

Prayer That Shapes You

By Ron Owens

Speaker 1:

To lead us in some worship. And he and his wife are with two organizations actually. They work with International Missions six months out of the year and North American missions the other six months out of the year. So they keep a pretty busy schedule running back and forth. We also work with Henry Blackaby who is the author of "Experiencing God" if you have read that. So you may be familiar with that. Please welcome with me, Ron Owens.

Ron Owens:

Thank you, Jenny. It's good again to be with you. Patricia and I met on a college campus many years ago in upper state New York. She is from the sovereign state of Mississippi. You know Mississippi. They show up everywhere. And I was born in eastern Canada and sort of grew up my teenage years overseas in Europe and Switzerland and then made my way to the States to go to school. And sovereignly, God had a southern belle in a voice teacher studio, a music school in Rochester, New York.

The voice teacher started to play Cupid. And Cupid didn't fire his arrows, or he missed. I went on to get engaged to another girl and was six days to marrying her when the arrow hit my heart. And it was the work of the Lord. It was a very, very difficult time in my life, but I knew that I was making a mistake. And by God's grace, He put us together. And we've been together for 38 years. They've had their highs and their lows, I guess, as all marriages do. When I say that it's marriage, you have to rework at it. And over the years we've experienced God's blessing and His faithfulness and I'm reminded over and over again it's more His grip on us than our grip on Him.

And He never lets go. And how grateful and grateful I am for that. And in many ways these latter years are better than the former. It's one thing to begin well and it's another thing to end well. And we're not planning on ending yet. But remember what the Lord Jesus said, I'm chasing a rabbit right now. I wasn't planning to talk like this, but I just want to share. Remember what the Lord said at the end of His ministry? 'Father, I have brought You glory on earth by completing or finishing the assignment the work You gave me to do.'

And there are many reasons that, when she clears her throat, that was you. Jenny, wasn't it, coughing? When Patricia starts clearing her throat, she's trying to bring me back in line to what I'm here for. But anyway, many reasons why Jesus could say that and many reasons why the Apostle Paul could say that. But I think one of the primary fundamental reasons is that they could say they finish well. That our Lord could say he had finished and accomplished the work the Father had assigned him to do was that the things that ought to have been priority in his life were priority.

And the thing that was most important to him was the fellowship he had with the Father. And in spite of having only three years to accomplish the work, three ministry years to accomplish the work that the Father had given Him to do, He always had blocks of time to spend alone with the Father as was His custom to do. He got up early in the morning to pray. And it was the one thing, you recall, that we know the disciples asked the Lord to teach them. So it was obvious that they had recognized the importance of it in the Lord's life and the importance of prayer for themselves.

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So I covet for each of you here, those of you who are beginning, as it were, your walk in ministry with the Lord that you will make first things first in your life. And I believe that, I believe the reason for and I touched on this last night, but the reason that many folk are not finishing well and many who are dropping out of the ministry, many times just discouragement and burnout, is that they are operating or they are living, they are ministering beyond their prayer life. And that is a precarious place to be.

I picture it. I see it almost as you're like a duck sitting out there on a still lake for the enemy to shoot at when you're ministering beyond your prayer life. And you know something, there's more than just praying to ask God for things. I think one of the fundamental purposes God has in our need of being people of prayer is that it is in prayer that God shapes our character. You know, the more time you spend with someone, the more like that person you become. And I think we fail to realize that that God shapes our character.

The more time we spend with Him in prayer, the more like Christ we--that makes sense, doesn't it? And it is possible to long for a God size assignment but not be willing to let God work in you, a God sized character or a character that is equal to the assignment that He has given you. And before we get into the lecture this morning, I just want to ask you this one question. Is your prayer life equal to or commensurate with the assignment that you feel God has given you in life? Or the goal or the vision you have of serving the Lord? Is your prayer life commensurate with the desire and the vision you have to serve Him in the future?

