

Four Key Worship Activities

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[0 : 00] Well, if you haven't already got your Bibles open at Acts chapter 2, can I encourage you to do that? We're going to have an opportunity after we reflect on this passage together to discuss some questions and think about applying this passage to our lives and to our gathering here at Holy Trinity.

So you might want to have it open so that you can take note of how we reflect on it as we go through. That's Acts chapter 2.

Let's pray. Lord our God, thank you so much for your word. Thank you that you are a God who reveals himself to us because you love us.

We pray that tonight by your Holy Spirit you will help us to understand it and apply it to our lives so that we might be the worshippers you long for.

We pray it in Jesus' name. Amen. I'd like you to imagine that God has put an ad on seek.com.au.

[1 : 15] It's an ad to employ people to do his most important job, the job that he wants done the most.

What would he advertise for? He would advertise for worshippers. God seeks worshippers.

We read that last week in John chapter 4. God seeks worshippers. Now the position wouldn't be advertised for a particular location, must work in New York, not one mountain or another, not one temple or another.

It wouldn't say what the working hours were like. This would be a 24-7 global position. But like they often have in those ads, there would be requirements for the suitable applicant, wouldn't there?

I wouldn't be must be able to use Excel and MYOB or something. In God's ad for worshippers, we learnt last week, there would be two requirements.

[2 : 23] Worshippers must be able to worship in spirit and truth. But is that really a detailed job description? It's more how.

It's more a who. I used the illustration last week of the furnace. And I love this illustration because Phil and I often dream together about building a holiday house up in the hills and we'd have a little, you know, kunara or potbelly stove or something.

So I love the idea of this furnace. This is the illustration I used last week, but I want to remind you of it again. Our spirit is the furnace of worship.

The fuel we put into the furnace is the truth about God in Jesus Christ. Everything that Jesus Christ reveals to us about God, everything that the scriptures tell us about God, that is the wood, that is the fuel that we put into the furnace.

But it is the Holy Spirit of God who sets that alight, who gets the flame going, who sets that truth on fire in our spirit, in our heart, our soul, our mind, our strength.

[3 : 38] And the heat that arises from that, everything that comes from our meditation on the worthiness of God, the truth of God, everything that comes from that, the heat from the furnace is our worship.

That's worship in spirit and in truth. But what would it look like if you answered God's ad on seek.com.au?

If you logged on and said, yep, I want to be a worshipper, I want to be that furnace, I want to worship in spirit and in truth, yep, I'm up for it. When you turned up for work on Monday, what would your job look like?

Would you just sit there and glow? Would God give you a piece of paper and say, okay, you're a worshipper, now go back to do what you were doing before, it's just that you're a worshipper now. Would there be different tasks for you to do when you answered this ad? Well, that's exactly what we're finding out in our passage today from Acts chapter 2.

[4 : 56] Give you a bit of background. The Holy Spirit has been poured out upon the disciples and in the Spirit's power, they've been praising God and proclaiming the gospel in the languages of all the people that are gathered there.

Then the Apostle Peter preaches his first sermon and proclaims to the crowd the truth about Jesus, concluding in verse 36, the verse before we started our passage, Therefore, let the entire house of Israel know with certainty that God has made him, Jesus, both Lord and Messiah, this Jesus whom you crucified.

And as our passage opens in chapter 2, verse 37 of Acts, we see that the crowd has been cut to the heart. The Holy Spirit has indeed been working in them, setting alight this fuel, the truth about Jesus that they've heard.

And so they want to know what to do. How do we become fully-fledged worshippers of the Lord Jesus? And so Peter answers them in verse 38, Repent and be baptised, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ, so that your sins may be forgiven and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.

And those who are being stirred by the Spirit to become worshippers that day did exactly that, we read in verse 41. And about 3,000 persons were added.

[6 : 37] 3,000 men, women, old, young, from far and from near in Jerusalem. Logged on to seek.com.au and answered the Lord's ad and said, yes, we want to be worshippers in spirit and in truth.

