



FOUNDATIONS: WEEK TWO
CORPORATE WORSHIP



INTRODUCTION

Every week believers gather to sing songs and listen to messages. Some dress in suits and ties and reach for a hymnal as they rise to sing all five stanzas of “A Mighty Fortress.” Others come as they are which, more often than not, means jeans and a fashionable tee. They stand to their feet as the lights dim and the band members take their place on the stage. They know that things are about to kick into high gear. If the worship leader were to ask them to reach for a hymnal, they would stare at one another with blank looks on their faces. The words are right there, bigger than life, complete with theatrical lighting, motion backgrounds and occasionally a fog machine for good measure.

I am sure those cradling their hymnals have no idea what to make of the modern worship scene, and those who’ve never experienced a traditional worship service would be blown away that anyone still knows how to tie a tie.

It is hard to believe we are even talking about the same thing, but we are. Two very different portraits of the church at worship.

In an age, where we can listen to a Matt Chandler podcast and create our own worship mix on Spotify, is there really any reason to slide out of bed, tie the tie or slip on a tee and worship with our church family. We’re part of a small group. We are meeting with a couple of friends for accountability. We’re studying Scripture on our own. Do we really need to gather for worship?

Obviously, I’m going to say, “Yes.” You might have expected that, but there is really a lot more to it than its just my job.

Corporate worship is important because it is one of the many means of grace that God has ordained to grow us up in Christ, it is a vital component of our life together as God's people and one of the most compelling testimonies we can offer an unbelieving world.

THREE BIG TRUTHS ABOUT WORSHIP

Before we talk about Corporate Worship let's take a couple of steps back, and think about worship in general. Let's start with three big truths about worship.

A. WE ARE ALL WORSHIPERS AND OUR WORSHIP DRAMATICALLY SHAPES THE COURSE OF OUR LIVES.

The first thing you need to know is that all of us are worshippers, and for better or worse, our worship dramatically shapes the course of our lives.

James K. A. Smith hits the nail on the head when he tells us, "You need to worship well. Because you are what you love. And you worship what you love. And you might not love what you think."¹

The Psalmist comes to the same conclusion in Psalm 115.

PSALM 115:3-8 Our God is in heaven; he does whatever pleases him. ⁴ But their idols are silver and gold, made by human hands. ⁵ They have mouths, but cannot speak, eyes, but cannot see. ⁶ They have ears, but cannot hear, noses, but cannot smell. ⁷ They have hands, but cannot feel, feet, but cannot walk, nor can they utter a sound with their throats. ⁸ Those who make them will be like them, and so will all who trust in them.

You are always shaped by the objects of your affection.

B. WORSHIP IS FAR MORE THAN SINGING A FEW SONGS ON SUNDAY MORNING.

The second thing we need to know about worship is that it is far more than singing a few songs on Sunday morning.

Don't get me wrong. Singing plays a major role in the worship of God's people in both the Old and New Testament. When the nation of Israel is dramatically delivered from the death grip of Pharaoh and the Egyptians, they break out in song and dance. David incorporated song and dance into the worship in Jerusalem. The book of Psalms is a book of songs. Most of the books in the Old and New Testament contain songs. After Jesus and the disciples shared a final Passover meal together, they sang a song. Paul refers to singing as both a sign that we are filled with the Spirit, and one of the means by which we are filled with the Holy Spirit. He also tells us that we instruct one another through our singing. He tells us:

EPHESIANS 5:18-20 Do not get drunk on wine, which leads to debauchery. Instead, be filled with the Spirit, ¹⁹ speaking to one another with psalms, hymns, and songs from the Spirit. Sing

¹ Smith, James K. A. *You Are What You Love: The Spiritual Power of Habit*. Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press: A Division of Baker Publishing Group, 2016.

and make music from your heart to the Lord,²⁰ always giving thanks to God the Father for everything, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.

We all came into the world singing and dancing. Every time we load our three granddaughters in the van, it is only a matter of minutes before they break out in spontaneous song. Sometimes they invite us to join them as they sing an old familiar tune, at other times they break into free verse descriptions of what is actually taking place. “We’re driving in the car to get some cheese curds with grandad.”

If you are not singing and dancing anymore, you need to ask yourself, “Who stole my song?” and “How can I get it back?”

So while singing is a vital part of worship, it is far from the sum total of our worship.

