

Telling His Story, Together

Last week I took some time to tell God's story as it has been unfolding in my personal life.

Recap

It's Not About Me Through a variety of circumstances, God showed me that though my illness was not about me, as much as His work in me

God Changed My Name I would like you to call me by my first name, Timothy, which means to honor God, to fear God

God is showing me His gentleness and calling me deeper I encouraged you to let God carry you and illustrated that as I held our youngest son Aiden, I asked the question, "From what does God need to rescue you?"

What I want to do today is share some perspective on how that story was unfolding in the church life, and how I pray it will continue to do so as we partner to tell His story and make much of our Lord.

Reports started to get back to me even while I was still in the hospital about some things God was doing in the church...

Praying – The church agreeing in prayer and filling the sanctuary with intercession for me, some people praying more earnestly through the week than ever before, pouring their hearts out to the Lord on our behalf, one dear friend being awoken every hour on the hour the night following my second procedure, that night in ICU I described last week (Life Change)

Fasting – Pastor Bill Stevens told me some people denying themselves and pleading for us who had never fasted before (Life Change)

Linking hearts – People who did not know us began to love us as they prayed and helped and served (Life Change)

It's Not About Us

One thing really strikes me about the life change that I heard about and experienced first hand, first in myself and my family, and then in others. **It's not about US!** Can you get excited about that church? It is about the One who is changing us! Jesus! As He broke me I was able to see Him more clearly. As He continues to break us, may we see Him more and more clearly.

Let me share a little more...

Doug Schlaegel sent an email to Pastor Myron, which he later shared at our Elders retreat two weeks ago. He described part of what he saw as a result of my illness.

Initially, it became clear that the church was rallying around them. It changed some persons in the body. We prayed more earnestly. We realized that the hedge of protection had been moved for one of our own. I also became more excited when I saw the witness NMC had with the Mattern extended family...

Well, we are on the back side of most of this. It is time to welcome TSM back (when he is ready) with freedom in worship. I feel when he is ready to lead again, we will be ready to follow, no matter the style of music, the type of instruments used, the volume...

The Lord has opened my eyes and given me reason to trust Him all the more.

**O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! how unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out!
Romans 11:33**

**Trusting Him even more,
Doug**

There was one line in Doug's email that really jumped out at me. Let me read that line again. **The Lord has opened my eyes and given me reason to trust Him all the more.** Doug, if you will allow me...God revealed something about Himself to Doug and that revelation afforded Doug the opportunity to respond with more trust than before.

You know what that's like church. It is true of any relationship; the more you get to know someone the more likely you are to trust them, assuming they are trustworthy of course. Think about a relationship in your life. Picture the person's face. The more you got to know them, the easier it was for you to trust them, right. The same is true of our relationship with God. The same can be said of your relationship with me church.

Part of the point of my sharing these two weeks is for you to see God's hand on my life. **God's Hand.** I trust that will help you trust Him with yours. Another part is for you to get to know **My Heart**, so you can trust me as I lead us in worship.

But let's be careful here. Remember, it's not about US. It is easy to say that, and then immediately inject ourselves back into the conversation as we start to talk specifics. And we are going to do that in a few minutes.

Pastor Myron asked this question of the staff in early March as this journey was just beginning, **"What is God asking you to trust Him on, so that when He does it He gets all the glory?"** I need to tell you, we he first asked I did not know how to answer that question. I had some ideas, but they were not truly God-sized. They would have been

cool, but not big enough to be an appropriate response. I do not think I was capable of answering that question then. But God has changed me, and I think just this week I came to a place where I can finally answer it.

“What is God asking you to trust Him on, so that when He does it He gets all the glory?” I believe God is asking me to trust Him **to rescue us from a worship war**. Trust-rescue-worship war. For those of you who are unfamiliar with this term, it describes the battle that ensues when there are at least a couple different perspectives on the style that should characterize the corporate worship of the church, for example traditional vs. contemporary. These battles are often fought from a variety of perspectives and with a wide range of ammunition, but let me say that I do not believe they honor the Lord.

I mentioned last week as I began to tell my story that in each church I have served I have faced opposition. I have tried to deal gently with it, but was not always successful. I think that is part of the reason God is teaching me more about His gentleness.

