

Sermon Transcripts
Learn To Love
A Study in Malachi
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Malachi #1: Learn To Love

- All right, here we are, it's time for Christmas. How many of you are feeling the pressure, time to get ready? As we're getting everything ready for Christmas, you get your list ready, you get your house ready, you get your travel plans ready. Also need to get your heart ready to prepare for the Christmas season. And I was, I was thinking, how do we prepare our hearts to receive the gift of the Lord Jesus in this holiday season? And there's actually a book of the Bible that is written to prepare people for the first Christmas. So the last book of the Old Testament is written to prepare people for the first Christmas. It's God's final word to prepare people for the coming of Jesus. And then there is 400 years of silence. And so it is God's way of saying, "Jesus is coming, prepare your hearts." And then we pick up the story with the birth of the Lord Jesus Christ in the New Testament. And when you have final instructions for someone, you know that they are important. So before your child gets married, whatever you tell them, before they walk down the aisle, that's important. Whatever they tell you at your graduation ceremony, as they commission you into the world, that's important. If you're a soldier being deployed into the field, whatever your final instructions are, that's important. Whatever a coach would say during halftime at a football game, before you take the field to close strong, that is important. The Book of Malachi is God's final words, His final instructions, the last book of the Bible written, preparing everyone for the coming of Jesus. It's God's final word for the first Christmas. So we're gonna spend about six weeks studying it together. You can read it in about 15 minutes. I would encourage you to read it frequently, and you could just be prepared every week. We'll start this week in Malachi 1:1. And here's how the story begins. The oracle of the word of the Lord to Israel by Malachi. And so it is to God's people. They are collectively called Israel. This would be the old covenant people of God in the church family. God, ultimately, is the one speaking. He is the Lord, and then the messenger, the one who is delivering the mail, this man's name is Malachi. Now a little bit here, this little word, oracle, some of your translations might call it a burden. What this means is that God has a burden on His heart. God is burdened for His people, God is burdened for His children, God is burdened for relationship. And so Malachi is going to reveal the father heart of God, and it is His intent to build a relationship with you, so that you have a healthy relationship with Him. And then also with family and also with friends. And that's where Malachi is going. So God has a burden for His people and relationship, and health for them, and as a result, He has a word to them. So God cares and God speaks. And ultimately when God speaks, it is the Word of the Lord. Now this is significant, because this book is unlike any other book that has been or will ever be written, that there are lots of words about God, philosophy, religion, speculation. This is not a word about God, this is the Word of God, and when we open it, we receive a word from God. This is very important because what he is claiming is this is the Word of the Lord. So, as

God is communicating to us, you are hearing from God, you are receiving a message, a revelation, an instruction from God as you open this word. And it's interesting as well, the man who delivers it, he is the mailman, his name is Malachi. And in chapter three, verse one, we are told that his name literally means messenger. Some of the commentaries will say, maybe this is a personal name, maybe it is not a personal name, maybe it is just his job description. I think it's both. For example, my last name was O'Driscoll till we dropped the O, we're Irish. And it literally means, O'Driscoll literally means messenger of God. It means a preacher, a communicator of God's truth and Word. So God knew that He would call me to be a preacher of His Word, and He named me in such a way to prepare me for the future that He destined for me. I believe God does the same thing with Malachi. His name means messenger, and that is his appointed duty and responsibility in the sight of God to be a messenger. All of that, to say, when you open this book, you are going to learn a lot about God, and you're gonna learn next to nothing about this man, Malachi. He doesn't tell us about his parents, his history, his pedigree. We really know virtually nothing about this man. Here's why, because it's about God and His relationship with His children, His people, and Malachi doesn't meddle in the middle. There's a good relational principle here, and that is that sometimes you need to get out of the way and just let people talk to God and hear from God for themselves, amen? How many of you have reached that point with people? You are like, "If I argue with them, it always goes bad. I'll let God argue with them, it'll probably go better." And so sometimes this is saying, "I'm not gonna just hammer you, what I'm gonna do is I'm gonna give you the Bible. I'm gonna buy you a nice Bible and you read it and you deal with God. Let me get out of the middle. You talk to God, you pray to God, you study God's Word. You work it through with God." Malachi chooses not to meddle in the middle. He's the messenger, he's not the meddler. Some of you, particularly during the holidays, you want your family to get connected to the Lord, that you're in the middle, but sometimes in the middle, you're not the messenger, you're the meddler. And sometimes it's just getting out of the way and saying, "I'm gonna pray, I'm gonna give you God's Word and I'm gonna let you talk to God, I'm gonna let God talk to you." That's what Malachi does. And the people of God have a problem with God, and He allows them and encourages them to deal directly with the Lord. So there's the introduction, here is the Word of God, God is going to speak to His people. Here's the good news, I believe as we open the Word of God, we receive a word from God. The same God who spoke to them, wants to speak to you. And now it is important to consider, what will God's first words be? When there is a relationship, how we start the conversation, oftentimes determines its conclusion. Your Genesis determines your Revelation, where you begin can affect where you end. Here's where God begins. Malachi 1:2, first, I want you to know, God speaks first, God initiates. And God says, I have what? I have loved you, God starts with love. There is a sociologist, he's a researcher, his name is Dr. John Gottman. He's done some of the leading work on relational and marital conflict. And after lengthy, significant clinical study, one of the factors that he says contributes to a very painful, broken relationship is something called a harsh startup. Meaning the conversation starts as a conflict or as a criticism or with controversy. How many of you know exactly what this is like? There are certain times where people or topics that when you broach them, it is a harsh startup. It's a hard startup. And it's, you know, why are you so mean and angry and nasty and like Satan?

You're like, "Well, here we go, fire up the carnival music, pop the popcorn and just, you know, watch the dumpster fire. Here we go again, da, nan ta dadalanta ta da right?" Just that how you start the conversation, sets the conversation in motion. It's like firing a gun, right? If you're off course, ultimately it is going to end very, very badly. A harsh startup sets the conversation in the wrong direction. Where does God start? Love. Now these people, they're trying to coax God into a harsh startup. As you read the book, God is going to take some of their accusations against him, and he is going to answer them, but He doesn't answer them by attacking them. He answers them by loving them. Here's what I need you to know, if you're angry with God, He can handle you. If you have questions for God, He can handle those. That in this instance, God is serving like the lightning rod. God's people, they're not atheists, but they're angry, they're frustrated and God grounds out their storm. And He loves them, He loves them. "I have loved you," says the Lord, but you say, "How have you loved us?" Now, how many of you have a child, small or grown, and sometimes they accuse you of things that are not true? God, here is a father, and they're accusing Him of not loving them. In fact, as you read the book, they're going to say, "God, You don't love us, You don't bless us. You love and bless wicked people who are our enemies. As a result, we have no use for You and we judge You and we have found You to be a failed Father." This is a strong statement from the people of God, and it comes from a place of hurt. They're hurting financially, their economy is collapsed, they're hurting politically. They're a little nation getting kicked around by the other nations. They're hurting morally. They have decided that they have a right to rebel against God and they are hurting spiritually, and even some of their "preachers, Bible teachers", have created a theology where God is a failure. People are the product of their instruction, and these people are hurting, and rather than getting clarity, they're getting confusion. And ultimately what the bad Bible teachers are saying is, God is a failure. And what this is, this is an inversion of the storyline of the Bible. The storyline of the Bible is that God is good, that we have failed, that God judges us and we need forgiveness. They have inverted the storyline to where they are good, God is bad, God has failed, therefore they sit in the seat of judgment, they determine and decree that God is wrong and God needs to repent and God needs to apologize. And maybe then they'll forgive God for His failure. See, we chuckle, but we're like them, amen? How many of us, when we're hurting, start accusing God of failing? Now what God is going to do is something that is very significant, and because God is a father, there are a lot of parenting lessons and grandparenting lessons in the book. Here's one, connect before you correct, connect before you correct. The rest of the book, God is going to correct, but here He is going to connect. I'd always do this when I would deal with our kids when they were little, I'd get down on eye level, and I would say, "I love you, let's talk about this. I love you, I love you. Let's talk about this." Connect before you correct. Some of you had parents that they would correct and they never did connect. You correct after you connect. Think of it this way, let's say there is a chasm between two points and you need to build a bridge from one place to the other. You need to make sure that that bridge can carry the weight of the load that needs to traverse over it. Well, if God's people are here and God is here, He needs to build a relationship that is strong enough to carry the load of truth and correction. That's why some of you, you need to understand that it is ultimately about building a relationship with someone, to where they know that you love them and care for them and have their

best interest at heart. And then that becomes the bridge over which the correction and information can venture. Some of you have loaded up too much correction and information, you have not built the bridge of love and trust. And as a result, halfway through the conversation, things collapse and they will no longer listen to you, because they do not trust you and your love for them. We connect before we correct. And that is exactly what God is demonstrating, and He is modeling here. So what I wanna say here, is they ultimately have accusations about God that are unfounded and untrue, and they posit them in the form of questions. This still happens, sometimes we'll do it academically, philosophy, sociology, psychology, Christians are mean, the Bible is an outdated old book, God is a bigot, God is intolerant, God is unloving. All of these things we still say. And sometimes, religious people, instead of making the clear accusation, we'll hide it and guise it in the form of a question. How many of you have been in a relationship like that? Where somebody asks a question, but it's not really a question. It's like, why are you a stupid, evil idiot? You're like, "That's not really a question, that's more of a conclusion that is disguised as a question." So they go to God and they're like, "Why are You evil?, and why are You failing us, and why are You mean, and why are You not good to us?" Those aren't really questions, those are accusations. Those are accusations. God hears those, God knows those, and God responds to those. Couple of things I want you to see. And before I do, let me just emotionally try and connect your life with the hearers of the original recipients of the book. The more that you study the Word of God, and the more that you get a vision for the kingdom of God, true or false, the more frustrated you get in this world. I mean, some of you are like, "I was frustrated till I got saved or read the Bible, now I'm super frustrated." Like, 'cause in heaven, everyone will be healthy. Is that the case? No, my neck hurts, I pulled it in the first service. Some of you say doing what? I'll show you, I did this. That was it, that's all it took. I have a huge crank in my Shrek size head neck. It's terrible. In heaven, it will not happen, in heaven, we'll all be healthy, in heaven there will be no copay or deductible, there is free healthcare for all. In heaven will people be rich or poor? Rich. In heaven, there is so much gold that they pave streets with it. That's when you know you have a lot of extra loot. They're like, I don't know what to do with all the gold, it's in the way, I don't know. Expand the 101, put in some extra lanes, just get it out of the way. Heaven is paved in gold. Everybody's gonna be rich, everybody's gonna be healthy. I will be tall, I will be slim, my bangs will be full. Right now, I don't, I mean, I don't have a hair problem, I have a distribution problem. I can, I can braid my feet, but not my hair. In heaven, I'm just, you know, sharing a little bit from the heart. In heaven, it's gonna be amazing. Guess what? We're not there. In heaven we won't have elections every year, it'll be, hey, Jesus is in charge again, yay. Yay, yay. Yay, we don't have to vote. 'Cause it's a series of bad options. I won't get into it, but if you're paying attention, it's frustrating, amen? It's super frustrating. As you read the Bible, you're like, can we just get there? And then you look at life on the earth, you realize this is frustrating. These are not atheists, they're people that are angry. They're not people that necessarily hate God, they're just hurting. God doesn't do harsh startup, God connects before He corrects. God comes and starts with I love you, let's start with a relationship. A couple of things I want you to know about God from Malachi, number one, God is a father. In chapter one, verse six, He says, "I am a father." In chapter two, verse 10, He says, "I'm the only father." 'Cause some people are like, "Can we get a new dad?" Nope, you gotta

deal with this one. Gotta deal with this one. Some books of the Bible are gonna really focus on Jesus, like the gospel of John that we'll pick up in chapter 17 in January and continue studying all the way through Easter. Some books of the Bible are really gonna focus on God the Holy Spirit, Malachi really focuses on God the Father and the father heart of God. So think of His people like kids who are throwing a fit and having a tantrum. And God is like a father who is dealing with His rebellious kids Number two, God knows what His kids are saying, doing and thinking. God is not a father who is un-involved, non-relational. He's paying attention. He comes and He says, "I know what you're thinking. I know what you're saying, I know what you're doing." How many of you moms, you're like that? See a good mom, a mom's like, "I know what you're doing, I know what you're saying." And a good mom, she's got a spidey sense. She says, "I know what you're thinking." And she does, okay? God's like that, He knows what His kids are thinking, saying, and doing, God pays attention. Number three, God calls a family meeting. So as you read the Book of Malachi, think of it, God is a father, His people are a family, and when there's a problem in a family, if it involves one of the kids, you go meet with that kid. This little parenting lesson. Like, if Johnny's got a problem, don't call a family meeting and shame Johnny in front of everybody. But if Johnny and Susie and Tom are now, you know, a prison riot aligned together, you gotta deal with the whole family because now everyone is involved. What happens here is all of God's children are having the same rebellion. So God calls a family meeting where He pulls the family together. So for those of you that have had a family meeting, where do they tend to occur? What places? Dinner table or living room? It's family. Okay, everybody, come on downstairs, stop playing "Fortnite". Come on, right? Just leaking a bit. Okay, come on down, we're gonna have a family meeting, which means this is important enough that we all stop what we're doing, and we all have this conversation. And God calls a family meeting. When we come together on Sundays, I need you to know that this is a family meeting. That at times in your family, you need to call a family meeting. God calls a family meeting. So as you read Malachi and you can read it in about 15 minutes, I want you to be reading it over and over and over, think dinner table, think living room, think couch, think family meeting where the father is leading and loving the family. And then number four, God doesn't act like a sibling. What happens is sometimes children will not respect and honor the authority of the parent. So they sort of shoot a torpedo up the chain of command, trying to get the parent rattled and emotional and freak out and then respond like a sibling, rather than a parent. Now don't raise your hand, but how many of you have this kid? They come to you and they just know how to get you, like their spiritual gift, is this. That's their, it's just, they're so good . This kid drives me crazy. And they know it. And so what they realize is, if I can get you to freak out, then you will act like a sibling, stop acting like a parent, and I will win and you will lose because you will lose your authority. Write that down. So what they do, they come to God and they're like, "You don't love us, You fail, You're horrible, You're terrible." God doesn't act like a sibling, He acts like a parent. When you take it personal, you make it personal. Some of you, if the kid yells at you, you yell at them, you just went from mom to sister, or from dad to brother. Some of the kids say something crazy, you say something crazy back, you just went from parent to peer, amen? Now some of you like, one of the kids testified in the front row, so there there's the spirit right now. Sometimes the parents will say, "But they drive me crazy." You're still supposed to above it and be

the parent and lead them through it. So God doesn't act like a sibling, He doesn't come down from His place of authority, though He's still loving. Number five, God meets us where we are to bring us where we need to be. The children of God, young and old in this story, they're not where they're supposed to be. They're not giving, they're not serving, they're not worshipping, they're not praying, they're not caring, they're blaming God, they're all retweeting #Godfails. I mean, these kids are just being naughty. And what God does is He meets them where they are to walk them to where they need to be. How many of you are parenting adult children? It's harder, amen? When kids are little, let's say the kids are not where they're supposed to be, physically, what can you do? Hey, that's a toilet, get out of there. You know, here's toys. We trade toilet for toys, that's what we do. You could just, what about when they're 25? Like I tried to pick them up, and they're bigger than me, and they're frustrating. How do you move an adult child? Through a relationship, one step at a time, meeting them where they are and walking them through influence, love and relationship to where they need to be. That's what God is demonstrating and modeling here with His adult children. You're not where you're supposed to be. But through relationship, I will walk you, through influence and love, where you need to be. And then number six, God starts with love. All healthy relationships have to start with love. And this is very different, for those of you that may not know, from the other religions of the world. Really, you can break down religions into two categories, what is called works or grace, which means love in action. All other religions teach works, and that is if you perform, I'll be your parent. If you obey, I will love you. God says, "Because I am your parent, My love will change your performance." Jesus says it this way, "I love you, and if you love Me, you will obey Me." The loving relationship leads to the change in behavior. Some of you grew up in performance-based relationships where the parents said, "If you do good, I will love you and have a relationship. And if you don't do good, I will punish you and cut off my relationship with you." God comes and says, "I love you. No strings, no conditions." God's love forgives the sins you are committing and changes your heart to not commit them anymore. God's love changes you to be more like Him, because we become like those whom we love the most and have loved us the most. And then, lastly, sometimes we just need a word from God, amen? Some of you you're here today, and you're like, "I just, I don't know what to do, I don't know where to go, I don't know how to respond, I don't know, I need a word from God." These people need a word from God. And so what they get is the Word of God. God doesn't just give an individual word to every single person in the nation, He writes a book of the Bible for every person in the nation, and also for all the nations. So lemme say this, if you need, or when you need a word from God, the surest, best way to get a word from God, is to open the Word of God. I want you to read Malachi, I want you to study Malachi, I want you to memorize Malachi. It's a little book, but it has big implications for your family and your future. And as you read it, what you will hear, is there are 55 verses, 47 of those are God saying something. It's God talking to you, it's God speaking to you, it's God pursuing you, it's God seeking you. So, they asked the question, "How have you loved us?" And God says, "Well, let Me tell you how I've loved you." And then He proceeds to tell them, in verse two through four, "Is not Esau Jacob's brother?" How many of you didn't see that coming? God, how do I know you love me? He's like, "Well, Jacob and Esau were brothers." How many of you were like, "Okay, good, that's all I needed to know. We can

go home now." How many of you were like, "What does that mean?" They knew the Old Testament, and what He's talking about is their family. And it's His way of saying not only have I loved you, I've loved your crazy family for generations? How many of you, now that makes sense? How many of you have a family/crazy family? Those are synonyms, by the way. God looks at our crazy family and says, "I've loved you for a long time." And He's talking here about family history. "Is not Esau Jacob's brother?" declares the Lord, "Yet I have what?" It's not a trick question, it's reading. Okay, what does it say? Love Jacob and but Esau I have... Uh oh. Let's say, whoa, what? how many of you, that's what? God hates people? We'll talk about that. I have laid waste his ill country and left his heritage to jackals of the desert. If Edom says, "We are shattered, but we will rebuild the ruins," the Lord of hosts says, "They may build it, but I will tear it down, and they will be called the wicked country, and the people with whom the Lord is what? Angry forever." There are some people who say, "I don't need God. I'll be my own God, I don't need to obey God. I'll live by my own might, will, conscience, decree. I'll build my own life. And even if it's tore down, I'll build it up again." And God says, "You're fighting Me and no one ever wins." What He's talking about here is their family history. He's going all the way back. This is the last book of the Old Testament. It's their version of the Book of Revelation. It tells them what comes next. He goes all the way back to the first book of the Old Testament, Genesis chapter 25, and He starts with a story about a man named Abraham. Story of Abraham is this, Abraham is a bad guy. He comes from a godless nation. I can't get into all of it, but Numbers even says that his dad was a godless, ungodly, pagan worshiper of a false demon god. He's a bad guy from a bad family, doing bad things. God comes down and says, "I pick Abraham." Not because Abraham is good, but because God is good. And God makes a promise, a promise rather, to Abraham, "Through you will come Jesus Christ, the Savior of the nations, the forgiver of sin, the Son of God." Okay, that's amazing. So Abraham is chosen by grace and he is not yet a Jew, he is a Gentile. He's just a regular old pagan. Now Abraham has a wife named Sarah, Abraham has a son named Isaac. That son, Isaac, has Abraham's grandsons, twin boys, Jacob and Esau. They start wrestling and fighting in their mother's womb. How many of you have got two sons and you've seen this? They're always going at it. These are very different boys, but hear me in this, they're both bad boys. And God is going to pick one to be the line through whom the nation of Israel comes and, ultimately, Jesus, our savior. Jacob and Esau are bad guys, and they're different, but they're bad in different ways. So Jacob is a mama's boy, Esau is daddy's boy. Horrible things happen in a family when you play favorites. That's one of the underlying themes of Genesis. Jacob is very tender, Esau is very tough. Jacob drives a Prius, Esau drives a truck, a diesel truck with a lift and nightlights, okay? Now Jacob wears open toed Birkenstock, sometimes with socks. Esau wears steel toed boots. Jacob really likes musical soundtracks and figure skating. Esau, it's all in the Hebrew, I'm just summarizing. Esau, loves Country Western music and hardcore metal and cage fighting, okay? Now Esau only eats things that he kills, and Jacob is committed to vegetarian, sustainable living. So while Esau is out hunting, Jacob is finger painting his feelings. So they come home, it's all in the Hebrew, they come home and God has to pick one of these boys. So is Esau a bad guy? Yeah, he is. Later in life, he has the birthright as the first born, that's significant, and he trades it for what? A bowl of soup. That's coming to somebody and saying, "How important is your family and your

legacy and your inheritance to you?" They're like, "I don't know, not as important as a bowl of soup." Well, then you are not a very honoring person or you really like soup. Either way, you've got a problem. So what does Jacob's name mean? Trickster or conman. See, some people look at him and they go, "How come God doesn't work through the good guys?" 'Cause there's no good guys. For God, all of history is an old Western and everybody's wearing a black hat. There's no good guy, there's only bad guys. So we need to start looking at history saying, God doesn't just love the good guys. If He did, God would love no one, 'cause we're all bad guys. And so, when he's telling the story, what he's saying is, through Jacob comes a nation called Israel whom God has blessed and Jesus is coming. Through Esau comes another nation, he mentions them here, Edom, and the Edomites are opponents and enemies as a nation of God's people. Not only do these two boys war in the womb, the nations that derive from them, they war on the earth. Now some will say, it's talking about nations, not individuals. It's talking about both. I'll prove it to you, Jacob is a person, Edom is a nation. It's both, it's the individuals and the nations that proceed from them. And what happens is, over time, these boys become nations and they're warring against each other until Jesus comes from the line of Jacob, and there is a man named Herod who seeks to murder Jesus and all the baby boys in the nation, because Herod is a descendant of? Esau and the Edomites. It's as if that is a demonic family that leads to a demonic nation, that sees its intent of destroying the life and salvation that God is bringing into history. So here's the big idea, they're both bad guys, Jacob got grace, Esau got what he deserved. This raises some questions. I'll unpack them for you as best I can. Here's one of the first questions that comes, next slide, please. What does it mean that God hates people? How many of you were asking that? Like, what about the hate people thing? Can we back up, pull the car over, take a look at that? "Is not Esau Jacob's brother?" declares the Lord, "Yet I have loved Jacob, but Esau I have hated." When we think of hate, we think of personal vengeance, ungodly, untethered, emotional hammering. Is that what it means? I wanna be careful with this, how many of you have painted a house or painted a room in your house? And you go to the paint store and they have all the paint swatches, and you realize, there is an entire range for a color. So let's say you're looking at blue, there might be the lightest shade of blue that almost looks white, all the way over to the darkest shade of blue, that almost looks black. But all of that is blue. Words, like colors, have hues, shades and degrees. The question is what is the hue, shade or color of this word hated? Many of the scholars, and I wanna be careful with this, would say it means to prefer one over the other, or to choose one over the other, or to involve oneself with this and not to involve oneself with that person. And I would give you an occasion in the gospels where the Lord Jesus uses a similar word. Jesus says, and the point here is to let Scripture interpret Scripture. So if you hit something in Scripture, you're not sure what it means, look for other Scriptures that are saying the same or similar things and let those things that are clear, help you understand those things that are less clear. "If anyone comes to Me," Jesus says, "and does not what? Hate his own father and mother." Did Jesus hate His mom? Let's let the moms vote on this. Moms, what do you think, did Jesus hate His mom? No, He loved His mom. On the cross, as He's dying, He appoints John to care for His mom. He's loving His mom while He is dying. Did Jesus hate his dad? No, He had a great dad and they had a close relationship. And wife, how many of you, are husbands supposed to hate their wives?

Now most men didn't answer as quickly and enthusiastically as the wives were hoping. The wives were like, "Please tell him to love me, we already have our problems." Husbands are to love their wives, as Christ loved the church. What about our children, are we supposed to hate our children? No, we're supposed to love our children. "And his brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be My disciple." The shade or hue of the meaning of hate here, is the law of priority. Jesus is referring to the law of priority. And that is that our relationship with God needs to be our first and highest priority. And what Jesus is saying is, "Our relationship is more important than your marriage, our relationship is more important than your children, our relationship is more important than your family or your church family." And it doesn't mean that those relationships are unimportant, but the law of priority means that this is of first importance. I believe, you can disagree with me, this is an open, not a closed handed issue, but I believe that here, in Malachi, He is saying something similar, and that is that I have preferred Jacob, not Esau. Both were bad, but I gave grace to one and I let the other experience the consequence of his decision-making without intervening. And this leads to other questions. Next slide, please. Why does God choose some people but not others? Have you ever had this conversation or debate? In every Bible college or seminary, it is required that you argue about this 47 nights in a row, it's just required. So, why does God pick some but not pick others? In the New Testament, again, we looked at Malachi, there's a man named Paul, he writes a book of the Bible called Romans and he actually quotes Malachi. I've underlined it here, as it is written, where's it from? Malachi. Jacob I have loved, Esau I have hated. So Paul writes Romans and it's a bit of a commentary on Malachi. Here's what I need you to know, sometimes the best way to interpret Scripture, is to let Scripture interpret Scripture. So Malachi says something and then Paul writes a commentary on it. The best way to look at Malachi is to also look at it through the lens of what Paul has said, both inspired perfectly by the Holy Spirit. The whole context of Romans nine through 11 is this, how does someone enter into a relationship with God? Do you pick God, does God pick you? How does this work? In every relationship, someone chooses, someone responds. So Grace and I, we met at 17 in high school. Two weeks in I said, "I love you, I pick you." And she said, "I haven't picked you yet," because she has the gift of discernment. But I have fortitude and patience, so I hung in there. I picked her, then she picked me. To have a relationship, you need to choose each other. But the question is who initiates? Who initiates the relationship, is it God or us? Well, here we go, he tells a story. When Rebekah had conceived children by one man, our forefather Isaac, though they were not yet born and had done nothing either good or bad, in order that God's purpose in election. Okay, there are various words, choose, choosing, chosen, elect, appointed, plan, purpose, predestined, which means to predetermine the destiny, those words are in your Bible, and it means that God not only knows the future. He decrees it and oversees it. So his election might stand not because of works, not what we do, but what God does. But because of Him who calls, she was told the older will serve the younger. In that culture, the first born was in the priority position, but through election, it was the younger who then became in the position of head of the family upon the death of the dad to assume leadership of the household. As it is written, he quotes Malachi, "Jacob I have loved, Esau I have hated. What shall we say then? Is there injustice on God's part?" Let's just leave it there for a moment, by no means. What he's saying here is this,

there were two boys, both bad, God worked through one, brought Jesus to be the forgiver of sin and savior of the world. The other, He just let that guy get what he wanted, and all of his descendants go their own way. Here He intervened, here He did not intervene. And then the question is, does this make God unjust? And the answer is fairly self-evident, between Jacob and Esau, which of them deserves to go to heaven? Neither. You and I need to start with that presupposition. You and I and we all deserve nothing but hell. When you accept that, you become grateful for everything else. So you know what? I don't like my life. Hey, you're not kindling, it's better than you deserve. We have a culture of entitlement where everyone thinks that not only should they go to heaven, they should be there now. And as a result, we say foolish things about God, like, "He's not loving, He's not present, He's not gracious, the Bible's not true. God's a bigot." All these horrible things we think and say about God, and the truth is everyone deserves nothing. As an American, you need to get your mind around that. It'll breed in you an attitude of gratitude. If God sent everyone to hell, would that be unjust? No, that's like what happened to all the criminals? They got convicted and went to jail. You can't say that's unjust. No, actually, that is the definition of justice. Guilty people got tried and convicted and sentenced. That's not injustice, that's justice. Now let me just say this, what happens is if I sin against you, you want justice for me. If you sin against me, you want forgiveness for you. We're all a bunch of hypocrites. It's always law for you, grace for me. I deserve to get out and you need to get in, to that sentence of eternal torment. If God sent everyone to hell, He would be just. If He takes anyone to heaven, we call that grace. He then gives another analogy, illustration, and here, just, Paul is gonna say this in Romans 12 coming up, "Don't be conformed any longer to the pattern of this world. Be transformed by the renewing of your mind." You can't just go to the Bible and say, "You know, America's right, and the Bible is wrong." Instead of you go, "You know what? The Bible is right and we're all wrong." Okay, he uses another analogy illustration, next slide, please, from the next book of the Bible, first, he goes to Malachi, he looks then at Exodus, "For He says to Moses, I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and compassion on whom I have compassion. So that it depends not on human will or exertion, but on God who has mercy. For the scripture says to Pharaoh, the political leader who thinks he's god in Exodus, 'For this very purpose, I've raised you up, that I might show my power in you, that My name might be proclaimed in all the earth.' So then he has mercy on whomever He wills, and He hardens whomever He has hardened." Okay, let me unpack this. God's people are a small family at the end of Genesis. During the famine, they take refuge in a nation called Egypt. For generations, the Pharaoh who rules as a god, political and spiritual, he is favorable because Joseph, one of the Hebrews, was helpful. Eventually the Bible says that the new Pharaoh forgot about Joseph and how good God's people had been to the nation. And he then wants to be worshiped as God, and he wants to abuse them and make their life, for the children of God, basically a hell on earth. God raises up a man named Moses, sends him as a messenger, like Malachi, to speak against the nation and to bring promise of doom to the Pharaoh. It says 19 times, if my memory is correct in the book of Exodus, that Pharaoh had a hard heart. About half the time, it says that Pharaoh hardened his heart against God. And about half of the time, it says that God hardened Pharaoh's heart. And there's this big debate. Well, who did it? Well, here's what I would tell you, Pharaoh hardened his heart toward God and God hardened Pharaoh's heart, but how He did it

as crucial, He did it through love, He did it through patience, He did it through kindness, He did it through extending a hand, inviting Pharaoh to a relationship with the real God and the forgiveness of his sins. The old Puritans, they were Christians, they used to say the same sun that melts the ice, hardens the clay. How many of you have someone who hates you? If you approach them, they attack you. If you forgive them, they declare war on you. If you try to bless them, they assault you. God feels like that all the time. God's love exposed Pharaoh's hard heart, God's goodness hardened Pharaoh's already hardened heart. Who is to blame? Pharaoh. Who is good? God. That's why the Bible says in Ezekiel that we, as sinners, have a heart of stone. It is a hard heart. And that God has to take out our heart of stone and give us a tender heart of flesh. Here's what I'm telling you, and if you love God, it's because you have a new heart. If you choose God, it's 'cause God chose you. If you have affection toward God, it's because God's affection has transformed you. The hard heart can only hate God, the hard heart can only oppose God, the hard heart can never choose God, the hard heart can never love God. That's what we see with the Pharaoh. Some of you say, "But I love God." Then God gave you a new heart. And the evidence of that new heart, is a new affection for the Lord. So this leads to a series of questions, is it unloving for God to choose some people and not others? One guy says no. Okay, what do you think? Well, here's what's interesting, when God talks about predestinating or choosing or electing, in the same more of it, He also talks about loving. God says, I have, I've loved you, back to Malachi, says the Lord. You say, "How have you loved us?" And He says, "Well, I love you by choosing you." Three times, he talks about God's love. And God says, You don't love us. Yes, I do love us. How do you love us? I chose you. He says it this way in Ephesians 1:4 and 5, in love He... We're like, "God, if You love people, You wouldn't predestinate them." God's like, "Because I love people, this is how, that's how I love them, is I choose them." Let me say, let me make this, can I make this simple? How many of you are fathers who have adopted a child? Raise your hand. How many of you have ever seen a child adopt a father? A child never adopts a father. Right now, no kid can fill out paperwork and adopt a father, amen? Who has to fill out the paperwork? The father. If you were a child of God, it's not because you adopted God, it's because God adopted you. And the fact that He adopted you means He's loved you. These are the children of God sitting on God's lap, screaming, freaking out, cursing Him, slapping Him in the face saying, "You don't love us." He's like, "I'm your dad and I'm still here. I promise you I do. I promise you I do. And I'm gonna love you until I change you, 'cause that's the kind of dad I am. And I didn't pick you because you're an awesome kid, I picked you because you really need a dad." That's the father heart of God. So let me summarize all of the options. Okay, can I be your nerd friend? Y'all need a nerd friend, I'm a nerd, I'll be your friend. We're gonna summarize all, a whole year of Christian theology, all right? We're gonna summarize it in six options, bring me the next slide. Here are the options, there is God, there is us, how does this work? I'll give you six options, they're in the app. But the first is, everybody goes to hell. This is not a popular position, by the way, there's not a lot of parades. Like yay, we're all kindling, fire up the band. Let's sing a song and celebrate again. But let me ask it this way. Angels who rebelled against God and fell, they became demons, is there any opportunity for the salvation of a demon? Zero. Jesus says, and I quote, "Hell was made for the devil and his angels." One of Peter's letters says that Jesus died for people, not for demons. All

