During the wedding rehearsal, the groom approached the pastor with an unusual offer: “I’ll give you $100 if you’ll change the wedding vows. When you get to the part where I’m to promise to ‘love, honor…and forsaking all others, be faithful to her forever’ I’d appreciate it if you’d just leave that part out.” He passed the minister a $100 bill and walked away satisfied.

When it came time for the groom’s vows during the wedding, the pastor looked the young man in the eye and asked: “Will you promise to prostrate yourself before her, obey her every command and wish, serve her breakfast in bed every morning and swear eternally before God and your lovely wife that you will not ever even look at another woman, as long as you both shall live?” The groom gulped and looked around, and said in a hushed voice, “I Will.” The groom then leaned toward the pastor and hissed, “I thought we had a deal.” The pastor returned the folded $100 bill and whispered back, “She made me a much better offer.”

It’s amazing how easily we can lose focus in our relationships, isn’t it? As we come to Malachi 2:10-13 and verse 16, we’re going to see that our relationships with others, with God, and with our spouse, if we’re married, all have the potential to disintegrate if we’re not careful. No matter what kind of deal we’re hoping to make with God, His offer is always better.

Here’s what we’re going to learn today: Because God keeps his covenant with us, He expects us to keep our covenants with others.

Let’s read our passage together.

“Have we not all one Father? Has not one God created us? Why do we deal treacherously with one another by profaning the covenant of the fathers? Judah has dealt treacherously, and an abomination has been committed in Israel and in Jerusalem, for Judah has profaned the LORD’s holy institution which He loves: He has married the daughter of a foreign god. May the LORD cut off from the tents of Jacob the man who does this, being awake and aware, yet who brings an offering to the LORD of hosts! And this is the second thing you do: you cover the altar of the LORD with tears, with weeping and crying; so He does not regard the offering anymore, nor receive it with goodwill from your hands…‘For the LORD God of Israel says that He hates divorce, for it covers one’s garment with violence,’ says the LORD of hosts. Therefore take heed to your spirit, that you do not deal treacherously.”

I want to begin by pointing out a phrase that is repeated three times in our passage: “deal treacherously.” This can be translated as “breaking faith” or “broken faith” or “faithless.” It has the idea of pillaging something that was supposed to be protected and is tied very closely to the word “covenant” in verse 10.

A covenant was a solemn and binding mutual agreement between two parties. An oath was made and it was formally ratified by an external act. All relationships — with others, with God, and with our spouses, are to be held together by a compulsory keeping of covenant that encompasses the entire community of faith. I asked Jason Crosby to read this sermon beforehand and he added this thought: “You need to know that God takes covenants very
seriously. Whereas we are casual with covenants, God is calculated. He is calculated to the point that violation of a covenant comes with severe consequences.”

There are three ways God’s people had broken faith in their relationships. We’ll state it both positively and negatively. I want to acknowledge my thanks to John Piper for his keen insight into this section of Scripture:

- Keep faith with others: Don’t allow your relationships to rupture (10).
- Keep faith with God: Don’t unite with an unbeliever (11-13).
- Keep faith with your spouse: Don’t get divorced (16).

1. Keep faith with others: Don’t allow your relationships to rupture. (10). Look at verse 10: “Have we not all one Father? Has not one God created us? Why do we deal treacherously with one another by profaning the covenant of the fathers?” While Abraham was their earthly “father,” Malachi is really focusing their attention on God as their heavenly Father. Isaiah 64:8: “But now, O Lord, you are our Father; we are the clay, and you our potter; and we all are the work of your hand.”

As believers we are in the same family because we have the same Father. As such, we must keep faith with one another. The word “profane” means “to wound” or “dissolve” or “to pierce.” I wonder if another believer has wounded you? My guess is that you’ve been hurt at least once. Have you wounded someone else? You probably have at least twice. Friends, because we have one Father, and one God who created us, and we are in covenant with Him through Jesus Christ, let’s redouble our efforts to live out the community challenge of Ephesians 4:3: “Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace.”

