

From You Comes My Praise: Guide My Steps

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Preacher: Pastor Scott Johnson

[0 : 00] Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

[2 : 30] Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

[4 : 59] Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you. Thank you.

Thank you. Thank you.

Thank you. Thank you.

[8 : 59] Amen. Thank you.

Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you.

Thank you. Thank you. Thank you.

Thank you. Thank you.

Thank you. Thank you.

[12 : 45] Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you.

Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you.

Thank you. You and me. Thank you. Thank you.

Thank you. As we come to this time of prayer where we in our own minds and an eye in words offer up to God those needs in the life of our congregation and the world, not just us.

I want to just a reminder that this afternoon at 3 o'clock will be Frank Woods Memorial Service, the father of Becky Snyder and Janet Kayla.

[14 : 26] So that will be at 3 o'clock here at the church and you are welcome to come. I also want to ask us to continue to be in prayer for Sherry Mehar and her father who continues to be critically ill and has been moved to Erie, Pennsylvania.

So just invite you to keep them in prayer as well as all others who are in that place in their life of crisis and not being certain what the next step is in this dance that we call faith.

Let us come before God in prayer. Oh God, you know us better than we know ourselves. You know that this is the season when college students face exams and papers and the overwhelm of the end of the semester.

So whether they are at home or far away, we offer them up to your care. Lord, keep them well in the midst of all of what is expected of them.

We pray that you continue to be with Sherry and Sally and Jim and all of their family. That they might feel comforted by you.

[15 : 42] We ask you to be wherever people are facing doctor's appointments and treatment and surgery. Lord, there's always a moment of insecurity when we step through some of these doors.

So we ask you to surround us, to support us, to always give us your grace when we act in fear rather than in trust.

Because we are just human beings, always looking, always trying to believe that you are with us, around us, and going before us.

Comfort those who grieve. Support those who feel all alone. Bless those who are joyful and full of life.

And may we all give thanks for those times. Bless this world and the creation you gave us. These weeks of the world unfolding in color and allergies.

[16 : 45] What a gift. We give thanks for the beauty of it, no matter how we see it. For those who cannot leave their homes. For those who cannot go home.

For those who find themselves all alone. We ask you to intervene. We ask you to help us. To help those we see and touch and are with.

And all of these things and the things that are in our hearts and not in the words we speak. We offer to you. Our mighty and risen Lord. In Jesus name we pray.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Good morning. Good morning. Good morning. Good morning. Good morning. Today's scripture reading is from two passages. This first one is from Acts chapter 8 verses 26 through 40.

[18 : 41] And then I'll follow that up with John chapter 15 verses 1 through 8. Now an angel of the Lord said to Philip, go south to the road, the desert road that goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza.

So he started out and on his way he met an Ethiopian eunuch, an important official in charge of all the treasury of the Kandake, which means queen of the Ethiopians.

This man had gone to Jerusalem to worship and on his way home was sitting in his chariot reading the book of Isaiah the prophet. The spirit told Philip, go to that chariot and stay near it.

Then Philip ran up to the chariot and heard the man reading Isaiah the prophet. Do you understand what you are reading? Philip asked. How can I? He said, unless someone explains it to me.

So he invited Philip to come up and sit with him. This is the passage of scripture the eunuch was reading. He was led like a sheep to the slaughter and as a lamb before its shearer is silent.

[19 : 48] So he did not open his mouth. In his humiliation, he was deprived of justice. Who can speak of his descendants? For his life was taken from the earth.

The eunuch asked Philip, tell me please, who is the prophet talking about? Himself or someone else? Then Philip began with that very passage of scripture and told him the good news about Jesus.

As they traveled along the road, they came to some water and the eunuch said, look, here is water. What can stand in the way of my being baptized? And he gave orders to stop the chariot.

Then both Philip and the eunuch went down into the water and Philip baptized him. When they came up out of the water, the spirit of the Lord suddenly took Philip away and the eunuch did not see him again, but went on his way rejoicing.

Philip, however, appeared at Azotus and traveled about, preaching the gospel in all the towns until he reached Caesarea. And now John chapter 15, verses 1 through 8.

[20 : 56] I am the true vine and my father is the gardener. He cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit. While every branch that does bear fruit, he prunes so that it will be even more fruitful.

You are already clean because of the word I've spoken to you. Remain in me as I also remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself. It must remain in the vine.

Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me. I am the vine. You are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit.

