

Title: Return to God with Your Whole Heart

Text: Malachi 3:6-12

One of the most dangerous things about spiritual decline is very often slow and quiet.

Most Christians do not suddenly wake up and decide, *"I no longer love God."*

Spiritual apathy usually develops slowly and quietly.

Affections cool gradually.

Convictions weaken subtly.

Worship becomes mechanical.

Obedience becomes optional.

A believer can continue attending church, carrying a Bible, singing worship songs, and serving in ministry while inwardly drifting from vibrant fellowship with God.

That is why spiritual apathy is so deceptive.

It often hides beneath the appearance of normal Christianity.

And eventually, spiritual apathy reveals itself in practical ways:

- prayer becomes inconsistent,
- worship becomes routine,
- sin becomes tolerated,
- generosity becomes reluctant,
- and obedience becomes conditional.

The truth is, we can say we trust God while functionally trusting ourselves.

Jesus repeatedly taught that our stewardship of our resources exposes our hearts because money reveals what we truly treasure.

Where our money goes, our priorities follow.

Where our treasure rests, our heart settles.

That is exactly what God exposes in [Malachi 3](#).

The people of Israel still had religious activity, but they no longer had wholehearted devotion.

They had become spiritually indifferent.

Their worship was polluted.

Their priests were compromised.

Their marriages were unfaithful.

Their hearts had grown cynical toward God.

And now God exposes another evidence of their spiritual decline: they were withholding from Him.

Their wallets revealed what their worship concealed.

Malachi ministered sometime around 430 B.C., after the Babylonian exile.

The Jews had returned to the land.

The temple had been rebuilt.

Jerusalem's walls had been restored under Nehemiah.

Outwardly, things appeared stable again.

But spiritually, the nation was deeply unhealthy.

The people had expected the return from exile to usher in immediate blessing, prosperity, and covenant glory.

Instead, life remained difficult.

Crops struggled.

The economy was weak.

Foreign powers still dominated them politically.

Discouragement slowly turned into cynicism.

Rather than humbling themselves before God, the people began questioning Him:

- questioning His love,
- questioning His justice,

- questioning whether serving Him was even worth it.

Throughout the book, Malachi is structured around a series of divine disputes:

“I have loved you.”

“How have You loved us?”

“You despise My name.”

“How have we despised Your name?”

“Judah has been faithless.”

“Why does He not regard our offerings?”

“You have wearied the LORD with your words.”

“How have we wearied Him?”

Their spiritual blindness had become severe. They no longer recognized the seriousness of their condition.

And in [Malachi 3:6–12](#), God confronts one of the clearest manifestations of their spiritual apathy: they no longer trusted Him enough to obey Him fully.

This text is not merely about giving.

It is about worship.

It is about repentance.

It is about trust.

It is about a wholehearted return to God.

Main Idea: When We Return to God in Faithfulness, He Restores Covenant Blessing.

What does a genuine return to God actually look like in the life of spiritually apathetic people?

Malachi begins by reminding the people that the foundation of repentance is not human faithfulness, but the unchanging character of God Himself.

1. God’s Unchanging Character Invites Our Return — v. 6

God’s covenant faithfulness gives sinful people hope to return to Him.

Malachi 3:6 ESV

⁶ “For I the LORD do not change; therefore you, O children of Jacob, are not consumed.

This verse is one of the clearest theological statements in all of Scripture concerning the immutability of God.

Immutability means without change.

God does not change in His nature, His character, His holiness, His truth, His promises, or His purposes.

Nothing about our God changes.

Hebrews 13:8 ESV

⁸ Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever.

Everything in our world changes:

- economies fluctuate,
- governments rise and fall,
- emotions shift,
- relationships weaken,
- bodies age,
- circumstances vary.

But our God remains eternally consistent.

He is always the same!

And I am grateful for this one constant in my life.

The verse begins:

“For I the LORD..”

The covenant name “LORD” is Yahweh. This is the sacred covenant name God revealed to Moses in

Exodus 3:14 ESV

God said to Moses, “I AM WHO I AM.” And he said, “Say this to the people of Israel: ‘I AM has sent me to you.’ ”

It emphasizes God’s eternal self-existence and covenant faithfulness.

God depends upon no one outside Himself.

He is never developing, evolving, or improving because He is already perfect.

That truth matters deeply because Israel had changed constantly.

Israel had repeatedly:

- wandered,
- rebelled,
- doubted,
- compromised,
- and broken covenant obligations.

Yet God preserved them.

