

What Is Worship?

There are many ways of defining, describing, and illustrating what worship is—at its core. If we strip away the particular songs and structures (which vary from church to church and culture to culture), what IS worship? A definition we work with here at Point Place UCC goes like this:



**As we are sown in God's Story,
we reap the expression of praise and the formation of lives.**

Thus, the goal of worship is to help the people of God develop roots into the Story (the Scriptures, the Gospel, the Story of God's work in the world), and then to create space where God's people can express praise in response to that Story and have their lives formed by that Story.

Here's what others are saying about worship:

What fits your definition? What challenges it? What implications do each of these definitions have for the practice of worship?

- John Piper: "Worship is a way of gladly reflecting back to God the radiance of his worth."
- Robert Webber: "Worship does God's story...The story of God is communicated in the narrative of Word and Table...I find thinking about worship in terms of content, structure, and style is a good way to organize our thoughts."
- Eugene Peterson: "Worship is the primary means by which we immerse ourselves in the rhythms and stories of God's work, get a feel for proper work, creation work...When we walk out of the place of worship we walk with fresh, recognizing eyes and a re-created, obedient heart into the world in which we are God's image participating in God's creation work. Everything we see, touch, feel, and taste carries within it the rhythms of "And God said ... and it was so ... and it was good...." We become adept at discerning the Jesus-signs and picking up on the Jesus-words that reveal the presence and the glory. We are more deeply in and at home in the creation than ever."
- Thomas Oden: "Worship is not finally a matter of serving or satisfying human feelings, but of serving and rightly glorifying God through song, proclamation, teaching, and acts of mercy."
- Abraham J. Heschel: "Worship is a way of seeing the world in the light of God."
- David Crowder: "Worship and justice go hand in hand. If what you're singing doesn't change what you do, what's the point of singing?"

CHAPTER ONE

What Do We Love?

EXERCISE

When you walk in the door on a Sunday morning, what are you hoping is going to happen to you? What should be true of the worship service to bring this about?

Introduction

While there are many things we hope for when we come to church on Sunday morning—community, pastoral care, teaching—in this study we are going to talk about the most fundamental purpose for gathering: worship. When we come to worship we bring our desires to love God and to be loved by him, to experience his love and be changed by it, to find ourselves in a community of love that God is creating, and to play a role in the story of love between God and his people. It shouldn't be surprising that worship is so deeply bound to love. In Deuteronomy, God begins to teach his people how to worship by saying, "Hear O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart with all your soul with all your might." (Deuteronomy 6:4-5) Everything that follows—all the Levitical codes, all the specifications for the tabernacle, all the Law—issues from this love for God.

So to talk about worship is not to talk about ideas, styles, or even music at all; to talk about worship is to talk about what we love. When we talk about worship together—when we debate which songs to use in the worship service and find ourselves embroiled in arguments about worship—we are exposing the most intimate desires of our hearts to each other.

In any healthy love relationship, our actions and choices both express our love and form our love. Our love finds expression in loving words and actions. Our love is also formed by regular actions that we commit to—such as conversations and date nights—which we carry out no matter how we are feeling toward our loved one. In the same

way, worship is a place for us to come to express our love for our God through our words, our songs, our actions, and even our physical worship space. And it is where we come to be formed into the sort of people who can love God deeply and richly by participating in regular practices that shape our love and us. We are going to look at these two complementary aspects of worship—the *expression* of our love and the *formation* of our love—and talk about them in terms of their scriptural sources and their lovely fruit.

Discussion

Worship: The Expression of Our Love

Worship is the expression of our love for God and our life with God.

1. Scriptural Source

This understanding of worship as the expression of our love is deeply biblical. The Scriptures depict worship as a place where God's people express the fullness of their lives with and the many aspects of their love for God. There are expressions of praise in Psalm 103:1, *Bless the LORD, O my soul, and all that is within me, bless his holy name; gratitude in Psalm 107:1, Give thanks to the LORD, for he is good; his love endures forever; and mourning in Psalm 88, Darkness is my closest friend. In the New Testament in Revelation, God's people worship in a highly expressive manner: In a loud voice they were saying: 'Worthy is the Lamb, who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and strength and honor and glory and praise!' (Revelation 5:12) The Bible expects God's people to be expressive in corporate worship.*

2. Lovely Fruit

Over time, the congregation that cultivates this healthy expressive aspect of worship will see beautiful fruit. The service will be in a language people can immediately understand. The music will be readily accessible and the pastor will preach in an approachable manner, helping us to make a connection to the text. And we will see the full range of human emotional experience brought before the Lord and submitted to his lordship. There

will be engagement with what is said, sung, and prayed. Worship will become a place of refuge, solace, consolation, and profound spiritual power.

