

## **The Secret to Becoming a Great Worshiper: Focus Your Thoughts on God**

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Rich Nathan

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Prayer: Hungry for God Series

Isaiah 40:18-31

One of the great challenges for an unchurched person to overcome is getting over the initial shock of what they discover when they go to church. To some degree, the same thing is true of a person who is looking for a new church. There are so many hurdles to overcome regarding the reality of what we discover in the church.

I remember the first church service I ever attended at a little church in Cleveland when I was 18 years old. Many of you know that I come from a Jewish background and through a woman I met at college in Cleveland at Case Western Reserve; I was led to embrace Jesus as the Jewish Messiah and as my Savior. Then this woman named Marlene took me to church. It was 1974. I had a big curly Afro. I was used to dressing in flannel shirts, jeans and work boots. I was coming out of the whole drug and rock-and-roll culture. And I was going to church.

Now, there was nothing about church that I understood. I didn't know when you were supposed to stand or sit. I didn't know what the books were that were in the backs of the pews. I didn't know any of the songs. I didn't understand why everyone in the church was really old. And to complicate matters further, there was an elderly woman, who was probably about my age now (late 40's, but I took her to be elderly), a very sweet woman. She asked the church if there was anyone new there. Marlene said: "Richie, you have to stand. They want you to stand now. You are new here."

So I stood. I was the only one new in the church that Sunday. This woman invited me forward to the church and in front of everyone, she put her arm around me, pinned a little button that had a little cross on it to my lapel, and while her arm was around me, she sang me a song: "There's Welcome Here." The congregation joined in and I was introduced to the church. Some people would have been put off by all of this. But even coming from a totally different background, I found the whole experience rather sweet. And I thought this woman was really sweet.

You see I had fallen in love with Jesus. And so Marlene could probably have told me: "Hey, you know what we do here at church is jumping jacks for the first ten minutes," and I would have said, "Fine."

It is so easy though to struggle in worship because of what you see as you look around you in church.

- Why is that baby crying?
- What does that banner mean?
- I'm not sure that I like the colors in this room.
- I wish those people four rows away from me would stop talking.
- Isn't it annoying when people come in late and push their way into your row?
- Why do they sing so many hymns?
- Why don't they sing any hymns?
- I'm not sure I like that female singer's voice.
- Why are people in this church raising their hands?
- Why did that woman start crying during that one song? Her mascara began to run and she looked like a little raccoon. I mean religion is fine in its place, but she seemed to be getting carried away.

C.S. Lewis, the great Christian writer and English professor from Oxford University, once wrote a book that I've quoted on a number of occasions, called *The Screwtape Letters*. It is written in the form of a satire in which a senior devil named Screwtape instructs his nephew, a junior devil, in the art of temptation. In one of the early letters from Screwtape, this senior devil instructs the junior devil about how to tempt people when they go to church. Let me read to you from *The Screwtape Letters*:

One of our great allies at present is the Church itself. Do not misunderstand me. I do not mean the Church as we see her spread out through all time and space and rooted in eternity, terrible as an army with banners. That, I confess, is a spectacle that makes our boldest tempters uneasy. But fortunately it is quite invisible to these humans. All your patient sees is the local grocer with rather an oily expression on his face bustling up to offer him one shiny book containing a liturgy, which neither of them understands, and one shabby little book containing corrupt texts of a number of religious lyrics, mostly bad, and in very small print. When he gets to his pew and looks around him, he sees just that selection of his neighbors whom he has hitherto avoided. You want to lean pretty heavily on those neighbors. Make his mind flit to and fro between an expression like, "The body of Christ," and the actual faces in the next pew. It matters very little, of course, what kind of people that next pew really contains. You may know one of them to be a great warrior on the Enemy's side. No matter. Your patient, thanks to Our Father Below, is a fool. Provided that any of those neighbors sing out of tune, or have boots that squeak, or double chins, or odd clothes, the patient will quite easily believe that their religion must therefore be somehow ridiculous. All you have to do is keep out of his mind the question: "If I being what I am, can consider that I am

in some sense a Christian, why should the different vices of those people in the next pew prove that their religion is mere hypocrisy?”

