

THE BIG IDEA: Giving God our worst frees us to receive his best.

The Take-Off

This morning we're celebrating a new space, a new year at The Gathering and we're kicking off a new 4-week series called "The Big Oh!" that will help us know what to do when the commands of God are more shocking than safe.

This morning's shocking statement? **GIVE GOD YOUR WORST.**

Here's a quick story to show us why we should...

In 2010, 5000 people were actively involved in the beta-testing of an unknown, private picture-sharing social media site.

It experienced pretty substantial growth when it was made public, and grew to about 700,000 users.

But in 2011-2012, users went through the roof, climbing from 700,000 to a staggering 20 MILLION users!

And while Instagram is a very popular picture-sharing social app, if you guessed that one, you'd be wrong.

The site I described is Pinterest. Yep, that "woman" site has rapidly become the third most popular social media.

And one of the more popular categories of pins is crafts, and one of the hottest trends in crafts is repurposing old junk and other stuff you and I would normally take to the dump.

Here are a few examples.

[PICS FROM PINTEREST]

For someone like me who sees a shovel and thinks it will always be a shovel, stuff like this blows my mind.

Who takes shovel heads and makes giant metal pine cones????!!!!????

Repurposing is HUGE now, and it's the perfect metaphor for what we're going to talk about today.

This morning, we're going to take a peek at an old book named after the prophet who wrote it, and what we're going to find out is that God is better at repurposing than all 20 million Pinterest users combined.

He takes trash, and does something amazing with it, but to get to the amazing part, we're going to need to do a little dumpster diving.

In Malachi, God is going to point out three areas in which his people were trashing him, and to be honest, it's going to be as difficult for me to teach as it will be for you to hear at time because, as you'll see, this is going to really hit home.

But like only God can do, he sandwiches all the hard stuff between a truth and a promise.

The truth is found in Malachi 1:3 and it's simple: God says he loves them.

God goes on to say some confusing things about loving one and hating another and it can honestly be a little tough to understand. (Obviously, one was a Wolfpack and one was a Tarheel!)

There will be other times to really dissect what is happening here, but for today, let's just explain it this way: his answer to how had he loved them was simple - "I chose you."

That's the truth: God loves us and proves it by choosing us - now we look back to the cross and see that on the cross God was choosing us.

Unfortunately, the book is a downhill slide from there.

Malachi goes on the point out how the people that God had chosen had ruined God's love. While we look at the ways they did - and realize we have, too - it's important to remember today's Big Idea: **Giving God our worst frees us to receive his best.**

1. Ways that we RUIN God's love

(1) In our message

- a. We're not going to take the time to read every verse from the middle of chapter 2 to the middle of chapter 2, but let me sum it up this way: the people had trashed God's standards because the leaders had trashed it first.
- b. Instead of making sure they kept a high standard, the priests started offering sick, diseased and lame animals as offerings. (1:8)
- c. They would promise God one thing but offer less because it hurt less. (1:14)
- d. God reminded them of the message of Levi and how he feared and listened to God (2:4-5) and told the people what God said (2:6-7)
- e. But these new priests feared the people more and told the people what they wanted to hear, and so they trashed God's standard with their message (2:8)

- f. So what does this mean to you?
- g. First, as a pastor, let me apologize for all pastors who have lowered God's standard in order to make people happy, sell books and pack seats.
- h. Many of you here today don't do church anymore simply because you saw that a message like that may sound good for a week, a month, maybe a year, but ultimately it runs shallow and doesn't last.
- i. For that, I'm sorry.
- j. God's plan for each of you is that you would be planted in a church family where you are rooted and grounded through the consistent teaching of the truth in God's word.
- k. We don't mind saying that we'd like that church to be The Gathering. We aren't perfect, but we aren't lowering the standard of God's word.

(2) **In our marriages**

- a. If I was going to play the role of one of those preachers, then I'd simply stop the message now, because it would be easy to let everything you and I struggle with rest on the shoulders of pastors and leaders, but God kept writing and speaking through the prophet, and honestly, the rest of it gets worse, because God gets personal.
- b. After telling the truth about the leaders trashing the message of God's worth, he turns the tables on his own people and tells them they've trashed who he is in their marriages.
- c. Yep, God went there.
- d. God tells the church that they ran the risk of being cut off even if they gave offerings (2:12), so we know that God isn't after our money. He wants way more than that.
- e. And worse than that, God goes on to say that he won't even hear them no matter how much they beg or try (2:13)
- f. What could be so bad that it would cut us off from God? 2:14 tells us - they had broken the covenant that HE HAD WITNESSED!
- g. All this time we thought weddings were just ceremonies that we invited people to. But God is the witness all along! He's watching to see how we keep the vows that he heard us say.
- h. That is sobering.
- i. How seriously does God take marriage? Seriously enough that this is the chapter that includes words like "detestable" in verse 11 and "hate" twice in verse 16.
- j. And just to point out the obvious, the divorce rate is just as high among church goers as non-church goers. We try on spouses like shoes, and God's love and mercy towards us gets trashed in the process.

