

I. Intro

A. When we were living out west, I bought this sculpture.

1. We were young and poor, and I made my purchase at a garage sale. I paid 50 cents for this boat. You should know, not everyone in our home thought that was a good deal. In fact, my purchase was ridiculed. It was suggested that I had overpaid for it, and after a few weeks of being displayed over the fire place, it was relegated to a closet. There were even efforts to throw it away.

2. So imagine my joy when I found an identical wire sail boat in an art shop a few years later, on sale for \$300 dollars. Which was 600 times more than I had paid. (A point I began repeating whenever my judgement on other matters was questioned.)

B. A while back I heard a related story. It was about an older woman who had inherited a broach from her grandmother some forty years earlier. The story was, it had been in the family a long time, but no one thought much about it. In fact, no one liked it.

C. Well, as her life was winding down, she started handing things off to her heirs. In that process, she took the broach in for an appraisal. And after examining it the jeweler got very excited and announced that it was the most valuable thing he had ever seen in his long career - worth more than everything in his shop combined.

D. The woman was stunned. And then she was mad, because she had not lived her life in light of the value of the broach that had been there all along.

E. Here's the deal: you have access to something worth more than this sculpture or the broach. You have access to God. You have access to a relationship with the Creator of everything everywhere. You have been invited into a relationship with your heavenly Father – an abundant life today and eternal life thereafter. This relationship should change everything about the way you live.

II. Last week I argued that we need to understand the goal of life, the point, our reason for being here. We need to know how to win.

A. I then offered a fly-over of the book of Ecclesiastes, where King Solomon plays a philosophy professor using the Socratic method, brutally forcing his students to admit that the three most common approaches to life - humanism, hedonism and existentialism – do not work.

1. He argues that these views fall apart if we live “under the sun,” which is a code for life without God. The one who dies with the most toys, still dies.

B. From there we jumped to the end of Ecclesiastes, where Solomon explains how to win. He says: live for God.

1. We need to order our life – make our decisions, establish our values – in light of God, and in light of the fact that we are going to live forever.

C. From there we looked at how the Apostle John stunned the Greek philosophers of his day by saying, “there is meaning. There is purpose for life. I know that you have given up ever hoping you could figure this out. But the purpose for life – the logos – is not an idea it's a person: Jesus.

1. Jesus came so that we can have abundant life today – that's what he promises in John 10:10.

2. And He came so we can have eternal life tomorrow – which is what he promised in John 3:16. “For God so loved the world that He gave his only son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.”

3. Jesus is the path we want to take. Jesus is the way forward. Discovering life with God pivots around Jesus.

D. Today we start unpacking what that looks like - what we get invited into. What having a relationship with God looks like.

E. In an effort to make this simple and memorable, we’ve laid it out under three headlines: Love God, Serve Others and Reach One. And today we are taking the first one. Love God.

III. What does loving God look like?

A. How do we do it? How do we do it today, in this postmodern, post-truth, post-fact, alt-news, reality-TV culture, in which many people spend a lot of time watching cat videos and getting their news via 140 character chunks, from celebrities. How do we love God in a world that is ripped apart by horrific weather and in a society that is overshadowed by unstable nuclear states, racial ugliness and an increasingly caustic public square? What does it look like to love God in this world?

IV. It strikes me that there are different ways we might attack the question.

A. We could focus on love.

1. The Bible uses different words to distinguish between different kinds of love: *eros* is for sexual love, *phileo* is for brotherly love. We could dig into the Greek word *agape* to explore the qualities of love at its essence. There are also key chapters to turn to – I Cor. 13, I John 4, several Psalms - but I’ve done that before.

B. We might think about and then script some ways that love should shape our behavior.

1. When we love someone, we act in ways that honor them. We could study that so we know exactly how to act. But I’m a bit nervous about providing a script. These lists easily lead to legalism or a lot of self-righteous effort.

C. I want to propose a different approach. I’d like us to think about worship. My premise is, if we worship God a lot of things will fall into place. But our worship needs to be real. Authentic. Let’s think about what that means. I have six points.

