



# LITURGY, MUSIC & SPACE

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By  
Isaac Wardell

Edited by  
Laura Merricks



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# ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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This curriculum is the result of the many books, articles, and experiences that have formed my understanding of Christian worship. I hope that this project, which introduces a wide range of issues related to worship, will encourage a deeper exploration of these topics. You can find source materials in the “For Further Study” section on page 49 of this study.

I would especially like to acknowledge the following. Chapters 1 and 7 were co-written with Rev. Greg Thompson in Charlottesville, Virginia. Chapter 3 is derived from a lecture given by Dr. John Witvliet, the director of the Calvin Institute of Christian Worship in Grand Rapids, Michigan. I am indebted to that Institute for the content of chapter 6, which is a summary of its “vertical habits” project. (For more information about this concept, visit [www.calvin.com/worship](http://www.calvin.com/worship).) Chapter 10 is a summary of concepts set forth by John Witvliet as well as Nicholas Wolterstorff at the Institute. In chapter 2, the image of worship as banquet hall rather than lecture hall has its source in a sermon by Rev. Bill Boyd in 2008 in St. Louis, Missouri. Throughout chapters 4-6, I have drawn heavily on the theology of liturgy presented by James K. A. Smith in his book *Desiring The Kingdom: Worship, Worldview, and Cultural Formation*. Much of chapter 7 originates from the teachings of Dr. John Hodges, the Director of the Center for Western Studies in Memphis, Tennessee. In chapter 9, the use of Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego as an illustration of the life of faith in a particular culture is an idea recently expounded on by David Dark in a series of 2007 lectures in Nashville, Tennessee. Lastly, chapter 12 draws extensively from the lifelong teachings of Fr. Bruce Morrill at Boston University. Additionally, all that follows owes much to the writings of Alexander Schmemmann, Tim Keller, Eugene Peterson, Ken Myers, James Davison Hunter, and Bryan Chapell, all of whom have shaped my understanding of what it means to be a Christian in the late modern world.

I would like to thank Laura Merricks, the editor for this project, for her countless hours of sculpting this content into a curriculum. Calvin Brondyke has also been instrumental in this process. Additional thanks to Dr. Trenton Merricks, Dr. Mike Farley, Hilary Swinson, Paul Nedelisky, Kris Livingston, Lee Livingston, Debby Prum, Trish Owen, and Wallace White for their editorial contributions.

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I’d especially like to thank my wife, Megan, for the many hours of editing and talking through these lessons. Her wisdom and insight have been invaluable to the writing of this curriculum.



# INTRODUCTION

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Our culture has seen many changes in the past fifty years, and those changes have affected worship in all of our churches. In my fifteen years of work in church worship, I have watched churches try hard to be faithful to God and to their neighbor with their worship in the midst of these changes, but many have struggled under the weight of strife over this issue. Often churches form segregated worship services using distinctions such as “traditional” and “contemporary,” but this solution has done little to lift the burden. The result is often individuals and families worshipping only with others who share their aesthetic vision, or even entire churches filled exclusively with a single demographic.

Because of this widespread struggle, there are many resources available to churches seeking a more biblical understanding of worship: academic studies, practical guides, and worship-planning manuals. This curriculum is none of those. While those resources are valuable for individual study and planning good worship services, the information and skills gleaned from them are not enough to shepherd congregations to health in the area of worship; that requires helping our congregations love each other in our differences. So the purpose of this curriculum is to help groups of Christian brothers and sisters learn healthy corporate worship, which the Scriptures say involves not only our love for God, but also our love for each other. It does this by teaching new ways of understanding biblical categories of worship and by offering new vocabulary to help congregations describe their experiences to each other. It is my hope that this 13-week study will help churches and small groups of all kinds to learn one another’s stories and to find healing and reconciliation through the Holy Spirit’s work.

This curriculum is in no way exhaustive in any of its categories. Instead, it is meant to function as a survey of the topics since many participants will be introduced to these theological concepts for the first time. I encourage all who use this resource to spend time each week in corporate prayer, asking God to be merciful, to grant understanding where there is distrust, and to grant wisdom where there is hurt. This has been our prayer in our own congregation as we have walked through this course together with individuals from all kinds of cultural backgrounds, with all kinds of assumptions and expectations for worship. May God bless your study and continue His work of building us together into a temple, holy and blameless in his sight.



# READ THIS FIRST

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While this curriculum may be used for individual study, its purpose is for use in a group setting – small groups, Sunday school classes, or any group gathering. The goal of this study is to provide an opportunity for groups to talk about their church’s worship, not to give individuals information about worship. Each chapter has the following components:

## **Exercise**

This is an interactive activity to help prepare you for the discussion of the chapter.

## **Discussion**

The topic for each week is covered in the main body or discussion of the chapter. It includes possible questions for you to discuss during the small group or Sunday school time. Illustrations of many of the points are included for your use or to give you ideas for illustrations of your own.

## **Lesson**

Each chapter includes a summary of the lesson to be learned in that chapter along with a place for participants to write down obstacles that might stand in the way of applying the lesson.

## **Handout**

Each chapter ends with a page called the Handout that can be copied and given to members of the group to take home (you might even consider using a different color of paper for clarity). It includes the Exercise for the chapter, the questions from the Discussion section, and the Lesson for the day with scripture reference.

For a small group or Sunday school class where the format is group discussion, we encourage you to print out copies of the Discussion for all participants to read ahead of time. Print and distribute copies of the Handout when you meet. Do the Exercise as a group to open. Discuss the chapter using the Discussion Questions. Finally, go over the Lesson together and write down obstacles to applying this lesson.

Or you may teach the class by reading the Discussion on your own, listening to Isaac’s lecture, and then teaching the information to the class. Print out and distribute the Handout in order to guide the group through the Exercise at the beginning of class and the Lesson at the end. Feel free to use the Discussion Questions to guide further conversation.

*For the leader:* We have structured this study so it begins and ends with participants interacting with each other about the material. We believe that Christian growth is not only cognitive, but also relational. This relational growth happens when we love one another through hearing each other, submitting to each other, and listening to and celebrating each other’s stories. So we begin with a group activity, then have a discussion, and finish each chapter by asking the question together: What are the obstacles to our applying these truths to our church’s worship? Try to allow at least 10 minutes to discuss this question. Each chapter ends with a prayer you may use to close your time together. (All prayers adapted from the *Valley of Vision: A Collection of Puritan Prayers and Devotions*, Arthur G. Bennett, author, editor.)

# CHAPTER ONE

## What Do We Love?

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### EXERCISE

When you walk in the door on a Sunday morning, what are you hoping is going to happen to you? What should be true of the worship service to bring this about?

### Introduction

While there are many things we hope for when we come to church on Sunday morning—community, pastoral care, teaching—in this study we are going to talk about the most fundamental purpose for gathering: worship. When we come to worship we bring our desires to love God and to be loved by him, to experience his love and be changed by it, to find ourselves in a community of love that God is creating, and to play a role in the story of love between God and his people. It shouldn't be surprising that worship is so deeply bound to love. In Deuteronomy, God begins to teach his people how to worship by saying, "Hear O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart with all your soul with all your might." (Deuteronomy 6:4-5) Everything that follows—all the Levitical codes, all the specifications for the tabernacle, all the Law—issues from this love for God.

So to talk about worship is not to talk about ideas, styles, or even music at all; to talk about worship is to talk about what we love. When we talk about worship together—when we debate which songs to use in the worship service and find ourselves embroiled in arguments about worship—we are exposing the most intimate desires of our hearts to each other.

In any healthy love relationship, our actions and choices both express our love and form our love. Our love finds expression in loving words and actions. Our love is also formed by regular actions that we commit to—such as conversations and date nights—which we carry out no matter how we are feeling toward our loved one. In the same

way, worship is a place for us to come to express our love for our God through our words, our songs, our actions, and even our physical worship space. And it is where we come to be formed into the sort of people who can love God deeply and richly by participating in regular practices that shape our love and us. We are going to look at these two complementary aspects of worship—the *expression* of our love and the *formation* of our love—and talk about them in terms of their scriptural sources and their lovely fruit.

### Discussion

#### Worship: The Expression of Our Love

Worship is the expression of our love for God and our life with God.

##### 1. Scriptural Source

This understanding of worship as the expression of our love is deeply biblical. The Scriptures depict worship as a place where God's people express the fullness of their lives with and the many aspects of their love for God. There are expressions of praise in Psalm 103:1, *Bless the LORD, O my soul, and all that is within me, bless his holy name*; gratitude in Psalm 107:1, *Give thanks to the LORD, for he is good; his love endures forever*; and mourning in Psalm 88, *Darkness is my closest friend*. In the New Testament in Revelation, God's people worship in a highly expressive manner: *In a loud voice they were saying: 'Worthy is the Lamb, who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and strength and honor and glory and praise!'* (Revelation 5:12) The Bible expects God's people to be expressive in corporate worship.

##### 2. Lovely Fruit

Over time, the congregation that cultivates this healthy expressive aspect of worship will see beautiful fruit. The service will be in a language people can immediately understand. The music will be readily accessible and the pastor will preach in an approachable manner, helping us to make a connection to the text. And we will see the full range of human emotional experience brought before the Lord and submitted to his lordship. There

will be engagement with what is said, sung, and prayed. Worship will become a place of refuge, solace, consolation, and profound spiritual power.

### DISCUSSION QUESTION

Which emotions are being expressed in our worship service? Do we have the healthy expression of our love for God, gratitude for his grace, and humility and trust in him even in the midst of grief?

#### Worship: The Formation of Our Love

Worship is also the formation of our love for and life with God.

##### 1. Scriptural Source

This understanding of worship as the formation of our love is also deeply biblical. The Psalms urge and invite us to come and worship the Lord, to open our mouths, to give thanks, to wait for the Lord, and to sing joyfully to the Lord. The Psalms call us to these actions because we don't naturally do them. Have you ever heard the phrase, "Please stand for the call to worship," and thought, "I'd rather sit, thank you"? Cultivating formation in worship means saying, "Stand because you are being called into something and what is being formed in you is as important as what is being expressed by you."

Soon after God rescued his people from Egypt, they created a golden calf, a false god, to worship. So God said, "I will teach you how to worship and how to be a human being again. Here are practices for you to follow that will shape you into my people." In Deuteronomy 6:6-9, God tells his people, "*And these words that I command you today shall be on your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise. You shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates.*" Lest you think this passage is about discipleship and not worship, understand that that distinction is almost completely absent in the Old Testament. God's commands to his people are all part of the worship vision of the Old Testament. And this worshiping life takes shape when they work, walk, talk, as well as when they gather in worship. So this text shows us that God recognizes there are times when we don't want to hear the Word of God, we don't want to talk about these things with our children,

and we don't want to hang them on little pieces of paper in front of our eyes. Worship is not only something coming out of us through expression, it is also something being formed into us. There is an expectation in the Bible that we need to be formed into a people who can worship.

##### 2. Lovely Fruit

Over time, cultivating the formative aspect of worship will grow spiritual maturity and an understanding that God cares about what we do in worship. Our worship will include music that is rich and challenging. It will cultivate in us patience and trust in the Holy Spirit's work. It will free us from frustration and despair when we find that worship is not a rapturous emotional experience every single week. Instead, we can declare together, "God was present, I heard his word, and I know that he is at work in me." This is not an affective experience on one given Sunday; it is a lifetime of Sundays.

