

Contagious Worship

I will declare your name to my people; in the assembly I will praise you. (Psalm 22:22)

Scripture: Psalm 22:22–28

Song: “How Great Is Our God”

Walter is a worship leader at my church. The joy that flows from his smile while he is worshiping God is genuine and contagious. After a particularly hard and exhausting week, it took all my energy just to make it to church. I was focused on all the things that were weighing me down. Then I looked up at Walter and saw him smiling. It was impossible for me not to think about God’s greatness. My focus shifted, and I joined in worshiping God.

In today’s passage, David feels abandoned and attacked by others. In the middle of his struggles, he decides to gather with others in worshiping God. His focus begins to change from the burdens he is facing to the God who is greater than those burdens. David’s desire is not just to worship God, but that “all the ends of the earth will remember and turn to the LORD” (v. 27).

When we join with other believers in worship, we can inspire each other to focus on all God has done for us. There is always going to be someone around us with heavy burdens and in need of encouragement. May we be the Walter they need to remind them that God is bigger than their troubles.

Father, let me encourage someone who is hurting today by showing them the joy of worshiping You. In Jesus’ name I pray. Amen.

January 26–February 1. **PJ Kitchen, ThM**, has taught as an adjunct professor at Spring Arbor University for 14 years. He teaches at Cornerstone University and is a graduate of Cornerstone Theological Seminary. He previously served as a youth minister and led a network of area youth pastors.

Saying Thanks

I have not stopped giving thanks for you, remember you in my prayers. (Ephesians 1:16)

Scripture: Ephesians 1:15–23

Song: “Give Thanks”

A couple of years ago, I was encouraged to think about the people who made a positive impact on me. In the list, I included the names of friends who were no longer in my life but who had been there for me during some pivotal times. Even though I hadn't seen them in years, I reached out to couple of them to them to thank them for the way they had helped me.

Paul spent three years with the Ephesian believers as he led them to Christ and partnered with them to establish a new church in their city. When he writes a letter to them years later, he starts by sharing a message of gratitude. He wants them to know that despite all the challenges they were facing, he is grateful for them and for the difference they are making.

There are people in our lives who have made a positive impact on us. Maybe they were only there for a short season, but when we think about them we feel grateful. Take the time to write down the names of those people and thank God for the specific impact they had. Then pick one or two of them and reach out to thank them for the difference they made.

Father, I thank You for the people You have brought into my life who have helped me grow closer to You. Let them know how much they are appreciated. In Jesus' name I pray. Amen.

Passing the Test

“Simon Peter answered, ‘You are the Messiah, the Son of the Living God.’” (Matthew 16:16)

Scripture: Matthew 16:13–30

Song: “Because He Lives”

I remember the day I took the ACT college entrance exam. I hadn’t slept well the night before and was nervous and tired as I walked into the testing center. The thought that kept running through my mind was, “Am I ready for this?”

After asking His disciples to summarize what others said about Him, Jesus tested them by asking, “Who do you say that I am?” Peter spoke up quickly, “Jesus, you are the Messiah, the Son of the living God.” Jesus affirmed that this was the right answer and that knowing this would make all the difference for Peter in the tests he would face in the future.

We all face tests in our daily lives. It might be a traffic jam or stress at work. Other times the tests will be much bigger. The doctor gives us bad news or someone we are close to passes away. It is in those moments Jesus asks us the same question He asked His disciples. Do we believe that He is just a prophet or that He is the Son of the living God? If He is just a prophet, calling on Him won’t do us much good, will it? But if we believe He is the Son of the living God, we can be confident that He will walk with us through whatever tests we face.

Father, I believe that You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God. Help me remember who You are when life gets hard. In Jesus’ name I pray. Amen.

A Life Well-Lived

If either of them falls down, one can help the other up. But pity anyone who falls and has no one to help pick them up. (Ecclesiastes 4:10)

Scripture: Ecclesiastes 4:7–12

Song: “Trading My Sorrows”

I was awakened by a phone call that my dad was being rushed to the hospital for emergency surgery for a ruptured aorta. Over the next several weeks he would go through intensive rehab before he could return home. I watched as his friends supported him and his sister flew across the country to stay with him when my brother and I were not available.

