and Deuteronomy 26:13-15. According to these Bible passages, what is the tithe, and to whom or what are we to give it?

Deuteronomy 26:1-2 - And it shall be, when you come into the land which the LORD your God is giving you as an inheritance, and you possess it and dwell in it, that you shall take some of the first of all the produce of the ground, which you shall bring from your land that the LORD your God is giving you, and put it in a basket and go to the place where the LORD your God chooses to make His name abide.

Deuteronomy 26:13-15 - Then you shall say before the LORD your God: "I have removed the holy tithe from my house, and also have given them to the Levite, the stranger, the fatherless, and the widow, according to all Your commandments which You have commanded me; I have not transgressed Your commandments, nor have I forgotten them. I have not eaten any of it when in mourning, nor have I removed any of it for an unclean use, nor given any of it for the dead. I have obeyed the voice of the LORD my God, and have done according to all that You have commanded me. Look down from Your holy habitation, from heaven, and bless Your people Israel and the land which You have given us, just as You swore to our fathers, 'a land flowing with milk and honey.