

Session 1 Overview

A Lesson in Being an Encourager by Giving

Be a Barnabas Acts 4:36-37 et al.

Lesson Objective: To lead persons to emulate the spiritual qualities of Barnabas in order to become Godly stewards of their resources and lives who build up the church and enhance the work of missions.

Lesson Preparation: Read the following Bible passages: Acts 4:36, 9:26, 11:25-29, 12:25, 15:37-40; 1 Cor. 9:6, Heb. 7:8. Thoughtfully piece together the images you acquire of Barnabas. Consider what kind of person he was. Think of someone who displays similar qualities in his life, and refer to this person internally as an illustration of “a Barnabas” as you teach the lesson.

Prepare a display using the main headings of the lesson: Setting the Pace in Sacrifice, Investing Life in Ministry, Giving Time to the Kingdom, Proving Trustworthy with Resources, Valuing Potential Over Past, and Practicing Proportionate Giving, with the scripture basis for each point as a sub-point. If you can use PowerPoint, Corel Presentations, or other presentation software with a computer and video projector, do so. Other options include overhead projector, and dry-erase or chalk boards. Use the best method possible.

If using computer software, select background pictures for each point that match the idea presented. Example: sprinters or a pace car for “Setting the Pace,” disaster relief workers for “Investing Life,” etc. The pictures can serve as illustrations if needed.

Be thoroughly familiar with this guide. Anticipate questions or discussion. Think of questions that can help participants capture and internalize the principles being taught.

Lesson Approach: Many adults already will have learned the stewardship principles in this lesson when young. Some, however, will be newer to biblical thinking or to Christian life. Simplify the thoughts. Make them yours. Use the outline and the display to greatest advantage. Re-emphasize points often. Gather and use illustrations from your own local association or your state to “localize” the biblical teaching. Draw on your own life, avoiding any hint of bragging. Talk about how you have been humbled by learning one of the lesson points in your own life. Urge commitment to be a Barnabas.

Lesson 1

Be a Barnabas

A Lesson in Being an Encourager by Giving

Introductory Illustration:

They say that Hollywood is the only city where you can be encouraged to death. At least one person who knows Hollywood well, however, is proud to say his success owes much to the encouragement of others. He was, by his own description, just another foreign young man struggling to make it in America, and starting from scratch. He went to a community college where a counselor encouraged him to take an English course, and then another and another. One particular teacher, Mr. Dodge, changed his life. Dodge, he says, “encouraged me, pushed me, and made me believe I could succeed.” Dodge saw this young man’s potential and encouraged him to educate himself in business and economics. He did, then taking courses in accounting, bookkeeping, and micro and macroeconomics. The young man developed a business, one in which he gained the public eye, and a popular following, and now, an influential place in public service. As Governor of California, Arnold Schwarzenegger says he owes a lot to the people who encouraged him along the way.

All of us should remember the encouragement of others that has helped us get where we are. Some had more encouragement than others, but some who were not encouraged much realize how important encouragement is.

If anyone needs encouragement in Christian circles these days, it’s missionaries and ministers. There are many ways to encourage those who do Christian work. The International Missions Board recently published a note from missionaries in an unnamed Asian country, saying, “The only Bibles available are in the country’s national language. An translator recently completed a Bible version in the state language. Your giving can help provide bulk copies of this new state translation, enabling Great Commission organizations to share it in the form of tracts and as encouragement to local believers.” Time and time again, missionaries call on us to give and give more, so that more can be done to spread the message of Christ and undergird the work of those who go for us and for Christ.

Someone who is a good model of Christian stewardship in the Bible is Barnabas. We learn about him in several vignettes—little pictures here and there that gradually sketch a picture of this important, first-century Christian.

The New Testament figure Barnabas is a multifaceted example of stewardship. While accounts of him are not as extensive as those of Peter or Paul, the frequent descriptions that we have of his involvement in ministry and missions in the New Testament draw a picture of a person who exemplified godly, spiritual management of the life and resources God gave him. Careful inspection of Barnabas’s activities and personality lead us to regard him as a model for Christian stewardship. A Christian sets his aim high if he says, I’m going to be a Barnabas!

Our knowledge of Barnabas comes chiefly from Acts. Thorough study of these passages reveals the consistent character of Barnabas.

1. Setting the Pace in Sacrifice

We are introduced to Barnabas with a short description that shows him to be a person who set the pace for other Christians in the matter of sacrifice.

Joseph, a Levite from Cyprus, whom the apostles called Barnabas (which means Son of Encouragement), sold a field he owned and brought the money and put it at the apostles' feet. -Acts 4:36-37

Barnabas was possibly Joseph's nickname. If it had been a second given name, Luke probably would have written the name together, "Joseph Barnabas." However, the name seems to have been given to him by his friends, much in the same way that Simon was called Peter because of the meaning of the name "rock." The apostles called Joseph Barnabas because it fit his character.

