



*True*  
**devotion.**

A CALL TO ABANDON HALF-HEARTED FAITH

**DAILY READING GUIDE PART 1**

**MUCH OF THIS  
RESOURCE  
IS DRAWN DIRECTLY  
WITH  
PERMISSION FROM THE  
ST HELEN'S  
BISHOPSGATE  
RESOURCE ON MALACHI  
(AUTHORED BY LEE  
GATISS).**

You can download their full guide at  
<http://www.st-helens.org.uk/resources/bible-study-resources?ref=nav>.

## **WHAT IS THIS?**

Welcome to the Grace City Church Daily Reading Guide. These are made for you, to help you get stuck into the Bible each weekday. It follows along with the series we're doing at church and in our Community Groups, so you get three chances to understand and apply God's word to your life. We hope it will find a place with your Bible and be opened often!

## **HOW DO I USE IT?**

Find a time and place each weekday where you can spend 15 minutes or more with your Bible, a pen and this guide. Pray that God would speak to you through His word, by His Spirit. Read the passage provided. Then use the questions provided as a way to get you thinking. You might like to write down your thoughts and questions.

## **ABOUT THE BIBLE**

At Grace City, we believe that the way God reveals Himself to us is through His word, the Bible. The Bible is God's revelation to us. The words of the Bible are divinely inspired and infallible, as originally given, and have supreme authority in all matters of faith, conduct and experience. The Bible is sufficient for knowing God. It is not only central to the wellbeing of the church but is able to thoroughly equip the Christian community for life and godliness.

# MALACHI

## Why Malachi?

Why are we studying the book of Malachi? The Old Testament is still relevant to us today, over two thousand years after it was written. So we will find as we study Malachi a declaration of God's love to us, an exposition of our sin, an explanation of hope, and a clear response. God remains faithful to his covenant promise made to Abraham, and His word endures. He still cares for his people and is hurt when they give him second best.

Malachi calls us to honour God, even if the glory days seem to have passed. They seemed to have gone forever in the 6<sup>th</sup> century BC. And for many of us the glory days of being all out for God, being full of enthusiasm and keenness to serve the Lord Jesus also seem to have gone. We don't feel so motivated anymore, there isn't that same urgency as when we first became Christians all those years ago.

If we've lost that impetus, that energy as Christians, and started to coast along a bit instead of being fervent and passionate about Christ and his gospel – then Malachi is the book for us. It won't be pleasant studying all this stuff. It might be painful, as Malachi uncovers careless, slapdash attitudes in our hearts and demands that we give God our very best.

If we've started to drift away, Malachi will snap us back and remind us of important truths. So if we've started to slide, this is certainly going to be the right prescription. But if we are still firing on all cylinders for God, then Malachi is a good inoculation, a way of immunising ourselves against the temptation to half-heartedness.

## Question and Answer

Look out for the 'question and answer' structure. You can see this in 1:2, for example. It happens again in 1:6 for instance, and 2:17, "You have wearied the Lord" but you say, "How have we wearied him?" etc. So God says certain things, and the people question those statements, either out loud or in their hearts so that Malachi can put words in their mouths which accurately reflect their state of mind.

## Malachi and the New Testament

It's important to say that we know more now than Malachi ever did, about God and about his plan for the world. And that will have an impact on how we understand some of the things he says. So, for instance, when he's talking about sacrificing sheep and goats, we need to understand that in the light of the cross, where Jesus died as our one perfect and fully sufficient sacrifice.

And when Malachi mentions the temple, we will have to remember that Christ has come to fulfil what the temple stood for. When he talks about tithes we need to understand that in the light of the gospel and the fact that in some sense the law of Moses has been abolished, as we saw in Ephesians 2 last year.

Our understanding of God's love has also been enlarged, so that we look back not to the Exodus, the return from exile, and the defeat of earthly enemies like Edom but to the cross, to reconciliation with God through Jesus, and to his decisive victory over evil.

