

Exceed

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[0:00] Just to lean in, I'm talking about the subject of giving your best. Of giving your best. And we know there's a story back in 2 Samuel 24 where David was offered a place to give an offering.

! And some offerings to give. And in 2 Samuel 24, verse 24, he refused it.

He said, Nay, but I will surely buy it of thee at a price. Neither will I offer burnt offerings unto the Lord my God of that which doth cost me nothing.

So David bought the threshing floor and the oxen for 50 shekels of silver. He said, I will not offer burnt offerings unto the Lord my God of that which doth cost me nothing.

He wanted to give something that cost him. And when we think of what Christ has given for us, the cost of Calvary, the cost of his blood, of the precious blood.

[1:08] Precious. And unto you that believe he is precious, think of the value of Christ, our Lord and Saviour. And the question for every one of us is, how valuable is God to you?

How valuable is he? How valuable is Christ, your Saviour? And we're not just talking about money as such, but it's about the giving of ourselves, isn't it? It's about the giving of who we are unto him. It's been said that a gift's value is not the cost of the gift, but how much it costs the giver. And you think of it, it's relative, isn't it?

One person's \$5 in the offering bag might be all they could muster out of their worldly wealth because of trying times or difficult straits that they're in.

And yet, for another \$5 could be just a pittance, just a nothing, just a token. And we know it's not the value of the note or of the gift as such.

[2:14] It's what it means for you. It's like it's been said, it's not so much what you give as to how much you've got left when you're given. For some, it's like they could give much more than they do give, as we know.

And yet, for some, that which they give, whilst others might think of it as nothing, that is really a sacrifice for them, a sacrifice for them. And we think of giving, we think of giving our hearts to him, we think of giving our lives to him, and of giving our best to him.

That's my subject tonight, as we see in Malachi chapter 1, if you're turning there. Are we willing to be spent and to spend for him? To be spent for him.

Or is our Christianity just something that we give a token lip service to? It's just something that we casually pay attention to when it's convenient.

And does it matter? Does it matter? Malachi chapter 1, from verse 6 through to 8, it says there, A son honoureth his father, and a servant his master.

[3:21] If then I be a father, where is mine honour? And if I be a master, where is my fear? Saith the Lord of hosts unto you, O priests that despise my name.

And you say, wherein have we despised thy name? Ye offer polluted bread upon mine altar, and you say, wherein have we polluted thee? In that ye say, the table of the Lord is contemptible.

And if ye offer the blind for sacrifice, is it not evil? And if ye offer the lame and sick, is it not evil?

Offer it now unto thy governor. Will he be pleased with thee?

Or accept thy person, saith the Lord of hosts. The context there is of some giving lambs or sheep that were blind and maimed, diseased.

They were offering the sacrifices that weren't worth anything. It's as if you had a flock of sheep, and which one are you going to sacrifice to God? Oh, which is the one that's going to die next?

[4:26] Which is the one that's got something wrong with it? You know, it might be a... I know, I was talking about sheep lately, and some of them... My brother here is very knowledgeable about sheep.

He's saying, some sheep are just fit for dog food. All right? You know, some sheep are just fit for dog food. Some of it is just worthless meat, because it's rubbish.

And some people in these days, in Malachi's day, they were offering the rubbish to God. They were offering the worst that they could find to God. And I know there was a time in my life when I was like that.

You know, when the offering bag came around, I used to fish around and look for the smallest note I had in my pocket, the smallest coin, just as a token to put in. But now, it's different.

We want to give our best. We want to give our most. Not our least to Him. We don't want to give our worst to Him. We want to give our best to Him. Amen? That should be our spirit. That should be our attitude.

[5:30] That should be our heart. That we don't want to give God second rate, second best, second hand. We want to give Him our best. Our first, our best.

Because God is worthy of our reverence. He's worthy of our honour. He's worthy of the best that we are, the best that we can do, the best that we can give. And when I shared that one time before, Brother Cliff was here, and he's since gone to be with the Lord, and he said that they really spoke to him, that that is something that he was doing too.

