

THE DISCIPLINE OF WORSHIP

Daily Bible Reading

- Sunday 25th February - Worship in spirit and truth John 4 v 19 - 24
- Monday 26th February - Communion: the essence of worship John 6 v 52 – 58, 6 v 63
- Tuesday 27th February - The life of worship Ephesians 5 v 18 – 20, Colossians 3 v 16 - 17
- Wednesday 28th February - The Lord high and lifted up Isaiah 6 v 1 - 8
- Thursday 1st March - Sing to the Lord Psalm 96
- Friday 2nd March - Worship of all creation Psalm 148
- Saturday 3rd March - Worthy is the Lamb Revelation 5 v 6 - 14

We are told that, on one occasion, St. Francis of Assisi "rejoiced greatly in Spirit, and he raised his face toward Heaven and stood for a long time with his mind absorbed in God." He entered worship.

Caught up into God, Juliana of Norwich exclaimed, "I saw Him, and sought Him: and I had Him, I wanted Him... He will be seeing and He will be sought: He will be abided and He will be trusted." She entered worship.

Worship is something that happens. It is experience. When we speak of having a "worship service," we are usually referring to the various elements of worship—hymns, Scripture readings, preaching, Holy Communion, liturgy. All of these may lead to worship, but worship is much more than any of these expressions. The expressions are important because they are the means of God's grace, but it is quite possible to do them all without entering into worship.

Worship centres in the experience of reality. Whatever ushers us into the Divine Presence should be welcomed. Whatever hinders a genuine encounter with the living Christ should be shunned. The biblical requirements for worship include such matters as confession, adoration, and proclamation, but the Bible does not hold us to any universal wineskin or form in which worship must be contained. What we are to be committed to is reality—real worship, real confession, real praise, real adoration. If particular forms at particular times bring us more fully into worship, we are free to use them; if not, too bad for the forms. We are free to use the highest liturgy, no form at all, or anything in between so long as it brings us into real worship. The forms of worship must always be subject to the reality of worship.

Christ alone is the leader of worship, and it is He who decides what is needed and when it is needed. We should recognize and welcome the free exercise of all the spiritual gifts, as they are used and directed by the Spirit. Christ puts His Word in the mouth of whomever He chooses, and He confirms this same Word in the hearts of the members of His community. If there is any excess, He will raise up a prophet to bring the needed correction.

All these lofty words about the priority of reality over forms may make you think that worship forms are of little use. Nothing could be farther from the truth. Worship forms are essential if we are to inflesh the reality of worship. As long as we are finite, we must have forms. And so we bring our

bodies, minds, and spirits before God to give Him the glory due His name. We offer the sacrifice of our lips—our singing, our praising, our preaching, our confessing. We offer Him the sacrifice of our bodies—our listening hearts, our eucharistic celebration, our obedient lives. And it is important to do these things whether we feel like doing them or not. Often we come into a worship experience and must honestly confess, "Lord, I do not feel like worshipping, I do not feel righteous, I'm tired and distracted in both body and spirit, but I want to give you this time. This hour belongs to you. I love you and to the best of my ability want to give you the glory due Your name. Therefore, I will sing and pray and listen and ask that in Your mercy You will free my spirit to worship you." And as we do this, often something seems to let go inside: perhaps it is the release of an old fear, or a little bitterness, or maybe just a tight-fisted determination to come into God. When this happens, then the singing of hymns, the reading of Scripture, the confession of sin, the preaching of the Word, the receiving of Communion lead us into praise and adoration, which in turn open the inner sanctuary of the soul into worship.

Above all, worship leads us to Christ the Centre, as Bernard of Clairvaux put it so well:

Jesus, Thou Joy of Loving hearts!

Thou Fount of life! Thou Light of men!

From the best bliss that earth imparts,

We turn unfilled to Thee again.