V. First, I want to define worship in a particular way: worship is our natural response to something awesome.

A. When we are in the presence of something amazing, we are amazed. This is especially true if we go there with others.

B. One place to see this spontaneous worship – especially, spontaneous collective worship – is a sporting event. Adoring fans get excited. They sing. They shout. They jump up and down and high five. In fact, their whole week often leads up to the game. They buy and wear jerseys. They read write ups. They engage in pre-game parties. They order their week and pay lots of money and invest their hope in a team. And when their team prevails they celebrate.

C. You see it in other places besides sports – you see it wherever people are able to recognize something great – in art, music, anything really – there is an admiration that is elicited that can lead to worship.

VI. Point two –we are wired to worship.

A. We do not have to be told to worship. We can't help it. It is part of what it means to be human.

B. In the first Harry Potter novel, Harry stumbles upon the Mirror of Erised – which is “desire” spelled backwards.

1. Harry looks in the mirror and sees his parents who are dead. He sees that they love him. He is so overjoyed that he runs to get Ron. Only Ron doesn't see Harry's parents at all. He sees himself as the head prefect, a sports champion and all around big shot.

2. They do not understand what is going on until Dumbledore explains to them that what the mirror shows them is their real hope, what they really want, what they are living for. So, everyone sees something different. But everyone sees something. We all have a great hope. An animating dream. Something we believe will complete us, bring us joy and peace.

C. Another book brings the same idea to mind. I've been reading *Sapiens: A Brief History of Humankind*, Yuval Noah Harari's book about humans. I'm not recommending it. I am bringing it up because as soon as I started reading I was reminded that years ago the argument was made that we should not be called Homo *Sapiens*, we should be called Homo *Religious*, because what makes us different from the animals is that we worship. Our lives end up pivoting around something.

D. So, point one. Worship is a natural response to something great. Second, we are wired to worship.

VII. Number three: The Bible doesn't tell us to worship, it tells us to worship God.

A. The First Commandment says – you shall have no other Gods before me. Worship God, not anything else. And the rest of the Old Testament is riddled with passages about not worshipping anything else. Some claim discussions of idolatry are the most frequent topic in the Old Testament. Why? Because we will naturally worship something - money, sex, power, pleasure, god, the Chicago Bears, something. Good things elicit a response. We are wired to worship. So the directives we get are not to worship, but to worship God.

VIII. Four: Perhaps the principal reason the Bible has so much to say about worship is because it shapes us.

A. The reason the Bible has so much to say about worship is not because God needs our kind words. That would be rather pathetic. The Psalms are full of commands to praise God. If God was telling us to do this because his ego needed feeding, well, that would be pathetic. But He does not. God is perfectly complete on his own.

B. C. S. Lewis said God doesn't gain anymore from our adoration than a writer gains from the barks of approval of his dog. The reason the Bible tells us to worship God is because, worshipping God shapes and completes us. It leads to a life that is rightly ordered.¹

C. We are shaped by what we worship. If we worship money it takes us down one path. If we worship power it takes us down another path. We become like the things we love. We are most fully alive, most fully human, most what we were made to be when we worship God. Worshipping God shapes us in the best ways possible. Worshipping anything else – no matter how good that other person or thing might be – makes us smaller than God intends for us to be.

D. Worship forms us. What forms you? What occupies first place in your life? What do you value most? Financial security? Rest? Power? Your reputation?

IX. Point Five: We are instructed to focus on God.

A. Because God is amazing – indeed, He is amazing in ways that will fascinate us for eternity - the more we know about Him – and the more we know Him! - the easier He is to worship. Therefore, our job is to look. Our job is to focus. Our job is to prioritize events that help us know God. Our job is to create patterns of life that direct us back to God. This point is made over and over in the Psalms.

