

Malachi 2:5-9
Keeping the Bible Central: A Practical Plan of Attack
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Introduction:

You can see that the title to this week's sermon is "Keeping the Bible Central: A Practical Plan of Attack." Last week we took a look at Malachi 2:5-9. What we saw in these verses was the foundation of Israel's sin. The question which nagged on my own heart as I studied Malachi 1:6-2:5 was this, "How could the Israelites have fallen to such a low? How could God's own special priests, those whom he had called and selected to mediate—go between—God and his people... how could these priests have fallen to such a low? How could they have become so corrupt and defiled?" In Malachi 2:5-9 we found the answer to this nagging question.

Last week we discussed the fact that the priests had fallen to such a low because they made a foundational error. Some decisions that we make have greater consequences than others: if you forget to put your shoes on before going to work, you may get yelled at by your boss, get your feet dirty, and possibly injure your feet; if you forget to breath you will die. While wearing shoes is not foundational to living life, breathing is—if you fail to breath you will die. In the same way, the Israelites made a foundational error—they removed the word of God from the center of their life and ministry. The word of God is absolutely foundational to the Christian life—if you lose the word of God you lose everything. In the same way that if you fail to breath you will fail to live, if you fail to keep the word of God central to your life everything else will fall apart—you will die spiritually. Thus, what we saw last week was that the priests fell to such a low—they became so corrupt and defiled -because the Bible took a back seat in their lives and ministry.

Last week I stated that I wanted to do a Part II to the message, in order to really apply this word to our individual lives. It really is one thing to look at the Israelites and immediately get frustrated with them, however once we start putting the magnified glass on ourselves, we begin to wiggle a bit.

It seems to me that we all know two things: (1) the ultra importance of the word of God, and yet (2) we also know that the word does not play a large enough role in our lives. Isn't that interesting: we know that it is vital and yet we know that we don't give it us as much attention as we should. Spiritually speaking, we are like those who know the life-endangering effects of a bad diet and yet they continue on with their bad eating habits.

Now, if the eating habits are not fixed, somewhere down the line, all of the warnings delivered by the doctor are going to come to fruition. So it is spiritually... if our poor relationship with the word of God is not fixed, somewhere down the line, all of the warnings delivered by God in his word are going to come to fruition as well. Thus, in the same way that a person who struggles with eating has to, at some point in their life, get serious about their health—they have to, at some point in their life, take a good, hard, and long look at what needs to be done to fix such a problem, we need to do the same thing spiritually. We need to look at those things which keep us from what we know we need

so badly. We need to take a look at those things which fence us off from the Word of God.

That is exactly what we are going to be doing this morning—we are going to be examining ourselves. We are going to be asking ourselves one primary question, “What keeps me from feasting upon God’s word?” The first step to fixing a problem is to determine the root cause of our problem. Thus, we must first uncover those things which hinder our approach to the word of God before we can fix them. We will be consider at least six of the most common things that keep the people of God from meaningfully feasting upon the word of God.

#1: Insufficient Information

Diagnosing the Problem:

Although the majority of believers would wholeheartedly affirm their vital need for the Word of God, many underestimate its true worth. Often times there is a tendency for Christians to, like mindless drones, say correct things without knowing the true significance of them. If you have been in the church for longer than a few months, you will know, at least in theory, that the Bible is foundational to the Christian life. However, although most Christians would affirm this fact, not many understand the full orb ed reality of this truth. You can agree that you have an essential need for the Bible, but you cannot adequately explain exactly why you need it. Thus, while you know the importance of the Bible, your intake of the word of God is lacking because of insufficient information—you know that it is important, but your understanding for why it is important is insufficient. You know that it is important but your knowledge of why it is important isn’t deep enough to drive you to action.