And what I would add, if I were tempting people, is to make sure that people entirely focus their attention on what's going on in the room around them rather than on God. Keep people's thoughts at the most superficial level possible – on their neighbor, on the comfort of the chair, on the loudness of the music, the heat in the room. At all costs, keep them from focusing their thoughts on God.

I've been doing a series on prayer. Last week I began to talk about how one prays. I offered you a simple track that many people have found helpful to know what to do when you pray. You sometimes need a track to run on, where we begin in prayer, how we continue, and how we end. And the simple track I suggested last week is based on the acronym ACTS:

A  
C  
T  
S

Adoration  
Confession  
Thanksgiving  
Supplication (or making our petitions)

The place to begin in prayer, as I said last week, is with adoration, with worship. And worship is all about focus. You can't worship God while the focus of your mind is on your kids, or your problems, or the person in the next row, or whether someone near you is singing off-key. Great worshipers focus their minds and hearts on God. Worship is our response to what we see of God.

In Isaiah 6:1, Isaiah the prophet records:

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Isa 6:1 In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord seated on a throne, high and exalted, and the train of his robe filled the temple.

What distinguishes the people in the Bible in terms of their worship is that their worship is entirely focused upon God. Down through the centuries, what set the saints apart was this ability to focus their thoughts on God. Bernard of Clairvaux wrote this back in the Middle Ages:

*Jesus the very thought of thee  
With sweetness fills the breast.  
But sweeter far thy face to see  
And in thy presence rest.*

Many of you know that famous hymn, “Be Thou My Vision.” It is all about seeing God. It is all about focusing on God.

*Be thou my Vision  
O Lord of my heart;  
Not be all else to me,  
Save that Thou art –  
Thou my best thought,  
By day or by not,  
Waking or sleeping,  
Thy presence my light.*

Or the simple chorus that we sing here at Vineyard:

*Open the eyes of my heart, Lord.  
Open the eyes of my heart.  
I want to see you.  
I want to see you.  
High and lifted up  
Shining in the light of your glory.*

To worship God, we've got to be rid of certain things like thinking superficially about our surroundings, and what people are doing and saying. We've got to deliberately focus our hearts upon God. I've called today's talk: The Secret to Becoming a Great Worshiper: Focus Your Thoughts on God. Let's pray.

Isaiah 40:18-20

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Isa 40:18 To whom, then, will you compare God?

What image will you compare him to?

Isa 40:19 As for an idol, a craftsman casts it,  
and a goldsmith overlays it with gold  
and fashions silver chains for it.

Isa 40:20 A man too poor to present such an offering  
selects wood that will not rot.  
He looks for a skilled craftsman  
to set up an idol that will not topple.

Let me set the context for this passage. Isaiah is prophesying to a discouraged, disheartened remnant of the Jewish people who are living in exile in Babylon. Because of the Israelites sin, because of their immorality, their injustice, and their idolatry, about 600 years before the birth of Christ, God sent the pagan nation of Babylon to invade the land of Israel. They leveled the towns and villages, killed tens of thousands of Jewish people, and knocked down the walls surrounding the Holy City of Jerusalem. Most importantly, from the Jewish perspective, they destroyed the Jewish Temple, the central place of worship in ancient Judaism, the place where Jews went to meet with God and to offer him sacrifices. The temple was burned to the ground and thousands of Jews were dragged off into exile to Babylon.

And from Babylon, they begin to ask the questions: Has God forsaken us forever? Does God care? Have we gone so far as to no longer be God's people? Has God stopped being our Father?

As we found last week, Isaiah responded and said: You still remain God's people. God still remains your Father in heaven. God's love is so great for his children that even our sin can't quench the love of God.