DISCUSSION QUESTION

Which emotions are being expressed in our worship service? Do we have the healthy expression of our love for God, gratitude for his grace, and humility and trust in him even in the midst of grief?

Worship: The Formation of Our Love

Worship is also the formation of our love for and life with God.

1. Scriptural Source

This understanding of worship as the formation of our love is also deeply biblical. The Psalms urge and invite us to come and worship the Lord, to open our mouths, to give thanks, to wait for the Lord, and to sing joyfully to the Lord. The Psalms call us to these actions because we don't naturally do them. Have you ever heard the phrase, "Please stand for the call to worship," and thought, "I'd rather sit, thank you"? Cultivating formation in worship means saying, "Stand because you are being called into something and what is being formed in you is as important as what is being expressed by you."

Soon after God rescued his people from Egypt, they created a golden calf, a false god, to worship. So God said, "I will teach you how to worship and how to be a human being again. Here are practices for you to follow that will shape you into my people." In Deuteronomy 6:6-9, God tells his people, "And these words that I command you today shall be on your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise. You shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates." Lest you think this passage is about discipleship and not worship, understand that that distinction is almost completely absent in the Old Testament. God's commands to his people are all part of the worship vision of the Old Testament. And this worshiping life takes shape when they work, walk, talk, as well as when they gather in worship. So this text shows us that God recognizes there are times when we don't want to hear the Word of God, we don't want to talk about these things with our children,

and we don't want to hang them on little pieces of paper in front of our eyes. Worship is not only something coming out of us through expression, it is also something being formed into us. There is an expectation in the Bible that we need to be formed into a people who can worship.

2. Lovely Fruit

Over time, cultivating the formative aspect of worship will grow spiritual maturity and an understanding that God cares about what we do in worship. Our worship will include music that is rich and challenging. It will cultivate in us patience and trust in the Holy Spirit's work. It will free us from frustration and despair when we find that worship is not a rapturous emotional experience every single week. Instead, we can declare together, "God was present, I heard his word, and I know that he is at work in me." This is not an affective experience on one given Sunday; it is a lifetime of Sundays.

DISCUSSION QUESTION

What kinds of things are being formed in us in our worship service? Are we learning to confess our sin? Are we learning how to pray for and care for others? Are we learning the humility of putting our brothers' and sisters' needs before our own?

Lesson

Christian worship is both the formation and the expression of our deepest loves. (Psalm 51:7-13)

Psalm 51:15 says, *Oh Lord, open my lips, and my mouth will declare your praise.* In this passage we see that the only way we will properly express our love for God is if he forms that love in us.

Every worship service is forming us to express something. Is our worship service forming us to open our mouths and declare the praise of our Maker? Or is it forming us to see the world only as a set of principles for us to silently evaluate? If we desire biblical worship, we cannot ask worshipers to only express what is already in their hearts because that would not be forming our congregation into the kind of worshipers our God wants us to be. The Bible paints a beautiful picture of worship in which the expression of our love blossoms out of practices cultivated in obedience to the Scriptures. In the coming chapters we will talk about how our love is expressed and formed by Scripture.

Handout *What Do We Love?*

Exercise

When you walk in the door on a Sunday morning, what are you hoping is going to happen to you? What should be true of the service to make that happen?

Discussion Question

1. Which emotions are being expressed in our worship service? Do we have the healthy expression of our love for God, gratitude for his grace, and humility and trust in him even in the midst of grief?
2. What kinds of things are being formed in us in our worship service? Are we learning to confess our sin? Are we learning how to pray for and care for others? Are we learning the humility of putting our brothers' and sisters' needs before our own?

Lesson

Christian worship is both the formation and the expression of our deepest loves. (Psalm 51:7-13)

What are obstacles in our path to applying this lesson?

Glorious God,

It is our crown and glory of our souls to worship You. Give us knowledge of Your goodness, and make us over-awed by Your greatness. Crowns to give we have none, but what You have given, we return. Make us content to feel that everything is ours when it is Yours, and more fully ours when we have yielded it to You. We are bought by the blood of Jesus. Give us a new sense of it – may we come every day to its fountain, and every day be washed anew, that we may worship You always in Spirit and Truth. Amen.

CHAPTER FOUR

Liturgy: The Shape of Our Worship

EXERCISE

1. Write down an activity in your life that you do at least once a week or once a day.
2. What would happen if you stopped doing this activity?
3. If you continue in this activity faithfully, what do you hope will happen?
4. Can you recall specifically the last ten times you did this activity?

Introduction

In some circles, the word "liturgy" has a bad connotation. It can conjure up images of cold formality and rote worship. But "liturgy" comes from the Greek word *leitourgia*, which simply means the work (*ergon*) of the people (*leoi*). It is sometimes translated just as "service." For our purposes in this study, we are using the word "liturgy" to refer to the repeated corporate practices of a group of people.

