

# God's Warns His People Through a Prophet

**SESSION IN A SENTENCE:** God confronts the faithlessness of His people to draw them to repentance.

**BACKGROUND PASSAGE:** Malachi

It never ceases to amaze me how easy it is to put my relationship with God on cruise control. Somehow we as human beings are able to mutate the beauty of godly, routine, healthy rhythms into disfigured zombie-esque patterns. And without noticing it, we can become nonchalant and numb as we inch away from the God we claim to love.

This is where the people of God found themselves at the time of the prophet Malachi. The people's hearts were disengaged from the acts that should have been filling their hearts with awe, stirring their affections, and directing their lives. In tender love, God sent His messenger to expose their wicked hearts and to renew their hearts through the call to repentance, a call to worship.

## Voices from the Church

"The inner essence of worship is to know God truly and then respond from the heart to that knowledge by valuing God, treasuring God, prizing God, enjoying God, being satisfied with God above all earthly things. And then that deep, restful, joyful satisfaction in God overflows in demonstrable acts of praise from the lips and demonstrable acts of love in serving others for the sake of Christ."<sup>1</sup>

—John Piper



What factors contribute to putting our relationship with God on cruise control?

# Group Time

## Point 1: God warns His people of having no fear in their worship (Mal. 1:6-10).

<sup>6</sup> “A son honors his father, and a servant his master. If then I am a father, where is my honor? And if I am a master, where is my fear? says the LORD of hosts to you, O priests, who despise my name. But you say, ‘How have we despised your name?’  
<sup>7</sup> By offering polluted food upon my altar. But you say, ‘How have we polluted you?’ By saying that the LORD’s table may be despised. <sup>8</sup> When you offer blind animals in sacrifice, is that not evil? And when you offer those that are lame or sick, is that not evil? Present that to your governor; will he accept you or show you favor? says the LORD of hosts. <sup>9</sup> And now entreat the favor of God, that he may be gracious to us. With such a gift from your hand, will he show favor to any of you? says the LORD of hosts. <sup>10</sup> Oh that there were one among you who would shut the doors, that you might not kindle fire on my altar in vain! I have no pleasure in you, says the LORD of hosts, and I will not accept an offering from your hand.

How we view God shapes how we live. In other words, what we believe about God—Is He our Father? Is He our Lord?—functions like a set of building blocks for our relationship with Him. The rhetoric God used here unveiled the heart of the priests and the people, showing that they had a distorted picture of Him.



What are some things that can dim or distort our view of God?

Malachi’s contemporaries were Ezra and Nehemiah. As a post-exilic prophet, Malachi was speaking to a people who had experienced the faithfulness of God in returning them to the land and providing for their protection and revival. The people had heard of God’s faithfulness through His word and experienced it themselves, yet they still questioned God’s commitment to them. They had **spiritual amnesia**, forgetting both the love and the glory of God, which made them **spiritually anemic**.

**God’s Glory:** The glory of God is His manifest \_\_\_\_\_, His excellent \_\_\_\_\_, and His inherent \_\_\_\_\_. The Scriptures speak of humanity as having “fallen short” of God’s glory because we have rejected the \_\_\_\_\_ for which God created us—to glorify Him.

## Point 2: God warns His people of having no trust in their giving (Mal. 3:8-12).

<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.

Because our use of money is connected to our faith, it will always be connected to our worship. Therefore, it's only logical that the decay of the Jews' worship would show up in how they viewed and managed their resources. Not only did their distorted view of God reduce Him from a generous King to a potential consultant for them, they found themselves robbing God, withholding what was due Him in honor, faith, and worship.



How should a biblical view of God affect the way we view and use our finances and resources?

The Jews were bringing some of their resources to the temple, but not the full tenth required of them, so they weren't acting out of obedience, generosity, or faith. God delights in being generous, so He invited His people to test Him, not for His sake but for theirs, that they would see the fruits of faithful obedience. God is not in need, but we are, and we need to see that God is good, gracious, and generous beyond our wildest imagination.

