

# **Generous Joy: Straight Talks on Giving**



**Community Group Study Guide  
January 2010**

**Holy Trinity Church, Chicago**

**Downtown and North Side Congregations**

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## WELCOME TO A COMMUNITY GROUP

### Introduction

We are committed to building authentic community in Chicago that transforms lives – so that each of us looks more and more like Jesus. Because we’ve been changed by the stunning good news of the gospel, we want to respond to one another in love. Jesus tells his followers, “By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another” (John 13:35).

### Vision

We are praying for a movement of community groups throughout Chicago, so that our city is filled with Jesus’ glory.

### Structure

Community groups meet weekly in homes throughout the neighborhoods of Chicago in groups of 6-12 people who commit to stay together for 12-18 months and plant a new community group.

### Life

Community Groups at Holy Trinity Church help us connect on four levels:

- ***Connect to God:*** God designed people for relationship with Him – and so we’ve specifically designed community groups to bring you closer to God. In fact, the very reason why Jesus came into the world is to bring people into intense, personal and eternal relationships with God.
- ***Connect to the Word:*** We believe that God speaks today through his word. So in our community groups we train each other on how to listen carefully to what God says in his Word. We have found that as we’ve studied the Bible, it has changes us individually and as a group to be more like Jesus. Jesus teaches (Luke 24:44-47) that he is the point of history and the Bible, and so we are always connecting our story to the story of the text and the larger story of God’s work in history.
- ***Connect to other people:*** City living can be isolating. But Jesus calls us to live in Christ-like community with each other in accountability, sharing, love and commitment. So we laugh, pray, sing and share together on a weekly basis. We celebrate the idea that God himself lives in eternal community!
- ***Connect to the city:*** Even as God sent Jesus as a missionary to us, we believe God has called us on a mission for the Kingdom. So we intentionally serve those in our city, the poor, disadvantaged and isolated – celebrating God’s goodness towards us with them.

You are most welcome!

## WINTER/SPRING 2010 COMMUNITY GROUP CALENDAR

### *Week of:*

Jan 11	Group Study	Malachi 3:6-12 <i>personal study/sermon/group discussion</i>
Jan 18	Group Study	2 Corinthians 8:1-5; 9:6-12 <i>personal study/sermon/group discussion</i>

*Groups will continue through the week of May 10th*

## GENEROUS JOY: STRAIGHT TALKS ON GIVING

HTC Downtown and North Side will preach three messages in a “Generous Joy” series from January 3, 2010 to January 17, 2010.

This series is not primarily about money, but more so about what money says about us. How we spend our money tells us where our heart is. What are our priorities in writing our checks each month? What do our attitudes say about God’s greatness?

In the first message on January 3<sup>rd</sup>, *Treasure and our Hearts* (Matthew 6.19-34), we will look at the principle that all money is God’s and it is an indication of our devotion to him and our spiritual health. A study is *not* included for that text since Community Groups do not meet that week. We encourage you to study this text on your own, and if you wish, to discuss it briefly at you Community Group during the week of January 11<sup>th</sup>.

In the second sermon on January 10<sup>th</sup>, we will explore the biblical basis of tithing, including whether it holds for today, *Tithing and The Windows of Heaven* (the Community Group study will primarily cover Malachi 3:7-12; the sermon will include other Old Testament passages such as Lev. 27:30-33). Community Groups resume during the week of January 11<sup>th</sup> with a study on this second sermon text.

In the third and final message on January 17<sup>th</sup>, we will study the pattern of generosity as being joy and cheerful determination on how to give. *Abundant Joy – the pattern of generosity* (2 Corinthians 8:1-5; 9:6-12). A study for this text is attached.

Our aim is to deepen our maturity in Christ in every area, including our generosity. We trust that through these sermons and Community Group studies we all will grow in our understanding and practice of “Generous Joy.”

## Malachi 3:6-12

### Week of January 11<sup>th</sup>

Community Group calendar: **Study**

Text: **Malachi 3:6-12**

Ways in which you will interact with the text:

- Personal study (we recommend three separate readings)
- Listen to sermon preached on January 10<sup>th</sup>
- Group discussion during week of January 11<sup>th</sup>

### Malachi 3:6-12 *English Standard Version (ESV)*

<sup>6</sup> “For I the Lord do not change; therefore you, O children of Jacob, are not consumed. <sup>7</sup> From the days of your fathers you have turned aside from my statutes and have not kept them. Return to me, and I will return to you, says the LORD of hosts. But you say, ‘How shall we return?’ <sup>8</sup> Will man rob God? Yet you are robbing me. But you say, ‘How have we robbed you?’ In your tithes and contributions. <sup>9</sup> You are cursed with a curse, for you are robbing me, the whole nation of you. <sup>10</sup> Bring the full tithe into the storehouse, that there may be food in my house. And thereby put me to the test, says the LORD of hosts, if I will not open the windows of heaven for you and pour down for you a blessing until there is no more need. <sup>11</sup> I will rebuke the devourer for you, so that it will not destroy the fruits of your soil, and your vine in the field shall not fail to bear, says the LORD of hosts. <sup>12</sup> Then all nations will call you blessed, for you will be a land of delight, says the LORD of hosts.

