

## 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.