



A COMMUNITY OF PRAISE AND WORSHIP

Lessons 1 to 12

Vicar's Message

As the church prays, it must also learn to adore the God that they pray to. The church, therefore, must grow to become a community of praise and worship. It is a natural progression. In trusting God, we come to a point of praising Him. Our lives now revolve around Him and worship begins.

Worship demands our entire life and lifestyle because the God that we worship is worthy of it all. Praise (the singing and celebrating) is a vital part of worship. Too often, Christians like to call the praise part worship. In the lack of precision of language, it dilutes the gravity of True worship in our lives. Some of us are not too good at singing and dancing before the Lord. But that should not stop us from doing so. It is good for us to learn to do it more so that we become comfortable doing it. Worship includes everything – reading the Word, praying, trusting Him, tithing, changing our lifestyles and behaviours..... It is lifelong.

It is good for us in this part of the study to know more about how the church grows to be a community of praise and worship. It is communal as the church is not an individual but a community. So, let us grow together.

Revd Barry Leong

What is True and Genuine WORSHIP?

“The true, the genuine worship is when man, through his spirit, attains to friendship and intimacy with God. True and genuine worship is not to come to a certain place; it is not to go through a certain ritual or liturgy; it is not even to bring certain gifts.

True worship is when the spirit, the immortal and invisible part of man, speaks to and meets with God, who is immortal and invisible.”

William Barclay

Church as a Community of Praise & Worship 1

The Type of Worshippers God Seeks

“God is trying to call us back to that for which He created us, to worship Him and to enjoy Him forever” - A. W. Tozer

The word ‘worship’ is a contentious subject in some churches. People have left church because the worship is too loud, or too liturgical, or not up to their expectations. Churches have split because members quarreled over what type of songs should be sung, whether worshippers should speak in tongues, prophesy, etc. during the worship time.

To many believers, worship is nothing more than what they do once a week at the worship service or what happen during the 30-minute of singing at the beginning of the service. So, what is the biblical understanding of worship and what type of worshippers does God look for?

True Worship is to Revere & Honor God

The word ‘worship’ comes from an old English word which means ‘worth-ship’ or ‘worthiness’. It implies that the act of worship comes from an inner reverence for God and a desire to honor Him because He is worthy.

Throughout the bible, to worship God is to have a reverent devotion to Him because He is the Great and Mighty God. In the OT, God’s people were commanded not to worship or bow down to idols but to worship or obey Jehovah alone as nothing and no one can be compared to Him (Isaiah 45: 5-6). In all the references to true worship, the focus is not on the worshipper and what he / she wants; but on God, who He is and what He expects from His people.

In the NT, 5 Greek words describe what true worship of God entails.

- *Proskuneo*, the most frequently used word for worship, and the word Jesus used when talking to the Samaritan woman in John 4. It describes the posture of humbly prostrating before God out of reverence and adoration.
- *Sebomai*, to revere, to be awed by God.
- *Sebazomai*, to give honor to God.
- *Latreuo*, to serve, to render religious service or homage with no expectation of reward.
- *Eusebeo*, to be pious.

True Worship is Not What We Do Outwardly but Who We Are in Our Inner Being

John 4 highlights a shift in the worship of God from physical to spiritual, from outward form to heart condition, from rites and rituals, offering of sacrifices to inner devotion and reverence for God. The Samaritan woman was concerned with where the right place of worship should be (John 4: 20-24).

Jesus responded that the worship of God is not restricted to the physical space and building. He pointed the Samaritan woman to the new worship He would inaugurate; “But the hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshippers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father is seeking such people to worship Him.” (John 4: 23, ESV)

True worshippers are those who worship God not just outwardly through acts of piety and only within the confines of the church. God is Spirit and we must worship Him in our spirit, that is, in our inner being.

True worship is not about what we do once a week in church or what happen during the time of praise; whether we follow the liturgy faithfully, clap and raise our hands or behave ecstatically. What is important is that our heart be worshipful & our inner being is devoted to God; desiring to bring Him glory & honor.

We are not called to worship God only in one specific place, on a specific day, during a specific time slot. We are called to worship God, that is, to revere & honor Him, day and night, 7 days a week, wherever we are; at home, in school, in the office, in our relationships, in our times of rest and recreation, etc. Our words, our actions, our conduct must reflect a deep reverence or a holy fear of God and a readiness to submit to His will and word. True worship is to bring praise, honor and glory to God's Name with our whole life. That is the kind of worshippers God is seeking.

For Cell Group Discussion / Personal Reflection

Text: John 4: 7-26

Topic: What is Essential in True Worship?

1. The Worship Service is the time when God's people gather to give Him praise and honor. Jesus said that when 2 or 3 are gathered in His Name, He will be there in their midst. What are some behavior that we should refrain from when we gather to worship because they are dishonoring to God?
2. What are the three areas the Samaritan woman fail to see or understand (vv. 19-20, 22)? In what ways are we like the Samaritan woman?
3. What did Jesus say is true worship and what type of worshippers does God seek (21-24)? Who did Jesus say He is (25-26)?
4. What are the essential characteristics of a true worshipper and do you see yourself as a true worshipper? What does it mean for you to serve and honour God at home, in your workplace / school, and with your pre-believing friends and loved ones?

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Church as a Community of Praise & Worship 2

We Cannot Be True Worshippers Unless We Believe the Truth about Jesus

“To worship God in truth is to recognize Him for who He is and to recognize ourselves for what we are.” - Brother Lawrence

Unlike the other gospel writers, John used the Greek word *aletheia*, translated ‘truth’, many times in his gospel (noun 25X, adjective 23X). The reference to truth is often linked to Jesus; who He is and the truths of His death and resurrection.

John said Jesus is the Word that became flesh; “the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth” (John 1: 14). The Law was given through Moses but; “grace and truth came through Jesus Christ” (John 1: 17).

In Jesus’ conversation with the Samaritan woman in John 4, Jesus said true worshippers are those who worship God ‘in spirit and truth’. He also told those who believed in Him that; “you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free” (John 8: 32). Of significance is what Jesus said of Himself; “I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me” (John 14: 6).

True worship has to do with our response to who Jesus is and that only through Him we can have eternal life. We can only worship God ‘in spirit and truth’ when we accept and believe that, Jesus is the Son of God who came as man, to give His life for our sins on the Cross. And because He is God, He resurrected from the dead and ascended to heaven.

When Jesus breathed His last breath on the Cross, the curtain that separated the holy of holies from the rest of the Temple was torn apart; “And behold, the curtain of the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom. And the earth shook, and the rocks were split.” (Matt 27: 51). This important event is recorded in Matthew, Mark & Luke. The tearing of the curtain from top to bottom signifies that the way to God’s holy presence is now opened by the death of Jesus. By His blood our sins are forgiven and we can now enter God’s holy presence to worship Him.

True worship begins when we believe the truth about Jesus, who He is and what He had done on the Cross. To be true worshippers, we must be born again!

Unfortunately, we live in times when many baptized believers do not know or do not believe who Jesus is and what He had done for sinners to have eternal life. They do not acknowledge the uniqueness of Christ and the distinctiveness of the Christian faith. Many reject the truth of Jesus’ resurrection because to them it is illogical and humanly impossible. In a plural society like Singapore, there are also Christians who believe that Jesus is no different from the founders of other religions; He is just a man, a good teacher and a miracle worker.

Friends, how can we worship God if we reject the truth that it is the blood of the Son of God that makes it possible for us to enter God’s holy presence?

A. W. Tozer in his book *Whatever Happened to Worship?* lamented that there are all kinds of substitutes for true worship in this time and age. He emphasized that true worship demands the new birth, that we must be born again. Tozer said; “Something wonderful and miraculous and

life-changing takes place within the human soul when Jesus Christ is invited in to take His rightful place. That is exactly what God anticipated when He wrought the plan of salvation. He intended to make worshippers out of rebels; He intended to restore to men and women the place of worship which our first parents (Adam & Eve) knew when they were created.”

True worship is possible only when Christ is at the center of our lives. Some of us, especially those who were baptized at birth, may be Christian in name, or Christian by habit, but not Christian in the heart. We need to be born again in order to be in God’s Kingdom and to worship Him now and throughout eternity. Do you have the new life and are you born again? If no, would you like to invite Jesus into your heart now?

For Cell Group Discussion / Personal Reflection

Text: John 3: 1-18

Topic: To Worship God, We Must Be Born Again.