Barnabas's act regarding the piece of land was first one of commitment or devotion to the Lord, then one of devotion to the church (cp. 2 Cor.8:5). Ananias and Sapphira used the example of those who sold land and gave the proceeds to the church as an opportunity to join those donors in significant giving, while not actually being as committed as they wanted to appear. Barnabas, however, was honestly a sacrificial steward and giver. Even though his act of giving was publicized it was not any indication of his seeking attention. In fact, it is likely he could not have kept the matter private. In any event, public awareness of his act made it a dramatic example for other believers.

The example of Barnabas teaches us a principle of stewardship involving unusual sacrifice. We often associate sacrifice with loss. However, the biblical concept of sacrifice focuses not on the negative, but on the positive. Sacrifice can be joyful. Sacrifice is not what someone else takes away, but what one willingly gives for the joy of meeting a need or furthering the kingdom cause.

Discussion Questions:

- a. Ask if anyone in the class has a nickname that was given him or her in college or some other time, especially if it "stuck." Ask if the name fit the person. Let the class have fun with this idea for a minute. Point out that the disciples probably had given Joseph the nickname "Barnabas" because it fit him, and perhaps also because it set him apart from other "Josephs," which was a very common name.
- b. Ask participants to give their first impression of the word sacrifice. Most will probably agree that the idea communicated is "giving up" something. Ask if they believe that idea is really the heart of what sacrifice means.
- c. Tell this story: A soldier came back from the war with a missing arm. A curious acquaintance asked him how he lost his arm. He replied, "I didn't lose it. I gave it." Sometimes giving hurts, but when we go into something with our eyes open, knowing that to meet a need, giving might hurt, it changes the way we look at our contribution.

2. Investing Life in Ministry

When we next encounter Barnabas, he comes forward to testify to the genuineness of the conversion of the church's early and great enemy, Saul of Tarsus.

When he [Saul] came to Jerusalem, he tried to join the disciples, but they were all afraid of him, not believing that he really was a disciple. But Barnabas took him and brought him to the apostles. He told them how Saul on his journey had seen the Lord and that the Lord had spoken to him, and how in Damascus he had preached fearlessly in the name of Jesus. -Acts 9:26-27

Barnabas by nature was an encourager, a supporter. He saw the good in people. He believed the best about them. He lived so as to bring out the best in others and to appeal to their faith and optimism.

Barnabas was also a risk taker, and risk is always an element of investment. If one invests his time, energy, resources or reputation in a cause, he incurs risk. Not without the risk of personal loss of credibility did Barnabas defend Saul before the apostles. We have the benefit of hindsight, from which we see that Barnabas did not lose anything by his support of Saul (at least Luke did not record any negative impact on Barnabas). We may reasonably assume that he did not know anything remarkable that needed reporting. Barnabas, however, did not know what might happen if he defended Saul. He might have been rejected by the apostles. They might have concluded that Saul was engaging in a sinister plan to convince them to drop their defenses so that he could infiltrate them, and that Barnabas was gullible and therefore not deserving of their trust either.

Barnabas evidently evaluated his situation in this way: he gathered the facts; he drew conclusions about what the Lord wanted to take place; he assessed the cost and requirements of his being part of bringing about the Lord's will; and he submitted himself to be used of the Lord to accomplish that will. Every Christian steward does the same thing. He acknowledges that God has placed him in management of resources, he sees what God wants to do through him, and he determines to yield his resources to God for the accomplishment of His will.

Another passage, this time a comment by Paul to the Corinthian church, confirms Barnabas's willingness to invest his substance in ministry:

Or is it only I and Barnabas who must work for a living?

1 Corinthians 9:6

Barnabas, like Saul, was willing to forego the rights of missionary/apostles to be supported by the churches, if it was necessary to prove that they were not "in it for the money." His attitude about money fits well with the idea that he was a sacrificial investor. His operative question was not, "How much will this cost me?" but "How much can I give?"

Discussion Questions:

- a. Ask if anyone in the class ever took a risk to stand by someone else. If someone volunteers, ask him or her to describe how it felt, fearing what might happen. Ask how things turned out. Make the point that one never knows whether helping someone will be rewarded or not.
- b. Ask how this kind of encouragement is a stewardship idea. State that one side of stewardship is about investment, and that if "time is money," then life itself must certainly be gold. Some people, by investing their lives in the lives of others, actually forego the money they could otherwise make. How many mothers who choose to stay at home and invest themselves in the rich character and potential of their children, sacrifice luxuries that a second income might afford.
- c. Point out that extra giving to missions encourages churches and missionaries, and that sometimes the giver chooses to bless the missionary instead of enhancing his own lifestyle.

3. Giving Time to the Kingdom

Studying not only the explicit statements of Scripture, but the implicit ideas as well, yields depth and texture in the portraits of great Christians. Luke's description of some of Barnabas's early missionary activity tells us that Barnabas gave significant time to the kingdom.

