

Main Idea: When life is hard, we learn what we really think about God. In Malachi 3:13-18, we meet two types of believers who respond in two different ways to suffering.

- I. There are people who fiddle with God (13-15).
 - A. Such people criticize God (13).
 1. They say it's vain to serve God (14).
 2. They say it's pointless to obey God (14).
 3. They say it doesn't pay to be godly (15).
 - B. Such people compliment themselves (15).
- II. There are people who fear God (16-18).
 - A. It's evidenced by their actions (16).
 1. They reverence God.
 2. They rejuvenate one another.
 3. They think on God's name.
 4. They serve God.
 - B. It's evidenced by their anticipation (17-18).
 1. God will reward the righteous.
 2. God will repay the wicked.

Make It Personal: What do I really think about God?

1. How do I respond when life is hard?
2. Am I living today in light of the coming day?

Theme Song of Series: "Great Among the Nations" (Malachi 1:11)

My name will be great, great among the nations.

My name will be great, great among the nations.

*From the rising to the setting of the sun, my name will be great,
great among the nations.*

God is great, and this verse in Malachi sums up the Great God's agenda in this world. He wants His great name to be great among the nations. This of course is why He chose Israel, ultimately sent His Son into the world, who then gave His followers the charge to make disciples of Him *among all the nations*.

If the book of Malachi sounds like a court case, it essentially is. The great God is not being treated as great by His own chosen people. Thus, the prophet Malachi, acting as the Lord's prosecuting attorney, confronts God's people with seven covenant violations (note: I said six last time, but added another from today's text, for we see another "But you say" objection). We'll be looking at the seventh today.

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| 1:1-5 | God's people questioned God's love for them. |
| 1:6-14 | God's priests defiled God's altar. |
| 2:1-10 | God's priests failed to keep their fiduciary responsibility. |
| 2:11-16 | God's people were faithless in their marriages. |
| 2:16-3:5 | God's people questioned the God of justice. |
| 3:6-12 | God's people robbed God by neglecting their tithes. |
| 3:13-18 | God's people spoke harshly against their great God. |

Scripture Reading: Malachi 3:13-18

^{**}Note: This is an unedited manuscript of a message preached at Wheelersburg Baptist Church. It is provided to prompt your continued reflection on the practical truths of the Word of God.

¹ For a previous look at this passage, see the Malachi series preached in 1994.

One Christmas many years ago, my daughters received the game, Junior Monopoly. We had a fun time playing it together. As you likely know, the object of the game is to be the person who makes the most money. You accumulate money by buying property and collecting rent from the other participants in the game. The game is over when the first participant loses all his money.

At times, it can get tense because in order for one player to win, another must lose. But after all, it's only a game. If you lose today, no big deal. You just put the game board away and try again next time. It really doesn't matter in view of eternity whether you win or lose a game.

Back in 1990, Ken Hemphill wrote a book entitled, *The Official Rule Book for the New Church Game*. In it he pointed out that since the early 1960's most major denominations in the United States experienced either a decline or they plateaued. He asked the question, "Could it be that we have been guilty of going about our church activities and programs as if they were a 'new church game (15)?"

He shares this as to why he wrote his book (9-10), "My initiative in writing this book comes out of my love for the church and my conviction that the church is the body of Christ, the very cutting edge of spiritual awakening and world evangelization. We must recognize our potential, commit ourselves to the task, and experience the full empowering of God's Spirit. The church triumphant can and must become reality. We must become what we have been called to be. We cannot approach our involvement in the local church with a casual attitude that is inappropriate to our high calling. This is not a game! We are not dealing with issues as simple as life and death--but we are dealing with eternal issues. Our very best is required."

He made a valid point. For far too many people, church is essentially a game. It's what they do on Sunday mornings. And then they put the pieces back in the box until they're ready to play again.

How can we tell if church is merely a game for us? Here's a powerful indicator. Hardship. The Lord loves His people too much to allow them to turn His precious church into a game, so He allows them to face hardship, to suffer. Suffering produces many outcomes, and this is a vital one. Suffering reveals what we really think about God, His Word, His Son, ourselves, and life itself.

This is today's message in a sentence. According to Malachi 3:13-18, *when life is hard, we learn what we really think about God.*

This passage is significant for me. The first sermon I ever preached was an "exposition" of this text, if I can use that term. I was 19 years old, and had not yet had a preaching class. What I had was a pastor who preached expository messages, and I'd been listening to him for about four years. So I tried to follow his example.