1. **John 4: 19-24**

- What does this passage tell us about what worship is and what it is not?
- Where should our focus of worship be (see also Matthew 4:10)?
- What does it mean to worship "in the Spirit and in truth"?

2. What do you understand by the term "holy expectancy"?

3. What practical ways can you develop "holy expectancy"?

4. **Hebrews 10: 19-25** and **Philippians 2: 1-4**

- Why is corporate worship important?
- What are the advantages or disadvantages of formalised liturgy and of informal worship forms used in various churches today?
- In your experience, what forms of worship have been especially meaningful to you?

5. **Ephesians 5: 15-20** and **Colossians 3: 16-17**

What should our life of worship look like?

6. Richard Foster gives some practical steps into worship. Which step(s) in your experience have you found helpful?

- Which step(s) do you need to cultivate and why?

7. Foster writes "Just as worship begins in Holy Expectancy it ends in Holy Obedience". What will that look like for you in the coming week?

THE DISCIPLINE OF GUIDANCE

Daily Bible Readings

- Sunday 4th March - The polestar of faith Hebrews 11
- Monday 5th March - The guidance of divine Providence Genesis 24 v 1 -21
- Tuesday 6th March - The guidance of justice and obedience Isaiah 1 v 17, v 18 - 20
- Wednesday 7th March - Led into all truth Proverbs 3 v 5 -6, John 14 v 6, 16 v 13, Acts 10 v1,35
- Thursday 8th March - Close doors, open doors Acts 16 v 6 – 10, 2 Corinthians 2 v 12
- Friday 9th March - Listening or resisting Acts 21 v 8 - 14
- Saturday 10th March - The family likeness Romans 8 v 14, v28 - 30

Guidance is the most radical of the Disciplines because it goes to the heart of this matter of walking with God. Guidance means the glorious life of hearing God's voice and obeying His word.

The goal of guidance is not specific instructions about this or that matter but conformity to the image of Christ. Paul said, "Those whom he foreknew he predestined to be conformed to the image of his son" (Romans 8:28b). Specific guidance, in particular matters, is a happy by-product of this goal having worked its way into our lives.

We make such a mystery out of the matter of the will of God. The surest sign that it is God's will for us to be where we are is simply that we are there. Now if we throw that away, we throw away the sovereignty of God over our lives. When we can come to the place where we understand that where we are is holy ground, we will begin to understand the meaning of guidance.

The will of God is discovered as we become acquainted with God, learn His ways, and become His friend. As we do this, God will take us right where we are and produce in us the winsome fruit of love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control (Gal. 5:22-23). As the friendship grows, as the conformity grows, we will know instinctively what actions would please Him, what decisions would be in accord with His way. Just like our intimate knowledge of and love for our wife or husband guides us to decisions we know they would approve, so our inward fellowship gives an inward knowledge of the ways of God.

There are, of course, the outward tests of God's guidance such as Scripture, the Christian community, divine providence working through circumstance, and our own personal integrity. There are also the exceptional means of guidance such as fleeces, dreams, visions, signs, and angels. It is important for us to remember that God will not lead us in ways that are contrary to His known will. The Spirit that inspired the Scripture will lead us in ways consistent with the Scripture. Our understanding of God's ways is shaped and tempered by His self-revelation to us in the Bible.

We must also remember that there is such a thing as supernatural guidance that is not divine in origin. John the Beloved warns us to "test the spirits to see whether they are of God" (1 John 4:1). There are principalities and powers who wage war against the Kingdom of God, and they are both real and dangerous.

So we are not to listen to every voice that comes our way, but only to the voice of the true Shepherd. But here is the wonder of it all. For, as Jesus reminded us, He is the Good Shepherd and His sheep know His voice (John 10:4). We walk in the light, we fulfill His commandments, we put on the mind of Christ, and as we do, we find the voice of the true Shepherd quite different from all imposters. While Satan may push and condemn, Christ draws and encourages, and it is His voice that we obey.

