

# GROWING IN FAITH



## Malachi

"A son honors his father, and servants their master. If then I am a father, where is the honor due me? And if I am a master, where is the respect due me?" says the Lord of hosts to you, O priests, who despise my name. You say, "How have we despised your name?" By offering polluted food on my altar. And you say, "How have we polluted it?" By thinking that the Lord's table may be despised."

- Malachi 1:6-7

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## GOING DEEPER

In the video, Josh talked about most people having a 'canon within a canon'. This means that we tend to place more importance or focus on certain scriptures over others.

Have you noticed this in your own devotional life? Which scriptures and stories do you tend to read the most? What are the pros and cons of having a canon within a canon? How can we stretch ourselves beyond the stories we are already comfortable with?

Malachi was concerned about a lack of piety in the community. People were not really connecting with God. They were just going through the motions. John Wesley was also concerned about living lives of piety and growing in our faith.

Josh listed several acts of piety in the video. Which acts of piety, or devotional acts, have you found helpful in your faith journey? What acts of piety are you willing to commit to doing for the next seven days? As a group, hold each other accountable to these.

Malachi 1:6-7 tells us that people were offering impure sacrifices to God. They weren't really giving their best, they were just going through the motions.

What is the difference in your own spirit when you give something out of a sense of obligation versus giving out of gratitude? In what ways, other than monetarily, can we give our best to God?

Malachi spoke to the priests of the temple about having integrity in their instructions and teaching. Josh mentioned the idea of the "Priesthood of All Believers" or the "Ministry of the Baptized".

How do you see yourself as a minister of the gospel? How are you ensuring that what you are teaching others about Christianity through your words and actions is being done with integrity?

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## Amos

I hate, I despise your festivals, and I take no delight in your solemn assemblies. Even though you offer me your burnt offerings and grain offerings, I will not accept them; and the offerings of well-being of your fatted animals I will not look upon. Take away from me the noise of your songs; I will not listen to the melody of your harps. But let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream.

- Amos 5:21-24

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In the video, Josh mentioned that Amos was from the Southern Kingdom of Judah and was preaching to the Northern Kingdom of Israel. His formula was leading to the seventh nation being the worst condemnation.

How do you think the people of Israel reacted to what Amos had to say? Were they surprised? Convicted? Defensive? How do you respond when someone challenges you for something you have done wrong? How can you help hold others accountable when they have done something wrong in a way that doesn't push them away?

Josh defined righteousness as "doing the right thing at the right time at the right place for the right reasons".

By this definition, in what ways are we as a nation righteous? In what ways are we falling short of righteousness? How are we as individuals righteous? In what ways are we falling short of righteousness?

Amos convicts the Kingdom of Israel of corporate sin because they were not taking care of the poor, widows, and orphans. Even those who were not directly involved with the injustice were still guilty because they weren't doing anything to stop it.

Are there corporate sins in our world today that we are guilty of? What can we do to stop these corporate sins?

Read Amos 7:7-9. A plumb line was used in construction to make sure a wall was being built straight up and down and on a good foundation.

What do we use as the plumb line in our lives as Christians? How does this plumb line keep us on the right path?

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## Jude

“For certain intruders have stolen in among you, people who long ago were designated for this condemnation as ungodly, who pervert the grace of our God into licentiousness and deny our only Master and Lord, Jesus Christ.”

- Jude v. 4

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In the very first verse of Jude’s letter, the author identifies himself as a servant of Jesus Christ and brother of James.

In the video, Josh mentioned that Jude might be the brother of Jesus. Why would he not identify himself as the brother of Jesus? What does the title “servant” connote? The ministry of Jesus seemed to reverse societal norms so that servanthood was something to strive for rather than be ashamed of. Do you think this is still true today? Why or why not?

Jude quotes from Jewish apocryphal writings like 1 Enoch and the Testament of Moses. Neither of these books were considered scriptural, but Jude, and the community he was writing to, apparently still saw them as authoritative.

Can writings that are not part of our Bible still have authority for our lives? Are there any books you have read that have served as authoritative texts for you? What makes a book authoritative? Is it the author? The value the community assigns it? Something else?

Jude’s main theological point in the letter is that God’s grace was being perverted in the community by outsiders who were coming in and teaching that people could do whatever they wanted because God’s grace would forgive them anyway?

