

Guard Your Spirt
Malachi 2:10-16
May 19, 2026

Introduction

- Last week Pastor Eris walked us into Malachi 2:1-9 and stood us in front of the altar. He told us about priests who still had the office, still had the vocabulary, still had the religious motions.
But they had lost the fear of the Lord. And the word of the Lord came: *guard the holy*. Take His name to heart. Do not let what is sacred become common.
- This morning the prophet takes us outside of the temple courts. He follows the corruption home. Because what gets profaned at the altar always finds its way to the kitchen table.
- The disease that started in the priesthood has spread through the household.

Open your Bibles to Malachi 2:10-16.

The Setting: The Same Disease, A New Address

- Pastor Will showed us in chapter one that the people had begun to doubt God's love. "*How have You loved us?*" (1:2). Pastor Mark showed us that they were bringing polluted offerings to the altar — leftovers, blemished animals, half-hearted worship — because they did not see God as great. Pastor Eris showed us that the priests, who were supposed to guard the holy, had let it become common.
-
- Now Malachi turns the camera. He moves it from the temple to the home. From the altar to the bedroom. From the priest's robes to the wedding garment. Because the prophet understands something we constantly forget in our compartmentalized lives:

You cannot have one heart at the altar and another heart at home. The God who watches your worship also witnesses your home life.

- The accusation has now broadened. It is no longer just the priests who are faithless. *Judah* has been faithless. The whole house. And when Malachi looks for the evidence
 - the place where the inner corruption has become visible in the outer world
 - **he points to the marriages.**
 - Two faithlessnesses. One covenantal, one marital.
 - He treats them as the same disease at two different addresses.

Let's walk through it.

1. One Father, One Covenant (vv. 10-12)

"Have we not all one Father? Has not one God created us? Why then are we faithless to one another, profaning the covenant of our fathers?"

- Notice where Malachi starts. Not with the marriages. Not with the divorces. He starts at the highest level: *we have one Father. One God created us.* He is reminding the people that they are a covenant family before they are anything else.
- Then he asks the question that frames the whole passage: *"Why then are we faithless to one another?"*
- That word — faithless — will appear five times in seven verses. It is the word for treachery, for breaking faith, for betraying someone who trusted you. And what Malachi is doing here is something we miss if we read too quickly.

He is telling Judah that the way they treat one another is the proof of how they actually understand their God.

- If we share one Father, then the way I treat my brother is not separable from the way I treat my Father. If we share one covenant, then breaking faith with the one God put me in covenant with is breaking faith with God Himself. Horizontal faithlessness is just vertical faithlessness with a human face on it.
- Then comes the specific charge in verse 11:

"Judah has profaned the sanctuary of the Lord, which he loves, and has married the daughter of a foreign god."

- We have to be careful here. This is not about ethnicity. The Old Testament celebrates Ruth the Moabite and Rahab the Canaanite — both grafted into the line of Christ. The phrase *"daughter of a foreign god"* tells us exactly what the issue is. **It is religious syncretism.** The men of Judah were marrying women whose loyalty was to other gods, and bringing those other gods into the covenant home.
- This is the same disease that brought down Solomon — the wisest man who ever lived, undone by the women he loved who turned his heart to their gods. Malachi is watching it happen all over again.
- And here is where this lands on us. We do not have the exact same problem in 21st-century Sandpoint. We are not literally marrying the daughters of Baal. But the underlying issue — the issue of who is forming the inner life of your home — is *exactly* the same.
- **Whatever forms your imagination is shaping who you become.** Whatever shapes your imagination is preaching to you about who God is. The phone in your pocket is forming you. The streaming service you watch every night is forming you. The voices you let into your home through podcasts and feeds and screens are forming you.
 - And if those voices preach a different gospel than the one we confess, then we have, in a very real sense, brought the daughters of foreign gods into our covenant homes.

The question Malachi asks Judah is the same question he asks us: Who is forming the inner life of your household?

- The warning in verse 12 is severe:

"May the Lord cut off from the tents of Jacob any descendant of the man who does this, who brings an offering to the Lord of hosts!"
- **You cannot bring offerings to the true God while building your inner life around false ones.** The disease at home will eventually kill the worship at the altar. Or, more accurately, it will reveal that the worship at the altar was already dead.

2. The Tears at the Altar (vv. 13-14)

"And this second thing you do. You cover the Lord's altar with tears, with weeping and groaning because he no longer regards the offering or accepts it with favor from your hand."

