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Psalms Volume XI

Let the Whole World Sing

Psalm 66

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Last Monday night, I came perilously close to rolling my truck over in the pond. It was a very unpleasant moment. My wife Patti was with me and it just wasn't a great moment. Let's just imagine that the truck did roll into the pond, and I get knocked unconscious. And Mark, my neighbor across the pond—who by the way in the real life story was absolutely no help at all, he merely came over to gawk at my misery, but that's for a different sermon—comes to my rescue, risks his own life, jumps in the pond, frees me, saves my life.

The mayor finds out about it and designates him as hero of the month. So there's a big banquet in his honor. The night of the banquet, I show up fifteen minutes late because I had something else to do. All through the banquet, I'm kind of fiddling with different things. When it comes time for the presentation, I fall asleep. I'm just kind of irritable through the whole thing. At the end of it, I say to Patti, "You know, I'm really irritated about this whole thing. I mean after all, I was the one who almost died. I was the one whose life was at risk. I mean, the thing should have been about me. They should have interviewed me, they should have told my story, the focus should have been on me." And Patti looks at me and says, "You know, have you ever stopped to think about the fact that maybe this night wasn't about *you* at all." Do you think that ever happens in worship?

You know by definition, we call this a worship service, which means by definition it's about God. It's not about you. It's not about me. He's the One who saved us. But it's hard. It's really hard in a consumer culture because a consumer culture bombards us with this message that it's all about me, it's all about me, it's all about me. So we show up as consumers thinking: *You know I hope they play music I like, and I hope they use instruments I like, and I hope there's something here that is entertaining to me, and I hope I walk away thinking there was something, some reason to be there.* And it's all about me. And we lose sight of the fact that it's not about me. It's about God. He's the One who is worthy of our worship. He's the reason why we're here.

You say, "Well is there anything in it for me?" Well actually, there's a lot in it for you because when we worship God, everything else tends to fall into its proper perspective so much so that I would say any Christian who is not a consistent worshiper will never live a consistent Christian life. You just can't keep everything in perspective unless you are consistently coming before God as a worshiper, being reminded of who God is and why we serve Him.

That's what we want to talk about this morning. If you have a Bible, turn with me to Psalm 66. I want to just remind ourselves of some things that are true about worship. Nobody knows who wrote Psalm 66, and nobody's quite sure of when it was written. Most scholars think it was written after the captivity which would be fairly late in the Old Testament story – after David, after Solomon, after the captivity – and I think that's probably likely. There are some things in the Psalm that seem to indicate that. Verse 1:

Shout joyfully to God, all the earth; sing the glory of His name; make His praise glorious. (Psalm 66:1-2; *NASB)

There are a couple of things to notice in those opening verses. One is the emphasis on "**all the earth.**" One of the features of these Psalms that show up here in "the 60's" is a consistent emphasis on "all the nations" and "all the earth". There's a reminder that God wants worshipers from every tribe and tongue and nation to come and to worship Him. God has never wanted to limit worship to

just one group of people. Even in the Old Testament, God wanted to reveal Himself through the Hebrew people to the world that every tribe and tongue and nation would come and worship.

When you get to the New Testament in the Gospels, clearly the Hebrew people really have a hatred for the Gentiles. They have separated themselves out. They avoid the Gentiles. They look down on them. They want nothing to do with them. But you have to understand, before the captivity that really wasn't true. The Hebrew people understood that their call was to reveal God to the nations that every tribe and tongue and nation would ultimately come and worship God.

If you've ever traveled internationally and you've experienced an international worship experience, it's very inspiring. As a matter of fact, it would be one of those highlight moments as a Christian. There's something about being in a completely different culture with people who don't speak your language, who live life very differently, but they are worshiping the same God. And even if you don't know the language, there's a sense of connectedness at the heart level that's highly inspiring. As a matter of fact, it would just be one of those rare moments. You find yourself more connected to people in a different culture that don't even speak your language than you often feel to people that you've worked next to or lived next to for years and years and years. There's something about coming together and worshiping the same God that's a very inspiring experience. You can imagine one day people from every tribe and tongue and nation coming together worshiping our God.

