



Family Meeting

Part 3 – Bringing Your Absolute Best

Pastor Ted Cunningham

Today we're finishing our series *Family Meeting*. Next week, we're starting a series called *Reset*. We thought, since we're spending so much of August resetting everything for September 9th and changing the structure of our Sunday morning services, it would be a good time to also talk about resetting your life.

So, next Sunday, I'll be speaking on marriage in a message called *Reset Your Marriage*. If you've kind of gotten off track or just going in a different direction in your marriage and you want to come back to what you once had or what you know it could be, I encourage you to be a part of that. And then *Reset Your Family*, *Reset Your Faith*, and then on Labor Day, we're doing *Reset Your Job*. So, if you're retired, you don't even need to show up on Labor Day; you can just stay home. No, we want you to be a part of that as well.

Today, we're hitting a core value that's been a part of this church for over 16 years. Ever since we started, we've had a core value of excellence. We just want to bring God our best in everything and everything we do. Thank you, the three of you that are really on with that core value. It just flows through. I think that was Katie that tried to lead out with that. That's a Branson technique if you didn't know that.

Bringing Your Absolute Best. This expression started almost 300 years ago. It started in the 18th Century, but we have different versions of it. It goes something like this and I would like you to complete it for me. Any job worth doing is worth doing... well. You got it; you're strong in that. But there's this expression that you and I have that we say when we don't want to spend anymore time on something or we don't want to spend any more money on something. We just simply say, "It's good enough." When we get to a point where we've been on a project for a while and it's taken so much out of us, we say, "Eh, it's good enough."

There are some places I don't want to hear "good enough." Maybe you're with me on this. I don't want to hear "good enough" when I'm getting my hair cut. Nobody wants to hear that. I haven't had a bad haircut for like 20 years, but in college, I got my haircut, ironically at a place called Great Clips. I went back to school at Liberty after I got it cut and then that night, I went over to my aunt and uncle's house in Lynchburg. I noticed that my aunt kept staring at me. I finally looked over and I went, "What!?"

She goes, "Come with me." She walked me to the bathroom and we looked in the mirror. She goes, "I don't know what happened. Did you try to cut your own hair?"

I looked in the mirror and I was like, “Whoa, what did happen?” From one side, everything was perfect, but then the other side was just choppy. I go, “Now that makes sense.” She goes, “What?” I go, “The lady cutting my hair was super emotional and she was crying. Something was going on in her life. I tried to get into what was going on in her life. She took a phone call, cursed a little bit, and walked out. I thought we were done. I learned a couple of lessons. Don’t leave until you’re dismissed. That’s one of the things from a barber shop or a beauty salon. The other thing is don’t ever let someone who is emotional or angry cut your hair. I went back, and the manager was at the cash register at Great Clips. When I walked in, he was startled. He was like, “Yep, you’re going to need this.” I go, “You did this!”

I also don’t want to hear “good enough” with the mechanic who’s putting breaks or tires on my family’s vehicles. I want to hear “We did our best. These are awesome tires. You’ll be grateful you paid \$1,200.00 for the set.” Are tires expensive or is it just me. I just want tires. I don’t need a new engine...

Do you know where I really don’t want to hear “good enough”? I never want to hear a surgeon... Technically, you’re never going to hear him say that when you’re in the operating room, but if you are in the waiting room and your loved one is under the knife. And then they walk out, and the surgeon goes, “You know what? It was pretty complicated, but we think we did an alright job.” I don’t want an alright job; I want the best surgeon. And all God’s people said... amen. I want him on his A game. And all God’s people said... amen.

Here’s an example of a plumber that said, “good enough.” [picture of two urinals in a corner] I love it when you don’t have to say anything; a picture is worth a thousand words. This picture is worth about 10,000 words. That’s a lazy plumber right there. If you don’t know what everybody is laughing about, we call that “cheek to cheek.” You are crowding me. That doesn’t work in any bathroom situation.

Any business people here? Any business leaders or community leaders that have read the book by Jim Collins called Good to Great? Here’s what he says about “good enough.”

“Good is the enemy of great. And that is one of the key reasons why we have so little that becomes great. We don’t have great schools, principally because we have good schools. We don’t have great government, principally because we have good government. Few people attain great lives, in large part because it is just so easy to settle for a good life.”

