



First Things First

Malachi 3:6-12

Malachi served as a prophet to Israel around 460 BC. This was a time of relative calm as a nation. The people had returned from exile and the Temple had been rebuilt, but Israel had not returned to the greatness that they envisioned. This disappointment led the people to drift from God in a number of ways. Regarding their tithes and offerings to God, the Israelites had developed a wrong perspective of their material belongings as well as a wrong attitude toward God.

1. Have you ever stolen anything in your past (either by actively taking or by not giving/returning something to someone)? How did you feel about it after the fact? Did you ever come clean?
2. Would you say that not giving or returning something to someone feels less like stealing than actively taking from someone? Why is that?
3. In verses 8-9, Malachi tells the people that they are *robbing* God by withholding their tithes and offerings. To what degree do you see not giving to God as an act of robbery? Considering that so many Christians do not regularly tithe, why do you think it is so easy for people to ignore this charge of robbery against God?
4. The Hebrew word used here for robbery implies a false sense of ownership and therefore an improper use of the goods. How does this explain the charge of robbery for not giving a tithe to God? How should our perspective change if we are not truly the owners of the resources we have? How would you know that someone sees themselves as a steward rather than an owner?

In verses 10-11, God tells His people that He will provide for their needs and increase the fruitfulness of their work when they are faithful to give Him the tithe He deserves. These promised blessings give us insight into why the Israelites (and us) are afraid to give God His tithe.

5. How does not tithing indicate that we have a low level of trust in God's ability to provide for us? Why do you think people believe they can do more with 100% of their income without God's blessing than they can do with 90% of their income with God's blessings?

6. Has there been a time in your life that God provided when you didn't know how things would work out? What did that experience do for your trust in God? Do you think we will see more of that in our lives if when we are faithful to tithe to God? What positive results might we experience if we take the risk to give God His tithe even when we're not sure that we can afford it?

7. In verse 7, God says, "return to me, and I will return to you." Do you need to "return to God's way" in your giving?
 - What can you begin doing to develop a stronger perspective of a steward rather than an owner of your resources? What step can you take in this, this coming week?
 - Ask God to give you a more generous heart toward Him and greater faith that He will provide for you.

8. Do your spending patterns fit the 10-10-80 plan that Pastor Mark mentioned? If not, what can you do begin to align your financial life around this formula? What will you need to *start* doing? What will you need to *stop* doing? Consider sharing your decisions with someone else in the group so that they can encourage you and help you make the changes you want to make in your financial life.

Going Deeper - passages you can explore to dig deeper into the topic of giving and tithing

Matthew 23:23 - How do Jesus' s words reinforce the command to give God a tithe?

2 Corinthians 9:6-11 - Is a tithe all God wants? What does God desire from our hearts as we give our tithe?