I was doing a work-study program in Israel for a semester, living on a kibbutz, and had been asked by our group leader if I would be willing to preach a message to our group of 30 American students for our Sunday evening worship service. The date was October 5, 1980, and the passage I chose was Malachi 3:7-16.

That's an interesting place to go for one's first sermon, for sure! Interestingly, I was an undeclared major at the time, after a brief stint at pre-med. One of my objectives during those four months in Israel was to wrestle with the question, "Did the Lord want

me to be a pastor, as my own pastor had suggested?” To answer that question, I began journaling through the pastoral epistles of 1 & 2 Timothy and Titus.

I read some of those journal entries this past week. I also found my sermon notes for that sermon from Malachi. I’d like to begin this message by sharing a few excerpts from that message. I began by asking two questions.

First, “What should our attitude towards our God be?” And then, “Who is the Lord pleased with?”

“We need to turn to a very *striking* and *pointed* passage dealing with the people of Israel and see how we can gain some practical principles for our lives, dealing with the *fear of God*.”

I proceeded to read the Lord’s invitation in verse 7, “Return to me and I will return to you.” And then read the people’s startling reply, “What have we done?”

“Immediately we see that these people’s concept of God had depreciated,” I observed. “The danger of ‘leaving God’s ordinances’ is even more tragic when we observe that it can happen even *without our realizing it*. How we need to be in close fellowship with our God, moment by moment!”

“The Lord points out the first of two ways these people had forsaken God (in verses 8 and 13).” The first? According to verse 8, “They had *robbed from God*. How? In their tithes and offerings.” “The use of what God has given us, in particular our money is so key. Dr. Ryrie points out, “One’s use of money is often a *barometer* of his *spirituality*.”

After developing that section of Malachi [which Pastor Matt did with the WBC family last Sunday], we moved to “the second way the people had forsaken the LORD” in verse 13. ‘Your words have been stout against me’. I was preaching from my KJV and pointed out that “stout” literally means “arrogant” or “obstinate”.

“Again the people ask... ‘What words?’ They were saying, “It’s vain to serve God... What *profit* is it for us to...?” “Notice this wrong, self-centered motive for serving God! How easily we acquire this wrong reason for obeying God. As Ryrie again puts it, ‘Some wrongly maintained that if material prosperity didn’t result, there was no point in serving the Lord.’

“Sometimes it’s so easy for me to equate a successful spiritual life with a prosperous ‘physical’ life. This is *wrong*.”

“How could these people (or even ourselves as well) ever say it is vain to serve God unless they really didn’t understand *who* they were serving. Again this thought we mentioned earlier comes up, what *should* our attitude towards God be?”

That was 1980. Now it’s 2024. I’m as convinced as ever that we need to hear what God has to say to us in Malachi 3:13-18. This passage teaches us that there are two types of believers (not believers and unbelievers, but *believers*, people who say they *believe* in the Lord) who respond in two different ways to the hardships of life. Let’s call them God-fiddlers and God-fearers.

I. There are people who fiddle with God (13-15).

Fiddle. Not a very theological term, but appropriate. By definition, to “fiddle” means “to play on a fiddle,” “to move the hands or fingers restlessly,” “to be nervously or uselessly active,” “to spend time in aimless or fruitless activity,” “to putter, to tinker.” Used in a sentence, “He *fiddled* around with the engine for hours.”² Used in another sentence, “He *fiddled* around with God for years.”

This is what the Israelites were doing in Malachi’s day. In fact, as you saw in the last message, they had two problem areas in which they were robbing God. They robbed God in their living (6-7) and in their giving (8-12). They were stingy in their giving. God commanded them to give Him the first fruits of their income, but they didn’t. They robbed God of the tithes and offerings He deserved.

Now in verses 13-18, Malachi confronts a third problem area in the lives of his people. Their serving. Notice verse 14, “You have said, ‘It is vain to *serve* God.’” The theme of serving appears again in verse 18. Malachi’s people didn’t truly serve God. They fiddled with God.

How can we tell if people are fiddling with God? Here are two indicators.