Sign us up. But what we read next in verse 42 isn't a list of strategic projects or commands by the boss for the new recruits.

There's no page of bullet-pointed tasks to be actioned, handed to them. Instead, we read a description of the community of new worshippers as it is shaped by the Spirit of God.

And I think we do really well to prick up our ears at this point because we're in the midst of a great push amongst Christians today to return to authentic worshipping communities.

It was strong, obviously, in the 60s and 70s with the Jesus people or the Jesus movement, but it's really resurfaced, I think, in the last decade, primarily in the West with Generation X, Generation Y Christians trying to grapple with post-modernity, with a rejection of authority and institutions, with people's search for an authentic experience of faith with integrity.

[8 : 12] People are expressing significant dissatisfaction with the worship that is being modelled in mainline churches, I think. And they're exploring alternative ways of being church, of meeting in houses or in cafes, in pubs, in having meals together but no sermons or different things, you know, just music, different things.

What does it mean to worship authentically? And if you've never come across someone exploring these ideas at the moment, then you probably should get out more because it's really on people's minds.

People are hungry and not just young people. They're hungry to know what it looked like for the first worshipping community to worship in spirit and in truth.

What did that look like? How does the shape of that community impact the shape of our community today? So that's what we've got the privilege of looking at in these next few verses from verse 42 to 47.

And there's a bit of a break in your NRSV Bible but I think that verses 43 to 47 are really unpacking what is summarised in verse 42.

[9 : 34] So let's read them together. They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. All came upon everyone because many wonders and signs were being done by the apostles.

All who believed were together and had all things in common. They would sell their possessions and goods and distribute the proceeds to all as any had need. Day by day, as they spent much time together in the temple, they broke bread at home and ate their food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having the goodwill of all the people.

And day by day, the Lord added to their number those who were being saved. So verse 42 tells us that these new worshippers were devoting themselves to four things.

And the word we've translated devoted here means to persist in, to hold fast to, to be in continually. So we're not looking at just what happened the day after.

You know, maybe people excited after Billy Graham's come to town. No. We're looking at a faithful, focused, persistent pattern of behaviour. And the first thing that the believers were devoted to had in fact already been included as part of the job description when Jesus gave the disciples the Great Commission in Matthew 28, 20.

[10:57] He says, therefore, go and make disciples, make worshippers, baptising them and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. They were devoted to the apostles' teaching.

And to give authority and weight to their teaching, we read in verse 43 that the apostles were given the power to perform wonders and miraculous signs.

Now in other places in the New Testament, obviously we read that the worshipping community is characterised by healing at times and different miracles that God might be doing amongst us. But here, the language of signs and wonders is particularly the language of giving authority to the teaching of the apostles. And so, its purpose here was to draw the worshippers and draw the crowds to this first, most important aspect of worship to be devoted to the apostles' teaching because the signs and wonders showed that their teaching was actually the teaching from the Lord. And so, the new worshippers we read devoted themselves to, persisted in, held fast to the apostles' teaching because a community that worships God is a community that learns from God.

[12:25] With that furnace illustration, worship must continually be fuelled by God's word so that the fire in our spirit grows rather than kind of dwindling.

That expression in Revelation return to your first love. So many of us will have had that experience of the fire slowly getting colder and colder.

Well, they're devoted to the apostles' teachings so that the heat of their worship continues strong and hot. And so, John Stott makes the point that the Holy Spirit opened a school for worshippers in Jerusalem that day.

Its teachers were the apostles, whom Jesus had appointed and there were 3,000 pupils in the kindergarten. And even though they had seen a wonderful and miraculous work of the Spirit and they'd powerfully experienced his manifest presence, these new worshippers didn't imagine that they knew all they needed to know or that if they needed to know more, the Holy Spirit would teach them without human mediators.

Jesus? No. On the contrary, they sat at the apostles' feet. They were hungry to receive instruction and they persevered in it. Any worshipping community, alternative or not, that doesn't keep reading and preaching and chewing over the word of God is not an authentic worshipping community.