The two foundational passages on worship in the New Testament do not even mention singing.

One of the most profound conversations on worship occurs beside a well outside the city of Sychar. Jesus engages a woman in a conversation about “what it means to be thirsty.” When he tells her that her never-ending search for the right guy will never quench her thirst, she quickly changes the subject. She is through talking about water, she wants to talk about worship. Jesus obliges her, because both conversations are about the same thing. In criminal investigations the rule of thumb is “follow the money.” In matters of worship, the rule of thumb is to follow the heart. The deepest longings of our heart will always reveal the object of our worship.

You hear the echo of James K. A. Smith. “You are what you love. And you worship what you love. And you might not love what you think.”

Here is a woman who looked to relationships for meaning and purpose in life. To this point they had only made her thirsty for something deeper. She turns the conversation on a dime and asks Jesus,

JOHN 4:20 Our ancestors worshiped on this mountain, but you Jews claim that the place where we must worship is in Jerusalem.”

Jesus seems to respond, “Alright I’ll play along.”

JOHN 4:21-24 “Woman,” Jesus replied, “believe me, a time is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem. ²² You Samaritans worship what you do not know; we worship what we do know, for salvation is from the Jews. ²³ Yet a time is coming and has now come when the true worshipers will worship the Father in the Spirit and in truth, for they are the kind of worshipers the Father seeks. ²⁴ God is spirit, and his worshipers must worship in the Spirit and in truth.”

So let’s form a definition. At its foundation, “Worship is a work of the Holy Spirit in the human heart in response to truths about God revealed in Scripture...

The Samaritans had to twist Scripture a bit in order to form their own definition of worship. Jesus reminds her, “You worship what you do not know.” If your worship is not informed by the truth of Scripture it will be informed and shaped by popular culture.

That is why Paul tells us, “Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God. ¹⁷ And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.” ESV

Another foundational passage on worship is found in the first two verses of Romans 12. In the first eleven chapters of Paul’s letter to the Romans, he explains the gospel and its implications in profound detail. At times, Paul goes over our heads. We think we get it, but we are not quite sure. While the theology is dense, the application is simple. In chapter 12, Paul applies the great truths of the gospel in a couple of memorable lines.

ROMANS 12:1-2 Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God’s mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God—this is your true and proper worship. ² Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God’s will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will.

Paul tells us worship is not about singing a song, or attending a worship service, or volunteering in the nursery, or sharing the gospel across the fence with your neighbor. It is not less than all of these, but it is so much more. Worship begins when we offer ourselves to God, and when we offer ourselves to God, we are transformed by his grace and find ourselves in a position to know and do his will. So let’s expand our definition:

“Worship is a work of the Holy Spirit in the human heart in response to truths about God revealed in Scripture that results in our giving ourselves more fully to God, being transformed by his grace, and longing to know and do his will.”

C. WE CAN DRAMATICALLY CHANGE THE COURSE OF OUR LIFE BY CHANGING THE COURSE OF OUR WORSHIP

The third big truth about worship is that we can dramatically change the course of our life, by changing the course of our worship. We tend to think that our actions follow our heart. Jesus, however, points us in the opposite direction. He seems to be telling us that our hearts are formed by what we do. That is why the means of grace are so important. They are the daily habits that reshape our heart.

Listen to what Jesus says in

MATTHEW 6:19-20: “Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moths and vermin destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. ²⁰ But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moths and vermin do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal. ²¹ For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

Jesus doesn’t tell us that our treasure follows the heart, he tells us our heart will follow what we treasure. We can change our heart by changing what we treasure. In other words, we can dramatically change the course of our life by changing the course of our worship.

James Smith tells us we change our heart, by changing our liturgies. He defines liturgies as the daily habits that shape our appetites. Guess what, if you spend your days watching soap operas

and reading romance novels (and who does that, anymore?) your heart will begin to long for what the characters in the novels long for. Your practices are shaping your heart.

Walking into REI is a major religious experience for me. Every time I walk in the store my heart leaps with joy at the prospect of purchasing a new lead rope or new backpack or a cool pair of sun glasses. My heart is delighted by the prospect of acquiring the latest and greatest outdoor gear. As you well know, your identity as a “climber” or a “mountain biker” is always defined by the quality of your gear, and a pair of cool sunglasses. I am never more of a worshipper than when I walk into an REI.