A. Such people criticize God (13). Notice the beginning of verse 13, “Your words have been hard against me, says the LORD.” *Stout* words, says the KJV. *Harsh* words, says the NIV. This is a strong indictment, and it’s not the first time Malachi confronted his people’s criticisms of God

See 1:2, 6, 7, 12; 2:14, 17; 3:7, 8

The people replied rather cynically in verse 13b, “But you say, ‘How have we spoken against you?’” In the AV, “What have we spoken so much against Thee?” Sounds kind of like what a defensive teenager would say to his mother when confronted about his or her actions. “What have I done wrong?!”

Many years ago, when I was a resident director in Quincer dorm, I used to hear this kind of defensive response frequently. It was a Christian college, and we had several institutional preferences. One pertained to alcoholic beverages which we agreed not to consume. I remember walking by Bruce’s room one day and seeing a large wine bottle sitting in his window. I approached him and he blurted out, “I haven’t done anything wrong! It’s a non-alcoholic drink.” Sure enough, as I read the fine print, he was right. Bruce was a master when it came to “beating the system.” And at defending himself. I believe he was a pre-law major.

What kind of criticisms were the people making against God? Notice three.

1. *They say it’s vain to serve God (14).* In verse 14, “You have said, ‘It is vain to serve God.’” The word “vain” appears in the third commandment, “You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in *vain*.” The term means “empty, without value and worth.” That’s how the people felt about serving God. It’s not worth it. Have you ever felt like you served God and gotten a raw deal out of it? The people of Israel did, and were telling the Lord so.

2. *They say it’s pointless to obey God (14).* “What is the profit of our keeping his charge or of walking as in mourning before the LORD of hosts?” The

² <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/fiddle>

Hebrew word for “profit” was a technical term used for weavers cutting a piece of cloth from the loom. In Malachi's day it also had the negative connotation of a criminal demanding his “cut” for his work.³ And so the people criticized God, saying, “We've kept His Word, and we've even fasted and mourned, but where's our cut? Where's the profit? There hasn't been any. It's pointless to obey God.”

Hold on. Had the people obeyed God? Not according to what God just said in verse 7. “From the days of your fathers you have turned aside from my statutes and have not kept them.” Yet they believed a different narrative. “We're good people! But it sure hasn't been worth it.”

3. *They say it doesn't pay to be godly (15)*. In verse 15 Malachi continues to record what the Lord hears His people saying. “And now we call the arrogant blessed. Evildoers not only prosper but they put God to the test and they escape.”

To put it plainly, the people looked at life around them and made three erroneous observations. One, they said the proud are the happy ones, not us. Two, the wicked have it made, not us. And three, the people who challenge God got the breaks, certainly not us.

Based on these three erroneous observations, they came to one bottom line conclusion. It just doesn't pay to be godly.

How did they arrive at such a pessimistic (and heretical) deduction? A. W. Tozer offers this helpful insight in his classic, *The Knowledge of the Holy*, “I think it might be demonstrated that every heresy that has afflicted the church through the years has arisen from believing about God things that are not true, or from over-emphasizing certain true things so as to obscure other things equally true. To magnify any attribute to the exclusion of another is to head straight for one of the dismal swamps of theology; and yet we are all constantly tempted to do just that.”⁴

How can you tell if someone is fiddling with God? Here's evidence. It was true in Malachi's day and in ours. People who are fiddling with God criticize God. They criticize His Word. They criticize what He's doing in this world (and not doing), and certainly they criticize what He's doing (and not doing) in their lives.

How can we tell if people are fiddling with God? Here's the first indicator. Such people criticize God. It's vain to serve God, says the God-fiddler.

B. Such people compliment themselves (15). Take another look at verse 15. We've considered what the people said, but let's go deeper, to what they didn't say but certainly meant. They said, “The proud have it made, and so do the wicked and those who test God.” What they didn't say but believed strongly in their hearts was this, “God, we deserve better from You. We've been good but have gotten a raw deal for it. You're blessing the pagans, and we're taking it on the chin. It's not fair. We deserve better from you, God.”

Isaiah confronted the same problem in Isaiah 58:3, “Why have we fasted, and you see it not? Why have we humbled ourselves, and you take no knowledge of it?”

³ Kaiser, p. 98.

⁴ A. W. Tozer, *The Knowledge of the Holy*, p. 85.

We hear it in Job 34:9, “For he has said, ‘It profits a man nothing that he should take delight in God.’” And in Job 35:3, “You ask, ‘What advantage have I? How am I better off than if I had sinned?’”

