

CHIEF

MINISTRIES

April 2014

Inherent in the question, "Why worship?" Is another question. "What do we hope to accomplish in and through our Congregational worship? This is significant when we consider the time we give to this activity. Church leaders will admit that time is one of the most valuable commodities on Sunday morning. Yet it is insufficient to conceive of our worship time as "the preliminaries," something to "condition" the people in preparation for the truly important part of the service: the sermon.

The first and foremost reason for worship is to minister to the Lord. The basic posture of the worshiper is not "bless me, Lord, but rather "I will bless the Lord!" Most of us will affirm that this is not an unfamiliar concept, and yet we must admit that there are times when we go home from a worship service and complain because the service didn't do as much for us as the previous week. If someone asks us how the worship service was, we might answer, "Well, on a scale of 1 to 10, I'd put it around the five." But if the main purpose for worship is to bless and glorify the Lord, then why am I upset when it does not seem to bless me? The question is not whether it blessed me but whether it blessed God. It is not what I thought of the worship service that counts. It is what God thought of it that truly matters! How did it rate on His scale of 1 to 10? Did He approve? Was He pleased with our "sacrifice of praise"?

Granted, when we bless the Lord we get blessed in the process. There is an old Indian saying that goes, "If you want to smear the face of others with mud, you will have to smear your hands first." And the opposite is true to; if you bless another then you will be blessed. Proverbs 11:25 says, "*He that watereth shall be watered also himself*". When we truly bless the Lord, we are automatically blessed. But the important thing is our motivation. We must minister to the Lord not with the ulterior motive of receiving a blessing, but rather with the motive of blessing Him whether or not He blesses us.

Don't get sidetracked from this. There are so many things that can pull our attention away from the Lord if we're not careful. Even getting caught up in "What is God saying?" that we miss our opportunity to minister unto Him. Or diverted by the question "Is there sin in my life?" Trust me, there is. Bless His name anyways. Introspection is good, but don't get so engrossed with "me" all the time. Concentrate on Him for once! The problem with too many people is that their lives are completely self-centered, with everything revolving around personal interest, desires and concerns. Forget about yourself and get taken up with God!

We can also be distracted by outside factors in a service. In some churches, the people concentrate so much on the worship leader that they are never able to lift their hearts unto God. Admiring a dynamic leader is never a substitute for a personal encounter with Christ. I can recall a certain person approaching me after a Sunday service to say, Oh, brother, I just love the way you play piano! I could just sit there for hours and listen to you play! I thank them politely thinking that was a nice thing for them to say. But in retrospect, I saw that it was not a complement at all. In actuality, that person was so taken with my piano playing that they had not worshiped. My musical style had become a distraction, causing them to take their eyes off of the Lord! I can no longer consider it a compliment when I realize my piano playing has distracted others from their primary ministry unto the Lord. Let's not get distracted by admiration of talent. Hopefully, those talents are being expressed exclusively as a stimulus to direct the worshiper Godward.

How easy it is to become a picky analyzer of worship - some of us are veritable connoisseurs of worship services - and bypass our heavenly ministry. We may be the sharpest spiritual detective of all time, constantly hitting the nail on the head, detailing every flaw in the leadership, and imagining the perfect solution, but our negligence in worship would displease God. Let us not even allow our so-called ministry of "discernment" deter us from blessing the Lord.

We also worship in order to better realize the manifest presence of God. The Scriptures reveal that God is everywhere at all times (omnipresent) but yet there are different degrees to which God manifests His presence. He manifests Himself at one level "where two or three are gathered". But when a group of God's people congregate to sing his glorious praise, He "inhabits" those praises and reveals His presence in a very particular way among His praising people (Psalms 22:3)

Exodus 33 records an interesting conversation that Moses had with God. In this divine encounter, Moses was given a unique glimpse of the Lord such as no other man has ever had. God covered Moses in the cleft of the rock and then removed his hand to reveal his back to Moses. Before this took place, the Lord promised Moses, *"My presence will go with you, and I will give you rest. Then Moses said to God, "if your present does not go with us, do not send us up from here. How will anyone know that you are pleased with me and with your people unless you go with us? What else will distinguish me and your people from all the other people on the face of the earth" (Exodus 33:14-16).*

The same question can be asked today. What distinguishes the church from the world? What makes our church services any different from the meetings of any other club or group or social organization? Is it because we're happy? They are probably happy too. Is it because we had good fellowship? They have good fellowship too. The difference is God's presence! The presence of God is the earmark of the church! If we do not have God's presence in our services, we may as well dismiss and have a picnic instead. But when sinners experience the presence of God in our midst, they will know we have something different.

