

Turn Back To God

Malachi

MEMORY VERSE

MALACHI 2:17

“You have wearied the LORD with your words; yet you say, ‘in what way have we wearied Him?’ In that you say, everyone who does evil is good in the sight of the LORD, and He delights in them,’ or ‘Where is the God of justice?’”

WHAT YOU WILL NEED:

Pink construction paper, scissors, a marker, magazine pictures of toys, etc. pre-cut before class.

As many copies of the “Memory Verse Decoding” template as children in your class.

ATTENTION GETTER!

“What’s In Your Heart” Object Lesson

God sees our hearts. When we worship God, it is our hearts that matter. Before class, prepare two large hearts (1 foot x 1 foot) from pink construction paper. Write “Jesus” in large letters on both hearts. During the week, cut out pictures from magazines of things that children do or play with (example: toys, TV, video games, computers, friends, pets, etc.).

When class begins, pull out one of the hearts. Explain that the heart represents our hearts. Jesus lives inside of our hearts, but other things can get into our hearts as well. Begin to paste on the magazine cutouts with glue stick covering the name of Jesus. When all of the pictures are glued on, explain to the children that sometimes other things become more important than worshipping Jesus. After a while, Jesus can be forgotten. God wants us to worship Him with our whole hearts. Jesus should have the most

important place in our hearts; He should be the very center of our worship. With the second pink heart, glue and cover over the heart with the magazine pictures on it.

A lot of things had crowded into the hearts of the people of Judah. The worship of God became less and less important to them. They became cold in their relationship with God. God called them to return to Him with their hearts.

LESSON TIME!

Malachi is the last of the Minor Prophets and the last prophet of the Old Testament period. The Jews, having returned from captivity in Babylon, had been in their land about 100 years when Malachi came on the scene. Under the leadership of Ezra and Nehemiah, the people worshipped God. The temple and the city walls in Jerusalem that once lay in ruins from the Babylonian conquest were rebuilt.

Sadly, the revival did not last. It was not long before the nation of Judah began to grow aloof from God, pursuing their own ways. They still went through the motions of serving Him, but their hearts were not in it. They still had religion, outward rituals and actions, but their relationship with God was seriously lacking. God is not content to have a distant relationship with the children He loves, so He sent the prophet Malachi—whose name means messenger—to call the people to repentance and to let them know there was still a future for His chosen people.

Note: After the prophecy of Malachi, the Lord was silent for 400 years until the time of John the Baptist who ushered in the time of the Messiah.

MALACHI 1:9-14

“But now entreat God’s favor, that He may be gracious to us. While this is being done by your hands, will He accept you favorably?” says the LORD of hosts.

“Who is there even among you who would shut the doors, so that you would not kindle fire on My altar in vain? I have no pleasure in you,” says the LORD of hosts, “nor will I accept an offering from your hands.

For from the rising of the sun, even to its going down, My name shall be great among the Gentiles; In every place incense shall be offered to My name, and a pure offering; for My name shall be great among the nations,” says the LORD of hosts.

“But you profane it, in that you say, ‘The table of the LORD is defiled; and its fruit, its food, is contemptible.’

You also say, ‘Oh, what a weariness!’ and you sneer at it,” says the LORD of hosts. “and you bring the stolen, the lame, and the sick; thus you bring an offering! Should I accept this from your hand?” says the LORD.

“But cursed be the deceiver who has in his flock a male, and takes a vow, but sacrifices to the Lord what is blemished— for I am a great King,” says the LORD of hosts, “and My name is to be feared among the nations.”

God is speaking to the priests, the leaders, of Malachi's day. They continued to burn sacrifices and do all of the religious things that they were supposed to do, but their hearts were far from God. God sees the heart and could not accept their rituals and offerings.

In the Old Testament law, the people were to bring the first fruits. Instead the people were first satisfying their own desires, than giving to God what was left over. The priests were holding back the best animals for their own selfish gain and bringing the sick or lame animals as sacrifices to God. God desires that we give our best.

In verse 11, God points to a future day (the millennial kingdom) when His name will be great among the Gentiles. In Philippians 2:11, we read that every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord. The Gentiles, on this future day, will offer incense to God in every place. Incense is used symbolically in the Bible to refer to prayers and praise. In Revelation 5, we read that when Jesus takes the scroll out of the right hand of God who is sitting on the throne, the 24 elders come forth with little golden bowls filled with incense to offer before the throne of God. The Bible says the incense is the prayers of the saints offered to God, ascending as a sweet smelling savor before the Lord.

Though the Gentiles will one day offer a genuine worship well pleasing to God, the priests among God's chosen people of Israel were profaning (showing disrespect to) the name of the Lord (verses 12 and 13). Their service to God had become a labor and a burden to them. Perhaps, they were serving under a sense of obligation or pressure. For that reason, it had become "weariness" to them. How sad! The Bible says our giving should never be by constraint (pressured); God loves a cheerful giver (2 Corinthians 9:7).

