

Worship Basics  
February 24, 2013

When my sons were in little league, I went to little league games. One year both my sons were in soccer, so I went to a lot of soccer games that year.

In soccer, for those of you who don't really know the game, there are players assigned to certain locations on the field. And they are supposed to stay in those relative locations. That means that when the ball is all the way down on the opposite end of the field, there is nothing for them to do but stand there and wait for the ball to come back up to their end of the field so they may get a chance to kick it.

One day one of these little guys, about second grade, was busy waiting for the ball to come back up the field, when he noticed a jet flying overhead. He was so excited that he called the coach's name until the coach heard him, and looked his way, to hear the boy say, "Coach Tony, Coach Tony, look at the jet!" as if there was no soccer game going on at the other end of the field that both he and the coach were supposed to be watching.

That's often how it is for kids in worship services. They lose interest quickly, and start looking around, fiddling with this and that, kicking the chair in front of them, asking for gum, folding the bulletin, drawing on the bulletin, etc. They know we are here to worship God, but they don't really know what that means for them. It seems to be a very adult thing, and they lose interest and tune out.

We expect that from kids in the worship service. You can teach them what worship is about, but since they are not yet spiritually focused on God, its relevance escapes them. So they tune out. And that's okay. That's okay. We understand that.

The problem, and it is a problem, is that as the children grow into teenagers and then into adults, they may never learn how to worship. In fact, you may be a teenager or adult and not know how to worship. You come. You sing the songs. You listen a bit to the prayers, unless they are too long and hard to follow, and you listen to the preacher as long as he is not too long and hard to follow, and you go home and think to yourself, "I worshipped today." The truth is, you may not have worshipped at all.

Worship is much more than showing up and speaking, singing, and listening. Jesus explains it this way, to a woman He was in conversation with.

**John 4:23-24 (NIV)** ... 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. God is spirit, and his worshipers must worship in spirit and in truth."

Your spirit is you, the real you, the inside you. Your spirit includes your heart, mind, body, and will. God is looking for you to worship with your heart, your mind, and your will. Anything less is not the kind of worship God is looking for.

Just showing up and using your eyes, ears, and voice is not the full you. You can do all this with your body, while your will is resisting being here. Maybe your parents made

you come. Maybe your kids made you come. You look like you are worshipping God, but your will is saying, "I'm not really into this. I'm not going to be affected by this."

That's not worship in spirit. **Worship in spirit means you are fully engaged.**

You can do all this singing, speaking, and listening with your body, while your mind is somewhere else. You can be here and appear to others as if you are worshipping and not be worshipping at all. Like the soccer player was present but not fully engaged in the game, so you can be here, but not be fully engaged in worship.

Let me give you an example of something you may have experienced elsewhere. Have you ever read a page in a book and gotten to the bottom and thought, "I don't remember what I just read." Your eyes read each word, maybe your mouth formed the words, and even part of your mind read the words, but most of your mind was focused on something else. You read every word on the page, and to adapt an old saying, they went in one ear and out the other. Not a single word or concept stuck with you, because your brain wasn't really engaged in the reading and comprehending of the words. Your spirit was somewhere else.

In the same way, you can sing the songs in a worship service. You can sing them with your eyes, your mouth, and your ears, but your mind is focused on something other than what is being sung or spoken. You appear to be worshipping, but you are not really focused on doing so.

Worship in spirit means you are fully engaged in the task of worship.

So what is it you are supposed to be doing? What is worship? **The word "worship" means "to give worth to"**. So on a foundational level worship is giving. Worship is giving something to someone. One mistake some people make about worship services is that they think it is for them to get something from. The person who says, "I don't get anything out of the worship services," has missed the point. Worship is about giving, not getting. **Worship is about giving worth to God.**

I do hope and pray that God speaks to you often in your worship of Him. Maybe He will speak to you, individually, through one of the songs or someone's prayer, or through something I say in the sermon. But the main action that's supposed to be taking place when we get together for worship is that YOU are supposed to give worth to God.

So what does THAT mean? Let me give you an illustration that will lead us to the principle.

When you tell your child you love her, you are expressing value. Your love is more than a feeling. It is an expression of importance. You are saying, "You are important to me. I value you. I care about you. I'm interested in you. I am committed to you." All of these and more tell the other person that they have great worth to you. And they feel loved. They feel honored. They feel valued.

That's what we are supposed to do when we worship. We express these same kinds of things to God. We tell God we love Him and why we love Him. We tell God how thankful we are for how He has blessed us. We praise Him. We honor Him. We lift up

His name. We encourage each other to value Him. We renew our commitment to Him. That's what the words in the songs are all about.

So here is the principle. **Worship is communicating to God how valuable He is to you.**

So just showing up doesn't cut it. If you aren't singing the song TO God, from your heart, in your mind, with your will, you aren't worshipping in spirit. You are just singing. Just because you are singing a Christian hymn or praise song doesn't make it worship. God isn't honored by your absent minded presence here on Sunday. God isn't honored by your distracted presence here.

