

TALKING POINT #11
LIVING IN THE CHURCH COMMUNITY #4: A WORSHIPPING COMMUNITY

THE CENTREPIECE OF CHURCH LIFE

Worship has become a hot-potato topic for many Christians and Churches. People seem to argue over the correct style of worship music, the appropriate amount of movement in a worship service, how long a service should be, at whom a worship service should be aimed and how often we should have worship services. However, these arguments seem to miss the whole point of worship, being the gathering of God's people to acknowledge their Lord and Saviour. So, it is a tragedy that this most wonderful element of Church life has become such a divisive issue. So, for us at Forest Lake Baptist Church, let's take a look at worship and how we do it at Forest Lake.

WHAT DOES THE BIBLE SAY?

The Bible has a great deal to say about our attitude to worship, but not a lot about the structure or form of worship. In other words, we have been given principles that govern what we do but we are left to fill in the details and form of worship depending on our own situation. For example, imagine if we were bound to the form of worship by the 1st Century Churches. We would be singing and preaching in New Testament Greek, probably sit on the floor in homes, have tambourines for musical instruments and our services would go for most of the day with 3 or 4 sermons!

Of all that the Old Testament says about worship in the context of the ancient Israelites, one of the most instructive passages is 1 Chronicles 25:6-8. Other than the obvious points that worship is ultimately God-centred and to be enjoyed by all God's people, this passage gives the following 9 points about those who served at the Temple – effectively the worship team members:

1. They were called to the task – they had to be Levites, the tribe called by God to His service;
2. The team submitted to leadership – v6 (under the direction of their fathers and the king);
3. Their goal was “service of the house of God” – v6 – the greatest goal for any person;
4. There was diversity in team gifting – v6 – cymbals, lyres, harps, voices, conductors;
5. They were “skilled” – v7 – “excellence” is not a dirty word in Church music;
6. They were trained – v7 – in all ministries, we should be always looking for how we can be more effective in ministry;
7. Their training was not just in singing but “singing to the Lord” – v7 – ultimately, everything we do is done for the Lord;
8. There was equality amongst them – v8. They were ordered and submissive to leaders but they were still equal;
9. They were selective – v7 – of the 4000 available for the task (23:5), only 288 were used. This doesn't mean they were elitist but they put people where they were most gifted for service. Participation in worship ministry is not for everyone, just as youth ministry or children's ministry are not for everyone. In Church life, every ministry is important and equally valuable but not every ministry should be done by anybody regardless of gifting. Rather, we should seek to have people serve in those ministries for which they are most gifted, be it worship, pastoral care, teaching, mentoring or whatever else.

Temple worship must have been an amazing event – God's people gathering together in an enormous group to vibrantly and joyfully praise God as Creator of the World and thank Him as their Saviour. Christian worship should be no less, providing a place for us to worship God in our own style and respecting others' styles.

In the New Testament, most of the instructions for worship are given in 1 Corinthians 11-14. Without going into specific details, Paul's teaching surrounds spiritual gifts and their use in the Church. While more has been said in Talking Point #10 about Spiritual Gifts, the most important points for this discussion are that Paul clearly advocates the use of gifts and that everything should be done with reverence and order.

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In short, Christian corporate worship is the amazing opportunity for us to come together as God's family to praise our Lord and Saviour. In the midst of our day-to-day lives, we join with the host of Heaven to praise the King of the Universe. Church worship should be vibrant, inclusive, life-affirming and God-centred. What a privilege!

WHAT SHOULD WE EXPECT TO HAPPEN AT WORSHIP?

With all this in mind, what should happen at Church worship? Two particular verses come to mind:

- 1 Corinthians 14:24-25 – “an unbeliever or uninformed person enters, he will be convicted by all, he will be called to account by all. The secrets of his heart are disclosed, and in this way he will fall down with his face to the ground and worship God, declaring, “God is really among you.”
- Matthew 18:20 – “For where two or three are assembled in my name, I am there among them.”

When we come together in Christ's Name, the Risen Lord Jesus is also there and will make Himself manifest among us. Is that what you expect when you come to worship – for God to show up? So often, we judge worship by the standard of music or the choice of songs. However, we should come ready to encounter God, to join others in encountering God and be ready to be challenged, stretched and encouraged as we encounter God. We should not limit worship by our expectations but come expecting God to show up and helping others to do the same.

DO YOU WANT TO SERVE OR RECEIVE?

One of the key Greek words used in the New Testament for worship is *latreia* (λατρεία), which means “to serve.” In worship, we serve two ways:

1. We serve God by praising Him and serving His people (Matthew 25:40);
2. We serve our brothers and sisters by facilitating and helping others to worship (1 Corinthians 11:33).

In a consumerist society, we are tempted to come to worship simply to receive and be served by others. If things are not the way we like them, we become critical. Rather, we should come ready to serve God and others, to enhance worship by doing our part and to serve others by encouraging them with the right spirit of worship. The remarkable thing is that as we serve others and bless them, we are most blessed ourselves.

WORSHIP IS THE END OF MISSION

John Piper has said that the end of all mission and ministry is worship. We do all that we do in Church so that more people will come to worship God as their Lord and Saviour. One day, all Creation will worship Jesus as Lord and our worship now foreshadows that day. Hence, our worship now is for people to proclaim Jesus and be inspired to continue in mission and ministry that will result in greater worship. Romans 12:1-2 says “Therefore I exhort you, brothers and sisters, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a sacrifice – alive, holy, and pleasing to God – which is your reasonable act of worship.” Worship is ultimately a whole-of-life activity but corporate worship is our opportunity to be together and enjoy this amazing opportunity.

CONCLUSION

Worship is a privilege that we have been granted through the blood of Christ here and now, that points to the worship that will be given to Jesus when He comes again. It is to be a vibrant, life-affirming, God-centred and inspiring time as we are inspired by the Holy Spirit.

Next month, we'll continue our series on “Living in the Church Community” as we look at discipleship.