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The Worship of God • August 21, 2022



THE SCRIPTURE
John 14:6-10 (*The Message*)

Many among his disciples heard this and said, “This is tough teaching, too tough to swallow.” Jesus sensed that his disciples were having a hard time with this and said, “Does this rattle you completely? What would happen if you saw the Son of Man ascending to where he came from? The Spirit can make life. Sheer muscle and willpower don’t make anything happen. Every word I’ve spoken to you is a Spirit-word, and so it is life-making. But some of you are resisting, refusing to have any part in this.” (Jesus knew from the start that some weren’t going to risk themselves with him. He knew also who would betray him.) He went on to say, “This is why I told you earlier that no one is capable of coming to me on his own. You get to me only as a gift from the father.” After this, many of his disciples left. They no longer wanted to be associated with him. Then Jesus gave the Twelve their chance: “Do you also want to leave?” [Are you gonna go my way?] Peter replied, “Master, to whom would we go? You have the words of real life, eternal life. We’ve already committed ourselves, confident that you are the Holy One of God.”

THE MESSAGE
“Then Sings My Soul: Are You Gonna Go My Way?”
Mark Briley

[Editor’s Note: It would be helpful to listen to “Are You Gonna Go My Way?” by Lenny Kravitz. Follow this link:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8LhCd1W2V0Q>]

“What I really want to know is... are you gonna go my way?” It’s such an iconic question, and nobody asks it cooler than Leonard Albert Kravitz¹. Our Broadway friend who submitted this song for our series led with that very sentiment. “*First of all,*” he says, “*Don’t we all wish we were as cool as Lenny?!?!*” And this self-styled rock-soul revivalist is pretty cool... and timeless really. He performed this very 29-year-old song at the Grammy’s this year with Gabriella Wilson, a.k.a. H.E.R. *Timeless*.



Everybody’s got an in with Lenny. Teenagers may not know his music all that much, but most of them think the role of Cinna, whom Lenny played in the hit series *The Hunger Games*, is pretty cool. He played a stylist in the movie, yes, but if you’re into fashion at all, you’ve long been fascinated with Lenny’s personal style. Hit up the late twenty-somethings in the house, and they may tell you they loved Lenny Kravitz as Nurse John in the award-winning film, “*Precious*” which you can’t just leave the title at *Precious*, right? Every single time the movie won an award ... and it won 75 of the 135 awards it was nominated for... the presenters had to read the full title, “*And the winner is... Precious: Based on the Novel ‘Push’ by Sapphire.*”

If you’re my age, you probably remember this song, and others, that were hits during high school... and the fact that he married Denise Huxtable... or Lisa Bonet as it were. Add another 15 years, and you know Lenny’s momma, Roxie Roker, who played Helen Willis on the television series, *The Jeffersons*. And if Roker sounds familiar, it may be because you watch *The Today Show*, where Lenny’s cousin a couple times removed, Al Roker, is the famous weatherman. Everyone got a Lenny in, now? This eclectic beauty, however, brought about some challenges for Lenny growing up.

“*I am deeply two-sided,*” he said in his memoir. “*I’m Black and white. Jewish and Christian. Manhattanite and Brooklynite.*” He struggled filling out paperwork in school as it would ask you to check all these boxes. Like race. He said, “*What box do I check? My great-grandmother is Cherokee Indian. My father is a Russian Jew. My mom is Bohemian. What do I put on this thing?*” Then he said the thing that stung the most. “*Teachers would look over my shoulder and say, ‘Black, that’s what you are.’*” “*So much of my heritage squashed. I didn’t like that,*” he said.

This expansive background, however, exposed Lenny to many people and experiences. His dad was a television producer and jazz promoter in New York City, so

¹ While I utilized a number of sources concerning Lenny’s story, you can discover his life and music first and foremost from his personal website: www.lennykravitz.com. Oprah’s Master Class podcast featuring Lenny Kravitz was also invaluable: <https://podcasts.apple.com/ae/podcast/lenny-kravitz/id1401057414?i=1000419206747>

he hung out with the likes of Duke Ellington, Ella Fitzgerald, and Miles Davis. He moved to California when his mom landed the role on *The Jefferson's* and was exposed to Rock 'n' Roll and classical expressions of music. He was a member of the prestigious California Boys Choir.

