

“MY WORSHIP CAN CHANGE THE WORLD”
by Rom A. Pegram (11/3/19)

Thank you all for being here today for Part II of our IGNITE worship series—as we continue to learn how our lives can make a difference in this world and, well, for eternity. Let me begin today by asking a question: Have you ever witnessed people (maybe yourselves) in the midst of tough situations in life ... and the reaction to that tough situation speaks volumes? I mean, it’s like the storms of life are blowing; some people are able to stand firm in the storms of life—acting Christ-like no matter what the situation, where others seem to be blown off course in a major way. Have you noticed that? And why is that?

Like maybe at work, everything is going great for a co-worker, and then—all of a sudden—they get a call from home and they are just not the same for the rest of the day? Or maybe someone has an argument with a spouse, like you or me, and it just throws us off course for the rest of the week? What happens when the storms of life come *your way*? How do you respond?

The truth is, there are other people who get the same news in life, the storms come, but they’re able to stand firm. But others will totally get knocked off their game. Why is that? *That’s what we want to dig into today.* Listen now as we hear from a story of Paul—when he and his mission partner, Silas, had a really bad day. Let me give you a little background on these two guys...

They were friends who traveled together and shared the GOOD NEWS of Jesus wherever they went. Some had asked them to stop—not to share the GOOD NEWS anymore. But they continued anyway and here’s what happened (Acts 16:19-34)...

¹⁹ ...so they grabbed Paul and Silas and dragged them before the authorities at the marketplace. ²⁰ “The whole city is in an uproar because of these Jews!” they shouted to the city officials. ²¹ “They are teaching customs that are illegal for us Romans to practice.”

²² A mob quickly formed against Paul and Silas, and the city officials ordered them stripped and beaten with wooden rods. ²³ They were severely beaten, and then they were thrown into prison. The jailer was ordered to make sure they didn’t escape. ²⁴

So the jailer put them into the inner dungeon and clamped their feet in the stocks.

²⁵ Around midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the other prisoners were listening. ²⁶ Suddenly, there was a massive earthquake, and the prison was shaken to its foundations. All the doors immediately flew open, and the chains of every prisoner fell off! ²⁷ The jailer woke up to see the prison doors wide open. He assumed the prisoners had escaped, so he drew his sword to kill himself. ²⁸ But Paul shouted to him, “Stop! Don’t kill yourself! We are all here!”

²⁹ The jailer called for lights and ran to the dungeon and fell down trembling before Paul and Silas. ³⁰ Then he brought them out and asked, “Sirs, what must I do to be saved?”

³¹ They replied, “Believe in the Lord Jesus and you will be saved, along with everyone in your household.” ³² And they shared the word of the Lord with him and with all who lived in his household. ³³ Even at that hour of the night, the jailer cared for them and washed their wounds. Then he and everyone in his household were immediately

baptized. ³⁴ He brought them into his house and set a meal before them, and he and his entire household rejoiced because they all believed in God. -- Acts 16:19b-34 (NLT)

So, there are a lot of things that happened in this story. But the main thing was ... Paul and Silas responded to this impossible situation in a most extraordinary way! It was so out-of-the-ordinary that a jailer ended up asking the question, "What must I do to be saved?" How can I live a life of NO FEAR like you guys are? Paul and Silas' response was so unusual that it led to this powerful reaction from the jailer. And that idea ... is our IGNITE principle for the day. So, here's the second IGNITE (biblical) principle for this series: **My response to pressure opens up doors to share my faith.**

You see, what I hope to show you today is this: *Often, your life circumstances—that you initially want to avoid—could be the very circumstances God wants to use to show others the difference Jesus has made in your life!* And, so often, it's so contrary to how we think. Typically, when we get ourselves backed into circumstances that are difficult and just want to get out! But your response to those circumstances could be the very vehicle God wants to use to share the GOOD NEWS of Jesus with others...

Let me say this: *How we respond to situations in life is not determined in the moment. When life's storms come to us, they're often unexpected and unannounced; how we respond is determined by what's inside of us.* So, we need to work on that. How do we work on what's inside of us—our faith foundation—so that when the winds of life blow, we're not blown off course, but stand firm on that foundation?

Today I want to introduce you to *five habits* that—when you begin to practice them, they'll not only produce a 'full life,' but they'll produce a 'worship-full life'—drawing you closer to God, who is your firm foundation. And it'll be a life where others will wonder how they can get to know Jesus like you do. So, what's our first habit of a worship-full life? First...

DEVELOP REGULAR DAILY DEVOTIONS (Love God). This is nothing new; I've blown this horn more than once, because here's what I know... As we give God the gift of time—daily and regularly, we'll experience the foundation of our faith getting stronger and stronger and stronger...

This first habit is so basic for every Christian, which is why I can't figure out why many who claim the name of Christ ... don't spend daily time with him. *You spend time with who you love!* Is God (Jesus) your friend or not? Quite simply, this is a time set aside (maybe just 5 minutes) where you spend time reading out of God's word—the Bible. And when you spend time reading the Bible, you begin to recognize how God wants you to respond when a variety of situations come your way. Look with me at Joshua 1:8 (NLT), today, would you? And *read this with me...*

Study this Book of Instruction [Bible] continually. Meditate on it day and night so you will be sure to obey everything written in it. Only then will you prosper and succeed in all you do.

I've said this before, too, but I think it deserves repeating: *Aim for 7 and hit 5!* The reality is ... we have incredibly busy, demanding lives. It's important that getting into God's word daily is a priority; but the reality may be, we shoot for 7 days a week (even 5 minutes) ... and we may hit 5 days a week. But those 5 days will make a huge difference in how we're able to withstand the storms/winds of life!

