

[1] Worship – the Family Gathering

Having been a “worship leader” for over 15 years now, and having been on staff here for 9 years, one might assume that I am now an “expert” on what it means to “worship.” It takes 10,000 hours to technically become proficient in a task or skill, and I’ve definitely put that time in by now... so when I started a PhD program last fall, any potential pride in my knowledge of “worship” was completely washed away by the fire hydrant of knowledge and wisdom I’ve been drinking from for the last year. I’m so grateful for the GCC family and the elders here who have supported me 100% in this endeavor, and I’m beyond thankful for my wife, who has been a faithful and absolutely necessary support and encourager through this year. All that to say... I have been living in a constant state of being overwhelmed by theology and worship since entering that track at Southeastern Seminary.

I’m going to summarize for all of you what the last year has been like, in about 30minutes. Buckle up.

I’m mostly kidding... but if you have any questions at ALL about the things i mention today to define our biblical response to God, our worship, then please ask me! I’d love to talk about it – and, you’ll get to talk about a lot of this in your home groups this week – there are several questions that I purposefully had to cut out of our time this morning, and it was painful, but Brad reminds me that a preacher and/or teacher is always sharing about 10% of what they actually study in preparation.

[2] What I want to do this morning is show you how we biblically define worship, explain how corporate worship is indeed a gathering of the family of God, and clarify that we GATHER to be SENT.

There are two uses of the word “Worship” that I want to lay out, then we’ll pursue one more than the other this morning, focusing in on Worship as the Family Gathering.

[3] Biblically, there is a call for individual worship AND there is a design for corporate worship. These function distinctly in our lives, but they are INSEPARABLE. Individual worship and corporate, gathered worship are distinct, but INSEPARABLE. A Christian who worships at home, in private, but does not gather with other believers... this person may not be following Jesus. A Christian who worships on Sunday mornings but does not worship in the quiet of their bedroom, or daily with their family, in their place of work, this person may not be following Jesus. That may be a hard word, but consider it as we define worship this morning.

if you’re aware at all of the trends in society, there is a rise of the nones. People who have no religious affiliation or preference when they are polled. There is also a rise in the spiritual/not religious category... those who practice some kind of Privatized worship of something or another.

Privatized worship? hopefully that sounds ridiculous to you. because, in fact, every believer in Jesus, who has professed the gospel to be true and repented of their sin, has been sealed into the Kingdom of God by the Holy Spirit. They’ve been made a part of the capital C church through the same power that raised Christ from the dead. The church is described as a body, and is intended to function together, in harmony. The church, and the Kingdom, is a family, since we are all adopted as sons and daughters, and made co-heirs with Jesus, our great savior.

And the Bible is actually very clear on what worship is, and what it looks like. Here are a few key texts that inform what it means to worship – you’ll be talking about some of this a bit more in home groups, so make note of these to read this week or over the next several weeks. These are some of my favorite passages in scripture.

[4] these are the Chair Texts for a theology of worship first, Genesis 1–3 – this answers WHY we were created from our first breath, which God Himself gave to mankind, we were worshiping. We were created for a relationship with the Creator, to participate with Him in creativity. We learn from this narrative that we are always worshipping, but if we are not careful we will exchange worship of the Creator for worship of the created things, or worship of knowledge, or worship of ourselves. But God has always intended to walk with us, to show His glory to us, and for us to respond.

[5] Romans 12 – would you turn there quickly? this describes what we do as new creation in Christ. Here in Romans, Paul lays out the most compelling theological articulation of the gospel until Augustine, pretty much. At the end of all of his chapters of theology, what does Paul do? He breaks out into song! The end of Romans 11 is a Trinitarian doxology (from Him and through Him and to Him are all things), and Romans 12 picks up by saying Therefore – which means EVERYthing i’ve just said leads to THIS – Therefore, don’t be conformed, but be renewed. Be a living sacrifice, as your reasonable service to God. this is also translated what? Worship. The kind of sacrifice we make now, in Jesus, is not a once-a-year thing, or a once-a-week thing, it’s a living, daily posture in response to God’s revelation.