Our hope is in one sense the same as Malachi's but in another sense different. The messenger of the covenant has come to his temple, in the person of the Lord Jesus. God is acknowledged as a great king by Christians in many nations of the world in a way that Malachi could only dream about when he wrote 1:11. Those things have happened, they were Malachi's future but are in our past.

But we still look forward to a day, don't we, when we will leap like calves released from the stall, when the sun of righteousness will rise with healing in its wings? We still look forward to a day when evil will be wiped out and sin will be no more, when our hearts will be purified and our offerings perfect.

We'll need to do a bit of work on these things over the next few months to make sure we don't misunderstand Malachi in the light of the rest of

Scripture. Things have changed this side of the cross and resurrection of Christ.

But they haven't changed so as to make God's word defunct. This is still as relevant and as powerful today - properly understood - as it was in Malachi's day. And I hope that this term we will grasp something of the profound depth of the challenge to our hearts that God intended when he put this book into our Bibles.

# WEEK 1 MONDAY

## Malachi 1:1-5 (focus v1)

Background: Jacob is the forefather of God's people receiving this prophecy. Esau is the forefather of their enemies.

1. Outside of the Bible, how we normally know that somebody loves us?
2. In this section of Malachi, what unusual fact does God use to prove that He loves his people?
3. Reflecting on your answer to Q2, how could the same be true for us Christians today?
4. What causes you personally to doubt God's love?

### ALTERNATIVE

Read the introductory material earlier in this booklet.



Remembering that He could have fairly rejected you on the basis of your sin, thank God for choosing you.

# TUESDAY

## Malachi 1:1-5 (focus v2-3) + Gen 25:19-34

Note: Israel (v1) and Judah (v2) are two different terms for the same group of people.

1. From Genesis 25:23, what is unusual about which son God chose?
2. What was it about Jacob that made God choose him instead of Esau?
3. What do we learn about how God chooses people from Gen 25:23? How does this relate to Malachi 1:2-3?

**ALTERNATIVE** Write down at least 3 questions about this section of the Bible and ask them to a Christian friend.



If you trust in Jesus, thank God that He chose you. Recognise before God that you didn't earn your salvation. As a completely undeserving sinner, praise God that He chose to save you.

# WEDNESDAY



This coming Sunday: 'True Devotion'.

## Malachi 1:1-5 (focus v4-5)

1. Using the word 'enemy' in your answer, how does God say that he demonstrated His love towards his people?

2. As Christians, we also have enemies. Who/what are the enemies of the Christian?

3. Using the word 'enemy' in your answer, how has God demonstrated His love towards us as Christians in a similar way?

Bonus: Read Obadiah vv10-14 to better understand the enmity between Israel/Jacob and Esau.



Ask God to help you resist Satan's schemes and to make progress in holiness.

**ALTERNATIVE** If this section was missing from the Bible, what would we not know? How are we richer as a result of this treasure?

# THURSDAY

## Malachi 1:1-5 (focus v5)

1. Why would God's people have been tempted to think that the Lord is only great within the borders of Israel?
2. How does the action of v4 show the Lord to be great beyond the borders of Israel (v5)?
3. God is glorified (shown to be great) not only in saving people, but also in condemning people and fighting his people's enemies. Does this challenge or match with your view of God? Why?

### ALTERNATIVE

Put Malachi 1:1-5 into your own words.



Ask God to give you understanding in a tough topic.

# FRIDAY

## Malachi 1:1-5 + Romans 9:6-13

Note: This is a complex day of notes. It's OK if you need to consult the 'weekly reflections'.

1. What is Paul's main concern in this section, as stated in Romans 9:6?

2. Paul is dealing with predestination. V13 is a quote from Malachi 1:2-3. How does the quote from Malachi address Paul's main concern from Q1?

3. What is the difference between Malachi and Paul's use of Jacob/Esau?

4. What confidence can predestination give us?



Praise God that, if you trust Jesus on the cross, you have been chosen like Jacob. Praise God that you are chosen entirely independent of anything you have done. Praise God for his grace in saving you.