They trained rigorously all day and night and taking a toll on his body at one point, he got sick. He was 13-years old and sent to the infirmary with the flu where he holed up in a room for days with another kid who also had the flu. One night, as the boys were passing the time, Lenny's roommate asked, "*Do you know about Jesus Christ?*" Lenny said, "*Well, I've heard of him, but what?*" This young boy starts talking about Jesus and scripture and Lenny's like, "*What's happening here? We're having this great conversation about God and love and Christ.*" Lenny said, "*I can't explain it to you, but the presence of God was in that room. I'm talking about something really heavy and thick and the two of us felt it. We were having an experience with God.*" Changed his life. He said, "*The spirit, the being, the power that created me was right there with me. I didn't need to go to anybody to deal with God. God was just right there. It was a personal experience.*" And he was never the same. Across his back today is a large tattoo that says, "*My heart belongs to Jesus Christ.*"

Have you had one of those transformative moments in your life? Maybe it was a conversation with someone that you didn't expect. Maybe it was an encounter alone when you just felt there was something beyond your own limited understanding that was guiding the universe. Can you take a second right now and remember such a moment, such a person, such a conversation. ... Can you remember the pivot? In some ways, though it was most certainly not perfect, you made a shift. You made a decision about what way you wanted your life to go. And... you've just stepped into a faith story with Jesus and the Disciples. The Gospel of John specifically. And it's awesome.

You've got Jesus doing his thing – upending every previous notion about faith and life and who to follow and how. He was blowing minds! He's got Nicodemus, a prominent man and Pharisee in the community sneaking around at night in hopes of connecting with Jesus about this way he's heard him talking about. Lots at stake. Lots to lose. And Nicodemus says, "*Born again? My mom won't be up for going through that again, Jesus.*" But his direction shifted.

The Woman at the Well. Wilma, we'll call her. Do you remember? Rough past. Lots of hurt and struggle and baggage and skepticism. But she connects with Jesus, and she leaves packing light and her direction shifted. So, transformation is happening everywhere. He heals the sick. He feeds 5,000 with an order of fish and chips from Long John Silvers, and here he is now teaching the crowds, telling them to quit their bickering and fussing about him and just follow his way.

Like students are apt to do, they are having some side conversations about all that Jesus was saying. *“Do you get what he’s saying?”* And they’re like, *“24 minus 7, carry the five... yeah, no. I don’t get it.”*

Beyond that, it was sort of hard teaching... and deeply theological about how he’s one with God and yada, yada, yada, and people just start filing out of the auditorium. *“We’re out.”* The text says, *“A lot of his disciples left. They no longer wanted to be associated with him. Then Jesus gave the Twelve their chance: “Do you also want to leave?”* For today’s purpose, I’ve paraphrased Jesus giving the Twelve their chance asking, *“Are you gonna go my way?”* He asks it almost as cool as Lenny. Did you know, Lenny said of the lyrics of his song, *“It’s coming from the mouth of Jesus Christ, as I thought. So basically, ‘Are you gonna go my way?’ meaning ‘my way of love.”* He says, *“God gives us a choice about where we’ll turn.”* Lenny just keeps getting cooler.

Our Broadway friend submitting the song said, *“Lenny presents the most basic question for each of us who follow Jesus. We answer, “Are you gonna go my way?” every day... in every action... in every decision... in the way we live and love, the way we treat “the least of these....”* He goes on, *“The best line for me is, “But what I REALLY want to know is...”* and he says, *“I can imagine Jesus saying that. Tough ask for sure”* and he ends with, *“I ask myself how ‘real’ I am pretty regularly.”*

How ‘bout you? Can you hear Jesus’ voice asking you, *“Are you gonna go my way?”* Truth is... you’ve got to listen closely for the voice because there are many voices who want you to go their way and we can quickly get confused.