The idea of "shout" is actually a Hebrew word that is sometimes translated "blow the trumpet". It's a military term. It really is referring to in the ancient world when fighting was face-to-face and kind of a hand-to-hand type combat that when an army knew that they were right on the verge of victory, oftentimes they would either blow a trumpet or they would let out a great shout. And the purpose of the shout was to encourage the troops—Hey, we've got this thing. Let's finish it off—and it was to demoralize the enemy.

Imagine if you're the enemy and you have this sense that we're losing, and all of a sudden you hear this shout, there is a sense in which, *We're done for*, and that quickly brought the end to the battle. Well that's the background of this term. It's the idea that we are victors, that God has given us the victory. And as the people of God, we gather together and we shout in order to encourage one another and in order to demoralize the enemy.

I think sometimes people get it in their head that worship always has to be quiet and always has to be somber, and we don't ever raise our voices because God is real quiet. And there are times when that's very appropriate. But there are times when God says, "I want you to shout! I want you to raise the roof. I want you to express 'We won this thing!'" And it's a very appropriate expression of worship. Verse 2, he says:

Sing the glory of His name; make His praise glorious.

The idea of glorious is enhancing the reputation of God, and this is done through music. The word translated "sing" really isn't a reference so much to the words but to the music. As a matter of fact, it's often used to identify instrumental music. Have you ever thought about how interesting it is that people of all cultures for thousands of years have had this one thing in common and that is music as this universal language?

Now some people are much more into music than other people, but it's important to recognize, again, this isn't about me. This is about God and God has said, "That's how I want to be worshipped." Sometimes we have people that linger out in the hallway until the music's over, and

they come in for the message because that's the real spiritual part of the service. And you forget, "Hey wait a minute. This isn't about me." The whole thing is worship. And whether you like it or not, God has said, "I want to be worshipped with music." And that's part of God's call, "Come together and use music to worship Me to enhance My reputation."

Verse 3:

Say to God, "How awesome are Your works! Because of the greatness of Your power Your enemies will give feigned obedience to You."

"Say to God" – now this does get into the content of the songs. The word sing is about the music. This is about the content of what we're saying to God in the words of our songs and the things that we read. It's very important to remember that when we come to worship we engage our minds. It isn't just to be carried along by our emotions, and we like this tune, and we like this style of music. But we're engaging our minds, and we're thinking about what we're saying. We're thinking about what we're saying to God. We're thinking about what we're saying about God. We have no more right to spout bad theology in music than we do in the preaching. We need to engage our minds in what we say to God. And what are we saying? In this case: **"How awesome are Your works!"** The word "awesome" means awe inspiring. It causes fear. It causes my mouth to fall open because God is so awesome.

It says, **"Because of the greatness of Your power Your enemies will give feigned obedience to You."** The version that John read was **"Your enemies will cringe."** There's a sense in which when God displays His power, even His enemies just kind of cringe. The idea of "feigned obedience" means fake obedience. The enemies are dropped to their knees, and they say, "Uncle! I give up." I think there's probably a reference here to Pharaoh and the Egyptians when the plagues came and finally they just cried, "Uncle!" and said, "Okay, I give up. You can leave." It was kind of a fake obedience because they changed their minds quickly, but in that moment God's power overwhelmed them, and they just gave in.

One of the ways I think we see it in our culture today, especially this time of year, is when one of these spring or especially these summer storms come in and you have this real heavy lightening and you have these explosions of thunder that just rock the joint. It's always interesting to watch people's faces when one of those thunder explosions happens because it really doesn't matter where you are. You could be at home; you could be at the mall; you could be out at a ballgame; you could be in a restaurant. It doesn't matter if you're an agnostic; it doesn't matter if you're an atheist; it doesn't matter if you follow some other world religion. In that moment when the whole joint rocks from that thunder, everybody does the same thing. They raise their eyebrows, and they look at each other like: *Whoa!* I like to say, "Wow God! That was a *good* one!" It's just this tiny glimpse of the awesomeness of God's power where you say, "Whoa! I don't think I want to mess with that God." And this captures just a little bit of what he's saying here. There's a sense in which even the most pagan among us falls on his face and says, "Wow! That is too much. That is so awesome."

Verse 4:

"All the earth will worship You, and will sing praises to You; they will sing praises to Your name."