## ALTERNATIVE

Predestination means that God chooses people to be saved, even before they were born. What does Romans 9:6-13 say about predestination?

# WEEKLY REFLECTIONS

## MONDAY

We normally know that someone loves us by their words, or their desire to spend time with us, or their gifts etc. Here, however, God proves his love by pointing to His election of his people (Jacob's descendants). This election is made all the more tangible by the fact that God did not choose another group (Esau's descendants). Similarly, Christians who trust in Jesus' finished work on the cross and his physical resurrection can be confident that they are chosen. You are loved by God.

'The people are not convinced that God really loves them. 'How have you loved us?' they protest (1:2)...God appeals to his love in choosing them in the first place. He chose Jacob above Esau; there was nothing intrinsic to the two men to prompt the choice. The choice is traceable to nothing more and nothing less than the electing love of God. Believers must learn to rest securely in this love, or they will be bushwhacked by every dark circumstance that comes along.' (From Don Carson's *For the Love of God* vol. 2).

## TUESDAY

Usually, in that culture, the older child was favoured above the younger. Gen 25:23 is unusual because God favours the younger over the older child. In reality, there was NOTHING that suggested Jacob as a better pick than Esau before God. They had not even been born yet. Similarly, God does not choose Christians to have faith in Him because they are better people, or more deserving, or have any particular identifying feature in them – God simply chooses who He chooses. That is confusing and raises many questions, but one clear application of being chosen independent of any merit in ourselves is to praise God for choosing us.

## **WEDNESDAY**

God demonstrated his love to his people in Malachi by opposing their enemies. Jacob's enemy was Esau (read Obadiah vv10-14 for background) and God actively opposed Esau (v3), even to the extent of preventing them from rebuilding (v4). While Jesus told us to love our human enemies, Christians still have enemies such as Satan, sin and death. That's why in Ephesians 6:12 Paul speaks about our struggle against spiritual powers. God loves us today by opposing our enemies Satan, sin and death. For example, God will defeat Satan at the last day, the Holy Spirit helps us overcome sin and pursue holiness and Jesus' resurrection was the ultimate triumph over death.

## **THURSDAY**

When God chose Abraham, He picked a special people for Himself. Old Testament history involves God focussing on this group of people – fighting for them, giving them special laws and entering into a special relationship with them. It would have therefore been very easy for God's people to think that God only cared about what occurred within the borders of Israel. By being involved beyond the borders of Israel, specifically by opposing Esau's descendants, God shows that his concern extends to the whole world and not only one nation. Malachi is a particularly fitting place to find a worldwide emphasis, because it is the last book of the Old Testament, which leads on closely to Jesus, whose focus was worldwide (see Matthew 28:19). It may be challenging for you to think that God is glorified in opposing Esau's descendants, but this is what Malachi teaches. The glory of God is ultimately revealed not only when he saves people, but also when he judges. Absolutely everything God does, not only pleasant things like answering prayers, bringing salvation and providing for us, but also other deep things like judging and condemning bring God glory. It's normal to find this a challenging truth.

## **FRIDAY**

In Romans 9:6, Paul is answering the charge that God's word had failed. The reason he feels that he needs to answer this charge is found in 9:1-5, where he identifies that not everyone from Israel believes in Jesus. He answers the charge by speaking about predestination (God chooses some and not others to have faith in Jesus and therefore be saved). In the context of predestination, Malachi speaks about how God chose Jacob and not Esau (v13) completely independent of any works (v11). So, Paul uses Jacob and Esau to talk about predestination and God's faithfulness to his promise, while Malachi uses Jacob and Esau to talk about God's love for and undying commitment to his people.

