

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

We have been studying through the book of Malachi. Two Sunday's ago we took a look at Malachi 2:5-9. As stated before, when I first started studying the book of Malachi the question which kept nagging at my heart 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 appointed 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, and especially considering their privileged place of honor and proximity to God in the temple?" In Malachi 2:5-9 we found the answer to this nagging question. We found that the reason the Israelites fell to such a low was because the Bible left the center of their life and ministry. The Israelites in Malachi's day were under God's judgment, buy why? We can find the answer to this question in Malachi 2:1:

*"If you don't listen, and if you don't take it to heart to honor My name," says the LORD of Hosts, "I will send a curse among you, and I will curse your blessings. In fact, I have already begun to curse them because you are not taking it to heart."*

We see here that the reason God was going to judge them was because they were not taking him seriously; they were not concerned for God's glory, and they had a lackadaisical approach to his word. The evidence that they were not taking God's name seriously was that they were not taking his word seriously.

As has been stated many times over the past few weeks, if we fail in our approach to God's word everything else in our lives, spiritually speaking, will fall apart. The word of God is foundational to both belief and practice; it is foundational to everything having to do with God and our relationship with him; it is even foundational to our relationships with each other in the body of Christ. If we fail here we fail everywhere.

This week's message will be an extension from last week's message. Last week we took a look at our own lives. I posed the question, "What keeps you from feasting upon God's word." We all know that we need the word of God—we have all witnessed the damaging effects of not keeping the Bible central as we have been going through the book of Malachi—and yet we all know that the word of God does not play as large of a role in our lives as we know it ought.

Last week we looked at two of the most common things which fence the people of God off from his word. First we considered the effects of *Insufficient Information*. Our conclusion was that although most Christians affirm the importance of the word of God for their lives, their knowledge of why it is so important is lacking. As stated, we have a tendency to give Sunday School answers to spiritual questions as we know we ought without really knowing the full-orbed ramifications of what we are saying. And although you know your need for Scripture enough to affirm your need for it, you do not know it well it enough to produce any sort of action. I stated that the solution to this problem is

not rocket science: if the problem is insufficient information, what we need to overcome this is some good Christian education, a developed and in-depth understanding of why the Bible *is* so important for your life.

Second, we considered the effects of *Polarized Priorities*. Most Christians blame their lack of pursuit of God's word on their busy schedules. However, we know that our schedules are not the root of our problem, rather they are the symptom of a greater problem, misplaced priorities. In fact, your schedule reflects your priorities. We looked at Deuteronomy 6:5-9 which reveals God's priority for our lives. We concluded that the reason the Bible never finds its way into our schedule is because the priorities we have set for ourselves are polar opposites of the priorities laid forth for us by God in the Scriptures. Although most people would think this problem to be solved by praying that God might loosen up their schedules or that he might add an hour to the day so that there might be 25 hours in a day as opposed to 24, we know that our real problem is not lack of time. I suggested that if God did add an hour to the day we will simply spend that extra hour on whatever is our greatest priority, and if the bible is not one of our greatest priorities, it will not find its way into that extra hour. Thus, the only way this can be fixed is through adopting God's priorities for our lives, so that even if there were only 23 hours in the day we would force the word of God into our schedules. After all, your schedule reflects your priority.

Today we are going to be continuing this discussion. We will be looking at 2 more things which keep the people of God from feasting upon his word. So...

### ***Reason #3: Addictive Amusement: A Slacker's Satisfaction***

#### *Diagnosing the Problem:*

Does anyone realize where the word amusement (amuse) comes from? Well, it comes from the word *amuse*. It is a word that has two parts: *a* (from *amuse*) is a prefix which means "no" or "non" (much like *asymmetrical*, *atheism*) and *muse* means to be deep in thought. Thus, to be *amused* is to be distracted from any sort of serious thinking by being redirected by something light and easy. *Webster's* suggests that the word *amuse* "implies directing attention away from serious matters." In fact, it has been suggested that the purpose of the jester in medieval times was to help the king divert his mental and emotional energy to things of a lighter nature. No doubt about it, being the ruler of a nation is about as stressful as it gets, and the jester provided the king some sort of an intellectual escape, a mind nap. The way the jester did so was by diverting the king's mind from the problems of the kingdom through entertainment. The purpose of the jester was to help the king empty his mind of all seriousness—to distract the king from those stresses which so heavily weighed upon him. As the king mindlessly sat by watching the jester do all of the work the cares of the kingdom went to the back of his mind. The goal of the jester was to amuse the king.