Those from more informal churches might argue that their church does not have set worship practices because it is more spontaneous. But let's examine this claim. When an individual walks into a more youthful and energetic worship service in a less traditional building, with microphones on stage and drum sets rather than choir lofts, what will their experience be? In all likelihood, there will be some background music playing, either from a recording or from the band itself. Following that will be a greeting and some sort of invitation from someone on stage to worship. Then the band will begin to play a more modern worship song, by the end playing with heightened intensity. Following this will often be a question posed to the congregation in the form of a video or dramatic presentation, such as, "What is my purpose?" or, "Does God care about suffering?" Climactically, the pastor will come on stage (to a "podium" rather than a "pulpit") and address the congregation in an approachable,

relational way to teach the Scriptures. The sermon will end with a challenge for everyday life and the band will quietly re-emerge to lead the congregation in a final time of worship.

With some allowance for variation, this form will surely seem familiar to members or visitors of the growing number of informal evangelical churches. This description is in no way meant to be critical, but rather to illustrate the inescapable fact that every church has an order of worship that remains more or less constant from week to week and so, therefore, has a liturgy.

Discussion

The Power of Liturgy

The concern about liturgy in worship for many Christians is that they fear just "going through the motions." So worship that has been scripted ahead of time can feel artificial and ineffectual. But all the liturgies and routines in our lives are powerful and effectual, even when we are not paying attention, because of what they form in us over time.

ILLUSTRATION

Remember that liturgy is a word to describe the corporate practices of a group of people. So consider the liturgy of attending a professional sporting event or concert. The liturgy begins as we pull up to the arena or concert hall and look for parking. It may be that we actually pay for time in a parking lot, effectively buying tickets for our vehicles as well as for ourselves. As we enter the space, we look for vendors selling food or drinks and head there immediately (we know that we will not want to get up from the performance and risk missing anything). We proceed to our seats and either celebrate or bemoan our proximity to the performance. As the game or concert begins, we enter into the spirit of the event, raising our hands or

applauding at the appropriate times, standing in silence or removing our hats at the appropriate times, and becoming outraged or moved with emotion at the proper times dictated to us as a group by the liturgy of the evening. Finally, we will collectively stand up and gather our things, feeling either satisfaction that the order of events brought us toward the beatific vision for our community or discontent that it left us only wanting. (For further study on the liturgies in our lives, see *Desiring the Kingdom: Worship, Worldview, and Cultural Formation*, by James K. A. Smith)

This is only one of the many examples of liturgy in our lives. In all these liturgies—going to a concert, shopping for clothing, shopping for cars, or even dating—we can repeatedly participate in them to the point that we are not fully engaged with our actions. This can result in these liturgies forming us in ways that we don't realize. Liturgies are powerful forces of formation in our lives.

REFLECTING ON OUR LIVES

When we choose to enter into the liturgy of the mall, the liturgy of the sporting event, or the liturgy of social technologies, what kinds of strengths are being formed in us? What kinds of weaknesses are being formed in us? Is it possible for those strengths or weaknesses to be formed in us subconsciously?

The Hope of Liturgy

The power of liturgy also points us to the hope of liturgy. If we are humble enough to accept that our lives do have liturgies, realistic enough to embrace that our worship is liturgical by nature, and courageous enough to believe that God is at work in our lives, then we can begin to see the hope we have in the power of our liturgical practices: that if we are obedient in our practices of prayer and scripture in worship, the Holy Spirit promises to be at work in those routines and practices. He is not just at work in spontaneous moments, but also in liturgical ones.

ILLUSTRATION

The Bible repeatedly uses botanical and agricultural analogies to describe the Christian life. These metaphors (e.g., seeds, vines, branches, land, or cedars) imply that Christian

growth takes time and faithful practices. In fact, the botanical life is one in which we don't see the mechanism of growth with our eyes. We wait for it faithfully as we tend to the plant, but we only see the effects of the growth using photographs or our mind's eye as we remember the humble beginnings of our seedling.

In this way, the hope of the farmer is like the hope of the believer. While the growth may be so slow that we can't see it with our own eyes, we continue in our liturgical practices—sometimes with great care and sometimes as a matter of repetition—because we believe that, over time, God will bring the work to its full fruition.

REFLECTING ON OUR LIVES

Do we trust that God is at work in our worship service even if we don't feel the immediate results of stirring or inspiration?

Lesson

Christian worship is powerful and effective when we seek to make our worship liturgies obedient to the Scriptures. (Psalm 103:15-22)

God promises us that he is at work in the world and that his Word will not come back void. But it can be difficult for those who work for the church vocationally, as well as for lay worship leaders, to believe this because there can be a tremendous pressure to see immediate "results" in ministry. We want to see results that can be measured at an annual meeting. We want to see results that prove people have been emotionally moved by our 75-minute worship service. This can sometimes lead us to adopt an ethic of pragmatism. We look for what is working in other churches and what is drawing the most people and try to package these strategies for use in our own worship service.

