

Small Group Discussion Guide

Sermon: "The Last Shadow Before Bethlehem" • Series: *Silhouettes of Hope: Christmas through the Eyes of the Minor Prophets*
Pastor Mel Baga, D.Min. • Dec. 13, 2025

OPENING PRAYER

Lord, as we open Your Word, rekindle our love, refine our hearts, and help us hear Your voice with fresh clarity. Amen.

1. WARM-UP CONVERSATION (5–10 MINUTES)

When you think about shadows before Christmas, what comes to mind?

2. READ THE TEXT TOGETHER

Malachi 3:1–4 and Malachi 4:5–6 After reading, pause for silence and sit with the words.

3. UNDERSTANDING THE PASSAGE

The People's Condition: A Heart in Winter. Malachi speaks to people practicing religion with cooled hearts. Which parts of Malachi's critique feel most relevant today—doubt of God's love, half-hearted worship, cynicism, withheld trust, relational fracture?

God's Response: He Comes Himself. The solution is not more effort from the people, but the arrival of God. "The Lord whom you seek will suddenly come to His temple." What does this teach us about God's posture toward spiritually tired people? How does the Incarnation fulfill this promise?

The Refiner's Fire: Jesus Comes as a Refiner, not a Destroyer. What's the difference between destructive fire and refining fire? *Where do you sense God doing refining work in your life right now?*

The Messenger: Preparation for Hope. Malachi promises God will send a messenger—fulfilled in John the Baptist. Why does God prepare hearts before the Messiah arrives? What does preparation look like in your life?

Restoring Relationships. Malachi ends with relational healing: "He will turn the hearts of fathers to their children..." Why is

relationship-repair a sign of God's kingdom arriving? What relationships in your life need God's reconciling touch this season?

4. PERSONAL REFLECTION (SILENT OR JOURNALING)

Move into a quiet space, invite the Holy Spirit to speak, write each prompt in your journal with space beneath it, and sit with God in silence, jotting down whatever He brings to mind.

- Lord, where has my heart cooled toward You?
- What part of my life needs the Refiner's fire?
- Whom are You calling me to reconcile with or draw close to?
- What "shadow" am I standing in before Your light breaks in?

5. LIVING THE PASSAGE (APPLICATION)

Choose one practice to live out this week:

A Small Act of Preparation to "prepare the way" for Christ:

- a daily Scripture reading rhythm
- a quiet moment of prayer each morning
- clearing unnecessary noise from your schedule

A Refining Practice. Ask the Spirit to purify one attitude or habit that feels like dross.

A Reconciliation Step. Reach out in humility and grace to someone with whom distance or tension exists.

A Worship Renewal Step. Offer God your best in one specific area—time, attention, generosity, or devotion.

6. CLOSING REFLECTION QUESTION

Where do you see the "shadow before Bethlehem" in your own life—and how is Christ beginning to break in with light?

7. CLOSING PRAYER

Refining God, come again into our lives. Turn our hearts back to You and to one another. Prepare us for the Light of Jesus, who breaks every shadow with hope. Amen.