Apart from me, you can do nothing. If you do not remain in me, you are like a branch that is thrown away and withers. Such branches are picked up, thrown into the fire, and burned.

If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish and it will be done for you. This is to my father's glory that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples.

[22 : 00] This is the word of the Lord. Thank you. Thank you.

Pray with me, please. Almighty and gracious God, we are humbled before you. Humbled as we come with our hearts open and we have sung your praises, we have prayed together, we have heard your word.

And now, Lord, we are hoping that you will move in us. Move in us and plant a seed that will grow and bear fruit for the honor and the glory of your name. Through Jesus Christ, our Lord, we pray.

Amen. So, we are in a series called Dare to Dance Again. Dare to Dance Again. And dancing has been a theme, sort of this motif that we have kept over our sermons these past few weeks.

And so, we are going to keep in that space today as we think about daring to dance again. So, I would like you to, in your mind, go back to a time when you were dancing and having fun.

[23 : 30] Now, you may not be a huge dancer, but I'm willing to bet that all of us have at least one time danced somewhere and we're having a really good time. Now, even if this may be one of those times you just had the radio on in your own bedroom, you were probably still dancing and having a good time.

But if you, you may be at a wedding reception, Pastor Kathy talked about dancing at receptions. See, my wife and I, we got close hanging out at the same club when we were in college.

And so, dancing was a big part of our thing. Now, we don't move like that anymore, per se. We still have a good time, but we don't move as well. But, any event, if you've been to a reception or a party or even just listening to the radio in your own room, you've had this feeling where, like, you've been in your own groove, right?

We're just doing your thing and it was high and it was good and it was great. And then, all of a sudden, the music changes. And a song comes on that's not one that speaks to you as well, right?

Everybody's used to that. You're just feeling it, you're doing your thing, and then, all of a sudden, you're just kind of like, wait, wait, wait, what is this? And you kind of have that pause, right?

[24 : 45] Where you're like, I don't know. I don't know if I feel this one the same way. Or it's just, this doesn't speak to me at all. And you have that few seconds where you kind of hang on and you go, well, am I going to try and feel this?

Or is it maybe time for me to go sit down? And that's where we want to spend a few minutes today. We want to talk about that moment.

That time where you're debating, is this something I can figure out? Am I going to vibe to this? Or am I really needing to pause? Because how we negotiate those moments may speak to us a little bit more than we think.

And can tell us a little bit more about our walk in faith as well. Because when you get into that moment, how you adapt to that changing music can actually speak to how you handle some bigger changes.

Case in point, when we think about where we've been over the past year. That no matter what the music felt like last February.

[26 : 00] You may have been riding high and feeling really good. You may have been in a pretty challenging place as well. But nevertheless, for all of us, music has changed.

Music has changed pretty significant. And we are, in many ways, facing that moment.

Because new music is playing. The song that was playing is gone. And new music is playing.

And it's going to be a minute. You got that few beats at the beginning, in that transition. Where you're going to figure out, can I dance to this?

Or not? Can I dance to this? Or not? So as we kind of consider what that feels like, we can get some guidance on it from our scripture lessons today.

[27 : 12] Because we're dealing with someone who kind of feels a similar feeling. Okay? So, let's go into our passage today.

Especially the Acts passage. So, as we're in Acts 8. One of the things we want to know is, let's put a little context around this story. Because in Acts, we know that we're talking about the things the apostles did after the resurrection of Jesus.

And as we consider what that means for us in the Easter season. That we are in a place where the book is starting to shift. We know the book opens up.

We have Jesus giving the commission folks, and he ascends. Then, we have the story of Pentecost. And the coming of the Holy Spirit into the world. And we see the community start to develop.

But as we start to get to this place, we're starting to see the mission shift. And the apostles actually go to other parts of the world. That we're starting to take the message to the Gentiles.

[28 : 16] And that's a pretty big deal. It's a pretty big deal. If you really want to see how that works, what comes after this particular story in the book is the conversion of Saul to Paul.

Okay? So, we're really starting to see a shift, as we said. We get a hint of it in the story that we're reading. Because, as you heard in the passage, the person we're talking about today is an Ethiopian.

An Ethiopian who had come to Jerusalem to worship. It says a lot. Okay? Because if you can, like, put that geography together in your head, you realize that Ethiopia is on the eastern coast of Africa.

Okay? And as you consider how far a journey that is, that's a pretty significant trip to worship. So, we're not sure if, you know, Scripture doesn't give us this.