# **SUNDAY'S SERMON NOTES**

<b>DATE</b>	<b>WHAT'S ON?</b>
<p><b>14 OCT</b> SUNDAY</p>	<p><b>True Devotion</b> (Malachi 1:1-5)</p>
<p><b>21 OCT</b> SUNDAY</p>	<p><b>Worthy Worship</b> (Malachi 1:6-2:9)</p>
<p><b>28 OCT</b> SUNDAY</p>	<p><b>Faithful Relationships</b> (Malachi 2:10-16)</p>
<p><b>4 NOV</b> SUNDAY</p>	<p><b>Enduring Righteousness</b> (Malachi 2:17-3:5)</p>
<p><b>11 NOV</b> SUNDAY</p>	<p><b>Trusting Generosity</b> (Malachi 3:6-12)</p>
<p><b>18 NOV</b> SUNDAY</p>	<p><b>Reverent Service</b> (Malachi 3:13-4:6) <b>COMMITMENT DAY</b></p>

# WEEK 2 MONDAY

## Malachi 1:6-9

1. What two ways does God use to describe Himself in v6?
2. Looking closely at v6, what attitude does the first description demand? What attitude does the second description demand?
3. Which one of these two descriptions do you personally feel more comfortable with?
4. Now focus on the description with which you feel less comfortable. If you treated God that way, what would be different?

**ALTERNATIVE** Read Malachi 1:6-14 and divide it into sections. Give each section a sub-title.



Pray to God using the less comfortable description from Q4.

# TUESDAY

## Malachi 1:6-9 + Hebrews 10:12 + Romans 12:1

1. We do not have priests and animal sacrifices as the people of Malachi's day did. So in what ways is this Old Testament theme fulfilled and developed in the New Testament? See Hebrews 10:12 and Romans 12:1.

2. Given your answer to Q1, in what ways can we fail to honour God, like the priests of Malachi's day did?

**ALTERNATIVE** Write down at least 3 questions about this section of the Bible and ask them to a Christian friend.



Repent to God of failing to honour Him fully. It may be helpful to repent of specific instances and not only in a general sense.

# WEDNESDAY



This coming Sunday: 'Worthy Worship'.

## Malachi 1:9-14

1. Put Malachi 1:10-11 into your own words.
2. How would this make the Israelites feel when they heard God saying this?
3. From v10, it appears that God would prefer that they didn't meet to worship Him at all, rather than offer Him such weak worship. He is deeply offended by the weak worship of the priests. How does this adjust the way you think about your own worship of God?

**ALTERNATIVE** If this section was missing from the Bible, what would we not know? How are we richer as a result of this treasure?



Repent of weak worship in your own life. Before God, commit yourself afresh to offering your whole life as a full and living sacrifice (Romans 12:1).

# THURSDAY

## Malachi 1:10-14

1. In what way are the Israelites cheating God?
2. In what ways can people today also cheat God?
3. Reflect on yourself: are there any ways in which you could be cheating God?

**ALTERNATIVE** What phrases do you see repeated throughout Malachi 1:10-14?



Ask God to reveal to you any areas of life that you are yet to submit to Jesus. Repent of them when they come to mind. Praise God that, because of Jesus, you do not have to be known to God as a cheat but as a child.

# FRIDAY

## Malachi 1:6-14

1. How many times do you see the phrase 'my name' occur within these verses?

2. It is proud for a person to be overly concerned with their own name (their own glory and fame), but how could it actually be good for God to be concerned for His own name?

**ALTERNATIVE** Read the  
WEEKLY REFLECTIONS section for  
this week.



Listen to 'No Other Name' by Hillsong Worship to help you reflect on the theme of God's name.

Praise God. You can do that specifically by identifying things about Him that are praiseworthy. Use the line 'your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven', because this is very similar to praying for God's name to be feared among the nations (v14).

# WEEKLY REFLECTIONS

## MONDAY

God is a father, and so the right response is honour. God is also a master and so deserves respect (other translations say 'fear'). Many of us feel more comfortable with the idea that God is a father, and less comfortable with God as a master. But that is what He reveals Himself as. To pray to God as our master includes a willingness to obey Him.