"God's primary purpose in generosity is not to get the \_\_\_\_\_ out of our pockets but the \_\_\_\_\_ out of our hearts."<sup>2</sup> –J. D. Greear

### Point 3: God warns His people of having no faith in their living (Mal. 3:13-15).

<sup>13</sup> “Your words have been hard against me, says the LORD. But you say, ‘How have we spoken against you?’ <sup>14</sup> You have said, ‘It is vain to serve God. What is the profit of our keeping his charge or of walking as in mourning before the LORD of hosts?’ <sup>15</sup> And now we call the arrogant blessed. Evildoers not only prosper but they put God to the test and they escape.’”

Again God was indicting the Jews for their faithlessness, this time because they were jealous of the wicked who tested His character. To them, God’s justice delayed looked like justice denied, so they were caught in a mind-set where faithlessness looked like wisdom and faithfulness like foolishness. What is the gain of obedience? What is the gain of relationship with God? The people could find no adequate answers to these questions, yet God will bless faith and obedience one day and for all eternity.



What have you found helpful to combat the appeal of disobedience?

As the prophetic Book of Malachi comes to a close, some people do respond in faith to God’s calls for relationship and intimacy. They feared the Lord and esteemed His name, resulting in obedience to the Lord in their lives. For these faithful few, God promised His remembrance, His presence, His compassion, and His reward (3:17-18). God affirmed that there is indeed a difference between the ones who serve God and those who don’t—those who serve Him in faith and fear will not only gain His reward but His loving, faithful presence as a Father, they gain God Himself.



What does it look like to live by faith in Jesus, the Son of God?

# My Mission

Because all of our sin is forgiven in Christ, we take worship seriously to magnify His great worth so that all people everywhere will know His name.

- **How do you need to respond to the good news of Jesus in your worship, giving, and living?**
- **What are some ways your group can stir up each other's affections for God in light of His attributes?**
- **How will you change your personal financial stewardship to reflect the value and worth of following and trusting Jesus?**



## Voices from Church History

“The remarkable thing about fearing God is that when you fear God you fear nothing else, whereas if you do not fear God you fear everything else.”<sup>3</sup>

—Oswald Chambers  
(1874-1917)

## Notes

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# Daily Study

## Day 1: Read Malachi 1:1-14

Ever since the days of Adam, we as human beings have been looking for ways to find fault with God so we can feel justified in creating our own paths to walk. Sometimes our departure is physical. The Israelites often prostituted themselves with other gods and goddesses, forsaking the Lord. People today may leave the church altogether. Other times, our departure is emotional, often characterized by people just going through the motions.

For the people and priests of restored Israel, God was someone to question, someone to doubt, but this betrayed their own doubts and desires. Though they were full of familiarity with the grace of God in making promises to Abraham, in rescuing them from slavery in Egypt, in establishing them as a people and nation in the promised land, in forgiving them over and over and over again, and in restoring them from their exile back to the promised land, they still found fault with God. Their sin-tainted perceptions of God's care led them to halfhearted worship and full-throated arguments with Him.

Their indictments and questioning of our good God should cause us to examine the view we have of God in our own hearts. Yet no matter how many factors may contribute to a lessened view of God, one factor is definitive in fighting these sinful tendencies—an accurate picture of Jesus, the Son whom God sent for our salvation.



What are the areas in your heart where you've felt disappointed by God? Why?

## Day 2: Read Malachi 2:1-17

Faithfulness among the people of God stems from the fear of God, a recognition that God is both tender and terrifying. He is holy, just, merciful, patient, wise, sovereign, and loving. Being that these attributes reflect His being, He is worthy of our worship and our obedience—worthy of our faithfulness. Yet the priests and people of restored Israel in Malachi’s day chose paths of unfaithfulness because there was no fear of God in them.

