



**HABAKKUK,
ZEPHANIAH,
HAGGAI & MALACHI
DEVOTIONAL**

By Pastor Phil Emerson

NAME: _____

OUR DISCIPLESHIP FLOW

At Emmanuel Church, we are passionate about living out the call to be disciples of Jesus Christ, and make it our goal to see His Kingdom come in our lives and the world in which we live. We recognise that in Biblical times, a disciple was someone who followed a teacher or rabbi, not simply to gain head knowledge to pass an examination, but to be fully immersed in the life of the rabbi, and *learn his ways*, so that they in turn could replicate this to the world around them. As Christians, we are now those who have been invited to ‘follow’ Jesus and all of His ways, and we therefore call ourselves His disciples.

“This is how we know we are in him: Whoever claims to live in him must live as Jesus did.” 1 John 2:5,6

We therefore want to take seriously the words of Jesus in Matthew 28:19-20 to make disciples and also commit to an ongoing journey of teaching and discipleship together.

We all have differing personalities and learning styles. At Emmanuel, we recognise this diversity within the church body and therefore desire to support and journey together as we relate with God and each other in some of the following environments:

- **Public (20+)**

In the Bible, we see Jesus seeking to make disciples as He engaged with larger numbers of people, e.g., His interaction with the crowds (Matthew 4:25; Luke 14:25), and the 72 (Luke 10:1-24).

At Emmanuel, we want to use each of our **larger gathered environments** as an opportunity to make disciples, e.g., **Sunday services, Friday Youth/Kids’** environments, **men’s/women’s** gatherings.

- **Social (10-15)**

Jesus demonstrated the necessity for **smaller accountable relationships** as an essential part of the life of a disciple. He did this by teaching and doing life with his twelve disciples (e.g., Matthew 10).

At Emmanuel, small accountable relationships are offered through:

Lifegroup 12s

These are **gatherings of 10-15 people** who meet bi-weekly in homes or around specific interests, e.g., crafts, football.

- **Personal (2-5)**

As well as having smaller accountable relationships amongst His twelve friends, Jesus also seemed to go to even deeper levels of trust with three in particular – Peter, James and John (Matthew 17; Mark 9). At Emmanuel, we seek to do this through:

Lifegroup 3s

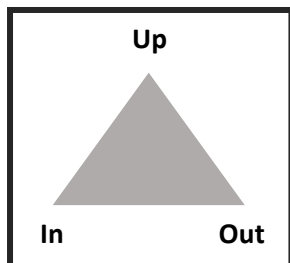
These are smaller **gatherings of 2-5 people** who are committed to transparent and accountable relationships in order to grow together in following Jesus. The aim for these groups is that after 1-2 years, each person in the group would be able to lead a smaller number of people themselves and replicate the process... **disciples making disciples!**

- **Intimate (1-1)**

Jesus regularly withdrew to spend time alone with the Father. This is the ultimate goal of discipleship, that each member of our church family would increasingly spend time alone with the Father and grow in devotion and desire to see the Kingdom come.

A TOOL TO USE

As stated previously, 1 John 2:6 makes it clear that for those of us who call ourselves disciples of Jesus, our goal should be to daily walk in the ways of Jesus, our Rabbi. As we examine the New Testament we see that Jesus lived His life based on three relationships: **Up** – with His Father; **In** – with His chosen followers; **Out** – with the hurting world around Him. This is illustrated in the following triangle:



Jesus taught and modelled out to His disciples how to live into each of these areas in life.

Up

Jesus frequently left the disciples to spend personal time with the Father (Mark 1:35; Luke 5:16). He taught them the significance of prayer, and how to pray and communicate with the Father (Luke 11:1-13). When comparisons with one another or insecurities presented themselves, He spoke into it in love and challenged them into a greater depth of living (Mark 9:33-37; Matthew 18:1-5).

In

Jesus had significant relationships with others in which He intentionally invested (12s and 3s). When He went to engage with the Father He brought the three with Him (Matthew 17:1). He taught them and modelled out the significance of Sabbath and rhythms of rest (Mark 6:31). He demonstrated with His life the significance of generosity and sacrificial love for others (John 13:1-17).

