

## AUTHENTIC WORSHIP

Back in 1997, Reeve Lindbergh, the daughter of aviator Charles Lindbergh, was invited to give the annual Lindbergh Address at the Smithsonian Air and Space Museum to commemorate the 70th anniversary of her father's historic solo flight across the Atlantic. On the day of the speech, museum officials invited her to come early, before the museum opened, so that she could have a closeup look at The Spirit of St. Louis. The plane that her father had piloted from New York to Paris in 1927 is today suspended high up on the museum ceiling.

That morning in the museum, Reeve and her young son Ben eagerly climbed into the bucket of a cherry-picker, a long-armed crane that carried them upward until they were right next to the plane. Seeing the machine that her father had so bravely flown across the sea was an unforgettable experience for Reeve. She had never touched the plane before. That morning, 20 feet above the floor of the museum, she tenderly reached out to run her fingers along the door handle, which she knew her father must have grasped many times with his own hand. Tears welled up in her eyes at the thought of what she was doing. "Oh, Ben," she whispered, her voice trembling, "isn't this amazing?" "Yes!" Ben replied, equally impressed. "This is SO cool. I've never been in a cherry-picker before!"

The experience was exciting for Ben because of where he was and what he was doing. The whole experience of being up 20 feet above the floor in a museum. It was meaningful to Reeve because of who it was for. It brought her closer to her father.

When you come to church, are you more like Ben or Reeve? Do you get caught up in the lights and sound and atmosphere of church, or are you here because it brings you closer to your father. What is your focus? More importantly, what SHOULD your focus be?

Today is our Kickoff Sunday, the day we usually celebrate when we return from the summer and start off another ministry year. This fall will be very different in terms of what we are able to do because of this pandemic, but it is still a time that we remember our mission as a church. Like the banners say, we exist as a church to exalt God, embrace one another, equip for service and extend the kingdom.

Today we want to talk about exalting God which means worship. What is worship?

Heb 12:28 Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, let us be thankful, and so worship God acceptably with reverence and awe

The word used for acceptable here is the Greek word EUARESTOS which means PLEASING. There is a right way and wrong way to worship. What is worship that pleases God? We read in the New Testament of a time when a Samaritan woman tried to debate Jesus on the best time, place, and style of worship.

John 4:19 "Sir," the woman said, "I can see that you are a prophet. 20 Our fathers worshiped on this mountain, but you Jews claim that the place where we must worship is in Jerusalem." 21 Jesus declared, "Believe me, woman, a time is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem. 22 You Samaritans worship what you do not know; we worship what we do know, for salvation is from the Jews. 23 Yet a time is coming and has now come when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for they are the kind of worshipers the Father seeks. 24 God is spirit, and his worshipers must worship in spirit and in truth."

Jesus tells the Samaritan woman that the external issues of time, place, and style are irrelevant. Where and how you worship is not as important as why you worship and how much of yourself you offer to God when you worship. Worship is all about God. God doesn't want just a part of your life - he wants all of you. He wants all your heart, all your soul, all your mind, and all your strength. He desires your full devotion, not just parts of your life.

What is worship that pleases God? It has four characteristics:

1. ACCURATE

A few weeks ago I used the quote by AW Tozer that says "what comes into your mind when you think about God is the most important thing about you." It is important that our image of God reflects reality and not our own ideas and understanding. We cannot just create our own comfortable or politically correct image of God and worship it. That is idolatry. We must worship God accurately.

It is much worse to have a false idea of God than no idea at all. -- William Temple

Jesus tells the Samaritan woman that, "True worshipers will worship the Father in ... truth, for they are the kind of worshipers the Father seeks." We must worship in truth. That means to worship God as he is truly revealed in the Bible.

William Temple once summed up worship like this: "Worshiping God is nothing but opening our hearts to the love of God, quickening our conscience to the Holiness of God, purging our imagination with the beauty of God, filling our minds with the truth of God and committing our purposes to the will of God."

Worship is a feast in which God is the host, the cook, the waiter, and the meal itself! - Sam Storms

We must be careful that we are not simply worshipping the style and form of worship but rather worshipping the one for who the worship is for.

I heard the story about a priest who began serving at the great cathedral of Florence, Italy. The church had a beautiful marble statue of Mary that many people would come to see. One day the priest noticed an elderly woman who came and knelt before the statue. Over time he realized it was her habit to come every day and bow before it. She would spend hours looking up into the eyes of the stature.

One day the priest remarked to an elderly priest who had been serving in that cathedral for many years, "Look how devoted and earnest this woman is. Every day she comes and sits before Mary to pray. What a marvelous act of faith!" The older priest laughed and said, "Do not be deceived by what you see. Many years ago, when the sculptor needed a model to pose for this statue, he hired a beautiful young woman to sit for him. This devout worshiper you see here everyday is that young woman. She is not worshipping God, she is worshipping who she used to be."

When you came to worship today, what was your focus? Was God your focus, or was it on the things around you? Were you conscious of the words that you were singing? Were the words you sang today biblical?