How sad it is to think that people can “act” like they are serving God when they are really only serving themselves. Let us be careful not to fall into the same trap. We need to examine our hearts to make sure that our relationship with God is alive and growing. If our love for God grows cold, we will find ourselves going through empty motions, which mean nothing to God. **Let us worship God with true hearts.**

MALACHI 2:7-9

“For the lips of a priest should keep knowledge, and people should seek the law from his mouth; for he is the messenger of the LORD of hosts.

But you have departed from the way; you have caused many to stumble at the law. You have corrupted the covenant of Levi,” says the LORD of hosts.

“Therefore I also have made you contemptible and base before all the people, because you have not kept My ways but have shown partiality in the law.”

A priest was to be the messenger of God to the people; his intention should not only be to know God well himself and be an example for others to follow, but to impart God’s knowledge, His truth and ways, to others. God bemoans that the teachers had become corrupt—departing from God’s ways—and thus, causing many who followed their leadership to stumble.

Being a teacher of God’s Word is a great responsibility. Those who teach and lead are accountable to God, not only to be good examples, but to assure that the Bible, the whole Bible, will be faithfully taught to the people. God desires that His Word to the people be preserved—not distorted by men who would teach their

own opinion or would hold back important truths in order to keep their listeners comfortable. **Let us worship God with true hearts.**

Wolves in Sheep's Clothing

The nation of Judah did not have good leaders. They were more interested in their own gain than in the spiritual health of the people. Play this variation of "Red Light/Green Light" to remind the children about false teachers and "wolves in sheep's clothing."

Before class, choose one child secretly and tell him that he will be the wolf. Do not let anyone else in the class know. Tell the class that they are going to play a game of "Red Light/Green Light." The problem is there is someone in the group is a wolf. They do not know who it is and the wolf looks like everyone else. When you say "green light," all of the children should move forward. When you say, "red light" all of the children should stop. The wolf will then be able to take one additional step and tag as many children as they can. The wolf will then be revealed and play will continue until either the wolf tags all of the players or someone has made it to the finish line. Give instructions to the child who is the wolf that they should try to tag as many other children as possible.

In Malachi's time, like today, everyone who says that they are one of God's leaders does not always have a heart after God. We need to be careful for "wolves in sheep's clothing." Ask, "What are some ways that we can tell who are really God's leaders and who are wolves?" Some possible answers are that true leaders will teach God's Word. What they say will line up with God's Word. They will love the people. They will demonstrate the fruit of the Holy Spirit in their lives. Just as the wolf in the game was revealed, God has His ways of eventually revealing who are teachers following after His heart and who are not.

MALACHI 3:6-12

“For I am the LORD, I do not change; therefore you are not consumed, O sons of Jacob.

Yet from the days of your fathers you have gone away from My ordinances and have not kept them. Return to Me, and I will return to you,” says the LORD of hosts. “But you said, ‘In what way shall we return?’

“Will a man rob God? Yet you have robbed Me! But you say, ‘In what way have we robbed You?’ In tithes and offerings.

You are cursed with a curse, for you have robbed Me, even this whole nation.

Bring all the tithes into the storehouse, that there may be food in My house, and try Me now in this,” says the LORD of hosts, “if I will not open for you the windows of heaven and pour out for you such blessing that there will not be room enough to receive it.

“And I will rebuke the devourer for your sakes, so that he will not destroy the fruit of your ground, nor shall the vine fail to bear fruit for you in the field,” says the LORD of hosts;

And all nations will call you blessed, for you will be a delightful land,” says the LORD of hosts.

God is now addressing His people. He recounts their history of straying away from Him, but assures them that if they would simply return, He would return to them. God was patient and loving toward His people Israel, just as He is toward us.

An old bumper sticker said, “If you feel far from God, guess who moved?” God is never the one who moves away from us, but sometimes, we drift away from Him and His plans for our lives. Yet, God is faithful! He will never cast us away. When we realize that we have left His side, we can *always return*. The door remains open.

Then, God addresses the people concerning their disobedience in giving: “Will a man rob God? Yet you have robbed Me! But you say, ‘In what way have we robbed You?’ In tithes and offerings.” By failing to tithe, as God had commanded them, the people were robbing God. In fact they had removed themselves from God’s blessing because they refused to be faithful in their giving to God.

Rather than bringing tithes and offerings from their increase as God commanded, the people were keeping the money to enrich themselves and do as they pleased. God did not need their money. Yet, their use of their money was a significant indication of where their heart was—what their priorities were! Today, we give to the work of the Lord because we love Jesus and are responding to His love for us. How we handle our money is always a good indicator of where our hearts are.

The people, in their disobedience, were cursed. They were not enjoying the fruits of their labors. They must have felt like they were putting their money into pockets with holes. Their greed had caused them to not be able to enjoy the resources they had. Tithing, giving, is the only place in the Bible that God says to “test” him. He assured the people that if they would be obedient and give to Him from their hearts, He would greatly bless them.

It is a spiritual law—the more one gives, the more one will receive. The Bible says, “Give, and it will be given to you: good measure, pressed down, shaken together, and running over will be put into your bosom. For with the same measure that you use, it will be measured back to you” (Luke 6:38). When we choose to be obedient

to the Lord in any area of our lives, we will be greatly blessed. God promises that if we seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, He will provide for all of our needs (Matthew 6:33). God desires to bless His children. It does not mean that we will always have everything we want, but it does mean that God will take care of us. **Let us worship God with true hearts.**

MALACHI 3:13-15

“Your words have been harsh against Me,” says the LORD, “Yet you say, ‘What have we spoken against You?’