- The men of Judah are at the altar. They are weeping. They are wondering why God is not hearing their prayers. Their prayers feel like they are bouncing off the ceiling. Their offerings feel empty. Their worship is not working.
- And now Malachi tells them why they feel like God is not hearing them:

"Because the Lord was witness between you and the wife of your youth, to whom you have been faithless, though she is your companion and your wife by covenant."

The Lord was witness.

- Your wedding day was not a private contract between two consenting adults. It was a public covenant made in the presence of God Himself, and He was the witness — the one who stood between you and made the covenant binding.
 - Every wedding is a divine event, whether you knew it or not.

—

Look at these three phrases in this verse:

"The wife of your youth."

- Proverbs 5:18 — *"Rejoice in the wife of your youth."*
- The girl you met in college. The woman who walked beside you when you had nothing. The one who carried your children when your career was just starting. The one who watched you become who you are. *The wife of your youth.*

"Your companion."

- The Hebrew here is the language of friendship. Of partnership. Of the one who has walked with you through everything. Not your servant. Not your possession. Your *companion*. The one God gave you to face the world with.

"Your wife by covenant."

- This is the legal, binding, theological term. She is your wife not because the state recognized it. Not because you signed something. She is your wife because a covenant was sworn before God, and God Himself stood as witness.
- What is happening in Malachi's day is that the men of Judah are divorcing the wives of their youth — the Hebrew women they had married when they were young, before they had means, before their lives had taken shape — and they are trading them for the foreign women they now want. They are using divorce as a tool of personal advancement.
- And then — and this is the part that God is pushing on — they are showing up at the altar weeping that their prayers don't seem to be working.

Men: The way you treat your wife is not a private matter that runs on a separate track from your relationship with God.

- Peter says it bluntly in... 1 Peter 3:7 — *"Live with your wives in an understanding way... so that your prayers may not be hindered."*
 - If your devotional life feels dry, the first place to check is not your devotional life. The first place to check is the room you just walked out of. Did you walk out of it leaving your wife flourishing or wounded?
- **Wives, the same is true for you.** The way you speak about your husband, the contempt you allow to settle in your heart, the comparisons you let your mind make — these are not separate from your worship. *The Lord is a witness.*
- God is not a passive observer of marriages. He is the *binding agent* of every Christian marriage. He stood between you. He still does. He sees what is happening at home. And — believe it or not — He cares about it more than you do.

3. What God Is Building (v. 15)

"Did he not make them one, with a portion of the Spirit in their union? And what was the one God seeking? Godly offspring. So guard yourselves in your spirit, and let none of you be faithless to the wife of your youth."

- This is one of the most disputed verses in the Old Testament — the Hebrew is genuinely difficult — but the central claim is unmistakable. **God made them one. With His Spirit involved. And He was seeking something.**
- What was He seeking? *Godly offspring.*
- The Hebrew is literally, "seed of God." God's seed. God's lineage. God is not just looking for biological offspring. He is looking for *godly* offspring — children who carry the faith forward, who will know His name, who will worship Him in their own generation.
- This needs to make us stop and think hard about what marriage is actually for.
- Our culture has handed us a vision of marriage that is essentially therapeutic. Marriage exists to make me happy. Marriage exists to fulfill my emotional needs. Marriage exists to give me a person who validates my self-expression. And in that frame, divorce is just the natural correction when the therapy stops working.
- Malachi tells us something completely different.
 - **Marriage is not just for the two of you. Marriage is for the kingdom.**
- God designed the one-flesh union to be the engine that produces a faithful people. He is building something across generations. He is forming a covenant people who will know His name in the year 2050 and the year 2150 and the year 3000. And the means by which He does this — the *primary* means — is the faithful, covenant-keeping marriage of one man and one woman raising children who know Him.
- Children are not the byproduct of marriage. Children are part of what marriage is *for*.

Psalm 127:3

"Behold, children are a heritage from the Lord, the fruit of the womb a reward"

- This is why Malachi's protest is not just about hurt feelings. It is not even just about wronged wives, though it is certainly about that. It is about *what God is building*. Every divorce in covenant Judah was a strike at the project. Every unfaithful marriage was a corruption of the seed. Every household that failed to raise its children in the fear of the Lord was a generation lost to the kingdom.