Quite often people who fiddle with God have an inflated view of themselves. They're impressed with their lives and think God ought to be as well.

In his commentary, Walter Kaiser points out how relevant this is, “All too frequently contemporary churchgoers act as if God owes them something once they have participated in, or merely attended, services in the house of God—no matter how cold or bankrupt the real affections of their hearts were in that service!”⁵

Kaiser calls this a “mercenary approach to serving God.” Obviously, He’s not pleased with it, for He will not be great among the nations when He’s not great in the hearts of His own people.

This is essentially the problem the Lord confronted in His letter to the Laodicean church in Revelation 3:16–17, “So, because you are lukewarm, and neither hot nor cold, I will spit you out of my mouth. For you say, I am rich, I have prospered, and I need nothing, not realizing that you are wretched, pitiable, poor, blind, and naked.”

Friends, God-fiddlers often put on quite a show on the outside, particularly when life is good. But it's all an external shell, for on the inside they are void of true godliness and piety. And here is when the truth becomes clear, *when life gets hard*. When life is hard, we find out what we really think about God.

This brings us to the second category of people. God-fiddlers. God-*fearers*.

II. There are people who fear God (16-18).

Notice the shift in pronouns from “we” in verse 15 to “they” in verse 16. Things were bleak in Malachi's day, but God had His remnant. He always does. In verse 16 we meet the godly remnant.

“Then those who feared the LORD spoke with one another.” We’ve seen the God-fiddlers, now we meet the God-fearers. This second group faced the same hardships the first group faced. But instead of responding with cynicism, instead of leveling criticisms against God and exalting self, those in the second group chose to *fear God*.

What's true of people who genuinely fear the Lord? We see two evidences here.

A. It's evidenced by their actions (16). As I read again verse 16, look for the actions. God-fiddlers talk. God-fearers *act*. “Then those who *feared* the LORD *spoke* with one another. The LORD paid attention and heard them, and a book of remembrance was written before him of those who *feared* the LORD and *esteemed* his name.”

Here we see four actions exhibited by people who fear God.

1. *They reverence God.* We see the action verb twice in this verse, first at the beginning, “Then those who *feared the LORD.*” And then at the end, “Those who *feared the LORD.*”

We might get the idea from reading Malachi 1-3 that there were no God-fearing people left in Israel, that Malachi may have been wondering (as had Elijah), “Am I the only one left?! Is there no one else around here who fears God?” This is what makes

⁵ Walter Kaiser, p. 95.

verse 16 so refreshing! There was a group of people, small no doubt yet there nonetheless, who revered God. That's what it means to "fear" God.

In the Old Testament, fearing God is nearly always connected with righteous living. As in Deuteronomy 10:12, "And now, Israel, what does the LORD your God require of you, but to **fear the LORD your God**, to **walk in all his ways**, to love him, to serve the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul."

When we fear God, we reverence Him, first in our hearts, but then it shows up, not just in our words, but our lifestyle. God-fearers are not simply talkers, but doers, all by grace for sure.

We see this in the Torah, in Leviticus 19:14, "You shall not curse the deaf or put a stumbling block before the blind, but you shall fear your God: I am the LORD." And in Deuteronomy 17:19, "And it shall be with him, and he shall read in it all the days of his life, that he may learn to fear the LORD his God by keeping all the words of this law and these statutes, and doing them."

We also see it in Proverbs too. "The fear of the LORD," says Proverbs 8:13, "is to hate evil." When we fear God, His influence touches every area of our lives.

2. *They rejuvenate one another.* Don't miss what the people who feared God were doing. Verse 16 says (AV), "They spoke often one to another." Don't miss that. The people who feared God made it a point to invest time talking with other people who feared God.

If you ask me, "Pastor, I want to learn to fear God. What should I do? Should I read the Bible more, and pray more?" Yes, the Word and prayer are vital. But don't miss this. Make it a priority to spend time with others who fear God. Friend, if you spend time with people who are negative and critical, that's what you'll become, negative and critical. That's why it's so important to spend much time with other people who fear God. People who fear God sharpen and rejuvenate each other.

You can't get that from podcasts and virtual church. This is why God commands us to prioritize our local church, not just to hear truth preached (which is vital), but to see truth modeled. "Not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near (Hebrews 10:25)."

