

The Books of Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi, Teacher's Guide

Lesson 11: A Son Honors His Father: The Lord's Complaint

Malachi 1:1-2:16

Teaching Aim (Teacher Orientation)

Doctrinally, this lesson confronts the congregation with the question of honor: whether God is truly receiving the reverence, the firstfruits, and the wholehearted devotion that belong to Him as Father and Lord, or whether He is quietly receiving our leftovers. Malachi works through a series of disputations: God states a charge, the people object as if innocent, and God lays out the evidence. The central charge is that the priests despised God's name by offering blemished, lame, and sick animals, the very thing they would never dare bring to their governor. The sin is not the absence of worship but the contempt within it, careless, second-best, going-through-the-motions religion offered by people who keep the best for themselves. Teach the timeless principle plainly: God deserves our honor and our best, not our leftovers, in worship, time, money, and devotion.

Two further threads run through the passage and must be handled with care. First, the corrupt priesthood is rebuked for failing to honor God and for causing many to stumble (2:1-9), set against the ideal of Levi who walked with God and turned many from iniquity. This presses the responsibility of all who lead and influence others. Second, the closing section (2:10-16) addresses covenant unfaithfulness, both with God and in marriage, where God declares Himself the witness to the marriage covenant and says He hates the treacherous covenant-breaking of divorce. Teach this truthfully, upholding God's unchanging design for lifelong marriage and the gravity of breaking covenant, while being genuinely pastoral toward those who carry the wounds of a broken marriage. Do not be harsh, simplistic, or careless; many in any room have been hurt here. Note also that "my name will be great among the nations" (1:11) is fulfilled not in a future earthly temple program but in the gospel and the worship of God by all peoples in Christ's church.

This passage was never meant only to inform; it was meant to search and to change. A student who truly hears Malachi will stop and examine the secret quality of his devotion, the part no one else sees, and will resolve to bring God his honor and his best. So aim at both targets. Send students home understanding why God refuses to be honored with second-best and why He stands as witness over our covenants, and send them home ready to name one specific area, worship, giving, time, or marriage, where they will stop offering leftovers and begin offering their best, moved by the God who first said, "I have loved you."

Question 1

Student Question:

Malachi opens not with a rebuke but with a declaration of love: "I have loved you, says the Lord," and the people answer, "How have you loved us?" (1:2). God points back to His sovereign, covenant love for Jacob (1:2-5). What does it reveal about God that He grounds His complaint against His people in His prior love for them? Why does He establish His love before He names their sin?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Begin where God begins, because the order is everything. Before a single accusation, God says, "I have loved you, says the Lord." The whole book of complaint rests on this foundation of love. God is not a distant inspector hunting for faults; He is a Father whose love has been spurned, and His charges flow from that wounded love, not from cold legalism. Help students feel the tenderness here before the severity.

The people's response is telling: "How have you loved us?" They are so dull, so consumed with their disappointments, that they cannot see God's love at all. God answers by pointing to His sovereign, covenant choice of Jacob over Esau (1:2-5), an electing love that set His affection on a people who had done nothing to earn it. This is not about Esau the man being hated in a cruel sense, but about God's free, covenant love for Jacob and his descendants, a love they had received and forgotten.

Teach why God establishes His love before He names sin. This is how God consistently deals with His people throughout Scripture. He redeems Israel from Egypt before He gives the law at Sinai. In Christ, He demonstrates His love while we were still sinners (Romans 5:8) before He calls us to obedience. Love is the ground, not the reward, of the relationship. When we hear God's commands apart from His love, they sound like tyranny; heard inside His love, they are the appeals of a Father.

Bring it home. The right response to being loved is not to take it for granted but to honor the One who loves us. The tragedy of Malachi's hearers is that they had received covenant love and answered it with careless contempt. Lead students to hear God's "I have loved you" afresh, and to feel how naturally honor should flow from a heart that truly grasps it.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- God grounds His relationship with His people in His prior, freely given covenant love (Deuteronomy 7:7-8; Romans 5:8).
- God's rebukes flow from wounded love, not cold legalism; correction is evidence of His covenant care (Hebrews 12:5-6).
- Love is the ground of obedience, not its reward; God redeems before He commands.
- Spiritual dullness can blind even God's people to love that is plainly before them.

Discussion Prompts

- Why does God establish His love before He brings any charge against His people?