Notice the logic of the verse:

Malachi 3:6 ESV

⁶ “For I the LORD do not change; therefore you, O children of Jacob, are not consumed.

Israel’s survival was not grounded in their faithfulness.

It was grounded in God’s.

The phrase *“children of Jacob”* is significant.

God intentionally says *“Jacob”* rather than “Israel.”

Jacob reminds us of weakness, struggle, deception, and failure.

Jacob was the schemer.

Jacob was the manipulator.

Jacob was the deeply flawed man transformed only by grace.

God is reminding the people:

“You are descendants of a deeply flawed man, yet I have remained faithful to preserve you.”

This is covenant mercy!

This verse must be understood within the larger framework of Old Testament covenant theology.

Under the Mosaic covenant, covenant disobedience brought covenant curses.

[Deuteronomy 28](#) clearly established blessings for obedience and curses for rebellion.

Israel deserved judgment repeatedly.

So why had they not been destroyed?

Because behind the **Mosaic** covenant stood the **Abrahamic** covenant.

God had sovereignly promised to preserve a people for Himself.

His covenant promises rested ultimately upon His own faithful character.

This verse therefore reveals an important theological tension:

- God is perfectly holy,
- yet God is perfectly faithful.

He disciplines His people without abandoning His people.

This chosen people, who often acted like or worse than the pagan nations around them, served as a poignant backdrop for the graciousness and longsuffering of their God!

That truth reaches its ultimate fulfillment in Christ. God's covenant faithfulness culminates in Jesus Christ, the true and faithful covenant keeper.

Numbers 23:19 ESV

¹⁹ God is not man, that he should lie, or a son of man, that he should change his mind. Has he said, and will he not do it? Or has he spoken, and will he not fulfill it?

James 1:17 ESV

¹⁷ Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change.

Psalms 102:27 ESV

²⁷ but you are the same, and your years have no end.

Lamentations 3:22–23 ESV

²² The steadfast love of the LORD never ceases; his mercies never come to an end; ²³ they are new every morning; great is your faithfulness.

Our entire assurance of salvation depends upon the unchanging character of God.

If God changed, grace could disappear.
If God changed, promises could fail.
If God changed, salvation could become uncertain.

But the God who saves is the God who remains faithful forever.

Imagine a lighthouse standing on a rocky shoreline during a violent storm.

Waves crash against it relentlessly.

Wind howls through the darkness.

Rain pounds the coast. Out on the water, everything feels unstable and disoriented.

Ships are tossed by the waves, struggling to find direction.

But the lighthouse does not move.

It stands firm through the storm because its foundation is anchored deep into the rock beneath it.

And from the top of that lighthouse shines a steady light, piercing through the darkness and guiding weary sailors safely home.

That is what the character of God is like.

Everything around us changes:

- circumstances change,
- emotions change,
- economies change,
- relationships change,
- even our own hearts can fluctuate.

But God does not change.

And because He does not change, His mercy still shines toward wandering sinners, calling them to return to Him.

The unchanging faithfulness of God becomes the steady light that guides repentant people safely home.

This truth speaks powerfully to spiritually apathetic believers. Maybe you are one here today!

Maybe you've drifted spiritually and you are believing that:

"I've wandered too far."

"I've failed too much."

"God must be tired of me."

Perhaps:

- your prayer life has weakened,
- your love for Scripture has cooled,
- hidden sin has returned,
- worship has become routine,
- church attendance has become habitual rather than joyful.

And over time shame creates distance from God.

If God feels distant, the issue is not that He has abandoned you. More often, you have slowly wandered from Him.

[Malachi 3:6](#) reminds us that the invitation to return is grounded in God's character, not ours.

However, this truth must not be abused.

God's unchanging nature does not mean He tolerates ongoing rebellion.

The same God who remains faithful in mercy also remains faithful in holiness.

For spiritually apathetic churchgoers, this becomes very practical:

- Are you coasting spiritually?
- Are you maintaining appearances while your heart grows cold?
- Have you become comfortable with partial obedience?

This is a baptism questionnaire from a church in South Asia.

Are you willing to leave home and lose the blessing of your father?

Are you willing to lose your job?

Are you willing to go to the village and those who persecute you, forgive them and share the love of Christ with them?

Are you willing to give and offering to the Lord?

Are you willing to be beaten rather than deny your faith?

Are you willing to go to prison?

Are you willing to die for Jesus?

Some believers have not abandoned God outright.

They have simply reduced Him to a lower priority.

Is that you this morning?