B. Psalm 95 reads:

1. **Come** (this is a command. It's in the imperative mode), **let us sing for joy to the Lord; let us shout aloud to the Rock of our salvation. Come before him with thanksgiving and extol him with music and song.**

2. David says: set aside time to engage in worship of God. In this case, singing and shouting – which, I will say again, is exactly what happens at Soldier Field every time the Bears score. The crowd sings, "Bear Down, Chicago Bears."

C. We get something similar in Psalm 100

1. **Acknowledge that the Lord is God! He made us, and we are His. We are His people, the sheep of His pasture.** (Again, this is a command. An order. We are being told – do this!)

2. **Enter His gates with thanksgiving, go into His courts with praise.**

3. **Give thanks to Him and praise His name. For the Lord is good. His unfailing love continues forever, and His faithfulness continues to each generation.**

D. We are directed to slow down and reflect on who God is and what He has done. We are told to pray and read the Word and to meditate and sing and go to worship. Why? Because:

1. When we do these things, we reflect on God;

2. And when we reflect on God we worship;

3. And when we worship we are completed and we are also shaped in good directions.

X. OK, so far I have argued that:

A. Worship is a comprehensive response to something great.

B. The Bible doesn't tell us to worship, the Bible knows we will worship. It instructs us to worship God. More specifically, it tells us to focus on God.

C. Because worship shapes us and because we were created to be completed in a relationship with God, we can never do better – we can never be more complete, we can never find a better life – than one that revolves around God. We must prioritize focusing on God.

XI. Six: We need to worship God in good times and in bad.

A. Let me flesh out this point with a story from II Sam. 6, which is a story about David and a worship experience that goes bad. To appreciate what is going on I need to tell you what happens in II Samuel 5.

B. In chapter five, three big things go well: Saul – who has been trying to kill David – dies and David is made king in his place. Second, David captures Jerusalem and turns it into his capital; and third, David deals a crushing blow to the Philistines – Israel's enemy.

C. To put this in today's terms. It would be as though: 1) The board fires the CEO that was trying to get you removed and places you in that role; 2) you successfully negotiate a deal that secures for you Apples new corporate headquarters; and 3) the courts rule in your favor on a huge patent infringement suit you brought against your biggest competitor. As a result, they are sending you a check for several billion dollars and going out of business. David is on a roll.

D. Some of you are on a roll. Some of you have had a chapter five week or month or year. And when that happens, it's easy to be happy. It is easy to thank God.

E. So, it's no surprise that in chapter 6, David plans a huge celebration – a big worship event. He decides to have a parade with 30,000 people processing into Jerusalem – and as part of this he is going to bring in the ark of the covenant

1. Which, in the event that you missed *Raiders of the Lost Ark*, is a box that was overlaid with gold. It has models of two angels on the top. Inside are holy relics. It was believed that this was where God most fully manifested His presence. (God is everywhere, but there is a sense in which he is more fully in some places than others. And this was the place He said He was most present). The ark was understood to be the most holy object anywhere. And the Jews used to parade it around to show it off. Or bring it into battle for good luck. Tragically, in one battle they lost it. The Philistines captured it. But when it was in their camp their idols kept getting destroyed, so they sent it back. It ended up in a field. David is going to bring it into Jerusalem.

F. We read in I Samuel 6 that there is this big worship parade – with David leading the way. And they are singing and dancing and celebrating. David has had a chapter five week and everything is good and he wants to praise God. But something goes wrong.

G. In I Samuel 6:6 we read:

1. When they came to the threshing floor of Nakon, Uzzah reached out and took hold of the ark of God, because the oxen stumbled. The Lord's anger burned against Uzzah because of his irreverent act; therefore, God struck him down, and he died there beside the ark of God.

H. One of the men carrying the ark on a cart – which is not how it is supposed to be carried – (there are rules for how it is to be handled. But apparently those rules are inconvenient. David isn't following them. So when the cart lurches, Uzzah reaches out to steady the ark and keep it from falling, and as soon as he touches it, God kills him. Which puts a real damper on the party. This is exactly the kind of thing that gives the Old Testament a bad rap. You can imagine, David is shocked and mad and a bit unnerved.