So, how are you doing? Rate yourself (on your note sheet) on the scale from 1-----10. Take your pencil or pen and circle where you're at right now. After you do that, *recommit yourself to do better in this area of your life.* For all God has done for you, don't you think you could start by giving God 5 minutes a day—to make a positive difference in *your* life? Here's the 2nd habit for a worship-full life:

DEVELOP FAITHFUL SUNDAY WORSHIP ATTENDANCE (Love God/People). If you're here today, you're already working on that, so that's good...

Sometimes, when we hear the word 'attendance,' we tend to think about something that's just legalistic. "And they even use Connection Cards to take attendance. I can't believe it!" Well, I think 'intention' goes a long way in explaining what we mean...

God's intention is to CARE for those he loves. In the same spirit, our intention is to CARE for those God loves—those God's trusted us with. Encouraging regular attendance at worship is both God's and our way of CARING for who God loves. We want God's very best for you, too. But if it's to be the meaningful experience God intends, we need to start by asking ourselves a couple of questions, like these:

- When we come into this place, are we just 'going to church' because that's what we're supposed to do, or have always done? Or...
- When we come into this place, are we actually coming to ... worship God?

There's a difference, you know—a *big difference*. And *what attitude we come into this place with will surely help determine what attitude we walk away with*. Look at Hebrews 10:25 (NLT) with me, would you? "...let us not neglect our meeting together, as some people do, but encourage one another, especially now that the day of his return is drawing near." Encouragement is something all of us need—regularly. And here's where you'll get your weekly dose (Trinity)...

Folks, if you want to strengthen your foundation of faith, so that you can withstand the winds of life—those storms that tend to toss most people to and fro, this is one of the habits you need to develop in your life—consistent/faithful Sunday worship attendance—for the right reason, *to worship God*, not just 'hoops you jump through' but to put God back in first place in your life. Because we're human beings, we need regular reminders to do that... Make sure you rate yourself in this area too—1-----10. Here's the next habit you'll need to develop:

GET ACTIVE IN A STUDY GROUP (Grow). Some churches call these 'Growth Groups'...

You see, we need both that large group worship experience, like we get on Sunday mornings; but the fact is, that's not enough. We also need peer groups or smaller

groups where we can feel free to ask questions and grow personally. Why would we want to belong to a study group? Several reasons come to mind: accountability (discipleship), to study God's word deeper, to be prayed for (and to pray), and to generally grow in our faith. Look what happened in Acts 5:42 (NLT), would you? "And every day, in the Temple and from house to house, they continued to teach and preach this message: 'Jesus is the Messiah.'"

With Paul & Silas as our example, we see how important it was for consistent study of the Christian faith/lifestyle—in smaller groups. People need accountability. People need support. People need encouragement. And we're no different, are we? (Women=Tuesday nights, Men=it's in the works for 2020...)

DEVELOP CONSISTENT SACRIFICIAL GIVING (Love God). Some people think this habit is all about \$\$\$, but it's not; it's really about *our witness that God lives in us ... and through us ... and we are his!* Just as we *spend time* with who we love, we also *support* who we love! Folks, when we come to know Christ personally, it's a relationship, where we receive a HELPER—God's Spirit, and with that Spirit comes the gifts of GENEROSITY and PEACE...

There's a reason Dave Ramsey's program for dealing with debt is called "FINANCIAL PEACE UNIVERSITY." The reason is because the Dave Ramsey's of the world have discovered that that's what God wants for us. God wants to replace our 'financial panic' with his 'financial peace.' Here's the promise (Mal. 3:10, NLT): "Bring all the tithes into the storehouse so there will be enough food in my Temple. If you do," says the LORD of Heaven's Armies, 'I will open the windows of heaven for you. I will pour out a blessing so great you won't have enough room to take it in! Try it! Put me to the test!'"

Folks, all the days of your life, God will meet your every need; all you have to do is give him *the tithe*—the first 10% of your income. And what will God give you? '...a blessing so great you won't have enough room to take it in!' A blessing, of course, could be a tangible or intangible favor of God; that's up to God. But that's what you get in your life when you honor God with consistent (and sacrificial) giving... Rate yourself on this one. How are you doing 1-----10? Here's the final habit ... to having a strong, steadfast, worship-full life:

DEVELOP PRAYERFUL AND SINCERE WITNESSING (Grow/Serve). This is the last of our 'worship-full habits'...

As you are filled up with God, God will give you an opportunity to share your faith with other people. As your faith grows, it overflows to others. When you get serious about strengthening your faith and decide to pray for your friends (especially those who are not currently walking closely with God), and invite your friends to participate in the faith, you're going to discover something: GOD IS CHANGING YOU! We always want to help others, to help their lives change, but the truth is ... GOD IS CHANGING YOU. Have you noticed that?

When you take time to develop these habits that'll help strengthen your spiritual foundation, and when the winds/storms of life come, your response won't just affect others; it will affect YOU, too! Acts 1:8 (MSG) tells us, "What you'll get is the Holy Spirit. And when the Holy Spirit comes on you, you will be able to be my witnesses in Jerusalem, all over Judea and Samaria, even to the ends of the world." Even northeast Dodge County! God's power will be yours ... to tell your story! How are you doing with that? Rate yourself 1-----10 now!

I want to end with this scripture: 1 Peter 3:15 (NIV): **"...in your hearts set apart Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect...."**

Take just a moment and look back over the 5 habits we covered—habits you need to develop in your life if you're to stand strong when the storms of life come your way. How you respond—your witness—will determine if others see Jesus in you. And that's our prayer today—that others will see Jesus in you. Because that's how you IGNITE your own faith ... and the faith of others you love...