I know that there have been times in the past where people have questioned the theology of a song. That is a good thing, because it means that you were paying attention to what you were singing and not simply regurgitating the words.

The best way we get to know the biblical Jesus is by being students of the Bible. The more we read and understand the more pleasing our worship will be because it will be based on truth.

## 2. AUTHENTIC

Jesus said that we must not simply worship in truth but that we should also worship “in spirit.” He was not necessarily referring to the Holy Spirit, but to your spirit. We were created in the image of God, meaning we have an immortal spirit that resides within us. God designed us so that our spirit communicates with Him. In worship, our spirit is responding to God's Spirit.

Mar 12:28-30 One of the teachers of the law came and heard them debating. Noticing that Jesus had given them a good answer, he asked him, "Of all the commandments, which is the most important?" 29 The most important one, answered Jesus, "is this: 'Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one. 30 Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.'

When Jesus told us to worship with our heart and soul, he means that worship must be genuine and heartfelt. It is not just a matter of saying the right words; you must mean what you say. Heartless praise is not praise at all! It is an insult to God. When we worship, God looks past our words to our hearts.

Since worship involves delighting in God, it engages your emotions. God gave you emotions so you could worship him with deep feeling -- but those emotions must be genuine, not faked. God hates hypocrisy. He doesn't want showmanship or pretense or phoniness in worship. He wants your honest, real love. We can worship God imperfectly, but we cannot worship him insincerely.

Of course, sincerity alone is not enough; you can be sincerely wrong. That's why both spirit and truth are required. Worship must be both accurate and authentic. God-pleasing worship is deeply emotional and deeply doctrinal. We use both our hearts and our heads.

Today many equate being emotionally moved by music as being moved by the Spirit, but these are not the same. Real worship happens when your spirit responds to God, not to some musical tone. In fact, some sentimental, introspective songs hinder worship because they take the spotlight off God and focus on our feelings. Your biggest distraction in worship is yourself -- your own preferences, interests and even worries over what others think about you.

Christians often differ on the most appropriate or authentic way to express praise to God but these arguments are usually just personality and background differences. Personally, I like both hymns and modern praise songs. I know that this is an issue of debate from time to time.

A young Christian went to church and loved the modern worship, but one weekend was visiting a relative and attended a small town church. He came home and his wife asked him how it was. "Well," said the young man, "It was good. They did something different however. They sang hymns instead of regular songs." "Hymns," said his wife, "what are those?" "Oh, they're okay. They're sort of like

regular songs, only different," said the young man. "Well, what's the difference? Asked his wife. The young man said, "Well it's like this: If I were to say to you, 'Martha, the cows are in the corn,' well that would be a regular song. If, on the other hand, I were to say it to you like this:

Oh Martha, dear Martha, hearest my cry.  
Incline thine ear to the words of my mouth.  
Turn thou thy whole wondrous ear by and by,  
To the righteous and glorious truth.  
For the way of the animals who can explain?  
There in their heads is no shadow of sense.  
Unless from the mild, tempting corn they are fenced.

Yea those cows in glad bovine, rebellious delight,  
Have broke from their shackles, their warm pens eschewed.  
Then, goaded by minions of darkness and night,  
they through all my sweet corn have chewed.

So look to that bright shining day by and by,  
Where all foul creatures of earth are reborn.  
Where no vicious animal makes my soul cry,  
and I no longer see those cows in the corn. AMEN!

"Then, if I were to do only verses one, two, and four and do a key change on the last verse, well that would be a hymn."...

An old farmer went to the city one weekend and attended the big city church. He came home and his wife asked him how it was. "Well," said the farmer, "it was good. They did something different, however. They sang praise choruses." "Praise choruses?" said his wife, "What are those?" "Oh they're okay. They're sort of like hymns, only different," said the farmer. "Well, what's the difference?" asked the wife. The farmer said, "Well it's like this - If I were to say to you: 'Martha, the cows are in the corn,' well that would be a song. If, on the other hand, I were to say to you:

'Martha, Martha, Martha, Oh, Martha, Martha, Martha  
the cows are in the corn.  
the big cows, the brown cows, the black cows, the white cows, the black and white cows,  
Oh, the COWS, COWS, COWS are in the corn,  
are in the corn, are in the corn, are in the corn,  
Oh, Oh, Ooooooooh, yes, it's true, the whole herd is in the awesome corn,  
yes, it's true, the whole herd is in the awesome corn,  
weell, it's true, the whole herd is in the awesome corn!!! Alleluia!

That would be a praise chorus ...

The truth is that there is no right or wrong style. Worship is not about you. There are many forms of praise mentioned in the Bible in addition to singing. Among them confessing, singing, shouting, standing, kneeling, dancing, making a joyful noise, testifying, playing musical instruments, and raising hands. The best style of worship is the one that most authentically represents your love for God, based on the background and personality God gave you.

The English word worship is a shortened form of the old word worthship, which means showing God the worth he holds in your life. Fellowship with a holy God will produce holy living.

