

100% Devotion
Malachi 2:10-16

Remember when you first met? There was something special; you couldn't put your finger on it, but it was there. Slowly you began to encounter one another more often; the seeds of friendship sprouted and began to germinate. Before long, you realized this was not a fleeting thing. You longed to be together more and more; your affections were budding. Soon you can't imagine not being together; the relationship has blossomed. Then it came. It seemed to have just popped out and yet nothing else ever had so much thought and purpose. Never before have you been so excited and so afraid at the same time. The answer is ... yes!

What have I just described? (Expected answer: courtship and marriage proposal) But is it? What I have actually described to you is the Sacred Romance between you and God. There is nothing so special as the experience and excitement of a relationship with God. God prepared the way, removing anything that might prevent us from having intimate relationship with Him. In the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus, God has shown his great love for us removing the barrier of sin and the curse of death. God by the Holy Spirit encounters us, knocking on the door of our heart as it were, hoping, longing for us to meet. Then, ever so gently and yet ever so persistently, God continues to meet us. God demonstrates the power of His love, showing his heart, and then says, "See how much I love you? I will continue to love you and care for you."

Then it comes, the proposal. God says to us, "*Believe in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and you shall be saved.*" We believe and an awesome relationship begins with God; it is a love unlike any we have ever had. When we begin with God, the only thing we want is more, more of God and to be all that God wants us to be. We are totally devoted to God.

The reason our Sacred Romance with God sounds so much like courtship and marriage is that it is. I believe God designed the most precious relationship we can have, the relationship

between and husband and a wife, to give us a glimpse of the kind of relationship we are supposed to have with Him. In the creation account we are told, *“For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united with his wife and the two shall become one”* (Gn.2:24). Malachi reminds us that God didn’t just institute marriage; he’s still involved in it, *“Has not the Lord made them one? In flesh and spirit they are his.”* I remind all the couples who come to me for a Christian wedding that they are asking God not only to witness their marriage covenant, but also to become a part of the covenant with them. Perhaps you’ve seen the billboard that reads: Loved the wedding; invite me to the marriage. God.

Now, counter to what society teaches, or at least permits, I believe God established marriage to be “till death we part.” A key question I ask couples in premarital counseling is, “If you were to describe the perfect marriage in terms of percentage of responsibility, what would that be?” The answer most often given is 50-50. Their rationale is admirable; each is to give equally to make a 100% marriage. However, in marriage each partner cannot give only half of themselves because when they do the other half would be devoted to something or someone else. And what of those times when one is unable to give even 50% due to illness or other life circumstance? Each must take 100% responsibility and be 100% devoted to the other. So it is with our Sacred Romance with God. God has already proven and will always continue to be 100% devoted to us. God will do what ever it takes keep our relationship strong.

Still, somehow it happens ... in marriage and, worse, in the Sacred Romance. Perhaps it’s the cliché come true: Familiarity breeds contempt. We begin to lose interest; our enthusiasm fades; our commitment flounders. It’s not that we don’t love at all, exactly; it’s just that it isn’t 100% devotion for God anymore. We have allowed other things to take our attention away from God and allowed ourselves to be tempted into thinking either that there is something better than God is offering. Or we decide we can have God and other, too.

The reason God's words in Malachi seem so harsh is that God is heart-broken. God so desires an intimate, growing relationship with his people. Listen to Jesus' heart, "*O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who killed the prophets and stone those sent to you, how often I have longed to gather your children together as a hen gathers her chicks, but you were not willing*" (Mt.23:37). God has so much love to give, but his people aren't willing to receive it. And we can't receive it when we are "looking for love in all the wrong places." God says, "*Judah has done a detestable thing. He has desecrated the sanctuary God loves by marrying the daughter of a foreign god.*"

This text has often been used as the basis for teaching against knowingly marrying an unbeliever. However, the verse is speaking about a much deeper problem, unfaithfulness. Paul tells us that as Christians we are both individually and collectively the sanctuary where the Holy Spirit resides (1Cor.3:16; 6:19). God dwells within us and, as such, we are to keep ourselves pure and holy for God alone. God's sanctuary becomes desecrated when we allow anything or anyone, including ourselves, to take precedence over Him. God says, "*You shall have no other God's besides me*" (Ex.20:3). There is and can be NO sharing of allegiances. We are either faithful to God or we're not.