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And if it isn't, let me encourage you, make sure it is, because it still is 'Not by might nor by power, but by my spirit, says the Lord.' That's free. We were going to sing just a little bit, but I've taken the singing time and I'm going to stick pretty close to notes this morning because I have a tendency when I get on one of my pet things, of spending all my time on it. So I'm going to try to stick to things that everyone in the church today, not everyone, but a lot of what is being discussed in the church today is over worship. And some people promote one kind of worship, some promote another kind of worship, and usually each feel that theirs is the best. And there's just basically a lot of confusion and even division in the midst of the church today. And the central issue is worship.

Now, so often today when people think of worship, their minds immediately turn to music. They think of music styles. They talk about the type of worship or music they like. To them, worship is seen only in the context of music. I've done this and I expect probably it would be maybe over 90% of the people asking them what kind of worship do they have in their church? Their immediate response is, well, we have contemporary worship or we have traditional worship or we have blended worship. And they're talking about music.

And I said, no, I didn't ask you what kind of music you use in your church, I'm asking you how do you worship God? We are contemporary, traditional, blended. You see, worship is so much more than music. In fact, I know it's not going to surprise you, but it surprises some people that you don't have to have music to worship God. In fact, I will say this, and I need to be careful in saying this because we're in music, a large part of our ministry is music. I believe that music has become, in some places in our land, more important in the church than it ought to be. And

because of it having become more and more important in our minds, things such as prayer and worship have been placed on the shelf.

Such things as the public reading of Scripture has been placed on the shelf. And we were just somewhere, I forget where it was, I think it was in Oklahoma was talking about the ingredients, the necessary ingredients to really have true worship in the church, which of course, includes preaching. A pastor came up to me after and says, ron, we've been taking more and more and more time for music. And I'm down now to 17 minutes for my sermon. That's what I'm given.

It's interesting, the three things that the Apostle Paul talked to Timothy about when he talked about worship. The three things were what? Prayer, the public reading of Scripture, and the preaching of God's word. We were just not too long ago, if not the largest church in land, one of the very largest churches in the land, and it's a Baptist church, and we're grateful to have been invited there to be part of their two morning worship services, thousands of people. But because I'm writing in this area and because it's a deep concern of ours about how some of these necessary ingredients in worship have been placed on the shelf in many of our churches, I sometimes time the amount of time that is given to such things as prayer and the public reading of Scripture.

And in that particular church, and you would know it if I mentioned it to you, they're on television. And in that particular church, in each of those services, worship services now, the worship service, Sunday morning service, a total of 45 seconds was given to actual prayer. That included the pastoral prayer, that included the prayer at the offering, that included the closing

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prayer because there were so many other things that had to be packed into the hour they had for worship. What did Jesus say His house would be called? The House of Music. I know. What did He say my house should be called? A house of prayer.

Of course, we know that this house here is to be a house of prayer because this is the temple of the Holy Spirit, but also when we gather together, the place in which we meet the gathering of Christians to be a time of prayer. So, again, this is free. I wasn't planning to talk on it, but I just encourage you, those of you who will be getting involved in your churches or the churches you're involved in right now, that you think about this, that you spend time for a prayer in the pulpit and prayer in the pew.

You know, there used to be that the pastoral prayer used to be a significant part of the worship time when the pastor stood before God in front of his people and prayed. We worked for eight years with a man by the name of Dr. Stephen F. Olford. I know this generation may not know him, but some of you may be familiar with him. He is now, he'll be 80 years old in just a couple of weeks, and he is considered by many to be the Prince of Preachers in the English speaking world. He's a Britisher. He pastored for many years. The Calvary Baptist Church across from Carnegie Hall, Manhattan. Years ago, he had the first coast to coast television program that any church ever had.

He said, he said back then, it took him 22 hours to prepare his Sunday morning sermon, but it also took him that long to prepare his Sunday morning prayer. And then he qualified. Said, all the time I'd be preparing my sermon, I'd be thinking about what I was going to say to God when I

stood before my people, what was happening out there in the world, what was happening in New York City, what was happening in the life of the church.

He said, I pray about the scriptures I was going to use in prayer before the Lord, how I was even going to approach Him when I stood before Him and prayed. In fact, he said, I take notes into the pulpit with me. Spurgeon, many of you have heard of Spurgeon, the greatest preachers that ever lived, Charles Spurgeon. You know what he admonished his young preachers to do? To outline their pulpit prayers. But those who knew Spurgeon knew him more for just as being one of the greatest preachers that ever lived, but they knew him as a great man of prayer. Prayer in the pulpit and prayer in the pew.