However, having established that all of our churches have a liturgy, that these liturgies direct our emotional experiences, and that ultimately these liturgies are shaping us in certain ways, we can look at our worship services with new eyes. Looking for both expression and formation in our worship service, what do we see?

How do our worship liturgies form us? Take a few moments to think about the following questions.

Does the liturgy direct us to feel comfortable the same way the movie theatre makes us comfortable? Does the liturgy direct us to feel

moved the same way a concert gives us goose bumps? Does the liturgy direct us to examine our lives using the same criteria that advertisers or psychologists give us to examine our lives? Does the liturgy direct us to affirm our cultural idolatries?

Or

Does the liturgy of the worship service direct us to be joyful about the things that make God joyful? Does our worship direct us to grieve the things that make God grieve? Does our worship direct us to examine ourselves with the criteria

that God gives us to examine ourselves? Does our worship direct us to tear down our false hopes, and replace them with eschatological hope?

Handout Liturgy: The Shape of Our Worship

Exercise

1. Write down an activity in your life that you do at least once a week or once a day.
2. What would happen if you stopped doing this activity?
3. If you continue in this activity faithfully, what do you hope will happen?
4. Can you recall specifically the last ten times you did this activity?

Discussion Question

1. When we choose to enter into the liturgy of the mall, the liturgy of the sporting event, or the liturgy of social technologies, what kinds of strengths are being formed in us? What kinds of weaknesses are being formed in us? Is it possible for those strengths or weaknesses to be formed in us without our thinking about it?
2. Do we trust that God is at work in our worship service even if we don't feel the immediate results of stirring or inspiration?

Lesson

Christian worship is powerful and effective when we seek to make our worship liturgies obedient to the Scriptures. (Psalm 103:15-22)

What are obstacles in our path to applying this lesson?

Our Dear Lord,

Our souls long for communion with You – to have a precious sense of the mystery of Your Holiness. What blessedness to be like You, as much as it is possible for a creature to be like its Creator. Lord, give us more of Your likeness. Enlarge our souls to contain fullness of holiness. Let us climb up near to You, and love and plead and wrestle with You; for our hearts are wandering and aimless. Wrap our hearts in divine love, and keep us ever desiring You with our eyes fixed on Your holiness. Amen.

CHAPTER FIVE

Liturgy: The Practices of Our Worship

EXERCISE

Think of an important person in your life and what you do to show this person that you love him or her. Write down a favorite memory with that person.

Introduction

In the same way that beautiful relationships are made strong and healthy by various practices of love and service, so also our experiences in worship blossom out of being rooted in healthy practices.

Discussion

Five Types of Practices in Worship

We should build five kinds of practices into our worship that will help tend our relationship with God and hopefully bear the fruit of some beautiful experiences of worship with God. These practices are not mutually exclusive; they will overlap and intermingle.

1. Word Practices

Our worship should cultivate in us a deep knowledge and love of the Scriptures. This means that worship should be focused around the Bible, sermons should be expository, and our songs should put God's words into the mouths of his people.

ILLUSTRATION

One of my first jobs after graduation from college was as a music director in a small parish church in Brooklyn. The pastor had a standard liturgy each week that included an Old Testament reading, a reading from the Psalms, and a Gospel reading. I wasn't used to this much Scripture reading in a church service

and I couldn't believe they were reading a whole chapter of an Old Testament book and a whole psalm as well as something from the Gospels. This went on week after week and each week when the readings began I prepared myself to be bored. But when I went home to worship with my parents in my home church and there were no set scripture readings, I realized how much I had grown to love hearing God's Word read to me. I loved having the opportunity to meditate on it and have the words echo in my ears throughout the week. I began to understand what David meant in Psalm 119 when he says he loves the law of God and meditates on it day and night.

DISCUSSION QUESTION

Do we make time in our worship service for the reading of God's Word? Are the scriptures clearly present in our prayers and song lyrics?

2. Praise Practices

Our worship should cultivate in us the practice of praising God for who he is and what he has done. This means that our services should include prayers of praise to God, corporate praise music, and testimonies of God's work in our lives.

ILLUSTRATION

Consider the story of Job. He was faithful to God and God blessed him. But then God took the blessings from him and gave him trials of many kinds. Job's wife told him that it made sense for him to praise God in good times, but now he should curse God. Job responded, "Though he slay me, I will hope in him." (Job 13:15) We learn from Job that praising God doesn't always flow from an expressive emotional experience for good that God has done in our lives, but that it is also a discipline we need to cultivate. Or as the hymn puts it, "Take my voice and let me sing, always only, for my king."