[6] John 4 – this encounter between Jesus and a Samaritan woman at the well describes what kind of worshipers the father seeks, who worship in spirit and in truth. This passage is what reminds us that worship is indeed internal, a matter of the heart. Just Being present here this morning is not necessarily worship – singing with us is not necessarily worship – UNLESS, it is in the power of the Spirit, according to the revealed truth of the gospel.

[7] Psalm 96–99 – these Psalms answer for us, what does praise look like? They are pure, unadulterated exaltation of God’s glory. They are focused on the awesomeness of the King of kings, the God who shares His name with us, Yahweh. These Psalms remind us of the AWE that should characterize our encounters with the truth of the gospel – the All-powerful, Holy God of the Universe has bid us to come into His presence, and as we rightly tremble in fear of what He can do, and SHOULD do because of our rebellion, He has lifted our heads, helping us see His glory in the person of Jesus, the Lord.

[8] Revelation 4–5 – this is basically what does praise look like pt. 2. I’ve spent some time recently studying this passage, and This may be one of my top 3 passages in the whole Bible. I don’t know if you are supposed to do that, but oh well. Here, we find the picture of the throne room of God, which is like a constant concert. Nonstop singing, nonstop instruments, and i would venture to say that it may get a bit loud in there. Not only because John describes things with “loud” a lot, but because at one point, you’ve got EVERY creature in existence praising God. Tony was describing how, on Memorial Day, thousands of bikers from around the country drive into DC in order to remember fallen soldiers. They will gather around the National Mall, and then every bike there will rev their engine at the same time... they call it “rolling thunder.” The hosts of

heaven are praising God with rolling thunder every moment.

The psalmist is not being rhetorical when he says let EVERYTHING that has breath praise the Lord. It's going to happen, because the Lamb of God who was slain, He is WORTHY of it all. This passage also reminds us that He alone is worthy.

[9] lastly for this morning, we have Matthew 28 – the resurrection and the Great Commission – this passage is what we'll read together, so would you stand with me, and read aloud together with me the bold section when we get to it.

[10 – 11]

Matthew 28:16–20

Now the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain to which Jesus had directed them. **17** And when they saw him they worshiped him, but some doubted. **18** And Jesus came and said to them, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. **19** Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, **20** teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”

This is the Word of God for the People of God.

Would you pray with me? God – give us illumination.

[12] Here in Matthew 28, This commission both IS worship, and is preceded by worship

Worship is the context for God's commands to us.

I love the honesty of this passage, too... when people are wanting to attack the validity of the scriptures, I love being reminded of verses like verse 17. Matthew 28 describes the

resurrection – and if you were going to lie about it, you’d want to paint the most clear, compelling picture possible, right? You’d want to convince people, to dress it up so no one would have any questions... But here, Matthew is just honest. Some doubted. Why else would Matthew include such a troubling thought, unless it was just true? Jesus was raised from the dead. Some people will doubt this. Their doubt doesn’t make it any less true.

[13] But I digress... here we find the disciples SEE Jesus, and they WORSHIP Him. The word in the greek is Pro-skuneo, which literally and usually means to lay prostrate. To bow down. We’ve lost a lot of that in the good ol’ American church with our comfy chairs and tight rows and propriety. Unless you’re Charismatic or Pentecostal, then this makes sense. But in the first century and beyond, to worship God in corporate gatherings included more than just your voice raised or your thoughts directed and ordered – you put your whole body in submission to the King. They see Him, and they worship Him. Then He gives them a way to continue their worship, by making disciples.

[14] Making disciples is worship, and we do that personally, individually, and corporately. Making disciples is teaching people how to respond to the incredible news of what God has done for us and for His glory through Jesus. This is what God has commissioned us to do, if we are following Jesus.

[15] I’ve used this word “worship” a lot so far... Here is a theological Definition of biblical worship that I was tasked with compiling this last semester. I relied heavily on biblical language, as you might guess, and the work of some incredible theologians to craft this –

True worship is the heartfelt, Spirit-empowered response of God's covenant people to the revelation of God's glory in the person and work of Jesus Christ, initiated by God's invitation and performed according to His will, in the context of the gospel's promises.

This definition is on my mind as I do my "job" as Creative Arts director. If you are every curious what is governing the choices that we make in our gatherings together, this is the guideline for me.