For example, when I was young, I, along with every mindless drone in America, affirmed the importance of wearing my seat belt. I knew that there were dire consequences for not doing so. However, since neither myself nor any of my relatives or close friends had been in a life-threatening accident, I was lackadaisical about wearing my seat belt—I would wear it sometimes and not wear it at other times. Even when I did wear my seat belt I wouldn’t do so understanding the depth of importance for it. However, when I was 15 I had to take a driver’s education course. In this class we had to watch a 30 minute video which showed picture after picture of automobile accidents. In order to make their point, they showed before and after pictures of those involved in the crashes. What became evident was that those who did not wear their seat belts, even if their accident was minor, suffered life-altering and even life-threatening injuries. They would show two car wrecks that were similar in nature and then they would compare post-wreck pictures of those who had their seat belts on to those who didn’t. The evidence was staggering! Those who wore their seat belts surely received a beating, however those who didn’t wear their seat belts were pummeled in the car wreck to the point of not being recognizable. After watching this video, even up until today, I mindfully, intentionally, and faithfully wear my seat belt.

What changed my approach? Additional Information! Before watching this video, I knew that it was dangerous to not wear my seat belt, however it took much-needed education for me to understand the depth of its importance. So it is with many of you and

the word of God. You know that you need it, but your understanding of why it is so important has not quite sunk in. You have heard the soul-and-life-endangering effects of false teaching, but the seriousness of it all has not quite become real to you. You have heard of other Christians, such as those in Malachi, who have suffered moral and spiritual failure because of their biblical malnutrition, but you think that it will never happen to you. Thus, although you in some general sense understand your need for God's word, your understanding of it is too small to produce in you any real effort toward pursuing an ambitious relationship with God through his word.

Wouldn't you agree that many people know that they need the word of God, but they still do not really grasp their great need for it. And not just in a negative sense—not just understanding the true danger of not feasting upon God's word, but also not understanding the true blessing of knowing God through his word. You know that it is important but your knowledge of why it is important isn't deep enough to drive you to action.

Prescribing a Solution:

How do we tackle such a problem? The only way this can be fixed is through a vigorous study of the importance of God's word. Doesn't this make sense? If the problem is a lack of information, what do you think the solution will be? Gaining information, of course! If you question your understanding of the importance of Scripture, do not hesitate to approach a believer that you know who uncompromisingly feasts on the word of God. I personally will take however long is necessary to explain to you the ultra importance of the word of God in your life. I have put a number of verses for you to consider to help you really grasp the great need you have for the word of God. I really recommend all of you to go home and pour over these passages to reestablish in your own mind the great importance of the word of God in your mind. Remember, many people have a lackadaisical approach to the word of God because they do not have a full-orbed understanding of why it is so vital in their lives.

Deuteronomy 8:1-3 (Matthew 4:4; Luke 4:4); Psalm 119; Proverbs 18:15; Hosea 4:6; Malachi 2:1-9; Romans 1:28-32; 10:1-2; 12:2; 15:4; Ephesians 5:25-27; 2 Timothy 3:1-4:5; Hebrews 4:12-13; 5:11-14; 1 Peter 1:23-25-2:2; 2 Peter 1:3-4; 3:17-18; Jude 3

Reason #2: Polarized Priorities

Diagnosing the Problem

When you ask the average Christian why he does not spend as much time in God's word as he knows he ought, something about over crowded schedules and/or a lack of time will come up. Now, there certainly are times in our lives where there is nothing that we can do about our overfilled schedules. Some people really are in a pinch—they have to work 15 hours a day, 6 days a week just to keep afloat. However, the average person works probably around 30-60 hours/week. Of course on top of work, there are all of the menial chores that need to be done around the house: fixing the leaky faucet, mowing the yard, snow blowing the drive, changing the oil, helping with the dishes, running the kids to and fro to all sorts of activities, communicating and spending

time with the spouse. There certainly are things in our lives that we cannot compromise on. For instance, you simply do not have a choice—I don't care how badly you want to stay home from work to study God's word... you must make a living; you must put food on the table for your family. However, there are many things in our daily lives that can be rearranged or deleted all together.