This is why God says, "*I hate divorce.*" Listen to how the NLT renders the reason, "*the Lord has witnessed the vows you and your wife made to each other on your wedding day when you were young. But you have been disloyal to her, even though she remained your faithful companion, the wife of your marriage vows.*" While these words can be taken literally, God is using them metaphorically, too. "I have been faithful to you. I redeemed you. I restored you. I brought you back to me. I am faithful, 100%. But you have been disloyal to the vows, the covenant, we made."

When those times come, and they do, in our human relationships, whether marriage or otherwise, when we do something that creates tension and division, our immediate reaction is to

try to make it better. The floral industry expects a significant percentage of sales to come from the husband or boyfriend who blew it and is trying to make amends. Let me ask you guys: how well does it work? Our gals appreciate the gesture but they're looking for something more. What they want is return to 100% devotion.

Malachi says that Judah tried giving God a "bouquet of flowers." Offerings were made with loud cries and wailing trying to regain God's favor. But unless we are willing to repent, give up the foreign gods - which is anyone or anything, including wanting our own way - that we have given our devotion to, and return to God with 100% devotion, God will not accept our offerings. We can do all the "Christian Service" we want; but, nothing will satisfy unless we are totally committed to God.

How do we do that? Follow God's example. Paul says in Ephesians 5, "*Be imitators of God, therefore, as dearly loved children of God and live a life of love*" (1). How Does God live? It's demonstrated in Christ Jesus. A poster I once had says it well, "I asked the Lord how much he loved me. 'This much,' he answered. And he stretched out his hands and he died." That's 100% devotion. Further into the chapter, just before Paul gives instruction to the marriage relationship, he tells us that our relationship with God is expressed in our relationship with others, "*Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ*" (21). We are to live with each other as God lives with us. Malachi states it this way, "So guard yourself in your spirit, and do not break faith."

Just as we need to step back and get a bearing on our relationships with one another, we need to contemplate our devotion to our Sacred Romance with God. Keith Greene, a singer and song writer from the 70's and 80's, was at a place where he needed to evaluate his Sacred Romance. Keith wrote:

About midnight one night I wrote a letter to the Lord. I didn't know where to mail it, so I put it in my Bible. I asked him, "Lord, you got to do something about my heart. You know a lot of time has gone by since I met you and it's starting to harden up, you know, it's just kind of natural. I want to have baby skin, Lord – I want to have skin like a baby on my heart. It's starting to get old and wrinkled and callused." It not cause of anything I'm doing. It's cause of a lot of things I'm not doing.

After he wrote the letter, he composed this song:

Oh Lord, you're beautiful,
Your face is all I see,
For when your eyes are on this child,
Your grace abounds to me

Oh Lord, you're wonderful,
Your touch is all I need,
For when your hand is on this child
Your healing I receive

I want to take your word and shine it all around
But first help me to just, live it Lord
And when I'm doing well, help me to never seek a crown
For my reward is giving glory to you

Oh Lord, please light the fire
That once burned bright and clean
Replace the lamp of my first love
That burns with holy fear

I want to take your word and shine it all around
But first help me to just, live it Lord
And when I'm doing well, help me to never seek a crown
For my reward is giving glory to you

Oh Lord, you're beautiful
Your face is all I see
For when your eyes are on this child
Your grace abounds to me

Oh Lord, you're beautiful
Your face is all I see
For when your eyes are on

Songwriters: Keith Gordon Green
Oh Lord You're Beautiful Lyrics © Universal Music Publishing Group