



Connecting with God for a Strong Finish

CHAPTER 13

The Worship Service

Various models facilitate the body of Christ as she gathers to connect with God and with one another. Liturgical and some non-liturgical formats offer a predictable style; they provide security through familiarity. Other models offer less structure, which accommodates creativity, diversity, and spontaneity. Ideal models serve those in attendance by presenting the truth about God clearly in an atmosphere that draws attention to His presence. Participants offer their response of praise, worship, and gratitude within parameters favored by their religious culture.

In “Putting an End to Worship Wars”, Elmer Towns describes six paradigms of worship, though he admits, “Some might argue that none of the six types of worship (see chapters 5 through 10) are in fact worship”.¹ He offers the following clarification.

The Evangelistic model is not worship; it’s evangelism

The Bible Expositional model is not worship; it’s teaching

The Renewal model is not worship; it’s revival

The Body Life model is not worship; it’s fellowship

The Liturgical model is not worship, for worship is internal

¹ Elmer Towns, *Putting an End to Worship Wars*, Broadman & Holman Publishers, Nashville, TN, 1997, p.60.

The Congregational model is not worship; it's an assembly of the church²

Though most biblical accounts emphasize expressions of facedown worship in heaven and on earth, Jesus' closest disciples worshiped Him by saying, "*You are certainly God's Son!*"³ They may or may not have bowed; the Bible does not elaborate. Each response of worship varies depending on one's personal preference and the corporate dynamics associated with the situation. Each gesture of worship reflects how well we know our Heavenly Father and how acutely we experience His presence.

Attending to God's Presence

In "Leap Over a Wall", Eugene Peterson defines worship as, "the strategy by which we interrupt our preoccupation with ourselves and attend to the presence of God."⁴ He adds, "Worship is the time and place that we assign for deliberate attentiveness to God—not because he's confined to time and place but because our self-importance is so insidiously relentless that if we don't deliberately interrupt ourselves regularly, we have no chance of attending to him."⁵ After establishing an appropriate time and place to attend to the presence of God, Peterson cautions that we not presume control over that time and place or confine God to any particular time and place.

Attending to God's presence offers indispensable benefits—to us. Bible reading and prayer integrated with confession and praise all serve to promote spiritual awareness and personal well-being. Psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs inspire us to recognize God for all He is worth. When guided by sensitive leaders, formal sacraments and sym-

² Elmer Towns, *Putting an End to Worship Wars*, Broadman & Holman Publishers, Nashville, TN, 1997, p.60.

³ Matthew 14:33 NAS

⁴ Eugene Peterson, *Leap Over a Wall: Earthly Spirituality for Everyday Christians*, Harper San Francisco, 1997, p. 152.

⁵ Peterson, *Leap Over a Wall*, 1997, p. 153.

bolic rituals escort participants toward spiritual maturity. Repetitive liturgies reinforce sound doctrine. They emphasize the truth about God and the truth about us. These activities prime worshipers to notice God and acknowledge His eminence with the utmost respect. It motivates them to serve with courage and inspires them to perform with enthusiasm.

While God may find pleasure in our gatherings, singing, praying, confessing, communing, and giving offerings do not serve any need that He might have. God exists in a state of perpetual perfection. Nothing we think, say, or do will ever improve His character or enhance His welfare. Though God does not need our ministry, participating in a ceremony or celebration blesses Him with relational attention. God enjoys interacting with us as we deliberately attend to His presence and exchange overtures of love.

Public Service

The word *liturgy* comes from the Greek word *leitourgia*, which means public service. It is derived from two words: "laos", which means people and "ergon", which means work.⁶ A liturgy therefore denotes the "work of the people". City-States in ancient Greece established a "public service liturgy" where citizens and alien residents financed the State from their personal wealth.⁷

According to Merriam-Webster, *liturgy* involves, "A rite or body of rites prescribed for public worship."⁸ A *rite* is "a prescribed form or manner governing the words or...ceremonial practices of a church or group of churches".⁹ The Roman Catholic term *Mass*, refers to a celebration of the Eucharist or Holy Communion. Mass is derived from the

⁶ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Liturgy_%28ancient_Greece%29 (accessed 9-13-12)

⁷ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Liturgy_%28ancient_Greece%29#cite_note-1 (accessed 9-13-12)

⁸ <http://www.m-w.com/dictionary> (accessed 12-11-11)

⁹ <http://www.m-w.com/dictionary> (accessed 9-11-12)

Latin word *messa*, which literally means dismissal at the end of a religious service.¹⁰

Either through a well-designed liturgy or a spirit-led celebration, gathering as the church behooves its attendees to worship God. Both formats concentrate our attention on Him and promote harmony with His ways. Whether standardized or spontaneous, each format facilitates our focus on Jesus. Both models provide opportunities to consider the value of His worth and recognize the significance of His accomplishments. Using words, symbols, and activities, they emphasize spiritual priorities and reinforce eternal promises.

Christ-centered communities offer spiritual guidance for those wanting to connect with Jesus for redemption and restoration. They provide an atmosphere that facilitates God's voice as He builds up His church with strength, courage, and comfort.

Called out from this world, church communities recognize the benefits associated with regular assemblies. Preserving sound doctrine has important consequences as does promoting spiritual growth and addressing personal needs. Besides building unity in the faith, congregating in Jesus' name provides an opportunity for mutual encouragement and moral support. Publicly rehearsing vital tenets of the faith restrains heresy and deters apostasy.

Worship however, is not a means to an end. Its purpose is not to maintain orthodox systems of religion for generations to come. Worship is not about evangelism, meeting needs, or generating feelings of exhilaration. To be sure, God has equipped the saints to fulfill these objectives through other means.