Then in Isaiah 40:12ff, the people ask a different question: If God loves us, is he strong enough to defeat the Babylonians? After all, their army is so great. They have hundreds of thousands of troops. They have thousands of chariots. The walls around Babylon are dozens of feet thick. Is God even strong enough to rescue us from the hands of Babylon? We saw last week that Isaiah's response was: Your God is too small.

But all that we read about God in Isaiah 40 assists us to properly worship God because Isaiah focuses our attention on who God is. He calls us to get rid of certain things so that we can see God more clearly. What must we get rid of so that we can see God better?

Isaiah said: Get rid of your idols. verses 18-20

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As 21<sup>st</sup> century Americans we usually think of idols in the crude way that Isaiah describes them as some animal or human figure made out of gold, wood, or stone. We usually think of idols as some statue that a primitive person would prostrate themselves in front of believing that the statue had magical powers to give them what they're asking for.

But you know, idolatry wasn't just an Old Testament problem. Christians in the New Testament were warned against idolatry. We read in 1 John 5:21,

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1Jn 5:21 Dear children, keep yourselves from idols.

And the apostle Paul, writing to the church in Corinth, says in 1 Cor. 10:14,

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1Co 10:14 Therefore, my dear friends, flee from idolatry.

In both the Old and New Testaments, idolatry goes well beyond bowing in front of a statue made of stone, wood, or gold. Idolatry has to do with the focus of one's heart. Listen to what Paul says in Ephesians 5:5,

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Eph 5:5 For of this you can be sure: No immoral, impure or greedy person—such a man is an idolater—has any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God.

He's equating human greed and lust, the craving of one's heart, with idolatry. Paul says the same thing in Colossians 3:5,

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Col 3:5 Put to death, therefore, whatever belongs to your earthly nature: sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires and greed, which is idolatry.

Idolatry deals with the focus of one's heart. Idolatry deals with the orientation of your mind. And in simple terms, we become idolaters when we orient our hearts and minds around the creation rather than around the Creator. Idolatry doesn't mean that we deny the existence of God. Rather, we turn from looking into God's face, focusing upon God's majesty and holiness, and instead, form an over-attachment to something in this world.

Now, that over-attachment could be to something good. It could be to work, or our country, or even one's family or children. The over-attachment could be to something bad – a broken sexual habit, a substance, like alcohol or drugs. But when we turn our attention away from God, we fallen human beings always become idolaters.

The great Catholic writer, GK Chesterton, once said when we “cease to worship God, we do not worship nothing, we worship anything.”

Atheists are still worshipers. It is impossible to simply get rid of God. Atheists simply have a thousand God-substitutes in God's place.

You see, our hearts are restless. We're always on the search for meaning and significance. We're on the search for control in this very uncertain and unsafe world. We desperately want security and so we look around and on the one hand, we have God, who cannot be controlled by us, who remains untamed, free, I almost want to use the word “wild” in the best sense, undomesticated by human

beings – on the one hand we have God. The thing we're going to focus upon requires us to surrender to his Lordship and to gaze into his face.

On the other hand, we have the works of our hands, things that we make. Idolatry springs from our unbelief in God. We feel like we can't trust God to secure happiness for us in this world, to protect our end of the bargain, to watch over us and to provide for us, and give good to us. So we say: I can control the future by purchasing more insurance, massive over-investment in insurance and in our retirement plans. And we rationalize our massive over-attachment, over-dependence on our insurance policies and retirement plans by calling it an act of love. It is simply wise planning for our family. We're not really shifting our focus away from God and onto our bank accounts. We're being good providers. We're just loving our wives and children, that's all.

Anyone or anything that grabs our confidence and seizes our trust so that God gets pushed to the edges while this person or thing becomes central makes us guilty of the sin of idolatry.

