

We are going to talk about the culture of the church today, more specifically what should happen at our worship gatherings when we yield to the person of the Holy Spirit who brings revelation of Jesus Christ who is the head of the church. *Did you know the corporate gathering is not designed for the lost it was designed for the Christ follower and is purposed to be a place of worship, prayer, mystery, of learning and equipping, a house marked by His tangible Presence.*

Acts 2:42-47 (NKJV) 42 And they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers. 43 Then fear (awe) came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were done through the apostles. 44 Now all who believed were together, and had all things in common, 45 and sold their possessions and goods, and divided them among all, as anyone had need. 46 So continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they ate their food with gladness and simplicity of heart, 47 praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved.

People were not coming into the kingdom because the church was seeker sensitive. The world witnessed the beauty of a unified body moving in one accord in love with Jesus and each other. These were disciple of the resurrected Christ! The Presence of God was experienced in their practices and the power of the Holy Spirit was evident in all their life. **Fear or awe of God marked their gatherings.**

The Presence centered church

Why do we emphasize prayer, take more time in our worship, expect encounter from the living God, explore the beauties and mysteries discovered in communion, prioritize the Presence and leadership of God, and emphasize first love and intimacy?

Everything in our services should be ordered to emphasize God's glory and be purposeful to awaken the fullness of our senses to Jesus Christ. This can be a model that we live our lives by daily, without reducing the spiritual significance of the entire body coming to worship together every Sunday.

We must continue to develop a culture (meaning our entire body understands, emphasizes and lives out) that is Presence centered not people or program centered. **Jesus is the emphasis of our gatherings.**

The number one task of the weekly gathering is not the attraction of the lost it's the attracting of Holy Spirit and the fire of God. Yes we are commanded to live missionally, do

the work of an Evangelist, reach the lost but I am specifically talking about the purpose that drives our gathering.

The danger with being seeker sensitive, program centered is -We are letting people dictate what will happen and we move into a worldly paradigm that seemingly meets peoples' initial needs but is far removed from the power of God to save, heal, deliver, transform individuals, renew their minds.

Can you imagine meeting Jesus and having Him adapt to what people expected rather than move from the voice of the Father in the power of the Holy Spirit to release Heaven on earth. **If people don't encounter the Holy Spirit in our gatherings we are missing the mark.** It doesn't mean we don't honor people or love them or meet them where we are at but it does mean we know there is only One who will satisfy every desire and His name is Jesus. They are coming into an environment that is unique, loving and powerful.

As a church we should embrace the truth that our goal is not how comfortable people are in their sin, strongholds and sickness. Jesus came to offer complete freedom and that means a radical death to self in order to be filled with the Holy Spirit of God. **This is God's house, it's Jesus body and He is jealous for His bride.** *Jesus wants to reign here and it will always make the flesh uncomfortable when He is present. His very Presence demands we make a decision. Holy Spirit calls us to adjust to Him, not Him to adjust to us.*

Listen as Paul explains the power of the Holy Spirit in a church service working through the prophetic gifting.

1Corinthians 14:24-25 ²⁴ But if all prophesy, and an unbeliever or an uninformed person comes in, he is convinced by all, he is convicted by all. ²⁵ And thus the secrets of his heart are revealed; and so, falling down on *his* face, he will worship God and report that God is truly among you.

What a gift to offer unbelievers. They are convinced and convicted by God, they fall down in His Presence and worship because the anointed words flowing out of the believers tongue are so encouraging, strengthening and equipping that they fall on their face and say God is real and He is here! They don't leave commenting on how orderly everything was and it was exactly what I expected. They leave unhinged because they met Jesus.

When naturally minded people walk into the fire of the Holy Spirit and God's supernatural activity, they should be unsettled! Honestly we should want people to be touched by the Holy Spirit in intimacy and power not for them to feel comfortable and have a nice down to earth sermon with music that is catchy. **Each one should be asking Holy Spirit who they can minister to because we love when Jesus loves on people.**

Protestant presence-centered worship stands in deep continuity with ancient Christianity, even without adopting full Orthodox or Catholic liturgical forms. In other words this is not new it is rooted in ancient Christianity.

