

BROADWAY CHRISTIAN CHURCH • COLUMBIA, MISSOURI
THE WORSHIP OF GOD • MAY 3, 2020
“OPEN MIC: FEEDBACK”

The Litany
Based on Psalm 138

*We give you thanks, O Lord, with our whole heart.
As before you, we are open to receive.*

**Not with empty prayers that sound profound or with false humility,
but with songs of praise.**

*We give thanks, Exalted One, because when we called, you answered,
you increased our resolve and our strength.*

**Though the Lord is high and lifted up,
every lowly one is held in the heart of God.**

*Though we walk in the midst of trouble, fulfill in us your purpose,
inspiring in us your steadfast love which endures forever.*

**In your great compassion and holiness,
we give thanks for your faithfulness as you preserve us
for nothing stands in the way of your holy purpose.**

Song of Focus
A Stewardship Prayer
Words and Music by Ed Varnum

The refrain is inspired by a quote from David Viscott's
“Finding Your Strength in Difficult Times”
The purpose of life is to discover your gift.
The work of life is to develop it.
The meaning of life is to give your gift away.

1. Oh my God, you've given, and I am blessed.
Help me nurture these gifts you've poured from above!
Send me into this world to use them to help the rest
and tell the world you're here and they are loved.

Refrain

The joy of our lives is in the gifts we discover.
The work of our lives is to nurture, excel in those gifts.
The meaning of life is using these gifts to serve others
in the fulness of life to witness your love as we give!

2. Oh God, my God, you give, and I receive.

Help me develop these gifts that they may grow.
O my God, you've spoken, and I believe.
Help me serve others that they too may know.

Refrain

The joy of our lives is in the gifts we discover.
The work of our lives is to nurture, excel in those gifts.
The meaning of life is using these gifts to serve others
in the fulness of life to witness your love as we give,
and so truly live.

The Scripture **Acts 20:17-24**

From Miletus he sent a message to Ephesus, asking the elders of the church to meet him. When they came to him, he said to them: "You yourselves know how I lived among you the entire time from the first day that I set foot in Asia, serving the Lord with all humility and with tears, enduring the trials that came to me through the plots of the Jews. I did not shrink from doing anything helpful, proclaiming the message to you and teaching you publicly and from house to house, as I testified to both Jews and Greeks about repentance toward God and faith toward our Lord Jesus. And now, as a captive to the Spirit, I am on my way to Jerusalem, not knowing what will happen to me there, except that the Holy Spirit testifies to me in every city that imprisonment and persecutions are waiting for me. But I do not count my life of any value to myself, if only I may finish my course and the ministry that I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify to the good news of God's grace.

The Message **Open Mic: Feedback** **Mark Briley**

Synopsis: We all know that shrilling sound called "*feedback*" that is experienced when a live microphone gets too close to the speakers from which it is propelling sound. What if we looked at feedback as in "*feeding back*" or "*giving forward*:" from our abundance into the glory of God and the needs of the world? We can surely name at least one person whom we would deem generous; one who has given forward with grace. In remembering that person, we may describe him or her with a quote paraphrased by author Mary Magee: "*They opened their hearts to help others, and they helped others to open their hearts.*" Wouldn't we all like to be such a person? The Apostle Paul leaves the same idea with the elders of Ephesus in this passage from Acts. Paul has poured his life into his ministry. May we also make the same commitment saying, "*I will give forward.*"

“I do not count my life of any value to myself, if only I may finish my course and the ministry that I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify to the good news of God’s grace.” (Acts 20:24)



How are you holding up these quarantined days? If you’re quarantining with others, have you said anything you regret yet? I had a friend post this on social media: *“My wife and I play this fun game during quarantine, it’s called, “Why are you doing it that way?”* and there are no winners. Sound familiar?