- How does hearing God's commands inside His love change the way they sound to us?
- What does it mean that the people could no longer see a love they had clearly received?

Question 2

Student Question:

The people had grown so spiritually dull that they could no longer see God's love (1:2). Where in your own life have familiarity and routine made you blind to evidences of God's love that were there all along? What has stopped feeling like grace and started feeling like background noise?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This is the first self-examining question, and the aim is honest awakening, not shame. The people's answer, "How have you loved us?", reveals a heart that has gone numb. The blessings were still there, the return from exile, the rebuilt temple, the running sacrifices, but familiarity had drained them of wonder. What had once been seen as grace had faded into mere background, taken for granted and no longer felt.

Help students recognize this drift in themselves, because it is one of the most common spiritual ailments. The very mercies we receive most regularly are the ones we notice least: daily bread, a sound mind, the gospel freely preached, the fellowship of the saints, the patience of God with our failures. Routine has a way of turning miracles into furniture. We walk past God's kindness every day without a second glance.

Lead them to name specific examples. The goal is not vague guilt but concrete recognition. Where has something that was once a clear gift, a relationship, health, salvation, opportunity, the Lord's Day gathering, become simply expected? The first step out of dullness is to start counting again, to deliberately recall and name what God has done.

Move toward a practical remedy. Gratitude is the cure for the numbness Malachi describes. Encourage students to begin a deliberate habit of noticing and thanking God for ordinary mercies, because a thankful heart is a heart that can see God's love again, and a heart that sees His love is moved to honor Him.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Familiarity and routine can dull the believer's awareness of God's ongoing mercies.
- Ingratitude is a serious spiritual condition, a root of deeper drift (Romans 1:21).
- Gratitude restores spiritual sight and rekindles love for God (Psalm 103:2).
- The most regular blessings are often the most overlooked.

Discussion Prompts

- What blessing in your life has quietly stopped feeling like grace and started feeling like background noise?

- Why do the mercies we receive most often become the ones we notice least?
- What is one practical habit that would help you start counting God's kindnesses again?

Question 3

Student Question:

God says, "A son honors his father, and a servant his master. If then I am a father, where is my honor?" (1:6). What does this teach about the kind of relationship God desires with His people, and about the honor and reverence that rightly belong to Him as Father and Lord?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Here is the question that names the lesson: "A son honors his father, and a servant his master. If then I am a father, where is my honor? If I am a master, where is my fear?" (1:6). God uses two of the most basic human relationships, child to parent and servant to master, to expose what is missing. In both, honor and reverence are simply assumed; a son who treated his father with contempt would be a scandal. Yet that is precisely how God's people were treating Him.

Teach the two images together. As Father, God deserves honor, the warm, glad esteem of a child who loves and respects the one who gave him life. As Master, God deserves reverent fear, the proper awe of a servant before a sovereign Lord. These are not in tension; the healthiest relationship with God holds both the tenderness of a child and the reverence of a servant. Where either is missing, worship goes wrong.

Show students what dishonor looks like, because it is rarely loud. The priests had not renounced God or shut the temple. They kept the forms running. But they had drained the honor out of the forms, treating holy things casually, offering God what cost them nothing. Dishonor often wears the costume of continued religion; that is what makes it so easy to miss in ourselves.

Press the relational heart of it. God is not after mere ritual correctness; He is after the honor that flows from a loving, reverent heart. Help students see that the question, "Where is my honor?", is not the demand of an insecure tyrant but the rightful longing of a Father who deserves to be loved and revered by the children He has loved.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- God rightly desires both the warm honor due a Father and the reverent fear due a Master.
- Honor and reverence are the natural response of a heart that truly grasps who God is.
- Dishonor often hides inside continued religious activity, draining the forms of their heart.
- God seeks a relationship of love and reverence, not mere ritual correctness.

Discussion Prompts

- What does it look like to hold together the tenderness of a child and the reverence of a servant before God?

- Why is dishonoring God so easy to miss when the outward forms of religion continue?
- How is God's question, "Where is my honor?", the longing of a Father rather than the demand of a tyrant?

