

# encounter

leading people as we worship God

## Recap

- **True worship has God as its object**
  - We are all worshippers, but we have sold God and ourselves short, giving our worship to creation rather than Creator, falling into idolatry rather than honouring the only One who is truly worthy.
  - Our call as true worshippers is to place God at the centre of our allegiance, making him the ultimate object of our worship.
  - Our call as worship leaders, is to assist others to join us in this, by seeking to magnify God and to paint a compelling picture of who he is.
- **If God is the *object* of true worship, then we should concern ourselves with what kind of worship he finds *acceptable***
  - The Worshippers God finds acceptable
    - Balance between: *resting* in Christ's work (1 Pet 2:5), *responding* with our lives (Rom 12:1-2 & others)
      - Being a worshipper
      - Leading as a worshipper
      - Leading people as we worship
  - This week: the principles & practice of acceptable worship

## 3. The principles & practice of corporate worship

What does God think of our meetings? Do we give him a good laugh?

**'I have no praise for you,  
for your meetings do more harm than good.'**

1 Cor 11:17

We want to strive to be good stewards with the opportunities God has presented to us as we serve in Glenabbey Church. We want to move on to ever deeper encounters with the living God and so are eager to learn from his word how we might best plan and conduct our services to the end that he is more clearly seen and that we more readily glorify him in our gathered and scattered worship.

## Our philosophy of corporate worship

- There is no detailed prescribed pattern for what Christians should do when we gather for corporate worship.
- However, God reveals principles in his word that should guide the decisions we make about what we do and how.
- Based on these principles, we have come up with a philosophy that guides our corporate worship in Glenabbey.
  - Not a straight jacket constraining creativity
  - Rather the bones which provide a central reference for our creativity to grow out from – and a way of assessing how true to scripture we're being!



(This model of the goals of corporate worship borrows heavily from the work of Bob Kauflin. See his blog: [www.worshipmatters.com](http://www.worshipmatters.com))

## i. THE PRINCIPLES

### > Shaped by scripture ...

It often surprises people to learn that God is not always pleased when people worship him. We might be inclined to think that God should be thankful for any attention we give him out of our busy schedules. But worshipping God is not about God's thanking us; it is about us thanking him. And God is not pleased with just anything we choose to do in his presence. The mighty Lord of heaven and earth demands that our worship - indeed, all our life - be governed by his word.

John Frame

- Do what scripture commands (eg preach the word, sing, share communion)
- Don't do what scripture forbids (eg
- Use biblically based wisdom to make judgement calls on all the rest (which is most of what we do!). Scriptural principles guiding us include:
  - God centred
  - Christ exalting & gospel focused
  - Mutually edifying,
  - Loving mutual submission
  - Intelligible to all involved
  - Leadership - motivated by a commitment to God's glory, a servant heart and a pastoral care for all those gathered

### > Informed by culture...

- The truths of scripture are **trans-cultural**, that is they are absolute in whatever culture they find themselves expressed. Jesus is Lord, whether you make that statement in Ballynure or Bangalore.
- But they are expressed in a particular **cultural context**. We seek to engage with our cultural context, contextualising our message using appropriate cultural elements (such as contemporary music, movies, use of multi-media etc).
- Our culture is not neutral to the gospel, however. Where our society is at odds with the values of the gospel we seek to be **counter-cultural**.
- At the same time, the church is one body from many 'tribes, tongues and nations. As such the gospel is **cross-cultural**. We also seek to build bonds across the various cultures that make up Glenabbey & its locality.

#### Take it further

- For biblical texts on contextualisation into culture, read Acts 17:16-34 on how Paul used contemporary cultural references to build bridges to the people he was addressing
- Read Ephesians 2 to explore further the trans-cultural nature of the gospel
- Hebrews 12:22-23 reminds us that the church is trans-cultural across the ages too. We should be relevant to our culture, yet rooted in our heritage as the church of Jesus Christ.

### > Through the sacrifice of Jesus...

- It is simply beyond the ability of any worship leader to 'bring people into God's presence'. Only Jesus Christ, our great High Priest, is qualified to do so.
  - Heb 10:19 Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus, 20 by a new and living way opened for us through the curtain, that is, his body, 21 and since we have a great priest over the house of God, 22 let us draw near to God..
  - We are not musical high priests, responsible for bringing people into God's presence. Don't carry that responsibility and resist letting others place that responsibility on your shoulders!

### > And the enabling of the Holy Spirit...

- Phil 3:3 For it is we who are the circumcision, we who worship by the Spirit of God, who glory in Christ Jesus, and who put no confidence in the flesh
- We are to actively trust in the Spirit's empowering as we lead. Without him, we are no more than musical cheer leaders, trying to hype things through force of personality or entertaining musical arrangements.
- What does the Spirit do?
  - Depending on his guiding & empowering during planning & leading
  - Other work such as inspiring, illuminating, comforting, strengthening and bringing truth to light and exalting Jesus Christ.

