



# ***UPSTATE GROUP GUIDE***

*Through the Bible*

*July 21 -27*

*Malachi 3-4*

## *Things to Know*

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## **Studying God's Word *In Community***

*Reminder: Seek to understand and apply God's word, **not** rehash the sermon.*

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# Sermon Recap

1. **God will come to purify, not just to comfort** – The Lord's coming is not only a promise of presence but a process of refining (Malachi 3:1–3).
  2. **God's justice addresses both personal sin and public injustice** – He sees and confronts sins against both holiness and humanity (Malachi 3:5).
  3. **God's unchanging nature guarantees His mercy** – Though we wander, God remains faithful and invites us to return (Malachi 3:6–7).
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## Discussion Questions

1. **Malachi 3:1** – *Who is the “messenger” in this verse, and how does this verse ultimately point to Jesus (cf. Matthew 11:10)?*
  2. **Malachi 3:2–3** – *Why does God describe Himself as a refiner's fire and fuller's soap? What does this imagery teach us about how God works in His people?*
  3. **Malachi 3:5** – *What kinds of sins does God highlight here? Why might these be particularly important to Him in a covenant community?*
  4. **Malachi 3:6** – *What does it mean that God does not change? How does this truth give us hope when we've failed?*
  5. **Malachi 3:7** – *What does returning to God look like in practical terms? How can we help each other pursue faithfulness?*
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## Read

**Read Malachi 3:1-7a and make observations about the text.**

- What is God teaching us in the passage?
  - What does this reveal about who God is, what God has done, and how I should respond?
  - Which part of the text was most meaningful to you and why?
  - What do you need help understanding about this passage?
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# Scripture

## Malachi 3:1-7a

**3** “Behold, I send my messenger, and he will prepare the way before me. And the Lord whom you seek will suddenly come to his temple; and the messenger of the covenant in whom you delight, behold, he is coming, says the Lord of hosts. **2** But who can endure the day of his coming, and who can stand when he appears? For he is like a refiner’s fire and like fullers’ soap. **3** He will sit as a refiner and purifier of silver, and he will purify the sons of Levi and refine them like gold and silver, and they will bring offerings in righteousness to the Lord. **4** Then the offering of Judah and Jerusalem will be pleasing to the Lord as in the days of old and as in former years.

**5** “Then I will draw near to you for judgment. I will be a swift witness against the sorcerers, against the adulterers, against those who swear falsely, against those who oppress the hired worker in his wages, the widow and the fatherless, against those who thrust aside the sojourner, and do not fear me, says the Lord of hosts.

### Robbing God

**6** “For I the Lord do not change; therefore you, O children of Jacob, are not consumed. **7** 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?’

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Malachi 3:1-7

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## Living on Mission In Community

Malachi 3 reminds us that we cannot long for God’s presence while ignoring His purification. He comes not just to affirm us, but to refine us—to burn away sin, cleanse our hearts, and restore justice in our lives and communities. And yet, amid His holiness, He remains merciful. The same God who comes with fire also opens His arms and says, “Return to me.” That invitation still stands for every wandering heart.

**Where in your life is God calling you to stop resisting and start returning?**

*How is God leading me to respond to His Word this week?*

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# Optional Breakout Questions

*Consider making time at the end of the group to break out into groups of 2-4 (keep them gender specific). Have them answer these three questions about their weeks:*

1. How did you feed yourself?
  - *(What have you been doing to feed your spiritual life, and how is it going?)*
2. How did you feed others?
  - *(How did you share the gospel or gospel truth with someone this week?)*
3. How did you feed your flesh?
  - *(What sins did you struggle with this week? How can your friends hold you accountable?)*

# Leader Resources

## Small Group Curriculum: Malachi 3:1–7 – “Return to Me”

### 1. Session Overview

- **Main Theme:** God's justice is coming, but His mercy is calling.
- **Key Passage:** Malachi 3:1–7
- **Main Idea:** God promises to come, purify, and restore His people—and calls them to return to Him before it's too late.
- **Memory Verse:** *“Return to me, and I will return to you, says the LORD of hosts.”* – Malachi 3:7

### 2. Opening

#### Prayer & Icebreaker:

- Break into pairs or triads and ask:  
*“Is there any way we can pray for our personal walks with God this week?”*
- Icebreaker question:  
*What comes to your mind when you hear the phrase, ‘God is coming’—fear, hope, conviction, joy? Why?*

### 3. Scripture Reading

Read Malachi 3:1–7 aloud as a group.