Out

Jesus personally lived a life that engaged with the crowds and the broken world around Him. He healed the sick (Matthew 8:1-4), fed the poor (Mark 6:30-44), and cast out demons (Matthew 8:28-34). But with the people who were closest to Him, He challenged them to do the same (Mark 6:37), and when they took risks themselves He critiqued and gave honest feedback to call out more for them (Luke 10:17-20).

As we spend time alone or together in this devotional, we want to help and encourage you to engage in each of these ways – UP, IN, and OUT.

HOW TO USE THE BOOK

First

If you haven't already done so, please take a second to fill in your name on the inside of the front cover. There'll be a lot of identical books floating around, and we don't want yours to get lost.

Prepare

Get ready for each session by spending some time to invite the Holy Spirit to speak to you. The Bible is a written word (logos), which becomes a living word (rhema) as the Holy Spirit breathes upon it and speaks directly to our lives through it.

Commit

Commit to the journey. Discipleship is not a commitment to a moment, but to a lifetime journey. As you personally commit to journeying with God daily, commit to others by sharing what you are learning (possibly in Lifegroup 12s or 3s), and in this way encouraging one another in what God is saying.

Reflect & Respond

Each day, as you spend personal time with God, we encourage you to ask the following two questions:

- 1) What is God saying to me?
- 2) What am I going to do about it?

This is how we become doers and not just hearers of what God is saying.

INTRODUCTION TO HABAKKUK

Habakkuk, a contemporary of Jeremiah and Zephaniah, writes this little book in which he converses with Yahweh with a barrage of questions. I think this is what I value most in the prophets, their huge questions and their lack of inhibitions to ask them.

The name Habakkuk means 'embrace'. As you read through this prophecy of Habakkuk you will discover that this is the very problem he wrestled with (the lack of embrace) and eventually learned the answer to. Because of this, he becomes a comforter and embracer of his people in their distress.

The prophet lived in a time very similar to our day, a time when everything was going wrong. He lived when there was great national corruption and distress, when the land was filled with violence, hatred, and outbreaks of evil. His distress is reflected in the opening phrases of the book: *"How long, O Lord, must I call for help and You don't listen!"* Sound familiar to you today?

This little book is number eight in the list of twelve minor prophets. Let's go for it! Get your Bible, journal, pen, soft seat, and a cuppa. I hope you learn much and enjoy.

Love and prayers,
Phil

Live

Habakkuk lived in a time when Babylon was gaining more traction and God was using this corrupt system to judge the disobedience of His own people. Habakkuk is really struggling with this and we have a barrage of questions from him to God about how He could tolerate such injustices. The Hebrew for “tolerate” here carries the idea of looking upon or watching something. Habakkuk's complaint is wondering how the Lord can watch the evil that's going on and not do something about it. We could ask the same. As we look around at the world, we wonder why God allows evil to continue, why the righteous suffer, and why the wicked appear to live carefree lives. Those are legitimate concerns and there are places in Scripture that address them.

What Habakkuk writes here can apply to the ungodliness we see in the world as a whole; however, he's not talking about those who don't know God, he's referring to his fellow Jews, God's chosen nation. Habakkuk is frustrated by the injustices that are happening and the strife that existed among the ones who should have known better. At the time, Judah was ruled by King Jehoiakim who was cruel and corrupt. The law was paralysed because it wasn't being honoured. Those who had been overtaken by wickedness were causing problems for the righteous ones.

Habakkuk looked around at all the evil his fellow Jews were committing and wondered why the Lord was letting them get away with it. Habakkuk is saying, "God, why are You allowing those who have turned away from You to have power over the ones who are true to You?" As we read on, we will see that God had a plan for dealing with the people's wickedness. God is a just God but He's also a patient God. We can have righteous anger over evil in the world and the Christians who are setting a poor example, but we need to be thankful that God is tolerant of us. Let's tolerate God's tolerance.