We must, folk, if we're going to worship God, I'm talking about the corporate context of worship. If we're going to worship God, we must pray. And then the public reading Scripture. When's the last time you heard an entire chapter or two chapters read in a worship service? Maybe you do in your church, but in most churches we only have time for a few verses because of all of the other things that we have to include. The public reading script, you say, but everybody has a Bible. They didn't have a Bible back in Paul's day. Everybody didn't have a Bible like we--in fact, I've got a dozen Bibles. I've got four or five different translations.

Okay, how many of your people, how many of you read your Bible and study your Bible all week long? Some of you folks coming to church? The only time they're even going to hear God's word read will be when they come to church. Am I right? And if it's worship time, it's time for the public reading a Scripture, reading a Scripture here, pulpit reading a Scripture there. Okay,

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well, anyway, where was I when I got off on that? I was talking about that obviously that worship is more than music.

Just skip along here. Let me just basically, before I get into the two things I want to share with you this morning, I just want to look just briefly, and I touched on it last night briefly at the Old Testament and the New Testament as to what really essentially, fundamentally what worship is. The word worship means the word used more times than any other word in the Old Testament, I think it's over 170 times, something like that is the word "shaka," which has the meaning, as I said last night, of bowing, of bending, of kneeling, of stooping before the one you worship.

Therefore, if we are going to worship God, there will be this attitude of bowing, of bending, of stooping, of humbling ourselves before the Lord. And if there is not that attitude of heart, then I guess we are really not worshiping. And in the New Testament, the word that's used more than any other word in the New Testament having to do with worship, there are other words that have to do with the kind of worship in service. But the word "proskuneo" is the Greek word that I think it's used over 60 times in the New Testament. And it has to do with this bowing. Of this bending. This stooping. And it adds the thought of kissing the hand of a monarch kind of thing. You kneel and you kiss the ring of the king or the queen or this kind of thing. It has this attitude if we're going to worship, we come with this attitude of heart.

It's my conviction, as I said in much of the Western world today, that music has taken the place of some of these other things. Music obviously is important, but it has encroached upon some of these other things that if they are not included in worship, my question is, have we really

worshiped God? Too many music is worship. Worship is music. And I think today that many worship music. Let me quickly go to the New Testament and I'd like you to turn with me to the 9th chapter of John, going to begin here, and I have until I have about 23 minutes left, the 9th chapter of John. Now, this is an account, the account of the blind man who was sitting by the roadside.

You recall that the Lord Jesus and the disciples were walking by, they were approaching Him, and the disciples turned to the Lord and said, Lord, who sinned that this man is blind? Did this man sin or did his parents sin and caused him to be blind? That was sort of, in a way, a dumb question. At least half of the question was dumb because that would have meant that the man had had to have sinned even before he was born because he was born blind. So obviously it wasn't because he had sinned, but it was and nor was it because his parents had sinned.

But you recall what Jesus said in that 9th chapter neither this man nor his parents sinned, but this happened so that the work of God might be displayed in his life. Now, this is not usually considered to be a chapter having anything to do with worship, but I think it is fundamentally one of the most important places in Scripture that deals with worship. You recall that after he was healed, remember Jesus stooped him down in the clay and spit in the clay and made mud and put it on his eyes and told the man to go and wash in the pool of Siloam. He went and washed in the pool of Siloam. He immediately saw.

And then, of course, you know, the crowds were following him and there's much excitement and then they decided to take him to the synagogue. I don't know what their motive was. I think it

was more than just reporting that he had been healed. I think it may very well have been because Jesus had done this on the Sabbath. That was anathema to the religious leaders of that day to do anything like that on the Sabbath. So they end up in the synagogue.

And you recall what happened, the religious leaders of the day trying to convince this man either that he hadn't been born blind or he couldn't see. It was a ridiculous scene. And you remember they asked, well, who did this? And remember, he confessed everything he knew. He said, well, this man must be a prophet. He must be sent by God. How could anybody else do what he did? And he was very excited about what had happened to him. Well, that wasn't exactly what the religious leaders wanted to hear, so they brought his parents in on it.

