

BROADWAY CHRISTIAN CHURCH • COLUMBIA, MISSOURI
THE WORSHIP OF GOD • APRIL 26, 2020
“OPEN MIC: TESTING ONE, TWO, THREE”

The Litany
Based on Psalm 8

Out of the mouths of babes and infants, in all newness of life, your glory shines.

O Lord, our God, how majestic is your name in all the earth!

*We look upon your creation, the work of your fingers,
the moon and the stars, the trees and sun that you have established.*

O Lord, our God, how majestic is your name in all the earth!

*Yet you have entrusted the creation to us, to our mortal hands,
you have put all things under our feet.*

Aid us in being stewards of your creation.

O Lord, our God, how majestic is your name in all the earth!

Song of Focus
In Giving We Receive
Words and Music by Ed Varnum

Give and you'll be given God's blessing from above,
pressed, shaken, running over, outpouring of God's love.
Open doors say "welcome," giving hope to those that grieve.
So, open hands in giving, in giving we receive.

Working together, there's so much to achieve,
intertwining separate gifts, a ministry to weave.
So, open hearts to care as open eyes see needs.
And open hands in giving, in giving we receive.

Give and you'll be given God's blessing from above,
pressed, shaken, running over, outpouring of God's love.
Open doors say "welcome," giving hope to those that grieve.
So, open hands in giving, in giving we receive.

What are tightly clutching? Is it out of fear?
Grasping for security? Afraid to lose what's dear?
Do we close hands and minds, thinking faith naïve?
Open hands in giving, in giving we receive.

The Scripture Proverbs 11:24-25

*Some give freely, yet grow all the richer;
others withhold what is due, and only suffer want.
A generous person will be enriched,
and one who gives water will get water.*

The Message **Open Mic: Check One, Two, Thee** Mark Briley

Synopsis: An old rap song from my youth included the line, "*You better check yourself before you wreck yourself.*" While none of the other lines were memorable, that one has staying power. Against what do we measure the effectiveness of our lives? Some level of success? Some measure of kindness? A lifestyle of generosity? A man gave millions to establish a university in Texas. Several years later, he lost everything. Someone asked if he had regretted all he had given to the university? "*Regret it?*" he said, "*That school is the only lasting thing I've done with my money. Had I not given that money, I would have lost it, too.*" So much of living a generous life involves loosening our grip on fear, security, and the sense of scarcity. Only then, might we experience the freedom of a life that is "*growing all the richer.*"

"Some give freely, yet grow all the richer; others withhold what is due and only suffer want." (Proverbs 11:24)



If you're happy and you know it clap your hands. If you're happy and you know it clap your hands. If you're happy and you know it then your face will surely show it if you're happy and you know it, clap your hands.

Well... okay then. Wasn't sure how that would go virtually. And... still don't know but shoot me a text or an email if you clapped your hands, okay? I'm trusting we have some happy people tuning into worship this morning. Some of you may have just humored the pastor and went along with the child-like experiment. I appreciate that spirit. Maybe you were trying to get the kids to sit still and pay attention and offered the threat: "*Quit making fun of the pastor, Billy. You know he can hear you, right?*"

Thanks for defending me even as I'm sorry you missed clapping along. I'm sure some of you watching flat out refused – *"I don't participate in ridiculous clapping rituals."* And honestly, it's all okay. In fact, I learned that whether we're happy, and we know it or not may be something we can't fully control. I've been reading some of Dr. Robert Emmons work in preparation for this series on gratitude. Dr. Emmons is considered one of the top scientific experts on gratitude which is fascinating – the science of gratitude – have you ever thought about gratitude as a science? Emmons notes that each person has a chronic or characteristic level of happiness. The research suggests that *"People have happiness set-points to which they inevitably return following disruptive life events. Getting that book published, moving to California, having the person of your dreams answer your personal ad, each of these may send the happiness meter right off the scale for a while but, in a few months, it will drift back to the set-point that is typical for that individual. What goes up must come down."*

Interesting... especially as we wonder how this pandemic will change us for better or worse or... not at all.

