

**Wednesday, July 22, 2020**

**SERIES: CHARACTER OVER COMPROMISE**

**SPEAKER: NAT CRAWFORD**

**TITLE: Worship Without Reservation Pt. 1**

I have been blessed to worship in locations all around the United States. I've also been able to worship outside of this country – in Croatia, where locals gather together in a church building, much like the ones we see here in the U.S. However, the building is very cold, and the people in attendance come to church faced with 50% unemployment. Yet they sing with enthusiasm and dance with joy.

I've worshipped in Nepal, where our Indian brothers and sisters in Christ face health issues, food shortages, and persecution. Still, they sing with total joy.

I've worshipped in a small village in India. They dance, sing, and laugh. One person in that crowd was a church planter whose story I couldn't grasp. You see, Sunit, had a "joy stealing" story. His oldest son was born with a severe disability. He was limited in his capacity to communicate. He was forced to live and operate out of his wheelchair. They would travel to the big cities for doctors' appointments and surgeries to help his son. But he knew that there was likely nothing they could do to heal him. Sunit's son was his pride and joy. He loved him. He prayed for him. To Sunit, his little boy was perfect. When his son was eight, his health made a dramatic downturn. Suddenly, his son died. His beautiful son was gone. Sunit needed to be strong for his wife Sunita, who was carrying their third child. But suddenly, in the midst of their sadness, Sunita lost that baby too. So sad. And if two deaths weren't enough, Sunit's sister-in-law passed away due to some health issues.

To share their story, makes me want to cry today. But here is what's incredible: when I met Sunit, it was less than a year after he lost both children. Yet, he smiled. He laughed. He praised God with all he had. I asked him, "How can you worship and praise God without reservation, in the face of such pain?" He said, "Because the Lord is good."

You see, I love worshiping around the globe. I love worshiping here at home. But it has been my overall experience, that there is little reserve in the worship of our God, in places that face the largest setbacks. It's amazing. Now, to be honest, I don't see that enthusiasm as much in the US. In our churches, we come distracted. We come late. With COVID-19, many of us haven't worshiped together for a long time. And while church is streaming, we are on our phones, not paying full attention. Friends, this can't be.

I believe every Christian can worship God without reservation, by embracing five essentials of worship. And we'll see those essentials of worship in Psalm 100. So if you have a Bible with you please turn with me to Psalm 100.

Psalm 100 is a short Psalm: only 5 verses, but packed full of theological goodness. Psalm 100 is a psalm of praise – a hymn of thanksgiving. That is exactly what today is all about. Praising God.

**Make a joyful noise to the LORD, all the earth!**

**<sup>2</sup> Serve the LORD with gladness!**

**Come into his presence with singing!**

**<sup>3</sup> Know that the LORD, he is God!**

**It is he who made us, and we are his;**

**we are his people, and the sheep of his pasture.**

**<sup>4</sup> Enter his gates with thanksgiving,**

**and his courts with praise!**

**Give thanks to him; bless his name!**

**<sup>5</sup> For the LORD is good;**

**his steadfast love endures forever,**

**and his faithfulness to all generations. (ESV)**

A short Psalm – only five verses, but they are rich. Did you notice how the psalmist breaks apart this Psalm? It is divided into 4 parts: Verses 1-2 is how to worship and praise God. Verse 3 is a reason for why we should praise God. Then verse 4 is again telling us how to praise God. Then verse five again provides the reason for praising God. Take note as we briefly survey these five verses.

**Verses 1-2 says, “Make a joyful noise to the Lord, all the earth! Serve the Lord with gladness! Come into his presence with singing.”**

Here in rapid succession, we see the first three essentials of worship without reservation. In verse 1 the psalmist says, “If you are going to praise God, make a joyful noise.” The NLT says “Shout for joy to the Lord.” So the first essential of worship without reservation is, we are to **Make a joyful noise**

Shout! Yell! Let loose and get funky! It's not a monotone, “Yup. God is good. Yup, He's there. Yup, He's our provider.” Not at all. It's the opposite. It's a loud and boisterous praise! Where does such a response come from? From the heart. It's something that springs from deep within us. Jesus recognized this. He said **what you say flows from what is in your heart (Luke 6:45)**. In other words, what you truly love, your lips will declare.

One of my guilty pleasures is concert-going. I really enjoy going to live concert events. I've probably attended nearly 50 concerts over the past 17 years. Nothing compares to the live event. To be honest, it's an amazing sight: being surrounded by 15,000 attendees, as people shout and sing their lungs out, to the music of a famed musician. Thousands of people singing, cheering, hands raised high, screaming and clapping. But here's the problem. They are doing it for a person. They are doing it for the things that will perish. Because of that, it's a bit sad, because these people are worshiping and praising not the one true God, but just a person, or a band.