Whether this is somebody who's a true believer in Judaism, or if he's sort of a proselyte who's on his way to just participate. All right? But one thing is also clear.

[29 : 21] That as a eunuch, he would not have been able to fully participate in Jewish worship life. He would not have been able to fully participate. And that's important as we get into other themes in the story.

So, when you consider who he is, right? Because he's a high-ranking official. We get that from the text. He's a high-ranking official, and he works for the queen and is in charge of her treasury.

Which is one of the reasons he may have been a eunuch, because he was working for the queen. Okay? So, that speaks a little bit to that history. That said, he's in Jerusalem.

He's worshiping, and now he's probably headed home. But, he's reading the Scriptures. And Philip is directed by the Spirit to go on this road.

Now, it doesn't say what's going to happen on the road. Just as God will do sometimes. It says, I just want you to take the road. Okay? That next faithful step.

[30 : 28] Not so much, you're going to see a guy. Just take the road. Okay? Then, he encounters this man. And he hears him reading the Scripture.

And here's where the meat of our story hits. Because if you're with me, and you go into this, and at verse 30, here's what you hear.

Then Philip ran up to the chariot and heard the man reading Isaiah the prophet. Do you understand what you're reading? Philip asked.

How can I? He said. Unless someone explains it to me. So, he invited Philip to come up and sit with him. Okay?

Hear that again. Think of all those moving parts that we just put in together. Philip directed by the Spirit. This man who wants to worship, but is not a full participant in the worship community.

[31 : 29] And he's seeking. He wants to understand more. So, he's reading. And then, do you understand what you are reading? How can I unless somebody explains it to me?

And so, they have this moment together. And if we read ahead. Verse 32. This is the passage of Scripture the eunuch was reading.

He was led like a sheep to the slaughter. And as a lamb before its shearer is silent, so he did not open his mouth. In his humiliation, he was deprived of justice.

Who can speak of his descendants? For his life was taken from the earth. The eunuch asked Philip, tell me please, who is the prophet talking about?

Himself or someone else? Then, Philip began with that very passage of Scripture to tell him the good news about Jesus.

[32 : 35] So, I want you to think about this time that you are experiencing. This moment that we're all going through together as a people, as a nation, as a world.

Where the music around us shifts under our feet. No matter how you are feeling, how good it may sound, and you are just riding high. But the music changes.

And when the music starts to change, you have those few seconds that say, Am I going to vibe this? Or am I going to stop?

And in many ways, your life falls into that very place. Because if you're trying to make sense of what's happening in the world. Or if God is moving around you in a way that you don't quite get.

Then, you ask a question. What's happening to me? How am I supposed to figure this out?

[33 : 41] Can I dance to this? And that's when you've got to reach out. That's when you need someone to come and help you figure out what's going on.

And we can trust God to do what God only can do. Which is to either help you on his own. Through the Spirit, give you the direction that you need to hear.

Or place a guide near you. Who might help you figure out the next steps. But when you're stuck like that, it's not the best feeling in the world.

When your question goes up. And you're just trying to make sense of what's happening. You're trying to figure out. Man, I want this, but I don't quite get it. I want to understand it, but it's just not clicking for me.

And if your heart speaks it. If your heart speaks it. Trust that your Lord hears it. And the guide you need will come to you.

[34 : 52] And that's really an amazing thing. That's really an amazing thing. To know that God hears you and understands where you are to that degree.

The hard part for us sometimes is to just listen to what God is telling us. To figure out how is God trying to help me keep moving. As the music has changed.

What's beautiful in the next part of the story. Is that as Philip shares the good news with this man. And they continue on the road.

We get the next part. Which is, here's some water. What's going to keep me from being by ties now? You catch that?

Especially given the context we had. Because I'm not able to be fully engaged in it as I've understood it before. But now, is there anything that's going to keep me from going all the way in?

[35 : 54] Is there anything that's going to keep me on the margin still? Or can I actually do this? Because I've heard it. I've got it.

I want to keep dancing. And there was nothing. That's who Jesus is. No more exclusion.

No more being on the outside. You can be a part. Now. And so he's baptized. And this baptism piece is really kind of an important parallel to what we've been talking about with dancing, right?

Because when you think about your baptism. Now, many of us are probably baptized very young. But if you were baptized as an adult, or at least you were able to remember it.

