

*Text of a message delivered by Grant Harris at Windsor Park Baptist Church on Sunday 24th August 2025.
The written text may vary from the spoken/video version due to time and flexibility.*



Malachi: Decisions, Decisions, Decisions

Every day we make thousands of small decisions, from the mundane to the significant, and these decisions shape the direction of our lives. The minor prophets, culminating in Malachi, call God's people back from apathy and half-hearted devotion, challenging us to choose who we will serve. Spiritual growth is built in the everyday: each small decision either draws us closer to Jesus or steers us away. God's ultimate call is relational: He wants our hearts. When we respond, our lives, actions, and blessings flow from that choice. This week, we'll talk about small decisions that change eternity.

Introduction: Thousands of Decisions

Thanks for joining us today! Every choice brought you here — and I'll never know about those who didn't. Haere mai!

It's generally accepted by researchers that the average adult makes 33,000 to 35,000 decisions every day, including what we'll eat, what we'll wear, what we'll say, how we'll say it, which roads to take to work; and then there are the more deliberate decisions about our relationships, finances, and our life direction. Gerald Zaltman, a Harvard Business School professor, suggests that about 95% of our decisions occur in our subconscious mind through information we've gathered as we journey through life and as we interpret information about what is 'good' or 'bad.' Interestingly, 226.7 of our daily decisions are specifically about food alone ... flat white or long black? Vogels or Molenberg? Could I

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sneak in a Whittaker's Peanut Slab before dinner? Even these tiny decisions can reveal what, and who, we truly love.

The sheer volume of decisions we face every day helps explain why spiritual disciplines and habits are so important – the ongoing decisions we make to embrace them help automate some of our God-facing rhythms so that we don't have to rely on decision-making energy for every spiritual moment throughout the day.

Prophets: Ancient Voices | Modern Hope

Today we finish an 8-week series looking at the minor prophets, hearing their ancient words that still echo God's heart today. These prophets consistently call people back to God when they've wandered away. They remind us of God's passionate pursuit of His people, His covenant love, and His desire for justice, restoration, and hope. Through Amos, Hosea, Micah, Joel, Habakkuk, and Zephaniah, God called His people back to Himself — a call that finds its ultimate yes in Jesus, who draws us into full life and restored hearts. Jesus shows us the fullest expression of God's call. Following Him is the way to a meaningful life: to know God's love, to embody it, and to serve others. Spiritual growth isn't just about self-improvement; it's about becoming more like Jesus in thought, word, and deed. Every small decision we make either aligns us with Him or distances us from Him.

If we combine all the prophetic words, there's not one big decision - they call us to thousands of small, everyday decisions that shape our lives and draw us closer to Jesus.

We end the series today by looking at the last book of the Old Testament, a book that was then followed by 400 years of silence - what is called the intertestamental period.

Malachi

In the book of Malachi, the people that he was speaking too were, just like those the other prophets were speaking too, making countless small decisions that revealed where their true loyalties lay - we encounter a people who stood at the crossroads of choice. They had returned from exile, rebuilt their temple, and yet found themselves spiritually drifting. Think of it as the ancient equivalent of joining

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the local gym in January - new gear, download the Strava app, lots of enthusiasm, but by February your membership card is just propping up a wobbly table leg at home. They're being asked whether they would decide to follow God wholeheartedly, or would they settle for something less.

Malachi speaks to a people who had grown comfortable with half-hearted devotion, who had begun to question whether following God was truly worth it. Basically, Malachi was asking them the question that Bob Dylan intimates in his 1979 song that says, *'It may be the devil, or it may be the Lord, but you're gonna have to serve somebody.'* Ancient Malachi and [kindof] modern Bob Dylan are suggesting that we have a decision to make – who will we serve?

This is not an unfamiliar question in the Bible. Back in the 6th book of the Bible, Joshua said to the people of Israel (24:15), ***If serving the Lord seems undesirable to you, then choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve, whether the gods your forefathers served beyond the River, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land you are living. But as for me and my household, we will serve the Lord.*** Decisions to make – who are you going to serve? And through the prophets and ever since, we have seen that whatever decision we make about that, there will be consequences.

Malachi is a unique book in the Old Testament because of its literary form and structure; we see an ongoing 'conversation' between God and his people, people who have quite obviously become apathetic towards their relationship with Him. If we had looked at Haggai and Zechariah as part of this series, we would have seen that God spoke through them to warn about complacency, and in Malachi this pattern continues, apathy and complacency in their spiritual lives seems to rule the day. It's not the same today, surely?! Well let's be honest, as much as a lot of things have changed over a long time, a lot of things haven't, and this is something we all wrestle with in a society like ours that worships self-sufficiency and individualism.