Maybe it's not a concert for you. Maybe you get to worship full-on at a sporting event. Over the past few months, with COVID-19 impacting our world, we've put a pause on life. We've put a pause on playing at the park. We've put a pause on going to the pools. We've put a pause on going to church. We've put a pause on sports. Every once in a while, on my commute to the office, I will listen to sports talk radio, and there is a lot of excitement right now about getting back to sports. People want to watch them on TV, but we also really want to get back to being in the stands.

In Nebraska, it's all about Husker football. And I will tell you, it is an awesome experience to be surrounded by 93,000 people, shouting and cheering for those Huskers. But again, it makes me a little bit sad, because I wonder how hard would it be to fill the stands of Memorial Stadium with 93,000 people shouting and worshipping God?

I think about churches in the world of COVID-19. I believe the body of Christ longs to get together again, and to worship without reservation...to worship without masks...to worship without social distancing ... to worship on Sunday. But as a pastor, I know many people gather on a Sunday morning, and they don't shout. They don't make a joyful noise. They come and they stand, they listen, and then they leave. It's my prayer, that when the body of Christ gathers together in their fullness, that we will make a joyful noise. That we will shout. That we will praise God without reservation!

## **DISCUSSION:**

N: Let me turn to Arnie Cole today and ask: Arnie – do you think the break we had during the COVID-19 crisis has forced us to rethink how we worship and what true worship is all about?

A: Oh, you bet. Not only do I think it, we did lots of research on it, and had the ability to speak at different places about it on air. Yes, it's made a tremendous difference. And you know, we predicted that attendance was going to go down 25 to 30%, and we didn't know there was going to be these extensions and all of that stuff. And I think you can pretty well say that attendance has hit that low. Also, the thing that scares me - two things scare me the most. The first thing is the average person is getting out of the habit - the average Christ follower is getting out of the habit - of worshipping on Sunday in community. That concerns me a lot. And then the second thing is: for those pastors, they're so glad that they're able to bring some of their congregation back, that they've decided not to continue their online presence. So you take those two things, and yeah, it causes me a great deal of concern.

N: Do you think, moving forward, that it's wise for pastors and churches just to abandon their online presence, or should they be ready for a next wave?

A: I think they should be. I'll use this term and everybody hates it, and it's not really a word, but irregardless of what's going on - and all the educated people roll their eyes, but it's my favorite term - irregardless of COVID-19, the church needs to leave the walls of their building behind. So yes, you need a building, but people are hanging out in the virtual world. That's where a lot of their problems they get into are, as we've talked about before. Why not meet them where they are, and run with them, if you will, in their lives? And that's what an online presence really does. Yes, you need community; you need it all. You need it all.

N: Yeah, the church is the body of Christ. It's not a building, as you said; it's not the walls. It is a people. And so, whether we are meeting physically in person, or for a time digitally, or in a combination of both, we still are the church. And what a great way to redeem the online world, the online marketplace, that has been so infiltrated with bad worldviews, with poor philosophy, bad theology; what an opportunity for churches to reclaim the marketplace on ideas, and do so with excellence. And in fact, that's something we've developed here at Back to the Bible. Isn't that right?

A: Yeah. We provide several different tools for the church to help them minister beyond their walls.

N: If you want to help your church or your pastor, look at some of these resources for a future date, for the unknown of the future. Check it out at [BacktotheBible.org](http://BacktotheBible.org).

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In Psalm 100, whoever the psalmist was, he was right to be prescriptive in how to praise God. We are an easily distracted and swayed species. We get distracted by celebrities, sports figures, sports, restaurants, food, drinks; you name it, we get distracted by it. We shout for joy for so many things, but we whisper our praise to God. This is why the Psalmist tells us to praise the Lord with a loud, guttural, and full on emotive noise to the Lord! Shout! Shout for joy!

So consider today, how you can make a joyful noise to the Lord. Who can you express your love of God to? How can you tell people about Him? How can you do it - through social media? Through a conversation with a friend? Around a bonfire with a group of neighbors or friends? Absolutely. At the supermarket?

One of the neat things I saw during the initial lockdowns of COVID-19, was the mosaic paintings in people's windows. As I walked through our neighborhood, I saw crosses and shining lights coming from them. I saw the words "hope", with an empty tomb painted in a window. I believe that was a shout to the neighborhood of worship to the Lord. So today, make a joyful noise! Do not be ashamed! *Shout for joy, all the earth.*

**Essential #1** is make a joyful noise to the Lord. In verse 2, we see the **second essential**. It says we are to **Serve the Lord with gladness!**

**Serve the Lord with gladness** –In other words, our service is to be an act of worship to God. I don't think we think about this much. We often equate worship with singing in church. And surely that is. We just talked about that. But actually, our service is an act of worshipping our God and King. Peter writes in First Peter 4, “**As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another, as good stewards of God's varied grace (10).**” God's grace does not just end when He saves us. We know that He also gives us spiritual gifts. How we use those is an act of worship. How we use those to build up the body of Christ is an act of worship. So serve the body of Christ with the gifts that He has given you.