Remember what we believe about what baptism does for us. Because baptism is the outward sign of what God's already done inside you. Remember that?

[36 : 57] Remember that? Baptism doesn't do the magic itself. God's already done this thing. And this is you saying some things, making the promises, and receiving that welcome into the community.

That's a beautiful thing. But the important part is that God's already done the work in you, and you are just letting it out for other people to see. You're just letting it out for other people to see.

That sounds like dancing, doesn't it? Because when you're feeling a good tune, when you're feeling that rhythm, when you're in that moment, you're just simply letting out what's already happening inside you.

You're just expressing yourself. And that's a beautiful, amazing thing to be able to do that. So we get to this moment now. And the thing is, we try to live life.

When the music around you changes, you know that what happens is you do, in fact, just let out whatever it is you're feeling inside. The question is, what does it look like?

[38 : 00] Does it look like dancing, or does it look like something else? Because the music can change. The reality of life is that the music is always going to change. Just like you at the club, the music always changes.

Right? Just like the wedding reception, the music always changes. Sometimes the music changes and clears the floor. We've all been there. The question is, are you going to be that person, or are you going to be the person that's still able to stay in the moment?

Because the music always changes. The good news for us, church, is that those of us who are people of the risen Lord know that what makes us move, what makes us dance, is not necessarily the music of the world.

It's the joy that we know. It's the music that God plays for us. And that music is not just our physical circumstances.

It's something else. Because when you understand the truths of who Jesus is, when you understand the miracle of what God has done for you in the life and the death and the resurrection of Jesus Christ, how do you not let that out in a way that looks like joy?

[39 : 28] No matter what's happening in your circumstances. Because it's hard to dance in hard moments. We get it. You know, when someone is struggling health-wise, when you are grieving a loss, when hard things hit, yes, it's hard to feel like dancing.

We get that. So does God. But most days, most days, there's plenty of reason to keep moving.

There's plenty of reason to keep dancing when you remember the truth of what God has done for you. See, the hard part for a lot of us is we get stuck here.

We understand stuff. We comprehend stuff. We intellectualize stuff. And it gets in our head. And we can get it technically.

But see, the thing that really changes for us is when it moves from our head to here. Right? See, that's one of the things about worshipping.

[40 : 38] That's one of the things about dancing. You can know the steps. You can count. Okay? But when you're really in a tune, when you're really just feeling it, you stop counting and you just go.

You just let go. And you do it. And it's fun. And it's great. And you stop paying attention to what everybody else is looking at. You stop losing that.

You lose that self-consciousness of it. You just go. And worshipping God is like that. See, we're lucky, right? We have people in our worship team who are excellent technically.

But they're worshipers. They're worshipers. In other words, they move past the technical, and they just praise God. And that's different.

And that's what we have to do. Move it from here to here. Because when it's here, then it works its way all the way out here. And that's when you just go.

[41 : 43] And it feels amazing. And you're free. And it's great. And it's wonderful. And you don't pay attention to the world. That's the point. The music that is moving you is not the music that's playing in the world.

The music that moves you is the song God is singing. And when the song God is singing is in your heart, it's impossible not to know that as joy.

It's impossible not to know that as freedom. It's impossible not to know that as praise. That's what it means to dance again.

See, when we are caught in the realities that we've been caught in, it's hard to dance. It's hard to dance if you are watching and listening to the world.

But when the song in your heart is the song sung by God, you will dance again.

[42 : 58] Amen. And amen. Almighty and gracious God, we thank you for the gift that is your song. The song that comes to us over and above the noise of the world, above its cries, above its din.

Lord, we know we are in the world, but not of it. And we know our circumstances sometimes make it hard for us to dance. But Lord, as we hold on to your song, as we listen to it, let it continue to land in our heart.

And when the song may change, not that you change, but the song may change, help us to continue to listen for your voice.

Help us to continue to listen for your music. Because the truths you have taught us, the things you have given us, continue to move through us into the dance that we dance every day.

The dance of joy, the dance of love, the dance of peace that happens no matter what is going on around us in a given day.

[44 : 15] So Lord, we thank you. We thank you that you have shown us how to do that. By abiding in you. By focusing on your voice and your song.

And inviting you regularly and constantly into our prayer, into our lives, into our hearts.

That we stay tuned in. That we stay in that groove. That we stay in that place as best we can.

And that we can keep dancing as you lead and guide. Amen. This is where we come for the food that gets us through those spaces.