Then Barnabas went to Tarsus to look for Saul, and when he found him, he brought him to Antioch. So for a whole year Barnabas and Saul met with the church and taught great numbers of people. The disciples were called Christians first at Antioch. -Acts 11:25-26

Did you ever ask yourself, “Who funded all the Christian workers of the Bible?” The evidence is clear that the official missionary journeys were supported by the church at Jerusalem, and by other churches after they were established. But who supported the other persons who are seen going here and there, preaching, teaching, going house to house, and obviously spending major amounts of time being agents of kingdom growth?

We are safe in concluding that many first-century Christians who invested heavily in the growth of the kingdom of God did so at their own expense. The picture of exemplary New Testament Christianity strongly suggests that vast numbers of believers who are nameless to us, whose stories were not recorded for history, gave of themselves sacrificially every day to minister to people, to share the gospel, and to serve God in other ways.

Barnabas was included generally in the group referred to as apostles, though he was not one of the twelve apostles. His role was unique in Christian history. As one of the larger group of the “sent ones” (which is what “apostles” means), Barnabas may have received regular and full support by the growing church in Jerusalem. The example of the twelve reflected in Luke 18:28-29, however, suggests a pattern for first century discipleship. People commonly risked their material security to follow Christ.

Other Bible passages suggest that genuine Christians were normally careful not to be perceived as motivated by greed. Paul said in 1 Timothy 6:5 that charlatan ministers were motivated by the prospect of financial gain. Certainly honest believers distanced themselves from the dishonest.

Discussion Questions:

- a. These days, many churches (perhaps yours) are involved continually in organizing and taking “mission trips,” short ventures to some mission field, usually across a state or country, sometimes on another continent. Many times, churches will ask for special offerings to fund the trips. Sometimes, however, the individuals going on the trip are expected to raise their own funds. Somebody has to pay for it!
- b. The writer of this lesson took a mission trip to Ecuador a few years ago, as part of a team that taught natives from deep in the jungles there. These people, known as the Chachi, have a few churches in their forest homes. The writer was well qualified to teach—he was a seminary graduate and a teacher—but he didn’t begin to have the money. Friends in his church, however, came forward to say, “If you will go, I will pay.” It took several thousand dollars for him to fly to Ecuador and back, stay in various places while there, buy food, and drink bottled water! But the people who weren’t called to go were led to support those who went. What an encouragement that was for the writer and for everyone else on the team! It warmed their hearts to be able to go with the very real backing of church friends. And it produced a harvest in the work in Ecuador.
- c. Ask, “Can you see yourself in this role of encouragement? Do you have an opportunity, by giving of yourself, to encourage someone else who wants to do ministry or is doing ministry now?”

4. Proving Trustworthy with Resources

The disciples, each according to his ability, decided to provide help for the brothers living in Judea. This they did, sending their gift to the elders by Barnabas and Saul. -Acts 11:29-30

Barnabas could be trusted with great sums of money. He joined Saul in serving as a courier of the mission gifts of the church.

This trust is no small matter. All of us have heard stories about church leaders or workers who steal church funds. Sadly, some of us know persons who have been caught up in such events. Pastors, other staff members, financial secretaries, deacons, ushers, and anyone else who might handle funds or have authority to make decisions about records and expenditures simply must be trustworthy. Basic honesty should be expected in all Christians, but certainly the church must be careful about whom it entrusts with the handling of offerings. Christians give to the Lord through the church, expecting that their gifts will be managed honestly as well as used wisely.

Stewardship in this respect may be considered to have two halves. One is a negative half, in which money (or any other resource) is not stolen or wasted. The other is a positive half, in which money is used sacrificially and to the greatest effect for the kingdom of God. Certainly a church has this stewardship (management) obligation, but so does every Christian, who has his own resources to be managed honestly as well as wisely for the Lord.

Discussion Questions:

- a. State that in many places, people (especially outside the church) think that offerings are misused or that preachers and other church leaders simply enrich themselves with offerings. Recall that Jesus' disciple Judas often helped himself to the money donated to the disciples' work (see John 12:6). Ask how important it is for Christian leaders to be thought trustworthy.
- b. Ask if anyone has ever gotten a call from a charity (all hands will go up!). Ask if anyone has ever used internet sites or other materials to see which charities give the most of your donations to the actual cause or need.
- c. State that Christians should be confident that their churches will make the best use of gifts for the kingdom cause. Churches should be good stewards, too.

5. Valuing Potential over Past

And Barnabas determined to take with them John, whose surname was Mark. But Paul thought not good to take him with them, who departed from them from Pamphylia, and went not with them to the work. And the contention was so sharp between them, that they departed asunder one from the other: and so Barnabas took Mark, and sailed unto Cyprus; And Paul chose Silas, and departed, being recommended by the brethren unto the grace of God.

Acts 15:37-40

Mark was Barnabas's cousin. Barnabas took Mark under his wing, defending him as a valuable missionary aide when Paul excluded him because of his leaving the team in Pamphylia. Again, Barnabas risked the investment of his support, this time for John Mark. Barnabas recognized the potential in the young man, in spite of what had happened in the past. This time, however, Barnabas paid a price. His decision to support Mark provoked controversy with Paul, resulting in their going their separate ways. Initially, then, Barnabas's friendship was strained over the incident. Eventually, however, his loyalty to a young, developing Christian worker was vindicated.