This research does make sense when you think about people in your life. Some have a naturally happy disposition, and others have been waking up on the grumpy side of the bed for a while it seems. It's a process of adaptation. Humans are adaptive machines. We take good things for granted and overcome obstacles that life throws our way only to return to the state of happiness that is natural for us. You win the lottery? A couple months later, you come down from the high to your happiness set-point. You lose a job? Your spirit dives for a time. A few months later, you re-settle into that natural set point. I was honestly a little discouraged by this; as if there is nothing, we can do about it. To strengthen this idea, Emmons says that 50% of our happiness is determined by our genetics. Really?!

But... that means we've got another 50% to consider, right? So, you're saying there's a chance. Turns out 10% of our happiness is determined by our circumstance. Just 10%?! I would have guessed more. These are the things you can't necessarily control. Life that happens to you. A global pandemic that shuts down the world. Emmons says humans mess up the happiness quotient by focusing on this 10%. He says quite specifically: *"Most people are trying to improve their outside circumstances. They want more money, a better car, a hotter body, a more beautiful spouse, a better job, and more."*

Research says we are seeking happiness in all the wrong places. Why? Because the remaining 40% of our happiness is determined by our behaviors... our intentional activities. And as one of your pastors, I'm going to call these behaviors and intentional activities – spiritual disciplines or spiritual practices. The key to happiness lies not in changing our circumstances or changing our genetic makeup (*which is frankly*

impossible) but in changing our behavior. Focusing on our behavior is four times more powerful than considering our circumstances when it comes to increasing levels of happiness. And do you know the number one behavior Dr. Emmons suggests improves happiness? He's not the Gratitude Guru for nothing, my friends. You guessed it. Gratitude. To take it one step further, improving behavior also tends to create better outside circumstances as well. Not always, as some things are clearly beyond our control, but there is some correlation.¹

Why does this matter? Because I want you to be happy? Of course, I do. But I also want us all to be growing in our spiritual health. It is why we are focused on gratitude in this stewardship series. Practicing gratitude seems to be more than a good idea – but a reality of spiritual health. So, we're tackling this honestly in this series called *Open Mic*. Some of our youth stepped to the Open Mic this week to share their thoughts on gratitude and stewardship. Thank you, Mara Zaner, for being on our stewardship team and helping your peers share this word today.

We're asking all of us to consider our own lives as an Open Mic. You have a voice. You practice a set of behaviors. You have influence in your home, or your place of work, or in your circles of friends. What kind of impact are you making in those places? What is your life saying to them? We're asking these important questions, considering the nature of gratitude and how, in turn, we give of our time, talents, and resources to God. Today's title: *Open Mic: Check one, two, three*.

As a kid, there was nothing more fun than finding an open mic... you could make weird noises or yell loudly or beat box... it was just fascinating to hear your voice amplified. Being a pastor's kid, I often was around the church early (*and late*), before and after events would happen in the life of the church. The sound guy would often send me up on the chancel before events and check the mics. Loved it. "*Mic check, one, two, three*," was the standard and I usually started with that before broadly expanding what I would test out on the microphones.

There was an old rap song from my high school days that included the line, "*You better check yourself before you wreck yourself*." It was actually more like, "*Chick-chiggidy-check yo'self before you wreck yo'self*." It was always worth a go when checking the mics. And while I can't remember even a little bit of the rest of the song, that line has staying power. It would heed a good warning to my spirit in times of need. It was like the parental advice before going out on the town, "*Remember who you are*." Same thing. Check yourself before you wreck yourself. You can get yourself in a bind pretty quickly if you're not intentional about what you expect your life to be about. There is

¹ <https://www.njlifehacks.com/thanks-robert-emmons-book-summary/> Info shared in this message concerning Emmons work are found at this link.

plenty of Scripture that can be of help in times of need but there's nothing quite like the Proverbs to put you in check when you need it the most.