Optional: Assign one reader for verse 1, another for verses 2–4, and a third for verses 5–7 to emphasize the movement of the passage.

### 4. Teaching Points with Commentary and Quotes

#### A. The Lord Will Come Suddenly (v. 1)

- God promises to send a **messenger to prepare the way** (fulfilled in John the Baptist; cf. Matt. 11:10).
- Then “the Lord whom you seek” will suddenly come to His temple—a prophetic reference to the coming of Christ.

**Commentary:** This verse blends near and far prophecy—John the Baptist prepares the way (near), and the Messiah comes to refine and judge (far).

“God's judgment is not absent—it is delayed. And His delay is mercy.” — Tim Keller

#### B. The Lord Will Refine His People (vv. 2–4)

- The Messiah will come like a **refiner's fire** and **fuller's soap**—not just to punish, but to purify.
- God is not only after justice; He is after holiness in His people, especially the priests (Levites).

**Note:** Refining fire burns away impurities to make gold pure. God's judgment purifies what He loves.

"God is not a forest fire destroying indiscriminately. He is a refiner's fire, precise and purifying." — John Piper

### C. The Lord Will Judge Wickedness (v. 5)

- God lists sins rampant among the people: sorcery, adultery, lies, exploitation of workers, the vulnerable, and injustice toward immigrants.
- These sins reflect a society that has stopped fearing God (v. 5b).

**Insight:** God's justice targets both personal sin and systemic injustice. He sees both private immorality and public exploitation.

### D. The Lord Calls Us to Return (vv. 6–7)

- God's unchanging nature is Israel's only hope: "*I the Lord do not change*" (v. 6).
- Despite their covenant-breaking, God calls them back: "*Return to me, and I will return to you.*"

**Theological Note:** God's immutability (unchanging nature) means He is faithful to His promises—even when we are not.

"God never turns from a sinner until the sinner turns from Him." — Charles Spurgeon

## 5. Discussion Questions

1. **Malachi 3:1** – What do we learn about God's coming from this verse? How is it both comforting and sobering?
2. **Malachi 3:2–3** – What does it mean that God is like a refiner's fire? How have you experienced God's refining work in your life?
3. **Malachi 3:5** – Why does God take sin—especially oppression and injustice—so seriously? What does this reveal about His character?
4. **Malachi 3:6** – Why is God's unchanging nature good news for sinful people?
5. **Malachi 3:7** – What might it look like to "return to God" in your own life right now?

## 6. Application Paragraph

Malachi's audience had grown cynical, careless, and complacent in their worship and justice. But instead of wiping them out, God reminds them of who He is—holy, just, and unchanging. He sends a messenger to prepare the way and promises that He Himself will come to purify and restore. The same call echoes to us today: "*Return to me.*" Whether you've wandered in cold religion or hidden sin, God's heart remains open. He doesn't demand perfection to return—just repentance.

**Where might God be calling you to stop drifting and return to Him today?**

## 7. Closing Reflection and Prayer

- Reread Malachi 3:7 slowly.
- Invite group members to reflect silently: "*What would it mean for me to return to God this week?*"
- Pray together, asking God to refine, renew, and restore His people for His glory.

## 8. Memory Verse

*“Return to me, and I will return to you, says the LORD of hosts.” – Malachi 3:7*

Encourage memorization and meditation on this promise of restoration.

## 9. Leader's Notes

- **Christ Connection:** Jesus is the Messenger and the Lord—He came to His temple, cleansed it, and offered Himself as the final sacrifice. He will come again to judge and restore.
- Help your group see how the call to “return” is not just for the irreligious but also for the religiously hardened.
- Be sensitive—refining is painful, and some may be in a difficult season of spiritual discipline. Encourage them with God’s mercy and character.