## TUESDAY

The theme of 'priests offering sacrifices' is fulfilled in the New Testament in Jesus Christ, the perfect priest, offering himself once-and-for-all as the perfect Lamb of God (see Hebrews 10:12). There is still, however, a sense in which we do offer sacrifices to God (see Romans 12:1). We fail to honour God, like the priests in Malachi, when we offer the lame sacrifice of half-hearted devotion or when we hold back our best from God.

## WEDNESDAY

Malachi 1:10 should shock us as much as it shocked Malachi's audience: if you can't be bothered to serve God with your whole life and whole heart, then don't bother. This is not meant to make us give up being Christians, but to prompt us to wholehearted dedication to God in every area of our lives. It's a rhetorical device to rouse us to action, not a literal command to give up if we've started to slip.

## **THURSDAY**

They are cheating God by vowing to offer a good sacrifice, but then sacrificing something blemished. For background, it is likely that the people in this book were suffering from some kind of natural disaster that made food supply inconsistent. It made sense, but was not godly, for the Israelites to save their best animals instead of offering them to God as they vowed to do. Christians today can do something similar any time that they commit something to God but then don't follow through.

V14 is a warning to us not to leave a study of Malachi chapter one making great promises which we know we will not keep the next day and the next week. It is not saying that if we fail or fall or stumble then God will abandon us as Christians. But it is saying that if we persist in giving God second best then we cannot expect his blessing or expect to enjoy our Christian lives and increase in godliness.

## **FRIDAY**

'My name' occurs twice in v11 and once in v14. When something is repeated in the Bible, it is good to concentrate our reflections there. Although it is vain for a person to be overly concerned with their own name/glory/fame/reputation, it is actually good that God is deeply concerned for His name. At 'onboard' (our new members course), we use the following the illustration: People eventually realised that the earth is not the centre of our solar system. Actually, the sun is the centre and everything revolves around it. That's a good, orderly state of affairs. It is not arrogant for the sun to expect everything else to orbit around it. It would not be good for everything to begin orbiting around Pluto. That would be chaos. When you're the biggest thing, around which our solar system is designed, it is good for everything to be centred on you.

# **SUNDAY'S SERMON NOTES**

# WEEK 3 MONDAY

## Malachi 2:1-9

1. What is the problem in Malachi 2:1-3 and 2:8-9?
2. Looking closely at v4, why does God threaten and warn the priests?
3. A covenant is 'an agreement between two parties binding them mutually to undertakings on each other's behalf' (Eerdman's Dictionary of Theology). What encouragement can we draw from seeing God's commitment to His covenants in the Old Testament?

### ALTERNATIVE

Read Malachi 2:1-9 and divide it into sub-sections. Give each sub-section a title.



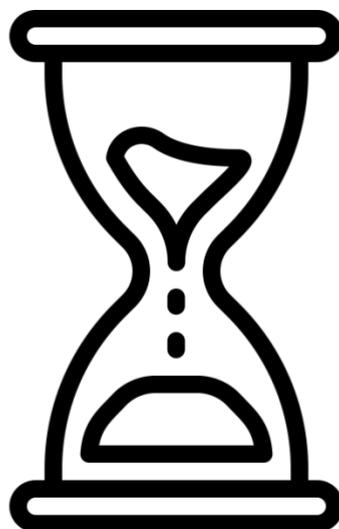
Praise God for His faithfulness. Praise God that He upholds His end of every relationship.

# DO WE STILL HAVE PRIESTS TODAY?

Malachi 1:6-2:9 has a lot to say about priests. To what extent is any of that still relevant to us today?

The Levitical priests (priests of the tribe of Levi) were set apart for a particular function amongst the people of Israel, but the people themselves were in some way priests too: Exodus 19:6 calls them a 'kingdom of priests and a holy nation'. So the priesthood function narrows down from people to Levitical priests. The Old Testament theme of 'priests as teachers and examples to others' is fulfilled in Jesus, the perfect teacher who taught God's word faithfully, lived what he taught, and turned many from iniquity. The priesthood theme then widens out again in the New Testament. 1 Peter 2:9 applies Exodus 16:9 to Christians: we are a royal priesthood (the 'priesthood of all believers' as theologians call it).

