

MESSAGE: “Here I Am to Worship”

Text: Romans 12:1-2 (*The Message*)

Shift #2: Worship as Event to: Worshipful Life (Shift/Phil Maynard)

Purpose: the purpose of this message is to encourage a paradigm shift from worship as a component of life to life as an expression of worship.

In 1996, my congregation sent me to a pastor’s convention in Atlanta, Ga. It was a sacrificial gift on their part, not inexpensive, offered to help me renew my passion for ministry in God’s service. At the time, I was clinically depressed for reasons beyond the scope of this message. God hadn’t left the building, but I sure felt like God had left my building. How could I possibly help others experience God when my own experience of God was misplaced?

I left my wife and three young children at the airport and flew to Atlanta to attend a Promise Keeper’s worship event with 42,000 other pastors from around the world. The speakers were top-notch, and the music was inspirational, strategically-planned to transport you into the very presence of God. All around me, there were colleagues practically glowing with a profound experience of the sacred: laughing, weeping, kneeling, praying, dancing, hugging, singing, speaking in other languages, falling on the floor entranced. And there I was, feeling... Well, feeling nothing at all, except perhaps like a fish out of water. “I don’t fit in with this,” I lamented, all the while, begging God to show up for me in some discernible way.

When the five-hour worship ‘event’ was over, I plunged into an ocean of pastors making their way to the subway system in order to be transported to overnight accommodations. There were so many of us, we could barely move, inching forward toe by toe. Then, spontaneously, a baritone began to sing, “Amazing Grace, how sweet the sound that saved a wretch like me...” People stopped talking to listen, “I once was lost, but now am found, was blind but now I see...” Other voices began to join in, “T’was grace that taught my heart to fear, and grace my fears relieved...” Something stirred within, and I, too, felt compelled to sing, “how precious did that grace appear the hour I first believed...”

Standing there in downtown Atlanta, waiting for the subway, I felt the presence of God, flowing through the whole lot of us. During the rest of my days there, as I encountered folks at the hotel, in the restaurants, on the street, on the return trip to the airport, they asked if I was part of the crowd singing “Amazing Grace.” As I reflected on it later, I realized, ‘We did not sing the song; the song itself sang us.’

There is nothing wrong with corporate worship, (nice observation to make as I speak to a congregation gathered for corporate worship), but it is no substitute for a worshipful life. I'm sure you have heard of the fabled story of a pastor who visited a parishioner who had not been in church for some time. As they visited by the fire, a glowing coal snapped to the hearth and they watched it cool, losing its glow and warmth. After a time, the pastor lifted the ember with tongs and returned it to the fire where it again began to glow. It is a useful metaphor that illustrates our need for one another in living as disciples of Jesus.

But here's the thing: an hour per week of worship does not a disciple make, and a day of worship per week does not a church make! At our core, we are worshippers. It isn't something we do, but something we are. "Consider the lilies of the field," Jesus said, "how they grow; they neither toil nor spin, yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not clothed like one of these."

One might ask, "What is the purpose of a lily?" To be sure, it participates in the cycle of photosynthesis by supplying needed oxygen, but its primary purpose is to look and smell beautiful. In other words, to glorify the One who made it. Similarly, we may have many purposes in life, but celebrating the One who made and redeemed us nourishes the soul like nothing else!

God has planted within each of us a capacity for passion, and that passion is the heart of worship. Who and what we give it to fosters health or dis-ease. We may overflow with passion for a person, a sport, a hobby, or a vocational pursuit. We may be passionate over a vacation paradise, the language of music, a political cause, or a friend of fur or feather. Such passions are gifts God has placed in our hearts, but any one of them becomes idolatrous if it is the center of our worship.

"What is the greatest commandment?" Jesus once was asked. His reply echoes eternally, "Love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul and strength, and the second is like it, Love your neighbor as yourself." This expression of worship is organic to the heart that is truly alive in God. Which brings us to the second shift described in Phil Maynard's book, *Shift: Helping Congregations Back into the Game of Effective Ministry*: a shift from worship as an 'event' to 'worship as a lifestyle' or, as I prefer to say it, 'a worshipful life'.

What exactly is a worshipful life? A worshipful life honors God not only at church, but also in the driver's seat, at the coffee-pot, in the movie theater, on the ski-slope, at the dinner-table, on the battlefield, in the ER, in the classroom, and yes, in the bedroom, too. A worshipful life invites God into our thoughts, feelings, dreams and memories too—healing those that are painful, restoring hope to those beyond reach, and awakening those that are precious.

Let's face it. There are times when God feels far away. Sometimes it is related to our own sin or brokenness, but not always. The worshipful life cannot rest until God is loved. It isn't about a certain style of praise, order of worship, offering given or sacrifice made. In fact, after King David had made a spectacular mess of his life, he identified God's definition of worship, "You have no delight in sacrifice; if I were to give a burnt offering, you would not be pleased. The sacrifice acceptable to God is a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise." The worshipful life is not someone who prays and sings hymns 24/7, but one who surrenders to God in the moment.

The alcoholic who is tempted to grab for the bottle, yet recognizes the voice of God calling him or her to call a sponsor instead offers an act of worship more genuine than many preacher's prayers of invocation. The person at a gas pump who notices a family living from their car and offers to fill their tank or buy them breakfast participates in an act of worship more authentic than many anthems that might be sung. The worshipful life is one that loves God enough to be available to God at a moment's notice.

There are spiritual practices and disciplines that can help us grow into a worshipful life. If you desire, I would be delighted to explore them with you, but if you really want to grow into a worshipful life, learn to bless the life of the one in front of you. The smile it brings to the two of you will reflect the smile of the One who made you both.