



KEEPING FAITH

Under what circumstances would you dump someone from your friendship group / social network group? What would be the trigger? A few years back, BK launched an ad campaign, called the 'Whopper Sacrifice Challenge':

What would you do for a free Whopper? Insult an elected official? Do a naked handstand? Would you go as far as to turn your back on friendship?

The premise being, un-friend 10 Facebook friends, get a coupon for a free Whopper. To add insult to injury, the app would notify your friends that they'd been dumped. For a hamburger. (So not so much being treated as a piece of meat, as being treated as *less* than a piece of meat.)

Of course, the real issue here isn't food, is it? It's faithfulness. What does faithfulness mean? And are you a faithful person? According to Malachi, there's a link between worship and faithfulness. Let's take a look ...

Malachi 2:10-16

Right from the start, Malachi says, "Our God is a faithful God, a Father who created us and loves us." And that same God is asking, "Are you faithful to Me?" A faithful God desires a faithful people (hence Galatians 5:22). That could mean being faithful to His word, or to His work. But it could also mean being faithful to each other. And it begins, not in the temple or the church, but in the home.

"You have broken faith," God says. This phrase literally means 'to break the trust of another', and is sometimes used of disobedience to God. But in its original context, it refers to infidelity – the breaking of a marriage covenant.

And in this chapter, Malachi picks up on 3 examples that are as relevant today as they were 2,400 years ago:

1) Marriage. "You have broken faith with Me ... by marrying the daughter of a foreign god" (vs11). This is a toughie, but let me explain. God is not talking about race or culture here (historically the nation of Israel was made up of various people groups – Exodus 12:37-38). What He's talking about is faith: marrying a worshipper of a different god. God doesn't want His kids being led astray.

The situation might be slightly different today, but the principle remains the same. God is saying, "Marry someone who loves Me the way you do." Why? Firstly, God should be No.1 in our lives, the most precious thing of all, and if you can't share that with your spouse or kids, then at some point there will be conflict. Secondly, life can be tough, marriage can be tough, family can be tough, and you need someone to trust Jesus with. "The couple who prays together, stays together", as the adage goes. That's why the Israelites were commanded not to marry outside the faith; why Song of Songs refers to "my sister, my bride" (4:9); and why Paul tells the church at Corinth, "Do not be unequally yoked" (2 Corinthians 6:14).

Now that does *not* mean: if you're married to a non-Christian, ditch 'em. God is an incredibly faithful God, and He can bring good out of the mistakes we make, the situations we find ourselves in. But to purposely *choose* to marry a non-Christian? That is *not* a wise move.

2) Infidelity. "You have broken faith with Me ... by breaking faith with the wife of your youth" (vs14). Again, this expression refers to marital unfaithfulness.

Now you may be thinking, "I've never been unfaithful." But breaking faith can happen in a number of ways, not just physically, but in the heart. We break faith with our spouse when we do stuff we shouldn't, say stuff we shouldn't, think stuff we shouldn't, watch stuff we shouldn't. We live in a society where erotic material is the norm; where paperback porn makes the bestseller list; where sexually explicit images are available at the click of a mouse. And we tell ourselves it doesn't matter.

But Jesus says it does (Exodus 20:14; Matthew 5:27-28).

Hence Malachi's warning, "Guard yourself in your spirit" (vs15). Because 'inside here' is where all the problems begin, and if we don't keep a check on 'inside here', it could affect our loved ones ...

For generations to come.

3) Divorce. Finally, God says: "I hate divorce ... and I hate a man's clothing himself with violence" (vs16). Here God compares an unjust divorce to domestic abuse, as both things are a betrayal of the marriage covenant.

Now to understand the context, imagine if I were to say, "Kellie, I've had enough of endless costume dramas and costume-making. I'm off." That would make me a miserable specimen-of-a-husband, wouldn't it? But in Malachi's day, that's exactly what was happening. Men were divorcing their wives for the most pathetic of reasons and kicking them out into the street (and in a male-dominated society, only the men were allowed to do that). 400 years later, things were just as bad: the School of Rabbi Hillel was teaching that a man could divorce his wife for burning the dinner, or in exchange for a younger model – hence Jesus' warning in Matthew 19:3-9.

Now these are tough verses, I realise that, and some of us have known divorce in our own lives. And God also understands that people are complex; that in a fallen, broken world, things don't always go according to plan; and that sometimes, marriage can become twisted – whether by adultery, abandonment, or abuse – and divorce may be the only way out. But that's not the way God wanted things to be. Which is why He says, "I hate it."

So, we must never, ever take it lightly.

Ever.

Relationship No.1

What's the point here? Human relationships – marriage or family or friends – are a picture of God's relationship with His people. In fact, marriage is sacred in itself, and is an act of worship in itself. So if things are not going well in our earthly relationships, it may be an indication that things are not going well in the heavenly one, either.

Maybe you've been hurt by someone who promised to be faithful, and they've broken those promises. God says, "Even if everyone else leaves you, I won't. You can rely on Me." Or maybe you know you're the one who's done the hurting, and you need forgiveness. God is saying, "Even if you've been unfaithful to Me, I will be faithful to you. You can rely on Me."

The more we grasp this, the more we will have an example for our own relationships.

So what is your relationship with God like? Are you being faithful to Him? And what is your relationship with others like? With your spouse; your children; your parents; your boyfriend or girlfriend? Are you being faithful to *them*?

Cue the 'scarlet cord' response activity!