“I’ve come far enough. I’ve grown enough. This is good enough.” No. I’ve been in a lot of places... Have you been in restaurants where you’re sitting down eating and you have the thought, *This was probably a great place at one time*. Do you ever have that moment where you’re sitting there going, *When did they stop caring? When did they just give up and go with a “good enough” attitude?*”

I’ve sat in churches... I’ve been in some this year where I just sat there and went, *This place was awesome in the 80s*. And they never brought it out of the 80s. They never brought it out of the 90s. Maybe it’s just old leadership. I’m going to start to put myself in the old category. I’m at 45. I’m on the down side, according to Psalms... Seventy years you have upon this earth, eighty if you’re strong. I’m in the back half. I’m in the second half of the game. I’m wondering if churches go from great to good because they never turn it over to the next generation. That was a millennial saying, “Give it to us!”

Alright, you got it. We're dying for you to take it, if I'm being really honest with you. We're tired. Okay, we'd love a nap. But, you've been in those places.

How about this... We talked a little bit about it last week. How about an entitled worker who, at one time, was a great worker? Now they do their job with a good enough attitude. We're going to see that today with the children of God, the children of Israel. Following a period of great revival under Nehemiah... We looked at it earlier this year. They fell into a lax worship, they were delinquent on their tithes, and they still couldn't figure out why God was dissatisfied with them. God sends Malachi to speak on his behalf. Malachi actually means "my messenger." God's going to share, through Malachi, clearly why he is dissatisfied with them. Do you know why? It's because they developed a good enough attitude with worship. They developed a good enough attitude with the sacrifices, with giving. It was just good enough.

Before we jump into Malachi 1, we're going to look at the Law of Moses and we're going to see what was clearly given to them on what made a worthy and acceptable sacrifice. Maybe in the headline of your Bible, it says Worth and Unworthy Sacrifices. This is clearly what it spells out in the Law and the children knew this. ***21 If an animal has a defect, is lame or blind, or has any serious flaw, you must not sacrifice it to the Lord your God.*** Today, we still use the term livestock. Why? Because it's when we look at animals as assets. We have about 200 head of cattle... We drive by it every time we leave our house. One of our neighbors has 200 head. They're beautiful and they're all the same color this year. We always kind of have an awe because about 30 or 40 of them were calves and they're cute, but they are assets, they're livestock and they're up to about 500 bucks right now. In another month or two, they may be at \$700 or \$800. I don't know exactly what they are getting for them, but they got them at \$100 to \$200.

In that day, the livestock, more so than I just described it with our neighbor, was your livelihood, your savings, your inheritance, what you gave to your family upon your death. And as you look out at what you have, within your corral, you're going to go pick the best one. You're not going to pick the one that is leaning up against the fence that's about to die. That's convenient, that's easy. "That one doesn't have much longer to live. Quick, get him to the altar before he dies." No.

That's what was happening here, and we pick it up in Malachi 1. God starts this out talking about proper relationships in community. This community, the children of God, the children of Israel would know this is how you have proper relationships within community. And then God's going to turn that around and say, "If you expect this type of respect within community, why are you not giving it to me?"

6 "A son honors his father..." Honor your father and your mother. It was expected in that day and it's still expected our day. Children should respect their parents. A son should respect his father at any age. If you're out of the house and you've been out of the house for 20 years, you're still called to honor your father and your mother. It's expected. ***"...and a slave his master."*** As you're doing your work... We have this in Colossians 3 – Do your work as unto the Lord, not unto human masters. It's expected that you bring respect to the master.

“If I am a father...” God is saying, “This is how I relate to you.” ***“...where is the honor due me?”*** “Why are you disrespecting me.” ***“If I am a master, where is the respect due me?” says the Lord Almighty.*** I want you to count the number of times we see “Says the Lord God Almighty”

“It is you priests...” The people and the priests are confused why God is dissatisfied with them. ***“...who show contempt for my name.”*** ***But you ask, ‘How have we shown contempt for your name?’*** ***By offering defiled food on my altar.*** (The Altar of Sacrifice) ***But you ask, ‘How have we defiled you?’*** ***By saying that the Lord’s table is contemptible.”*** By your actions, by the way you’re fulfilling this law. ***8 “When you offer blind animals for sacrifice, is that not wrong? When you sacrifice lame or diseased animals, is that not wrong?”***

If I can go a little bit further and give you a little bit more detail, this comes from Leviticus 22: 20-25. I’m going to just give you the list of what was considered unworthy in bringing to the Table of Sacrifice. It couldn’t have a defect, a blemish, blind, injured, maimed, anything with warts or festering or running sores, deformed or stunted in growth, and testicles that were bruised, crushed, torn, or cut.