(3) **With our money**

- a. Well, that was fun, wasn't it? And just as we think we can come up for air, God lays out the third way we trash his love, and it may be even more of a sticky situation than even marriage.
- b. God starts talking about the Benjamins. He tells his people that they are robbing him with their money. Ouch.
- c. And if we're like the people Malachi was talking to, we'll have the same reaction they did: "Say what??"
- d. Listen, no one likes to talk about money. It's true then and it's true now, and that's because we think our money is our money.
- e. But it isn't.
- f. I've told this story before, but let me share it again because it's such a great illustration of how we rob God.
- g. I've been on the God end of this equation, and I learned a really important lesson about how God feels.
- h. [Tell the story about being robbed by a believer]
- i. Now, I've made the choice to forgive this man, but do you think we have a close relationship? No. Could we? Maybe. It depends on him, though, right?
- j. God loves us extravagantly and we waste his resources extravagantly and then wonder why we don't feel close.
- k. Um, that is a no brainer.
- l. And I don't like to be told what to do with my money anymore than you do. But the point here is that it isn't OUR money. It's God's, and if we don't give it to him, we're robbing him EXACTLY like the man robbed me.
- m. So we've trashed God's love in our message, our marriages, and with our money, and at this point, if you and I were God and had seen our love trashed like that, we'd simply throw the people who had done it in the trash.
- n. And most people do.

- o. But not God!
- p. The God whom we have trashed does something amazing, something unexpected and undeserved.
- q. He takes our trashed lives and he REPURPOSES them.
- r. Listen to these invitations from a God who wants you to give him your worst so we can be free to receive his best:
 - “Come now, let us reason together, says the Lord: though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red like crimson, they shall become like wool.” (Isaiah 1:18)
 - “For if you return to the LORD, your brothers and your sons will find compassion before those who led them captive and will return to this land. For the LORD your God is gracious and compassionate, and will not turn His face away from you if you return to Him.” (2 Chronicles 30:9)
 - If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. (1 John 1:9)
- s. We even find God offering hope here at the end of Malachi after he has called them out for ruining his love
- t. In Malachi 4:17 God tells them that they’ll be his and part of his treasured possession and at the end God points them toward Jesus when he says that he’ll turn the hearts of the fathers to the children and the children to the fathers. (4:6)
- u. We ruin God’s love, but God still repurposes our lives!

2. Ways that God REPURPOSES our lives

(1) At the cross

- a. 1 Peter 1:18-19
 - There’s no way around it, the cross is where a great exchange takes place
 - Our sin for his sinlessness
 - Our trash for his treasure
 - Our worst for his best
- b. Anyone that says you and I can be repurposed without the cross is smoking something.
- c. 2 Corinthians 5:17 says that old can be done away with and the new can come
- d. You can be a new man, a new woman, a new creation!
- e. But only in Christ, or at the cross

(2) In the church

- a. As we get ready to close, take a peek at Ephesians 2 with me.
 - After ruining God’s love toward us, God sent Jesus at the cross to bring us near him (v. 13)
 - He is repurposing us, and verse 15 tells us WHAT he’s repurposing us for: that we would be one body at peace with each other and with God
 - And vv. 19 and 22 tells us WHERE God does the repurposing: in the church
 - “with God’s people and members of God’s household” (v. 19)
 - “you too are being built together to become a dwelling” (v. 22)
- b. What this means is that we are saved at the cross and changed in the church, planted in a body with others who are being changed, too.
- c. A body that supports each other, challenges each other, and cheers for each other. Deep roots and deep commitment. A bunch of trash turned treasure by the priceless mercy of God.

The Landing

And so we live free.

Free from shame, guilt, condemnation. Free from an enemy who wants to hold all that trash against us.

And no matter where you are or where you’ve been, no matter how many steps you’ve taken away from God, the cross stands as a reminder that you are one step away from freedom.

Jesus has come to those who are far off and stands ready to bring them near God and near man.

This morning, if you’ll **GIVE GOD YOUR WORST**, you can be **FREE TO RECEIVE HIS BEST**.

[Video]