

“Shift:Accelerating on the Discipleship Highway - A Life of Worship”

Scripture: Psalm 117

Graphics: car, highway, shifter

Big Truth: Discipleship is not a passive event or anything we complete in our lifetime. Following Jesus is a process that takes intentional engagement and sacrifice to live fully into the call of Jesus to, “follow me.” There are milestones along the way to help orient us and show us what areas we can engage: Worship, Community, Openness, Obeying, Serving, and Sharing.

Focus phrase: A Life of Worship is praising God for who He is and what He’s done for me.

1. Introduction

- A. PRAY!
- B. Every spring break, when I was a kid, my family and I would leave from our little house in Western NY in the wee hours of the morning, and travel to Florida to visit my grandparents, who lived there part of the year. I took at last 10-12 trips to Florida in various vans that my parents owned.
- C. My brother and I slept for the first few hours, and, as the biggest treat of the trip, we got to eat cereal in those little individual boxes. You know the ones: where you open the box on the side, along the perforations, open the wax or foil bag that holds the cereal, and then in a miracle that can only be explained at MIT, you can pour the milk RIGHT INTO THE BAG, using the box as your bowl, watching the sun come up, eating Sugar Smacks in your pajamas, riding in the car to see palm trees and the ocean.
- D. For the first 2 hours, life was GOOD! But once we got to hour 10 or 18, even the miracle of cereal from a box couldn’t touch the boredom and dread of another 6 hours in the van. Thankfully, we didn’t have to wear seatbelts back then, amen?
- E. And it was somewhere in South Carolina or Northern Georgia that the dreaded question of all questions began to be voiced from the small boys in the back seat. It was...? “ARE WE THERE YET?”
- F. The car was moving in the right direction, we could see some of the signs that told us where we were, but we didn’t always want to patiently wait for each milestone to pass to give us a sense of how we were progressing.
- G. Last week, we introduced our new sermon series called SHIFT. And we’re right at the beginning of the journey. We’re tempted to begin thinking, aren’t we THERE yet!
- H. This is an 8-week series that will help us, as individuals, and us, as a church, to begin to engage in our Intentional Discipleship Pathway.
- I. We began by giving an overview of the purpose of intentional discipleship, which is to make disciples for the transformation of the world. But making

disciples is not the vision...that's the mission. The vision is, as a result of the mission, to give every family and person in our community to opportunity to believe in and follow Jesus.

- J. As we become disciples that are centered in Jesus, we're called to do what Jesus asks of us, no matter the cost, to give every family and person the opportunity to join us with Jesus.
- K. To help us, and give us some tangible goals, we've established 6 milestones. These milestones are the Growth and Vision Team's prayerfully discerned aspects of our faith lives that, if we're growing in these 6 areas, we'll be more and more equipped and ready to carry out the mission and see the vision become a reality.
- L. This is for you and for me...for the praise team and the choir...for the missions team and the church council. This is for the person who's brand new and the one who has been here the longest.
- M. And for each milestone, we have different gears or levels of engagement that can help each one of us reflect on where we think we are, and where we want to be, with God's help.
- N. The six milestones are A life of **Worship**, A life of **Community**, A life of **Openness**, A life of **Obeying**, A life of **Serving**, and A Life of **Sharing**.
- O. There may be others things we do and ways to be a disciple, but as you grow in THESE six areas, from dipping your toe in the water...to diving in fully, then Jesus will go from being someone "out there" to someone "in here"...and your life will be more and more centered on Jesus and his ministry.
- P. This morning, we'll start with one of the things I am most passionate about: A life of Worship. My heart desires every person who hears this message to take one step forward in passion for worship. (t-shirt) That we would, together, CLUTCH...SHIFT...ACCELERATE...and REPEAT.
- Q. Let's find out what the Bible has to say about worship...and then we'll begin to ask ourselves where we are with a LIFE of worship. There's no WRONG place to be...but there IS a direction to travel for each one of us.
- R. Grab your bible and turn with me to Psalm 117. This is the shortest Psalm of the 150 Psalms, but it packs a lot of horsepower for us today...Psalm 117...

2. Scripture

A. **READ Psalm 117**

B. Worship!

C. Let me read Psalm 117 again, this time in The Message, which is a modern-language translation by Eugene Peterson that I think is spot on! "*Praise God,*

everybody! Applaud God, all people! His love has taken over our lives; God's faithful ways are eternal. Hallelujah!"