QUESTION

Does our worship service proclaim praises for God's character? Does it also bear witness to the work he has done in our lives?

3. Prayer Practices

Our worship should include prayers of all kinds. This includes verbal prayers as well as meditative and contemplative prayers. And the prayers should reflect the whole range of emotions that are offered in the Psalms.

ILLUSTRATION

A common view of prayer is that it is a laundry list of needs that we bring to God. But if we look at the Psalms we see prayers of lament, doubt, joy, anger, praise, and confession as well as petition. Ambrose of Milan, a church leader in the time of the gladiators, called the Psalms "God's gymnasium of prayer." When we go the gym there are a variety of machines and exercises available to us. We tend to gravitate toward those machines or exercises that come naturally to us, not the exercises that are difficult but equally necessary. But, if we are wise, we make use of all these exercises and machines in order to become physically fit so that we can play with our family, live a healthy life, and prepare ourselves for all that life will throw at us. In the same way, the Psalms offer us many different prayers that express a variety of emotions and experiences. But we tend to pray the Psalms that come more naturally to us. Worship should teach us the languages of lament, anger, joy, and doubt so that when life throws experiences our way that bring these emotions and experiences, we know how to express them before God.

QUESTION

Is prayer a filler in our worship service for transitioning us between events or is it a way for us to bring the whole range of our emotions and experiences before the Lord?

4. Action Practices

The Bible connects our worship to actions of love and justice. So our worship should cultivate opportunities to show compassion to the poor and needy among us. This includes giving our money away to be used by God for these purposes as well as praying for the needs of the

poor, the orphans, the widows, the vulnerable, the sick, and the lonely. (See sidebar for more support of this point.)

ILLUSTRATION

In Isaiah 1:15-17, God refused to receive his people's worship because their *hands are full of blood*. He said he would bring judgment on them unless they *cease to do evil, learn to do good; seek justice, correct oppression; bring justice to the fatherless, plead the widow's cause*. James 1:27 reads, *Religion that is pure and undefiled before God, the Father, is this: to visit orphans and widows in their affliction, and to keep oneself unstained from the world*. There is a consistent message in the Bible that our worship is tied to our actions, especially toward the needy, and that we neglect this at our peril.

QUESTION

Does our worship service include opportunities to pray for peace, for our community, and for God to renew our zeal to care for the "least of these"?

5. Sacrament Practices

The sacraments are visible signs of inward grace. And they provide opportunities to participate with our bodies in worship. The practices of baptism and communion in particular are instructive and participatory, and provide predictable, beautiful, and familiar structure to our worship and to our year. Whether our church takes communion and baptizes weekly, monthly, or yearly, the sacraments should be part of our worship.

ILLUSTRATION

In Matthew 28:19 and 20, Jesus tells his disciples to make disciples and baptize them *in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you*. He also gave his disciples at the Last Supper his body and blood and instructed them to *do this in remembrance of me*. (Luke 22:19) Jesus gave us sacramental worship. He did not only see our minds and emotions as needing to come under his lordship, but also our bodies.

Reflection

Are there ways that our church can incorporate the beauty of communion and baptism by talking about them or participating in them?

Lesson

Christian worship is made healthy and strong by faithful cultivation of biblical practices.
(1 Corinthians 12:1, 4-7, 13-20)

First Corinthians 12 gives us a picture of the body of Christ where every member has gifts to contribute to the good of all. Through much of history, many people had no choice of where to worship; they worshiped in the one church in their town or village. This tended to create congregations that included people who gravitated to a variety of practices, each bringing their varied gifts to bless

and sharpen one another. Now, however, because we are not limited by geography, we tend to choose churches and gravitate to worship services that are comfortable to us and where like-minded people worship. The people with strong word practices gather together, and the people with strong praise practices worship with each other. But when this happens, we miss out on the varied gifts God gives to his body. Instead of sharpening each other, we affirm each other's idolatries and ignore our collective failures. We need our brothers and sisters to use their varied gifts in worship for our benefit. For instance, we might come to church wanting to experience the joyful release of praising God while he wants us to experience giving our money away. We might want to be intellectually stimulated while God wants us to be still and meditate. God can use others to do this work in our lives. God wants to build us together into something stronger and more beautiful than what we could be alone.

Handout: Liturgy: The Practices of Our Worship

Exercise

Think of an important person in your life and what you do to show this person that you love him or her. Write down a favorite memory with that person.

Discussion Question

1. Do we make time in our worship service for the reading of God's Word? Are the scriptures clearly present in our prayers and song lyrics?
2. Does our worship service proclaim praises for God's character? Does it also bear witness to the work he has done in our lives?
3. Is prayer a filler in our worship service for transitioning us between events or is it a way for us to bring the whole range of our emotions and experiences before the Lord?
4. Does our worship service include opportunities to pray for peace, for our community, and for God to renew our zeal to care for the "least of these"?
5. Are there ways that our church can incorporate the beauty of communion and baptism by talking about them or participating in them?