I heard about a pastor who was looking at the order of service in the bulletin one Sunday. He noticed that there was a spelling mistake. After the sermon, it said that there would be an 'Alter Call' with alter spelled with an e. An Altar Call is named that because the front of a church is referred to as an altar – spelled with an a.

The pastor thought about the spelling mistake for a moment, but then realized that perhaps the way it read in the bulletin was correct. What we want at the end of a service is an alter call.

We want to recognize how being in the presence of God has changed us. Do we really want God to alter us? Do we really want to be changed into His likeness? Are we just seeking an experience or do we truly want God to connect with our spirits and change us?

### 3. ARTICULATE

Jesus' commanded us to "love God with all our mind." This is repeated four times in the New Testament. God is not pleased with thoughtless singing of hymns, perfunctory praying of cliches, or careless exclamations of "Praise the Lord" uttered because we can't think of anything else to say at that moment. If worship is mindless, is it meaningless. You must engage your mind. Even if what you are saying is correct, you have to mean what you are saying.

This is not just confined to the English language. When I visited Kerala in India I went to a church and the people spent the whole time saying stotrum...

Jesus called thoughtless worship "vain repetitions" (Matthew 6:7, KJV). Even biblical terms can become tired cliches from overuse and we stop thinking about the meaning. It is so much easier to offer platitudes in worship instead of making the effort to honor God with fresh words and ways. This is why I encourage you to read Scripture in different translations and paraphrases. It will expand your expressions of worship.

Repetition is not always a good thing. In Eastern religions repetition is used to empty the mind – which is exactly the opposite of what we are trying to do – fill our minds with Christ.

Try praising God without using the words praise, hallelujah, thanks, or amen. Instead of saying, "We just want to praise you," make a list of synonyms and use fresh words like admire, respect, value, revere, honor, and appreciate.

Be specific in worship. If someone approached you and repeated, "I praise you!" ten times, you would probably think, For what? You would rather receive two specific compliments than twenty vague generalities. So would God. A few specific comments are better than a lot of general comments.

Have you ever been to the Waffle House? They don't serve waffles. I mean, during breakfast they have one plate which features waffles, but it's mostly just burgers and fries. If you're looking for a tasty Belgian waffle or a waffle smothered in fresh strawberries or even a waffle cone, you better go somewhere else. Apparently the Waffle house has forgotten what they are all about. Have we forgotten what we're all about? Have we forgotten how different our Savior is?

#### 4. ACTIVE

Rom 12:1 Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God -- this is your spiritual act of worship.

Why does God want your body? Because without your body you can't do anything on this planet. In eternity, you're going to get a new, improved, upgraded body but while you're here on earth God says, "Give me what you've got!" He's just being practical about worship. You've heard people say, "I can't make it to the meeting tonight but I'll be with you in spirit." Do you know what that means? Nothing. It's worthless! As long as you're on earth your spirit can only be where your body is! If your body isn't there, neither are you!

In worship we are to "Offer our bodies as living sacrifices." Now, we usually associate the concept of "sacrifice" with something dead, but God wants you to be a living sacrifice. He wants you to live for him! However, the problem with a living sacrifice is that it can crawl off the altar, and we often do that. We sing ONWARD CHRISTIAN SOLDIERS on Sunday then go AWOL on Monday."

Beware of worshipping Jesus as the Son of God, and professing your faith in Him as the Savior of the world, while you blaspheme Him by the complete evidence in your daily life that He is powerless to do anything in and through you. -- Oswald Chambers

Worshipping God with our bodies means recognizing that all we have belongs to Jesus. It is using what we have been given for His glory. It is remembering who we belong to, who is Lord of our life. It also means showing up. It means being there.

I recognize that these are unusual days that we are living in. We talked about change last week. I am not speaking to those who are willing but not able. I am speaking to those who are able but not willing. Those who chose to come only occasionally because it is easier.

C.S. Lewis said that when he first became a Christian, he had trouble with church gatherings. "I thought that I could do it on my own by retiring to my rooms and reading theology, and I wouldn't go to churches anymore." He found the sermons often dull, and he disliked organ music, which he described as "one long roar." He had contempt for church hymns, which he "considered to be fifth rate poems set to sixth rate music." However, as his faith matured he grew to value gathering with other Christians to worship. As his ego diminished, he realized that these hymns were being sung with enthusiasm by elderly saints in neighboring pews, and then he realized that he was unworthy to clean their boots. He said, "Going to church gets you out of your solitary conceit."

Song writer and worship leader Graham Kendrick said, "Worship is first and foremost for His benefit, not ours, though it is marvelous to discover that in giving Him pleasure, we ourselves enter into what can become our richest and most wholesome experience in life"

I heard about a guy in England years ago who was looking to rent a new house in Newcastle. The owner took him up to the second floor and showed him the nice view out of the bedroom window. He said, "You can see Durham Cathedral from this window on Sundays." The man asked, "Why on a Sunday and not any other day?" The owner replied, "Because only on Sunday there is no smoke from those tall factory chimneys." Why is coming to church so important? As we gather together we put aside the time to focus on Jesus. The busyness of the week fades and we are able to see more clearly.