The only way to loosen the allure of this well constructed temple of “rock climbing” and “mountain biking” is to spend less time in REI and more time with God and his people. If I want to recapture my heart, I need to refocus my worship.

THE IMPORTANCE OF CORPORATE WORSHIP

Now let’s turn our attention to the value of corporate worship. It is certainly not the sum total of our worship experience, but it is a vital component of our worship experience. As we alluded to in the introduction, corporate worship is important because it is one of the many means of grace that God has ordained to grow us up in Christ, it is a vital component of our life together as God’s people and one of the most compelling testimonies we can offer an unbelieving world.

Let’s look at each of these in turn.

A. CORPORATE WORSHIP AS A MEANS OF GRACE

Corporate worship is one of the many means of grace that God has ordained to grow us up in Christ.

The pattern set by the early church was to come together in both large and small group settings. They gathered by the thousands and they gathered by the handfuls. Luke tells us,

ACTS 2:44, 46-47 ⁴⁴ *All the believers were together... Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts* ⁴⁷ *praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people.*

We are not sure what form their larger gatherings took but it is reasonable to conclude that they involved teaching and prayer. We also know that they were continually praising God, so the free expression of thanksgiving may have been involved as well. Luke seems to suggest that being together in large and small groups, listening to instruction and praying together were catalytic both to their growth as a body and their growth as individual members of Christ’s body.

The writer of Hebrews confronts a group of believers who are in danger of losing their passion for Christ. In order to rekindle the flame, the writer of Hebrews encourages them, among other things, “not to give up meeting together as some were in the habit of doing.” He is simply telling them, “we find God’s grace and strength for the journey when we gather with God’s people.

Let’s follow his logic in Hebrews 10:19-25.

HEBREWS 10:19-25 Therefore, brothers and sisters, since we have confidence to enter the Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus, ²⁰ by a new and living way opened for us through the curtain, that is, his body, ²¹ and since we have a great priest over the house of God, ²² let us draw near to God with a sincere heart and with the full assurance that faith brings, having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience and having our bodies washed with pure water. ²³ Let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess, for he who promised is faithful. ²⁴ And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds, ²⁵ not giving up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching.

The writer of Hebrews is clearly drawing on Old Testament patterns of worship, to lay the foundation for our worship as the New Covenant people of God. You hear the echoes of the priesthood, the Holy of Holies, animal sacrifice, ritual purity, and curtain through which only the high priest could enter. The writer of Hebrews uses these images to remind us of what God has accomplished for us through Christ.

When he challenges us to “not give up meeting together,” he chooses an unusual word. It is only used one other time in the New Testament where it refers to the gathering of all believers at the coming of Christ (2 Thessalonians 2:1). The word is *episynagoge*. It comes from the word group associated with the formal meeting of the Jewish people in a synagogue setting. In the Old Testament the word is sometimes used to describe a gathering of “the whole nation of Israel” in a formal convocation. More than likely, the writer of Hebrews is referring to the formal gathering of the whole church for the reading of Scripture and prayer after the pattern of the Jewish Synagogue or what we might refer to as corporate worship.²

Gathering as a people of God for formal worship is a pattern that is established in the Old Testament, was practiced by Jesus and the disciples, and adopted by the early church. According to the writer of Hebrews, it is a vital component to drawing near to God, holding fast to our faith, and spurring one another on toward love and good deeds.

We refer to Corporate Worship as a means of grace because it is one of the ways we draw near to God, experience his presence, are formed by his Spirit, and rekindle our passion for Christ. Corporate worship is a vital component of our life in Christ.

B. CORPORATE WORSHIP AS A VITAL COMPONENT OF OUR LIFE TOGETHER

Corporate Worship is not only a vital component of our life in Christ, it is a vital component of our life together. After telling us that all the believers were together and held everything in common, Luke reminds us that they gathered “everyday in the Temple courts.” Their large group gatherings were every bit as important to their “devotion to fellowship” as the more intimate gatherings in their homes.

The writer of Hebrews tells us that there should not only be a Godward focus in our gatherings, there should be a “one another” focus as well.

² Kittel, Gerhard, Gerhard Friedrich, and Geoffrey William Bromiley. *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*. Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans, 1985.

In verse 22 he tells us, “let us draw near to God with a sincere heart and with the full assurance that faith brings.”