When I shared that in the first service, a brand-new family to our church walked in and sat on the back row. As I delivered that last line, those were the very first words they heard at Woodland Hills Family Church when they walked in. And I went, “That’s Leviticus 22: 20-25!” because they all got sat down and they heard that, and then the dad was right back up like, “We’re going right out and we’re going to First Baptist.” To show God respect and to show him honor, you brought the absolute best. And you looked over the animal before you took the animal to be sacrificed. Is this my best?

“Try offering them to your governor!” You wouldn’t do it. I was very young when Jimmy Carter was president. Does anybody remember... I’ve seen this. I love watching documentaries on presidents. Can’t wait for this president’s documentary to come out. I’m sure he’ll do it himself. Jimmy Carter used to do home visits. He would just casually show up at people’s homes. Some of you remember. If the president was coming to your house... Don’t think of a specific president. The president is coming to your house; what are you going to do? Clean. Declutter. Hire people to help you. Call in friends and family. You’re going to go out of your way. Here’s the problem. The Lord is telling his children. “You would do that for the governor, you would do that for your leaders, but you’ve gotten lax in how you treat me. ***“Would he be pleased with you? Would he accept you?” says the Lord Almighty.***

When you look at all that you have, is your gift like a thrift store donation or the widow’s offering? So, that’s the question I have for you this morning before we dig into the rest of the text. When you look at all that you have, all that you have been entrusted with... We’re stewards. God doesn’t have 10% of what you have; it’s 100% his and he’s asks you to steward it, to manage it. What he has given you in money, in physical possessions, in your time, in your talent, in how he’s gifted you, when you look at what you have – don’t look at what others have – is your gift like a thrift store donation? And you know what a thrift store donation is. It’s what you don’t want anymore.

I was trying to think because not a lot of us prepared our offering today by going out and looking at our animals. How many of you take a bag or two every year to a thrift store because you don’t want it anymore, you don’t need it, it’s not that important, and you drop it off? So many people are doing this

in our community that I've shown up with my bags and they've said, "We're not taking anymore." Because there is so much left over. Or, is your offering – what you give to the Lord – more like the widows offering?

Jesus put it this way: **1** *As Jesus looked up, he saw the rich putting their gifts into the temple treasury.* **2** *He also saw a poor widow put in two very small copper coins.* **3** *"Truly I tell you," he said, "this poor widow has put in more than all the others."* – Luke 21

Do you understand the importance of this? When you give today, stop looking at everybody else and what they're giving and not giving. You're not giving based on what everyone else has; you're giving based on what you have. When it comes to serving, it's the same thing. Stop comparing your gifts and your talents and what you're called to do to everyone else. Don't do it. That's going to wear you out and it's going to keep you from understanding how you give back in recognition of the fact that God has given all of this to you. It says, **3** *"Truly I tell you," he said, "this poor widow has put in more than all the others."* All these people gave these gifts out of their wealth, but she, out of her poverty, put in all that she had to live on. When you give, think only of what God sees.

I'm told 1 in 3 millennials don't carry cash, so they give online. I've heard people say that when the baskets come around, they feel terrible that they don't put anything in. Stop thinking about what other people are thinking. Don't worry about it. Some of you give online. We've had shirts made for my millennial friends that simply say, "Don't Judge." Then the back says, "I give online." If you give online, just raise your hand. There you go. A free tee shirt for you, online givers over here. I'm throwing them over all the senior adult check-giving heads. We're not selling them; that was just a prop for this morning. Some of you give online, some of you give once a year in a 40K distribution, some of you give through a foundation. Please hear me. Stop comparing your gift to what everybody else has. Give according to what you have. And before you give, ask yourself the question: "Am I bringing my absolute best?" Here's why and here's what we're going to pick up from the rest of this text.