demons rebel, all demons go to hell. If all of the rebellious people who joined the demons in the rebellion went to hell, true or false, that would be justice, that'd be justice. It's really weird, there are people that believe everybody should go to heaven. I don't know anybody who believes that everybody should go to hell, but that makes more sense to me. Number two, option two, God chooses everyone. Everybody's saved, everybody's going to heaven, everybody's sins are forgiven, everybody lives forever, everybody's okay. Is that what the Bible teaches? No. It's called universalism, it's been rejected as a heresy. It's wrong, it's false teaching. Jesus talks of hell more than anyone in the whole Bible. There are people that hate God, there are people that don't love God, we just looked at Pharaoh. He is an example, Judas is another. We say, "Oh, they died and went to a better place." It doesn't always work like that. Number three, good people can choose God. And that is, we have complete and total free will, and let me say this, the only two human beings that ever had complete and total free will, were Adam and Eve. Before sin entered the world, before they got a corrupt nature, they had free will to choose freely. Once we inherit a sin nature, the Bible says that we are by nature objects of wrath, that we are by nature dead in our trespasses in sins, that we are by nature enemies of God and that no one chooses God. And Jesus says it this way, "You didn't choose me, I chose you." But this heresy, this false teaching from a guy named Pelagius is that you're good and you could just pick God. Let me tell you this, you can pick your breakfast cereal, but you can't pick your Savior. So the first three are all false teaching, they're heretical, they're wrong. Some of you say, "I don't believe in right and wrong." Well then you're a heretic too, 'cause these are wrong, okay? The last three are what I will call faithful Christian options. There are closed handed issues like the death, burial, resurrection of Jesus, there are open-handed issues like this, and there are three positions that godly, Bible-believing, faithful, Jesus-loving people will hold, if you believe these, welcome to our church, you can be in leadership, we can agree to disagree agreeably. We can open the Bible and hash it out, but we don't need to file for divorce over this issue, this is a secondary matter. The first is called Arminianism named after a guy named Jacob Arminius, God grants sinners a free will choice. They would teach, he would teach that we are sinners and we don't choose God, but God chooses to give us a choice. That God, at some point in everyone's life, opens up their will and gives them a free opportunity to choose or not choose. So if you don't choose, it's not God's fault, it's your fault, God chose to give you a choice. Some would teach that and it comes with something called prevenient, for you nerds, prevenient meaning first grace, prevenient grace, that He opens up the will at some point to make a free will decision. Number two, double predestination by God comes from the teaching of Calvinism, named after a man named John Calvin. And this is that God chooses some for hell and some for heaven. Before you were born, before you live, your destiny is sealed. God chooses you for heaven, God chooses them for kindling. That's the way that it is, double predestination. Some would argue that this makes God seem unloving, cruel and capricious. I've often joked, you know, this is like dot, dot, damn. Like I want be a dot, am, you know what I mean? So, you know, it can make God look capricious, amen? But that is faithful Christian teaching. Single predestination by God is the position of a man named Martin Luther, Lutheranism. Me, Jesus, the Bible, and all that is right and good in the universe. So you can disagree, but this is where you should land, just kind of kidding a little bit. Okay, so single

predestination is this, everybody chooses hell and God chooses to save some. People who go to hell, get their choice. People who go to heaven, get God's choice. And that sometimes God's choice overrides our choice. And what that means is that the people who choose hell, they got to choose. They chose through sin, folly, rebellion. Those who get heaven, they should thank God because He saved them from Satan's sin, death, hell, the wrath of God and themselves. I'll give you an analogy, I know I'm way over time, you're welcome, and I think of it this way, imagine there were a group of people that had a suicide pact. They just decided we're gonna kill ourselves today. They lock themselves in their home. They chain themselves to the sink and the furniture. They set the place on fire and they were determined to die. The fire department shows up, everything is a raging inferno and they're putting the hoses on it. It is not subsiding. They're calling to the people, "Come out, come out, jump out of the window." And the people are, "No, we refuse to live. We've chosen death." Imagine then one of the firefighters decreed and decided, "I'm gonna go in and I'm gonna save some." The other firefighters are like, "They wanna die, they did this to themselves, they are not looking for your help. And if you go in, you're gonna die." Let's say the firefighter runs in, breaks the chains whereby they have chained themselves up. These people are fighting and hitting him because they wanna die, they don't wanna live. He overrides their will, takes them, carries them out on his shoulders and they live and he dies. I'd be very disappointed if the news showed up and said, "We're really disappointed in the firefighter, he didn't get everybody." I would say he's a, he's a hero. He saved people, at the expense of his own death. That's the story of human history. Through sin, folly, rebellion, we've all said, "I'm gonna kill myself." And Jesus comes and says, "I'll die so that you can live." Some are going to get what they choose, some will get what He chooses. Now in closing, Malachi 1:5, your own eyes shall see this. It's a promise, it's a prophecy. And you shall say, and in your heart today, my friend, I want you to say this, "Great is the Lord beyond the border of Israel." You know what? If God chooses, then an unborn child can be chosen of God. If God chooses, then someone in a closed nation that has never heard, could be chosen of God and revealed to by God. If God chooses, then someone that lacks the mental capacity to fully understand the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus, can be chosen by God. If God chooses, then it's not just one nation, but all the nations that can be invited to the kingdom of God. And if it is God who chooses, then God can choose the worst, the most vile, the most evil. A man like Paul, who was murdering Christians, when he himself met Christ. A man like me, who is sinful to his core, rebellious, foolish, and I have chosen death, and I am happy to report that God has made a choice that overrode my choice and He has chosen to save me from Himself, from Himself and myself. And let me tell you this, great is the Lord. And the promise here is great is the Lord, beyond the border of Israel. Where are we today? We are 2,500 years later, beyond the border of Israel. We are here to testify that this is in fact true. God has saved people from every nation. God has saved some of the worst people and made them His children. God has saved people who are far from Him and drawn them close to Him. And if you are here today, and you belong to God, or your heart is inclined and stirred toward a relationship with God as your Father, and Jesus as your Savior, you need to understand great is the Lord, great is the Lord, great is the Lord. And let me close with a story, I've told this story before, but I feel inclined to share it again. When my kids were little, they'd play this game, kind of, hey dad, chase

me. And they'd, look, daddy, you can't catch me. And they'd run and they'd look back, and I'd, you know, pretend to be slow, even though now I am and I'd chase my kids. I'm gonna get you, I'm gonna get you, I'm gonna get you. Where there was, we lived on a very busy street, lanes of traffic flying by. My beautiful little girl, she thought it was time to play daddy, chase me. And she looked back, and she started running, but she was looking at me. She wasn't looking at the four lanes of high speed traffic, right on the other side of our driveway. My daughter is running to her death. She doesn't know it. Parked in front of our house, there is a car. I could see vehicles, including a large box truck, barreling down the road. I see my little girl with her ponytail, running in front of the vehicle. The truck cannot see her, she cannot see it. She thinks we're playing a game. She doesn't know that she's in danger. She made a free will choice and so did I, because that's what dads do. I looked at her, I said, "No, no, stop." She said, "Ha ha, daddy, you can't catch me." Yes I can. I did not have a philosophical debate about the free will of my daughter. I did not say, "She makes her choice, I make by choice, who might override her choice." I took a philosophy class reaching to independent autonomous individuals with a free will choice in her. I chased her. I chased her and here's what I did, I ran, and my daughter was beyond the bumper of the parked car, into traffic. I grabbed her by the back of the coat and I pulled her out of harm's way. If you are saved, that is your story. You may not know it, you may not see it, you may not believe it, but you are headed toward death and destruction. You made your choice and then your Father made His choice. You're gonna be loved, you're gonna be saved, you're gonna be blessed, you're gonna be adopted, you're gonna be protected, you're gonna be provided for. Great is God, great is God. We need to worship Him, amen? Father God, thank You, thank You, thank You. We say great is the Lord, great is the Lord, great is the Lord. God, You are great. We're a bunch of foolish, rebellious, wayward, self-destructive, arrogant kids, who have an awesome Dad, who loves us and pursues us and forgives us and blesses us and speaks to us and endures with us and will never leave us, betray us, abandon us or forsaken us. So, God, we come today to sing. And this is a declaration against principalities and spirits, this is against demonic forces and realms of rebellion and religion. And we say, great is the Lord, great in my life, great in my family, great in my legacy, great in the past, great in the present, and great for the future. God, You are great. And out of that, we respond because we are glad, amen.

Malachi #2: Learn to Honor

- Alrighty. If you've got a Bible go to the book of Malachi, it is actually in the Bible. It's the last book of the Old Testament. Little book we're gonna spend about six weeks studying, and it is God's final written word to his people. It's-- it's the last thing that he has to say, preparing them for the first Christmas, and the coming of Jesus, which would occur 400 years later. And so, it is kind of like an audit, it's an examination, it's an investigation. And it's one of the three major themes of scripture. So, as you read the Bible, and we'd encourage you to be reading the Bible, there are three major themes. One is sin and how God forgives sin. One is suffering, and that's how God helps those who are hurting. And one is stewardship, and that's really the theme that we'll be studying today. It's a theme that Jesus spent 25% of his teaching on, and that is stewardship. And that is that our lives belong to God, our money belongs to God. Our company belongs to God. Our house belongs to God. Our car belongs to God, everything that we are, everything that we have, everything that we do, every word that we say ultimately belongs to God. That God is the owner, and that we are the manager, the manager. Meaning we need to invest the resources that God gives in a way that God decrees. And what we do this time of year, personally, corporately, even as a church family, we do a bit of an audit. Look back at your year. Okay, what was our spending? How did our investments go? Were we good stewards? Look at our time. Are there things that we would add next year or cut? We also look at our energy. What are the people or things that took our energy? Was that good stewardship, good investment, good return on investment? This is what you should do individually. This is what we do with our company, and that's what we do at our church family. When you come to the end, you sort of have an audit, look at everything and where are we, and how did it go? In the end of the Old Testament, this is kind of like God's audit. This is a family meeting where he is looking at how things have been going. And God has been working in and forward through his people for a few thousand years. So, God's been super gracious. How many of you wish your boss would give you 2,000 years before you got a performance review? Like, that'd be amazing. God's very patient. He waits a very long time, and he is going to look at how things are going. And so, I just ask you, did you come here today to hear a hope filled, encouraging, inspiring sermon?

- [Audience] Yes!

- That's not gonna happen. It's not gonna happen. I want to-- I want to just tell you right out of the-- right out of the shoot, it's-- you've come to the wrong place on the wrong day. This is-- this is God giving them a very bad report card. Well, we'll look at first the priests. Starting in Malachi, chapter one verse-- it'll still be fun though, I promise. Hang in there. I've been in Mexico for two days. I'm full of the Holy Spirit and . So, I am ready to go. This is gonna be good, even though it's a little bit rough. All right, the priests failed Malachi, 1:6. So, before we get into the text, let me explain. In each of these scenarios, sin has created a problem, and then God has made a solution. And the problem here is that sin has caused suffering. So, there is death, and poverty, and hurt, and shame, and guilt, and grief, and-- And as a result, that's-- that's the problem that sin creates. So,

then God has a plan, and he's going to send forth a group of people called the priests. And this is from one generation to next, it's supposed to be family ministry descended from an Old Testament man, named Aaron, and through him were to come the priests. And the priests were kind of like pastors, they teach people the Bible, they love them, serve them, lead them in worship, encourage them, visit them at the hospital, officiate the wedding. Be there for the times that people really have need. And God is first going to start with the priests, and kind of give them his examination, his evaluation. And here's what God says, Malachi 1:6, "A son honors his father." So, the concept of God through the course of Malachi, is that God's like a dad, and we're like his kids. And this is kind of like a family meeting where God pulls the family together, says, okay, let me just-- let me have a family meeting here to tell you how things are going. "A son honors his father, and a servant, his master. If then I am father, where is my honor?" God says, really all the problems that we're having in our relationship is because there is dishonor. This is a key principle for relationships. It's hard to have a healthy relationship with someone who continually dishonors you. If they honor you, it's easier to have a relationship with them. What God is saying is, we have relational problems, and it starts with the fact that you dishonor me. You don't honor me. "If I am a master, where is my fear says the Lord of hosts." That's the God who rules over the angels and the demons, "To you, o, priests." So, those are the leaders, "Who despise my name." You know you've got a problem in your relationship when you hate the name of the other person, right? So, let's say, not you, but somebody you know, they've got a rough marriage, okay? So, let's just hypothetically say, you know somebody with a rough marriage, and I meet them and I say, okay, tell me about your spouse. They're like, I don't want to talk about it. Well, what's their name? I can't say it. It's a trigger word for my PTSD. And you're like, I-- I am a prophet, and I perceive that perhaps you have a relational strife. Yeah, well, when I say their name, I get a nervous eye twitch, and I shake, and then I clean my gun and read lamentations, and think about naughty things. So, I don't say it. You can't even say their name. Their name is a trigger word for you, right? So, what God is saying is, you guys hate my name. You don't even say my name. You don't even say my name. "O, priests who despise my name, but you say, how have we despised your name?" So, they're even kind of mocking God. God's like, you're not respectful. They're like-- we are. God's like, uh, that-- was an indication that you're not. And they're like, well, we voted. They're-- they're disrespectful to our God. They're dishonoring toward God. And what I need you to see here is the priesthood fail. We created a problem. God created a plan, and then the priests failed to execute God's good plan. They failed, the priests here are a failure. These are the leaders, and so, five principles here for leadership, and-- and the first is this, honor goes up and blessing comes down. See, if you read Malachi, and I encourage you to do so, you could read it all in about 15 minutes. They keep asking, hey, where's our blessing? Where's our blessing? Where's it? We don't feel blessed. We don't feel blessed. Their concept is that God is piñata, prayer is a stick. They're like, hey, we asked for stuff, We haven't seen any, where's our blessing? God's asking them, where's my honor? They want blessing to come down, but they're not sending honor up. Okay, how many of you are parents, and this is how it works with your kids? Your kid's like, I hate you, and I would like ice cream. You're like, well, you know what? No, I have a wooden spoon, and it's not for ice cream. It's for you, right? Like you're-- you're not gonna get any ice cream. You're like, I don't bless

dishonor. I don't bless dishonor. If you will honor, if you will respect, if you will obey, if you will try, if you will respect, then I can bless you. But parents, hear me in this, what happens if you bless a disobedient child? You rewarded and you encouraged what? More disobedience and rebellion. So, bad parents with bad kids have come up with something called, reverse psychology, which is, I know they'll defy me. So, I'll tell them to do the opposite of what I want them to do, and then when they sin, I'll get what I want. Shizam, we're both evil, okay. That's bad parenting. God show-- some of you are like, uh, this is so discouraging. We've only begun. Okay, so it's gonna get worse. You're gonna look back at this moment as the good old day in about half an hour. Okay, so what happens is, God tells them, hey, you're not honoring me. You're not respecting me. You're not listening to me. You're not following me, as a result, I'm not blessing you. So, honor goes up, blessing comes down. Leadership principle number two, people are like their leaders. Jesus says in Luke 6:40 that students become like their teachers. Here, God is going to speak to all of his people, but he speaks to the priests, that group of people first, because people follow the leader. And if the leader is going the wrong direction, everything is askew and astray. So, the key is to get the leader straightened out first. So, God speaks to the priests, and so, for me as a pastor, as your leader, I love ya. It's first examining my heart. Am I walking with the Lord? Am I honoring the Lord? Am I serving the Lord? I mean, before I get frustrated with anybody, I got to look in the mirror and see if the problem doesn't begin with me. And so, this is first a word to those of us who have the honor of leading at home, at school, at church, or at work. People become like their leaders, and so the result of the priests not honoring God is the people don't honor God. And here's the principle, God holds those in leadership to a higher standard of accountability. And as a result, they're not just accountable for themselves, but others. So, I'll give you an example, for those of you that are parents. If you have a kid who is freaking out, will we first go talk to the kid or you? No response, amazing. Man, parents are like, I don't know. I don't know, that-- that kid's naughty. You should start there. I don't know. We start with a parent because if the parent is not leading the child in the ways of God, just telling the child isn't enough, the child also needs to honor their mother and father, and follow their leadership. So-- so ultimately leaders are responsible for more than just themselves. And the reason that God starts with leaders is because people are following leader leadership. Principle number three, culture is created by what you teach and what you tolerate. Some of you lead at home. You're a parent. Some of you lead at work. Some of you lead in ministry, even here at our church. Culture is set by not just what you teach, but also what you tolerate. What you're going to see is prior to this, all of the Old Testament was written; this is the last Old Testament book. God taught them a whole bunch of things. Are they doing them? Yes or no? No. If God tolerates those who are not obeying his teaching, he is setting a culture. That's why an exception to the rule negates the rule. And so, culture is not just what you teach, but it's what you tolerate. And God shows up and says, I have taught you to do this, that's not what you're doing. I don't tolerate disobedience to my teaching. Think of it this way, how many of you, if you brought your boss today, don't raise your hand. But how many of you, you've got a job where when you got hired they handed you a big manual, and brought you through an employee orientation? And you're like, okie dokie, and then you go onto the job, and they're like, yeah, we don't do any of that. You're like, well they wrote it all down. They killed a tree. Like this is important, right?

No, it's not-- that's what they say. That's not what we do. And what happens is, so oftentimes, things will be taught that are not obeyed, and if you allow disobedience, then you are setting a culture by what you tolerate, even if it contradicts what you're teaching. Amen? And so, God shows up and he says, I have taught you and I am not tolerating what you're doing. Number four, godly governance is theocratic. Big word. What it means is God down, not people up. So, the priests were like, hey, it's working for us. And we met with the people, we took a big church vote. We all think it's going fine. God said, I don't agree. Well, the people think it works for them. God says it doesn't work for me. And the question is, is church, is ministry, is life supposed to be what works for us, or what works for him? Oh, there's no response whatsoever. This feels like it's going in a bad direction for me. I feel like he's gonna put a bucket out, and expect me to do something at the end. I-- I see where he's going. That's exactly where he's going. Okay, so-- so what happens here is that they are living people up, not God down, meaning they are-- the leaders, they are torn. So, the priests here, they're between God and the people, and God says, here's what I want, and the people say, here's what we want. And the priests, the leaders decide, well, we'll give the people what they want. And as a result, God shows up says, that's not what I want. We live in a world where everybody wants what they want. And the key, this is the last point, the key to leadership is finding, and following the will of God. See, the people are getting up every morning and they're saying, what do we want? God says, no, no, you're supposed to get up every morning and ask, what do you want? The key-- the key to being a leader is finding and following God's will, and then helping others find and follow God's will. I'll-- I'll give you an example. Somebody meant very well, they were at the church here recently, they're sweet. But they came up and they said, I want us to have, or do blank. I won't tell you what it was, it doesn't matter. And I looked at him, I said, well, I appreciate that. You seem kind. I said, but, let me ask you this, is that what God wants? Here's what they said, I don't know. I said, well, that's an important question. Amen. I said, well, I don't know if God wants us to do that or not. But what I would say is if-- if it's something that you want, ask God if it's something that he wants. If you are convinced that it's something that God wants, then we could talk about that. I said, but if you're not convinced it's something that God wants, you gotta start with God. So, ultimately we want to start by figuring out, God, what do you want? We do this through reading the Bible. We do this through prayer. We do this through wise counsel because everybody is showing up, and they're all saying, here's what we want. And nobody's asking, what does he want? Let me-- let me tell you this. Just as a-- an aside, most marriages, the war is, are we gonna do what he wants, or do what she wants? And a lot of this gets resolved when we ask God, what do you want? Thy will be done. Thy will be done. Thy will be done. God, what do you want? And so, the problem here with leadership, they're giving the people what they want. They're not giving the people what God wants, and ultimately what the people need is not what they want. What the people need is what God wants. How many of you, you're parents, and you don't say yes to everything your kid asks. If you're a good parent, you say no, right? Otherwise they're gonna just drink Mountain Dew at bedtime. They're gonna light off fireworks in the house, and horrible things are gonna happen to the dog. Okay, that's what's gonna happen. Sometimes a parent says no, I can't give you what you want because what you want is not good for you. I love you. God here is a father, these are his kids. They're like, this is what we

want, and God's like, but that's not what you need. And when I say no, it's not because I don't love you, it's because I do love you. Trust your dad. Okay, second thing, so the priest failed, the sacrificial system failed. So, here's the problem, we sin, sin brings what? Death. So, God devises a plan, and that is the sacrificial system that rather than the person dying, we'll put in place a sacrificial system, where an animal will be the substitute, and the sin will be imputed or reckoned from the sinner to the substitute. The substitute will be sacrificed so that the sinner doesn't need to die. That's God's plan for the problem that we have made through sin. It's a great plan. And God says, okay, this has been going on for a long time. Let's see how it's going. "O, priests who despise my name, you say, how have we despised your name? By offering polluted food upon my altar. You say, how have we polluted you?" They keep arguing with God. Children and the children of God argue, hey, you're being disrespectful. How am I being disrespectful? Maybe by interrogating your parent. Right, it could be one example . God's like, this isn't going well. They're like, I disagree. They're arguing with him. "How have we polluted you? By saying that the Lord's table may be despised. When you offer blind animals in sacrifice, is that not evil?" Next slide. "And when you offer those that are lame, sick-- what kind of sacrifice are they bringing? Blind, lame, sick. How many of you, your kid wants a puppy for Christmas, you're not gonna get em that one. Dad, I want a puppy, oh I found one. Here you go. Why does he just lay there and throw up? He's sick. He's a sick puppy. He's literally a sick puppy. How come he doesn't run to me? He's lame. It's a one legged puppy. Does he fetch? No, he's blind. Don't complain. You got a puppy. That's what they're bringing to God, blind, lame, sick. It's not like, well, I'll let the animal walk to the priest. He can't . It's a-- these are terrible sacrifices, right? Oh, gosh. Let me-- anyways, so I was gonna say some stuff, but the Holy Spirit was not involved, it would have been hilarious, and we'll just read the Bible now. "Present that to your governor," political leader, "will he accept you and show you favor? Says the Lord of hosts. And now entreat the favor of God that he may be gracious to us with such a gift from your hand." He's being a little facetious. "Will he show favor to any of you? Says the Lord of hosts." So, the sacrificial system is bring a sacrifice, unblemished pure, holy unto the Lord, because worship is a sacrifice. They bring blind, lame, sick. God's like, I can't believe this. I mean, this is like, how many of you have worked at a charity or a donation center, and you see what people actually drop off, right? You're like, I was at the food bank and a guy drove up, he's like, yo, I got a tuna fish sandwich I left in my car this summer, can I give it to the poor? No. How about a deduction? How bout you drive away, right? Sometimes people just give the worst stuff, the worst stuff. And that's what they're doing here under the Lord, and what God says is, you know what? You don't do this to the governor, and what he's talking about there is the government. Now, how many of you, you pay your taxes, right? Of course you did, that's why you're still here and not doing prison ministry from the inside. What happens is, when the government takes our money, they don't really give us a choice, right? God does cause God wants your heart. So, he wants you to give cheerfully. He wants you to give sacrificially. He wants you to give out of your heart. The government does not care about your heart. They just want your money, right? That's why the government doesn't say, get up in the morning, say the Pledge of Allegiance, and have a quiet time with America. They don't care. They just don't care. How many of you, when you got your first paycheck, you realized that the government took your money? I could still remember. I was a high

school kid and I got my first check, and I did the numbers. I was so excited I got it. It was less money. I was like, who's FICA? Who's FICA? I'm gonna find him. We're gonna talk about this. FICA ripped me off. I didn't talk to FICA. I didn't agree with FICA, and what I found out is FICA's the Greek word for demon. It's the government. Okay, and they took their money first. I didn't even-- it's not like they said, would you please, out of the overflow of the love of your heart, give a percentage back to the government. I would have said no, cause I hate what you do with my money. Most of what you do with my money is naughty. And so, I'm not gonna give you any more money. And what happens is, the government takes their money, but God wants you to give it because he cares about your heart. And what he says is this, everybody's paying their taxes to the governor, right? How many of you would not send to the IRS? Sorry, don't feel it. Right? By the way, I got a tuna fish sandwich I left in my car for the summer. I'm sure that'll cover my property taxes. The Bible says, don't judge. Right, what happens is-- he's saying you're a lot better to government than you are to God. And how many of us actually think that giving money to God does some better things than what our government does with it? I don't care what political team you're on. We all agree on that. And all of God's people said?

- [Audience] Amen!

- Amen, okay, that being said, the point here is the discount religion is always really popular. And-- and the problem here is worshiping is different than shopping. Okay? Worshiping is different than shopping. What are you doing in shopping? You're trying to spend as little to get as much, amen. How many of you did this on Black Friday? Okay. How many of you went out on Black Friday? You people are crazy. You people are putting yourself in harm's way. Black Friday is-- it's prison riot at the mall. That's what it is. Okay? It's where-- it's where moms show up with knee pads, and elbow pads, and helmets, and tasers, and knives, I mean, it's-- it's a situation. Because if you stand in line, and you can hold your ground, you can get in first, and you can buy a 60 inch TV for 37 cents. And you're just like, you know what? I did it, I did it. I did it. I plundered the Egyptians. I'm bringing this loot home for the family, and that's what happens is when you're shopping, we're trying to get the best deal, right? Shopping is different than worshiping because shopping is about getting, worshiping is about giving. Shopping is not about being generous, right? How many of you have walked into Costco and said, it's on sale, I was hoping to pay full price cause I wanna be generous toward Costco. I'm worried about Costco. I want to make sure that Costco has a really profitable year. You all chuckle except for the guy who owns Costco. He's like, I hope that's the takeaway. Okay, now what happens is in worshiping, it's about giving, it's not about getting, it's about worshiping, it's not about shopping. And what happens is that sometimes God's people spend all of their life shopping, and they show up to worship, and they think I'm a customer, and the customer's always right. And the staff's job is to do what the customer wants, and to give the products that the customer demands. And God says, no, worshiping is different than shopping. Worshiping is different than shopping. So, the sacrificial system, it invariably failed. Okay, next slide please. The temple failed. So, here is the problem, sin comes, sin causes separation from God. God is holy, we're unholy. God's in heaven, we're on earth. There is separation, this is relational problem.