I can think of two main areas of disagreement in almost every church. The first is music. We won’t address that today but I do encourage you to read a book by Gordon MacDonald called, “Who Stole My Church?” The second area of difference is marriage. We will tackle that today because that’s what Malachi brings up.

Marie Guyton copied a chapter for me from a book called, “Table for One” that was really eye-opening. The name of the chapter is called, “Solo on Sunday Morning.” Here’s a brief excerpt: “I hate to admit it, but sometimes Sunday morning is the loneliest part of my week. I often sit by myself…in a sea of happy couples and families, with empty chairs on either side of me.” After describing some bad experiences that led the author to become bitter toward married couples, she eventually had a realization that they are just like she is: “As my bitterness melted, I realized afresh it’s not us and them, marrieds and nonmarrieds, parents and nonparents. It’s simply a collective us – children of God.”

This goes back to the first two questions of verse 10: “Have we not all one Father? Has not one God created us?” That led me to write this down: Your status with the Master is more important than your marital status. God doesn’t categorizes us as married or single but as sons and daughters, brothers and sisters in Christ. We could visualize it this way:

**STATUS WITH JESUS > MARITAL STATUS**
I feel badly for singles when someone who is married asks the infamous and very insensitive question, “Why aren’t you married?” I like the perspective of one single who reframes this question by asking: “What is God doing in and through my singleness?” This same woman says instead of thinking of herself as a “single” woman, she refers to herself as a woman who happens to be single. This helps to keep the emphasis on who she is and the gifts she has been given, not on her marital status. One single put it this way: “I need to stop asking, ‘Why am I alone?’ and start asking, ‘Why am I here?’”

To those of you who are single, I want to ask you to forgive us as a church for making you feel second class or unimportant. Please forgive us when we put pressure on you to get married, or make disparaging comments, or tease you, or just leave you out of things. That’s wrong. It’s sinful. And we must stop.

The U.S. Census Bureau’s newest numbers show that married-couple households have slipped from nearly 80 percent in the 1950s to less than 50 percent today. In an article entitled, “Bowling (and Living) Alone,” The Wall Street Journal reports that the nuclear family of two parents and their children is no longer the most common living arrangement. In its place at the number one spot are what are called “single-adult” households. According to census figures, the largest chunk of American households now consists of people who live alone.

Let’s admit something. Married couples often don’t know how to relate to singles and some singles feel like they can’t connect with couples. One single person put it this way: “Being single would be easier if others would accept it as a valid lifestyle.” One of my goals today is to help tear down these walls so that we can accept one another.

Pastor Rick McGinnis, in a sermon called, “Solid Singles” lists four marital myths. Here are two:

- **Myth #1: Marriage is the only God-ordained lifestyle.** Some people think that God’s preference is **always** for people to get married. Some singles even believe this. Friends, 1 Corinthians 7 says that singleness is Scriptural and has a lot of advantages.

- **Myth #2: My life + someone else = happiness.** Some singles think that if they were married everything would be better. Our culture communicates that if we just get the right person in our life then we’ll be happy. Singles are faced with this all the time, but so are married people when they consider leaving their spouse to find someone else who will finally make them happy. Friends, contentment only comes from Christ and does not depend on anyone else. Paul, who was single, put it this way in Philippians 4:11-12: “For I have learned in whatever state I am, to be content.” It’s only through Christ that we can find contentment.

Let’s remember that our status with the Master is more important than our marital status and let’s not allow our relationships to rupture.

2. **Keep faith with God: Don’t unite with an unbeliever** (11-12). God’s people had not only pillaged their promise to one another and had forgotten that they were all part of the same family, they had disengaged from God Himself. Verse 11 begins with some strong words: “Judah has
dealt treacherously, and an abomination has been committed in Israel and in Jerusalem.” An abomination is something “morally disgusting” and “abhorrent.” This term was reserved for the worst of evils, such as immorality, witchcraft, or idolatry. Notice that they had “profaned the Lord’s holy institution which He loves…” A secondary meaning of profane is to treat as common something that is sacred. Their behavior was a direct affront to the weightiness of Yahweh.