### DISCUSSION QUESTION

What kinds of things are being formed in us in our worship service? Are we learning to confess our sin? Are we learning how to pray for and care for others? Are we learning the humility of putting our brothers' and sisters' needs before our own?

#### Lesson

Christian worship is both the formation and the expression of our deepest loves. (Psalm 51:7-13)

Psalm 51:15 says, *Oh Lord, open my lips, and my mouth will declare your praise.* In this passage we see that the only way we will properly express our love for God is if he forms that love in us.

Every worship service is forming us to express something. Is our worship service forming us to open our mouths and declare the praise of our Maker? Or is it forming us to see the world only as a set of principles for us to silently evaluate? If we desire biblical worship, we cannot ask worshipers to only express what is already in their hearts because that would not be forming our congregation into the kind of worshipers our God wants us to be. The Bible paints a beautiful picture of worship in which the expression of our love blossoms out of practices cultivated in obedience to the Scriptures. In the coming chapters we will talk about how our love is expressed and formed by Scripture.

## **Exercise**

When you walk in the door on a Sunday morning, what are you hoping is going to happen to you? What should be true of the service to make that happen?

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## **Discussion Question**

1. Which emotions are being expressed in our worship service? Do we have the healthy expression of our love for God, gratitude for his grace, and humility and trust in him even in the midst of grief?
2. What kinds of things are being formed in us in our worship service? Are we learning to confess our sin? Are we learning how to pray for and care for others? Are we learning the humility of putting our brothers' and sisters' needs before our own?

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## **Lesson**

Christian worship is both the formation and the expression of our deepest loves. (Psalm 51:7-13)

What are obstacles in our path to applying this lesson?

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Glorious God,

It is our crown and glory of our souls to worship You. Give us knowledge of Your goodness, and make us over-awed by Your greatness. Crowns to give we have none, but what You have given, we return. Make us content to feel that everything is ours when it is Yours, and more fully ours when we have yielded it to You. We are bought by the blood of Jesus. Give us a new sense of it – may we come every day to its fountain, and every day be washed anew, that we may worship You always in Spirit and Truth. Amen.

# CHAPTER TWO

## What Do We Believe?

### EXERCISE

Have you ever worshiped at a church with a different worship style? How was it different? Were there any basic characteristics that worship service seemed to share with your own?

### Discussion

#### Characteristics of Biblical Worship

Throughout this study, we will look at this beautiful picture of worship as the expression of our love for God blossoming out of practices cultivated in obedience to the Scriptures. First, though, we must look at the fundamental characteristics that must be present as we begin this growth.

#### 1. Scriptural (Colossians 3:16)

We believe that worship should be governed by the language, themes, and story of the Bible. Commentaries, confessions, and Christian literature are all valuable. But for corporate worship, the Scriptures should shape and guide our choices of prayers and songs. While we may all agree that Scripture is important, it is often the case that our worship services are shaped only by a limited number of passages of the Bible that resonate and feel familiar instead of all the Scriptures.

### ILLUSTRATION

When we praise God, we are guided by psalms such as Psalm 100, *Praise the Lord! For his love endures forever, and his mercy knows no bounds*, but we also look to Psalm 98 to form our praise: *Praise the Lord, for he will judge the earth in righteousness*. When choosing passages that tell us who God is, we can choose Isaiah 40:11, *God will tend his flock like a shepherd; he will gather the lambs in his arms*,

a comforting picture of a God who cares for us, but we don't neglect the rest of the chapter where we see a God who brings the plans of the nations to nothing: *Scarcely are they planted, scarcely sown, scarcely has their stem taken root in the earth, when he blows on them, and they wither, and the tempest carries them off like stubble*. We believe that without the guidance and governance of the Scriptures, we can easily choose the comfortable passages and shape for ourselves an image of a God who is like us and loves the things that we love. Instead, we need the Scriptures to show us who God is and what he loves, and to teach us to love those things as well.

### DISCUSSION QUESTION

Look at the songs we've sung in the last week at our church. Take a moment and see if we can find scripture references for the lyrics. Is this scripture a complete passage or thought, or just a series of emotive phrases?

#### 2. Triune (Matthew 28:16-20)

One distinctive of the Christian faith is that we believe in a triune God. We believe that the Scriptures describe God as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, of one will, of one substance, unchanging, and glorious beyond all comprehension. This should be reflected in our worship.

### ILLUSTRATION

You may have observed that different traditions tend to emphasize one particular person of the Trinity. For example, some churches emphasize the Holy Spirit, the baptism of the Holy Spirit, praying to the Holy Spirit, and being filled with the Holy Spirit, maybe even to the point of neglecting some of the other persons of the Trinity. Other churches can boil down the whole of the Bible to having a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. All the prayers are directed to

Jesus. We don't want to be guilty of neglecting any person of the Trinity. Our songs and prayers should recognize and honor the work of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

### DISCUSSION QUESTION

Look at or listen to the prayers we pray during our worship service. Are they always to one person of the Trinity? What would it look like to say prayers and sing songs that acknowledge each person of the one triune God?

### 3. *Redemptive (1 Peter 1:18)*

We believe that our worship should celebrate and enact the redeeming work of God in the life of his people. We assume there are people sitting in our worship service on any given Sunday morning who have never heard the gospel, so we make sure that God's redemption story is present throughout our worship service every week, and not just in the sermon. We also recognize that it is not just the unbeliever who needs to hear this story; believers also need to be told the story of the gospel each week.

### EXERCISE

As children many of us learned the acronym ACTS for praying, which stands for Adoration, Confession, Thanksgiving, and Supplication. This framework is also a common guide for the order of a worship service. Each week we come to worship and spend time in songs and prayers praising God for who he is. We follow this with a time of confession of our sin. Then we spend time thanking God for what he has done. Finally, we ask him for ourselves and on behalf of others those things that are necessary for our life and our salvation. A great way to proofread an order of worship is to look for these elements that allow us to tell the gospel story before the pastor gets up in the pulpit.

### DISCUSSION QUESTION

If someone were to visit our church, would they hear the gospel story outside of the sermon spelling it out? Should we expect the sermon to be the only place this story is told each week?

### 4. *Participatory (1 Corinthians 14:26)*

Lastly we believe that worship is participatory. This challenges two idolatries: seeing the preacher as the one who does all the heavy

lifting in the worship service, and believing that a worship leader or musician will deliver an expressive experience of worship to us. We believe that worship is active and should therefore include the full participation of the minds, hearts, and bodies of God's people.

### EXERCISE

Churches can tend to use one of three paradigms in their view of what worship is. One is the "lecture hall" model that sees worship as the transfer of information from teacher to student. Another is the "concert hall" paradigm that sees worshipers as audience members and the musicians and preacher as performers. But the Bible gives us a picture of worship as a "banquet hall." Revelation 3:20 says, *Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and eat with him, and he with me.* God wants us to sit down with him, eat with him, and be full participants in our worship of him.

### DISCUSSION QUESTION

Does our church most resemble the concert hall, lecture hall, or banquet hall? What would be different if every worshiper in our congregation were fully participating in times of adoration, confession, thanksgiving, and supplication?

### Lesson

Christian worship, regardless of style, should always be scriptural, triune, redemptive, and participatory. (See scripture references for each characteristic.)

## Exercise

Have you ever worshiped at a church with a different worship style? How was it different? Were there any basic characteristics that worship service seemed to share with your own?

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## Discussion Question

1. Look at the songs we've sung in the last week at our church. Take a moment and see if we can find scripture references for the lyrics. Is this scripture a complete passage or thought, or just a series of emotive phrases?
  2. Look at or listen to the prayers we pray during our worship service. Are they always to one person of the Trinity? What would it look like to say prayers and sing songs that acknowledge each person of the one triune God?
  3. If someone were to visit our church, would they hear the gospel story outside of the sermon spelling it out? Should we expect the sermon to be the only place this story is told each week?
  4. Does our church most resemble the concert hall, lecture hall, or banquet hall? What would be different if every worshiper in our congregation were fully participating in times of adoration, confession, thanksgiving, and supplication?
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## Lesson

Christian worship, regardless of style, should always be scriptural, triune, redemptive, and participatory. (See scripture references for each characteristic.)

What are obstacles in our path to applying this lesson?

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O Fountain of all Good,  
Destroy in us every lofty thought; break pride into pieces and scatter it to the winds. Annihilate each clinging shred of self-righteousness; implant in us true lowliness of spirit. Break us, then bind us up. Thus will our hearts be a prepared dwelling for our God. Then can the Father take up his abode in us – Then can Jesus come with healing hands in His touch – Then can the Holy Spirit descend in sanctifying grace. O Holy Trinity, inhabit us and make us a temple consecrated to Your glory. Amen.

# CHAPTER THREE

## What Do We Say?

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### EXERCISE (allow 15 minutes for this exercise)

1. Using just one sentence, write down on the first line something either from this study or from your own church's worship service that resonates most strongly with you.
2. Using just one sentence write down on the second line why this resonates with you.
3. Reword your statement into the form of a beatitude or blessing, as when Jesus said, "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." If you wrote on the first line, "I like singing the Gloria Patri each week," and for the explanation you said, "Because I feel connected to Christians all over the world singing that song," now format those two thoughts into the beatitude, "Blessed is the congregation that sings the Gloria Patri for they will truly experience what it means to worship with Christians around the world."
4. Now, trade books with the person sitting next to you and read one another's blessings, speak your blessings to each other, and take your pens and pencils and edit each other's blessings for clarity. If your partner has said something you don't understand, talk through it until you do.

### Discussion

#### Five Ways of Communicating with One Another about Worship

Here are five ways we communicate information to each other: We assert claims, we appeal to rules, we use reason, we speak from personal conviction, and we confer blessings. These ways of communicating information in general can be applied to communicating about worship in particular. But before we focus on worship, let's illustrate these ways of communicating by considering the seemingly simple question, "Who is Jesus Christ and how can I be saved?" Here is

how each approach might answer.

#### 1. Assertion

First, we could answer by making a statement of fact or an assertion. For example, if someone asks you, "Who is Jesus Christ and how can I be saved?" you could read from the Apostles' Creed, a set of statements about who God is. You could answer, "Jesus Christ was the only Son of God our Lord, he was conceived by the Holy Ghost, born of the Virgin Mary, he suffered under Pontius Pilate, and through him we have forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting." This way of communicating brings clarity, order, and understanding.

#### 2. Rules

A second way we could answer the question is by pointing to governing rules with demonstrable consequences. You are asked, "Who is Jesus Christ and how are we saved?" You could answer, "Well, the rule is that if you believe in the Lord Jesus, the Son of God, you will be saved. And if you don't believe, then you will spend eternity in Hell. That's how it works." Communicating by pointing to rules acknowledges that what we do matters and there are consequences to our actions.

#### 3. Reason

Some of us would prefer to answer by reasoning things out using rational arguments and appealing to universal ideals. A neighbor asks you the question, "How can a person be saved by Jesus?" You decide to say, "Well, we all know that we do wrong things sometimes. If we believe that God is holy and above all things, then there are consequences to these sins. So God decided to save us by coming to earth as a man, living a perfect life, and taking the consequences of our sins on himself. And we can choose to accept his gift and be saved." Reason allows us to find common ground using the language of our culture and of unbelievers.

### 4. *Personal Conviction*

Another way to communicate an answer is to speak out of our own personal experience and convictions. A friend asks, “Who is Jesus Christ and how can I be saved?” and you give the answer, “You know, I don’t know much about creeds, about theology, or about apologetics, but I know that I was lost and now I’m found. When Jesus came into my life he changed me.” The power of these statements of personal conviction demonstrates that God is at work through emotions and experiences.

