

How to Use Sermon Resources

- **READ AHEAD TOGETHER** - MCG's should use the Devotional at the end of this resource as a reading plan for the week leading up to your meeting.
- **SIT UNDER THE WORD** - This resource is filled with scripture references. Read them aloud, together before you answer any questions.
- **APPLY TRUTH** - The goal is deep discussion and application, not necessarily to complete this resource. Don't squash a good discussion. If you get into something important along the way that's fine.

Small Group Discussion Guide

Opening Prayer [2 mins]

Use the Overview [5 mins]

- Cover any key points for people who missed parts or all of the sermon

Scripture Deep Dive [30-40 mins]

- Opening Question
- Read the scripture for each question then ask the question. Some have multiple scriptures.

Close in Prayer

- In this extended prayer time, ask others to pray as they feel led, pray in a circle, pray over one another, pray to your left, or pray for someone specific. Whatever seems best.

Split Time (if applicable)

- Men with men, women with women
- Share in a circle. "What's one thing you want to celebrate? What do you need prayer and accountability for?"
- After everyone shares, pray in a circle for the person to your left/right.

SERMON OVERVIEW

Return: Haggai

Sermon Summary:

Drawing from the book of Malachi, this sermon challenges believers to examine whether their lives are genuinely distinguishable from the surrounding culture. Written roughly 100 years after the Israelites returned from exile, Malachi confronts a people whose faith had become indistinguishable from the world around them. Using the comparison of authentic versus imitation artwork, the pastor illustrates how Christians today face the same danger of blending in rather than standing out.

Key Points:

- The book of Malachi was written to a people whose lives were indistinguishable from the surrounding culture, a problem that mirrors the state of many Christians today
- Statistics on divorce rates, online viewing habits, charitable giving, and domestic issues reveal that Christian and non-Christian behavior in America is often nearly identical
- Living for God flows from a genuine understanding of being loved by God, and doubting that love leads to compromised decisions
- Sincere worship means bringing one's best before God with a devoted heart, not going through the motions of religious activity while the heart remains distant
- Cultural Christianity describes the pattern of engaging in Christian behaviors only when they cost nothing, and withdrawing when genuine sacrifice is required
- Faithful marriage reflects God's covenant relationship with his people and should be a visible witness to the surrounding culture
- Treachery in marriage can take many forms, including lying, demeaning speech, unfair comparison, emotional unfaithfulness, and withholding affection as punishment
- Giving regularly, cheerfully, and sacrificially is a mark of trusting God with all of life, including finances
- Giving anchors the heart in eternity and serves as a consistent practice of gratitude and stewardship
- Communion serves as a remembrance of Christ's sacrifice, a celebration of his resurrection, and an anticipation of his return

Scripture Reference:

- Malachi 1-3

Stories:

- The pastor displayed side-by-side images of the Mona Lisa and Girl with a Pearl Earring, pairing authentic masterpieces with imitations, one by a professional and one by a child in the congregation, to illustrate how difficult it can sometimes be to distinguish the real from the counterfeit, and how this mirrors the difficulty of distinguishing believers from non-believers in today's culture
- The pastor described a hypothetical gym scenario in which a person secretly skips several repetitions while their trainer is distracted, then claims to have completed all twelve, using it to illustrate that when believers cut corners in obedience to God, they are the ones who lose out, not God
- The pastor referenced the fulfilled prophecy concerning the Edomites from the book of Obadiah as context for God's declaration of choosing and rescuing Israel in Malachi chapter one

Scripture Deep Dive

Read Malachi 3:18

If someone watched your life for one ordinary week—your conversations, spending, online habits, schedule, and responses under stress— what would be the indicators that you follow Jesus?

Sincere Worship

Read: Malachi 1:6-8; Isaiah 29:13; John 4:23-24 —

God accused His people of honoring Him outwardly while offering Him what cost them little.

When you worship, serve, pray, or gather with the church, how can you discern if you are giving God your sincere attention and affection, or are you just going through the motions?

For you, what does bringing God your best look like?

Faithful Marriages

Read: Malachi 2:14-16; Ephesians 5:25-33; Matthew 19:4-6 —

Malachi says marriage is a covenant before God.

In a Godly marriage, what are the signs that a spouse thinks of their partner as a covenant partner to love and protect?

Conversely, what are the signs of a casual, critical, or self-protective relationship?

In Malachi 2:15-16 God says, “Watch yourselves carefully.”

Where do you most often encounter people or content that influences you negatively in regards to your marriage? How can you combat these “voices”?

Faithful Stewardship

Read: Malachi 3:8-10; 2 Corinthians 9:6-7; Matthew 6:19-24 — God connected their spiritual condition to how they handled their money.

How should the spending habits of a Jesus follower be different from someone who does not follow Jesus? Do you have a personal practice of stewardship that you would share?