So, what God does is he devises a plan for the problem that we have made. He creates something called the temple. The temple is the connection point, the bridge between heaven and earth. It's the place where the God of heaven comes down to earth, and as a result, everything orbits around the temple. The temple is a massive, massive undertaking, huge construction project, exceedingly expensive, lengthily construction project over the course of decades. Hundreds of thousands of people would show up for the high holy days, and so you're looking at massive infrastructure among largely poor rural people. And the whole point of the temple was you would go there for worship, you would go there to be in God's presence. You'd go there to deal with your sin. You would go there to pray. If you didn't know God, you would go there to learn about God. If you were a leader, you would go there to learn the Bible. If you had a baby, you would go there to dedicate the baby. Everything orbited around the temple. It was the spiritual center of the universe. It was the holiest place on earth. It was the place that God's presence dwelt. It's amazing. The first temple stood for a while then was destroyed. They went to great expense to then construct the second temple, and here's what God says. "Oh that there were one among you who would shut the doors." Here's what God is saying, shut it down. God, we have spent a ton of money and generations of our family to get the thing open. God says, shut it down. "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." Wow, those are strong words, amen? This is where I tell you that I love ya. And you know what? I didn't pick this book because it fits. You guys are actually doing good. So, you're doing way better, like we'll take an offering. I don't think a lame animal's gonna be in the bucket. So, we're doing good. How is our giving? It's actually pretty good. How is our serving? It's actually pretty good. Our staff has half the size of a church our size, because you guys serve. You guys give, you guys pray. In two years, as our baby church has grown and taken root, everything we've asked, you've done. I didn't pick this because this is my, I am sick of these people. How can I yell at them, right? And no, no. What-- these were people that started good. At some point they had some enthusiasm, but it waned over time. So, we're not, okay you're not, right, if God were to write you a letter, it would not say this, but this is a good check of our heart. Okay, God, things are going pretty good, but we can see that sometimes in our lives we can lose heart. Sometimes our children, or our grandchildren, they don't carry forth the faith that we have, or the passion that we have. And so, this is not for us a crisis, but it's a warning, and it's an encouragement, right? And a hope that he who began a good work in you will see it through to completion. But here God says, "I have no pleasure in you and I will not accept an offering from your hand." Here's the key to ministry, God is the focus, people are the beneficiaries. God is the focus, people are the beneficiaries. Here, the problem is people are the focus. People are the focus. People are saying, it works for us. God's saying, it doesn't work for me. The people are saying, this is about us, and God's saying, no, it's about me. God has to be the focus. God has to be the focus, and then people are to be the beneficiaries. Some of you will think that it sounds selfish for God to be the focus. Actually, it's the best thing for you. You're not meant to be God. You're not meant to be the center of the universe. That we are not independent, we are dependent. God doesn't need us, we need God. Back to the language here, father, child, God says, he's a father. What a good parent does is, they tell the kids, you follow us, we don't follow you. You're little. You got some things to

learn. So, we're gonna teach you, but we're not here for you to teach us, and us to take notes, and for you to be the boss. The reason that a parent puts themselves in authority is to love, protect, bless, lead, and mature the child. When God is the center, when God is the focus, he is the father to love, bless, protect, lead his children. And even if we're big, we're still God's kids. Amen. And here, what happens is, the whole sacrificial system, it is declared by God to be a failure. Number four, tithing failed. Our problem is that we sin and sin brings suffering, and shame, and strife into the world, and there's not enough resources to meet the needs of people. And so, what God does is, he devises a plan where his people would give first fruits and generously, so that ministry could happen, so that people could be cared for again. God is the focus, people are the beneficiary. And ultimately the way this is supposed to work, there was something called a tithe. Think of it as two pockets, tithe is 10%, literally means 10% is a tithe, and then the second pocket was offerings. So, tithe this 10% of gross off the top of your income to the Lord, and then there were feasts, festivals. There was gleanings for the poor. There were other things that would account for a grand total, depending upon which scholar you prefer, of 25 to 27% of your gross income. Now, there's two ways to look at this. One is, why should I give God my wealth? The other is, God, how much of your wealth do you want me to keep? Do you see the difference? Is-- is your wealth, his wealth? Is your family his family? Is your car his car? Is your job, his job? Okay? And this is an issue of ownership, and what God wanted is, he wanted his people to be generous, and you would give out of what you had. So, if you are a rancher, you bring your animal. They brought blind, lame, sick animals. If you were a farmer, you would bring the first fruits of your crop. But what they bring, you'll see in a moment, it's rotten food, Okay, here's what God says, "From the rising of the sun to its setting, my name will be great among the nations." What God is saying is, everybody on the planet is hurting, and most people don't know me. So, if you're my kids, let's help get the word out, and let's help some people. "And in every place, incense will be offered to my name and a pure offering for my name will be great among the nations, says the Lord of hosts, but you profane it when you say that the Lord's table is polluted." That's rotten offering, and it's fruit that is-- it's food may be despised. This is the thing that nobody wants to talk about. So, we'll talk about it. And that is, you either worship your wealth, or you worship God with your wealth, okay? Four reasons, biblically, principally that this is important. Number one, Jesus says you can't serve God and-- money. Right? That ultimately when you're giving, you're worshiping and worship, ultimately is sacrifice, that's the big idea in principle. And some people will say, why does God want to get the money out of my hand? And the issue is, he-- he actually is trying to get the idol out of your heart, because Jesus says, principle two, where your treasure is, your heart is. Heart is. If God is your treasure, right, then your giving should reflect your deepest commitment, your love for God. Number three, in the book of Acts, they quote the Lord Jesus, Acts chapter 20:35. The Lord Jesus said, "It is more blessed to give than receive." Here's the key, giving is a blessing. There's a false teaching that says, if you give God will give you a blessing. And it's like a Ponzi scheme. Give God a dollar, he'll give you \$100. That's not true. The giving is not to get a blessing. The giving is the blessing. Some blessings are external. God is generous. Some blessings are eternal. You store up your treasures in heaven. Some blessings are internal. How many of you have met a need, and there was just a tremendous joy in meeting the need? How many

of you, you were able to help somebody, you're like, I am so overjoyed that I got to help? That was amazing. The blessing is not in the getting, the blessing is in the giving. That's why we live in the richest country in the history of the world, where people are racking up unprecedented debt, and everybody's miserable. Because they keep trying to get joy, and happiness, and contentment by taking, and it's only found by giving. Let me prove it to you. Christmas is coming, how many of you are gonna buy a present for a kid, or a grandkid, a little guy? Is your favorite moment at Christmas like, is it my turn, can I open my present? Can I go first, please, please, please, please? If you're the grandpa, don't do that, okay? That's weird. When you open a present, it's a joy, but when you give a present, and you watch the joy that someone else has when they open the present, true or false, that's the greatest joy of all? It's a blessing. It's a blessing. God is blessed above all because God gives above all. And number four, Paul says that God loves a cheerful giver. Giving is cheerful. Giving is joyful because when you understand this, everything I have is a gift from my father, and he asked me to share some of it. Right? It's amazing to me. How many of you have kids, and you've realized that they do not have a decent income stream? Have you noticed that with kids? They're not like when you do your finances at the end of the year, you're like, yeah, they didn't-- they didn't add a lot. They were sort of an expense, these little people. Everything they have, they get from their? Parents, and one of the things we should teach them as parents, is to share what they have. Hey, Johnny, here's two popsicles. Yay! Give one to your sister. Why? That's not your popsicle. That's-- that's a gift to you to enjoy and to share. Okay? Here's the point, all the popsicles are whose popsicles? They're all the father's popsicles. You're like, why would I give you my popsicle? He's like, it's not your popsicle. I-- I gave one for you, I gave one for them. When you give it, you're gonna share in my joy. I'm happy to give it to you. You'll be happy when you share it with them. I have cheer in giving to you. You'll have cheer when you give it to them. Because the world is filled with two kinds of people, takers and givers. And takers are never joyful and cheerful, and givers are joyful and cheerful. Here's the big idea. If I can get you to be a giver, I could change your life. Let me-- let me tell you how this works. If I can get you to give, I can get you to forgive. Because giving is not just your money, it's everything. If you will give, you can forgive, which is, I'm gonna give you love, and grace, and mercy, and compassion, and not vengeance, and not violence, and not justice. That's what I'm gonna give you. If-- if you can give your words of encouragement and hope, and life, you're gonna build people up instead of beat people up. If you can give your time to lift burdens and to help others, you'll be-- you'll be a burden lifter and not a burden giver. If I can-- if I can give you to give your heart to someone, you're gonna make a better spouse. If I can give you to give your heart to someone, you'll be a better friend. If I can give you to get your energy away, then you'll be a better employee. I'll give you a-- a weird analogy. I don't have a lot of notes. I'm a little tired, I'm doing the best I can, but just bear with me on this. I've got two beautiful daughters sitting in the front row today. They're now embarrassed that they're my children, and I'm gonna use them as an illustration. I love you girls with all my heart. So, I apologize in advance, love dad. Okay, so-- that being said, someday, these girls that I love with all my heart, and I do love you with all my heart. Where did the other girl go? She was just here. She's a Ninja, she's gone. Okay. So, so let's say a man comes one day, okay, I'm prophesying, hoping grand babies. So, one day, let's say that a-- a man

comes to me and says, I love your daughter, and I want to be with her. I will ask him, are you a giver or taker? And if he says, I'm a taker, then that's not going to work. Right? Because you can't have a healthy relationship with two takers. You can't have a healthy relationship with a giver and a taker. That's an abusive relationship. You can only have a good relationship with what? Two givers. Two givers. Behind all of this, it's not about the money, it's about the relationship. God's saying, I give, you don't give. I talk to you, you don't talk to me. I serve you, you don't serve. I love you, you don't love. You're takers, I'm a giver. For us to have a healthy relationship, you need to be a giver too. It's all about the relationship. True or false, we live in a world that is primarily filled with takers, and it's really hard to find a giver? God's not like that. And God doesn't want our relationships to be like that. And so, what God is saying is that giving is the key to living. Okay? Giving is the key to living. Number five, ministry failed. It's really-- do you see a theme? So, so here-- here we are so far, if you're not discouraged, let me fix that for you. The priests failed, the sacrificial system failed, the temple failed, tithing failed, ministry failed. So, here-- here's our problem. Sin creates a world filled with needs. So, God's plan is that his people would do ministry, loving and serving, and helping, and blessing, and participating in the needs of others. And then God calls a family meeting after waiting thousands of years, and says, "But you say what a weariness this is, and you snort at it." Right what I would say what? I don't-- How many of you-- how many of you, when you're so frustrated, you're like, I don't even say things, I just make noise like-- That's how I feel about you. "But you say what a weariness this is, and you snort at it says the Lord of hosts." What God is saying is, I'm asking you as my kids to help other people, and you're sick of serving. Okay? This is-- This is what happens when people forget that God is always serving them. This is what happens when we forget that we're not the only ones that are having a hard day, other people are too. And that-- that, that, that-- there's an opportunity to be helpful, and that's called ministry. Now, this being said, let me distinguish between wariness from ministry, and wariness of ministry. How many of you have served the Lord? And you've discovered wariness of ministry? You got tired, you got exhausted. You're worn out. We are blessed as a church family with an exceedingly high percentage of leaders. Okay? When you open a church like Lord, I hope the nice people show up. Okay? And the nice people did show up. We love you. Actually, things are very healthy. Your giving is good, your serving is good, like everything, there's room for improvement and maturity, but I'm overall encouraged. But we have a lot of leaders that show up, a lot of former senior pastors, missions leaders, church staff, people that have been to Bible college, been to seminary. When they first show up, here's what we often hear, I love the Lord, I'm looking forward to participating. I'm just exhausted, I need a break. Is that okay? That's totally okay. That's wariness from ministry, right? Like Jesus did ministry, did he ever get tired? He took a-- a nap. God, God took a nap. That means it's exhausting, amen? And I would say, be like Jesus, take a nap, okay, be like Jesus. Paul says he pours himself out like a drink offering, and he's like, I got no energy left. I am emptied out. I got to get charged up. There are times and seasons that you need a break, take a sabbatical, take a rotation, take a break. That's not a problem. That's wariness from ministry. This is wariness of ministry, and it's like, I'm done. God, you're not worth it. I'm sick of it, I don't want to be involved. I don't wanna do anything. I don't want to be a worshiper. I want to be a customer. I want other people to serve me. I don't want to serve them. That is their

attitude, and it's-- it's not an attitude of gratitude. While there's one more category, so there's still hope. And now we'll dash it. Malachi chapter one verses 13 through 14, right? Worship failed. Worship, so the problem that we created through sin is rather than worshiping God, and enjoying the things that he gives, we worship the things that he gives. We worship our money, and so we're workaholics. We worship alcohol, so we're alcoholics. We worship our perception in the light of others, and our reputation, so we lie. We-- we have addictions to food, and sex, and money, and fame, and power. And all of that is a worship issue, it's worshiping someone or something other than God. We're made to worship. We worship someone or something other than God, that's the problem that leads us into sin. So, God's plan is worship me. Then everything else will be done in relationship to, in obedience of me. And here's what they-- you bring what has been taken by violence . This is crazy! They're tithing stuff they stole. That's what that means . This is crazy. Like this is-- okay, I'm having fun. I appreciate you participating. This would be like, we're doing work on the property, some guy shows up and is like, I noticed you're doing work here at Trinity. So, I'm gonna donate a truck. Thank you. Thank you. Hey, where's the VIN number? He's like, don't ask, can I get that receipt? And then you see lights, and a cop, and they cuff the guy. He's like I-- they-- they're tithing things they've stolen. Now, it's one thing not to give it all, it's another thing to be like, well, I'm gonna give generously, from them, right? That's a whole other thing. This has only happened once in the history of our church. I kid you not it was early on. We go to go into the office one day, and there's this scooter there, parked right by the office door. And we're talking, we're like, did somebody tithe the scooter? Why don't we call the police? They're like, that was stolen. Somebody stole the scooter, and left it to the front door of the church. I kid you not, stolen scooter. If that was you, we forgive you, but that was wrong, okay? "Shall I accept that from your hand says the Lord, cursed be the cheat who has ma-- who has a male in his flock, and vows it, and yet does not sacrifice to the Lord what is blemished. For I am a great King, says Lord of hosts, and my name will be feared among the nations." They're saying, God, we would have given you better, but you didn't give. God's like, I gave you. I gave you the unblemished animal, and you ate it. All right . And then you stole your neighbors blind, lame, sick animal and tithed it. So, their worship failed. The end. Thank you Lord for this word of discouragement. We're now gonna-- all gonna-- all just gonna cry and go home , right? Yeah, this-- this is-- this is crazy, right? Like let me just summarize it for those of you that were checking football scores and missed the low lights. The priests failed, the sacrificial system failed, the temple failed, tithing failed, ministry failed, worship failed! That's it, that's the Old Testament, this is the end of the book. And here's the big idea, cause Jesus hasn't shown up yet. And everything is a total disaster, it's a wreck, it's a failure until Jesus shows up. You can have a great plan, and it's a failure unless Jesus shows up. Whatever you have planned, whatever you are working on, whatever you are aspiring to, whatever you are hoping for, until Jesus shows up, it's all a complete and total failure! Total failure! So, all of this is to prepare people for the coming of Jesus, and the first Christmas. And so, everybody's looking at it, and the people are like, well, God, this failed . You failed, and God's like, I'm pretty sure it wasn't me. Right, I'm pretty sure it was you. So, as you read the book, please read the book, they're blaming God for the failure, and God is saying actually, no, you are the ones that have failed. So, here's the point, where's the hope? Who's gonna fix this mess? Jesus is coming. So, here's what

I'm gonna do, I'm gonna yell really loud for the last 13 minutes. Plus, however many more I feel like using. And then, it's gonna get awesome. Okay, so here's what I want you to see. The priests did what, the priests what? They failed, but-- but Jesus is faithful. Jesus is our priest, and here's double, double craziness, he gets us to be his priests. I'll read it to you, here it is, Hebrews two, Jesus is our faithful, what? "High priest in the service of God." The priests failed, but our high priest, he is? Faithful. Now-- now, we don't follow a failed priest, we-- we follow a faithful high priest. His name is Jesus. He lives to intercede for you and me. You can trust Jesus. You can follow Jesus. You can depend on Jesus. You can bank on Jesus. You could follow Jesus to your grave. You can follow Jesus through your grave. He is a faithful high priest in the service to God. Oh, you gotta clap cause I'm old, and I need to breathe, and I need a break, and I need your help. I don't wanna preach my own funeral here. So, I got-- all right. Not only that Jesus is our priest, and we are his priests, 1 Peter, 2:9, you! You guys, this is crazy! Are a chosen race. Right, let me tell you this. God didn't pick us for the team cause we're awesome. Right? God picked us for the team cause he's awesome. A chosen race. A what kind? How many of you like, I gotta get me a tiara. I am-- Men go with the crown. It's-- it's a confusing day, we wanna clarify that. Right, a roy-- shouldn't have been said, hilarious, inappropriate and right. Okay, a royal what? Priesthood, your Kings and queens. "A Holy nation of people for his own possession that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light." Priests failed! Jesus is faithful. What's the spirit in you? Now you're a priest, everywhere you go, how can I minister? How can I love? How can I serve? How can I with my works, how can I with my words, proclaim the excellencies of him? The love of him, the provision of him, the protection of him, the presence of him. You have a great high priest, and the Holy Spirit empowers you to be priests in service to God. At work, at school, at the grocery store, everywhere you go. You're on kingdom assignment, bringing the love of Jesus to the people who need it the most. Number two, I told you as well that the sacrificial system failed, and Jesus is our sacrifice. And he allows us to offer our lives as a living sacrifice. 1st Peter 1:19 speaks of Jesus precious blood of Christ, a what? "A lamb without blemish or spot." They're bringing lame sacrifices. Jesus is not a lame sacrifice. They're bringing polluted offerings. Jesus is not a polluted offering. Jesus is sinless. Jesus is pure. Jesus is good. Jesus is the lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world. Jesus is our Passover lamb who has been slain. Jesus comes as your substitute. Jesus takes all of your sin. He takes all of your suffering. He takes all of your shame, and he goes to the cross, and he lays down his life so that you might live. And Jesus Christ took care of everything. He took care of everything. My friend, you can be forgiven, you can be loved, you can be reconciled. You can be reunited with the father who loves you. And this is crazy! You get to offer your life as a sacrifice. Here's how he says it, 1st Peter, 2:5, "You yourselves like living stones are being built up as a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood." He says it again, "To offer spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God through Jesus Christ." Every sacrifice you make, if it is for Jesus Christ, it is acceptable. And some of you, I want you to know that you're storing up your treasures in heaven, and you're making sacrifices today for a return on investment forever. Because you love Jesus some of you are making less money than you could. Because you're walking according to biblical principles, some of you have had some conflicted relationships. Because you're seeking to obey God with your

behavior, there are some things in life that are more complicated or difficult for you. God is not punishing you, this fallen world is opposing you. And every time that you do what is right in the sight of God, regardless of the consequence, that is a sacrifice. And I need you to know that your sacrifice is not in vain. That your sacrifice is in response to the God who loves you so much, that he sent Jesus to be sacrificed for you. Number three, I told you as well that the temple failed, and Jesus is our temple! This is mind blowing. We don't go to a place. We go to a person, whose name is Jesus. The reason the temple no longer exists, it was destroyed in 70 AD, is because we don't need it. We need Jesus. Jesus is the connection point between heaven and earth. Jesus is the place that sin is forgiven. Jesus is the place that prayers are heard. Jesus is the place that people are saved. Jesus is the place that nations are reached. Jesus is the place that burdens are lifted. Jesus is the place that destinies are altered. Jesus is the place the demons are defeated. Hey, uh, come on! Man! Come on. Jesus answered them, so they come to Jesus, and he says, destroy this temple, and I'll rebuild it in three days. You're crazy, it took 46 years they say to build this temple. And in three days, Jesus says, "I will raise it up." He was speaking about the temple of his what? Body. Body. Jesus Christ is the presence of God. Jesus Christ is the connecting point between heaven and earth. It's not just a pithy statement. It's a prophetic truth on your Christmas card. That Jesus is Emmanuel, God with us. That God came down to earth, that God came down to be with us. That God came down to be like us, that God came down to seek us. That God came down to save us, and as a result, we don't go to a place, we go to a person, whose name is Jesus.

- [Audience] Yeah.

- And this is crazy! You get to be a temple. That's crazy. Alright. All chubby temple. That's amazing! That's amazing. I'll read it to you, do you mind? Okay, 1st Corinthians 6, your body is a-- I didn't make it up. Your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you. God, the Holy Spirit used to dwell in the Holy of Holies. Once you belong to the Lord, Jesus and your sin is forgiven, your body becomes the Holy of Holies. That means that you don't go to God, that God goes with you wherever you go. And some of you, this explains the opposition, the hostility, the trouble that you have because I don't know why, when I go there, they oppose me. I don't know why when I interact with those people, they hate me. I don't-- I don't know why they're against me, because you're bringing the presence of God.

- [Audience] Yeah.

- And as darkness hates light, when the light of Christ shines through the people of Christ, some people oppose the dark, and they love the dark, and they resist the light. Don't take it personal, you'll make it personal. When they reject you, if you are walking in faith, if you were walking in truth, if you were walking in grace, if you were walking in the spirit, realize that the opposition is to the presence of God. Don't make it personal. Love, forgive, bless, care, share, and let it be between them and God. But friends, your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit. How many of you didn't know that? That your body is sacred, hallow ground. That the food we eat, the-- the drink we drink, the words we

say, the places we go, the images we see, the decisions we decree, the things we hold in our hand. Those are all in the presence of God, and they're all opportunities to be worshipers of God. In addition, I told you that tithing failed, and first fruits failed. And here's what's amazing, Jesus comes to give himself as a sacrifice of first fruits. First means first, and best. And here's what we learn about Jesus, 1st Corinthians 15:23, Christ is the? The first fruits, he's the first and best. Here's what it says, God so loved the world that he? Ga-- loving is demonstrated by giving, and giving is one way of loving. And you don't love if you don't give, love, grace, mercy, time, patience, money, everything. Not just some, but all, all it is to be given first fruits to God because God gave us his first fruits. Jesus is first. Jesus is best. God so loved the world that he gave. And then he invites us to give our first fruits, not so that God will love us, but because he does. Not so that God would be pleased with us because in Christ that he is, not because we have to, but because we get to. And it says it this way, honor the Lord with all your wealth, and the first fruits of all. They gave their worst. God gave his? Best, that's amazing. I told you as well, that ministry failed, and Jesus comes as our servant, and he comes as a servant that does not fail. The son of man, that's a designation for Jesus, he uses it some 70 times. He's speaking of himself, he's quoting the Old Testament prophet, Daniel, the son of man came not to be? Served, a taker, but to serve a-- giver, and to give, to give what? His life as a ransom for many. All the ministry failed, and one servant shows up, and he doesn't fail. Can I tell you something about Jesus? He doesn't fail. He doesn't fail. He's faithful. Bible says, even when we're faithless, he's faithful. They asked the Lord, Jesus, how do we be the greatest? It's an arrogant question. He doesn't rebuke them, he redirects them. He says, to be the greatest, you must be the servant of all. Because God opposes the proud and he gives grace to the humble. And as a proud person, I could tell you that that's true. That if we humble ourselves, God lifts us up. If we lift ourselves up, eventually we are taken down. Jesus, humbled himself. He came down to the earth to serve us. Jesus then went to the cross to serve us, and then Jesus went to the grave to serve us. He went as low as one can go, and God has raised him up to the highest place. And today, Jesus is seated on a throne, and it just goes to show that the best leaders are those who are lifted up by God after faithful, humble service. Our world knows nothing of this. Our world knows nothing of this. This is the kingdom of God. It's not the cultures of the earth. That's amazing. Not only is Jesus a faithful servant, now back real quick, I'm not done. I got more yelling to do. Go back. Romans 7:6, we serve in the new way of the? Spirit. So, here's what ministry is, God does something for you through the life, the death, the burial, the resurrection, the ascension, the triumphant eternal cosmic victory of Jesus. He does something for you, and then he puts the spirit in you, and he does something in you. He changes your desires. He changes your nature. He changes your identity. He changes your power source. He changes your destiny. And then the ministry that was done for you is something that God does in you. And then it's something that God does through you. And all of a sudden now, by the power of the Holy Spirit, ministry is from God to God. That is the cycle of ministry. I receive and I give, I'm forgiven and I forgive. I'm loved and I love, I'm served, and I serve. And this is the rhythm of the soul that is filled with the spirit and relationship with Jesus. My friend, it's the best life. It's the joyful life. It's the satisfied life. It's the significant life. It's the eternal life. And I told you as well, last one, maybe that worship failed. People weren't worshipping. Jesus shows up. Satan

comes to him, and says, you don't need to be a worshiper. You could be a consumer, or a customer. You don't need to sacrifice. You need to indulge yourself. Worship failed, Jesus shows up. And in this moment, Jesus answered the devil. "It is written," he quotes the Bible. "You shall worship the Lord, your God and him only shall you serve." The problem is not money. The problem is worship. The problem is not sex, it's worship. The problem is not fame, it's worship. The problem is not alcohol, it's worship. The problem is not drugs, it's worship. The problem is not gambling, it's worship. The problem is not anger, it's worship. The problem is not lying, it's worship. That when we worship God, everything else gets straightened out. And Satan comes ultimately to the Lord, Jesus, and says, here's the deal, worship me, and I'll give you all that you want. And Jesus says, I will take nothing but a relationship with the father because that is the most treasured possession. That is the most sacred relationship. And Jesus comes to a position where everyone else in the history of the world has failed. They worship someone other than God. They worship something other than God. And Jesus said, I am here to worship the father, and to worship the father alone. I say no to every temptation. I say no to every indulgence. I say no to every selfishness. And I say, thy kingdom come, thy will be done. Not my will, according to your will. And Jesus in that moment, worships, he worships God, and as a result, he says no to sin. You worship your way into trouble, you worship your way out of trouble. And Jesus is the perfect worshiper, and then here's what's crazy, he gives us the Holy Spirit so that we can worship. He says it this way, "Present your bodies," Romans 12:1, "As a living sacrifice." Sometimes people die for Christ, and sometimes it is harder to live for Christ. Because dying for Christ means your suffering ends, living for Christ means your suffering continues. Offer your bodies as a living sacrifice holy and acceptable unto God. This is your spiritual spirit filled spirit empowered worship. God comes as Jesus, Jesus lives a life of worship. Jesus makes you a temple. His presence is in you. Jesus places you in relationship with God. Jesus declares you to be a priest living in the presence of God. Jesus then empowers you to live a life of worship unto God. The one thing that you were made to do, the thing you were created to do, the place that you'll find your greatest joy, that your burdens will be lifted, that your hope will come. That your life will change. That your destiny will be altered is in the presence of God, worshiping God. So, guess what we're gonna do now? We're gonna do all of this. That's why we're here. So, ushers come forward. We'll collect our tithes and offerings, right? If you brought a blind, lame, sick lamb, we love you. Don't stick it in the bucket. In addition, guess what we're gonna do with the band? Rise up. Dang it, really, come on. Jeez, come on, we're gonna worship. I hate to wake you up, but we're gonna worship. We're gonna partake of communion, which is remembering what? We have a faithful high priest who has laid down his life as a sacrifice. His body was broken, his blood was shed, that he is not a failure. He is faithful. Amen. And if you don't know Jesus today, if you've missed the big idea, you need Jesus, you need Jesus, you need Jesus. We all need Jesus. Religion fails, spirituality fails, morality fails, human attempts fail, nations fail, politics fail, leaders fail, fundraising fails. Jesus never fails.

- [Audience] Woo!

- So, we're gonna worship him, is that okay?

- [Audience] Yeah!

- All right, why don't you stand and sing with us?

Malachi #3: Learn to Listen

- Alrighty, we're spending six weeks looking at Malachi. It's the last book of the Old Testament. And it's God's way of preparing his people for the first Christmas. It'll be the last book of the Bible that God writes, and then the next major event in human history is the birth of the baby Jesus that we're going to celebrate in a big way come Christmas, and it's God's way of calling a family meeting. So the context is kind of like this. When we get together for church, we consider this a family meeting. If you're in a family, you've had a family meeting. It's where everybody sits down. It's like, okay, we got something to talk about, it's important. God, in chapter one and chapter two of Malachi, he tells us that he's our Father, so he loves us like a father's heart. And when you think of God, think of the Father heart of God. And he calls everybody together for a family meeting, and that's the context of Malachi, and he's going to give some instruction about how to take care of his children. Some of his kids are younger, some of them are older, just like our church family. And the big concept today is that God is gonna have a strong word because he's very concerned about the health and the wellbeing of his people. And I'll give you a bit of an analogy. How many of you men will identify with this? How many of you men are glad that your children ate what their mother picked, not what their father picked, amen? When our kids, Grace and I got married at 21, we started having kids at 25, and I realized very quickly I have no idea what to do with a child, especially when it comes to feeding the child. I didn't eat well at the time, I eat better now, but I ate really bad. And I was just assuming you just feed the kids whatever. So it's like, "Hey babe, "I'm going to the microwave to get a corn dog, "you think the baby wants one?" You know what I mean, I don't know what to do. I'm a standard off-the-rack, guy, I don't know what to do. Do they want a Coke? I love Coke. So Grace would be like, all the time, this was what grace would say in our house, and she was right, I was wrong, so this is just public knowledge, but she'd say, "Don't feed that to the kid." I was like, "Why, they're gonna love it, it's amazing. "Who doesn't love ice cream and toppings?" She's like, "They're two days old." But Grace knew what I didn't know and I needed to listen to her so I could learn from her to learn how to feed the kids, right? And so Grace, she did all this research and she knew what she was talking about. She ate healthy and she was gonna make sure our kids ate healthy. And it was, first of all, feed the kid this, don't feed them that 'cause that'll make them sick and they'll throw up. And I can just testify that's a true fact. Kids will puke if you feed them the wrong thing. It seems fun at the time until you're wearing what you fed them. Nonetheless, if you feed them the wrong thing, they get sick and they throw it up 'cause their body can't process it. Or if you give them the food and you enter it into their diet too quickly and they're not yet at a stage of maturity, they can develop an allergy, and maybe even for the rest of their life they can be allergic to that food. So grace was very wise and I had a lot to learn. How to feed the kid, what to feed the kid, how much to feed the kid, when to feed the kid, what not to feed the kid so that the kid can be healthy. That's the whole point, because you are what you eat. And garbage in, garbage out, all of these things are true. Well, what is true physically of the body is also true spiritually of the soul. That you're two parts. God gave us a body and that body houses the soul. And just as God wants us to feed and nourish our physical body so that we can be physically healthy, God wants our soul to be fed so that we are also spiritually

healthy. Now here's where God's frustration comes in in the tone and text of our section of scripture today. The people who are supposed to be feeding are feeding garbage, junk food, to God's children. It's bad teaching, it's not healthy teaching, and as a result, it's making the people of God, the children of God sick. I'll give you an analogy. Finishing up travel season, I was recently making a flight to the East Coast. And I got on the plane and near me was a mom who came on with two big bags. I was wondering, what's in those? It had a little kid. And opened the tray in front of the kid, took out a few bags of Halloween-sized candy, and put it in front of this little kid, and then opened the other bag and started taking out cans of Coke or bottles of but it's Coca-Cola, giving it to this little kid. This kid starts off fairly pleasant. By the end, it's a demon disguised as a child. It's like a terror cell, a sleeper cell from Al-Qaeda got awakened mid-flight. This kid started freaking out because for the whole flight the kid is literally eating candy, drinking Coke. How many of you moms know exactly how this is gonna end? By the end, this otherwise nice child, their snot come out of their nose, they are screaming, they are throwing a tantrum, everyone is looking at the mother. Basically, put them in the overhead bin. That's sort of the look they're giving her, right? This kid's really out of control. But whose fault was it, primarily the child or the parent? The parent, because the child eats what the parent provides. And if it's poor nutrition, the kid gets sick. I just need you to know God's language today is gonna be a father who walks in on his family and he sees leaders that are feeding garbage to the kids and the kids are getting really, really sick and the leaders won't change the spiritual palette and diet. So that being said, we're in Malachi 2, and God says this, Malachi 2:1-2, "And now, O priests." The priests are the Old Testament version basically of a pastor. They're to lead and to feed, that is their responsibility in the sight of God. And the way the priests were appointed, they were to be doing family ministry, family ministry. And that is that mom and dad serve the Lord and they train their kids to serve the Lord and they train their grandkids to serve Lord. And it's called Levitical, you'll see this guy's name in a little bit, Levi, the Levitical priesthood. And it's kind of I think about a little bit like our family. So Gracie's daddy was a pastor and she did ministry and we do ministry and it's generational like that. Not that everybody who is a pastor needs to have kids that become pastors, but families should be serving the Lord from one generation to another. That was the big idea. And the priests were supposed to be like the mom and the dad. So the priest and his wife were to feed the people the Word of God, help them be healthy, sort of parent the people of God, whether they were young or old so that they would be healthy and have a healthy church family and then have healthy families. "And now, O priests, this command is for you," because everything rises and falls with leadership, so God speaks to the leader first. And this is a deep conviction for me. God burdened me this week. He's like, "Mark, this is for you. "You're the leader, you're in this role, "you have a responsibility, "you teach people the Word of God. "This is for you." So I'm not saying this is a word just for you. This is a word first for me and all leaders. "If you will not," what? "Listen." This is important because every relationship if it's to be healthy requires that both people communicate and listen, amen? How many of you, you're like, yeah, that's the problem. You either don't talk or you don't listen. If both people communicate and they listen, you have a healthy relationship. God's a loving God, God's a relational God. This is like a parent, how many of you have had a kid, and the kid doesn't listen? I don't know why I asked it that way. I could have asked, do you have a kid? Obviously,

then you had a kid who doesn't listen. Amen, this always happens. They don't listen. And so what you do, you lovingly look at them and you say, okay, now I need you to listen, because what you're doing is going to harm you. It's gonna hurt you, it's not gonna help you. I love you, you're not listening. God looks at the leaders and he says, "If you will not listen, "if you will not take it to heart "and give honor," it's a big theme in the book, "to my name, says the Lord of hosts, "then I will send the curse upon you "and I will curse your blessing. "Indeed, I have already cursed them "because you do not lay it to heart." The Bible says that children are a blessing. I love the little voice in the front rows, right? So all you little guys, little gals, you're a blessing. God gives us children as a blessing and we can curse our own blessing. How do we curse our blessing? By teaching them things that are not biblical, they're not truthful, they're not helpful. Okay? In the same way as a parent feeds the body of the child, so the parent needs to feed the soul of the child. God gives us children as a blessing. And if we put garbage in their soul, we're cursing our blessing. That's what he's saying. That's what he's saying. And the reason he's talking to leaders is because the leaders of the ministry need to set the precedent and pattern for those in the ministry. So imagine if Grace and I didn't really like each other. Imagine if we didn't really like our kids. Imagine if our kids didn't really like the Lord. I mean, imagine if. God could look at the whole church and say, "Everybody's gotta work on their relationships," but God would call us first and say, "Hey, you and Grace gotta sort some stuff out "and you gotta love those blessings I gave you, "because if you guys aren't doing well, "it's not gonna go well for the church family, amen?" And so this is what God is saying here and he's talking to leaders, so this is first and foremost, again, a word for all of us, but firstly for any of us that are honored with the privilege of being in leadership. And the last thing we should want to do is to curse our blessing. I mean, if God gives us a blessing, we wanna bless our blessing, we don't wanna curse our blessing. And so a couple of things here. To be a good leader, you gotta be a good follower, right? They're leading people, but they're not following the Lord. To be a good teacher, you gotta be a good student, right? They're talking a lot, but they're not listening a lot. And it's interesting, I was thinking about it, listening is really the first responsibility of a student or of a follower. I got a degree in speech. You know what they didn't have? They didn't have a degree in listening. Amen? We have a world where everyone is communicating information, but hardly anybody's listening. And God says that's the problem. And so listening is honoring. This issue of honor has come up in chapter one and two. And God says, "Where's my honor?" And what God is saying is we honor him by listening with our ears, taking it into our heart, and then obeying it with our life, okay? You listen with your ears. Okay, God, I hear you. Take it to your heart. God, I agree with you. Work it out in your life. God, I obey you. That's the cycle of honor. Ears, heart, hands. That's the cycle. Ears, heart, hands. That's the cycle of honor. How many of you, God has said something to you? I don't know what it is. How many of you even here today, God has communicated something to you, he's revealed something to you, he's asked something to you, he's instructed something to you. The Holy Spirit will make that plain. I don't know what that is for each of you. When God speaks, and let me say this, God is always speaking, sometimes people just aren't listening. That's what it's saying. You have a decision to make, and that is, I will take it to heart or I will harden my heart. I will take it to heart or I will harden my heart. And he gives us a little clue here. He's gonna use it repeatedly in Malachi, but

