

XXXIX

THE OLD TESTAMENT

Leader Conversation Guide – XXXIX: Zephaniah

Main Idea

The Book of Malachi exposes a dangerous shift in the hearts of God's people: their worship became routine, their obedience became selective, and their hearts became distant. They kept up the outward activity of religion but lost their sense of holy reverence and awe. Instead of offering sacrifices that represented God's true worth, they gave Him what cost them the least. This week's message challenges us to look closely at our own relationship with God, reminding us that He calls for a life of genuine, costly devotion rather than comfortable routine. As we begin our discussion, let's ask God to realign our hearts so that we don't just go through the motions, but truly live in awe of who He is.

Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, let us be thankful, and so worship God acceptably with reverence and awe, for our 'God is a consuming fire.

HEBREWS 12:28-29

Make it Practical:

Guard against a routine heart

- Spiritual drift rarely happens all at once; it begins when our worship becomes routine and our hearts drift far from Him, even while our lips still honor Him.
- Malachi 1:6; Matthew 15:8-9

Recognize God on His terms, not yours

- The people of Jesus' day missed the Savior because they were looking for someone to fit their personal expectations
- We must fear and know God as He truly is, not as we want Him to be.
- Malachi 3:1; Proverbs 9:10

See the big picture of Scripture

- The Old Testament is not a series of disconnected rules or stories, but a unified narrative pointing directly to Jesus as our ultimate Redeemer and King
- Malachi 4:2; John 1:23

Talk About It

Malachi notes that the people didn't stop worshiping God, they just stopped being moved by Him. What are some practical warning signs that our faith or church attendance has turned into a routine rather than an expression of genuine awe?

The sermon points out that the people were giving God what cost them the least. In what areas of our modern lives (time, finances, relationships, energy) are we most tempted to offer God "convenient" worship instead of "costly" worship?

In Matthew 15:8-9, Jesus warns against honoring God with our lips while our hearts are far away. How can we intentionally guard our hearts against this kind of spiritual distance during our personal devotional time this week?

**The problem wasn't the absence of activity.
It was the absence of awe.**

Prayer

Lord God, we come before You acknowledging that You are a consuming fire, worthy of all our reverence and awe. Forgive us for the times we have allowed our worship to become a routine and our obedience to become selective. Search our hearts today and pull us close to You once again. Help us to offer You our very best, holding nothing back, and living lives that truly reflect Your immense worth. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Next Steps

Evaluate your obedience: Ask a trusted friend or group member to help you identify if there is any area of Scripture where your obedience has become selective, and make a plan to align your actions with God's commands.

Trace the story of Jesus: Read through one of the Old Testament passages mentioned in the notes (such as Isaiah 53 or Psalm 23) to reflect on how God's rescue plan has always pointed to Christ.

Realign your expectations: Pray and ask God to reveal any areas where you are trying to force Him into your own expectations, choosing instead to submit to who He truly is.