Recently took a family trip with 14 of Carrie’s family as we celebrated her mom’s 75th birthday. We’ve come to recognize the difference between a family trip and vacation. There is a difference, and if you know, you know. But my mother-in-law leaned in fully to the experience. She parasailed with Dane and danced with Hector and even snorkeled with the family. Here she is taking the leap into the water. We cherish her adventurous spirit and came home with many a memory. But as we were snorkeling... without snorkels mind you... a reminder to ask more questions ahead of any such excursion, we were out in the water that had a pretty good current tug on the body where control didn’t always seem like it belonged to you. But we had Hector – Carlyne’s dance partner – out in the water with us and we’d just keep hearing his voice, *“Follow me, family!”*



“Over here, family!” “This way, family!” “Swim family!” But I swear that guy was all over

the place. He was left and then he was right and some of the family would hear him and go this way and others would hear him over there beyond the boat, “*Follow me, family!*” and we were every which way and nobody seemed to follow all that well, and so you’ve got the family starting to point and yell directions to each other – “*That way! No! This way.*” Oh my. Don’t you feel like this is life much of the time?

In all the noise of this season of life in society, I’m trying to listen more closely than ever for the voice of Jesus. I want to follow. And it’s hard. And I’m starting to see it differently in many ways. People are falling away it seems just like the first disciples were. And Lenny sings, “*So tell me why we got to die and kill each other one by one. We must engage and rearrange and turn this planet back to one.*”

Huh. What are you hearing? When you hear Jesus ask, “*Are you gonna go my way?*” What do you say? What’s your why? That question was a poignant one raised at a church meeting this week.

Do you know your why?

It’s a great question – Simon Sinek always leads with it.

I loved the State of Wyoming’s slogan, at least for a while, “*Come and find your why!*” Why. Wyoming. Perfect. I personally always thought that was better than the slogan Nebraska tried out for a while: “*Nebraska – it’s not for everyone.*” What’s your ‘why’ when it comes to following Jesus? Is your why compelling enough to keep you pressing forward?

Jesus even says in this passage, “*Sheer muscle and willpower don’t make anything happen.*” Your willpower will give out on you, but your *why* power should endure. Willpower is important and gives you momentary strength. I won’t eat that cookie because I’m trying to lose weight is *willpower*. I won’t eat that cookie because I want to create a healthy legacy and lifestyle for our kids is *why* power.

You know as we’re praying about what kind of Church will make the best impact in this new world we’re living in, we’re asking about our “why” at Broadway. Hard questions about why churches are floundering post pandemic. Why are generations losing interest? Why people are giving more readily to foundations than churches these days. Hard stuff.

The question happened at the same meeting I named before when one person spoke the question to another across the table. “*Do you know your why?*” And the answer? “*This church has shaped me, and I want to see it inspire another generation to faith too.*” But what we know is the transformation will not happen in the same way as it did

for you... or me... most likely. “*New wineskins*,” Jesus says. We’ve got to pour the living message into some new wineskins. And our why is found not in the same methods but in pursuit of the same transformative faith, and love and service that speaks to a generation not yet among us. Could we be open to that, Church? That’s good stewarding of our compelling why. Think big. “*Engage and rearrange*,” Lenny sings.

Let your why guide you but...

Plan to fail.

Craig Groeschel² gives this sound advice. Pursuing your why and following Jesus won’t be done perfectly. Being consistent isn’t the same thing as being perfect. When we’re exploring the future with a compelling why, we’re going to try and fail along the way. Don’t give up. You know when you eat something you shouldn’t in the morning and then you think, “*Well I’ve already blown my diet for the day*,” so you blow up your diet at lunch and dinner and for dessert, too? Nobody else? Just me? Or you miss a workout one day and then are less motivated to do it the next day. Or maybe it’s your prayer life or your Bible study. Groeschel says, “*Miss one but don’t miss two*.”

