*divING DEEPER* **Discussion Guide**

**TEXT SUMMARY**

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This week’s sermon is based on the prophecies of Malachi, the last prophet in the Hebrew canon (Old Testament). Malachi was one of the three prophets who ministered to the Jews who had returned from exile in Babylon to rebuild Jerusalem (along with Haggai and Zechariah).

The problems Malachi addresses are surprisingly modern: the people had become cynical and complacent. They still went through the motions of the worship ritual, but their hearts weren’t in it anymore.

The sermon concentrates on three of the complaints God lodges against His complacent, cynical people:

1. *The people were dishonoring God in their worship by bringing defective animals for their sacrifices.*
2. *The Jewish men were treating their wives and their marriage vows with contempt: divorcing their Jewish wives in order to marry pagan women.*
3. *Throughout the nation, people were withholding the tithe, the tenth part of their goods that belonged to God. (The tithe supported the work of the Levites, who devoted their full time to ministering in the Temple.)*

**INTRODUCTION** (observation):

As you read Malachi (four short chapters), watch for the repeated pattern:

1. *God lodges a complaint against His people.*
2. *The people respond incredulously (who, me?)*
3. *God explains.*

**DISCUSSION** (interpretation):

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From one point of view, the people of Malachi’s day were doing well enough. They had rebuilt the Temple and the city and the walls. Yet their personal lives and their interior lives were rancid and corrupt.

*As you read through the prophecies of Malachi, begin to build a profile of the interior lives of his countrymen.*

1. *What were their primary concerns?*
2. *What were their fears?*
3. *What motivated them?*
4. *Why did they respond the way they did to the complaints voiced by Malachi?*

**SO WHAT?** (application)

Scripture serves as a mirror in that it prompts us to reflect on what kind of people we are, how our lives have been misshapen by disordered affections and priorities.

1. *What does Malachi have to say about the way we approach our worship of God?*
2. *What does Malachi have to say about the way we think about the covenant of marriage?*
3. *What does Malachi have to say about the way we manage our resources?*
   1. *our talents and abilities*
   2. *our privileges: our social connections and professional network*
   3. *the opportunities we have in our neighborhoods and places of work*
   4. *our time*
4. *What does Malachi have to say about our interior dialogue, the conversations we have with ourselves about loving and serving God?*