Question 4

Student Question:

The priests were bringing the "best" of their excuses while bringing God the worst of their flocks (1:6-8). If you examined the quality, and not just the quantity, of what you give God, your worship, your prayer, your giving, your service, what would the quality say about how much you honor Him? Where are you offering God effort you would be embarrassed to offer your employer?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This self-examining question turns from quantity to quality. The priests were still bringing offerings; the altar was busy. The problem was what they brought: the blind, the lame, the sick, the animals no buyer would want (1:8). They kept the best for the market and the worst for God, all while keeping the religious machinery running. The forms were intact; the heart had gone hollow.

Help students apply this to the texture of their own devotion. It is possible to pray without praying, to attend without worshiping, to give without sacrificing, to serve while resenting it. The question is not merely whether we do these things but how, and with what heart. God reads the quality of an offering, not just its existence on the ledger.

Offer the convicting comparison the question raises. We would be embarrassed to give our employer the level of effort we sometimes give God: the distracted prayer mumbled while half asleep, the giving of whatever is left after every want is satisfied, the worship attended with one eye on the clock. We bring our sharpest selves to the things that pay us or impress others, and our most exhausted, leftover selves to the God who made us.

Move toward concrete reordering. The remedy is not more activity but better, the deliberate offering of our best to God: a real, attentive hour of prayer; giving that is planned and sacrificial rather than incidental; worship entered with preparation and engagement. Invite each student to name one area where the quality of his offering needs to rise.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- God weighs the quality and heart of our offerings, not merely their existence (1 Samuel 16:7).
- It is possible to keep the forms of devotion while the heart has gone hollow.
- We reveal what we truly honor by where we direct our best effort versus our leftovers.
- Acceptable worship engages the whole heart, not divided or distracted attention.

Discussion Prompts

- If you examined the quality, not just the quantity, of what you give God, what would it reveal?
- Where do you give God effort you would be embarrassed to offer your employer?
- What is one area where the quality of your offering to God most needs to rise?

Question 5

Student Question:

God exposes the sin plainly: they offered the blind, the lame, and the sick, animals they would never dare present to their governor (1:8–9, 13–14). What does this teach about the nature of acceptable worship, and about a God who refuses to be honored with our second-best while we keep the best for ourselves?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

God strips away every excuse with a devastating test: “Present that to your governor; will he accept you or show you favor?” (1:8). The people would never dream of bringing a lame, defective animal to the Persian governor as tribute; they knew it would insult him. Yet they brought exactly such gifts to the Lord of hosts, the King above every governor. The comparison exposes the absurdity of their contempt.

Teach the principle of acceptable worship that emerges here. Under the law, the sacrifice was to be without blemish, and behind that requirement lay a truth that outlasts the law: God is worthy of our best, and worship offered carelessly is not neutral but offensive. Worship is not made acceptable by its mere occurrence; it must be offered in a manner worthy of the One who receives it. God does not grade on effort while ignoring contempt.

Connect this forward without binding the old sacrificial system. The animal sacrifices have been fulfilled and set aside in Christ, the spotless Lamb who offered Himself once for all (Hebrews 9:11–14; 1 Peter 1:18–19). But the principle endures: we now offer spiritual sacrifices, our bodies as living sacrifices (Romans 12:1), our praise, our giving, our service, and these too can be offered with our best or with our blemished leftovers. The form changed; the call to honor God with our best did not.

Press the heart of the matter. The God who keeps nothing back from us, who gave His own Son, refuses to be honored with our second-best while we hoard our first and finest for ourselves. This is not divine vanity; it is the simple fitness of giving the worthiest One our worthiest gift. Help students feel both the seriousness of careless worship and the joy of bringing God their best.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- God is worthy of our best; worship offered carelessly is offensive, not neutral (Malachi 1:8, 14).
- Acceptable worship must be offered in a manner worthy of the One who receives it, not merely performed.
- The blemish-free sacrifice is fulfilled in Christ, the spotless Lamb (1 Peter 1:18–19; Hebrews 9:14).
- Christians now offer spiritual sacrifices, which can likewise be given with our best or our leftovers (Romans 12:1; 1 Peter 2:5).
- God, who kept nothing back from us, refuses to be honored with our second-best.

Discussion Prompts

- Why is the comparison to the governor so devastating to the people's excuses?
- How does the principle of unblemished offerings carry over into Christian worship today?
- What does it say about God's worth that He refuses to accept our careless second-best?

