

VITAL, TRANSFORMING WORSHIP

Be a worshipping disciple

Disciples follow Jesus, seeking to be like him. So did Jesus worship God? The only story told of Jesus as a boy finds him in the temple for three days, talking with others about God (*Luke 2:41-52*). When he returns home for a visit early in his public ministry, he goes to the synagogue on the Sabbath — “as was his custom” — and reads Scripture and teaches (*Luke 4:14-30*). Many of the gospel stories find Jesus in the synagogue on the Sabbath or at the temple. It is not clear that he is always worshipping, as we think of that, but he is there when others come regularly to worship God and offer their gifts to God. Besides participating in public worship, Jesus often prayed, both privately and publicly, teaching his disciples how to pray and often teaching about faithful, persistent prayer.

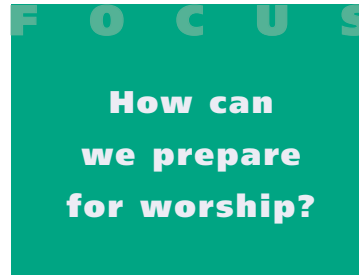


Jesus was not concerned about the place or style of worship. When a woman asked Jesus where they should go to worship God, he responded: “A time is coming, and is now here, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father seeks such as these to worship him. God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth.” (*John 4:23-24*). Worship can happen any place and time and incorporate many styles of worship. What worship must have are people who come to God “in spirit and in truth” — humble, faithful, loving, forgiving, generous people who want to be with God.

Prepare for worship

We often think of preparing for worship in terms of writing a sermon, practicing music, printing a bulletin, arranging the sanctuary, decorating with flowers, and so on, but the most important preparation happens in individual hearts before we participate in a worship service. We prepare for worship by living “in spirit and in truth” through-

out the week. We prepare our hearts to meet with God, to give thanks and praise to God, to pray and to listen to the word of God, by living with humility, faithfulness, love, forgiveness, and generosity all through the week. The daily life of discipleship best prepares us to worship God.



If we have a public role in the worship service — whether preaching, singing, playing an instrument, praying, reading Scripture, collecting the offering, or anything else — our first priority in preparing for worship is to pay attention to our hearts and our relationship to God, and to the people who are present. If our relationship with God or with anyone else in the sanctuary is not good, our best effort at preaching, singing, or praying will be undermined. And if our relationships are good, even though what we do may not be as good as we would like it to be, we will still be “the kind of worshipers the Father seeks.”

Expect to meet God in worship

Far too often we participate in a worship service without much expectation that anything good will happen. Maybe our experience in some churches dampens our expectations for what we consider “quality” preaching or music, for instance, but we are not there to hear a good sermon or good music. We are there to worship God. We come to the sanctuary (if that is where we worship) to meet with God, to experience God’s presence, to be filled with the Spirit, to offer our praise, thanksgiving and prayers to God, to hear what God wants to say to us that day. A good sermon and good music may help us experience all of that, but they are not necessary to that experience. Inspiring worship is when we leave the sanctuary knowing that we have been in the presence of God. When we prepare ourselves for worship throughout the week and when we come together with expectation that we will meet God, we will be in God’s presence, no matter how we feel.

Worship God as a community

In public worship, we are not only in God’s presence, we are in the presence of other people. The psalmists often acknowledged this: “I will tell of your name to my brothers

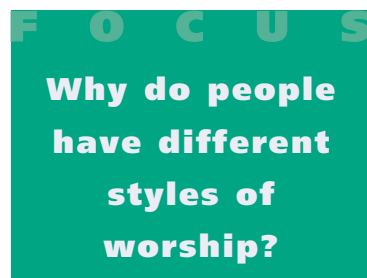
and sisters; in the midst of the congregation I will praise you" (*Psalms* 22:22). In *1 Corinthians* 11, Paul talks about times when the people "come together as a church," and in that context speaks about public prayer, communion and the exercise of spiritual gifts. The psalmists and the apostle both address one important concern for worship—the spiritual state of the gathered community in worship. The psalmists often spoke of people who are gathered with them who oppose them and seek to do them harm. Paul speaks in this chapter of the divisions among them, and earlier in the letter (*10:24*) he said "Do not seek your own advantage, but that of the other."

