Sermon: Testimony is…. Identifying Memory Verse: Psalm 66:16

Date: 11/19/2022 Scripture Reading: Psalm 139:13-18

**SLIDE 1: TITLE**

Let's do a quick show of hands: fiction readers, non-fiction readers, or maybe a mix of both like me? I've got a soft spot for both genres.

You know, when you finish a fiction book, it's like, "Wow, that was a great story!" But when you wrap up a compelling non-fiction book, it leaves you in a state of awe, doesn't it? It's like, "Wow, that actually happened." There's something about knowing it's true that hits you differently.

And speaking of stories, ever come across one that just didn't quite add up? Or what about those Pastor stories that seem tailor-made for the sermon? Steve has a term for those: "Pastor stories." They're so spot-on, you can't help but wonder if they're made up. Most of the time, they slip through the memory cracks because we can tell they're not quite true.

But when a friend or family member shares something real with you, it's a game-changer. You lean in, feel the emotions, and it sticks with you. It's like we're wired to crave the truth. That's why it's crucial that when we share our own stories, we keep it real and give credit where it's due. It's all about respecting the truth and acknowledging those who played a part in our journey.

**SLIDE 2: “Come close and listen, all you who honor God; I will tell you what God has done for me” Psalm 66:16**

Alright, let's dig into our memory verse today. Psalm 66:16 “Come close and listen, all you who honor God; I will tell you what God has done for me” It's a call to action, encouraging us to boldly proclaim His name and share the incredible things He's done for us. It's like a reminder to spread the word about His goodness and grace.

Now, when we talk about being made in God's image, it's not just a passing thought—it's a profound truth that can really reshape how we see ourselves. The scripture we're delving into today reveals this intimate connection between us and our Creator. It's like God's this master craftsman, meticulously fashioning each one of us in the womb with such deliberate care and attention to detail. It's a bit like watching a skilled artist weave a tapestry, with every thread and color chosen purposefully.

But here's the kicker: it's not just our physical features. God's design extends way beyond the surface. It includes our strengths, weaknesses, talents, and even the quirks that make us unique. And get this, all of it is part of His grand plan. It's like we're pieces of a puzzle that He's put together, each one with a specific role to play.

So, when we really let that sink in, it changes everything. We're not just random products of chance, tossed into existence. We're intentional creations, each with a purpose that's been divinely ordained. It's like realizing you're part of something much bigger, something with a special place in the grand scheme of things. Pretty amazing, right?

**SLIDE 3: Psalm 139:16 Your eyes saw my unformed body; all the days ordained for me were written in your book before one of them came to be.**

You know, Psalm 139:16 really hits home with its message. It says, "Your eyes saw my unformed body; all the days ordained for me were written in your book before one of them came to be." It's like a reminder of how God saw us even before we were fully formed, and He's been with us from the very beginning to the very end. He's the Alpha and Omega, the whole journey mapped out.

And let me tell you, understanding this gives us such a deep sense of security. It's like knowing that the Creator of the universe is right there, intimately aware of who we are and loving us through it all. We're not on this journey alone; we're known and cared for by the Master Craftsman who formed us in the womb.

Now, here's something really special. Recognizing God's hands-on approach in our lives leads us to embrace our individuality. Our journeys are all different, and that's by design. It's like God intentionally crafted each of us to have a unique story. This recognition also highlights the beauty of diversity within the body of Christ. We start to see the value in every member and the contributions they bring.

As we reflect on God's role as this incredible Master Craftsman, it brings a sense of assurance. It's like realizing that our lives are purposefully designed and intricately woven into this grand tapestry of creation. And that, my friends, empowers us to live with confidence. We can stand tall, knowing that we've been fearfully and wonderfully made for His divine purposes. How awesome is that?

**SLIDE 4: Surrendering to Divine Authorship**

You know, surrendering to Divine Authorship is like recognizing that our stories aren't just isolated chapters, but part of this grand, divine tale written by God's loving hand. It's a big deal, because it means letting go of the idea that we're the ones driving the narrative. Instead, we're invited to see how our lives are intricately woven into the bigger picture, kind of like each brushstroke in a masterpiece.

