



Small Group Guide

Malachi 1:1-5 | "The Love of God"

Overview

In the opening verses of Malachi, God speaks to a people who have grown cold, disobedient, and doubtful of His care for them. Yet His very first words are not a rebuke of their failures. They are a declaration of love. This guide is designed to help your group explore what it means to receive, remember, and rest in the love of God, even in the most difficult seasons of life.

Key Takeaways

- God's first word to a wayward Israel was not condemnation but love: "I have loved you, says the Lord."
- God's love is sovereign and unearned. Nothing we do increases it, and nothing we do diminishes it.
- Doubting the love of God is one of Satan's oldest and most effective strategies, going all the way back to the Garden of Eden.
- God's love has a proven and traceable record in the lives of His people. We are called to remember it, record it, and declare it.
- Being employed in God's mission is itself an expression of His love for us.

Getting Started

Begin your time together with this opening question to help people engage before diving into the text.

Think of a time in your life when someone expressed love to you in a way you did not expect or feel you deserved. What did that feel like, and how did it affect your relationship with that person?

Discussion Questions

On God's Declaration of Love

1. The sermon opened with the observation that God's very first words to a disobedient Israel were "I have loved you." Why do you think God chose to begin there rather than with a list of their failures? What does that tell us about His character?
2. Read Ephesians 2:4-5, Jeremiah 31:3, and Romans 8:38-39. Each of these passages emphasizes that God's love is not based on our merit. Why is it important to understand that we did not earn God's love and cannot lose it? How does that truth change the way you approach your relationship with Him?

On Doubting God's Love

3. Israel doubted God's love because of their suffering, their exile, and the ruins they returned to. In what kinds of circumstances are you most tempted to doubt God's love? What does that doubt tend to produce in your life?
4. The sermon described Satan's strategy in the Garden of Eden as an attempt to get Eve to doubt God's goodness and love. The sermon also mentioned that doubting God's love can lead to self-effort, searching for validation elsewhere, and eventually abandoning His commands. Have you seen that pattern in your own life or in the lives of people around you? What does it look like in practice?

On the Sovereignty of God's Love

5. The sermon explained the difficult phrase "Jacob I have loved, but Esau I have hated" by pointing to the Hebrew concept of comparison, that God's love for Jacob was so overwhelming that by contrast His treatment of Esau appeared as hatred. Dr. Amo Gablian's response was that his greater problem was not "Esau I have hated" but "Jacob I have loved," because Jacob did nothing to deserve it. How does the undeserved nature of God's love for Jacob speak to your own sense of worthiness before God?
6. The sermon stated: "You cannot do anything to make God love you any more, and you cannot do anything to make God love you any less." How does believing that truth shift the way you think about your obedience? Does it feel freeing or does it raise questions for you? Discuss together.

On Remembering God's Love

7. The sermon drew a parallel between Israel forgetting God's faithfulness shortly after crossing the Red Sea and our own tendency to forget God's past goodness when we face present hardship. Why do you think it is so easy to forget what God has done? What makes remembering so difficult?

8. The pastor described keeping a journal during a difficult season to record specific ways God showed up and came through. He said, "You're going to need them." What practices, habits, or rhythms do you currently have, or could you develop, to help you remember and recount God's faithfulness? How might those practices strengthen your faith during future trials?
9. The sermon mentioned that God commanded Israel to build memorial stones at the Jordan River so that future generations would ask about them and be told the story of God's faithfulness. Do you regularly tell stories of God's goodness to the people around you, whether children, grandchildren, neighbors, or coworkers? What is one specific story of God's love in your life that you could share with someone this week?

On Being Employed in God's Mission

10. The sermon described being called into God's mission as an expression of His love, comparing it to a business owner who would only entrust what they have built to someone they deeply love. How does thinking about your role in God's mission as a gift of love, rather than an obligation or a duty, change how you approach it?

Practical Applications

Choose one or more of the following to put into practice before your group meets again.

Start a record of God's faithfulness. Begin a journal, a note in your phone, or even a simple list on paper. Start with yesterday and work backward. Write down specific moments where you can trace the love and faithfulness of God in your life. Commit to adding to it regularly.

Identify your doubt triggers. Spend some time this week reflecting on the specific circumstances that most often cause you to doubt God's love. Bring one of those to God in prayer, and ask Him to meet you there with truth from Scripture.

Tell someone a story. Identify one person in your life, a child, a friend, a coworker, or a neighbor, and intentionally share a story of God's faithfulness with them. It does not have to be dramatic. It simply has to be true.

Memorize one passage. Choose one of the verses referenced in the sermon, Ephesians 2:4-5, Jeremiah 31:3, or Romans 8:38-39, and commit it to memory this week. Use it as a weapon when doubt comes.

Pray for someone who is doubting. Think of someone in your life who may be in a season where they are struggling to see or feel the love of God. Commit to praying for them by name each day this week, and consider whether God is calling you to be a voice of encouragement to them.