So, what do God-fearers talk about when they get together? Malachi doesn't tell us what they were saying, yet it's not a complicated answer. They talk about the One they fear! They talk about how much He means to them, and what they are learning about Him, and what they are seeing Him doing in their lives. And they certainly talk about this, the third evidence of those who fear God.

3. *They think on God's Name.* We see this at the end of verse 16. The AV says, "And that thought upon His Name." The ESV says, "And esteemed His name."

God's name is a big deal to God, and He says it should be to us as well. In the third commandment He forbids the vain use of His name (Exodus 20:7). But elsewhere, He invites and encourages the proper use of His name. At the burning bush He gives His redeemed people His very name.

He tells Moses in Exodus 3:14–15, "I AM WHO I AM... Say this to the people of Israel: 'I AM has sent me to you.'"... "The LORD, the God of your fathers, the God of

Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, has sent me to you.’ This is my **name** forever, and thus I am to be remembered throughout all generations.”

But He doesn’t just reveal His name. He gives His name to His redeemed people. Micah 4:5 says, “For all the peoples walk each in the name of its god, but we will walk in the **name** of the LORD our God forever and ever.”

When we come to the New Testament, we see the name of God taking a human face in the person of Jesus the Christ. “I AM” says Jesus again and again in John’s gospel.

What’s more, because of what the I AM did on the cross, God now gives His name to all who call on Him in faith. John 1:12 says, “But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God.”

If you want to go to heaven, my friend, you must cherish this name above all other names. Acts 4:12 says, “There is salvation in no one else, for there is no other **name** under heaven given among men by which we must be saved.”

God-fearers *esteem* His name, says Malachi. Don’t miss this. People who fear God don’t live their lives based on their feelings, but based on their thinking, their esteeming. They think about God, who He is, what He is like, what He has said.

This underscores the importance of true, biblical meditation. If we are to experience the fear of God, we need to learn to saturate our minds with the truth of God and review it over and over, personally and when we’re together.

I’ve made it a practice all my Christian life to write down key statements about God, and to think about them, and talk about them. They help me esteem His name.

Here are two examples. John Piper said, “God is always doing 10,000 things in your life, and you may be aware of three of them.”⁶ That’s a truth about God that’s worth pondering again and again, particularly when life is hard and we find ourselves beginning to question God.

Here’s another, from Tim Keller, “God will either give us what we ask, or what we would have asked if we knew everything He knows.”⁷ You see, when life is hard and we begin to doubt God, it’s because we’re not thinking rightly about God. Those who fear God *think*, and specifically think accurately about God’s name.

4. *They serve God.* In verse 18, Malachi says this is the bottom-line distinction between God-fiddlers and God-fearers. “Then once more you shall see the distinction between the righteous and the wicked, between one who serves God and one who does not serve him.

To those who fiddle with God, serving God is vain. But to those who fear God, serving God is the natural thing to do, the delight of their hearts. Which describes you? Are you serving God with your life? Can you say with confidence, “By God’s grace, I know I am doing with my life what my Master wants me to be doing.”?

People who fear God can. They reverence God, they rejuvenate each other, they think about His Name, and they serve Him.

⁶ <https://www.desiringgod.org/articles/god-is-always-doing-10000-things-in-your-life>

⁷ Timothy Keller, *Prayer*, p. 228.

But there's more. Malachi says there's something else that's true of people who fear God. It's evidenced, first, by their actions, and secondly, by their anticipation.

B. It's evidenced by their anticipation (17-18). What fuels present living for God-fearers is their assurance of what's coming. They know that God is in control of the present, which is why they don't complain as God-fiddlers do. But they also know He's sovereign over the future. In fact, they live their lives with the assurance that two events are coming, which Malachi identifies in verses 17-18.

1. *God will reward the righteous.* Notice verses 17-18, phrase by phrase, "They shall be mine, says the LORD of hosts." Who? The God-fearers. When? "In the day." What day? "In that day," says the AV, the day when God sends His Chosen Messiah into the world.

And what will the Messiah do in that day? "When I make up my treasured possession," says the Lord. "When I make up my jewels," says the AV. In the Hebrew text, "my" is emphatic. *My* jewels. People who fear God are despised by the world now, but God says they are *My treasured possession*. And God has something special for them in that day.

