

Good morning everyone, my name is Shane Gould, and I serve as one of the pastors here at North Shore Alliance. I'm excited to see how God has been growing us, as we began our fall by journeying through the Lord's Prayer, to now exploring what it means to worship.

We started this teaching series on Three Dimensional Worship with a definition, which read, "Worship is the submission of all of our nature to God...the greatest of human expressions of which we are capable."<sup>1</sup> In looking at what it really means to worship, we saw that worship is so much more than a Sunday morning. True worship takes in our whole life, as we choose to go "all in" with God. Worship is most authentic when the *whole of our life is being lived in submission to God*. The more that our every day life intersects with Jesus and his heart, the more our lives give Him worship.

Now, even though worship is three dimensional in the sense that it encompasses every aspect of our life, at it's core, it's only the expression of one thing. And the one thing that worship is always about is LOVE. Worship is love for God and love for others. As we heard two weeks from Pastor Mark, we can bow down to another. We can follow and obey. But until the things we do for God begin to flow from a place of love, we can't call them displays of worship. It may be religious, but according to Jesus, it isn't worship.

On the topic of what's most important when it comes to pleasing God, a religious expert asked Jesus this question, "Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the Law?" Now what's interesting is that in answering, Jesus doesn't give one answer but two. In Matthew 22:37, Jesus replies, "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.' This is the first and greatest commandment." Now, Jesus could have stopped right there. But he didn't. Instead, he goes on to give a two-part answer. Jesus adds a second greatest commandment, saying, "And the second is like it: 'Love your neighbour as yourself.'"

Now, maybe it's an obvious point that love for God is really what worship is all about.

But would we realize if we stopped there, we would only have half the answer to the question? This morning's message is entitled, *Worship By Loving Your Neighbour*. Jesus makes it clear that when it comes to worship, love for God is the essential thing. That's the first and greatest commandment. But Jesus' two-part answer reveals that our worship is incomplete, partial at best, if we don't take the second greatest commandment as seriously as the first.

It's this second part of the answer that I want us to focus on this morning.

### **Pray.**

Love is such an abstract concept. It's a word that can mean so many different things. In one moment, I can be telling my wife, Linda, how much I love her over an anniversary dinner like I did on Friday night, where we celebrated 15 years, to using the very same word just a few moments later to talk about the feeling welling up in me as I gazed affectionately at the Crème Brule I was served for dessert!

But clearly, when Jesus speaks about having love for God, he's not talking about a love that's reduced to simply having an emotional attachment. Loving God involves following him, obeying him, serving him, and putting God and his purposes above my own. Sometimes we feel like obeying God and sometimes we don't. But we love God when we obey him, regardless of our feelings as I John 2:4-5 says,

"Whoever says, "I know him," but does not do what he commands is a liar, and the truth is not in that person. But if anyone obeys his word, love for God is truly made complete in them."

The second greatest commandment is like the first. To love our neighbour as Jesus commands isn't just about having nice feelings for someone, it's about actively loving people in a way that is beyond just a warm feeling. It's about loving someone even if I don't feel like it.

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<sup>1</sup> William Temple, former Arch Bishop of Canterbury

In his study on the Gospel of Matthew, theologian Michael Wilkins says that according to Jesus' life and ministry, "Love is an unconditional commitment to an imperfect person in which one gives oneself to another to bring the relationship to God's intended purpose."<sup>2</sup> *To love your neighbour as yourself is to make an unconditional commitment to an imperfect person, where we give of ourselves, that the person might come closer to God.*

Two weeks ago, a dear woman by the name of Verna Dyk took the step of giving her life to Christ by inviting Jesus to become the Lord of her life. She prayed to receive Jesus' forgiveness for sin and by faith accepted God's gift of eternal life. That was on a Thursday afternoon right here at the church. The following Tuesday, just a few days later, to the surprise of everyone, Verna suddenly passed away from a heart attack. God's timing is always perfect. He pursues us right up until the end of our days, drawing us to himself and inviting us to trust him with our lives, even in the eleventh hour of our lives. God is so good!

God used a number of people to love Verna into his kingdom. One of those people was Rob Lawrence. I've invited Rob to come and share a little about the way God got a hold of Verna's heart.

### **Rob Lawrence's Testimony.**

When we actively love the people around us – especially those we don't know well – God is worshiped. The love of Jesus is magnified, in them, and in us. Loving our neighbour is how we worship God outside these four walls. You know, God never bullies people into giving their lives to him. Instead, God loves to love people into his presence. And the way God loves people into his kingdom is through the loving acts of his people. At its core, worship is a beautiful display of love that magnifies Jesus.

