

Spiritual Pathways: Worship as a Way of Life

Listen as I describe the following scenes. What do these actions have in common?

overwhelmed by the great love and acceptance shown to her, a woman walks into a dinner party weeping and begins to wash Jesus' feet with her hair and tears.

moved by Jesus' words 'when I was in prison you comforted me,' a man decides to join Prison Fellowship and begins fortnightly visit to prison where he gets to know inmates and invests in befriending them.

sensing a yearning for greater understanding of the Bible, a young woman enrolls in a 'bible overview' subject at Stirling Theological College.

for the first time in his life, an old man recognises that there is far more to prayer than reading out his checklist every night. He embarks on a new morning and evening meditative practice with the simple desire to learn to listen to God.

a child plays on the sea shore, relishing with great interest and delight the sea creatures she has found in a series of rock pools.

a family, tired of the excess consumerism at Christmas, decide to limit presents and invite some newly arrived refugee neighbours to a picnic on Christmas Day for lunch.

What do they all have in common? - They are all worshipping God!

Today we are starting a new series called 'Spiritual Pathways: Worship as a Way of Life'. The aim of the series is to help us recognise God's loving presence in our daily down-to-earth experience of life and how we can practically respond to his love.

This is for those of you who wonder how can I experience God in my life more powerfully, which is hopefully all of us!

Each week, we're going to look at a different aspect of everyday life: things like nature, relationships, our minds, our senses, our time and resources. We're wanting to explore each area as a spiritual pathway, that is, as a road God has given us to journey down so that we can connect more deeply with him.

My hope this morning is to make it clear what is meant by 'worship as a way of life'. I could have just called this series 'spiritual pathways' but ... something essential is missing.

If there's one thing I want you to remember today 'Christian spirituality is all about worship'.

What is worship?

Worship - comes from the word 'worth'. - to show worth (more than that!), to give great honour (still more required), to deeply commit to (almost there), to place your life before (that's it!).

Worship impacts all areas of life - the priorities we choose, the activities we practice, the ways we relate to each other, how we spend our money...

It's a distinctive way of life, and it goes back to the earliest Christians. They were known simply as people 'of the way' and their life was modelled on Jesus' life.

Romans 12:1 - So here's what I want you to do, God helping you: Take your everyday, ordinary life - your sleeping, eating, going-to-work, and walking-around life - and place it before God as an offering.

Brothers and sisters, in view of God's mercy, offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God...this is your spiritual act of worship.

If you thought worship refers only to what we do at church on Sunday morning, think again! This picture of worship as a way of life is a much bigger and bolder one for us to wrestle with.

So I've mentioned worship, now what do I mean by spirituality?

Christian spirituality is best spoken of as worship. They're the same thing, and it's centred on God.

Whereas in the culture around us, spirituality is very different. It's not God centred at all.

Have you heard people say 'I am not a religious person, but I am spiritual'? They don't want to have anything to do with religions, but to be 'spiritual'...now

that is attractive! Spirituality when spoken of in this way usually means something pretty vague, like 'getting in touch with who I am'. It is usually a very self-focussed approach to spiritual growth. This has less to do with honouring God, and more to do with pleasing ourselves, even so, the fact that there is even interest says spirituality something about the society in which we live... there is a hunger for it. There is a hunger for something bigger than ourselves.

This is why getting in touch with spirituality seems so appealing. We get energised with the thought of getting more in touch with spirituality, but when it is for its own sake and it is self centred, its rather like 'Spirituality' shopping - I'll try that one on for a bit...I like the look of this. I'm over this one...

To me the tragedy is that, without a solid understanding of worship, us Christians also get caught up in spirituality shopping. And we quickly lose our distinctiveness.

Going back to our scriptures, **Romans 12:2** - Don't become so well-adjusted to your culture that you fit into it without even thinking. Instead, fix your attention on God. You'll be changed from the inside out. Readily recognise what he wants from you, and quickly respond to it. Unlike the culture around you, always dragging you down to its level of immaturity, God brings the best out of you, develops well-formed maturity in you.

Just as in Romans 12 Paul urges the church to stand out from the culture around them. So we need to do likewise. This is why in this series, when we are talking about spiritual pathways or practical spirituality, I want you to realise we are not spirituality shopping, looking for little ways to improve ourselves, we are always talking in the context of worship.

So, Christians have a distinctive approach to spirituality and it's called worship.

So we've established that worship is a way of life where we place our life before God and that worship of God is very different from the spirituality of our culture. Lastly, I want to ask: What is it about God that makes us want to worship him?

Worship is a possibility only because God shows himself to us, he pours himself out to us in so many ways. It doesn't start with you! It starts with God. You don't find God, God finds you! In fact he's the one that has been after us and drawing us to himself since the very beginning.

He is our creator and sustainer and loving father - he wants to relate with us and he moves mountains to set things right between us.

He is our saviour and healer in Christ - he came to be one of us to show us the way back to his loving presence.

He is always present - forming me, inspiring me, shaping me to a way of life that imitates Jesus, through the Holy Spirit.

Romans 12:3 - I'm speaking to you out of deep gratitude for all that God has given me, and especially as I have responsibilities in relation to you. Living then, as every one of you does, in pure grace, it's important that you not misinterpret yourselves as people who are bringing goodness to God. No, God brings it all to you. The only accurate way to understand ourselves is by what God is and by what he does for us, not by what we are and what we do for him.

Worship is not about what I do, but what is done in me.

Our worship then becomes an echo, responding back in gratitude to his gifts.

Its not like God commands us to worship him in some kind of dictatorial way - its God saying here I am, see my splendour, my faithfulness, my kindness, my generosity, my glory.

He stirs us up to want to respond. When we see our lives being transformed it makes us want to worship even more. It spurs us on. We become unstoppable because God is unstoppable. That is the momentum we want to reach.

We can choose to step back, to slow the momentum, to put a lid on it.

You are as close to God as you want to be. But why would you slow down. And yet many of us keep God at arm's length, only wanting a small dose.

You know the old saying: You are what you eat? Well, I reckon 'we are what we worship, that is, we become what we worship. If you worship money, you become cold and hard and passionless. If you worship prestige and reputation, you become proud and arrogant and lacking in compassion. If you worship fame and celebrity, you become shallow and fake. So don't settle for anything less.

Close with Story: A young man I know, back when he was newly wed, realised that his wife's birthday was coming up soon. He racked his brain for the right present. Being a Parramatta Eels fan himself, he decided to buy her a special rugby league jumper, complete with all the right logos. It was not easy for him to accomplish. He had to get a friend in Sydney to pick it up for him and

send it down. But it never crossed his mind that his wife might not actually be interested in it. He got her what he'd always wanted, seemingly unable to tune in to what she loves. I'm sure none of us guys would ever do that sort of thing, would we?!

As we start this series, each Spiritual pathway is something that God loves dearly, these are things that God has invested in, they are His love languages, they speak of God's character, of who God is. Let's make our worship about learning to love what God loves, and to invest the whole of our lives in the things God cares about.