1. Who is Nicodemus and what religious group did he belong to (3: 1, 10)? What is known about this group?
2. What did Jesus repeatedly tell Nicodemus (3, 5, 7)? What was Jesus referring to by ‘Kingdom of God’ (3) and ‘born of water and the Spirit’ (5)?
3. Who did Jesus say He is and what is the result of believing in Him (15, 16-18)? How would you explain John 3: 16-18 to your pre-believing friends?
4. To be born again is to believe that Jesus, the Son of God, had died for your sins and to invite Him into your heart. What had led you to Jesus and to believe in Him? / Share with others in the group your born-again decision.
5. End the session with a time of thanksgiving for what Jesus had done on the cross for our sins. The group may want to sing or listen to the hymn, ‘O for a Thousand Tongues to Sing.’ Charles Wesley wrote this hymn to commemorate the 1st anniversary of his conversion to Christ.

O for a Thousand Tongues to Sing

*O for a thousand tongues to sing
My great Redeemer's praise,
The glories of my God and King,
The triumphs of His grace.*

*Jesus! The name that charms our fears,
That bids our sorrows cease,
'Tis music in the sinner's ears,
'Tis life and health and peace.*

*He breaks the power of canceled sin,
He sets the prisoner free;
His blood can make the foulest clean;
His blood availed for me.*

*He speaks, and, listening to His voice,
New life the dead receive,
The mournful, broken hearts rejoice,
The humble poor believe.*

*My gracious Master and my God,
Assist me to proclaim,
To spread through all the earth abroad,
The honors of Thy name.*

*To God all glory, praise, and love
be now and ever given
by saints below and saints above,
the Church in earth and heaven.*

(Charles Wesley)

NOTES

Church as a Community of Praise & Worship 3

Do You Know God Whom You Worship?

“I am the LORD, and there is no other; apart from me, there is no God. I will strengthen you, though you have not acknowledged me, so that from the rising of the sun to the place of its setting, people may know there is none besides me. I am the LORD, and there is no other.”
(Isaiah 45: 5-6, NIV)

Surveys conducted by the Pew Center Research (US) in 2014 showed that there is an increasing number of Christians who do not believe in the existence of God. Only two-thirds or 63% of those in mainline Protestant churches said they are certain God exists, down from 73% in 2007. A similar trend is seen among Catholics as well: 64% said they believe with certainty God exists, compared with 72% in 2007. If church worshippers don't believe in the existence of God, then who and what are they worshipping?

We cannot assume that Christians in Singapore believe in God's existence and know who He is either. Many in a plural society like Singapore believe that the God of the bible is one of many gods and it is up to them to choose which of the gods they want to pray to. Professing believers also claimed that the universal God has revealed Himself in different forms to different people's groups and all religions point to the same God, which is absolutely false.

Increasing number of younger believers, those 40 years and below, both in the West and in Singapore, do not acknowledge God as the Creator. Others believe that the God of the OT is a God of wrath and there are even churches that don't encourage their members to read the OT.

Can the Church be a community of praise and true worship if her members do not know anything about God or hold all kinds of misconception about Him?

There are fundamental truths about God which all true worshippers need to know and be ready even to die for. The bible is clear that the God we worship is not one of many gods; He is God Most High and no one, no other god, or power, or spirit can be compared to Him.

Another fundamental truth is that He is the Creator; He created the earth and the universe, everything seen and unseen. And because He is the Creator, He is Sovereign, He rules over all that He has created. As the Sovereign God, He answers to no one but everyone has to answer to Him.

The bible also describes God as all-powerful & all-knowing and there is nothing that is impossible to Him. Even though He has absolute power over the world, He is not a tyrannical God. He is a God whose love is steadfast, unconditional and without measure. He is perfect in love, in righteousness and in holiness; no evil comes from Him and no one who is evil / sinful can stand before Him.

To be true worshippers, we not only should know the fundamental truths about the God we worship; we also need to know Him personally. In the OT, God's people were rebellious because they forgot their God; they failed to know His attributes & character, they also failed to know Him relationally and they forgot what He had done for them.

They set their gaze on idols, the gods of the pagans, instead of on Yahweh who had brought them out of bondage to the Promised Land. The servants of God, especially the prophets, often had to refocus their attention on God and reminded them of who He is and what He had done.

For us to accord to God the worship He deserves we need to know Him and see Him in His glory and majesty. We need to set our gaze on Him and not on something / someone else.

Brother Lawrence, known for his total devotion to God, wrote in his book, *'The Practice of the Presence of God'*; "Let us occupy ourselves entirely in knowing God. The more we know Him, the more we will desire to know Him. As love increases with knowledge, the more we know God, the more we will truly love Him. We will learn to love Him equally in times of distress or in times of great joy." Praise the Lord!

For Cell Group Discussion / Personal Reflection

Text: Isaiah 40: 9-31

Topic: How Great & Awesome is Our God

1. If a pre-believer were to ask you to tell him about your God, how would you describe God to him? How sure are you that God exists and that He is the Creator?
2 – very sure; 1 – not sure; 0 – don't believe at all.
2. What are the three things the prophet Isaiah ask Israel to behold (40: 9-10)?
3. Isaiah reminded Israel of God's supremacy, power & tender-heartedness. List 7 attributes that Isaiah has described about God in these verses. Which part of Isaiah 40: 9-31 speaks to you most? Why?
4. Like Israel our gaze may be set on something else and we may worship, that is, trust, honor and serve idols instead of God. What 'idols' do 21st century Christians bow to which lead us away from God?
5. True worship requires us to know about God and to know Him personally. How can you grow in knowledge of God and to know Him more each day?
6. End the session with a time of praise and adoration. The group may want to sing or listen to the song "I Stand in Awe of You".

I Stand in Awe of You

You are beautiful beyond description
Too marvelous for words,
Too wonderful for comprehension,
Like nothing ever seen or heard.
Who can grasp your infinite wisdom?
Who can fathom the depth of your love?
You are beautiful beyond description,
Majesty enthroned above.

And I stand, I stand in awe of you.
I stand, I stand in awe of you.
Holy God to whom all praise is due,
I stand in awe of you.

About the Song

Mark Altrogge who wrote the lyrics, shared: “Around that time I had been reading *The Holiness of God* by R.C. Sproul, *The Knowledge of the Holy* by A.W. Tozer, and *The Attributes of God* by Stephen Charnock.

I was particularly blown away to learn that God is an infinite being, and infinite in each of His attributes. He is infinitely holy. Infinitely powerful. Infinitely loving. Infinitely wise.

In fact, because He is infinite, there will always be things about Himself that only He knows. Throughout eternity, those He redeemed will never come to an end of seeing new vistas of His glory, majesty and beauty.”

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Church as a Community of Praise & Worship 4

True Worship is to Bring Honor to our Heavenly Father

“No detail of your life is too insignificant for your heavenly Father’s attention; no circumstance is so big that He cannot control it.” - Jerry Bridges

The gospel of John, written primarily to believers rather than non-believers, reminds us of who Christ is and assures us of who we are because of Jesus’ death on the cross. John started his gospel proclaiming: “But to all who did receive Him, who believed in His name, He gave the right to become children of God, who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God.” (John 1: 12- 13)

When we invite Jesus into our lives we become children of God Most High. Jesus did not die so that we may become members of a church. Jesus died so that we will become children of God, co-heirs with Christ (Romans 8: 17). What a great privilege! God is Father to those who believe in Jesus; to worship God is to know Him as our Father.

A key distinction between Christian worship and worship in other religions is, through Christ, we are called to be in a relationship with God, a Father-child relationship, the closest and most intimate of relationships. We are not called to be devotees but to be sons and daughters of God.

As our Father, God takes upon Himself to care for us; to protect us and to provide for our needs. As our Father, God is always there for us and with us. He listens to our cries of frustrations as well as of joy. He is concerned about our future, our growth in maturity and how we live our lives. And as our Father, He believes in us and challenges us to go beyond our potential.

So what type of worship should we, as children of God, give to our Father?

Accord to our Heavenly Father Respect & Honor.

As God’s beloved children, we should always approach our Father with respect and in an attitude of submission. For those who are parents, we certainly will not tolerate having our children bossing us around, giving us instructions or throwing tantrums when they don’t get what they want. Such behavior from children are considered childish and spoilt.

Unfortunately, some of us behave like spoilt brats in our relationship with God. We treat God like our servant, telling Him what we want done and expecting Him to make sure our lives are comfortable and that we are not inconvenienced in any way. Some of us may also treat our heavenly Father like a vending machine that churns out ‘blessings’ at the press of a button. True worship is to approach God with reverence and respect to seek His wisdom, to know His will and to receive His instructions.