For the priests, their forefathers in the tribe of Levi received a covenant from God for their faithfulness, namely, the faithful acts of Phinehas for the Lord’s honor and glory (Num. 25:1-13). They feared the Lord and acted on His behalf for the blessing of the nation. They honored God and taught His truth. But now they turned from the Lord and contented themselves with His curses as they led others astray. Woe to those who cause others to stumble (Luke 17:1-2).



What are some circumstances that challenge your faithfulness to the Lord, and how does the gospel help steer your heart for God’s honor?

## Day 3: Read Malachi 3:1-12

Every day we wake up, a war of faith rages in our hearts. It takes on many shapes and forms, but this war is centered on the trustworthiness of God. Our sinful hearts wonder, “Can God be trusted, and if so, how much, and for how long?” One arena of battle in this war is the area of finances.

The elastic approach we take to God’s commands concerning how we view and manage our resources isn’t because of sound hermeneutics but because of our sinful hearts. God clearly, compassionately, regularly, and authoritatively invites us to a generous life anchored in His generosity. God, through Malachi, tied the Israelites’ lack of experiencing and expressing generosity to their misconception of God; in their minds, He wasn’t powerful or generous enough—they didn’t fear Him (v. 5). If we don’t trust the Lord to take care of us, then we won’t be free to honor Him with our finances as He calls us to use them.



How has the generosity of God emboldened you to pray and freed you to give?

## Day 4: Read Malachi 3:13-18

Foolishness rears its ugly head in our lives when we misunderstand the nature of God and His actions, and foolishness defiles a person before God like every other sin that comes from the overflow of our hearts (Mark 7:20-23).

To speak harshly about God is foolishness, as is pleading ignorance of having done so. He is the Creator, Sustainer, and Provider for all that exists. Who has the right to speak back to Him? No one (see Job 42:1-6; Rom. 9:20-21).

To consider obedience to the Lord as useless is foolishness. He rewards those who seek Him in faith (Heb. 11:6). Those who fear the Lord and honor Him will receive His compassion and blessing.

To be envious of the arrogant and the wicked is foolishness. God is holy and just; He will punish those who reject and defy Him. His justice often does not come when we want or expect it, but it will come. His patience is a time for sinners to repent and believe in His Son—this is wisdom (2 Pet. 3:8-13).



What are some ways you will serve the Lord in faith because of who He is and what He has done and will do?

## Day 5: Read Malachi 4:1-6

There is coming a day when eternal destinies and consequences will be sealed. The sun rising on that day will either rise to consume or rise to heal. The difference will lie in how people have chosen to respond to the Lord of Armies, the great Creator and Savior God.

Those who reject His commands, refuse to honor Him, and run along their own paths will find the Day of the Lord to be a day of ruin. The fire and stubble imagery here is stark, and we cannot help but connect the fire on this day to the fiery descriptions of hell and final judgment (Matt. 25:41; 2 Thess. 1:4-10).

Those who fear the Lord, however, have nothing to fear from this coming day. It will be marked by full restoration and joy. To fear the Lord is to know Him, and to know Him is to obey Him. And the obedience He requires is to obey the gospel, to believe in Jesus Christ sent for our salvation and to love as we have been loved (2 Thess. 1:8; 1 John 3:23).



How will you love others with the love God has shown you in Jesus Christ?



# Encourage One Another

*Join together with 2-4 people from your group, or with your family, sometime during the week to reflect on the session and to share how God is working and you are responding.*

Share your thoughts and reflections on the truths from Scripture in this session:

- God warns His people of having no fear in their worship (Mal. 1:6-10).
- God warns His people of having no trust in their giving (Mal. 3:8-12).
- God warns His people of having no faith in their living (Mal. 3:13-15).



How have you responded to these truths from Scripture?



What measures can we take to avoid succumbing to shallow and compromised worship?