Pray

Father, thank You for giving grace, healing, and tenderness more than I can imagine. Thank You that I don't have to be ashamed of my lingering battle with shame. There's *nothing* about me You don't know. You don't love me as I should be or will be, but as I am, right now. In Jesus' strong name. Amen.

REFLECT

What is God saying to me?

RESPOND

What am I going to do about it?

Live

This chapter opens with a gem of wisdom that we would do well to adhere to. Habakkuk says, 'I am going to leave the matter with God and wait for Him to take the next step. I have gone as far as I can.' Have you ever done this? Or are you like me – when you bring a problem to God and explain it all to Him in prayer, you take it back and start worrying about it again? When Habakkuk hands it over, the Lord responds, 'Habakkuk, I am going to tell you the answer. I want you to write it down, and I want you to write it so plainly that anyone who reads it will be able to immediately tell the answer abroad.' This is why I tell you at the beginning of every single devotional to get your pencil and journal ready. You need to be ready for God to speak clearly to you today and every day!

Every good thing we have comes from the Lord. He is the fountain of pleasure and delights, the God from whom all blessings flow. He gives to us cheerfully, not begrudgingly and He redeems us fully, not partially. I can think of many times in my own life where I've handed things over to the Lord only to take them back again and fumble them up. If you are like me in that, this is a great chapter today and a great time to say three huge words, 'Lord, forgive me.' The Lord assured Habakkuk that everything was under control and he could trust Him. Here we find the verse that Martin Luther often turned to, *"The righteous will live by faith."*

There are five woes in this chapter. The first (verses 6-8) deals with the sin of theft. The second (verses 9-11) deals with the sin of injustice. The third (verses 12-14) deals with the sin of violence. The fourth (verses 15-17) deals with the sin of exploitation. The fifth and final woe (verses 18-20) deals with the sin of idolatry. Strong stuff here!

Pray

Father, my wandering heart tends to run after answers elsewhere when YOU ALONE are to be desired and treasured. Compared to You, Father, all other gold is fool's gold and all other currencies are counterfeit. I trust in the real deal today. In Jesus' strong name. Amen.

REFLECT

What is God saying to me?

RESPOND

What am I going to do about it?

Live

This chapter is aptly entitled 'Habakkuk's prayer'. It is one of the most beautiful, poetic passages in all the Scriptures. Read it and see how the prophet is going back and remembering what God has done in the past. God is the God of history; He has everything under control. Many of our problems are too big for us and can only be solved by our relationship with God. Let's run to Him today and lift our eyes to the Lord in the midst of our problems. Let's remember the God of our salvation, the God who is our strength, and find the answer right in the middle of affliction.

God had told Habakkuk about the coming invasion by the Babylonians, describing the arrogance and cruelty of these invaders in chilling detail. God also told Habakkuk about the great and awesome judgments He would bring upon Babylon and indeed upon all the nations of the earth that refuse to submit to Him. Habakkuk is terrified at what will soon take place. He feels physically weak, barely able to stand.

My friend bought me a great book called 'Hinds' Feet on High Places', based on the final verse in Habakkuk. The book is written as an allegory, similar to John Bunyan's 'Pilgrim's Progress'. It tells the story of a girl named Much Afraid and her journey from doubt to faith. Her story begins as she leaves the Valley of Fear. This is all she has ever known, but in faith she embarks on a new journey. Her path is marked by much sorrow and suffering, but through it all she learns to depend on God and find her strength in Him alone. And as she learns to trust God no matter what, He leads her to the higher places of fellowship with Him that she has always longed for.

Choose to rejoice in God even when everything in life goes wrong. Find strength in God to scale the heights, no matter what.

Pray

Father, thank You for this revelation of truth I find running throughout the Scriptures, that You are the God of history. No event takes place but that which is in Your program. All things are moving in relationship to Your divine kingdom. In Jesus' strong name. Amen.

REFLECT

What is God saying to me?

RESPOND

What am I going to do about it?

