

Corporate Worship

(Week 7)

Central Truth: *“It is a holy opportunity to be in His presence together.”*

Corporate Worship Defined (Day 31)

The hymn writer has stated the case for worship well for us:

*Worthy of worship, worthy of praise
Worthy of love and devotion
Worthy of bowing and bending the knee*

The plan of God is to build each week around attempts to fall more in love with Jesus, to draw nearer to Him through intense connection with His Word and His people, and to raise the level of devotion through raising each of our hearts in open praise and honor of Him as King of life.

Worship is intensely personal and purposely corporate at the same time. When it is one-sided on the personal front, we approach a church service as a cafeteria from which we select items we like and avoid items we don't like, blame others for distracting us from our worship, and focus on the environment of the worship location rather than on the purpose of worship itself. When it is too much on the corporate side, we come to critique the performance, focus on comparing current services to those in the past, and examine the “parts” of the worship time rather than accepting the worship invitation:

*Come, now is the time to worship
Come, now is the time to give your heart*

Points to Ponder

Do you come to our corporate worship gatherings “prepared” for worship? Do you come listening for God to speak to you personally? What gifts do you bring to worship the King?

Worship that Pleases God, Part 1

(Day 33)

“And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength.” (Mark 12:30)

God wants all of you. God doesn't want a part of your life. He asks for **all** your heart, **all** your soul, **all** your mind, and **all** your strength. God is not interested in halfhearted commitment, partial obedience, and the leftovers of your time and money. He desires your full devotion, not little bits of your life.

Rick Warren paints a beautiful biblical picture of worship that pleases God in his book entitled *“The Purpose Driven Life.”* Today and tomorrow we will look at excerpts from Day 13 of this work. You are encouraged to read this chapter in its entirety.

The kind of worship that pleases God has four characteristics:

God is pleased when our worship is accurate. Worship must be based on the truth of Scripture, not our opinions about God. Jesus told the Samaritan woman, *“But an hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth; for such people the Father seeks to be His worshipers.” (John 4:23).* To worship in truth means to worship God as he is truly revealed in the Bible.

God is pleased when our worship is authentic. When Jesus said you must “worship in spirit,” he wasn't referring to the Holy Spirit, but to your spirit. Made in God's image, you are a spirit that resides in a body, and God designed your spirit to communicate with Him. Worship is your spirit responding to God's Spirit. When we worship, God looks past our words to see the attitude of our hearts. Heartless praise is not praise at all! The Bible says, *“But the Lord said to Samuel, do not look at his appearance or at the height of his stature, because I have rejected him; for God sees not as man sees, for man looks at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart.” (1 Samuel 16:7)*

Christians often differ on the most appropriate or authentic way to express praise to God, but these arguments usually just reflect personality and background differences. Many forms of praise are mentioned in the Bible, among them confessing, singing, shouting, standing in honor, kneeling, dancing, making a joyful noise, testifying, playing a musical instrument, and raising hands. The best “style” of worship is the one that most authentically represents your love for God, based on the background and personality God gave you.

There is no “one-size-fits-all” approach to worship and friendship with God. One thing is certain: You don't bring glory to God by trying to be someone he never intended you to be. God wants you to be yourself.

Points to Ponder

Is our worship at First Baptist Church accurate? Is it authentic? Is it pleasing to God?

Worship that Pleases God, Part 2

(Day 33)

God is pleased when our worship is thoughtful. Jesus' command to "love God with all your mind" is repeated four times in the New Testament. God is not pleased with thoughtless singing of hymns, perfunctory praying of clichés, or careless exclamations of "Praise the Lord," because we can't think of anything else to say at that moment. If worship is mindless, it is meaningless. You must engage your mind. Try praising God without using the words *praise, hallelujah, thanks, or amen*. Instead of saying, "We just want to praise You," make a list of synonyms and use fresh words like *admire, respect, value, revere, honor, and appreciate*. Also, be specific. If someone approached you and repeated, "I praise you!" ten times, you would probably think, *For what?* You would rather receive two specific compliments than twenty vague generalities. So would God.

God wants our corporate worship gatherings to be thoughtful, too. Paul devotes an entire chapter to this in 1 Corinthians 14 and concludes, "*But all things must be done properly and in an orderly manner.*" (1 Corinthians 14:40). Related to this, God insists that our worship services be understandable to unbelievers when they are present in our worship gatherings. Paul observed, "*Otherwise if you bless in the spirit only, how will the one who fills the place of the ungifted say the 'Amen' at your giving of thanks, since he does not know what you are saying? For you are giving thanks well enough, but the other person is not edified.*" (1 Corinthians 14:16-17). Being sensitive to unbelievers who visit your worship gatherings is a biblical command. To ignore this command is to be both disobedient and unloving.

God is pleased when our worship is practical. The Bible says, "*Therefore I urge you, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service of worship.*" (Romans 12:1). Why does God want your body? Why doesn't he say, "Offer your spirit?" Because without your body you can't do anything on this planet. While you're here on this earth, God says, "Give me what you've got!" He's just being practical about worship.

Real worship costs. "*However, the king said to Araunah, 'No, but I will surely buy it from you for a price, for I will not offer burnt offerings to the Lord my God which cost me nothing'. So David bought the threshing floor and the oxen for fifty shekels of silver.*" One thing worship costs us is our self-centeredness. You cannot exalt God and yourself at the same time. You don't worship to be seen by others or to please yourself. You deliberately shift the focus off yourself. When you praise God even when you don't feel like it, when you get out of bed to worship when you're tired, or when you help others when you are worn out, you are offering a sacrifice of worship to God. That pleases God.

