

SLIDE 1 This is the last sermon in our vision & values series, 6:8@Six:Eight. The value of Grace as it pertains to Community, and the Story of God has shown through, as it will today. Grace saves us once for all, and transforms us daily. We said last week purity, or attaining to God's standard in the Law is important. But purity/holiness (sanctification) is only transforming when it is grounded in God's love and his acceptance of us based on grace, not our performance. Without Grace, Law becomes damaging; but Law under Grace becomes freeing. **SLIDE 2** Therefore, how do we go about living in response to the grace we receive daily as we pursue a life of holiness & purity; a life of passionate worship of Jesus?

This is how the Value of Passion reads...

SLIDE 3 Passion Matters

In response to the grace extended through Jesus, we value a lifestyle of holistic passionate worship. We seek to offer ourselves as living sacrifices to him in all areas of life: corporately & individually. One experience of this can be found in our weekly gathering in which we strive to create an open, relaxed, interactive & creative atmosphere. However, our worship extends into *every aspect* of our personal lives in what we believe, value, how we live, think, and treat others. We avoid busyness, but work hard for the joy that has been set before us in Jesus. Our passion for worship extends to the holistic value of God's creation in its entirety.

SLIDE 4 Mature Christian Profile as it pertains to Passion

The mature Christian in the issue of passion sees all of life as their spiritual act of worship. They have grown past the empty notion that worship is found only in song on Sunday mornings. They value creation, people, and all of life. Their decisions, inner thoughts, and heart life, are all a sacrifice to God. They have come to realize that consistent good treatment of others, and how they interact with the Holy Spirit are more profoundly worshipful experiences than occasional 'worship gatherings'. They make Kingdom Choices, which may seem illogical on a worldly standard, and are based on their calling and Scripture. However, these choices are not in isolation, they are based on God's Word, interaction with the Holy Spirit, and the faith community. Worship and passion for God, as reflected in Christ, is a lifestyle, not an event for them. Their passionate worship in all areas drives them outward to take the good news to their neighbors, family and friends.

Passion Matters; we see ourselves linked to the continuing story of God, from the garden of Eden to the present; God's grace like a river running through it. **SLIDE 5** And looking forward we must ask, where is our story headed? Because our story will be driven by our passion. Our passions reveal our desires, our loves, and they give our story its direction. Your story moves towards what you love, what you want/desire the most. Passion directs our story; it reveals the object of our hopes; it shows us where we're headed and who we're becoming. To what does Jesus direct our passion?

SLIDE 6 In Matthew 6 He says, ³³ But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. ³⁴ Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own. ¹

SLIDE 7 Therefore, if the Kingdom of God & His Righteousness is our passion, transformation occurs marked by a natural outpouring of trust, purity & holiness; a lifestyle of passionate worship.

My wife used to watch a child a few days a week so the mother could go to work. Having a child around is a blessing. I had forgotten how children give themselves fully to the object of their passion. This little guy loved cars, and he let you know it. Aidan loved sticks, and swords, and Peter Pan. Maddie loved animals, dresses, and flowers. Senah just plain loves life. Tanner loves a good joke, the drums, and his big brother. Whatever is your child's passion you hear about it constantly. Another child got out of his dad's car the other day at my house and within 30 seconds told me 10X's about his new baseball mitt and ball. **SLIDE 8** And when the parents would show up to pick up their child Kim watched at my house, you saw the true object of their passion; their parents.

SLIDE 9 We intentionally used the word Passion when writing this value, although passion is synonymous with worship. But worship has lost some meaning. Worship has become just a weekly music event, which does not begin to round out the idea of holistic worship. John Piper said worship is not just song, but sermon as well. Correct, but still limited. He also stated that missions exists because worship doesn't among all peoples of the world - that worship is our end goal and missions will one day cease; true.

SLIDE 10 Worship has an objective focus; it is what you give your life to; it is what you see as most important, every decision stems from what you worship. Worship of God should be at the center of our worldview. The object of our worship guides all that we do, choose, feel, and think.

Charles Misner a scientist in general relativity theory, spoke of Albert Einsteins skepticism of the church and how shallow it is in the realm of worship:

SLIDE 11 "The design of the universe...is very magnificent and shouldn't be taken for granted. In fact, I believe that is why Einstein had so little use for organized religion, although he strikes me as a basically very religious man. He must have looked at what the preachers said about God and felt that they were blaspheming. He had seen much more majesty than they had ever imagined, and they were just not talking about the real thing. My guess is that he simply felt that religions he'd run across did not have proper respect...for the author of the universe."²

That's part of the answer; stop and take notice of the beauty that surrounds us - but even that is limited.

¹ *The New International Version*. 2011 (Mt 6:33–34). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

² *Let the Nations Be Glad*. 2003, Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic. p18.