I think the idea of **"all the earth"** has two levels to it, one sense saying people from every tribe and tongue and nation – which is really a theme throughout the Scriptures – people from all over the earth will ultimately be worshipers of God. But I think there's also another level to it that correlates

with what Paul says in Philippians 2—that one day every knee shall bow and every tongue shall confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God. Now when you stop and think about it that is just an amazing concept. There will come a day where there will be no more atheists, no more agnostics, no promoters of any other world religion. Everybody will be in agreement that there is one God. And every knee will bow, and every tongue will confess. We know that now. As the people of God, we know that now. It's why we gather and we acknowledge that understanding one day every knee will bow and every tongue will confess that this God that we worship is the only God.

Verse 5:

Come and see the works of God, [this is a call to worship] who is awesome in His deeds toward the sons of men. He turned the sea into dry land; they passed through the river on foot; there let us rejoice in Him! (vs. 5-6)

He's identifying a specific miracle that rocked the nations. Hundreds of years later, nations were still talking about the time that God parted the Red Sea and the Israelites passed through on dry land. Now, one of the things that's interesting is to recognize this Psalm was written about a thousand years later. We have a tendency to think in the Old Testament these miracles were just happening one after another after another after another. But that really isn't true. They were still extremely rare. They were very special moments.

Now don't misunderstand me. I believe God is a miracle working God. I think He does miracles every day. But this kind of highly public – this level of miracle – has always been the exception, so much so that here they are a thousand years later going back to that saying, "That was one of the top ten. That was a biggie."

If you've ever seen this reenacted on television, you maybe have a little bit of a misconception of what this was like. It looks like a little trail of 20 people going through a pond. And that's really not what it was at all. Roughly three million people, the Red Sea parting – imagine trying to lead three million people with no modern means of communication. You stand up there and holler to three million people, "Let's go!" If you took three million people and you lined them up, we could start up on the interstate, and let's say where 70th connects with I-80, if you lined them up 100 abreast and then packed them in, they would start at 70th and I-80 and go all the way into downtown Omaha, a mass of people, three million people, marching through the Sea. The miracle was so unbelievable that pagan nations for hundreds of years still talked about what happened that day at the Red Sea.

Well, that's what he's talking about here. "Come and check this out—what God has done. And it's the same God yesterday, today, and forever." We talked about this two weeks ago. When we worship, we're reminded of who God is. And if we think, *Wow, God was able to pull that off?* So exactly, remind me, what problem do you have today that's just too big for God? It puts everything back in perspective that my God is big enough, and I believe that and I trust in that.

Verse 7, I love this verse:

He rules by His might forever; His eyes keep watch on the nations; let not the rebellious exalt themselves.

The idea of "might" is a word that's referring to military might. It's ultimately saying God is the ultimate victor. God is the One who rules by His might. He's very aware of the nations. God is not

unaware. God is not clueless. He's not disconnected from this world. God knows exactly what's going on.

We would all acknowledge we live in a very unsafe world. There are things happening around the world that make it feel like this world is coming apart at the hinges. You watch the nightly news and it seems like everything is falling apart. In Iraq, you've got this very unstable leader; in Iran you don't know what's going to go on there. They're fueling this whole thing with Hamas and what's happening in the Middle East. North Korea wants to make a nuclear bomb. You have all these nations that hate us and want to kill us. And it goes on and on, and it feels like everything's out of control.

And then we as a people of God, we gather together and remember: *Now wait a minute. God is the One who rules by His might. God's in charge. God hasn't lost control. Everything's not falling apart. God's clearly aware of the situation, and God is the One who rules the nations. He knows exactly what's going on.*

We need to remind ourselves on a regular basis that our safety does not depend upon the U.S. Army. It does not depend on the U.S. government. It doesn't depend on any human agency. Our safety is ultimately in the hands of God. And God's got it all in control. I have to believe that and I have to trust that.

At the end of verse 7 when he says, **“Let not the rebellious exalt themselves,”** he's looking at Iran, looking at Iraq, he's looking at the Middle East, he's looking at North Korea. And the people of God are saying, “I would strongly suggest that you people not shake your fists at God because our God is ultimately the God of might. And He can't be defeated.” It's the people of God who are issuing the warning, “Don't rebel against our God. Don't shake your fists at our God because He can't be defeated.”