Think about it, I call you up on the phone and ask you how your time in the word has been going. You respond by calling attention to your busy schedule. I answer back, "So, you have a 20 minute drive to and from work everyday... what do you do in the car?" You respond, "Well, I listen to the news... the radio." I then suggest, "Well... why don't you get the Bible on CD and listen to that on the way to work? I mean really... what's more important, staying up on current events, or feeding upon the word of God?" I then ask, "Do you watch TV?" You respond, "Well sure I do, about an hour before going to bed. I use it as a sort of downtime." I then suggest, "Well... why don't you cut about 10 to 20 minutes out of your TV time for the sake of feasting upon God's word. 10-20 minutes shaved off your downtime isn't going to ruin you."

Notice that I diagnosed this problem as "Polarized Priorities." I could have diagnosed it as "Slimy Schedules," but I didn't because I believe that our busy schedules are not the root of our problem, rather they are the symptom. Schedules reflect priorities. You have no problem revolving your schedule around your favorite TV show or favorite sports team. Even if you find yourself to be busy during your favorite TV show (which is probably for most Americans, *American Idol*) you will tape it and fit it into your schedule at a later date. You have no problem revolving your schedule around updating and remodeling your kitchen or bathroom even though they are livable in their present condition—surely, the avocado green linoleum and the stained toilet are not easy on the eyes, but a remodel is not 100% necessary either. Now, I am not knocking your desire and effort to remodel, rather what I am knocking is your priority. Your schedule reflects your priority. You will be inconvenienced all day every day to have an updated living space, but as soon as your time with Jesus inconveniences you, you have no problem pushing Him to the back burner. Your schedule reflects your priority.

Notice that I identified this problem as *Polarized Priorities*. By *Polarized* I mean that our priorities for our lives are polar opposites of the Bible's priorities for our lives.

Well then, what are God's priorities for our lives (as revealed in Scripture)? Take a look at Deut 6:5-9:

Love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength. ⁶ These commandments that I give you today are to be upon your hearts. ⁷ Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. ⁸ Tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads. ⁹ Write them on the doorframes of your houses and on your gates.

Look at verse 5. Many people when they come to this verse try to figure out how to love the Lord their God first with all of their heart, then with all of their soul, and then with all of their strength as if the command in this passage was to love the Lord your God specifically with these three distinct parts of your being. But this misses the point of the passage. What God is doing here is he is pointing to three fundamental aspects of our

nature as a way of referring to our entire being. Thus, what God is saying that we are to love Him with every ounce of our being. You are to love the Lord your God with absolutely everything that you have and are. Does this not communicate priority? You are to be consumed with loving God. Then he goes on in vs. 6-9 and commands his people to make his word a part of every nook and cranny of their lives—they are to make it their highest priority—that thing which consumes and drenches everything else in your life. Does the word of God consume and drench everything else in your life.

If you make your time with God in his word a priority, your busy schedule will be not be an issue, because you will build those unessential areas of your schedule around it and fit everything else in where there is room left over. The issue here is not time—It's really not, it's your priorities. What's interesting is that we, no matter how busy we are, somehow make time for those things which we want to do.

At this point I am sure that those who question my judgment on this issue the most is parents, and understandably so. Without a doubt, raising children takes much time, energy, and care. And those of you who have more kids carry a larger burden. However, one of the things that is interesting about raising children is that parents pack their kid's schedules to the max—they keep them busy with sports, music, and academics—running them to and fro, here and there, all over creation, to take them to their next appointment, practice, game, or event.

Parents act as if nothing could be done about all of the chaos. However, at some point parents must ask themselves, “Why do I have my kid involved in so many different activities?” Why do you? Now, you ought to be driving your kids to be excellent in all that they do. You ought to encourage their participation in different things such as sports, music, acting, the arts, or academics. However, there is a problem when you sacrifice your own time and/or your kids time with Jesus for the sake of their success in these areas. Now remember, your schedule reflects your priority. So, why do you sacrifice your own relationship with God to uphold such an all-consuming schedule for your kids? You probably have them in these activities because you want them to be successful—you want them to go to a good college so that they might get a good job, but why? So that they can be healthy, wealthy, and wise. Do you see the problem here? What is the driving force behind all the madness—a desire for health, wealth, and prosperity. Now, there is nothing wrong with desiring your kids to be healthy, wealthy, and wise, but this should not be your greatest priority or ambition for them.

