

## Start With a Song

Psalm 90:1-6  
Ephesians 1:3-14

October 29, 2017  
Faith Community

***Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God***  
(Ephesians 1:1, TNIV)

This is how Paul begins his letter to the Ephesians. Using just eleven words he opens his heart, declares his authority, and sums up his life purpose. Not too shabby for eleven words, don't you think?

Out of thirteen New Testament letters attributed to Paul, nine begin with his identifying himself as an apostle. An apostle is someone who has been sent or commissioned for a purpose. It wasn't something they came up with on their own, but rather they were assigned.

This is who he is.  
This comes before anything else that can be said about him.  
It informs what he does.  
It shapes his life because Jesus Christ is his life.

Once that's addressed along with opening greetings we move into the heart of the matter. Watch this, friends.

We begin with praise:

***Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ.*** (Ephesians 1:3, TNIV)

Always start with praise, friends. However you may feel, whatever the circumstances of your life, be a person of praise, in good times and bad.

The very first question in the Westminster Shorter Catechism is,

**What is the chief end of humankind?**

And the answer is:

**The chief end of humankind is to glorify God and enjoy him forever.**

Friends, you are not an accident or afterthought. You have a purpose in life, and your purpose is not to go to school, get a job, grow up, have kids, and then die. Instead,

your purpose in life is to glorify God and enjoy God forever. Those other things are important, but they're means to an end.

The heart of today's passage begins:

***Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.***

Now see how it ends:

***....to the praise of his glory.***

There's the template for your life, the bookends, if you will. You are not an accident or afterthought. You have a purpose.

When this passage was first written, all 12 verses, all 201 words, were caught up in one sentence. Imagine that! One sentence! You could spend a lifetime on just this passage and you would be exhausted long before you even came close to grasping fully what's going on here. I wonder how Paul felt after writing it all out. I bet he was so overtaken by the God he loved and served that once the words started to flow, it was all he could do to keep up, and by the end of this glorious sentence he felt spent like an Olympic athlete at the end of a race.

So if your purpose in life is to glorify God and enjoy him forever, it follows that worship is a response.

***Worship is a response.***

It's a response because God made the first move. God always makes the first move. That's our Reformed tradition at its best, you see.

***Lord, you have been our dwelling place  
throughout all generations.  
Before the mountains were born  
or you brought forth the whole world,  
from everlasting to everlasting you are God.***  
(Psalm 90:1-2)

Our Ephesians passage is a marvelous, extravagant, exuberant, exultant, song of praise to the God who makes the first move. It's life with an exclamation point at the end. That's because God not only made the first move, God did so in a lavish manner. Listen to verses seven and eight:

***In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God's grace that he lavished on us.*** (Ephesians 1:7-8)

The word occurs 78 times in the New Testament, with more than half of them used by Paul. Now for those of us who like our worship services scripted, neatly laid out, predictable and punctual, this is not necessarily a good thing. It doesn't sound like something we can pull off decently and in order, so a suspicion might rear its ugly head here.

If you want to see real lavish exuberance, go to any college football stadium where the home team wins on the last play of the game. That is true lavish exuberance!

**Authentic Christian worship, like the Word of God on which it is centered, is living, breathing, changing, vibrant, vital, refreshingly unpredictable and always transformative.<sup>1</sup>**

Does that describe what happens here? Do you have moments in which you connect with God and things like that happen? When was the last time you let go?

Worship is a response.

One of our Guatemala mission teams experienced that. Each day as they approached the village in which they worked, children came running to welcome them, with smiles, hugs and laughter. They were truly grateful. Is our worship like that?

In this marvelously overpowering passage, notice please, there's not a thing for us to do. There's no assignment, no job, no responsibility on our part, not even a chore.

I love the way Eugene Peterson puts it. If you are truly going to grow up in this Christianity business, there's one skill you need to cultivate. The only people who are any good at it are babies. That's because the skill in question is receptivity.<sup>2</sup> The life of discipleship is not a do it yourself enterprise. That's because,

---

<sup>1</sup> "Worshiping the Triune God: Gathering," by Paul Detterman Reformed Worship, No. 101, September 2011, p. 16.

<sup>2</sup> Eugene Peterson, Practicing Resurrection: A Conversation On Growing Up In Christ (Grand Rapids, Eerdmans, 2010) p. 68

**Disciples are people who are becoming more like Jesus in their character and emotional and spiritual development.**

We are take charge people, which is why this stuff can be so difficult for us to grasp, let alone put in practice.

**We need to make ourselves conversant with the largeness, the sheer immensity of the world in which we are growing up in Christ. Every part of the landscape, every shift in the weather, every conversation, every person we meet, every book we read provides a different and unique slant on what is involved: God's grace activated, God's grace in motion- in us. It isn't our business to figure this out or catalogue it or master it. Get used to abundance.<sup>3</sup>**

So come on, engineers and scientists. Take all that training, the data, the achievements and inventions, and let them move you into a state of wonder over the greatest designer of them all.

Come on, musicians. As Andre Previn said, you are never as good as the music, and neither are you concerned about anything other than an audience of one.

How about you, educators and students? You can master all the knowledge under the sun, but without wisdom it'll do you precious little good.

So:

***Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ!***

---

<sup>3</sup>Eugene Peterson, Practicing Resurrection: A Conversation On Growing Up In Christ (Grand Rapids, Eerdmans, 2010) pp. 62-3.