### 5. *Blessing*

Finally, we could answer the question by bestowing an unconditional blessing or invoking God’s favor on the questioner. Someone says, “What does it mean to be saved by Jesus?” and you answer, “It means that Jesus loves you and will never turn you away because he has called you his child.” Or you could answer with John 3:16, “That God so loves you, that God so loved the world, that he gave his only son and whoever believes in him will have eternal life.” Bestowing an unconditional blessing on someone, a forgotten but important art, acknowledges that that person’s flourishing matters.

## Why Talk about Talking?

### 1. *Growing in Wisdom*

We need to learn about communication styles as we enter into these conversations about worship because we want to learn the wisdom to know when and why to use the appropriate way of communicating.

## ILLUSTRATION

Imagine your beloved niece comes to you and says, “I don’t know if I’m a Christian or not.” As you look through the various ways of replying to this statement, wisdom seems to say that answering using rules—“Believe in Jesus and you’ll be saved; if you don’t, you’ll go to Hell”—may be a correct way to answer, but would be more hurtful than helpful. Instead, wisdom would be to speak to your niece using your personal experience or with a blessing or even reasoning with her, rather than confronting her with ultimatums.

Jesus used all of these ways of communicating to convey truth in different contexts. When he spoke to the moneychangers in the temple, he did not use reasoning, he used a rule: “You will

not turn my Father’s house into a den of thieves.” Or in Luke 8, when the woman admitted to touching Jesus’ cloak to be healed, Jesus didn’t use assertion and say, “I’m not sure you really understand how this whole healing thing works.” He spoke a blessing; he said, “*Daughter, your faith has made you well.*”

## DISCUSSION QUESTION

Can I think of a time when I communicated with someone in church or in another context using a style of communication that was inappropriate to the setting?

### 2. *Learning to Love*

It is also important to understand how to communicate well because Jesus calls us to move toward one another in love, not to wait for others to move toward us. Each of us has certain ways of communicating that make us most comfortable. And we have a tendency to become suspicious of people who don’t communicate in those same ways. As we continue our study of worship, we need to understand this about one another and ourselves so that we don’t hurt each other as we expose these deep desires of our hearts.

## ILLUSTRATION

In many conversations about worship—on committees or around the dinner table—people can look like they are communicating because they are talking, but they are not listening to one another. One person might be speaking rule language, saying, “The early church used to sing psalms a capella and if we don’t get back to our roots, we are going to be swept away by our culture.” She says it over and over again, sticking with the rule. Next to her, her brother might be speaking with personal conviction: “I am so convicted that our teenagers need to have more opportunities to walk forward and make a profession of faith like I did when I was in high school.” He simply repeats his personal conviction regardless of others’ experiences and convictions. Next to him, his sister may argue using reason: “If we can just do an even number of hymns and praise songs or maybe break up our church into a traditional service and contemporary service, we might have an acceptable compromise.” Everyone is using his or her favorite way of communicating, and each

is waiting to be heard by the others in the group. But no one is using wisdom in the choice of how to communicate, nor are they moving toward the others in love. When our brother speaks with conviction, we need to take his personal conviction seriously. When our sister speaks about history with rule language, we need to take her seriously. We need to learn to listen before we speak, and when we speak, we should speak with wisdom and love.

### DISCUSSION QUESTION

Which style of communication do I use most often?

love, and we know the way to get there is through humility. One way to humble ourselves before one another is to take each other's stories seriously. Do any of these statements sound familiar to you? "I'm not interested in your personal feelings about this; I'm interested in what's best for our church." Or, "I don't want to have a philosophical debate about this; I know what I feel." Underneath these statements is the hidden message: "I don't really care about your story." Until we experience the humility of laying down our lives for one another, we will never experience the freedom of bowing down before God in true worship.

## Lesson

The posture for Christian worship is the posture of humility. (Philippians 2:5-11)

This passage shows us the humility of Christ and encourages us to have the same attitude. We know we want to communicate with each other in

## Exercise

1. Using just one sentence, write down on the first line something either from this study or from your own church's worship service that resonates most strongly with you.
2. Using just one sentence, write down on the second line why this resonates with you.
3. Reword your statement into the form of a beatitude or blessing, as when Jesus said, "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." If you wrote on the first line, "I like singing the Gloria Patri each week," and for the explanation you said, "Because I feel connected to Christians all over the world singing that song," now format those two thoughts into the beatitude, "Blessed is the congregation that sings the Gloria Patri for they will truly experience what it means to worship with Christians around the world."
4. Now, trade books with the person sitting next to you and read one another's blessings, speak your blessings to each other, and take your pens and pencils and edit each other's blessings for clarity. If your partner has said something you don't understand, talk through it until you do.

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## Discussion Question

1. Can I think of a time when I communicated with someone in church or in another context using a style of communication that was inappropriate to the setting?
2. Which style of communication do I use most often?

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## Lesson

The posture for Christian worship is the posture of humility. (Philippians 2:5-11)  
What are obstacles in our path to applying this lesson?

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Our Good Shepherd,  
Let not pride swell in our hearts. Help us to see ourselves with Your sight. Humble our hearts before You, and replenish us with the choice gifts of Your Spirit. When we are tempted to thinking too highly of our own wisdom, grant us the wisdom to see the power of our spiritual enemy, which is pride. Keep us humble, meek, and lowly, we pray. Amen.

# CHAPTER FOUR

## Liturgy: The Shape of Our Worship

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### EXERCISE

1. Write down an activity in your life that you do at least once a week or once a day.
2. What would happen if you stopped doing this activity?
3. If you continue in this activity faithfully, what do you hope will happen?
4. Can you recall specifically the last ten times you did this activity?

### Introduction

In some circles, the word “liturgy” has a bad connotation. It can conjure up images of cold formality and rote worship. But “liturgy” comes from the Greek word *leitourgia*, which simply means the work (*ergon*) of the people (*leos*). It is sometimes translated just as “service.” For our purposes in this study, we are using the word “liturgy” to refer to the repeated corporate practices of a group of people.

Those from more informal churches might argue that their church does not have set worship practices because it is more spontaneous. But let’s examine this claim. When an individual walks into a more youthful and energetic worship service in a less traditional building, with microphones on stage and drum sets rather than choir lofts, what will their experience be? In all likelihood, there will be some background music playing, either from a recording or from the band itself. Following that will be a greeting and some sort of invitation from someone on stage to worship. Then the band will begin to play a more modern worship song, by the end playing with heightened intensity. Following this will often be a question posed to the congregation in the form of a video or dramatic presentation, such as, “What is my purpose?” or, “Does God care about suffering?” Climactically, the pastor will come on stage (to a “podium” rather than a “pulpit”) and address the congregation in an approachable,

relational way to teach the Scriptures. The sermon will end with a challenge for everyday life and the band will quietly re-emerge to lead the congregation in a final time of worship.

With some allowance for variation, this form will surely seem familiar to members or visitors of the growing number of informal evangelical churches. This description is in no way meant to be critical, but rather to illustrate the inescapable fact that every church has an order of worship that remains more or less constant from week to week and so, therefore, has a liturgy.

### Discussion

#### The Power of Liturgy

The concern about liturgy in worship for many Christians is that they fear just “going through the motions.” So worship that has been scripted ahead of time can feel artificial and ineffectual. But all the liturgies and routines in our lives are powerful and effectual, even when we are not paying attention, because of what they form in us over time.

### ILLUSTRATION

Remember that liturgy is a word to describe the corporate practices of a group of people. So consider the liturgy of attending a professional sporting event or concert. The liturgy begins as we pull up to the arena or concert hall and look for parking. It may be that we actually pay for time in a parking lot, effectively buying tickets for our vehicles as well as for ourselves. As we enter the space, we look for vendors selling food or drinks and head there immediately (we know that we will not want to get up from the performance and risk missing anything). We proceed to our seats and either celebrate or bemoan our proximity to the performance. As the game or concert begins, we enter into the spirit of the event, raising our hands or

applauding at the appropriate times, standing in silence or removing our hats at the appropriate times, and becoming outraged or moved with emotion at the proper times dictated to us as a group by the liturgy of the evening. Finally, we will collectively stand up and gather our things, feeling either satisfaction that the order of events brought us toward the beatific vision for our community or discontent that it left us only wanting. (For further study on the liturgies in our lives, see *Desiring the Kingdom: Worship, Worldview, and Cultural Formation*, by James K. A. Smith)

This is only one of the many examples of liturgy in our lives. In all these liturgies—going to a concert, shopping for clothing, shopping for cars, or even dating—we can repeatedly participate in them to the point that we are not fully engaged with our actions. This can result in these liturgies forming us in ways that we don't realize. Liturgies are powerful forces of formation in our lives.

### DISCUSSION QUESTION

When we choose to enter into the liturgy of the mall, the liturgy of the sporting event, or the liturgy of social technologies, what kinds of strengths are being formed in us? What kinds of weaknesses are being formed in us? Is it possible for those strengths or weaknesses to be formed in us subconsciously?

### The Hope of Liturgy

The power of liturgy also points us to the hope of liturgy. If we are humble enough to accept that our lives do have liturgies, realistic enough to embrace that our worship is liturgical by nature, and courageous enough to believe that God is at work in our lives, then we can begin to see the hope we have in the power of our liturgical practices: that if we are obedient in our practices of prayer and scripture in worship, the Holy Spirit promises to be at work in those routines and practices. He is not just at work in spontaneous moments, but also in liturgical ones.

### ILLUSTRATION

The Bible repeatedly uses botanical and agricultural analogies to describe the Christian life. These metaphors (e.g., seeds, vines, branches, land, or cedars) imply that Christian

growth takes time and faithful practices. In fact, the botanical life is one in which we don't see the mechanism of growth with our eyes. We wait for it faithfully as we tend to the plant, but we only see the effects of the growth using photographs or our mind's eye as we remember the humble beginnings of our seedling.

In this way, the hope of the farmer is like the hope of the believer. While the growth may be so slow that we can't see it with our own eyes, we continue in our liturgical practices—sometimes with great care and sometimes as a matter of repetition—because we believe that, over time, God will bring the work to its full fruition.

### DISCUSSION QUESTION

Do we trust that God is at work in our worship service even if we don't feel the immediate results of stirring or inspiration?

### Lesson

Christian worship is powerful and effective when we seek to make our worship liturgies obedient to the Scriptures. (Psalm 103:15-22)

God promises us that he is at work in the world and that his Word will not come back void. But it can be difficult for those who work for the church vocationally, as well as for lay worship leaders, to believe this because there can be a tremendous pressure to see immediate "results" in ministry. We want to see results that can be measured at an annual meeting. We want to see results that prove people have been emotionally moved by our 75-minute worship service. This can sometimes lead us to adopt an ethic of pragmatism. We look for what is working in other churches and what is drawing the most people and try to package these strategies for use in our own worship service.

However, having established that all of our churches have a liturgy, that these liturgies direct our emotional experiences, and that ultimately these liturgies are shaping us in certain ways, we can look at our worship services with new eyes. Looking for both expression and formation in our worship service, what do we see?

*How do our worship liturgies form us? Take a few moments to think about the following questions.*

Does the liturgy direct us to feel comfortable the same way the movie theatre makes us comfortable? Does the liturgy direct us to feel

moved the same way a concert gives us goose bumps? Does the liturgy direct us to examine our lives using the same criteria that advertisers or psychologists give us to examine our lives? Does the liturgy direct us to affirm our cultural idolatries?

