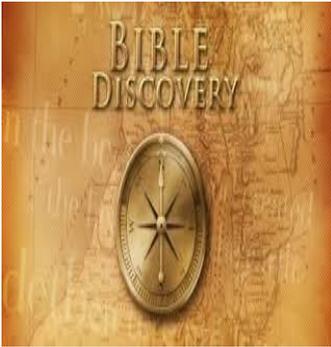


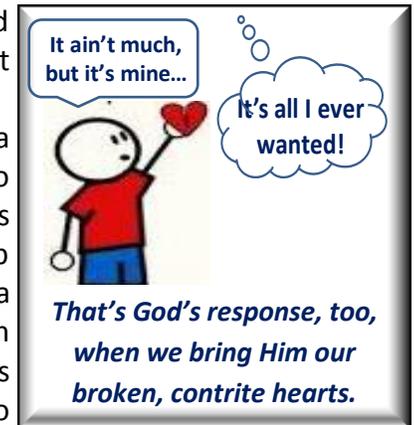
## Bringing God our Best



Happy belated Valentine's Day everyone! Valentine's Day's the opportunity to truly reconnect with the real meaning of the day. It's about love, sharing and giving. Rather than focusing on what fancy gift we'll give our loved ones, or how elaborately we'll celebrate, let's focus on what we actually give of ourselves. Remember when as kids we'd bring Mom our Valentine? Recall coming into the kitchen holding up your homemade heart to say something like, "It ain't much but it's mine." Was Mom's response something like, "It's all I ever wanted"? I believe that's God's response too when we bring him our broken, contrite hearts. God turns broken pieces into masterpieces. Yes, it's hard to imagine what it means to give God our best by giving of ourselves rather than merely going through the motions. For the priests of Malachi's day, it meant putting God first – culling from the herd the best rather than crippled and sick animals that had no value at market. But they wouldn't do it. What about us, what does it mean to bring God our best?

To understand what it means to bring God our best, I want to take us on a journey. Our first stop is in Zambia where a mother of 12, ministering to widows and orphans each day for decades, juggles life at home. Her joy is infectious, as she and her husband quickly tell you to come over and catch up on the kid count and quickly adds "God always provides!" Our next stop is a small Zambian city housing 5 colleges and technical schools. The church painfully describes a scenario that should not happen in our modern era yet is playing out over and over. Young women, having fought a world of obstacles to make college in the first place, are then forced to prostitute themselves to earn enough money to just eat. The church, though poor, has started a small ministry to provide alternative options for these women. While being materially stretched already far beyond what we'll ever experience they're giving of their small reserves to thwart it. On a more pleasant note, in Zimbabwe we stop and visit with Mrs. Nyoni, an elderly woman unable to afford to live closer who has walked 3 hours each way for church for 30 years every Sunday to worship and to minister to neighborhood children who've lost their parents. Each stop on our journey shows us those who are giving of themselves for the Lord in amazing ways. They're first and foremost in love with Jesus and serving Him out of love.

Speaking of love, trying to understand what it means to love God, give Him our best; let's meet Janet Folger, president of **Faith2Action**, a faith-based, pro-family organization that links with other like-minded organizations in the U.S. to reinstate godly values in society. Never married, she speaks on being single on days like today, "Somebody rear-ended me on the way home, it is Valentine's Day, I don't have a date, and my Christmas tree is still up. God really is who He says He is. I am really going to trust Him, even when things aren't as I would like them to be." One of her books, "**What's a girl to do while waiting for Mr. Right?**" is a look at the single's scene today, complete with hilarious tales of Janet's personal dating woes. She explains her trust in her heavenly Father, "God has a plan and a purpose. If all of the days of your life are ordained before one of them came to be, that includes even now. Instead of waiting by the phone or looking at your watch, get off the bench, get in the game, and make a difference and fulfill the purpose and plan He has for you."



It ain't much, but it's mine...

It's all I ever wanted!

*That's God's response, too, when we bring Him our broken, contrite hearts.*

**It's about a total attitude change of gratitude from deep down in our hearts!**

What do these stories mean for you and me? It's about a total attitude change of gratitude from deep down in our hearts, not only about relationships with others, but about our relationship with God. Are we going to lament all the things we haven't got, or enjoy what God's given us now? Because God is God, there's nothing He can't do. If He can raise the dead, if He

can part the Red Sea, if He can create the universe out of nothing, He can do anything. Satan wants you debilitated worked into a depression. He wants you feeling God's forgotten you, God doesn't care, God's not able - but that not the reality God wants for you. It isn't found in how you're feeling. Our really trusts every syllable of the Word of God. In His Word we discover who God is, shown to us through His Son, dwelling in us with His own Spirit – not on what we think we are, not on what others may think we are.

As I've suggested, it begins by us changing our attitude – about ourselves, and about how we respond to God; changing directions, allowing God to direct our steps. As we change direction, how do we respond to God? Churches change their worship styles. Does determine how we respond? We call it worship but perhaps if we start with what the word 'worship' means we can find our answer. The English word's derived from 2 Old words – our modern 'worth', and 'ship', meaning showing "quality." We use this for *friendship* and *sportsmanship* demonstrating qualities of a friend, the quality of a sport. Our worship therefore demonstrates the quality of being worthy in whom we worship. Do we bring God our worship, saying to God that He's worthy?