The split took place between the first and second missionary journeys. Some time after Paul and Barnabas parted company, Paul remarked in the Colossian letter that he sent greetings to them from “Marcus, sister’s son to Barnabas.” Piecing together what we know of Mark from 2 Tim. 4:11, Philemon 1:24, and 1 Peter 5:13, as well as the Gospel of Mark, we learn that Mark continued to grow as a disciple and become thoroughly committed to the Lord’s service. In fact, he wrote an account of Jesus’ life that probably came from consultation with Peter, and that was used in the earliest churches to teach and train Christians. Somewhere along the line, Mark again became an associate of Paul, and regained not only his respect but his appreciation. Barnabas’s friendship with Paul may have experienced a chilly wind initially (1 Cor. 9:6 suggests that they were mutually supportive afterwards), but what he did for Mark eventually paid off for the entire Christian community.

Sacrificial stewardship of life and means can occasionally have significant cost. People are not always repaid in this world for what they give or give up in order to serve the Lord. While Jesus promised us we would be rewarded for what we sacrificed for Him and His gospel, He made certain we understood that the full repayment would be “in the world to come.” Sometimes, what we recover in this world is the far smaller portion of that full repayment.

Food For Thought:

State: If stewardship is about the investment of energy and passion as well as the giving of money—and it is—then sometimes we must be willing to pay a significant cost because we believe what God will do with tomorrow, instead of being discouraged by what we did with yesterday.

Point out that all giving, whether to the ongoing ministry of the church or to the needs of missions, is giving to the potential of something. It’s thinking about what God is going to do, that we haven’t seen yet.

6. Practicing Proportionate Giving

Possibly there is one more indication in the New Testament of the stewardship of Barnabas, depending on the question of the authorship of Hebrews. Consider what Hebrews says about tithing:

And here men that die receive tithes; but there he receiveth them, of whom it is witnessed that he liveth. -Hebrews 7:8

While the authorship of Hebrews has always been uncertain, among the strongest candidates for its writing is Barnabas. The early church father Tertullian believed this and implied that most people of his day did as well. Numerous specific reasons exist for thinking that Barnabas penned the letter. If he did, we must regard Hebrews 7:8 as indicative of Barnabas’s stewardship of money.

The author of Hebrews speaks of tithes as a continuing fact—even though he may be referencing Jewish practice. It is not likely, however, that Jewish Christians had abandoned tithing, because of the fact that giving a tenth to the work of the church made so much sense as a means of fully supporting the ministry. The mention of tithing is probably significant as evidence that first century Christians did retain the principle of the tithe as baseline Christian giving. If Barnabas was the author of Hebrews, as many believe, this passage would likely indicate that he believed in and practiced tithing himself.

Whether or not Barnabas was the tithing writer of Hebrews, the other New Testament evidence about his life

clearly depicts him as a good example of the management of life and resources for the glory of God. Barnabas led the way in giving. He invested his life in ministry. He gave his time willingly and fully. He put his substance, and indeed himself, at risk, doing whatever it took to serve the Lord Jesus Christ. The “son of encouragement” encouraged many other believers to step up to the plate and give their all for the One who had given His life for them.

Discussion Questions:

Tell the class that Aristotle said that to prove a point, reduce the matter to its logical extreme. For instance, as every mother has said to her child who wanted a certain toy because “everybody has one,” “Johnnie, if everybody jumped off a cliff, would you jump off, too?”

- a. Ask the class: If you were in a church where nobody gave anything, and the money dried up and the bills could not be paid and the power was cut off and the worship services were cancelled—would you be encouraged or discouraged?
- b. Ask the class: If you were in a church where people gave more and more, and the church could send more to missions and take more mission trips and start more ministries in the community and help poorer members with their needs—would you be encouraged or discouraged?
- c. Ask the class: Considering your answers to these questions, do you have any doubt that stewardship and giving is directly connected to the encouragement of the church and ministers and missionaries everywhere?

Lead in prayer to close the class session. If someone in the class is particularly articulate in prayer, ask that person beforehand to be ready to pray if willing.

The Circle of the Tithe

Gen. 14: 18-20

Gen. 28: 20-22

2 Cor. 9:7

2 Chr. 31:6

2 Cor. 8: 1-7

1 Cor. 16:2

Tithe Becomes Thanksgiving
Thanksgiving Becomes a Tithe
The Symbolic Center
Tithe Is Submission
Tithe Becomes the Law

Mal. 3:10
Heb. 7:4-10
Mat. 23:23

Deut. 14:22

Lev. 27:30

Mal. 3:10

Mat. 23:23

Mat. 5:17

Rom. 10:4

Heb. 7:12

The Law Became Fulfilled

Session 2 Overview

Leading Adults to Establish Tithing as a Positive Practice for Christ

Lesson Objective: To teach the biblical principle of tithing, with focus on the New Testament spirit of giving and the positive outcome of giving the tenth.