1. Ancient Christianity Was Presence-Centered

The earliest Christian gatherings (1st–3rd century):

- Assumed God's manifest presence
- Gathered primarily for worship and formation
- Did not explain every action
- Expected transformation through encounter
- The church was birthed when the unified, praying church in the upper room were immersed in the power of the Holy Spirit

2. God Was the Primary Audience in Ancient Worship

In ancient Christianity:

- Worship was directed to God, not to outsiders
- Unbelievers were allowed to learn from the teaching or instruction but left before believers Received communion
- Mystery was emphasized

Presence-centered Protestant worship shares this conviction: This aligns it more closely with ancient practice than seeker-oriented models. When an individual steps into a Presence centered church they are literally crossing a threshold into a room inhabited by the manifest Presence of God.

3. Ancient Worship Formed the mind, heart and body

Early Christian worship involved:

- Standing, kneeling, lifting hands
- Singing Scripture
- Silence and awe
- Shared participation

Presence-centered Protestant gatherings:

- Expect the entire body to respond believing we all are included in the priestly acts of prayer and worship
- Allow silence and lingering, searching out the will of the Holy Spirit and responding
- Invite whole-person engagement involving spirit, soul and flesh, responding appropriately to the leading of the Holy Spirit. The entire body is expected to “enter in” to worship.

4. Scripture Was Sung, Prayed, and Lived in Ancient Christianity. Not Just Explained in a three point sermon

- Chanted psalms
- Sang Christ centered hymns
- Let Scripture shape the imagination

Presence-centered Protestant worship:

- Emphasizes Scripture-saturated songs
- Allows repetition for formation
- Prioritizes proclamation through praise
- Expects Jesus to be enthroned upon the praise of His people

5. Ancient Worship Made Space for Holy Mystery

The early Church:

- Did not rush
- Did not fear silence
- Did not attempt total explanation
- Guarded the mystery discovered in the Eucharist

Presence-centered Protestant worship:

- Resists over-management
- Allows waiting on God
- Acknowledges God cannot be controlled

- Emphasizes doctrine and encounter

This posture is ancient—even when the form is modern.

6. Spontaneity Is Older Than Formalization

While later liturgies became fixed, the earliest gatherings included:

- Exhortations
- Prophetic utterances (1 Cor 14)
- Shared prayers

Presence-centered worship recovers this early charismatic freedom, rooted in apostolic instruction.

7. “Atmosphere” vs “Awareness”

Ancient Christians did not falsely produce an atmosphere ; they cultivated awareness.

Presence-centered worship:

- Uses music, silence, prayer not to manipulate But to attune the heart to what is already true and to awaken the soul to the reality of God in our midst.

This is closer to ancient worship than performance-driven modernity.

8. The Early Church Expected God to Act

Ancient Christianity expected:

- Conviction
- Healing
- Repentance
- Transformation

Presence-centered Protestant worship expects the same, That expectation is profoundly ancient.

Presence-centered Protestant worship remains:

- Rooted in Scripture as final authority
- Christ-centered rather than object-centered
- Participatory rather than led by a professional

When Protestant worship becomes presence-centered—Scripture-saturated, participatory, reverent, and expectant—it often stands closer to the instincts of ancient Christianity than modern explanatory, consumer-shaped church models, even when expressed in present day forms.

Home group questions

1. Discuss the difference between a seeker sensitive service and a Presence centered service.
2. How is a Presence centered service more aligned with ancient Christianity.
3. Take some time and discuss the similarities between ancient Christianity and Protestant Presence centered worship. Where do we have room to grow.
4. Discuss the beauty of coming into a space that has the primary purpose of experiencing the tangible presence of Jesus Christ? How can this be life changing for an unbeliever.
5. What is your role in cultivating a Presence centered lifestyle at home as well as in the body of Christ?