

So you want to be a Christian?

This series is a call. It is a call to those serious enough about their faith to want to change. Those who want to rise above the low level of Christianity that is accepted by so many today. It is a call to biblical Christianity not cultural. Cultural Christianity is based on the standards of the culture and what is accepted by the majority as “normal,” even though it is lukewarm and tepid at best. Biblical Christianity is based on the scriptures and what the Bible defines as discipleship. Because of the low grade Christianity practiced by the multitude, Biblical Christianity may seem harsh and even demanding.

I have news for you. This is normal. Biblical Christianity is tough and demanding and challenges us at our very core of living. But that is exactly what Christianity is. Christ never had in mind for it to be a feel good ticket to heaven or a weekly emotional encounter in a performance-based service within the walls of a church. Yes, those that accept Christ are promised eternity in heaven, and feeling something in a church service is not wrong but our emotions should be rooted in love for God that strips away everything else that threatens our relationship with Him outside the walls of the church.

It is a call to those weary of half-hearted Christianity. It is a call to ordinary men and women who have been captivated by a call to holiness and full surrender. It is a call to those who are determined to live a purposeful life. It is a call to those who will be passionate about Jesus every day of their lives. It is a call to have a God-lit fire in your belly and a nothing is impossible mind-set. It is a call to the spiritually hungry of every age, culture and gender who share a passion for following Christ and living in the grandness of His grace and not the smallness of those who cry out for us to be ordinary in our faith.

In the words of Mike Bickle let us hear this call together: *“The promise of being transformed and ignited to holy passion by understanding and beholding God’s glorious personality is for all believers. No matter how weak or strong we feel, regardless of our previous failures, irrespective of our natural temperaments or personalities, each of us can be ablaze with passion for Jesus.”*

For the next ten weeks we will explore a series of topics that will give all of us a chance to deepen our walk with Christ. The success of this series in your life will be measured by the seriousness with which you accept it and embrace it for yourself.

Today’s word is worship!

The essence of worship is an unrestrained giving of yourself to your heart’s greatest treasure. One thing, above all others will lay hold of your deepest affections and truest allegiance.

As Christians, our passions for Him will find genuine pleasure in giving – giving adoration, thanks, time and service, and giving attention every day of our lives. This is

the beginning of worship. The greater the giving of yourself, the more freely your heart pours out delight and the deeper the intimacy between you and God.

The object of your worship and the intensity of your worship will define your life. We get one shot at it – and that is the sum of our days. Within that span of time we are called to worship and commit our lives to the One that created us and everything that is. This kind of worship is not for the faint of heart but this is authentic worship. Anything less is just a poor copy of the real thing. Living the life of a worshipper is an incredible challenge and to not think that it is would be naïve and ignorant.

In Matthew 11:12, we find these fascinating words: *“From the days of John the Baptist until now, Jesus said, the kingdom of heaven has been forcefully advancing and forceful men lay hold of it.”*

Listen very carefully to what I am about to say. There is violence infused by the Holy Spirit that is necessary to break us free from the idols of this world. All of us live surrounded by people, places, and things that call for our attention and allegiance.

Some of the false gods worshipped by our culture include – money and power, sports and entertainment, youth and beauty. There is nothing wrong those things but too often we become entangled to the point that are time, energy and emotions are more taken by these things than God. They are takers and demand our attention, loyalty and eventually our hearts.

But when you worship and give yourself to God you worship the ultimate Giver. The worship that you bring to Him will find expression in extraordinary ways and you will feel the call to give yourself completely to Him.

There is a great Old Testament story that I want to draw from for my remarks about worship. It involves David who had become a mighty soldier but would eventually become the King of Israel.

He was hiding out in a cave while outside foreign enemies were pressing him on one side and King Saul was after him with a murderous vengeance on the other. Listen to this story.

Once during the harvest, when David was at the cave of Adullam, the Philistine army was camped in the valley of Rephaim. The Three (who were among the Thirty—an elite group among David’s fighting men) went down to meet him there. ¹⁴ David was staying in the stronghold at the time, and a Philistine detachment had occupied the town of Bethlehem.