1. How would you define divine guidance?

2. What different ways have you sorted guidance from God, on your decisions in life?

3. **Genesis 24: 1-21**

- How did Abraham's servant seek guidance and how did God answer him?

- What can we learn from this story about seeking God's guidance?

4. **Proverbs 3:5-6**

- When have you found it hard/easy to trust in God?

- What have you learned about God from the hard times?

- How is God superior to "your own understanding"?

- How should this affect the amount of trust you have in Him?

5. **Matthew 18:19-20** and **Acts 13:1-3**

- According to Richard Foster, what is corporate guidance?

- What has your experienced been of corporate guidance in action?

6. How do the following verses help us guard us against some of the dangers of corporate guidance?

- **2 Timothy 3:16**

- **Ephesians 4: 1-6**

- **Romans 12:2**

- **1 John 4: 1-3**

7. If living in guidance comes mainly through entering into friendship with God so that we know and desire His ways, what should you drop from your life and what should you add to your life in order to deepen your intimacy with Christ?

THE DISCIPLINE OF CELEBRATION

Daily Bible Readings

- Sunday 11th March - The Lord has triumphed gloriously Exodus 15 v 1 -2, v 20 - 21
- Monday 12th March - The joy of the Lord 2 Samuel 6 v 12 - 19
- Tuesday 13th March - Bless the Lord Psalm 103
- Wednesday 14th March - Praise the Lord Psalm 150
- Thursday 15th March - Hosanna! Luke 19 v 35 – 40, John 12 v 12 - 19
- Friday 16th March - Walking and leaping and praising God Acts 3 v 1 – 10
- Saturday 17th March - Hallelujah! Revelation 19 v 1 – 8

The Psalmist exclaimed, "Our mouth was filled with laughter, and our tongue with shouts of joy" (Ps. 126:2a). And St. Augustine echoed Scripture's words with the declaration, "A Christian should be an alleluia from head to foot." Celebration is a happy characteristic of those who walk cheerfully over the earth in the power of the Lord.

The joy of the Lord is not merely a good feeling. It is acquainted with suffering and sorrow, heartache and pain. It is not found through seeking. It does not come by trying to pump up the right emotions, nor by having a cheery disposition, nor by attempting to be an optimist.

Joy comes as the result of the abundant life Jesus promised having taken over the ingrained habit patterns of our lives. It slips in unawares as our attention becomes focused upon the Kingdom of God.

Joy makes us strong. Foster recalls: I'll never forget the day I heard the words of Agnes Sanford: "On one of my most joyful and therefore most powerful days. ..." I do not remember the rest of the statement, but I never forgot the connection she made between joy and power. I have found this to be true, and I imagine you have also. On those days when the joy of the Lord seems to engulf us, there is an almost unhindered flow of God's life and power from us to others.

Celebration is a grace because it comes unmerited from the hand of God. It is also a discipline because there is work to be done. In Hebrews, we are instructed to "continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of lips that acknowledge his name" (Heb. 13:15). The sacrifice of praise is the work to which we are called. In the Old Testament, there was a morning and an evening sacrifice. That is a good beginning for all New Testament priests, of which you are one. Begin the day with the morning sacrifice of praise, "Lord, I love you, adore you, worship you, desire your will and way... Conclude the day with the evening sacrifice of thanksgiving, "Thank you, Lord, thank you for your love, your presence, your strength and grace..." And as we do this, the fire will fall upon the sacrifice of our lips just as it did upon the altar of old. God's joy will come, and there will be dance and song and joy unspeakable and full of glory.

- **Luke 10:20-24**

3. **Acts 3:1-10**

- What was the beggar expecting from Peter and John?

- What were the beggar's true needs and how was it met?

- How did the beggar react in being healed? What can we learn about ourselves from this story?

4. According to Foster, what are the benefits of celebration?

5. How can we practice celebration?

- **Psalm 150**

- **Philippians 4:4-9**

6. What other creative ways can we bring celebration into our fellowship and life?