especially today. "The Lord of hosts." And that's incredibly spiritual language. What that refers to is the God who rules over a heavenly host. That's the angels and the demons. And the story of the Bible is that before we existed, God existed eternally. And at some point in history, he created spirit beings called angels. They were to be ministers and messengers of his. They were to function like his staff. They were supposed to listen to what he said, take it to heart, and then honor him by obeying him. Well, some of those angels decided that they were not going to listen. And rather than receiving it in their heart, they were going to harden their heart. And rather than obeying God, they were gonna disobey God. We now call them demons. They're fallen angels, they're rebels. A third of them, the Bible says, were cast down to the earth. That's why we have so many problems on the earth today. It's not just people, but it's principalities and powers or spirits and demons that are at work in the world. And so what happened was some of the angels said, "We will listen. "We will take it to heart. "And we will honor through obedience." Some of the angels that chose to not listen, not take it to heart and not honor through obedience, they became demons. Here's the big idea. When God speaks to us, we have two choices, angelic or demonic. When God speaks to you, you have two choices. Angelic, Lord, I will hear and obey. Demonic, God, I do not have ears to hear, and I do not have a heart to obey. So this is one of the most crucial things in all of your life, and that is whether or not you are listening, taking to heart and honoring God. And so I wanna talk briefly about how God speaks. And again, here's the great news. God is the Father. He loves you. Every parent is constantly communicating with their kids, right? And so the kids need to know how the parent communicates so that they can receive. Sometimes we use text, sometimes we use email, sometimes we use a phone call, sometimes we use a meeting, sometimes we leave a letter. That's how we communicate in the Driscoll family. There are various communication channels by which I can send a message to our kids. God has various communication channels as a Father that he speaks to his family. God says, "Listen and take it to heart." That's the big idea of Malachi 2:6. Okay, God, if you speak, I need to listen. How do I know how you are speaking? Number one, God speaks firstly, primarily through scripture. Some of you are mature Christians, you know this. Some of you are non-Christians and this is new information. When you want to get a word from God, the best thing to do is open the Word of God. That's what's happening here in Malachi. God calls a family meeting, he raises up Malachi, he gives them his word, God's Word goes to Malachi, Malachi faithfully writes it down as a book of the Bible. So guess what we're doing now? We're hearing from God, we're listening to God from the Word of God. We're opening a book of the Bible to hear what God has to say. We believe that this is the highest court of authority. Think of it like our legal system. There are lower lesser courts, but the highest court in our nation is, what? It's the Supreme Court. And once the Supreme Court renders a verdict, that's the final decision, there is no appeal. The Word of God is for the people of God the proverbial Supreme Court, it's our highest authority. So everything gets judged and tested and verdicts get rendered by what the Word of God says, amen? In addition, God speaks through the person of the Holy Spirit. The third member of the Trinity, he is tremendously helpful. Jesus said, "I'm gonna send you a helper." And the helper that he promised is the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit helped Jesus. The Holy Spirit, he wants to help you. And furthermore, Jesus had a personal relationship with the Holy Spirit, and he sends the Holy Spirit to have a personal relationship with

you. And so if you have a personal relationship with the Holy Spirit that is guided by the Word of God, God the Holy Spirit will speak to you. Sometimes he'll give you a burden or he'll lift a burden. He'll give you an opportunity. He'll speak to you in some form or fashion. And this is what happens in every relationship. If your heart is, Father, I wanna obey you, I wanna hear what you have to say. Sometimes, God Holy Spirit uses that opportunity to speak to you in some spiritual way to reveal to you God's will for you, and he's awesome at that. And we test that by the Word of God. It says, "Don't believe every spirit, but test the spirits," to see if they are in fact from God, because there are demonic spirits. And so the way we test whether it was a holy or an unholy spirit, we test the spirit by the Word of God. Third thing, wise counsel. God the Holy Spirit lives in people, and the people that are wise, they have the Holy Spirit and they know the scriptures. And so sometimes it is, I'm not sure what God is saying, I'm not sure what to do, I'm not sure what decision to make or what direction to go. Meeting with wise counsel. These are people that love the Lord and know the Word of God and they're filled with the Spirit of God, and God speaks through them to help you hear what God is saying. Now all three of these are happening right now in the Book of Malachi. So it's a book of the Bible that is written by inspiration of the Holy Spirit, and Malachi is the one who is delivering it. He is God's wise counsel to the family, you see that? Sometimes God speaks to us through prayer. Every relationship is built by talking and listening. God primarily speaks to us through his Word. We talk to him through prayer, and that would include worship. You need to know when we worship, it's a form of corporate congregational prayer. Out of the overflow of the heart, the mouth speaks. In praying, we're praising God, and it's a form of prayer collectively. Sometimes when you're praying, God will reveal something to you. He'll speak to you, he'll direct you. If you've walked with God for a while and spent time in his presence through prayer, sometimes God will just tell you what to do, and you know exactly what to do in that intimate moment of prayer. Sometimes God speaks through circumstances. I had somebody come up recently and say, "Pastor Mark, please pray for me. "I've got my job, I don't really like my job, "I think it might be time to transition, "but I'm asking the Lord." They came back and said, "The company was sold, I'm moving to another country." Well, checked that prayer request off the list, we got that one knocked out, right? You no longer have a job, circumstances have spoken. I'd say behind that is the Lord, amen? I had a guy come up recently, he's like, "I really, really, really like a girl." He's single, she's single, so the math can potentially work. And he said, "But I don't know if she likes me." I said, "Well, do you love the Lord?" "Yeah." "Does she love the Lord?" "Yeah." Well, go talk to her. Right, that's what Christian guys need to do, right? Cowardice is not a spiritual gift. You just got to step up to the plate. So Johnny steps up and he tells her, "I like the Lord and I like you." And she said, "I like the Lord and I like you." There you go, Johnny, green light. Gas her up, move down the road, okay? That would be circumstances, amen? If she's like, "No, I have a boyfriend "and a ring and a gun and a restraining order," you're like, "Well, Lord, I hear you clearly. "This is obviously not your will." And then God speaks sometimes supernaturally. As you read the Bible, our God is an extraordinary and supernatural and sometimes absolutely unpredictable wonderful God. And so I'll give you one example. On August 24th, I went to bed and I had a dream that there was a conference and I was going to get invited to speak, and God told me what to say at that conference. And then I woke up and I sent myself an email, 'cause

I'm 48 and I forget things. And I just thought, I'm gonna recount this as a moment that the Lord spoke to me. And so I knew it was coming. So I actually put the speaking event on my calendar for 2019. And then I saw the leader of that event a few months later and he said, "I wanna invite you." I said, "I know, to that event on such and such a date, I've got it on my calendar." And he says, "Why do you have it on your calendar? "You haven't invited me." "The Lord invited me, "and he told me that you would invite me." And he's like, he said, "That's interesting." He said, "You could talk about whatever you want, "but I just feel like the Holy Spirit "is gonna tell you what to say." As like he has. So the Lord told me and he told you and he told us both, and it's the will of the Lord, so I know what I'm supposed to do next October. That's supernatural. Sometimes God speaks through an angel, sometimes God speaks through a dream. God does extraordinary things, right? It's Christmas time. As you read the story of Jesus' birth, angels keep showing up to talk to his dad Joseph. That's different, right? Mary gets pregnant through a miracle of the Holy Spirit. There's extraordinary things that are happening. Sometimes God works in superb and supernatural ways, okay? But we test all of this by the Word of God. That's how God speaks, that's how God speaks. And then the problem becomes sometimes we don't listen. So there's two sides. God speaks, we listen. Next slide, please. Listening to the Lord. God says, "Listen, take it to heart," Malachi 2:6. A little while ago, one of our pastors that we love and appreciate, he preached for me, and he hit a section on listening, and that was the part of the sermon that was most personally convicting. I don't know if you know this, I talk a lot. I don't know if you notice that. If you're new, you'll know that soon. And so for me, though, I don't listen as well as I talk. Okay? And the part of the sermon that he was talking about listening really convicted me. Like, yeah, I'm not a great listener. And these are some of the things that he shared and I'm reworking them, but sometimes we don't listen 'cause we're distracted, right? I mean, you're listening, and then squirrel. You're distracted. Or how many of you it's your phone? Phone is the Greek word for demon, it distracts you, right? Or how many of you you're a doer and you've got so many tasks, you're like, I was listening to the Lord, but then I had to go get some stuff done. You get distracted. How about ignoring, meaning, I know what he's gonna say, I don't wanna hear it. Or he said it, but I don't wanna hear it. I was talking to a pastor friend of mine, somebody that he loves very much, he's out of state. This family has made a series of cataclysmic, catastrophic decisions. And his heart is broken because now their family is broken. And he met with them and he asked them, he's like, "Why didn't you call? "I love you guys, I mean, I would have helped." And they said, "We knew what you were going to say "and we didn't wanna hear it." Oh, okay, that's ignoring. Interrogating, this is reversing roles. We do this in our relationships with one another and our relationship with God. And the big point of Malachi, he's trying to improve the relationship with God, his first relationship, and then relationships with each other, starting with marriage and family, which is where we go next week. But what interrogating is, it's a role reversal. God shows up and says, "Okay, hey son, daughter, I love you." I mean just, if I could make this clear. God's heart is a father's heart, okay? So it's like dad's sitting down with a kid saying, "Okay, we're gonna talk about this now, right? "Son, daughter, I love you." "No, dad, I got questions, I have problems," and you take over the conversation. How come you didn't do this, how come you didn't do that, why didn't you do this? What this is, this is reversing roles by interrogating. They do this a lot with God in Malachi. If you read it,

the whole book, it's sort of thematically works around a series of questions. They're not really questions, they're accusations disguised as questions. How have you loved us? How have you cared for us? How have you provided for us? That's not really a question, that's interrogating and it's a role reversal. God says, "You're under my authority "and I wanna talk to you." And it's saying, no, actually, God, you're under my authority and you will answer to me. Switching, that's changing the subject. How many of you know your kid's guilty when they do this? Did you clean your room? "Oh gosh, yeah, I think I'm coming down with the flu." That's not what we're talking about. That's not what we're talking about. "Yeah boy, yeah, the Bible says "we should pray for our leaders. "Let's pray for the government right now." No, how's your room? How's your room? "Yeah, let's pray for the government." No, no, no, let's talk about your room. It's changing the subject. We do this with God, they do this with God throughout Malachi. God comes and says, "Let's talk about your heart." And they say, "No, God, let's talk about our income. "It's not what we anticipated." And that's part of their argument. How about this one? Interrupting, you change the flow. You say I don't like where this conversation is going, I'm gonna keep interrupting so that hopefully you lose your place and get very frustrated. Some of you laugh. This marital advice is free, okay? It's interrupting. How many of you have said this in a conversation? You're interrupting me. No, I'm not. You just did. It's trying to change the flow of the conversation so that you can be in the driver's seat. How about this one? Number six, disagreeing. That's challenging the point. They're doing that over and over and over as you read Malachi. Please read Malachi, it'll only take you about 15 minutes, it's short. But disagreeing is you're wrong, I'm right, I'm gonna fight, I'm gonna argue, I'm gonna prove my point, and we're gonna convene court. I'm gonna be the cross-examining attorney and I'm gonna show you you're wrong. Rationalizing is where you excuse yourself. You're like, Lord, that's a great principle. Love your wife. But of course it doesn't apply to me. I mean, have you seen her? I mean, good golly, certainly that can't apply to me. Or respect your husband. You're like, look at him, Lord, that's hilarious. Obviously that doesn't apply to me. Look at the man, he's a mess. Nobody's laughing, that's insightful to me. But what we do, we find a reason for ourselves to be the exception to the rule. How many single people say this? We're married in God's eyes. No, they're not. He's not blinking, they're red, I've seen his eyes. You're not married in his eyes. Editing is selective hearing, and that is where I am really not listening, I just wanna hear what I wanna hear, so I pull something out of the conversation that sounds like what I wanted to hear and that's all that I retain. And people do this all the time with God's Word, they cherry pick it. They just go, I want God to tell me that I can do this. Okay, there we go. First and second opinions, there it is, I got a verse. Just pull it, yep, there it is. And you're like, no, did you read the context? Is that what it means? Is that what the Word of God teaches? Or did just pick something 'cause you wanted to hear what you wanted to hear? And all of this ultimately is disobeying. It's hearing with your ears, but not letting it venture to your heart and to work itself out with obedience, which is the cycle of honor. We all have work to do in hearing and listening, amen? We all have work to do in hearing and listening. And so, again, my question to you would be, what has God been saying to you? This is a family meeting, he's still a good Father. Our Dad still talks to his kids. You're the sons and daughters of God if you're a believer in Jesus Christ. What has the Father been saying to you? Are you listening? Are you taking it to heart? Are you

honoring through obeying? That's why we're here today, God wanted to have a meeting with you because he loves you. And he has good for you. And if you're not listening, you're gonna hurt yourself. And because he loves you, he wants you to be healthy and not sick, okay? Now the next verse is different, so I'll just put it up, you can read it for yourself. I'll just drink water and figure out how to not get myself in trouble. See the chuckle roll through the room? See, sometimes as a Bible teacher, you don't have time to prep, so you just watch "VeggieTales." They never made this veggie tale. They never made this veggie tale. This is why some people don't preach through books of the Bible. They're like, "Well, I'm just gonna skip that, read fast, "hopefully they didn't see it." How many of you didn't anticipate this was the next verse? How many of you are just naughty and this is your life verse and you knew it was coming, right? Just naughty people. All scripture is God-breathed and profitable. It's in the Bible, so it must be important and helpful. "Behold," God's like, "Hey kids, listen. "Behold, I will rebuke your offspring and spread." You said it, not me. I didn't say anything. "And spread dung on your faces." That's way worse than egg on your face, way worse. "The dung of your offerings, "and you shall be taken away with it." Wow. All right, we'll close in prayer, and sing a few songs along that theme. Here's what's happening. The priests are offering sacrifices, we looked at this in chapter one. They were supposed to offer sacrifices that were unblemished and pure as a substitute for the sinner. But God says they were bringing sacrifices that were lame, blind, and sick. So it's lame leaders offering lame sacrifices. Not only that, when they sacrificed the animal, there were certain unclean portions that they would take out of the animal, they would actually take outside of town, and the Old Testament mandated that they would burn those because they were unclean, filthy, disgusting, nasty, and defiled, right? So think of it this way, how many of you fish? When you catch a fish, the first thing you learn is don't eat the whole fish, amen? Some of the fish, you gut, you take out. That's not stuff that's good, that's stuff that's bad. Well, there were bad parts of the sacrifice, the unclean, the intestines, the disgusting part, and it was supposed to be taken out. They were offering that to God. Here's what God is saying. "If you keep shoving that in my face, "would you like it if we reversed roles "and I wiped it on your face?" See, because sometimes we are shoving things into God's face that we wouldn't want anyone wiping on our face. Furthermore, what's happening here is God is upset, here's why. What they're teaching the people is this. Some teaching is this. It's garbage, right? What happens to your body if you eat garbage? You get sick. What happens to your soul if you learn garbage? You get sick. That's why God is frustrated. If I could use a strong analogy, imagine you're a parent, you come home and there was somebody watching your kid. And you walk in and they're changing the diaper and then they're feeding the diaper to the baby. Right? How many of you parents wouldn't be like, "Well, you know, I don't mean to judge." You'd be like, no, we're gonna turn up the volume on this. This is all awkward, amen? I mean, right now you're like, "I wanted to be a preacher and I'm glad I'm not today." What God is saying is what the leaders are feeding the people is garbage, it's defiled, it's dung, it's not to be consumed, it's false teaching, it's erroneous, it's incomplete. And as a result, the children of God are getting sick. Because God loves us and God wants us to be healthy, emotionally, spiritually, relationally, with him and one another. And what is confusing the people is that the people that are teaching, outwardly, they look awesome. I mean, they've got PowerPoint slides and smoke machines and great

memes. I mean, they're killing it. But the content is garbage. Sometimes the worst food comes in the best package, amen? How many of you been to the grocery store and the candy aisle is way more exciting than the fruits and vegetable section? I've looked at asparagus and I've looked at a Snickers, and I tell you which one is more exciting. And what he's saying is this. The package is great, but the content is garbage. That's what he's saying. And the people that are teaching, they look great. But inwardly, in God's sight, what he sees is corruption. See, 'cause man looks at the outward and God looks at the heart. And out of the overflow of the heart, the mouth speaks. And so God calls a family meeting and he's like, "Hey, those of you "who are feeding my people the Word of God, "I see your heart, and I hear your teaching, "and it's all garbage, "and the kids are getting sick, "and I'm turning up the volume because I love those kids." When we hear this, we can think, man, God's just an angry, mean God. No, he's a loving, passionate God who knows if this continues, it is going to do great devastation and harm to the health of his kid. So let me say a couple of things. Number one, God rarely uses strong language. But I've taught a lot of books of the Bible. Isaiah, he's got some. Ezekiel, he's got some. Philippians, he's got some. There's some in the gospels, there's some on the lips of Jesus. There's some strong language. So what we can't say is, you know, all strong language is bad. What we need to say is God uses strong language sparingly and rarely, so we should use it how often? Sparingly and rarely. Some people will get more religious and spiritual than God and they'll say, "Well, we never use strong language." Well, God does. So you know, if you're to the right of God, scoot over. You're too conservative. That's why they murdered him, by the way. He was not conservative enough for them. And some of you say, "God uses strong language, so I use it all the time." Did God use it all the time? No, just some of the time. Number two, we use good words for good things, bad words for bad things, otherwise we confuse people. Why does God use the bad, not bad in quotes, a strong language word? It's 'cause it's bad. What they are teaching is bad and the effects on the people are bad. But let me say this. This is not an irreversible condition. God continually says in Malachi 2, if then, if then. If you will change this, then things will get better. Let me share the heart behind this. And again, as a Bible teacher, I feel this burden and responsibility firstly. I'll give you some examples, because people become healthy or unhealthy based upon the teaching they receive. Sometimes you get frustrated with fellow believers and you start asking them, well, who have you listened to or what have you been taught? And you're just like, oh, that wasn't a good diet. You got a lot of junk food. You got a lot of garbage. You got a rotten meal. This hit me as a new pastor. I was in my 20s with some church planners, we got together in another state just to be encouraged. And they brought in this really well known NFL, I think first ballot Hall of Fame, All-Pro, and he was gonna talk to us and he ended up doing a devotional Bible study. And it was garbage. All he talked, it was something called prosperity, he said, "God likes you to sow a seed of faith, "and if you'll give a dollar, "God will give you 100 dollars, "and that's God's hundredfold blessing." And he worked out of a Malachi 3, so pray for me, I've got to get there soon. And the whole thing was just garbage and we're all looking at each other like, what the heck? And I talked to him afterward, I said, "How long have you been a Christian?" He's like, "About a year." Something like that, he's a new believer. I was like, "Oh, okay." I said, "Tell me about where are you going to church, "and is anybody helping you learn the Word of God?" He said, "Yeah, I meet with my pastor about once a week. "He's

discipling me." Okay, good. I said, "What does he teach you about?" "Oh, the hundredfold blessing and sowing a faith seed." And I was like, "Anything about the resurrection? "Forgiveness of sin? "A guy named Jesus? "Any of that come up?" He's like, "Yeah, a little bit. "But you know, it's all about being a good steward." What I realized was this guy got saved, and I don't know, but it seems like his pastor thought the guy was an ATM and not a person. I said, "You know, have you ever read the Bible?" He's like, "No." Do you have a good copy of the Bible? "Not really." Is anybody helping you learn how to study the Bible? "No." That's like a kid who's sick, but the kid didn't feed themselves. The one who is feeding them is responsible for their sickness. I'll give you another example, I've got three at least. And the second one, I get an honor of teaching in some churches and doing some consulting, and there's a thing called biblical counseling, and I like the Bible, amen? I like the Bible. But just because you say it's biblical doesn't mean it is. And in this one stream of biblical counseling, it says you can't forgive anybody until they repent. I've consulted at some of these churches and they are prison riots. People are just beating each other up. And I was dealing with one, I was like, what is going on? Why are they beating? Why is everybody just beating each other? "Well, we can't forgive until they repent, "so we need to bring the law of God on them "and bring them to repentance. "Then we'll forgive them." No, no, no, forgiveness is at the starting line, not the finish line. It's the kindness of God, not the beatings of God, that lead us to repentance. I said, "So you're in the judgment seat as God, "judging them. "And then you're going to punish them, "so you're gonna give them a little internship for hell." And then I said, "Well, when do you forgive them?" They said, "When we see the ongoing signs of repentance." I was like, are you kidding me? There's a dude here with a clipboard who's keeping score? You know what this does to a marriage? I'm right, you're wrong, I will beat you till you agree with me and I see a change over an extended period of time. Until then I have no forgiveness for you. These people that were beating each other, they were applying bad teaching, it was garbage. It's not how Jesus treats them. And as a result, they had unhealthy souls and they had unhealthy relationships and unhealthy marriages and unhealthy families and unhealthy church family. So when God shows up and says, "It's garbage," what he's saying is stop eating it. You're getting sick. This isn't working. Let's change the menu. Last one. This is, to quote Beyonce, for all the single ladies, okay? So for all the single ladies, how many of you single ladies have had a guy, real spiritual guy come up and say, "God told me that we should be married"? Have you ever heard that? I was dealing with a dating relationship a while back and there was not a really great guy and a fairly sweet gal, and it was not a healthy relationship. They're dating, working toward marriage. And I asked her, I said, "Why are you putting up with all this?" She said, "Well, it's God's will that we marry." I was like, "Well, how do you know it's God's will?" She said, "God told him." Front row. Did God tell you? She's like, "No." I was like, "Whoa, that's bad teaching." She says, "Well, you don't wanna disobey the Lord." I said, "His name is Bob, not Lord." You can disobey Bob without disobeying the Lord. But she had been taught that if the Word of God comes, you need to submit, but she didn't know that God could speak to her as well. I told her, I said, no, the Father heart is this. If God says, "This is my daughter and this is my son "and I want them to be together," is he gonna let them both know? Yes. He's gonna let them both. I've got two daughters, I'll tell you this right now. Any guy comes up and is like, "The Lord told me." Oh, really? My phone never rang. I

was doing a word study in the Old Testament where they murdered a ton of people for giving false prophecies. I feel like we both got a word from the Lord, isn't that remarkable? What a kawinkidink that might be. So the big idea is this. When God hates something, he calls it garbage, it's not because he's angry or mean. It's because he's passionate and loving, okay? All right, we'll move on. I tried to get out of trouble there. Malachi 2:4-6. "So shall you know that I have sent this command to you "that my covenant with Levi may stand." He was the first priest descendant of Aaron, and then what they call the Levitical priesthood descends from Levi, "may stand." It says, "The Lord of hosts, my covenant." So this is God entering into a loving relationship and commissioning one generation after another, a family of ministry. And this is my heart for my family and your family, that we just love and serve the Lord until we see the Lord, amen? And that's God's heart. "Life and peace, and I gave them to him. "It was a covenant of fear and he feared me. "He stood in awe of my name. "True instruction was on his mouth," not garbage. "And no wrong was found on his lips. "He walked with me in peace and uprightness, "and he turned many away from iniquity." When he's giving here is a very basic definition of leadership. A leader knows what to walk away from and who to walk with. That's really as simple as leadership is. And what he says is, "They walked away from inequity and they walked with me. "And as a result, many turned from inequity." So here's the thing, people are following you. Every one of us is a leader. He's speaking first and foremost to the senior leaders, but he's gathered the whole family, 'cause everybody has people who are following them. If you're a teacher, if you are a parent, if you're an aunt and uncle, if you're a grandparent, if you're a coach, if you're a friend, if you're a mentor, if you're a ministry leader, if you're a business leader, whatever the case might be, there are people who are following you. And you need to first say, I need to follow the Lord. So the first key to being a leader is being a follower. The New Testament says it this way. "Follow me as I follow Christ." And so the problem here is the people are all following, but the leaders are not following. It's the blind leading the blind and everybody goes over the cliff. That's the situation. How many of you are parents and as a general rule your kids follow you? So you better know where you're going. That's the principle he is teaching. What it's kind of like is if you have a lot of kids, it's really helpful if the parents are going the right direction and the first kid is a good kid. Because what do the other kids tend to do? They tend to follow the oldest. So God here is dealing with the leaders, and then the proverbial spiritually older, more mature people, and then the younger, newer people will follow those that are more mature and those that are leaders. So this is where I get to tell you how it's going. I love you with all my heart. You are easy to love, you are easy to lead. I'm not a fighter, I'm a truth teller, but I wanna be an encourager. The heart of the leaders in this church is to follow the Lord Jesus and to learn the scriptures and to have a healthy soul and to build healthy relationships. It just is. People ask me all the time, how's it going? It's going great. We have a loving, healthy, growing church family. The goal is to open the Word of God, have our souls get healthy, build healthy relationships and follow Jesus together as a church family filled with families. I wanna thank you for being a great encouragement to my family. I said this to somebody recently, I kind of got choked up. I said, you know, on many Sundays I come in and there are letters from members of the church that are written to Grace and the kids. "We love you, we're praying for you, "thank you for moving to Arizona, "thank you for planting the church, "thank you for

serving the Lord, "thank you for building this church family with us." We feel very loved, we feel very encouraged, we feel very supported. To me, what it does is it, really, it gives me this deep desire to follow Jesus closely and to be a good Bible teacher 'cause you're wonderful people and I want your souls to be healthy and I want our relationships to be healthy. And that's the father heart of God and that's my heart. So the word that he has to these people is one of correction, and I think the word to us is just encouragement. Just, you know, that work that has begun, just see it through to completion, just keep going. But it's really encouraging, really encouraging. And if you're new here, you're surrounded with some extraordinarily wonderful people, you really are. And people are getting healthier, their relationships are getting healthier, their soul is getting healthier. Some of you, some of you you've never really studied the Bible. I mean, if you live in this world, let's just be honest, most of the teaching is what in the world? It's just garbage, people aren't healthy. Especially at the soul level. Some of you have been Christians for a while, maybe you've had some good teaching and some bad teaching. But it's time to get the junk food out of your diet and start to eat well. And sometimes some of you will be a little frustrated because you're like, "Man, I wish I was growing faster." And let me say, we look for progress, not perfection. And there was a season in my life, Grace was wise, I was foolish. I was eating garbage, my diet was not good, okay? And I was sick. I was physically sick. So I go into the doctor and they say, "You've gotta change your diet." I said, okay, so I had to learn about nutrition, and oh, lo and behold, everything they're telling me is what Grace already told me, I just didn't listen and take it to heart. As I changed my diet, what I noticed was I started to get healthy, but how long does it take? It takes a while. That's why some people are like, "I read the Bible this morning. "It didn't work, I'm not better." It's like, well, it's like broccoli. The broccoli is duking it out with the Skittles. I mean, it's a battle royal down there, right? Like you're still full of Skittles and one broccoli, it's putting up a fight but it's gonna be awhile, you know? If it's just been garbage for years and then you're starting to get healthy, nutritious Word of God into your soul, it might take a little while for the health to show up, but it will show up, okay? So let's talk a little bit for those of you that maybe have a little sickness in your soul how to heal it up. Malachi 2:7-9, "For the lips of a priest "should guard knowledge "and people should seek instruction from his mouth." This is important. You need to be teachable. How many of you have tried to feed a kid that won't open their mouth? You ever had that kid? You're like, open up. They need to be receptive. What he says is that leaders should be feeders and that people need to be receptive. They need to seek instruction. What that means is I wanna learn, I wanna know, I wanna grow. "From his mouth, "for he is the messenger of the Lord of hosts. "But you have turned aside from the way, "you have caused many to stumble by your instruction, "you have corrupted the covenant of Levi, "says the Lord of hosts. "So I make you despised and abased "before all of these people "inasmuch as you do not keep my ways "but show partiality in your instruction." And what he's saying is that leaders are to be feeders, that leaders are to be feeders of the Word of God. And what we are to be is message deliverers, not message writers, okay? God has already written the message. We are to be the mailman, the mailwoman, the mail deliverer. How many of you, if you wrote, let's say it's Christmas time and you're gonna write a handwritten letter to somebody that you love. Your mom, your dad, your brother, your sister, your kid, your grandkid, your best friend. You sit down, you pour your heart out.