Lesson Preparation: First, read the entire book of Malachi for the larger context of the target passage. Then read the basic lesson carefully and be thoroughly familiar with all its information. Note the progression of the four points. Be able to explain the sense of each itemized emphasis without referring to the lesson.

Study the diagram of the Circle of the Tithe. If possible, use an enlarged, poster version of the diagram. A PowerPoint presentation of “The Circle of the Tithe,” has been provided at LRBC.church/downloads. Understand how the Bible passages move from one step to the next. See how tithing revolves around the central concept of surrender to the Lord. Be prepared not only to re-form your own concept of tithing, if necessary, but also to guide adults to a new, positive understanding of tithing as an expression of thankful surrender to Jesus Christ, who gave not just a tenth, but his all for us.

Lesson Approach: Adults want to be stimulated and need to keep thinking! Be both enthusiastic and challenging. If each member of your group has the basic, printed lesson, your summaries may be abbreviated, but make certain you cover each thought thoroughly. Think up your own illustrations as needed. Bring your own class’s or church’s financial challenges into the picture as you bring the lesson home to your hearers.

Introductory Illustration

In the holiday classic movie, *Planes, Trains and Automobiles*, Steve Martin played an easily irritated Chicago businessman named Neal, and the late John Candy portrayed Del, an often obnoxious salesman. The two pair up to reach home when snow forces flight cancellations. Along the way, they take various forms of transportation and undergo comedic trials. The story is really a vehicle, however, for telling us about how Neal softens from being intolerant, contemptuous and begrudging, to being genuinely and humbly responsive to people’s needs.

Lesson 2

Discovering the New Testament Principle of an Old Testament Law

Few theological issues are debated as passionately as whether or not tithing is expected of the Christian. The Old Testament demanded tithing of Israelites. In the New Testament, however, the apostles expended quite a bit of effort explaining how under the new covenant in Christ, people were not required anymore to perform numerous things that were part of the old covenant. For instance, all sacrifices were ended immediately for those who received the Lamb of God.

Tithing, because it was part of Jewish Law, most certainly was affected by Jesus' messianic work. But how? One key to the place of the Law in Christian living is that the Law, once written on stone, is now written in the hearts of believers, enabling Christians to fulfill God's expectations from the inside out, rather than from the outside in. In other words, what was once expectation under Law, has become motivation under grace. The Holy Spirit works inside the heart to create both the desire and the ability to obey the Lord.

This key thought tells us that while tithing is not required in the same way as it was in the Old Testament, it has been transformed into a principle, teaching proportionate and sacrificial giving. It had also become the silent benchmark of giving in the service of God. Put another way, looking at everything the Old Testament teaches about tithing from Abraham to Malachi, "the use of the tenth should be considered an initial guideline for New Testament giving."¹

We need to have a Christian view of tithing, going beyond a doctrinal understanding to put into practice what we know. The purpose of this lesson is to let the scripture speak to us about the challenge of giving—using the tithe as a benchmark. The challenge is to be an encourager: tithe!

We begin with a scriptural foundation from the Old Testament, the familiar passage from Malachi 3:10:

"Bring the full 10 percent into the storehouse so that there may be food in
My house. Test Me in this way," says the Lord of Hosts. "See if I will not open
the floodgates of heaven and pour out a blessing for you without measure"
-(Malachi 3:10, HCSB).

In the midst of the scolding that Malachi was giving the Israelites, this verse gave them a remarkable reason for encouragement. Through the prophet, God was telling them to respond penitently to his warnings. But he promised them that if they would obey, he would restore them and bless them. In this particular passage, Malachi said that if the people would tithe, good things would happen to them and their nation. That was encouraging news!

Sometimes people think of tithing in a negative way, as a standard of giving that is painful to meet and hard to maintain. In at least four ways, this message in Malachi leads us to realize that tithing is a very positive thing that can be a source of great encouragement.

Discussion Questions:

1. Summarize the meaning of Malachi 3:10 by saying that it teaches God's people to be faithful in giving to him, being thankful in advance for his blessing.

a. Ask what kind of motivations people have for giving. Take responses from the class. Point out that they need not be revealing their personal reasons(!), just reasons that some people have. Write the reasons on a board, or other display apparatus.

b. Ask which motivations the Bible in any way teaches us to have. Emphasize that some motivations are inappropriate, some are immature, and others are a reflection of mature spirituality.

c. Ask how many believe that giving can be motivated effectively by the desire to encourage other people.

Move from that thought to the lesson points.

Tithing Encourages the Recipients of Blessing —to Regard Offerings as Gifts, not Debts

First, Malachi linked tithing to anticipated blessing in order to encourage the Israelites to regard the tenth as a gift of thanksgiving instead of a payment of debt.

Some people have heard since childhood that you “pay the tithe.” But the usual verb paired with “tithes” was “bring.” Only two places does the Bible say of people that they “pay the tithe,” and in neither place does the original language actually have the word for “pay.”