- D. This psalm identifies WHO we worship, WHO is to DO the worshipping, HOW we are to worship, and WHY we worship.
- E. And, let me start with saying, WORSHIP is not optional for a follower of Jesus Christ. In fact, it's a mandate.
 - i. Psalm 150:6 says, "Let everything that has breath praise the Lord. Praise the Lord."
 - ii. Jesus said in John 4:24, "God is spirit, and his worshipers must worship in the Spirit and in truth."
 - iii. In Romans 12:1, Paul said, "Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God—this is your true and proper worship."
 - iv. We have a mandate to worship. But this isn't a matter of God said it, I believe it, and that's that. It's SO much more...
- F. Psalm 117 gives us the details of our mandate to worship.
 - i. Verse 1 tells us clearly that we worship the LORD. The God who is revealed in the Bible is the Triune God of the Universe - Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Three-in-One. Father, Creator and Provider. The Son, fully God and fully human, Savior and Redeemer. The Holy Spirit, the spiritual presence of God in our lives, the Comforter and Guide for every second of our lives. We worship The Lord God...and no other.
 - ii. Verse 1 also tells us WHO is to DO the worshipping. Is worship for someone in the front row, or someone next to you? Is it for the people who have it all figured out, or the ones that have been to church their whole lives? YES! But, it's not JUST for some. Worship is mandated for ALL THE NATIONS...and ALL YOU PEOPLES. In fact, worship is not just for the people who are following Jesus. All nations...all people...all creatures...all CREATION is mandated to worship. Every person and creature and rock and tree is mandated to worship, even though many don't know, do it, or worship in the same way you and I do. This is ALL about The Lord...and not about us at all. We are the ones who are to worship.
 - iii. The second part of verse 1 tells us HOW we are to worship. The word in English here is **extol** - which means to praise enthusiastically! Peterson tells us to Applaud God. And this isn't a polite golf clap. This is a football game, home run, hole-in-one raucously wild cheering! The root of the Hebrew word means to praise LOUDLY with abandon. There's a place for quiet contemplation in worship, but the psalmist is giving us permission to praise God loudly with enthusiastic abandon. We so often don't want others

to think we're silly or weird, and so we tone it down. Yet, this psalm is encouraging ALL PEOPLE to rev the engine and put it in gear!

- iv. Why? Verse 2 gives us two reasons:
 - a. (1) Because of God's **steadfast LOVE** towards us; and,
 - b. (2) Because God's **faithfulness** to us endures forever.
- v. God has revealed Himself to the world with these two main characteristics - LOVE and FAITHFULNESS.
- vi. All the way back in Exodus when God was beginning to show His people how and why they should worship Him alone, God revealed Himself to Moses. Exodus 34:6-8 reads like this: "The Lord passed before him, and proclaimed, 'The Lord, the Lord, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in **steadfast love and faithfulness**, keeping steadfast love for the thousandth generation, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin,' ... **And Moses quickly bowed his head toward the earth, and worshiped.**
- vii. Steadfast love and faithfulness are exactly how God reveals himself to us. And in Jesus Christ, God's only Son, we see steadfast love and faithfulness IN THE FLESH...on the cross, in the tomb, walking out of His own grave, and sitting on the Throne praying for YOU and ME right now!
- viii. The REASON WHY we worship is because of God's steadfast love for us, proven on the cross...and God's faithfulness to us, loving us and forgiving us and giving us life...always.
- ix. God loves you! His love, as Peterson writes, **has taken over your life!** God faithfully remains in your corner.
- x. Our response? simple: WE. WORSHIP.
- xi. J. Clinton McCann, Jr. said this, "Praising God is the proper vocation and goal of human life." There's no greater reason to live nor any greater way to faithfully live out our discipleship than to worship.
- xii. John Stott said, "True worship is the highest and noblest activity of which man, by the grace of God, is capable."

3. Application

- A. A disciple is a follower of Jesus Christ for LIFE. Following Jesus is something we do for the long haul.
- B. Because of that, you have whatever life you have left to nurture and foster a LIFE of WORSHIP.

- C. When we talk about discipleship, we don't often start with worship. We start with learning in Sunday School or a small group. We think about doing the things Jesus did and learning from the things Jesus said.
- D. All that is true, but worship is THE place where discipleship starts! Where would the disciples be if Jesus had not taught them to worship the Father like He did? Where would the disciples have gotten strength had they not worshipped Jesus?
- E. Jesus said to the woman at the well in John 4, "The true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father is seeking such people to worship him." (John 4:23)
- F. Jesus often went away to pray to the Father...an act of worship.
- G. When Jesus appeared to the disciples after his resurrection, the disciples worshipped Him. Matthew 28:16-17 we read this, "Then the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain where Jesus had told them to go. When they saw him, they worshiped him; but some doubted."
- H. As followers of Jesus, you and I are to worship the Lord, because of His steadfast love and faithfulness in ALL things.
- I. The past three weeks have been difficult for Stacy and me for quite a few reasons, but one thing Stacy said to me after worship last week was, "It's so good to worship with our church family." See, despite all the challenges in our lives, worship is like coming home...giving thanks to God for the lessons and the grace He gives through it all.
- J. Worship isn't a magic pill that fixes your life or makes everything OK. What it DOES do is reorient your life to God by bowing before Him humbly giving thanks and praise. Moses fell on his knees. The disciples fell at Jesus' feet. Worship is getting low, so God can be elevated to the place He deserves in your life.
- K. So the question is: What gear are you in for worship? And, how do you grow in this milestone of worship?
- L. For each milestone, we'll go through 4 gears or levels of engagement that can give you a baseline for where you are in your life of worship. If you're just getting into it, then there's room to learn more about worship. If you're growing and engaging, then there's always room to be more and more centered.
- M. No one has it all figured out, for sure. Together, we can move grow together. If you want, you can follow along with me on the HANDOUT that is in your bulletin.
 - i. The first stage of a life of worship that is accelerating on the intentional discipleship highway is EXPLORING.