Luke 5:17 speaks of an occasion in which *"the power of the Lord was present for him to heal the sick."* In the presence of God, the power of God is revealed. As God's presence is realized among His worshipers, we should expect to experience a tremendous unleashing of His power. There is deliverance, cleansing, the fullness of the Holy Spirit, and much more when God is present in power. A church was experiencing electrical problems and put this notice in their Sunday bulletin: "Due to the lack of power, there will be a worship service tonight!" In many church services we could perhaps amend that to say, "Due to the lack of worship, there will be no power in our service today."

Worship should provide an atmosphere or seedbed for the expression of the gifts of the spirit, and various spiritual ministries. The gifts of the Spirit are apportioned according to the sovereign will of God and our praises do not cajole God into releasing His gifts. But a worship service will provide an atmosphere that is most conducive to the operations of the gifts of the Spirit. Without an atmosphere of worship, the gifts seem to rarely manifest, but in a worshipful setting the Spirit is able to operate more freely.

Also worship opens the channels of communication between us and God. We can look deceptively spiritual in our Sunday attire, but inside feel alienated from God. Some have not prayed or communicated with God since the last service they attended. Perhaps we would be shocked to know how many Christians forget to read their Bibles or spend quality time in prayer in a given week. Others may come to a meeting harassed by guilt and depression. The worship service is their opportunity to find new strength in the presence of God.

A great deal of action takes place between us and God in praise and worship, there are the "vertical" aspects I just went over. But there are some "horizontal" aspects that I want you to understand as well. The horizontal dynamics of praise comprise an intercooled part of the Congregational experience - an element that is critical to the life of the believer and yet absent in one's personal devotional life. Within the following points, the terms "praise and worship" are not used interchangeably. Some of these horizontal elements are operational in worship, but most are expressed through praise. Let's look at six ways in which worshipers interrelate in the context of congregated praise and worship.

As a first consideration, we praise and worship to enhance the sense of unity within a body. From passages like Psalms 133 we begin to understand how important unity is to the Lord and how it pleases Him. Since praise and worship contribute to unity, they must hold a special place in God's heart.

Singing can in itself unify a group in mind, activity and stance, because when a group sings a song together, they are all saying the same words, doing the same thing, involving themselves in the same activity. Worship takes the natural medium of singing and becomes even more effective as a tool for unity.

Consider what happens when believers from various denominations, backgrounds or churches come together for a unified gathering. They can't talk doctrines, nor discussed church government or structure, and there may be little else they can agree on. But one thing they can do together is unitedly sing praises to the Lord! All believers have this one thing in common. They love the Lord Jesus Christ and they can express their mutual faith together in song. What better way to catch a glimpse of the unity we truly have in Christ than to gather together to praise God.

Psalms 86:11 says *"let me be one in heart with those who revere Thy name."* As we see someone pouring their heart out to God or praying with fervency or expressing great worship, it makes us want to join them. There is a bond that can grow between people who were not afraid to open their hearts to God before others.

When we let down our guard and open our hearts to the Lord, we begin to realize properly just how much a part of one another we truly are. We do not feel a strong rapport with others when walls of insecurity and self protection are erected, but we do identify strongly with the true inner person of other saints. Our fear of becoming vulnerable holds us back from being that open and transparent before God and others. We know that as we make ourselves vulnerable to God, we become vulnerable to others as well - our brothers and sisters will see us for who we truly are, without the spiritual façade. Since God knows all things anyways, we may not be threatened by the idea of becoming vulnerable before Him. But before

others? Why, we have a reputation to maintain. We would not want others to know the truth about our spiritual needs. But until we are willing to become vulnerable before men, we will not know a full openness before God. There is a level of unity that will never be realized until we learn to become completely open and vulnerable before both God and His people.