And you recall that his parents didn't want to say anything about it because word was out that if anybody professed or supported Jesus as being the Messiah, they would be excommunicated from the synagogue. And so they said to the religious leaders, well, ask our son, he's of age. Well, they have been asking him, and they didn't like what he was saying. And you remember finally this healed man said to them, you've been asking so many questions about him, do you too want to become his disciple? Well, that was the straw that broke the camel's back.

Remember, the Bible says they threw them out of the synagogue, and later on that day, the Lord crossed his path. Now, that's where I want to pick it up, here in the 35th chapter of the 9th chapter of John. 35th verse of the 9th chapter of John, Jesus heard that they had thrown him out. And when he found him, he said, do you believe in the Son of man? Who is he, sir? The man

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asked, tell me so that I may believe in him. And Jesus said, you have now seen Him. In fact, He is the one speaking with you.

Then the man said, Lord, I believe. And he what? Worshiped Him. It is my firm conviction, my firm conviction that worship begins at conversion. In fact, it is my conviction that the attitude, the act of worship is simultaneous, if not immediately following our profession confession of faith, our repentance of our sins, the moment we are birthed into the family of God, the moment we are born again, it is at that moment that we become a worshipper. And it is my contention and firm conviction that without that attitude of worship in the heart, there is no such thing as conversion.

What does Isaiah say? The people that God dwells among I think I quoted it last night those who are contrite and humble in spirit. The Lord says, though I live up here, I'm a high and holy God. I live among those who are of a humble and a contrite heart. I don't think that the Holy Spirit responds to anybody who walks down the aisle of a church and feels, I think this church is pretty lucky to get me. Conversion begins with that attitude of heart. Conversion begins with an act of worship, a bowing, a humbling of ourselves before the Savior.

Let me ask you, how can it be any other than that how could it be anything other than that?

When we see God and we see he has died, Jesus has died for us, and we are lost, eternally lost, without any hope, how can there be any other attitude than to bow before him? You know, back when I was y'all's age, I saw a lot more weeping at the altar than I see today. When people came face to face with their sin in other parts of the world, you see that the Lord opened up the door of

the Soviet Union for us for a number of years when it was still communists. Some of those satellite communist countries we were able to get in because they considered us to be poets and composers.

And I remember in those churches how when people responded in almost every service, somebody came in response. And how they kneel at the altar and weep and weep. You know what they were expected to do? In fact, if the church was large and some churches we were in had two to 3,000 people, if everybody couldn't hear what they were praying, the pastor, one of the pastors would take a microphone and hold it in front of the mouth as they confess their sin before the Lord. I'll never forget what was then Leningrad, now St. Petersburg. One man just pouring one woman, two people that night pouring out their hearts and confession to God. O God o God, please save me. My sin. In the rest of the congregation, many of them just weeping because someone had been lost.

Well, how about if this healed, blind man had walked into our churches today? Here he had had this phenomenal experience. He was excited about what had happened to him. And he said, this man surely is God. He had a great testimony already. He had been physically healed by God. Physically healed by God, and yet was he saved? Not yet. Not yet. Isn't it interesting? You can be physically healed by God and still not know him. That's what happened here. That man did not become a follower of Christ until Christ had revealed himself to him as Savior, as a Son of man, as the Messiah. And that man's response was immediately Lord. I believe it was at that point when he fell at Jesus feet that he became a believer.

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Now, what would happen in many of our churches today, maybe not in your church, but in a lot of churches in our land, in fact, I think the majority of our churches in our land, even our evangelical churches in our land, you know what we would have done? We would have had that man baptized into the membership of the church and probably on the testimony circuit in just a couple of weeks. And that man would not have yet come to faith. And I believe that that is a problem today. There are a lot of folk in our churches who have been even awakened to their spiritual need.

They know there's a need, they recognize something, in fact they may have even had a great experience, but they've never become a worshiper. And it is our responsibility as leaders in the church. If you're a leader. Whatever worship leadership you have in a church. It is our responsibility for the best we can to make sure that the person who is coming has bowed the heart in worship and not just said words. Or not just filled out a card or not just had an experience. But that they have bowed the heart and become a worshiper.