Question 6

Student Question:

God cries out, "Oh that there were one among you who would shut the doors, that you might not kindle fire on my altar in vain!" (1:10). He would rather the doors be shut than receive contemptuous worship. Where might your own worship have become a going-through-the-motions that God would call "in vain," and what would it take to close the gap between your outward acts and your heart?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This self-examining question turns on one of the most arresting verses in the prophets: "Oh that there were one among you who would shut the doors, that you might not kindle fire on my altar in vain!" (1:10). God says, in effect, that He would rather the temple doors be bolted shut than receive worship offered in contempt. Empty pews would please Him more than full ones filled with hollow hearts. This should stop us in our tracks.

Teach what God means by worship offered "in vain." It is religious activity that goes through the motions while the heart is elsewhere, the body present and the soul absent. Such worship is worse than useless; it is offensive, because it treats holy things as routine and offers God the appearance of devotion without its substance. God is not impressed by attendance figures or busy altars; He looks for hearts truly turned toward Him.

Help students examine their own going-through-the-motions. We can sing without meaning the words, take the Lord's Supper while planning the afternoon, sit through teaching without listening, bow our heads in prayer while our minds wander far away. The danger is not that we will stop coming; it is that we will keep coming with closed hearts and call it worship. Familiar ritual is especially prone to this hollowing.

Move toward closing the gap. The remedy is not to abandon the forms but to fill them again with the heart, through preparation, attention, and deliberate engagement. Invite students to identify one act of worship that has gone mechanical and to take a concrete step toward offering it with a present, honoring heart, so that it is no longer fire kindled in vain.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- God would rather receive no worship than worship offered in empty contempt (Malachi 1:10).
- Going-through-the-motions worship is not neutral but offensive to God (Isaiah 29:13; Matthew 15:8-9).
- Familiar ritual is especially vulnerable to becoming hollow and heartless.
- The remedy is not abandoning the forms but filling them again with a present, engaged heart.

Discussion Prompts

- Why would God rather the doors be shut than receive worship offered in vain?
- Where has an act of worship become mechanical for you, body present and heart absent?
- What concrete step would help you close the gap between your outward worship and your heart?

Question 7

Student Question:

Despite the failure of His people, God declares, “For from the rising of the sun to its setting my name will be great among the nations” (1:11). How is this promise fulfilled in the gospel and in the worship of God by people of every nation in Christ’s church (Acts 2; Revelation 5:9-10)? What does it reveal about God’s purposes that His name will be honored among the nations even when His own people grow careless?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Even amid the indictment, God lifts His eyes to a sweeping promise: “For from the rising of the sun to its setting my name will be great among the nations, and in every place incense will be offered to my name, and a pure offering” (1:11). The contrast is stunning. God’s own priests despise His name, yet He declares that His name will be great among the very nations Israel looked down upon. God’s purposes do not finally depend on the faithfulness of any one generation of His people.

Teach this as a gospel promise fulfilled in Christ and His church, not as a prediction of a future earthly temple program. This is not foretelling some rebuilt temple in Jerusalem with reinstated animal sacrifices; that whole system was fulfilled and set aside in Christ. Rather, it looks forward to the day, arrived in the gospel age, when worshipers of every nation would offer God pure

spiritual worship in spirit and truth (John 4:21-24). When the gospel went to the nations at Pentecost and beyond, God's name began to be honored from the rising of the sun to its setting (Acts 2; Acts 10).

Show the "pure offering" for what it is. No longer bulls and goats, but the spiritual sacrifices of redeemed people: prayer, praise, thanksgiving, lives surrendered to God (Hebrews 13:15; 1 Peter 2:5; Romans 12:1). John's vision shows the consummation, the redeemed "from every tribe and language and people and nation" worshiping the Lamb (Revelation 5:9-10). Malachi's promise reaches its fullness in the worldwide worship of God in Christ's church.

Bring it to the heart with both warning and comfort. The warning: God's work will go forward with us or without us, so we must not presume that our carelessness is harmless; we can forfeit our part in what God is doing. The comfort: God's redemptive purpose is unstoppable; His name will be honored among the nations no matter how His people falter, and we are invited to take our place among the worshipers who give Him glory.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- God's redemptive purpose is global and unstoppable; His name will be honored among all nations (Malachi 1:11).
- The promise is fulfilled in the gospel age and the worship of God by all peoples in Christ's church, not a future earthly temple (John 4:21-24; Acts 2).
- The "pure offering" is the spiritual worship of redeemed people, not reinstated animal sacrifice (Hebrews 13:15; 1 Peter 2:5).
- The consummation is the worship of the Lamb by people of every tribe and nation (Revelation 5:9-10).
- God's purposes do not finally depend on the faithfulness of any one generation.