God is lovingly calling you back!

The hope of repentance rests not in human consistency, but in the unchanging covenant faithfulness of God.

But God's covenant faithfulness does not ignore sin.

It becomes the basis for a loving confrontation and a gracious call to wholehearted repentance.

2. God Calls His People to Return Fully — vs. 7–9

Returning to God requires wholehearted repentance expressed through practical obedience.

Malachi 3:7 ESV

From the days of your fathers you have turned aside from my statutes and have not kept them. Return to me, and I will return to you, says the LORD of hosts. But you say, 'How shall we return?'

This was not a temporary failure.

This was a long-standing pattern.

The phrase *"turned aside"* refers to departing from a path.

God had clearly revealed His covenant standards, yet generation after generation wandered from them.

Spiritual decline rarely happens instantly.

It develops gradually through repeated compromise.

One compromise after another.

One generation tolerates what the previous generation feared.

The next generation normalizes it.

The next generation embraces it openly.

That pattern appears throughout Israel's history:

- during the Judges,
- during the divided kingdom,
- during the exile,
- and now again after the exile.

Yet despite their rebellion, God graciously says:

Malachi 3:7 ESV

Return to me, and I will return to you, says the LORD of hosts...

This is covenant language.

The word *“return”* speaks of repentance, restoration, and renewed covenant fellowship.

Notice God does not merely say:

“Return to rituals.”

“Return to traditions.”

“Return to religious activity.”

He says:

“Return to Me.”

Biblical repentance is **relational** before it is **behavioral**.

Repentance is not merely feeling guilty.

Repentance is turning back toward God Himself.

As Dane Ortlund writes in his book, *Gentle and Lowly*,

“When you come to Christ for mercy and love and help in your anguish and perplexity and sinfulness, you are going with the flow of his own deepest wishes, not against them.” - Ortland, Gentle and Lowly, pg. 38

But the people respond with yet another dispute (Number 5).

Malachi 3:7 ESV

From the days of your fathers you have turned aside from my statutes and have not kept them. Return to me, and I will return to you, says the LORD of hosts. But you say, ‘How shall we return?’

This question exposes profound spiritual blindness.

They no longer recognized their sin.

Spiritual apathy had dulled their conscience so severely that they questioned whether repentance was even necessary.

Then God responds with shocking specificity on how they have abandoned Him.

Malachi 3:8 ESV

⁸ Will man rob God? Yet you are robbing me.

The Hebrew word for **“rob”** carries the idea of defrauding or withholding what rightfully belongs to another.

This is a powerful reminder to us that all that we have is not our own - we are merely managers of what God has entrusted to us.

The issue in [Malachi 3:8](#) was not merely financial negligence.

It was a theological failure of stewardship and trust.

The people had begun treating God’s blessings as though they ultimately belonged to them rather than to Him.

That is why the Lord uses such shocking language when He says, “You are robbing Me.” They were withholding from God what already belonged to God.

Randy Alcorn captures this idea well in *The Treasure Principle* when he writes,

“A steward manages assets for the owner’s benefit. The steward carries no sense of entitlement to the assets he manages. It’s his job to find out what the owner wants done with his assets, then carry out his will” (The Treasure Principle, 28).

Israel had forgotten they were stewards, not owners.

And when believers forget that everything they possess ultimately belongs to God, generosity dries up.

The people ask:

Malachi 3:8 ESV

“How have we robbed you?”

God answers:

Malachi 3:8 ESV

In your tithes and contributions.

Under the Mosaic covenant, Israel’s tithe system was comprehensive and deeply connected to covenant life.

The tithes supported:

- the Levites who served in temple ministry,
- worship operations,
- national festivals,
- care for the poor,
- widows,
- and covenant community life.

This was not simply a donation system.

This was worship.

The issue was not ultimately financial.

The issue was spiritual trust.

The people withheld from God because they no longer trusted Him enough to obey Him.

Malachi 3:9 ESV

⁹ You are cursed with a curse, for you are robbing me, the whole nation of you.

This refers directly back to [Deuteronomy 28](#) where covenant curses included drought, crop failure, and economic hardship.

The people likely blamed:

- politics,
- economics,
- difficult circumstances,
- surrounding nations.

But God exposed the real issue:

Their hearts had moved away from Him.

And notice this carefully:

The entire nation participated in this disobedience.

Spiritual apathy had become normalized culturally. And this is a dangerous place to be.

Matthew 6:21 ESV

²¹ For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

[Haggai 1](#) rebukes the people for investing heavily in their own comfort while neglecting the house of God.