The book of Ecclesiastes addresses the question of what makes a well-lived life. The author talks about a man who works hard and becomes wealthy. The tragic part of the story is that this man has no family or friends with whom to enjoy his riches. Even though he has many possessions, he is all alone.

While my dad worked hard at his career, he also invested a lot of his time with family and close friends. When he had a life-threatening heart condition, that investment showed in the way others helped him when he needed it most. Are we mostly focused on our jobs and portfolio, or are we taking time for family and friends? As the writer of Ecclesiastes says, this will lead to a life well-lived.

Father, I want to live a life that honors You by the way I value my relationships with the people You’ve placed in my life. Show me how I can invest in others and help someone today. In Jesus’ name I pray. Amen.

God's Amazing Story

Let everything that has breath praise the Lord. (Psalm 150:6)

Scripture: Psalm 150

Song: “10,000 Reasons (Bless the Lord)”

I love detective novels. My favorite authors are the ones who use foreshadowing effectively, like when a character makes a comment early in the story that hints at something that is unknown but yet to come. It shows how much effort the author put into crafting the storyline for the reader's enjoyment.

I have come to view the storyline of the Bible in a similar way. However, God is not just the writer of the story; He is also the main character. He created humanity, and despite our sin the entire storyline is God restoring us back what He started in the beginning. What we read about in the creation story is an intentional foreshadowing of what we will experience later in the New Heaven and New Earth. And it is because of God's power and surpassing greatness in writing this story that we can praise Him.

We can sometimes wonder if God has forgotten us or think we are not good enough for Him. If we have breath in our lungs, we don't have to convince Him to include us. The storyline has already been written, and He has already invited us to be part of it. Think of the powerful acts He has done to accomplish His plan, especially through Jesus Christ. No one is greater than He is.

Father, as long as I have breath in my lungs, I will praise You for creating the universe. As long as I have breath, I will praise You for including me in Your story. In Jesus' name, amen.

Keep Planting Seeds

Night and day, whether he sleeps or gets up, the seed sprouts and grows, though he does not know how. (Mark 4:27)

Scripture: Mark 4:26–32

Song: “This Little Light of Mine”

It was the summer before my senior year in high school. My friend Jimmy and I were sitting on the deck of his house on the lake. As we looked out at the water, he asked me if I was nervous about what would happen after we graduated high school. I told him that I believed in God and trusted that He had a good future planned for me. It seemed like a random conversation, but little did I know that the seeds from that conversation would yield a harvest later.

Jesus tells a story about how the Kingdom of God works. He says it's like planting a seed that will eventually grow up into a harvest. Even when the person planting the seed has little control over making the seed grow, the initial act of planting the seed makes a difference.

I saw Jimmy about five years later, and he told me he had given his life to Christ and was now following Him. What a blessing! Whether you hear about the results or not, don't ever forget that the seeds we plant into people's lives make a difference. God promises to use them to grow up a harvest in the future!

Father, show me the opportunities I have today to plant the seeds of Your love and mercy in the hearts of those around me. In Jesus' name I pray. Amen.

It's Not About Me

To equip his people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we reach unity in the faith.
(Ephesians 4:12–13)

Scripture: Ephesians 4:4–16

Song: “They’ll Know We Are Christians”

When I was growing up in the 1980s, it was common for public figures to say they wanted world peace when asked what they most wanted to see on earth. That answer always sounded unrealistic to me when I considered all the conflict in the world. While I still think the sentiment may be a little naïve, it does show that a reflection of what God desires for us to experience is inside many people. He originally created us to live in harmony, not in conflict with each other.

Paul explains to the Ephesians that God has given different gifts to each person. The goal is not for our personal advancement, but to build unity among His people. Paul says that when we are all operating in the gifts God has given us, we will experience unity along with becoming complete and mature. We will experience a world full of peace and not conflict.

Think about how God has gifted each one of us. Are we using those gifts to help people around us? If we are, then we should expect to see more unity within our churches. We should expect to see maturity. The result will be less conflict and more peace in the world.

Father, thank You for the gifts and abilities You have given me. Show me how I can use them today to serve others and bring about unity. In Jesus’ name I pray. Amen.