

WORSHIP 24/7

October 27, 2019

UMCG

If I were to ask you to offer a description of worship—how would you reply? For most of us—myself included—our minds most likely picture a worship service. We would likely describe a service that includes a call to worship, hymns and prayers, special music, a sermon followed by receiving an offering, and so forth. What we would be describing is worship as an event...an hour on Sunday morning. Romans 12:1-2, is all about worship...but worship as a lifestyle. Phil Maynard, in his book *Shift: Helping Congregations Back into the Game of Effective Ministry*, believes that many churches today need to shift from “Worship as an Event to Worship as a Lifestyle” as we tend to over focus on worship as event.

Truth be told, both worship as event and worship as a lifestyle are important. Both flow into and out of each other. Worship as event ideally leads to worship as a lifestyle. Two weeks ago, I preached on the vital connection of worship as an event and worship as a lifestyle as we looked at the call to ministry of the Prophet Isaiah in Isaiah chapter 6. As you recall, the prophet showed up to worship in the temple in Jerusalem, and got his socks knocked off! (More likely his sandals.) What an event that visit to the temple was! For in worship, he looked up and saw God as God truly is...a holy yet merciful God. That vision of God caused the prophet to look inward, to himself, to see himself as he truly was...flawed, imperfect, in need of God’s love and grace. Having received God’s forgiveness and mercy, Isaiah was then able to look out and see the world as God sees the world...broken, hurting, in need of God’s love and mercy, justice and peace. And thus Isaiah was able to move from worship in the temple as an event...to worship as service, as lifestyle in the world 24/7.

Last week, Pastor Becky focused primarily on worship as an event, as a GPS in life that gives our lives meaning, direction and purpose. Today, my focus is on worship as a lifestyle...what happens after we leave the sanctuary. Romans 12:1-2 will help us better understand worship as a lifestyle. What I’d like for you to take away from my sermon are 3 points, 3 facets, or aspects of worship as lifestyle 24/7.

For starters, worship as lifestyle is merciful...It's all about mercy. Paul in Romans 12:1 writes "I appeal to you, through the mercies of God, to present your bodies to God as a living sacrifice—acceptable to God—which is your **spiritual worship**." Paul starts off by saying, "I appeal to you therefore." (In seminary, I was taught that whenever you see a "therefore" ...ask what it's there for!) Paul appeals to the Roman Christians to engage in worship as a lifestyle...but on what basis? The answer? On the basis of the first 11 chapters of his letter to the Romans. You see, worship as a lifestyle doesn't just appear out of the blue. It's based on something. What is that something? It is the **mercies of God**. Romans 1-11 is all about the mercies of God demonstrated in the saving work of Jesus. Romans 1-11 is all about the mercies...the love...the grace of God offered to us. God has been merciful to us. By God's grace we have been reconciled with God—fully accepted by God. Romans 1-11 spells out, in detail, how God has been merciful to us through the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

And so, the basis of a lifestyle of worship 24/7 is none other than the mercy of God. Mercy that we have received. Our lives, our daily lives, are built on God's mercy. As Pastor John Piper puts it, Romans 12 oozes with mercy. (1) It tells us to "show mercy with cheerfulness. Let love be genuine. Give to the saints. Bless those who persecute you. Weep with those who weep. Associate with the lowly. Repay no one evil for evil. Never avenge yourselves. If your enemy is hungry – feed him/her." Rev. Piper goes on to remind us, however, that a merciful life is built on a worshipful life. They go together. Before we give ourselves away in mercy to others. Before we give ourselves away in ministries of "mercy," we give ourselves away in worship to God.

And so I ask: To whom were you merciful this past week? An irritating member of the family? A difficult co-worker? A spouse or significant other? That guy driving like a maniac down Randall Road? How will you and I display mercy...today... and in the coming days 24/7? Worship as a lifestyle is **merciful**.

2. Worship as a lifestyle is a **presentation**. A daily presentation of ourselves...literally our bodies...to God. You've no doubt heard the phrase – "80% of life is simply showing up." Pastor Elizabeth Milford, in a blog, points out that this well-known phrase indicates the importance of presence in life. (2) Bodily presence.

In times of crisis, a friend's personal presence can make all the difference! When one's health fails, a friend's personal presence can work wonders. And it's not just for the difficult times. As a teen ager playing sports in H.S. in Akron, Ohio, I recall scanning the crowd, looking for Mom and Dad and others who were there, bodily, to support me and cheer me on.

Paul calls this presentation of our bodies to God and others a "living sacrifice." In Paul's day, because of Jesus' death and resurrection, worship was no longer about presenting *dead*, sacrificed animals to God in worship. No! It was about presenting one's self...one's *living body*...to God and others. These living sacrifices result not in death...but in life...healing...and wholeness in our world. Worship as a lifestyle...24/7...is our bodily presentation of ourselves to God and others in life-giving, healing ways.

3. But it doesn't end there. There's another saying you've no doubt heard. "Showing up is half the battle." Well, according to Paul in Romans 12: 2, there is more to embodied faith and worship than presenting our physical bodies to God. That's half the battle. Worship as a lifestyle also involves our minds. Worship as lifestyle is holistic, involving body and mind. Verse 2 says: "Do not be conformed to this world but be transformed by the renewal of your minds to discern what God wants...what is good, acceptable and perfect." In short, worship as a lifestyle is not simply a presentation of our bodies...it is a **transformation** of our minds and selves that results in the transformation of others whose lives we touch. And as you know so well, our mission is to make disciples of Jesus Christ for the *transformation* of the world.

The Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. preached a most powerful sermon on Romans 12:2 titled "Transformed Nonconformist." (3) In just two powerful words he summed up the essence of this verse—"transformed nonconformity." As the NIV version of the Bible puts it: "Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be *transformed* by the renewal of your minds." Our culture exerts incredible pressure on us to think and to live our lives according to its values and standards...many that don't align with God's values. The challenge for us is whether or not we will be "conformed" to the world or "transformed" by God.

Rev. King asserts that as followers of Jesus, we must be “makers of history, not be shaped by history.” He goes on to say in his sermon that “most people are thermometers that register the temperature of the majority, not thermostats that transform and regulate the temperature of society.” He reminds us of the church’s complicity in slavery, racial discrimination, wars, economic disparity and exploitation, the Holocaust and so forth. Will we be thermometers? Or thermostats in our daily lives?

Today, I’d like to close by reading Eugene Peterson’s adaptation of Romans 12:1-2 from *The Message*. “So here’s what I want you to do, God helping you. Take your everyday, ordinary life—your sleeping, eating, going to work, and walking around life—and place it before God as an offering. Embracing what God does for you is the best thing you can do for God. Don’t become so well-adjusted to your culture that you fit into it without even thinking. Instead, fix your attention on God. You’ll be changed from the inside out. Readily recognize what God wants for you, and quickly respond to it. Unlike the culture around you, always dragging you down to its level of immaturity, God brings the best out of you, develops well-formed maturity in you.” May it ever be!

Amen.

- 1 Rev. John Piper, *desiringGod* blog, “Present Your Bodies As a Living Sacrifice to God,” June 2004.
- 2 Rev. Elizabeth Lovell Milford, “Transformed,” a sermon based on Romans 12:1-8, August 27, 2017.
- 3 Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr. “Transformed Nonconformist,” in *The Strength to Love*. Boston: Beacon Press, pp. 11-20.