But this teaching was not just for me, I believe it was for us all. I will share a little more of this passage later, but hear **Colossians 3:15. Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace. And be thankful.** Now, when you think about the Sunday morning service, and we do not happen to sing the songs you like, would you consider this Scripture? Do you see the picture of unity it paints? If we are a thankful people that will disarm much of the potential discord. We are called to live at peace, and this is not always easy, but it is best. Let us strive to deal gently with one another and allow God to mark our lives with His peace.

North-Mar, I do not want to be a part of another worship war. I do not think the Lord wants us to have one, but it will require that each of us approach the work He is doing with fear and reverence. **I commit to earnestly seek His face** for our times of corporate worship, and to lead them with the gentleness only He can give.

I have to tell you church that I am so excited about what I see God doing in our midst. What a priceless gift has been given to me! As I am recovering to get to stand here with you in worship. To pour my heart out with you, what a blessing! **Words fail me.**

As I think about what God is doing, I can not help but wonder what that is going to look like as we continue to allow Him to have his way in us. I told you last week I believed God spoke to me as He was calling me here telling me that He was going to take me places I had never been. Do I know what those places look like? No. Am I smart enough or clever enough to discover them on my own? Absolutely not. Do I possess enough talent to facilitate the journey? I am afraid not.

So that begs the question, **“If you don’t, then WHO does?”** The answer, Jesus. I am comfortable waiting on Him to show us what to do, or rather I am because increasingly desirous of being so comfortable. How about you?

I have been learning to ask more lately. The Lord has been faithful to answer. He always is.

I liked the way John Grundy put the question last Sunday evening at the Family Room. He first painted the picture like this. The men's ministry prepared to a Wild Game Dinner for 150 or so men and got over 400. Pastor Myron prayed for 30 baptisms and got 140. We hoped to break even financially on the Aaron Shust concert and God provided a surplus. This followed by the question, "What's going on here?" The answer, God is teaching us to trust Him. Do you realize that broken people tend to do that better that puffed up, self-confident, proud ones?

2 Corinthians 12:7-10

⁷To keep me from becoming conceited because of these surpassingly great revelations, there was given me a thorn in my flesh, a messenger of Satan, to torment me. ⁸Three times I pleaded with the Lord to take it away from me. ⁹But he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may rest on me. ¹⁰That is why, for Christ's sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong.

"I delight in weaknesses"? What kind of a ridiculous statement is that? It makes sense to no one outside the people of God, but resonates with them. I am understanding this as never before.

Church you have no idea how **inadequate** I feel as I prepare to take up this mantle again and lead you in worship. I have always had some sense of this, but now it is overwhelming. I have such a sense of anticipation that it is almost paralyzing. Almost! The words on my lips in prayer often these days are "Help me Lord not to mess this up. Help me not to get in the way."

We have been talking about becoming **new wineskins**. If you have not read that lately, read it this week in **Matthew 9:17**, then stop and think about it. God is pouring out new wine, new life in our midst and we must prepare ourselves for this, by anticipating the changes He will require of us. One commentator said it this way: "It is of no use attempting to bind new life down to old forms; whenever this is done there is conflict and confusion." I pray we can avoid that conflict and confusion, by allowing God to not only usher in new life, but also new forms, new ways of doing things.

God is Changing our Worship

As certainly as God is changing me and all of us, He is changing the way we approach Him together. **God is changing our worship**. Though the substance will remain the same, the style is changing. Though the essence is not negotiable, the form is.

I outlined some of this last week by highlighting that first Sunday I was gone, but it has been true of every time we have gathered since then. There have been changes in personnel. Pastor Nathan leading the team and service, Bill Fleet leading the choir, and so many others stepping up and helping us approach the Lord in worship are some examples of this. Life change testimonies highlighting God's work are becoming a regular feature. Elders baptizing is another example of this. Praise God! He is providing for the needs of His Bride.

We are becoming a more loving church. People are excited about coming here, never knowing what to expect next. Mercy is flowing in this place. God is calling us to display His gentleness and be marked by brokenness. There is an expectancy that has begun to mark our gatherings. **Can you feel that, church?**

We are at just the beginning of what He wants to do in us as we come together to ascribe worth to Him alone. Before I go any further, let me try to define worship so that there is no confusion as to what I am talking about. Let me borrow words from some far wiser than I.

A. W. Tozer – Alliance pastor and theologian

Worship means "to feel in the heart and to express in some appropriate manner a humbling but delightful sense of admiring awe and astonished wonder."

