

LEADING JUSTLY

LESSON SCRIPTURE: MALACHI 2-3

FOCUS SCRIPTURE: MALACHI 2:1-9; 3:5-6

Key Verse: *For the lips of a priest should guard knowledge, and people should seek instruction from his mouth, for he is the messenger of the Lord of hosts. Malachi 2:7*

Malachi 2:1-9; 3:5-6 (NRSV)

Malachi 2:1-9

1 And now, O priests, this command is for you.

2 If you will not listen, if you will not lay it to heart to give glory to my name, says the Lord of hosts, then I will send the curse on you and I will curse your blessings; indeed I have already cursed them, because you do not lay it to heart.

3 I will rebuke your offspring, and spread dung on your faces, the dung of your offerings, and I will put you out of my presence.

4 Know, then, that I have sent this command to you, that my covenant with Levi may hold, says the Lord of hosts.

5 My covenant with him was a covenant of life and well-being, which I gave him; this called for reverence, and he revered me and stood in awe of my name.

6 True instruction was in his mouth, and no wrong was found on his lips. He walked with me in

integrity and uprightness, and he turned many from iniquity.

7 For the lips of a priest should guard knowledge, and people should seek instruction from his mouth, for he is the messenger of the Lord of hosts.

8 But you have turned aside from the way; you have caused many to stumble by your instruction; you have corrupted the covenant of Levi, says the Lord of hosts,

9 and so I make you despised and abased before all the people, inasmuch as you have not kept my ways but have shown partiality in your instruction.

3:5-6

5 Then I will draw near to you for judgment; I will be swift to bear witness against the sorcerers, against the adulterers, against those who swear falsely, against those who oppress the hired workers in their wages, the widow and the orphan, against those who thrust aside

the alien, and do not fear me, says
the Lord of hosts.

6 For I the Lord do not

change; therefore you, O children
of Jacob, have not perished.

VOCABULARY

- **Rebuke** – Sharp disapproval of someone because of their actions.
- **Abase** – Behavior that belittles someone else.
- **Reverence** – Deep respect.
- **Integrity** – Having strong moral character and principles.
- **Iniquity** – Immoral behavior.

INTRODUCTION

Tim and James decided that they were going to be successful in their endeavor, and by all measures, they were on their way to the top. They had a great vision, and a great work ethic. However, success for them meant more than having money. They wanted to give back to their community and wanted a strong relationship with God. When they had the opportunity to sit with a group of youth, they shared the secret of their success. The first thing they mentioned was that they sought out and found a mentor who was really interested in them and their success. Tim and James thought that the most important aspect of their mentoring relationship was the fact that their mentor had a solid relationship with God. With a godly mentor, they would be able to stay on track with their purpose and spiritual goals.

Tim shared with the group that he was not perfect, but strived

every day to do the right thing by God. Some days are better than others. James quickly chimed in stating that it was really nice to know that his mentor was transparent enough with them to know that everyone makes mistakes. There have been times when Craig (their mentor) spoke to them candidly about having struggled in the same areas they did, when he was younger. The great thing was that they never felt judged when they spoke, but received critical advice to help them. It was clear to see from their relationship that they had every aspect covered. Craig helped them to remain accountable to each other and stay grounded, focused, and true to their God-given purpose.

These relationships are important when you're working on a kingdom purpose. The struggle is real, and you need to know that leaders around you will not cast judgment, be unfair, but can counsel you in the sincerest way.

Activity #1: You Don't Say... Have students share about positive experiences they had with mentors who took an interest in them. Now, share about a leader who was the complete opposite. What do you think the two leaders could learn from each other?

THE BIBLE STORY

Malachi voices an argument between God and the people. The people of Judah had returned from exile about one hundred years earlier, but were committing the same sins that sent them into exile in the first place! Malachi accuses the priests of being disrespectful and then relays to

them the threat made by God (2:1-9). God says that he will curse their blessings, and will rebuke the offspring of the priest. Then, God compares God's relationship with Judah to that of Levi, an example of reverence and awe.