INTRODUCTION TO ZEPHANIAH

The name Zephaniah means ‘Yahweh Hides’ or ‘Yahweh Has Hidden’. Zephaniah was almost certainly born during the long, wicked reign of Manasseh. He was different from all the other prophets in that he was born of royal lineage and was probably hidden for his own protection. Zephaniah's purpose was to announce coming judgment on Judah in the Day of the Lord. However, he said that judgment would extend to all the nations of the earth, indicating that the Day of the Lord would also bring deliverance for Israel and the Gentiles.

There is a Day of the Lord coming for us all. How easy it is to live life and forget that we will all stand before God and give an account! This little book cuts to the chase and brings conviction to our hearts. It's amazing how quickly the busyness of life can take our eyes off God's imminent return. His promise in the closing verses of the Bible is, *“Behold I come quickly”*. Other scriptures remind us that He will come *“as a thief in the night”* and *“in such an hour as we think not the Son of man comes”*. These scriptures, along with the 25 plus references in the Bible to *“the Day of the Lord”*, ought to stir us today to turn our attention to God. That's what this little book is all about.

Grab your Bible, journal, pen and a cuppa, and let's get going. I pray you are as challenged as I have been.

Love and prayers,
Phil

Live

These minor prophets had a rough old job. They were living in the times when destruction was coming on the house of Judah because they had forsaken the Lord. They were worshipping Baal and Molech and God's long-suffering was getting shorter. Verse 1 of chapter 1 tells us, "*The word of the Lord came to Zephaniah the son of Cushi*". Then he jumps right into the message. Verses 2-4 show us that it is a message of God's judgment, a stern warning of impending doom. In verses 4-6, God talks about why this judgment is coming. This is important; they need to know why the punishment is being given, so they can learn not to do it again. God lists a number of sins they were involved in that were bringing about His punishment. If we are wise, we will pay attention to these because God is the same yesterday, today, and forever. The things that angered Him against Judah and Jerusalem back then are still offensive to Him today.

I am intrigued by verse 6: "*Those who have turned back from following the Lord, and those who have not sought the Lord or inquired of Him.*" Here, we find a different kind of sin. It was not the sin of *committing* anything; but rather the sin of *omitting* the worship of God. He says, 'You have turned back from following Me, you have not sought Me and you have not inquired of Me.' This is a very convicting word from God. We usually think of sin as particular acts like murder, adultery, stealing, cheating, lying, lust, drinking, gambling, etc. But James 4:17 reminds us that there is another category of sin – not only things we commit, but also things we omit. This neglect, this not thinking about God or giving Him consideration, is a serious sin. The greatest sin is breaking the greatest commandment, right? That makes sense. And what is the most important commandment? "*Love the Lord your God with all your heart.*"

Pray

Father, I am convicted today about how many times in the last number of days I have failed in my quiet times and in simply spending time with You, my Abba Father. Please forgive my lack of discipline in these areas. May I love You more. In Jesus' strong name. Amen.

REFLECT

What is God saying to me?

RESPOND

What am I going to do about it?

Live

Zephaniah describes approaching judgments not to drive the people to despair, but to drive them to God and to their duty; not to frighten them out of their wits, but to frighten them out of their sins. His prophecies about the nations reminded the Judeans that Yahweh was sovereign over all the earth. He was not just singling out Judah for punishment. God is not given to partiality. It would be good to remind ourselves that God is not mocked and we reap what we sow. If there is one major thing we learn from the prophets it is that God will not tolerate sin.