What do we find out of this? What can we learn from this? Though the man was physically healed, he was not yet a believer. Secondly, there is no salvation without revelation. Jesus said you have both seen him and it is I who am talking to you. Does he who is talking to you? Belief is a response to God's work of grace in revealing himself to us. Thirdly, there is no redemption without an attitude of worship. Lord, I believe and he worshiped him. The moment this man realized that Jesus was the Messiah, he responded with a response of a humble worshiping heart.

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And anyone who speaks the words Lord, I believe it in his heart will not stoop to worship. The Savior has not experienced God's saving grace. The soul who has never bowed to worship knows no redemption and the soul who was once bowed to worship but no longer worshiped is living in disobedience. Listen, I believe that worship begins at conversion for the rest of our lives here on earth we are worshippers. We don't just go to church to worship, we are worshippers. And everything we do, everything else in our lives, every activity, every ministry comes out of that worship begins with worship for the rest of our lives here on earth.

Fundamental to everything else is that heart of worship. And we know, as we saw last night in the book of Revelation, that a large part of the activity of heaven and eternity future is going to that exciting is going to be worship. What a tragedy it is when the believer sees worship only as something that takes place at church on a Sunday morning or as I said, when we sing it, that is how many think of worshiping god essentially as I said, it is an attitude of heart that finds expression in the daily living of life.

In reality, worship is a lifestyle and with this I want to leave you and I'll be picking up on it some I believe tomorrow morning. I just want us to look briefly in the last ten minutes we have at several lifestyles of worshipers in Scripture. The first one is found in Two Samuel. The one chapter, King David's life is a good example of worship. Remember in two Samuel the prophet Nathan confronted David with his sin of both murder and adultery. He told him that as one of the consequences of his sin, his son would die.

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Now, for six days following that word from God to Nathan, David pleaded for the child's life. Remember that he covered himself with ashes. He dressed in sack cloth. He covered himself with ashes. He fasted, he prayed, he wept, he cried, o God, please do anything else but don't take the life of my son. And on the 7th day, the child died. God didn't answer his prayer, David's prayer, the way David had wanted it to be answered. But isn't it interesting, what we find David doing immediately when he heard, when he realized that his little boy had died?

Remember, he rose from the ground, washed and anointed himself. He changed his clothes and he went into the house of the Lord and worshipped. The response of a worshipper, no matter what the circumstances of life may be, the response of a worshipper is to worship God.

Remember that little scripture that we like always to apply to other people? It's a lot easier. In everything, give thanks for this is the will of God, concerning Christ Jesus.

You say well, I know, Ron, I know it says and everything, but you understand it doesn't mean I know it says and everything, but God didn't mean in this. He did. And God doesn't put scriptures in there to mock us. He doesn't. Look down south, Sally, look at Sally. She can't do it. She can't do it. No, I believe God put scriptures in there for a purpose. And one of the purposes is when we have a worshiping heart, when we learn to be a worshipper, when we can do that, when David was able to do that, it releases in us, the Holy Spirit, to do a work that he cannot do as long as we're uptight and resentful.

And David rose from the ground. He went to the temple and he worshiped God. The next one I want you to look at is in Joshua, the fifth chapter, an encounter that Joshua had with the angel of

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the Lord. And it came to pass, when Joshua was by Jericho, that he lifted his eyes and looked and beheld a man stood opposite him with his sword drawn in his hand. And Joshua went to him and said to him, are you for us or for our adversaries? And he said, no, but as the commander of the army of the Lord, I have now come.

And Joshua fell on his face to the earth and what worshiped. And said to him, what does my Lord say to his servant? What do you have for me to do here? Joshua had gone out to try to figure out, to plan how they were going to conquer the city of Jericho. Ready for battle, Joshua worshipped. Can you believe it? You see, worship is not something that we reserve for certain times. It is not just for your quiet time or when you attend service on Sunday morning? It is a lifestyle.