We may call the entire picture of the Bible’s teaching about tithing, “The Circle of the Tithe,” because the teaching goes full circle around a central principle. *(If you use powerpoint, you can find a Powerpoint presentation to download of the "Circle of the tithe" at lrbc.church/downloads)*

a. Ask if anyone has ever heard charities promote giving by telling people, “It will make you feel good,” or some such idea. Ask if anyone has a thought about this motivation. If no one points it out, follow up the response by saying that giving to feel good is not bad, but that it is essentially a selfish motivation. A better reason to give is to express thanksgiving, which is still a matter between just you and God, but is directed out from yourself, rather than in towards yourself.

(Use a display or projection of the Circle of the Tithe. If possible, use paper or electronic means to cover and then uncover the center and one quarter of the circle at a time.)

b. Tell the class that one of the first things many people need to do when talking about tithing is to clear some hurdles. Some people are doubtful that tithing is appropriate for Christians. Others think it’s just a goal we shouldn’t feel guilty about not reaching. Still others just avoid the subject, glad that their church doesn’t reveal who gives what. Ask, “Did that description match any of you?”

1. Thanksgiving Became a Tithe - Genesis 14:18-20

The beginning point on this Circle of the Tithe is the first instance of tithing in the Bible, Abraham’s giving a tenth of his spoils to Melchizedek, King of Salem. Abraham had won a small war against ruthless kings, and to express his gratitude to God, he gave to God’s priest, Melchizedek, a tithe. He didn’t have to; he wanted to. His grandson Jacob later promised a tenth as his expression of gratitude in advance, for God’s leading and provision (Gen. 28:20-22).

i. (Uncover the 12 o’clock position: Thanksgiving Became a Tithe). Summarize this point from the lesson. Point out that this instance of the tithe took place before the Law was ever given requiring a tithe. Say that this is important to our recognizing that tithing was not introduced by Law, but by the example of godly, thankful patriarchs of the faith.

2. Tithing Became the Law - Deuteronomy 14:22

If the first point on the Circle of the Tithe is 12 o'clock, the second point is 3 o'clock, representing God's establishing covenant with Israel, giving them the Law by Moses. The Law set standards of conduct, not only prohibiting what was wrong, but also teaching what was right. Among these regulations, God put into Law the ancient practice of tithing, set by the patriarchs. The tenth became the standard for giving to the ministry of the temple, which supported worship as well as benevolence. Paul later wrote that the Law was not supposed to bring people to God, but to show them where they had departed from God. Consequently, God's Law of tithing was not a "step to heaven," but an indicator of people's obedience or disobedience to God.

- ii. (Uncover the 3 o'clock position: Tithing Became the Law.) Summarize this point from the lesson. Ask if anyone sees that in a way, tithing was made something less than it used to be, when it was not required. Point out that this does not imply that God devalued the act of tithing, but that in giving the Law, he conceded that people needed minimum standards. To illustrate, tell some story of personal experience with children (if possible), that teaches the point that parents had rather have children obey out of love and desire, but are insistent that they obey out of duty, if nothing else. Ask if we should progress beyond "have to" to "want to," or if it's okay for us to remain immature.
(It's a rhetorical question!)

0. The Symbolic Center of Tithing - Hebrews 7:4-10

(numbering intentional)

Before moving on to the third point on the Circle of the Tithe, we must realize what the symbolic center of it is, the fixed point around which tithing—at any time in history—revolves. Quite simply, it is surrender to Christ. Genesis 14 represented the first tithe as an act of thanksgiving to the God whom Abraham served with his whole life. In Leviticus 27, the Law required tithing as an act of obedience signifying God's total ownership. Hebrews 7 interprets these passages, pointing to Melchizedek as a symbol of Jesus Christ, and teaching us that the tithe was a symbol of surrender to the great High Priest and Prince of Peace to come, King Jesus. Clearly, tithing was about more than just supporting the temple.

- iii. (Uncover the center of the circle: The Symbolic Center: Tithing is Submission.) Summarize the lesson explanation. Be especially careful to "punch up" this point, since it is crucial to understanding the meaning and the modern relevance of tithing. Illustrate the idea of biblical subjects having a "center." Mention that the sacrificial system was built around a central idea of the costliness of sin and the holiness of God in judging it. Point out that while we don't go to a temple and offer sacrifices today, we don't therefore ignore the concept of offerings to God. Instead, in thanksgiving for the once-for-all sacrifice of Christ, and according to Hebrews 13:15, we offer the "sacrifice of thanksgiving," which is the "fruit of our lips giving thanks to his name." In doing so, we are not to give less than the Old Testament saint, but even more. The principle is similar with tithing.