### Editor’s Note on the Book of Malachi

#### Author, Date, Occasion

The Book of Malachi, was written by a man with the same name (1:1). Malachi is considered one to the minor prophets in the Old Testament, and was likely written around the same time as the events of Nehemiah and Ezra (mid-5<sup>th</sup> century B.C.). The ESV Study Bible states:

*“the most compelling evidence for dating Malachi, however, is the substantial parallel between the sins reproved by Malachi and those reproved by Ezra and Nehemiah. These include corruption of the priesthood (Neh. 13:4–9, 29–31; Mal. 1:6–2:9), marriage to idolaters (Ezra 9–10; Neh. 10:30; 13:1–3, 23–27; Mal. 2:10–12), abuse of the disadvantaged (Neh. 5:1–13; Mal. 3:5), and failure to pay tithes (Neh. 10:32–39; 13:10–13; Mal. 3:8–10).”*

Malachi prophesied to Judah after the return from the Babylonian exile, and while not the darkest period in Israel’s history, the spiritual health of the people was far from ideal (as the previous list of Malachi’s reproofs demonstrate).

#### Structure of the Book of Malachi

The ESV Study Bible lists the following 6 “Disputations” and summary:

- Disputation #1 – Malachi 1:2-5 *Malachi begins by defending the reality of God's elective love for Israel, a love which calls for robust covenantal obedience and sincere worship as its proper response. Instead, the people were dishonoring God by their worthless offerings and the hypocritical formalism of their worship.*
- Disputation #2 – Malachi 1:6-2:9 *Malachi exposes these offenses and rebukes the priests for condoning them and thereby violating the Lord's covenant with Levi.*
- Disputation #3 – Malachi 2:10-16 *Malachi condemns marriage to an idolater as infidelity against Israel's covenant with the Lord, and he condemns unauthorized divorce as infidelity against the marriage covenant between a husband and his wife, to which the Lord is witness.*
- Disputation #4 – Malachi 2:17-3:5 *Malachi broadens his indictment as he promises that the Lord will vindicate his justice. This will take place when "the messenger of the covenant" comes to judge the wicked (when the Lord will function as a witness not only against adulterers, as in 2:10–16, but also against other offenders) and to purify his people so that their offerings will be acceptable at last.*
- Disputation #5 – Malachi 3:6-12 *Malachi returns to the subject of Israel's begrudging offerings. The people experienced material adversity and were under a curse—not in spite of their behavior, but because of it. Accordingly, Malachi challenges them to conscientious tithing, which will be rewarded with divine blessing.*
- Disputation #6 – Malachi 3:13-4:3 *Malachi assures his grumbling contemporaries that evildoers, who seem to escape divine justice because of their prosperity, will yet be judged, while the Lord will deliver those who fear him.*
- Summary – Malachi 4:4-6 *Malachi summarizes the main points of his prophecy: remember the Law of Moses (the focus of disputations 1–3), and remember the promise of Elijah and the coming day of the Lord (the focus of disputations 4–6).*

#### Focus of our study on Malachi 3:6-12

This study focuses on the 5<sup>th</sup> disputation listed above, namely the Lord calling His people back to following the Lord by obeying His Word, specifically with regard to “tithes and contributions” (3:8b).

#### Editor's Note on “tithing”

Tithing in the Old Testament was established by God through Moses as a means of worshipping God and supporting the work of the priesthood (Leviticus 27:30-33). However, even before the codification of tithing into the Mosaic Law, we find at least two instances of individuals giving away a “tenth” of their possessions as form of worship to the Lord.

In Genesis 14:17-24, Abram had successfully rescued his cousin Lot, and was greeted by the king of Sodom. Melchizedek, who was king of Salem and a priest (whom many scholars consider to be a pre-incarnate appearance of Jesus Christ) also met Abram and blessed him. Interestingly, “Abram gave him (Melchizedek) a tenth of everything” (Gen 14:20b). Therefore, Abram in the midst of great success and material blessing, worshiped God by giving a “tenth of everything” to the Lord.

In Genesis 28:10-15 Jacob had a dream in which the Lord promises to Jacob the land and an innumerable multitude of offspring, all of which are to be a blessing to all the earth. Jacob, after awaking from this dream, and after setting up a place of worship to the Lord, promised God “all that you give me I will give a full tenth to you” (Gen 28:22b).

In summary, “tithing” in the Old Testament is considered a standard amount with which to offer material forms of worship to God.

**First Reading – *What does this passage tell you about God?***

1. In Malachi 3:6-12 what is God ultimately interested in (hint: Israel’s ancestors had failed in this regard)? What does that tell us about God? Cross reference Malachi 1:11.
  