This is where Jesus feeds us for the journey. And so I ask you, will you open yourselves to the grace of Jesus Christ that is always and already available here at this table?

[45 : 44] If so, say, open us to your grace, Lord. Open us to your grace, Lord. Will you open yourselves once again to the call of Jesus Christ?

If so, say, open us to your call, Lord. Will you open yourselves to the possibility of transformation through Jesus Christ?

If so, then say, transform us, Lord. Transform us, Lord. As we prepare to attend the heavenly feast, we especially pray for those who have no earthly tables or no place at a table or nothing on the table.

we confess this day that we have sometimes been slow to join the dance that brings life to everyone.

We have been slow to be in the dance that brings love to all, brings sustenance to all. And so, in silence, let us lift up our own prayers of confession.

[46 : 52] hear now this good news.

God has loved you from the very beginning. The invitation of Christ is never ending because resurrection can happen at any moment.

The Holy Spirit is transforming you and me and us even now. And so, in the name of Jesus Christ, you are forgiven. In the name of Jesus Christ, you are forgiven.

Glory to God. Amen. The risen Lord be with you. And also with you. So lift up your hearts and voices. We lift them up with the Lord.

Let us give great thanks to the Lord, our God. We lift them up to the Lord, our God. Holy living one, you have transformed a whole lot of nothing into this amazing creation.

[48 : 01] You breathed life all around and you called it good. You invited us to the wonder of it all. And when we could not face you, you turned us around.

You keep bringing us around and around time and again, offering the chance to join you in the freedom dance. And so we join with the glorious chorus of saints, past and present, singing a never-ending hymn of praise.

Holy, holy, holy Lord, God of power and might. Heaven and earth are full of your glory. Hosanna in the highest.

Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord. Hosanna in the highest. Indeed, you are holy and blessed is your son, Jesus, anointed one, liberator, dance partner, brother, sister, friend.

Jesus sat at tables with those who had no place and offered fulfilling food for bodies and for souls. And on the night when he would give all love for us, he sat at the table with the extended family just as he hosts this table here and now with this extended family.

[49 : 20] He offered the usual prayers of thanks to you, O God, over bread and cup and then he disrupted the gathering with unc customary words.

Take and eat this bread. It is my body given for you. Whenever you gather around the table together, remember me. Take and drink this cup, each and every one.

It is the sign of a new covenant. The darkness has given way to the light and the resurrection dance goes on. This love is poured out for all people.

Whenever you gather around the table, remember me. And so, my friends, we remember and we believe. Christ has died. Christ is risen.

Christ will come again. Pour out your Holy Spirit upon us now. Pour out your transforming presence on the gifts of this body and the gifts of this bread and fruit of the vine.

[50 : 24] May they be for us your life and love uniting us as one body, Christ's body, for the sake of loving the world and as one body, let us pray the prayer Jesus taught us.

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.

Give us this day our daily bread and forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who have trespassed against us. And lead us not to temptation, but deliver us from evil.

For thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever and ever. Amen. This table extends beyond this space into the space where the spirit that unites us is present.

May this meal ready us to love, to trust, to hope, and dance to the beat of God's heart. So I invite you to remove your masks and to open the side that has the little cracker.

[51 : 36] the body of Christ broken for you. And then the blood of Christ shed for you.

may God feed our hearts and our spirits.

Amen. Amen. And singing forward through the ages.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

[53 : 37] Amen. of love and light. For every must labor till our faith is signed.

Prophets have proclaimed it, martyrs testified. Oh, it sung its glory, heroes for it died.

Forward through the ages in unbroken line, who the faithful spirits have the call divine.

Not alone we conquer, not alone we fall. In each loss or triumph, lose or triumph all.

Bound by God's far purpose in one living hope. Move we on together to the shining gold.

[55 : 03] Forward through the ages in unbroken line, move the faithful spirits at the call divine.

No matter the song that is playing in your life right now, no matter how the circumstances feel, no matter how the circumstances look, I pray for you that you will be able to remain in touch with the song that God is singing to you.

The music that God is playing around you. And let that come out in you as unshakable, untouchable, unstoppable joy.

And keep dancing. Keep dancing. Now in the name of God, our creator and our king.

In the name of Jesus Christ, our Lord and our savior. And in the name of the Holy Spirit, our counselor and our sustainer. May God bless us now as we leave to love and serve God and all of God's children.

[56 : 33] Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.