He was fishing around for the least that he could give. And friends, it's dishonouring to our Lord, isn't it, when we have that kind of spirit. Do we give God just the scraps, just the leftovers, just that which we've got after we've wasted it on ourselves?

Are we playing games with God, playing church? It may not be perfect, but make sure it is your best. Your best. Your best. Deuteronomy 15, 21, it says, If there be any blemish therein, as if it be lame or blind or have any ill blemish, thou shalt not sacrifice it unto the Lord thy God.

If it's sheep that's fit to be dog food, you don't bring that unto the altar of our God, do you? You want to bring the best. Bring the best sheep. You look along at those lambs and you want the one that is spotless, as it should be, as it reflects a type of Christ.

[6:55] It should be the best sheep. That which is spotless. That which is without blemish. That which is without anything wrong with it. As it was with our Saviour, wasn't it? God gave his best for us, didn't he?

In Christ. And I'm just thinking about this, as I say, not entirely in terms of giving money per se, but of giving yourself, of giving ourselves to him.

Do we have that kind of attitude with God that we give? That which we've got left over of our time, of our energy, of our life?

Or do we give that which is the best that we can give? You know, we could think of comparing it to school life. Do you want to strive for an A double plus? Strive for a, what's the university equivalent? A high distinction or a, whatever they call it, you know, the highest, the distinction. Or do you just settle for a credit?

[7:52] Just settle for a C minus? Just want to scrape through, scrape in, as it were. Not that we work for our salvation, of course. But as a Christian, don't we want to give him our best?

To strive for that which is excellent. That which is above average. That which is the best that we can be. And the best that we can be might be a C minus, but we'll give the best. Amen? We'll do the best that we can.

God deserves our best, not the leftovers. He deserves no less than our best. We want to praise him. We want to give him our highest praise. We want to give him our time, our talents, our treasure, everything.

Everything that we are. And lay it on the altar and give the very best that we can. To strive for excellence. There's a hymn that goes, Give of your best to the Master, nor else is worthy of his love. He gave himself for your ransom, gave up his glory above, laid down his life without murmur, you from sin's ruin to save. Give him your heart's adoration, give him the best that you have.

[8:53] Do we strive for that excellence, that quality? I know there's someone telling me they visited a church, and it was just excellence all over it. I mean, it might have been false doctrine they're preaching, but it was excellence.

Everything was excellent about it. You know, plush carpets and comfy pews and lovely lighting and anything that you wanted to have that opens and shuts, it had it there in that church.

And it would be lovely for us to have a meeting place that is excellent. I'd like to see that one day, that it can be a greater quality. Not that that's all that matters.

I mean, we don't have to have stained glass windows and, you know, all kinds of decorations about the place, because I think that detracts from a place of worship when that kind of thing is centre stage.

And as in some, the band and the drums are centre stage. We don't need all of that finery and hoo-ha and razzmatazz, but we want the place to be quality, don't we?

[9:53] We want our worship to be quality worship. And it's embarrassing. I know this morning when the technology failed again, and it was my fault, and you just wonder, you know, how I strive for the excellence, but I don't always achieve it.

I'd love to see it one day. And friends, we all can try harder and do better than we do. I know I can. Are you giving him the leftovers of your time, of your energy, of your money?

Hebrews 11.4 says that Abel brought a more excellent sacrifice to God by faith. It was faith that made the difference for Abel. His sacrifice was blessed because it was by faith.

Hebrews 11.4. And sometimes we pour our time and energy and effort into school and work and play or whatever else that we do, and then there isn't anything left over for God.

But shouldn't we put God first? Put him first in our lives. He wants the best. The best. And he deserves it. As we desire his will and do it.

[10:52] Give him your best. The best of your time. The best of your thoughts. The best of your day. God wants you to abound. The word says, Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye steadfast, unmovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, for as much as you know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord.

He wants us to abound. Abound. Excel. And I pray that your love may abound. Yet more and more in knowledge and in all judgment, that you may prove those things that are excellent.

