

Worship is important. Everything that has breath should praise the Lord. (Psalm 150:6)
Worship is something we will do for eternity. (Romans 9:5, 2 Corinthians 11:31, Psalm 111:10)
The greatest command we could keep includes loving the Lord with all our heart, mind, soul, and strength. (Deuteronomy 6:4, Mark 12:29-30)

Given the importance of worship, we should be able to educate others on the theology of corporate worship, architect vital and faithful for our congregations, and strive to better lead others into a deepening love for God.

"I don't do corporate worship... I worship out in nature all by myself."

It is true and wonderful that you can worship God anywhere and everywhere and not just at a Sunday Church service. Yet it is also true that God instructs us to gather with one another in worship.

Psalm 149:1 compels us to "Sing to the Lord a new song, his praise in the assembly of his faithful people." Hebrews 10:24-25 urges believers not to neglect gathering together but to encourage one another, especially as they see the day of Christ's return approaching.

Christianity emphasizes the importance of communal worship, where believers come together to praise God, offer prayers, receive teaching from scripture, and partake in sacraments like communion. This communal worship fosters a sense of unity among believers and strengthens their faith.

This corporate Christian worship started the day the Church was born again by the Spirit in Acts 2.

"They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer." (Acts 2:42)

James Wilhoit underlines the significance of this devotion to fellowship in *Spiritual Formation as if the Church Mattered*. "These three thousand new converts were proskartereō (devoted), which implies "to attend constantly" or "busy oneself with," to "the fellowship" and "the apostles' teaching." (Wilhoit 210)

The devoted, constant fellowship that started nearly two thousand years ago continues today as Christians gather worldwide to worship God. Worship is meaningful not only because it places you in the presence of God but also because it places you in the presence of other believers.

As leaders, how do we assess the vitality and faithfulness of our worship?

Because worship is important, we should aim for a vital and faithful worship that transforms lives. In his book *Beyond the Worship Wars*, Thomas Long gives nine helpful

criteria for congregations to architect transformational worship. (Long 13) Long's nine criteria help in the planning and assessment of worship.

Long recommends a "joyous festival experience" in the service, especially towards the end of the corporate worship service. (Long 13) As John Burkhardt notes, "Fundamentally, worship is the celebrative response to what God has done, is doing, and promises to do." (Van Dyk 294) Worship that recognizes the victory of Jesus Christ and crescendos with a celebration is both vital and faithful.

To assess this, we may ask, "Is there a pulse to our worship? Is there a sense of excitement? Are we still seeing the victories of what God has done, is doing, and will do?"

There should be smiles in your worship. In scripture, there is rejoicing. It is scriptural to clap (psalm 47:1) and make a joyful noise to the Lord. (Psalm 100) As leaders, we should take the temperature of our worship services.

If we lack joy and celebration in our services, we may be focused on the wrong things. Are we singing songs about the victory of Jesus? Are our sermons underlining the good news that has, is, and will appear in our lives? Every prayer, meditation, and appeal should amplify this message of joy.

Often, we don't point in the right direction. Instead of proclaiming a risen Christ, we point to lesser things like traditional trappings of religion and the senior ladies' quilting club meeting this Thursday in the Alan Jones memorial narthex. In other words, we might be pointing to ourselves, which is hardly a reason to rejoice.

Long also suggests that we "forge a strong connection between worship and local mission—a connection expressed in every aspect of the worship service." (Long 13) This presents a strong leadership component to the direction of our corporate worship.

"It's Sunday... let's do the things we are supposed to do." And the congregation in the voice of Eeyore says in a depressing and deadpan voice. "Oh - kay..."



We ask people to do things without telling them why we do them, why they matter, why they are exciting, and we wonder why they go through the motions. Most of our congregation works 9 to 5 jobs, 5 days a week, where they are told to do things they are not thrilled about. The Church should be different. Worship is IMPORTANT!

Authentic leadership does more than bark out orders. Worship leadership educates, equips, and empowers so that they understand the who, what, and why of worship. This can be described in a single word – mission.

Long insists that vital and faithful worship is connected to the Church's God-given mission. A transformation occurs when we connect what we do to an understanding of the mission.

·We are no longer taking up money for the Church; we are honoring God with our finances, and our offering accomplishes change worldwide – providing clean water in Africa or food for the single mom in town.

·We are no longer merely singing religious songs but ascribing to God the glory due to his name (Psalm 29:2) and encouraging one another.

·We are no longer self-serving ourselves with our preferred religious tradition aesthetic but serving others and putting their needs above our wants.