SLIDE 12 Our statement says, we value a lifestyle of holistic passionate worship which is synonymous with pursuing first His kingdom and His righteousness. His kingdom being the reign of God, and His righteousness being rightly related to God by Grace through faith alone. In seeking these two things first, everything else falls into place. But there are two things which happen to us which hinder this pursuit & worship of God. **SLIDE 13** Firstly, we lose our childlikeness. If raised by a loving, gentle, but directive parent, children easily trust & obey - they run freely within the safety of their limits. They give themselves completely to that gracious authority, and in doing so, they play and enjoy all the pleasures of life. **SLIDE 14** Children want & respond well to boundaries.

We live next to a park, and when spring comes my wife throws open every window in the house; you can hear the laughter of children in the park. Kids give themselves over to joy, it's pure, innocent, and good. Parental rules and direction have their place in child's play; you do not want joy destroyed by the trauma of a kid running into oncoming traffic; healthy boundaries are erected. **SLIDE 15** Likewise, God's standards set boundaries to keep us from running into the proverbial traffic - laws not to limit our freedom and joy, but to foster them. To keep us free from the bondage of things which would rob us of life. God's standards bring life when operated out of grace; there to keep us running and playing with God. We understand all too easily that good laws in society keep neighborhoods safe and foster freedom. You pursue your dreams without the worry of getting robbed or killed because the rule of law is in place. It's the same with God's standards which lead us to freedom in Him.

But for every child at play there seeps in the damaging fear and evil of the world. Other rules come into play, rules that hamper our joy, and choke the life out of living. **SLIDE 16** Rules not of a good parent, but the bad. Sin in ourselves, and others, corrode the joyful freedom we were meant to have. Fear and control from others get impressed on a child's psyche. "Stop that." "Grow up." "Don't do that, you're embarrassing me!" "You don't deserve it." "You're worthless." And worse has been said to many children. As a child grows they may become jaded and cynical. Lies are whispered in their ear. Something enters the playground & attention is diverted away from the parent. Worry takes root. **SLIDE 17** Cynicism grows, and is hard to break free of; it blinds us to the presence of God and his reign all around us. And with every negative statement & experience life gets sucked out of that little soul; we lose our childlikeness.

My wife has a childlikeness, an innocence. You can look at pictures of Kim and tell when it is springtime just by her face. In winter pictures, when she has been holed up in the house, her eyes are dim. But in springtime pictures, her eyes sparkle and I swear they become bluer. Take her on a trip, away from the pressures of being mom and a pastors wife, give her a Margarita overlooking a beautiful mountain range on a sunny day after a good hike, and this is what you get! **SLIDE 18** Kim has a very clear & natural sense of the Godly limits she lives under, which gives her a profound freedom to enjoy God and his creation - the law or limits are not confining, rather they produce a

purity which keeps cynicism at bay and as a result she is light and joyous; unencumbered by sin and worry. Childlike, but not childish.

Jesus said, don't worry. **SLIDE 19** Worry kills joy. Worry diverts our eyes from the parent. Worry crowds out the light and lets cynicism seep into the cracks of our soul. Worry does not account for the provision of God, and makes us blind to all the wonders placed before us. This is why Romans 12 says **SLIDE 20**, "Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God—this is your true and proper worship. ² Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will." ³ Understanding and transformation come by proximity to God the Father - and healthy passion is born.

Curt Thompson, a psychiatrist and a former discipler of mine, recently came out with a book, *Anatomy of the Soul*. **SLIDE 21** In it he states that when we apply ourselves to something long enough new synapses are physically formed in our brains; new connections. Let's listen to what he says, **SLIDE 22 VIDEO** (<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=67wRjiUN-Rc&feature=related>) Something physically becomes habit, and habit happens naturally. Normally we think of habits as bad, but we can form positive habits; spiritual habits; passionate, worshipful habits. Scripture urges us to form a Jesus-Focus habit **SLIDE 23**. That by choosing to believe God's mercy/grace in humble obedience, we are transformed. We pursue purity & holiness in holistically offering ourselves; and as a result something is transformed in us.

Giving ourselves over before we understand; understanding does not come from more knowledge. **SLIDE 24** It's not information from God which satisfies - it's His presence. What you put in, you get out, and to those who ask, more will be given. Being in his presence satisfies as a parent satisfies a child. Jesus never said, "I will teach you the truth", but that he was the Truth. He is the source of Living Water, not the Bible answer man. But most of us think that if we get more answers and information, then we will be satisfied. But more answers lead to more questions - what we need is to recline on the chest of our father as a child.

SLIDE 25 In relationship, trust eradicates worry. We're incrementally transformed - new synapses form, new habits, and childlike joy returns. We can smile again even in hardship; no longer the victim; it's no longer everyone else's fault; no longer trapped and confined. In Him we are free and joyful.

