

WORSHIPING TOGETHER

“There’s an element of worship and Christianity that cannot be experienced in private worship or by watching worship. There are some graces and blessings that God gives only in ‘meeting together’ with other believers.”—Donald Whitney, *Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life*

Corporate worship is the single most important means of grace and our greatest weapon in the fight for joy, because like no other means, corporate worship combines all three principles of God’s ongoing grace: his word, prayer, and fellowship. —David Mathis, *Habits of Grace: Enjoying Jesus Through the Spiritual Disciplines*

REVELATION 7:9–12; 15-17 After this I looked, and there before me was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and before the Lamb. They were wearing white robes and were holding palm branches in their hands. ¹⁰ And they cried out in a loud voice: “Salvation belongs to our God, who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb.”

¹¹ All the angels were standing around the throne and around the elders and the four living creatures. They fell down on their faces before the throne and worshiped God, ¹² saying: “Amen! Praise and glory and wisdom and thanks and honor and power and strength be to our God for ever and ever. Amen!”

¹⁵ Therefore, “they are before the throne of God and serve him day and night in his temple; and he who sits on the throne will shelter them with his presence. ¹⁶ ‘Never again will they hunger; never again will they thirst. The sun will not beat down on them,’ nor any scorching heat. ¹⁷ For the Lamb at the center of the throne will be their shepherd; ‘he will lead them to springs of living water.’ ‘And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes.’”

1. We’ve included a couple of quotes on corporate worship from some of the leading books on spiritual disciplines. Do these quotes ring true to you? Why or why not? How might these quotes shape your understanding of corporate worship?
2. Many of the more moving scenes in the book of Revelation involve great throngs in lively worship before the throne of God.
 - a. What does worship look and feel like in Revelation 7?
 - b. Who is involved?
 - c. How might who you worship with impact the quality of your own worship?
 - d. What is the major benefit you receive from corporate worship?
 - e. How might your participation in corporate worship enhance the experience of those around you?

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Worship is a deep heart response to the things we love most.

The “Shema,” ancient Israel’s call to worship captures the idea. *Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. ⁵ Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength (Deuteronomy 6:4-5).*

To worship God is to love him with all your being. It is not something you turn on and off, it is the driving passion of your heart. You’ll notice, as the passage continues, how naturally our love for God spills over into the fabric of our everyday lives.

These commandments that I give you today are to be on your hearts. Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. Tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads. Write them on the doorframes of your houses and on your gates (vv. 6-9).

When you love someone or something deeply it shows up in everything you are and everything you do.

There are several Old and New Testament words we translate by the single word “worship.” They describe raising one’s hands in prayer, drawing near to God, touching the face of God, bringing a gift or offering a sacrifice, ascribing glory and honor to God, or even serving him faithfully in the temple. Some are figures of speech, others describe ordinary acts of devotion. The one thing they have in common is that they are all outward expressions of our inward devotion.

Obviously you can do a lot of these things or even all of these things without deep heart devotion, but it wouldn’t exactly qualify as worship, would it? Both

Jesus and Isaiah describe the people of their generation as a “people who honor God with their lips but their hearts are far from him. (Isaiah 29:13; 15:8).

So the question is not whether or not you worship, but who or what has captured your affections.

It could be something as silly as a sports franchise, your college alma mater, a job, an all consuming hobby or ambition, early retirement on an idyllic beach with magnificent sunsets. It will be something that you talk about, think about, dream about, and spend a lot of your time pursuing. Something that shapes your identity like being successful at your job or mastering a favorite pass time. It could even be something as worthy as your kids, your spouse, or the dream of one day finding a spouse.

If you need a hint, you might want to check out the t-shirts hanging in your closet, or the coffee mugs in you cabinets—especially the one’s you bought yourself, especially the ones you bought recently. While the slogans and images might be a bit silly, the underlying truth can be revealing.

The problem with loving things, any of these things more than God, is not simply that you rob God of his glory, you are also robbing yourself of the joy that comes from loving God, and your robbing those around you of the far greater love you could offer them if you first offered yourself to God.

James K. A. Smith reminds us, “You need to curate your heart. You need to worship well. Because you are what you love. You worship what you love. And you might not love what you think you love (You Are What You Love: The Power of Habit).”

The Rhythms of Grace are the habits that curate our hearts and shape our love— This week our focus is on “Corporate Worship”

WORSHIP IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

DEUTERONOMY 6:4-9 Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. ^v ⁵ Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength. ⁶ These commandments that I give you today are to be on your hearts. ⁷ Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. ⁸ Tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads. ⁹ Write them on the doorframes of your houses and on your gates.

PSALM 95 Come, let us sing for joy to the Lord; let us shout aloud to the Rock of our salvation. ² Let us come before him with thanksgiving and extol him with music and song. ³ For the Lord is the great God, the great King above all gods. ⁴ In his

hand are the depths of the earth, and the mountain peaks belong to him. ⁵ The sea is his, for he made it, and his hands formed the dry land. ⁶ Come, let us bow down in worship, let us kneel before the Lord our Maker; ⁷ for he is our God and we are the people of his pasture, the flock under his care.

1. The people of Israel would recite Deuteronomy 6:4-5 as their call to worship in both the temple and the synagogue. How might these two verses shape your understanding of worship?
2. How do the following verses speak to the way our worship should naturally flow into the fabric of our everyday lives?
3. Psalm 95 is one of the many joyful calls to worship in the Psalms. How do these verses shape your understanding of worship?

WORSHIP IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

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.”

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.

1 CORINTHIANS 10:31 So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God.

COLOSSIANS 3:17 And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.

1. How do these passages shape your overall understanding of worship?
2. How can the mundane activities of everyday life actually become acts of deep heart devotion to God?