H. H. Rowley, an Old Testament scholar, said; "The first element in worship is adoration. The Hebrews expressed this by their posture and not by their words alone for they prostrated themselves before God. ‘O come, let us worship and bow down: let us kneel before the Lord our Maker.’ They did not come with an easy familiarity into the presence of God, but were

aware of His greatness and majesty, and came with a sense of privilege to His house." ("Worship in Ancient Israel", p. 257)

We not only should approach God with awe and respect to honor Him; our speech, our actions, our conduct, our relationships should bring honor to our Father's Name.

We are to Bring Honor to our Father's Name with Our Lives

The world's perception of God comes from looking at what type of people His children are. Our conduct either brings praise and glory to God or brings Him dishonor.

True worship requires us to reflect who God is in our lives. Unfortunately, many of God's children instead of being the light of the world have blended well into the surrounding darkness; behaving no different from those without God.

A. W. Tozer in his book *The Dangers of a Shallow Faith* wrote: "The greatest deterrent to victorious Christian living is the idea that once we accept Jesus Christ as Saviour and believe that John 3: 16 is all there is to it, our life now is on auto pilot and we can just sit back and enjoy the ride." He said such auto pilot living and thinking will only result in spiritual complacency and lethargy.

Tozer emphasized that; "our commitment as Christians is to live a lifestyle that models Christ. We are not to look like or act like other people; rather, we are to look like Christ. We are to act like Christ. We are to do the things that Christ would do in the power and demonstration of the Holy Spirit."

True worship is to bring honor to our Father's Name by being distinctive from the world. We must put what our Father wants above what we want or what the world wants. This is the respect and honor our heavenly Father deserves. Amen.

For Cell Group Discussion / Personal Reflection

Text: 1 John 3: 1-10

Topic: True Worship is to Live as Children of God

1. God has called us to a personal, direct, intimate Father-child relationship with Him. What should you do to strengthen your Father-child relationship with God and how can you express your love for your heavenly Father?
2. How has God, our Father, lavished His love on believers (1 John 3: 1)? What should those who hope in God do (2-3)? What step will you take today to purify yourself?
3. How does John define sin and what did Jesus do to take away our sins (4-5)? What does John say about the person who abides in Christ and who has seen & known Him (6)? Is John saying that true believers will not commit sin (refer 1 John 1: 8-10)?
4. What did John say distinguishes the children of God from the children of the devil (7-10)? How should the church handle Christians who persist in their sinful ways, e.g. always criticizing, accusing or gossiping about others in the church?

I Give You All the Honor

I give You all the honour
And praise that's due Your name
For You are the King of glory
The Creator of all things.

Chorus

And I worship You
I give my life to You
I fall down on my knees.
Yes, I worship You
I give my life to You
I fall down on my knees.

As Your Spirit moves upon me now
You meet my deepest need
And I lift my hands up to Your throne
Your mercy I've received.

You have broken chains that bound me
You've set this captive free
I will lift my voice to praise Your name
For all eternity.

(Carl Tuttle)

NOTES

Church as a Community of Praise & Worship 5

True Worship is to Love God with Our Whole Being

*“Normally when I’ve been in the position where I’ve felt little **love for God**, it’s because I haven’t understood how much He **loves me**. The more I understand how much He **loves me**, it’s almost parallel, the more I come to **love Him**.” - Josh McDowell*

“Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one. You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might. And these words that I command you today shall be on your heart.” (Deut. 6: 4-6)

This commandment which comes before the other commandments is repeated in the New Testament by Jesus in Matt 22: 37-38. Jesus said; “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment.”

True worship is to love God with our whole being and our whole life. We are to love God not only on Sunday but to be wholly devoted to Him every day, in every situation, at all times, in good times as well as in difficult times. Our love for God is to be expressed and seen in every aspect of our life; our family life, our social life, our work life and our church life!

True worship is to put God first above everyone and everything. It is to surrender our lives to Him; to live in accordance to His word, to do His will and to serve His purpose with faithfulness and absolute loyalty. In essence, it is to let God be the LORD of every aspect of our lives. We need to ask ourselves, is God truly the Lord of our lives or is He only the guest?

When someone comes to your house, you will invite your guest to the living room, or maybe to the kitchen while you are preparing the refreshments. You may also invite your guest to your study to look at your collection of books.

However, there are parts of the house your guest would not have access to. For example, you won’t invite your guest to your bedroom. You also won’t let your guest look into your closets or to tell you how you should sort out your home, how you should arrange the furniture, what are the things you should throw out to keep your house tidy.

So, is Jesus the guest or the Lord and Master of your life? Are there areas of your life which you have yet to surrender to Him? Does He reign or have a say in every aspect of your life; your marital and social life, your work life, your thought life, your time of recreation, etc?

Unfortunately, for many of us there are areas in our lives which we have not or will not surrender to God. Yes, He can have our time and attention in church on Sunday but He has no say in our life the other six days.

Some of you may have read the writings of William Law (1686-1761) who challenged believers to move from shallow devotion to renewed moral vigor and holiness. Law was known to be a man of great integrity. When he was a young man just about to go to university, he wrote down for himself a list of 18 rules to guide his life. The list included: total commitment to the will of

God, the primacy of Scriptures to live by, a distrust of the world, constant self-examination, to be humble, kind and prayerful.

To William Law, true worship is to be totally devoted to God. He said; “We must devote, not only times and places to prayer, but be everywhere in the spirit of devotion, with hearts always set toward heaven, looking up to God in all our actions, and doing everything as His servants, living in the world as in a holy temple of God and always worshiping Him, not only with our lips but with the thankfulness of our hearts, the holiness of our actions and the pious and charitable use of all His gifts.” Praise the Lord.

To worship and love the Lord with “all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might” is to think, to speak, to act and to live entirely to please Him. It is to give God His rightful place in our heart and to guard against anything or anyone that may diminish or take away our loyalty and allegiance to Christ. It is to let His Word fill our mind and guide our actions, our decisions, our speech, our relationships and our conduct. It is to do what God expects of us instead of what the world expects. It is to do what God wants, instead of what we want. It is to surrender all that we have to Him.

What we have to offer God is nothing compared to what He has given us. Jesus, the Son of God, came in human form to give His life so that we can have life eternal. If we love Jesus, what are we ready to give to Him? (Edited Extract from Revd Peter Chen’s sermon.)

For Cell Group Discussion / Personal Reflection

Text: Eph. 5:1-21

Topic: True Worship is to Express Our Love for God in Our Lives

1. What are we to do as beloved children of God (1-2) and what practices should we abstain from (3-4)? What warning did Paul give the early believers in vv. 5-7? Since becoming a child of God what old habits have you discarded?
2. Paul said believers are not only children of God, we are ‘children of light’. In Eph. 5: 8-21 Paul contrasted light with darkness to emphasize the importance of holy living. As ‘light in the Lord’, how are we to live?
3. William Law had a list of 18 rules which guided the way he lived. List 10 biblical values or truths which you have / would like to embrace to guide your life.
4. What does it mean for you “to love the Lord with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind” in your work and in your family? What are the things you are ready to give up because you love Jesus?
5. End with a time of prayer asking the Holy Spirit to check our hearts and to expose any area that is idolatrous (5) or a work of darkness (11). Pray that God will teach and empower you to be wholly devoted to Him. You may want to end the session singing or listening to the song “All to Jesus, I Surrender.”

All to Jesus I Surrender

All to Jesus I surrender,
All to Him I freely give;
I will ever love and trust Him,
In His presence daily live.

Chorus:

I surrender all,
I surrender all.
All to Thee, my blessed Saviour,
I surrender all.

All to Jesus I surrender,
Humbly at His feet I bow,
Worldly pleasures all forsaken;
Take me, Jesus, take me now.

All to Jesus I surrender,
Make me, Saviour, wholly Thine;
Let me feel Thy Holy Spirit,
Truly know that Thou art mine.

All to Jesus I surrender,
Lord, I give myself to Thee;
Fill me with Thy love and power,
Let Thy blessing fall on me.

All to Jesus I surrender,
Now I feel the sacred flame.
Oh, the joy of full salvation!
Glory, glory to His name!

Inspiration for the Song

Judson W. Van DeVenter, who wrote the lyrics, was an American Art teacher and musician who later became a music minister and evangelist. He said of the inspiration for the text: "For some time, I had struggled between developing my talents in the field of art and going into full-time evangelistic work. At last the pivotal hour of my life came, and I surrendered all. A new day was ushered into my life. I became an evangelist and discovered down deep in my soul a talent hitherto unknown to me. God had hidden a song in my heart, and touching a tender chord, He caused me to sing."