This chapter sounds like one of those films where judgment is coming and all human securities will be overturned. The truth is, things can't go on like this forever. Life as we know it is moving towards judgment day. Even on an individual level, our own bodies are decaying and falling apart, the physical world is groaning beneath us, and God has His plans all worked out. It is important to remember that all God's ways are purposeful. This is not about things naturally falling apart or the sun running out of fuel or the universe expanding into a big freeze or forces of physics deciding how it will all pan out. History as we know it will be wrapped up because the Lord has decided to wrap it up. The world will not end because of global warming, nuclear holocaust, a pandemic, or an asteroid. History will be brought to a conclusion because of the decision of the Lord our God. We are in a story, authored by the God of history and He has an ending in which He stands up to testify. Like Lt. Columbo at the end of the murder mystery putting all the pieces into place, the final judgment will be a purposeful wrapping up of history. Not only will it be purposeful, but it will also be personal. Notice the personal words being used: "My wrath", "My fierce anger". Judgment is not about impersonal forces having their way. Judgment Day will reveal the personal, settled hostility and wrath of our God.

Pray

Father, I weep over the years spent in seeing Jesus more as my model to follow than my righteousness to trust. In Him are all the things I need. In Him I stand redeemed. In Jesus' strong name. Amen.

REFLECT

What is God saying to me?

RESPOND

What am I going to do about it?

Live

In verse 2, there are four evidences that the people of Jerusalem had been rebellious against Yahweh: they had been unresponsive to the prophets whom God had sent; they were unteachable and refused to accept correction; they did not trust in Yahweh; they did not draw near to God in repentance and prayer. These would be four great investigations into our own souls! God is shown as a Father with a broken heart. The love of His life, His own daughter, has spurned Him thoroughly.

Always remember that it is God's love and kindness that lead us to repentance. Maybe we need help to hate our sin and not hate ourselves. There is no other god like our true God who is so holy and so merciful, so welcoming and so eager to redeem, so patient and so filled with unfailing love. Let's worship Him alone today as we finish this little book. Think of the mercy He has had for us and the price He has paid for us. If God were to deal with us according to our sin, we could not stand, and if He repaid us for all our transgressions, we would be lost forever.

We learn much from Zephaniah but two things stand out. Firstly, God is as angry at sin as we think He is. We don't serve a sentimental God and we can't domesticate Him. We serve a God who is so full of passion and blazing emotion that He burns, and yes, *smokes* in the ferocity of His infinite, holy love. Secondly, God is over-the-top in His grace to sinners who deserve judgment. One of the most awesome descriptions of the wrath of God in judgment appears in verse 15, "*He has taken away our judgments and cleared away our enemies.*" So, what do you do when you realise that you are a far greater sinner than you had realised, and that God is far angrier at sin than you could dream? Rejoice! God has taken away our judgments and dealt with our enemies. What a God, what a story of redeeming love!

Pray

Father, my hope is sure, for it is built on nothing less, nothing more, and nothing other than Jesus' blood and righteousness. Though I remain broken, I cannot be more loved. You will finish the work You began in me. In Jesus' strong name. Amen.

REFLECT

What is God saying to me?

RESPOND

What am I going to do about it?

INTRODUCTION TO HAGGAI

The book of Haggai, second shortest in the Old Testament, has a potent message. It tells us to put first things first in our lives. It was written to people who would have told you that God must be first. They truly believed that, but, just like us sometimes, they had drifted into a way of life where their intellectual belief in the supremacy of God was not reflected in the way they were living. They gave lip service to the priority of God, but lived with other priorities. God sent this prophet to help His people get their priorities in line with what they knew they should be.

Haggai is the first among the post-exilic Minor Prophets. Of the twelve Minor Prophets, the first nine spoke *before* Judah was carried away captive, exiled to Babylon. The last three (Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi) spoke to those who returned from the 70-year exile. Gone was the glory of the former kingdom and temple. Gone was the great population. All that was left was the rubble of Jerusalem, the remnant of the people, and the task of restoration.

Some people today also face a task of rebuilding, maybe following a job loss, relationship crash, grief or sickness. Lift your eyes and voice to heaven today. He is the Author and the Finisher! Haggai reminds us that no part of our story or sphere of our life is outside God's interest and care. He is Creator and Sustainer, Redeemer and Restorer, Author and Finisher. We can praise and adore God because of His finished work.

This is a great wee book, clearly divided into four messages. See if you can spot them! Grab your Bible, journal, pen and cuppa, and allow the Spirit of God to speak to you from this great prophet.