So, God speaks through Malachi, which simply means 'The Messenger.' The name Malachi wasn't really a real name at the time it was written, so some scholars attribute this book to Ezra – however a discussion on authorship is for another day but doesn't distract from the message that God is bringing.

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The uniqueness of the book of Malachi is the **constant questioning of the people to God**; there isn't another book like it in the Bible. And let's be honest, they sound like a bunch of whiners. Spread through the first three chapters of Malachi are eight interactions between God and His people that show cumulatively they are showing that their daily decisions are building distance between them and God, as they shoot back with complaints about what He's saying. Let's look at these interactions that start in ...

1. Malachi 1:2 where God says, ***"I have loved you," says the Lord. But you ask, "How have you loved us?"*** And God goes on to answer that question.
2. In Malachi 1:6, God is addressing even the priests who were showing apathy towards Him, ***"It is you, O priests, who show contempt for my name." But you ask, "How have we shown contempt for your name?"***
3. God replies in Malachi 1:7, ***"You place defiled food on my altar." But you ask, "How have we defiled you?"*** And God goes on to answer that question.
4. In Malachi 2:13-14, we see the fourth interaction where God says, ***"Another thing you do: you flood the Lord's altar with tears. You weep and wail because He no longer pays attention to your offerings or accepts them with pleasure from your hands." You ask, "Why?"*** And God goes on to answer that question.
5. A few verses later in Malachi 2:17 we see the prophet saying, ***"You have wearied the Lord with your words." "How have we wearied him?" you ask.*** And Malachi goes on to answer that question.
6. In the next chapter we see a return to one of the themes we've already talked about in Malachi 3:7, ***"Ever since the time of your forefathers you have turned away from my decrees and have not kept them. Return to me, and I will return to you," says the Lord Almighty. But you ask, "How are we to return?"*** And then this discussion gets a little spicy when in ...
7. Malachi 3:8 where God replies with a question, ***"Will a man rob God? Yet you rob me." But you ask, "How do we rob you?"*** And God goes on to answer that question.
8. The last interaction we see is in Malachi 3:13 where we read, ***"You have said harsh things against me," says the Lord. Yet you ask, "What have we said against you?"*** And Malachi goes on to answer that question.

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This sounds like our teenage kids answering every request we give them with, “*But whyyy?*”

We could look at each one of these interactions separately, because by themselves they’re all individual decisions that people have made that have moved them further from God. Each one could be solved by itself, but each little question, each little decision to ignore God, builds upon the previous one to create an ongoing theme of complacency and apathy that gradually but consistently separates them further from the God who has shown His faithfulness over many generations.

For a moment, let’s look at just one of these interactions, the one that many of you know, and in my opinion the one that is most often misused. Again, we read in Malachi 3:8-12, ***“Will a man rob God? Yet you rob me.” But you ask, “How do we rob you?” “In tithes and offerings. You are under a curse - the whole nation of you - because you are robbing me. Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse, that there may be food in my house. Test me in this,” says the Lord Almighty, “and see if I will not throw open the floodgates of heaven and pour out so much blessing that you will not have room enough for it. I will prevent pests from devouring your crops, and the vines in your fields will not cast their fruit,” says the Lord Almighty. “Then all the nations will call you blessed, for yours will be a delightful land,” says the Lord Almighty.***

Ever heard this Scripture used as a way of getting you to give all your ‘tithe’ to the Church, the firstfruits – before tax, and if you do, God will open the floodgates of heaven, and your wealth will be such that all people will call you blessed. But if you don’t, you’re robbing God, and that’s very naughty.

I want to suggest to you that in the context of the **eight** interactions we’ve looked at, this is just **one** example of the apathetic spirituality that God’s people were living out. Of course, under the law [that Jesus fulfilled], tithing was something that was expected, but the bigger principal that Malachi is highlighting is that apathy leads to selfishness; when we take our eyes off God it affects all the ways that we live, and that then affects others, as the tithing referred to in this passage is that of actual produce, which the priests were responsible for distributing to those in need. So, apathy results in selfishness that results in the needs of the marginalised going unmet. This example is just one of

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eight that paint a much bigger picture of the many small decisions resulting in deeper separation from God and His purposes for the world.

I remember when I was about 20, I had my first experience of backing a trailer at what we used to call, 'the dump' – what today is called a refuse transfer station. For the life of me I couldn't back the trailer straight and I remember someone getting very frustrated with me calling out, '*Is this your first time, mate?*' Well, it was, and it took me a lot of practice to learn that when you're backing a small trailer every little move of the steering wheel has a corresponding consequence on the trailer. I'm pretty good at backing trailers these days, but it took practice and perseverance and every now-and-then I still get it wrong and have to straighten up.