Listen — and hear it especially if you are young, if you are dating, if you are engaged, if you are early in marriage:

- **Your marriage is not primarily about you.**
- Your marriage is a unit of the kingdom. It is the place where godly offspring are formed. It is the visible witness in your neighborhood that there is a different kind of love than the world believes in. It is a small picture of the great wedding at the end of history, where Christ takes His bride forever.
- When you treat your marriage as a private project for your own personal happiness, you have already lost it. When you build your marriage as a kingdom project — for God's glory, for the forming of children, for the witness to your neighbors — that marriage has the kind of weight and purpose that can carry it through hard seasons.

4. Guard Your Spirit (v. 16)

"For the man who does not love his wife but divorces her, says the Lord, the God of Israel, covers his garment with violence, says the Lord of hosts. So guard yourselves in your spirit, and do not be faithless."

- And Malachi says: when you are faithless to your wife, that garment that was supposed to protect her is now stained with violence. The promise has become a weapon. The protection has become the wound.
- There are some in this room who carry the weight of a divorce. Some of you initiated it; some of you were left. Some of you did it before you knew Christ. Some of you experienced the kind of betrayal — abandonment, abuse, persistent adultery — that Scripture itself recognizes as breaking the covenant first. The New Testament does provide for these realities, in the words of Jesus in Matthew 19 and the Apostle Paul in 1 Corinthians 7.
- **But here is what we cannot do.** We cannot read Malachi 2 carefully and walk out of here believing that God is casual about divorce. He is not. He is grieved by it. He is angered by it. He calls it violence done under the cover of a wedding garment. And whatever cultural script tells us that ending a marriage is an unfortunate but neutral life event — that script is not the script of Scripture.

- Twice — verses 15 and 16 — he gives the same command:

"Guard yourselves in your spirit."

- Not your behavior. Not your boundaries. *Your spirit*. The inner room where everything begins.
- Divorce does not begin with the lawyer's office. It begins in the spirit. It begins with the small entitlements you let yourself feel. The contempt you don't bother to crucify. The comparison you allow your eyes to make at the gym. The conversation with the coworker that should not be happening. The slow, quiet drift of the heart that no one sees until the marriage is already gone.
- Jesus took us to exactly this place in Matthew 5. *"You have heard that it was said, 'You shall not commit adultery.' But I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lustful intent has already committed adultery with her in his heart."* Same logic. The faithfulness of your marriage is decided in the secret room of the spirit long before it shows up in the actions of the body.
- So guard your spirit. Watch what you let in. Watch what you let grow. Watch what you feed and what you starve. The marriage that lasts is the marriage of two people who guard their spirits ruthlessly.

Our Cultural Moment

Now I want to step back from the text and ask the question I want this whole sermon to answer: **why does Malachi 2:10-16 land on us with such weight?**

Because we live downstream of an anthropology that the Bible does not recognize.

Read Genesis 1 carefully: *"So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them."* Notice what the text says — and what it does not say. It does not say the image of God is reflected in the man. It does not say it is reflected in the woman. It says the image of God is reflected in *them*. Plural. *Male and female He created them.*

God did not form humanity around individuality. The basic unit of society — the foundational unit of what it means to be human in His world — is not the individual. It is the family. The image of God is not reflected in man or in woman. It is reflected in man

and woman. In the union. In the household that comes from that union. In the children that fill it. In the generations that proceed from it.

This matters more than it sounds. Because when the family is the basic unit of society, the family is hard to control. A household with its own loyalties, its own economy of love, its own pattern of worship — that household is a stubborn, rooted thing. It does not move easily. It does not bend easily. It is hard to manipulate.

But reduce that humanity to a collection of autonomous individuals — each pursuing their own happiness, each sovereign over their own body and identity, each negotiating their relationships as a contract that can be terminated at will — and the structural support that held a society together begins to erode. And when the structure goes, the principalities and powers of the age have a much easier time. Because it is far easier to push around a single person than a family that has its arms locked together.

What our culture sells as freedom is the dismantling of the very thing that protects us from being picked off one by one.

This is why the inversion of God's design in our moment is not an accident, and it is not random. For the past sixty years, our culture has been running an experiment built on three lies that you can find on every screen and in every assumption of the world we live in.