We can picture it like an hour glass (wide at the top, narrow in the middle, then wide at the bottom).



The New Testament does not call church leaders 'priests'. However, in terms of their function as described in Malachi 2, their equivalent role in the New Testament is taken by pastor-teachers. Church 'elders' must be able to teach faithfully, live faithfully and be model believers (see Titus 1:5-9 for instance). Like Malachi 2, the New Testament contains warnings such as James 3:1 for those who would be teachers of the word.

As an extended application, Malachi 2 can be applied in an indirect way to parents as teachers of their children (Ephesians 6:4), to community group leaders, to evangelists, and to all of us (Colossians 3:16 shows that we are all meant to be teachers of the word in some sense). It is a serious undertaking, in which we must give honour to God's name and listen to Him, otherwise we will be 'despised and abased' for hypocrisy.

# TUESDAY

## Malachi 2:1-9 + Deuteronomy 21:5

Tip: Because Levi is the forefather of the priests, you can think of 'Levi', 'Levites' and 'priests' as the same thing.

1. Read Deuteronomy 21:5, where the covenant with Levi (Malachi 2:4) is referenced.

2. According to Malachi 2:5-7, what are the main elements of the covenant with Levi? What was God's commitment and what was required of the priests?

3. As Christians, we are a royal priesthood (1 Peter 2:9). From the description of a well-functioning priesthood in Malachi 2:5-7, what can you apply?



Ask God to make Grace City (and all Christians) a well-functioning priesthood that acts like Malachi 2:5-7.

**ALTERNATIVE** Read the page on DO WE  
STILL HAVE PRIESTS TODAY in this resource.

# WEDNESDAY



This coming Sunday: 'Faithful Relationships'.

## Malachi 2:10-16 + Deuteronomy 7:3-4

1. What word is repeated 5 times in Malachi 2:10-16?
2. Read Deuteronomy 7:3-4 for background. Can you see from Malachi 2:10-12 how the people were against God's command in Deuteronomy?
3. What would it look like to apply Malachi 2:12 too strongly for a Christian today? What would it look like to apply Malachi 2:10-12 too weakly for a Christian today?

**ALTERNATIVE** If this section was missing from the Bible, what would we not know? How are we richer as a result of this treasure?



Ask God that Grace City would be a church where people make wise decisions about marriage with God as their first consideration.

# THURSDAY

## Malachi 2:13-16 + Isaiah 15:2-3

1. The first sentence in Malachi 2:13 indicates that, in addition to marrying foreign-god worshippers (vv10-12), there is a second issue. What is it?
2. Isaiah 15:2-3 gives a negative picture of pagan worship. What similarities do you notice with what God's people were doing in Malachi 2:13-16?
3. God, through his prophet Malachi, is opposed to religious hypocrisy, hypocritical emotionalism and religious show. How could this apply in church and for yourself?



Ask God to help you avoid religious hypocrisy, hypocritical emotionalism and religious show.

**ALTERNATIVE**  
Put Malachi 2:13-16 in your own words.

# FRIDAY

## Malachi 2:13-16

1. 'In Malachi 2:10-16, Malachi rebukes the people for breaking faith with God and one another by marrying outside the covenant, indulging in groundless divorce, and thinking they can cover such sins with a show of religion.' Which part of this summary does Malachi 2:15-16 deal with particularly?

2. An older version of the NIV Bible translates v16 as 'I hate divorce'. Our current NIV translation says 'The man who hates and divorces his wife...'. What is the difference? (For the record it likely that our current NIV is more accurate).

3. Given that the Bible's teaching on divorce is much broader than Malachi 2 and given that divorce is usually complex, what would be an appropriate next step for someone with questions in this area?



Ask God that we would be a church characterised by loving faithfulness within marriage, and that those with complex histories would find understanding, comfort and love in Jesus as they walk towards holiness.

