

Worship Essentials – Lecture #9

Applications

Part 2

Implications for Designing Worship Experiences

I. Worship should include elements of revelation and response.

- What kind of “elements” do we have in a worship service?

“Our worship experiences should have various elements, and every one of those elements should serve the principle of revelation and response.”

A. Revelation

a. Scripture readings and biblical preaching

“Scripture should be filling our worship times together, and Biblical preaching as well. Back in Nehemiah chapter 7 and 8 we find Ezra coming out to read the book of the law. We see that the Scriptures are read from sunrise to noon while the people stand, apparently for the entire time, and simply hear the book of the law as Ezra reads it, standing on a platform before the whole people. So, it is at least six hours of just listening to the Word of God being read. Then, in the passage following that, we find that some of the Levites and scribes among them did the work of interpreting and applying the Scripture that had been read. So, there was both Scriptural reading and teaching about the Scriptures.”

- Read **1 Timothy 4:13**

“...a lot of Evangelical churches have done away with Bible reading. There is very little public reading of the Scripture in the churches. ... We need to trust the authority and the power of the Word of God and let the whole counsel of the Word of God be read to the people and then join to that a commitment to rich, deep, Biblical **exposition** in our preaching.”

b. Songs of substance

“...to me, the issue is not traditional hymns or contemporary hymns or praise songs; the issue is really substance. Do the songs we sing, whether they are old or new, traditional or contemporary, whatever those terms may mean, really help reveal the truth about God to us? Is there substance in there that clarifies what God has revealed about Himself—God’s person, God’s work, God’s will? Are they songs that are substantial in portraying God’s attributes and acts and desires for us?”

c. Testimony and other spiritual gifts

“Also I think the careful use, and I would emphasize careful, of personal testimony and other spiritual gifts can be appropriate, as long as they are submitted to the sure Word of God. When I hear a testimony, a well crafted, thoughtful testimony, it also reveals to me something about God; that God is alive and active and still in business and still transforming lives today. As long as this is guided by good pastoral care and submitted to the Scripture, I think testimonies and the other wise use of spiritual gifts can be very appropriate and helpful in the area of revelation.”

d. Sacraments

“I am a believer, also, that the sacraments are very helpful in the area of revelation. Even in the celebration of the Lord’s Supper, as the action is taking place and joined to word of explanation, the sacrament becomes for us a retelling of the mighty acts of God in Christ by redeeming us. Baptism also speaks to us of death and resurrection that God has accomplished in our lives. So, sacraments are another way in which content and substance of revelation are brought into the service.”

B. Response

- a. Prayer
- b. Responsive readings
- c. Confession of sin
- d. Professions of faith
- e. Testimony
- f. Singing, clapping, shouting (praise and lament)
- g. Presentation of tithes and offerings

C. **Both revelation and response**

- a. Faith confession (e.g. Apostles' Creed or Nicene Creed)
- b. Choral or solo presentations
- c. Hymns and praise songs
- d. Silence

"The wise use of **silence** can be a very powerful tool for both contemplation upon what has been said or preached or taught or read or sung, and space for a personal response to what has been said. So silence can be recaptured in our worship gatherings."

D. **Traditional hymns and contemporary praise**

"Let's take time just to consider how the use of both traditional hymns and contemporary praise songs can be valuable working together in helping us respond well and have clarity of revelation. Here is an example: often hymns provide for a deeper glimpse into truth. Look how a hymn is structured with multiple verses, old hymnody had many, many verses often for one hymn. You could take an idea and take it more deeply on a Biblical level, a cognitive level, understanding it at the thought level and then take a hymn on a particular doctrine of God or attribute of God or a story of God's dealing and follow that hymn with a contemporary praise song that is simple. Instead of going into detail about the truth, the praise song can follow the truth with an opportunity for meditation or contemplation upon that truth, help us to linger in the presence of that truth and perhaps to take the truth from our minds into our hearts and digest it a little bit more deeply there."

II. **Worship should be Christocentric.**

Jesus is the Clearest Revelation of God:

- Read **John 1:1, 14; John 14:9**; Colossians 1:15; 2:9

"...**Jesus is also the perfect example of [a] faithful response to God.** When we consider the human life that Jesus lived, the true humanity of Jesus during his earthly sojourn, we find the One who is the absolute epitome of faithful response to God. Doing justice, that is Jesus; loving mercy, that is Jesus; walking humbly with the Father, that is Jesus. Consider how Jesus said, "I can do nothing apart from my Father; I do only what my Father shows me or tells me; apart from the Father I am nothing, can do nothing". He is the model of humility, the model of justice, the model of love of God and love of neighbor."

- What specific implications would a Christocentric focus have on our worship service?

III. **Worship should be Trinitarian.**

"Even with the Christocentric center, our praise and prayers should be continually directed to the Father and we should acknowledge that both the revelation we receive and the responses we offer are enabled by the ministry of the Holy Spirit."

- **Torrance:** "Worship is our participation through the Holy Spirit in the Son's communion with the Father."

IV. **Worship should counteract the tendency to focus on self and instead emphasize the community.**

"Implication number four: we have talked a lot about this so I won't say much more here, but we must counter the tendency of our simple flesh toward an inappropriately self-centered worship by emphasizing that the community worship experiences are indeed community worship experiences not simply the gatherings of assorted individuals. ... we should strive, therefore, for more global and historic perspectives in our worship. This could include the use of songs and hymns from different ages and different cultures, the welcoming of people from different cultures and traditions into our pulpits, and the use of more songs that express ourselves as we/thou than as I/thou, and of the whole forming and shaping of our worship experiences with a view to sensitivity toward all of the body of Christ."

V. **We must take opportunities to stretch our understanding about what true worship is and involves.**

"Number five is a word for all of us. As we think about these things, let us take opportunities to stretch the understanding of our members and ourselves about what true worship is and what true worship involves. This can include carefully adding new experiences in worship and providing intentional teaching about the meaning and practices of worship. I would encourage classes on worship periodically, teaching on worship and even preaching on worship. We should move members toward a view of worship that includes an ever-expanding view of God and an understanding that we are to worship Him with our whole beings in all times and in every place."