Love and prayers,
Phil

Live

In order to understand Haggai's message, we need to remember that the people to whom he was speaking had made the difficult decision to leave their established way of life in Babylon and make the dangerous journey back to the land of promise. They had homes and jobs in Babylon; most of them had been born and raised there. But they knew that God's purpose for His people involved the Promised Land. By faith, they responded to the call to return and committed themselves to the hardships of getting re-established in the land that had been devastated by war. Shortly after returning, they made an attempt to rebuild the Temple, but opposition stopped the project. Gradually, they lost their vision and drifted into a lifestyle where God's house was no longer the priority; it was nice but not necessary, extra not essential.

If you know Christ, there was a time when you made a personal commitment to Him. You decided to follow Jesus. At first, you were zealous for spiritual things, read your Bible every day, got involved in a local church. But perhaps your efforts met with difficulties. You had a personality clash with another Christian, or you were disillusioned, or you encountered personal trials that God didn't remove, even after much prayer. Meanwhile, life moved on. You started a career and a family. You had bills to pay and other demands on your time. Church and the Lord's work drifted into the background. You still attend church as often as you can, but it has become a piece of life, not the centre of life. You tell yourself that you just don't have time to serve as you used to. Someone else who doesn't have the responsibilities that you have will get involved instead. Without deliberately rebelling against God, you have drifted into putting your house above God's house. When your conscience nags, you have to explain why things are this way. I love verse 8. We are told that God is pleased and glorified when we put His house above our prosperity.

Pray

Father, I know You created me for wonder but often I'm prone to wander. I pray for my heart – already new by Your grace, but still broken by the fall and rebellious by choice. You have won and washed my heart, and today I choose to follow You. In Jesus' strong name. Amen.

REFLECT

What is God saying to me?

RESPOND

What am I going to do about it?

Live

The necessity of removing His people from the land which they had forfeited by disobedience brought heartbreak, even in God Himself. God's love and tenderness for His people is amazing. When the people were restored to the land of Canaan, after they had been working only about a month, the Lord provided strong assurance of the promise that He was with them. God had promised the Messiah through them. His prophets had foretold the birth of Jesus in Bethlehem and so restoration was inevitable. It's good to know that God is with us through all the trials and tribulations. He is always there!

This message *"Be strong"* was amplified when they remembered Israel's history, reading the book of Deuteronomy during the Feast of Tabernacles. They heard the record of the three times Moses told Joshua and the people, *"Be strong"*. They also remembered the three times the Lord told Joshua, *"Be strong"*. And when King David charged Solomon with the task of building the temple, three times he told him, *"Be strong"*. This wasn't an empty phrase; it was an important part of their Jewish history. It's one thing to tell people to be strong and something else to give them a solid foundation for those words of encouragement. Haggai told them *why* they should be strong and work – the Lord was with them. The Lord's word *"I am with you"* is the single most powerful promise for anyone embarking on God's call. So, be strong!

The second encouragement is God's covenant in verse 5, *"Do not fear"*. The promise of God's presence with His people is guaranteed by His unchanging Word. The third encouragement is God's promise in verses 6-9. With prophetic insight, Haggai looked ahead to the time when the Son of God would minister in this Temple and bring the glory of God into its city. John 1:14 says, *"The Word became flesh and made His dwelling among us. We have seen His glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth."*

Pray

Father, thank You for the One who came and died in our place. Help me to slow my pace and quiet my heart, that I might survey the wonders of Your sacrifice and the riches of Your love for me. In Jesus' strong name. Amen.

REFLECT

What is God saying to me?

RESPOND

What am I going to do about it?

INTRODUCTION TO MALACHI

Malachi is the last of the twelve Minor Prophets. Like Haggai and Zechariah, he is writing to post-exilic Jews. The only difference is that a few decades have passed since the people came out of Babylon and the temple has been rebuilt.

