

The Essential Elements of Christian Worship

1 - Making God the Centre of Our Worship

It's all about... me?

It might seem obvious, but making God the focus of our worship is the starting point. Yet all too often we can make 'church' about 'me'.

For example, influential Evangelical author Donald Miller recently came out and declared that he doesn't go to church very often because, he says, "I don't learn much about God hearing a sermon and I don't connect with him by singing songs to him."¹ But in saying this, he exemplifies one of the most rampant misunderstandings of Evangelicals everywhere, both about what worship is and the role of the church. There are two significant issues we glean from his comments:

1. Going to 'church' is about finding a way to 'connect' with God - **an experience.**
2. Going to 'church' is viewed as a portal through which the **individual** is fulfilled.

These are often the spiritual measures of a generation weaned in a consumerist culture that elevates personal experience to the highest level. Worship is judged by what it does for 'me', not what it does for God.

But what does Scripture tell us about worship that illustrates just how misguided Miller's approach is?



Re-focus...

Firstly, worship must help us take our eyes off of ourselves. Let's look at some of the statements in the Scriptures:

He must increase, and I must decrease - John 3:30 (John the Baptist of Jesus)

Die to yourself - Matt 16:24 (Jesus' command to any disciple)

Not my will but Yours - Luke 22:42 (Jesus' prayer to the Father)

I live but yet not I, it's Christ who lives in me - Gal. 2:20 (Paul's admission)

At the heart of all of this is an admission that God is bigger and more important (worthy?) than me. So how can we best



¹ Donald Miller, "I Don't Worship God by Singing. I Connect With Him Elsewhere." *Donald Miller Blog*, February 3, 2012, accessed Oct. 20, 2014. <http://storylineblog.com/2014/02/03/i-dont-worship-god-by-singing-i-connect-with-him-elsewhere/>

Lift Up Your Gaze...

Worship must place God on the Throne - Rev. 7:10

In many ways, we must reclaim an 'elevated' view of God in our worship. Many songs speak of Jesus as our best friend or the lover of my soul. He is these things, to be sure, but He is much more. Jesus is also the God who appeared in the burning bush on Mt. Sinai, and who will return at the Last Day to judge the living and the Dead. He is also the one whom all of Heaven and Earth worship, as seen in Isaiah's vision (ch. 6), and St. John's Revelation (Ch's 1-7).

Christopher J.H. Wright writes, "...the throne of God is the centrepiece of all the action in John's great vision of Revelation 4-7. What is at the centre of the universe, perceived as a series of concentric circles of adoring humans, angels, and creatures? **A throne is.** And who is on that throne? **The Lord God Almighty.** And what is he doing there? **He is governing** the whole of creation and history, all of which lies open to his gaze. This is the seat of cosmic government. This is the throne of God!"



What do we do before a King? *Proskuneo*, which according to David Peterson means to **bow** (literally, bend at the waist) **do homage; show respect**. It is "the inward attitude of homage or respect which the outward gesture represented."

When we acknowledge the sovereignty of God, not only in our cosmos, but in our individual and congregational life, then we find our understanding of spiritual reality re-oriented into a Biblical understanding that acknowledges:

1. Who is the worshipper, and
2. Whom is to be worshipped!

Acts of worship that remind us of God's greatness will be the very place we start whenever we worship - alone or gathered as His body. In the same way that the Lord's Prayer opens with a declaration of worship (Our Father in Heaven, hallowed be Your name), let us find the perspective that 'reorients' our sense of reality, and let that drive our worship and devotion of the Holy One.

Ps. 100:2-3a says:

*" 2 Worship the Lord with gladness;
come before him with joyful songs.*

*3 Know that the LORD is God.
It is he who made us, and we are his" (NIV)*

Discussion Questions:

1. What do you feel are the most important aspects of Christian worship times?
2. What kind of distractions do we face in worship that can cause us to focus on ourselves instead of God?
3. Write down some attributes of God that display both his Exalted and his Loving characteristics.
4. What do you personally find are the most 'self-emptying' acts of worship that we partake in?