Haggai 1:3–6 ESV

³ Then the word of the LORD came by the hand of Haggai the prophet, ⁴ “Is it a time for you yourselves to dwell in your paneled houses, while this house lies in ruins? ⁵ Now, therefore, thus says the LORD of hosts: Consider your ways. ⁶ You have sown much, and harvested little. You eat, but you never have enough; you drink, but you never have your fill. You clothe yourselves, but no one is warm. And he who earns wages does so to put them into a bag with holes.

Proverbs 3:9–10 ESV

⁹ Honor the LORD with your wealth and with the firstfruits of all your produce; ¹⁰ then your barns will be filled with plenty, and your vats will be bursting with wine.

New Testament believers are not under the Mosaic tithe structure, but the principle of generous, worshipful stewardship absolutely continues.

2 Corinthians 9:7 ESV

⁷ Each one must give as he has decided in his heart, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver.

If we Christians are no longer under the Mosaic system, why should we give to the work of the Lord?

While it is true that Christians are not under the Old Testament tithe structure, faithful giving still supports the work of God through the local church.

Generous stewardship enables pastors and ministry leaders to devote themselves to the ministry of the Word and prayer.

It supports the church's mission efforts locally and globally.

It funds children's ministry, student ministry, discipleship training, biblical counseling, worship ministry, church planting, benevolence care, outreach efforts, and the practical needs of maintaining a place where God's people gather for worship, fellowship, and ministry.

Faithful giving allows the church to function as the body of Christ in a broken world.

Ultimately, Christian giving is not merely about paying bills or funding programs.

It is about participating in the advance of the gospel and the making of disciples for the glory of God.

Imagine a man telling his wife:

"I love you more than anything."

But every practical decision says otherwise:

- *his time goes elsewhere,*
- *his attention goes elsewhere,*
- *his resources go elsewhere,*
- *his energy goes elsewhere.*

Eventually his words lose credibility because his priorities expose his true affections.

That was Israel.

They verbally claimed covenant relationship with God while practically withholding trust from Him.

This passage speaks directly into modern church culture because spiritual apathy often hides beneath respectable Christianity.

Many believers still:

- attend church,
- listen to sermons,
- participate in ministry,
- sing worship songs,

while functionally trusting themselves more than God.

And one of the clearest places this becomes visible is money.

Let's become very specific.

Some Christians spend freely on:

- vacations,
- streaming services,
- hobbies,
- restaurants,
- vehicles,
- sports,
- home upgrades,

while giving to kingdom ministry becomes whatever is left over.

Others give emotionally rather than intentionally.

Others give inconsistently because fear controls them.

Others never even evaluate whether their financial management reflects their genuine worship.

Some believers can quote theology about God's sovereignty while panicking constantly over money because their trust functionally rests in financial security.

Hear me carefully:

Money is rarely the real issue.

The issue is **trust**.

Money simply reveals where trust already exists.

And spiritually apathetic believers often compartmentalize obedience:

“I’ll obey God in church attendance.”

“I’ll obey God morally.”

“But I will retain control financially.”

Yet Jesus never calls for partial surrender.

He calls for wholehearted devotion.

Returning to God means:

- surrendering control,
- trusting His provision,
- aligning priorities with kingdom values,
- and obeying Him completely rather than selectively.

Review:

True repentance always moves beyond emotional regret into practical obedience.

And when God’s people trust Him through obedient faith, God delights to demonstrate His faithfulness in powerful ways.

3. God Blesses Those Who Trust Him Completely — vs. 10–12

God graciously honors those who trust Him through obedient faith.

Malachi 3:10 ESV

¹⁰ Bring the full tithe into the storehouse, that there may be food in my house...

The phrase “*full tithe*” indicates incomplete obedience.

The people were likely giving partially while withholding portions for themselves.

Partial obedience is still disobedience.

The “*storehouse*” referred to temple chambers where provisions were gathered to support ministry operations.

Then God says something astonishing:

Malachi 3:10 ESV

Bring the full tithe into the storehouse, that there may be food in my house. And thereby put me to the test, says the LORD of hosts...

Normally Scripture condemns testing God in unbelief. [Deuteronomy 6:16](#) says:

Deuteronomy 6:16 ESV

¹⁶ *“You shall not put the LORD your God to the test, as you tested him at Massah.*

So why is this different?

Because this is not rebellious testing.

This is obedient trust.

God invites His people to experience His covenant faithfulness through obedience.

