



Why, God?
I Will Worship Through It All
Part 4 – Worship When Blessed
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My name is Scott McElvain and I'm super honored and blessed to be here with you this morning. I had no idea when I accepted to be doing the senior sendoff that they would then say, nine days later, "Hey, you want to give a message on Sunday morning?" I'm honored by that. To be completely honest with you, when I was first asked, I said, "No way, absolutely not." After talking with Ted and being asked about that, I left, and I began to ask the Lord and I began to ask those that are near and dear to me.

I thought surely my wife would say, "No way, Scott, school is closing down on Wednesday, you've got a doctoral final due on Saturday, we've been too loaded." She didn't say anything like that. She said, "Absolutely, you've got to do it." I'm thankful that she did. I'm thankful that the people close to me really encouraged me because man, what a good study for me personally and to go over the first three weeks that we've been studying here.

So, with that being said, I want to rightly understand where we are in the context of this *Why, God?* series. I Will Worship Through It All. Ted kicked off week one with *Worshipping Through it All*, week two with *Worshipping In Uncertainty*, and last week, during Mother's Day, week three, *Worshipping Through Aging and Loss*. Today, get kind of a different direction in the questions and in the *Why, God?*

Those first three weeks were really tough; that's some really deep, tough struggle in there. I'm on the other side where things are seemingly going well. I'll be honest. When I first started to think about this, I thought *Hmm, I don't know that I really have much of a background to think about this*. I don't really have a jumping point to think about *When life is going well, am I continuing to worship?*

It was a fresh study for me in this because more often than not, I think I'm always pressed and pushed. When I'm down in the valley and I'm uncertain about some things that are going on and there are some trials and struggles going on, I know that I need to lean into a thankful heart. I know I need to be reminded of all the blessings that God has given me even in the midst of some tough things. Today, we're going to look at what it means for us to be worshiping even when things are going really well.

I think that as we pause and think about this for a second, we'll realize that there are some really big things that we forget, some temptations that we fall into when things are kind of smooth, when the burdens are low, and the trials are nonexistent. That's where we're going to jump in today.

I always go to 1 Thessalonians 5: 18, and we've looked at this before in the series. It says, ***This is my will for you: "Give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.*** That all entails the blessing, not just the tough things, not just to be reminded in the valleys, but even when we're on the mountaintop and things seem to be going well.

My dad, who I believe is here in this service, played basketball. I'm 6'6" right? So, I have to play basketball. When I was young, my dad did a great job of always laying out a target for me. You see, I was never a guy that was going to get twenty plus points a game. When people think of basketball and they say, "Are you good?" what they're really wanting to know is how many points do you score in a game. You could average twenty rebounds and twenty assists and two points and you're not that good. I don't know how that works.

My dad was always really great because he understood that I was never going to be scoring large amounts, but that I could do a lot of things on the basketball court well. I was not great in any of them. Before games, he would always just say, "Okay, let's set a goal out there and let's see how we do. What if today we thought about eight points, six rebounds, four assists, two blocks, and a steal?" After every game, we would get in the car and we'd think about that. There was a target. If I didn't have that target, what would I get in the car and do? Well did we win, or did we lose. That's all it would have been. I think giving that target helped me go, *You know what? I accomplished what I needed to for me individually and did we do that as a team?*

I say those things because I want to revert back. If we're talking about worshiping through it all, I want to go back to the definition that Ted laid out in week one and that is "Worship is an inner attitude and feeling of awe, reverence, gratitude, and love toward God, resulting from a realization of who he is and who we are." There is a lot in there and we could spend a lot of time and continue to unpack that and look into that, but, today, we're going to just hit on a couple of those things.

Before we do that, I want to ask a couple of questions of you this morning. How many of you out there are the type of people that will meet somebody, hear their name, and thirty seconds later, totally forget it? I am terrible at this. And more often than not, it looks like, "Nicole, what was that gentleman's name again?" And we both have no idea; it's bad. How many of you struggle with dates, times, remembering schedules? A lot more hesitant hands up there. I don't know why. Forgetting dates... I struggle with this mightily. I am often very forgetful. I can't think in terms of twelve months and what kind of happens in those months and things like that. How many of you have forgotten birthdays? I have been one of those guys. Thankfully, I married a woman who loves birthdays, loves celebrating, and is always on top of it, truly helping me through that.