Worship is the act of giving worth to God by telling Him how valuable He is to us. Worship is giving something to God.

Some people have the mistaken notion that worship is about someone up here doing something for you. This makes the worship leaders the givers and you the receivers. This is a wrong view of worship. The truth is as follows:

**God is the receiver. We all are the givers. Worship leaders are the prompters.**

Worship in spirit takes place when you give worth to God by praying to him His value to you.

Let me tell you what that means here, on Sundays.

**When we sing hymns or choruses, pray the words of the songs to God.**

Don't just sing the songs. Don't just sing them out loud. Sing them in your mind and heart and will to God. Use the words of the songs as the basis of your prayer to God. Communicate to God how important He is to you. Communicate your thanks to Him. Communicate your commitment to live for Him.

Focus your mind on God through the music. I hate singing rounds in worship. If you've ever sung a song like Row, Row, Row Your Boat you may have sung it in a round. This group starts, and then this group comes in when the first group sings the second line, and then the third group. There is a song in the hymnal that is easily sung as a round. I find that terribly distracting from worship. I can't focus on God when I'm busy watching to see when I come in, and how it all sounds, and is anybody going to mess it up.

**When the choir sings, listen and then pray.**

The choir is not performing for us. They are acting as worship leaders to guide us in worship of God. So don't just appreciate their talent, or the tune or even the words. Use the choir's words as the basis a prayer to God. If their song is requesting something of God, request that for with them, for you, for us. If their song is praise, praise with them. If their song is focused on spiritual truth, like the facts of what Jesus did for us, listen to the words and then respond to God based on that truth.

Don't talk while the choir is singing. Remember that no one has the words but them. The words in music are often hard to understand. The choir uses techniques to make it

easier for us to understand what they are singing. But any noise out here makes it more difficult.

I tell the children of the church that there are two times during the worship service they have to be especially quiet. These are during the choir and during prayers. The reason is that people are trying to hear what is being sung or said, and any other talking makes it difficult to do that. You parents need to emphasize that with your children too.

**When someone is praying, listen closely to the words and pray silently along with the person leading in prayer.**

You may not be ready to pray everything they pray about. But as the words apply to you, you might pray a silent "Amen" or "Yes, Lord" or "I agree", or "Me too!" as their words DO apply to you.

Don't use the choir time or prayers to clear your throat or get out your lozenges. Again, people are focused on trying to hear and understand the words. I think the devil invented cellophane. Cellophane is extremely loud during a prayer. Get out those throat and cough lozenges between parts of the service, or during the hymns, or even during the sermon. Avoid doing so during the choir and prayers.

**The offering is not an intermission.**

Think about what you are giving and why you are giving it. Don't let it be simply a habit. Use the offering as a time of dedication of these gifts back to the Lord. Pray silently while you give.

**As God uses the sermon to speak to your life, pray your response to God.**

Now I want to give you a visual clue to help you remember how to worship when you come here. I want you to pretend that you are a spy. You have been sent by God to spy on Emmanuel Baptist Church. You have a special encephalitic transmitter hardwired to your brain. So you don't actually have to speak audible words. All you have to do is think thoughts to God, and He will hear them. He has a high-powered receiver in this room that can pick up your transmitted thoughts about what is taking place here.

You see this speaker hanging on the wall? The bottom part is the real speaker. The top part is hollow and shaped kind of like a dish, gathering in and focusing the messages that you are sending God. As you see this speaker each week, let it be visual reminder of how to worship God through the elements of the service.

Following these guidelines will help you learn to worship in spirit when you come, to fully engage yourself in worship.

Now let's go back to what Jesus said in John 4.

(Invitation)

**John 4:24 (NIV)** God is spirit, and his worshipers must worship in spirit and in truth.

We must worship in spirit AND in truth. I've been speaking about what worship in spirit is. The truth means... the truth. Some think that Jesus means the truth that is in your heart. But His use of "in spirit" already covers that.

No, the context of this conversation with the woman at the well shows that Jesus is speaking about the truth of salvation. Jesus is THAT truth, a fact which runs throughout the book of John.

**John 1:17 (NIV)** For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ.

**John 14:6 (NIV)** Jesus answered, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.

Jesus is the truth. Jesus is true path to salvation from sin. Jesus is the Savior sent by God to meet our need of forgiveness.

Jesus is the true way to God and heaven. We have access to God only through Jesus.

Today, won't you put your faith in Jesus? Won't you choose to believe that He is the one and only Savior you need? Won't you choose to believe that you have no hope of reaching heaven without Jesus?

Today, choose to believe that Jesus is the truth of God. Receive Him as your Savior and Lord. He is your Savior because He paid the penalty of your sins when He died on the cross.

He is Lord because God made Him so. Commit yourself fully to living for Him.

Do this today, right now, and God will immediately forgive your sins, fill you with His Spirit, and begin the transformation of your heart, mind, and will as a follower of Jesus Christ.