1. Reading on, verse 8: **Then David was angry because the Lord's wrath had broken out against Uzzah... V9: David was afraid of the Lord that day and said, "How can the ark of the Lord ever come to me?"**

I. He was not willing to take the ark of the Lord to be with him in the City of David. Instead, he took it to the house of Obed-Edom the Gittite and left it there.

XII. Woodruff, where are you going with this?

A. Stay with me. This is not my main point. I simply want to note that sometimes worship isn't convenient.² David apparently couldn't be bothered with doing things the way he had been instructed. Our convenience is not the highest good. We are not God. God is God. Making time for God is not always going to be convenient. But let me keep reading.

B. Later in chapter six, we read that three months after the death of Uzzah, David's advisors came to him and said, "Obed-Edom the Gittite, is having one chapter five week after the next." (He is the guy who has the ark parked in his garage). "God is blessing him over and over. We need to get the Ark into Jerusalem." And David agrees. But this time they do things differently.

C. Let me read this, beginning in verse 12: **Now King David was told, "The Lord has blessed the household of Obed-Edom and everything he has, because of the ark of God." So David went to bring up the ark of God from the house of Obed-Edom to the City of David with rejoicing. When those who were carrying the ark of the Lord had taken six steps, they sacrificed a bull and a fattened calf."**

1. A more accurate translation would read, "every six steps they took they offered a sacrifice."

2. Slaughtering a bull and a fattened calf were ways to offer up wealth. It was a recognition that God is in charge. And we are going to trust and honor him over all things.

XIII. Men and women, we need to worship God when we are having a chapter five week and when we are having a chapter six week.

A. Some of you can relate better to Chapter Five. Great. Good. It's fun when life is working. But chapter six is generally not far behind. We may have a run where everything falls together. But in this broken world, we almost certainly will have a run where our best efforts end up not working. Uzzah dies. We look foolish. We need to worship God at all times. It is the way forward.

B. I want to show you a brief video of one of our members who is learning to worship God during a Chapter Six season.

XIV. According to the latest polls, for all the noise made by the new atheists a few years ago – for all the talk about the decline of the church, the Nones and Dones and the like – only 1.5 percent of Americans are atheists. Which leaves 98.5 percent saying that they believe in God.

A. Of these, over seventy percent are theists – that is, they believe in a personal God who answers prayer. However, of these, most do not follow the kind of plan laid out by Jesus in the Book.

1. Daily times of prayer and reflection. Acts of service. Weekly times of corporate worship. These things are not part of the cadence of their life. They are not convenient. And as a result, they are shaped in very different ways.

B. This is tricky, because I want to acknowledge that different things work for different people. I often experience times of greatest awe outside. Especially on the water. Or by reading about space.

C. But I also work pretty hard to have a pattern of Bible Study and prayer and reflection that follows the specifics laid out in the Book. The things God calls us to may not always be convenient. It might be easier to do things our own way – like David having them put the Ark on the cart. But we need to order our lives to reflect both the goodness and holiness of God.

XV. Here is what I am sure of.

A. The way toward the life you want is with God – the one you were made for, a life of purpose and meaning, is found in a relationship with Him.

B. We need to worship Him. We will worship something. It needs to be him. That is the way we get shaped in the ways we need to be shaped.

C. This means we need to focus on him. You – and this is you. You lead yourself. You are in charge of your decisions. You need to order your life in ways that keep you focused on Him. If you do that, things will fall into place.

XVI. Wrap up

A. Pick a service / Sign up for a group / find a place to serve.

B. If that all seems overwhelming, maybe the right first step is to sign up for SCI.

¹ Let me push this point a bit further: if we are worshipping God we are being re-formed. And if we are not being re-formed – reshaped in good ways – then we are not worshipping God. Beyond that, the Bible suggests that our ultimate problem is always what we worship. If we could perfectly enjoy God as He is, we'd be perfect. We could face anything.

² In Tim Keller's treatment of this passage, he notes that we cannot focus on God's goodness to the exclusion of his holiness.