This surrender is rooted in the understanding that God's wisdom and sovereignty are way beyond our human comprehension. It's about entrusting our past, present, and future into His capable hands, knowing He's right there with us through every experience, whether it's a trial or a triumph, using it all for a higher purpose. And when we embrace this Divine Authorship, we let go of the need for personal recognition, allowing God's glory to take center stage.

Trusting God with our story also means being open to the idea that His idea of a meaningful and purposeful life might not match up with society's standards. It's about knowing that His character and track record of faithfulness throughout history are the solid foundation we can rely on. Practically, surrendering authorship looks like having an open-handed posture before God. It means seeking His guidance through prayer, digging into His Word for wisdom, and really listening for His nudges in our hearts. It even involves being willing to obey, even when the path ahead seems uncertain or challenging.

And you know what's really amazing? When we surrender authorship, we start seeing our lives through a lens of gratitude. We realize that every circumstance, whether it's bringing joy or pain, plays a crucial role in God's grand narrative. It's like finding purpose and meaning, even in the tough times, because we know that God can use every experience for His glory.

When we share our testimonies, this surrender shines through. We don't talk about our lives as if we've authored these success stories. Instead, we share them as testimonies to God's grace, wisdom, and faithfulness. It encourages others to trust in His sovereignty and to surrender their own stories into His loving care. This surrender isn't a one-time thing; it's an ongoing journey of faith. And it leads to a deeper intimacy with God and a profound sense of peace, knowing that He's the ultimate Author of our lives. It's an invitation to live with open hands, allowing God to write His story through us, all for His glory and our eternal joy. Pretty amazing, right?

**SLIDE 5: Isaiah 42:8 “I am the Lord; that is my name! I will not yield my glory to another or my praise to idols.”**

It's fascinating how we, as humans, have this tendency to seek recognition and credit for our accomplishments. Isaiah 42:8 really drives this home when it says, "I am the Lord; that is my name! I will not yield my glory to another or my praise to idols." It's like a loving reminder from God, cautioning us about this inclination we all have.

When we fall into the trap of self-glory, we risk distorting the true source of our blessings and achievements. It's crucial to remember that every victory, every breakthrough, and every triumph in our lives ultimately stem from God's grace, wisdom, and intervention. It's His hand at work, even when we might not realize it in the moment. When we attribute it all solely to our own efforts, it's like unintentionally minimizing God's pivotal role in our lives.

This verse in Isaiah serves as a poignant reminder of God's rightful claim to glory and praise. Attempting to claim credit for ourselves, in a way, sets up these idols, elevating our own abilities or achievements above the very Creator who gifted us those abilities.

So, how do we safeguard against this natural human tendency? It starts with a keen awareness of our motives and a conscious effort to redirect praise back to God. We've got to make that deliberate choice to recognize His hand in our successes, acknowledging that He's the ultimate orchestrator of our victories. Seeking accountability from trusted mentors or fellow believers can be a powerful tool in keeping us grounded and preventing us from inadvertently stealing God's glory.

When it comes to sharing our testimonies, it's vital to intentionally shift the spotlight away from ourselves and onto God. This can be achieved by emphasizing His faithfulness, grace, and transformative power in our lives. And let's not forget the importance of transparency. By sharing our struggles and doubts, we reinforce the truth that it is God who works within us, enabling us to overcome even the toughest challenges.

Ultimately, recognizing the danger of stealing God's glory invites us into a posture of humility and reverence. It's about aligning our hearts with the truth that God alone is worthy of all honor, praise, and glory. In doing so, we not only honor God, but we also create testimonies that resonate with authenticity and point others to the source of true transformation. It's about giving testimonies that are not just impactful, but deeply identifying. Testimony is…. Identifying. This perspective really changes the way we approach our own achievements and successes, doesn't it?

**SLIDE 6: Testimony is…. Identifying.**

Claiming undue credit, in a way, is like putting a filter on our testimony. When we start attributing all our successes solely to our own efforts, it can inadvertently cast a shadow on the authenticity of what we're sharing. It's like people might perceive it as self-promotion rather than a genuine reflection of the incredible work that God has done in our lives.

This distortion can have a significant impact on how our testimony is received. It creates this sort of gap between our experiences and the struggles of those who are listening. It makes it harder for them to relate to our journey of faith. In fact, it might even lead to some skepticism or doubt about the authenticity of our story. And that's a real shame, because when we claim undue credit, we miss out on a golden opportunity to direct others to the true source of our strength and victory. Instead of shining the spotlight on God's goodness, we end up unintentionally elevating ourselves.