¹⁵ *David remarked longingly to his men, “Oh, how I would love some of that good water from the well by the gate in Bethlehem.” ¹⁶ So the Three broke through the Philistine lines, drew some water from the well by the gate in Bethlehem, and brought it back to David. But he refused to drink it. Instead, he poured it out as an offering to the LORD.*

¹⁷ *“The LORD forbid that I should drink this!” he exclaimed. “This water is as precious as*

the blood of these men who risked their lives to bring it to me.” So David did not drink it. These are examples of the exploits of the Three. 2 Samuel 23:13-17 NLT

David was hunkered down hiding from his enemies. He was being hunted unfairly by King Saul out of pure jealousy for his military successes. He was being pressed by the enemy armies that he was fighting on behalf of the very King seeking to kill him.

As he rests and catches his breath for a few moments he begins to think about home and the well of clean pure water. That well is a long ways away and with the bounty on his head he wouldn't even dare go near it.

He expresses his thoughts out loud in front of three of his top warriors. These three slip out of the cave and begin a thirty mile round trip journey to secure water from this very well.

1. Worship could involve risk

¹⁶ So the Three broke through the Philistine lines, drew some water from the well by the gate in Bethlehem, and brought it back to David.

It's an amazing story! These three men risked everything merely to bring pleasure to the heart of the leader. Risk is a relative term but let me try to explain how worship could be risky.

As **Christian leaders** highlighted the plight of believers facing the threat of attacks around the world, a bomb in a church during Christmas mass in the southern Philippines on Saturday wounded 11 people, including a priest.

A series of blasts in Nigeria's central region killed at least 32 people and left 74 in critical condition on Christmas Eve, police say. In separate attacks on Friday night, at least six others were killed and another eight wounded when gunmen attacked two churches in the northeast city of Maiduguri. Danjuma Akawu, secretary of the Victory Baptist Church, said about 30 men opened fire on his church, killing five people. Meanwhile at the other end of the city, Haskanda Jessu, a reverend of the Church of Christ in Nigeria, said that three men attacked his church, killing a security guard.

When we read those kinds of things in the news we realize that public worship in some world areas involves physical risk. For most of you sitting here today that is not the case so how does risk and worship go together for you?

To follow God with all of your heart mind soul and strength is to risk letting Him change your life completely. It means being honest in your daily dealings. It means treating others as Jesus would treat them.

It means doing His will with our lives, our vocations, our finances. It means pursuing God on a daily basis and allowing Him to speak directly into our lives and relationships. It

mean you take Him with you on Friday nights and Saturday nights. You lay aside the hypocritical life and risk your friendships to follow Christ and worship Him. You risk being thought of as strange or odd because you love and worship God with your life and allow Him to manage your choices and convictions.

There is something very appealing to me about risking it all to follow Jesus. I don't know about you but I am weary of a Christianity that changes nothing and means even less in the lives of those who profess to be following Christ.

Salvation is free, ... but discipleship will cost you your life. — Dietrich Bonhoeffer

2. Worship always involves recognizing worth

But he refused to drink it . . . “This water is as precious as the blood of these men who risked their lives to bring it to me.”

When these men returned from this trip and handed David a cup of water from his favorite well he was overwhelmed. The worth of that water was beyond his imagination. They traveled thirty miles to get it. They fought their way in and fought their way out. They didn't spill it but carried it carefully to express love to a mortal leader that they respected and followed. When David realized what they had done he could not bring himself to drink it but realized it was of such value that it should be sacrificed to God.

“Worship is the display of the surpassing worth of God revealed in Jesus Christ. Suffering in the path of Christian obedience, with joy—because the steadfast love of the Lord is better than life (Psalm 63:3)—is the clearest display of the worth of God in our lives. Therefore, faith-filled suffering is essential in this world for the most intense, authentic worship. When we are most satisfied with God in suffering, he will be most glorified in us in worship. “ John Piper, *The Hidden Smile of God*, pp. 168-169

Can you think about your life for a moment? Is your relationship with God so valuable that you would be willing to sacrifice some things that you may even be entitled to? I know this so counter to the culture we live in. We are a society driven by personal achievement and wealth. We find so much worth and value in our work and status but could it be that God might want you to sacrifice something for Him?

I have no idea what that might mean for you or for me but I am opening up my life to God in ways I never have. I have resigned to some things that I cannot change.

Are you willing to surrender happiness for the joy of the Lord and His approval in your life?

Are you willing to be His man or woman by living godly lives reflecting your personal hunger and pursuit of holiness?

Do you recognize His worth in your life?