Isn't this really the truth? Which would you prefer: (1) spend 7 hours watching the Lord of the Rings Trilogy on film or (2) spending countless hours reading through the Lord of the Rings books? The answer is quite easy for most Americans (if you would prefer the reading, you are quite rare). Why? Because reading takes work! It takes work to read; it takes work to follow the story line; it takes work to keep all of the character's

names straight without visuals to help; it takes work to conjure up images in the mind to bring the story to life. Movies, on the other hand, are easy. They take no effort because the producer, actors, and set designers have done all of the work for you. The producer organizes the content of the movie in a compelling and easy to follow way, the actors put flesh and bones on the characters in the story so that you do not have to conjure up creative images to bring the story to life, and the set designers create a visual world for the setting once again so that you do not have to conjure up creative images to bring the story to life. When you watch a movie, you are, in a passive sense, being entertained. When you read a book, although you are being entertained by the story, you are, in large part, entertaining yourself.

We can see this with kids as well: if you give kids the option to either sit in front of the TV and be entertained by their favorite movie or to go outside to play and entertain themselves, most kids would prefer to sit in front of the TV. Why? Because, it is much less work! You can get all of the pleasure of entertainment by sitting in front of the TV without putting any effort into it at all.

It seems that here in America as soon as something becomes difficult—as soon as we have to put work into something to make it interesting to us—we run from it, and especially when it involves intellectual or mental work. There is nothing wrong with the desire for interest or even entertainment, the problem is that as soon as the benefits of entertainment can only be attained through intellectual work we feel completely justified to stop whatever it is that we are doing. Unfortunately, we bring this same approach with us to the Scriptures. In the same way that you change the channel when you do not find a certain show to be appealing or entertaining, as soon as you find the Bible to be difficult and a bit less exciting than you would like, you turn the channel—you put the Bible down and do something a bit more appealing, like watch TV. Thus, we have become *Addicted to Amusement*. I was tempted to identify this problem as *Enslaving Entertainment*. We in America are slaves to entertainment, and anything which does not hold our attention without an effort on our part is not worth our time.

Isn't this the way we approach preaching as well? "We can't go back there honey! The pastor was too complex and difficult to follow!" Now don't get me wrong, there are plenty of pastors out there whose preaching of the Gospel is inaccessible to the Average Joe off the street. Preaching should not be directed to the intellectual elite alone, rather it should be packaged in such a way that the simplest of minds can follow. However, most people want their preacher to be more of a stand up comedian than an expositor of the Scriptures. I have two desires for my preaching in this light: (1) I hope that the average Joe off the street can follow the sermon and (2) I hope that the sermon intellectually and spiritually stretches all in attendance. But most people don't want to be stretched, they just want to sit back mindlessly and enjoy the show. As soon as any sort of intellectual discipline or stamina is required, the listeners check out not realizing that preaching is a two way street. Surely, the preacher ought to put his heart and soul into the preparation and delivery of a message, but the people of God ought to work just as hard to listen, learn, follow, and apply the word of God. Preaching is not a spectator event. Do you work as hard as a listener as I do as a communicator? You ought to. However, most Christians express frustration as soon as a preacher demands any sort of an intellectual challenge on the part of the people. People always speak in terms of "being fed." Notice the passive nature of this statement. Without a doubt, there has to be a passive nature in

preaching. After all, I am preaching *to you*. At the same time, however, it ought to be a joint effort. It ought not be like mommy doing air plane while feeding her hungry infant. In this case the hungry child ought to be grabbing the mom's hand to help direct the food into his mouth to show the mom that he knows what's going on and that he wants a part to play in the process. This would be a good question to ask at this point: Do you ever study the passage that I will be preaching from before the Sunday service so that you will be better prepared to follow? Do you at least meditatively read over the passage throughout the week so that you can better follow on Sunday morning?

I am not in any way saying that the Bible is not entertaining. Quite the opposite! I find the Bible to be one of the most riveting, engaging, relevant, entertaining books out there. Many of the stories in the Bible put the modern day stories loved by Americans to shame. You will find all sorts of people in Christianity saying silly things against entertainment as if entertainment were a bad thing. No, there is nothing wrong with entertainment. In fact, entertainment can be a gift from God. You see, I am not against entertainment or amusement at all; rather I am against an incessant addiction to entertainment. Entertainment should not be banned from all churches. The problem arises, however, when pastors sacrifice truth on the altar of entertainment. The problem in our own lives and in our own pursuit of God through his word is that we put God's word down as soon as it does not immediately provide us the benefits of entertainment. As soon as we have to put difficult work into our study of God's word we put it aside and go do something a bit more interesting.

