



# Taking Strides - Starting Over

## Good Enough

The Hebrew word for “honor” has the idea of something heavy, weighty. Gold is heavy, so it is valuable; a treasure to be desired and protected. We are to honor our parents as a treasure of great value—but our honor of God is to be even greater. Yet we often give to God our leftovers: if we have enough time, enough money, enough attention span left, we say it’s all His! Funny thing—we hardly ever have enough left over. And *if* we do, we somehow think the enough we give is *good enough*.

Complacency is a blight that saps energy, dulls attitudes, and causes a drain on the brain. The first symptom is satisfaction with things as they are. The second is rejection of things as they might be. "Good enough" becomes today's watchword and tomorrow's standard. Complacency makes people fear the unknown, mistrust the untried, and abhor the new. Like water, complacent people follow the easiest course -- downhill. They draw false strength from looking back.

What does God Almighty - the Creator who brought me into existence, and the Father who chose and adopted me to be His forever - what does He deserve? What do I give Him?

### FOR DISCUSSION

The Medal of Honor is the highest award for valor in action against an enemy force which can be bestowed upon an individual serving in the Armed Services of the United States.  
How does God deserve such an honor from us?

### ENCOUNTER

Read God’s Word so that He can speak to you.

### Malachi 1:1-14

1 An oracle: The word of the LORD to Israel through Malachi. 2 "I have loved you," says the LORD. "But you ask, 'How have you loved us?' "Was not Esau Jacob's brother?" the LORD says. "Yet I have loved Jacob, 3 but Esau I have hated, and I have turned his mountains into a wasteland and left his inheritance to the desert jackals." 4 Edom may say, "Though we have been crushed, we will rebuild the ruins." But this is what the LORD Almighty says: "They may build, but I will demolish. They will be called the Wicked Land, a people always under the wrath of the LORD. 5 Edom may say, "Though we have been crushed, we will rebuild the ruins." But this is what the LORD Almighty says: "They may build, but I will demolish. They will be called the Wicked Land, a people always under the wrath of the LORD.

6 "A son honors his father, and a servant his master. If I am a father, where is the honor due me? If I am a master, where is the respect due me?" says the LORD Almighty. "It is you, O priests, who show contempt for my name. "But you ask, 'How have we shown contempt for your name?' 7 "You place defiled food on my altar. "But you ask, 'How have we defiled you?' "By saying that the LORD's table is contemptible. 8 When you bring blind animals for sacrifice, is that not



wrong? When you sacrifice crippled or diseased animals, is that not wrong? Try offering them to your governor! Would he be pleased with you? Would he accept you?" says the LORD Almighty. 9 "Now implore God to be gracious to us. With such offerings from your hands, will he accept you?"-- says the LORD Almighty. 10 "Oh, that one of you would shut the temple doors, so that you would not light useless fires on my altar! I am not pleased with you," says the LORD Almighty, "and I will accept no offering from your hands. 11 My name will be great among the nations, from the rising to the setting of the sun. In every place incense and pure offerings will be brought to my name, because my name will be great among the nations," says the LORD Almighty. 12 "But you profane it by saying of the Lord's table, 'It is defiled,' and of its food, 'It is contemptible.'" 13 And you say, 'What a burden!' and you sniff at it contemptuously," says the LORD Almighty. "When you bring injured, crippled or diseased animals and offer them as sacrifices, should I accept them from your hands?" says the LORD. 14 "Cursed is the cheat who has an acceptable male in his flock and vows to give it, but then sacrifices a blemished animal to the Lord. For I am a great king," says the LORD Almighty, "and my name is to be feared among the nations.

## EXAMINE what the passage says before you decide what it means.

- ✓ Read it carefully three times. Underline anything you see as important. Write any questions you have.

## EXPLORE God's Word by asking questions of what you saw. The notes which follow may help you to think through these questions.

1) Read Zechariah 12-13. What does God promise to do for His people?