I'm just gonna express how I feel and what's going and I've worked on this and it matters and I've put time and effort. You put it in an envelope and it gets delivered, and when they open it, the mailman edited it. He like blacked certain, what is this, a Watergate transcript? Where did my lines go? And then there's other parts where he says, "Well, I'm not sure this is true, and in the Greek." And then over in another part he's adding his own commentary. You'd be what? Be very frustrated. You're like, hey, your job was to deliver the mail. I wrote the mail. The mail was just fine. Your job is to deliver the mail. God wants messengers, not editors. He wants messengers, not editors. And let me just tell you this. Whatever crazy thing you wanna believe, we now have something called the internet and you can find it. There is somebody out there that will teach you exactly what you want to believe, whether an audit is based in reality or rooted in the scriptures. And so what he's saying is, "They were my messengers," but you are now acting as my editors." And so the big idea here is God sets the menu. God goes to the grocery store. Remind yourself of this. Next time you go to the grocery store, next time you make a meal, next time you menu plan, next time you sit down to eat. God is the one. It says in the Bible that he prepares a feast at his table. That's how eternity is gonna go. That spiritually speaking, in this book God has already gone to the store, he's already pulled out all the ingredients, he's already put together the menu, he already has for you healthy, nutritious, soul-satisfying, life-changing, eternity-altering, nourishing truth for you. And our hope and prayer and goal should be I'm just here to deliver the food, not cook the meal. I'm here to deliver the mail, not edit the mail. And so this is language of the Bible and it means so much to me. So you teachers, you parents, you aunts, you uncles, you big brothers, big sisters, you coaches, we're teachers, you're all leaders, somebody is following you. And you're all feeders, someone is listening to you. And out of love for him and out of love for them, you wanna know the truth and you wanna walk in the way of God. And so this is a great theme in the Bible. When we kick back into John, the Gospel of John in January, eventually we're gonna hit here toward the end of John's Gospel. Jesus meets with a guy named Peter and he says, "Peter, blank my sheep." What does he say? Feed. Leaders are feeders, leaders are feeders. Leaders are feeders, thank you for listening. It's a spiritual act of worship. It's a great honor to teach God's Word. Paul has this instruction to two guys in the New Testament, Timothy and Titus. He tells them repeatedly to teach what he calls sound doctrine. That word literally means healthy. You know that you're getting good Bible teaching when you get healthier. I love God, I love people. I'm getting closer to Jesus. My character is getting to be more like Jesus. My soul is getting healthier. Good Bible teaching leads to healthy people, and my big idea is to be biblical is to be relational. Love God, love people, that's healthy. That's healthy, that's what I want for you, 'cause I love you with all my heart, I really do. And I love teaching the Bible. And some people ask, "Why do you go so long?" Well, 'cause I have a lot to say, but also I feel like if you're gonna get in the car and you're gonna drive and you're gonna come here, let's feed the people, let's feed the people. And so before we started the church, two of my pastors who commissioned me, one is pastor Robert Morris, he said, "Mark, we're commissioning you "to plant The Trinity Church, "and your job is to lead and to feed." That was the authority over me. And that's always resonated in my heart, like that's right, that's right. To lead the people and feed the people. And then I had breakfast or lunch, can't remember which was, with Pastor Jimmy Evans, one of my overseers and pastors, and

he said, "Mark, I was praying for it." And he said, "When you plant The Trinity Church," he said, "God has called you to teach the Bible." He said, "So you need to make sure that Bible teaching is the protein in the diet at the Trinity Church." That's his word to me. He said, "Other things will be greens and vegetables and fruits." He said, "But God is calling you to open the Word of God every Sunday and put the protein in the diet so that people get healthy." And I received that as a word from the Lord, like, okay. 'Cause, see, man does not live on bread alone, but every word that proceeds from the mouth of God. Just as much as your body needs a healthy diet, so your soul needs a healthy diet of God's Word. Well, that being said, let me summarize for you. If I was gonna take all of Malachi 2:1-9 and summarize it quickly, perhaps, and it's in the app, okay. If I was gonna pull all this together, number one, start with your ears open and your mouth closed. "If you will not listen," God says. Number two, get into God's Word and get God's Word into you. He says, "Listen and take it to heart." So not only do you need to be in God's Word, God's Word needs to be in you. In the same way, you can have awesome food in your fridge and awesome food in your pantry, but if you don't eat it, you're not gonna be healthy. Hearing is how God stocks up your fridge and he stocks up your pantry. Taking it to heart is how you invite him into you to make you healthy and nourish you. Every day seek to walk in God's will. He says, "Give honor to my name." There will be seasons in your life that you can look way down the road and you say, "I know where I'm going, I'm know what I'm doing." There's other days you're like, "I got no clue. "I don't know what's going on. "I don't know what the future holds." The key is just to wake up every day, seek the will of God, and then seek in the best of your ability to do what's right in the sight of God. And then go to bed and try again the next day. When he says, "Honor my name," that's what he's talking about." God, okay, I'm yours, I'm here today. What do you want me to do? I'm gonna try my best to do that, and then I'm gonna go to bed and I'm gonna ask the same question tomorrow. Number four, this is where it's gonna get a little more complicated. Binary thinking is biblical thinking. Some of you have a hard time being biblical 'cause you don't think binary. The world in its wisdom does not know God. The world in its wisdom does not think binary. I'll explain this to you in a moment. Paul says not to be conformed to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. To read the Word of God, you need to have biblical, categorical, binary thinking. Our world knows nothing of this. Let me just give you the words, the very words from Malachi 2:1-9. Curse and blessing, because they're different. True and wrong, because they're different. Uprightness and sinful iniquity, because they're different. Covenant versus corrupted, because they're different. Life and peace versus despised and abased, because they're different. And walk versus trip and fall and stumble, because they're different. See, in our world, it believes in spirituality. We believe in angels and demons. In our world, it's all about perspective. Well, for us, there is right and wrong, there are truth and lies, there is God and Satan, there is heaven and hell. There is folly and wisdom that the biblical thinking is binary thinking. And the problem in the world is there is not biblical thinking because there's not binary thinking. And the people are coming to God and they're saying to God, "This works for us." And God is saying, "This doesn't work for me." And they're saying, "This is how we see it." And he says, "That's not how I see it." Because we submit to authority and the authority of God says, this will make you healthy, this will make you sick, 'cause God loves his kids. How many of your kids, you want them to be sick, stumble, fall, walk

in darkness and die? No, God's a father that wants you healthy, walking in light, filled with joy, and in relationship with him and one another with a healthy soul. That's binary thinking. Number five, let the fear of God cast out the fear of man. He says of Levi, "He feared me." And then what he says is you're showing partiality in your instruction. That's the result of fear of man. Proverbs 29:25 says, "Fear of man is a trap or a snare." And Proverbs 1 says that "the fear of the Lord "is the beginning of wisdom." So you're either going to fear God or fear people. You're going to live for God's approval or people's approval. You know that you have fear of man and that you are practicing partiality when you change what you say depending upon who's listening. Are you a Christian? Oh, well, you know, . And you're with a Christian, you're like, yeah, I love the Lord. This is why even today they keep shoving a microphone into the face of the Christians saying, "What do you think about this?" And people are, "I don't know, I don't know. "I don't know, I don't know, who am I to judge? "Good luck, goodbye, please get somebody else." Here's why, it's fear of man. What will they say, what will they do? Sometimes we don't say the truth because they're rich and they're our boss and it's gonna hurt us or hurt our inheritance. Or sometimes they're gonna criticize us and we just don't wanna get criticized or have conflict. Or sometimes the case is they're just gonna freak out and I don't wanna deal with the drama. If you love someone, you present them a healthy meal in a loving way and invite them to partake. And if they throw the food at you, you still love them, because you want good for them and you want health for them. So you just keep presenting the meal. God loves you. The Word of God is good for you. God has a future for you. That's not God's best for you. I know you're like a kid that threw the meal on the floor again. How many of you had that kid? How many of you parents had that kid? You're like, I gave them the food and then they threw the food, and then I gave him the food and then they threw the food. Did you reach a point where you said, therefore I never fed my child again? You keep making the food because you love them. You want them to get healthy. Prize your relationship with God above all. They have not prized their relationship with God. He's getting their worst fruits, not their first fruits. The most important thing you have is your relationship with God. Consider your life and the lives of those following you. Who's following you? Where are you going? If you love them, you want to follow the Lord, and you want them to follow you as you follow the Lord. That's exactly what he is saying. "You do not keep my ways "and you have caused many people to stumble." And then the last point is there's one way home. Here's the good news, there's a way home. That's amazing. How many of you you've been totally lost and you're like, "I just got to figure out how to get home." Here's the good news, we're all lost. That's the Bible's language for sin. But the good news is, number one, there's a home and this ain't it, amen? That's why it doesn't feel like home, 'cause it ain't home. Now the good news is we've wandered, we're lost, we're away from home, but the good news is there's a way home. Here's exactly how it says it. He says, "You have turned aside from the way." That's what he says, "You've turned aside from the way." And what God is saying is there is a way, and it ain't that way, and it ain't that way, it's this way. And this is God's last book of the Bible. This is God's way of preparing his people for the first Christmas and the coming of the baby Jesus. And this is the last thing he has to say. He's like, "Jesus is coming. "Please keep walking forward, "walk in the way, walk in the way." And they have to walk for 400 years. This is their Book of Revelation. Revelation is our last book telling us how

to walk until Jesus comes back. This was their Revelation, their last book telling them how to walk until Jesus came the first time, not the second time, you get it? And so this is God's way of giving them this tremendous and great gift, and that is knowing that there is a way that is coming, so walk in the way and then Jesus comes. This is it, all of history, all of scripture, everything is culminating with the coming of Christ. Everything in Malachi is pointing, leaning forward to the coming of Jesus. And Jesus comes and he says, "If you have ears to hear." Some people don't, they argue with him, but some people do and they follow him. And then Jesus says something amazing in John 14:6. He says, "I am the way." He picks up this theme from 400 years prior. God says, "Walk in the way." Jesus shows up and says, "I am the way. I am the way." And he invites people, "Come, follow me." That's following in the way. And then Jesus walks all the way to the cross, carrying the cross to his place of crucifixion. When Jesus was born, gifts were given to him as a baby, and he came to ultimately give himself as a gift as a man. And Jesus does the most unbelievable. As you prepare your tree for Christmas, as you prepare your gift list for Christmas, as you wrap your presents for Christmas, don't overlook the greatest gift that's ever been given in the history of the world, the whole point of the Bible. Jesus comes to give himself as a gift, that's what he does. And so God says it this way. "God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, "the Lord Jesus Christ." And if you have not received this gift of salvation, if you've not received this gift of forgiveness, if you've not received this gift of Jesus, God wants you to receive that gift, my friend. God's heart is a father's heart, he loves you. He wants you to be healthy and he wants to have a relationship with you that endures forever. And then Jesus dies and he gives himself as a gift, and then he rises, and he conquers Satan, sin, death, hell, the wrath of God. Jesus does it all. And then he walks, and ultimately he walks into the kingdom, and guess what the first Christians were called in the Book of Acts. Christianity was called the way. So I'm excited, man. I think we should sing. I think we should take communion. I think we should remember Jesus' broken body and shed blood, receive it as a gift, amen? I think we should celebrate, 'cause we have reason for joy. We've just learned that this isn't our home and there is a way, and that way his name is Jesus. So we're gonna worship him, we're gonna enjoy him. And my question to you today, what is God saying to you? What is God's word for you? What is God's instruction for you? What is God's encouragement to you? What is God's correction to you? Just listen, take it to heart. Honor him by obeying, okay? All right, I'm gonna invite the band up, I'm gonna pray, we're gonna sing. Father God, thank you, thank you, thank you, that you are our Father. That we get to be part of the family. That when we get together, it's a family meeting. And Dad, you teach us things that we need to know 'cause you want us to be healthy. Holy Spirit, we invite you right now to reveal to each of your children what it is they need to know, what it is they need to hear, what it is they need to do. We ask that this would be a divine supernatural encounter. And God, as we come to sing, help us to fix our eyes on Jesus. Help us to open our hearts to the Lord Jesus. Help us to open our ears to the Lord Jesus. And God, when you ask for honor, we come now to worship you, and we do so as an act of honor because we honor you, Father. In Jesus name, amen.

Malachi #4: Learn to Persevere

- All right, we continue our study in the great Book of Malachi. And here's why I picked it. We're getting ready for Christmas, amen. How many of you, it's crazy, let me just tell you a little secret. We're about a week away. Amen? You got a week to find a tree, find some gifts, right? Find some stamps, find some Christmas cards, find some people to send them to. I mean, it's, it's a complicated season, amen? How many of you have tried to go to the mall? It's like ants on an anthill. I drove up to the mall, prayed about it, went home. I'm going to order everything online. Have them deliver it to my house. It's over. It's just done. I mean the mall right now looks like a prison riot. It's that time of year where we're all getting ready for, for the coming of Jesus and for the celebration of His birthday. Well, the reason I picked the Book of Malachi, it's the final book of the Old Testament. It's the last word that God has to speak directly to His people to prepare them for the first Christmas and the coming of Jesus. And amazingly, what God really focuses on in the Book of Malachi is relationship. Relationship with Him, relationship with one another, starting with the members of our family. And the sociologists will tell us that we have between 500 and 2500 people that we relate to every year, but that we spend 40% of our time with the same five people. Those are usually the people that are nearest and dearest to you. If you're married and/or have kids, it would be those people. And those people are the ones that you tend to love the most and have the most relational frustration with. And so what happens in every relationship is at some point you reach the point of the perseverance test. And the perseverance test is are we going to go forward or are we going to give up? Are we going to hang in or are we going to hang it up? Are we going to sign up for another season or are we going to walk away and call this the last season? That's true in our relationship with God. That's true in our relationship with our spouse. And that's where the people in Malachi 2 find themselves today. They're not atheists. They're a little bit frustrated. They're worn down. They're beat up. They're tired. They don't know what's going on. They're in that kind of season that maybe you are, you're in. This is the time of the year. We're a little tired. We're a little frustrated, a little grumpy. And now we've got to work on all these relationships with relatives and family and friends. That's where they find themselves. And God has a specific word to them regarding their relationship with Him and with one another that applies for us as well. So we'll jump right in. I've, let me just tell you this, I have way too many verses. I'm going to cover way too much information. No one else in America is preaching on Malachi 2 today because it's awkward. You're welcome, it's my gift to you. Merry Christmas. All right, we're going to deal with your two most important relationships first. Malachi 2:10-13. And your first most important relationship is your relationship with God. And then your second most important relationship is your relationship with your spouse. So if you're married, that's your second most important relationship. And the law of priority is that it's God, then spouse, then kids, then your work. And the law of jealousy kicks in where someone or something takes the place of God or the person that's supposed to be in that position. And that's what's happening here. Their relationships are out of order and God is going to reset them according to the law of priority. "Have we not all one Father? "Has not God created us?" So the relationship with God is that God made us and He's a father to us. "Why then are we faithless to one another "profaning the covenant," is going to talk a lot about covenantal

relationship and the context of marriage. And we'll get into that of our fathers. He talks about Judah and Jerusalem. Just hear that as God's people. Their nation was a Northern and a Southern kingdom, just hear that as God's people. So He's speaking to the family of God. "Judah has been faithless "and an abomination has been committed in Israel "and to Jerusalem for Judah "has profaned the sanctuary of the Lord." That's the temple, the presence of God, the holiest place on Earth. "Which he loves and has married the daughters "of a foreign god." We'll talk about this. Next slide, please. "May the Lord cut off from the tents of Jacob, "any descendant of the man who does this." So he holds the men first responsible. "Who brings an offering to the Lord of hosts. "And the second thing you do, "you cover the Lord's altar with tears, "with weeping and groaning "because He no longer regards the offering "or accepts with favor from your hand." Okay. So here's what He's talking about. Here's what God is saying. Everybody's really hurting, they're all very emotional. There's lots of tears and drama. Amen? And God says, "Let's pull back." Let's do Google earth. Let's look at the big picture. The pain is caused by the problem of the structuring of the relationships. God says, "The way to fix the relational pain "is to start with the first, most important relationship. "The relationship with me." So whatever you're dealing with or whoever you're dealing with, the first issue is you've got to find the Lord in the midst of it and ask how's my relationship with the Lord? And is that in the position of priority that it ought to be? And God tells us two things, that He created us and He's our father. So as our creator, that means that God is our maker. And this is where we find meaning in life. Atheism has a continual problem of giving life meaning because here's the, here's how it works. If you come from no one, if you're here for no reason and when you die you're going nowhere, it's hard to find meaning. Amen? It's hard to find meaning. It's hard to find me-, where do you come from? Nowhere. Why are you here? No reason. Where you going? Nowhere. All right, there was an old atheist. He said that, I think it was Thomas Hobbes, he said, "Life is brutal, nasty, and short. "But so what?" Well, the so what is we need to live it. Right now Christianity says you come from? God. He made you. You're here on a divine assignment in a mission that your life has meaning, value, and purpose. God made you and put you here and your life matters. So you come from God, you're here for God. And when you die, you will have an eternal relationship and give an account to God. So all of life, according to the teaching of the Bible finds its meaning, finds its value, finds its purpose in relationship with God. You come from God, you're here for God. You will die and stand before God to be with God forever. That's the storyline of the Bible. So God is your creator. If you're here and you're not a Christian or you don't think biblically, I need you to know that your life is not an accident. Your life is not a mistake. Your life is divinely appointed by God and He knows you and He loves you and He cares for you. And He has a destiny and a purpose and a plan for you. And He says that His relationship with you is like a father. And for those of us who are parents, boy, once you get your kid, it changes everything. Amen? You realize, oh my goodness. if God loves me the way I love this child. And this is the time of year that remember that God came as a baby. And every time we see a child, we remember that God took the form of a child. Any of you that have the opportunity to hold your child or your grandchild, you give them this sacred opportunity to really celebrate life. And then you think, oh my goodness, the way I feel about this child is the way the Lord feels about me. This child hasn't done anything to earn love. They just start with love. They haven't done anything

to earn relationship. They start with the relationship. That's the heart, heart of God. That's the father heart of God, that He's a father that He cares for you. And so in context here, this means that God is loving. This means that God is relational. And as I've told you repeatedly the concept in the context of Malachi, it's like God calls a family meeting. And He pulls all of His kids together, His sons and His daughters. And He said, "Okay, I know things are painful, "I know things are hard, I know things are complicated. "Let's just start here. "I made you, you're not a mistake or an accident. "Secondly, I love you. "I'm your dad, I'm here to help. "We're calling a family meeting "so that I can give you instruction to be of help to you." That's the whole heart and context of the Book of Malachi. And what this relationship with God does, it meets our deepest relational need. That you have relational needs that are inexhaustible, right? And so what God is saying is part of the problem that we have in our relationships, because here talking about relationship with Him, relationship with spouse. If you invert that and you put spouse or children or friend or family or coworker in God's place, you're going to overwhelm and exhaust them because they're finite. God is infinite. Our relational needs are infinite. And if we put a finite person in an infinite position, we are going to exhaust them and we're going to disappoint ourselves. And so what God is saying is I know you've got some relational problems, but the first problem is we don't have a healthy relationship. And as a result, you are seeking from people, starting with your spouse, needs that only can be met by me. And so this first relationship with God, it meets the deepest relational need. And then it models healthy relationship. So God is saying let's work on our relationship first. So here's what I would tell you, whatever pain or problem, whatever temptation, trouble, or trial you have, first things first, how's your relationship with God? How's your relationship with God? Because until that is strong, everything else will be weak. Until that is mended, everything else will be broken. And so of all of your problems, your first issue is your relationship with God. It will meet your deepest relational needs. And it also models for you what a healthy relationship looks like. And then he talks about the relationship with spouse. And what the problem is is that the men have been with women that they're not supposed to be with. Does this still happen? All of the ladies said? Amen. Yes it does. Okay? And here's the problem. There are believing men that are doing one of three things. Number one, they're marrying, some of them are, unbelieving women. Are believing men supposed to marry unbelieving women? Yes or no? No, no. Okay. Some of the men are believers and they have married believing women, but they are seeing on the side, unbelieving women. Should men do that? No. Okay, it was a little firmer from the ladies, a little firmer, okay. Not quite the outcry I was anticipating, but it's early so we'll get there. Believer male with an unbeliever. Believer male with a believing woman and then has a, another woman. And then some of these men are believers who have married unbelieving women. And now they're frustrated because it's not ending happily ever after. Happily ever after. So he said, why would he pick this book of the Bible? You know, he was thinking the same thing on the way in this morning. Malachi seemed like a good idea until I got into it today, okay? And today, what he's talking about is relationship with God, relationship with spouse, and the pain of family dynamics. Does anyone know that some people experience this during the holiday season? Have you noticed that? How many of you, how many of you, the holidays are coming and you're like, oh, I get a nervous eye twitch. I think about seeing the relatives. Our family org chart is very complicated. I'm

just reading books about the rapture and hoping I leave before Christmas, okay? Because what happens is life is filled with relationships and some of the most complex and painful relationships are with? Family. You said it, not me. I was just echoing you, so I agree with you. And so what is happening here is that the dynamics of family are very complicated. Okay? And so number one, your most important relationship is your relationship with God. Number two, the relationship with your spouse is your second most important relationship. And what these men were doing, and in that culture, a man would marry a woman, a woman would not propose to a man, in that culture, a man would divorce a woman. A woman couldn't really divorce a man. So God holds the men responsible for the condition of their covenantal relationship. But let me just say this, that in our culture there is a powerful and pervasive myth. It's actually, it's actually a lie and it would encourage men to think and behave in the same way as the problem and pain of Malachi, Chapter Two. Let me, let me explain it to you. How many of you have heard this, that Christians and non-Christians, their divorce rates are the same? You heard that? How many of you ever heard that the adultery rates for Christians and non-Christians are the same? Okay. And sometimes you'll even hear, oh, Christians divorce more than non-Christians. And it becomes this powerful, pervasive, cultural myth. It becomes this compelling gravitational lie. Let me just tell you this, that's not true. That's not true. It was based on some faulty research some years ago where a research firm, I won't name it, but I know this research firm, they would go out and they would interview people and they'd ask, are, are you a Christian? Are you a Christian? Are you a Christian? Are you a? Now if you do this in America, particularly in the South, anywhere there's grits, right? Where, how do they answer? Yeah, yeah. They answer like that as they're reading grits. Yeah, yeah, I love Jesus, moonshine, and football. You know, and they say yes. Okay? Not necessarily in that order, but that's their Trinity, right? Grits, moonshine, football, okay? And they believe in Jesus. Okay. So what happens is if you ask someone they're a Christian, they say yes. Okay. They say yes. Similarly there was a research study done, if you go ask the average person, do you give money to charity, what do they say? Yeah. Because that's what you're supposed to say. You're like, no, I ate it all. I bought a lot of candy bars and I don't care about homeless people. Now, oh yeah, I give to charity. I'm a good person. So what happens is we lie because we say what we think we should be doing, not what we're actually doing. Not you guys, but the people who took the test. Okay, now that being said, they then, so what happens then is if you ask people, are you a Christian, they say yes, well almost every American statistically says they're a Christian. How many of you look at the country and you're like, I don't see it. I don't think it'll hold up in court. Or I don't think there's evidence to convict that we're all walking faithfully and biblically with the Lord Jesus. Well, because you can profess something that you don't practice. Right? You can profess something that you don't practice. Right? Like how many of you have a gym membership? How many of you, you can't remember where the gym is? Right? Right? So you can be part of something but not practicing it. So they did a follow-up study. There's a man named Bradford Wilcox. He's a researcher in sociology at the University of Virginia. He's considered perhaps the leading sociologist on marriage and family in our nation. And he did a comprehensive survey and he decided, and it's written up in sociological reviews, a book was written, every year he sort of updates his findings, and what he added was a few additional questions. Not about just profession, but practice.

And so what he asked was, do you believe that the Bible is God's Word, that people are sinners and that Jesus is our Savior? On your beliefs, do you believe those things? And then in your behaviors, do you go to church? Do you read your Bible? And do you pray regularly? Okay? And those who said yes to all of those questions, they're not just professing faith, they're practicing it. Okay? The Bible says, don't merely listen to the Word and so deceive yourselves, do what it says. These are people that are not just hearers of the Word, they're doers of the word. Well, his findings are for those who both profess and practice faith, they actually, I'll summarize all the findings. It's the lowest divorce rates. It's the lowest, it's the lowest rates of spousal abuse. It's the lowest rates of adultery and the highest rates of marital happiness. So I want to encourage you that God's way still works. It just took two and a half thousand years for the researchers to catch up with the Bible. But God's patient. Amen? And what they find is if two believers marry and if they walk according to biblical principle, that God blesses and honors that, that their marriage tends to be more enduring, that their marriage tends to be more endearing. Does this mean that it's always perfect or easy? The married people said no, no. It just means we don't kill each other. That's what it means. Because Jesus died for us. So we give each other a hall pass. That's the way it works. Now, that being said, when people are married and they are believers and they have the best statistical marriages, and this is Protestant Bible-believing marriages, and the man who led the survey is not a Protestant, right? So he's not an evangelical, but he is someone who just followed the facts to find the truth. And that is people who walk with Jesus together have the best marriages. And here's what they found. The highest rates of divorce, what would you guess would be between two kinds of people who don't share the same religion? Don't share the. So let's say you're a Buddhist or a Muslim, or let's say you're an atheist or into a new age spirituality and you marry a believer. Those marriages have the highest rates of divorce. Why? Because Jesus predicted this. What He said is a house that is divided cannot stand. Division literally means two visions. If you have two visions, you have division. Division is a problem between a husband and a wife. And then it becomes more complicated when you add? Children. I believe the Bible's authority. I don't. I believe there's one God. I believe there's many gods. I believe we should go to a Christian church. I believe we should go to a mosque or temple. That's division. And the division needs to be eradicated by both the husband and the wife sharing God's vision for marriage, sharing God's vision for family. And so what they're enduring here and what they're suffering here is they feel the pain of their relationships, but they don't realize the problem of the architecting of their family. Right? So we'll continue, next line. We want to talk about contract marriage versus covenant marriage. This is something that I shared with the men on Wednesday night, a few weeks ago. We'll start up again in January. Grace leads the Life Groups for the women. I lead the Life Groups for the men and I shared this with the men. And so I'll share it with you. And it comes from Malachi 2. "But you say, 'Why does he not?'" Because what they're asking is God, how come you don't bless us? And God said, "Because you've got everything architected poorly. "I'm not going to bless your plan, I bless my plan. "So if you want blessing, right, "get rid of your blueprint and adopt mine." So here's what you need to know. God doesn't bless your plan, God blesses His plan. That's why we need to seek His will. Why does He not? Because the Lord was witness between you and the wife of your youth. How many of you know this? God attends your wedding. Sometimes

we'll do weddings in churches, we'll bring the husband and the wife up, you know, on the alter to be married. And we'll just sort of give this sort of sanctimonious religious lip service to, oh, you know, here in the presence of God. And God says, "Actually, that's true." See God, God attends the wedding. God's there as a witness. God's there as a witness "between you and the wife of your" "youth to whom you have been faithless, "though she is companion in your wife by covenant." Let's talk about that. What He's talking to here is the men. So let me, let me talk to the men. Men tend to see marriage as contractual, not covenantal. This is why men can win at work and lose at home. This is why men are good with money and bad with relationships. Right? We're at Scottsdale, Arizona. Can I just say it? Right? That the way you do business is not the way you do family. Right? The way you do business is not the way you do family. So let me explain it to you. Let me show you the difference between contract and covenant. Contracts are not bad, but contracts are for business. Therefore, the transaction and purchase of goods and services, that's not how we do Christian marriage. The Bible says in Romans 12, don't be conformed to the pattern of this world. Be transformed by the renewing of your mind. What that means is God's people are to think differently. So in a contract, or a contract marriage, it's two people. It's me and you. In a covenant marriage, how many people are involved? Three. God just said, "I was there at your wedding. "I'm a witness. "I'm a part of this." Right? A part of this. In a contract, I seek my best interest. How many of you negotiate contracts for business? We do this all the time, right? We do this all the time. Some of you do it formally for business. Sometimes it's just, I'm looking for a mechanic. I'm looking for healthcare. I'm looking for a landscaper. I need to bid out a job on my house. I'm getting bids. I'm looking for the numbers. I'm wanting to read the fine print. I'm hoping to negotiate the deal because I want to do what's in my best? Interest. That's a contract. In a covenant, I see God's will for our best interest. God, what do you want? What is your plan? What is your desire for this relationship? In a contract, we negotiate terms. I won't say his name, but one of the leading marriage and family experts on TV actually isn't someone who has any background in counseling. Their background is business negotiation. And what they used to do is they would go to two companies and then they would negotiate a deal. They've taken those skills to marriage and they just treat the husband and the wife like two competing interests in companies and then negotiate a contract between the two of them. In a covenant we serve each other. We serve each other, right? I'm for you, you're for me, we're for Him. In a contract, I keep a record of performance. If you do a good job, I compensate you. If you don't, I don't pay you or I negate the contract. How many of you, you rel-. How many, how many of you do have a performance review at work? Right? Is that okay? Yeah. How many of you have a performance review in marriage? How many of you, it's December, you're like, well, sweetheart, time for the performance review. I did a 360 review. I interviewed all the children and no bonus for you this year. We're going to talk about some things, right? See you all chuckle, but the truth is do we sometimes do this informally? A lot more women said uh-huh than men. That's interesting, insightful, and helpful. Thank you, ladies. So, but you know you've got this kind of relationship when you hear something like this. You owe me. Okay? When you hear things like that, you owe me. Okay? I keep a record of performance. In a covenant, love keeps no record of wrongs. Love keeps no record of wrongs. In a contract, I punish for failure. In a covenant, I forgive failure. In a contract, the goal is

winning. In a covenant, the goal is worshiping. See, in a contract, let's say because business is like sports. Two teams take the field, we keep score, one wins, one loses. In marriage, that's not the goal. The goal is that we're one. So it's not win-lose, it's worship. It's worship. We're not two seeing which will win, we're one worshiping Him. And what you end up in a contract is a professional relationship. What you end up with an a covenant is a personal relationship. Does this make sense? Does this make sense?

- [Congregation] Yes.

- Okay, thank you. I apologize for waking you up. Okay. So what happens is, if you understand this, you will win at work. If you understand this, you will win at home. Here's where men make mistakes. They do one or the other. The guy who only does this, he wins at work and he loses at home. The guy who understands this, he wins at home, he loses at work. You understand this? This guy makes money, not memories. This guy makes memories, doesn't know how to make money. So what I'm not saying is one is good and one is bad. It's like your right hand and your left hand. This is good for this and this is good for that. You go to work, you use your right hand, you come home, use your left hand. If use your left hand at work, you're going to love everybody, and they're going to gut you. Okay? Right? If you, if you go to work and you conquer everybody and you come home, nobody's going to have a relationship with you. So we need to be sort of ambidextrous as both hands. And this is true of men and women, but it starts and it rises and it falls with the men. That's why I'm speaking to the men. And so in this, what kind of relationship does God have with you if you are a believer? Which one? Covenant. Right? Right, God serves you. God forgives you. God doesn't keep a record. God helps you to worship. God wants a personal relationship. That's why you can't lose your salvation. That's why if you're adopted into the family of God, you don't have to worry about going to hell. It's not a contractual relationship where God is like, you're in, but I'm telling you, if your account goes upside down, you're going to go from kid to kindling and I'm going to flip your position. God doesn't do that. Because He's a father. Right? He's not a middle managing employer. He's a father. Get this? Okay. How many of you, now what I just did, maybe I helped, maybe I hurt, I don't know, but how many of you now it makes sense of some of your family dynamics? Some of your relatives you're like, it's all contractual, man. It's all record of wrong, punishment, performance review. Gosh, it's hard just to, now you know, now you know. And I'm not saying one is bad, one is good. I'm saying one is for the marketplace and one is for the home. Okay? Next section is going to talk a little bit more about marriage. "Did not." "Did He," God, "not make them one?" So in a marriage, the two become one. And it's not which one? It's a new one. Okay, it's now it's not which one. Right? Oh, come on, really? See when we first got married, single guys would ask me, how do you make Grace do that? I was like what? And they're like, you know, be a wife. It's not like we thumb wrestled and I won. We agree on what we're doing, we're one. Worship one God, right? Open one book, live in one house, sleep in one bed, right? "One "with a portion of the spirit in their union." The believer has the presence and power of the person of the Holy Spirit in their relationship. This means that marriage is supernatural. This means that marriage is innately spiritual. Okay? This means that the believing couple has a resource at their availability that the unbelieving couple does not. Because you'd be like, okay, you need

to love each other. God gives you His love through the Holy Spirit. We need to forgive each other. God gives you the power to forgive through the Holy Spirit. See, the first relationship is the relationship between the Father, Son, and Spirit. That God, the God of the Bible is by nature a relational God. God does love. God does communication. God does perseverance. God does service. God does affection. God does covenant. God does devotion. And He gives the Holy Spirit to those who walk with Him so that they can experience a measure of His power in their relationships. What this means is for your marriage to glorify God, it cannot be a natural marriage, it must be a supernatural marriage. You're going to need to love with the love that you do not have, forgive with the forgiveness that you do not possess, and endure with a perseverance that is beyond your ability and capacity. Okay? But God gives the Holy Spirit. And what was God seeking? See in football, we always drive toward an end zone, right? What's the end zone for God? See for us, the end zone is personal fulfillment and happiness. For God, the end zone is what? Godly offspring. We tend to think of having a good time. God wants us to think of leaving a good legacy. We tend to think in terms of days, God thinks in terms of generations. So, so here at the Trinity Church, we say that we open our Bibles to learn, we open our lives to love. So the Bible teaching is to build relationships so that lives and legacies are transformed. Not just you, but your children, your children's children, physical and spiritual people who would look to you as, as a leader and a predecessor for them. And so what happens is, let me, let me go from preaching the metal and for just a moment, what happens is we make decisions and we don't think about future generations. Has this been true in your family? Just looking back at your family of origins in your history, were decisions made that were shortsighted, not long-term, and as a result, they've created a lot of problems in the future because of a shortsighted decision in the past. Amen? We could see this very clearly when someone does it to us. If grandma and grandpa wouldn't have done that, if mom and dad wouldn't have done that, I wouldn't be here. But here's what you need to know, someone's coming in the future and the decisions you make today will affect them. So we're not just victims decisions made in the past, we're also determiners of those who are coming in the future and what sort of future they might have. Okay? And God comes to His people and they're making very short-term decisions and God's like, no, no, no, we need to, you need to think long-term. Legacy. Lineage. Godly offspring, not just offspring. How many of you found that offspring is easier than Godly offspring? Have you found that? Right? Making babies is fun. Raising babies is work. You don't even have to be a believer to agree with that point. That's just fact, Jack, that's the way that it is. Godly offspring, Godly offspring. So guard yourselves in your spirit, check your relationship with God, check your soul. And let none of you be what? Faithless. That means unfaithful to the wife of your youth. "For the man who does not love his wife, but divorces her," says the Lord, the God of Israel "covers his garment with violence," says the Lord of hosts. Next slide, please. "So guard yourselves in your spirit and do not be faithless. "You have wearied the Lord with your words" They're wearing God out. How many of you know that's hard? God is all powerful and exhausted. You know, that's. God here is using sort of human language. But they keep coming to God and they're saying, here's how we want it to be, Pete, please bless it. And God is like, that's not going to work. How many of you know somebody that's got a bad plan and they're asking you to help. You're like, I love you, but that's not going to work. Come on help.