Then God promises:

Malachi 3:10 ESV

Bring the full tithe into the storehouse, that there may be food in my house. And thereby put me to the test, says the LORD of hosts, if I will not open the windows of heaven for you and pour down for you a blessing until there is no more need.

The imagery points to abundant rain in an agricultural society.

Rain meant survival.

Rain meant crops.

Rain meant provision.

However, the promise encompasses more than rainfall alone.

The Lord committed himself to respond to faithful tithing in multiple ways, including sending abundant showers and *“a blessing”* that would continue to be poured out superabundantly.

Essentially, Malachi uses the *“windows of heaven”* as a comprehensive image of God’s overflowing provision—material prosperity, agricultural abundance, and divine protection—flowing toward those who demonstrate faithfulness through tithing.

Malachi 3:11 ESV

I will rebuke the devourer for you, so that it will not destroy the fruits of your soil, and your vine in the field shall not fail to bear, says the LORD of hosts.

Likely referring to locusts or destructive agricultural forces.

Malachi 3:12 ESV

Then all nations will call you blessed, for you will be a land of delight, says the LORD of hosts.

Israel was intended to display the goodness and glory of God before surrounding nations.

Their covenant faithfulness was missional in nature.

This passage must be handled carefully because it is often abused by prosperity theology.

God is not promising:

- luxury,
- riches,
- or worldly ease.

These promises existed **specifically** within Israel's covenant framework.

However, timeless principles remain:

- God honors obedience.
- God delights in faith-filled trust.
- God provides for His people.
- God blesses generosity.

And often God's richest blessings are spiritual rather than material:

- contentment,
- peace,
- joy,
- freedom from greed,
- gospel fruitfulness,
- eternal reward,
- deeper fellowship with Christ.

Sometimes the greatest blessing generosity produces is not what enters your bank account, but what lives in your heart.

Greed loosens.

Fear weakens.

Trust deepens.

Philippians 4:19 ESV

And my God will supply every need of yours according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus.

Luke 6:38 ESV

give, and it will be given to you. Good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over, will be put into your lap. For with the measure you use it will be measured back to you."

2 Corinthians 9:6 ESV

⁶ The point is this: whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows bountifully will also reap bountifully.

Acts 20:35 ESV

³⁵ In all things I have shown you that by working hard in this way we must help the weak and remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how he himself said, 'It is more blessed to give than to receive.' "

Angie and my giving story...

Generous stewardship requires trust.

Every act of faithful giving declares:

"God, I trust You more than I trust myself."

For believers who have grown spiritually dull, one beautiful sign of renewal is a renewed desire to honor God by faithfully giving back to Him what has always been His. When the heart is being restored, generosity toward the Lord's work begins to grow again.

When hearts return to God:

- worship becomes joyful again,
- serving becomes meaningful again,
- stewardship becomes cheerful again.

Specific application:

- Evaluate your budget honestly.
- Does your spending reflect kingdom priorities?
- Does your budget consider the Great Commission priorities of your church?
- Is your giving planned or accidental?
- Are you worshiping God with first fruits or leftovers?

Some believers need to repent of fearful withholding.

Others need to repent of materialism.

Others need to repent of self-indulgence disguised as “wisdom.”

Some Christians have become so financially consumed with:

- bigger homes,
- nicer experiences,
- endless upgrades,
- retirement security,
- recreational spending,

that kingdom investment has become secondary.

Church, generous Christians are not manipulated Christians.

They are worshiping Christians.

The gospel creates open hands because the gospel reminds us that everything we possess already belongs to God.

God delights to bless those who trust Him through wholehearted obedience.

Conclusion

When we return to God in faithfulness, He restores covenant blessing.

Spiritual apathy never stays isolated. It eventually affects worship, obedience, stewardship, and intimacy with God.

This week, stop treating your resources as though they belong to you and begin worshiping God as their rightful Owner by intentionally and sacrificially giving toward His work.

The greatest display of divine generosity is not found in earthly provision.

It is found at the cross.

Romans 8:32 ESV

He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things?

At Calvary, Jesus Christ took the covenant curse upon Himself for covenant breakers like us.

He bore wrath so repentant sinners could receive mercy.

He was forsaken so returning sinners could be welcomed home.

And because of Christ, the invitation still stands today:

“Return to Me.”

The God who confronts their sin is the same God inviting them home.

Not because you deserve restoration.

Not because you have earned mercy.

Not because your faithfulness is sufficient.

But because the God who does not change still welcomes repentant sinners home.