Lesson

Christian worship is made healthy and strong by faithful cultivation of biblical practices.
(1 Corinthians 12:1, 4-7, 13-20)

What are obstacles in our path to applying this lesson?

Merciful God,

May our religion be always firmly rooted in Your word. May our understanding be divinely informed, our affections holy and heavenly, our motives pure, and our hearts never wrong before You. Deliver us from the natural darkness of our own minds – from the corruptions of our hearts – from the temptations to which we are exposed – from the daily snares that attend us. Until we finish our course with joy, may we pursue it with diligence and humility. Amen.

CHAPTER EIGHT

Music: A Gift We Use

EXERCISE

In chapter 6 we learned about different kinds of worship language. They were:

Adoration – We say to God, “I love you.”

Confession – We say to God, “I’m sorry.”

Thanksgiving – We say to God, “Thank you.”

Supplication – We say to God, “Help me.”

Lament – We ask of God, “Why?”

Commission – We ask of God, “What can I do?”

Take a few minutes to write down a song that exemplifies each one.

Introduction

The typical dialogue about kinds of worship music focuses on whether a church sings “traditional” or “contemporary” music. These two categories of music are not adequate for the conversation. In this chapter we will look at a better framework for types of music, how to define each, and why we include them in our worship. This is not an exclusive nor is it an all-encompassing list but will hopefully give us a broader and richer musical language with which to communicate with each other and God.

Discussion

Service Music

Service Music is essentially the elements of the liturgy set to music. Many churches sing instead of simply saying the Doxology, the Gloria Patri, and the Prayer for Illumination each week in their services. These songs can be used to mark the great occasions of our worship service. We lift up our prayers together and sing the Doxology. Before we open up the Word we sing together the Prayer for Illumination. God sends us out and we sing the Gloria Patri.

1. Useful for the Formative Power of Memorization and Embodiment

Service music has a formative purpose in our worship lives. These songs give us words to memorize with the hope that these words will shape us into the kinds of people who personify or embody the ideas they express. Service music may also provide us a means of expressing our love for God at times when we don’t have words of our own.

ILLUSTRATION

I direct a children’s choir at our church. Often after practice when the parents come to pick up their children and the kids are stomping out in a big hurry, the parents say, “Go thank Maestro Isaac before you go.” The kids come up to me, often fidgety and sweaty, and say quickly, “Thank you, Maestro Isaac,” before flying out the door. I could ask them, “Was that really an authentic expression of thanks that you gave me just now?” But that’s not necessarily the point. We have our children say “thank you” and “you’re welcome” and “hello” with the hope that it will shape them into the kinds of people who are thankful and gracious.

2. Useful for Connecting Us to the Church Around the World

These songs are also ones that are shared by believers from all over the world. When we sing them, we join the one holy, apostolic, and catholic Church. We are lifting up our voices with Protestants, Roman Catholics, Americans, people in the Southern Hemisphere, Northern Hemisphere, and all over the world.

DISCUSSION QUESTION

Does our church include Service Music in its service? Why or why not?

Hymns and Anthems

Hymns and anthems are songs written with a versified form, to be sung to worship God for who he is, what he has done, and what he will do. Hymns and anthems have a lyrical, poetic quality where a certain theme is developed throughout so the climax of the song happens with the lyrics rather than the instrumentation.

1. *Useful for Turning Us from Ourselves to Praising God for Who He Is*

Most hymns and anthems begin with or focus on an aspect of God's character, such as his kingship, his holiness, or his love. Because they take this theme and look at it from various perspectives, they allow us time to meditate on who God is and what he has done in this area as we sing multiple verses about it.

ILLUSTRATION

The hymn "All Creatures of Our God and King" recounts how each part of creation gives glory to the Lord, and at the end it climaxes with, "Let all things their creator bless, and worship him in humbleness." "In Christ Alone" starts out by saying that our hope is found in Christ alone. Then it reminds us that Jesus died, but we can hope in that. It ends with, "No guilt in life, no fear in death, this is the power of Christ in me." It has its own momentum. These songs allow us to turn for a few minutes from ourselves and reflect on our God's character.

2. *Useful for Turning Us from Ourselves to Praising God for What He Has Done*

Even if we don't believe or feel in that moment that God is who the hymn says he is or does what the anthem says he has done, the truth isn't any less true. So these songs provide us with a connection to what God is doing and remind us of what he has done as we sing the true words regardless of how we feel. This is true even for the unbeliever.