When do you feel the most liberated to trust God in your giving?

## Notes

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**UNIT 16****SESSION 1**

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# THE GOSPEL PROJECT

A Journey Through the Storyline of Scripture

Fall 2018

## *In the Beginning*

Creation and the Fall (Genesis; Job)  
God Establishes a Covenant People (Genesis)  
God Grows His Covenant People (Genesis)



Winter 2018-19

## *Out of Egypt*

God Redeems His People (Genesis; Exodus)  
God Provides for His People (Exodus)  
God Receives Worship from His People (Ex.; Lev.)



Spring 2019

## *Into the Promised Land*

God Guides His People (Num.; Deut.)  
God Gives His People a Home (Joshua)  
God Delivers His People (Judges; Ruth)



Summer 2019

## *A Kingdom Provided*

God Provides a King (1 Samuel)  
God Provides a Godly King (1-2 Sam.; Psalms)  
God Provides a Wise King (1 Kings; Eccl.)



Fall 2019

## *A Nation Divided*

God Speaks to His People (1-2 Kings)  
God Judges the Sin of His People (2 Kings; Prophets)  
God Shows Mercy to His People (2 Chron.; Prophets)



Winter 2019-20

## *A People Restored*

God Sustains His People (Daniel)  
God Restores His People (Ezra; Prophets)  
God Prepares His People (Neh.; Esth.; Mal.)



**Spring 2020**

***Jesus the Messiah***

Jesus Comes into the World (Luke)  
Jesus Begins His Ministry (Gospels)  
Jesus Among the People (Gospels)

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**Summer 2020**

***Jesus the Servant***

Jesus the Healer (Gospels)  
Jesus the Teacher (Gospels)  
Jesus the Miracle-Worker (Gospels)

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**Fall 2020**

***Jesus the Savior***

Jesus and the Kingdom (Gospels)  
Jesus the Savior (Gospels)  
Jesus the Risen King (Gospels)

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**Winter 2020-21**

***The Mission Begins***

The Holy Spirit Comes (Acts; Epistles)  
Fundamentals of the Faith (Acts; Epistles)  
New Life in Christ (Acts; Epistles)

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**Spring 2021**

***The Church United***

Living Like Jesus (Acts; Hebrews)  
The Sent Church (Acts; Epistles)  
Don't Forget (Acts; Epistles)

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**Summer 2021**

***All Things New***

Paul in Prison (Acts; Epistles)  
Facing Adversity (Acts; Epistles)  
Jesus Will Come Again (Revelation)

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**Brian Dembowczyk**

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Answers to Learn Truth*

Think about the encouragement people often share to help others through times of adversity. We might hear someone speak of how pressure is required to transform coal into a diamond; thus, pressure can be good for us, transforming us into someone better. Or we might be told of the hatchling that has to work to break through its eggshell, and that struggle is good for this creature—even necessary—so that it grows strong. Likewise, adversity strengthens us and positions us to be who we were meant to be.

While these illustrations might provide encouragement, they reveal something quite important about the world's view of adversity. The world sees adversity as an opportunity for a person to dig deep, gaze within their soul, and discover who he or she truly is. But the gospel tells a different story—a better story. The gospel sees adversity as an opportunity for a person to look high above, gaze upon Christ, and see who He truly is. For it is Christ, not ourselves, who carries us through all trials and suffering. Adversity positions us to rely on Christ's power, not an inner human strength that has been lying dormant.

In this volume we pick up the story of Scripture with the Jews living in bondage in a foreign land, the result of their rebellion against God. But even in the midst of judgment, God's faithful love still shines forth brightly. We will witness God continuing to guide, strengthen, and protect His people in their time of great adversity, not to help them discover who they were but rather to understand who He is. At the same time, we will see God continue to drive the events of history toward the fulfillment of His ancient promise to provide the Rescuer, the One who would free people from an even greater bondage, that of sin and death.