Ralph Waldo Emerson hit the nail on the head when he said:

“THE GODS we worship write their names on our faces, be sure of that. And a man will worship something—have no doubt about that, either. He may think that his tribute is paid in secret in the dark recesses of his heart—but it will come out. That which dominates will determine his life and character. Therefore, it behooves us to be careful what we worship, for what we are worshipping we are becoming.”

The reason we call you to worship God with your entire life is because He is worth it. He is our Creator. He made us and He knows what’s best for us on a daily basis.

3. Worship should include releasing

Instead, he poured it out as an offering to the Lord

David poured it out on the ground before God as an offering. It must have been a stunning moment for both him and the three men who had given so much.

When we worship God with our lives we are called to release.

We release our will and submit to His will.

We release wants and wishes in honor of His wishes.

We release our desires in submission to His desires for us

We release our families in sacrifice to His plans for them.

We release our vocations to His so that He can use them for His glory.

We release our passions to Him so that we can be passionate for Him.

We release our free time to His so that He can use us to bless this world

We release at a minimum the first fruit of our finances so that He can bless us as He promised when we honor Him this way.

Why do you live the way you live? Why do you make the choices you make? We must always evaluate ourselves and actions in light of God’s word and presence.

Francois Fenelon was the court clergy for King Louis XIV of France in the 17th century. One Sunday when the king and his attendants arrived at the chapel for the regular service, no one else was there but the preacher. King Louis demanded, "What does this mean?" Fenelon replied, "I had published that you would not come to church today, in order that your Majesty might see who serves God in truth and who flatters the king."

4. Worship will include reward

No person was ever honored for what he received. Honor has been the reward for what he gave.

C.S. Lewis: If we consider the unblushing promises of reward and the staggering nature of the rewards promised in the Gospels, it would seem that Our Lord finds our desires not

too strong, but too weak. We are half-hearted creatures, fooling about with drink and sex and ambition when infinite joy is offered us, like an ignorant child who wants to go on making mud pies in the slum because he cannot imagine what is meant by the offer of a holiday at the sea. We are far too easily pleased.

So don't lose a minute in building on what you've been given, complementing your basic faith with good character, spiritual understanding, alert discipline, passionate patience, reverent wonder, warm friendliness, and generous love, each dimension fitting into and developing the others. With these qualities active and growing in your lives, no grass will grow under your feet, no day will pass without its reward as you mature in your experience of our Master Jesus 2 Peter 1:5-9

*"When you practice some appetite-denying discipline to better concentrate on God, don't make a production out of it. It might turn you into a small-time celebrity but it won't make you a saint. If you 'go into training' inwardly, act normal outwardly. Shampoo and comb your hair, brush your teeth, wash your face. God doesn't require attention-getting devices. He won't overlook what you are doing; he'll **reward** you well. Matthew 6:16-18
The Message*

For the Scriptures say, "You must be holy because I am holy."¹⁷ And remember that the heavenly Father to whom you pray has no favorites. He will judge or reward you according to what you do. So you must live in reverent fear of him during your time as "foreigners in the land."¹⁸ For you know that God paid a ransom to save you from the empty life you inherited from your ancestors. And the ransom he paid was not mere gold or silver. 1 Peter 1:16-18 NLT

"If you're going swimming, you don't stand forever beside the pool dipping a toe into the cool water. Ultimately the time comes to let go and dive in. There's no way to swim without using your whole body, unless you want to sink and drown. Swimming takes a total commitment of your body, including your eyes, mouth, lungs, arms and legs. Worship takes the same kind of spiritual commitment. Don't sit on the back pew, dabbing a toe into the deep spiritual waters. Dive into the wonder of the presence of God."

Many of today's worship songs seem to have the shelf life of a bag of Dorito's. In fact the slogan for some of them should "be go ahead and sing it will make more." There are some that are enduring and that should be sung often because they have a depth to them that leads us to recognize God for who He is. Listen to these words:

King of endless worth No one could express
How much You deserve Though I'm weak and poor
All I have is Yours Every single breath

I'll bring You more than just a song For a song in itself Is not what You have required
You search much deeper within Through the way things appear You're looking into my heart

I'm coming back to the heart of worship And it's all about You
All about You, Jesus I'm sorry Lord for the thing I've made it
When it's all about You It's all about You Jesus

What do you worship the most in your life? Who do you worship the most? God or
yourself?