You know why it's not going to work. There are many things that we bring to the Lord and we're like, Lord, here's how I want my life to be. And God's like, that doesn't work. Well, God bless it, make it work. No, God's like, I love you, that's not going to work. That's a bad architecting plan. That's a failure. That's doomed to not endure. And because He doesn't say yes, it's not because He doesn't love you. It's because He does love you and He doesn't want either of you to be wasting your time and energy on something that is not going to work. "You have wearied the Lord with your words, but you say, "how have we wearied him?" They're talking back to God. They're arguing with God. These are older and younger people, but we're all the children of God. And this is like a family meeting where God is like, I'm trying to help. No, you're not. I love you. No, you don't. I'm here to make it all better. We don't see that. You kids are driving me crazy. How do we do that, right? All right. This is the children of God. "By saying everyone who does evil is good "in the sight of the Lord and delights in them "or by asking where's the God of justice?" Sometimes in our relationships, we will have accusations that we posit in the form of questions. Right? Why are you so stupid? That's not really a question, amen? You're like, I don't know. Why are you so mean? Why are you so evil? Why are you so selfish? Right, those aren't really questions. Amen? So you're like, could you talk about, I thought we'd, it's Christmas, man, talk about, talk about angels and Magi. Don't talk about me. Okay. What they're doing with God, they're accusing God in the form of questions. Okay? Now let me say this, some of the most difficult seasons of life are in regards to relationship with family. Okay? And so a couple of things here, I'll speak to just various groups, because again, what is happening, some of these guys, they married women that they should've never married, but now they're married. And now they got kids and the guys are like I want out. And God's like, hey, look, this is your family. You guys got to work it out. What about the kids? Other men are with a woman they don't want to be with and they got another woman and God's like, that's too many people. Right? This too, it's just you and your girl. We don't have a parade of you and your girls, right? That's that's too many people. God is trying to focus their relationship with Him to get them healthy so that they can have healthy relationships with the other. So how many of you, so those of you who are single, how many of you are single? Single? Okay. You guys can meet afterward. So for single, I'm just tired, it's one of those weeks, amen? It's going to go this way. He just says stuff he shouldn't. I know that's, that's why we came. We heard it would happen. So, okay. So for you who are single, for you who are single, the second most important decision you will ever make is what? Who you marry. Okay? Who you marry. And so in making that decision, you can't make it short-term, you gotta make it long-term. And you've got to think about, not just can we have a good time, but can we live a good life and lead a good legacy. And a part of it too, and sometimes when single people get together, they don't factor in the children because the children aren't there yet. But you need to fact-, okay, what kind of marriage are we going to have? What kind of life are we going to have? What kind of God are we going to worship? What kind of kids are we going to raise? What kind of spouse and parents are they going to be? Making the decision with the long view in mind. And it's better to be single than it is to surrender to a life of suffering. Okay? For those of you who, who are married, okay, Grace and I are married, some of you are married, many of you are married, statistically, 91% of you will be married at some point. Everything rises or falls, first and foremost, with both of you

having a healthy relationship with God. All right? And a couple other things I would say, the last day of marriage is the most important day of your marriage. And for married couples, we take a lot of time, energy, and money and we put it into the first day. Amen? I mean, you can rack up some serious debt. Some of you men have no idea what cake costs. You're going to. Right? What happens is we put a lot of time, energy, money into the first day, but you also need to keep the long view and say the most important day is the? The last day. Time, energy, and money toward the last day. And what these people did, they had an awesome first day, but they didn't make a plan for the last day. And I would even say, you know, as we head into the holiday season, is there anything you need to forgive? Anything you need to change? Anything you need to apologize for? Anything of the architecting of your family that you need to alter so you could be healthy? Is it perhaps dysfunction from extended family that is now impeding on your family? That's what's happening here in Malachi. These guys married into families they're not supposed to be in. Their families are not rightly architected. They don't love, worship, serve God. They're not healthy. Those dysfunctional extended families are crashing into the immediate families. Everybody's crying. It's a painful situation. And God says, well, let's just re-architect all of this with me and my Word in authority and I'll bless my plan, if you'll live according to my plan. This is an opportunity for us even as married couples and families heading into the holiday season saying, if it's not working, what will we be changing? Because let me say this, this isn't in my notes, not that I really have any, but you can either get a new marriage or a new spouse. Let me just bottom line this. Some people say I need a new marriage, therefore, I need a new spouse. You can have a new marriage with the same spouse. So their answer is I need a new spouse and God was like, you need a new marriage. You need a new family system. You need a new family structure. Because sometimes what happens is we get a new spouse, but we have the same marriage. What needs to change? Starting with you. Number three, for those of you who are children of homes like this. Family was poorly architected, mom and dad didn't get along, God, wasn't in first position. Some of you are feeling the complications of that, particularly during the holiday season. Number one, forgive, forgive, forgive. So that bitterness does not take root in your heart. Number two, flush, flush. Flush it, let it go, move on, be done with it. Okay? Number three, find something to be grateful for and some lesson to learn. Find something to be grateful for from your family system and find some key lesson for you to learn so that you can be healthier with a better future. And then for those of you who are divorced, the whole context here in Malachi 2, right? Again, I thought Malachi was a great idea until I hit this week. And now we're talking about divorce. Merry Christmas. There you go, right? But for those who are divorced, Malachi 2:16, the scripture that we're reading right here, in some translations like the New American Standard Bible says that God blanks divorce. What's the word? Hates. Here's what it doesn't say. God hates the divorcee. Because God doesn't hate the divorcee. God loves the divorcee. What God hates is not the person who's divorced, but the pain that the divorce causes. And every divorced person that I know, they hate that, too. They say I hate this pain that caused me and others to have a very difficult immediate and perhaps short- or long-term consequence. Right? So in saying this, it's always hard as your pastor who loves you to say here's God's standard. And then some fall short and then they ask, so what about me? I have good news for you. God does not divorce the divorcee. Does

God divorce any one of His people? No. So even if your relationship with your spouse did not endure your relationship with God will always endure. And so what God is inviting is healthy, loving, healing, changing, restoring, forgiving, blessing relationship. The relationship that never ends, the relationship that never fails. He's used this word a few times that people have been faithless. It reminds me of this language in the New Testament where God says, "Even though you are faithless, I am?" Faithful, faithful, faithful. So what we want to do, we want to have love, encouragement, mercy, compassion. For those who have been through relational troubles, we also want to hold up a high Godly standard and encourage perseverance with the Lord and spouse for those who are married. Okay? This leads to an inevitable series of questions that I will try and answer. What does the Bible give for reasons for divorce? Again, hear me in this. I'm a Bible teacher. I like to teach through books of the Bible. I preached through a few dozen. This is the last word that God gives and it stands for 400 years until the first Christmas and the coming of Jesus. And some would look at it and say, boy, this is a weird conversation, God. God's saying, "No, actually what I'm talking about "is marriage and family." Relationship with me, relationship with spouse, relationship with kids, I'm talking about faith and family. That's what God's talking about. And God's talking about faith and family because it matters. And when the holidays come, it's faith and family that are sometimes frustrating. This leads to, as God brings the subject up, my, my goal is not to pick on anybody, but to pick up the Word of God, and if something happens, I want to talk about it. But I can't hit a section like Malachi 2 where God says, okay, "Let's talk about marriage and divorce" and then just sort of move right along because all of you are going to have? Reasonable questions. Okay? So what are the biblical grounds for divorce? And I'll take them from order of maybe easier to the most difficult. Number one, death. Right? This immediately raises the question, can I kill my spouse? No, no, you cannot kill them. Dang it, I thought I was out. Okay, so a little, little humor, right? Little, little sugar helps the medicine go down. You're welcome. All right. So Romans 7:2, a woman, a married woman is bound to law, by law. Man, I'm at that age where if I'm not at the right distance, I can't read it. Any of you have that? Gosh, okay, okay. Amen, thank you, brother. In our resurrection body, we're going to be seeing stuff. It's going to be amazing. Okay, Romans 7:2, a married woman is bound by law to her husband while he lives but if her husband what? Dies, she's released from the law of marriage. 1 Corinthians 7:39, a wife is bound to her husband as long as he lives. But if her husband dies, she's free to be married to whom she wishes only in the Lord. Here's what it means. Marriage continues in this life. If your spouse dies, your marriage is? Concluded. You'll have a relationship and have, and there's a big debate whether or not you'll be married in heaven. I don't know. We'll see when we get there. But you're married as long as you're alive. Once your spouse has gone, your marriage is over. That's, that's pretty simple. Number two, abandonment. 1 Corinthians 7:15, if the unbelieving partner separates, let it be so. In such cases, the brother's sister is not enslaved. Sometimes people just disappear. I mean, I've been doing this 20 some years as a senior pastor and some things are unspeakable, so I won't speak of them. But I mean, I've seen people literally move to another state. I've seen people change their identity and disappear. I've seen people move to another country and eliminate all lines of communication. You're like, people are like, what can I do? I don't, what can you do? I mean, they're, they have, they are gone, they are done, it is over. And there's nothing

you can do. You can pray. You can wait. You can give it some time. But at some point you've got to move on, right? These two are a little clearer. Actually I know some people now, they don't know what country their spouse lives in. They know they're alive, they just don't know where they're alive. Number three, adultery and sexual immorality. The reason that this one is more complicated, sometimes it's overt, sometimes it's covert. Sometimes it's obvious. Other times it's sneaky and secretive and hidden. In the old covenant, Deuteronomy 22:22, if a man is found lying with the wife of another man, both of them shall what? That's the old covenant. There wasn't a lot of paperwork with that. Just so you know. Right? You weren't like, well, my attorney and their attorney, and you're like, actually, this is, this is, this is a lot simpler. Okay? It wasn't often done. But sometimes, I mean, could you, I don't even go there. It would have been interesting, but we don't have time for it and I'd have to fire myself. So Matthew 5:32 and Matthew 19:9, if you're sort of a Bible nerd and scholar, and you want to look at this, it's all in the app. The notes are Matthew 5:32, "Everyone who divorces his wife, "except on the ground of sexual immorality," Jesus says, in Matthew 19:9, "Whoever divorces his wife, "except for sexual immorality and marries another woman "commits adultery." And there's in the Greek here, I'm not going to bore you, but there's two words. One is moichaó, means adultery. The other is porneia. We get our word pornography from it. It's all kinds of sexual sin. And what Jesus is saying is that the marriage relationship is that the two shall be one flesh and sexual immorality, particularly adultery, it violates those covenantal sacred commands. Okay? Now you just need to know we live in a world that doesn't think that the marriage is particularly important or that the intimate relationship is particularly sacred. God does. God does. God does. And number four, hardness of heart, this is the judgment call. This is the most difficult. When I was a young, newer pastor, I was a bit, I would say, idealistic, which can make you legalistic. Idealistic is where you're all about the ideas but you forget that you're dealing with people. That's why communism works on paper. Right? It does. And then you get people involved, you're like, oh, it doesn't work. Because people are not ideas. And people are complicated. And lives and relationships are difficult. Okay? So for me, as a younger, newer pastor, some decades ago, I was more idealistic, which caused me to be more legalistic. I now see this as God's loving provision for people's protection. Jesus says this, "They said," so they're arguing with Jesus, "Moses", go back to the Old Testament, "Moses allowed a man to write a certificate of divorce "and send her away." And Jesus said to them, "Because of your "hardness of heart." Hardness of heart. Let me say this to people with hearts that are tender toward the Lord and one another end up in a different place than if one person has a hard heart and one person has a tender heart or two people have a hard heart. That really, before there are problems out here, there's a problem in here. This is your emotional life. This is your spiritual life. This is your relational life. What we're seeing in Malachi, true or false, their heart is hard toward God? Their heart's hard toward God. They're like, they're yelling at God. They got accusations of God. They're fighting with God. Their heart is hard toward God. If your heart is hard toward God, eventually your heart gets hard toward everybody else. How many of you have seen just somebody who is just bitter, locked up, angry, frustrated and it affects all of their relationships. You have many relationships, but you have one heart and all of your relationships come out of your one heart. So if your heart is hard, it affects all of your relationships. So my question to you today, and I would ask the Holy

Spirit to give you a word, if you had to pick one word to describe the condition of your heart in this instant, what would that word be? Okay? If it's not a tender, loving heart, then something needs to heal or be changed or repented of or softened so that your heart is tender and loving toward the Lord and then it can be tender and loving toward each other. But under all of the ultimate relational problems is the hardness of heart toward God and others. Okay? So what I love about Jesus, because they come to Him and they want to argue all the details. They're like, okay, here's this team and this team and this team and this team and this team and this team. Okay, Jesus, where are you at? How do you parse the Hebrew? What team are you on? How did, what, what group do you align with on this very complicated. And Jesus just said, "Your heart." They're just like, oh, dang it. Now we got to have a relationship with God. And not just have math equations that we try and shove lives into. We need to be relational people that do life with God and one another. And that's the key. "Because of your hardness of heart," he wrote you this command, "but from the beginning of creation," he goes all the way back to God's intended order, "God made them male and female." America doesn't believe that. Just throwing it out there. I'll lean over the plate, take one for the team. But God made us male and female. "Therefore, a man shall," he goes back to Genesis, "leave his father and mother, hold fast to his wife." That's marriage. "And the two shall become one flesh." God's plan was a man and a woman, a man grows up, takes responsibility for himself, pays his own bills, marries a woman, they consummate their covenant, the two become one flesh and they do life together. That's God's plan. "So they are no longer two, but one flesh. "Therefore what God has joined together, "let not man separate." Right? What he's saying is that some got divorced because of hardness of heart, but that was not God's original intent and design. And if two people would bring their heart to God, say God, "Here's my heart. "Change my heart." Will God answer that prayer? Yes. And that will change their relationship. Okay? If you will bring your heart to God, He will change your heart. And then two changed hearts can have a changed relationship. Okay? Couple of things briefly. Because I get this question all the time. And then we'll, we'll go to Malachi 3. I get this question all the time, even in emails, literally almost every day. Okay? At the ministry website, somebody sends me an email and it's the whole story of their marriage and then at the end they ask this question, can I get a divorce? Firstly, that's not an email decision to a stranger. Amen? Other, I mean, I guess I could just sit at my desk all day and be like, yes, no, yeah, yeah. I mean, right? Like it doesn't work like that. People are not math equations. Okay? So a couple of things, if you are in a tough season and/or you're walking with someone who's in a tough season, number one, your heart is wrong if you're actively seeking to make your circumstances fit some criteria. If you're like, well, how do I get out? You're like you do like this - awesome. Then you figure a way to get there. No, no, no. Then your heart's wrong. Your heart's wrong. Number two, you do not have to end the relationship even if you have grounds to. People can forgive one another and reconcile and it could go from willful to wonderful. It happens. Number three, you can't make this decision in isolation. You bring in wise counsel. And I'm not talking about family and friends that just agree with you and take your side. I'm talking about pastor, Christian counselor, somebody who's wise. You cannot make this decision in haste. Just get angry and then double down. And then because you're stubborn, see it through to completion because you're angry in a moment. And you can't

make it in lust. You got somebody else. You're like, I got to get rid of this so I can pick up that. No, no, no. That's a heart problem. And then lastly, let me say this clearly. Great, great abuse happens when we tell one person to obey the Bible and not the other. Okay? The Bible speaks to husbands and wives. So we need to speak to husbands and wives. And all if you do is quote all the verses for the husband and not the verses for the wife, that's going to be an unfair, unholy, unhelpful relationship. If all you do is quote all the verses for the wife and not tell the husband what God tells him to do, you're setting up, again, an unhealthy, unfair, unloving, unholy relationship. It works if both people surrender to God. It works if both people submit to God. It works if both people obey God. It works if both people will bring their heart to God. Okay? And so I've even had recent conversations at the church where, you know, the relationship is in a difficult place, but the friends or family or counselors or whomever's involved are only reading the Bible and speaking the Word of God to one person, not both. Both need to hear what the Word of God says and do what the Word of God says if there is to be any hope for the relationship. So here's where we find ourselves. This is the end of the Old Testament. This is a 2000 year experiment. This is God setting up the nation of Israel. This is God setting up the family. This is God setting up the old covenant church and the temple and the priesthood and the sacrificial system. And it's all foreshadowing the forthcoming of Jesus. And it's all to get people ready for the first Christmas. And how's it going? Terribly. What do we do with that? Well, the big idea is this. Family without Jesus doesn't work. Church without Jesus doesn't work. Nation without Jesus doesn't work. Family without Jesus doesn't work. Church without Jesus doesn't work. Nation without Jesus doesn't work. The reason it's not working is Jesus hasn't shown up yet. And so what it creates is this thirst, this longing, this hunger, this appetite, this need, where is Jesus? And they end, I think it's in Chapter Two, verse 17, asking where is the God of justice? Chapter Three, here's what God has to say, "Behold." Pay attention. Good news, it's not, you it's me. I'll fix it. You're the problem, not the solution. "I will send my," who is that? "Messenger." Who's that? That's John the baptizer. That's Jesus' weird homeschool, rural Jerome, Arizona, already Jedi robe, bug-eating, honey-chugging cousin. Amen? He's a weird kid, but he loves the Lord. So he's going to do the job. "Behold, I send my messenger "and he will prepare the way before me." He is going to pave and plow. Right by our house, Grace and I went for a walk yesterday, they're getting ready to put in a whole housing development. First thing they do, they come in and they absolutely clear everything so that there is a path for everyone else to venture on. That's what he is doing. John the baptizer and who? The Lord. Who's that? Really? Really? Really? I don't know. Okay. If you are new, when I ask questions, there are two answers, Jesus or carne asada. Those are the two answers because whatever the problem, those are usually the solutions. Amen? Okay? So we're going to do this again. And who? "The Lord whom you seek will." Who is that?

- [Congregation] Jesus!

- Okay, better. You didn't say carne asada, good for you. All right. "And the Lord whom you seek will suddenly come to," where? The temple. The temple was the presence of God. It was the place that people would meet with God. It was the intersecting and connecting point between heaven and Earth Question, does the temple exist today? No,

I've been there. It's not there. They're like, hey, we're going to take you to the temple. It was like, somebody took it and it's gone. I don't, where is it? They're like, oh, it got destroyed. We've been there. When did it get destroyed? 70 AD, a long time ago. So for my Jewish friends, who I love, you're waiting for the Messiah. You missed Him. His name is Jesus. He came to the temple. The temple was destroyed. 70 AD. It's God's way of saying, okay, just to make sure you know who it was. Historically, whoever this person is, he had to come by 70 AD. There has been no temple since 70 AD. "And the messenger of the covenant in whom you delight," the relationship, covenantal language. God wants a covenantal relationship with you. God does not have a contractual relationship for you. You sin, you need to reincarnate, pay off your karmic debt to pay me back, that is contractual. You need to suffer, go to purgatory, pay me back, that is contractual. You need to die, you need to go to hell, that is contractual. You can have a covenantal relationship with God through Jesus Christ, where He is faithful even when you are faithless. He is forgiving even when you're undeserving. That He is loving from His pure heart even when you are unloving from your hard heart. That's the father heart of God. He is coming. He is coming. And let me tell you this. They were awaiting the first coming of Jesus, which we're going to celebrate big time in the coming week at Christmas. We are waiting for the second coming of Jesus. God gives prophetic promises. They waited by faith for the first coming. We wait by faith for the second coming. The God who was faithful to fulfill the covenantal promises in the first coming will be faithful to fulfill all of the covenantal promises at His second coming. Amen? You can trust this Jesus. "Says the Lord of hosts, "the God who rules over the angels and demons, "but who can endure the day of His coming, and who can stand when He appears?" Next slide, please. "For He is like a refiner's fire and fullers' soap. "He will sit as a refiner and purifier of silver. "He will purify the sons of Levi." Those are the Old Testament leaders and the pastors and priests. "And refine them like gold and silver, "and they will bring offerings in righteousness to the Lord. "Then the offering of Judah and Jerusalem "will be pleasing to the Lord as in the days of old, "as in the former years." Last slide, please. "Then I will draw near to you." Jesus is coming "For judgment. "I will be a swift witness against the sorcerers, "false, demonic, pagan spirituality and religion, "against adulterers, against those who swear falsely, "against those who oppress hard workers in his wages, "and the poor, the widow and the fatherless, "against those who thrust aside the sojourner "and do not fear me says the Lord of hosts." Their question is God, when are you going to deal with all of these people? And God says, "Don't worry about it. "I'll take care of those people. "Right now, what you worry about "is my people take care of yourself." And what God says is trust me to deal with everyone else and then invite me to deal with you. So here's what God says. Jesus is coming because family doesn't work unless Jesus is in it. Jesus is coming because church doesn't work unless Jesus is in it. Jesus is coming because nation doesn't work unless Jesus is in it. And what He says is that God not only will forgive through this man, Jesus, and He lived a life that we have not lived. He lived a life of complete and perfect relational obedience. He is without sin. He is God, He is Savior, He is King, He is Christ, He is hope, He is love, He is joy, He is peace, He is salvation. And He gives the gift at Christmas that you cannot earn. That's the gift of salvation. And then I got really good news for you. When he's talking about refining and he's talking about soap, what he's talking about is purifying and cleansing. The way it would work,

you would heat up a metal to draw out the impurities. With soap, you will clean yourself from that which is unclean. You can be forgiven by Jesus Christ. You can be loved by Jesus Christ. You can be made new by Jesus Christ. And you can be made clean through Jesus Christ. He wanted these people to not just know that they were forgiven, but to experience God's cleansing power. You can be forgiven and you need to know that whatever you have done, in your heart, in your head, with your hands, it can be not only forgiven, but made clean through this man, Jesus Christ. Just like this morning, you used soap to clean your hair and soap to cleanse your hands. You use soap to clean your laundry. You use soap to cleanse your dishes. They get dirty, but you make them clean. You, my friend, even though you belong to God, you will sometimes get yourself dirty. But this God will make you clean. He will clean you up so that you no longer live under the condemnation. You no longer live under the guilt. You no longer live under the shame. You no longer live under the defilement. You no longer define yourself by what you have done or what has been done to you. You will celebrate because of what Jesus Christ does for you. And I love that. These are guilty, filthy people who are forgiven and made clean. For those of us who are guilty and filthy, clean, guilty and filthy people, rather, this is good news. Amen? All right, so here's what we're going to do. We're going to sing. We're going to celebrate. Merry Christmas. There's hope for you. There's hope for your marriage. There's hope for your kids. There's hope for your family. There's hope for our church. There's hope for our nation. There's forgiveness. There's cleansing. Who is that that provides it?

- [Congregation] Jesus! Jesus, amen! Well, let's sing to Him and celebrate Him. Let me pray. Father God, thank you so much for this last word of the Old Testament. God, I am convinced that, that soft words produce hard people and that hard words produce soft people. God, we receive any hard words, not because you hate us, but because you love us. And if you're pushing a little harder it's because our heart is already hard and you need to push through that resistance to give us a tender heart. God, for any who would hear this, I pray, Lord God, that they would know that there is forgiveness in Jesus. There is cleansing in Jesus. There is hope, help, and healing in Jesus. And God, we confess, without Jesus, the family is a mess. Without Jesus, the church is a mess. Without Jesus, the nation is a mess. So God, as they received this Word, as they walked in this Word, we walk in this Word. By faith we trust that the God who promised He was coming is coming again. And all the promises that He makes will come true. And His son, our Risen Savior, the King of Kings, the Lord of Lords, the heart of the covenant, the giver of grace, the forgiver of sin, the cleanser of unrighteousness, the changer of our hearts, in whose name we pray. Thank you, Jesus.

Malachi #5: Learn to Give

- All right, we continue our study on Malachi. If you've got a Bible, in Malachi 3, last book of the Old Testament, God's final word, preparing everyone for the first Christmas and today, he's gonna talk about relationships and resources, the things that truly are on most of our minds this time of year, relationships and resources and I was thinking about it, when I was a little boy, my dad was, I was the oldest of five kids, my dad was a construction worker, a carpenter, a drywaller, my dad literally broke his back feeding our family, one of the hardest working people I've ever met and dad, you're probably watching, love you, look forward to seeing you for Christmas, but when my dad came home from work one time, I noticed he would take out his billfold. If you're young, this is called a wallet. It's where we used to put money and pictures, now you put them on your phone, but when we would ride our dinosaur to work, we would first put our wallet in our pocket and my dad had this big, huge fat, thick wallet and I remember as a little boy wondering what's in that wallet and so my dad, you know, put it on the coffee table or something to that nature and I remember as a little boy going up and grabbing my dad's wallet and opening it and what there was in there, there was money and the thickness was a lot of pictures, a lot of pictures. It was pictures of me and my siblings and my mom and our family, included some of our school photos and I remember as a little boy thinking, huh, that must be what's most important, right? It's relationships and resources and maybe the reason that my dad gets up every day literally goes to work to break his back is to have resources to bless those that he has relationship with and that's a father's heart. Amen, how many of you guys are gonna get up tomorrow and you're gonna go to work and you're gonna slug it out to have resources to bless those that you're in relationship with? Well, that's truly the context of Malachi 3. We've learned in chapter one and two, God says he's a Father, so the context is that God is a Father and he has a Father's heart, that God's people are his children, some are young, some are old, they're a family. God has pulled them together for a family meeting and just so you know, this is how we see church, God's a Father, you're a family, right? We're a church family and God pulls his people together for a family meeting and what they wanna talk about is resources. What he wants to talk about is relationship. For them, they don't really care about the relationship, they primarily care about the resources. They're like, God, we want more money and God's like, let's talk about that after we talk about our relationship. Some of you know what this is like, you've got grown children. They don't really want a relationship, they just want the resources, right? They're like, hey, if the phone rings or they show up, you're like, they must be out of money again 'cause that's the only time that they actually engage in any sort of interaction or conversation, is when they want resources. Let me say this, life is about largely two things, this is what dominates our time and energy, our relationships and our resources and God wants the relationships to be first and the resources to be second and so, they are talking a lot about the resources, he's going to be focusing on the relationship and so, that's sort of the context that we find ourselves in, in Malachi 3 and we'll jump right in to God is Unchanging. So Malachi 3:6-7, "For I the Lord do not change." That's a big statement. When we talk about God, we refer to God in terms of something called his attributes, his attributes, God is Holy, God is loving, God is just, God is sovereign. Here, we would call this the immutability of God. That is that God does not change. The key to

understanding God is to have all of God's attributes exist co-equally and consistently. Problems happen when we take one of God's attributes, we elevate it above the rest and as a result, we have an inaccurate and imperfect view of God. So, let me just give you an example. If you take the sovereignty of God, that he rules over all things and you don't consider the other attributes of God, you end up with something called deism. That is the God is far away and we don't know him and he's not really involved in our life. Some people will say that God's only attribute is love and by love, they mean do whatever you want. God's also holy, all of his attributes work together and here, one of his attributes is revealed and God declares, he's unchanging, he's unchanging. Why is God unchanging? Because he's perfect. The reason we're still needing to change is we're imperfect. God gets it right the first time, God is holy, God is good, God gets it right the first time, God doesn't need to change, he's perfect, that's the point. "I do not change, therefore, O children of Jacob," family language, keep thinking in terms of family language. God's going to stress the relationship before he gets to the rules. God is firstly about relationship and secondly about rules. Here is a parenting principle, right, rules without relationship equals rebellion, rules without relationship equals rebellion and so God here, he connects before he corrects, he loves before he leads and that's the pattern and precedent, particularly for parental leadership and so, God here is using family language, "O children of Jacob, you are not consumed. From the days of your fathers," so this is generational. Sometimes children will learn things from their parents, good or evil and follow in their example. "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." That's the God who rules over the angelic and demonic realm. "But you say, 'how shall we return?'" So here, God is really focusing on relationship and what he's saying is this, you're like kids that have run away from home. How many of you, okay, how many of you have kids? How many of your children have tried to run away? They all do, right? Some of you are single, you're like, my child will never do that, yeah, they will, I just prophesied it, okay, it's gonna happen. At some point, the kid tries to run away. Sometimes when they're little, they literally run, right and sometimes when they're older and they get a driver's license, they run faster, right, that's what they do and what happens is that in relationship with parental authority, at some point, every kid tries to run away. Did you try to run away when you were a kid? Be honest, I did, I can still remember, I was a little boy, I literally, I was just a little guy, I just decided, you know what, that's it, I'm moving out now, I'm on my own. So what I did, I took a TV, an extension cord and I went outside 'cause I'm that kid, I'm gonna move out, but move out, right, I'm like a guy in his 20s, I'm moving out, but I'm still on mom and dad's dime. So, I moved out and I built a little fort in the backyard and then I ran a hose out there. I thought, I got water, I got power, I got TV, I'm set, I moved out, I was like, maybe five years old, maybe five years old. My mom, what do you think my mom did? She pursued me 'cause that's what mothers do, right? They're like Markie, she still calls me that, Markie, Markie, what are you doing? Mom, that's it, I'm running away to the yard, I didn't go far and she loved me and she talks, Markie, why are you running away? Well, you know what, I just wanna be on my own now, I feel like it's time, you know and then she brought something into the conversation that was a tremendous variable. She said, Markie, you have no food. I was like, oh yeah, see 'cause that's, I had a TV, but no food, okay. So, I realized I'm gonna have to go home, okay, at some point and so eventually, I

moved back home, like 20 minutes later, I moved back home. But the point is that, sometimes even those of us who were adults and we're grown, we act like, he's right, I'm sick of it God, that's it, I'm leaving and God's like, where are you going? And what are you gonna do without me? You're like, I don't know. Some of you have run away from God. Some of you have rebelled against God, some of you haven't picked up your Bible, you haven't prayed, you haven't been to church. The only reason you're in church right now is 'cause it's Christmas and your parents were crying and they drug you, welcome, you know, glad to have you, we do this every week, you're always welcome to come back. But what happens is, some of you would think, God have I run so far that it's over? What God is saying here is you ran, but so did I and here's what I wanna tell you, it doesn't matter how far you've run from God, if you turn around, you're back, you know why? 'Cause God was pursuing, right. God is pursuing and that's what he says here, he's looking at his people, he's like, man, you guys have all just run away, but if you'll just turn, I'm right here, I'll take you back, let's work on the relationship. I don't care where you've gone, I don't care what you've done, I don't care what you thought, I don't care what you've said, if you'll just turn around, say God, I'm back, he will hug you, embrace you. His heart is a Father's heart and here's the good news, he doesn't change. Now what that means is, if we disagree with God, who's got to change? Okay, you guys weren't very enthusiastic about that, but that's how it works, right? You're like, God, this is all wrong! Something needs to change and God's like, I vote you change, right? We're like, God, you need to change. He's like, I'm fine, your situation. This is how it works, that's what it says in the Hebrew. So, this is what it means. When we disagree with God, we need to change. They want God to change, they're like, God, you need to change. God's like, actually you need to change, okay? Now here's the good news though, this is the good news and the fact that God doesn't change. He doesn't change his heart or his mind or his commitment to his people. That's amazing. You know what, if God decided to love you, that'll never change. If God decided to adopt you as his kid, that'll never change. If God decides to forgive you, that'll never change. God will never wake up and say, I did love you, but I've changed my mind. I did adopt you, but I've changed my mind. I did forgive you, but I've changed my mind. You're not forgiven, you're not adopted, you're not loved, I've changed my mind, God never does that. When God makes a commitment to you, the Bible says this in the New Testament, even when we're faithless, he is faithful. That's the kind of dad you have, that's the heavenly Father he is and in a world where all of our relationships are fluid and all of our relationships are in flux, it's really nice to have one relationship that is faithful. Amen. I don't care who you're in relationship with, all of those relationships are in an open hand. People move, relationships transition or even the people we love, they pass away and they're no longer alive. God doesn't change. God doesn't quit. God doesn't go anywhere. That's the relationship that God offers with his people and so, this unchanging nature of God, it gives us a certainty and a security. It gives us a clarity, it gives us an absolute commitment from God. God is looking at his kids and saying, you're not great kids, but I'm a great dad. I'm trying to work it out, let's talk about the relationship and they immediately say, no, let's talk about the resources. God, we don't want you, we want wealth, money, possessions, and stuff. God, we would prefer that you weren't a Father, we would prefer that you were an ATM, okay? And some people have this relationship with God. They want what God gives, they don't want who God is.