This would have reminded the priests of the fate of Aaron's sons, Nadab and Abihu, who were unfaithful priests as well. God will bring swift judgment to anyone who ignores God's covenant and those who oppress vulnerable people. When religious leaders fail to honor God, are irreverent in their practices, and are being disrespectful, God equates that with rejecting God as father and master of the nation.

Through it all, God's unchanging nature provides a foundation for the faith and hope of those who believe. God does not change. God remains faithful even when we do not.

Activity #2: Lord, Have Mercy! Malachi points out a list of ways that we share similar attitudes with disrespectful priests in this passage. In groups, select an attitude below and discuss the similarities, giving examples of each. Come together and share.

- Do not listen
- Do not glorify God's name
- Do not reverence God
- Do not walk with God in integrity and uprightness
- Cause others to fall by the instruction you give
- Show partiality in your instruction

LIFE APPLICATION

God warned the priests that if they did not honor God, they would be punished. That is the same expectation that God has for us. We should worship God. We should give God honor because God is perfect and worthy of it, and because God is the one creator of the universe. God loves us unconditionally.

- Why do you worship God?
- Do you love unconditionally?

The priests didn't take God seriously enough even when they were reminded by God through God's word. Everything that we are mandated to do is in the word of God, but we must read it to discover its meaning. The instructions are hidden in plain sight.

- Reading God's word gives us specific instructions; do you read God's word?

We must love God with all of our mind, with all of our heart, and with all of our strength (Deut. 6). Then, align ourselves to do what God's word says. When we do that, the word becomes the light that guides our daily activities. When we neglect our time with God, we forget how important it is to do what God says, making it easy for us to follow our own agendas instead of God's. The priests (God's messengers) stopped spending the necessary time with God to be able to follow God's lead and know God's will. This caused a great lack in knowledge which resulted in leading people astray.

It is so important as leaders to understand that we cannot teach what we don't know, and we cannot lead where we don't go. Pastors and other leaders of God's people **MUST** know God's word – what it says, what it means, how it applies to daily life – to be able to lead God's people effectively. We cannot claim to know God's word and not read it. We cannot claim to be God's people if we don't know God. This is completely unacceptable and inexcusable.

- Do you know God?

SUMMARY

Many of us are not designated church leaders, or designated youth leaders, but this still applies to all of us. In the 21st century, we must be careful not to be led astray. The sure way of doing that is to establish a regimen of God-time. God-time allows us the opportunity to get to know God on a personal level. It includes finding time (even 30 minutes) in your day and dedicating it just to learn more of and hear from God. It will be the best moments of your day. During God-time, you can clear your mind from the busyness of school, extracurricular activities, and home life. It's time to speak to God, and listen to God speaking to you. Most importantly, you get to know God for yourself.

To establish God-time you will need: a Bible, journal (a notebook or paper), pen, highlighter, and dictionary. Find a place in your room or somewhere in your home that you will dedicate for your time with God. It can be a corner with pillows, your bed (just don't fall asleep!), or a table and chair. Decide on

a specific time so that you can be consistent. Now that you have your time, place, and materials, this is what you do:

1. **Pray:** Ask God to settle your mind and speak.
2. **Unplug:** Try to “unplug” or clear your mind from the world and focus on God.
3. **Read:** Spend time reading the Bible (experiment with different versions so that it will be easy to understand, e.g. the Common English Version, The Message Bible). Many of these versions are available on the Bible App on your smartphone. You can also ask your pastor for a recommendation.
4. **Take note:** You may want to underline or highlight a verse that really speaks to you.
5. **Investigate:** Look up words you don’t know, read reference scriptures and the notes in your Bible to help you understand what you’re reading. Make a note of your questions and ask your pastor or youth leader for help.
6. **Meditate:** Spend a few moments to let your reading sink in. Think about what God is saying to you.
7. **Journal:** Write what God says to you, and what you said to God.

Establishing God-time will help you grow to know God personally. Once you get to know God, it will change your world.

CLOSING DEVOTIONS

Listent to the song, “Do You Know Jesus?” by Hezekiah Walker (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fgh5DcENWq0>). On the index cards, write your answer(s) to the question from the song.

Prayer: God, I want to get to know you better. Help me to be intentional about our relationship. I really do love you, because you loved me first. Thank you for your word and your grace. In Jesus’ name. Amen.