An offering to the Lord that is convenient and affordable is contemptuous, dishonoring, and useless. We're going to see in the text today to stop doing it altogether. Don't even do it. If it's half-hearted, you're neither hot nor cold... Jesus said what in Revelation? "I will spit you out of my mouth." Are you giving your best?

Are you serving with your best? You've been in town... I'm looking on the second row here. I'm not going to call Drea out, but she's a server in our town. Every time I see her early in the morning... Where she works isn't important. It's Cracker Barrel. I'm going to say this as your pastor. You give your best when I see you there. I see your hustle. I see your heart. Now here's the secret. I can't compare you to everybody else. That's what we tend to do. I want to compare her serving to everyone else's serving. I've seen some servers that are struggling that are coming in with a good enough attitude. That you don't have. You don't have the this is good enough attitude. You show up with everything. You give it everything. Are you showing up to your job the same way? Are you showing up with a good enough attitude or are you showing up with 110% today?

Does anybody here play sports? You played sports in high school? I have to draw on your illustrations because I did not. I've heard of some coaches that didn't allow you to drink water until they witnessed you were giving your best. You've seen it. You have guys on the team with incredible talent who get lazy, guys with okay talent who give 110%, and the coach gets mad at the guy with a ton of talent that's only giving 50%. They're resting too much on talent. "Nobody's drinking, nobody gets a sip of water until I get 110%. We're not done running this drill or this play until I see 110%." They expect that out of you.

You're like, "You don't know, though. My boss is a jerk. She is relentless. She's mean. She cusses at me. She F bombs me all day." I'll take you back to Colossians 3. Do your work as unto the Lord. Show up with your absolute best, not a good enough attitude. "The way you treat me, I don't deserve this and I'm not giving you everything." Give it as unto the Lord. Serve. Be a light in that dark place.

Some of you show up here... If you're offering, if your gift to this church is convenient and affordable, it didn't cost you anything, the scripture says that's contemptuous, it's dishonoring, it's useless.

9 "Now plead with God to be gracious to us. With such offerings from your hands, will he accept you?"—says the Lord Almighty. 10 "Oh, that one of you would shut the temple doors..." In other words, let's just stop doing this altogether. ***"...so that you would not light useless fires on my altar! I am not pleased with you," says the Lord Almighty, "and I will accept no offering from your hands."***

Is there any stronger text that we've read in the last few months in this church? The Lord calling us to bring our best. If you sit down to write that check... We have a lot of check givers in this church. When you write that check, I just want you to ask: "Is it my absolute best or is it what's okay?" because just like the livestock... It's the same thing with first fruits when you looked at the crops in that day. You don't bring what you get at the end of harvest – the stuff that may be left over – you bring your best and your best is in the first fruits. The stuff that you pick, bring it. Bring your best.

If you signed a card last week for Sweet Spot or you pick one up today, can we just encourage you? If you committed to that, if you signed up, 1) show up, 2) serve well. The teaching team and I talk about this a lot in what we do in speaking and even speaking outside of our community. I've shared with them. I've said, "If you're committed to speak to 12 teenagers in the basement of a church in Bolivar, Missouri, and the Billy Graham Association calls and would like you to lead a crusade in India and it conflicts with what you've committed to here, you call the Billy Graham Association and you say, 'Sorry, I have a prior commitment.' And not only do you have a prior commitment, you're going to study and you're going to show up and you and I, if it's me, if it's you, whoever it is... We only have four, so it's like I'm talking about Adam, Travis, Shay. We're going to show up as prepared for those 12 as we would be to speak to 50,000 in India for the Billy Graham Association. Why? It's because that's what God honors.

I have a comedian friend who backed out of a gig because he got double booked. I went, "Ah hah, you didn't get double booked; you got a better offer. I just would like to know how much they're paying you." "Why does that matter?" "I just want to know how much your integrity is worth." Some of you are thinking, *He's an angry little preacher today.*

Show up. Give it your best. I have to be honest with you. When I show up to a retreat that has 100 couples at it, I love that almost more than going and speaking to a large crowd on a Date Night. You can look right at them and you can call people out like Dreya. I met Martha on a break, so now I'm going to pick on her and I met Jim and Jim says he gives online; we don't know, but I can now go at him. Just bring it. Bring your best to whatever you do.