God doesn't mind giving resources, but he values the relationship. So, we're gonna get into it now, right? Living Open Handed, Malachi 3. This is one of those verses that gets widely used and abused and misapplied, okay. Most of you, most Christians have never heard anything from Malachi except for this and this is the preachers go to, you know, show me the money verse, is what it is, okay. This is the verse when it's like God's a pinata and this is the stick, this is gonna work, right? When there's a desire for the leader to get money, they go to Malachi 3. The reason we took the offering before, I don't wanna guilt you, okay? So, there is something called prosperity theology. I tend to focus on who, I'm for Jesus and not what we're against, but this teaching is that you give to get, it's like an investment and they'll misuse Malachi 3. I've had the honor of traveling the world, I've been in Haiti and South Africa and townships and some of the poorest places on Earth and sometimes this American teaching of prosperity goes there and it sets up a very unhealthy church for people that are very hurting and the problem is this and I will get into Malachi 3:8-12 in just a moment, but the problem is this, they're going to God saying, how do we manipulate and make you give us what we want? And God's like, you can't control me, you can't manipulate me, you're not going to find a way to be in authority over me and then those who would misteach Malachi 3, they would say, if you give, God will give back and what they're doing is they're encouraging the same heart that God is rebuking in Malachi 3. We don't give to get a blessing, giving is a blessing. I'll deal with it, here we go. "Will man rob God?" That's the question. Some sins are easy to find out or easier, I should say, others are more subtle and sly. Financial sins, they tend to be a little more ambiguous. If I came to you and say, have you robbed God, you'd be like, what would your answer be? I don't know. If I came to you and asked, did you murder Tony? That's clear, right, you're like, well, is he dead? Then yeah, I did, I murdered him. No, Tony's fine, okay, then I didn't murder him, right? The sin of murder is a little easier to call than the sin of robbery, amen. Is it just me, you all right? Men, how are the football scores? How are we doing, okay. Okay, so some sins are easier, some sins are harder, this question is one we've go to ask, like, well, have I robbed God? "Yet you are robbing me. But you say, 'How have we robbed you?' In your tithes and contributions." So there are two pockets, one is the tithe, literally means a 10th, 10%. The other is contributions, it's other giving. So, God sees his people as having two pockets. The 10% is the tithe and then there are the contributions, that includes feasts, festivals, gleanings for the poor, I'm a nerd, so I've looked it up and it's hard to get an accurate total number 'cause you're dealing with an agrarian society. If a guy's like, I brought my fruit, the other guy says, I brought my goat, you're like, it's hard to pencil that out, amen. How many of you are accountants, you're like, yeah, that would be more complicated than money. It's their wealth, but different scholars will say that the grand total from their gross, not their net, that's what first fruits means, gives your first and best to God, that the total giving between the tithes, this pocket and the contributions, this pocket was between 20 to 25, some would say as high as 27% of your gross income, okay and what God is saying is, you're giving a little, you're not giving what I have asked, okay and we've looked at earlier in the book, they're bringing blind, lame sacrifices, they're giving their worst, they're not generous in their heart and they're not grateful toward God. "You are cursed with a curse, for you are robbing me, the whole nation of you." So, the leaders are participating in this and the people are like, we don't wanna do what God wants and the leaders are like, okay, we either need to

say what God says or say what the people want and what they do, the leaders, they tell the people what they want to hear not what God wants to hear and that leads to the problem. "Bring the full tithe into the storehouse," that's the temple, that's the funding of ministry, "That there may be food in my house. And thereby put me to the test, says the Lord of hosts." This little line is interesting. God says, put me to the test. You need to know, that's the only place in the Bible that I can find that God says, put me to the test because we're to trust God, not test God, so this is unusual. In fact, there is an occasion where Jesus walking on the Earth is approached by Satan and Satan puts Jesus to the test and what does Jesus say? If you know the story, do you remember? Jesus says, do not put the Lord, your God, to the test. It's satanic and demonic, okay. And so, what is happening here is very unusual. Let me unpack it for you in a moment. Next slide, please. See "if I will not open the windows of heaven and pour down for you a blessing until there is no more need. I will rebuke the devour." Those people and things that are destroying your income. Their businesses are suffering because of their sinning. "So that it will not destroy the fruits of your soil and the vine in the field shall not fail to bear, says the Lord of hosts," those are their businesses. "Then all nations will call you blessed, for you will be a land of delight, says the Lord of hosts." Now, what we're talking about here is stewardship. I believe in your Bible, there are primarily three themes and threads that pull the scriptures together. There is sin and how Jesus forgives sin, there is suffering and how Jesus sympathizes, empathizes and comforts us in our suffering and there is stewardship, how we manage the resources that belong to God, so, sin, suffering, stewardship, those are the three primary themes of the entire Bible. About 800 times, the Bible talks of stewardship. 25% of Jesus' teaching is on the theme of stewardship. They come to God and what they say is, we are suffering and God says, it's because you're not stewarding. Let me say principally, this is in fact very insightful. If you don't steward your health, you will suffer physically. If you don't steward your relationships, you'll suffer interpersonally, right? If you don't steward your soul, you'll suffer spiritually. If you don't steward of your finances, you'll suffer financially. Sometimes our suffering is unjust. Sometimes our suffering is mysterious. Sometimes our suffering is caused by us. In this instance, they are blaming God for their suffering and God is showing them that their suffering is a result of their failure to steward. So, this is the big theme and idea. The concept of stewardship is this, God is the owner, we are the manager, okay? God is the owner, we are the manager and stewardship is two things, it is managing and being generous. This is like, two oars in a boat, you've got to manage your resources well and God wants you to be generous, okay? If you're only generous, you're gonna bankrupt yourself. If you are managing your resources, but not generous, here's the truth, you'll be generous to yourself, but not to God or others. God doesn't, here's the big idea, God doesn't give to us, God gives through us, okay? God gives through us and what a steward realizes is what Jesus's brother James says and that, is that everything we have is a gift that comes from the Father above. Let me just say this, if you will start to think this way, it will cultivate in you an attitude of gratitude. So, think of it this way, you drove here in a car, who's car is it? It's God's car, hey God, thanks for letting me drive your car. When you go home tonight, wherever you live, where you live, that's God's house. Hey God, thanks for letting me stay at your house. When you go to bed, it's like, hey God, thanks for letting me sleep in your bed. The people in your life, hey God, thanks for sharing your people with me. The food you eat,

hey, thanks God, thank you, God, that I'm getting to eat some of your food. That's why we say grace when we eat. It's not just a superstitious or religious thing, it's to remind us, right, that this is a gift that God gives. If you start to see everything that you have as a gift, it just opens up a childlike wonder and gratitude and it combats against this gravity toward entitlement, right, and so what God is saying here is that the people are coming to him and they're like, we want, we want, we want and God is like, okay, I don't mind giving resources, but first, let's deal with the relationship. You're not stewarding my stuff in the way that I have asked you, therefore, until this is corrected, I'm not likely to give you more. Similarly, how many of you, 'cause we all have stewards in our life, your bank is a steward. Your credit card company is a steward. Your mortgage company on your home is a steward. Your investments are managed by a steward. Your retirement account is overseen by a steward, meaning it's your resources and assets, you give it to them and then you direct them what to do with what is yours. How many of you would be frustrated if you went to the bank and you're like, okay, I'd like to make a withdrawal, they're like, actually, we decided to do something different with your money. We know that you said to put it in savings and we put it in our pocket. Sorry, you would be frustrated, you'd be like, that's not why I gave it to you. What if you had money and you gave it to somebody, said, okay, so-and-so's in need or it's Christmas time or it's a single mom, could you please give them this gift? And then you meet the single mom or the person in need, say, hey, did you get that gift? They'll say, what gift? Well, the gift I gave so-and-so to give to you. They didn't give it to me. Go to so-and-so, what did you do? I kept it. No, no, no, that's not why I gave it to you. This is how God sees everything. We tend to look at things from our perspective and here, we need to Google Earth, pull up and say, how does God see it? And what God is saying is, I gave and you didn't steward. You thought that I gave it to you, I was trying to give it through you. This is the key, God doesn't give to you, God gives through you. What happens is they have this mentality that God gave them and they close their hands and they're not understanding that the hands need to be open because then some of it can pass through to others. As soon as we close our hands, God can't give any more because this is not a posture by which to receive, right? The Bible says that he who can be trusted with little can be trusted with much, the context is finances and when God says, if I put something in your hand, are you gonna do this, are you gonna do this? If you do this and you give it, you steward it, then I can give you more and the more faithful you are, perhaps now I can allocate more resources to you because you understand it's mine and you're to be a steward and generous and a manager and if it passes through your hands to bless others, here's the good news, when we give, we don't give to get a blessing, the giving is the blessing. The Bible says in Acts, it's more blessed to give than receive. The Bible says that God loves a cheerful giver. You know why, across the Earth, in the next few days, people are gonna give because it's a blessing and those who give should not be giving to get a blessing, they should be giving to be a blessing. This is what God is working on with his people and again, it all starts with a relationship and a recognition that we have a Father who is generous and he's good and he's kind and he's loving and he gives us grace and compassion and mercy and relationship and forgiveness and when he gives it to us, he wants us to keep our hands open, so that he can give through us, so that we can share in his joy, by sharing with others. Now, that's the heart of what's going on, they're just like, God, we want more stuff and God's like,

how about we work on our relationship? If our relationship is better and your hearts are better, then I can give you more but until then, I'll just be funding rebellion, okay? Now then the question is, this issue of testing God, the question is this, is this a onetime or an all time command? That's the question. There are commands in the Bible that are onetime, not all time, meaning God told somebody to do that, but we don't do that, not because it's wrong, but because that was a unique circumstance. I'll give you an example, God told a guy named Noah to build a boat, a huge boat in the middle of the desert, we are in the desert. I'm not gonna tell you that in 2019, we are launching the Arc Building Ministry of the Trinity Church and I'll need all you guys to bring scrap wood and tools, right? Because as far as I know, it's not gonna flood, amen. Now what if God told us, you're gonna need to build a boat. Well, we would, first of all, check that, right, with wise counsel and God's word. If God told us to do something, we would obey him, but he told that to Noah and his family, it was a onetime, not an all time command. There's another guy in the Old Testament, his name is Aaron, his brother is Moses, he's got a staff or a stick. How many of you go for a walk and you take a walking stick? God told him, throw it on the ground and it'll turn into a snake, we don't do that, okay. Somebody's like, dang it, I brought my stick, we don't do that. No, we don't do that because that was a one time, not an all time command. He was before Pharaoh, who thought he was God and God was showing I'm more powerful than you are, I can even make a stick into a snake. It was a onetime, not an all time. Another example in the Lord Jesus, the Lord Jesus came across a guy, we started this in John's gospel this year, a guy's blind, if you remember the story and you were here, the guy's blind, what does Jesus do to heal the guy's blindness? He spits a huge loogie in the dirt, apparently Jesus is good at everything, including spitting, he spits in the dirt and he makes it into mud and he shoves it in a blind guy's eye. If you do that today, you're gonna get arrested. Amen, that's like, hey man, why are you shoving mud into blind guy's eyes, they didn't even see it coming, that's not fair, right? We'll edit that out, that was inappropriate. He says stuff he shouldn't, I know, that's why we come back, it's exciting. Okay, so that's a onetime, not an all time, right? There are things that happened in the Bible that are all time and some that are onetime. Let me give you some of the others, so when the Bible says, husbands love your wives, is that onetime or all time?

- [Audience] All time.

- Ladies, quick response, good job ladies. All time, right, okay guys, write that down, okay. There are, children obey honor your mother and father, onetime or all time?

- [Audience] All time.

- All the parents were quick, right on that, good job parents. There are things that are onetime, there are things that are all time. There are things that are specific commands for individuals or groups. There are other things that are overarching and for all peoples, times and places. I believe that this instruction is for those people, nowhere else in the Bible does God say, test me, everywhere else in the Bible, God says, don't test me. But here what God says is, you do not believe that I am good, so I am asking you to trust me, this is a trust test. This is a trust test for them. That being said, let me give you an

example. There will be times in your life where God asks you to take your trust test. Okay, and you'd say, this is unusual God. When those occasions occur, we need to make sure we've heard from God, right? The Bible says don't believe every spirit, not every spirit comes from God, test the spirits. Test it by the word of God, test it by wise counsel. I believe God here is saying, this is unique, I'm gonna ask you to do something, so that you will trust me to build our relationship. I'll give you an example. Some of you know the story, some of you don't, to me, every time I drive to our church home, I'm reminded of the trust test. So, when Grace and the kids and I moved here three years ago, we didn't really know anybody, we knew maybe two people in the whole state, no friends, family, we didn't know where we were gonna live, God had to provide a house, we didn't know where the kids were gonna go to school and we had elementary, middle school, high school and college, so trying to find a place for everybody and then, we weren't sure what we were gonna do to be honest with you, we considered maybe planting a church, but we weren't resolved to that and so, the kids one Sunday, called a family meeting and said, hey, we want to plant a church as a family, let's do it as a family project. The kids all love the Lord and so does your mom. I was like, okay. Lord, do you want us to plant a church? We felt the answer was yes. We checked with pastors and authority over us and wise counsel and they said, yeah, we believe that's what God is saying. Well, the first question is, where are we gonna meet? Where are we gonna meet? It's hot here in the summer, can't meet outside. If you're new, I'll just tell you what's coming, it's gonna get hot, okay, so we needed a place with a roof. Well, here's the problem, we have no bank account, we have no money, we have no people. Most real estate deals require one to three of those things, amen, like I have no people or money or bank account, how much land can I have? And so, we started praying and asking the Lord and so, I met with one of my pastors, one of our overseers, pastor Jimmy, he's gonna teach at a leadership event for pastors in the Valley here for us in February and I met with him, I said, pastor Jimmy, I'm looking at places to rent, maybe three, 400 seats and he's like, no, don't rent, you're gonna buy. I was gonna say, okay, I have no bank account, no people and no money. He said, you're gonna buy an existing church, it'll be grandfathered in, so you won't need to bring it up to code. He said, I think it will seat around 800, it'll be right off the 101. Okay, okay, right. I mean, he loves the Lord and I trust him, but I'm like, okay, that's fairly specific, amen. That's fairly specific, you know. Sometimes people say, I have a word from the Lord, he loves you, you're like, you know, I knew that, that wasn't super specific. You're gonna get a church building off the 101 that'll seat 800 and you can buy it, that's fairly specific. So, I come back and I meet with some of the realtors in the Valley who do church work and I say, okay, I believe this is God's will for us and they're like, it doesn't exist. I said, has it ever? They're like, we don't know of any church that meets those specifications that has sold. I was like, okay, great. So, you know, pastor Jimmy, it doesn't exist. He said, wait, it's coming. Okay, we hear about this building potentially being available. It had defaulted back to the denomination, there was a church that was renting it, Gideon, my youngest son and I came by after his baseball practice at night, we saw the property, he felt like the Lord would give it to us, he raised a hand, took his hat off and prayed and asked the Lord to give it to us. So, I meet with the pastor, I was like, are you gonna stay or are you gonna go? I said, could you pray about leaving? I didn't say it exactly like that. I said, just pray about it, see what the Lord says, you know, they're charismatic,

they'll do that. So, they prayed about it and they said, we feel like God wants you to have the building. So I said, okay, so I go to the denomination, I'm like, I'd like to have the building. They're like, okay, how are your financials? I was like, well, yeah, I mean, yeah. I'll tell you, we're not in debt, you know, 'cause we don't have anything. So I said, so how about we do this deal, we rent it, this is before we had people, so thank you for coming, I was a little freaked out. So I said, okay, well how about we rent it and then, you serve as the bank 'cause if I go to the bank, it's gonna be a belly laugh, but no funding, okay and if it comes available for sale, we will give you an initial down payment, but then you'll need to give us a year to raise the remainder of the down payment 'cause I got to go find some people to show up that wanna make up the difference and they said, sure. Okay, all right, so we start working on this building and I'll never forget, it was the summer and I'm doing demo with the boys and you know, some of my kids and some of you all were here and thank you for serving and I remember we went back to the kids area and the kids area, it was like Jack Kevorkian architected this himself, it was a haunted house. Outside, it was all rocks and cactus. Which small child doesn't love cactus? And then you go in and it's all this maze, somebody intended well, but it did not execute well, it was a disaster and I thought, this is not a safe place for children. So we started, we're getting ready to demo and I'm thinking to myself, okay, we could tear the walls out, but we don't have any money to fix it, right? And I was like, Lord, what do we do? And he's like, trust me. So, we just started knocking out the walls. I kid you not, somebody pulls in visiting from out of state, drives up, what are you doing, show him around, writes a check to take care of the kids building. Oh my gosh, okay, great, thank you Lord and then we keep doing work and I'm like, I don't know how this is gonna work. Dozens of churches around the world that I never asked anything of started sending checks. I remember going to the mailbox, it was like Easter, it was like, woo, you know, I wonder what kind of candy we get today, this is amazing, right, and God provided and then the building lifted and we could buy it and then we needed the initial down payment, I'll never forget, we were home, we prayed as a family, a friend called, said, hey, I was praying for you, this is how I remember the story, you know, what do you need? And I remember saying, I need money. He's like, how much? I was like, well, it's a lot and I still wanna be friends after this phone call, so I said how much, and he said, I could today give this amount, it was to the dollar, to the dollar of what we needed, I called the guy, I'm like, I said, we're buying the building and we're renovating the building and we have a building and now, I hope people show up and all along the way, every single time, God has provided. Okay and so every time you come here, yeah-- Okay, is that a onetime or an all time? I've asked my pastor friends and they say, it's a onetime, okay, that's a onetime, okay. They're all like, you what? I was like, I what, so no, this was God saying, trust me and I will prove trustworthy, okay. Now, what I don't want to do is say, therefore, all of you, if you see a home you want, just go knock on the door and say, I have no money, but thus say the Lord, it's my house, I have Malachi 3 on my side, that's not what I'm saying. Okay, because some people will use Malachi 3 like God's ATM code. If you just punch in Malachi 3, all the loot comes out. That's not it. If you're in relationship with God, if he has some trust test for you to take, he will tell you and in so doing, he will prove himself faithful and then, when God does provide, the key is whatever you have, don't do this, do this. Lord, what do you want me to do with it? Who do you want me to give it to? And then God says, I could fill your

hands again. So let me say this, I'm grateful for our building, but it's not this, it's this, it all belongs to the Lord. It all belongs to the Lord. I believe that's the heart, I believe that is the principle of Malachi 3 and God does use this word tithe, full tithe, it raises a question, should Christians tithe? I'll answer that 'cause if you're new, you always get two sermons here. It's like a Groupon, you get one 30 minute sermon and I throw in another one for free. You're welcome, okay, so this is the second sermon. So, it just raises this question because it's in the Old Covenant, in the Old Testament before Jesus comes, the Christians need to tithe, okay. Well, it says in Romans 6:14, to the Christians, "You are not under law but under grace." The Old Covenant, the Old Testament was law, here's God's all of rules, demands and decrees, okay, law, things you have to do. We sinned, we broke the laws, we failed, that's the whole point of Malachi, they failed in everything. The whole point of Malachi is to prepare for the coming of Jesus first Christmas. Christmas comes, Jesus comes, he fulfills all of the law, there's no sin, he's perfect and he gives us grace. We now live under grace from Jesus who has fulfilled the law, we are no longer living under the law, okay. That's good news, amen? Okay, so then there's onetime in, what it's called the Gospels, Matthew, Mark, Luke and John, and the New Testament, where tithing as mentioned, just one and it's on the lips of Jesus. "But woe to you Pharisees!" These are religious leaders that are, they're not relational. They're like the people in Malachi, they're yelling at Jesus when they should be listening to him, okay. "For you tithe mint and rue and every herb," these guys are, you ever met a religious person that's more conservative than God, right? Jesus came along and they killed him because he didn't obey their rules and what they're doing though, God said tithe, so literally these guys, how many of you have a spice rack? Okay, if you're a single guy, you have salt and pepper, whatever it is, they're literally going to their spice rack and they're taking out 10% of all of their spices. So, they're giving God 10% of everything. They're really serious about this, right? They're really serious about their resources, they're not very serious about their relationships. They have the same problem that they had on the days of Malachi, "And neglect justice and the love of God." How many of you are resource people, but you're not relationship people? Okay, he goes on to say, "These you ought to have" what? You should have done that, "Without neglecting the others." God is saying, I do relationship and resources. You were doing the resources, you should continue to do that, but you have overlooked and forgotten the relationship. It's not an either/or, it's both and. How many of you know this? If you're married, if you have kids, if you love people, if you have a relationship, it includes resources, amen. It includes resources, so relationship and resources and so, Jesus doesn't necessarily rebuke tithing, he just says, you should do it in a way that is relational. In the remainder of the New Testament, it doesn't talk about tithing, it talks in 2 Corinthians 8-9, if you want to study it, 2 Corinthians 8-9 says that giving should be cheerful, regular, sacrificial, and generous, that's new covenant giving that we give out of proportion and so, it is according to income. In addition, what I would say is that, living under grace should cause us to have a standard that is higher than the law, okay? And this is where some would say, we don't practice the Old Testament anymore, I'd say no, it's fulfilled in Jesus, but he gives us the Holy Spirit, so that we can exceed the demands of the law. Give you an example, I think it's in Matthew 5, the Old Testament had a commandment, one of the 10, you should not murder. Jesus says, in addition to murder, you shouldn't say terrible things about people

because you're murdering their reputation with their words. That's a higher standard. In the Old Testament, one of the 10 commandments was, don't commit adultery with your hands. Jesus says, in addition, you should not commit adultery with your heart. Is that a lower or a higher standard? That's a higher standard because by the power of the Holy Spirit, by the grace of God, by the new life in Jesus Christ, not only can you keep your hands to yourself, you can keep your heart for the Lord and your spouse. So, what I would say is that perhaps some of the Old Testament requirements are a floor and not a ceiling and some of you then would ask, well, what should I give? And my answer would be, ask him because he's the owner, you're the manager. You need to ask the owner how he wants you to manage his resources. I don't know what that is for you, I can't tell you, I don't know, he will tell you, I do know that and so at this time of year, we always, Grace and I have conversation about what are we gonna do this next year? And we ask the Lord and we pray and in different years, he said different things. When we first started the church, I felt like the Lord spoke to me and Grace confirmed it, that God said this year, just volunteer at the Trinity Church. So if you're volunteering, thank you and the church is getting started. So for the first 18 months, we just volunteered and God, he absolutely provided. I had somebody recently say, how? Honestly, I'm still not sure how that all worked. It doesn't make any, it's like, God took care of us, God took care of the church family, God took care of our family, God took care of everything, God took care of everybody okay and what I wouldn't say is, what he told me is what he's telling you. What I would say is, hear from him, hear from him, hear from him, hear from him and do whatever he wants you to do because you know what? It's not about the resources, ultimately, it's about the relationship. Father, it's your stuff, what do you want me to do this year? He'll tell you, just do that, that's all I'd ask and here's what's so great about God, when we give, we get to share in his joy. See, this is the great, you know what's amazing, it's Christmas time, everybody's giving gifts, you know why? Because it's a joy to bless somebody and God blesses people and God enjoys blessing people and when God gives through us, he's inviting us to participate in his blessing, amen. I love you, hear my heart in this. If your relationship is right, I think your resources will get straightened out, okay, I think your resources will get straightened out. Last section, maybe, pastors always say that just so you'll pay attention, it doesn't really mean anything. Giving is Loving. The resources are for the relationship. So for the Christian, we don't use God and people to get money, we use money to love God and people, right? That giving is loving. If you give encouragement, if you give time, if you give service, if you give money to the people and things you love, loving is a verb, loving is doing. "Your words have been hard against me, says the Lord." Some of you are here and you have hard words against the Lord. These people are not atheist, they're angry, they're frustrated, they're unhappy, they don't understand why it's not working. They look at bad people, people that they think are bad and they're healthy and they're rich and their life is fine and they think that they're the good people and their health is bad and their finances are bad and their life is hard. Now just first and foremost, that's a corrupt heart. If you look out and say, God, why do you take care of all the bad people and not the good people like me? God looks down and says, they're all bad people. So, just, there's bad people and Jesus, right? Jesus is over on the other side, all by himself. The rest are all sinners fallen short of the glory of God. But how many of you are here today and you're just frustrated? You're like, I'm sick, I wanna be healthy, I'm poor, I

don't wanna be poor. I got fired and the bum got the job and you know, I love my spouse and they ran off and this other person's terrible to their spouse and their spouse is still there. I love my kids, my kids hate me, Christmas is a disaster and it's so frustrating. All right, don't raise your hand, but if that's you, you're like, God, what are you doing, I don't understand, It's not working, how come, I read the Bible, you got all this stuff, I need some more stuff. You heal people, look at me, help, come on, today, now, is anybody listening? Some of you would say, I would never say that, but you think that and God hears your thoughts. Here's what I want you to know, God can handle you. Amen, God is in heaven going, I tap out right here, they're yelling and I don't do yelling, right? What God says is, your words have been like you are yelling at me, but you know what? God absorbs it, God endures it because God loves you and God doesn't change. I don't care how far you've run, God is not done with you. I don't care how freaked out you've been, how frustrated you are or some of the terrible things you've thought or said, God absorbs it, God endures it. How many of you love someone so much that you have just absorbed a lot to be in relationship with them, okay? God has relationships like that and these people and some of us, we are not where we should be but God is so good, he meets us where we are to lovingly walk us to where we should be. That's the Father heart of God, right? If one of my kids rebels, runs away, I don't say well, that's it, you know, best of luck. What I do is, I pursue them, put an arm around them, even if the kids, I got good kids, but even if they're freaking out and if you had a kid freak out, I'm still your dad. You should be there, you're here. I'm gonna just absorb it, love you, get you to where you need to be because even if you are wrong, I will not change, I'm gonna act like a loving dad. That's the Father heart of God, okay? Some of you don't know this 'cause you didn't have a dad or you had a bad dad or you got a father wound and you have a hard time seeing God as Father, he told us in chapter one and chapter two, he's a Father. This is the Father heart of God. You need to forgive your Earthly father if he's failed you, you need to get to know your heavenly Father who never fails you and one of my great prayers, it sort of leans into the end of Malachi 4, that it says, when John the Baptizer comes to prepare the way of Jesus, that he will turn the hearts of the fathers toward the children and the hearts of the children toward the fathers, that not only does God want you men to know God is father and his heart, he wants you to share his heart, so that your children have a father that loves them, like you have a father that loves you. One of the reasons that this church exists is to do surgery on the hearts of men. That's one of the reasons that I'm here, I love you with all my heart and here, God is modeling for us what a father looks like and how he loves and leads a family and I want this to be a message, particularly and firstly, it's for all people, but firstly, and foremostly for the men who share that great grand title of father, amen, this is the Father heart of God. "Your words have been hard against me, says the Lord. But you say, 'How have we spoken against you?'" God's like, you're wrong and you're like, I don't agree. You're being disrespectful, how? The children of God, sometimes they're like children. You have said, it is what? Vain to serve God, it's a waste, some of you've gotten there. I volunteered at my last church, I quit, it's over, it didn't work, it was a disaster, those people, right. Take a break, we love you, welcome, right. Don't be a greeter until you work that out, okay, I mean, you know. All right. "What is the profit of our keeping his charge or walking as in mourning before the Lord of hosts? And now we call the arrogant blessed." God, you're good to the wrong people,

we took a vote and we decided it's a waste of time to serve you, some people say that, "Evildoers not only prosper but they put God to the test and they escape." They have accusations against God in the form of questions. What they're saying reveals their heart and how God responds reveals his heart. This is, I'll just tell you this, God's wonderful and sometimes, we're awful and God's still wonderful 'cause he doesn't change, okay? Story continues. "Then those who feared the Lord spoke with one another." There was a remnant, there was a group there that sort of came to their senses first. You know what, maybe God's not the problem, maybe we are. Maybe we should focus on the relationship and stop demanding all the resources. Maybe we should have our priorities be his priorities. There's always a remnant, there's always a group of people that their heart opens first and they lead the charge and they spoke with one another, the Lord paid attention and he what? Do you know that God hears your prayers? He does. Sometimes you wonder like, hey, am I talking to the ceiling? God's like, no, you're talking to your dad. Our Father, who art in heaven, the Father's ear is always open, he hears "And a book of remembrance was written before him of those who feared the Lord and esteemed his name." What the people decided to do was to write a book of remembrance in the presence of God. Do you know what this is, this is recounting the faithfulness of God. Here's my assignment for you before the year ends, you need to write a book of remembrance. Before we ask God for what we want next year, we need to thank God for what he gave this year. This is how the children of God develop and cultivate an attitude of gratitude, which works against the gravity of entitlement. We call this journaling as a Christian. I would encourage you, my covenant to God, my commitment to God is to do this and I started doing this, but to do this in totality before the end of the year and just start to look back on, and if you want to go further back, go further back. What has God taught you this year? What has he saved you from this year? Who has he brought this year? What has he protected you from this year? What has he given you this year? Right, what does he put in your hand? And then how does he want you to manage that and steward that, so that it is a blessing to others? This is a big statement, I've lived a ridiculously complex life, right? The highest of highs, the lowest of lows. This was for me, one of the greatest years of my whole life, one of the most enjoyable, fruitful, fun, awesome years of my whole life. The list of things I have to thank God for is remarkably long, so this is gonna take me a while and some of it was through hardship and trial and pain. God is good and God wants to see opened in his presence, a book of remembrance. It hit me last night, I'm happy 'cause all my kids are at home for a while. When they get older, they, you know, they go get a place and a car and they love the Lord, but you miss having them all in the house. Last night, our oldest daughter, she was home from college, just graduated now, she's working on her Master's and she was laying in bed and so I jumped on the top of the covers just to visit with her and she started asking me questions and we got to do a book of remembrance time together, father and daughter. I started telling her stories about when she was like, dad, what about this and what about that? And it led to this conversation where I started telling her about, well, when you were a little kid, did you know that this happened and that happened? And she's like, I didn't know that dad, I didn't know that either, I didn't know that, I didn't know that. I realized there's a lot that she knows, but there's a lot that she doesn't know, of ways that God provided for us and protected us and as I told her that, I thought, oh, this is in the presence of the Lord and

