

The Spiritual Disciplines of Worship

By Bob Young

Introduction

Many Christians and many churches do not have a well-defined, biblical concept of corporate worship. We have limited ourselves with pat answers. At times, the totality of our description of worship is encompassed in “in spirit and in truth.” Our in-depth study of worship is trying to decide if these are the same: does spirit equal truth?

Worship is more than pat answers. Worship is serious work. Worship reflects the essence of God, the epitome of the once broken, now restored God-man relationship. Worship is intentional. Worship is upward looking because Jesus in his full Godhead glory is at the center. Worship is inward looking because self-abnegation is essential to declaring Jesus as Lord. Worship looks outward and around because in shared worship, the body of Christ finds and expresses its voice.

We must understand three things in corporate worship.

Worship grips us. Worship grabs us in such a way that we cannot get loose. God’s people are “gripped in worship.” The majesty of God is awe-inspiring. To encounter God in all his glory is beyond words. We are not caught up in emotion—we are caught up in the cross. A few years ago, I met a visitor before we began worship—the fiancé of one of our young ladies. When the worship service concluded, I asked him how he liked it. He hesitated as he admitted that it made him uncomfortable because he felt deep emotions that he could not control. The cross must be able to move us.

Worship is conducted or led. Worship leading has not been in our view or our vocabulary. We have used “song-slingers.” We have not emphasized the importance of having a worship leader to lead us in worship. This leadership may come from multiple people as God’s people are led in prayer, in song, and in study, but it is important to recognize that someone is responsible for leading the body in worship. Because an effective leader sets the tone for corporate worship, the church would do well to rethink the significance of worship leading.

Worship is conducted, but worship also conducts us. Worship is conducive—it conducts us into the throne room of God, into his very presence. Worship is not static, worship is dynamic. The church in worship is on the move, it is going somewhere.

To facilitate our corporate worship, consider four disciplines of worship. These may apply in personal worship, but the subject here is corporate worship. What happens in worship? What things are essential in worship?

Submission occurs as worship unfolds.

→In celebration and adoration, God is recognized and honored. Such demands that the worshiper submit to the Lord. Submission is an essential part of worship. Worship recognizes something (someone) beyond us.

→Enthusiasm is literally “en theo” or God in us. Romans 12:10-11 guides us: when God is recognized and is within us, there is a place for smiles and joy. These are contagious (look at others).

Self-abnegation, self-emptying is different than self-denial.

→In lament and confession, the heart is cleansed. We worship Him who can do for us what we cannot do for ourselves.

→Tears and sorrow are a normal part of worship when the discipline self-emptying is included in worship.

Worship involves listening.

→We can worship in silence; we can stand in silence before the Lord. We sing songs that glorify stillness. But in the silence we listen. The psalmist urged us to “be still and know that God is God.”

→As we listen, we prepare ourselves to respond. Only because we have listened do we know what to say. Speaking to God does not precede listening to God.

I love the discipline of exulting and encouraging. In worship, hearts are changed. Attitudes are repaired. We

→We speak to God the many different facets of our hearts--praise, lament, confession, and request.

→We speak to one another.