NOTES

Church as a Community of Praise & Worship 6

Can I Worship God and Not Serve Him?

“You shall worship the Lord your God and Him only shall you serve.” (Matt 4:10b)

The second most common word in the New Testament translated ‘worship’ is *latreuo* (verb form, 21X) or *latreia* (noun, 5X). *Latreuo* carries the idea of worshipping God by serving Him. This service covers all that one does for God; for His sake, regardless of whether the duties are religious or non-religious in expression.

In the New Testament, *latreuo* is first used in Matthew 4:10. In response to the devil’s temptation to “fall down and worship (*proskuneo*) me,” the Lord Jesus Christ said; “Be gone, Satan! For it is written; ‘You shall worship (*proskuneo*) the Lord your God and Him only shall you serve (*latreuo*).’” In quoting from Deuteronomy 6: 13, Jesus reinforced the vital link between *proskuneo*-worship and *latreuo*-worship.

To serve God can be doing anything, from raising our children to be God-fearing, to witnessing for Christ in the workplace, to visiting the sick. teaching Sunday school, to be involved in missions, pastoral, caring or administrative work in church; the list is endless. It is to give our time, attention and energy to a work / service out of obedience and love for God, wanting to bring honor to His Name. *Latreuo*-worship is to do God’s will, to serve His purpose, to bring Him glory and praise out of our love for Him.

Perhaps the most well-known usage of *latreuo* is found in Romans 12: 1 which says: “I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship or *latreuo*. The phrase ‘your spiritual worship’ is rendered as ‘your reasonable service in the NKJ and ‘your spiritual service of worship’ in the NASB.

True worship and serving God complement one another. Therefore, it is impossible to truly worship God by just attending church services alone. Attending a church service is only a single facet in the multi-faceted beauty of the biblically defined worship of God.

Latreuo-worship is our worship of God beyond the Sunday service. Thus, the Apostle Paul encouraged us to offer our bodies as a living sacrifice as our continual act of worship. Generally speaking, sacrifices are dead by the time they are offered on the altar, and dead sacrifices simply cannot *latreuo*-worship God. When Paul introduced the concept of a living sacrifice here, he was preparing the readers for a very long list of ‘things to do’ that would follow this call to *latreuo*-worship God: exercising spiritual gifts (Romans 12: 3-8); loving people both within and outside the church-community (Romans 12: 9-21), living in submission to the authorities (Romans 13: 1-7) are all expressions of *latreuo*-worship. Only a living sacrifice is capable of the *latreuo*-worship of God; living out Paul’s injunction in Romans 12: 1.

The followers of Christ are not only exhorted to serve God’s purpose, we are urged to serve God in unity, together as one body. In the past 2,000 years, *latreuo*-worship of God has enabled the Church to carry out the mandate of the Great Commission. It has caused faithful followers of Jesus all over the world to endure hardship, even with extraordinary sacrifices, to make His name known where it is not yet proclaimed. We cannot truly worship God without serving Him

or doing His Kingdom work. In a very definite sense, the true worship of God continues right after we have attended the church worship service each week. In the Anglican order of Holy Communion, we often conclude the corporate worship by praying:

*Almighty God, we thank you for feeding us
With the body and blood of your Son Jesus Christ.
Through Him we offer you our souls
And bodies to be a living sacrifice.
Send us out in the power of your Spirit
To live and work to your praise and glory. Amen.*

After worshipping God as a community, and being strengthened by the Lord's Supper, we must surely conclude the worship service by asking the Father to send us out "to live and work to Your praise and glory", i.e. *latreuo*-worship. *Latreuo* is the worship of God outside the four walls of the church building in the midst of people who have yet to come to know the true and living God.

(Edited extract from Bishop Kuan Kim Seng's book, *Our Duty and Our Joy: A Call to Worship God Acceptably*.)

For Cell Group Discussion / Personal Reflection

Text: Matt 6: 19-34

Topic: Choose Whom You Will Serve

Our reluctance to serve may be because we do not know that service / ministry is an important aspect of true worship. It may also be because we have no time to be involved in God's work as our attention is fixed on something else, primarily, our work and/or family responsibilities. Here in Matthew 6, Jesus challenged those who follow Him to choose wisely what and who we will serve (*douleuo*), i.e. who and what we seek after, obey and submit to.

1. What does Jesus mean by 'treasures in heaven' and 'treasures on earth' and what distinguishes them? Why do we need to choose the right treasures (19-21)? What would you need to do to start accumulating 'treasures in heaven'?
2. We are not ready to serve God or do what is important to Him because our mind and gaze are fixed on something other than God. What did Jesus say about our eye and how can our gaze be 'sound' and healthy (22-23)?
3. What would you say to someone who believes that it is possible to serve (literally 'be a slave to') both God and mammon (24)? What would count as 'mammon in your life' and what do you need to do to serve God and not mammon?
4. What promise & advice did Jesus give His followers (25, 33-34)? What does it mean to 'seek first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness'? How does this apply to you?
5. Spend some time to pray about your life's purpose & goal in the light of this passage. Pray that God will use you for His Kingdom work and teach you to seek His righteousness. You may end with the songs, "When I Look into Your Holiness" and / or "Be Thou My Vision."

When I Look into Your Holiness

When I look into Your holiness
When I gaze into Your loveliness
When all things that surround become shadows
In the light of You

When I've found the joy of reaching Your heart
When my will becomes enthroned in Your love
When all things that surround become shadows
In the light of You

I worship You, I worship You
The reason I live is to worship You
I worship You, I worship You
The reason I live is to worship You

Be Thou My Vision

Be Thou my vision, oh Lord of my heart
Naught be all else to me, save that Thou art
Thou my best thought by day or by night
Waking or sleeping Thy, presence my light

Be Thou my wisdom and Thou my true word
I ever with Thee and Thou with me, Lord
Thou my great Father and I Thy true son
Thou in me dwelling and I with Thee one

Riches I heed not, nor man's empty praise
Thou mine inheritance, now and always
Thou and Thou only, first in my heart
High King of Heaven, my treasure Thou art

Be Thou my vision, oh Lord of my heart
Naught be all else to me, save that Thou art
Thou my best thought by day or by night
Waking or sleeping Thy, presence my light

High King of Heaven, my victory won
May I reach Heaven's joys, oh bright Heaven's sun
Heart of my own heart, whatever befall
Still be my vision, oh Ruler of all
Still be my vision, oh Ruler of all

NOTES

Church as a Community of Praise & Worship 7

True Worship is to Trust God In Spite of Life's Problems

“... God has said, ‘Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you.’ So, we say with confidence, ‘The Lord is my helper; I will not be afraid. What can mere mortals do to me?’”
(Hebrews 13: 5b-6, NIV)

For many years in my own pilgrimage of seeking to come to a place of trusting God at all times, I was a prisoner to my feelings. I mistakenly thought I could not trust God unless I *felt* like trusting Him (which I almost never did in times of adversity). Now I am learning that trusting God is first of all a matter of the will; it is not dependent on my feelings. I choose to trust God and my feelings eventually follow.

Having said that trusting God is first of all a matter of the will, let me qualify that statement to say that, first of all, it is a matter of knowledge. We must *know* that God is sovereign, wise and loving. But having been exposed to the knowledge of the truth, we must then *choose* whether to believe the truth about God, which He has revealed to us, or whether to follow our feelings. If we are to trust God, we must choose to believe His truth. We must learn to trust God in spite of how we feel and in spite of our adversities.

Admittedly, that is not easy. Only the Holy Spirit can make God's word come alive in our hearts and give us the faith to trust, but we can choose to look to Him to do that, or we can choose to be ruled by our feelings of anxiety or resentment or grief. What is important is do we want God to help us to rise above our problems or do we want to wallow in our negative feelings?

Trusting God does not mean we do not experience pain. It means we believe that God is at work through our pain for our ultimate good. It means we work back through the Scriptures regarding His sovereignty, wisdom, and goodness and ask Him to use these Scriptures to bring peace and comfort to our hearts. It means, above all, that we do not sin against God by allowing distrustful thoughts about Him hold sway in our minds. It is to tell God and to tell ourselves that though we do not understand, we are going to trust Him.

The whole idea of trusting God is, of course, based upon the fact that God is absolutely trustworthy. We must be firmly grounded in those scriptural truths of His sovereignty, love and wisdom, if we are to trust Him.