- a. This is like first gear. You've taken the on ramp and are beginning to get up to speed. You're beginning to move and get a feel for what God's mandate is for worship.
 - b. If I had to make some statements about the experience in the EXPLORING phase, they would be, "I attend worship when a friend invites me. I come to worship when it's convenient or when I'm free. Or, when I feel a need, I head to worship."
 - c. Questions for self-reflection would be:
 - i) Are there aspects of worship that I want to do more?
 - ii) What is holding me back from more regular Sunday morning worship attendance?
 - iii) Am I willing to start attending 1 or more Sundays per month without the need or prompting from others?
 - d. If you find yourself in this stage, make a small step to ask a friend or family member to help keep you accountable. Put worship on your calendar and just start building a habit of regular worship attendance. If you've gotten out of the habit of worship attendance, then the New Year is a great time to re-establish a pattern of worship.
- ii. Second gear is the FOLLOWING stage.
- a. This stage can be best categorized as, "I attend worship regularly, but I'm growing to realize that I need to attend to God every day."
 - b. Worship is great and you connect with people who are getting to know you and you are getting to know.
 - c. In the FOLLOWING stage, though, there's a growing discontent because you keep thinking there has to be more. Many people get stuck or discouraged at this phase because worship isn't enough, but the church doesn't always do a very good job of helping to SHIFT gears. You begin asking, "Aren't we THERE yet?"
 - d. Questions for this stage:
 - i) When worship is over, do I feel hungry for more, but aren't sure what else to do?
 - ii) Have I found that Sunday worship isn't enough and I feel like a daily routine of worship is something I desire?
 - e. If that's you, then begin a daily routine of worship. Pick up a devotional or find one online. Find a prayer group or small group that spends time in worship and prayer. Again, set a reminder in your calendar or phone to spend a few minutes praising God, giving thanks, or just singing.

- iii. You're moving to third gear - BECOMING.
 - a. At this stage, you attend worship regularly and you are setting aside time daily to connect with God in prayer.
 - b. One of the challenges with this stage is that your faith life is still a little compartmentalized. Worship on Sunday...read and pray at 6am. Then, the rest of the day is crowded out with work, kids, family, worry, and whatever else is less focused on God.
 - c. For those who have been at this for a while, we get stuck here because we're not sure how to do anything else. Life has huge demands and we do all we can to make through each day.
 - d. Questions to ask yourself:
 - i) Do I desire to be at more peace during the day, during the week?
 - ii) Am I enjoying the times I set apart for God, but why don't I feel God's presence more at other times?
 - e. At this stage, reorienting a life of worship from becoming centered on Christ to fully-centered is the difference between being on a diet and living a lifestyle of healthy eating. Being on a diet focuses on the meals and the things you can't have. Engaging in a healthy lifestyle incorporates every aspect of life, meals and every minute in between.
 - f. A life of worship at this stage is growing and beginning to be nourishing to the soul every day. Now, it's time to be intentional about shifting to being CENTERED, which is phase 4.
- iv. CENTERED:
 - a. For this gear, you worship God in the ways you work, play, engage others in relationships and in all of life.
 - b. When I encounter people who operate at this level of intentional discipleship, I'm always amazed at how they talk and think and pray. They're able to see and interpret all aspects of life from more than a surface level of awareness of God at work.
 - c. This level of discipleship is a place we all can be...and we should be asking each other how it's going...how can we pray for each other... share meals, share times of trial and praise, and be encouraging each other every day.

4. Conclusion

- A. "Are we there yet?" Maybe...but whatever gear you find yourself in for this first milestone of worship, begin to assess honestly and make the intentional decision to CLUTCH...SHIFT...ACCELERATE...and REPEAT.

- B. One day, we'll be worshipping with the angels who are already worshipping right now around us.
- C. In Revelation 5:11-14, here's what we have to forward to: "Then I looked and heard the voice of many angels, numbering thousands upon thousands, and ten thousand times ten thousand. They encircled the throne and the living creatures and the elders. In a loud voice they were saying: "Worthy is the Lamb, who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and strength and honor and glory and praise!" Then I heard every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and on the sea, and all that is in them, saying: "To him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb be praise and honor and glory and power, for ever and ever!" The four living creatures said, "Amen," and the elders fell down and worshiped."
- D. Are we there yet? Not in the same way, but a life of worship that's growing gives us a little glimpse of that...here and now.
- E. We're going to spend a few minutes pondering this as we remain seated and allow the praise team to lead us in two songs. The first is a reflection song about our engagement in worship, so let's stay seated for the first one.
- F. The second song will be our call to EXTOL GOD - praising Him enthusiastically.
- G. Intentionally choose a life of worship...explore, follow, become, be centered...
- H. Let's pray...