The Bible makes it clear that there is a distinct relationship between our love for God and our love for our fellow believers: *"if anyone says, 'I love God', yet hates his brother, he is a liar. For anyone who does not love his brother whom he has seen, cannot love God, whom he has not seen."* (1 John 4:20) The principle is this: our love for God can never transcend our love for one another. Put another way, we can never enjoy a measure of worship that exceeds the quality of relationship we have with our brothers. It is not possible to have a dynamic personal relationship with God and be at odds with other Christians. If we are growing in loving worship of God, we will inevitably grow in our love for others, for worship causes us to grow in love and unity within the body of Christ.

Not only does worship causes us to grow in brotherly love, but it also gives us the opportunity to minister to one another. There is no better time to minister to others than in the context of the worship service! To his admonition about brotherly love, John adds in verse 21, *"Whoever loves God must also love his brother."* Worship is somewhat in tangible and ethereal, so God says to us, "You say you love me? Okay, prove it! Minister in love to your neighbor." That is the proof for our love for God. We should not tell God we love Him if we are unable to show that love for others. When we congregate, we find ample opportunity to express our love for God in a tangible way to others.

We praise further in order to teach and reinforce spiritual truth. Notice how Paul worded this concept: *"Speak to one another in psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs. Sing and make music in your heart to the Lord (Ephesians 5:19)* In another place Paul said, *"Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom; teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord (Colossians 3:16)* Paul made this horizontal function of praise very plain! He said clearly that we speak to one another in the songs we sing, and he specified how this happens, for we teach and admonish one another through praise.

Many of the songs we sing are actually intended to be sung to one another. We sing songs like: "Come, now is the time to worship" or "Shout to the Lord, all the earth, let us sing." These are songs that we sing to one another, exhorting each other to lift high God's praises. How often we do this and it is right to do so!

As a fourth consideration, our praise provides believers with an opportunity to profess their faith before others. Congregational praise helps us become more vocal in expressing our faith, because praise is simply giving vocal affirmation to our love and faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. When we sing, "I belong to Jesus," the next step is to make that same confession outside the walls of the church house. If we confess the name of the Lord in the worship service, we will find increased boldness to declare His name before unbelievers. If some are too shy to confess Jesus' name aloud among believers, they will never summon the courage to share their faith with unbelievers.

The fifth point is related to the fourth, for we praise in the congregation to declare the glories of God before unbelievers.

The unsaved usually fill our worship services and they give us the "once - over" when we praise. Often we need to be reminded that we are under scrutiny in our worship services. What impression do sinners get when they listen to our praises and watch our countenances? Do they respond by thinking, "I've got enough problems of my own already, without joining up with this morbid bunch?" Or do they witness a level of vitality and enthusiasm that convinces them we are participating in something genuine.

When unbelievers come into our worship service, they need to experience the reality of the glory of the Lord. Sinners do not need to understand everything they see and hear so long as they sense God's presence. We cannot worry about unsaved visitors misunderstanding our praise. Explanations of why we praise the way we do will not improve their first impressions, particularly if they are determined to be critical from the start. Sinners simply need to experience the reality of Him whom we praise!

Psalms 108:3 declares, *"I will praise you, O Lord, among the nations, I will sing to you among the peoples."* God never intended that His praises be confined to the ears of believers. A worship service just might be the best place to bring an unsaved friend, because God manifests His presence in the praises of His people.

Hosea 6:1 says, *"also for you, Judah, a harvest is appointed."* Since Judah means praise, the Lord was saying that praises will reap a harvest. A church, thriving, evangelistic church is not too likely to have a mediocre worship service, because when a church becomes a praising church, it will begin to reap a harvest of souls. Praise is evangelistic! Praises intended to draw souls unto God. When we worship we are advertising our faith before the world. We are telling others about God's goodness, faithfulness, holiness, righteousness, mercy, love and so on. There is no better way to tell our unsaved friends about the great God we serve.