Malachi writes not so much about idolatry, like all the other prophets; rather, he writes of the cold-hearted indifference of the priests in their service and in their teaching. It is this lack of love on their part that prompts Yahweh to remind them of His own faithfulness. Temple service was now just professional and routine. These people had grown so cold in heart they couldn't see the grace of their God, even when it stared them in the face.

This book brings a reminder to never mix up service for surrender and work for worship. Martha becomes Mary when she drops her to-do list and sits at the feet of her master. That's a good place to sit today! As I read this wee book I am challenged as to the state of my own heart before the Lord. I'm sure there are many areas of in all of our lives where we long for greater freedom.

Grab your Bible, journal, pen and your brew, and let's close off the Old Testament together.

Love and prayers,
Phil

Live

Israel was like an insensitive wife who is oblivious to the frustration and unhappiness of her husband. If you had asked Israel about her relationship with the Lord, she would have responded, "It's okay." But if you asked her partner, the Lord, He would have said, "It's awful! My wife is unresponsive to My love. If I were to leave, I don't think she'd miss Me!" Malachi falls into two sections: the indifference of the priests to God's love, and the indifference of the people to God's love.

In the Old Testament, what begins with a blessing in the Garden of Eden ends in this last book with the threat of a curse because of sin. But the New Testament reveals God's gracious solution, the coming of Jesus Christ to bear the curse of our sins. Israel was a people familiar with the things of God. As a matter of fact, they were born into the covenant community. Their whole lives from infancy were centred on their religion. However, how easy it is to shrug our shoulders at things we've heard from day one.

For Malachi's readers, things were not going as they had expected, so they grew discouraged. They had been back in the land for around 125 years. The temple had been rebuilt and Nehemiah had recently led the people in rebuilding the walls of Jerusalem. But there were only about 100,000 Jews back in the land. They didn't have an army to protect themselves. They were still under the rule of the Persian king and his so-called governor. Their farms were not producing well because of drought. Many of them were probably thinking, "God hasn't fulfilled His promise of a land flowing with milk and honey." But God is saying to Israel, "The reason you're back in the land after captivity but Edom is desolate and forsaken is that you're My chosen people." May that be an encouragement to all today. Ephesians 1:4 reminds us that we are chosen in Christ before the foundation of the world.

Pray

Father, some people have way more power over my heart than they deserve. Their criticism and rejection can devastate me and their praise and appreciation can make me. May Your great love *for* me and delight *in* me be the pivoting point for me, not man or things. In Jesus' strong name. Amen.

REFLECT

What is God saying to me?

RESPOND

What am I going to do about it?

Live

I have always loved this chapter where we see how God feels about marriage. It is holy to Him and He loves it. When we sin against our marriage, we sin against something holy to God. At the beginning of chapter two, Malachi mentions a covenant with Levi and in the latter half he again introduces the topic of covenant. In verse 10 he talks about the covenant with their fathers and accuses the people of Judah of profaning it. In verse 14 he says to the men of Judah concerning their wives that she was their companion and wife by covenant.

Covenant has importance in Malachi, just as it has throughout Scripture, and just as it has for us as a church. A covenant is a bond between two or more parties that secures a special relationship. The idea is that when God graciously enters into a relationship with a people, He secures that relationship by means of covenant. He reaches down to a people who have done nothing to earn His grace and favour. He makes promises to commit Himself to them for their good and for His glory. He promises, *“I will be your God and you will be My people and I will dwell among you.”* That statement is the essence of the covenant promise God makes among His people.

We have a God who promises that those who belong to Jesus Christ will never be cast aside. Whether you're single, married, divorced, remarried, widowed, celibate or anything else, it's a promise that's magnified and expanded in the new covenant. We have a God who created and shapes our heart by the power of His love. We have a God who calls us to love Him. As the church, we are the bride of Christ. Whether married or single, we have to acknowledge that marriage is God-ordained and special. Failure to pray for and nourish our marriages is like failing to drink water, get sleep, or breathe air. The outcome is pretty predictable and not good at all.

