

OVERCOMING FAMILY CHALLENGES

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Message Study Guide

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Malachi served as a prophet to Israel about four hundred years before the birth of Jesus. He brought a message from God which reminded the people of His love and rebuked them for their disrespectful worship. But through Malachi, God ended the Old Testament with a prophesy about future restoration.

Malachi 4:5-6

"I will send you the prophet Elijah before that great and dreadful day of the Lord comes. He will turn the hearts of the fathers to their children, and the hearts of the children to their fathers; or else I will come and strike the land with a curse."

Just over four hundred years later, John the Baptist, "the Elijah who was to come" (Matthew 11:14), began to preach a message of repentance. The purpose of John's ministry was to prepare hearts for the coming of Jesus; "Prepare the way for the Lord" (Matthew 3:3). But according to Malachi, John would also cause the hearts of fathers and children to turn toward one another.

When the Spiritual fellowship between man and God was broken, a basic void was formed in man's heart which led to a breakdown in his earthly relationships. The moment we lost the ability to walk in perfect harmony with God, we also became filled with self-importance and pride, and lost the ability to truly love one another; "But if we walk in the light, as He is in the light, we have {true} fellowship with one another" (1 John 1:7). Walking closer to Jesus allows us to walk closer with others; "We love because He first loved us" (1 John 4:19).

God created us to be in fellowship with other people - even imperfect, hard to love people. Our quiet and peaceful times of study and prayer are essential for our Christian walk; but some of God's most important truths can only be learned as we stumble through difficult situations with others. Only there can we learn the difficulty of true grace and forgiveness; only there can some of our own deep sin (like pride, jealousy, and anger) be revealed.

Many relationships are filled with past pain - particularly the relationships between parent and child - but God's Word still stands as truth. He has provided the path to restoration; a path which begins with repentance, requires the cleansing of sinful pride, and leads to a heart filled with love and forgiveness.

Who do we need to reconcile with today? Full restoration requires the cooperation of both parties; but as a child of God, we can now cross the desert and begin to mend what is broken. Jesus died as a sacrifice for the forgiveness of our sins in order that we may be reconciled with our Heavenly Father. He crossed ALL the way over and completely mended our shattered heart! Let's walk in the light of His love and take the necessary steps to humbly reconcile with one another.

QUESTIONS:

1. Which of your relationships need mending?
2. Who do you need to reconcile with today?
3. Who, in your family, is hard to love? Is this because of past pain or problems?
4. What is the next step you must take to reconcile with that family member?

Malachi 2:13-16 NKJV

¹³ And this is the second thing you do: You cover the altar of the LORD with tears, With weeping and crying; So He does not regard the offering anymore, Nor receive *it* with goodwill from your hands. ¹⁴ Yet you say, “For what reason?” Because the LORD has been witness between you and the wife of your youth, With whom you have dealt treacherously; Yet she is your companion And your wife by covenant. ¹⁵ But did He not make *them* one, Having a remnant of the Spirit? And why one? He seeks godly offspring. Therefore take heed to your spirit, And let none deal treacherously with the wife of his youth. ¹⁶ “ For the LORD God of Israel says that He hates divorce, for it covers one’s garment with violence,” says the LORD of hosts. “Therefore take heed to your spirit, that you do not deal treacherously.”

THREE BIG FAMILY CHALLENGES

1. REJECTION

Rejection is a big issue facing many in the church today. Because of our fear of rejection, we live our lives as a slave to what people think of us, instead of living up to what God thinks of us. If we continue to live only up to what people think, we’ll never please everyone. All that matters is that we please God. In Galatians 1:10, we are reminded that, “If pleasing people were my goal, I would not be Christ’s servant.”

To reject means “to throw away,” “discard.” Rejection is the act of “being denied love.” The feeling of being discarded leads us to believe that we are unloved. When we feel unloved, we deem ourselves worthless. As much as we feel rejected/unloved/worthless, that is how much we are unable to receive love, whether from God or people. Often, we hear when people tell us they love us, but we don’t truly recognize that love for the gift it is. Instead, we wait for the proverbial “other shoe” to drop, and anxiously anticipate when that love will be withdrawn.