As parents what ought to be your greatest priority and ambition for your kids? That they might know Christ and live for his glory alone. Look at Ephesians 6:4 and see what God says your ambition should be for your children: “*Fathers, do not exasperate your children; instead, bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord.*” Also, don't forget that in Deuteronomy 6:7 the admonition is given to the men to “*Impress them [the commandments revealed in the word of God] on your children.*” Thus this passage says much about the parent's responsibility to teach their kids the word of God. Unfortunately, most Christian parents have adopted the world's blueprint of parenting over/against God's (as laid forth in his word). Many parents are so busy running their kids around to all these different activities for the sake of helping them fulfill the American Dream that they simply do not have enough time to develop a relationship with Christ through his word. What do your kids need more, someone who is going to sacrifice all, including a relationship with Jesus, for the sake of prosperity—a chauffeur to

help them fulfill the American dream, or, on the other hand, do they need a Christ focused, Spirit-filled, Bible-saturated Mommy and Daddy who will sacrifice all to teach them to live their lives to the glory of God? And parents you must know that your kids are adopting the priorities that you have set for them. When little Joey sees that Mommy and Daddy will sacrifice anything on the altar of academic, athletic, or musical success, what sort of a message do you think that is sending. While Jesus informs us that we are to be storing up treasures in heaven, even to the detriment of every earthly treasure, Mommy and Daddy are teaching the kids the exact opposite. Mike Foss and I have been reading through a book called. Let me read a portion of a book written by Voddie Baucham titled Faith Driven Family. He wonderfully communicates the importance of setting biblical priorities in parenting by telling a story about a college student named Thomas. This is a long quote so bear with me.

“Not long ago I sat down with a grieving father. He wasn’t grieving because his child had died, but over something potentially far worse. His son, Thomas, had grown up in church. He was a good kid. He was fixture in the youth group, he dated a girl from the church, he went o Disciple Now weekends, Youth Camp, and YEC (a Baptist Youth outreach), and even participated in a mission trip his sophomore year in high school.

However, when he went off to college, things changed. His parents had heard of the dangers of ‘secular’ schools, so they guided him toward a Christian university. He was an outstanding athlete and had won a baseball scholarship. Thomas’s story was not just typical—it was exceptional. He had done all of the things Christian parents desire for their children—good grades, great friends, active in church, popular, and off to college on an athletic scholarship. So why was his father grieving.

As it turns out, there was a darker side of Thomas’ life. Things were lurking beneath the surface that his mom, dad, youth pastor, and Sunday school teacher never saw. Once he was away at ‘All-American Christian University,’ this darker side began to surface.

First, Thomas stopped attending church. He occasionally attended the large weekly Bible study on campus or the area-wide college service hosted by a large church in town, but he was not plugged into a local body of believers. Moreover, there was no sense of personal holiness, no pursuit of Christian disciplines.

Next Thomas began to struggle a bit in class. He had always been an A/B student, but now he was struggling just to pass his midterms in some of his classes. Upon closer examination of his academic struggles, they found that Thomas was staying out late and drinking heavily and often missed classes.

Finally, Thomas was suspended from his baseball team when a random drug test revealed that he had taken anabolic steroids. The father was so distraught that he did not allow Thomas to return for his second year. He opted instead to place in a local community college until the young man could ‘get his head on straight.’

Upon hearing Thomas’s story, I tried to console this grieving father as best I could. He cried for a while and then asked me a question that I don’t think he wanted answered. ‘Where could I have gone wrong?’ he asked as he shook his head in disgust. Over the next several days he and I unpacked the situation and dealt with some very tough issues. I am not suggesting that this case is cut-and-dry, but we did find some very familiar patterns.

First, Thomas’s lack of commitment in spiritual matters was not as strange as it seemed. As I talked with this father, I learned that Thomas was more than just a naturally gifted ballplayer. This kid had been playing baseball since he was six and started taking private instructions at nine! He had been part of a traveling squad at age twelve and was an all-star at every level. This man and his wife had gone to great lengths to see to it that their son became the best baseball player he could be.