My point this morning is that I want to highlight that **we are a forgetful people**. Before we talk a little bit about that, I want to give nice little illustration that highlights how bad I am in this. As I was doing my prep and study, I came home and I told Nicole, "Nicole, oh my gosh, things are just clicking, and everything is falling into line. It's all going really well. Man, I'm thinking about talking about memorials and Memorials Day is coming on Monday. Wow! This is just working out." She kind gently touched me and said, "Scott, that's next week."

It was so funny because in the same vein of I felt so like *wow how can you forget that. You get a day off work and what that entails with Memorial Day.* Then I thought, *But that's a great illustration for this morning.* So, I kind of won in the sense that I'm highlighting for my self that I'm forgetful; I have a tough time understanding timelines and dates and calendars and these things.

The truth is that I don't think it's a hard sell to you all. I think we all generally nod our heads that we are forgetful people. We live in an age where distraction is super high, where your watch is buzzing every thirty seconds, Twitter is constantly tweeting at you, and news is cycling forward. There is so much information coming at you. With that, we find ourselves packing our schedules, with business taking over our lives, calendars being full. In that, we find that we are forgetful. We're forgetful of things in our personal lives. I can't tell you how many times I've lost my keys just this week, and my phone, and my wallet; I've lost it all. But I would even say, in a broader context, we are forgetful people of history. Not only American history, but even biblical history. We have a tough time remembering some of these truths.

This morning, what I want to talk about is when we find ourselves in the season of blessing – things are going well, all facets of life are green light, the burdens are low – what are some truths that I tend to forget? What are some lies in the season of blessing that I find myself buying into that inevitably pull me away from worshiping the Lord? I always have the mental imagery of what are the things that are taking me from shining the spotlight on Christ and directing it to me?

I thought of three things. The first one is I have a mentality of **I deserve**. In a season of blessing, I deserve this. I'm owed this. I'm entitled to things going well because I've done A, B, And C. This is owed to me. This is mine. I deserve what's being had right here.

The second one that I often fall prey to is I begin **to compare**, even when things are going really well. I begin to look at everybody else's blessings and I still find myself unhappy. I still find myself envious because they still have something I don't have. Fully transparent here... When Ted asked me to talk, some of the first things that came into my mind were, *I'm not anywhere close to the communicator that Ted Cunningham is. I'm nowhere near as funny as he is. I am nowhere near as passionate and as energetic as Shay Robbins. I'm not bold like Adam Donyes or precise like Travis.* God is giving me a great opportunity to preach the Word of the Lord, a blessing, and I begin to compare it right off the bat. It's stealing things. It's robbing me.

The third one is this mentality of **I built this**. I worked hard for these blessings. I did this. I got this. I, I, I... I've been at School of the Ozarks since we reopened. Those first couple of years, it was a daily reliance upon the Lord. "Lord, you've got to show up for this thing to go. You've got to show up because we're starting a school, we're getting a rocket off the ground; this is a lot of heavy lifting every day. We have no idea what today holds; you've got to show up." Year seven, "I built this; I know how to do this; I've done it before. God, I appreciate you and I'll call you when things are kind of going awry, when there are some tough situations, but we're in a season of blessing. God's been good to us, things are going well. I built this."

What I want to do is go back through each one and give just a tidbit of truth to remind ourselves that in the season of blessing, what are things that we should be remembering when we encounter I deserve, I compare, and I built.

As we jump back into the first one, **I deserve**. Spurgeon hits this one on the head. *“Everything a sinner gets must come by favor. It cannot come anyway else, for if you get what you deserve, you will get no love, no mercy, no grace.”* The truth is, my friends, I am a broken sinner. I deserve death. Thankfully, we serve a God and a King who loves me so much that he sent his Son to die on a cross. I do not deserve anything. I deserve death; that’s the truth.

The next one. **I compare**. I go to Ecclesiastes 4: 4. Andy Stanley did a great sermon series. It has always resonated so deeply with me. Solomon, the man who had it all; he had everything. He says this: ***4 Then I saw that all toil and all skill in work come from a man’s envy of his neighbor. This also is vanity and a striving after wind.*** What’s he saying? A guy who has it all looks at everybody else who’s trying to build their little kingdoms and store up their houses with material things and he says that is but worthless. It is vanity and a striving after the wind. It produces no fruit.

Andy Stanley said, “When we look to the left or the right and we begin to compare, there is no win.”

Even when things are going great, I still find myself comparing, envious, jealous of what others might have and how God is blessing them.