He quickly follows with verse 24, “And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds, ²⁵ not giving up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching.”

One of the major reasons we meet together is to encourage one another. Certainly we are able to encourage one another more profoundly in a small group or a one on one setting, but we should never discount how deeply we can encourage one another through corporate worship.

Our family is so committed to “meeting together” that we even look forward to worshipping with other congregations when we are on vacation. I know we are insane, but it is our favorite part of our time away. We recently worshiped with the Park Street Church in Denver Colorado. They were a lively young congregation that obviously loved being together. Their worship was passionate and compelling. The pastor did a beautiful job of pointing us to Christ from the book of Isaiah. We enjoyed good coffee, great fellowship, and were able to lift our voices and raise our hands with a group of brothers and sisters we had never met before. We sat humbly under God’s word and were deeply blessed by it.

We didn’t know anyone, we didn’t exchange anything of theological depth with the people who greeted us, but we walked away full. We were encouraged by gathering with God’s people to revel in his grace with complete strangers. And hopefully our presence was, in some small way, an encouragement to that congregation as well.

You’ll notice that the writer of Hebrews is not at all focussed on the role of the speaker or the worship leader. He is focused on the role each one of us plays in ensuring that our gatherings are everything God designed them to be. “Let us consider how we may spur one another on” and “let us encourage one another.” Whether we find ourselves in a large or small group setting, we need to think about how we can encourage those around us in the name of Christ.

C. CORPORATE WORSHIP AS A COMPELLING WITNESS TO THE WORLD

When we are part of a church that enjoys being together and enjoys expressing their love and devotion to God through heart felt worship, we will not only encourage one another, we will offer a compelling witness to the world.

Paul picks up on this idea as he offers loving correction to the Church in Corinth. He begins with a stern warning, but ends with the possibility of a far more positive outcome. In Chapter 11, he tells them,

1 CORINTHIANS 11:17 “In the following directives I have no praise for you, for your meetings do more harm than good.”

After four chapters of gentle, and at times not so gentle correction, Paul concludes,

*1 CORINTHIANS 14:23-25 So if the whole church comes together and everyone speaks in tongues, and inquirers or unbelievers come in, will they not say that you are out of your mind?
²⁴ But if an unbeliever or an inquirer comes in while everyone is prophesying, they are*

convicted of sin... So they will fall down and worship God, exclaiming, "God is really among you!"

Wouldn't that be great if our friends and neighbors walked in here and were blown away by God's presence.

Your neighbors don't even have to follow you to church for your worship to have an impact on them. They notice when you pack the minivan and head out for worship every Sunday. Sometimes they will even stop to ask, "I notice you guys head out to church every Sunday, nobody does that anymore. Why is that so important to you?"

HOW CAN WE MAXIMIZE OUR TIME TOGETHER?

A. COME EXPECTANTLY

The writer of Hebrews is certainly trying to raise our expectations before challenging us to "not give up meeting together." He reminds us of everything that God has done in Christ to make our worship possible. It won't hurt to read the passage again.

HEBREWS 10:19-25 Therefore, brothers and sisters, since we have confidence to enter the Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus, ²⁰by a new and living way opened for us through the curtain, that is, his body, ²¹and since we have a great priest over the house of God, ²²let us draw near to God with a sincere heart and with the full assurance that faith brings, having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience and having our bodies washed with pure water. ²³Let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess, for he who promised is faithful. ²⁴And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds, ²⁵not giving up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching.

The gospel creates a sense of expectancy that prepares us for worship.

The Psalmist challenges worshippers of old, "Enter his gates with thanksgiving and his courts with praise... (Psalm 100:4)" in other words we should already be worshiping before we walk into the worship center and find our seat.

Praying that God would be actively present in our worship and *expecting* him to be actively present in our worship can change the entire character of our worship.

As Mac Brown used to say, "Come early. Stay late. Yell loud. Wear orange." He was talking about corporate worship, wasn't he?

B. GREET ONE ANOTHER WARMLY IN THE NAME OF CHRIST

The New Testament calls on us to greet one another with a Holy kiss. We'll let that one pass for the time being, and opt for more culturally acceptable forms of greeting. I would settle for a contagious smile and a warm handshake. The point is "greet one another." Not just at the designated greeting time, but throughout the day. Greet each other in the parking lot, in the foyer, in the worship center, as you pick up your children, before and after the service. Greet

each other in Serranos. One of the measures of a great church is her love for a stranger. Find a stranger and make them feel at home.