This is obviously a loaded definition... there's a lot going on here, and i won't have much time to unpack it this morning. But please notice what is NOT Here... i do NOT say 'worship' is really good music or 'worship' is led by a worship leader or pastor. Worshiping God is so much bigger than that. It is our RESPONSE to God's REVELATION... and we see this pattern of Revelation & Response throughout the scripture. God reveals Himself, the people respond. Here in Matthew 28, the disciples see the revealed, resurrected Jesus, and they respond by falling on their faces before Him.

[16] If you recall our title for this morning, we're going to focus on the aspect of corporate worship, or the gathering of believers. In keeping with our theme for our study of the church, let's consider how corporate worship is like Family Gatherings.

I missed the Stephenson family reunion last month, that's my mom's dad's side of the family... over a hundred folks who are all related via our great-grandparents all got together in a small church's fellowship hall in Willow Spring. When you have family reunions, whether multiple branches like that one was, or just your Thanksgiving gathering of the "immediate" family in the area, there are several things that are going to happen, guaranteed.

When your whole family gets together, something awkward is going to be said or done. You can count on it. There are various degrees of awkwardness, but it's inevitable. When your whole family gets together, someone is going to take a nap – whether it be your toddlers or grandpa. When your whole family gets together, the time either passes way too quickly, or not quickly enough. There is no in-between.

Now, all of those could describe church.

[17] But these next 4 things DEFINITELY describe the church. When your family gets together, you first have to GATHER together. Then, you usually spend time remembering life, catching up, celebrating the good things, grieving the losses. Then, you come to the table, for fellowship and nourishment. Finally, you're sent back out to be a Calvert, or a Stephenson, or a Talley in the wider world.
– gathering, remembering, the table, sending

These are four elements of every corporate worship gathering, across denominations and across traditions.

[18] Gathering – Biblically, this includes the invocation. The prayer of welcome, the intentional gathering at a time and a place that has been agreed upon, for the expressed pur-

pose of worshiping God together as the body of Christ. this is the Gathering.

In our context, this includes announcements, welcome, greeting, coffee! These are all ways that we intentionally gather together and begin to shift our focus away from ourselves towards Jesus and those gathered.

Remembering – Biblically, this is accomplished through the Word of God, the sure and unfailing testimony of God's work and of God's character. This remembering through God's Word is done by preaching, by singing, by praying.

In our context, that's how we do this! by singing, praying, preaching, and celebrating the work of God for the people of God as recorded in the Word of God. We remember what He has done, is doing, and has promised to do.

The Table – biblically, this is most clear in the Lord's supper. but Before the Supper, God instituted the Passover Meal as a signpost to both REMIND the people of what He had done and His faithfulness toward them, but also to POINT them toward the lamb who would be the final sacrifice to shed blood that would atone for them.

When Jesus led the Supper in the upper room before His death, He showed how the fullness of the gospel is mysteriously wrapped up in the practice of eating broken bread and drinking wine. It would take a whole sermon series to unpack the ways that the Lord's Supper is alluded to all throughout scripture, and the amount of meaning it is intended to convey when we partake together, coming to the Lord's table at His invitation.

our context – once-a-month Supper. If you are a follower of Jesus and you are involved in a church that does not celebrate the Lord's Supper in corporate worship, you need to find a church that takes the Bible a bit more seriously. In the same way that the Bible knows nothing of an un-baptized Christian, the Bible knows nothing of a Chris-

tian who does not commune with God and with the body of Christ at the Table. Also, in our context, our weekly fellowship through Home Groups usually takes place around A table – because meals are powerful times for building relationships, for being vulnerable, for showing hospitality, and for modeling the gospel in your homes.

Sending – biblically this is a benediction, a missional blessing that accompanies the people as they go forth. Paul writes benedictions in his letters. Aaron pronounced a benediction over the people of God that was repeated and has been repeated innumerable times since.

our context – we have elders and deacons pronounce a benediction! This may seem like a simple moment at times, but these men are praying for EACH of us and ALL of us, offering a blessing for our week as we go.