You say: Where might I be guilty of idolatry? What in my life shifts my focus even subtly away from it being centered entirely on Jesus Christ so that my heart is gripped by something humanly created?

Let me try to pull something out of the air. How about our political views? I've gotten the most astounding array of letters surrounding this year's presidential campaign that I think I've ever gotten in my nearly 20 years of pastoring. I want to share with you some of the things people have written to me. I want you to know that I'm not targeting any of you. But I want to call your attention to something I believe is really important to our Christian faith. People have written me statements like:

- I can't for the life of me imagine anyone who dares to call themselves a Christian voting for John Kerry.
- Voting for John Kerry is an abomination to God and a crime against humanity.

On the other side, I've gotten emails that said things like:

- Can you explain to me how someone who bombs innocent people, lies and cheats his way into a war, can claim to be a Christian?

Now, listen to me. I believe it is totally okay for human beings to be passionate about issues that are biblical issues, issues such as the taking of innocent life through abortion, issues like the taking of innocent life through war, issues like the sanctity of marriage. But we are guilty of the sin of idolatry when we dare to take this flawed human thing called politics, this provisional contingent, utterly bound in time, utterly human, utterly relative thing and we absolutize it.

And then we go further and claim that someone who disagrees with our fallen, flawed perspectives, about fallen, flawed candidates, and their fallen, flawed policies, are not Christians. When we dare to make a distinction between people based not on where they stand to the Cross of Jesus Christ but where they stand regarding an issue no matter how significant that issue is, friend, you are guilty of taking your focus upon God and becoming a profound idolater. When we judge others based merely on where someone prioritizes this or that issue, we replace the more essential distinction on where a person stands with Jesus Christ.

From what I've heard from our small group leaders I fear that many of us in this church have gotten caught up in the unbelievably over-heated political rhetoric of this race demonstrated especially in our willingness to judge brothers and sisters as less Christian than us not because of the holiness of their lives, but because of their preference for this candidate or that one.

My great fear for many of us as Christians in America during this election cycle is that we have succumbed to the great temptation of Satan called "Christianity And." Again, let me read to you from The Screwtape Letters by C.S. Lewis:

*My dear Wormwood [that's the junior devil], the real trouble about the set your patient is living in is that it is merely Christian. They all have individual interests, of course, but the bond remains mere Christianity. What we want, if men become Christians, is to keep them in the state of mind I call, "Christianity And." You know – Christianity and the Crisis, Christianity and New Psychology, Christianity and New Order, Christianity and Faith Healing, Christianity and Cyclical Research, Christianity and Vegetarianism, Christianity and Spelling Reform. If they must be Christians, let them at least be Christians with a difference. Substitute for the faith itself some fashion with a Christian coloring.*

To which we would add: It is not enough to be merely Christian now in America. You must be Christian and Republican, or in some circles, Christian and Democrat, Christian and someone who holds my political views and orders life the way I do.

What is particularly tragic is when we impose our views in such an overbearing way that some grieving person, some lonely person, some hurting person might come to church or to a small group meeting seeking some word of consolation, seeking some word of comfort, some encouragement, some prayer and instead because of political differences, leave feeling more lonely, and more isolated, and more hopeless than when they first came.

Over against this perspective, Isaiah calls us to worship God in his uniqueness. We must not lower Almighty God to anything in this creation, even the very best thing.



True worshipers focus upon God. True worshipers focus upon God's awesomeness. Verses 21-24,

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Isa 40:21 Do you not know?

Have you not heard?

Has it not been told you from the beginning?

Have you not understood since the earth was founded?

Isa 40:22 He sits enthroned above the circle of the earth,  
and its people are like grasshoppers.

He stretches out the heavens like a canopy,  
and spreads them out like a tent to live in.

Isa 40:23 He brings princes to naught  
and reduces the rulers of this world to nothing.