Mark Twain said that if he’d had more time, he would have said less. Quite a self-reflection, don’t you think? Do you ever reflect this way on your own life? We do tend to be our own worst critic. Our own self-feedback may not always be the healthiest. The truth is, we may not be great at receiving feedback from others either. We like to call it constructive criticism, but often that’s just the veil of judgment. But... feedback is important if we’re going to grow, change, shift, adapt, improve, succeed. In many ways, we’ve become oversensitive to receiving feedback.

I had a scooter accident this week. I’m not proud. And I wish I could say it was a big, bad, motor bike with some epic tale. But, no. It was just a little manual scooter you ride on with one foot and push with the other foot like a skateboard. I’ve got some road rash on the elbow to remind me that I didn’t win that battle. I had run outside on a whim to excite the boys a bit, who were riding already. I jumped on a vacant scooter and went up our steep hill as I had watched the boys do a hundred times. I hit the top, the boys by my side, stoked to see dad doing something a little risky, I suppose. *“Any advice?”* I asked. *“Don’t crash!”* was about all I got from the boys. I felt like Lane Myer standing atop the steep ski mountain in the movie *Better Off Dead* when looking at his friend Charles De Mar for some ski instruction advice. Charles says, *“Go that way, really fast. If something gets in your way, turn.”* Against better judgment, I took off. I’m cruising at break neck speeds (*please allow for slight exaggeration*). I was going a hundred miles an hour when I see the lip of our driveway at the bottom of the hill quickly approaching. I estimated the need to hop the lip so as not to topple over the front of the scooter. My massive error landed me on the back wheel of the scooter which appeared to be a rad, fully intentional wheelie landing. However, I was out of control. My weight proceeded to carry me to the concrete driveway flat on my back. Boys were compassionate enough even as the feedback I was getting was all in the look: *“Told you not to crash!”*

Feedback. We all need it if we truly long to improve. I heard a leader once say, “*I try hard not to offend others and try even harder not to be offended.*” Not bad advice and maybe some helpful feedback for you and me to remember.

Feedback. Are you up for some today? This sort of advice may be what you first think of when it comes to feedback. Certainly, as we are in the throes of this *Open Mic* series, feedback also has a technological connotation. If you get a microphone turned up too loud or in front of the wrong speaker or amplifier, a deafening screech will blare from the speakers. A “*hot mic*” we might say when that ear-piercing sound is made. Nothing pleasant about it whatsoever. But we’re not really talking about that kind of feedback today either though we are playing on that idea given the nature of our series.

Instead, I’m taking some liberties with the two words that are the basis of the word feedback. *Feed* and *back*. In this series on gratitude, I’m wondering how we’ve been fed – our minds, our stomachs, our souls – and how, in turn, we might feed *back*. With gratitude for all we are, all we’ve experienced, all we have, how will we feed *back* – how might we give back to God, to our neighbors, to the church?

Someone surely comes to mind when you think of a person who has done this well, faithfully, with deep gratitude. A dear friend from the church I served in Tulsa used to say about generous people who inspired her to be her best self: “*They opened their hearts to help others and they helped others to open their hearts.*” That’s this feeding back we’re hoping to embody as people of faith.

The Apostle Paul had the same hopes for the early churches he helped start. What an exciting season in the life of the church. Talk about grass roots. Jesus is resurrected and now it’s game on. Life was forever different, and the likes of Paul stepped into the role of church planter, ministry entrepreneur, creator of the community of faith designed to contain the hopes of the world.

The passage from Acts that is our focus today is Paul’s farewell to many he nurtured along the way. These were people with whom he shed blood, sweat, and tears for the sake of the Gospel. They believed in it so. They were moved by Jesus. They were committed to the cause. And they gave everything they had to propel the church into the future. Paul knew it wasn’t long before this contagious love reached the whole world. Though he lived among the pain every day, we find throughout the entire motif of this pericope from Acts, a dominant feeling of affection. That feeling should be in every church, for when love dies in any church the work of Christ cannot do anything but wither.