Discussion Prompts

- How is the promise that God's name will be great among the nations fulfilled in the church today?
- Why is it important to read this as gospel fulfillment rather than a future earthly temple program?
- What does it mean for us that God's purpose advances even when His people grow careless?

Question 8

Student Question:

God describes the ideal priest in Levi, who "walked with me in peace and uprightness, and turned many from iniquity" (2:6), in sharp contrast to the corrupt priests who "caused many to stumble" (2:8). Whatever your role, parent, teacher, friend, mentor, where is your life turning people

toward God, and where might it be causing others to stumble? Name one relationship where your example matters more than you have admitted.

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Malachi sets two pictures of leadership side by side. There is the ideal, embodied in Levi: he “walked with me in peace and uprightness, and turned many from iniquity,” and “true instruction was in his mouth” (2:6). And there are the present priests, who “turned aside from the way” and “caused many to stumble by your instruction” (2:8). One kind of leader draws people toward God; the other drives them away or trips them up. The difference is enormous, and it is measured in the lives of others.

Teach the weight of influence. Those who teach and lead carry a heightened accountability, because their lives and their words shape others (James 3:1). The corrupt priests did not merely sin privately; their corruption rippled out, causing many to stumble. This is why leadership in God’s house is held to a high standard. But press the point further: every believer leads someone. Parents lead children, the older lead the younger, friends shape friends, the watched are always being watched.

Help students take an honest inventory of their influence. The question is not abstract. In specific relationships, am I a Levi or a corrupt priest? Does my example turn people toward God, toward peace and uprightness, or does it cause them to stumble through hypocrisy, harshness, careless speech, or a faith that looks hollow up close? Often the people most shaped by us are the ones who see us at our least guarded.

Note the picture of the faithful leader and aim there. Levi “walked with God,” and out of that walk came integrity and the power to turn others from sin. We cannot lead others toward a God we are not ourselves following closely. Invite each student to name one relationship where his example matters more than he has admitted, and to consider what walking with God there would require.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Those who teach and lead bear a heightened accountability for their influence (James 3:1).
- Faithful leaders walk with God and turn others toward Him; corrupt ones cause many to stumble (Malachi 2:6–8).
- Every believer influences someone; example teaches more powerfully than words (1 Timothy 4:12).
- We cannot lead others toward a God we are not ourselves following closely.

Discussion Prompts

- In which specific relationship is your example turning someone toward God, and in which might it be causing stumbling?
- Why do those who teach and lead carry a heightened accountability before God?

- What would walking closely with God look like in the relationship where your influence matters most?

Question 9

Student Question:

The lesson closes with the hardest charge of all: the people deal “treacherously” with one another and with “the wife of your youth,” profaning the covenant, and God says of the man who breaks faith with his wife by divorce that he “covers his garment with violence,” and “I hate” such treacherous dealing (2:10–16). What does this passage reveal about how seriously God regards the marriage covenant, that He Himself stands as witness to it, and about His call to lifelong covenant faithfulness? How does this both uphold God’s unchanging design for marriage and speak with tenderness to those who have been wounded by its breaking?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This is the heaviest block of the lesson, and it must be handled with both clarity and tenderness, because it touches deep wounds. Malachi turns from worship to covenant faithfulness. The people had dealt “treacherously” with one another and had broken faith with “the wife of your youth,” the woman they married in their young years and to whom they had pledged themselves (2:10–14). God names this for what it is: covenant-breaking, treachery against a sacred bond.

Teach first the astonishing claim that God is witness to the marriage covenant. “The Lord was witness between you and the wife of your youth... she is your companion and your wife by covenant” (2:14). Marriage is not a mere private arrangement or a civil contract to be dissolved at will; it is a covenant made before God, who stands as its witness and guarantor. This is why its breaking is so grave: it is not only a wound to a spouse but a betrayal in the presence of God Himself, who designed marriage as a lifelong, one-flesh union from the beginning (Genesis 2:24; Matthew 19:4–6).