Isa 40:24 No sooner are they planted,  
no sooner are they sown,  
no sooner do they take root in the ground,  
than he blows on them and they wither,  
and a whirlwind sweeps them away like chaff.

The Israelites in Babylon believed that the Babylonians were huge and God was small. Isaiah described God as sitting above the circle of the earth. Now, I don't know if this is a proof text to say that the biblical writers believed that the world was round. The circle of the earth may simply be the horizon.

There is a very fine book out now titled "When People are Big and God Is Small" by Edward Welch. It is subtitled, "Overcoming Peer Pressure, Codependency and the Fear of Man." The problem of big people and a small God was not just an ancient Israelite problem. It's our problem.

Friend, what makes you feel good about yourself? Is it that the Judge of all creation accepts you, loves you, and values you? He says you are right in his eyes. Or do you only feel good about yourself if you are able to gain the respect of your parents, your spouse, your boss, your pastor? Isaiah says: Do you not understand that people are like grasshoppers? If people are so insignificant, how much more insignificant are their opinions? Why would you base your feeling about yourself on the opinions of others?

People are huge in the lives of teenagers. Is there anything that is a bigger battle in the life of a teenager than fighting peer pressure:

- What a teenager wears
- What kind of music a teenager is allowed to like
- What jokes a teenager has to laugh at
- What a teenager has to think and feel

I remember being so self-conscious of not saying the wrong thing, picking up cues of when to keep my mouth shut, what people I had to be nice to, doing things just so a group would like me.

But you know, people-pleasing doesn't end with turning 18, 19, 20 or 30. How many of you find yourselves unable to say "no" to other people. You always have to appear to agree, even when you don't agree. How many of you find it really difficult to share your faith because you don't want to seem weird, or like some religious fanatic. So you virtually never share your Christian faith. How many of you are on a treadmill of work, relational, material or academic achievement that you have never been able to get off of? Could it be that you are still seeking the approval and affirmation of your father or mother, approval, which even if you gained it, would still leave an enormous hole in your soul?

The Bible puts under one umbrella succumbing to peer-pressure, people-pleasing, what we term codependency and what the Israelites were showing towards the Babylonians. Its all summarized under "the fear of man." Proverbs 29:25,

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Pr 29:25 Fear of man will prove to be a snare,  
but whoever trusts in the LORD is kept safe.

We attribute tremendous power to people – power to secure our future, power to give us happiness, power to make us feel loved, power to ruin us. We lie to people. We cover up. We cut corners because people are so big in our eyes and God is so small. How many marriages spiral down because there is a continual complaint that "my husband simply will not meet my needs – my need for just a little undivided attention, my need to be understood, my need to be listened to, my need for some emotional support. My husband will not meet my needs, therefore, I am unhappy."

My wife simply will not support my dreams. My wife won't show me the respect that I need. My wife won't give me the sexual intimacy that I need, therefore, I'm unhappy.

How many marriages are suffering under the weight of this distorted thinking of huge people and small God? When you are trusting in another person to secure your happiness, you've just got to have a boyfriend or girlfriend, or the dream of getting married at some point, otherwise you know your life will be bleak and miserable, when another human being has the power to determine your joy, when you are constantly afraid of experiencing another person's disapproval, then your eyes have been taken off of God and you have ceased to be a great worshiper.

Isaiah says: Focus on God's awesomeness. Verse 22-23,

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Isa 40:22 He sits enthroned above the circle of the earth,  
and its people are like grasshoppers.

He stretches out the heavens like a canopy,  
and spreads them out like a tent to live in.

Isa 40:23 He brings princes to naught  
and reduces the rulers of this world to nothing.

Isaiah knew from personal experience that the only way to drive out the fear of man is to experience the fear of God, to see God, to allow your heart to focus upon God. Let's return to Isaiah 6. Here was Isaiah's calling into ministry, Isaiah 6:1-5,

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Isa 6:1 In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord seated on a throne, high and exalted, and the train of his robe filled the temple.