by me telling my daughter of his faithfulness and goodness, it builds her faith in his goodness. Amen? So, start there and what that will do in the presence of God, it will build a relationship and then the resources can work themselves out. I'm not saying they're unimportant, but I'm saying they're in secondary priority position. "They shall be mine, says the Lord of hosts." You're gonna be my kids, I'm gonna love you, I'm gonna bless you, we're gonna work this out, it's gonna be okay, "In the day when I make up my treasured possession," let me ask you this, what's your most treasured possession? Car, house, beauty, status, success? Here's what God says, my people, that's my treasure. You know what that means, you're his treasure. That's amazing and they're looking at him saying, give us treasure and he's like, be my treasure. The most treasured thing that we have at this church after the presence of God, is the people of God. You are a gift, you are a blessing, you are a treasure. I wanna speak that over you, so that you can rise up to be who God destined you to be, his treasured possession and for those of us who are parents, we need to have the Father heart of God and say, you, your child, you are my treasure. You may be by freaking out, screaming and yelling, demanding more stuff, still playing Fortnite and not talking to me, treasure, okay? And I'm gonna love you and we're gonna work on this relationship, okay? Last slide, "And I will spare them as a man spares his son who serves him. Then once more, you shall see the distinction between the righteous and the wicked because one who serves God and one who does not serve him." Here, what we see is people who are very, very, very unfaithful to God. Relationally, they have failed him, resource wise, they have failed him and we see God who is very, very, very faithful. He is working on the relationship with them, he wants to work on the relationship with you, he is exceedingly generous with his words, he's generous with his works and what God is doing here is he's trying to get their hearts open, he's trying to get their hands open, so that he can start to bless them and then they will realize that he doesn't just give to them, but through them and the whole point of this is to prepare people for the coming of Jesus. This is the last book of the Old Testament. This is God's final directives for the first Christmas. You've been working very hard to get ready for Christmas. This is God preparing his people for the coming of Christ and the first Christmas, that's the whole trajectory of the Old Testament. That's the whole point of human history. That's where God is driving the entire story and so, it comes to pass that Jesus does come and what happens is, and think of this as you are wrapping your presents, God, the Father wrapped a present for us, his name is Jesus and he took his son and he wrapped him in human flesh and as you send out gifts, so God sent his son as a gift wrapped in human flesh and so, the Bible says that God so loved the world that he gave his only son, Christmas is all about gift giving, gift receiving, it all starts and ends with Jesus coming as the greatest gift that's ever been given and my question to you would be this, have you received the gift of Jesus Christ? And what happens when Jesus is little, something remarkable, Magi show up, what are these guys? These are Pagan astrologers. Magi is the Hebrew word for Sedona, these are weird guys, these are weird guys. Have you been to Sedona, I mean? All right, so the wise guys, the Magis, we don't know how many they are, but they're following the star, they're like astrologers, but they want to meet God. So, their hearts are actually more open than God's children. Sometimes we think, oh, God's people are the good people, the other people are the bad people. God's like, that's not how I see it. There are these men, these leaders, they're greatly

inconveniencing themselves because they want to meet with Jesus and they want to worship him, even as a baby and they arrive and the gift giving tradition of Christmas is inaugurated and they bring three gifts. We don't know how many men there were, but we know that they brought three gifts, what are they? Gold, Frankincense, myrrh. Gold is what you give to a King. How many of you are not giving out gold for Christmas? Right? Jesus is a King and we give gold to the King, right? Gold, frankincense, what's frankincense? It's incense, right? How many of you right now in your home, there's a candle that gets lit, so the home smells nice? If you're a single guy, you don't understand what I'm talking about. Once you get married, married men testify, the house smells different and better, okay because what women do, they'll light incense or candles and all sorts of like, oh, I didn't know there was an odor that was different than mine, that's amazing, okay. That's what frankincense is, it's incense. Where was it lit and burned? In the temple, the holiest place on Earth, in the presence of God, where the priest would come to mediate between men and God. You give frankincense to a priest who mediates. Jesus is a King, come down to be God and man, to mediate between God and man and as incense was in the presence of the priest, they give it to Jesus as our great high priest who comes to bring the presence of God, the Holy of Holies and then the third gift, what is it? That's a weird one. What do you use myrrh for? Dead people. How many of you are not giving, just don't. If you have a kid, you're like, I was reading the Bible, I'm giving you myrrh. Kids gonna do a word study and be like, you're gonna kill me, okay, that is, they're gonna sleep with one eye open, right? Myrrh is what you use to prepare a dead body for burial. True or false, that's a weird gift to give a kid? True, right? It's weird, like, hey Johnny, I got ya an electric chair and some embalming fluid, happy birthday, who loves you? Right, Johnny's like, I was born into a Scooby Doo episode, this is terrifying. What happens is, it foreshadows that Jesus will give his life as a gift. Jesus is a King who comes down to be a priest, who offers himself as a sacrifice and goes all the way down into the grave, that God the Father sends Jesus as a gift and then Jesus gives his life as a gift. So, if you're here today, let me just ask you, if you received the gift of Jesus, have you received the gift of forgiveness of sins? Have you received the gift of reconciled relationship with God through Christ? And some of you, you'll ask, okay, well, what do I have to give? This is crazy. Give your sin. Jesus wants you to give your worst and in exchange, he'll give you his best. You give Jesus your sin, he gives you his life, his death, his burial, his resurrection, his forgiveness. Amen, Merry Christmas, thank you, Jesus. So, we're gonna take communion, remembering that Jesus gave his body and blood as the greatest gift that's ever been given. He's our King, he's our priest and he is our sacrifice for our sins. I'm gonna invite the band up at this time and we're gonna sing, amen? And we're gonna sing and celebrate Jesus and as we sing, I want you to be asking, Holy Spirit, remind me of the things that you've given me, the people that you've given me, the insight that you've given me, the opportunity that you've given me this year. Cultivate in your heart an attitude of gratitude and singing for us as a form of prayer and God already told us that he hears and so, as we sing, his ear is open as our mouth is open and it's a form of praying together. Father God, thank you so much for your word. Thank you that your heart is a Father's heart, that your heart is a loving heart, that your heart is a generous heart, that God, you are a good God and God, even when we're not good kids, you're a good dad. You pursue us, you love us, you speak to us, you hear us, you forgive us,

you bless us. God, you are amazing, you are wonderful, you are good. God, for anyone here who has run away from home and rebelled against their father, I pray that they would return now. For anyone who's frustrated, please let them work that out with you and have it replaced with faith and Jesus, we confess Christmas is about you, the Bible is about you, history is about you, life is about you, you are a gift and you give yourself to us as the greatest gift that's ever been given. Jesus, we come to worship you now in the spirit of Christmas, as we celebrate Jesus in whose name we pray, amen.

Malachi #6: Learn to Change Your Heart

- Well happy birthday Jesus and Merry Christmas. The first ever Christmas Eve service here at the Trinity Church. If you are new you are surrounded with some wonderful people and I just wanna thank our church family you guys are amazing, it's been an extraordinary year, things are going great, and isn't it fun to be together tonight, amen?

- [Woman] Woo.

- Well, my gift for you is a short sermon. If you're a first time visitor and you come back, this is a one-time only gift. You'll get a little short sermon from me. I hope you guys are ready for Christmas tomorrow. You start to think about it, all the preparation and planning that goes into Christmas and actually God is the one who started planning for the first Christmas. And so what I want to do briefly, perhaps tonight, is for you, I don't wanna lie, but perhaps for you start in the first book of the Bible, Genesis, we're gonna go all the way to the last book of the Old Testament and we're gonna see all the ways that God promised, planned, and prepared people for the first Christmas. And so I'll give you a brief overview, but we're gonna be talking from the Bible. If you're new, this is the Word of God, this is the book that God wrote, this is the only perfect thing on the earth. It's not speculation about God it's revelation from God. And when this book was written, unlike any other book that's been written in the history of the world, this book tells us the future in great detail. In fact, 25% of the Bible at the time of its writing was prophetic in nature preparing God's people for the future. Because God wrote the Bible, God knows the future, God controls the future, and God reveals it. And the centerpiece, the masterpiece of all of human history is one person. We're here tonight to celebrate him, what's his name?

- Jesus.

- Jesus, his name is Jesus. So we're gonna start with the first promise and prophecy way back in Genesis chapter three. This is the first book of the Bible we'll put the notes for you up on the screen. The context is this, God is awesome, God is good, God is glorious, God is grand. God made the world and gave it to us as a gift. As you give and receive gifts this year, remember that all of life on the earth is a gift from God. God made us in his image and likeness. God made us for loving relationship. God revealed himself to us. God extended a hand of friendship toward us and tragically our first parents rejected God, they rebelled against God, they broke God's laws, and in so doing, they broke God's heart. The Bible calls this sin. And at that moment everything that God made was infected and affected by sin, death and destruction, sin and suffering, pain and problems, came into the human world. It doesn't matter how many wars we fight, it doesn't matter how many dollars we spend, it doesn't matter how many politicians we elect, it doesn't matter how many protests we hold, the world does not change because it has a problem at the core of who we are and that is sinners by nature and choice. Only the Bible makes sense of human history. Only the Bible makes sense of your history. We are the problem and we needed a solution. And at this moment that our first parents rebelled and brought death into history God showed up.

God could have abandoned us, God could have neglected us, God could have left us unto ourselves, instead God pursued us. And some of you who are here tonight you do not know but God has been pursuing you. God is pursuing you. God has been speaking to you and I pray tonight that he would speak to you. And to our first parents he made the first promise and he promised that Jesus was coming. And he tells his enemy, his adversary, our enemy and adversary, this in Genesis 3:15, "I'll put enmity between you and the woman, between your offspring and hers." "He," that is Jesus, "will crush your head and you will strike his heel." This was written 1,400 years before Jesus was even born on the earth. We're now 3 1/2, nearly a thousand years from this utterance. And the problem was humanity, and the promise was that through a woman a man was coming. Most of the time in the Bible, it speaks of children coming through their father because it was in that culture, a patriarchal culture. Here there is no mention of an earthly father because it is the first intimation of the virgin birth and the coming of Jesus that he would have an earthly mother, but he would not have an earthly father and that he would come to undo all that has been done through sin. That where our first parents had failed that he would come to be faithful. So from that moment forward, God's people were anticipating, leaning, yearning, expecting the coming of the Savior, this Messiah, this deliverer. And God continues to give revelation, God continues to give prophecy, God continues to prepare God's people and to point them into the future because the hope is coming. The problem is down here and the solution needs to come from up there. So then there is a prophet that is raised up 700 years before Jesus Christ even walked the earth. And some of you may think that Christianity is one among many religions it is not. Our Bible is exclusively unique. Other books do not include prophecy because they are not written by God and they are not revelations of God. And here we hear through this great Prophet Isaiah, the scripture that most of you, if not all of you, have received at some point on a Christmas card. I want you to see where it comes from and what it means. "Therefore, the Lord himself will give you a sign." Who will be with child, the virgin, so we're narrowing down our options, amen? Right, a woman is gonna give birth to a son and she'll be a virgin. This really limits the number of candidates for this fulfillment. "The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, a son, and we'll call him Emmanuel." What does that mean? God with us. Here's what you need to know. We don't go up to God, God comes down to us. Every other religion teaches in some form, fashion, or falsity, that we go up to God, we die and reincarnate, pay off our karmic debt. That our good deeds outweigh our bad deeds, that in some form or fashion, we go up to God. The truth is none of us, none of us can go up to God, but God has come down to us. This is the miracle of Christmas, this is the mystery of Christmas, this is the majesty of Christmas and his name is Jesus. He is Emmanuel, God with us. What that means is Jesus is God. And just as you wrap up presents and give them as gifts so Jesus wrapped himself in human flesh and God came down to give himself as a gift. And this was of course, referring to his mother, Mary, being that virgin. And then 700 years before Jesus was born we were told where he would be born. We read this from the prophet, Micah, Micah 5:2. "But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah," that is the region, "Though you are small among the clans of Judah," small town and tribe, "Out of you will come for me one who will be ruler or King of Israel. The people of God whose origins are from old, from ancient times." That's originally written in the Hebrew language and that word literally means from eternity, from eternity. And

so the promise was given that a woman would give birth to a son that that son would be born of a virgin and that son would be born in the small town of Bethlehem. If you know the Christmas story, you know that Jesus' family did not live in Bethlehem. In fact, they lived far away from Bethlehem, but in the providence, in the sovereignty, in the dominion of God, God allowed there to be the decree of a governmental census. And what happens is everyone has to go to their hometown of their family of origins to register for tax purposes. I have good news for you. God can even work through governments, God can even work through taxes, that is a miracle, amen? And so that's what God does here. He works through the government seeking to increase their tax base. Everyone has to go to their family of origin's hometown because his adoptive father, Joseph, is a descendant of the great King David, his family home traditionally was in Bethlehem. So Mary very much pregnant, I don't know if she walked or rode a donkey, but this teenage girl made the long journey to the town of Bethlehem at the exact time that she was, as the Bible says, great with child. As she gave birth to the Lord Jesus, where? In Bethlehem, she was only there for a short period of time. That was not her home or residence, but the God who rules over history, the God who knows history, the God who reveals history, and the God who enters into history, brings everything that he promises to pass. So he is born of a woman, he is born of a virgin, he is born in Bethlehem and then we would know that he would come when as a man he would perform extraordinary miracles. He would do things that no one else can do and make claims that no one else would claim as Jesus was an adult male walking the earth. You need to know that he said something that is unique in the history of the world. In the history of the world there has never been the founder of any major world religion who declared himself to be God, who declared himself to be God. Jesus openly, Jesus repeatedly, Jesus emphatically, Jesus unapologetically declared himself to be God. He was hated, he was despised, he was opposed, his reputation was slandered, his life was taken not because he was just a loving and kind and generous person though he was, but because he continually said that he was God. And when they came to him and they declared that he was lying, he said, "If I am lying, then also examine my works." "Listen to my words and watch my works," and he was referring to his miracles. And what he was saying is if you don't believe the words that I say, watch the works that I do. And Jesus, it was promised, would be a miracle worker. Isaiah 35:5-6, "Then the eyes of the blind will be opened, the ears of the deaf unstopped. The lame will leap like a deer and the mute tongue sound for joy." We know that Jesus performed at least three dozen different miracles while he was alive and walking on the earth. The Bible says that he also had so many additional miracles, that many volumes of books could be written if we recorded them all. He, he fed thousands of people with a little boys, Lurchable, that's amazing. He raised a dead guy. The Bible says that the dead guy stinketh so he was very dead. Jesus went water skiing without a boat, that's different. He did things that no one else does, amen? He did things that no one else does and he is the miracle worker. Then comes the promise of Isaiah and this is one of the most rich deep sections of the entire Old Testament. And the promise was given about Jesus 700 years before he was born. Just pause for a moment and consider this. How many of you would like to know the future? Every one of us would like to know the future so that we could prepare for it. Imagine if someone knew the future 700 years in advance. Here's what I'm telling you, friend, if God did not write this book, then who did? If God did not

reveal these things, then who did? If this is not in fact from God, then for what cause could we possibly explain all of this tremendous prophecy, promises, and preparations? This is the book that God wrote and it's all about who? Jesus. And so it is said regarding him 700 years before his birth, Isaiah 53: 8-11, he was cut off from the land of the living. That Jesus was healthy, he was young, he was in his early 30s, he was sick, he was very much strong, he worked as a carpenter. He was a single man. He traveled great distances on foot, but that ultimately he would be cut off from the land of the living, what does that mean? That he would be killed prematurely as a young man stricken for the transgression of my people. What that intimates and refers to is that Jesus would substitute himself, that he would die for us, for our sins. The Bible continually uses this little word to explain this big result of the suffering of Jesus. The word, for. Christ died for our sins, that he died for your sins, that he died for my sins. The concept here is one of substitution. The wage for sin, the penalty for sin, the consequence of sin is death. It is separation from God and when our first parents sinned against God and separated themselves from God, they unplugged from the source of life and the death cycle ensued. And when Jesus comes, he pays our price, he steps in our place, he endures our penalty and he dies for our sins. That's exactly the cause of his mission. And it goes on to say, "Stricken for the transgression of my people. They made his grave with the wicked and with the rich man in his death." The point of Jesus' death is it was promised and prophesied, it was foreshadowed, and foretold that when he died he would be buried in the tomb of a rich man. Question, was Jesus rich or poor? He was poor. How could a poor man be placed in the grave of a rich man? The Bible tells us the story that when Jesus died, there was a gift given to him post-mortem by one of his more quiet followers, a very affluent man named Joseph of Arimathea. That man was probably a political leader that's what his title seems to infer and indicate, and so he was an affluent, wealthy, prominent man who had purchased for himself, a very expensive, a nice burial chamber and when Jesus died, he gave it to Jesus. They had nowhere to lay his body and then his body was placed in a rich man's tomb. Jesus did not manufacture this historical fact. This was something that God ordained and prepared. Now the good news for Joseph is he got it back. It was like a hotel stay for just a few nights it was not a big deal, alrighty, it was basically just a couple of nights at the Motel 6 and then he got the keys to his tomb back. But the promise was made that he in fact would be laid with the rich in his death. And let me say this at the time of Jesus' death, the tombs of dozens of holy men, I use those that word in quotations, when they died their graves were memorialized. Much like in our own day, if someone is loved and they die, we build a monument, a memorial to them. If there's someone famous like a political leader, we just had the passing of a former President and everyone knew that that person had died and they memorialized their death and they commemorated their life, and they, they leave legacy for that person's body to be remembered we know where the bodies of famous people are. Well, let me just say this Jesus is the most famous person in the history of the world. More books have been written regarding him, more songs have been sung to him, more paintings painted of him, than anyone who has lived in the history of the world. The Christian church is the biggest movement of any sort or kind in the history of our planet. There is no one bigger than Jesus. We measure time by Jesus into BC, before Christ, AD, anno Domino, the year of our Lord, and the biggest holiday on planet earth is what? It's Christmas. And so if we know where dead people who are

significant are buried, the question is, do we know where Jesus is buried? Answer, we do not. I've been to Israel where he lived and taught, died and rose, a few times. Every time I hire an archeologist, or a professor, and I ask them to take me out to see the sights and I always ask them the same question, "Where was Jesus buried?" And the answer is, "We don't know, we've gotta couple of spots we could take you, we'd be happy to take your money, and that's what a tomb looks like, we don't know where he was buried, no one can find him." You know why, he's not there. Not only did Jesus die, Jesus rose, that's where Isaiah continues. "Made his grave with the wicked and the rich in his death, although he had done no violence and there was no deceit in his mouth." What he is saying is, is that Jesus had no sin of any sort or kind, with his words or his works. Jesus never said anything that was not true, including declaring himself to be God. Jesus never did anything that was unholy. Jesus' life is perfect. Jesus life is without sin. Jesus in fact makes this claim, "Who of you can cause me to be found guilty of sin?" And not, even if you're here and you're not a Christian, we don't say this, amen? In fact we have a very different statement which is nobody's what? Perfect. Jesus raises his hand and says with one exception, that's either true or false. He's either a truth teller or a tremendous liar. And the Bible declares that he would come and that he would be put to death for our sin, though he himself would commit no sin, and it goes on to say, "When his soul makes an offering for guilt, he shall see his offering, he shall prolong his days and the will of the Lord shall prosper in his hand." What does that mean? He's coming back after he dies he will rise. Jesus said this openly, emphatically, repeatedly, if I die, when I die, I will return three days later, all of that came true, all of that came to pass, all of that is actual, historical, and factual. And this is why Christians we worship on Sunday. Jesus, as a devout Jew worshiped on Saturday. To this day devout Jewish people, they meet on Saturday. God's people started meeting on Sunday, which was for them a great expense and inconvenience because for them that would have been a workday, that would've been their Monday. And the reason that they started meeting on Sunday was that was the day of Jesus' resurrection. That was the day that sin was forgiven. That was the day that death was conquered. That was the day that relationship with God was reconciled. That was the day that heaven and the Kingdom of God and the great grand glorious gift of eternal life was given, amen? And that's, that's why God's people gather on Sunday. It was promised that he would rise and he did. "Out of the anguish of his soul he shall see and be satisfied by the knowledge shall the righteous one, my servant, make many to be accounted righteous, he shall bear their iniquities." Again, that is referring here to Jesus taking your place. And what it is referring to here is that Jesus would die on a cross and when it says that he would be pierced, when it says that he would be punished, this is hundreds of years before crucifixion was even invented. Here God is not only foreshadowing the forthcoming of the crucifixion of Jesus, he is promising and prophesying, the coming of crucifixion. It was created by the Persians hundreds of years later. God knows the future, God sees the future, God rules the future, God controls the future including yours and mine. That friends our day on this earth will come to an end and God knows what awaits on the other side and his name is Jesus. He has gone through death to the other side, he has come back to testify, and he has promised us, "I am the way I am the truth, I am the life, no one comes to the Father but by me." And it was Jesus' great way of saying, if you follow me I know and control the future and I have a great destiny and a purpose and a

plan for you. Let me tell you I have good news for you. You come from God, you're not here for no reason. You're here to meet with God, you're here to belong to God, you're here to experience newness of life with God. You're here to experience the destiny, and the power, and the greatness, and the grandness, and the glory of what God has for you, and your family, and your children, and your children's children. You're not an accident of evolution. You're the child of a living God made in his image and likeness. You're not from no one, here for no reason, die and going nowhere. You come from God, you find your meaning in relationship with God and when you die you will stand before the same God and his name is-

- Jesus.

- That's exactly what he is promising. In addition, it goes on to say that he would arrive by 70 AD. Thus far God has established that he would be born of a woman, born of a virgin, born in Bethlehem, perform miracles, including his resurrection, that he would die for our sin and rise as our Savior and that all of this would happen on a historical continuum before the year 70 AD. I'll prove it to you. We're now at the last book of the old Testament, we made good time, amen? We just went from the first book, to the last book of the old Testament, Merry Christmas, that's my gift for you, there you go. All right, Malachi 3:1 "See, I will send my messenger." Who's that? It's a guy named John the Baptizer, he is a prophet and he goes before telling people about Jesus. If you were brought here tonight by someone who was telling you about Jesus, they are following in the ministry of John the Baptizer. They're saying, you know what, I want you to meet Jesus, I'm a friend of his, let me introduce you to him. When we love someone we wanna introduce them to other people we love, amen? That's how it works. Well, John loved Jesus and he's the last of the Old Testament prophets and so he goes before because he loves Jesus and he introduces Jesus to other people. Some of you are here today and you're wondering why am I here? Because God has a destiny for you, because God has affection for you, because God wants a relationship with you. And what God did is he took someone who knew him and loved him and someone who knew you and loved you and he had that person be the one to introduce you to this place so that you could meet this person, his name is?

- Jesus.

- That's why we're here. Well, Malachi says, "I'll send my messenger Who will prepare the way before me. Then suddenly the Lord," that's the Lord Jesus, "you are seeking will come to his temple." The temple was the holiest place on earth. The temple was the place where the presence of God was available to the people of God. God is in heaven, we are on earth, and the temple was the connecting point, the most sacred point between the two. True or false, the temple still stands today? It no longer exists. Again, I've been there multiple times and I was disappointed, I saw a pile of rocks. It looked like the boulders, but it was not a temple, I'll just tell you that. I asked, "Where's the temple?" They said, "It's gone." When did it disappear? It was attacked and destroyed in the year 70 AD, a long time ago. Well the Messiah we are told would come to where? The temple, the temple no longer exists, it has not existed since 70 AD ergo, this person that

we have been waiting for, he has already come. If you're here and you're one of our Jewish friends, and we love you, you are a physical descendant of Abraham. You need to know that apart from Jesus, you are not a spiritual descendant of Abraham. That Jesus is the physical descendant of Abraham and he is the spiritual fulfillment of the promise given to and through Abraham. And if you're among the Jewish people, whom we love, and we are honored to have, and you were saying, I believe in Messiah and I'm awaiting his coming he has already come. He had to come before 70 AD, the priesthood no longer exists, the temple no longer exists. He's already come, his name is? His name is Jesus. The story goes on, "The messenger of the covenant, whom you will desire, will come, says the Lord Almighty." And that language of covenant is language of love, it's language of friendship, it's language of, of relationship. My wife, Grace, and I we've been married for 26 years, we're in a covenant, it's a unique and special loving relationship. God wants a unique and special relationship with you. He doesn't want you to just know about him he wants you to know him. He doesn't want you to just walk into church once in awhile, he wants you to walk with him every moment of every day. And that's the language of covenant. I have good news for you, there's a God who knows you, there's a God who loves you, there's a God who forgives you, there's a God who seeks you, there's a God who pursues you, there's a God who will never fail you, there is a God who will never leave you nor forsake you. And he has done an extraordinary thing and we celebrated here in this place tonight. He has come down to be with us so that we could be with him. And then it says the last lines of the Old Testament, Malachi chapter four. This is spoken regarding John the Baptizer and the result of the ministry of Jesus. "He will turn the hearts of fathers to the children and the hearts of children to their fathers." Let me speak to the men. Men are the problem and God's men are the solution for most of the social ills, for most of the crime, for most of the problems. God is a father. Jesus Christ is the Son of God and the revelation and the reflection of the Father, heart of God. One of the reasons why I am in Scottsdale, Arizona, I am on divine assignment from the Father to seek fathers, to encourage men, to aspire, not just to enjoy women, but to build legacies, loving women and serving children. And I am so honored and glad to have all of you, but let me just say this men, all these children running around, they're glorious, we love them, make all the noise you want kids, drink hot chocolate and go home with your parents, We love you. But the wellbeing, and the joy, and the health, and the safety, and the future, and the legacy of children is largely determined by the quality of their father. This is a place that is established by authority from God the father, to raise up men. To raise up men to love and honor women, and to bless and enjoy children. We live in a cursed world and things that are done particularly to children are despicable, deplorable, and damnable, but we want to meet the Father. We want Jesus to be our big brother and the Son of God. We want God to do heart surgery on men so that we have the Father's heart. We want to love our children the way that our Father loves us. We want to forgive our children the way that our Father forgives us. We want to bless our children the way that our Father blesses us. And so for you men my encouragement for you is starting in this moment, covenant to walk with God as your Father, have him welcomed into your life to do heart surgery on you, pray with your wife, read the scriptures, talk about the Word of God with your children, lead them in the purposes and plan of God. Too often it is women who are begging their husbands to walk with God, rather than celebrating that their husbands are walking with

God. I want you to know that this includes some of you men doing as Jesus' own father, Joseph, did. Joseph was a tremendous man who adopted Jesus and was not his biological father. Jesus not only had a perfect Father in heaven, he had a fantastic father on earth and Jesus Christ wants you men to love children as his father on earth loved him, and as his Father in heaven loved him. What I'm saying men is tonight when you go home, thank God, if you get to be a dad, and thank him twice if you get to be a granddad, amen? For those of you men who are single think about a good legacy and not just a good time. Think about loving for decades and making the last day of your marriage, the best day of your marriage. And tomorrow, for those of you who are fathers, for those of you who are grandfathers, love your kids, bless your kids, unburden your kids, invest in your kids, thank God for your kids, pour life into your kids, because what he is saying is there are two kinds of people, those who are cursed, and those who are blessed. We live in a world where men curse their wives and they curse their children. God wants to bless men to bless their wives and bless their children. How many of you men, this resonates in your heart and soul. You know that this is why God made you, you know that this is why God is saving you, you know that this is God's intent and purpose for you. This is the last line of the Old Testament. This is God's way of preparing everyone for the coming of Jesus and the celebration of the first Christmas. And he wants to start with the men, of course he involves and includes the women and the children, but if men would have a heart for their children and if children would have a heart for their father, then there could be generations of blessing, where there has been generations of cursing. Some of you come from long lines where your parents knew and loved and serve the Lord and they blessed you, praise God for that, continue that legacy. Some of you come from families where it is not the case that it was cursing and not blessing, it was burdened giving and not burden lifting, it was life taking, and not life-giving. Well, this is the day that God has appointed for you. This is the day that God has appointed for you to break a spiritual curse against the history of your family, to forgive, to be unburdened, to forget what lies behind it, and to move forward with the future that God has for you. We're not just talking about dying and going to heaven, my friend, we're talking about living in the presence of God so that heaven begins not the day we die, but the day we meet Jesus, amen?

- [Congregation] Amen.

- That's why we're here. My job, my honor, my joy is to tell you about Jesus. Your job is to make the most important decision of your entire life. The most important thing about you is what you think about Jesus, what you decide about Jesus, whether or not you would receive him or reject him. And I have a great, great, great, great invitation for you. We've all made great preparations for this Christmas season, amen? I just showed you God made preparations for more than 1400 years, getting us ready for the birth of Jesus, the coming of our Savior, the great Son of God. Some of you have traveled over great distances to be here with us, we're honored to have you. Jesus Christ made the greatest journey of all time. He came from heaven to the earth. He went from a throne to a manger. He humbled himself to be with you. He humbled himself to be like you. He humbled himself to give himself as a gift for you. You need to know that when Jesus was born, gifts were given to him, gold, frankincense, and myrrh, but ultimately Jesus

came as the greatest gift that's ever been given. The reason that you're gonna give gifts tomorrow, and receive gifts tomorrow, is all of that follows in the wake of Jesus. Here's what the Bible says, this is such good news for you. "God so loved the world that he gave his only Son that whoever" any of you, you or you or you, God'll save the balcony, God'll save the people that are standing up, God'll save the people in the back, God'll save the guy on his phone, whoever. "Whoever believes in him need not perish, but have eternal life." Friends, eternal life does not begin the day you die, it begins the day you meet Jesus, this should be that day. Now what you need to do, you can clap if you want. Tomorrow, when you receive a gift, you need to open it. A small child testified in the front row, said, "yeah." All right, out of the mouth of babes, right? Have you ever seen a kid give 'em a gift and they didn't open it? If so you have a weird kid I'll just tell you that right now. I mean, we still love 'em, but they're a weird kid. Every gift I've ever given to a kid one thing happens they open the gift and they enjoy it. Jesus comes to give himself as a gift to you. You need to receive him. You need to open that gift. You need to invite him into your life. I'm gonna give you an opportunity to do that right now. If you have never received Jesus, somebody say, I grew up in church, you can grow up in church and not grow up in Christ. Some of you say, I believe in God. The Bible says, so did demons and it's not a real bonus round for them. It's not enough to go to church. It's not enough to believe in God. Some of you say, well, my family believes in God, great, but it's a single-file line into the kingdom. You need to also make your own decision. Have you ever received, Jesus? Have you ever made a conscious decision of the mind and heart to say, Jesus, I receive you? Starting right now, forgiveness of sins, eternal life, new relationship, I receive that from you. And if you've never done that, let me just tell you the whole point of Christmas is not that you would just give gifts, but that you would receive the greatest gift that's ever been given, his name is Jesus. I'm gonna pray for you in just a moment and I'm gonna invite the band up right now because we should sing, amen? I mean we gotta sing some Christmas songs and we gotta have a little Jesus party. Jesus is alive, Jesus is seated in heaven, Jesus has conquered sin, Jesus has conquered death, Jesus has a destiny and a future for you, God, through Jesus Christ knows every hair on your head, knows every longing of your heart, knows every day of your life and right now wants to meet with you. And as you sing out to him he hears you and he responds and this is one of the ways that we enjoy our relationship with Jesus. And you know, what's amazing I'll tell you what's going on right now. Jesus is alive, did you know that? Jesus is alive? Furthermore, Jesus is seated on a throne and he's being worshiped by angels. When Jesus was born on the earth, the angels came down to sing. Do you remember the Christmas story? They came down to sing at the birth of Jesus. Well, Jesus is in heaven now and so the angels are in the presence of Jesus and they're singing, and worshiping, and celebrating because every party needs a band, amen? So here's the good news, you get to take the place of the angels, you get to do what the angels are doing in the presence of Jesus, and one day together we will all do in the presence of Jesus, and that is to sing and celebrate. And as you sing you need to know that our voices go into the presence of the living Jesus, that our voices combine with that angelic choir and that it is a great day in heaven, it's a great day on earth. And so we pray, thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven, amen? All right, I think we should sing, are you ready, Pastor Dustin? What do you got for first song, buddy? First song?

- We're gonna stand together and we're gonna sing, "O Holy Night."

- "Oh Holy Night," please stand and join us.

- Come on family.

- Here, let me just pray for you. Father God, thank you for these people, thank you for this great night, thank you for this extraordinary church family, thank you for providing this building, thank you for filling it with wonderful people, thank you for all the little kids that are running around and having fun. Lord Jesus, we remember that you were a kid. You came for kids too. You came to live and die and rise and you are good, you are God, you are glorious, you are victorious, you are ruling, you are reigning, you are healing, you are forgiving, you are altering lives, you are changing destinies. We are so glad to be with you. We're so glad to belong to you and as we lift our voices, we say, thank you, Jesus, happy birthday to you and Merry Christmas to us, amen.