

# Corporate Worship

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[ 0 : 00 ] Good morning everyone and welcome to St Paul's this morning. My name's Steve, I've never met you before. Last week I kicked off our series with a little bit of vulnerability and I thought I'd do the same this morning.

On the screen is a picture of me when I was 21. And yes, thank you. And what is there, that's the back page of what is called a certificate of competency as a powder man, which I got when I was 21.

It's an explosive license if you're not sure what that is. My brain had not fully developed and I was hardly even competent in life, but I was competent to blow things up apparently.

And for me, it was a very useful skill to have. You never know when you might need to blow things up. And for me it was more to do with, that was not timed or planned in any way whatsoever I might add.

That is just pure God moment there. For me, as it is out there, the competency as a powder man blowing things up was mainly for entertainment purposes.

[ 1 : 23 ] Very dangerous entertainment and I've got lots of stories to tell. But one of the things that I learnt through the course, four weeks by the way, about four and a half hours is all it took.

I think it's changed since then. But one of the things I learnt was that for the maximum impact, you never just got explosives as you do see in the movies.

You just attach it to something and it's going to blow the whole building down. You don't just get explosives, attach it to a pillar and boom, it's all going to go. What I learnt was for maximum effect for an explosive, and you only need to use a little bit of explosive for this, is you actually need to go down deep into something.

If you want to blow a tree and send it to the moon, you need to dig down under the tree, you don't just attach explosives to it. If you want to explode a massive boulder, you need to drill into the boulder and put explosives inside for it to go boom from the inside out.

That's one thing that I really picked up in the course. That is that the deepest impact really happens from the inside out.

[ 2 : 38 ] One accusation that's often levelled at Christians is that they... Take this. I'm done with that now. And please don't.

I hope no one's ever taken a photo of that. It's only online. It's only online already. Facebook update. One of the things that's levelled at Christians is that we're often no different than anyone else in society.

We're just as miserable. We're just as angry. We're just as impatient. Just as unforgiving. Just as inconsistent as everyone else. And there is certainly truth to that.

You know, I don't want to ignore that at all. But the main reason for that is that for too many, the Christian faith hasn't transferred from ideas in the mind to down into the driving core of their beings in such a way that it transforms them from the inside out in their actions, their courage, and their priorities.

That is for too many, particularly, I would say, in the Western world, is about an intellectual ascent to certain things. So what we're doing in this term, as we kick off 2025, is we're exploring and implementing rhythms of grace that really put us on the path, as we follow Jesus, on the path where God can bring about real transformation in our lives from the inside out.

[ 4 : 15 ] And the place where to start, and it's the very first of the rhythms, and I would say it's the foundational rhythm, and that is worship. That is weekly corporate worship.

So three points on the screen in front of you. So what is worship? That's what we're going to kick off with. Psalm 95, I think, is one of the best places in the Bible to understand worship.

In Latin, this psalm is known as Venite Exotimus Dominio, which is essentially a call for people to come together and to celebrate God, to rejoice in God.

In the English language, the word worship has changed. It's got many different aspects to it, but it's changed in its meaning significantly over the centuries.

From the 10th century on, the word worship was connected to God. But from the 13th century, it was also connected with anything to ascribe honour, such as knights who did really well in a battle.

[ 5 : 24 ] We worship you. And by the 16th century, we have the words of the groom saying to his bride-to-be, with my body, I worship thee in the marriage service.

That doesn't, of course, make her a deity, even if she thinks she is, or he thinks he is. It doesn't make her a deity. It's ascribing honour. Worship in the Bible is the proper and delightful response of moral and rational beings to the self-revelation of their creator God, precisely because he is worthy to receive it.

If you are following, just to pause every moment, if you are following the notes, the handout, you will discover that they're not all in sync this morning. That's the consequence of having a good night's sleep and waking up early and having inspiration.

But it's basically all there. Okay? It's basically all there. Christian worship is empowered by the Spirit to be Christ-centred as we bring honour to God.

And its key impulse, its key delight, its impulse for delight, if you like, is the gospel. Of Jesus Christ. So Christian worship, as John has just prayed in his prayers, it manifests itself in all of life in both adoration and action.