Confessing our utter dependence on the Spirit should produce a deep sense of gratitude, humility and peace in our hearts. It should free us from anxious thoughts about how smoothly the service will flow, whether or not the sound system will feedback, and how people will respond to us. Of course, each of those items requires our attention, but our confidence isn't tied to them. After all, it's not our sufficiency that displays God's power but our weakness (2 Cor 12:9).

Bob Kauflin

### > We... We value planning as a team.

- We have been granted a delegated leadership position, as part of the church's pastoral care.
  - Joyfully submit to the authority of the elders
  - Heb 13:17 Obey your leaders and submit to their authority. They keep watch over you as men who must give an account. Obey them so that their work will be a joy, not a burden, for that would be of no advantage to you.
- The functioning of the body of Christ – complementary skills. We're here to support one another!
  - Eph 4:11-16, esp v15-16  
Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into him who is the Head, that is, Christ. 16 From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work.

## ii. THE PRACTICE

### > Use songs, scripture readings, prayers & other elements...

- **Songs – see 'Choosing Songs Wisely' booklet**
  - The purpose of singing (more in week 5)
  - Choosing songs wisely (see other booklet)
    - Remember the goal – to paint a compelling picture of the glory of God in Christ
    - Content matters – consider the words carefully

'The words of worship songs matter. They convey truth - the truth to which we are supposed to respond. They aren't just sounds to enable us to join in the melody. They are the means by which the mind understands what God has done for us ... Banal, meaningless lyrics, badly crafted and expressed in confusing language, will not lead us into the deep worship that our world and church need to see.'

Nick Page

- Col 3:16 Let the word of Christ dwell in your richly, teaching and admonishing one another, singing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs with thankfulness in your hearts to God.
- Think of the 20 year principle
  - Our song diet is formative because songs teach. What are we training the next generation in through the songs we sing?
- **Prayers – see 'Leading in corporate prayer' booklet**
  - Praying in public is different than praying privately because it plays a different role
  - What are the types of prayer modelled in the bible?
  - How can we incorporate these into our services?
  - Get a hold of The Valley of Vision edited by A. Bennett (!). Inspiring prayers from a previous generation.
- **Scripture readings**
  - 1 Tim 4:13 Until I come, devote yourself to the public reading of Scripture, to preaching and to teaching.
  - Heb 4:12 For the word of God is living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart.
  - Not formulaic, but powerful
    - Can speak the, attributes, commands and promises of God directly into the hearts of the listeners
  - Prepare well to read
    - Read with understanding, so study the passage before you read, get a sense of it, and pray that the Spirit would help you read it with clarity and conviction.
    - Don't pick people at the last minute to read! Give them notice and allow them to prepare.
- **Other elements**
  - Spoken links
  - Including ppts, videos, performance songs
  - Why Glenabbey is not a cool church!!
  - Incorporate them where appropriate – don't feel you have to. Also, feel free to call on others in the team to assist you if you feel out of your depth in something.

### iii. THE PURPOSE

> To paint a compelling picture of the glory of God in Christ ...

- Don't be satisfied with vague ideas of who God is.

All true worship is a response to the self-revelation of God in Christ and Scripture, and arises from our reflection on who He is and what He has done ... The worship of God is evoked, informed and inspired by the vision of God ... True knowledge of God will always lead us to worship.

John Stott

- Don't be satisfied with a response to the elements themselves that we use (eg a cool new arrangement, an impressive multi-media) rather than to the truth of who God is. We want the elements to *aid* our response *to God* not become an end in themselves – and watch the tendencies in our hearts to idolatry, to becoming fixated with creation rather than Creator!
- How do we do this? More next week, but for now, consider this quotation:

Instead of telling us a thing is 'terrible' describe it so that we'll be terrified. Don't say it was a 'delight', make us say 'delightful' when we've read the description. You see all those words (horrifying, wonderful, hideous, exquisite) are only saying to your readers 'Please will you do your job for me?'

CS Lewis, giving advice to a young writer.

'Worship without wonder is lifeless and boring. Many have lost their sense of awe and amazement when it comes to God. Having begun with the arrogant presumption of knowing about God all that we can, they reduce him to manageable terms and confine him to a tidy theological box, the dimensions of which conform to their predilections of what a god ought to be and do. That they have lost the capacity to *marvel* at the *majesty* of God comes as little surprise.'

Sam Storms

How well can you describe God? Get to know him better so that you may be better able to find the words that will paint this compelling picture.

