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Title: The Discipleship Gene: Gathering

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Scripture: [Psalm 100](#)

Text: [Hebrews 10:19-25](#)

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I am not who I've said I am. Don't worry. That's not a dark confession of dishonesty. It is a genetic confession, something I'm still working to get my head around. This new insight about who I am comes from my sister. She did one of those genealogical tests last year. So did a lot of you. According to Ancestry.com and 23andMe, 6 million

people did genealogy tests last year. Is anyone here part of the 6 million group? 2017 was the mother-lode for this kind of testing. The pool of people tested more than doubled.¹ When my sister got her results, which are my results too, 41% of our ancestry was British and Irish, even though the family myth is that we are 100% German. Surprise! We aren't who we thought we were.

Who are you genetically? Are you who you think you are? The study of genetics is fascinating and clearly one of the hot subjects today. You have millions of cells in your body and each contains 23 pairs of chromosomes and each of the chromosomes there is DNA, call a gene. The complexity of these genetic combinations unraveled through genomic projects shows that the Bible is right. You are fearfully and wonderfully made. But the genetic makeup I want to talk about isn't if you are broadly Northwest European or Native American. I want to talk about your genetic markers as fully devoted followers of Jesus. What do your genes say?

Over the next few weeks, we are going to look at the genetic characteristics of discipleship. There are a number of traits from gathering to connecting, from serving to caring and giving. Today, we focus on the gathering gene. A faithful disciple has a gathering gene and shows up consistently in worship.

A famous passage of scripture which points to this genetic marker is from the book of Hebrews, a mysterious book written by a scholar of the Old Testament. He understands the evolution of gathering and the importance and privilege of this discipleship gene. He says: "...since we have confidence to enter the sanctuary by the blood of Jesus.... and since we have a great

priest over the house of God, let us approach with a true heart in full assurance of faith...Let us hold fast to the confession of our hope without wavering.... And let us consider how to provoke one another to love and good deeds, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day approaching.” (Hebrews 10:19-25)

We have the honor and privilege of worship because God sent Jesus with an invitation. It reads, “Come, worship me. Enter my sanctuary with confidence. My son is your invitation to come into my presence.” We gather to worship at God’s gracious invitation.

The background behind this invitation is a worship orientation that is very different than ours. In the time of Jesus, Jews could approach the Temple in Jerusalem, but you couldn’t get very near. If you were a woman, you could only proceed to the wall that separated the court of the women from the court of the Israelites. If you were a man, but not a priest, there was another barrier that stopped you. You couldn’t get near to the presence of God. If you were of the tribe of Levi and a priest you could work around the outer areas of the larger Temple, in the Holy Place. But even a priest couldn’t enter into the Holy of Holies and approach God. That area was separated from everyone by a huge, thick curtain. Only the high priest could lift that curtain and enter into the Holy of Holies and that was for a few hours one day a year, on Yom Kippur. There, the priest offered a blood sacrifice in hopes of appeasing God’s anger for all of the sins of the previous year. It was such a fearful experience that a rope was tied around his ankle, to pull him out of the Holy of Holies should he die from the experience.

When Jesus died, an amazing thing happened. The curtain of the Temple was ripped from top to bottom. God ripped the curtain in half and now, through the sacrifice of Jesus, our High Priest, we are invited to enter into the very presence of God. We can do so with confidence. When we gather in worship, we accept God’s invitation.

The invitation to gather commands us to perform worship before God. That might surprise you, something that you might have to work to get your head around. Worship is not just a warm-up act for teaching or preaching, nor is it primarily about inspiring people at all. Worship is fundamentally about praising and honoring God, a command performance giving thanks for God’s grace and love.² We gather not as spectators but as performers.

The expression “command performance” has a long history. Kings and queens throughout the ages have called special people to their courts to perform on their behalf. In scripture, David was commanded to perform for

King Saul, singing and playing his harp. One of the most famous command performance in history was the first performance of the Messiah before King George II. The cantata was so long that he stood up to stretch his legs during the Hallelujah chorus and a tradition was born. While others may be around for these command performances, the real audience is just one, the king or queen or in our case President.

Think about the different people at any performance. There are three participants, the audience, the performers and the prompters. When it comes to worship, most think that the gathered congregation is the audience, present to listen to the performers. You are the audience listening to the performance like we did when we listened to the Flying Toasters at GeistFest. In worship, you sit in the pews, fold your arms and say, "Give it to me, let me hear it, whether it be the sermon or prayer or music." Worship needs to be engaging, entertaining, inspiring to you as a member of the audience. In this model, the performers are the worship leaders, the pastors, singers, choir, soloist and instrumentalists and God is the prompter through the Holy Spirit and the sacred Word. Be honest now. Isn't that the way you think about worship? It isn't a biblical orientation of worship.

Worship in the Bible is a command performance for God which completely changes the orientation. It makes you the performers of worship. The people gathered are participating in the act of worship. The worship leaders are the prompters of worship. They lead the congregation on the journey of worship, helping them to voice their praise to God. God is the audience, receiving our offering of worship. Like a command performance for a king or the president, the real audience is God. We worship the Audience of One.³

If this stretches your understanding of what you are doing today, listen to the orientation of worship in Psalm 100, one of the most famous Psalms about worship. "Shout for joy to the LORD, all the earth. Worship the LORD with gladness; come before him with joyful songs... give thanks to him and praise his name. (Psalm 100: 1-2) There is a pretty clear orientation. Worship is God-centered because God is the Audience of One. We gather in worship at God's gracious invitation, responding with a command performance.