[ 6 : 58 ] This adoration and action is expressed both corporately, like this, and also individually, privately. Christian worship is a way of life.

We worship God by ascribing to him the worth due to him as we gather corporately and as we worship God by offering ourselves entirely to him in all of life and therefore reflecting his worth, his value to the world.

So worship is both up and out at the same time. And the key is that God is the focus.

There is a little word that appears twice in Psalm 95. It's the key to understanding worship. Verse 2. Let us come before him with thanksgiving and extol him with music and song for the Lord is the great God.

And again in verse 6. Come, let us bow down in worship. Kneel. Let us kneel before the Lord, our maker, for he is our God and we are the people of his pasture, the flock under his care.

[ 8 : 20 ] So the trigger for Christian worship is a God who is great and almighty and a God who is a tender, merciful, gracious shepherd. The God who is revealed here in the scriptures, in the gospel, is a God who is both almighty and merciful.

Not just a king sitting on a throne, but a king who is gracious. A God who is all-powerful and merciful. And so what the psalmist is doing here in 95 is he's thinking, he's pondering, he's considering the excellencies of this God.

He is treasuring the excellence of God until it overflows with joy and his life changes. Until it drives him out into all of life worship of God.

That's what biblical worship is. What's interesting in the Bible is that there isn't a possibility to not worship.

That category does not exist. All of humanity are worshipping beings because they were created to be worshipping beings.

[ 9 : 37 ] And so we are either worshipping the excellence of the God who has revealed himself, our creator, or we're worshipping something else. That is, every single person ascribes value to something.

Ultimate value to something. That thing is what they give their heart to. It's what they set their hopes and their dreams on. And it's the thing that builds their lives around.

And we will all see what that ultimate thing is in the rhythms of our daily life.

How we live day by day. Our patterns. Everyone has to live for something and find their meaning in something. And if we achieve it, we have it, then we will feel valuable, we will feel worthy, we will feel loved, and so we worship it.

So in Psalm 95, verses 1 to 2, we are commanded to worship God joyfully. To shout and sing. So the biblical view of worship involves the emotions.

[10:53] Then in verses 6 and 7, we are commanded to worship submissively. There is a bowing. There's a kneeling. There's a confessing. There's a submission to God's will and obedience.

And from verse 7 onwards, we are told to listen to the voice of God. There's an emphasis on the understanding and the mind. And so what we have here in the biblical worship is the mind, the will, and the emotions are all involved.

And so if we ascribe to Christian truth, if we intellectually assent to orthodox Christian truth, but never feel it, that's not worship.

If we have lots of emotions and praise God in worship, but don't submit to his will and obedience to him through his word, and we don't acknowledge our failures, that's not worship.

If mind, will, and emotions are not all together, it's not worship. You see, biblical worship captures all of life.

[12:10] All of life. So, secondly, why do we need worship? Worship. It's interesting. The word worship in the English language and in the biblical Hebrew and Greek has all kinds of different sort of connotations to it and connections, and they've shifted over time.

But one of the key aspects of worship in the ancient English language flowing out of biblical language is the phrase worth shape.

That is, the ancient idea of worship, or part of it, is to be shaped by the worth of something. And everyone is being shaped by what we worship.

Everyone has got something that they think is their greatest treasure and their life is shaped by it.

Worship is an all-of-life activity. As I said, whatever we think is of ultimate value in our life, all of our actions and our priorities and our plans and our rhythms will focus on whatever that ultimate thing is.

I remember hearing this story years ago now, many years ago, of a man who was out on his, you know, it was a walk Saturday morning. This is in America. He's on a walk Saturday morning.

[13:31] He wanders past on his Uroutine. There's a garage sale. And as he's at the garage sale, he thought, oh, I'll stop and have a look, you know, kind of thing. And he was a bit of an art enthusiast, not a professional, a bit of an art enthusiast.

He noticed this painting for sale in the garage had a sticker on it for \$20. He asked the owner about the painting, what's the deal with the painting. He said, that's just some old thing that my, you know, my dad or my grandfather had, you know, passed it down.

I've stuck it up in the attic. I don't like it. And I just finally decided to clear out all the junk, get rid of it and sell it. So he put it there. The guy who was a bit of an artist who was out for his walk looked and went, it looks familiar to me.