The Enemy, Satan, is a liar, a thief and a murderer. He’s a liar because he tries to convince us that what he is saying (through our perceptions) is true – that we are worthless, unloved, un-cared-for. This idea directly contradicts Scripture. In many passages, we are told of our value in God’s sight. He is a thief, because he tries to steal our faith, our peace, our joy, our freedom in Christ. In fact, in the Greek, the word for “steal” is “klepto”. Just as in life, too often, the theft isn’t noticed until it’s too late. He is a murderer because he wants us to give ourselves over to worthless pursuits – things that are empty and void of any purpose or plan, thereby “killing” any chance we have to engage in meaningful, Kingdom-building activity. He is a destroyer because he destroys (completely ruins) lives and causes regret over things undone or dreams unpursued.

But, the grace that shines through is this: Jesus is the opposite of all of that – the antidote, the remedy! He’s Truth personified. He restores instead of stealing. He rebuilds instead of tearing down, and that which He rebuilds is beautiful. He is Life itself! In laying down His life, He restores life to us.

There are four walls of rejection.

Rejection of God: God says in His word that we are His children, that we are made in His image – beautiful. Anytime we think less of ourselves than this, we are, in effect, rejecting His word, and by connection, Him.

QUESTIONS:

- 1. Do you reject God's beliefs toward you?**
- 2. Read Psalm 139. Do you still feel rejected by God?**

Fear of Rejection: We want everyone to like us. But, at the same time, we tend to sabotage our relationships. We don't keep in touch like we should. We get close to someone and then pull back. Could it be that we are afraid of losing them at some point? Is it that, maybe, by being in control of when the relationship ends, we won't feel rejected because we are doing the rejecting? It's a vicious cycle – we try to run from relationships because we don't want to risk being hurt – but in doing so, we feel more rejection, and so the next time we have the chance to enter a relationship, we withdraw further, adding more perceived rejection. It's hard to trust people when we are caught up in a cycle of rejection – always wondering when they will end up not liking us for whatever reason. So often, it feels like it is easier to not even get involved.

QUESTIONS

- 1. Do you keep people at a distance, especially family, for fear of being rejected?**
- 2. Has the loss of a past relationship affected your current relationships?**

Self-Rejection: Have you ever watched Sesame Street when they had the “One of these things just doesn't belong here, One of these things just isn't the same” segments – a group of things where 3 are similar, but 1 item is really different? When dealing with rejection, we can feel like the thing that wasn't the same – out of place. But, to think that the first sacrifice ever (Gen. 3:21) was made so that Adam and Eve could have a permanent covering for their “shame” reminds us that Jesus' sacrifice covers us from our hopelessness, worthlessness and worse.

QUESTIONS:

- 1. Is your hopelessness beyond the reach of Christ's sacrifice?**
- 2. Have you believed a lie from Satan about your life?**

Rejection of Others: A lot of people have hurt us over the years – some intentionally, some not. It's hard to let go of that hurt. We have to remember that forgiveness is a choice, not a feeling. We may not feel like hugging the people that hurt us, but we can still choose to forgive them. In forgiving, we release our pain, leaving it at the feet of our Father. We ask God to come and fill the hollow places left when we release the pain, and we ask Him to bless those who have hurt or offended us. We do this so that we can stand before our Father and receive the forgiveness He offers to us (Matt.6:14-15). We may not feel like we have forgiven, but in that moment, we receive our freedom in Christ from the bitterness that once bound us.

QUESTIONS:

- 1. Is there someone you need to forgive?**
- 2. Do you feel truly forgiven by Christ?**

Malachi 1:2-3, 6 NLT

2. REBELLION

Malachi 2:11 NKJV

2 Corinthians 6:14-15 NKJV

Should Christians marry non-Christians?

