

Psalm 150 >> On Purpose: Worship

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“Each week, Christians gather for worship in mud huts and Gothic cathedrals, in prisons and nursing homes, in storefront buildings and village squares, in sprawling mega-churches and old country chapels. In these diverse contexts the style of worship varies greatly. Some congregations hear formal sermons read from carefully honed manuscripts; others hear extemporaneous outpourings of emotional fervour. Some sing music accompanied by rock bands, some by pipe organs, some by drum ensembles, some by rusty old pianos, and some by no accompaniment at all. Some dress in their formal Sunday best, others in casual beach clothes.”¹

Each week, Telkwa Christian Reformed Church joins in on this worship that happens throughout the Bulkley Valley and spans the globe, that crosses international borders and transcends cultures, that has been and will be occurring all through time. Telkwa Christian Reformed Church is a worshipping community.

Why?

Why can't we simply be a loving community that gets together for weekly fellowship events over coffee and cookies and cake? Why can't we be a community that pours 100% of its efforts into advocating for a particular worthwhile cause or two? Why is worship so important?

Why is worship listed first on Telkwa Christian Reformed Church's purpose statement? It reads: “The purpose of Telkwa CRC is to be a community devoted to worshipping God...” It's printed at the top of every council and congregational meeting agenda. You'll read this on the main page of our new website. You see it posted in a lovely frame in our facilities.

“The purpose of Telkwa CRC is to be a community devoted to worshipping God...”

Why?

Why We Don't Worship

You ask people on the street what they think Christians do in church, they'll probably say something that connects with worship: They'll refer to singing songs or listening to a sermon.

So, do we worship because that's what people expect us to do? ...*What would the neighbours think if we stopped holding worship services and set up a soup kitchen on Sundays instead?* Is there a fear of what people in Telkwa would say if we stopped worshipping that forces us to keep gathering every Sunday?

Maybe we don't have to look to our neighbours' expectations. Maybe we're here because of expectations from our own family members. ...*My parents or parents-in-law expect me to worship here. My kids should see their parents here.* Is it the expectations of others that keep us worshipping week in and week out?

¹ *The Worship Sourcebook* (Grand Rapids: Faith Alive, 2004), 15 (from the prologue).

Or, what about unhealthy expectations we place on ourselves? We confess that “it is by grace [we] have been saved” (Eph 2:5), and yet maybe in the back of our minds we picture God with a calculator adding up the number of times our shadow darkens the church doorway. We think (perhaps subconsciously) that if we come here often enough, well, then, God will have to love us and let us into heaven one day. Is it a picture of God keeping score that keeps us worshipping week in and week out?

Some of us spend a great deal of time at home with young children; others of us have jobs that don’t involve a whole lot of meaningful interactions with our peers. We value the time we can get together with other people, more or less similar to us. So, do we gather for worship so we can socialize? That’s what *fellowship* means, after all, right? Maybe we should switch the amount of time we do things, shortening the 11am worship services to half an hour, and increasing the time for coffee and refreshments to an hour and a half!

Fellowship, by the way, means more than just socializing. 1 John 1:3 says: “We [John and the other apostles] proclaim to you [the recipients of John’s letter] what we have seen and heard, so that you also may have fellowship with us. And our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son.” That makes *fellowship* sound like a bit more than socializing, doesn’t it? John’s letter was sent to a number of churches in different cities and towns, and those believers probably did not have many occasions to socialize together with the believers in the different towns to which the letter was sent. And we don’t usually think of ourselves as socializing with Almighty God.

At 1 John 1:3, my trusty *NIV Study Bible* defines *fellowship* as “the spiritual union of the believer with Christ... as well as communion ... with other fellow believers.” We see fellowship in the early church of Acts where “all the believers met together constantly and shared what they had... They ... met in homes for the Lord’s Supper, and shared their meals with great joy and generosity – all the while praising God” (Ac 2:44, 46-47, NLT). We see fellowship still today as one weeps when another is weeping, as one laughs when another is laughing; “...I will share your joy and sorrow / ‘til we’ve seen this journey through,” as “The Servant Song” by Richard Gillard (*Sing! A New Creation* #277) goes.

Obviously, fellowship with each other is important. So, is it the fellowship (let’s replace *socializing* with this word instead) with each other that keeps us coming back for worship week in and week out?

Why We Worship

I’d say that fellowshiping together is overall a better motivator than others’ expectations or pictures of God with a calculator when it comes to us gathering together each week. But fellowship still isn’t the final, most basic and fundamental reason why Telkwa Christian Reformed Church is a worshipping community; it’s more like a by-product.

We gather to worship because God commands it.² We respond to His call to worship Him.

² See Ron Rienstra, *Worship* (“Disciples” year 2; Grand Rapids: Faith Alive, 2008), 50.

Maybe that sounds a little funny. Imagine a human being commanding you to worship him or her; we'd admit them to the care of a psychologist.