Or

Does the liturgy of the worship service direct us to be joyful about the things that make God joyful? Does our worship direct us to grieve the things that make God grieve? Does our worship direct us to examine ourselves with the criteria

that God gives us to examine ourselves? Does our worship direct us to tear down our false hopes, and replace them with eschatological hope?

## Exercise

1. Write down an activity in your life that you do at least once a week or once a day.
2. What would happen if you stopped doing this activity?
3. If you continue in this activity faithfully, what do you hope will happen?
4. Can you recall specifically the last ten times you did this activity?

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## Discussion Question

1. When we choose to enter into the liturgy of the mall, the liturgy of the sporting event, or the liturgy of social technologies, what kinds of strengths are being formed in us? What kinds of weaknesses are being formed in us? Is it possible for those strengths or weaknesses to be formed in us without our thinking about it?
2. Do we trust that God is at work in our worship service even if we don't feel the immediate results of stirring or inspiration?

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## Lesson

Christian worship is powerful and effective when we seek to make our worship liturgies obedient to the Scriptures. (Psalm 103:15-22)

What are obstacles in our path to applying this lesson?

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Our Dear Lord,

Our souls long for communion with You – to have a precious sense of the mystery of Your Holiness. What blessedness to be like You, as much as it is possible for a creature to be like its Creator. Lord, give us more of Your likeness. Enlarge our souls to contain fullness of holiness. Let us climb up near to You, and love and plead and wrestle with You; for our hearts are wandering and aimless. Wrap our hearts in divine love, and keep us ever desiring You with our eyes fixed on Your holiness. Amen.

# CHAPTER FIVE

## Liturgy: The Practices of Our Worship

### EXERCISE

Think of an important person in your life and what you do to show this person that you love him or her. Write down a favorite memory with that person.

### Introduction

In the same way that beautiful relationships are made strong and healthy by various practices of love and service, so also our experiences in worship blossom out of being rooted in healthy practices.

### Discussion

#### Five Types of Practices in Worship

We should build five kinds of practices into our worship that will help tend our relationship with God and hopefully bear the fruit of some beautiful experiences of worship with God. These practices are not mutually exclusive; they will overlap and intermingle.

#### 1. Word Practices

Our worship should cultivate in us a deep knowledge and love of the Scriptures. This means that worship should be focused around the Bible, sermons should be expository, and our songs should put God's words into the mouths of his people.

### ILLUSTRATION

One of my first jobs after graduation from college was as a music director in a small parish church in Brooklyn. The pastor had a standard liturgy each week that included an Old Testament reading, a reading from the Psalms, and a Gospel reading. I wasn't used to this much Scripture reading in a church service

and I couldn't believe they were reading a whole chapter of an Old Testament book and a whole psalm as well as something from the Gospels. This went on week after week and each week when the readings began I prepared myself to be bored. But when I went home to worship with my parents in my home church and there were no set scripture readings, I realized how much I had grown to love hearing God's Word read to me. I loved having the opportunity to meditate on it and have the words echo in my ears throughout the week. I began to understand what David meant in Psalm 119 when he says he loves the law of God and meditates on it day and night.

### DISCUSSION QUESTION

Do we make time in our worship service for the reading of God's Word? Are the scriptures clearly present in our prayers and song lyrics?

#### 2. Praise Practices

Our worship should cultivate in us the practice of praising God for who he is and what he has done. This means that our services should include prayers of praise to God, corporate praise music, and testimonies of God's work in our lives.

### ILLUSTRATION

Consider the story of Job. He was faithful to God and God blessed him. But then God took the blessings from him and gave him trials of many kinds. Job's wife told him that it made sense for him to praise God in good times, but now he should curse God. Job responded, "*Though he slay me, I will hope in him.*" (Job 13:15) We learn from Job that praising God doesn't always flow from an expressive emotional experience for good that God has done in our lives, but that it is also a discipline we need to cultivate. Or as the hymn puts it, "Take my voice and let me sing, always only, for my king."

## DISCUSSION QUESTION

Does our worship service proclaim praises for God's character? Does it also bear witness to the work he has done in our lives?

### 3. Prayer Practices

Our worship should include prayers of all kinds. This includes verbal prayers as well as meditative and contemplative prayers. And the prayers should reflect the whole range of emotions that are offered in the Psalms.

## ILLUSTRATION

A common view of prayer is that it is a laundry list of needs that we bring to God. But if we look at the Psalms we see prayers of lament, doubt, joy, anger, praise, and confession as well as petition. Ambrose of Milan, a church leader in the time of the gladiators, called the Psalms "God's gymnasium of prayer." When we go the gym there are a variety of machines and exercises available to us. We tend to gravitate toward those machines or exercises that come naturally to us, not the exercises that are difficult but equally necessary. But, if we are wise, we make use of all these exercises and machines in order to become physically fit so that we can play with our family, live a healthy life, and prepare ourselves for all that life will throw at us. In the same way, the Psalms offer us many different prayers that express a variety of emotions and experiences. But we tend to pray the Psalms that come more naturally to us. Worship should teach us the languages of lament, anger, joy, and doubt so that when life throws experiences our way that bring these emotions and experiences, we know how to express them before God.

## DISCUSSION QUESTION

Is prayer a filler in our worship service for transitioning us between events or is it a way for us to bring the whole range of our emotions and experiences before the Lord?

### 4. Action Practices

The Bible connects our worship to actions of love and justice. So our worship should cultivate opportunities to show compassion to the poor and needy among us. This includes giving our money away to be used by God for these purposes as well as praying for the needs of the

poor, the orphans, the widows, the vulnerable, the sick, and the lonely. (See sidebar for more support of this point.)

## ILLUSTRATION

In Isaiah 1:15-17, God refused to receive his people's worship because their *hands are full of blood*. He said he would bring judgment on them unless they *cease to do evil, learn to do good; seek justice, correct oppression; bring justice to the fatherless, plead the widow's cause*. James 1:27 reads, *Religion that is pure and undefiled before God, the Father, is this: to visit orphans and widows in their affliction, and to keep oneself unstained from the world*. There is a consistent message in the Bible that our worship is tied to our actions, especially toward the needy, and that we neglect this at our peril.

## DISCUSSION QUESTION

Does our worship service include opportunities to pray for peace, for our community, and for God to renew our zeal to care for the "least of these"?

### 5. Sacrament Practices

The sacraments are visible signs of inward grace. And they provide opportunities to participate with our bodies in worship. The practices of baptism and communion in particular are instructive and participatory, and provide predictable, beautiful, and familiar structure to our worship and to our year. Whether our church takes communion and baptizes weekly, monthly, or yearly, the sacraments should be part of our worship.

## ILLUSTRATION

In Matthew 28:19 and 20, Jesus tells his disciples to make disciples and baptize them *in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you*. He also gave his disciples at the Last Supper his body and blood and instructed them to *do this in remembrance of me*. (Luke 22:19) Jesus gave us sacramental worship. He did not only see our minds and emotions as needing to come under his lordship, but also our bodies.

## DISCUSSION QUESTION

Are there ways that our church can incorporate the beauty of communion and baptism by talking about them or participating in them?

## Lesson

Christian worship is made healthy and strong by faithful cultivation of biblical practices.  
(1 Corinthians 12:1, 4-7, 13-20)

First Corinthians 12 gives us a picture of the body of Christ where every member has gifts to contribute to the good of all. Through much of history, many people had no choice of where to worship; they worshiped in the one church in their town or village. This tended to create congregations that included people who gravitated to a variety of practices, each bringing their varied gifts to bless

and sharpen one another. Now, however, because we are not limited by geography, we tend to choose churches and gravitate to worship services that are comfortable to us and where like-minded people worship. The people with strong word practices gather together, and the people with strong praise practices worship with each other. But when this happens, we miss out on the varied gifts God gives to his body. Instead of sharpening each other, we affirm each other's idolatries and ignore our collective failures. We need our brothers and sisters to use their varied gifts in worship for our benefit. For instance, we might come to church wanting to experience the joyful release of praising God while he wants us to experience giving our money away. We might want to be intellectually stimulated while God wants us to be still and meditate. God can use others to do this work in our lives. God wants to build us together into something stronger and more beautiful than what we could be alone.

# Handout: Liturgy: The Practices of Our Worship

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## Exercise

Think of an important person in your life and what you do to show this person that you love him or her. Write down a favorite memory with that person.

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## Discussion Question

1. Do we make time in our worship service for the reading of God's Word? Are the scriptures clearly present in our prayers and song lyrics?
2. Does our worship service proclaim praises for God's character? Does it also bear witness to the work he has done in our lives?
3. Is prayer a filler in our worship service for transitioning us between events or is it a way for us to bring the whole range of our emotions and experiences before the Lord?
4. Does our worship service include opportunities to pray for peace, for our community, and for God to renew our zeal to care for the "least of these"?
5. Are there ways that our church can incorporate the beauty of communion and baptism by talking about them or participating in them?

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## Lesson

Christian worship is made healthy and strong by faithful cultivation of biblical practices.  
(1 Corinthians 12:1, 4-7, 13-20)

What are obstacles in our path to applying this lesson?

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Merciful God,

May our religion be always firmly rooted in Your word. May our understanding be divinely informed, our affections holy and heavenly, our motives pure, and our hearts never wrong before You. Deliver us from the natural darkness of our own minds – from the corruptions of our hearts – from the temptations to which we are exposed – from the daily snares that attend us. Until we finish our course with joy, may we pursue it with diligence and humility. Amen.

# CHAPTER SIX

## Liturgy: The Language of Our Worship

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### EXERCISE

(Take half of the class time for this exercise.)

1. Look at your church's printed order of worship, or write down from memory the order of worship your church participates in.
2. Now write down what is being expressed with each part.
3. Then write down what what is being formed with each part.

### Introduction

We have established that worship is the expression of our love and the formation of our love. Worship is also the manifestation of the relationship of God and his people. In fact, when you looked at your order of worship you may have discerned a conversation happening between God and his people. It can be said that liturgy is the language of our worship. God's voice is present throughout our worship service in his Word through the power of the Holy Spirit. Here are some of the ways we respond through the elements of our liturgy:

**Adoration** – We say to God, "I love you."

**Confession** – We say to God, "I'm sorry."

**Thanksgiving** – We say to God, "Thank you."

**Supplication** – We say to God, "Help me."

**Lament** – We ask of God, "Why?"

**Commission** – We ask of God, "What can I do?"

With this language of liturgy, we are practicing attitudes and postures with which to approach the Lord and his world. These attitudes and postures can also form us for our spontaneous moments of prayer as we learn to bring our whole selves before him. Some churches have even found it helpful to put arrows next to each element of the worship service to show when we are talking to God, he to us, and we to each other.

Effective conversations using healthy language not only express our thoughts and emotions, but also form our thoughts and emotions. And just as

healthy language does not come naturally to children—they have to be taught to say "please" and "thank you" and "I'm sorry"—we, too, have to be taught healthy worship language. One of the ways we learn healthy language is to come to worship together to learn how to speak to God earnestly and fully.

This language is not only for use in worship, but will ideally also be with us in our weeks, helping us to cultivate relational depth with our loved ones and neighbors.

### DISCUSSION QUESTION

Can I think of a time when my parents made me say something that did not come naturally to me? How was it of benefit to me?

