

Why Worship?

Occasionally I hear someone talk about worship like they think it is a spiritual version of *Red Bull*: "I go to worship to be energized so I can make it through the week." I suppose that is fine as far as it goes. But it just doesn't go far enough. I think it is great for people to feel emotionally pumped up at worship. But that is a bad measure of whether worship is serving its purpose.

Worship is expressive and formative. We are to worship, as Jesus said, "in spirit and in truth" (John 4:24). On the one hand, we come together to express our love and loyalty to God. We sing and pray, offering thanks and praise. We joyfully honor God for giving us life, forgiveness, guidance, and more. We celebrate the love of God as we bask in the presence of the Lord of glory. Worship is something we do before God, expressing our faith.

On the other hand, faithful worship is formative. God does something to us as we come together in worship. If our worship is patterned after the wondrous story of God's saving act that culminates in Jesus Christ, our lives are touched and shaped in Christ-like ways as we worship. We learn to see in new ways, ways that arise from what God has done in Christ, ways that lead to broader and deeper love in a frequently unloving world.

Worship is training for life in the Kingdom of God. Jesus taught us to pray, "Thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven." And the Kingdom of God is the real world. Worship trains us to see with Kingdom of God eyes and not be deluded by the sort of "realism" that excuses violence, greed, and hostile divisions that set peoples against each other. Worship prepares us to live with kindness, generosity, forgiveness, and non-discriminating hospitality.

Sadly, we don't always pay sufficient attention to what we are doing in worship. Consequently, we don't learn to see and live out the implications of our worship practices. We fail to prolong the story we present in worship as we live our lives after the benediction. Instead we allow other stories to shape us, stories that emphasize fear and suspicion or that glorify vengeance and violence, greed and selfishness, self-importance and pride.

Worship is one of the primary means God uses to "get under our skin" so we will embody what the Lordship of Jesus means and put it in practice. Good worship doesn't just "meet our needs." It helps us see that we often are all wrong about what we need because we don't see what is really real. As we rightly worship we prepare ourselves to be blessed and to be a blessing for others. So let us come together and worship.