Some have described the Proverbs as the voice of that wise, elderly person in your life, who has been through it all and doesn't have time to sugarcoat advice anymore. The Proverbs cut to the chase. Get right after what's real and necessary and what can alter your behavior in a positive way. The two short verses from Proverbs 11:24-25 get right to the point. *"Some give freely yet grow all the richer; others withhold what is due and only suffer want... a generous person will be enriched, those who help others will be helped."*

Boom. Short and sweet. To the point. Would you say that is true of your life? In giving freely, do you grow more fulfilled? In withholding, do you end up only wanting more? The writer says bluntly, you want to measure an effective life? What do you give away? How do you help others? Are you more concerned with getting yours, being selfish, or living in gratitude and doing good for the world? Seems pretty straightforward and I think most of us would say that we agree with the notion, *"It is better to give than receive."* But is that truly how we see success? Or do we live as if control and power and money and more of it is what determines success?

There was a man who gave millions to establish a university in Texas. Several years later, he lost everything. Someone asked if he had regretted all he had given to the university. *"Regret it?"* he said, *"That school is the only lasting thing I've done with my money. Had I not given that money, I would have lost it, too."*

What have you given of yourself... to what place, what cause, what hope? Gratitude is about living with open hands to the world. When we clench our fists or hold tight to our possessions or our time or our gifts of ability to some cause to improve the world, we close the door on gratitude. We are, in turn, not changed for the better either. We're not happier. And we just get lost in the fear of scarcity... as if there's not enough stuff to go around. Not enough money. Not enough, not enough, not enough. How often is that our driving concern?

Pre-COVID realities, my friend wandered into an Estate Sale and was a bit taken aback by the whole experience. Have you gone to these things? People were rushing in to claim the material goods of another now deceased... a houseful of things that stood as a reminder of one's property, possessions, personality and likes. My friend stood back as others were aggressive in the hunt for steals and deals and a couple of those working the sale said in observance of the look on my friend's face. *"Look at him, he's soaking it all in, creating a plan for what he wants to get."* My friend, still a bit stunned by the whole thing, asked the two working the sale, *"Did you know the person who lived here?"* *"Uh, no,"* they said. *"Do you know her name?"* *"Um. No, guess I don't... but she sure had some great stuff."*

We work hard to accumulate a life without taking much time to truly live a life. The writer of Proverbs is saying, *“You want your world to expand? Not with riches but with what truly is a rich life? Then live generously. Lead and make room for others to lead. Give and model for others what generosity looks like. Loosen the grip on your possessions and see what that affords your spirit to possess anew.”*

Sometimes, it is our comfort that makes us lose site of the generous life. We become consumed by mundane things that are not kingdom game changes.

In the movie *Old School* (not a pulpit-endorsement mind you) Will Ferrell plays a married, thirty-something-year-old suburban man who finds himself at a college party. When he's offered a drink, he declines, saying, *“I have a big day tomorrow.”* When he's asked, *“Doing what?”* he responds, *“Well, um... actually a pretty nice little Saturday. We're gonna go to Home Depot, buy some wallpaper, maybe get some flooring, stuff like that. Maybe Bed, Bath & Beyond... I don't know. I don't know if we'll have enough time....”*

As you can imagine, not overly relatable to a college-aged crowd but why do people who have seen this movie remember this line? Will knows how to deliver a line, yes, but more than that, there's something more going on than his trip to Home Depot on a Saturday. The man in this movie is bored.

He has the life that is often portrayed as the ideal – a spouse, a house, a job, security, comfort, privilege, freedom – and yet it's left him bored, numb, and in a low-grade state of despair. His 'success' has actually served to distract him from just how deeply unsatisfied he is with his life. Many may be struggling with this right now as all the things we have used to identify our lives have stopped or shifted: our jobs, our extracurricular activities, our life at home. We're forced to look at our lives from this new perspective. What defines my life now? That old life may have created a paralyzing indifference that comes from being too comfortable... what Rob Bell calls, *“Death by wallpaper and flooring.”*² Happiness does not exist solely in wallpaper and flooring... even if you're an interior designer. Our behaviors have to move us beyond that comfort... over the edge of easy, comfortable, existence to a life that places gratitude, generosity, and difference-making as our top behaviors.