Matt Redman, a worship leader in England, tells how his pastor taught his church the real meaning of worship. To show that worship is more than music, he banned all singing in their services for a period of time while they learned to worship in other ways. By the end of that time, Matt had written the classic song “*Heart of Worship*.”

*I'll bring You more than a song
Because the song itself is not what You've required
You search much deeper within
Than the way things appear
You're looking into my heart.*

The heart of the matter is a matter of the heart.

Points to Ponder

What would First Baptist Church be like if we went for a “season” without music? Would we experience worship? Do we equate worship solely with music? Would our hearts change?

The Song of Moses (Day 34)

Read Exodus 15:1-27

The “songs” of the Old Testament were Hebrew poetical compositions, usually brief, that could be set to music (v. 21). The song may either acknowledge God or, in some instances, some great exploit of man (1 Samuel 18:6-7). Some songs were carefully composed, while others, such as this one, seem to be more of a spontaneous outburst.

Moses began his song by acknowledging the exalted Lord who turned back the advancing army by drowning them in the sea. The Israelites experienced deliverance through the Red Sea and celebrated corporately.

The Israelites had hit a dead end. Mountains on both sides, the Red Sea in front of them, and Pharaoh’s army behind them. The people grumbled. God told them to get going. His power was revealed through Moses, his servant, in parting the waters and destroying their enemy. The Hebrew people needed to uproot a bad habit of grumbling and distrust, and God provided some training for this on that day. He had guided and protected them through the pillar of cloud and fire. He had revealed his faithfulness over and over, and now it was time to pull a larger plant.

As you read chapter 15 do not get the impression that the people of Israel just sat on the seashore. This was a major step of faith for these people as written in Hebrews 11:29:

“By faith they passed through the Red Sea as though they were passing through dry land; and the Egyptians, when they attempted it, were drowned.”

When the Israelites finally finished the crossing, God sped up their learning curve. On one side of the sea, the people were filled with fear and complaints. On the other side of the sea, there was worship. In the midst of this worship experience primarily by Moses and secondarily by Miriam, we hear one of the key verses for the Book of Exodus: *“In Your lovingkindness You have led the people whom You have redeemed; in Your strength You have guided them to Your holy habitation.” (Exodus 15:13).*

First, God leads his people by his mercy. Second, God continually reveals his omnipotence throughout the journey. Third, God’s map may not be the shortest route so that lessons may be learned along the way. The journey is just as important, if not more so, as the destination. Each of these truths reveals God’s unending mercy and compassion for his people. And God simply wants us to take him at his word.

After the brief celebration, God brought them to the bitter waters of Marah where the people went from singing and rejoicing to difficulty and complaining. They had experienced two water problems that week – too much water at the Red Sea and too little water at Marah. The Hebrew people still had a lot to learn. So do we!

Points to Ponder

What “journey” is God taking you through personally? What “journey” is God taking us through corporately? What Red Seas do we face personally and corporately? What do you treasure more in your life, the “journey” or the “destination?” Corporately?

In an article written by David Roach entitled *“Forgiveness and Fellowship Essential for Corporate Worship,”* located in the Appendix section of our Vision Walk, Ergun Caner, dean of Liberty Baptist Theological Seminary and professor of theology and church history at Liberty University in Lynchburg, Va., states that *“The responsibility for the power of God in worship rests on us.”* Preaching from Exodus 15, Caner continues by stating that, *“Christians cannot worship corporately by focusing only on God. Focusing only on God may result in individual praise, but it will not foster the fellowship required for corporate worship.”*

If we truly want to unite people, the fellowship of believers here at First Baptist Church, then we need to simply be reminded of what it was like the day we got saved. After believers remember their common salvation, the next step to rejuvenating fellowship is forgiveness.

True fellowship depends on forgiveness and true forgiveness destroys bitterness; bitterness is the secret enemy of worship. Regardless of how bitter or cynical we may become toward others, it is not their fault, because the bitterness does not reside in their hearts, but in ours.

We should encourage one another to take any steps necessary to forgive those toward whom we harbor bitterness. Forgiving is a sure way to move a congregation toward God-honoring corporate worship.

Points to Ponder

Ask God to place the name of a fellow church member on your heart toward whom you harbor bitterness. Ask the Lord to forgive you. As the Lord directs, go to that person to seek their forgiveness and restore fellowship. How will that impact your corporate worship experience?

Application (Day 35)

There are many practical things that we can engage in as we accept the responsibility personally and corporately for “Corporate Worship” under the guidance and strength of the Holy Spirit. These include, but are not limited to:

- Exercise the acceptance and encouragement of variety in music, instrumentation, expression and Biblical praise, as this is Scriptural
- Establish an alternative day and time for an additional service weekly to reach more people
- Ignite our prayer ministry within the church to underwrite what we seek to do in service to God; if we increase our prayer coverage, we can raise our sights and attempt greater things
- Utilize media to touch our community with the life of God coming from within our church family
- Hold each other accountable to come to worship services prepared to worship in spirit and in truth; be intentionally upbeat as we come together
- Maintain public prayer and the reading of the Scriptures as centerpieces of our worship services

Points to Ponder

What are some ways you can “apply” yourself in our corporate worship settings? How are you “wired” for worship? What are some elements to worship that will “draw” others to Him versus be more “pleasing” to you?