### DISCUSSION QUESTION

Now that we have talked about what we have in our order of worship, what changes or additions would we like to make?

### Lesson

In Christian worship, we learn a new language with which to speak to God and to one another. (Acts 15:1-35)

## Exercise

1. Look at your church's printed order of worship, or write down from memory the order of worship your church participates in.
2. Now write down what is being expressed with each part.
3. Then write down what what is being formed with each part.

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## Discussion Question

1. Can I think of a time when my parents made me say something that did not come naturally to me? How was it of benefit to me?
3. Now that we have talked about what we have in our order of worship, what changes or additions would we like to make?

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## Lesson

In Christian worship, we learn a new language with which to speak to God and to one another. (Acts 15:1-35)

What are obstacles in our path to applying this lesson?

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Lord Jesus,

Give us a deeper knowledge of Yourself as Savior, Master, Lord, and King. Give us a deeper power in private prayer. Give us deeper holiness in speech, thought, and action. Plough deep in us, that our being may be a tilled field with the roots of grace spreading far and wide. We have no wealth but what you give us – We have no good but what you bestow on us – We have nothing but what we receive from You. Quarry us deep, dear Lord and then fill us to overflowing with living water. Amen.

# CHAPTER SEVEN

## Music: A Gift We Discover

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### EXERCISE

Write down any objects that exist in the world that produce musical sounds without our involvement in the creation of those sounds (e.g., wind whistling through the trees, metal pieces clanging together in just the right way to produce a tone, the hiss and plunk of rain falling).

### Introduction

I am a night person. When I was first married, I would stay up late and sleep later in the morning. When I woke, I would hear the sound of the birds singing in the trees and weaving with those notes were the sounds of someone singing in the house. It was my wife, who is a morning person, walking around the house and singing in the day. And it was as if I had emerged onto the shores of a new world and waiting for me was this surprising and beautiful sound I had not looked for and could have never imagined existed. This is an image of how we all are. We have emerged onto the shores of this world and have found the mysterious presence of song and it predates us; it arrests and indwells us. We live in the presence of this gift of music.

### Discussion

#### Music Is a Gift We Discover

Music is God's gift to us. There are many times in the Scriptures where God bestows on his people a gift for their good, but he also expects them to steward that gift for his purposes. Music is such a gift, given to us in love and to be used for his purposes.

#### 1. *God Has Woven the Gift of Music into Creation*

God has woven music into creation and we discover it.

### ILLUSTRATION

Legend has it that Pythagoras of Samos was walking in a marketplace and heard two blacksmiths hammering on their anvils and noticed they made different tones. He began a series of experiments with different lengths of metal strings and discovered how mathematical ratios affect musical consonance. So the instruments we have don't create music; they work as a conduit for the music God has woven into creation. Augustine said, "Beauty is indeed a gift of God but that the good may not think it a great good, God dispenses it even to the wicked." As far as we know, Pythagoras did not know God. Babylonians were discovering some of these things hundreds of years earlier, but even though they did not know their Creator, they were able to see this miraculous order that God has woven into His creation. We live in a world that is full of music.

#### 2. *God Has Given Us the Gift of Music for Pleasure*

One of the most mysterious things about music is the pleasure that it brings us.

### ILLUSTRATION

Music brings us pleasure in many ways. Children sing when they play and dance when they hear music. We drive places and pay money to listen to people make music. We honor those who make music and permit them their eccentric haircuts. We buy each other music. We search it out when we're in our cars or homes. It makes us weep, laugh, and feel brave. It is a gift of beauty, kindness, and sheer delight. It is a presence in a world that could have been otherwise, but isn't.

3. *God Has Given Us Music to Point to Himself*

Like all of creation, music not only gives pleasure, but also has purpose. In fact, like all good gifts of creation, it has at least two purposes: to bring glory to God and to bring good to our neighbor.

a. *Bring Glory to God*

When we find pleasure in God's creation, this brings glory to him because we are responding to it in the way we were made to do. So just our singing in delight is a joy to him and brings honor and glory to him. We also glorify God with music when we focus our music on telling of his greatness and beauty and when we give our music to him as an offering.

## ILLUSTRATION

Psalm 96:1-2, 12-13 says, *Oh sing to the LORD a new song; sing to the LORD, all the earth! Sing to the LORD, bless his name; tell of his salvation from day to day.... Let the field exult, and everything in it! Then shall all the trees of the forest sing for joy before the LORD, for he comes, for he comes to judge the earth. He will judge the world in righteousness, and the peoples in his faithfulness.* The Bible continually tells us to take music and celebrate God with it. Scripture also encourages us to express the whole range of our life with God with a range of musical sounds: *Praise him with trumpet sound; praise him with lute and harp! Praise him with tambourine and dance; praise him with strings and pipe! Praise him with sounding cymbals; praise him with loud clashing cymbals!* (Psalm 150:3-5)

b. *Bring Good to Our Neighbors*

The other purpose of music is to bring good to our neighbors. God's commands to his people are summed up as: love God and love neighbor. And all his good creation can and should be used in this work of love.

## ILLUSTRATION

Ephesians 5:1, 2 and 18, 19 say, *Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children. And walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.... Be filled with the Spirit, addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making*

*melody to the Lord with your heart.* Paul links music to loving each other. We are supposed to encourage one another with this gift. Our discourse with each other is to be leavened with music. We use music to strengthen the church and build the body into wholeness. So music is not only a private delight, but also a public good. This also means conversations about music should be shaped by the acknowledgment that music is a good gift from God. If we keep this in mind, our conversations won't begin with debates over style or attempts to vindicate our own preferences; our conversations about music will begin with gratitude and a humble sense of our responsibility to steward this gift.

Our music should also be a point of communication with our unbelieving neighbors. The music we listen to, write, sing, and play should be music that loves our neighbor in beautiful and accessible ways.

## DISCUSSION QUESTION

When we talk about music, do we begin with gratitude to God for giving us this beautiful gift? Do we understand that music is a good gift for our unbelieving neighbor as well?

## Stewarding the Gift

Stewarding music means being skillfully creative with this gift God has given us. J.I. Packer says, "Taste is a facet of wisdom, the ability to distinguish that which has value from that which does not." (*Christianity: The True Humanism*, Thomas Howard and J.I. Packer, p. 165)

## ILLUSTRATION

Exodus 35:30-33 says, *Then Moses said to the people of Israel, 'See, the LORD has called by name Bezalel the son of Uri, son of Hur, of the tribe of Judah; and he has filled him with the Spirit of God, with skill, with intelligence, with knowledge, and with all craftsmanship, to devise artistic designs, to work in gold and silver and bronze, in cutting stones for setting, and in carving wood, for work in every skilled craft.* The Holy Spirit falls on us to inspire us to do various skills with excellence. We recognize the value of cultivating a skill in other areas of our lives. We don't want "earnest plumbing" done on our pipes we want excellent plumbing

done. We don't want someone to do our taxes with sincerity, but with skill. So we also need to see music as a valuable skill that can be cultivated and used with beautiful creativity.

### DISCUSSION QUESTION

Are we finding the people in our congregation whom God has gifted with skill in music to take part in our worship service? Are we providing opportunities for them to grow in excellence in this skill?

instrument in existence. For many of us, this is a daunting prospect. We may only want to express the experiences we have already had in musical forms we are already comfortable with. Many of us come to worship and don't want to think about the needs of those around us. Others of us are fearful of trying something new because we don't believe that God is able to move us in new ways.

But in Revelation 5, we see the fulfillment of God's amazing promise that we will all be singers together. We will be able to use this gift of music, along with all the people who have ever lived, to sing a song that has not yet been heard.

### Lesson

In Christian worship, God teaches us that music is a gift that we discover and steward.  
(Psalm 150)

We see a picture of full worship in Psalm 150 where everyone and everything that has breath is praising God with every kind of music and

## Exercise

Write down any objects that exist in the world that produce musical sounds without our involvement in the creation of those sounds (e.g., wind whistling through the trees, metal pieces clanging together just the right way to produce a tone, the hiss and plunk of rain falling).

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## Discussion Question

1. When we talk about music, do we begin with gratitude to God for giving us this beautiful gift? Do we understand that music is a good gift for our unbelieving neighbor as well?
2. Are we finding the people in our congregation whom God has gifted with skill in music to take part in our worship service? Are we providing opportunities for them to grow in excellence in this skill?

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## Lesson

In Christian worship, God teaches us that music is a gift that we discover and steward. (Psalm 150)

What are obstacles in our path to applying this lesson?

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Father of Jesus,

We commend our hearts to your watchful care. May our words allure others to the highest walk of faith and love. Cause me to be a mirror of Your grace. May our lips be well-tuned cymbals sounding Your praise. Help me to walk as Jesus walked, our only Savior and perfect model. Let our happiness be amongst the poor in spirit; let us always esteem others better than ourselves and find true humility through our union with Christ our Lord. Amen.

# CHAPTER EIGHT

## Music: A Gift We Use

### EXERCISE

In chapter 6 we learned about different kinds of worship language. They were:

**Adoration** – We say to God, “I love you.”

**Confession** – We say to God, “I’m sorry.”

**Thanksgiving** – We say to God, “Thank you.”

**Supplication** – We say to God, “Help me.”

**Lament** – We ask of God, “Why?”

**Commission** – We ask of God, “What can I do?”

Take a few minutes to write down a song that exemplifies each one.

### Introduction

The typical dialogue about kinds of worship music focuses on whether a church sings “traditional” or “contemporary” music. These two categories of music are not adequate for the conversation. In this chapter we will look at a better framework for types of music, how to define each, and why we include them in our worship. This is not an exclusive nor is it an all-encompassing list but will hopefully give us a broader and richer musical language with which to communicate with each other and God.

### Discussion

#### Service Music

Service Music is essentially the elements of the liturgy set to music. Many churches sing instead of simply saying the Doxology, the Gloria Patri, and the Prayer for Illumination each week in their services. These songs can be used to mark the great occasions of our worship service. We lift up our prayers together and sing the Doxology. Before we open up the Word we sing together the Prayer for Illumination. God sends us out and we sing the Gloria Patri.

#### 1. *Useful for the Formative Power of Memorization and Embodiment*

Service music has a formative purpose in our worship lives. These songs give us words to memorize with the hope that these words will shape us into the kinds of people who personify or embody the ideas they express. Service music may also provide us a means of expressing our love for God at times when we don’t have words of our own.

### ILLUSTRATION

I direct a children’s choir at our church. Often after practice when the parents come to pick up their children and the kids are stomping out in a big hurry, the parents say, “Go thank Maestro Isaac before you go.” The kids come up to me, often fidgety and sweaty, and say quickly, “Thank you, Maestro Isaac,” before flying out the door. I could ask them, “Was that really an authentic expression of thanks that you gave me just now?” But that’s not necessarily the point. We have our children say “thank you” and “you’re welcome” and “hello” with the hope that it will shape them into the kinds of people who are thankful and gracious.

#### 2. *Useful for Connecting Us to the Church Around the World*

These songs are also ones that are shared by believers from all over the world. When we sing them, we join the one holy, apostolic, and catholic Church. We are lifting up our voices with Protestants, Roman Catholics, Americans, people in the Southern Hemisphere, Northern Hemisphere, and all over the world.

### DISCUSSION QUESTION

Does our church include Service Music in its service? Why or why not?

### Hymns and Anthems

Hymns and anthems are songs written with a versified form, to be sung to worship God for who he is, what he has done, and what he will do. Hymns and anthems have a lyrical, poetic quality where a certain theme is developed throughout so the climax of the song happens with the lyrics rather than the instrumentation.