Don't you get passionate? I love watching people that are passionate about what they do. We were just at a resort in June and the landscapers were trying to move a bolder. It was that tall and they had those metal rods with the points on the end. Again, I'm about as good with tools as I am with sports. They were moving this thing an inch at a time. As we walked by, I was very inspired by how much they were putting into it. They were giving it their all. It's like 8:30 in the morning and they had sweat rings like this. As we walked by, they all stopped and jumped up with, "How are you doing? Are you guys having a good time? We're so glad that you're here." I was completely fired up because that's what people with passion and bringing their absolute best does.

11 "My name will be great among the nations, from where the sun rises to where it sets. In every place incense and pure offerings will be brought to me, because my name will be great among the nations," says the Lord Almighty. "You will bring the proper offering, the offering that follows the law, as honor and respect to me" God is just clearly spelling out to his children why he is displeased with them. Some of you, if this is your first time at Woodland Hills, your just like, "Wow, this is just so on it." You've probably had a talk like this with your children at one point in time. The way God is speaking to his children, you probably have spoke this way on more than one occasion to yours. "You're not showing up for this family. You're not bringing this family 110%. We poured into this." Parents, you can become angry little parents too if you're really honest because you're thinking about all you've done for your kids, all you've poured into your kids and now your asking your kids to show up and bring 110%.

12 "But you profane it by saying, 'The Lord's table is defiled,' and, 'Its food is contemptible.' 13 And you say, 'What a burden!'" talking about the Laws of Moses ***"...and you sniff at it..."*** This is an arrogant sniff. ***"...contemptuously," says the Lord Almighty.*** That sniff is a good enough sniff. It's like, "We've done it enough. We've been doing this for so long. We're almost in this mechanical process." Some of you have gotten there with your faith. It's just mechanical, it's just going through the motions. Today, you need to hear... The Lord showed up for you. Jesus gave you his all and you need to stop giving him a little or some. Its time for you to bring your all.

"When you bring injured, lame or diseased animals and offer them as sacrifices, should I accept them from your hands?" says the Lord. When you study the scripture, when it's repeated, it's not that we forgot something; it's so that we'll remember something. It's not that we've already forgot what was just shared, but it's being repeated to us for memory sake. You will sear this into your mind. You are doing this and it's not what the Lord accepts. ***14 "Cursed is the cheat..."*** It's useless, it's contemptuous, it's dishonoring, but now you're a cheat if this is how you treat the Lord. ***"...who has an acceptable male in his flock and vows to give it, but then sacrifices a blemished animal to the Lord. For I am a great king," says the Lord Almighty, "and my name is to be feared among the nations."***

What is excellence? It's been a core value of our church in everything we do. You see it around here and I just want to share the people that really have this in their DNA. Katie, our Experience Director, Matt and Carolyn and the whole team... Sometimes people will talk about worship and how is it showy... It's what we would consider excellent. We ask our worship team to show up with excellence every week. We believe excellence in everything we do is doing your absolute best with what you have.

We may sing a lot of Hill Song music, but we're not Hill Song. We're not Chris Tomlin. We're way better than all those people I just mentioned. That was terrible to say. This isn't a message on humility, it's a message on excellence. We believe excellence is doing your absolute best with what you have. I have to be careful when I visit the churches and I'm like, *Wow, look at this going on and look, they have a two million dollar LED screen; that thing is awesome!!* But, we ain't got it. And I can come back and... I can't look at what Woodland Hills can do and how we can serve and how we can give based on what a church in Chicago or Australia is doing. The same thing individually... The same thing happens for us corporately as a church. We look around.

I grew up in a church with Sunday morning, Sunday night, and Wednesday night services. Sunday night at 6:30 was our service and our song director would come in at about 6:20 or 6:25. He would rush in and grab a hymnal and he'd be looking for three numbers. He needed three numbers for three hymns that he could use. We don't do that here. They put prayer into what they're doing. They gather a team around what they're doing. They bring in special elements.

When you walk through our children's area, that's not somebody on Saturday night throwing a lesson together and calling some people to show up. That's people that are dedicating their lives to bringing their absolute best. If you've signed up to serve in any area at this church, from facilities to worship to the prayer team, we say show up, serve well, give it 110%. We believe you're measuring your best on what you have, not what someone else has, but we also believe that **excellence in environments and experience honors God and inspires people**. We've made the decision we're going to bring our best.