Recognizing all this really calls us to a deeper level of humility and authenticity in our testimonies. It prompts us to pivot the focus back to God, acknowledging His sovereignty and grace as the driving force behind every step of our journey. And let me tell you, when we do that, it's not just about preserving the integrity of our witness, but it's about providing a testimony that truly magnifies God's power and faithfulness. It's like letting His fingerprints shine through in the most genuine way. It's a powerful invitation for others to see God's work in their own lives too. Pretty amazing, isn't it?

**SLIDE 7: Boasting in the Lord**

Boasting in the Lord is really something special. It's like recognizing that every success, every achievement, and every transformation we experience is all thanks to God's grace, guidance, and intervention in our lives. When we shift the spotlight and give praise to God, we're basically saying, "You're the real source of all the good stuff."

On the flip side, when we start boasting about our own achievements, it's like we're downplaying God's role. It's as if we're saying, "Hey, look at me, I did this all on my own!" But in reality, it's God's hand that's been guiding us every step of the way. Seeing things this way doesn't just twist the truth, it also undermines the incredible impact of God's work in our lives.

Now, embracing this wisdom of boasting in the Lord means shifting our perspective. It invites us to look at our accomplishments with gratitude and humility, knowing that every step of our journey is guided by God's wisdom and love. This kind of humility opens the floodgates for God's grace to flow abundantly, letting His transformative power take the spotlight.

In practical terms, it means choosing our words and narratives intentionally, always lifting up God's name above our own. Instead of promoting ourselves, we're shining a light on the amazing work God's doing. And you know what's really cool? It invites others to see the beauty of God's story woven into our own, and that might just inspire them to seek Him in their own journeys.

Ultimately, this wisdom of boasting in the Lord is an invitation for all of us to stand together, praising and glorifying the One who's writing our stories. It's like declaring that our lives aren't just a random series of events. They're a purposeful masterpiece, crafted by a God who loves us and is in control. And when we embrace this wisdom, we find true fulfillment and purpose in giving glory right where it belongs. It's pretty incredible, isn't it?

**SLIDE 8: Give God the Glory**

As we bring things to a close today, it's crucial to remember that our testimonies serve a greater purpose. They're not about putting ourselves in the spotlight, but about shining a light on the name of our Heavenly Father. When we recognize His sovereign hand at work in our lives, we're essentially offering a powerful testament to the transformative power of God.

So, let's not take this lightly. We need to be vigilant about giving God the credit He rightfully deserves. It's in doing so that we authentically reflect His glory to the world. And as we step out from this place, let's carry this truth in our hearts. Let's be bold in proclaiming His name and sharing the wondrous works He's accomplished in our lives.

You see, when we do this, it's not just a mere act of giving credit where it's due; it's an act of worship and gratitude. It's a way of saying, "God, You are the author of our stories, and You deserve all the praise." And that's a powerful stance to take, not just for ourselves, but for all those whose lives we touch with our testimonies.

So, let's leave here today with hearts full of gratitude and a commitment to magnify the name of our Heavenly Father in all that we do. In doing so, we'll be spreading His love and His transformative power to everyone we encounter. All the glory belongs to Him, now and for all eternity. Let us close in a prayer:

Heavenly Father,

As we step out from this place, we carry with us the deep understanding that our stories are penned by Your loving hand. Every twist and turn, every victory and challenge, is guided by Your wisdom, grace, and tender intervention. Help us, Lord, to always be mindful of giving You the credit You rightfully deserve. In doing so, we know we're reflecting Your incredible glory to the world.

Lord, let us boast in You and You alone. May we recognize that any success, every achievement, and each transformation we experience is a direct result of Your boundless love and care for us. And as we move forward, may our testimonies be a powerful witness to the transformative work You do in our lives, drawing others closer to Your loving embrace.

With hearts brimming with gratitude, we'll proclaim Your name and share Your amazing works with everyone we meet. To You be all the glory, now and forever. Amen.

**Benediction:**

Lord, as we go our separate ways, we ask for Your continued guidance, protection, and wisdom in all that we do. Help us to be vessels of Your love, grace, and truth to those we encounter. Amen