#### 1. *Useful for Turning Us from Ourselves to Praising God for Who He Is*

Most hymns and anthems begin with or focus on an aspect of God's character, such as his kingship, his holiness, or his love. Because they take this theme and look at it from various perspectives, they allow us time to meditate on who God is and what he has done in this area as we sing multiple verses about it.

### ILLUSTRATION

The hymn "All Creatures of Our God and King" recounts how each part of creation gives glory to the Lord, and at the end it climaxes with, "Let all things their creator bless, and worship him in humbleness." "In Christ Alone" starts out by saying that our hope is found in Christ alone. Then it reminds us that Jesus died, but we can hope in that. It ends with, "No guilt in life, no fear in death, this is the power of Christ in me." It has its own momentum. These songs allow us to turn for a few minutes from ourselves and reflect on our God's character.

#### 2. *Useful for Turning Us from Ourselves to Praising God for What He Has Done*

Even if we don't believe or feel in that moment that God is who the hymn says he is or does what the anthem says he has done, the truth isn't any less true. So these songs provide us with a connection to what God is doing and remind us of what he has done as we sing the true words regardless of how we feel. This is true even for the unbeliever.

### ILLUSTRATION

The woman who played the piano at the church I grew up in told me that there were times she went to church when she couldn't even sing. On some days she felt that if she sang the words to the songs she would be

telling lies because she did not feel them in her heart that day. That troubled me, even at age fifteen. She implied that there are times when we believe what we sing completely and without doubt. It also seemed to mean that if we only believe the words a little bit, maybe we should only sing a little bit. It occurred to me that the best things we sing in church are true no matter how we feel.

If the best songs we sing are true regardless of how much we believe them, then even unbelievers can sing these hymns and anthems. They can sing the words and it gives them a chance to reflect on these truths and be connected to who God is and what he is doing as well.

### DISCUSSION QUESTION

Does our worship include hymns and anthems that praise God for who he is and what he has done in its service? Or do we only sing songs about how we feel?

### Psalms and Scripture Songs

These songs are either a Psalm or other Scripture verbatim—or close to it—put to music, such as "Create in Me a Clean Heart," which is simply the words of Psalm 51 put to music, or "All People That on Earth Do Dwell," which is Psalm 100.

#### 1. *Useful for Memorizing and Internalizing God's Holy Scriptures*

All worship songs should reflect truths from the Scriptures. But Psalms and Scripture songs start with the Scriptures in a way that helps us to learn and memorize its language. These songs can be useful to children and adults in internalizing scripture to be used when we need to remember the words.

#### 2. *Useful as an Act of Obedience*

Ephesians 15:19 tells us to *address one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs*. We obey God's injunction to do this with these songs.

### DISCUSSION QUESTION

Which of our songs are the Scriptures set to music?

### Devotional Music

Unlike hymns, devotional songs are not so much about who God is and what He has done, but rather about our reaction to what God has done in our lives. They are songs about what we do, what we feel, and our reaction to who God is.

#### 1. Useful for Better Contextualizing God's Work into Our Life Experiences

We have an opportunity to meditate on God's work in the world when we sing hymns and anthems. Devotional music gives us the opportunity to express what we think and how we feel about that work.

### ILLUSTRATION

I went to a formal church for a couple of years after college where we sang with the organ from the hymnal. At the new members meeting, the pastor explained that this church sang all hymns because hymns tend to be more about God while choruses are more about us. That disturbed me. First, because we can open the hymnal and find many hymns that are about our response to God. Hymns like "Just as I am" are songs that are about what we bring to God. He also seemed to be saying that there is no biblical precedent for us praising God for what he has done in our lives and how we feel about that. But we can open the Psalms and find many subjective, emotional, and deeply personal prayers to God.

#### 1. Useful for Following David's Model of Singing a New Song to Our God

We have seen how the Psalms give us a precedent for coming to God and bringing our feelings to him. David frequently told his story. He said he waited for the Lord, God inclined to him, heard his cry, brought him up, and at the end David sang a new song. This is a beautiful part of Christian worship. Worship isn't only a place for expressing our theology and doctrines about God, it is also a place for telling God about our complete and real selves and all of our emotions.

### DISCUSSION QUESTION

Does our music include opportunities for us to bring our full range of reactions to God before him?

### Lesson

In Christian worship, we use the gift of music in its many forms to glorify God. (1 John 4:7-12)

## Exercise

We talked about different kinds of worship language in chapter 6. As a reminder they were:

- Adoration** – We say to God, “I love you.”
- Confession** – We say to God, “I’m sorry.”
- Thanksgiving** – We say to God, “Thank you.”
- Supplication** – We say to God, “Help me.”
- Lament** – We ask of God, “Why?”
- Commission** – We ask of God, “What can I do?”

Take a few minutes to write down a song that exemplifies each one.

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## Discussion Question

1. Does our church include Service Music in its service? Why or why not?
2. Does our worship include Hymns and Anthems that praise God for who he is and what he has done in its service? Or do we only sing songs about how we feel?
3. Which of our songs are the Scriptures set to music?
4. Does our music include opportunities for us to bring our full range of reactions to God before him?

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## Lesson

In Christian worship, we use the gift of music in its many forms to glorify God. (1 John 4:7-12)

What are obstacles in our path to applying this lesson?

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O Savior,  
We are slow to learn, prone to forget, and weak to climb. We are in the foothills of faith, rather than the heights. Make it our chiefest joy to study You, to gaze on You, to sit like Mary at Your feet, to lean like John upon Your breast, to appeal like Peter to Your love, and to count like Paul all other things rubbish. Let not our faith cease from seeking You until our faith vanishes into sight. Amen.

# CHAPTER NINE

## Music: A Gift We Cultivate

### EXERCISE

If someone tells you that she likes country music, what other things do you assume about her? If someone says he likes heavy metal music, alternative music, rap music, hip hop, jazz, or pop, what other things do you assume about him?

### Introduction

Music is not just a raw human experience devoid of cultural context. We must come to terms with the fact that music is inextricably tied to our cultural experiences.

### Discussion

#### Music Should Be Contextual

Living in North America in the twenty-first century means that our music should not be like the music Jesus would have heard in the Middle East more than 2000 years ago. God used the types of instruments that they played and the sorts of songs that they sang at that time to convey his gospel story to those particular people. We need to do the same with today's instruments, songs, and culture. This is called contextualization.

#### 1. Contextualizing the Gospel to Our Culture

None of us chooses the culture in which we live, but we need to study to understand our culture if we are to create and use music that conveys the gospel message contextually. The Bible tells us that we are all strangers in a foreign land. One of the best examples of this in Scripture is the story of Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego.

### ILLUSTRATION

Daniel 1 tells us that, *[Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon] commanded Ashpenaz, his chief*

*eunuch, to bring some of the [captive] people of Israel, both of the royal family and of the nobility, youths without blemish...to teach them the literature and language of the Chaldeans. The king assigned them a daily portion of the food that the king ate, and of the wine that he drank. They were to be educated for three years, and at the end of that time they were to stand before the king. Among these were Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah of the tribe of Judah. And the chief of the eunuchs gave them names: Daniel he called Belteshazzar, Hananiah he called Shadrach, Mishael he called Meshach, and Azariah he called Abednego.*

Daniel and his friends did not choose the culture in which they were placed. But faithful presence for Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego meant that they learned the language, the literature, and the whole culture of the Babylonians. And ultimately these young men brought glory to God and great good to the king of Babylon because they were obedient to God in that time and place.

Some of us are not happy with the culture in which we have been placed. We might wish it were more conservative or more liberal, more urban or more rural, more like Calvin's Geneva or more like America's 1950s. But God has put us right where we are and, like Daniel, we have before us the task of serving our neighbors by learning their language, their literature, their aesthetics, and their priorities. When we understand our culture we can bring glory to God and great good to our neighbor by using creative cultural vehicles to bring God's word to life for them.

### DISCUSSION QUESTION

Do we study our culture's literature, music, and language? What are some creative cultural vehicles for bringing God's word to our neighbors contextually?

## 2. Being Culturally Contextual, not Subcultural

To be contextual with the Gospel story means to put it into the language, literature, and music of the culture in which we live. To be subcultural with the Gospel would be to create a separate culture within this culture and give it its own language, literature, and music that do not interact with the rest of society.

### ILLUSTRATION

Imagine that Daniel had not moved into the king's house, learned the language and customs, and served in the king's court. Instead he and his friends, out of fear of these strange people, decided to stay camped outside of Babylon and have their own culture instead of engaging with the Babylonians and getting to know their hopes and dreams. But imagine that they also liked the haircuts, the fabrics, and the music of Babylon, so they brought those aspects of Babylonian culture into their own culture without also taking in the Babylonians themselves. This wasn't what God was calling Daniel, Meshach, Shadrach, and Abednego to do. God had plans to use them in the context of this people's culture.

This is a danger that we face in our own culture. We might like the cool t-shirts, the music, the radio stations, and the bookstores of our society. So we make Christian versions of these elements of our culture that are only used by Christians. We thereby create a Christian subculture.

But how can we practically tell the difference between creating subcultures and contextualizing the gospel? When we are contextual with the gospel we say, "For the sake of my neighbor, I will move into this culture and try to understand her hopes and desires by listening to her music and reading her literature." When we are subcultural with the Gospel we say, "For my own sake I want what my neighbor has. And out of fear I don't want to know him."

### DISCUSSION QUESTION

Are we, for the sake of our neighbor, moving into our culture to try to understand her hopes and desires by listening to her music and reading her literature? Or are we, for our own sake, taking elements of our culture for ourselves without taking in our neighbor?

## 3. Challenging Places of Cultural Brokenness

This doesn't mean that we can't evaluate or speak words of challenge into our culture. Part of studying and learning our culture is keeping our eyes open to the places it is broken. And it is not enough to recognize those places of brokenness; we must also look for loving ways to challenge them. The music we choose and the ways in which we choose to play and sing it should do this.

### ILLUSTRATION

In Daniel 1:8 we see, *But Daniel resolved that he would not defile himself with the king's food, or with the wine that he drank. Therefore he asked the chief of the eunuchs to allow him not to defile himself.* Daniel knew the God who had created all things and knew God's heart through the laws he had given his people. Therefore Daniel could see that Babylon was broken in ways they couldn't see because they did not have God's law. So he explained this to the man over him and asked not to be forced to enter this brokenness himself.

In 21st-century North America, we have been given a vision by the music industry that says each person in our family—our 13-year-old, our 16-year-old, our 25-year-old, and we parents—should choose a different music to listen to and identify with. Music is treated as a deeply individual experience that we can each use to define ourselves rather than a corporate experience to draw our families closer together. This is a way that our culture is broken musically and needs to be healed.

The story continues: *Now God had caused the official to show favor and compassion to Daniel, but the official told Daniel, "I am afraid of my lord the king, who has assigned your food and drink. Why should he see you looking worse than the other young men your age? The king would then have my head because of you. Daniel then said to the guard... "Please test your servants for ten days: Give us nothing but vegetables to eat and water to drink. Then compare our appearance with that of the young men who eat the royal food, and treat your servants in accordance with what you see." So he agreed to this and tested them for ten days. At the end of the ten days they looked healthier and better nourished than any of the young men who ate the royal*

*food. So the guard took away their choice food and the wine they were to drink and gave them vegetables instead.*

Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego needed to adopt many new practices in order to serve their neighbors, but there were some customs put in front of them that they literally could not swallow. They would not be swept away by this new culture in ways that would make them disobedient to God. But Daniel did not want his decision to mean the death of the man in charge of him. So when this man expressed his fear, Daniel lovingly suggested a trial period. God honored these young men's decision to challenge the culture while loving their neighbor by causing them to flourish physically and giving them understanding and skill. And God used them by bringing them into the center of this society to counsel the king and eventually lead him to their God.