- **Lie One: Sex, marriage, and children can be separated without consequence.** Take them apart. Have sex without marriage. Have marriage without children. Have children without marriage. Mix and match. The promise was freedom. The result has been an epidemic of fatherless homes, broken attachments, and adults who cannot form the bonds they were designed for.
- **Lie Two: Men and women are interchangeable.** There is no real difference. Masculine and feminine are social constructs. Headship and submission are oppression. Complementarity is a fiction. The promise was equality. The result has been a generation of men who do not know what they are for, and a generation of women who have been told that the very things that make them women are obstacles to be overcome.
- **Lie Three: Sexual autonomy and human dignity are the same thing.** What I do with my body is who I am. To restrict sexual expression is to attack personhood. The promise was identity. The result has been a culture that no

longer knows what a person is, what marriage is, what a child is, or what a body is for.

- What has it produced? Look around. Loneliness. Broken homes. Look at the rates of depression and anxiety in the very generations that received the most "freedom." Look at children being raised by algorithms because their parents are too exhausted from their own broken relationships to raise them. Look at the men who cannot commit and the women who cannot trust.
- **The horizontal really does flow from the vertical.** When a culture stops fearing God, it stops protecting marriage. When a culture stops protecting marriage, it stops forming children. When it stops forming children, it loses its future.
- This is not just a passage about ancient Judah. This is a diagnostic for our current culture. And the call of the prophet is the call we have to hear: *guard the holy*. Take it to heart. Recover what we have lost. Rebuild what has been broken. Repent of what we have profaned.

Conclusion:

Before we walk out of this room, we have to see something. Because if Malachi 2 only condemns failed husbands and failed wives, it crushes every one of us. None of us is what we should be in this passage. Not the married. Not the single. Not the divorced. Not even the most faithful spouse in this room.

So here is the gospel that runs underneath the text.

There is a Bridegroom in this story who is faithful.

Where Judah was faithless, Christ is faithful. Where Judah broke covenant, Christ keeps covenant. Where the men of Judah covered their garments with violence, Christ covered His garment with His own blood — for a Bride who had not been faithful to Him.

The church — the people of God across the centuries, including you and me — *we are the faithless wife*. We are the ones who have given our hearts to other gods. We are the ones who profaned the covenant. We are the ones who deserved the divorce papers, signed. But the Bridegroom did not divorce us. He went to the cross *for us*. "*Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her*" (Ephesians 5:25). That is the original. That is the story every Christian marriage is a small picture of.

And remember what we saw earlier — the Second Temple lacked the fire from heaven. The signs of divine acceptance were absent. For four hundred years after Malachi, the

silence held. Until one day a young man stepped down into the Jordan, and the heavens opened, and the Spirit descended like a dove, and the voice came: *"This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased."*

The fire returned. The acceptance came back. And it did not return to a building made with hands. It returned to a Person — the perfect Bridegroom, the true Israel, the faithful Husband who would do what no man in Malachi's day had done. And then, on the day of Pentecost, that same fire fell on His Bride.

The gospel is not that God lowered the standard. The gospel is that Christ met the standard for us — and is now, by His Spirit, forming us into a people who can keep covenant.

So what do we do with this Word?

We come to Christ. We bring Him our faithlessness — the contempt we have allowed in our hearts, the wandering eyes, the conversations that should not have happened, the apologies we never offered, the divorce we still carry shame from, the marriage we have been quietly checking out of. We bring all of it. And we trust that the same blood that bought our forgiveness has the power to remake us.

And then we go home. And we begin again.

We guard our spirits. We see the wife of our youth as a gift to be cherished, not a problem to be managed. We honor the husband God gave us instead of comparing him to the men in our heads. We pray with our spouses. We repent first. We forgive seventy times seven. We raise our children to know the name of the Lord. We build households with our arms locked together — households the powers of this age cannot pick off — because we know who we are, whose we are, and what we are for.

The question Pastor Mark left us with two weeks ago, at the end of his sermon on the polluted offerings, was not *am I performing the right religious behavior?* It was, *where is my heart actually pointed?*

That is the question Malachi leaves us with this morning, in the most personal sphere of our lives. Where is my heart actually pointed in my marriage? In my home? In the way I treat the woman or the man God gave me? In what I let into my eyes and my imagination when no one is watching?

Because if our hearts are pointed at Christ, everything else follows. The faithfulness. The repentance. The forgiveness. The love that lasts. They flow downhill from a heart that has fixed its gaze on the faithful Bridegroom.