[13:59] community. And it's not even enough to say we gather together to support each other or to share a meal together and we read the Bible at home.

No. We are together to be devoted to the scriptures, the record of the apostles' teaching for us so that together we can help each other to understand it.

Together we can prevent each other from distorting it by our own personality, predilections, by our own particular sinfulness and we can of course keep each other accountable to living it out.

Secondly, the new worshippers were devoted to the fellowship. Now you might have heard that lovely word *koinonia* before which means a sharing in.

That's what's translated the fellowship here. When Luke describes the worshipping community the primary sense in this sense of fellowship is that the believers had become a deeply unified family sharing relational fellowship with God himself, Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

[15:14] You might remember when Jesus prayed in John 17 he said Father just as you are in me and I am in you may they also be in us so that the world may believe that you sent me.

And in 2 Corinthians Paul talks about us sharing in the fellowship of the Holy Spirit. So that's our primary fellowship, our primary *koinonia*, our sharing in God himself by faith.

It's a unity of purpose, of salvation, of grace. And just like this community on the day of Pentecost, this primary fellowship brings together in God people of amazingly diverse backgrounds and languages, experience, and by faith it unites them, it unites us in Christ.

But flowing out from this sharing in God is a sharing out amongst us of our possessions, a generosity. They often say that the last part of the Christian to be converted is his or her wallet.

But this wasn't the case with the first worshippers, was it? They expressed their worship in verses 44 to 45, having everything in common, selling their possessions and goods they gave to anyone as he or she had need.

[16 : 52] Elsewhere in Acts and in Paul's letters we see that this generosity like all worship couldn't be legislated or forced. We're not talking about a communism here.

It had to flow out of a generosity of spirit. And it was just as all worship, all of the heat from our furnace, it was an outworking of meditating on the sovereignty, the sacrifice and the sustaining power of God.

If everything we have comes from God and belongs to God, if he promises to provide all that we need, and if he himself did not hold back his only son, but gave him up for us all, then how much more should we respond in worship by giving generously our time, our talents, our treasure, our money, our possessions to his people as worshipful offerings.

It's a challenge, isn't it? But boy, that kind of worship got people's attention back then, and it gets people's attention today. As I've been studying over the last six years at the various churches that we've been at, Phil and I have been the recipients of some amazing generosity, you know, like \$600 just shoved under our door anonymously, and many of you might have stories to that effect.

But I tell you, that is, when I share that with my mum and dad, and who aren't strong Christians, and maybe my dad isn't a believer, I'm not quite sure, that story of other people's generosity, it's so counter-cultural, and so radical, and so sacrificial, that it's a very powerful witness.

[19 : 05] It's fellowship, a sharing out that comes from our sharing in, that's a powerful worship to God and witness to the world. Sometimes I think, though, we have a tendency in churches today to sell the idea of fellowship a bit short.

We often use the phrase, after worship tonight we will have a time of fellowship, to talk about, you know, having a cup of tea and having a biscuit, and that's kind of okay, and I have said that heaps of times, but it's really just the smallest tip of the iceberg of what koinonia fellowship means, isn't it? And it seems to me from this passage that we ought not think about fellowship as something separate to our worship, but as something completely integral to it.

It certainly wasn't a separate idea for the worshipping community in this Acts passage. They were as devoted to being together as they were devoted to the apostles' teaching.

And that's a challenging thought too, isn't it? It's almost harder for us in our particular church community today to express our worship in fellowship than it is to be devoted to the apostles' teaching.

[20 : 39] Certainly requires more energy and more time which can be so hard for us to find in our busy lives. I think that every week.

And it can require great sacrifice, being devoted to fellowship in areas that really pinch. And it requires a willingness to spend time with people who might not be our natural mates, and a willingness to commit to do life with people who might be having ups when we're having downs and downs when we're having ups.

Or that have questions that we can't answer or problems that we can't fix. But really it's a living out of being devoted to the teaching of the apostles, isn't it?

Think of all the one another passages in the New Testament. God's job description for worshippers must be willing to work closely with others in a team environment.

And that's a big challenge.