Philippians 1 in part 9 and 10. Is good enough good enough for God? Sometimes we settle for a second rate, don't we? Good enough. You know, she'll be right.

Near enough's good enough. But should that be our attitude with the things of God? It shouldn't be, should it? We shouldn't settle for a second rate. We shouldn't settle for a second best.

I'd like to think that as a church, we can strive for an exceeding. Now, on the way to church tonight, before I picked anyone up on the bus, I was practising my sermon just about.

[12:01] I was kind of going over it in my mind. And I had this word, exceeding, exceeding, exceeding. You know, the Lord Jesus, he said, that our righteousness should exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees.

Now, of course, he wasn't talking about all the rules and regulations and the binding up of the religion that they had that was unhelpful and really ungodly. But the exceeding righteousness, the righteousness.

Christ counts righteousness as something that's important. And it's something we should be exceeding in. And I was thinking this, exceeding, exceeding, exceeding. And I thought, well, I'm exceeding the speed limit here.

I was getting carried away with the exceeding. And of course, we want to exceed in that which is righteous, don't we? Not exceeding the speed limit. But we should be exceeding for God. We should be excellent for God.

We should be wanting to aspire for that which is excellent, the highest, the best, the greatest, the most good that we can do. And it says in Colossians 3.23, And whatsoever you do, do it heartily as to the Lord and not unto men.

[13:03] And that can apply in the workplace too. I know on the weekend, the preacher was saying yesterday that in the workplace, you don't want to just laze about when the boss isn't watching, you know, having eye service.

You're just having service when the eyes are on you. But you want to be doing it all the time so that you're working as unto the Lord. Here's your supervisor. Here's your manager. Here's the one you report to ultimately, isn't he, for the standard of your workmanship.

And you want to be the best that you can be as a worker. It's a good thing. It's a godly thing to have that kind of work ethic. And do not serve or give out of obligation either. It's not a burden for you to serve him.

It's not a burden for you that is a heavy burden for you to serve him. It's a light burden. It's a burden that he carries for you. And so out of, not out of obligation, but wholeheartedly.

Do it wholeheartedly. Do it heartily as to the Lord. And it says in Ecclesiastes 9.10, Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might. So if God gives you a talent, if God gives you an ability, if God gives you a calling, a job to do, do it heartily.

[14:10] Do it with all thy might. Do it the best you can do. Excel at it, whatever it be. Whatever it be, and that might be humdrum things. Yet you can do it as unto him.

And excel in it. Excel in it. We know he wants us to excel at being all that he wants us to be and do all that he wants us to do. Are you applying your life wisely? You know, there's a sense where we're stewards.

We are meant to be stewards. And there's a stewardship of your life. Your life is something you're going to have to give account for. The minutes and days and seconds, hours, years, your life. You've got to give account for it, brother. You've got to give account for it, sister. Those days, those hours, those times. We should apply our hearts to wisdom. So use those days wisely for his glory. Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, with all thy soul, with all thy mind, with all thy strength. All, all, all. Excel. Exceed. In faith, give him your best.

[15:13] Glorify God. Give him your best service. Not half-hearted. I know another brother was telling me, half-heartedness. And we've heard on the weekend, too, of diligence and of sluggardliness.

Which are you? Are you diligent or a sluggard? Brothers and sisters, let's not be half-hearted. Let's not be half-hearted with our faith. Half-committed.

Don't settle for, that's good enough. Near enough's good enough. It'll do. Is good enough good enough for God? Well, now I've heard it said that there was some workmen on a church building. Not that building a church building, per se, is the be-all and end-all. But when asked about what he was doing, he was particularly diligent about shaping this stone, which was going to be high up where no one would really see it.

And he said that he was building a cathedral. Whereas others would just think, oh, I'm just laying bricks. He had the sense, and he knew that God would see his workmanship on that high part of the building that he was building.

[16:20] And that should be our mindset, shouldn't it? That what we do, God is seeing what we do. Whether it's in the regular secular workplace, the work-life scene that we're in, the secular world, the study world, the regular sports world, whatever we take part in and do, we want to be the best that we can be.