"And I will spare them as a man spares his son who serves him." The verb "spare" comes from the Hebrew *hamal*, which "describes the activity of having pity, compassion, or mercy on someone."⁸

Verse 16 indicates that God keeps records. There's "a book of remembrance" that records what God-fearers do in this life. And God says He will spare the God-fearers. He will treat them with compassion and mercy.

Verse 18 says, "Then once more you shall see the distinction between the righteous and the wicked, between one who serves God and one who does not serve him." There's a big difference between "this day" and "that day." In *this day* we have trouble, and affliction, and often injustice. In *this day* it may seem vain to serve God at times. But in that day, God-fearers will be glad they did, for it will be worth it all.

But there's another side to *that day*. There will be a second event, says Malachi.

2. *God will repay the wicked.* There's another unfortunate chapter break between chapters 3 & 4. The fourth chapter begins with a description of what will happen to the wicked in that day. "For behold, the day is coming, burning like an oven, when all the arrogant and all evildoers will be stubble. The day that is coming shall set them ablaze, says the LORD of hosts, so that it will leave them neither root nor branch (Malachi 4:1)." More about this next week, the Lord willing.

But for now, we need to take inventory and ask ourselves some probing questions. Let's start with this one. Have I been playing the church game? Thankfully, God in His mercy is giving us the opportunity right now to stop viewing the Christian life as a game and truly begin to cherish and live for Him.

Make It Personal: What do I really think about God?

⁸ Frederick, J. (2014). [Mercy and Compassion](#). In D. Mangum, D. R. Brown, R. Klippenstein, & R. Hurst (Eds.), *Lexham Theological Wordbook*. Lexham Press.

1. *How do I respond when life is hard?* Have I been questioning God, even criticizing Him? There is a place for honest lament, and there's a proper way to bring our questions to God when we're hurting (see Psalm 13). But there's a difference between bringing our questions to God and questioning God.

You say, "I've fallen short." Indeed, we all have. But there's hope. There is a Savior who understands how hard life can be. Turn the page from Malachi and you'll see Him in Matthew's gospel. See Him fasting and facing forty days of testing in the wilderness. See Him being criticized and rejected by the religious leaders. See Him enduring agony in the garden of Gethsemane, being betrayed and abandoned by His own. See Him receiving injustice in the court systems of His day, and then being whipped by cruel soldiers. Then see Him being nailed to a cross, dying not for His own sin, for He had none, but for ours.

And how does He respond when life is hard? He turns upward and says, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do." And then, "Father, into Your hands I commit my spirit." In other words, He fears God. Perfectly.

And He will save us, and enable us to respond like Him, if we will ask Him.

2. *Am I living today in light of the coming day?* Sometimes we may wonder, "Is it worth it to live a godly life?" In our country we receive a lot of fringe benefits for living for God (although this is changing). But even if we didn't, it would still be worth it to fear God. Why? Because of *that day*.

Growing up we had a Border Collie dog named Andy. He had one great love in life, that was to round up and guard the livestock. That dog would rather work than eat. In the pouring down rain, he'd be out in the field, lying in the mud, watching the cows. He delighted in hearing two words from his master, "Good job."

May God help each of us to choose to live this day in light of that coming day, to hear our Master say, "Well done."

Closing Song: #404 "*The Solid Rock*" (all four verses)

Closing charge: Let the redeemed of the Lord...SAY SO.

Nepal trip: Please be praying for me as I travel to Nepal Wednesday, and for Sherry as she cares for matters on the home front.

Community Group Discussion:

1. The title of today's message from Malachi 3 was, "*When Life Is Hard, We Learn What We Really Think about God.*" Think of a hard time in your own life. What did you learn about yourself during that experience? About God? About life itself?

2. Take time to read again Malachi 3:13-18. In this passage we meet two groups of people who responded in two different ways to their suffering. First, we meet those who fiddle with God. What does the verb *fiddle* mean? How does this term apply to the people described in verses 13-15?

3. In Malach 3:13 (NIV) the Lord said, "You have said harsh things against Me." Do we ever do this? What are some examples of saying harsh things to God? What's the difference between expressing appropriate grief and inappropriate complaining?

4. In verses 16-18, we are introduced to people who *fear the Lord*. What was the evidence of their fear of God? After reviewing this evidence, discuss how their example affects you personally.

5. Verse 16 says that "those who feared the LORD spoke with one another". What do you think they talked about in their conversations with each other? Why are such conversations essential for us as well?