

**Habits—Healthy Practices to LIVE By—Worship—Giving Praise
John 4:19-26**

Romania greetings—Black lives matter—Marshawn McCarroll

Prayer

We are a product of what we sew or is sewn into our lives. **If we sew a thought— (click) we reap an act. If we sew an act— (click) we reap a HABIT. If we sew a HABIT— (click) we reap a life. If we sew a life— (click) we reap a destiny.**

(click) **Our HABITS shape our LIVES and determine our DESTINIES.** An anonymous author once wrote "A man's fortune has its form given to it by his HABITS." Aristotle said, "**We are what we repeatedly do. Excellence then, is not an act, but a HABIT.**" If we take control of our HABITS—we take control of our lives.

The same holds true for faith development. **Our HABITS are crucial to DEVELOPING and STRENGTHENING our FAITH.** We can see this from the start of the Church. Jesus called his disciples to leave their former ways of life and follow him—a change in HABITS. Paul admonished the people in Colossae to “take off” their old life—and to “put on” a new life in Christ—a change in HABITS.

On the day of Pentecost, after 3,000 persons had responded to the Gospel, the **FIRST THING** the disciples did was to expose them to the life-giving HABITS that grow faith. **“They devoted themselves to the apostles’ TEACHING and to FELLOWSHIP, to the BREAKING of BREAD and to PRAYER. Everyone was filled with awe at the many wonders and signs performed by the apostles. All the believers were TOGETHER and had everything in common. They sold property and possessions to GIVE to ANYONE who had NEED. Every day they continued to MEET TOGETHER in the TEMPLE courts. They BROKE BREAD in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, PRAISING GOD and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.” (Acts 2:42-47)**

During the last 2,000 years, the times that the Church has flourished have been the seasons when the followers of Jesus have been intentional about pursuing life change with the HABITS of their lives.

John Wesley, the first Methodist, saw that the church in his day was doctrinally sound—they had “right beliefs”—but their beliefs were not affecting the way they lived—they had “wrong practices.” There was a gap between BELIEF and PRACTICE. They were SAVED, but were not living a HOLY LIFE. Wesley responded by encouraging the practice of HABITS that formed and grew faith—while changing lives.

Wesley called these the **Means of GRACE**—the holy HABITS that shape the life and soul—and defined them as—**“Outward SIGNS, WORDS, or ACTIONS ordained of God, and appointed for this end—to be the ordinary channels whereby he might convey to men PREVENTING, JUSTIFYING, or SANCTIFYING GRACE.”** Wesley emphasized being SAVED—AND SANCTIFIED. BELIEF—and PRACTICE. One of the reasons that I am a Methodist is because I believe in the power of the practice of the “means of grace” to change lives and communities.

We try to live this today. The mission of our congregation is **“to develop fully-devoted FOLLOWERS of Jesus Christ”**—in other words—**“to CONNECT people with JESUS—and make JESUS KNOWN.”** There is nothing new about this—it has been the mission of the church ever since Jesus gave the Great Commission in Matthew 28. Several years ago, during a staff retreat, we asked the question, “How will we know? How will we know when persons are being connected with Jesus and making Jesus known in and through our congregation?”

The conversation that followed resulted in identifying and teaching six core HABITS that have historically shaped the lives of those who live with the greatest spiritual power and potency:

- **Growing disciples WORSHIP GOD WEEKLY** with other Jesus followers—and understand that worship is a filling station that helps refocus one’s life on the Creator of the Universe.
- **Growing disciples know that the greatest spiritual growth comes in the SMALL GROUP** setting. They live in a small community where they are known full and fully known.

- **Growing disciples have a DAILY DEVOTIONAL practice.** They stop depending upon the pastor or other people to feed them spiritually—and learn to feed themselves so that when they hear a sermon or participate in a small group—the Spirit takes what they have fed themselves and supercharges its impact in their lives.
- **Growing disciples understand that SERVING** is entry level Christianity. They embody service.
- **Growing disciples LIVE GENEROUSLY**—sharing what God has given to them with those in need and giving to the cause of Christ in the world.
- **Growing disciples are contagious and SHARE FAITH.** They are always ready to share the reason for the hope that they have in Jesus with anyone they meet. It is almost as if they have been infected by the Gospel of Jesus—and are committed to spreading the good infection of Jesus to everyone they know.

Our HABITS shape our LIVES and determine our DESTINIES. Human development experts tell us it takes 30 days for a HABIT to become engrained in our lives and concrete life change to begin to take root. 30 days. We have begun the season of Lent—the 40 day period (not including Sundays) from Ash Wednesday to Holy Week. In some traditions, Lent is seen as a season of penance and self-denial, and is observed by fasting or giving up something for Lent.

This year, instead of just asking each other to give something UP—we are challenging each other to take some HABITS ON for Lent. If a new HABIT can become engrained in 30 days—imagine the potential of spending the 40 days of Lent devoting ourselves to these six life-changing, faith-developing, Kingdom-expanding HABITS.