William Temple – Archbishop of Canterbury

Worship is the submission of all of our nature to God.

It is the quickening of conscience by His holiness, nourishment of mind by His truth, purifying of imagination by His beauty, opening of the heart to His love, and submission of will to His purpose.

And all this gathered up in adoration is the greatest of human expressions of which we are capable.

Warren Wiersbe – Pastor, speaker, teacher, author

Worship is the believer's response of all that he is--mind, emotions, will, and body--to all that God is and says and does. This response has its mystical side in subjective experience, and its practical side in objective obedience to God's revealed truth. It is a loving response that is balanced by the fear of the Lord, and it is a deepening response as the believer comes to know God better.

Simply put, I like to define worship as our response to God's revelation. It is important to understand what worship is, and what it is not. It is humbling, delightful, wonderful, submission, adoration, response. It is not simply music, an order of service, what we do for an hour on Sunday morning. It must not be considered lightly, for worship is an incredible gift... **FIRE VIDEO**

VIDEO “The Gift of Worship” *Insert Video HERE in PPT*

Above all things, this is what I want you to remember as we follow God and move forward together to make much of Him, that **my singular desire is to lift up Jesus**. We must be careful as we do this that we do not exalt our own desires of His.

And what is His desire for His church, this church? Author Gordon McDonald offered this as the one unchanging thing in the church: “**the gospel of Jesus that calls people to forgiveness of sins and to participation in a community of people who want to serve each other and go forward to make a statement about God’s love in their worlds.**” McDonald goes on to say that beyond this primary purpose almost nothing else can stay the same for long if you want to “connect with people and introduce them to Jesus Christ”

How have we stated that purpose for this local body? What have we said is our part in telling God’s story as a congregation. “**Impacting the World with Great Commission Disciples**” This requires us to be looking beyond ourselves. It has expression in our giving and our serving, in every area of church life. As we think about our corporate worship gatherings, how will this be expressed?

While we must remember that worship is primarily for God, it has great benefit to the church and to those who are considering the claims of Christ. As we **contextualize** the gospel, as our missionaries do all around the world, what kind of style will help us connect with God and with the people of our community? As we endeavor to be Great Commission Disciples in Warren, Ohio in 2009 what will our worship sound like? What will that experience feel like as we think about designing one that glorifies God and impacts our world?

What does that look on Sunday morning? I am not certain.

What does that look on Sunday morning? I am not certain. One thing I am certain of is that I am glad God did not give us a specific form for how we do that. He could have of course. That’s what He did in the Old Testament.

God gave the form and spelled it out; their approach to Him was through a series of sacrifices and offerings which made them right with God. God went to great lengths to clearly communicate to His people what worship should **look like, smell like, feel like**, but they still messed it up. And how!

Though a can fully examine this, would you agree that **we too often resemble Israel**? Knowing the right thing to do but failing just the same. This is what God said of what they made of worship.

Amos 5:21-24

²¹ **"I hate, I despise your religious feasts;
I cannot stand your assemblies.**

²² Even though you bring me burnt offerings and grain offerings,
I will not accept them.
Though you bring choice fellowship offerings, ^[b]
I will have no regard for them.

²³ Away with the noise of your songs!
I will not listen to the music of your harps.

²⁴ But let justice roll on like a river,
righteousness like a never-failing stream!

Though my heart grieves at the thought, **I think we would do the same**. For even though there is no such clear instruction to us, we are all guilty, at least at times, of shaping worship more around what we like than what God has commanded. We must be very careful that our slick forms and polished programs do not replace a dependency on the Holy Spirit.

So, **what have we made worship?** As the video said, we have too often made it about the music we want to hear. The music that we think best communicates the gospel. And there is some wisdom here because music is a powerful tool to communicate and imbed truth in the soul of the listener. But how do we make those choices, when hopefully an every diversifying group call North-Mar home? Let us consider a couple more verses from Colossians 3, Paul writing to the church in Colosse, to close out our time this morning with some practicals.

Colossians 3:16-17

¹⁶ Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom, and as you sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God. ¹⁷ And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.

Let's think for a few minutes about these words. First, the **word of Christ** is to dwell in us richly. What did God preserve from the worship of the Hebrew people and the early church? **Words**.