I know you see that analogy of the coaches down at the footy field, give 110%. That should be, you know, we always need to hear Christ as that coach saying, come on, give more, give more, be more, exceed, exceed, excel, excel.

Go further, go farther, go longer, go stronger. And he's there beckoning us to go on, to go, to press towards the mark, the prize of the high calling.

It's good enough, truly good enough for God. Or do we settle for substandard? There's a quote here of a man, he wrote a book about visiting churches, and he wrote this, and I think I've referred to this or something like it some while back, but it's a lot of truth here, and we could say, well, that sounds a bit like us.

And he's visited a lot of churches, and he says, the experience of a first-time visitor in many of these churches goes something like this. You drive into the parking lot of the church at 10.40 Sunday morning, and you assume you're five minutes early, because the sign says the service starts at 10.45.

[17:44] Soon you discover that the sign still needed to be changed, and it shows the name of the previous minister. It doesn't really reflect

some of the proper details about the church service. The grass was cut yesterday.

That was a good thing, because it was badly needed, but no one had raked it, and the lawn looked like a hayfield. And as you walk into the church, you're greeted with a melancholy, good morning, and handed a bulletin.

The bulletin has a line through it, because the copier hasn't been serviced in a while. You head towards the sanctuary and take a seat. You wait for 20 long minutes, because the service doesn't actually start until 11 o'clock.

And about 11.02, a piano player begins plunking out some chords on the piano. She's not very good. That reflection on our present musician here.

But she's been doing it for 40 years, and nobody has the nerve to tell her it's time to step aside. Someone shuffles to the platform and says, please take your hymn rules and turn to page 150.

[18:42] We'll sing all five stanzas of one day. The song leader has no musical talent. That's true. But he's the only one courageous enough to get in front of this crowd and try.

After struggling through a couple of hymns, the song leader says, now we're going to have a special number by the girls' trio. One girl gets up from the back and heads to the front. And in the silence, everyone turns around and watches her walk forward.

About the time she gets to the second row, a girl sitting in the first row stands up and heads to the piano. The girl from the back row says, Sheila is sick today, so there's only two of us.

Bear with us, because we haven't had much time to practice this. And they sing, give of your best to the master. At the end of the song, someone says, and all God's people said, and you feel like shouting, we can do better than that.

But the crowd mumbles, amen. After the song, everyone watches the two return to their seats.

When they're seated, the song leader shuffles back to the platform and says, now we will take up the offering.

[19:42] Will the men designated to take up the offering please come forward? Three men get up from various parts of the sanctuary. One of them nods to a fourth, who either forgot he was ushering or was needed in someone's absence.

And the fourth man, in a brief panic, drops his hymnal, gets up and follows the other three to the front. One of the men prays methodically, Our majestic Heavenly Father, we thank Thee for this day and all of Thy bountiful blessings.

Please bless the gift and the giver. In Jesus' most precious holy name we pray, amen. A bit of a mechanical prayer. And the piano player plunks out a few more chords as the offering plates are passed.

The service continues in an equally haphazard fashion. If communion is served, you struggle to watch how everyone else partakes so you can follow suit. Because it's not clear from the front. And when the sermon is delivered, you battle to stay awake during a message that is long on time and short on content. When the invitation is given, no one responds. When the benediction is over, you're relieved.

[20:40] And head for the door as quickly as possible. By the grace of God, people still come to know Jesus after enduring church services like that for most of their lives. But that kind of service, where people are giving less than their best, doesn't bring honour to Jesus Christ.

And it's certainly not the most effective way to evangelise. It's so true, isn't it? I know this morning there was numbers of people rostered to do things they weren't even here. Let alone apologise or seek someone to take their place or make some other arrangement.

Less than the best. It's less than the best. Would we do that for our employer? Not come and not phone up and apologise or say, look, please find someone else to take my place.