This weekend—we are discussing the HABIT of **weekly WORSHIP**. We believe that our faith grows when we REGULARLY WORSHIP God with our whole heart, soul, mind and strength.

The average American Christian attends worship 1.5 times a month—here at RUMC—we are just above average—1.8 times a month. When asked, we have our excuses ready—“It is my only day to sleep in”—“The kids have games”—“I have to get my shopping done”—“I don’t like this”—or “I don’t care for that.” In the end our lack of commitment to the HABIT of WEEKLY WORSHIP shrinks our

faith, and prevents us from living with spiritual power and strength. Its absence shapes our lives and determines our destinies.

It is important to remember—**we were CREATED to WORSHIP**. God has hard-wired us for relationship with Him. Anthropologists have researched and determined that the innate desire/need to worship God is found in EVERY CULTURE on the planet. Why is that? The Creator of the Universe has hard-wired us to desire and worship Him. The Psalmist says it this way: **“My soul YEARNS, even faints, for the COURTS of the Lord; my heart and my flesh CRY OUT for the LIVING GOD.” (84:2)**

Illus: Mountains—sunrise—stars—take our breath away

There is a throne inside of every human heart—a place of primary importance—and we will put something on that throne. It may be ourselves or another person—the desire for a place—a quest for a possession—the pursuit for a certain position. Weekly worship reminds us that we were created to place God on the throne of our hearts—to be in relationship with One who provides—forgives—heals—mends—and calls us to live the life we were created to live. We were CREATED to WORSHIP.

CS Lewis describes this deep yearning when he writes: **“If we find ourselves with a desire that NOTHING in this world can satisfy, the most probable explanation is that we were made for ANOTHER WORLD.”**

We believe that the God of the Universe emptied himself of the privilege of heaven—and became one of us in Jesus. Jesus lived a perfect life—resisting sin and temptation. Jesus died a sacrificial death—forgiving and cancelling the penalty of our sin. Jesus rose again—showing his power over sin and death. That same God invites us to relationship—to receive the forgiveness of our sin and live our lives in response to the grace he has given to us by placing our faith in Jesus. When we understand that God’s sole motivation for going to such extraordinary lengths to save us is that he loves us and desires a relationship with us—it prompts us to WORSHIP. God is worthy of our WORSHIP.

However, **we sometimes FORGET the OBJECT of our WORSHIP**. Worship is about WHO we are worshipping and not about US. We sometimes get distracted by

HOW—WHEN—WHERE—and WHETHER we should worship. We focus on the style—the type of the music—who the preacher is or is not—and the dress of those around us—rather than WHO we worship. And when we do this—we are really worshipping ourselves—and not the Creator of the Universe. That is idolatry.

Jesus said, “Worship the LORD your God—and SERVE HIM ONLY.” (Matthew 4:10) Worship is not about US—it is about GOD. The way we talk about it is often a reflection of whether we understand that or not. Mark Batterson writes: **“There are basically two types of people in the world—COMPLAINERS and WORSHIPPERS. If we tend to think that worship is about US—we will tend to be a COMPLAINER. If we remember that worship is about GOD—we will tend to be a WORSHIPPER.”**

Who are you WORSHIPPING? Make sure the focus is on God.

I love this story of the encounter between Jesus and the woman at the well in John 4. There are all kinds of subtle undertones that add meaning and depth to the story—a Jewish man talking with a Samaritan woman in public—a woman coming to draw water from the well at noon and Jesus offering Living Water—the way Jesus unpeels the layers of her life while offering grace—her response to the man who tells her everything she ever did. At that moment—the time and place when everyone else has passed judgment on her—Jesus offers GRACE—and it changes her life.

In the story, Jesus reminds us that **WORSHIP is the KEY to DRAWING NEAR to GOD**. This woman’s response to Jesus shows us three ways WORSHIP causes us to look at ourselves, God and others. Worship **BEGINS with an INWARD LOOK**. As Jesus engages her, he strips away the veneer of sin covering her life, and offers her GRACE. Then Jesus scratches the itch of her soul and asks the question he already knows the answer to—she has a past—a well-earned “reputation”—and it has separated her from everyone else and God. He asks her about her husband, and she says, **“I have no husband.” (4:17)**

Every person in this room has a secret. A place in our lives that we wish Jesus would just leave alone. Jesus knows, and when we come to worship—placing ourselves in the presence of the LIVING God—God will often cause us to LOOK

INSIDE at ourselves. Sometimes—the stuff that we carry can cause us to feel that we are DISQUALIFIED from experiencing what God has to offer—but that is a lie.

This woman was alone at the well in the middle of the day—because the actions of her life had DISQUALIFIED her from going there with all the other women of the community—but instead of REJECTING her—Jesus ENGAGES her.