No one should ever say, “No one greeted me”, it is not their job to greet you, it is your job to greet them. When we greet someone in the name of Christ we are greeting them in Christ stead. We are greeting them as he would greet them, and we are greeting them as a vivid demonstration of the love and acceptance they will find in Christ when they come to him.

C. ENTER WHOLEHEARTEDLY INTO THE WORSHIP OF THE CHURCH

Our services are built around singing, greeting, hearing the word and receiving the benefits of the gospel through the Lord’s table.

If we are to love the Lord our God with all of our heart, soul and strength, then certainly all of our expressions of love and obedience should involve all of our heart, soul and strength.

If Paul tells us that, “In all that you do, do it with all of your heart, as to the Lord...” How much more should our singing, hearing the Word and receiving the benefits of the gospel at the Lord’s table be done with all of our heart as unto the Lord.

Remember we said earlier that our singing is both a sign that we are filled with the Spirit and the means to being filled with the Spirit. Sometimes we sing because we are full, sometimes we simply sing out of obedience, trusting God to fill us.

When we sing, you should sing with all your heart. I know that for most of us our singing falls loosely into the category of “making a joyful noise to the Lord,” but by all means make whatever noise you must make, “joyfully.” If you are terribly out of tune, we will turn up the volume and no one will be wiser.

And while you are singing tell your face, and maybe even the rest of your body, that you passionately believe what you are singing. Your singing is not only an expression of your love and devotion to Christ, it is a testimony of your love and devotion to Christ to everyone present.

When we participate wholeheartedly in the worship of the church we are encouraged. When we are in the company of passionate worshipers we are encouraged. When we are a passionate worshiper, we not only experience God’s grace, but we encourage those around us as well.

CONCLUSION

Corporate worship is important because it is one of the many means of grace that God has ordained to grow us up in Christ, it is a vital component of our life together as God’s people and one of the most compelling testimonies we can offer to an unbelieving world.

May our worship always be pleasing to God, edifying to the body of Christ, and a compelling declaration of our love for Christ to those around us.

AROUND THE TABLE

1. While some people are drawn to more traditional expressions of worship and others are drawn to more contemporary expressions of worship, what do we (or should we) all have in common?
2. What can those who are drawn to traditional expressions of worship learn from those who are drawn to more contemporary expressions of worship?
3. What can those who are drawn to more contemporary forms of worship learn from those who are drawn to more traditional expressions of worship?
4. In Sunday's message we highlighted three big truths about worship.
 - We are all worshippers and our worship is dramatically shaping the course of our lives.
 - Worship is far more than singing a few songs on Sunday.
 - We can dramatically change the course of our life by changing the focus of our worship.
 - a. Which of these truths is most meaningful to you and why?
 - b. How do our affections determine the shape of our lives?
 - c. What happens when our affections are set on worldly things?
 - d. What happens when our affections are set on good things rather than ultimate things?
 - e. How can we determine the shape of our affections?
5. We define worship as, "A work of the Holy Spirit in the human heart in response to truths about God revealed in Scripture that results in our giving ourselves more fully to God, being transformed by his grace, and longing to know and do his will."
 - a. What is striking about this definition?
 - b. Do you agree or disagree with this definition? Why or why not?
 - c. Is any part of this definition new to you? If so, which part? How does it shape your understanding of worship?
6. In Sunday's message we said, "Corporate worship is important because it is one of the many means of grace that God has ordained to grow us up in Christ, it is a vital component of our life together as God's people and one of the most compelling testimonies we can offer an unbelieving world."
 - a. How does God use corporate worship to grow us up in Christ?
 - b. Why is corporate worship a vital component of our life together?
 - c. How is corporate worship one of the most compelling testimonies we can offer an unbelieving world?
7. What are some steps each of us can take to insure that our worship gatherings are everything God intends them to be?

Copyright © 2017 by Paul Kemp and Christ Church of Cedar Park. All rights reserved. Feel free to make copies for use in personal and group Bible study without altering the character of content of the study in any way.

Unless otherwise indicated, Scripture quotations are from the Holy Bible, New International Version®. NIV®. Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984, 2011 by Biblica, Inc.™ Used by permission of Zondervan. All rights reserved worldwide.