Brothers and sisters, less than your best. Don't settle for it. Don't settle for it, brother. Don't settle for it, sister. And I know there's some that are the opposite here. They're not on the roster to do anything, and yet they're doing just about everything they can do.

Amen? People are giving the best that they can do. I thank God for those that show the initiative to put the urn on, to get the food ready, to clean up after, and just to muck in and be a deacon.

[21:50] Really? Even though they're not named one. They haven't got a badge that says that. But that's what they are. Amen? They're a deacon. They're a servant of the church. That's what we should be. Shouldn't we give our best for the Lord?

Don't settle for less than that. Do we put him first in everything? Friends, we should aspire for excellence. I wonder when I see some churches that are false cults, and there's something. They make an effort. They do make an effort. You wonder, friends, shouldn't we exceed? Shouldn't we exceed the Mormons?

Shouldn't we exceed the Kingdom Halls? We should. We should exceed. We should exceed. You know, put the foot on the accelerator and exceed.

Amen? In the spiritual sense. And friends, sacrifice. Sacrifice. In John 12, Mary wanted to worship the Lord, and she took costly perfume and anointed the feet of Christ, wiped His feet with her hair.

[22:59] You know, she didn't give her second-rate, did she? She didn't pick the plain-wrapped version off the shelf. She picked the one that, as some have said, that it was worth a year's wages for the average worker.

That's what she gave. It was the best. It was the best that she could give in her devotion to the Lord. And some counted it waste. Some counted it as a waste.

But Christ counted it as worship. And, friends, we need to think, do we want to settle for the second rate? And, you know, some people think that, just because we're in Elizabeth.

And we're in Salisbury, or whatever it might be. And think, oh, this suburb's got a name. It's got a reputation. And I know even in the council, which I'm privileged to be part of, we're constantly knocking this knocking of Elizabeth.

Because there's so much that we can thank God for, even in this place that we live. As much as many would knock it and rubbish it, as the media can at times, and maybe there's a reason why.

[24:02] But, brothers and sisters, just because we live in this place doesn't mean that we need to be second-rate, does it? We can aspire to excellence. We can press towards the mark for the prize of the high calling.

We can aspire to be the best that we can be. Every one of us, every one of us here today, you can aspire to be the best that you can be for your God and Saviour.

And we don't need to be put down because of where we live, of our class, or standing in our station in life. We can be the best that we can be where we planted. We can bloom where we planted.

We can be that man, that woman of God. And thank God that we are here in this place. We've got a message that this place needs to hear, that these people about us need to hear.

And we need to give it faithfully as he helps us to. And think of the stewardship of your life. Your life counts. It's important. Your soul counts. Don't settle for the mediocre and the ordinary.

[25:00] Let's aspire to be A double plus. Let's aspire to be Christians who are on the cutting edge, the leading edge. You know, you could use some of that terminology. Go to the next level.

You know, you hear this sort of talk in some circles. We should go to the next level. We should go and we should exceed the Pharisees. We should exceed the Mormons. We should exceed the JWs.

We should stand out from the crowd and be the best that we can be for our Lord. And not give God something that costs us nothing. Let's give the best that we can be.

Be the best we can be. Let's sacrifice like Mary did. Let's be that one who won't give the worst of the sheep but the best of the sheep when we give something to God.

When you give your time to him. Let that time, that precious time, that valuable time, let it be given wisely in things that count. Stand out from the crowd.

[25:53] Aim for excellence. Could be excellence in integrity in the workplace. You're a Christian. You go to church. Live like you live for Christ. Live like you mean it.

Your faith that you profess. Don't just be a professor. Let it be one who realises it. Not just professing it but realising it.

It's not just lip service. It's not just talk. It's in your walk. It's in your way. It's in your life. It's in your lifestyle. In your character. You've got grit. You've got resolve. You've got determination.

And as Paul urged Timothy, be strong. Be strong. 2 Timothy 2.1. We can be strong. Even though all around us are weak as water. Even though the trend, the popular move is to be a slugger.