Isa 6:2 Above him were seraphs, each with six wings: With two wings they covered their faces, with two they covered their feet, and with two they were flying.

Isa 6:3 And they were calling to one another:

"Holy, holy , holy is the LORD Almighty;  
the whole earth is full of his glory."

Isa 6:4 At the sound of their voices the doorposts and thresholds shook and the temple was filled with smoke.

Isa 6:5 "Woe to me!" I cried. "I am ruined! For I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips, and my eyes have seen the King, the LORD Almighty

We read in Isaiah 6:3,

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Isa 6:3 And they were calling to one another:

"Holy, holy , holy is the LORD Almighty;  
the whole earth is full of his glory."

Now this call of holy, holy, holy is antiphonal call. They were calling back and forth to one another. Many of you, who are OSU fans, you know this one. Half the stadium shouts: O-H...What's the response? I-O.

Here's what I want to do. Let's divide the church right down this middle aisle. On the right side when I count to three I want you to yell "Holy." And then on the left side, in response, I want you to yell: "Holy." Let's try it.

The way to get unstuck from people is to start focusing your heart on the awesomeness of God. Spend time reading the Psalms out loud to begin your prayer time. If people are big and God is small, how about reading out loud Psalm 146:

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Ps 146:1 Praise the LORD.

Praise the LORD, O my soul.

Ps 146:2 I will praise the LORD all my life;  
I will sing praise to my God as long as I live.

Ps 146:3 Do not put your trust in princes,  
in mortal men, who cannot save.

Ps 146:4 When their spirit departs, they return to the ground;  
on that very day their plans come to nothing.

Ps 146:5 Blessed is he whose help is the God of Jacob,  
whose hope is in the LORD his God,

Ps 146:6 the Maker of heaven and earth,  
the sea, and everything in them—  
the LORD, who remains faithful forever.

Ps 146:7 He upholds the cause of the oppressed  
and gives food to the hungry.

The LORD sets prisoners free,

Ps 146:8 the LORD gives sight to the blind,  
the LORD lifts up those who are bowed down,  
the LORD loves the righteous.

Ps 146:9 The LORD watches over the alien  
and sustains the fatherless and the widow,  
but he frustrates the ways of the wicked.

Ps 146:10 The LORD reigns forever,  
your God, O Zion, for all generations.

Praise the LORD.

And we become great worshipers when we focus on God's sovereignty and we rid ourselves of impatience. Isaiah 40:27-31,

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Isa 40:27 Why do you say, O Jacob,  
and complain, O Israel,  
"My way is hidden from the LORD;  
my cause is disregarded by my God"?

Isa 40:28 Do you not know?

Have you not heard?

The LORD is the everlasting God,  
the Creator of the ends of the earth.

He will not grow tired or weary,  
and his understanding no one can fathom.

Isa 40:29 He gives strength to the weary

and increases the power of the weak.

Isa 40:30 Even youths grow tired and weary,  
and young men stumble and fall;

Isa 40:31 but those who hope in the LORD  
will renew their strength.

They will soar on wings like eagles;

they will run and not grow weary,

they will walk and not be faint.

The Jews in exile asked: Does God still love us? Are we still his covenant people? Isaiah answered with a resounding “yes.” Not even your sins can quench the love of God for you. Then they asked: Can even God do anything about our situation? We’re stuck here in Babylon facing the strongest army in the world. And again, Isaiah answered with a resounding “yes.” God is huge! People are like grasshoppers.

And so Isaiah concludes his prophecy with a rebuke of the Israelites saying: In light of this, how can you continue to believe that God is ignoring you. Verse 27,

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Isa 40:27 Why do you say, O Jacob,

and complain, O Israel,

“My way is hidden from the LORD;

my cause is disregarded by my God”?