I built this. It’s too easy. James 1: 16-17 reminds us, ***16 Do not be deceived, my beloved brothers. 17 Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change.*** Every gift, every blessing, every good thing that we have comes from the Lord.

Travis Brawner, I believe his first time ever getting up here, had an illustration of a turtle on top of a fence post. I don’t know if you remember this, but that stuck with me. As I was thinking about this and going back over this, I had to use this because it’s too good, right? Nobody walks by a turtle on top of a fence post and goes, “Wow, that turtle is incredible.” Nobody has ever said that. Nobody has ever said, “Wow, the climbing power, the jumping ability of that turtle...” No! Everybody recognizes that somebody picked that turtle up and put it on a fence post. This illustration is right in line with how we should think about *I built this* in the blessing we have. God has given us those things. It would be silly to look at the turtle and go, “Great job!” Likewise, for me, it would be silly of me to stand here and clap for myself and say, “Great job! You built this.” God is the one who gives those gifts.

My point here this morning is that we are forgetful people. Therefore, we must build memorials, big and small, as reminders of the blessings of God. You see, we take Memorial Day and we, as a country, stop. We stop and we remember. At 3:00 on that Monday, there will be a moment of silence. Our country understands this. Our country says “Hey, we’re going to stop everything and we’re going to take a moment to remember those that gave their life for this country in the armed forces.” They understand the power of stopping and remembering. They get that and we should too, as Christians. As we understand we are forgetful people in the valley and in the mountains.

So, what do I mean when I'm talking about memorials? We're going to jump into a text in Joshua 4. I'll tell you this: if we study the Old Testament, we see there are many memorials that are built, many things that were erected to remind people of something that happened. We're going to jump into Joshua 4 this morning as we look at what's going on. In the context, Joshua is leading the Israelites. They're going through the Jordan. God says, "The priests pick up the Arc of the Covenant. When their feet touch the water, I will stop the waters. It will open that they may pass through."

4 Then Joshua called the twelve men from the people of Israel, whom he had appointed, a man from each tribe. 5 And Joshua said to them, "Pass on before the ark of the Lord your God into the midst of the Jordan, and take up each of you a stone upon his shoulder, according to the number of the tribes of the people of Israel, 6 that this may be a sign among you. When your children ask in time to come, 'What do those stones mean to you?' 7 then you shall tell them that the waters of the Jordan were cut off before the ark of the covenant of the Lord. When it passed over the Jordan, the waters of the Jordan were cut off. So these stones shall be to the people of Israel a memorial forever."

You see, a memorial moves us to remember something. A memorial moves us and brings us back to a place, a time, or an experience. This morning, I want to ask a question of us. What do those stones mean to you? What is that experience that you have had that you may speak of worshiping and experiencing the Lord within the context of memorials? So, to maybe expand, what I'm talking about when I say memorials, I want to kind of put it in two categories for us. The first category is **memories**. The second category is **mementos**. What memories do we have that bring us to a place where we experienced God, we drew closer to him, and that in our remembering of these things, we worship him.

The first memory, maybe, that we can think in terms of are **places**. What house? What gym? What field of grass? What restaurant? What have you experienced in your past that when you think of that, you think, *Man... I saw God there and grew closer to him*.

One I was thinking for myself was the Kanakuk K2 boys' basketball gym. It was there that night on a muggy summer night that I heard the gospel from Matt Houston in which he encouraged me to step out from the faith of my parents. I will never forget the concrete floors, the mugginess of the atmosphere, and my feelings during it. When I think back, I remind myself of what that night was like and I am surely grateful and thankful for the Lord.

What are those places for you? What rooms, what chairs elicit a memory of a reminding of the blessings of God that is bestowed upon us.

A second place is **people**. Who has God placed in your life, through your history, that reminds you of his goodness and blessing? It might be a timely friend in a season or tragedy, whether that be a consistent mentor who was discipling, asking hard questions. Who are those people in your life?

Mike Higgins, Matt Houston, Kyle Unruh, Tim Huddleston, Bruce Morgan, my father, Brad Dolf. Those men are the men that I think of and say, "Lord, thank you for their investment in a young, goofy kid like me. They held me accountable, challenged me in my walk, spurred me on to be a better husband, better dad.

Those men, when I think about them, I find myself thanking the Lord. What are those experiences and memories of the things we've experienced, whether it be the birth of your first child, graduations, finding out that the Lord has worked a miracle in someone's health? When we take time to stop and think about what those memories are...