But also know that God has given you a unique shape. In Erik Rees' book *S.H.A.P.E.*, he points out that God has given each one of His children a unique shape, and we can leverage that to serve the body of Christ, and to advance His Kingdom.

Using “SHAPE” as an acrostic – the first letter, “S” stands for *spiritual gifts*, and we just talked about that. But He has also given us a *heart*. That's the “H” in shape.

Why is it, that some of us have a special heart for people in a certain country, or maybe a certain area of service? Because God designed us that way. I have friends who just have a heart for Japan, and so they picked up and moved there to become missionaries. Others have a heart for the disenfranchised, so what do they do? They start a church in the neighborhood, but they also move their family there. They don't want to just drop in and out. No, they have a heart for those people, and so they live amongst them. I have friends who have a heart for mothers who are struggling with the thought of abortion So what do they do? They give of their time and their talents to serve that group of people. We all have a heart for people and things, so we should lean into them.

Also, God has given us abilities. The “A” in SHAPE stands for our *abilities*. Some of those are God given and others are developed. Some people ask if leadership is something you're born with or whether it's developed, and I think it's both. The reality is, whatever we do today, we can always do it better. So even if you are a gifted natural leader – whatever that means– you can always do better through development. Public speaking: Some people are naturally gifted communicators. They have a way with words. But I believe that they can always improve that ability. I never thought I'd be a preacher, and I never thought I would be a communicator. I was never comfortable with talking in high school. I kind of felt like Moses – I had no grasp of mastering my words. But through the gifting of the Holy Spirit, and through the development of certifications, and getting reps in the pulpit, I've been able to improve what God has already gifted me with. The same is true for you.

Some people say, “But you don't understand that I'm not a preacher.” Or, “Please understand, I'm not a teacher.” But then I say, “Good, you're not supposed to be. But what can you do?” I had someone say, “Well, I'm not really great with people, but I'm really good at knitting or sewing”. I said, “Great. How can you leverage that to serve the body of Christ, and to advance the Kingdom of God?” And after some thought, they said, “Well I could knit baby blankets for new mothers and attach a little note”. “Exactly, great idea”. Maybe you're a hairstylist, and you say, “What good can I do?” You go down to your local homeless shelter, when life allows, and you can

serve them through cleaning up their style, but also delivering the Good News. Maybe you're a sports nut - you could leverage that to coach youth sports.

That's one of the things I do. Honestly, I'm not good at sports - and honestly, I don't know a lot about them - but I am passionate about being with my kids, and developing them in the areas of their passion. So, I coach youth football and basketball. And what's great is, I get to serve my kids and their friends, but we also open up our teams to the community. We have people who are far from God in our presence. And because of my willingness to teach and to coach, I have parents message me –not about sports– but about parenting and life. Because life is hard, and they know I care about their kids, and so they reach out to me. So today, consider what you can do to serve others, as an act of worship, and also an advancement of the Kingdom.

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N: Now let's check in with Arnie Cole. Arnie, you have many skills and abilities. Did you ever question how God would use those within ministry?

A: Oh, totally. Totally. I mean, it's amazing from when I became a Christ follower at 43, I totally thought I'm going to go to Heaven – Whoopee - but I was done. I had no skills that God could use. I was just lucky that He saved me. So yes, personally, it was a big, big deal. And it took mentors working with me and saying, “Look, man, you've got something to offer. You haven't thrown your life away totally. There's more life after 47.”

N: So, how'd you find your mentors? I mean, was there a criteria that you were using? Did God just provide them? A combination? Talk a little bit more about that mentorship.

A: You know, it was in my local church. I met a group of guys and I joined a men's group, really liked it. They had this organization called Halftime. I think it's called From Success to Significance. They made a big deal, probably overplayed that. It was like, let's find your skillset, and see if we can plug it into some kind of ministry. It was a very helpful experience for me, that's for sure.

N: Well, I think what you've done is, you've leveraged what God has given you, both in experiences, and abilities, and personality, and spiritual gifts, to lead a ministry, and to do so with excellence. And God is calling all of us. He's not necessarily saying, you're going to be a CEO of an international ministry. You're not necessarily going to be a Bible teacher at a church, or in a ministry, but God wants us to take the everyday abilities that He's given us, and use those for His Kingdom. It doesn't matter if it's speaking, or writing, or research, or maybe it's golf. Any of those things can be used to expand the Kingdom of God. And that's what He wants us to do. And back to your point, you were willing to go out and find people to help you develop those skills, and to grow to become the best leader, and best Christian, possible. And that's exactly what God is calling us to do as well.