For worship to be inspiring, for the congregation to experience God's presence consistently, the people must become a true community—a place of quietness, peace, laughter, joy, tears, healing, and deep inward change. True worship is worship that transforms us. Vital worship is worship that has the life of the Spirit in it. If we quench the Spirit through lack of forgiveness or compassion, if we stay in our pseudo-community with false smiles and superficial talk, if our hearts are not bound together in the love of God, our worship will fall short.

Be creative in worship

When we come together with hearts prepared to worship, in expectation of God's presence, and gathered as a true community, we are ready to address questions of style and quality in worship. "What we do" in worship always comes after "who we are" in worship.

Styles of worship that feel "right," or with which we are most comfortable differ according to personality of individuals as well as congregations. For instance, those with introverted personalities are seldom comfortable with lifting their hands or moving around during a "meet and greet" time, while extroverts are often energized by these things. Congregations that have a long history of formal, liturgical worship can be quite resistant to the "contemporary" style of praise teams and spontaneous participation. There is nothing implicitly or biblically right or wrong with any worship style; it's a matter of personality or history.



A congregation wanting to invite and include more people from the community in their worship might consider going beyond their comfort levels. Explore with the congregation the reasons for their style of worship. Encourage members to consider how people with different personalities might not feel comfortable or how they might even feel excluded. Engage the congregation in a process of learning about different styles of worship and why many people enjoy participating in other forms of worship. Ask open-ended questions like "what if?" or "why not?" about incorporating different styles of music or sermon or prayer or drama in worship, even on a limited basis. Making creative changes on an occasional or a limited basis may be accepted when trying to make a permanent change would be rejected.

Most congregations have people with different personalities, of course. Allow everyone the opportunity to say, "I liked that," or "I didn't like that." People who enjoy drama or comedy can get a group together and practice for a presentation of a gospel story or a Christian "skit" during worship. People who dance can use their gifts for liturgical dance accompanying a hymn or a reading. People with technical savvy can put together a Power Point presentation or enhance singing and other parts of worship with multi-media presentations. People who like to play and sing in bands can lead the music some Sundays. If enough creative people incorporate different styles and forms of worship often enough, even on a limited basis, most congregations will grow accustomed to the idea. And if new people begin to come as a result, most congregations will welcome that.

Give the Spirit freedom

"Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom," Paul writes in *2 Corinthians* 3:17. The Scriptures often encourage the church not to limit the Spirit. There is always some risk involved in giving the Spirit freedom to do whatever God wants. God may want to do something we do not. The Spirit may move us in directions we don't want to go, but if discipleship is about following Jesus and if the Spirit of Jesus wants us to go somewhere that is uncomfortable for us, disciples will still choose to go.

A disciple-making congregation chooses freedom in the Spirit, perhaps especially in worship. If worship is to be vital and transforming for the congregation, we must be ready to let the Spirit move in the hearts of the people, leading them to try new things, guiding them in new directions. Remember Jesus' words "God seeks those who worship in spirit and in truth" (*John* 4:24).