What is it that is so abhorrent to the Almighty? The answer is found at the end of verse 11: “…he has married the daughter of a foreign god.” The Bible is filled with examples of what happens to godly people when they unite with an unbeliever. Let me remind you of the context. When Judah returned from captivity, the men saw some beautiful foreign foxes that lived in the land and they wanted to hook up with these heathen “hotties.” In many cases, they divorced their wives and married pretty pagans who worshipped false gods. Both Nehemiah and Ezra, who ministered around the same time as Malachi, describe this situation in more detail (see Ezra 9:1-4; Nehemiah 13:23).

It has never been God’s plan for believers to marry unbelievers. Both Samson and Solomon learned this lesson the hard way as the women they had relations with ended up causing their relationships with God to head south with disastrous consequences. 2 Corinthians 6:14: “Do not be unequally yoked together with unbelievers…” The concept of being “unequally yoked” is taken from Deuteronomy 22:10, where the Israelites were told not to plow with an ox (a clean animal) and a donkey (an unclean animal) yoked together. An ox and donkey are incompatible and uncooperative because their natures and temperaments are vastly different.

Friend, if you claim to love God, and then willfully choose to unite yourself with a non-Christian in the most intimate union this side of heaven, the Bible says that you are desecrating the holiness of God. Don’t let your drive for human intimacy lead your heart to grow cold toward your heavenly Father. It is never God’s will for a Christian to marry a non-Christian.

Because of the confusion going on in our culture, let me be totally clear about what the Bible teaches. Marriage is a covenant commitment between one man and one woman for life! So-called same-sex marriage is not a civil rights issue, even though you’ll hear the phrase “marriage equality” used. At its core, marriage is a moral issue, founded and preserved by God himself. No matter what our culture communicates, a “same-sex” relationship is not, and cannot be called marriage. It is a direct affront to the weightiness of Yahweh and to use the words of Malachi 2:11 it profanes “the Lord’s holy institution which He loves.”

Now before you feel that God may be just into judgment, I want you to notice the word “loves.” As we pointed out at the beginning of the book, the first message that God wants His people to hear in 1:2 is, “I have loved you.” Here in verse 11, God reaffirms that He has strong affection not only for His people but also for His holy institution. The reason God’s admonition is so adamant is because He loves you. He doesn’t want anyone to take His rightful place on the throne of your life. He doesn’t want you to make a decision that you may regret for the rest of your life.

Verse 12 teaches us that those who marry someone who is not a spiritual match are in essence asking God to turn His back on them. I know that sounds strong but look at the verse: “May the Lord cut off from the tents of Jacob the man who does this, being awake and aware.” This
The word “cut” is very interesting because it refers to the “cutting of a covenant.” In this context, it means to “cut off” the covenant, or to sever.

Let me be quick to add two points:

- **It is possible for unbelieving spouses to come to Christ.** If you’re married right now to someone who does not confess faith in Christ, pray fervently and practice the principles taught in 1 Peter 3:1-6. Instead of clobbering him or her with the gospel, live out the challenge of verse 4: “Rather let it be the hidden person of the heart, with the incorruptible beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is very precious in the sight of God.”

- **If you’re married to a non-Christian, don’t bail on your spouse.** Paul addressed this to the church at Corinth, arguing in 1 Corinthians 7:12-13 that the unbelieving spouse is sanctified through the faith of the believer and therefore the believer must stay committed to his or her spouse. Keep praying and providing the environment for God to go to work.

John Piper sums it up well when he says: “If the choice of a marriage partner still lies before you, settle it in your mind right now never to marry anyone that does not love the Lord Jesus with all his or her heart.” Teenagers and young adults, you are not too young to make that decision right now. My counsel is that you don’t even go out with someone who does not share your faith. “Missionary dating” very seldom works because when emotions get involved and romance is in the air, the non-Christian is usually the one with more influence.