**How's our  
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Father?**

We're to bring this not only during formal gatherings set aside for 'worship' but with everything we do, everything we say, everything we feel, everything we believe. How's our "worship" shown in what we bring our Heavenly Father? How does God react to those who should know better but bring Him a poor-quality life? We're called for the purpose of praising God, worshiping God. Our lives should declare God is worthy, worth more than everything else put together. Bringing God our best is first reflected in our lives. **Amen?**

Malachi 1:6-11 depicts God's reaction when we fail to bring Him our best - *He's not pleased*. God indicts the people of Malachi's day for offering inferior, deformed animals on His altar! What indictment does He bring to the church today? The spiritual parallel concerns the offering of our lives in service to Him and those He sends across our paths. Are we, out of love for God and His people, bringing the best we have to offer? Do we bring to God of our time, talents, and faith only of what we can afford to live without? Though God accepts us just as we are graciously because of Jesus Christ, He expects us to give the very best we can in return out of thanks and deep devotion to Him.

***We can't fool God.*** Our Heavenly Father knows what we're capable of; where our loyalties truly lie. He's all knowing. We often forget this detail, feeling as though trickery gets us through by looking so spiritual to everyone around us, but unless we're a fool we know we aren't giving God our all. And God knows. By giving God our "leftovers", we're signifying who God is to us. We're suggesting God only *deserves* what we can't use for anything else; treating God like the Salvation Army or Good Will is for many people. What we can't sell or give away, we truck to the used good's store to "help others". God really shouldn't be the after-thought; we're to bring Him our best - always. What can we bring that offers respect and thanks to God?

I think it's fitting to have this discussion on Valentine's Day when we focus on caring, sharing, and expressing our feelings of love for others. Malachi gives us great instruction against our failing to express these precepts, not only to those we love around us, but perhaps more importantly to our Heavenly Father as we bring Him our sacrifices of praise, give Him our hearts and our devotion. Let me share briefly, three symptoms of a wearisome relationship with our Father we must avoid.

**1. Inadequate preparation**

This is rampant in North American churches today. We've commercialized our lives, compartmented our activities, and even molded our expectations to the society in which we live. Because we've assimilated so well, we've failed to prepare ourselves to meet with our Holy God, failed to bring Him honour and sacrifice.

***Well, what's your daily practice?*** Have you time for God 7 days a week? Do you talk to God as you rise, as you go to bed? Do you take Jesus with you in your routine throughout each and every day? If not then, like most of us, you're just like the Hebrew priests we heard about in Malachi's message. When we come before God, we must have prepared by spending time with Him, knowing Him? ***Does God know us?***

## 2. Half-hearted participation

If we do finally find time in our busy schedules for time with God, do we just go through the motions? There's nothing more boring than trying to pray, meditate, spend time with God, worship or discover His presence in our lives then when our heart isn't in it. Consider this, you're not being entertained by a sugar-daddy God, God's waiting to hear from you, to be worshiped, recognized as your Father, as your Master. God desires to be honoured. By-the-way, God will be honoured whether we're part of the solution or not. He tells us, *"From the east to the west I will be honoured among the nations. Everywhere they will bring incense and clean offerings to me, because I will be honoured among the nations."* Let us recommit folks and be real. Let us not place ourselves forlornly amongst the throngs who hear on that last and dreadful day, *"I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!"* [Matthew 7:23]

## 3. Improper motivation

Do we follow God to get *what we want* or do we glorify Him, give Him honour, and bring God our best - because we recognize Him for who He is? The answer we give makes a world of difference - in how we experience God, and in how we live every day of our lives. When you set time aside to spend with God the real question you'll have to answer is, *"Did I meet with God today and to some degree, did I grasp the wonder of His greatness in my life?"*

Friends, what I've suggested isn't easy, but it's time to consider it seriously! Are we bringing God our best with our lives, our time, our talents, and our treasures? Are we giving Him what we can afford to discard, or what's honouring to our Lord God who's given us everything? Our answer's not found in our accomplishments, family, wealth, or even our health. It begins with bringing God our broken hearts and it's found in recognizing we can't navigate this world without the hope we have in Jesus. If we're going to bring God our best, we must first grasp His greatness and embrace an authentic faith in the One who has opened the Kingdom of God to us, given us His life, and loved us so dearly.

As I close today, I want to bring one more story from Janet Folger as she shares the dating scene, speaking of the men she's dated, saying, *"They have been wimped-out, portrayed as the idiots in sitcoms and movies for the past ten years. We need to say, 'Be a man!' 'Open the door.' If some female doesn't appreciate it, that is a great screening process. You don't want that kind of girl."* In other words, be real, dare to be who you know you should be. That's good advice for us too. Christians have been portrayed as wimped out idiots by the world too long. Stop living up to their portrayal. It's time to be sincere in our relationship with God because like the priests who were singled out by Malachi, we've been given a great responsibility and have failed in our duty. We need to pursue Christ with passion and show His great love to everyone we meet. We need to stop trying to manipulate life for our benefit, stop orchestrating things the way we think they should be. If we can live as people of God, living an authentic faith, serving God with all our heart, soul, mind and strength, if we're willing to lead our families to church and to love sacrificially as Christ has loved us, then think of where we'll lead our families in honouring God? Do you want to be a leader, a spiritual leader? Seek Christ. This valentine's be one who has a heart after God. I'm willing to suggest our families; our friends; our neighbours will follow someone who is going God's way. If we aren't sold-out to God, I don't think they'll even want to be on the same train.

**We need to  
pursue Christ  
with passion and  
show His great  
love to everyone  
we meet.**

To discuss how Jesus can make an impact in your life, to discover what true love is all about, our to request prayer, give us a call our send us an email.

*Blessings,*

*Pastor Dave*