Now, before we get too carried away...talking about love, I think we need to acknowledge that loving our neighbour is never as easy as it sounds.

This week as I contemplated Jesus' command to love God and love your neighbour as yourself, I began to ask myself the question, "Which is harder to do? Is it harder to love God or is it harder to love people?"

How many of you really needed any time to answer that question!? Hands down, I would have to say that for me, people are usually much harder to love than God. When you think about Jesus in all of his goodness, love, and power -- what's not to love!

But when you think about people, it's a different story isn't it? Even the people we say we love, we sometimes have a hard time loving. There are all kinds of reasons for why it can be hard to love the people around us. But unless we do, Jesus teaches that we will never have a worship that will really please him, regardless of how much we are singing out our hearts on a Sunday morning.

As we read the scriptures, we discover that God is not very interested in our worship until the second greatest commandment is taken as seriously as the first.

The Law of the Old Testament outlined all kinds of instructions and requirements for the people of God to follow in giving God worship. But as detailed and as prescriptive as all of the religious instructions were for what kinds of feasts to celebrate, what kinds of sacrifices to offer, and what kinds of prayers to pray, none of it mattered to God until Israel began to love their neighbours as themselves.

At some point in their history Israel, like most of us, lost their way with God. They settled for a worship that in God's eyes was nothing more than a hollow religious shell. The reason God saw it this way was because their worship left out a genuine and caring love for the people around them, whether it was in family life, at work, or in the street market.

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<sup>2</sup> Matthew, The NIV Application Commentary. 2004 pg. 726.

Never satisfied with that kind of worship, where we are one way with God and another way with people, God gave these words to Isaiah to speak to the nation of Israel:

**Isaiah 58:3-5**

“Yet on the day of your fasting, you do as you please and exploit all your workers. Your fasting ends in quarreling and strife, and in striking each other with wicked fists. You cannot fast as you do today and expect your voice to be heard on high. Is this the kind of fast I have chosen, only a day for people to humble themselves?”

Through the words of Isaiah, God exposes their worship as something completely different than what God is looking for. He basically says, ‘You can’t claim to love me, when you take advantage of people, or beat people up, physically or emotionally. The heart of worship is love, not religiosity.

Then Isaiah goes on, explaining the kind of worship God is really looking for:

**Isaiah 58:6-9**

“Is not this the kind of fasting I have chosen: to loose the chains of injustice and untie the cords of the yoke, to set the oppressed free and break every yoke?

Is it not to share your food with the hungry and to provide the poor wanderer with shelter— when you see the naked, to clothe them, and not to turn away from your own flesh and blood?

Then your light will break forth like the dawn, and your healing will quickly appear; then your righteousness will go before you, and the glory of the LORD will be your rear guard. Then you will call, and the LORD will answer; you will cry for help, and he will say: Here am I.”

You want to see God show up in your life? Then worship him through the Second greatest commandment as much as you do through the first.

**James 1:27**

“Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world.”

The kind of religion, *or worship*, that God accepts is one that finds its expression as much in the service of others as in service to Him.

**Worship By Loving ‘The Least of These’**

As you read the Gospels, you see that wherever Jesus went during his earthly ministry, he received worship. There always seemed to be at least one person in the situation who saw Jesus for who he truly was, the Son of God. And in recognizing him, people fell to their knees, asked for his mercy, and began serving him.

Even when nailed to the cross, Jesus was receiving worship. In the Gospel of Luke it says that there were two criminals on either side of Jesus, also being crucified. The one criminal hurled insults at Jesus, while the other, recognizing Jesus’ true identity, asked that Jesus remember in him at the coming of his kingdom.

Obviously, not everyone worshiped Jesus. Many mocked him, criticized him, and shouted for him to be crucified. Many couldn’t recognize God when clothed in human flesh.

And in one sense, it’s still the same. Jesus still comes to us in human flesh. It’s just that we often don’t recognize him. He doesn’t appear to us in the flesh of his glorified and resurrected body, but instead come to us in the lives of the needy around us.

In talking about the final Day of Judgment, Jesus told a parable in Matthew chapter 25 to explain how Jesus will separate out those who really belong to him. Jesus tells the story of a king who rewards his servants for attending to his needs. Only in the story, the servants can’t figure out how they have ever served the needs of the king because they didn’t remember ever meeting him in the course of their life.

In the story the king says, “...I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me.’