Though we like to believe that our worship makes a difference, the Bible does not emphasize any such cause and effect relationship. Acts of worship may or may not change the spiritual climate. They may or may not affect spiritual strongholds or activate healings and deliver-

¹⁰ <http://www.m-w.com/dictionary> (accessed 9-11-12)

ance. Venerating God may or may not enhance the quality of a worshiper's life or influence curious onlookers wanting to connect with Jesus.

Simply put, worship is all about God. When this truth hits home, worshipers assure their Heavenly Father that they get it. They initiate a posture of maximum deference because the truth about God literally sweeps them off their feet. Nothing else communicates such extreme honor. No one else merits such radical distinction. Asking nothing in return, worshipers extend themselves with total abandonment. Based on an incomprehensible estimate of God's worth, they worship Him in spirit and truth. Each response of worship says something special about God and to God, which nothing else can say.

Stronger than Words

“Worship is not an optional extra for the Christian,
a self-indulgent religious activity.
It is the basic Christian stance...”¹¹

N. T. Wright

The profile of a worshiper goes beyond performing religious rites in a ceremony. Jesus did not choose a service-oriented word like *latreia* or a devotion-oriented word like *sebomai* to describe the kind of worshipers that our Heavenly Father seeks. He used *proskunetes* (pros-koo-nay-tace'), which appears only one time in the New Testament. In John 4:23, this Greek noun denotes “*true worshipers*”. The verb form, *proskuneo*, means to do homage or make obeisance by kneeling or prostration.¹²

True worshipers use extreme body language to say what human words cannot express. From the earliest biblical descriptions, to the last reference in the Bible, worship remains essentially the same. From an-

¹¹ N. T. Wright, *For All God's Worth*, Eerdmans Publishing Co., Grand Rapids, MI/Cambridge, U.K., 1997, p. 1.

¹² [http://bible.crosswalk.com/Lexicons/\(9-15-12\)](http://bible.crosswalk.com/Lexicons/(9-15-12))

gels and demons to saints and sinners, individuals and groups alike extended similar gestures. From first-time encounters to seasoned patriarchs, from spontaneous expressions to organized events, worshipers responded with facedown reverence.

Transfixed by the glory of God, worshipers abandon business as usual. They advance beyond prayer as usual, praise as usual, and worship as usual. Discerning the signs of the times, worshipers stop operating in their own strength and lunge headlong toward “*the substance of things hoped for*”.¹³ They lay their faith completely at Christ’s feet based on “*the evidence of things not seen*”.¹⁴ This is not as good as it gets. The best is yet to come!

Beyond the Bow

On a foundation of reverence, worshipers demonstrate and articulate all that our Heavenly Father seeks. Besides bowing, they generate other expressions as well. Worship is a big word—big enough to influence everything we think, say, and do, wherever we may be or go. After bowing or falling facedown, worshipers continue interacting with the Lord and others. They descend in worship then arise with a standing commission to speak inspired words and perform virtuous deeds. Service-oriented activities may precede, follow, or intermingle with sentiments of reverence. They flow naturally from men, women, boys, girls, and angels who know the truth about God and the truth about themselves.

Worship complements a variety of attitudes and activities. Some of which are spontaneous, while others are planned or rehearsed. Worshipers offer so much more than an isolated event. With overtones of reverence, they convey gratitude and communicate praise. Love and admiration undergird their offerings and highlight their sacrifices. As worshipers congregate under both liturgical and non-liturgical formats,

¹³ Hebrews 11:1 NKJ

¹⁴ Hebrews 11:1 NKJ

they proclaim God's word, confess sins, celebrate sacraments, offer petitions, profess creeds, and make intercession. While striving to live a devout and holy life, they attend to widows and orphans, visit prisoners, feed the poor, and serve the sick and homeless.

Because worshipers know who they are, they serve their Heavenly Father in every activity with deep conviction. They go and do His will because they grasp the urgency behind His appeal for redemption and restoration. As co-laborers and fellow workers with Christ, worshipers recognize the passion behind His priorities. They serve Him enthusiastically with diligence, courage, and respect.

Knowing before Going

Our Heavenly Father provides us with the Spirit of wisdom and revelation specifically so that we "*may know him better*".¹⁵ Knowing the truth about God is essential if we are to live-out priorities based on what is truly important. Paul understood the importance of this knowledge derived from the Spirit of wisdom and revelation. He prayed:

*I keep asking that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, so **that you may know him better**.* (Ephesians 1:17 NIV)

Hearing what the Holy Spirit has to say goes beyond guidance and direction. God wants us to *know and be* before we *go and do*. Worshipers who know God act accordingly. They respond instinctively "to all that God is with all that [they] are".¹⁶

Waiting on the Lord before doing with the Lord, marks a sacred rhythm. It prepares the mind with volleys of hope and tunes the heart with episodes of courage. Waiting facilitates prayer and augments in-

¹⁵ Ephesians 1:17 NIV

¹⁶ Spiros Zodhiates, *The Complete Word Study, Old Testament*, Chattanooga, AMG International Inc., 1994, p. 2372 and *The Complete Word Study Dictionary, New Testament*, Chattanooga, AMG International Inc., 1992, p. 1233.

tercession. It quiets the soul to hear God’s voice and allows time to process reality with greater faith and confidence.

In Psalm 46:10, translators for the ESV Bible emphasize being and knowing rather than going and doing.

*“**Be** still, and **know** that I am God. ...”* (Psalm 46:10 ESV)

NAS translators put it this way:

*“Cease striving and **know** that I am God; ...”* (Psalm 46:10 NAS)

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