SLIDE 26 The second thing that happens is that we are deceived. After a child's gaze is taken off the parent, negative influence is too easy. Our sinful nature at some point dupes us into the pursuit of pleasure as an answer to our deep longing for joy. Whether we know it or not, all of us long for that Eden-like whole relationship with God once

³ *The New International Version*. 2011 (Ro 12:1–2). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

more. However, we are deceived into thinking that pleasures placate, make us whole, or at the least, stave off the emptiness we feel. When in reality they fill that well of emptiness with more despair. Pleasures are good and should produce gratitude to God, but they slowly become our gods when used in unhealthy ways. An alcoholic does not say to themselves, “I want to train my body to need alcohol like water.” That’s never the goal - no one sets out to destroy their liver and relationships. But one drink to relieve stress leads to two, and eventually like **SLIDE 27** George Carlin says, one tequila, two tequila, three tequila, floor! I’ve turned my pain off for a time.

No one sets out to be an addict, an angry old cynic, a know-it-all, or an eccentric recluse. We set out to fill that Eden-like void which only Jesus can fill. Whatever it is in our lives which we hold onto as our security blanket is knitted one link at a time over many years. **SLIDE 28** First comes the loss of joy and freedom, then cynicism, then bondage in a self-made prison of our false god. Negative habits, synapses are formed, and you find yourself in a hole with no way out - a little light at the top, but the walls are smooth; a caterpillar back in the ring of fire once again in need of rescue above. It’s like knitting chain mail together which we think will protect us from the pain of life.

Maybe it’s why Jesus used a child as an example with his disciples, **SLIDE 29** “Truly I tell you, unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. ⁴Therefore, whoever takes the lowly position of this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven.⁴

SLIDE 30 Because, “to all who did receive him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God—¹³ children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband’s will, but born of God”⁵ Born of grace; children, not cynical adults. Kids who need, trust, and obey their Father; looking to him for direction and joy. By grace, becoming who they are, by grace. The Psalmist sensed this when he said, **SLIDE 31** “Surely I have composed and quieted my soul; like a weaned child *rests* against his mother, My soul is like a weaned child within me. O Israel, hope in the Lord from this time forth and forever.” ⁶

His soul is quieted and composed by the hope in his heavenly parent, and as a result, he enjoys that sense of being a weaned child leaning against his mother’s breast. I remember Tanner when he was young, leaning against his mother; safe, his world in order, content - the Eden-like state we long for, but fill in all the wrong ways.

There is an interesting passage in Mark 4 just after Jesus told the parable of the sower of the seeds. At the end of that passage he says, **SLIDE 32** ⁹...“Whoever has ears to hear, let them hear.” Which is always a confusing statement, we’ve all got ears.

⁴ *The New International Version*. 2011 (Mt 18:2–4). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

⁵ *The New International Version*. 2011 (Jn 1:11–13). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

⁶ *New American Standard Bible : 1995 update*. 1995 (Ps 131:1–3). LaHabra, CA: The Lockman Foundation.

It gets worse **SLIDE 33**,¹⁰ When he was alone, the Twelve and the others around him asked him about the parables. ¹¹ He told them, “The secret of the kingdom of God has been given to you. But to those on the outside everything is said in parables ¹² so that, “ ‘they may be ever seeing but never perceiving, and ever hearing but never understanding; otherwise they might turn and be forgiven!’”

But I thought Jesus’ desire is that all people will hear and be forgiven? Is he intentionally being vague so others might not receive forgiveness? But when you think about who he is talking to, it is more easily understood. These are the 12 disciples and a few others. The crowd has dissipated, they went home confused. He is left with only a handful of people and they ask, “What the heck does this parable mean?”

It is like you are sitting in a philosophy class of 50 students in college. The professor has just said something confusing, no one understands. When the bell rings everyone leaves, not really caring that they didn’t understand. They just want to get back to their girlfriend, their frat house, TV, or whatever makes them stop thinking. Only a handful stick around and approach the professor and ask, “What the heck did you mean?” They don’t give up, they latch onto the source. That is what Jesus is saying, those who have ears to hear are those which do not just go away and give up when they don’t understand, allow Satan to divert them, get caught in the thorny worries of life, or just say that’s great and walk away - they are those who pursue Jesus even in their confusion. They are the ones who come to the end of themselves, and call up from the ring of fire and say I need you Jesus! **SLIDE 34** Because transformation does not come from knowledge, but from proximity to Jesus.

SLIDE 35 Seek first His Kingdom (his reign) and His righteousness (grace). Become childlike not childish. Because when a child is the company of a parent, everything falls into place even when you don’t know the answers. The object of a child’s passion is the parent. When Jesus becomes our passion, we are freed, content and joyful. His desires become ours and we give ourselves holistically in passionate worship to Jesus. His standards then become life-giving and foster an abundant life. Purity & holiness develop naturally into a lifestyle of holistic passionate worship; we are transformed and renewed in the presence of Jesus.

There are many of us in this room who live in proximity to Jesus. You show Him to be the object of your passion, when you are transformed into his likeness and take on his heart. Others around us have passions, and those passions are connection points which we can enter in and gain the ground for reorienting their journey towards Jesus. Let’s listen to some of this passion from some people now, some past, some present Six:Eighters, and some community partners. **SLIDE 36 VIDEO**