Are there things that our culture puts in front of us musically that we should not swallow? Recently I observed a radio station promoting a new record with giant posters of a Christian musician's face with the words superimposed, "Can this man change the way we worship?" Is this vision of worship coming from the Scriptures or from our People magazine-influenced culture where celebrity sells? Is this vision of Christian musicians and how they should look and dress good for our congregations and our worship? Should we lovingly push back against this kind of brokenness?

### DISCUSSION QUESTION

What are musical practices or customs being put in front of us that are broken?

## Lesson

In Christian worship, the Church inspires our culture to greater things and heals our culture where it is broken. (1 Corinthians 9:19-22)

## Exercise

If someone tells you that she likes country music, what other things do you assume about her? If someone says he likes heavy metal music, alternative music, rap music, hip hop, jazz, or pop, what other things do you assume about him?

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## Discussion Question

1. Do we study our culture's literature, music, and language? What are some creative cultural vehicles for bringing God's word to our neighbors contextually?
2. Are we, for the sake of our neighbor, moving into our culture to try to understand her hopes and desires by listening to her music and reading her literature? Or are we, for our own sake, taking elements of our culture for ourselves without taking in our neighbor?
3. What are musical practices or customs being put in front of us that are broken?

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## Lesson

In Christian worship, the Church inspires our culture to greater things and heals our culture where it is broken. (1 Corinthians 9:19-22)

What are obstacles in our path to applying this lesson?

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O Lord, Searcher of hearts,

It is a good day to us when you give us a glimpse of our true selves. Show us how to know when a thought is evil which we think right and good – how to know when what is lawful comes from an evil principle. Give us grace to know our lack and our emptiness without You. And let us not lay our pipe too short of the fountain, never touching the eternal spring – never drawing down water from above. Amen.

# CHAPTER TEN

## Space: Physical Space in Worship

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### EXERCISE

Think of a time of closeness with the Lord when you experienced his presence and that experience changed you. These times are often called “mountaintop experiences.” Take a moment and write down a summary of that experience.

### Introduction

The physical space in which we worship is important. We see this in the narrative of Scripture. We are material creatures and creation is our home. God created the material world and our life with him is lived in this world. And God gave us the vocation of caring for this material world in all its beauty and brokenness. The incarnation, God becoming a physical body, fully affirms the importance of the tangible stuff that makes up our world and us. Now Jesus reigns, the resurrected Lord, body intact, at the right hand of the Father, and he is coming back to renew and restore this world and make a material new heavens and new earth in which we will live for eternity. In this chapter we will see how our physical worship space should be important to us because it is important to God. The book of Exodus will shape our discussion.

### Discussion

#### The Mountaintop and the Sanctuary

There are expressive and formative aspects to our physical worship space just as there are for liturgy and music. We meet God in expressive ways when we have meaningful and emotional encounters. Those moments can take place anywhere God chooses: on a mission trip, in quiet meditation with God, or in our worship spaces on Sunday.

#### 1. Encountering God on the Mountaintop

We can tend to think of encountering God in terms of those times when we feel the presence of God in tangible and deep ways. These can be very important and pivotal times in our spiritual lives.

### ILLUSTRATION

In Exodus 24:15-18 we see the original mountaintop experience: *Then Moses went up on the mountain, and the cloud covered the mountain. The glory of the LORD dwelt on Mount Sinai, and the cloud covered it six days. And on the seventh day he called to Moses out of the midst of the cloud. Now the appearance of the glory of the LORD was like a devouring fire on the top of the mountain in the sight of the people of Israel. Moses entered the cloud and went up on the mountain. And Moses was on the mountain forty days and forty nights.*

The Holy Spirit came down on the mountain as fog and fire. Moses didn't plan this mountaintop spiritual experience with the Lord, but it clearly changed him. When he came down from the mountain his face shone because he had been in the Lord's presence. This story shows that having mountaintop experiences with the Lord—knowing him and communing with him one on one—is a good thing.

#### 2. Encountering God in the Sanctuary

But between these mountaintop experiences are all the days, weeks, and months that make up our lives with God. These day-to-day experiences are also very important for our spiritual lives and for shaping us into God's people. So that is why God has taught us to order our worship spaces to be places where God's people can meet him in more formative ways.

### ILLUSTRATION

As Moses came down the mountain, God gave him a prescription for how that mountaintop experience could be woven into the everyday life of the Israelites: *And let them make me a sanctuary, that I may dwell in their midst. Exactly as I show you concerning the pattern*

*of the tabernacle, and of all its furniture, so you shall make it.* (Exodus 25:8) God then spends the next seven chapters of Exodus going into every beautiful detail of how this tabernacle should look.

God is saying, “You are not going to come up here on the mountain with me every single day, but we will bring this experience into your daily life. I will pour out my power and glory and holiness into the everyday life of my people and it will take place in the tabernacle.”

### The Inbreaking of God’s Holiness into Our Lives

The instructions that God gave for the tabernacle tell us a story about who he is. They tell of God’s holiness, how it should permeate and center the lives of his people, and how it can break into our everyday lives and our world of sin and chaos.

## ILLUSTRATION

The tabernacle was the center of the corporate life of God’s people. In Exodus 25-31 we read that at the very center of the tabernacle was the Holy of Holies that the high priest could go into only once a year. Further out was the holy place that only priests could enter. Outside of that were courts where the sacrifices were made. Then surrounding all of this was the rest of the world. The tabernacle showed God’s people that in a world of disorder and chaos due to sin, God had an invasion strategy. It was a visual depiction of God’s glory coming to dwell with them.

I was invited to the Ukraine to help with the worship service of a church that God had raised up in the midst of the worst prison in that country. Many prisoners, along with the warden, had come to Christ, so they had built a church in the middle of the prisoners’ exercise yard and were training elders and deacons and trying to think through how worship should look in this place. I was led into the heart of this maximum-security prison, through a maze of tunnels and locked gates, until I emerged outside where hundreds of prisoners were in tent-like cells lining the walls of the exercise yard in a long corridor. Guards walked on either side of me down the corridor as prisoners actually banged on their bars with their cups. Then I saw a brick and adobe structure right in the middle of the yard. I heard big booming bass and tenor voices singing a

capella, “How Great Thou Art” in Russian. Here, in the midst of a place where everything was so obviously stained by sin and out of order, was a beachhead of holiness—a little church where God’s presence was making all things new.

## DISCUSSION QUESTION

What story does our worship space tell about what God is doing in worship?

### The Outpouring of God’s Holiness into the World

The word “holy” simply means “set apart.” God describes his people as holy, not because they are better than their neighbors, but because he set them apart for a special purpose, and part of that purpose is to make his glory known to the rest of the world. So the story of the tabernacle is also the story of God’s holiness pouring out from this place into the world and bearing fruit.

## ILLUSTRATION

In Exodus 25:31-40 God spends ten verses describing in great detail the lampstand that would be in the center of the holy place and provide light. It was to look like a verdant, full, flowering almond tree. In the midst of God’s holy place there was a fruitful tree holding up a light in the darkness.

God has given us these light and tree images threaded throughout the Scriptures. In Genesis 1, when there was darkness over the face of the world, God said, “Let there be light.” At the end of the world, God says there will be no darkness; there will only be light and that light will be him (Revelation 21:23-27). In the same way, at the beginning of the world, God made a tree in the center of the Garden of Eden. At the end of the world, God says he will make a new heaven and a new earth. In the center will be a new city and in the center of the city will be a tree (Revelation 22:1-5). So our world began in a garden of light surrounding a tree and it will end in a city of light surrounding a tree. God gave his people these tangible images to gather around in order that these eternal realities might permeate and reorient their lives. This tells us a couple of things about us as the Church in a dark and dead world.

First, it tells us that we are to be light in the darkness. God tells his people, "I am the LORD; I have called you in righteousness; I will take you by the hand and keep you; I will give you as a covenant for the people, a light for the nations, to open the eyes that are blind, to bring out the prisoners from the dungeon, from the prison those who sit in darkness." (Isaiah 42:6-7). God makes us a light for the sake of the people in darkness around us. We get to take part in the redemption of the world and everyone and everything in it.

It also tells us that holiness is a kind of fruitfulness. In Psalm 92:12-15 David says that *the righteous flourish like the palm tree and grow like a cedar in Lebanon. They are planted in the house of the LORD; they flourish in the courts of our God.* [God's people would be imagining the courts of the tabernacle when they heard "courts."] *They still bear fruit in old age; they are ever full of sap and green, to declare that the LORD is upright; he is my rock, and there is no unrighteousness in him.* This true picture of holiness shows us that it is rich and beautiful and life giving—to us and to those in the world around us.

Let's go back to that church in the Ukraine. As the doors to the church opened, I stepped into a place of beauty and order lit by candlelight. There was light in this dark place. The warden explained that the little church in the middle of the prison was not just an institution with closed doors that took care of its own; they regularly had visitors. They had a greeting team and a visitors' section for others from the prison. The church's physical presence permeated and centered the life of the prison.

We live in a world that is disordered and filled with all kinds of pain. But on Sunday morning when we come together, our worship is an outpouring of holiness into the world.

## DISCUSSION QUESTION

In what ways is the worship of our church a source of light and life to our community?

## Lesson

Christian worship is the place for the inbreaking of God's holiness into our lives and the outpouring of God's holiness into the world. (Psalm 63:1-8)

Our worship space, both inside and outside, tells us a story about God and his people. The way we order our worship spaces should tell us what God is doing during worship. The communion table tells the story that God intends to feed his people. The pulpit tells the story that God speaks to us in his Word. The baptismal font tells the story that God is washing us and making all things new. The way we use light and shadow tells the story of God bringing the light of his salvation into the dark places of sin and injustice. The way we use beauty, artistry, mystery, and the design and craftsmanship of all of these elements tells the story of God's people being brought into God's work, both in the inbreaking of his holiness in worship and the outpouring of his holiness into the world.

### Exercise

Think of a time of closeness with the Lord when you experienced his presence and that experience changed you. These times are often called “mountaintop experiences.” Take a moment and write down a summary of that experience.

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### Discussion Question

1. What story does our worship space tell about what God is doing in worship?
2. In what ways is the worship of our church a source of light and life to our community?

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### Lesson

Christian worship is the place for the inbreaking of God’s holiness into our lives and the outpouring of God’s holiness into the world. (Psalm 63:1-8)

What are obstacles in our path to applying this lesson?

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Maker and Sustainer of all things,  
Day and night are Yours. Heaven and earth declare Your glory. Deliver us from all worldly allegiances. For, though we are born slaves, we are bound for glory. May we long after holiness. Sanctify us in every place, in every office, in every action, in every condition of life. Help us to cultivate a disposition that renders every act a spiritual privilege, that we may find joy in Your glory and rest in holy living. Amen.

# CHAPTER ELEVEN

## Space: Our Bodies in Worship

### EXERCISE

Have you ever been asked to do something with your body in worship (e.g., kneel, raise your hands, clap your hands, bow down)? What sort of emotions did it evoke? Did it feel comfortable? Take time to go around the room and allow people to describe their experiences.