In this scripture, Paul does not specifically or directly refer to the marriage relationship. Nowhere will one find the command, "*Thou shalt not marry an unbeliever.*" Indeed, we find reference in the NT writings to such unions. Paul, in 1 Cor. 7:12-16, speaks to those who are married to unbelievers, encouraging them to stay together, working to bring their partners to a saving relationship with Jesus Christ. The apostle Peter also encourages wives of unbelievers to work to win their husbands to the Lord (1 Peter 3:1-2). Obviously, religiously mixed marriages are not the ideal situation. In fact, there are serious problems involved with such unions, and many are destined to fail. Nevertheless, they do exist, and Christians who find themselves in such circumstances should do their best to bring a positive influence to these

I have seen unbelievers brought to the Lord by believing spouses. Paul even alludes to such in 1 Cor. 7. I would personally never encourage such a union, and would strongly counsel against it. It is my conviction that believers should NOT marry unbelievers. I feel very strongly that such unions will present some difficult challenges to both spouses; it is simply asking for trouble! One of the passages I quote in wedding ceremonies I perform is from 1 Peter.. He charged husbands and wives to be "*heirs together of the grace of life*" (1 Peter 3:7). When husbands and wives journey together toward their heavenly home, that is the IDEAL in marriage. That ideal is not realized when husbands and wives are traveling separate paths spiritually. They are "unequally yoked" ... they are pulling in different directions. The tragedy is that many believers are pulled down the path to destruction by the unbelievers. That is the very real danger of being "unequally yoked" with unbelievers. This is especially true in the marital relationship.

QUESTIONS:

- 1. Do you think you should marry someone to try and “evangelize” them?**
- 2. Should you adhere to “not being unequally yoked” altogether? Should you weigh out the “pros” and “cons” before entering the relationship or should you just avoid it altogether?**

3. DIVORCE

Divorce is a sin! Perhaps you may think that marriage is the "old fashioned" way. If that is your thought on marriage, then let me say that marriage is the "right way" as well. It does not matter what has changed over time, marriage will always be the right way within the sacred boundaries of God's law. Marriage is right between a man and a woman!

There is no perfect marriage. There are no perfect families. You always get the good with the bad...such is life. It is ok for a marriage to hit some potholes in the road. These cannot be completely avoided simply because we are all human beings prone to anger and disobedience against God. We are going to hit some potholes in the road; however, it is those open manhole covers that we need to watch out for. It is unrealistic to believe that you can live with another human being for any length of time without eventually having cross words between each other, etc.

A marriage should be based upon one another's love for each other. Unfortunately, many marriages today are based upon economics, loneliness or an unexpected pregnancy. If you are in such a marriage, it is still a legitimate marriage in the eyes of God. Perhaps you married for the wrong reasons, many people do. That is ok, you just make the best of your marriage and don't let other people interfere. Two wrongs never equal a right. Wrong is wrong! If you feel you married the wrong

person, then you need to ask God to humble you. Anyone can live with anybody if they can learn to be a nobody. This whole idea of finding the perfect mate is an illusion. Remember, Romans 3:23 declares, "*For all have sinned...*" I don't care who you marry, they're a sinner too. We all have faults, and commit sins. Leaving one spouse for another will just bring more problems. It is not uncommon for a couple to wonder after a few years if maybe they should have married someone else. However, it is still a sin to divorce your spouse. Don't do it. If you need to separate for a time, then do so...but never ever consider a divorce. If you do, you are willingly sinning.

QUESTIONS:

- 1. Do you know someone who is contemplating a divorce? What can you do to help?**
- 2. Should divorce be the first option of a troubled marriage? Even when adultery is involved?**
- 3. What steps should those in a troubled marriage seek to restore their marriage?**

Malachi 4:2 NKJV

Genesis 32: 7-8, 24, 26, 30-31 NKJV

Genesis 33:1, 4 NKJV

1. HEALING IN HIS WINGS

Malachi 4:2 NKJV, NLT

2. LIKE CALVES RELEASED FROM THE STALL

Malachi 4:3 NKJV

3. YOU WILL TRAMPLE DOWN THE WICKED