When we were first married, Amy and I visited her grandma's church. I'm not going to tell you exactly where it was; we're going to call it Downtown Minnesota. It's a large Baptist church. It probably seats 1,000 people. This probably would have been a church that was great in the 60s and 70s. I sat there... This would have been around 96 or 97. The church seats probably 1,000 people and that morning in worship there were 20 people, including our family: Amy and I, Denny and Linda, and Grandma. The pastor even gave the children's portion and two little kids came forward. He sat there and read them a Bible story.

This is just what was in my heart. I wanted to yell out, "Why are we doing this? When did this group stop caring? When did your weak leaders give into one or two demanding parishioners? When did somebody with money come in and say this is how it's going to be done and if it's not done this way, I'm leaving." To which we would say, "God bless you. I hope you find a place where you can serve. But, we are not bringing halfhearted to appease you, my friend."

I sit through a lot of churches where I see someone was appeased and this church not only went from great to good, but went from good to we should have shut the doors maybe a long time ago. Or gave it to a church that's thriving and needs space. Angry little preacher.

But you've been there. You've been in restaurants. I talked to you about a restaurant some time ago and where it is isn't important; it's Springfield, Missouri. We loved it. We loved the name of it. We loved the food they served. We loved the whole theme of it. We went in one night as a family to eat and there was a VIP table set up in the middle of the restaurant. I didn't know who any of the VIPs were sitting at it. About every five to seven minutes, a new course would come out with everyone from the kitchen to the VIP table. Just like Beauty and the Beast. They're setting the food down and these people are cheering. An hour goes by and no one else in the restaurant has food. You can look around the restaurant and everyone is getting ticked. I almost wanted to go up the VIP table and start taking food and run back over and set it down.

Last week, I heard that restaurant closed. When the people told me, I wasn't shocked. I said at some point... It may have started great... I told you I do this in this town all the time. When the new place starts, I run up to it. I feel like it's speaking a blessing over them. I'm like, "Blessings on you. Keep it going. Branson needs infrastructure." I hate when things close. Go for it! Run! Do this!

We were just at a bakery last week. As the lady was piping the frosting on the cupcakes, I said, "Blessings on you and every generation that flows from you" because we need more passionate cupcake bakers. Pour it in.

At our church, when these baskets come around, here's what I want to say as your pastor. If it's not your absolute best, don't give it. If it's your best... Don't talk to me about what your best is; take it to the Lord. Think about what you have. You're not walking out and looking at livestock, but you know your assets, you know what you have. Lord, is this my best? Am I bringing you my absolute best?

If you're signed up to serve this Sunday, and a better gig or opportunity comes along, decline it so you can honor the Lord with your commitment. If it rains, take up your cross and grab an umbrella. Serving, giving your time and your treasure and your talent. Bring your absolute best. And all God's people said... amen.

Father, it is in the name of Jesus that we'd never want to be lax in our worship. We never want to be delinquent in our tithes and giving. We don't want affordable and convenient gifts with our time or with our money. We want to give sacrificially. We want to bring the absolute best of what we have to you. Why? Because that is the glory due your name. We honor you today. We respect you today.

May our elders be on this and notice places where excellence backs down that we would never be confronted in the way the priests were confronted in Malachi 1 where we hear from the Lord, "We are dissatisfied with you because you've become lax in this area. We're dissatisfied with you because you're delinquent in this area."

Father, our heart's desire as a church, as a family is to bring our absolute best. We ask that today. We ask that of every member today. We're grateful for what you continue to do here. As we make changes in the next few weeks, as we go to three services, we're asking that you divinely disperse all of us among those three services so that we can reach more people and continue to grow as a church and for that we're grateful.

It's in the name of Jesus that everyone agreed and said... amen.

When you leave here today, there is another opportunity you have to give. The box is in the back that says mercy offering. I shared with you that we've sent the check to Care for Kids for \$42,000.00. That meets the physical needs of students in Stone and Taney Counties. The mercy offering is the gift that you give to meet the physical needs of families and children right here in our church family. Every dollar you give goes to pay rent, medical bills, dental bills, eye glasses, coats, clothes, meals, food. Whatever the physical need is that presents itself, our desire as a church is to always meet those needs. Again, it's because of your generosity. I encourage you to bring your best to the mercy offering as you leave today.