Here’s how it often happens. If you’re not fully committed to Christ, you’ll be tempted to compromise and give your heart to someone who isn’t sold out to Jesus. This will cause you to go down a slippery slope that can lead to a spiritual free-fall. On the other hand, and this is the key, if you determine to be fully devoted to God, then you can also make a decision right now to avoid allowing your emotions to become entangled with a non-Christian.

Let’s take a look at verse 13: “And this is the second thing you do: You cover the altar of the LORD with tears, with weeping and crying; so He does not regard the offering anymore, nor receive it with goodwill from your hands.” God is not interested in outward show or ceremony; he wants full surrender. Even though the people came and wept while they worshipped and probably raised their hands in praise, they had rebellious hearts. God will not accept offerings like that. Proverbs 15:8 says: “The sacrifice of the wicked is an abomination to the LORD, but the prayer of the upright is His delight.”

First, we’re to keep faith with others by not allowing our relationships to rupture. Remember that one’s status with the Master is more important than marital status. Second, we’re to keep faith with God by not uniting with an unbeliever. Third, keep faith with your spouse.

3. **Keep faith with your spouse: Don’t get divorced** (16). Let me make some preliminary points in reference to verse 16: “For the Lord God of Israel says that He hates divorce…”

- **God does hate divorce.** We can’t water this down or try to act like He doesn’t.
• **God does not hate divorced people.** Many of you are divorced and are suffering through some incredible pain right now. Whatever the circumstances of your divorce were, God does not hate you. He loves you.

• **Divorce is not the only thing God hates.** Sometimes we single out divorce and forget what God said in Proverbs 6:16-19: “These six things the LORD hates, yes, seven are an abomination to Him: a proud look, a lying tongue, hands that shed innocent blood, a heart that devises wicked plans, feet that are swift in running to evil, a false witness who speaks lies, and one who sows discord among brethren.”

• **God does not forbid all divorce.** There are two exceptions to the “no divorce” dictate of Scripture. 1 Corinthians 7:15 teaches that if the unbelieving spouse wants to break it off, the believer can let him or her go. And, in Matthew 5:32, Jesus recognized that in the case of adultery, the one who was wronged is not obligated to stay married. Having said that, God’s heart is always for reconciliation and restoration of the marriage covenant. The death of a spouse also releases one from marriage. Let me be quick to add that if you’re in a marriage where you’re being physically abused or in danger, you need to separate yourself from your spouse for your own safety.

• **The church has not always been a healing community.** I recognize that the church in general has not always been an oasis of understanding. In some instances, the church has been overly harsh on individuals who have been stung by divorce. From what I can tell, Edgewood is an exception as we offer grace and support to those who are hurting through ministries like Divorce Care on Wednesday nights.

Incidently, next Sunday we’ll be looking at the foundational building blocks of marriage found in Malachi 2:14-15.

**Give Heed to Hedges**

I remember meeting with a couple that wanted to get married when I asked them a question that I like couples to consider: *Would you fly an airline in which 50% of all their flights crash?* The guy was adamant and said “no way.” He then got a scared look on his face and looked at his fiancee. I paused for a bit and then asked, “So why would you want to get married since half of all marriages end up crashing to the ground?”

Sadly, the stats for Christian marriages are no better. I want to camp on a phrase that is repeated twice for emphasis in verse 15 and verse 16: “**Therefore take heed to your spirit.**” This means “to hedge with thorns” or “to protect by attending to.” Since God hates divorce, are there some things we can do to promote and protect marriage today? The answer to that is an emphatic “yes”!

Here are six practical ways to keep your marriage covenant.

**1. Take responsibility to grow spiritually.** As we discussed last week, the greatest leadership challenge is not those around me, but what’s going on inside of me. You will not be the husband or wife your spouse needs you to be unless you take responsibility to cultivate your spiritual life. To help with that we’re offering CLASSES Sunday at 4:00 p.m. We still have room.

