

# How have you loved us?

## sermon discussion guide

based on **Malachi 1** from 18/11/18

which can be accessed at [www.stjamesbythepark.org/current-sermon-series](http://www.stjamesbythepark.org/current-sermon-series)

Intro: what's your favourite thing to do with advent (other than chocolate!)?

### **Read Malachi 1.1-5**

*Malachi, as messenger of the Lord, passes on some pretty strong warnings. But it begins with reassurance: "I have loved you."*

What are some of the things that make us doubt God's love?

*To help them understand the depths of his love for them, God gets them to focus not on their current situation (which will always change anyway), nor to compare themselves to others (which will change as well), but on the fact that he chose them in the past.*

List as many reassurances of God's love to us as you can.

How could you encourage yourself and each other with those truths about God's love when you're tempted to doubt God's love for you?

### **Read Malachi 1.6-14**

*The issue here is that the people and priests aren't honouring God – they're showing contempt for him, by bringing him half-hearted sacrifices. Leviticus 22.21 had made it clear that offerings were to be 'unblemished' – yet here they were bringing offerings which were blind / crippled / diseased etc.*

Why do you think the people tempted to offer 'blemished' sacrifices, rather than unblemished ones?

*Because of Jesus, we don't have to offer animal sacrifices (see 1 Peter 1.18-19). We offer ourselves as 'living sacrifices' instead (see Romans 12.1).*

How can we be tempted to offer half-hearted sacrifices?

"The people were offering God what was left rather than what was best." How might we fall into that trap today?

Why were the priests tempted to accept 'blemished' sacrifices, rather than unblemished ones?

How might today's spiritual leaders be tempted to teach half-truths relating to God, rather than the whole truth?

How does this passage speak to our desire to be a God-dependent, grace-filled, Bible-based, mission-focused, authentic community?

**Up:** v11 focuses on the global honour that will be given to the Lord. Spend some time together praising God for his love and global honour.

**In:** What can you do to encourage each other to offer God what's best, rather than what's left over?

**Out:** Spend some time sharing about who you want to invite to Christmas services, or people you want to share the 'good news' with this December. Pray for opportunities to invite and share, and for boldness to take those opportunities.