We must also lay hold of some of the great promises of His unwavering care for us. One such promise we will do well to store in our hearts is Hebrews 13: 5b: “Never will I leave you, never will I forsake you.” Thomas Lye, a preacher, remarked that in this passage the Greek text has 5 negatives and may be rendered; “I will not, not leave thee; neither will I not, not forsake thee.” 5 times God emphasized to us that He will not forsake us. He wants us to firmly grasp the truth that whatever circumstances may indicate, we must believe, on the basis of His promise, that He has not forsaken us or left us to the mercy of those circumstances.

God cares for you and me! Not only will He never leave us, He cares for us. He is not just there with us, He cares for us. His care is constant – not occasional or sporadic. His care is total – even the very hairs of our head are numbered. His care is sovereign – nothing can touch us that

He does not allow. His care is loving – all things work together for good, for those who love Him (Romans 8: 28). To trust God is to learn to surrender our problems, our whole life to His sovereign rule.

Trust is not a passive state of mind but an act of the will to hold on to the promises of God and cling to them despite the adversity that at times seeks to overwhelm us.

Several years ago, I encountered a series of related difficulties, not major calamities, but of a nature as to cause me great distress. At the outset, Psalm 50:15 came to my mind; “Call upon me in the day of trouble; I will deliver you, and you will honor me.” I began to call upon God asking Him to deliver me, but it seemed the more I called, the more the difficulties came.

I began to wonder if God’s promises had any real meaning. Finally, one day I said to God; “I will take You at Your word. I will believe that in Your time and in Your way, You will deliver me.” The difficulties did not cease, but the peace of God did quiet my fears and anxieties. And then, in due time, God did deliver me from those troubles, and He did it in such a way that I knew He had done it. God’s promises are true. They cannot fail because He cannot lie. But, to realize the peace they are intended to give, we must choose to believe them. We must learn to cast our anxieties on Him and to trust Him.

(Edited extract from *Trusting God Even When Life Hurts* by Jerry Bridges.)

For Cell Group Discussion / Personal Reflection

Text: Psalm 56

Topic: True Worship is to Trust God & His Promises

1. Share a time when you feel overwhelmed by life’s problems and what did you do to de-stress? Which bible text has brought you comfort or helped you?
2. From the Psalm what situation was David in (1-2, 5-6) and what did David do during this difficult time (3-4, 9-11)? What did David say repeatedly he would do (4, 10) and how does this apply in your situation?
3. God was not only there in David’s situation, what else did He do (8-9, 13)?
4. God is with us and for us; what is there to fear. Yet many believers struggle in trusting God. Why? What is your reason in not being able to trust God totally? In the article by Jerry Bridges, how can you learn to trust God more? List three promises of God that are important to you and by which you will stand in your time of difficulty.
5. End with time of prayer for one another that we may know God and trust Him more each day. Share also any specific difficulty you may be facing at the moment and what it would mean for you to trust Him. The group may want to end with the song “Standing on the Promises of God.”

Standing on the Promises of God

Standing on the promises of Christ my King,
Through eternal ages let His praises ring,
Glory in the highest, I will shout and sing,
Standing on the promises of God.

Refrain:

Standing, standing,
Standing on the promises of God my Saviour;
Standing, standing,
I'm standing on the promises of God.

Standing on the promises that cannot fail,
When the howling storms of doubt and fear assail,
By the living Word of God I shall prevail,
Standing on the promises of God.

Standing on the promises I now can see
Perfect, present cleansing in the blood for me;
Standing in the liberty where Christ makes free,
Standing on the promises of God.

Standing on the promises of Christ the Lord,
Bound to Him eternally by love's strong cord,
Overcoming daily with the Spirit's sword,
Standing on the promises of God.

Standing on the promises I cannot fall,
List'ning every moment to the Spirit's call,
Resting in my Saviour as my all in all,
Standing on the promises of God.

Russell K. Carter

NOTES

Church as a Community of Praise & Worship 8

Genuine Love for God is To Live in Obedience to His Word

“If you love me, you will keep my commandments.” (John 14: 15)

In the last 150 years, two philosophies, existentialism and relativism, have impacted and influenced many disciplines, e.g. theology, the arts, psychology & education. They shape the way we think & behave as well as our approach & response to God’s truths & expectations.

Simply put, existentialism teaches that the individual has the right to decide what he / she wants to believe and to do. Nobody, not even God, decides how he / she should behave and live. The existential Christian sees God’s word as just a guide but ultimately, he / she chooses whether to obey and which of God’s commandments to obey.

Defenders of relativism, one of the most popular and reviled philosophies of the 21st century, pride themselves as being open-minded and tolerant. They believe there is no absolute truth and no universal & permanent ethical or moral standard; meaning what is good and right for you may not be good and right for me. They view biblical truths and values as applicable only to those in ancient times but irrelevant in this time and age!

Such influences have resulted in churches openly saying that believers can live as they like; there is no need for repentance and transformation. This has also led to churches supporting same-sex marriages, sex outside marriage, gambling and many other practices which God has forbidden. Telling believers to obey and to live in accordance to God’s word will be seen as inappropriate, even rude and offensive.

But Jesus said very clearly to those who profess to have faith in Him; “If you love me, you will keep My commandments” (John 14: 15). As a matter of fact, in the Upper Room discourse (John 14-17) on the night of His arrest, Jesus emphasized the link between love for Him and obedience to His commandments five times (14: 15, 21, 23-24; 15: 10, 14-15).

The measure of our love for God is our obedience to His expectations, regardless of how difficult they may be to us. Love for God and obedience to His commands are two sides of the same coin; we cannot profess to have one without the other. We obey God’s word not because we have to earn our salvation. We obey because we love God who first loves us.

Leon Morris, in his exposition on the Gospel of John, said that if we truly appreciate what Jesus had done for us on the Cross, we “would not see the commandments as a harsh set of external requirements, but as the guidance needed by weak and imperfect people as they respond in love to the wonderful love of Christ... It is the person who keeps the commandments who loves Christ. When someone claims to be a Christian but takes no notice of what Christ has commanded His followers to do, there is something hollow about his profession. Real Christianity is not like that. To love Christ means to keep His commandments. Do not all those who love anyone delight to do what they know is pleasing to the one they love?”

The consequence of our obedience is that we will be loved by the Father (14: 21, 23). God is love and He loves even those who don’t believe in Him. But He has a special love for those who appreciate His love by obeying His commandments.

Morris said; “When people respond to what God has done in Christ, when they turn from their sin and in faith commit themselves to Him who died for them, when they love Him and keep His commandments, all this does not go unnoticed. God does not treat such people with indifference. He loves them. And Christ loves them.”

Jesus also said in Jn. 14: 24 that the person who does not love Him is not concerned with doing what He commanded. Morris elaborated; “Just as obedience and conformity to Jesus’ teachings is the inevitable consequence of love, so a neglect of that teaching is the inevitable consequence of a lack of love.” The difference between authentic and superficial faith lies in our readiness to obey God’s word and to acknowledge God’s truths as the sole authority in our lives.

In Matthew 5-7, commonly known as the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus listed the Kingdom values expected of true worshippers. In the concluding section of the sermon, Jesus impressed upon His followers the difference between true and nominal worship, calling them to turn from superficial faith to whole-hearted commitment.

Jesus said in Mt 7: 21-23, “Not everyone who says to me ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. On that day many will say to me, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and do many mighty works in your name?’ And then will I declare to them, ‘I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness.’” This is a serious warning! To be in God’s Kingdom we not only need to know the bible, we need to obey and live by His word. There is no short cut!

For Cell Group Discussion / Personal Reflection

Text: Matthew 7: 13-27

Topic: A True Worshipper is One who Obeys God’s Word

1. What did Jesus say about love for Him and obedience to His word in the Upper Room discourse recorded in John 14-17? Why do Christians disregard and not obey the teachings of Jesus, e.g. the Kingdom values in His sermon? What are the reasons why you yourself fail to obey Christ’s teachings?
2. In the concluding section of the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus challenged those who believe in Him to take heed of 3 warnings: to choose the narrow gate and the narrow way; authentic faith is seen in the fruit we bear and to build our life and faith on the right foundation. What does He mean and how does it apply to you?
3. Who did Jesus say will and will not enter the Kingdom of heaven and who are the workers of ‘lawlessness’ (21-23)? How do you distinguish the true prophet from the false prophet and why do we need to guard against the teachings of false prophets?
4. Few of us would dare to claim that our lives are built solely on the teachings of Jesus. It would be accurate to say our life and faith foundation is a mix of Jesus’ teachings and secular worldly values. How solid is your foundation; how much is made up of sand or worldly values and how much the rock of Christ’s commands? List 1 worldly value you would remove from your foundation and which particular teaching of Jesus would you obey to strengthen the foundation of your life and faith?