Literally, why do you keep saying, O Jacob? Why do you keep complaining, suggesting that God is not committed to you? You see, God was not working according to the Israelites timetable. His action was delayed. Isaiah says: It is not because of a lack of commitment to you. Notice in verse 27 the names he gives to the Jewish people. He says: Why do you say, O Jacob, and complain, O Israel? These are the covenant names that God gave to his people. These names recall God’s great promises to the patriarchs.

Remember God’s unquenchable love. Remember God’s great power. Verse 28,

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Isa 40:28 Do you not know?

Have you not heard?

The LORD is the everlasting God,  
the Creator of the ends of the earth.

He will not grow tired or weary,  
and his understanding no one can fathom.

But the people were forced to wait. Let me give you a definition of godly waiting. Godly waiting is being joyfully willing to allow life to go at God's pace. You see, the Christian life is a continual lesson in learning to walk at God's pace. We have a fantasy regarding what we think will make us happy: finding a marriage partner, making more money, getting a certain job, being promoted, having our spouses respond to us in a certain way, having our kids doing certain things. We have fantasies about what we think will make us happy, or we read promises in the Bible, or we believe that we've received a promise of God through a prophetic word, or we believe we've heard something from God during our prayer times, and we get real excited. Then when our fantasy, or the promise we read in the Bible, or the promise that we've received in prayer is not fulfilled in the way we desire it to be fulfilled, or at the pace we desire, the enemy whispers in our ear: See, that promise wasn't really true. In fact, are you all that confident that your faith is really true?

Friend, here is something that God has been pressing into my own life. Waiting is an opportunity for worship. When you are waiting in life, when you are waiting in traffic, when you are waiting for a healing, when you are waiting for a job, when you are waiting for the conversion of a loved one, waiting is a divinely appointed context for worship. And it is worshipping in a time of waiting that gives us the strength to continue. Verses 29-31,

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Isa 40:29 He gives strength to the weary  
and increases the power of the weak.

Isa 40:30 Even youths grow tired and weary,  
and young men stumble and fall;

Isa 40:31 but those who hope in the LORD  
will renew their strength.

They will soar on wings like eagles;  
they will run and not grow weary,  
they will walk and not be faint.

Let me tell you a story. There was a great Christian professor of theology at Princeton University in the 19<sup>th</sup> century named Benjamin Warfield. He wrote a lot of important Christian books including *The Inspiration and Authority of the Bible*. What a lot of people don't know about Benjamin Warfield was at the age of 25 he married the love of his life, Annie Kinkead, and they went on a honeymoon to Germany. The year was 1876. While they were on their honeymoon, traveling around Europe, Benjamin Warfield's new bride was struck by lightning and she was permanently paralyzed.

Benjamin Warfield, this great theologian and teacher, prayed for his paralyzed wife for 39 years until he laid her to rest in 1915. For all those years he was almost never able to get out of his house more than two hours at a time because of his wife's extraordinary needs. Yet he faithfully kept his marriage vows for better or for worse, in sickness and in health. The woman was never healed. Incredible and spectacular endurance for 39 years. How did Benjamin Warfield do it? He didn't do it in his own strength. Isaiah is really clear.

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Even youth grow tired and weary and young men stumble and fall.

The strongest of the strong give way under massive pressure. Warfield was able to keep going day after day in this extraordinarily difficult situation because he was a great worshipper of God. And in particular, he believed in the sovereignty of God over all things. Warfield deeply believed that in all of the detours and delays of life, God is always up to something good in the lives of those who love him. He worshipped a God who was always up to something good in all the detours and delays of life.

Friend, if you are stuck in a traffic jam, or in a line at a store, can you say with faith: God is up to something good right now? If your prayer is unanswered or delayed for a loved one, can you say with faith: God is up to something good in my life right now? If you've not met anyone yet to marry, can you say in faith: Nevertheless I know that God is up to something good in my life right now. If a healing hasn't happened, if your finances haven't turn around, if a loved one is not yet converted can you still say with Benjamin Warfield: I know that I know that God is up to something good in my life right now.