ILLUSTRATION

The woman who played the piano at the church I grew up in told me that there were times she went to church when she couldn't even sing. On some days she felt that if she sang the words to the songs she would be

telling lies because she did not feel them in her heart that day. That troubled me, even at age fifteen. She implied that there are times when we believe what we sing completely and without doubt. It also seemed to mean that if we only believe the words a little bit, maybe we should only sing a little bit. It occurred to me that the best things we sing in church are true no matter how we feel.

If the best songs we sing are true regardless of how much we believe them, then even unbelievers can sing these hymns and anthems. They can sing the words and it gives them a chance to reflect on these truths and be connected to who God is and what he is doing as well.

DISCUSSION QUESTION

Does our worship include hymns and anthems that praise God for who he is and what he has done in its service? Or do we only sing songs about how we feel?

Psalms and Scripture Songs

These songs are either a Psalm or other Scripture verbatim—or close to it—put to music, such as "Create in Me a Clean Heart," which is simply the words of Psalm 51 put to music, or "All People That on Earth Do Dwell," which is Psalm 100.

1. *Useful for Memorizing and Internalizing God's Holy Scriptures*

All worship songs should reflect truths from the Scriptures. But Psalms and Scripture songs start with the Scriptures in a way that helps us to learn and memorize its language. These songs can be useful to children and adults in internalizing scripture to be used when we need to remember the words.

2. *Useful as an Act of Obedience*

Ephesians 15:19 tells us to *address one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs. We obey God's injunction to do this with these songs.*

DISCUSSION QUESTION

Which of our songs are the Scriptures set to music?

Devotional Music

Unlike hymns, devotional songs are not so much about who God is and what He has done, but rather about our reaction to what God has done in our lives. They are songs about what we do, what we feel, and our reaction to who God is.

1. *Useful for Better Contextualizing God's Work into Our Life Experiences*

We have an opportunity to meditate on God's work in the world when we sing hymns and anthems. Devotional music gives us the opportunity to express what we think and how we feel about that work.

ILLUSTRATION

I went to a formal church for a couple of years after college where we sang with the organ from the hymnal. At the new members meeting, the pastor explained that this church sang all hymns because hymns tend to be more about God while choruses are more about us. That disturbed me. First, because we can open the hymnal and find many hymns that are about our response to God. Hymns like "Just as I am" are songs that are about what we bring to God. He also seemed to be saying that there is no biblical precedent for us praising God for what he has done in our lives and how we feel about that. But we can open the Psalms and find many subjective, emotional, and deeply personal prayers to God.

1. *Useful for Following David's Model of Singing a New Song to Our God*

We have seen how the Psalms give us a precedent for coming to God and bringing our feelings to him. David frequently told his story. He said he waited for the Lord, God inclined to him, heard his cry, brought him up, and at the end David sang a new song. This is a beautiful part of Christian worship. Worship isn't only a place for expressing our theology and doctrines about God, it is also a place for telling God about our complete and real selves and all of our emotions.

DISCUSSION QUESTION

Does our music include opportunities for us to bring our full range of reactions to God before him?

Lesson

In Christian worship, we use the gift of music in its many forms to glorify God. (1 John 4:7-12)

Handout: Music: A Gift We Use

Exercise

We talked about different kinds of worship language in chapter 6. As a reminder they were:

- Adoration** – We say to God, "I love you."
- Confession** – We say to God, "I'm sorry."
- Thanksgiving** – We say to God, "Thank you."
- Supplication** – We say to God, "Help me."
- Lament** – We ask of God, "Why?"
- Commission** – We ask of God, "What can I do?"

Take a few minutes to write down a song that exemplifies each one.

Discussion Question

1. Does our church include Service Music in its service? Why or why not?
2. Does our worship include Hymns and Anthems that praise God for who he is and what he has done in its service? Or do we only sing songs about how we feel?
3. Which of our songs are the Scriptures set to music?
4. Does our music include opportunities for us to bring our full range of reactions to God before him?

Lesson

In Christian worship, we use the gift of music in its many forms to glorify God. (1 John 4:7-12)

What are obstacles in our path to applying this lesson?

O Savior,
We are slow to learn, prone to forget, and weak to climb. We are in the foothills of faith, rather than the heights. Make it our chiefest joy to study You, to gaze on You, to sit like Mary at Your feet, to lean like John upon Your breast, to appeal like Peter to Your love, and to count like Paul all other things rubbish. Let not our faith cease from seeking You until our faith vanishes into sight. Amen.

What We Can Learn from How Other Traditions Worship

Pentecostal: Pentecostal worship intends to follow the unexpected, supernatural experience of Pentecost and other stories from the book of Acts. There is a great freedom for worshippers to express themselves with their voices, bodies, and spiritual gifts such as speaking in tongues, prophesying, etc. How are we making room for people to express a passionate joy and devotion to God? Are our worship times structured in ways that keep out the sometimes-unpredictable movements of the Spirit or in ways that facilitate the Spirit's movement in and among us?