Trust and Obey

When we walk with the Lord
in the light of His word,
what a glory He sheds on our way!
While we do His good will,
He abides with us still,
and with all who will trust and obey.

Refrain

Trust and obey, for there's no other way
to be happy in Jesus, but to trust and obey.

Not a burden we bear,
not a sorrow we share,
but our toil He doth richly repay;
not a grief or a loss,
not a frown or a cross,
but is blest if we trust and obey. [Refrain]

But we never can prove
the delights of His love
until all on the altar we lay;
for the favor He shows,
for the joy He bestows,
are for them who will trust and obey. [Refrain]

Then in fellowship sweet
we will sit at His feet,
or we'll walk by His side in the way;
what He says we will do,
where He sends we will go;
never fear, only trust and obey. [Refrain]

John Sammis

NOTES

Church as a Community of Praise & Worship 9

How Can We Claim to Worship God if We are Unfaithful to Him?

“It is impossible to be our best at the supreme moment if character is corroded and eaten into by daily inconsistency, unfaithfulness, and besetting sin.” – F. B. Meyer

Some people described Judges as the ‘book of weeping’; it starts with Israel weeping (2:4) at a place called Bochim (Weeping). God had sent an angel to confront them of their disobedience and unfaithfulness. At the end of the book, the Israelites were again weeping before God; they were in a civil war (20: 23, 26) which almost wiped out the tribe of Benjamin (21: 2).

But I believed the One who wept the most throughout the history of Israel was God. He must have been deeply grieved by Israel’s apostasy and spiritual decline. God had brought them out of slavery in Egypt, cared for them when they were in the desert, led and gave them the Promised Land. His intention was that Israel would be His people and He would be their God (Jer. 31: 33-34). Unfortunately, instead of living as God’s holy people, Israel chose to live like the pagans, embracing their values, their practices and even their gods. Israel responded to God’s steadfast love and faithfulness with unfaithfulness and disobedience.

In what ways was Israel unfaithful? First, they broke the vows they had made when they entered the Promised Land. They had pledged three times that they would serve and worship God alone and would not bow to any idol (Joshua 24: 16-18, 21, 24). But throughout the book of Judges we see they not only bowed to idols; they ignored God’s commandments and abandoned Him.

They lived as they like in total disregard of the Mosaic Law. They broke almost all of God’s moral laws and happily embraced pagan practices, like child sacrifice, unnatural sex, violence and killing one another, etc. To them God’s commands did not matter, or to put it bluntly, they couldn’t care less about what God expected of them. It was about what they wanted and what benefited them, hence, they had no problem embracing pagan worship.

In Canaanite religion, religious rites, like idol worship and temple prostitution, were performed to enlist the help of the gods to ensure good harvest and prosperity. The Israelites were tempted to adopt pagan beliefs and ways of worship because the Canaanite city-states were rich and the success & prosperity of the Canaanites were attributed to their idols.

Is God’s people today also guilty of idolatry in our pursuit of success and wealth? Idolatry is not just bowing to an idol but trusting, serving, putting as important something /someone else other than God. Anything that comes between God and us is an idol. Tom Wright warned that idolatry is subtle, hence, dangerous. The idol we worship will soon control our mind, our heart, our whole being and pushes God out of our heart and lives.

Two recurring statements in the book of Judges highlight the unfaithfulness & arrogance of God’s people. The author recorded 7 times, 3 times in the beginning of the book, that; “The people of God did what was evil in the sight of the Lord’ (2: 11-13; 3:7, 12; 4: 1; 6: 1; 10: 6; 13: 1). They served the idols; they went after & trusted the pagan gods and offered sacrifices to them (2: 11-13). They disobeyed God’s commands and did what God forbade them to do.

In the second half of Judges, the author also emphasized that “everyone did what was right in his own eyes” (17: 6; 21: 25, ESV). Israel chose to do what was convenient & beneficial to them, e.g. embracing pagan practices, instead of doing what God had commanded them. They chose to live according to the standard of the world instead of according to God’s standard.

Are God’s people today any different or better? Are we like Israel grieving God’s heart with our unfaithfulness? What happened to God’s people in ancient times is a warning to us today. When we persist in disobedience and do ‘what is right in our own eyes,’ or do ‘what is right in the eyes of the world’ we are on the slippery road of spiritual compromise and decadence. When we pick and choose what to believe and reject any biblical truth or value that is inconvenient or ‘offensive’ to the world, are we not like Israel doing what is right in our own eyes? Let’s not forget that what is right in our own eyes, or what is right in the eyes of the world may not be right in God’s eyes, e.g. striving for material success, sex outside marriage, homosexual lifestyle, gambling, genetic engineering, euthanasia, etc. So, are you and I going to live in faithfulness or unfaithfulness?

Israel’s downfall was caused by pride, self-will and unfaithfulness which led to spiritual compromise. They presumed on God’s blessings, thinking that God owed it to them to bless them even though they were disobedient. Their spiritual compromise led to their spiritual decline. Israel not only tolerated pagan practices, they soon adopted them as their own. They put their trust in idols and once God was displaced, Israel began to fall apart, as will the Church that dethrones Christ from His rightful place.

The Almighty God, our heavenly Father, said in Hosea 6: 6-7 (NASB); “For I delight in loyalty rather than sacrifice. And in the knowledge of God rather than burnt offerings. But like Adam they (God’s people) have transgressed the covenant; there they have dealt treacherously against Me.” May the Spirit empower us to be faithful, that we will serve and worship God alone!

For Cell Group Discussion / Personal Reflection

Text: Judges 2: 1-5, 10-23

Topic: An Unfaithful People

1. What are the two recurring statements in the book of Judges that describe Israel’s unfaithfulness? Do you think they apply to the Church today? What are the things that Christians are endorsing or doing that may be right in their own eyes but evil to God?
2. The generation that entered the Promised Land with Joshua had neglected to do one important thing which was one of the reasons for the unfaithfulness of the next generation (Judges 2: 10-11). What did the early generation fail to do (Deut. 6: 1-9)? How can we avoid this mistake in the church?
3. God was angry with Israel’s idolatry and let them face the consequences of their unfaithfulness. But when the people were oppressed by their enemies what did God do and how did Israel respond to God’s compassion & deliverance (Judges 2: 16-19)?
4. Why do you think Israel persistently chose idolatry instead of remaining faithful to God and to obey His word? What are the idols that are luring God’s people today from faithful worship of God? What does it mean for you to reject these idols and to be faithful?

Take My Life, and Let It Be

Take my life, and let it be
Consecrated, Lord, to Thee;
Take my moments and my days,
Let them flow in ceaseless praise,
Let them flow in ceaseless praise.

Take my hands and let them move
At the impulse of Thy love;
Take my feet and let them be
Swift and beautiful for Thee,
Swift and beautiful for Thee.

Take my voice, and let me sing
Always, only, for my King;
Take my lips, and let them be
Filled with messages from Thee,
Filled with messages from Thee.

Take my silver and my gold;
Not a mite would I withhold;
Take my intellect, and use
Every power as Thou shalt choose,
Every power as Thou shalt choose.

Take my will and make it Thine;
It shall be no longer mine.
Take my heart; it is Thine own;
It shall be Thy royal throne,
It shall be Thy royal throne.

Take my love; my Lord, I pour
At Thy feet its treasure-store.
Take myself, and I will be
Ever, only, all for Thee,
Ever, only, all for Thee.

(Frances R. Havergal)

NOTES

Church as a Community of Praise & Worship 10

True Worship is to Be Faithful to God Regardless the Cost

“I know of nothing which I would choose to have as the subject of my ambition for life than to be kept faithful to my God till death; to be a soul winner, a true herald of the cross, and testify the name of Jesus to the last hour.” – Charles Spurgeon

In May 2018 suicide bombers attacked three churches in Surabaya during Sunday worship services, killing at least 12 people and wounding 44 others. Indonesian police described this as one of the worst attacks on the Christian minority. Bombing and burning of churches are not unheard of in Indonesia. On Christmas Eve in 2000, a series of attacks on 12 churches in Indonesia killed 15 people and wounding nearly 100.