But think about this: Although we are imagebearers of God, God is no human being. God can and does command us to worship Him because He is the only One worthy of our worship. He is all-powerful – we see that in the magnificence of His creation, a universe that extends farther than we see or calculate (*cf.* Ps 150:2). He is all-loving – we see that in His grace towards broken, sinful people, microscopic though we may be when thinking in terms of the whole universe. “We ... worship because when we encounter God, it is the right way to respond.”³

“Basically, *worship* means attributing worth to the one who is worthy.”⁴ As we come to know God better and better while walking as disciples of Jesus, we discover that our all-powerful and all-loving God is indeed worthy. To put it more simply: Worship rightly glorifies God.

When we go home and say something like, “I didn’t like the service today,” we’re in danger of shifting the focus of what we do here from God to ourselves. Worship is not first of all about what I like or what you like; worship is first of all about glorifying God because He is worthy. So, instead of thinking, *I didn’t like the music* or *That sermon was boring*, we need to retrain ourselves to ask questions like, *Regardless of my personal taste, did the way people used their gifts glorify God? Did we hear the truth of God’s Word and His will for our lives?* Those kind of questions will help us put the focus back on God and our reason for worshipping Him.

Telkwa Christian Reformed Church is a worshipping community not so that we can show off our talents, or argue over which songs to sing or which instruments to use where, or do anything else that begins to push God to the edges. Telkwa Christian Reformed Church is a worshipping community because God commands and deserves it.

So, in a sense, we “have to” worship; it’s not optional.

But it also becomes a blessing to us. One writer speaks about the blessings of praising God; when you hear the word *praise* in this quote, I think you can also hear the broader term of *worship*:

“Praise inoculates us against cynicism and despair in a world that is often hard and cold. Praise helps us to combat idolatry. Praise helps us put the wonders of this world into God’s account, as it were. Every time we say “Praise God from whom all blessings flow!” we are saying that blessings do not flow from our hard work, or from the stock market, or from sparkling white teeth. Praise helps us map our joys, our experiences of awe and thanksgiving – our very existence – to its genuine source, the Creator. Praise also helps us, even in our deepest sorrows, to remember that nothing can separate us from the love of God.”⁵

You can think of worship as a deeply grateful response to who God is and what He has done. God is all-powerful and all-loving; He is our Creator and Redeemer. We are small, broken and sinful; we are worthy... of God’s profound disappointment and wrath. But in Christ – who

³ Rienstra, 50.

⁴ Stanley J. Grenz, *Theology for the People of God* (Vancouver: Regent, 2000), 491.

⁵ Rienstra, 52.

paid for our sin on the cross – God doesn't see our brokenness, our mistakes, our poor choices and regrets; in Christ, we are "holy and dearly loved" (Col 3:12). God the Father generously gave His one and only Son to make it that way.

He loves us endlessly more than we can imagine – He loves us even before the very first time we step into a church building. It's impossible for God to love us more, even when we think we're earning brownie points by showing up here each week. Instead, by showing up here each week, we have the opportunity to thank God for His grace and grow in what it means to live grace-filled lives ourselves.

So then, in a desire to imitate God and express our gratitude, our

"worship should be a generous and excellent outpouring of ourselves before God. Worship should not be stingy. Like the perfume that anointed Jesus' feet (*cf.* Jn 12:1-3), our worship should be a lavish outpouring of our love and praise to the God who has created and redeemed us. Worship calls for our best offerings. When we practice music, prepare words to speak, set aside gifts of money and time to offer, and ensure that we are rested and ready to give our undivided attention, we are practicing the kind of excellence worthy of our great and gracious God."⁶

And then, as we worship, as we pay attention to the words, reflect on the visuals, soak in the music, participate vocally or quietly in the prayers, we begin to experience fellowship with God – there is that spiritual union with Christ I mentioned a few minutes ago. Worship – whether it's praise or lament, thanksgiving or confession, alone or with others, standing or sitting, listening or singing – worship can be a joy that makes us forget the expectations others put on us, a joy that fills you with the kind of life God has in mind for you. And then our joy, our fellowship with God spills over into fellowship with each other, genuinely loving one another, being a support and expressing care, being united in purpose.

What's more, our formal time of worship here each Sunday becomes one way the light of God shines into our neighbourhood, inviting people to come join us in knowing, loving and following our God, and growing together as disciples.

Conclusion

Telkwa Christian Reformed Church desires to be a community devoted to worshipping God. God commands it and it's our thankful response to His power and grace.

What's more, in worshipping God, we are part of the fulfillment of the vision expressed in Psalm 150, the doxology, the glory-to-God-filled conclusion of the book of Psalms. The all-encompassing vision in Psalm 150 is of everything that has breath praising God (*cf.* Ps 150:6). Filled with the Holy Spirit, may we continue in that vision, inviting others to join us in honouring God in worship and experiencing the blessings of fellowship with Him and each other.

⁶ *Worship Sourcebook*, 17.