



Sermon Study Guide

February 22, 2015 - Pastor Lionel Young

Return to Me

Malachi 1:1-5

THINK & SHARE

Are you the kind of person who stops to ask for directions when you get lost while driving? Ever gotten into some kind of trouble either because you stopped or because you didn't?

Malachi's words are intended to break off Israel's gradual but slippery descent of "disbelief, disappointment, and discouragement" (Kenneth Boa, *Talk Through the Bible*). Share about a time when you slid down your own slippery slope away from the Lord and He called you back.

STUDY & DISCUSS

A. When God confronts the people of Israel, He declares His covenant love to them. Yet, the people question that love. Have you ever found yourself questioning God's commitment to you? What was your response to those doubts?

B. What are some of the ways that God answers the question, "How have you loved us?" in our lives? Instead of pointing to things, events, or blessings (a good job, for example), think on consistent patterns of behavior God has exhibited in His relationship to you. (Something else to consider, if time allows, is how God has shown His love to the Calvary Church community.)

C. To answer the question "How have you loved us?", God draws a comparison between Jacob (Israel) and Esau (Edom). One is chosen by the Lord and set apart. He needs only to follow God in love, honoring and obeying Him, to find success. The other strives hard to triumph in his own strength. (And God, knowing his evil intent, will not let his rebuilt nation stand.) If you had to describe yourself as either Jacob or Esau, how would you characterize your way of relating to God? When it comes to growing in your faith, are you following a plan like Jacob's or like Esau's?



D. The Israelites' reaction to God, their determination to challenge everything God says through Malachi, indicates a destructive lack of spiritual self-awareness. What is the danger of lacking spiritual self-awareness?

E. The Israelites had the prophets to shine a light when they were blind to their own failures or missed the fact that they had wandered away from God. What is the value of welcoming this kind of intervention into our personal faith journey and also into the life of the spiritual community? If you have invited people into your life to help you with your spiritual "blind spots," why have you done so and with what results? If you have not, what are your reasons for not doing so?

PRAY & COMMIT

Questions for your breakout prayer time and challenges for the rest of your week

A. Pastor Lionel made the assertion that at the root of much of our sin is a failure to believe the gospel, to trust God's unequivocal commitment to love us. Consider this statement carefully and answer this question: how is it possible for a lack of faith to manifest as sin? Then think about your life. Are there areas in your heart where, if you're honest, you have to admit that you really don't trust God or don't believe in His love for you?

B. Take a courageous step and ask a friend whom you trust to identify any blind spots you have. Choose someone who knows you well and is full of grace, but not afraid to speak truth. Before your talk, prepare your own heart by committing to receive what your friend has to say with the understanding that he or she is coming alongside you to increase spiritual self-awareness.

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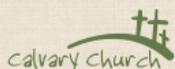
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