I admire the courage and resolve of Indonesian Christians who continue to gather to worship God in spite of the risks. I wonder if similar bombings were to take place in churches in Singapore, will that empty our churches or will we continue to boldly gather to worship and proclaim the greatness of our God?

Dietrich Bonhoeffer, a German pastor & theologian, martyred for his stand against the Nazis, wrote in his book *The Cost of Discipleship* that; “When Christ calls a man, He bids him come and die.” Throughout the history of the Church, believers had courageously chosen death rather than to renounce their faith in Christ. Many were flogged and thrown in prison, some burned to death at the stake, others beheaded because of their faith. They readily gave their lives and continued to lift up the Name of God to the end. True worship and love for God is to remain faithful to Him and to stand up for His Name and truths even in a hostile, threatening situation.

In the book of Acts, the Early Church amazingly grew and thrived even in a very hostile environment. The early believers had no money, no status, no proven leaders and faced enormous obstacles to bring the gospel to unbelieving Jews and Gentiles. Yet the Church grew phenomenally in spite of the persecutions. And the gospel spread from Jerusalem to Rome, the capital of the known world, all within the lifetime of the first generation of believers.

The early believers were faithful witnesses (Acts 1: 8). They seized every opportunity to preach the good news of the resurrected Christ; they talked about Jesus when they were in prison and even when they were about to die. The last words of Stephen when he was stoned to death were to tell his enemies about Jesus and what He had done for their salvation (Acts 6 & 7).

The more these early believers were persecuted, the more zealous they were to preach the gospel. For example, we read in Acts 5: 17-18, Peter, John and other apostles were arrested and put in jail because they were healing the sick and telling them about the power of Jesus’ Name. God miraculously released them from prison and instead of running away and going into hiding, Peter, John and the other apostles went to the Temple in Jerusalem and taught the people about the new life in Christ.

When the Jewish religious leaders heard what these disciples were doing, they had them re-arrested and instructed them again to stop talking about Jesus. The response of Peter and the rest was: **“We must obey God rather than men!”** (29).

Their response almost led to their execution if it were not for the intervention of one of the Pharisees. They were instead flogged and banned from talking about Jesus. Bleeding and in great pain because of the flogging, we would expect Peter and the other disciples to go home to rest. Instead, they left the council meeting “rejoicing because they had been counted worthy of suffering dishonor for the Name” (41). They also boldly defied the council’s prohibition, and daily, both publicly and privately, “in the temple courts and from house to house, they never stopped teaching and proclaiming the good news that Jesus is the Christ” (42). What faithfulness & courage!

That is the kind of worshippers God looks for. Their examples and that of other faithful believers throughout the history of the Church challenge us to take a hard look at our own faith and worship. Is our faith robust enough to last the long haul and what price would you pay to remain faithful to God; to obey His word, to do His will and to live out our calling to be His witnesses?

True worshippers are not ashamed of who they are and would proudly proclaim who their God is, even to those who may find such proclamations offensive. Let’s not forget Jesus’ warning in Matt. 10: 32-33; “So everyone who acknowledges me before men, I also will acknowledge before my Father who is in heaven, but whoever denies me before men, I also will deny before my Father who is in heaven.”

For Cell Group Discussion / Personal Reflection

Text: Acts 5: 17-42

Topic: Are You Ready to Pay the Price to be Faithful?

1. What persecution do you face at home and in the office / school because you are a Christian? Have you tried speaking to your unbelieving friends about Jesus? What was their response?
2. Why did the religious leaders arrest the disciples and put them in prison (17-18)? What did God send His angel to do and what instruction was given to the disciples and what did they do (19-21)?
3. What did the religious council instruct the disciples not to do and what was Peter’s response (28-32)? What did the council intend to do to the early apostles for refusing to obey their demand and how did the council punish them in the end (33, 40)?
4. What did the apostles do after they were released (41-42)? What would you do if you were one of those arrested, flogged and threatened?
5. How does the example of Peter and the other apostles (29-32; 40-42) challenge and inspire you about being a faithful worshipper and witness? In what situations can you witness for Christ this week? How?
6. What forms of opposition / obstacles do Christians in Singapore face today? Do you think your faith is strong enough to go through persecution and how can you strengthen your faith that it may persevere to the end?

Stand Up, Stand Up for Jesus

Stand up, stand up for Jesus,
Ye soldiers of the cross!
Lift high His royal banner,
It must not suffer loss.
From victory unto victory
His army shall He lead,
Till every foe is vanquished,
And Christ is Lord indeed.

Stand up, stand up for Jesus,
The trumpet call obeys;
Forth to the mighty conflict,
In this His glorious day.
Ye that are men now serve Him,
Against unnumbered foes;
Let courage rise with danger,
And strength to strength oppose.

Stand up, stand up for Jesus,
Stand in His strength alone;
The arm of flesh will fail you,
Ye dare not trust your own.
Put on the gospel armor,
Each piece put on with prayer;
Where duty calls or danger,
Be never wanting there.

Stand up, stand up for Jesus,
The strife will not be long;
This day the noise of battle,
The next the victor's song.
To him that over-cometh
A crown of life shall be;
He with the King of glory
Shall reign eternally.

George Duffield Jr.

NOTES

Church as a Community of Praise & Worship 11

Is Discouragement Hindering Your Worship of God?

“Don’t let life affect your worship; let your worship effect life.”

LaMar Boschman

All of us have gone through times when we felt discouraged or spiritually tired and not in the mood to worship or have the energy to go to church, much less to love & serve God. We may be feeling down and discouraged because of the disappointing conduct of some Christians or leaders in the church or because we are worn out by life’s problems and demands. Or perhaps our spiritual dryness may be the result of our neglect to spend time with God daily.

What should we do in times like these? How can our spirit be lifted up that we may worship God with vibrancy and to face life with fervor and vitality? Solution is simple; spend time to praise the Lord! But how do we praise when we don’t feel like praising? And are we not being hypocritical to praise and give thanks to God with our lips when our hearts are discouraged?

Our Lord deserves all praise and worship and we should praise His Name regardless of how we feel. David proclaimed; “I will extol the Lord at all times, His praise will always be on my lips.” (Psalm 34:1, NIV) Another Psalmist said; “I will sing to the Lord all my life; I will sing praise to my God as long as I live.” (Psalm 104:33, NIV) We should praise God at all times as long as we live because He deserves all praise and honor. Singing praises to God is also the cure for our depression and anxiety, both spiritual and emotional.

I remember when I was diagnosed with my first cancer, I was shocked and could hardly do anything. I couldn’t think; I couldn’t pray and was overwhelmed by anxiety, confusion and depression. I was deeply discouraged; ‘How could God let this thing happened to me?’ But I knew, for me to fight this huge problem before me, I needed to hang on to God. Only He could give me the power, the strength and the peace to overcome my illness.

It was tough for me to read the bible as my mind was blank and I could only stare at the words. The only thing I could do then was to listen to some of my favorite hymns and songs of praise to remind myself that God can and will help me. The comforting lyrics and music lifted up my spirit and as I began to sing and give praise to God with my lips, I could feel an indescribable peace and quiet confidence welling up in my heart.

To those who feel overwhelmed by life’s problems, the more discouraged you are, the more you should resolve to spend time in praise and thanksgiving. Listen to and sing hymns and songs of praise. Let the words be the light that shine into your darkness. Our hearts will soon well up with joy and peace as we praise and give thanks to God with our lips.

Feelings of discouragement, spiritual weariness, depression are not rare; many godly men and women have gone through such experiences. Our Lord Himself had also experienced such feelings. In Gethsemane, just before His arrest, He told His disciples: "... ‘Sit here while I pray.’ And He took with Him Peter and James and John and began to be greatly distressed and troubled. And He said to them, ‘My soul is very sorrowful, even to death. Remain here and watch.’” (Mark 14: 32-34, ESV)

In Psalms 42 & 43, seen as one Psalm because of the literary unity, the psalmist confessed that he was feeling downcast and distressed. The words of those who are deceitful and ungodly had further shaken his confidence in God. They mocked him: *Where is your God?* (vv. 3, 10).

He yearned to be in God's presence: "As a deer pants for flowing streams, so pants my soul for you, O God. My soul thirsts for God, for the living God." (Psalm 42: 1-2) Many times in these two short psalms, he called out to God and reminded himself that he should put his hope and trust in God for He is his God, his Refuge and his Deliverer.

He prayed that God would show him His light and truth and lead him back into His presence. He yearned to again worship God with joy and gladness in the Temple. He deeply desired a renewal of that special time with God, praising & worshipping Him with fellow Jews.