So fix your gaze there. Guard your spirit. Do not be faithless. And let the fire that fell at the Jordan and at Pentecost burn in your home, in your marriage, and in this church — until the day of the wedding feast of the Lamb.

Let's pray.

Malachi 2:10–16
Small Group Discussion Questions

1. The Vertical Runs Through the Horizontal

Malachi opens this section at the highest level: "Have we not all one Father? Has not one God created us?" Then he asks the question that frames everything that follows — "Why then are we faithless to one another?" The word "faithless" appears five times in seven verses, and Malachi is making a claim we instinctively resist: the way we treat the people closest to us is not on a separate track from our relationship with God. Horizontal faithlessness is just vertical faithlessness with a human face on it. How we treat the brother, the spouse, the household — that is the proof of how we actually understand our Father.

Discussion: Where in your life do you feel the strongest pull to compartmentalize — to act as if how you treat the people closest to you can run on a separate track from your walk with God? What would it look like this week to refuse that compartmentalization?

2. Who Is Forming the Inner Life of Your Household?

The men of Judah were marrying "the daughter of a foreign god" — not an ethnic problem, but a religious one. They were bringing other loyalties, other gods, other liturgies into the covenant home. We do not face the exact same situation in 21st-century Sandpoint, but the underlying issue is identical. Whatever forms your imagination is shaping who you become, and whatever shapes your imagination is preaching to you about who God is. The phone in your pocket, the streaming service you watch every night, the podcasts and feeds and screens — these are forming you. And if those voices preach a different gospel than the one we confess, we have, in a very real sense, brought the daughters of foreign gods into our covenant homes.

Discussion: What voices or inputs are doing the most forming of your imagination right now? If a stranger looked at your weekly intake — what you watch, what you read, what you listen to — what gospel would they say is being preached to you? What needs to be turned down, turned off, or replaced?

3. The Lord Was Witness

When the men of Judah came to the altar weeping that their prayers were not working, Malachi tells them why: "The Lord was witness between you and the

wife of your youth, to whom you have been faithless." Three phrases pile up — the wife of your youth, your companion, your wife by covenant. The wedding day was not a private contract between two consenting adults. It was a divine event, with God Himself standing as the binding witness. Which means the way a husband treats his wife — and the way a wife speaks of her husband — is never a private matter that runs on a separate track from worship. Peter says it bluntly in 1 Peter 3:7: live with your wives in an understanding way, "so that your prayers may not be hindered."

Discussion: If your devotional life has felt dry recently, Malachi suggests the first place to check is not your devotional life but the room you just walked out of. What would it look like, this week, to honor the covenant relationships in your home in a way that your prayers are no longer hindered?

4. Marriage for the Kingdom, Not for the Self

Our culture has handed us a therapeutic vision of marriage — marriage exists to make me happy, to fulfill my emotional needs, to validate my self-expression. And in that frame, divorce is just the natural correction when the therapy stops working. Malachi tells a completely different story. God made the union one, "with a portion of the Spirit," and what was He seeking? Godly offspring. Marriage is a unit of the kingdom — the engine by which God forms a faithful people across generations. Children are not the byproduct of marriage; they are part of what marriage is for. When a marriage is treated as a private project for personal happiness, it has already lost what gives it weight. When it is built as a kingdom project, it has the kind of purpose that can carry it through hard seasons.

Discussion: How would you live, decide, and love differently this week if you genuinely believed your marriage — or, if you are single, your future marriage and the household God may give you — was a kingdom project rather than a personal happiness project? What is one concrete thing that would change?

5. Guard Your Spirit

Twice in this passage Malachi gives the same command: "Guard yourselves in your spirit." Not your behavior. Not your boundaries. Your spirit — the inner room where everything begins. Divorce does not begin in the lawyer's office. It begins with the small entitlements you let yourself feel, the contempt you don't bother to crucify, the comparison your eyes make at the gym, the conversation with the coworker that should not be happening, the slow drift of the heart that no one sees until the marriage is already gone. Jesus took us to the same place in Matthew 5: faithfulness is decided in the secret room of the spirit long before it

shows up in the body. The marriage that lasts is the marriage of two people who guard their spirits ruthlessly.

Discussion: What is one specific thing in the inner room of your spirit right now — an entitlement, a contempt, a comparison, a conversation, a drift — that needs to be named, guarded against, or repented of before it grows? Who could you trust with that honest answer?