



## YEAR 3—The God Who Pursues Relationship: A Story of God's People

### *Module 5: The Message of the Prophets*

#### *Lesson 6: God's Desire for Israel to Overcome Complacency—Malachi 1-4*

### BIBLICAL REFLECTION

*(A theological and biblical reflection on today's Scripture passage.)*

### GOD'S STORY

Malachi is the last book of the Old Testament, marking a time around 100 years after the rebuilding of the temple. The Israelites had again become complacent and forgotten the core message of God. Malachi was brought in by God to set things straight by steering the people away from laziness with God, especially the priests who were failing to set the right example for the people.

The tone of Malachi is penetrating boldness, as he challenges the Israelites to realize how much God loves them and honor Him back accordingly. Even the religious leaders began to offer shoddy worship offerings that defied the commands of the Law (Leviticus 1:3). Actions they thought no one would notice God brought into the public forum.

Another matter Malachi addresses is divorce, highlighting both the relational and spiritual complications it creates. The people were not only being unfaithful to God but also to each other. Consequently, they formed an inaccurate view of what it meant to be in a relationship with God. The book ends with a recalling of what Moses and Elijah shared with them, as well as a look toward the future Messiah.

### OUR STORY

Notice in these chapters how the leaders fell sort and the people followed. One of the most neglected responsibilities of a leader is nurturing one's soul. Before you can truly take someone to a destination with confidence and experience, you must first go yourself (or at least have gotten a map from someone else who has). In desperation we must daily seek God redirection, allowing Him to change us before we ask Him to change others.

In God's system, the leaders always go before the people. Whether they are prophets, priests, or kings, each is called to lead the charge as one set apart by God. In general, the people will not follow nor awake from complacency until someone picks a direction and sounds the alarm. The presence of someone on the frontlines setting the pace will often inspire others to come out of the dark and into the battle.

You are a leader and will serve as someone's "priest" or "pastor" in some way. Leadership like this is less about a structure you live by and more about picking a direction, such as toward the Lord himself, and walking toward it while assuming others will follow. Christian leadership is specific in saying, "Follow me as I follow Christ." If you reproduce who you are, consider what needs to happen in you to produce dangerous, thirsty Christ-followers.

## *OTHERS' STORY*

Malachi 3 shows that the people were tired of serving God because they didn't see any tangible gain from it. To them, it even seemed that those against the Lord were "winning" in the world. The Jews started to lose sight of the eternal kingdom by prioritizing happiness in this realm.

Our calling as Christians includes getting others to do what they don't want to do in order to achieve what they've always wanted to achieve. The first sermon Jesus ever preached said, "Repent" (Matthew 4:17), and one of His last commands before ascending back into heaven was that "repentance should be preached in His name" (Luke 24:47). This is more than a one-time attempt to bring them to Christ or to try to get out of hell and into heaven. Reaching others requires determined, deliberate, definable actions with a clear goal in mind.

This is why the Holy Spirit convicts us—not to kick us, but to inspire us to the life we know we could be living instead of the one we've settled for. People may have their guard up and it's important that we don't attack it but try to work with them as innocently as we can.

## *THE WORLD'S STORY*

The amount of complacency and evil in the world can overwhelm anyone. It's common for people to point fingers and ask why God isn't fixing anything. We may even get distracted by the trouble versus being in awe that the Lord is still seeking out His wayward people. If we do, we may interpret God's alleged inactivity for His alleged unconcern.

The people in Malachi's day started to doubt God's justice because they couldn't see any discipline of the wicked (Malachi 2:17). The Persians remained in power, while the Jews remained under their thumb. It was a classic issue of "Why do bad things happen to seemingly good people, and vice-versa?"

By now we should know that the Lord doesn't stop loving us and is what happens in this world isn't the ultimate reality. God may give us time through certain situations to sort things out and return back to Him. When we look at the evil in the world and wonder why God isn't fixing things, He may be asking the same question of us. If we did, we might be amazed and overwhelmed that God doesn't send us all to hell but send His Son to save us.

There are no shortcuts in reaching the world, just like there are no shortcuts in growing our relationship with the Lord. No matter how many tools or gimmicks we use to try to make an impact, it always comes back to our connection with the Lord. Even if we lose all of our Bible studies, buildings, gatherings and more we can still be His people—the salt of the earth and the light of the world.