This also meant that during the summer and fall their church attendance was sporadic at best. Like many parents, they found themselves traveling to tournament after tournament and praying for the opportunity to be out on Sunday since that meant they were playing for a title somewhere. What they didn’t realize is that they were teaching Thomas to prioritize baseball above the Fourth Commandment. They were teaching Thomas that he should honor the Sabbath and keep it holy *unless it’s baseball season*.

Thus when Thomas got to college and had to choose between going to church and hanging out with his teammates, the foundation for his decision had already been laid. When he had to choose between extra time in chemistry lab and extra time in the batting cage, he knew intuitively which choice to make. And when he had a choice between sitting on the bench for the first time in his life or taking a shortcut to a bigger body and a faster bat, he struggled for a while but eventually made his decision based on the thing that had directed his path since he was six years old.

In other words, Thomas' lack of commitment to spiritual matters laid the groundwork for his moral compromise. Christianity was never the center of Thomas's universe. It was always something on the periphery. Church, and more importantly Jesus Christ, always orbited around baseball, the bright, shining star at the center of his universe. Does this mean that every young ballplayer will experience moral compromise? Certainly not; nor am I arguing that we should abolish all sports. I am simply arguing that anything that causes us to compromise our beliefs can (and probably will) become an idol...

Thomas's father had never missed one of his son's games. Moreover, it was his father who taught him how to throw a curve ball, how to put his body in front of a grounder, and how to turn a double play. In fact, Thomas's father was the coach of his first T-ball team. However, when I asked whether or not he led his son (and his family) in worship, his only response was, 'I never even thought about it.'

In other words, this man had spent countless hours and immeasurable amounts of energy teaching his son how to be a ballplayer but hadn't done a thing to teach him how to be a Christian. When I pressed him on this issue, he said, 'I thought the youth pastor was doing a good job of that.' The point here is so obvious that I hesitate to state it. When it came to baseball, he had coaches and leagues, but *he* was the one providing private instruction in the backyard. However, when it came to spiritual matters, he passed the buck.

When it came to game time, he was not willing to miss (and wore that fact as a badge of honor), but when it came to church, they thought nothing of being absent for weeks and at one point months at a time. This family was worshipping a rival, and their son's life was the fruit of their idolatry. There were certain things for which they were willing to sacrifice all. Unfortunately, their son's walk with the Lord was not one of those things. Is there any wonder that a young man in Thomas' situation would be hard-pressed to find the courage to resist having a few drinks with the guys on the squad?

Sadly, this story is very familiar to those of us who have been around the church for a while. In fact, many of us see ourselves as we read between the lines. We live in an age where many gods vie for our allegiance. What's worse, these gods try to convince us that if we bow down and worship them, they will give our children what the God of the Bible cannot give—success by worldly standards.

Voddie Baucham, *Faith Driven Family: Doing What It Take to Raise Sons And Daughters Who Walk With God* (Wheaton: Crossway Books, 2007), 33-38.

By the way, I highly recommend every parent, no matter how young or old your kids may be, to order and read this book as soon as possible. I do not agree with everything Voddie says, but the overall message is much needed in our world today. If any of you parents would like to get this book please contact me.

But the question is this: what keeps you from feasting upon the word of God? I think that we would all, at least to one point or another, admit that our lack of pursuit of a relationship with God through his word is due to our polarized priorities—our priorities are polar opposites of the priorities of Scripture.

Prescribing a Solution:

So how do we go about prescribing a solution to this problem—this problem which threatens our time in God's word? It really is not rocket science. Well... since our problem has more to do with priorities than with our lack of time, we must seek to change our priorities. The only way this can be fixed is by adopting and revolving our lives

around God's priorities. What you need is not an extra block of time in the day—for if your priorities do not change it does not matter even if you have 3 extra hours a day, you will just fill it with whatever is your largest priority. Thus, the way you fix this problem is by adopting God's priorities for your life, so that even if you only have 30 extra minutes in the day, your first response would be to use in communion with God through his word.