When will these promises be fulfilled? When is "on that day"?

2) How are we to show Him honor? What is acceptable?

How do we give it to Him?

3) How do we dishonor Him?

What is God's response to dishonor? Why does He respond this way?

4) What is the connection between the fact that God loves us and our honor of Him?

5) Why does God love you?

Do you love Him? How do you show it?

"Malachi's first address is governed by the ironic exhortation in 1:10, 'Oh, that one of you would shut the temple doors.' It is directed against the priests of the postexilic temple. Despite their responsibility under the covenant of Levi (cf. 2:4, 8) to be the Lord's messengers of Torah (2:7), they were dishonoring the Lord (1:6), particularly in their careless attitude toward the offerings (1:8). Failing to take their responsibilities to the Lord seriously, they had become political pawns of the influential in Israel who used religion to maintain respectability (2:9). The priests are here exhorted to stop the empty worship and to begin honoring the Lord with pure offerings and faithful service. As motivation the Lord declares his love for them (and for all the people; 1:2-5) and threatens them with humiliation and removal from his service (cf. 2:1-3, 9)." (E. Ray Clendenen, *Haggai, Malachi*, p. 244)

**2-3** - The Lord's first word to His people was short and sweet. He had "loved" them. He had told His people of His love for them repeatedly throughout their history (cf. Deut. 4:32-40; 7:7-11; 10:12-22; 15:16; 23:5; 33:2-5; Isa. 43:4; Hos. 11:1, 3-4, 8-9). Yet they were now questioning His love and implying that there was no evidence of it in their present situation in life. This is the first of seven such dialogues in Malachi (cf. vv. 6, 7; 2:14, 17; 3:7b-8, 13b-14). Yahweh had promised them a golden age of blessing, but they still struggled under Gentile oppression and generally hard times (cf. v. 8; 2:2; 3:9, 11). Their question revealed distrust of Him and hostility toward Him, as well as lack of appreciation for Him. Israel should have responded to Yahweh's love by loving Him and keeping His commandments (Deut. 6:4-9).

God had "loved Jacob," the younger, and "hated Esau," the older. The evidence of God's hatred for Esau was that He had "made" the ("his [Esau's]) mountains" of Seir, the inheritance that God gave Esau and his descendants, a desolate "wilderness." Unstated is the fact that God had given Jacob a land flowing with milk and honey for his inheritance, which proved His love for that brother. It is remarkable that God loved Jacob in view of the person Jacob was, and it is equally remarkable that God hated Esau, because in many ways he was a more likeable individual than his brother. Normally in the ancient Near East the father fa-

vored the eldest son, but God did what was abnormal in choosing to bless Jacob over Esau. God's regard for individuals does not depend ultimately on their behavior or characters. It rests on His sovereign choice to bless some more than others (cf. Rom. 9:13). This is not a statement about God's affections—since He loves the whole world (John 3:16). This is a statement about His choice—God chose Jacob and He didn't choose Esau.

**4** - Even though the Edomites, Esau's descendants, determined to rebuild their nation after it had suffered destruction by the Babylonians, they would not be able to do so. They could not because Almighty Yahweh would not permit it. He would "tear down" whatever they rebuilt, so much so that other people would view them as a "wicked" land (cf. the holy land, Zech. 2:12), and the objects of Yahweh's perpetual indignation. The "holy" land was holy—sanctified—because God had set it apart for special blessing, as He had the nation of Israel. "Edom," on the other hand, was called "wicked," because God had not set it apart for special blessing.

**5** - Observing Yahweh's dealings with Edom, the Israelites would learn of His love for her and His greatness that extended "beyond . . . Israel" (cf. vv. 11, 14; 3:12; 4:6). They would eventually call on other people to appreciate Him too.