3. The Law Became Fulfilled - Matthew 5:17

At 6 o'clock on the Circle of the Tithe we find the dividing point in history—the coming of Christ. In Christ, the Law became fulfilled, including the Law of tithing. To understand what that meant, we have to realize that tithing was part of both the symbolic Law and also the transcendent Law of God. It was a symbolic surrender to Christ before His coming, as we have seen, but it was also an acknowledgment of God's never-changing ownership of everything, and it expressed a surrender to the King of Kings that was never to end. When Christ fulfilled the Law, therefore, he did not cancel the principle embodied in it. If anything, God's people go beyond the Law.

iv. (Uncover the 6 o'clock position: The Law Became Fulfilled.) Use some of the Scriptures listed on the diagram to re-emphasize repeatedly the concept that Jesus fulfilled the Law. State that this was no semantic point, but that it really meant something for Jesus' disciples and the church to come. Ask if the class can think of other examples of Christian conduct that has been transformed by the fulfilling work of Jesus. Re-read Matthew 23:23 and show how Jesus was really saying that tithing was the benchmark of giving.

4. Tithing Became Thanksgiving - 2 Corinthians 9:7

At 9 o'clock on the Circle, we have what tithing has become to the Christian: tithing has become thanksgiving once again. 2 Corinthians is clear in saying that the Christian's giving is not to be driven by obligation or guilt. It is to come out of a decision made in the heart. Paul taught this truth vigorously in several places (see Rom. 10:4 and Gal. 2:14-16). One of his greatest doxologies is 2 Cor. 9:15, "Thanks be to God for his indescribable gift." The best—in fact, the only appropriate—motivation for Christian zeal, in giving and everything else, is thanksgiving to God. Considering the unfathomable gift of Jesus Christ, can any of us ever give him enough to repay him? Do you think that you could convince anyone that it is fitting for the Christian to give less under grace than the Jew was required to give under Law?

The bottom line, doctrinally, is that tithing was, and is, a symbol of total surrender to the Lord. When a Christian tithes, it is not an Old Testament act. It is very much a New Testament act of surrender to the Lord who died and rose to save us from sin and eternal darkness.

The first encouragement that tithing accomplishes is something deep within the tither himself. It encourages him to see giving to God as a way to thank Him, not a ploy to please Him.

v. (Uncover the 9 o'clock position: Tithing Became Thanksgiving.) Recall the opening illustration about Planes, Trains and Automobiles. Say that the motivation of thanksgiving is where God wants us all to arrive in our personal pilgrimages in giving. Ask if class members have come to the point in their own lives at which they don't ask themselves anymore if they can afford to tithe (this week, or at all), but instead ask themselves if there is anything more they can do to show God their love and gratitude.

Tithing Encourages the Recipients of Ministry -by the Increase of the Good News

Second, when Christians tithe, ministry is enabled. That ministry is received by various persons in need. When the recipients of Christian ministry are touched by that ministry, they are encouraged.

One of the main purposes of the tithe in Israel was to fund the ministry of benevolence that the Levites had charge of. When the resources were not available, ministry to the poor, the fatherless, the widow, the disenfranchised, the sick, the struggling traveler, went by the wayside. The first thing Malachi said would happen when the nation returned to tithing was that there would be "food in My house." He was not talking about covered-dish suppers. He was talking about a storehouse of food to be used in ministry. That ministry, renewed as the tithes flowed in, would immediately encourage the downtrodden and disheartened throughout the country.

Thousands of examples of encouragement from Christian ministry poured out of the Gulf states after hurricane Katrina in 2005. Baptist relief teams were among the first to arrive on the scene. Many people in New Orleans, a predominantly Roman Catholic place, were heard to say that the Baptists were their source of hope. As the recovery

was underway, a curious fact emerged. People were reestablishing some of the many churches wiped out by the storm, but in many cases it wasn't the previous members—many of whom had evacuated to other states and then stayed. Instead, the new church members were new persons, often new Christians, won by the witness of ministering believers who descended on the area to help in the time of need.

This story would fit well into a lesson or sermon on evangelism, love, or service, but what does it have to do with tithing? Everything! Where did the money come from to buy the supplies, to equip the workers, to pay for the vehicles? It came from the overwhelming, sacrificial giving of Christians throughout the United States (and some places beyond), including the Gulf states themselves. It came from gifts over and above the tithe, poured out in love by believers who themselves couldn't go but who could open their pockets and make it possible for others to go. Money rushed into state convention disaster relief programs, in the millions of dollars per state. It went through local churches as special offerings, and drew on the devotion of tithers who added to their benchmark giving. They dug deep to minister in Christ's name where need was great and the impact for both humanity and the cause of Christ was likely to affect generations of people.

The widening encouragement brought about by tithing, and giving beyond the tithe, continues to be incalculable. However, the encouragement is not limited to those who receive ministry.

Discussion Questions:

a. Ask the class if they can think of any Add any personal illustrations they have from disaster relief, as in Katrina stories, or any other material that will personalize the concept that people who receive ministry are encouraged by it.

Tithing Encourages the Performers of Ministry -by the Increase of Supply

From all that the Scripture says about Christian giving, we can conclude readily that tithing encourages the people who perform ministry as well as those who receive it. This biblical truth is borne out continually in experience.

Malachi does not say anything about the attitude of ministers (O.T. priests) in 3:10. What he says about them in the wider context of the book is not complimentary. However, the tone of the promise in 3:10 suggests that all those active in temple ministry would be among the first to praise God for the return of his favor once the people began to tithe in obedience to him.