·We are no longer using our hands to pat ourselves on the back, but we are using our hands to greet and, over time, pull others from the fire of a life without Christ. (Jude 23)

This is the compelling mission of Jesus. As worship architects and followers of Jesus, we must connect everything we do to the Savior's mission. This is a simple way to make worship important.

Other benchmarks should be included in our assessment of worship vitality and faithfulness.

- Attendance
- Guest retention (do they return to our worship service?)
- Baptisms
- The number of volunteers serving
- Demographics (age, race, gender, religious background)

A consistently vital and faithful worship experience is necessary to fulfill the worldwide mission that Jesus gave us. (Matthew 28:19)

How can we better lead others into a deepening love for God?

"In the Bible, Word precedes world." – William Willimon, *Leading with the Sermon* (p6)

The message from God's Word is essential in our worship services. The sermon is worship also.

Whatever we want to see more of in our churches should be the subject of a sermon. If we want more baptisms, we preach baptisms, provide the opportunity, and see people respond. If we desire to see people serve, we preach service, provide the opportunity, and watch people respond. Likewise, if we want to see deepening worship, we preach deepening worship, provide the opportunity, and watch people respond.

If we want to see more participation in worship, we should preach and teach on the sacraments. We should, with one finger, point to the Word of God, and with another finger,

point to the Word of God in action within the Church. Sacrament is a combination of the Word and action.

"Sacraments are a type of sign that involves acts, words, and (usually) objects. John Calvin repeats Augustine's dictum: "Add the word to the element, and there results a sacrament, as if itself also a kind of visible word." More specifically, in sacraments, words become part of an action using an object such as bread, wine, oil, and water." (White 185)

It is good to take sacramental action. Including the Word's instruction as we do the action is decisive. This deepens understanding and worship.

It can be difficult to imagine an invisible God. Subjects like grace, atonement, and the godhead can be challenging to understand. It helps to point to something physical to present a spiritual concept. Much of our worship can point to the physical to reveal the God who exceeds the physical.

Communion's pointing to the broken bread and declaring the words of Jesus, "This is my body which is given for you" (Luke 22:19), is a natural representation of a supernatural work. If we teach, our disciples will not only enact the sacrament but also deepen the worship in the act. They will understand that like the bread feeds you, so does Christ feed us, sustain us, strengthen us...

There is a disconnect between the natural and the supernatural. "Worship does not come naturally to us, fundamentally, because we are sinners. All of our relationships - with God, with each other, and with creation - are damaged." (Van Dyk K441)

Through preaching the Word and sacramental worship, we can finally connect the natural and the supernatural.

Sermons are more than good speeches; they transform lives. "My sermons are to be judged by the quality of the disciples my preaching produces." (Willimon 10)

Personally, I hope to better use the Word to make more disciples and see them deepen their relationship with God. I want to use the sacraments to point to the natural and see the followers of Jesus experience the supernatural.

The sermon is THE PLACE in a sermon to invite people into the plan of God. As Willimon says, The sermon must also be invitational: 'Don't you want to hitch on to what God is doing?' At some point in sermons, God's people must hear the summons 'Let's go!' "(p12)

More than good information and interesting Bible stories, our job as worship leaders is to invite others into this encounter with Jesus Christ. As a preacher of the good news, I play a significant role in this drama.

While it is a heavy burden and responsibility, Long offers the wise words of a friend...

"Long after your sermons are forgotten, your congregation will remember whether you had fun preaching them." (Long p106)

I hope to have a blast being a deep worshipper who takes many deeper... a vital and faithful disciple who makes many more vital and faithful disciples.

Conclusion

Only eternity may fully reveal the full importance of worship. What we do know is that deeper worship is worth every effort.

Works Cited

Wilhoit, James C. *Spiritual Formation as if the Church Mattered: Growing in Christ through Community* (p. 210). Baker Publishing Group. Kindle Edition.

Long, Thomas G. *Beyond the Worship Wars: Building Vital and Faithful Worship* (p. 106). Rowman & Littlefield Publishers. Kindle Edition.

Leanne Van Dyk. *A More Profound Alleluia: Theology and Worship in Harmony* (Calvin Institute of Christian Worship Liturgical Studies) (Kindle Location 294). Kindle Edition.

Willimon, William H. *Leading with the Sermon: Preaching as Leadership* (Working Preachers Book 2) (p. 6). Fortress Press. Kindle Edition.

White, James F. *Introduction to Christian Worship: Fourth Edition Revised and Updated* (p. 185). Abingdon Press. Kindle Edition.