**6** - This section begins like the first one, with a statement by Yahweh and a challenging response (cf. Isa. 1:2-3). The priests were responsible to teach the other Israelites the Law, to mediate between Yahweh and His people, and to judge the people. Almighty Yahweh asked the priests of Israel why they did not "honor" Him, since sons normally honor their fathers (Exod. 20:12; Deut. 5:16), and He was their Father (Exod. 4:22; Isa. 1:2; 63:16; 64:8; Hos. 11:1). Since servants "respect" their masters, why did they not fear Him since He was their Master (Isa. 44:1-2)? Speaking for the priests, Malachi gave their response. They denied having despised His name. By asking how they had despised His name, rather than saying, "We have not despised your name," the priests were claiming ignorance as to how they were doing this. However, their question also carried a challenge; they resented the suggestion that they had despised His name.

**7** - Defiled sacrifices were sacrifices that were not ritually clean or acceptable, as the Law specified. By offering these, they defiled (made unclean) both the "altar" of burnt offerings and the Lord *Himself!* The Law referred to the offerings as food for God (Lev. 21:6), though obviously He did not eat them. The use of "food" for "sacrifice" and "table" for "altar" continues the human analogies already begun in verse 6. Moreover, these terms also connote covenant relationships, because covenants were usually ratified when the participants, typically a king and his vassals, ate a meal together.

**8** - Anything second-rate that we offer to God is inappropriate in view of who He is. This includes our worship, our ministries, our studies, physical objects, anything. The Lord is worthy of our very best offerings to Him, and we should give Him nothing less. To give Him less than our best is to despise Him. Shoddiness is an insult to God. Shoddy holy is still shoddy.

**9** - How foolish it was to pray for God to bestow His favor on the priests when they were despising Him in these ways.

**10** - The Lord ironically wished the priests would "shut" the temple "gates," and stop offering sacrifices, since they had so little regard for Him. He was displeased with them and would not accept any offerings from them. They might continue to offer them, but He will have no regard for them. Obviously the Lord had ordained the offering of sacrifices under the Law, but He preferred that the priests not offer them, than to have them offer meaningless sacrifices, simply as an obligation. "I am not pleased with you" is the opposite of "Well done, good and faithful servant" (Matt. 25:21).

**11** - It was particularly inappropriate for Israel's priests to despise Yahweh, because the time would come when people from all over the world would honor His "name" (i.e., His person; cf. Isa. 45:22-25; 49:5-7; 59:19). "Incense" accompanied prayers (cf. Rev. 5:8), and "grain offering(s)" were offer-

ings of praise and worship (cf. Heb. 13:15-16). In that day, people from many places will offer "pure" offerings. This refers to worship in the Millennium (cf. 3:1-4; Isa. 11:3-4, 9; Dan. 7:13-14, 27-28; Zeph. 2:11; 3:8-11; Zech. 14:9, 16).

**12-13** - The priests of Malachi's day were treating Yahweh's reputation as common. The proof of this was their statements that the altar was "defiled," and the offerings on it were "despised." They were also saying that it was "tiresome" and distasteful to worship the Lord. Their worship should have been passionate and joyful instead of boring and burdensome (cf. Col. 3:16-17). They would "disdainfully sniff at it" as something they "despised," and were bringing as offerings what they had stolen, as well as "lame" and "sick" animals (cf. 2 Sam. 24:24).

**14** - The people also were playing the old bait and switch game; they were swindling God. They vowed to offer an acceptable animal as a sacrifice, but when it came time to present the offering they substituted one of inferior quality. How totally inappropriate this was, since Yahweh was "a great King," the greatest in the universe—truly the ultimate royal suzerain! His "name" would "be feared among" all "the nations," yet His own people and their spiritual leaders were treating it with contempt.

**GOING  
FURTHER**

One thing we can do to train ourselves to remember, is to memorize a part of what our Father has said to us. The Holy Spirit can use this to change our thinking so that our "heads" are more like Jesus.

This week, memorize John 15:10-11