Every decision counts

So, here's the point: every small decision matters. Just like backing a trailer, every little adjustment – every 'yes' or every 'no' takes us somewhere. For the people of Malachi's day, a thousand little decisions of apathy had steered them further from God. They didn't wake up one morning and decide, '*Let's drift away from Him.*' It happened decision-by-decision, choice-by-choice, excuse-by-excuse, habit-by-habit. And before they knew it, they were asking God, '*How have we drifted?*'

We can fall into the same trap. The small decisions and choices we make every day of every week – where we give our attention, how we spend our money, whether we pray, whether we forgive, whether we serve – these things add up. They either draw us closer to God, or they slowly steer us into apathy and self-sufficiency.

Malachi's challenge is not simply '*stop robbing God.*' It's bigger: it's '*return to me.*' God's call is always relational before it's behavioural. He doesn't just want our generosity, or our Sunday mornings, or our leftover energy, He wants our hearts. And when He has our hearts, everything else flows out from that.

Application

So, let me leave you with this: What small decision will you make this week that will turn you toward

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God rather than away from Him? Not in theory, not in a vague way, but in real life – at 4pm on Thursday, when you're tired, stressed, and tempted to choose convenience over faithfulness. That's where the trajectory of your life is being set.

The prophets, this series, says to us that we're going to serve somebody. Every day, in all the little ways, we're deciding who that will be. So, like Joshua, can you say: *'As for me and my household, we will serve the Lord?'* Not just in words, but in choices. Because in the end, the hope the prophets remind us of is this: God is still calling us back, still inviting us to return. And when we do, He promises His presence, His restoration, and His blessing. That's the life worth choosing.

Every Peanut Slab, every trailer manoeuvre, every Thursday 4pm, every choice is steering your life somewhere. So don't drift. Don't settle. Don't serve convenience. Serve the Lord. Because one day, you'll look back and realise: your small decisions were your big decision.

Prayer

Lord, we admit that it's so easy to drift.

So easy to settle for convenience instead of faithfulness.

But today, we want to choose You.

Help us in the small moments — the Thursday at 4pm moments,
the decisions no one else sees, the places where our hearts are shaped.

Give us courage to serve You, wisdom to hear Your voice,
and joy in walking with You.

May our small decisions this week reflect the big decision of our lives — that we belong to You.

In Jesus' name,

Amen.

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These questions are intended to help you think more about this message. We hope they might enable conversation, encouraging you to wrestle with how God might be challenging us to apply what we have heard/read.

Reflecting on Sunday 17th July 2025: Last Sunday John Tucker asked us to consider the answer to the question, 'What makes life meaningful?' He suggested that serving people from a position of humility is where we become more like Jesus. How did you find meaning through service in this past week?

Questions from this week's teaching:

1. If your daily choices are steering your life like a trailer, where would those small turns be taking you right now?
2. Where are you most tempted to choose convenience over faithfulness, and what does that reveal about your heart?
3. Malachi's people asked God "*How have we drifted?*" If you asked Him that today, what do you think He'd say?
4. What's one small, real-life decision you could make this week that would shift your trajectory toward God?

If you'd like to chat with someone about your spiritual journey or anything else going on in your life, please contact us at care@windsorpark.org.nz; **we're better together and no perfect people are allowed.**

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Below are some further resources that may take the message further and deeper and enable you to explore other viewpoints on the same theme. We also encourage you to engage with the preacher if there are further questions you have or if you'd like clarification on anything. Email info@windsorpark.org.nz and we'll direct your query to the appropriate person.

1. The Bible Project has an excellent video that gives a comprehensive overview of **Malachi**. You can see it here: <https://bibleproject.com/videos/malachi/>
2. Creating a **Rule of Life** is one way to put habits in place that help us make little decisions to stay connected to God daily. Read this article for an overview of a Rule of Life, which includes links to other resources: <https://michellerayburn.com/creating-a-rule-of-life-could-this-framework-help-you-focus/>
3. The **YouVersion Bible App** is the world's leading app to not only read the Bible on, but to see a suite of other useful resources. Download the app and create your own account and then set Windsor Park Baptist Church as 'My Church'. Each week we recommend a short devotional plan (you'll get a notification about a new plan each week). This week we'll recommend **Malachi: Before the Silence**, which is a short devotional series that walks through key themes in Malachi; it contains easy to follow daily reflections with Scripture and prayer prompts.