[19] and in an interesting turn, we are SENT, in order to Gather the Family! Remember our text in Matthew, the Commission Jesus gives, immediately after worship? He sends them OUT, to all the ends of the earth, so that wherever they are they might GATHER the family of God and begin the cycle there as well.

We gather again, each week, to do the things that can ONLY happen when we gather, and then we are sent yet again. This cycle has been happening every week you've been attending church, by the way, whether you thought about it that way or not. You are worshiping through gathering, remembering, communing, and then living your ordinary, regular life. The church gathers, and scatters.

It may seem to be a little late in the game to ask this question rhetorically, but WHY do we worship?

You may have had this experience before where you're halfway through the year, and you've got all your routines

down pretty well, and life is moving right along, and you get up to go to church again because it's Sunday and that's what you've always done, but something brings you pause as you sit in your car about to pull out of the driveway. Why am I even doing this?

[20] In part, this is answered by another question, WHO do we worship?

If you're in a place where you've been wondering, WHY do we worship? Why is this such a big deal? Why have I been committed to this gathering together? Why am I hearing from this book again...?

Consider WHO you worship.

Reading Psalm 96–99, or reading Revelation 5, or even reading about Isaiah's call in Isaiah chapter 6... the God who created all the heavens and the earth and the atom and its subatomic particles and all the colors of the sunset and the human eye that can behold it and ice cream and gravity and starlight and TIME itself... He loves you.

The HOLY, RIGHTEOUS, JUST and PERFECT God who knows EVERY wicked thing you've ever thought about doing and who knows exactly how broken and sad and lonely and lost you are... He loves you.

The King who is above ALL KINGS left his throne in order to bring YOU home, though all things are already HIS, he died a thief's death, in your place, so that you could be his son, his daughter. He loves you.

When you're Focused on Him, the 'why' has its proper context. That's why the Great Commission begins with worship – they were focused on Jesus, and in that context, He sends them out, to make more worshipers.

And that's not as difficult as we make it out to be, actually. Making more worshipers. We're always on, always worshipping. You can't turn that part of you off. You will always be pouring out your affections toward something or someone. As Calvin puts it, your heart is an idol factory, and unless you are focusing on Him, you will create something else to love and put it in GOD's place.

We don't have to make people worship, we have to help them aim it correctly

Many of you have heard this before, but even A good thing that becomes a god thing is a bad thing.

People are already worshipping, and it is our commission, our task, as a gathered and scattered family to remind people to look to HIM, and live. When we SEE JESUS, we can't not worship in response.

So if you're wondering WHY we worship, look on WHO we worship, look at Jesus.

[21] SO when we gather on Sunday mornings, it's helpful to remember that Grace Community Church exists to Exalt – Establish – Engage

and as Pastor Brad reminded me this week, these are less sequential and more simultaneous, especially when we GATHER to worship together.

We simultaneously exalt, establish, and engage through our weekly liturgy. Liturgy simply means, the work of the people. The liturgy that we practice every week here is less about what I do or even what Brad does, but more about how ALL of us are equipped for ministry. We have several core values that reflect what it means for us to Worship in this Family Gathering, and you can find these on our website and discuss them in Grace Connection next week:

[22] – **Participatory Worship** – Meaningful worship is not a performance by a few, but a heartfelt response by all to the magnificence of God. Our worship gatherings are Christ-centered, God-honoring, culturally relevant, creative, innovative, and grounded in Christian heritage but not blindly tied to church tradition.

– **Every Member a Minister** – God works through people and gives every believer talents and gifts vital to accomplishing His plan. We help each member discover, cultivate, and employ those gifts so the church can better meet people’s needs and individuals can reach their full potential in Christ.

– **Creativity, Excellence, Innovation** – Meeting needs is more important than maintaining programs. While our message is timeless, our methods adapt to those we are here to serve. In all that we do, we give God only our best.

[23] We do all of this, we gather for worship, because He is worthy. God has made us all members of one another, knitting together the body of Christ, with Jesus as our head. Don’t neglect the gathering together – and don’t neglect the missional sending that takes place in just a few minutes. We gather to be SENT.

At the end of every month, we worship through giving – we give specifically to benevolence, which is a fund to care for those in our congregation and in our community who are in difficult places financially, so please consider worshipping this way as we close in prayer. [24]