Pray

Father, there's no other relationship with greater power to expose our brokenness and reveal Your grace than marriage. And there's no other relationship that Satan is more determined to wreck and destroy. So, we come to You today, praying for marriages. In Jesus' strong name. Amen.

REFLECT

What is God saying to me?

RESPOND

What am I going to do about it?

Live

If “*My messenger*” in verse 1 is John the Baptist, then “*the Lord whom you seek*” and “*the messenger of the covenant*” are referring to Jesus Himself. It is the Lord who is like a refiner’s fire and fullers’ soap. It is He who will purify the people of the covenant, and, despite our feelings and fears about this, this is actually good news! Sin separates us from God, it clouds and distorts the good creation God made us to be and we are helpless to clean ourselves. Enter the refiner of gold and the washer of clothes to do the cleaning for us. It is not an easy process, of course; there is pain involved in refining and cleansing, dying and rising, but it is a process that is designed for our well-being to prepare us for the coming of the Lord. God comes into our midst as Emmanuel. He comes to destroy the evil in us and in the world. He comes to draw us out of death into life. And though that is an alarming prospect, it is also one that should fill us with great joy. I love F.B. Meyer’s statement: “*If you are just now in the fire, dear soul, be of good cheer – it shows at least that you are silver and are capable of performing more acceptable service in God’s holy Temple.*”

These people in Malachi were certainly in the fire. They had become lazy in their love for God and in their giving. God calls it robbery because they had unlawful possession of what belonged to Him. Not only tithes and offerings belong to God; *everything* we have belongs to Him, according to Psalm 24:1, “*The earth is the Lord’s and the fulness thereof, the world and those who dwell therein.*” However, He allows us to keep some as managers on His behalf. Tithes and offerings are different. They are not given to us to manage, they belong to what the Lord calls “*My house*”, the house of the Lord. The Scriptures remind us that where a person’s heart is that’s where their treasure will be.

Pray

Father, this is the only place in all the Bible You ask me to prove You and it is in the area of giving. Help me to remember that it all belongs to You. May my heart be ever drawn to You. Let me be a cheerful giver to You. In Jesus’ strong name. Amen.

REFLECT

What is God saying to me?

RESPOND

What am I going to do about it?

Live

Here we have the Old Testament coming to an end. The voice and prompting of the Holy Spirit would soon lie dormant for four hundred years. Malachi prophesies of a day when the judgment of the Lord would come, a day we still wait upon. Before that day, John the Baptist would rise with the spirit of Elijah. The Day of the Lord is a great, glorious day that His people should long for. Paul, in his last days, looked forward to the Day of the Lord. He wrote, *“Henceforth there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, will award to me on that Day, and not only to me but also to all who have loved His appearing”* 1 Timothy 4:8.

How were the Israelites to prepare for the arrival of the Messiah? They were to *“remember the law of My servant Moses.”* Horeb (also called Sinai) refers to the mountain Moses went up and received the law from God. It is called *“the mountain of God”* in Exodus 3:1 and 1 Kings 19:8. God called the Israelites to remember His law, statutes, and rules. They were not to reinterpret or redefine them, they were to obey them.

How are Christians to prepare for the return of Christ? We do not remember and obey the Law of Moses, but the Law of Christ. The Law of Christ is the recognition that Jesus has fulfilled the law according to Matthew 5:17 and has called us to love the Lord our God with all our heart, soul and mind, and love our neighbour as ourselves. I love how Paul reminds us in Romans 13:10 that *“love is the fulfilling of the law”* and we accomplish this through faith in Jesus Christ. How powerful is the truth of the Word! It is like a bottomless treasure chest full of richness and every time we go into it, we are overwhelmed at God’s revelation. So, we go out leaping because resurrected life can’t be held back, because the power of the gospel is dynamic, not static.

Pray

Father, how I long for that Day when there will be no more death, pain, or mourning, no more knowing in part or loving in part. Grant me grace in my waiting and fill my heart with kindness and gentleness as I proclaim Your kingdom here on earth. In Jesus’ strong name. Amen.

REFLECT

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RESPOND

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