Why, ultimately, are we so addicted to entertainment? Well, we love our TV's because they provide us the immediate benefits of entertainment without requiring much work on our part. Thus, our addiction of entertainment stems from laziness. The thing that keeps many people from the word of God is that it demands too much from them—it is too much work to read God's word in a meaningful way.

At this point the average American Christian will look on and say, "So what! So I am lazy in regard to the word of God. Surely, I should be more diligent about growing in my knowledge of God's word, but Come On! God has not called me to be a theologian, teacher, or a scholar. What, do you think that God expects all Christian's to be scholars?" First, in regard to all Christians being teacher/theologians/scholars, I will answer both yes and no. No, God does not call every Christian to be a super-theologian; he has specially gifted certain men for this role. However, every Christian ought to be diligently pursuing a knowledge of God's word. Think about Jesus' words in Matthew 7 where he speaks about the wise and the foolish man. This portion of Scripture has bearing upon each and every believer, not just theologians. The wise man builds his house upon the rock. What is the rock? It is the teachings of Christ. It is impossible to build your life upon the teachings of Christ unless you first know the teachings of Christ. And how does one come to know the teachings of Christ? Through the word of God! Every believer has a responsibility to know and base his life upon the word of God, regardless of their unique Spirit-gifting. No Christian can use their unique gifting from the Holy Spirit as an excuse to not diligently pursue a knowledge of God's word.

Second, I would suggest that there are great consequences for not being diligent about God's word. Having a "So what" attitude about the role of the word of God in your life is dangerous. There are many passages in the Bible which speak about the danger of

laziness (lack of diligence), but I want to take you to Hebrews 6:11-12 and you will see why in a moment.

*<sup>11</sup> Now we want each of you to demonstrate the same diligence for the final realization of your hope, <sup>12</sup> so that you won't become lazy, but imitators of those who inherit the promises through faith and perseverance.*

You might remember that I preached a sermon on Hebrews 5:11-14 a few months ago. In Hebrews 5:11-14 the author completely lambastes the Hebrew believers because of their lack of growth in the knowledge of God's word, and especially considering the fact that they had been Christians for quite some time. In essence, these believers were old in the faith but babies in regard to the knowledge of God's word. He told them that although they should be accustomed to solid food (the deep doctrines of the faith) by this time, they can only stomach milk (the most basic teachings of the faith). These aged believers were still in their spiritual diapers.

What we see here in Hebrews 6:9-12 is the consequence of their laziness in regard to their growth in the knowledge and practice of the faith. The Hebrew believers had proven themselves to be lazy in the study of God's word and because of it they were toying with the thought of rejecting Christ, the only one able to save their souls, for the sake of avoiding persecution. Their laziness in regard to the word of God was the very thing which made them weak enough spiritually speaking to forfeit their eternal salvation in Christ. Their lazy approach to the word of God led them to a place where they were unable to discern their spiritual needs. Thus, what we saw in Hebrews 5:11-14 was the foundation of the Hebrew's error, and what we find here in 6:9-12 is the proposed solution to their problem. Their problem is their lazy approach to learning and living the word of God, the solution to their problem is to imitate those who "inherit the promises." Notice from vs. 13, what characterizes those who "inherit the promises"? Diligence and Endurance!

What is the first thing that comes to your mind when you think of the words 'diligence' and 'discipline'? Hard work! These are the ones that we are to be following/imitating. What is it about them that the author of Hebrews wants us to imitate? Faith and Diligence! What we see from this passage is that there is much at stake. Having a lazy approach to the Bible is costly, because when we have a lazy approach to the word of God, we will, as a consequence, have a poor ability to discern truth from error. When we have a poor ability to discern truth from error, we, like the Hebrews, will be susceptible to unknowingly follow after soul damaging teachings and pursuits. "Ahh... come on, I know that I am lazy about growing in the knowledge of the word of God, but so what! What's the big deal?" I'll tell you what the big deal is, the preservation of your soul.

