

“When your First Impression is Wrong”

Growth Group Discussion

Malachi

Begin with prayer. Invite the Holy Spirit to speak to you all through God's word, and to lead your discussion.

Opening Questions (try to get everyone involved in discussion):

- Share about a time when your first impression of someone was wrong. Or if you can't think of an example, share about a time when your first impression was confirmed to be right, and how it was confirmed.
- How does your impression of someone impact the way you relate with them? Can you think of examples?
- What are some “impressions” of God have changed for you over time?
- In this week's passage and sermon, we see *an accurate impression of God, an accurate impression of ourselves, and a change necessitated by these impressions.*
- Read Malachi 3:6-12.

1. An accurate impression of God's character.

- Why do you think that God would tell his people, in v. 6, that he does not change?
 - See Malachi 1:2 and 2:17, if you need some hints.
- This aspect of God's character—that he never changes—is known as **immutability**. Why do you think this divine attribute has practical value? Have you ever relied upon this trait personally?
- What practical bearing does God's immutability have on the people in Malachi's day? (See Mal. 3:6b).
 - What reason(s) might God have had to destroy Israel and/or Judah?
- Pastor Josh claimed, “The reason you have anything good is because of God's generous nature.”
 - What is your initial feeling upon hearing this claim?
 - Do you tend to think of God as generous? Why or why not?
 - What difference would it make in your life to believe that God never changes, and one key attribute of his that never changes is his generosity?

2. An accurate impression of our character.

- What claim does God make about his people in the beginning of v. 7? From your knowledge of the Old Testament story, what examples can you recall of this tendency?
 - Pastor Josh argued that we all have this tendency to wander away from God, and make good things in life into our ultimate things, rather than God. Is this concept something that you agree with, or that you find difficult? Please elaborate.
- In your own words, what invitation does God issue to his people in the second half of v. 7?
 - Have you ever felt like you wanted to return to God—or repent—and you didn't know practically what it would look like? What resulted from that scenario?

3. A changed relationship to God and money.

- In vv. 8-12, God gives specific directions as to what it would look like to return to him, orienting all of life around him.
 - What ideas are implied in this idea of robbing God (vv. 8-9)?
- On Sunday we heard that one implication of this concept is that God is the Owner and Giver of everything.
 - How do you feel about the idea that God is the Owner of your money, your time, your possessions, etc.? Are you naturally able to accept this, or do you feel some resistance? Please share openly!
- Another implication of this concept is that we are “money managers,” of God’s money. How does this image strike you?
- The main application here is that **if our generous God owns everything, our lives are to become marked by open-handed generosity.**
 - What do you recall about the function of tithes and offerings in ancient Israel?
 - What bearing do you think this ancient text—about generously giving tithes and offerings—has on our lives today? How does it apply to our situation?
 - How has God brought about generosity in your life? What has he used to get you there?
 - Are there areas where you sense God nudging you to be more generous today?
 - How does the “test” in vv. 10-11 free us to be more generous today?
- Read 2 Corinthians 8:9.
 - In what way does the riches-to-rags journey of Jesus provoke you to generous giving?
- Are there other ways that this Scripture, or this week’s sermon, spoke to you or challenged you? Please share.

Sharing/Prayer

- As always, take some time to share areas where you need people to pray for you. Spend time praying for one another.
- Pray in response to today’s Bible Study and discussion.
 - If confession and repentance are appropriate, feel free to do that.
 - If you sense it appropriate, verbally offer up your possessions to God for his use.