You have said, ‘It is useless to serve God; what profit is it that we have kept His ordinance, and that we have walked as mourners before the LORD of hosts?

So now we call the proud blessed, for those who do wickedness are raised up; they even tempt God and go free.’”

The people were saying it was a waste of time to serve God. “Why bother,” they thought. “How do we benefit from seeking and serving God?” What a lie from the enemy! Their question reflects their distance from God.

The leaders were guilty of holding back, not giving their best, saying it was “weariness” to serve God. The people, it seemed, followed their lead—holding back their tithes and offerings, saying it did not pay to serve God. God would hold the religious leaders to greater accountability, but both were responsible for their sins. Sadly, both the leaders and the people were *robbing themselves* of God’s blessing. **Let us worship God with true hearts.**

MALACHI 3:16-18

Then those who feared the LORD spoke to one another, and the LORD listened and heard them; so a book of remembrance was written before Him for those who fear the LORD and who meditate on His name.

“They shall be Mine,” says the LORD of hosts, “On the day that I make them My jewels. And I will spare them as a man spares his own son who serves him.”

Then you shall again discern between the righteous and the wicked, between one who serves God and one who does not serve Him.

Malachi’s message must have really stirred the people, especially those people who feared (deeply respected) the Lord. With a renewed focus on their relationship with God, they began to speak of the Lord often one to another. As they shared with one another, the Lord listened. Not only did He listen, but God put it on record in His book of remembrance. Perhaps, God’s book is similar to the journal a loving father would keep of all his special moments with his children.

How is your conversation? It’s a good indication of how important God is to you. It’s natural to talk about our favorite subjects! We know God hears every word we speak, but we know from these scriptures that God pays special attention to and keeps track of the words we speak one to another that give honor to Him. Are you filling up God’s journal with special remembrances of those times your conversation brought honor to Him? **Let us worship God with true hearts.**

God spoke tenderly of His children: “They shall be Mine,” says the LORD of hosts, “On the day that I make them My jewels. Not only did God claim them as His own people; but, also, His treasure. Are you aware that you are God’s treasure? God considers us of great value.

MALACHI 4:1-3

“For behold, the day is coming, burning like an oven, and all the proud, yes, all who do wickedly will be stubble. And the day which is coming shall burn them up,” says the LORD of hosts, “That will leave them neither root nor branch.

But to you who fear My name the Sun of Righteousness shall arise with healing in His wings; and you shall go out and grow fat like stall-fed calves.

You shall trample the wicked, for they shall be ashes under the soles of your feet on the day that I do this,” says the LORD of hosts.

Now, Malachi prophesies of a future day. The great day of God’s judgment will burn like an oven upon the wicked of the earth who have rejected His free offer of salvation through Jesus Christ. Those who do not fear the Lord look forward to future judgment and eternal separation from God; in contrast, those who fear the Lord will look forward to the Second Coming of Jesus Christ—when “the Sun of Righteousness shall arise with healing in His wings.” As Jesus establishes His kingdom on earth reigning with justice, righteousness, and peace, His people will be well satisfied with the goodness of their God.

How's your relationship with God? May we not, as the children of Israel, allow ourselves to become distant from God and our love to grow cold. The best place to be in relationship to God is as close as possible. May we be those who fear (deeply respect) the Lord. May our focus on Him be evident in our conversation to one another! God has great things in store for those who choose to fear Him and walk in His ways. **Let us worship God with true hearts.**

Memory Verse Decoding

Use the enclosed template. You will need to make one copy for each child. Follow the directions on the sheet.

PRAYER

Lead the children in prayer asking the Lord to help their worship to be from true, genuine, hearts of love. If there are any children who have not yet responded to the Gospel, give them opportunity.

Template – Memory Verse Decoding

Mixed in with today's memory verse you will find all kinds of other things that can fill our hearts. Using the code at the beginning of each phrase, cross out that number of words and skip the next. What will remain is today's memory verse. For example: If the code is 3-3-2 then you would cross out 3 words, circle the next word, cross out the next 3 words, circle the next word and cross out the next 2 words and circle the next word. Continue in this pattern until the memory verse remains.

(Code 3-3-2)

candy toys games You dog cat turtle have video TV wearied candy
friends play the gum cake cookies Lord bicycle roller-blades with
football baseball soccer your toys cat TV words

(Code 1-2-3)

video Yet computer cookies you bicycle turtle hamster say cake In
roller-blades soccer what dog toys baseball way games have friends
play we gum TV football wearied computer Him

(Code 3-1-2)

football bicycle toys In hamster that computer cake you cookies
candy dog say gum everyone video baseball who games toys candy
does baseball evil cookies bicycle is roller-blades TV games good
hamster in toys cat the dog hamster turtle sight candy of games
football the games gum computer Lord TV and toys candy He
roller-blades baseball cookies delights cake in TV toys them