ADORACIÓN VITAL Y TRANSFORMADORA

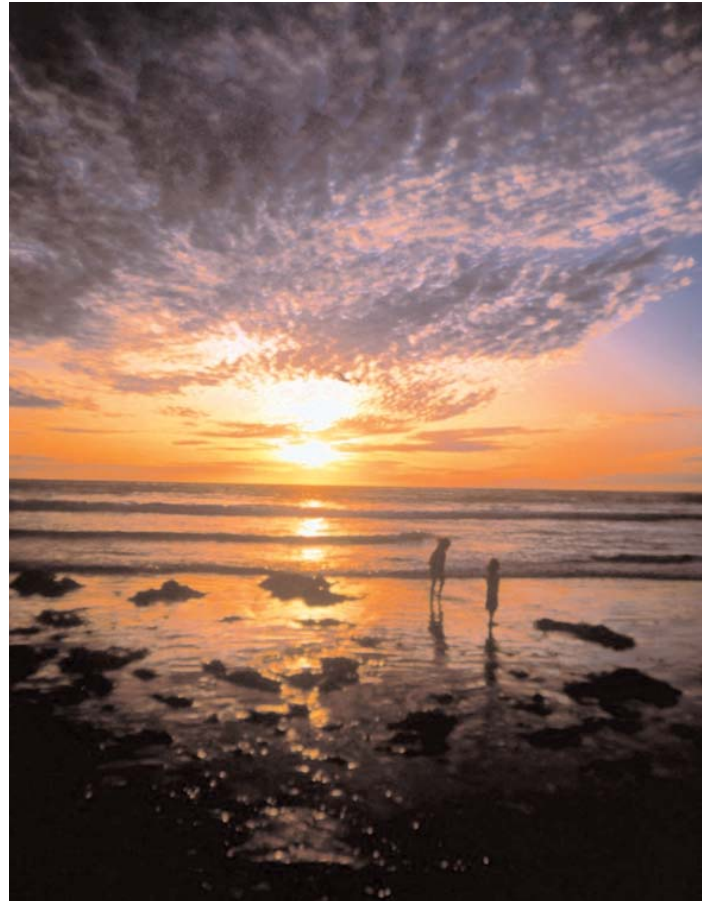
Muchos(as) de nosotros(as) hemos entrado y salido de cultos de adoración semana tras semana durante nuestras vidas. Algunos domingos han sido inspiradores, pero otros han sido pesados por la monotonía. Los domingos son, muchas veces, un intento de alcanzar a vislumbrar a Dios en medio de nuestras rutinas ocupadas.

ENFOCAR
¿Por qué las personas tienen diferentes estilos de adoración?

En una congregación local, la adoración ofrece un tiempo y lugar determinados de la semana para que sus miembros se reúnan con el propósito de ofrecer a Dios sus vidas y su fe. Las iglesias planifican muchas otras reuniones: comidas, oportunidades educativas, proyectos de servicio y programas. Sin embargo, la adoración congregacional tiene un propósito único. Es el acto fundamental que genera y da sentido a todas nuestras otras agendas. La predicación en el culto de adoración debe de alimentar nuestra alma e inspirar y animar nuestro diario caminar con Jesús. Si queremos revitalizar la adoración en nuestra iglesia, debemos de reconocer su verdadero propósito: abrir nuestro corazón y ofrecer nuestra vida a Dios; entonces, la adoración será la pieza central en la vida de la congregación.

Ultimadamente, los(as) adoradores en las bancas son los(as) que tienen la responsabilidad de abrir sus corazones y ofrecer su vidas a Dios. Nadie puede hacerlo por ellos(as). Habiendo dicho esto, es de igual importancia que las personas que lideran en la adoración o en la plataforma sientan la responsabilidad de ofrecer maneras variadas y efectivas de adoración para que los(as) participantes puedan responder en nuevas formas.

ENFOCAR
¿Cómo nos podemos preparar para la adoración?



Piense en estas maneras de participación –canto, oración, lectura de la palabra, etc. –como una ventana de una cabaña junto a un lago. En un intento de ver el cielo, para experimentar a Dios, los(as) adoradores miran a través de esa ventana y ven, digamos que, un ganso volando. Si la ventana es pequeña, la experiencia será pequeña, un ganso en un pedacito de cielo azul y un par de hojas en una rama vecina. Al expandir las posibilidades de participación en la alabanza, los(as) líderes tienen la oportunidad de transformar esa pequeña ventana en una ventana panorámica donde los(as) adoradores pueden darse cuenta de que el cielo está lleno de gansos, que la cabaña está junto a un hermoso bosque y que el cielo azul está adornado con nubes grandes y pequeñas. La vista de la realidad ha dado un giro enorme. La creatividad en la adoración no es la razón en sí misma –en efectuar cambios por hacer cambios. Más bien, nos damos cuenta de que, como una cabaña que tiene una ventana muy pequeña, nuestros recursos para la adoración pueden estar antiguos, oscuros y muy por debajo de las necesidades que nuestras almas anhelan. Para algunos(as) adoradores, la liturgia puede ser una pequeña ventana que divisa un pájaro pequeño volando. La tarea del o de la líder de adoración es de abrir de par en par las ventanas de la eternidad y permitir que la congregación atraviese esa ventana y sean transformados(as) al tener una perspectiva amplia de Dios.