### Introduction

Scripture tells us that we are material creatures with bodies that are important and given to us by God. The Bible also has much to say about how we use our bodies in worship. There are as many verses about lifting hands, bowing, kneeling, clapping, and other bodily expressions of worship as there are passages about music and liturgy. So the material world in the form of our bodies is not an obstacle to our life with God; rather it is one of the gifts God has given to us for use in worshipping him.

### Discussion

#### The Power of Bodily Expression

There are expressive and formative aspects to using our bodies in worship as there are in all other areas of worship. Our bodies are created to be able to physically and accurately express our inward emotions and states. This is true in worship as in all other aspects of life. For some people this comes easily and naturally, but for all of us it is an important part of worship.

### ILLUSTRATION

We know the power of expressing how we feel with our bodies. We should express our love with physical affection in our marriages, with our friends, and with our children. If we don't, our loved ones will find it harder to believe in our love for them. Some of us grow up in

an environment where physical expression is modeled well and so we are able to worship with our bodies well.

Scripture gives us many examples of God's people expressing their love for God in worship with their bodies. In Nehemiah, Ezra praised the Lord and all the people lifted their hands and responded, "Amen, amen," and they bowed down. In Psalm 28, David says, "*Hear my cry for mercy as I cry to you for help, as I lift up my hands toward the most holy place.*" In Exodus the Lord says *it is the Passover sacrifice of the Lord, who passed over the houses of Israelites in Egypt and spared our homes*, and then the people bowed down and worshiped him. "*But I, through the abundance of your steadfast love, will enter your house, I will bow down toward your holy temple in the fear of you,*" David says to God in Psalm 5.

### DISCUSSION QUESTION

Is it easy for you to express yourself physically in worship or does it feel uncomfortable and awkward?

#### The Power of Bodily Formation

While bodily expression in worship is important, no one is able to physically express his or her love for God fully or without brokenness. It is important to have instruction in ways of healthy expression. So we should structure our worship in such a way that we are teaching God's people how to use their bodies in worship.

### ILLUSTRATION

Just as we realize how important it is to express our love with physical affection, we realize there is something wrong if someone has no physical expressiveness. If a father is not physically expressive with his child, we don't say, "Oh, well, he doesn't really feel like

being expressive, so that child will never be hugged growing up.” Instead, we realize there is a deficiency there—perhaps because the father didn’t receive physical affection himself—and we say that he needs to learn how to be physically expressive with his children. Other things can make it hard for us to use our bodies properly. Some of us dislike our bodies due to what our culture or people in our lives have told us about how we look. Still others have physical disabilities.

So when we bring our bodies into a worship service, this brokenness comes with us. And in these cases we can’t rely on the authenticity of our expression; we have to learn how to express ourselves properly. Scripture shows us this because it not only gives us examples of people expressing themselves with their bodies, it also commands us to do so, implying that we don’t always do it naturally. Psalm 63 tells us to, *Praise the Lord as long as you live; in his name, lift up holy hands.* Psalm 134 says, *Lift up your hands in the sanctuary, and praise the Lord.* In 1 Timothy 2:8, Paul says, *“I desire then that in every place the men should pray, lifting holy hands without anger or quarreling.”* Psalm 95 says, *Come, let us bow down in worship. Let us kneel before the Lord our maker.*

Some of us show up to worship so well nurtured in what it means to be joyful that it comes naturally to us to raise our hands in celebration. Others of us are very comfortable with our need and we recognize the value of stretching out our hands for God to fill us, but we’re not comfortable with celebration and raising our hands. If we come to worship having been nurtured in such a way that we think of worship as the awesomeness and the terror of God, we might understand the kneeling posture, but not the joyful posture. We have to be formed and learn to worship with our bodies in all these ways.

### DISCUSSION QUESTION

Does it feel insincere to raise your hands if you don’t feel like it? How might you need to be formed into the sort of person who values bodily expression in worship and does it well?

## Lesson

In Christian worship, the way we use our bodies both expresses and forms our love.  
(Psalm 95:1-8)

## Exercise

Have you ever been asked to do something with your body in worship (e.g., kneel, raise your hands, clap your hands, bow down)? What sort of emotions did it evoke? Did it feel comfortable? Take time to go around the room and allow people to describe their experiences.

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## Discussion Question

1. Is it easy for you to express yourself physically in worship or does it feel uncomfortable and awkward?
2. Does it feel insincere to raise your hands if you don't feel like it? How might you need to be formed into the sort of person who values bodily expression in worship and does it well?

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## Lesson

In Christian worship, the way we use our bodies both expresses and forms our love. (Psalm 95:1-8)

What are obstacles in our path to applying this lesson?

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O Lord Jesus,  
You wept and suffered that we might rejoice. For our joy, You have sent the Comforter as a fountain of every blessing. You are preparing joy for us and us for joy. We pray for Your joy, wait for Your joy, and long for Your joy. If we weep at night, give us joy in the morning. Let our hearts leap toward the eternal Sabbath of joy where the work of redemption and sanctification give way to the work of joyful glorification. Bring us speedily to Your house of joy, we pray. Amen.

# CHAPTER TWELVE

## Space: Time in Worship

### EXERCISE

1. Write down 4 or 5 of the most important tenets of the Christian faith.
2. Are there ways throughout the year that we celebrate these ideas?
3. Are there some we don't celebrate that we should?

### Introduction

When God created the world, he made it to progress in rhythms and cycles. He created the course of the sun to give us each day, the course of the moon for each month, and the rhythm of the seasons for each year. He mapped out seven days for us—six for work and one for rest—to give us weeks. As we saw in chapter 10, God gave his people a place to worship that told a story about who he is. Likewise, he ordered their time in a way that told a story of his work in the world. He ordered his people's worship by giving rhythm and order to its services and to its years. And we should acknowledge with our worship that God wants to order our lives by his time.

### Discussion

#### Ordering Our Lives in Time

In the past, and even in many places in the world today, cultures ordered their community life by times: times to plant and to harvest, times to eat and to work, times to sleep and to rise. Activities could only be done during certain windows of time; they couldn't harvest crops until they came to fruition, they could only eat the crops that grew in that season, they went to bed with the sun for lack of light, and they couldn't eat a meal until the cook made and served it. This kind of order is guided by the rhythms and cycles that God built into the world at creation.

In our culture today, however, our community's time is becoming disordered. Instead of regular

meals cooked by a member of our household and eaten together, we can eat anything we want, day or night, because of fast food, prepackaged food, and food shipped in from all over the world. Because of technology, we can watch our favorite movies, television shows, or listen to our favorite music any time of day or night. Even education has become something we can do on our own, virtually and at any time.

### ILLUSTRATION

When we read about or visit other countries and their people, we find feasts, festivals, and other monthly or yearly celebrations. Most cultures have a weekly cycle that involves days of work and days of rest. They also have daily cycles of meals, work, and rest; in America many of us eat three meals—morning, noon, and evening—and rest until we sleep, while some other cultures rest in the middle of the day and work and eat the evening meal later.

Most cultures also order time to reflect their particular people's values, priorities, and story. There might be celebrations that remember a significant occasion in that culture's history or revolve around sporting and arts events. In America's twenty-first century, we celebrate the Fourth of July, Thanksgiving, and President's Day. We have Oscar and Grammy parties and gather to watch and celebrate the World Series, Super Bowl, March Madness, and the World Cup.

### DISCUSSION QUESTION

Does the culture in which we live give us a good cycle of working and resting? What values, priorities, and story does our culture build into its celebrations?

### Reordering Our Lives in Time

The disordering of time in our culture has led some Christians to ask whether it is necessary to assemble in a particular time and place for worship. After all, we can experience sermons, music, and even human contact through our computers. But God wants his people to reorder their corporate time in a way that celebrates his work in the world. This means that it is important that we *not give up meeting together* as believers, as an act of submission to God and to each other. (Hebrews 10:25) And we not only give our Sabbaths to God, but also our whole year. Meeting together to worship in a particular time and place and following the church calendar bear witness to the fact that our worship is where we express our love for God and are formed to love him; worship is not just one more thing we try to fit into our schedules.

### DISCUSSION QUESTION

Do we only mark the celebratory times of the church calendar or do we build in time to learn how to wait and mourn?

### Lesson

God uses Christian worship to reorder our time around his work in the world. (Jeremiah 5:20-25)

### ILLUSTRATION

Just as in Exodus God instructed his people to reorder their space as a community, so, in Leviticus, he instructed his people to reorder their time as a community. God gave them instructions for sacrifices and offerings as well as feasts, fasts, and festivals. He ordered their weeks, months, and years, even to seven- and then 49-year cycles. This order told the story of God's work to his people, to their children, and to the neighboring nations.

Since the coming of Christ and the kingdom of God, the Church has reordered her time to tell the story of this new work in our world. Our calendar includes Advent, Christmas, Epiphany, Lent, Easter, Pentecost, and Sunday Sabbath among other markers. Like in the Old Testament, there are times to feast and celebrate as well as times to fast and mourn.

Festivals like Christmas and Easter teach us how to feast and celebrate. These are rich and often very expressive times in our worship life. But it is also important to observe seasons like Advent and Lent that prepare us for these celebrations. Advent is a time of longing where we learn to hope and anticipate Christ's coming. Lent is a time for us to mourn and prepare to rejoice in Christ's resurrection. Just as it is important in our liturgy and music to be formed to express *all* of our life with God, so it is important that we structure our time to form us to express the whole of the Christian life.

# Handout: Space: Time in Worship

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## Exercise

1. Write down 4 or 5 of the most important tenets of the Christian faith.
2. Are there ways throughout the year that we celebrate these things?
3. Are there things we don't celebrate that we should?

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## Discussion Question

1. Does the culture that we live in give us a good cycle of working and resting? What values, priorities, and story does our culture build into its celebrations?
2. Do we only mark the celebratory times of the church calendar or do we build in time to learn how to wait and mourn?

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## Lesson

God uses Christian worship to reorder our time around his work in the world. (Jeremiah 5:20-25)

What are obstacles in our path to applying this lesson?

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O Lord our God,  
You have given us a day of rest, the seal of the Sabbath that is to come. Sprinkle all our Sabbaths with the cleansing blood of Jesus. Give us in rich abundance the blessings the Sabbath was designed to impart. Flood our minds with peace beyond understanding – make our meditations sweet – our acts of worship joyful – our food Your precious Word – and make our hearts more knit to Jesus, we pray. Amen.

# CHAPTER THIRTEEN

## What Do We Hope For?

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**Exercise** *(This chapter is just an exercise. Take the whole time to talk about it.)*

1. Without looking back at the first week's lesson, write down the answer to the question: When you walk in the door on a Sunday morning, what are you hoping is going to happen to you?

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2. What should be true of the worship service to make that happen?

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3. Look back at the answers you gave the first week of this study.

4. Trade pages with the person next to you and hear what he or she has to say.

5. Now, go around the room and have everyone tell the group what his or her partner has to say in answer to the question.

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O God of the open ear,

Teach us to live by prayer. Give us hearts frameable to Your will. Help us to know that the work of prayer is to bring our wills to Your will. Help us not to desire small things, but with holy boldness to desire great things for Your people, for ourselves, and for Your Kingdom. Teach us the wisdom of praying for all things out of love rather than necessity, for there is no wrath like the wrath of being governed by our own lusts for our own ends. O Lord, hear our prayer, and meet us in Your mercy. Amen.

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