Check out the following books:

- **The Knowledge of the Holy** by AW Tozer
- **Incomparable** by Andrew Wilson
- **Seeing and Savouring Christ** by John Piper
- **Knowing God** by JI Packer
- **The Cross of Christ** by John Stott
- **The Passion of Jesus Christ** by John Piper

> **So that ...** As we paint this compelling picture of God, as a result, we aim to achieve the following. It's the worship rhythm of **revelation and response**. Our worship is in response to what we see and know of God.

> **i. the gathered church may be motivated to ...**

- How?
  - If people don't engage, ultimately it's not our responsibility...
  - ... but we don't want to wash our hands totally – rather, we're seeking to serve one another in love
  - So, how do we motivate people?
- NOT by...
  - Making demands – sing like you mean it!

- Projecting guilt
- Manipulation via insincere emotion or extravagant musical performance.
- How then?
  - Titus 2:11 For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation for all people, 12 **training us...**
    - How does grace train us?
    - Through the compelling power of example
  - Point to the excellencies of Christ – lovingly extend the invitation for others to join us as we look to God

> **...to engage whole-heartedly with God ...**

- Revelation is the basis for response. Our aim is not just to be *aware* of the truths, but to be *amazed* by them; we aren't just checking in with God, we are cherishing our relationship with him. We seek to have a deep theological understanding of God that naturally overflows in expressions of heart-felt, joy-filled passion for God.
- Seek a balance in songs choice between **objective truth** that provides the basis for **subjective response**.

> **...and to seek to edify one another ...**

- Singing is a two dimensional activity
  - Vertical – God is the primary Object
  - Horizontal – yet we meet together to worship him, and in doing so we encourage one another and fulfil many of the scriptural commands for how the body of Christ should function
- Singing helpful in this because
  - It's a shared activity
  - It's a means of encouraging one another with truth and the faith-filled response of those around us
    - 'Admonish the idle, encourage the faint-hearted, help the weak, be patient with them all.' Thes 5:18
- Worship leaders must be pastorally sensitive to those we're leading.

> **...that spills out into worship service in all aspects of our lives ...**

- Worship that is acceptable to God is worship that invades all aspects of our lives. Our goal as worship leaders is to facilitate this challenge; to put into people's mouths the words that will allow them to express the devotion of all their lives and the words that remind them of the great strength of our God who empowers the very obedience he demands.
- Consider the response time at the end
  - Good as a general principle to have this, as it gives space for people to respond
  - Consider this opinion – 'We should have less of a tendency for our final songs to focus on what I'm going to do; rather, we should send people out singing the promises of God to help us to do what he has commanded.'

> **ii. Unbelievers may hear the hope and challenge of the gospel ...**

- Songs proclaim truth to unbelievers – as we paint this picture of God for Christians, we're aware that unbelievers will have an opportunity to look on. The gospel can be proclaimed through the songs we sing
- We seek therefore to avoid empty religious jargon, language that may seem 'spiritual' but actually says nothing. Drive for authenticity & integrity.

> **Celebrated and lived out in the worshipping community around them ...**

- But we're certainly not in any way dumbing down what we do – we are going wholeheartedly after God, seeking a rich, deep life-forming encounter with the living God.
- In fact, it's the very profundity & authenticity of this encounter, expressed in an intelligible manner, that scripture says is likely to facilitate this response from unbelievers.
  - 1 Cor 14:24 But if all prophesy, and an unbeliever or outsider enters, he is convicted by all, he is called to account by all, 25 the secrets of his heart are disclosed, and so, falling on his face, he will worship God and declare that God is really among you.
  - 'I still don't believe in God, but I believe in the people who believe in God' said a recent first time visitor after being in a service in Glenabbey.

Charles Misner, a scientific specialist in general relativity theory, expressed Albert Einstein's scepticism over the church with words that should waken us to the shallowness of our experience with God in worship:

The design of the universe ... is very magnificent and shouldn't be taken for granted. In fact, I believe that is why Einstein had so little use for organised religion, although he strikes me as a basically very religious man. *He must have looked at what the preachers said about God and felt that they were blaspheming. He had seen much more majesty than they had ever imagined, and they were just not talking about the real thing.* My guess is that he simply felt that religions he'd run across did not have the proper respect ... for the author of the universe.

The charge of blasphemy is loaded. The point is to pack a wallop behind the charge that in our worship services God simply doesn't come through for who he is. He is unwittingly belittled. For those who are stunned by the indescribable magnitude of what God has made, not to mention the infinite greatness of the One who made it, the steady diet on Sunday morning of practical how to's and psychological soothing and relation therapy and tactical planning seem dramatically out of touch with Reality.

John Piper

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