If God really does forgive us for things we do wrong, why should we even try to live good lives? Josh said that God’s grace is not just redemptive, it is transformative. What does that mean?

Josh talked about John Wesley’s idea of prevenient, justifying, and sanctifying grace.

Looking back on your life, can you see signs of God’s prevenient grace? How does God’s sanctifying grace lead you towards Christian perfection? If we define Christian perfection as all your thoughts, words, and actions being motivated out of love for God and neighbor, is Christian perfection possible?

# GROWING IN FAITH



## Second Isaiah

Thus says the Lord, your Redeemer, who formed you in the womb: I am the Lord, who made all things, who alone stretched out the heavens, who by myself spread out the earth; who frustrates the omens of liars, and makes fools of diviners; who turns back the wise, and makes their knowledge foolish; who confirms the word of his servant, and fulfills the prediction of his messengers; who says of Jerusalem, "It shall be inhabited," and of the cities of Judah, "They shall be rebuilt, and I will raise up their ruins"; who says to the deep, "Be dry— I will dry up your rivers"; who says of Cyrus, "He is my shepherd, and he shall carry out all my purpose"; and who says of Jerusalem, "It shall be rebuilt," and of the temple, "Your foundation shall be laid."

- Isaiah 44:24-28

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Scholars refer to Second Isaiah as chapters 40-55 in the book of Isaiah. It was written by someone who had obviously studied Isaiah and was greatly influenced by the 8<sup>th</sup> century prophet.

Who is someone that has deeply influenced you in your life and that you look to as someone worth modeling your life after? What is it about that person that is worth modeling? Group leader - see if there are any commonalities between the answers given. Does it make a difference to you that we don't actually know who wrote this part of the book of Isaiah?

Second Isaiah was written during the Babylonian exile while the Hebrew people were in a foreign land looking for hope.

Have you ever found yourself in unfamiliar territory in your life? What was that like? How did you find hope in the midst of uncertainty? What do you think of when you hear someone say "9/11" today? What would you have thought of before 2001? How can historic events like 9/11 or the Babylonian exile change our view of the world?

Second Isaiah makes the first truly monotheistic statements in the Bible.

Previous authors believed that God was the only God worth worshipping, but none of them claimed that there was no other God.

What difference does it make if God is the God of all nations and the only God vs. the God of one nation? If we believe there is only one God what does that mean for other religions?

God chooses to use Cyrus of Persia to do his work and let the Jews return home to rebuilding the temple. Cyrus was known for lacking morals, was a foreigner, didn't believe in God, and was ruthless, yet he was called "anointed".

Do we really believe God can work through anyone to bring about His will? Does this say more about the nature of the individual or the power of God?

# GROWING IN FAITH



## Hosea

Come, let us return to the Lord; for it is he who has torn, and he will heal us; he has struck down, and he will bind us up. After two days he will revive us; on the third day he will raise us up, that we may live before him. Let us know, let us press on to know the Lord; his appearing is as sure as the dawn; he will come to us like the showers, like the spring rains that water the earth.

- Hosea 6:1-3

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Josh mentioned in the video that the Northern Kingdom of Israel made alliances with other nations like Assyria and Cana. These alliances brought foreign influences to Israel including foreign gods and goddesses.

In many ways our world is smaller today than ever before. We are exposed to more diverse cultures, philosophies, and religions because of technology than at any other point in our history. In what ways is this good? In what ways is this bad?

The Israelites were guilty of apostasy. They were worshipping gods other than the one true God believing it would make them more rich or fertile.

Even though we only believe there is one God as Christians, we are still sometimes guilty of prioritizing other "gods" before God. As a nation, what are some of the other gods we worship? How do we get these priorities back in line to place God first?

Hosea's theology seems to indicate that God chooses to punish us for our idolatry and that this explains the bad things that happen to us in the world.

Do you really believe that God punishes us for our bad decisions or rewards us for our good decisions? What could be another explanation for the bad things that happen in our world?

The word "repent" literally means "to turn around". When we make bad choices and prioritize other "gods" over God we need to repent and get back on the right path. If we do, there is always room for hope. Read Luke 15:11-32.

How does the prodigal son show repentance? Are you willing to share a time in your life that you repented from something? When we understand that God is ultimately a God of hope, how does that impact the way we live our lives and the way we treat others?