Daniel Grothe, pastor in Colorado and friend of a friend wrote of this love-amid-the-pain-of-life. He said, “*One of my friends is walking through the Valley of the Shadow.*”

As I was listening to him share his heart, and when the appropriate amount of silence had settled over us, this came out of me: "You have permission to live the most difficult days of your life in the safety of our presence." Grothe said, "That is the summary of Christian community. We all need that permission from each other, permission to be where we are."¹

This is love run deep. This is church. After giving the first part of his adulthood to the persecution of the church, Paul gave the second part of his adulthood to building the loving Body of Christ. You can imagine Paul's intended move to Jerusalem at this point was bittersweet. He was with his people. They built love. They had some great pot luck dinners and built a few Habitat Houses. And the baptisms... the BAPTISMS! My, people were coming to faith left and right. Why would he leave? And beyond being comfortable, he knew he was risking it all to leave. He would not be received well in Jerusalem. In fact, he sums it up in this loving farewell to his posse: *"There is another urgency before me now. I feel compelled to go to Jerusalem. I'm completely in the dark about what will happen when I get there. I do know that it won't be any picnic, for the Holy Spirit has let me know repeatedly and clearly that there are hard times and imprisonment ahead. But that matters little. What matters most to me is to finish what God started: the job the Master Jesus gave me of letting everyone I meet know all about this incredibly extravagant generosity of God."*

He couldn't settle to just stay and be fed and enjoy the high life of faith in that community. He was called to give forward... to feed *back* from the enormity of the meal he'd feasted on with those Christians. If you read forward a way you see the beauty of Paul's send off. Listen to the words: *"Then Paul went down on his knees, all of them kneeling with him, and prayed. And then a river of tears. Much clinging to Paul, not wanting to let him go. They knew they would never see him again – he had told them quite plainly. The pain cut deep. Then, bravely, they walked him down to the ship."*

Parting is such sweet sorrow.

Paul's friends probably went into town after seeing him off and rented a *Rage Room* for an hour. You heard about those? Rage Rooms. It's often a BYOB situation – bring your own breakables. You rent a room for an hour or so, bring your breakables and then just smash all your stuff and walk away. That's it. It seems Springfield, Missouri is the closest one to us. Tulsa had a Rage Room called *Smash Something*.² You can break anything from an Xbox to a smart phone or bring in your own stuff to smash. *"It's fun to break stuff,"* said the owner. *"There's a lot of stress and anger in the world. It's nice to have a way to blow off some steam."* Cost is \$15-30 per session. But I digress.

¹ A friend shared Grothe's Face Book post with me which is what is quoted in this message. Grothe is on staff at New Life Church in Colorado. <http://www.newlifechurch.org/staff>

² <https://www.smashsomethingtulsa.com/>

Paul departs. He is grateful for what he's shared with that Christian community, but his course is forward. He's got to share forward that gratitude with more who are seeking faith. He must keep feeding *back*. What is *your* course forward? How are you feeding back, giving of yourself to the faith that has given you new life? Are you giving forward? A friend said to me this week, "*I always prayed I could live well enough until my kids were adults. But then I made it and realized I couldn't stop there. Now I've got grandkids to care about.*"

In this life of faith, there is no end-game. It's the course. The journey. The faithful next step to a new view where the next faithful step can be seen more clearly. This is Paul's sentiment – "*I do not count my life of any value to myself, if only I may finish my course and the ministry that I received from the Lord... to testify to the good news of God's grace.*" When you find that truest meaning of your life... that deepest conviction of your purpose... it must lead you forward. And such a path can only be taken with gratitude. Are you on such a path?

Much of the time we are either distracted by the chaos around us or without full attention to God's guidance. But don't give up when you can't feel it on the inside. Daniel Grothe noted this about the long journey we're on. "*The life of faith is the life where the saints learn to play the long game with each other. If we do it right,*" he says, "*the seasons of bottoming out in grief and overwhelming despair do not have to be seen as final but can be seen as stops along the way.*"

The biblical greats wobbled and fell and had moments of complacency, but they didn't stay there. They rose. They re-focused. They saw the course forward – and typically only did so when they remembered gratitude; when they recalled where they had been and who Christ had become for them. They couldn't help themselves but to press forward and give faithfully. They opened their hearts to help others and then helped others to open their hearts. Isn't this what we are about as a church family?