That means that we don't gather to be entertained. Worship is not a spectator sport. It's not something done for us. We gather together to perform for God which means that there is always a question in every worship. "Did our worship please God?" Or more specifically, "Did your worship today honor and praise God?" Think about it. When you come in late, leave early, participate half-heartedly, or think, "I didn't get anything

out of the service today" what does this say about your performance. Dare you ask, "Was God pleased with my worship today?"

We come together at the invitation of God to perform worship. Underscore **we come together**. The gathering gene of discipleship is communal. There is no gathering of one. Worship isn't a solo sport. There are no one-man bands in worship. It is about community; it is gathering as God's people.

When we remove ourselves from church to worship God on our own, we eliminate the beauty of the community. We were created for relationships. We were not meant to go through life alone. And we aren't meant to worship alone. Time and time again, I hear people say, "I can worship God at the lake or on the golf course." That's confusing worship with inspiration. We can be inspired by the beauty of nature; worship is a response to those moments. "Come, let us sing for joy to the LORD; let us shout aloud to the Rock of our salvation." (Psalm 95:1) "Praise the Lord...all you people." (Psalm 117:1) Even creation is invited into worship. "All the earth worships you; they sing praises to you, sing praises to your name." (Psalm 66:4). There is no such thing as individual worship. Yet more and more people are asking the question, "Why should I go to church?"

Worship attendance in America is on a steep decline with as little as 20% of self-avowed Christians on any Sunday attending worship. This is in spite of a clear biblical challenge to be committed and disciplined in gathering. Two thousand years ago, the author of Hebrews said, "...do not neglect to meet together, as is the habit of some..." (Hebrews 10:25a) That's one answer to the "why should I go to church." We worship out of obedience. But perhaps the better answer to why you should go to church is this. You are the church. The church is not a place; it's what exists when believers gather together. A faithful disciple of Jesus consistently gathers together with other believers. It is communal.

And, the gathering gene of discipleship is encouraging. We gather together to encourage each other. Again, Hebrews says "...let us consider how to provoke one another to love and good deeds, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another..." (Hebrews 10:24-25). If you aren't here I cannot encourage you and you can't encourage me. Did you ever think about that? Your very presence encourages me and others. And your absence discourages me and others.

This act of encouragement was modeled in the ancient form of worship found in the book of Acts. We are told that "They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer." (Act 2:42) In many ways, our form of worship is modeled out of that very

fourfold order of worship. Gathering with friends and family, we praise God for the gift of salvation which we remember around the Lord's Table. It encourages and gives hope even as our prayers support and encourage one another in our gathering. ⁴

Last summer, when the congregation was surveyed about our community and worship, encouragement and support was one of the universal affirmations about what we do the best as a congregation. Things like, "I've never experienced a more supportive congregation." "I know that I am cared for in the community." Gathering is one of the most basic things we do and it all starts with showing up. I guess Woody Allen was right when he said, "Success is 80% showing up."

There is an old preacher's story about a man an old man in a small village who was nearly deaf. Every Sunday, he walked over 2 miles, rain or shine, to his small church. There were no sound systems either for the congregation or for the hearing impaired. He never heard the songs or the music. People would greet him and he responded most often with just a nod. Communication was hard. You had to shout in an ear to be heard. So, during the service, he just read his Bible. But he never missed a Sunday. One day someone asked him, "Why do you go to church? You could read your Bible at home, so why do you show up?" He replied, "I go because I want my neighbors to know which side I'm on!" Which side are you on? Your presence demonstrates it and is encouraging. Turn to someone and say, "Your presence here is an encouragement to me." ⁵

Finally, our gathering gene of discipleship anticipates the Lord's return. Hebrews says "...encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day approaching." (Hebrew 10:25) Take note; day is with a capital "D." When the early church gathered, worship ended with the Lord's Supper. After eating bread and drinking wine, they would end their service by saying, "Maranatha." It's an Aramaic phrase which means, "Our Lord Come." They were constantly reminding each other that their time was short, that Jesus was going to return, that the next time they gathered might not be on earth but in heaven. They held tight to that hope because, whether we know it or not, the Day of the Lord's return is getting closer and closer. I don't know when Jesus is going to return but I can tell you this. We are one week closer to His return than we were last week.

We may not know when, but we have an idea what that will look like. We will gather again. That's our promise. There will be lots of joyful singing, a performance of praise before the throne of God. There will be a heavenly banquet spread for the faithful who have gathered. When we gather in

worship, we come to anticipate our life to come through the death and resurrection of Jesus.⁶

All of this might lead you to make a genetic confession, to say “I am not who I’ve said I am. I’m not here as a member of the audience. I’m here as a performer, accepting God’s invitation to perform worship, gathering to encourage others in anticipation of that day when we will gather in heaven.” I encourage you to make that confession. Use it as a type gene therapy, as a way to receive the discipleship gene of gathering.

¹ <https://www.technologyreview.com/s/610233/2017-was-the-year-consumer-dna-testing-blew-up/>

² Bolsinger, Tod E.. *It Takes a Church to Raise a Christian: How the Community of God Transforms Lives* (pp. 86-87). Baker Publishing Group. Kindle Edition

³ Søren Kierkegaard, *Purity of Heart is To Will One Thing*, Trans. Douglas Steere (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1948) pp.180-181.)

⁴ Webber, R. E. (1992). The future direction of Christian worship. *Ex Auditu*, 8113-128.

⁵ Dykes, D.O. The DNA of Discipleship, 1-13-13, retrieved at www.gabc.org.

⁶⁶ Webber, page 118.