

This Sunday, Steve wrapped up the final week in our Engage Series with a message titled “Tithing on Purpose”.

Our story begins in Genesis 14. Lot and Abram had parted company and gone their separate ways because the land could not support them while they stayed together with all their flocks and herds. One day a messenger came to Abram with the news that four kings from the East had invaded and captured Sodom (where Lot had settled) and enslaved all its population – including Lot and his family. Abraham organised a rescue party. He attacked the invaders and rescued Lot and all the wealth and people of Sodom.

Abram returned from the battle with all the loot and people, and he was met by Melchizedek, King of Salem, who come to greet him with bread and wine. Melchizedek is described as a priest of ‘God Most High’. Salem, meaning ‘peace’, is the old name for Jerusalem. Melchizedek blesses Abram: *Then Melchizedek king of Salem brought out bread and wine. He was priest of God Most High, and he blessed Abram, saying, ‘Blessed be Abram by God Most High, Creator of heaven and earth. And praise be to God Most High, who delivered your enemies into your hand.’* Genesis 14:18-20.

Abram’s response was to give Melchizedek a tenth of the battle spoils: *Then Abram gave him a tenth of everything.* Genesis 14:20. Abram paid this tithe as a heart response to physically express his appreciation of God’s help.

It is interesting to note that this is the first mention of a tithe (tenth) in the Bible. It was also the first mention of Melchizedek, and it’s interesting to note the following about him:

- He served God Most High
  - He was priest of God
  - He was King of Salem, that is King of Peace
  - He had no genealogy
  - He had no beginning of days or end of life
  - He gave Abram bread and wine and blessed him
- Melchizedek was a foreshadow of the coming Christ. Through Melchizedek, Abram got a revelation of ‘God Most High’.

So what is the importance of this story to us?

### 1. Abraham gave a tenth (tithe) by faith.

If giving, tithing and generosity are tricky areas for us, perhaps it’s because our revelation of God is too small. He is the Creator, Owner and Possessor of heaven and earth! And He wants to bless our faithfulness. After Abram gave a tenth of his battle spoils to Melchizedek, we read this in Genesis 15:1... *After this, the word of the Lord came to Abram in a vision: ‘Do not be afraid, Abram. I am your shield, your very great reward.’* The

shield is God’s protection, and the reward is His blessing.

While this is an Old Testament story, it holds true for the present time too. Romans 4:12 tells us that we follow in the steps of Abraham. In other words, we should follow his example of tithing. When we tithe, God promises us His protection and blessing!

### 2. The tithe belongs to God – we return it to Him

After Abram came ‘the law’, and tithing was written into the law: *“A tithe of everything from the land, whether grain from the soil or fruit from the trees, belongs to the Lord; it is holy to the Lord.”* Leviticus 27:30. And again Jesus reiterates this principle in the New Testament: *‘Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You give a tenth of your spices – mint, dill and cumin. But you have neglected the more important matters of the law – justice, mercy and faithfulness. You should have practised the latter, without neglecting the former.’* Matthew 23:23. And God doesn’t just want our tithes out of a ‘duty’ of legalism; He wants our justice, mercy and faithfulness too!

Malachi 3:7-9 reinforces that our tithe belongs to God: *Return to me, and I will return to you,’ says the Lord Almighty. ‘But you ask, “How are we to return?” ‘Will a mere mortal rob God? Yet you rob me. ‘But you ask, “How are we robbing you?” ‘In tithes and offerings. You are under a curse – your whole nation – because you are robbing me.*

God has no need of our money, but He wants to build our faith. He gives us 100%, and He expects us to return 10% to Him. The protection and blessing (shield and reward) are in the 90% that remains.

### 3. Tithing is returning the first 10% of my income to God’s storehouse (the church).

*Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse, that there may be food in my house. Test me in this,’ says the Lord Almighty, ‘and see if I will not throw open the floodgates of heaven and pour out so much blessing that there will not be room enough to store it.’* Malachi 3:10. Today’s ‘storehouse’ is the Church - the place where we are ‘fed’ spiritually. When we bring our tithe to Him, God opens the floodgates of heaven and unleashes blessings of peace and joy; His guidance, direction and strength into our lives.

*I will prevent pests from devouring your crops, and the vines in your fields will not drop their fruit before it is ripe,’ says the Lord Almighty. ‘Then all the nations will call you blessed, for yours will be a delightful land,’ says the Lord Almighty.* Malachi 3:11-12. This passage of Scripture again refers to the shield (protecting the crops from pests) and the reward (the harvest of ripe grapes). Tithing is giving God our best so that He can bless the rest.

## WHY TITHE?

1. Tithing provides for God's work through the church. We believe that the local church is the hope of the world.
2. Tithing teaches me to put God first. The tithe comes first and teaches us to put God first in every other area of our lives.

Tithing isn't about Jesus wanting to take the money out of our pockets; it's about taking the greed out of our hearts: *Honour the Lord with your wealth, with the firstfruits of all your crops; then your barns will be filled to overflowing, and your vats will brim over with new wine.* Proverbs 3:9-10. When we honour God with the "firstfruits" of our labour (i.e. our tithe), it stops the things we own from owning us.

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

### Icebreaker (choose one):

- How did you first find out about the concept of a tithe? What were your thoughts about a tithe at that time?
- Share about a time when you gave and you felt really fulfilled by that. Note: The giving doesn't necessarily have to be Church related.

### Questions for Groups (choose 2 or 3):

1. How are the invitations for the Detox series going? Is there anyone new that you have invited to join the group?
2. What part of Sunday's message was challenging to you?
3. It has been said that our bank statements reveal our values and priorities. Do you think that is true? Why or why not?
4. Read Malachi 3:10 What types of blessings have you seen come from tithing? Why do you think God says to test Him in this? Have you tested Him in this? What have been the results?
5. "For we brought nothing into the world, and we can take nothing out of it." 1 Tim 6:7. How does this verse help us keep earthly wealth and money in right perspective?
6. What are three reasons for the lack of generosity in your life? How could you become more generous?
7. Where is God calling you to be (more) generous? Finances, Relationships, Possessions? Be specific! Take a couple of minutes to share with another person 2-3 areas that you want to take risks with your generosity this week.

## PRAYER POINT

Thank God for what He has provided in your life and for the opportunity to give back. Pray for opportunities to bless others in need.

Pray for the Detox series coming up!

## ACTION POINT

Who around you has a physical need you could do something about? What specifically are you willing to sacrifice to meet that need?