I don't know about you, but I hear a lot of stories from the world that are designed to discourage us. Lots of bleak news out there these COVID days. We can get down and even become skeptical of our neighbors as physical distancing brings about emotional distancing or... spiritual distancing. But then I speak to you or get a message from you... we pray together... we come alongside of each other, pooling our resources of finance, ideas, talents, and a wholly other story emerges. A life with pain, sure, but a life that is pushing forward with purpose; a life that is singing a song that is worth getting stuck in your soul. Can you hear that soul song now? Is it in you? It's glorious. It's glorious, in part, *because* of the pain.

In his memoir "*What I Talk About When I Talk About Running*," the Japanese writer Haruki Murakami reflects on why runners spend so much time and energy on long distance runs like some of our folks training for the Heart of America Marathon to

support our ministry partner, ENLACE, this September. He says, *“It’s precisely because of the pain, precisely because we want to overcome that pain, that we can get a feeling, through this process, of really being alive.”*³

Paul was surely a runner – he used race imagery so often. But he knew he had to keep running. He couldn’t rest on his laurels. He couldn’t grow complacent. He was only really alive when he was gratefully living out the call on his life.

This is the closing Sunday of our stewardship series. I’m grateful for all who will make a pledge this week to support the ministry we’ll share in 2020-2021. May our gifts be sign and symbol of our gratitude and our clarity of course – that we are pressing forward together, not out of obligation, but out of faith... out of commitment to the long game of the saints. It speaks to the words of the Persian poet, Hafiz, who said, *“Even after all this time, the sun never says to the Earth, “You owe me.” Look what happens with a love like that. It lights the whole sky.”*

We have opportunity day after day, year after year to show the world what a grateful love like that can do. We can light up the whole sky... the entirety of the earth... with the glory of Christ. Your gifts matter. So do mine. It’s our feed *back*... our gifts *forward*. This is our time for we never know what time we have.



Kirk Cousins is the quarterback of the Minnesota Vikings. In front of his home, in between a few shrubs, stands a curious tower. It’s about four feet tall, filled to the top with stones. Inspired décor you ask? Well... sort of. *“It’s there,”* he says, *“to remind me how brief life is and how important the time we have here is.”* Okay. But why the tower of stones? *“It’s a little morbid,”* he admits, *“but it’s a tool my Bible teacher taught me in high school.”* The stones were inspired by the Psalm his teacher shared with him that says, *“Teach us to number our days that we may gain a heart of wisdom.”* Cousins said, *“It’s about making a deposit in people’s lives in a way that matters.”* We only have so many days. The quarterback transformed that verse into a visual reminder: 720 stones. He calculated what he considered a feasible number of years he had left given his health and history, measured that time in months and came up with 720 months left in his life, Lord willing. *“Every month*

I’m going to take out a stone,” he said, *“put it in my pocket and think: “Once this month is over, this is gone. You can’t get it back.”* Cousins was going to be intentional about how he spent the time he had left... wanting to stay the course of his faith, his call to

³ This piece was shared in Rob Bell’s “Drops Like Stars.” Harper One. 2009. Pg. 46.

live generously, in pursuit of his life's purpose. Carrying each stone reminds him to be less selfish and more giving to others because, in the end, he says, "*It's not going to be about what I did for myself, but what I did for others.*" So, he pulls a stone, and he asks the question, "*What impact am I making, not only today, but for eternity?*"⁴ This was Paul's waking question.



And so, my friends... what is your waking question? Does it have anything to do with feeding back; about giving forward? It's worth a thought. In fact, it's worth more than a thought. It's worth a life... lived open before God... free to pursue the dream of your calling in Christ. Which leads us to finish with the same question that started this whole series in the first place. Your life is an *Open Mic*... what will you say?

⁴ http://www.espn.com/nfl/story/_/id/25024166/minnesota-vikings-quarterback-kirk-cousins-confronts-mortality-stone-form