Verse 8:

Bless our God, [It's a word that means adore our God.] **O peoples,** [Again, it's a call to worship.] **and sound His praise abroad.**

I think a better translation of that is “Cause to hear the sound of His praise.” In other words, praise Him or worship Him in mass so that that worship is heard by the peoples of the world.

Now imagine this scene in the ancient world. The Hebrew people gather together to worship. They would have these massive worship experiences several million people strong, and they would lift their voices in worship to God. They would shout. They would sing. They would praise. And the sound of that would echo through the hills to the pagan nations. And they would hear that. They would hear this roar coming from the camp of the Israelites. And something in them would say, *There is something going on there. The God of the Hebrews is unlike any other god. He is awesome.* In essence, what's being said is the worship itself became the witness.

Think of it this way. There is nothing, really, in the state of Nebraska quite like what happens on a Nebraska football game day. Imagine that you've got tickets to the game. You've probably been in this situation where you're running late, the game has already started. It's one of those big games. There's a lot of energy. And as you're hurrying across the campus, something happens on the field and you hear this roar erupting out of the stadium. You don't hear one or two voices whooping and hollering. You hear a roar. It starts low, and it just kind of explodes. Okay, that's 84,000 people.

Now imagine that with three or four million people going on for several hours expressing praise to their God. And imagine that sound echoing through the hills and the pagan nations saying, “Something’s going on there.” That’s verse 8. That’s what he’s talking about. The worship becomes the witness as the people of God gather together to declare, “Our God is worthy!”

It’s always hard to try to put one of our core values above another. But if you backed me into a corner and said, “You have to pick one,” I would have to say worship. Worship is the highest of all the core values. It is what we will do forever. It’s what everything else flows out of. I agree with John Piper, “Evangelism exists because worship doesn’t.” The reason we evangelize is so that enemies of God become worshipers of God. If all we’re making is converts, we’ve missed the whole point. The whole point is not converts, it’s worshipers – that those who are enemies of God become worshipers of God from every tribe and tongue and nation. That’s why we send missionaries. That’s why we reach the people next door. And that’s what he’s saying here.

Now obviously we don’t worship outside, so we have our limitations with the building. But God has blessed us with a very strategic location and the fact is when people are pouring in and out of this place, there are people you work with and you go to school with and live next door that say, “What’s going on over there?” When we were building this building, people kept saying, “What’s going on over there?” And when people walk through these doors, we want there to be a sense of *God is here*. These are the people of God gathered together to declare that God is worthy of our worship, and our worship becomes our witness. People would walk away saying, “I’m not sure what’s going on, but it seems real and it seems alive.” That’s verse 8.

Verse 9:

Who keeps us in life and does not allow our feet to slip.

It’s probably a reference to coming through the captivity, and God has preserved them again as a nation. If you’ve ever studied the history of the Hebrew people, it’s an amazing story how they’ve been able to stay a people even to this very day. How do we explain that other than God? In our day and age, we would expand that to the reality of the Church, and God is holding the Church together and blessing the Church and multiplying the Church. There are places in the world where governments are doing everything in their power to stop the Church, and it’s just exploding under the persecution. And that’s what this verse is all about. It’s God, and He’s keeping us alive. And He’s causing us to flourish as the people of God.

Verse 10:

For You have tried us, O God; You have refined us as silver is refined.

The word “tried” and the word “refined” have basically the same Hebrew meaning. It’s a reference to the purifying process of a precious metal where they would put it under fire until the dross or the impurities come to the surface. They scrape it off, and they do it again until eventually all the impurities are out and you’re left with a pure precious metal. And that’s an imagery of both the Old and New Testament of what God is doing with us. God is taking us through the fire in order to burn away the impurities, not because He’s mad at us, but because He wants us to experience Him in a way we otherwise could never experience Him, that we might drink in His glory, that we might celebrate the wonder of who He is.

In the New Testament in First Peter, Peter talks about the fact that God’s intention right now is on His people. God’s really not working on the pagan nations so much as He is preparing the Bride for

the Bridegroom. And He's taking us through the fire, burning away the impurities in order that we might know Him more deeply, in order that we might drink in His glory in a way we otherwise never could have.