Certainly, this is what the New Testament teaches. In 2 Cor. 1:12 and Phil. 4:15-19 Paul spoke of how gifts to his missionary ministry brought gratitude to his heart. His words reveal his encouragement because of the partnership of committed givers. We have also been reminded often of the example of an early Christian by the name of Barnabas. We encounter him first in Acts 4:36, where the Bible says of him:

Joseph, a Levite and a Cypriot by birth, whom the apostles named Barnabas, which is translated Son of Encouragement, sold a field he owned, brought the money, and laid it at the apostles' feet. - (Acts 4:36, HCSB)

Barnabas's exemplary stewardship, surpassing the tithe many times over, encouraged persons within the Jerusalem

congregation to whom Christians were ministering, and surely also those who were laboring daily to meet the extensive needs (see Acts 6, “daily distribution”).

So tithing encourages the tither, the minister, and the recipient of ministry, but it does more.

Discussion Questions:

a. Ask the class to imagine a church where giving was minimal, only enough to provide bare support for staff and keep the building open. There was no money to do ministry of any kind, and while some members did ministry on their own, the church could not support any community work beyond itself, or help with the support of missionaries. State that the ministry staff would certainly be in a condition of discouragement. Point out that in fact, many churches are not far from being in this condition. Sparse and insignificant giving is failing to encourage ministers and missionaries.

b. God calls ministers, but churches need to support them. God calls missionaries, but the people need to send them on their way.

Tithing Encourages the Community of Faith

-by Reaffirming God's Working

In the widest scope of church life, growing commitment to tithing would encourage the whole people of God. A tithing trend would certainly be a move of God producing greater Christian discipleship. As tithing began to expand ministry, multiply missionaries, bear fruit in baptisms and churches planted, and contribute to spiritual awakening, the church across a state, a nation, and the world would be encouraged because believers would see the hand of God renewing his blessing and his moving.

Today, however, Christian stewardship is not characterized by tithing among Southern Baptists or any denomination. While pockets of tithing congregations exist here and there, tithing is not a popular practice, perhaps because it seems costly. Yet, its neglect is even more costly. Malachi described in his prophecy the terrible price the Israelites were paying for their neglect of committed living, and he specified tithing as one element of that neglect. Natural disaster had caused crops to fail and vines to wither. Israel had experienced widespread loss. Malachi said that God was using natural means to discipline Israel for their unfaithfulness. The solution was turning back to God—including tithing.

What joy would return to Israel when they obeyed the Lord—in sacrifices, in marital harmony, in renewed faith. Significantly, Malachi's was the last message recorded in the Old Testament. His prophecy urged God's people to return to their committed lives, that they might experience the encouraging presence and working of God, before the coming of the Savior who would be offered first to them, and then to the Gentiles.

Now, to us who have believed on Jesus' name and have come into his church, the message of the Bible, through the full circle of teaching on the tithe, urges us to give ourselves fully to Christ. Like the Macedonian believers, we are then to dig deep, to grow our churches, to expand missions—to encourage all who minister and all who are touched by our ministry.

In several scenes, Neal rolls his eyes at Del's neediness, but picks up the check for meals and other expenses reluctantly. Neal often becomes angry with Del, who is bumbling but hard not to like. At one point, having lost his temper, Neal rents a motel room by himself, leaving Del, who is now penniless, to sleep in the car with snow coming down through a burned-out roof. Struck by guilt, Neal cannot sleep, and finally begs Del to come in and share the room.

At the end of the film, however, Neal pieces together what has been staring him in the face all along, that Del is,

in fact, homeless, that he lives out of a suitcase, and that the wife he has spoken of died some time ago. Neal is going home to his wonderful wife and warm home, while Del has been hiding the truth of his desperate situation. Neal takes Del home with him for Thanksgiving, introduces him with genuine affection to his family, and gives him the warmth and welcome of his home, wholeheartedly. The film makes a point of showing us that Neal realizes the depth and richness of his blessing, and that he opens his heart to Del out of his newfound thanksgiving.

It's easy to see how such a film could become a holiday classic. It teaches a very important lesson that most of us need to learn, or to re-learn from time to time: to give not because we have to, or because we'll feel guilty if we don't, but because we want to, out of gratitude. For the Christian, that gratitude should be felt not so much for what we have in a material sense, but for what Christ has given us in the gift of himself and his salvation.

Discussion Questions:

b. Ask if anyone would argue with the proposition that the church at large needs to see a great moving and blessing of God. Ask if anyone sees a connection of that realization with the prescriptions of Malachi. If no one mentions it, connect the blessing of God to not only tithing, but the other things Malachi teaches. The entire book speaks of the ministry of priests, the marriages of the people, their attitude of doubt or faith, and their obedience in things such as the tithe. In other words, it talks about the entire commitment and holiness of God's people.

c. Ask the class to suggest what they would like to see in the way of stewardship among church members. Ask what part they are playing right now. Ask if any of them are leading the way.