**2. Stay committed no matter what.** An older couple was discussing their upcoming 50th anniversary in the grocery checkout line, when the young cashier interjected, “I can’t imagine
being married to the same man for 50 years!” To which the wife wisely replied, “Well, honey, don’t get married until you can!”

Listen. You’re going to have disappointments and disagreements and maybe even some disasters. Divorce is not an option. Don’t joke about it or even think about it. God’s intention for marriage is that one man and one woman commit themselves in covenant to each other for the rest of their lives.

Incidentally, while there is certainly a threat to marriage from the homosexual agenda, as believers we’ve not been doing such a good job with the whole marriage thing ourselves. It’s time for Christians to swim against our culture and remain committed to the covenant of our own marriages!

3. Set up some practical hedges. I learned this week that there is one divorce every 13 seconds in America. Let me ask you a question. Do you love your marriage enough to protect it? One of the most helpful books I’ve read in this regard is called, “Hedges” by Jerry Jenkins (1990: Wolgemuth and Hyatt Publishers). He argues that the greatest gift you can give to your spouse is to set up some boundaries with members of the opposite sex that include, but are not limited to:

- Avoid all flirting and suggestive behavior. That includes emails, texting, Facebook messaging and Snap Chat.
- Don’t be alone with the doors closed.
- Watch what you watch. We learn something about Job’s character when we read that he concentrated on his purity in Job 31:1: “I made a covenant with my eyes not to look lustfully at a girl.” Make sure you have a plan for dealing with pornography, which has now gone mainstream in the media and on the web. Get some accountability in this area if you’re struggling.
- Be careful about how you touch a member of the opposite sex.

4. Commit to communicate. It has been said that communication is one of the keys to marriage. When you have a fight, don’t go to bed angry. Ephesians 4:27: “Do not let the sun go down on your wrath, nor give place to the devil.” That doesn’t mean you have to solve the problem, but it does mean that you should at least be able to hug before you doze off. If you’re serious about this, it means you’ll have some pretty late nights!

5. Think the best of your spouse. When your husband or wife does something that makes you mad, say this: “Not wrong, just different.” Beth and I say this to each other all the time. Don’t make something a moral matter if it’s just a preference. Cut each other some slack.

6. Be a servant. If you want your marriage to make it, discover the secret of serving your spouse. It’s not about your happiness or even having your own needs met. It’s all about serving one another.

Because He is the covenant-keeping God, you and I must keep our covenants with one another, with Him, and with our spouses.

In 1990, Robertson McQuilken, the president of Colombia Bible College and Seminary, surprised many when he resigned in order to care for his wife, Muriel, who had Alzheimers. Listen to how he described his decision:
“When the time came, the decision was firm. It took no great calculation. It was a matter of integrity. Had I not promised, 42 years before, ‘in sickness and in health…till death do us part’? This was no grim duty to which I stoically resigned, however. It was only fair. She had, after all, cared for me for almost four decades with marvelous devotion; now it was my turn…If I took care of her for 40 years, I would never be out of her debt…”

Once, when they were traveling together, they had a long layover and Muriel took off on a fast walk. Robertson almost had to jog to keep up with her. She would sit for a few minutes and then take off again, with him racing to catch up each time. When they came back, he noticed a woman watching them and heard her mumble something. When he asked her what she said, she replied, “Oh, I was just asking myself, ‘Will I ever find a man to love me like that?’”

McQuilkin turned to the woman and said, “Oh yes, you can find a man like that…because I’ve found a man like that. The only reason I love my wife the way you see me loving her is because the man Jesus first loved me. The only resources I have to draw upon to love my wife the way I do are the resources He gives me.”

Are you drawing on those resources? Have you allowed Jesus to love you?

Invitation Saturday Night: “The Church”
Invitation Sunday Morning: “Mighty to Save”