We have little to no idea what the music sounded like that was used in Davidic and Temple worship. We do not even know what some of the instruments looked like. We have even less of an indication of what the early Church singing would have sounded like, though we might take some educated guesses.

I am delighted that this is so. I think the creativity of our God, which He has demonstrated and deposited in us, is more wonderfully expressed in this freedom from an ordained musical style. South American believers pounding with the Amazon rain, Asian Christians filled with God's holy fire, African worshippers singing on the plains, an

Ohioan choir lifting up their love song to their King all have distinctly different styles. I believe God delights in each of them!

Next we have His Word characterizing the things we say to one another. They impart **wisdom** to us so that we have something to offer to each other as we teach, more often outside a formal classroom, and admonish, gentle words of correction and encouragement.

So His Word is in us and we are in each others lives. What is the next thing Paul says? **Sing with grateful hearts**. That line could prove fodder for an entire sermon, but suffice it to say, a reflection on all that God has done should cause our hearts to sing gratefully. Yes, sing. But sing what?

Psalms, hymns and spiritual songs. I want to take a few moments here offering what scholars believe Paul meant, and what their contemporary corollaries might be. This is important since it is some of only a few passages of instruction for worship in the Church Age found in the New Testament.

Psalms, probably the most obvious. To Paul, this would be the text of the Psalms. Many early Christians were Jewish and would have brought this with them from the synagogue. We sing these texts today in Scripture songs like “This is the Day” and hymns like Martin Luther’s “A Mighty Fortress”, a paraphrase of Psalm 46.

Hymns are believed to have been songs that were already becoming known among the churches. We have a few recorded in Scripture. Philippians 2:5-11 and Luke 1:46-55. For us, this is a much more defined form. A hymn is a song that has an even meter throughout, that is each stanza has the same number of syllables for each line as every other stanza. There are both ancient and modern hymns, i.e. “I Surrender All” and “In Christ Alone”.

Finally, there are **Spiritual Songs**. The most debate is had over this form. It is believed by most scholars that this would have been a spontaneous song given by the Holy Spirit that may or may not have been simple enough for others to join, sung in tongues, or offered by several worshippers at once. Much of the repertoire coming from believers today falls into this category. A song like “I Will Never Be” we hope was inspired by the Spirit for the good of not just one church at one time, but for the Church.

We use examples of each of these to give voice to our worship, not only because we like them all, but there seems to be some instruction from Scripture encouraging such diversity. Will we sing Psalms? **Yes**. Will we sing hymns? Yes. Spiritual Songs? Yes.

As I continue to discern what I like to call the “voice” of our church, that is what we sing best as an expression of our collective heart of gratitude to God, I would like to request your help. I would like for you to tell me your **favorite song**, from any or each of these categories, and why it is so. You will find some forms for this exercise at the Welcome Center, and a similar form online at our worship ministries page.

I am trusting this to be a profitable exercise for each of you as you consider why a song is your favorite and expect that it will demonstrate God's working in your life through that song at some point in your walk with Him. I intent to put this information together over the summer for the edification of the church and our worship, as well as using a number of them as tools for praise over the next year, at times potentially asking one of you to share the significance of that story with the church family.

If the Lord has spoken to you in these past two weeks as I have shared, I want to alert you to two other ways you can hear my heart on a more regular basis. Though they are really one and the same, you can request to be put on an email list to receive a weekly worship tune-up of sorts I call, **Tuesday Tunings**, or visit my blog of the same title where I post them. There is a link to the blog on our webpage *as well as a link to request your name and address be added to the email list.*

As we learn each others favorite songs of worship, and to trust each other more, may we **surrender** to the work of God in our midst. Let us hold nothing back from Him, but offer all that we are and have and hope to be. And whatever we do, let us do it in the name of Jesus!

Pastor Timothy,

I originally saw Faith Hill perform "I Surrender All" on the Oprah show and I cried so hard when I heard it. My heart felt so full and open. When we sang it in church back in April, I experienced the same feeling.

Something changed in me. It was like the Lord was telling me to surrender all my burdens (which have been plenty this past year) to him and he'll take care of me. This may sound silly, but I feel the Lord is holding my heart and I feel safe and loved. It's such a powerful, transforming song and that's why I wanted to share it with my family, since they'll be there for the Baptism. I understand if you can't fit it into the schedule. I'm sure as always that the songs we'll sing for that service will be the songs that the Lord calls us to sing.

God Bless,

Danielle