Remember when we drew Star Words on the first Sunday of the year? That was approximately seven-and-a-half-years ago now, right? It was just a few months in actuality. It was fun that even this week, I heard from three different people who said, *“Man, remember that word thing? Here's my word... can you believe how it's impacting this new season in my life?”* Awesome. I love those stories. Our Star Word as a congregation is VISION. Our Vision Team met via ZOOM just the other night. New

² This quote and the *Old School* reference found in Bell's *“Drops Like Stars.”* Harper One. 2009. Pg. 41-42.

questions rising given this pandemic. How will the church be different on the other side of this? How will people be spiritually hungry in a new way? We don't know yet but it makes for a provocative conversation. I loved a clip several of you shared with me entitled: *"Every preacher the first Sunday back after Corona..."* Check it out...

[Pause in your reading and highlight [HERE](#) and right click **Open Hyperlink** to see the clip.]

It's going to be awesome! But what about the church? I think people are hungry for something new. Maybe we all needed a reset. I have loved stories you've shared of family members watching worship with you that you couldn't get to come to church before. I've loved questions several of you have asked, *"When we get back together again, I'm interested in joining this kind of group – do we have one of those? If not, can I start one?"* These just keep coming. *"I want to serve in a new way."* *"I want to give in a new way."* *"We weren't participating before but we're ready now."*

Terrific stuff! Who are we going to be Broadway? The hungry still need to be fed – we're supporting a number of families from our partner in education school who need some extra help right now. People still want to study – I'm hearing from folks who said, *"Our Zoom studies are better than our in-person studies ever were!"* I don't know, friends. But I believe the local church remains the greatest hope for the world. And if we don't believe in the power of faith in community, I'm not sure who will. VISION, Broadway. VISION! Are you up for it?

If we all do our part... give our best... invest intentionally in the communal effort, I believe the transformation will not only be visible to us all, but it will be an inspiration to our city. Carrie and I will be prayerfully completing our pledge card online during the next two weeks. Some of you have done so already, and we are grateful. Some of you may join us in doing so this week or next. Some of you have shifting economic situations, and you don't know what you might be able to pledge this year. We completely understand. The impact on the life of our church, like your small business, or your work with the University, or however you do your work is still unknown. This is an unprecedented time, new to every one of us. But I'm trusting that we'll find new strength through this time as a church. We're learning new spiritual realities all the time, and I still believe in the reason you called me and my family to come alongside of you and see who God needs us to be next. Your pledge to the church helps determine our reach in 2020 and beyond – what programs we can offer, what new needs we can meet, what worship experiences, studies, retreats we can create, who we can serve more fully, what witness we can make in Columbia and beyond. You may think that your contribution of time, talent, and resources isn't as valuable as another's, but I'll politely disagree. You give. You trust. You grow. The community gets stronger, too.

Chris Martin, lead singer of the band Coldplay once said: *“I can’t dance like Usher. I can’t sing like Beyoncé. I can’t write songs like Elton John. But we can do the best with what we’ve got. And so that’s what we do. We just go for it.”*

What are you ready to go for? How can you be grateful in a new way? How can your generosity expand to a new level? Proverbs says a generous person will be enriched. Your 40% control over your behaviors may make all the difference. Can you imagine your satisfaction – physically, emotionally, spiritually, improving by 40% next year? We can, at minimum, take a step in that direction. Practicing gratitude is the best place to start.

You know the story of the rich, young ruler. A young man who came to Jesus asking, *“How can I grow all the richer?”* He asked it by saying, *“What do I have to do to inherit eternal life?”* Jesus said, *“You saw the felt boards in Sunday School – follow the commandments, etc.”* The man smiled, *“Of course. Got it. I’m good.”* But Jesus knew he was living with tight fists on his possessions. So, Jesus challenges further, *“Sell what you’ve got and give it to the poor.”* And the line that always pierces my heart flows next. *“The man turned from Jesus and walked away, sad, because he had so much great stuff.”*

(Perfect for a someday Estate Sale). I don’t want to spend my life walking away sad. Do you? It’s all about perspective. And no one can *do* perspective for us. We’ve got to do that spiritual work. That’s the hard work of the 40% in the happiness quotient. But if I know you, Broadway Christian Church, I know you’re up for the work. And I’m so grateful to be on the journey with you. You are a people who live gratitude well. I’m happy, and I know it. You? Maybe worth one more shot...

If you’re grateful and you know it clap your hands. If you’re grateful and you know it clap your hands. If you’re grateful and you know it then your life will surely show it if you’re grateful and you know it, clap your hands.