Think of it like this. If you've ever been in the world of athletics, you know that if a coach is paying a lot of attention to you, that's probably a good sign. He may be yelling at you, he may be trying to motivate you, he may be riding you every day, and you say, "Why doesn't the coach leave me alone?" But that's actually a good sign. The bad sign is when the coach ignores you. You know, when the coach says, "You know Bryan that was a really good shot. You go over there and practice your dribbling. I'm going to focus my attention over here." That's not a good sign. It may be nice that the coach isn't yelling at you every day, but what he's saying is, "You really don't have any potential, and you're really not going to make much of a contribution, so I'm not really going to spend much time on you." But a coach spends the time on those people that have the ability to make a contribution, those people that he can motivate, or she can motivate, to contribute more than that person probably imagined. That's the role of a coach. And that's what Peter is saying, "Right now Jesus' attention is on His people, and He's refining them, and He's removing the impurities that we might become like Him, that we might become His worshippers. And our worship becomes our witness. He's refining us through the fire."

The next couple of verses give us just several metaphors to that end.

You brought us into the net; You laid an oppressive burden upon our loins. [Probably talking about the captivity and being enslaved in captivity.] (v. 11)

Verse 12:

You made men ride over our heads; we went through fire and through water. [This is probably talking about their defeat and capture.]

The Hebrew "fire and through water" would be the equivalent of our English "Hell and high water." "God, You've taken us through hell and high water. And we've come out the other side and flourished in a way we never would have known otherwise. He says, "...**You brought us out into a place of abundance.**" (v. 12)

Verse 13:

I shall come into Your house with burnt offerings; I shall pay You my vows, which my lips uttered and my mouth spoke when I was in distress. I shall offer to You burnt offerings of fat beasts, with the smoke of rams; I shall make an offering of bulls with male goats. (vs. 13-15)

The psalmist is talking about coming before God and offering this sacrifice of praise. Apparently, he made some sort of commitment in his hour of distress and said, "God if you get me out of this, this is what I will do." And now God has relieved his distress, and the psalmist is following through on his promise. The idea of a burnt offering carries the idea that you give it away. You don't give a burnt offering and expect to get it back. It's burned up. He's talking about an excessive offering. When he goes through the list in verse 15, that would be over and above. It would be excessive. But what he's saying is, "God, I made a promise to You, and I'm giving You the best I have, and I'm giving you this very generous offering as my act of worship." In the ancient world this is what they had. They didn't have a lot of cash. They gave of what they had. It might be grain. It might be livestock. But that was their giving to God.

When we give to God, the offering is not an interruption of our worship. It's not something we just kind of have to tolerate in order to get through the service. It is an element of worship. It's just as much an element of worship as singing is, as communion is, as baptism is. It's part of how we worship God. We don't give to God because God's got a cash flow problem. We give to God as an act of worship. It's our declaration that God is God. And we put our trust in Him to be our provider. We give sacrificially. We give generously. Sometimes in our hour of distress, we make promises to God that we need to be very careful to follow through on. Often, when the distress goes away, we just kind of back away, "Oh, I didn't really mean it." It just kind of all fades into the sunset. We need to be really careful with that.

A lot of churches have gone to where they put the offering buckets at the back somewhere in the hallway. And as you leave, you drop your offering in there. It communicates to me that, "Oh by the way, we've got this practical thing here. We have to pay the light bills. So if you don't mind dropping a few bucks in it on the way out, that would really be helpful." I really disagree with that. Giving is an act of worship. It's a part of the worship of the body. It's an element of worship, and we need to think of it that way.

Verse 16:

Come and hear, all who fear God, and I will tell of what He has done for my soul.

Shouting is an act of worship. Singing is an act of worship. Praising is an act of worship. Giving is an act of worship. Telling our story is an act of worship. When we run a Loop story on the big screen, that's not an interruption. That's not something outside the worship service. It's an element of worship, again, just as legitimate as communion or baptism or singing. It's mandated throughout the psalms—tell your story, tell your story, tell your story of what God has done.