I’ve got a buddy who is my Apple Watch mentor. My family got me this watch for Father’s Day. I’ve never worn a watch consistently in my life, but this one talks to me and teaches me stuff, so we’re living in a new world, friends. A goal of each day is to “*Close your rings*” on the watch. There are three rings to close each day – a standing ring that makes you stand for at least a minute over the course of at least twelve hours a day; a movement ring that basically counts your steps, and an exercise ring that requires a more rigorous workout for 30 minutes a day. I’ve got a streak of almost 60 days now, and it does become a consuming thought during the day sometimes. But my legendary mentor has over a 1,700-day streak in closing every single ring. The joke about being wiggled out about missing a day is real, but when you ask him about it, he says, “*If I miss a day, I’ll just start another one the next day*.” He’s formed a why, he’s okay with failing someday, and he’s prepared to get right back on it. He said, “*And I’d trust my friends would cheer me right on starting again*.”

Don’t give up, friends. Get right back on your purpose, your vision, your efforts to follow Jesus where love is leading you. The *why* power is about longevity. Are we consistently moving forward or are we falling away?

Groeschel started taking Jujitsu lessons in his mid-fifties after thinking about doing it for the last decade. He’s taking lessons with his boys, and he was nervous to try

² Craig Groeschel is the founding and lead pastor of Life Church. www.lifechurch.tv. His work on “*Know Your Why*” and “*Plan to Fail*” inspired the inclusion in this message.

something so physical at his age with people half his age and younger. It's hard to earn a belt, too. You work and work and achieve and you start to wear colored belts based on the levels of your achievement. It starts with a white belt and then there's brown and purple and others until you get to the top black belt. Some of them take years to earn. But as Craig earned his first white belt, his teacher put it on him and said, *"Which belt do you think is the hardest to earn?"* *"Black belt"* Craig said immediately. *"Wrong,"* his teacher said. *"It's the White belt because the hardest part is getting started."* And then he asked, *"Do you know what a black belt is?"* *"Someone I turn and run from."* Craig said. *"Nope. A black belt is just a white belt that was consistent."*

Lenny Kravitz learned this same lesson from his grandfather – the most important figure in his early life. He taught him discipline. Seeing your goals through and not skimping on each step of the process. Know your why and stay focused. Lenny said, *"I'd be awoken as a teenager in LA after being out and going to bed late to water droplets dropping on my head one drop at a time."* It was his grandfather waking him up with no time for small talk. *"Get dressed and in the backyard."* *"Why?"* *"Just do it."* They get out there and he points. *"Prune that tree, do this, then that, chop the wood; separate the piles, carry it up the hill."* *"Why?"* Lenny would wonder. *"My mom's on The Jeffersons – we can have someone come do this, grandpa."* But grandpa would say, *"I need you to understand follow-through, completing each step to get the result you're looking for."* Lenny said, *"It drove me crazy, but it shaped my approach to life."*

Are you gonna go my way?

Look. I don't want you to be intimidated or afraid about this shifting season we are in as people alive in 2022. We've got pieces to figure out, but I've never been more excited about following Jesus. And my why is becoming more compelling all the time. We are alive at a time that history will mark as a time when the Church of Jesus Christ went through a major shift. While it can be scary and can keep me up at night as a pastor sometimes, it's also exhilarating. What a privilege to be part of ushering in the new manifestation of the Body of Christ. We can be the ones, together in faith, to be a model of ushering in the new.

Like our charter members some 64 years ago, who surely had some big gulp moments of – *"Are we really gonna go that way? Are we really going to buy that land out in the middle of nowhere? Are we gonna leave the comforts of the Mother Church and start something new?"*

How many of us would not have been shaped the way we are if they had not had such courageous faith... if they had no compelling why and just went through the motions? We make our decisions and then our decisions make us. We can be those faithful souls now.

As Jesus saw folks falling away, the Twelve remained and Jesus looked each of them in the eye, asking: “*You out, too?*” Their response? “*To whom would we go? You have the words of real life, eternal life. We’re in.*”

What about you? Can you hear Jesus saying... “*And what I really want to know is. What I really got to, got to know is*” ... “*Are you gonna go my way?*”

BROAD HEARTS BROAD MINDS BROAD REACH