Handle verse 16 carefully and truthfully. The text declares that God “hates” the treacherous covenant-breaking that divorce represents, and that the man who breaks faith with his wife “covers his garment with violence,” a vivid image of a stain of cruelty on the very one who should protect. What God hates is the treachery, the violence done to a covenant and to a person. Teach this plainly: God takes covenant-breaking with terrible seriousness, and divorce is never the light thing our culture imagines. But be equally careful not to weaponize the verse. The passage condemns the act of treachery; it is not a verdict heaped upon every person who has suffered through a broken marriage, many of whom were themselves the wounded party.

Be deeply pastoral here, because in any room there are those who carry the grief of divorce, some who were betrayed, some who repented, some still aching. Speak the truth without harshness or simplistic judgment. Uphold God’s unchanging design for lifelong marriage and call

God's people to covenant faithfulness, to cherish and keep faith with the husband or wife of their youth. At the same time, hold out the gospel's grace and healing to the wounded and the failing, for there is forgiveness and restoration in Christ for every sin, including this one. The aim is not to crush but to call God's people back to faithfulness and to comfort those who have been broken.

Draw the threads together. The same God who refuses leftovers at the altar also refuses treachery in the home. Covenant faithfulness is of one piece: to honor God is to keep faith, with Him and with those to whom we have pledged ourselves. Invite the married to recommit to cherishing their spouse, invite all to take their covenants with utter seriousness, and invite the wounded to bring their pain to the God who witnesses every vow and heals every heart.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Marriage is a covenant made before God, who stands as its witness and guarantor (Malachi 2:14).
- God designed marriage as a lifelong, one-flesh union from the beginning (Genesis 2:24; Matthew 19:4-6).
- God takes covenant-breaking with great seriousness; He hates the treachery and violence of broken faith (Malachi 2:16).
- The passage condemns the act of treachery, not the wounded party who has suffered a broken marriage; it must never be weaponized.
- Covenant faithfulness with God and with people is of one piece; to honor God is to keep faith.
- There is forgiveness, grace, and healing in Christ for every sin and every broken heart (1 John 1:9; Psalm 147:3).

Discussion Prompts

- What does it mean that God Himself stands as witness to the marriage covenant, and how should that shape how we regard it?
- How do we uphold God's design for lifelong marriage while speaking tenderly to those wounded by divorce?
- How is covenant faithfulness with our spouse connected to covenant faithfulness with God?

Question 10

Student Question:

Look back across these two chapters, from "I have loved you" to "A son honors his father" to the call to covenant faithfulness. Name one specific area, your worship, your giving, your time, your marriage, or another covenant, where the Lord is calling you to stop offering Him leftovers and begin giving Him your honor and your best this week.

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This capstone question asks students to look back across both chapters and respond personally. Trace the movement once more with them: God's opening word of love ("I have loved you"), the searching question of honor ("A son honors his father"), the exposure of careless, second-best worship, the cry that God would rather shut the doors than receive contempt, the promise that His name will be great among the nations, and the call to covenant faithfulness with God and with the spouse of one's youth.

Resist letting the lesson end in mere agreement. Everyone will nod that God deserves our best; the point is whether we will actually give it. Malachi's hearers did not think they were dishonoring God; that is precisely the danger. The aim is for each student to see, concretely, where he has been handing God the stained shirt, and to name one specific change.

Help each person land on one real area. For some it will be the quality of worship or prayer; for some, giving that has been incidental rather than purposed and sacrificial; for some, time, the leftover minutes given to God after everything else; for some, the marriage covenant or another pledge in need of renewed faithfulness. The leftover looks different in different lives, but the call is the same: give God your honor and your best.

Close on the love that opened the book. Remind students that the strength to honor God flows from grasping that He first loved us. The same God who asks, "Where is my honor?", is the Father who said, "I have loved you," and who gave His own Son, holding nothing back. Let students leave hearing both halves of Malachi's message: God has loved you, so bring Him your best.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Genuine response to God's word moves from agreement to concrete, namable action.
- The subtle danger of honoring God in word while dishonoring Him in the quality of our devotion.
- Offering God our best, rather than our leftovers, applies across worship, giving, time, and covenant.
- The motive and strength to honor God flow from grasping that He first loved us (Malachi 1:2; 1 John 4:19).

Discussion Prompts

- In what one specific area, worship, giving, time, or a covenant, have you been offering God leftovers rather than your best?
- Why is it so easy, as it was for Malachi's hearers, to dishonor God without realizing it?
- How does remembering that God first loved you give you the strength to bring Him your honor and your best?