Don't settle for second rate. You can go with God. You can be the best you can be. And maybe sometimes you may not feel like it. But you can go that extra mile.

[26:53] You can go that second mile. You can go beyond your own strength. Because he will help you to get there. And just to close, this is an old hymn. Give of your best to the Master. Give of your best to the Master.

Give of the strength of your youth. Throw your soul's fresh, glowing ardour into the battle for truth. Jesus has set the example. Dauntless was he, young and brave. Give him your loyal devotion. Give him the best that you have. Give of your best to the Master. Give him first place in your heart. Give him first place in your service. Consecrate every part.

Give and to you shall be given. God his beloved Son gave. Gratefully seeking to serve him. Give him the best that you have. Give of your best to the Master.

Nor else is worthy of his love. He gave himself for your ransom. Gave up his glory above. Lay down his life without murmur. You from sin's ruin to say.

[27:50] Give him your heart's adoration. Give him the best that you have. God commends diligence and he condemns slackness. Now I'm not saying become a workaholic.

Now that's a danger there. You need to rest. And we need to take time to rest in the Lord. To wait on the Lord. To be still and know that he is God. Not to be just frantically busy, busy, busy.

And not finding his communion. His sweet fellowship. That can be all that he wants you to do sometimes. Is just to sit at his feet. Not be like Martha, cumbered about with much serving.

And yet, Proverbs 22, 29.

Be a man diligent in your business. A woman diligent in your business. We're talking on the bus on the way up. Proverbs 31, women. You know, I'm blessed to have one of them. Amen. Sometimes.

[28:50] No, she's always there. And, you know, I've just been blessed lately to think of that. And I've been saying to Julie lately that I'm going to make a determined effort to listen to her a lot more.

To listen to my wife. Because I've realised that God has given to her, her to me, as a help meet. A help meet for me.

And for her to help me, I've got to listen to her. Amen. I had a revelation about that. Amen. I've got to listen to my wife so that she can help me. And Julie said, Amen.

And brothers and sisters, so women can be diligent too. Look at the Proverbs 31 woman. She was diligent. She wasn't idling away her time playing video games.

She wasn't, you know, I don't know what else women do. Not that they do that. But, you know, she wasn't idling away her time. She was using her time wisely to work for her household and to make the most of her day.

[29:51] To be a diligent woman and strive for the prize. Press towards the mark. Whatsoever therefore you do, whether you eat or drink or whatsoever you do, do all to the glory of God.

1 Corinthians 10, 31. Think of it, brothers and sisters. Give of your best. Don't find that mangy little sheep that's fit for dog food and give it to God and think that you're giving Him your best because it's not.

It's lousy. It's a mockery and it's dishonouring to Him. You know, when we want to give to Him, don't find the piecemeal scraps, the leftovers of your time, of yourself.

Give Him your best. And friends, we can all be encouraged to think and exceed. Be excellent. Be excellent. And you can do that. Every one of you can. And I know, you've got your best, I've got mine.

We've all got our best. And, you know, sometimes we just set off a second best, don't we? Let's aspire to that which is greater, that which is better than we've given before, than we've been before to exceed the righteousness to be excellent.

[30:55] Let us pray. Heavenly Father, we thank You that we can find that joy of serving You. And Lord, for each one here today, we can know that privilege of saving grace.

Lord, we've given nothing to deserve it. We cannot give anything to merit it, Lord. Yet, You've given everything unto us. We thank You, Lord, that we can give some measure of ourselves to You, Lord. Let it not be that which is our leftovers, but that which is our substance, that which is honouring unto Your name, that which will be pleasing to You. Lord, that when it's all said and done, we can say, as we enter Your presence, You'll say, well done, our good and faithful servant.

Enter into the joy of Thy Lord. Lord, not that we are working for our salvation, but that our salvation is working for us. And Lord, we want to serve You because we love You. We want to give You our best.

We don't want to settle for giving You something secondary, second rate. Help us, Lord, to find that, to receive that, Lord, we pray. In Jesus' name. Amen.

[32:09] Thank you.