The other category that we see in Joshua is that of an actual **memento**, the building of these stones that move us to remember something. What are those things in our lives that are in our office that when we look at, we're moved to tears and thankfulness and gratefulness for what the Lord has given us? I don't know if you have those in your life. I don't know if you have those in your house, but I know they have been a very impactful thing in my life because I recognize I'm a very forgetful person. I've already forgotten some of the things I wanted to say in this message. I know this about myself. Because I know this, even in the seasons of blessing, I need reminders, I need memories, and I need mementos to bring me back to the realization of so many truths that I know, that I need to think on, that I need to be thankful for.

One of the ways in which we've done this in the McElvain house is what we call "couch time." My wife and I, every Sunday night, sit down for thirty minutes. The first thing we do is we answer to each other, audibly, what the things are that we have been thankful for this week. In my house, we will be a people that are intentional about remembering the blessings of God. We set these things out. These are priorities. We are on the same page on Sunday night, ready to go into Monday.

I think of Keith Chancey at the Kanakuk Institute encouraging me to go through my prayer journal at the end of every year and take a highlighter and highlight all the answered prayers that God has given me that year. You talk about a powerful memento. Talk about a powerful time of remembering.

I think of Dr. Gary Smalley and his honor list, which he encouraged for married couples. Write that honor list. I love my wife... and list all the things you love about your wife. And in times of struggle or when things are not going well, to return to that to be reminded of the great gift that God has given me in my life. I need these things in my life. We need these things to remind us of the blessings in the valleys and in the mountains.

I finish with a memento that is pretty hard for me sometimes to think about and look at. You see, a long time ago, less than a year, I suddenly and tragically lost one of my dearest friends. The week before she passed away, we talked about this piece art. After she left, I purchased that piece of art. Only two other people knew about why I had purchased this. It was my little secret, right? It was my way of memorializing and remembering her. I was walking through all the stages of grief and pain and I didn't know what I was doing. I purchased this piece of art, and I'd walk into my office and I'd see it and would just be reminded of her.

This is something I need. **Remembering people are thankful people.** When I'm walking into worship and we go back to our bullseye target of worshiping through it all, when we get to this gratitude, that thankfulness, that comes from a realization. If I could, I just kind of insert my own word: remembering. Remember who God is and who I am. You see, I need that. I need to be reminded of that. It's things like this that remind me.

There's this kind of progression that I've been going through this week, so I've been thinking about worship and it kind of starts like this: **I remember, I'm thankful, and I worship.** I asked you to think about your time of worship just a minute ago. Remember God and his goodness and the blessing he has bestowed. His promises move me to a heart of thankfulness, and when my heart is thankful, I am glorifying and worshiping the Lord. That's because, again, we are forgetful people. We must build memorials – whether it be small memories or big mementos like this artwork – that remind us of the blessings of God.

I close with a Spurgeon quote that I think hits this right on the head. *"We are too prone to engrave our trials in marble and write our blessings in the sand."* You say, "I see this artwork and yes, I'm heartbroken. I've cried many times. I've wept continuously. I etch it in marble the pain that I felt during this season of loss, but all too often, in the season of blessing, I am just writing in the sand, only to be washed away. I could see this in the light of just the pain and the hurt, but I also want to see it in the blessing that God gave me because I know for a fact that God brought that person into my life just when I needed her. What she meant to me, how she loved and encouraged me, I needed that.

So, we as a church... I encourage you to commit yourself today to begin to think upon those memorials that remind you of the truth that you and I need to hear. In the seasons of blessings that we can stay away from the *I deserve, I compare, I built* mentality. Maybe it's a conversation today with your spouse or a close friend that you sit down and audibly communicate the blessings, that you know God has given you, with a thankful heart. Maybe you put pen to paper tonight in a journal. You memorialize some of those memories, places, experience, people that you want to be thankful for. Maybe you think about how you design your house or your office as mementos that are worth something, reminders that keep you on the path of worshiping.

Father, we thank you for today and we thank you for your words that guide us, Lord. I pray that we would be a people who remember. We understand ourselves to be forgetful, we understand that we can often let truths go by the wayside because of our busy lives. So, Lord, today I pray that you would shine a light on some disciplines, some actions that we might take in order that we might remember some of the truths in all seasons of life, even when we are being blessed.

Lord, we thank you and we praise you and we want to be like you. It's in your name we pray... Amen.