Quaker: Quaker meetings avoid anything that would give the impression that one place or person are somehow more holy/chosen than others or might distract worshippers from intently listening to God. Thus a Quaker meeting house is intentionally sparse, and those meeting will typically sit facing one another in "expectant waiting," listening in silence for God's "still-small voice." When one feels they have heard from God, they may stand and share it with the community (or not, if it is personal or for another time). Rather than reciting creeds, Quakers write probing queries. How does our worship make space for God to speak and guide our time together? What might be distracting us from encountering God? What manifestations of our worship time become idols?

Orthodox: Eastern/Greek Orthodox churches tend to be multi-sensory. You will notice many visual images/icons, symbols of abundance and majesty, etc. You will smell incense. You will hear bells and oftentimes the acoustics lend themselves to an ethereal sound that communicates heavenly mystery. You will taste the bread and wine. How are we engaging all of our senses as we seek to be formed through our bodies and encounter God?

Catholic/High Church: These churches tend to have a highly structured liturgy. The intent is to have a sensed connection with churches all around the world and so that people can have the truths and practices of the liturgy deeply impressed upon their minds and souls. Repetition helps memory and may allow worshippers to be less concerned about what's coming next so that they are free to discern God within the liturgy. How are we helping people to remember deeply the Story of God and Way of Christ and impressing those truths deep into their souls? How are we balancing a desire to keep people interested and "on their toes" with creating an environment where people can be conscious of God rather than self-conscious?

Emergent Movement: The emergent movement emphasized participatory, tactile, creative worship experiences. There may be prayer stations, interactive conversations, and a variety of symbols both ancient and original. Oftentimes, these churches found ways of integrating worship practices from throughout church history, seeking to regain a connection to the early church while leaving room for innovation and authenticity. How are we encouraging the church to be participants in—not consumers of—the worship experience? How are we taking from the best of our history and inspiring creativity and innovation?

Contemporary Evangelical: These churches mainly reacted against what they perceived to be empty ritual that did not speak to newer generations. They developed services with "seekers" in mind, avoiding "Christianese" and other practices that might give increasingly unchurched generations a sense of culture-shock. Music sought to be in a musical language that unchurched people could understand and reflect the importance of faith to be personal, relational, and emotional. How might our worship services tear down barriers to the unchurched? How are we shaking people out of empty ritual and making space for new experiences and emotion?

Creating a Worship Space

Take a look at each of these images. What is gained in each worship space? What theology is communicated? What practical benefits/problems might their be? How would you design a worship space to accomplish our worship goals?

Outdoor Worship



House Church Worship

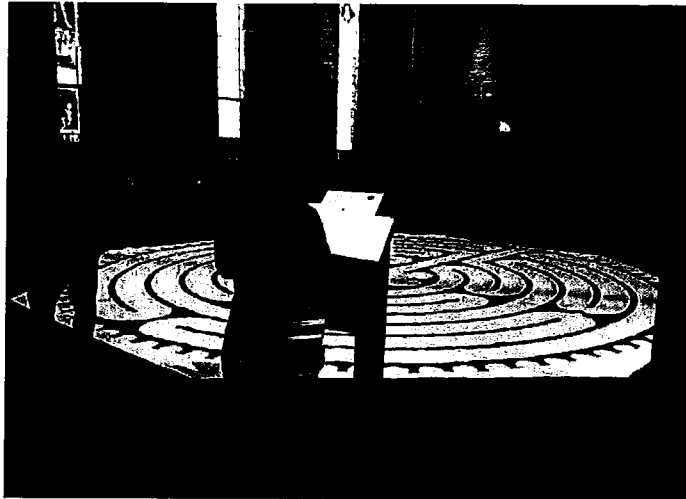
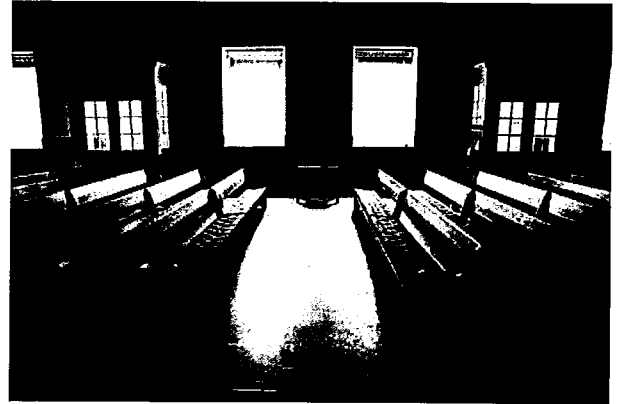


Dinner Worship



Worship in the Round

Quaker Meeting House



**Worship with Prayer Stations/
Movement**



Simple Orthodox Space



More Elaborate Orthodox