  2. How does the Lord describe the people’s lack of tithes and contributions, in terms of what it is doing to the Lord?
  
  3. What is the Lord’s positive admonition to his people, and what are the promised results of obedience?
- Write out any prayer requests that come to mind as you read this text and interact with these questions.

**Second Reading – *What does this passage tell you about yourself?***

1. Israel’s ancestors (3:7) had not kept the Lord’s statutes – list out instances you are aware of in the Old Testament that demonstrate this (and even from the Book of Malachi – see introductory notes). Reflect on your own life, and list out ways in which you do not follow God’s statutes.

2. Malachi 3:7-8 contains some dialogical back-and-forth between God and a representative person arguing with God. Reflect on ways in which people “rob” God today, and list those out.
- Write out any prayer requests that come to mind as you read this text and interact with these questions.

**Third Reading – *What does this passage tell you about how you should live?***

1. From this passage, and the others listed in the introductory notes, how should you view “tithing” today? How should you act in light of this?
  2. What would it (or does it) look like in your life to bring the “full tithe into the storehouse”? What might you have to change in your life to be able to accomplish this? If there are barriers to accomplishing this standard, how do you think God would respond to the reasons for not bringing the “full tithe into the storehouse”?
  3. Malachi 3:10-12 lays out blessings by God for obedience from his people. If God’s people follow the principle of “tithing” today, how would others call the church “blessed” and be a people of “delight”?
- Write out any prayer requests that come to mind as you read this text and interact with these questions.

**Summarize the passage:**

What is the **theme** of the passage (i.e., a sentence that captures the timeless essence of the passage)?

What is the **aim** of the passage (i.e., how should you respond to this passage in thought and behavior)?

## 2 Corinthians 8:1-5; 9:6-12

### Week of January 18<sup>th</sup>

Community Group calendar: **Study**

Texts: **2 Corinthians 8:1-5; 9:6-12**

Ways in which you will interact with these texts:

- Personal study (we recommend three separate readings)
- Listen to sermon preached on January 17<sup>th</sup>
- Group discussion during week of January 18<sup>th</sup>

### Background to the passages

The Apostle Paul is writing the second still existing letter to the church in Corinth (there were likely two other letters that either do not still exist, or exist but have not been found). Paul founded the church in Corinth (Acts 18:1-17) and was the church's pastor for about 18 months. The immediate background of the passages we are studying is a collection that was taken up for the church in Jerusalem (Romans 15:25-32; 1 Corinthians 16:1-4). The churches in the region of Macedonia had given generously to the church in Jerusalem. Paul is now exhorting the Corinthian church to do likewise.

### 2 Corinthians 8:1-5 *English Standard Version (ESV)*

<sup>1</sup>We want you to know, brothers, about the grace of God that has been given among the churches of Macedonia, <sup>2</sup>for in a severe test of affliction, their abundance of joy and their extreme poverty have overflowed in a wealth of generosity on their part. <sup>3</sup>For they gave according to their means, as I can testify, and beyond their means, of their own accord, <sup>4</sup>begging us earnestly for the favor of taking part in the relief of the saints— <sup>5</sup>and this, not as we expected, but they gave themselves first to the Lord and then by the will of God to us.

### 2 Corinthians 9:6-12 *English Standard Version (ESV)*

<sup>6</sup>The point is this: whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows bountifully will also reap bountifully. <sup>7</sup>Each one must give as he has decided in his heart, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. <sup>8</sup>And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that having all sufficiency in all things at all times, you may abound in every good work. <sup>9</sup>As it is written,

“He has distributed freely, he has given to the poor;  
his righteousness endures forever.”

<sup>10</sup>He who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will supply and multiply your seed for sowing and increase the harvest of your righteousness. <sup>11</sup>You will be enriched in every way to be generous in every way, which through us will produce thanksgiving to God. <sup>12</sup>For the

ministry of this service is not only supplying the needs of the saints but is also overflowing in many thanksgivings to God.

**First Reading – *What does this passage tell you about God?***

1. According to 2 Cor 9:6-8 what attitude should characterize our giving? Explain what this tells us about God's character.
  2. From this passage, how is God able to work through us? (hint – see 9:8)
  3. What else do we learn about God's character from 9:6-12?
- Write out any prayer requests that come to mind as you read this text and interact with these questions.

**Second Reading – *What does this passage tell you about yourself?***

1. Reflect on times in your life when you have been characterized like the churches of Macedonia by a “wealth of generosity” (8:2). What were the factors in your life, or another's life, that allowed you to be generous? Have you ever received a “wealth of generosity” from other people?
2. How does this passage relate ‘sowing’ and ‘reaping’? Have you experienced this correlation in your life – explain some of those situations.
3. What obstacles have prevented you from being a joyful giver of what God has entrusted to you? Explain your answer.