Verse 17:

I cried to Him with my mouth, and He was extolled with my tongue. If I regard wickedness [or cherish, or delight in wickedness] in my heart, the Lord will not hear; but certainly God has heard; He has given heed to the voice of my prayer. Blessed be God, who has not turned away my prayer nor His lovingkindness from me. (vs. 17-20)

The psalmist is saying, "I cried out to God and God heard me. I understand that if I cherish or delight in wickedness that God's not going to hear my prayer." We're reminded that worship is the culmination of how I live my life. I can't, all week long, live like the devil and come in here and think I'm just going to turn on worship and God's going to hear that. It's just bouncing off the ceiling. If I delight in wickedness, if I cherish it, if I live it as a way of life, he says, "God won't hear me." But he knows that's not the case, so he says, "God hears my prayer and God answers me."

I think the theme of this is God is alive. We're not coming in here and talking to the ceiling. We're not talking to the building. We're not just manufacturing some emotional, feel-good experience. God is real. God is alive and God responds to our worship with lovingkindness.

This psalm, like so many of the psalms, is an all out call to worship. In both the Old and New Testament we're clearly taught that the ultimate end of our salvation is that we become worshipers of God. There's something special and unique when the people of God gather together to worship. But that's a challenge in this busy culture in which we live. I think one of the challenges we face is because worship services are on the weekend, we tend to identify worship as part of our leisure.

You know, we work all week long and this is part of our day off. This is part of our leisure. And so we tend to treat it that way. We just kind of leisurely come in if there isn't something else going on, if there isn't a picnic, if there isn't something at the lake, if there's nothing else interfering with our schedule, then we'll wander in and say, "Hi" to God because this is the weekend. "This is my leisure time. I'm off."

We need to be really careful of that. This is not our leisure time. This is the apex of our week. This is our highest priority. This is the greatest moment of the week for the people of God – that moment when we gather and we declare our worship to God. And we need to get it in our minds that that's what this is. Some of you travel a lot. The people of God are everywhere. Join them in worship. It's a great experience.

When King David was looking for a piece of ground upon which to offer a sacrifice, somebody that had a piece of ground offered it to him for free saying, "Here you can use this." David said, "No, I insist. I'm going to pay for it." And then he said, "I will not offer to God that which costs me nothing." We need to get it in our heads, worship is costly. It doesn't always fit the schedule. It isn't always convenient. The culture, more and more and more, is moving into the times when we worship. And we have to make some hard decisions. But God shouldn't be getting the leftovers. God should be getting the best of our time, the best of our attention, the best of our energy. God is worthy of that.

Let me ask you a question: How many of you, on a weekly basis, show up 15 minutes late every day for work? If you don't think that's acceptable to your employer, what makes you think that's acceptable to God? Why would we give God less than our best? Why can't we organize our lives in such a way that we give God the best of our time, the best of our attention, the best of our focus? We're giving God the best we have to offer. This is the high point of the week and everything else has to come secondary. Isn't God worthy of that?

This isn't some legalistic thing where we're saying, "You know, the more times you're in the building, the more spiritual you are." But you cannot ignore the fact that from cover to cover of the Bible, there is this emphasis on the people of God gathering to worship, to declare that our God is God and He is unlike any other. When we do that everything else in life tends to fall into its proper perspective. We're reminded of who we are, and what we're about, and what we're supposed to be living for. When we don't do that, we inevitably get off track and find ourselves wandering as believers. We need to understand the value and the importance of worship and that God gets our very best – the best of our minds, the best of our emotions, the best of our energy, the best of our attention – because He is worthy of the best that we have.

Our Father, we are thankful that You are an awesome God. Lord, forgive us for the times when we give You the leftovers – the leftovers of our time, the leftovers of our energy, the leftovers of our attention. Lord, often we have all our excuses why it's that way. Lord, there needs to come a time when we make no more excuses. Lord, worship isn't convenient. It doesn't always fit the schedule. But Lord, our desire is that we as a body would be a worshiping people, that we would raise the roof in this place in declaration that our God reigns. In the midst of a very scary and uncertain world, we would remind ourselves that You reign, that You are God, that You are great, Your works are awesome. Lord, I pray that we would truly be a worshiping people, for Your glory. In Jesus' name, Amen.