We are worshippers. We were born again to be worshippers. The last one I want you to look at is, of course, this very familiar one, Job. When he learned of the loss of his animals as servants, as children, jobs immediate response was to worship. Then Job arose, tore his robe and shaved his head and he fell to the ground and worshiped. And he said, Naked I came from a mother's womb and naked shall I return. There the Lord gave and the Lord has taken away. Blessed be the name of the Lord. At the moment of life's deepest despair we find Job falling to the ground and worshipping God.

Here's an example of one who did not cease to be what he had been created to be even when faced with the greatest tragedy. From the midst of great crisis rises our deepest worship. Let me close with just a personal word of testimony. For a number of years we were responsible for the

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International Christian Center in Switzerland. There's a hotel in the resort area and I sort of inherited it from my mum and dad who had had the ministry for many years. And we were on our way to back from Africa for some ministry there in 1970 and discovered that both mom and dad were very ill. They couldn't continue the ministry.

So we felt the Lord leading us to help continue it. And those next seven years were probably years that God used to maybe shape us more than he ever has because with the glamour and the romance of being responsible for our minister in Switzerland, the hotel and all that kind of thing came all the problems and all the indebtednesses and all that kind of thing. And there was one particular weather a number of times during that period of our ministry that we were just faced with impossible situations and we had a home in Texas.

Well, I remember one of these times when we're having personnel problems and everything seemed to be mounting up. And I remember I was out on an early morning run back in those days. I ran a lot and it was very early in the morning, 4:30 or so, dark. And I was just walking along on the country road just burdened down. And I just hated to face the day because I was going to have to make some decisions. And all of a sudden, across the night sky flashed this meteorite that seemed close enough to touch. Then after it came another one and then a third one. And it just drew my attention, just drew my head, my whole body looking upwards.

And all of a sudden I saw beyond where those meteorites had flashed I saw that deep black sky with those lights shining down. And as I said last night, all of a sudden I was struck with the wonder and the greatness of God and I'll never forget, I stopped, I looked and I looked and I

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looked. All of a sudden I had to get on my knees in the middle of that road and I wept and I wept and I wept and I wept. I don't know how long I stayed there, but I remember when I finally got up and started to run again, it was a different world because, you see, God had brought me to my knees and I realized that I was a worshiper and I started hon, would you go to the piano? I wasn't planning to do this. I'll just close with this song. I was, "Try praising the Lord." I was running along and I found myself just shouting and singing at the top of my lungs.

I know the cow. There are a lot of cows and fields there. I heard a few moo's. I don't know whether they were worshipping the Lord too. But I was just loud as I could. I was just glorifying God and glorifying God. And as I was going along these words of the song came and I just started singing: [singing] when you find that the valley is lonely and deep, while the trails of the mountain keep getting more steep, in those nights when it's harder to laugh than to weep, have you thought about praising the Lord? Try praising, try praising the Lord. When the sandcastles built in the dreams you have dreamed start to crumble and fall and all hope seems to end, when you wish you could turn and start over again, why not stop and try worshipping God? Join me in singing.

Try praising Lord. Try praising the Lord. Try praising, try praising. Try praising, try praising, try praising the Lord. Try thanking the Lord, try thanking the Lord. Try praising, try thanking, try praising the Lord.

You know what I believe? I believe that most profound worship and praise and adoration does not happen on a Sunday morning in the four walls of a church. It happens out there in a nitty

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gritty of life. One of God's little children whose hurting has been pressed by melted and being shaped and things going. Everything's going seems to be going against them. They say, by the way, you can be honest with the Lord. They might even say something like this: Lord. I sure don't feel like it and it does not make human sense. But You've told me to thank You. You've told me to praise You. You've told me to worship You. You birthed me for that. So, Lord, thank you. Praise you. I worship You. Then watch what God can do.

As we stand, God, You're so good. Let's just one time through. Let's confess the goodness of God to us as we go from this place. [Singing] God, You're so good. God, You're so good. God, You're so good, You're so good to me. I praise Your name. I praise Your name. I praise Your name, You're so good to me. Hallelujah. Hallelujah. Hallelujah. Hallelujah, You're so good to me.

Lord, this confession we make to You today together, individually and together as a body, we make it in the name that is above every other name, the name of Jesus, the One before whom one day every knee is going to bound every tongue confess that He's Lord. Be Lord. O Lord, today of our lives as we worship You. Amen.