**ALTERNATIVE**  
Read the WEEKLY REFLECTIONS section for this week.

# WEEKLY REFLECTIONS

## MONDAY

The problem is that the priests are not functioning properly. They are not honouring God's name (v2), they have turned from the way and by their teaching have caused others to stumble (v8), violated the covenant with Levi (v8) and instead of following God's ways have shown partiality in matters of the law (v9). Interestingly in v4, God does not threaten them purely out of rage, but out of concern for his covenant. He warns them so that the covenant may continue. God has made many covenants with his people today. He has promised many things to those who believe in Jesus (e.g. Romans 10:9, Matthew 16:18, John 15:7). We can be confident that what God has promised to Christians in the New Testament is true because of His commitment to His covenant in the Old Testament. Our confidence now is grounded in His faithfulness previously.

## TUESDAY

God made a covenant of 'life and peace' with the Levites/priests. On their side, the Levites were supposed to exercise reverence and awe of God's name (v5). Additionally, they were to be characterised by true instruction, peace, uprightness and holiness (v6). They were to preserve knowledge and give good instruction (v7). As Christians, we have been made a priesthood of believers, and so we strive to enact these characteristics. When we fail, we repent and trust Jesus. Because we have the Holy Spirit inside of us, we can make progress in these areas of holiness.

## WEDNESDAY

'Unfaithful' (NIV) is repeated five times. Their unfaithfulness in Malachi 2:10-12 takes the form of 'marrying women who worship a foreign god' (v11). Because Sydney is a fairly diverse city, this command could seem to be unusual, but the original readers of Malachi would have known that this is directly against a clear command from God given to Old Testament Israel in Deuteronomy 7:3-4. How should a Christian consider this topic of inter-marriage today? Firstly, it is clear that interracial marriage is now acceptable, because God's people are not defined by a specific race but by their faith in a specific person, Jesus. Secondly, Christians should only marry Christians (1 Corinthians 7:39). If one becomes a Christian after marriage to a non-Christian, that is another matter (see 1 Corinthians 7). Malachi 2:12 seems a harsh sentence for a believer who has mistakenly married an unbeliever to bear, but the OT assumes that marrying an unbeliever means the believer giving up their exclusive faith in the one God and adopting the worship of a foreign god (or playing both sides). It is that abandonment of exclusive faith in the one God which incurs the penalty, not marriage to a non-Christian per se.

## THURSDAY

Malachi flags up a second issue in which they are being unfaithful. The big issue in the second half of the passage seems to be divorce, but this is only brought up as a way of highlighting their hypocrisy. They realise God is not happy with them and respond in an over-the-top way, reminiscent of pagan worship (see Isaiah 15:23) in an attempt to persuade God to accept them. God, however, responds by pointing to the real problem. No matter how impressive their religious performance, He will not be manipulated by it, or persuaded to ignore their marital infidelity.

If we sense a problem in our relationship to God, the prescription is self-examination not hypocritical emotionalism. This is the thrust of vv13-16, and it is the reason Malachi brings up divorce. He basically says, "Your marriage must be in good repair if you want God to listen to your prayer." That's a nice rhyme, and it chimes in well with 1 Peter 3:7 where the husband must treat his wife properly or his prayers will be "hindered." Can we expect God to be gracious to us and show his favour towards us if we treat His word with contempt (see also 1:9)? Thank God He is such a gracious God and overlooks many of our sins; but that is no excuse for us not dealing with them.

## **FRIDAY**

Vv15-16 deal with the groundless divorce in which God's people were indulging. While other parts of the Bible teach very strongly on divorce, it is likely here that God is speaking against the men who pursue unprovoked divorce, not divorce itself. Regardless of how we translate v16, God does not like divorce, and as a witness to all marriage covenants he holds both parties accountable. There is more in Scripture on the subject of divorce than just Malachi 2, and most divorces are complicated, so considerable care is necessary when talking about and applying this teaching. One helpful next step would be ask a Christian friend or leader to meet with you and discuss this from a more comprehensive range of Bible passages.

# **SUNDAY'S SERMON NOTES**

**GRACE CITY**  
— CHURCH —