As a final consideration we find that praise and worship foster a receptivity for the word. I've asked countless pastors, "do you find it easier to preach after your people have opened up in worship?" The answer has invariably been an

overwhelming yes! In the first place, after a pastor has worshiped with his people, he will gain a greater sense of the anointed Presence of the Spirit. But more importantly, by worshiping, the people will become more open to receive the word of God.

There is a phrase in Hosea 10:11 which reads, "*Judah shall plow.*" We could read this as "praise plows the soul of our hearts so that we are prepared to receive the implanted seed, the word of God." When a seed is planted, it requires immediate watering. David sang unto the Lord, "*You visit the earth and You water it, You greatly enrich it, the river of God is full of water; You provide their grain for so You have prepared it. You water its ridges abundantly, You settle it's furrows; You make it soft with showers, You bless its growth.*" (Psalms 65:9-10) We experience the river of God in worship when His Spirit flows over our hearts and washes us anew. God's River and His heavenly showers soften the soul of our heart and prepare it to receive the word. That word will find a hearty reception in true worshippers, for they have a vicarious appetite for it.

Music and worship also fulfill a role in preparing pastoral leadership for the delivery of the word. The third chapter of 2 Kings tells an interesting story of a harpist being brought to Elisha to calm his troubled emotions. As the harpist played, Elisha's emotions were soothed and he proceeded to prophesy. Preachers should find the worship service very necessary in preparing their own hearts prior to pulpit ministry. Many other concerns flood their hearts and minds, but getting caught up in the Spirit enables preachers to get their emotions in tune with the Spirit, and they are ready to proclaim, "Thus says the Lord!"

Let's now consider what worship accomplishes inwardly in the individual.

The first thing worship does in this inward sense is to release God's people in an uninhibited expression of their inner selves. The key word here is uninhibited. The Lord desires that we worship him without holding back or any inner hindrances.

Some folks feel that if we do not dance we have not experienced a full release in worship. Others react against that attitude and refused to dance at all. I am not suggesting that everyone ought to dance all the time, nor am I saying we should refrain. The point I'm making is this: no matter what outward form the worship takes, we should do it with all that is within us, without inhibitions. Who knows? Some of the most introverted here on earth may find themselves spinning on their head in heaven.

We will be completely uninhibited in our worship when we get to heaven - nothing will hold us back! So why should we not be that way down here; now? Uninhibited worship simply allows us to be completely transparent before the Lord.

We are so proficient, it seems, at barricading ourselves from the Lord and from one another. Psalms 24:7 says, "*Lift up your heads, O you gates; be lifted up, you ancient doors, that the King of glory may come in.*" To what gates does the psalmist refer? They are the gates to the heart - barriers that each of us put up inside. Our culture's train us to be self-protective, so we are preconditioned by society to erect walls of insecurity toward anyone who might try to get close to us. When God attempts to explore the recesses of our hearts, the barriers instinctively arise. If we would be willing to lift off those ancient gates that barricade our hearts, the King of glory would come in!

Worship also provides a verbal expression of the feelings of our heart. Some of us struggle with not always knowing how to express our feelings to the Lord. It can be difficult to vocalize just how much God means to us. At such times we need a little help to express ourselves, and Congregational worship provides that. We have hymns and choruses written by poets and writers who have been blessed with the gift of expression that have given our feelings a vocabulary where choice words are coupled with an enhancing melody, and the song becomes a meaningful expression from our hearts to the Lord.

A third element in worship is that worship increases our faith. When Jesus appeared to His disciples after His resurrection, "*When they saw Him, they worshiped Him; but some doubted.*" (Matthew 28:17) The sad fact is that much of our worship is mixed with doubt. But praising and worshiping can increase our faith.

We know that faith comes by hearing the word of God. Often when we praise God, we are speaking the word of God that we have learned. As we began to confess God's word and praise and confess God for who He says He is, we will find that our faith will begin to rise to the level of our confession. We will truly begin to believe that God is as great and marvelous as our praise indicates! This world would be different if all Christians everywhere truly believe that God is as awesome and wonderful as they claim in their singing. His praises should be allowed to stretch our faith!