“Then the righteous will answer him, ‘Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink? When did we see you a stranger and invite you in, or needing clothes and clothe you? When did we see you sick or in prison and go to visit you?’

“The King will reply, ‘Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me.’<sup>3</sup>

In serving what the king calls the ‘least of these,’ we find ourselves actually serving Jesus. Worship can be found in the most unlikely of places. To feed someone who is hungry, to give someone a place to stay, to look after them when they are sick – these are all acts of worship.

In the face of every person we find the face of Jesus – not literally Jesus, but the faces of people he came to identify and save, as he took on the limitations and poverty of a human life. There’s not an aspect of creation that doesn’t display something about God. But Genesis says it is only people that have been made in the very image of God. Wherever Jesus is found, there is to be worship. One of the ways Jesus has commanded us to worship him is in service to those in need.

One of the ways God has been growing our church over the last number of years is in this whole area of showing our love for God by loving those in our community who have significant needs. People who feel oppressed, who don’t have much financially, those who are in need of the basics of even food and shelter.

Every Wednesday at 2pm for the last several months, between 60 and 100 people who mostly come from shelters or the street come into our foyer for 2 hours of community, encouragement through the preaching of a message, and for a small amount of money in the form of a food card.

It’s been wonderful to see so many come. To see people given a place for community. To see people receive some concrete love, even if it’s in the small token of a food card. It has been even more wonderful to see some of these friends attend Alpha and Celebrate Recovery and consider North Shore Alliance their church home, where they come Sunday mornings. Through these Wednesday’s, we have seen people loved, get saved, and be baptized.

Because of what God’s been doing through these Wednesday’s, which has largely happened because of those who have given to our Care Fund, our church has become a greater place of worship.

As I think about what it means to really worship God, I not only think of Wednesday afternoons, but I think about Christmas Shoe Boxes, about the Christmas Bags being prepared for the downtown eastside. Those are just some of the ways God is increasing worship in the life of our church.

But there are other ways God has been moving in our relationships as a church family to grow worship. We have undergone a real transformation in terms of our gatherings becoming much warmer and more inviting. There has always been a great foundation of love in our church. But I think there was a time when we were most known for our preaching rather than our love. I think that has changed. We still have a high value on good teaching. But I think that even if I bombed in trying to communicate my message this morning, you would be back next Sunday!

I think you would be back next Sunday, not because you know it’s going to be Pastor Keith speaking but because you understand that worship isn’t preaching-centered, it’s relationship-centered. You’re here because God’s grafted you into a family, a place where you are

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<sup>3</sup> Matthew 25:35-40

both giving and receiving. Without love, without loving relationships, there can be no worship. Authentic relationships are becoming a big part of our worship here at NSA.

We're not a perfect church. We have a long way to go. But God has been growing our worship by growing our love for one another.

To finish, I want to go back to something I mentioned earlier. Sometimes it's harder to love people than it is to love God. And so, for a moment, I want to speak to those who feel they have a love deficit, who feel they just don't have much love to give.

For any of us, how is it possible to love your neighbour as much as you love yourself?

Well, the short answer is that it's not possible, at least not in and of ourselves. Without first having a personal encounter with the love of God ourselves, we have very little to offer someone else.

I have significant differences with Roman Catholicism's understanding of Christianity, but I very much share what Pope Benedict has written in this quote:

"Love of neighbour is thus shown to be possible in the way proclaimed by the Bible, by Jesus. It consists in the very fact that, in God and with God, I love even the person whom I do not like or even know.

This can only take place on the basis of an intimate encounter with God, an encounter which has become a communion of will, even affecting my feelings. Then I learn to look on this other person not simply with my eyes and my feelings, but from the perspective of Jesus Christ.

His friend is my friend...Seeing with the eyes of Christ, I can give to others much more than outward necessities: I can give them the look of love which they crave..."<sup>4</sup>

I think this is the look Verna craved. It's the look I crave, the look we all crave.

Before we can begin loving as much as we love ourselves, we first need to know the love of God deep within us.

Romans 5:5 says that, "God has poured out his love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, whom he has given us."

Let's invite the Holy Spirit to fill us with a fresh experience of his love, so that in knowing his love ourselves, we might then begin giving it away.

I want you to think of the person who you have the hardest time loving. Name them before the Lord and ask God to give you a change of heart for them. Invite the Holy Spirit to pour his love into you that you might begin to love even the hardest to love.

**Pray.**

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<sup>4</sup> Encyclical Letter: On Christian Love. 2006.