We've just been reminding ourselves that worship is a way of life. It's about what we're doing seven days a week, living for the glory of His name. I don't know anybody that models that better than John Matzke, one of our youth pastors. I've known John for about 20 years and have the highest respect for John and Beth. It's been a delight to have them on our staff. John is transitioning out. John was a school teacher at Lincoln High, believed God was calling him here to be part of the ministry staff. But over the last couple of years, John's been very open about the fact that he believed God was calling him back into education. And this year he transitions out. Everything about this is very positive. Every time somebody leaves the staff, there are certain people that just have a need to go negative. And I can tell you everything about this is positive. John's very excited about the youth ministry. He's very excited about Ty. He's going to continue to serve in the youth ministry. But he believes God's calling him back into the world of education. And we celebrate that.

One of the things that I think is a little bit unique about us as a church is we have a very high value that God calls all of us. He calls some of us to be pastors and missionaries. But He calls many out into the marketplace and into education, and that calling is just as high and holy as any calling to be a pastor or missionary. And it's very important that we understand that. When John was called from education to be a pastor, we celebrated that as a high and holy calling. Now he is transitioning from a pastor back into the world of education, and we celebrate that just as much because the calling is just as high and holy. With that in mind, we thought you might want to hear a little bit of John's story. So check it out.

Video Clip of John Matzke:

I came to know Christ when I was a freshman in college. And during that same time I was playing basketball at the University. So that kind of influenced a lot of my early spiritual growth—just learning what it meant to be part of a team and to work together and to try and accomplish a purpose. Probably half way through my college career I changed majors and wound up going into education mainly because I got involved out here in the high school ministry and realized that I really did love working with kids. And then in 1999 the youth pastor here left. I can't remember who it was that said, "You know, you ought to really think about praying about whether you should be the youth pastor." I was like, "You know, I'm really happy where I'm at. I'm doing fine and I was enjoying teaching, but I thought: *You know, I better be spiritual and pray about this.* So I started praying about it. And it was just one of those things where, you sense God leading you, "Yeah, this is what I want you to do," but in your heart you're just like, "Lord, I'm not a pastor. I'm a teacher." And I struggled with that. I mean, it was not just like God saying, "You need to go be a youth pastor," and I'm like, "Oh yeah, cool." I really battled with that and finally you come to this point where you're reading the Word, you're praying, you're talking to friends, and getting their counsel, and looking at how God's wired you, and all those things. And you feel like this is really where I feel like God's leading me. But you still have to take that step of faith.

Finally in – I think it was late fall of '98 – I turned in my résumé. And low and behold, they selected me to be the high school youth pastor out here. And it's been an adventure. Probably some of the biggest steps of faith in my life have happened over these past eight years. Some of the wildest gyrations in terms of emotions, and "What have I gotten myself into?" have happened over these eight years. You know, God is so faithful and it's just been a great journey. But probably one of the things I learned back in the day of playing

ball at UNL was that the coach is the one who decides the roles of the players on the team. My role is just to give all that I have to the role that He's put me in. And so my desire has just been to try and be faithful to what I've sensed God calling me to do and to dive into that with all my heart.

And God's been so good over the years. And these past few years, I've really had a sense that God was calling me to this position to prepare the way for the next person, that I probably wasn't going to be a 60-year-old youth pastor, "Come on kids, dodge ball time." You know, it probably wasn't going to be that sort of deal. And so just in praying through that again and going through that same process of praying, and talking to my wife, and seeking the Lord, and getting counsel from others, looking at how God's wired me in this stage of my life, you know you take all those things into account, and I just really had a sense that because I still love working with youth, education is probably the avenue I could take. For the next fifteen years God might want to continue to use me. So I'm just excited about where the youth ministry is right now. I'm excited about going back into teaching and being a part of that again, and being able to work one-on-one with kids all week long, and the relationships with staff and all that. I just tremendously look forward to diving back into that role again.

In the back of our head, and it's like part of American culture, we kind of have this idea that, when you're a pastor, you're this important person spiritually. But if you're not a pastor it's kind of a second rate deal. I honestly feel like if I didn't go back into education right now that I'd be being disobedient to what the Lord wants me to do. I look around our church and there are people in so many occupations and roles, and even in here serving out in the building. It's an encouragement to me to see what God has done and is doing through so many different people's lives and their backgrounds, and what He's brought them through, and now what He's using them to do in our community and around the world. It's just a privilege to be a part of it. That's the team that really matters. That's the team that really makes a difference. And I think God has used and will continue to use this place. So it's been fun to be a part of that.