You see, if you are just along for the ride, and have no meaningful pursuit of the word of God—if you are only intent on growing in the knowledge of Jesus in so far as it comes easily or naturally—In the words of Paul Washer, "Your Christianity won't be worth a fizzle." We want everything microwaved these days; we want a meaningful walk with God, but we don't want to invest any time or (especially) any intellectual energy to get it. I mean, you want a good turkey dinner, but you don't want to spend the 5 hours of roasting and basting the turkey, so you throw it in the microwave and what comes out? A

disgusting dry piece of bird! If you put a microwavable effort into your walk with God, what sort of a return do you think you are going to get? A microwavable result! Sure, you may pull a turkey out the microwave, but it ain't gonna be the rich, robust, flavorful thanksgiving dinner you were hoping for! Quick and easy! Quick and easy! This is what we are all about here in America. "If it ain't quick and easy I don't want anything to do with it." The sad thing is that this mindset carries over into our walk with God.

We want to be entertained, amused, and we will pursue a knowledge of God's word only in so far as we can be entertained in doing so. But as soon as we get to the genealogies; as soon as Romans dives in to deep truths that are not easily accessed; as soon as it becomes difficult to hold concentration; as soon as we have to struggle intellectually to find its relevance for our lives, we put the Bible down and go do something a bit easier and more interesting. Don't get me wrong, the Bible is not easy to read. I am not in any way suggesting that pursuing a knowledge of God's word is a cake walk. How do you think your elders got to where they are today in regard to their understanding of God's word (and they are in no way perfect)? Do you think that they were walking along one day and Snap! they were struck by lightning and suddenly they became saturated by the word of God? Of course not! The way they got to where they are today is this: they daily pursued a relationship with God through the knowledge of his word regardless of how tired they were, of whether it went over their head or not, of how busy they were, or of how many distractions there were. To put it another way, the reason why these men are where they are at today is because one day they got serious enough and said, "Enough is Enough! I don't care what it costs; I don't care how much work it is; I don't care how difficult it might be; I will do whatever it takes to know God through his word!" Surely, there is a huge Spirit element to this in regard to gifting and anointing, but there is a large human element to this as well.

Thus, we see that the people of God only pursue a knowledge of God's word in so far as it does not demand much (especially intellectually) from them. We are a people who are addicted to entertainment, and this addiction carries itself into our pursuit of God's word. We will pursue a knowledge of God's word until it fails to provide a certain element of excitement; until it takes mental energy to follow; until it takes intellectual stamina to find meaning and significance. Surely, we are addicted to amusement, the slackers satisfaction!

#### *Prescribing a Solution:*

The only way this can be dealt with is through getting serious about your walk with God. There has to come a time when you must put your laziness to death. You must come to terms with the fact that God is not interested in making your life and your pursuit with him a cake walk. God commands us to do difficult things. Many Christians do not understand this. However, if you know that God calls you to do difficult things you will not be as surprised when you find reading his word to be difficult.

Some ultra practical advice: I don't want to be legalistic by creating a bunch of rules for you, but try taking a fast from T.V., the internet, the radio, and any other form of entertainment that keeps you from feasting on God's word. (I have found today that the internet distracts people from the word of God just as much as the TV.) If you do so, and you pour energy and time into Scripture, you will learn to find pleasure in reading and pouring over God's word. It will still take discipline and hard work, but you will see that

God makes every moment spent with him in his word worth it. Your relationship with God will flourish and you will find your confidence in God and his promises will bring joy unspeakable to your lives. You must believe that although your time in God's word does not always pay immediate dividends, it pays a lifetime and more (eternal) of enjoyment, satisfaction, and rest. You will learn to find pleasure and even entertainment in the word of God. It will be your joy and your pleasure.

#### ***Reason #4: Lonely Labors***

Many times the reason why we have such a difficult time consistently feasting upon the word of God is because we are trying to walk the Christian life alone. You have to understand that God never intended his people to pursue him apart from community. He has also never intended that his people pursue of knowledge of himself apart from community. He has given us each other so that we might help each other bear each other's burdens. Take a look at Ecclesiastes 4:9-12,

*“Two are better than one because they have a good reward for their efforts. <sup>10</sup> For if either falls, his companion can lift him up; but pity the one who falls without another to lift him up. <sup>11</sup> Also, if two lie down together, they can keep warm; but how can one person alone keep warm? <sup>12</sup> And if somebody overpowers one person, two can resist him. A cord of three strands is not easily broken.”*

I can tell you from personal experience that having an accountability partner who will help you faithfully feast upon God's word is vital for most believers. I was known as the devotion nazi by some at my college. I got every morning at 5 am. After showering I would head up to Crouch Hall in order to wake up different people to go down to the basement to do our devotionals. By my Senior I was waking about 10-15 people up every morning. Quite a few of these people told me a couple of months after joining me in the basement that this was the first time that they had ever been consistent in their reading of Scripture. They said that the obvious reason was the accountability. Kristal and I can affirm the same thing. Just 8 months ago Kristal and I decided that we were going to start doing a devotional every day. We started in Genesis 1 and we are now almost done with the book of 2 Kings. Kristal has told me time and time again how happy she is that we are doing this together—how much more it motivates. It has proven beneficial for myself as well.