As we worship, we also grow in holiness. One of the best adjectives to describe God is "holy" and His holiness should become a part of our lives through worship. Psalms 115 talks about the false god of the heathen who cannot see or smell or walk or talk. It then adds "*those that make them will be like them*" (Psalms 115:8) We learn a valuable lesson here: we become like that which we worship. As a Christian, that holds true as well, someone has said, "you are the company you keep." So as we worship the Lord we are changed into His likeness! Oh that we would have that quality of relationship with the Father.

Second Corinthians 3:18 is a beautiful verse about worship; *"And we who with unveiled faces all reflect the Lord's glory, are being transformed into His likeness with ever-increasing glory."* When we worship with an uplifted countenance, we truly reflect the Lord's glory, and it is then that we are changed little by little, becoming more like the holy God we worship.

"Well, worship doesn't change me," some might say "I go out of the church the same way I went in." If worship doesn't change a person's life, the reason is simple: that person has not taken off their spiritual mask. Those who lower their inner barriers and pour out their hearts to God with tears of repentance and contrition and love will know life-changing worship.

Further, worship inspires a greater commitment to a life of worship. It is one thing to worship in the congregation, when the Saints are gathered in joyful assembly, musicians are playing their instruments, and everyone is united in glorious praise; it is quite another to live a life of worship throughout the week, when the music is gone and the charged atmosphere is forgotten! Our Congregational worship is intended to help inspire us to a consistent life of worship all week long. When the worship on Sunday is vibrant and real, we gain new impetus to go forth and live that during the week. The church service is practice time, out in the world we discover if we truly learn the lesson.

Finally, worship prepares us for the new thing God wants to do. There is no doubt that God is continually doing new things (see Isaiah 43:19), and He wants to prepare us to flow with Him in that. What is holding God back from sending His final outpouring that will see the culmination of the ages? Is God preparing the president of the United States, or is He trying to deal with communism first or is He waiting on the world's economy? No! But God is preparing people. Luke 1:17 reads, *".... to make ready a people prepared for the Lord."* God is preparing His people, His church! The church is the only thing that is holding God back from bringing the fullness of His Kingdom to earth.

Praise and worship have preparatory affects. *"He who sacrifices thank offerings honors me, and he prepares the way so that I may show him the salvation of God."* (Psalms 50:23) Worship softens our hearts and sensitizes our spirits so that when God moves, we will know it. When God does something new, it often comes in an unconventional way or unexpected form. If we are not closely attuned to the Holy Spirit, we can easily reject the new things that God wants to do. But if we behold Him steadfastly in worship, we'll see when He moves and which way He goes.

Revelation 19:7 speaks of the prepared Church and says, *"Let us rejoice and be glad and give him glory! For the wedding of the Lamb has come, and His bride has made herself ready!"* It would be a mistake for us to wait for God to do what we alone can do. Let us choose to be the worshipers God wants us to be. As we surrender our wills to Him, He will make us into worshipers who are prepared to move with Him.

It is possible for us to know what God is saying and doing in the earth today. The writer of Psalms 73 complained about how the wicked seem to prosper and the righteous seem to suffer. He said, *"When I tried to understand all this, it was impressive to me till I entered the sanctuary of God; then I understood their final destiny (Psalms 73:16, 17)* In coming into God's sanctuary, the psalmist gained understanding. And this is how we today can gain understanding in the ways of God: by worshiping in His sanctuary, in the congregation. When we congregate to worship, one comes with a word, another with that exhortation, another with the prophecy - and a picture begins to emerge and take form. By putting the contributions of all the saints in the body, we will gain insight into what God is trying to tell us and what He's up to today! Psalms 77:13 reads, *"Thy way, oh God, is in the sanctuary,"* or "The understanding of Your ways are in the place of worship." Truly we begin to understand God's ways in the congregation, as praise and worship ascend to Him!

I'm firmly believing that God is seeking YOU. So forget about yourself, concentrate on Him and worship Him. Live the life of a worshiper; my friend. There is no better way to live.....

Chief

If you want to know more about CHIEF Ministries or would like to be a part of this, please go to www.chiefministries.com and www.chiefshouse.org

Christ's

Heart

In

Every

Felon