Some of us are in the same place. We have stuff in our past or present that we try to keep covered up—but God has a way of bringing it to the surface—NOT to condemn—but to help us move forward to the life he offers us. What is that area of your life? Take a LOOK INSIDE.

We sometimes FEEL we are UNWORTHY to WORSHIP. This story reminds us—that there is NOTHING that can prevent us from receiving the grace and mercy of God—except our choice. There is NOTHING that is unforgivable—except what is unconfessed. There is NOTHING that should keep us from worship—except the excuses we offer. Jesus will offer GRACE and relationship if you will let him—so be honest with God—and he will be gracious to you. Remember—worship is not so much about what is WRONG with you—but what is RIGHT about God. This is what is RIGHT about God. God LOVES you. God is CRAZY about you. God wants to FORGIVE and RESTORE you. There is nothing that has happened in your life that is beyond his grace to FORGIVE—nothing—NOTHING—NO THING. It's not about you. It's about God—and how God wants to REDEEM, FORGIVE and USE us! UNDERSTAND this—and WORSHIP will take you to a deep and life-changing place.

As Jesus uncovers this layer of her story—she attempts to deflect it with a conversation about “religion.” It’s a natural response—when we encounter God—and take an INWARD LOOK at ourselves— we will eventually take an UPWARD LOOK.

Jesus has just exposed her past and present living conditions—that she has had six husbands and the man she is with now is not her husband—and she says, “**I perceive that you are a PROPHET**—tell me which place is better for worship—here in Samaria or in Jerusalem.” (4:19) Some of us are just like her—we respond to conversation about our sin—our brokenness—our secret—with “religion.” We deflect God’s desire to heal our lives by focusing on the practice of “religion”—while Jesus offers us relationship.

Illus: UMC in Romania—98% orthodox—2% in weekly worship. The #1 response they receive when they begin to share about Jesus is—“I am orthodox.” The first response is almost always a “religious” response.

In this story, Jesus redirects the conversation by saying that WORSHIP is not so much about PLACE—but HEART. It is not about BRAND—but SUBSTANCE. It is not RITUAL—but a REORIENTATION of life. It is not about RELIGION—but RELATIONSHIP. Jesus said, **“God is spirit, and his worshipers must worship in the SPIRIT and in TRUTH.” (4:24)**

What are you looking for as you come to WORSHIP? A particular RITUAL or RELIGIOUS practice—or an ENCOUNTER with a LIVING God? This woman got the connection—she has come there spiritually thirsty—and left filled with living water. She was NOT CONDEMNED for her many sins—but was OFFERED GRACE and RELATIONSHIP. She says, “Sir, I know that the Messiah is coming and when he does, he will explain all things.” Jesus tells her that he is the Messiah—and she is changed.

What are you looking for when you come to worship? I encourage you to look for Jesus. RELIGION will not save you—JESUS will.

This woman has taken an INWARD LOOK at herself—she has taken an UPWARD LOOK at GOD—encountering God in WORSHIP does that. When that happens, it **ALWAYS LEADS to an OUTWARD LOOK.** An authentic experience of Jesus is too good not to share. When we truly encounter Jesus in WORSHIP—it shifts the focus of our lives toward OTHERS.

The woman leaves her water jar at the well—and heads back to town—to the very people who had ignored and ostracized her—and says: **COME and SEE.** This woman wanted them—even those who had treated her poorly—to experience the same grace she had. When we experience Jesus—NOT RELIGION—but JESUS—we want to share him with other people—and we begin to live our lives INVITATIONALLY.

When was the last time you invited someone to COME and SEE something about Jesus? To worship? To a Bible study? To an opportunity to serve?

The impact of that woman's invitation was that many in her town came to faith in Jesus. **"They said to the woman, 'We no longer BELIEVE just because of what you said; now we have HEARD for OURSELVES, and we KNOW that this man really is the SAVIOR of the WORLD.'" (4:42)**

All this—because a woman encountered JESUS. Who are you inviting to COME and SEE?

Illus: Corneliu and Alena—soul parents to four teenage orphans—drip grace—letters—loved—cared about—developing a future with hope—being drawn to relationship with Jesus because this couple has an OUTWARD VIEW—inviting them to COME and SEE. Who are you inviting?

Living a life of WORSHIP is a means of grace—a holy HABIT that grows our faith, changes our lives, and shapes our destinies

Question: Can I be a Christian without being in WORSHIP? Yes—but...

How is your WORSHIP life? What does it say about the priority of your relationship with God? Our frequency in worship is often an indicator of the state of our relationship with God.

Illus: If we only show up to work two out of five days a week—are we good employees? If the mailman only delivers the mail every other day—what does that say about the quality of his/her service? If our car only starts once every four times—is it dependable? What does worshipping 1.8 times a month say about the state of our discipleship?

WEEKLY WORSHIP is about reorienting our lives around our relationship with God.

Will you COMMIT yourself to TAKE ON the HABIT of WEEKLY WORSHIP for Lent?