The psalmist told himself many times that he will not give in to his moods and be overwhelmed by them. He reproached himself for his depression. Why should he continue to be downcast? He knew the remedy to his discouragement was to put his hope in God and to trust Him.

We can and should always praise God regardless of how we feel or what situation we may be in. Even if we have nothing, we still have Jesus who is everything. Because of Him, we can have strength for today and hope for the future. When we look to Jesus, we will have the wisdom to live each day to our fullest; even in difficult times, there can be meaning, purpose and peace. Most of all, because we belong to Jesus, we can look forward to spending our eternity with Him in heaven.

John Stott, reflecting on Psalm 42 & 43 in his book *Favorite Psalms*, said that the cure for depression, discouragement and spiritual dryness is neither to look in at our grief, nor look back to our past, nor look around at our problems, but to look away and look up to the living God. Remember who He is, remember what He has done. Praise Him at all times, especially when we feel discouraged. Praise is the light that will lead us out of our dark tunnel into His presence.

For Cell Group Discussion / Personal Reflection

Topic: Praise is the Cure for Spiritual Weariness and Discouragement

Text: Psalms 42 & 43

1. Sometimes we hear believers lament that they feel spiritually dry and find no joy in attending worship services. How would you advise them to get out of their spiritual doldrums? What do you do when you are feeling down emotionally or spiritually?
2. What did the Psalmist say repeatedly in Psalms 42 & 43? Why did he feel downcast and disturbed within him?
3. How did he describe his longing for God's presence? What were his memories of worshipping God with fellow Jews? What do you miss most of the Sunday worship (the songs, the sermon, the creed and liturgy, the fellowship, the Eucharist, or the ministry time) when you are not able to come to worship with other Christians on a Sunday?
4. How did the psalmist describe God in the psalms and what does he perceive to be the cure to his spiritual depression and feeling downcast? Who is God to you and what does it mean for you 'to hope in God'?

5. Do you see yourself as rejoicing and vibrant or like the Psalmist feeling downcast and discouraged? What can you do to ensure that you will remain close to God and not feel you are 'estranged' from Him?
6. End by praying for one another that all will be disciplined not only to read His word and to pray daily but also to remember who God is and to praise Him daily. The group may want to end with the song 'Shine Jesus Shine.'

Shine Jesus Shine

Lord the light of Your love is shining
In the midst of the darkness shining
Jesus Light of the world shine upon us
Set us free by the truth You now bring us
Shine on me, shine on me

Chorus:

Shine Jesus shine
Fill this land with the Father's glory
Blaze Spirit blaze
Set our hearts on fire
Flow river flow
Flood the nations with grace and mercy
Send forth Your word
Lord and let there be light

Lord I come to Your awesome presence
From the shadows into Your radiance
By the blood I may enter Your brightness
Search me try me consume all my darkness
Shine on me, shine on me (Chorus)

As we gaze on Your kingly brightness
So our faces display Your likeness
Ever changing from glory to glory
Mirrored here may our lives tell Your story
Shine on me, shine on me (Chorus)

Graham Kendrick

NOTES

Church as a Community of Praise & Worship 12

Shout Aloud How Great Is Our God!

“Let them praise the name of the LORD, for His Name alone is exalted; His Majesty is above earth and heaven.” (Psalm 148: 13)

For the church to be a community of praise and worship, her people must be people of praise. A people of praise do not limit our time of praise to only once a week when we gather to worship God. We should exalt and praise His holy Name daily wherever we are; in our homes, our workplace, with our loved ones and friends, and even with strangers. A people of praise will seize every chance to praise God’s amazing love and power to those who know Him, as well as those who have yet to know Him.

A friend of ours shared with us that after her conversion, her colleagues noticed a change in her. She used to be grouchy and impatient but when she became a Christian, her colleagues noticed she would be humming and smiling at work. One day a colleague asked our friend: “Why so happy?” And her immediate response was: “Because Jesus loves me.” What an amazing proclamation of praise coming from a young believer! Let’s seize every opportunity to exalt God’s Name, especially to unbelievers.

During one of my medical consultations, my doctor, a professor, looking at the list of medical problems I have, remarked; “You have to cope with so many illnesses. Still very cheerful.” I told my doctor; “I leave all my problems with God; He gives me peace and joy.” My doctor smiled and shook my hands. We should praise Him not only with our lips but bring Him honor and glory with our demeanor.

C H Spurgeon believed that there is no reason for God’s people to look as if their God is dead. In his book *Perfect Praise*, he wrote: “Why should we remain downcast when our God is just and true, when His promises stand firm like the mountains, while the heart of Jesus is true to His Church, while His covenant and His oaths are unbroken and unchanged? It is not proper or fitting for God’s people to go mourning all their days. Instead let us make a joyful noise to the Rock of our salvation. Let us come before His presence with thanksgiving, expressing our gladness in Him with psalms.”

True worshippers would never run out of praises for God; there are so many things our friends and loved ones need to hear about Him. Spurgeon said: “Tell what God has done for us in days gone by. Sing of His long-suffering grace, which followed our wandering and bore with our rebellions. Remember the time when we first knew the Lord. Tell the matchless story of the never ceasing streams of mercy, which have flowed to us since then and which call for songs of loudest praise. Praise Him for His loving-kindness and His goodness towards us. Appreciate the wonderful gift of Christ Jesus. Count His eternal mercies to us, the treasures of that covenant which He made on our behalf, even before we were born. Sing aloud of His matchless wisdom, His divine love and His eternal grace, which carried out the scheme of our redemption.”

To those who are still wondering why is praise so important, Spurgeon said: “Does God deserve our praise? Or put another way, should we praise God? Of course! When men behold a hero, they fall at his feet and honor him. You, Jesus, the Redeemer of the multitudes of Your elect,

shall You have no song? Shall Your Name have no glory? Shall the world love its own, but the Church not honors its own Redeemer? Our God must and will be praised. ...Come believer, when you pray, you are as a man but when you praise, you are as an angel. When you ask for favor, you are but a beggar, but when you stand up to extol, you become next of kin to cherubim and seraphim. What a happy day when you and I join the eternal chorus to praise our Lord!"

Spurgeon continued: "Besides, do you not know that mourning weakens us? Doubts destroy our strength. But praise brings joy to our soul. We grow in grace when we grow in joy, which comes from praise. We are more heavenly, more spiritual and more divine, as we get more of the joy and peace that comes through praise. ...We not only should praise our Lord but we should praise Him at all times and give thanks at every remembrance of Him. Let us extol Him even when our souls are drowsy and our spirits are inclined to sleep."

May the Lord of Hosts empower us to praise Him bountifully day and night, especially amongst people who have yet to know His power, His grace and His love for them. Amen.

For Cell Group Discussion / Personal Reflection

Topic: Praise Comes Out of a Heart of Love & Gratitude

Text: Psalm 116

1. Why did Spurgeon say we should be joyful and to praise our Lord always? What are some of the things we should tell people about Him?
2. In Psalm 116, what did the Psalmist struggle with and what did he do (3-4)? Share a time when you also felt desperate and in despair and what did you do?
3. What did the Psalmist praise and thank God for (1-2, 5-8)? What are the things you want to praise & thank God for in your life?
4. What did the Psalmist say he would do because of what God had done for him (12-19)?
5. Why are we uncomfortable with praising God in front of our unbelieving friends and loved ones? What would you need to do in order to praise and honor God's Name with your lips and actions outside the church?
6. End with a time of praise and thanksgiving.

To God be the Glory

To God be the glory, great things He hath done;
So loved He the world that He gave us His Son,
Who yielded His life an atonement for sin,
And opened the life gate that all may go in.

Refrain

*Praise the Lord, praise the Lord,
Let the earth hear His voice!
Praise the Lord, praise the Lord,
Let the people rejoice!
O come to the Father, through Jesus the Son,
And give Him the glory, great things He hath done.*

O perfect redemption, the purchase of blood,
To every believer the promise of God;
The vilest offender who truly believes,
That moment from Jesus a pardon receives. (Refrain)

Great things He hath taught us, great things He hath done,
And great our rejoicing through Jesus the Son;
But purer, and higher, and greater will be
Our wonder, our rapture, when Jesus we see. (Refrain)

- Fanny Crosby

Can I Be A Worshipper and Not Follow Jesus?

“Then Jesus called the crowd to Himself along with his disciples and told them, “If anyone wants to follow Me, he must deny himself, pick up his cross, and follow Me continuously, because whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake and for the gospel will save it.”

(Mark 8: 34-35)

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