Why should we believe that God is up to something good in our lives when we are waiting? Because the Bible teaches that over and over again. Psalm 23:6,

#### SLIDE

Ps 23:6 Surely goodness and love will follow me  
all the days of my life,  
and I will dwell in the house of the LORD  
forever.

Jeremiah 29:11

#### SLIDE

Jer 29:11 For I know the plans I have for you," declares the LORD, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future

Lamentations 3:25

SLIDE

La 3:25 The LORD is good to those whose hope is in him,  
to the one who seeks him;

Romans 8:28

SLIDE

Ro 8:28 And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.

Do you know what happens when you get rid of your impatience and despite waiting, despite God not going at your pace and following your timetable, you believe that he's up to something good in your life anyway, and you worship God? Your strength is renewed. Isaiah 40:31,

SLIDE

Isa 40:31 but those who hope in the LORD  
will renew their strength.  
They will soar on wings like eagles;  
they will run and not grow weary,  
they will walk and not be faint.

As you worship God, God breathes strength in you beyond your human limits. As you worship God, he puts strength back in your body that's been weakened by illness, accident or age. When you worship God, he strengthens your will to resist temptation that you've given into. When you worship God, he strengthens you to be courageous when you are afraid to share your faith, afraid to risk your job, afraid to risk your future.

Let me close with this story. Most of you are familiar with the name Martin Luther, the great Reformer, who challenged the Catholic Church as it was emerging from the Middle Ages. He wrote stinging criticisms of the Church's practices like the sale of indulgences. If you gave money when the Indulgence was being offered, you could release relatives and yourself from suffering in purgatory. Luther wrote these stinging rebukes to the Church for denying the centrality of being made right with God simply by trusting in Christ alone.

Eventually, the religious authorities tried Martin Luther. They prosecuted him for heresy, the penalty for which was death. And the prosecutor asked a very simple question. He laid out all of Luther's writings and said: Do you defend them all, or do you care to reject a part? Maybe Luther was intimidated by the crowd, or by the prospect of execution. But in a barely audible voice, he whispered, "To say too little or too much would be dangerous. I beg you, give me some to think it over."



Luther wrestled with his faith that evening. But he was a great worshipper of God. And he particularly trusted in the sovereignty, the control, the weighing of God over all things. Luther knew that the plan of God to do him good could not be thwarted by any little trial, or any little group of people. And so by 6:00 the next day, Luther stood up bold as a lion and in front of people who had the power to kill him, and said: "I must walk in the fear of the Lord. My conscience is captive to the Word of God. I cannot and I will not recant anything, for to go against conscience is neither right nor safe. God help me. Here I stand, I cannot do otherwise."

When a person worships God, you are not just passively resigning to circumstances in life. "Oh well, the world is terrible. Life's unfair and then you die." There is something promised for great worshippers that is so much better than that. Isaiah 40:31,

#### SLIDE

Isa 40:31 but those who hope in the LORD  
will renew their strength.  
They will soar on wings like eagles;  
they will run and not grow weary,  
they will walk and not be faint.

There is a hopefulness in Christian worship. There is an eager expectation. There is a joy. There is a soaring like an eagle; there is a running like a sprinter. Get rid of from your heart everything that keeps you from being able to focus entirely and exclusively upon God. In your prayers, become a great worshipper of the Lord. Let's pray.

## **The Secret to Becoming a Great Worshiper: Focus Your Thoughts on God**

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- A. Focus on God's Being: Get Rid of Superficial Thinking
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
- B. Focus on God's Uniqueness: Get Rid of All Idols (Is. 40:18-20; Eph. 5:5; Col. 3:5)
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
- C. Focus on God's Awesomeness: Get Rid of the Fear of Man (Is. 40:21-24)
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
- D. Focus on God's Sovereignty: Get Rid of All Impatience (Is. 40:27-31)