Having an accountability partner specifically for reading the word is helpful in so many ways. Let me just hit on a few of the reasons:

1. You have to take responsibility for your lack of action. You know that you are going to have to answer to someone if you choose to not read. A good accountability does just say “Oh, okay... no problem” when you tell him that you didn't make time for the word of God. No, a good accountability partner gently and lovingly asks “Why? What kept you from it and how are you going to steer clear of making that same error in the future?” You see, an accountability partner does not just let you slither away from your sloth and lack of discipline; He makes you face your common faults and does not allow you to hide them; He calls you to account so that you might identify those things which keep you from feasting on God through his word the most.

2. Helps you know that you are not alone. You see that your partner has his/her devotional even when life is stressful, even when he is tired, even when he is sick, even when he doesn't want to. Knowing that someone else in a similar situation to you is still faithfully studying the word of God drives you to do more than what you would normally do. Peter, in 1 Peter 5:8-9, communicates this same truth in regard to persecution:

*Be sober! Be on the alert! Your adversary the Devil is prowling around like a roaring lion, looking for anyone he can devour. <sup>9</sup> Resist him, firm in the faith, knowing that the same sufferings are being experienced by your brothers in the world.*

You call up Franky, your accountability partner, to ask him if it would be ok if you didn't do your devotional for the day because of the hectic, busy, and exhausting day. After detailing for him the busy and exhausting nature of your day, you ask him how his day was. As he begins to answer you realize that his day was much worse than yours. Just as you are about to respond by saying, "Franky... hey man, since we both had crazy days, and it sounds like yours was much worse than mine, what do you think about us not doing our devotions for the day." And before you can get this out of your mouth Franky says, "Yeah, it was a tough day, but WOW! God is so good! In fact, you called me right in the middle of my devotion and God is teaching me so many cool things." You are going to be on the other end of the phone thinking in your head, "Man... if Franky made time for God's word today, certainly I can as well." This is what an accountability partner can do for you: he can hold you up and encourage you by showing you his zeal for the word of God. His example gives you encouragement to faithfully feast on God's word.

3. An accountability partner provides an opportunity for you to release all of the stuff that is welling up inside. Whenever we feast upon God's word his Spirit produces passion within us and he gives us a desire to tell others about the good stuff that we are learning. One of the huge benefits that I have had over the years with accountability partners is that I get to share all of the good things that God is teaching me through his word. Also, I can attest to the fact that some of the best things that I have learned have not been from John Piper, rather they have been through Average-Joe-Christians who teach me what God has been teaching them in their quiet times.

4. You feel the consequences of your actions: When you are pursuing the knowledge of God's word with someone else you are aware of the effects of your laziness in regard to the word of God. You know that if you fail to be consistent with your quiet time, it is likely that your accountability partner will feel the liberty to slack off. You realize that you are dependent upon that person and that person is dependent upon you. You are there to hold your accountability partner up, and if you are not being disciplined in your reading you will not be doing your job. I can tell you one thing: as soon as you slack off in your devotions it becomes impossible to keep your partner accountable to their bible reading. After all, how can you provide constructive criticism when you are just as guilty?

#### *Prescribing a Solution:*

Get on it! Find an accountability partner. Now I must caution here that you must take your time as you discern who you should ask. Here are a few things to consider:

1. You must trust the person.
2. The person must be in love with Christ (you don't want someone who is just disciplined or outwardly righteous).
3. The person must be committed to discipline (what good is an accountability partner who both lacks discipline in reading themselves and in holding you accountable).
4. The person must not be legalistic (you want someone who is going to be upfront with you, but a legalist will put unrealistic demands upon you without compassion, grace, or understanding).
5. You want someone who is going to press you (why didn't you read; is that a good excuse; what can you do differently in the future?)
6. You want the person to be a friend (one of the things that will dry up your relationship with your accountability partner is if your conversation only revolves around things of a serious nature.)