And so he bought it. And then he started, he didn't continue his work. He took it straight home. And then he got on, he started searching and searching and searching and ringing around and looking and looking and looking, getting information, what he could about this thing.

And eventually he found an expert art valuer, took it to the art valuer and said, I think this is valuable. Tell me that it's valuable. He took it on a plane to visit this.

[14:41] He spent money to pursue it. The guy said, yes, it is valuable. It's an original Rembrandt painting. Value rests approximately between \$10 and \$20 million. So one person is in the presence of something of incredible value and says, get rid of it.

Had it in their presence, in their attic, passed down from generation to generation. Not a single member has been transformed by the value of that thing. Not a single life transformed by it.

Even though it was in their possession. The other person casually walked past, see something of infinite value, or they thought was, grabbed hold of it, did everything they could to explore it, to confirm it, didn't even finish their walk.

And everything changed. And for too many people who claim to believe in an infinite God of infinite value, too many people who claim to be Christian, God is like that valuable item in their life.

Where it's there, but no real sense of the true value and worth of his excellencies at all. That is, God has never been taken out of the attic, so to speak, and put in the driving centre of their life.

[16:10] On full display. In such a way that there's real change and evidence in their life. They rarely or inconsistently pursue the value of what they have received in Jesus.

There is often a disconnect between the big truths of the faith and the practicality of living out those big truths of the faith. A disconnect between belief and the character and the priorities that belief ought to produce.

We can believe that God is almighty and that he's good, but we are irregular in ascribing that worship to him corporately.

We can believe that the Bible is God's authoritative word in all of life and faith, and yet never open it privately.

We can trust in the generous forgiveness of God, but are inconsistent in our own giving and generosity. If we just believe it, then we will be at best inconsistent and immature, and at worst, a hypocrite.

[ 17 : 34 ] There is a disconnect between corporate worshipper and the individual worshipper in the rest of life. Now, I would suggest that the reason people are not regular or committed or engaged in worship corporately is because they aren't worshipping during the rest of their life.

We are still, like I said last week, one foot in both worlds, trying to gain the whole world and make a name for myself still, but with Jesus in my back pocket helping me to pursue my goal in life.

And this is where the rhythms of grace or spiritual disciplines, if that's more familiar with you in terms of your language, this is where they fit. This is why we need the rhythm of corporate worship as the foundational rhythm of our life.

We need the value of Jesus to be consistently put before us week in and week out. Theologian John Calvin had his comprehensive sense of worship in mind when he ascribed the worship of God as the very beginning and the foundation of a life of righteousness.

That's where it begins, he said. It's the very foundation. None of us is just the brain.

[ 19 : 05 ] We are mind, emotions, body and soul. And real change only comes when beliefs in the mind are driven into the rest of our lives. Our will, our actions, our emotions, through intentional practice that engages the whole person.

Rhythms of grace, spiritual disciplines, Christian practices are the bridge that take what we believe about God and it pushes it down into our character.

And the foundation of all of that is worship. Ascribing to God his ultimate value as part of a community of believers who are walking in faith and life with each other, speaking the truth about each other's lives graciously to each other as we pursue obedience to all that God has called us to. So how do we do that? How do we worship? Worship is something that all people participate in. It shapes our character. It shapes our priorities and routines in life.

So how do we worship God well? On your notes, you've got three. I've had further reflection. It's now four. But I'll do it quick. Four things. We worship God relationally, rhythmically, routinely and restfully.

[ 20 : 36 ] Three R's. Four R's. Sorry, four R's. Relationally. All of Psalm 95 is in plural language. Come, let us worship.

It is not come, let me worship. It is let us worship. In the individualistic culture of our Western church, we tend to minimise the importance of the corporate nature of the Christian life.

The attitude seems to be that if I've got God, then the church really is an optional extra. If I know big things of God and my theology is right, I've got that sorted, I can go online and I can study the Bible by myself, and that's all really that I need.

If I know God, then I don't need the rest of stuff. It's almost like it's unnecessary. And yet the connection that I'm making here is that if that is your view of church, you are not worshipping him when you are doing your study by yourself.

You're not knowing God by yourself at all. There is both a personal and corporate nature to the rhythms of grace as we walk together. We cannot know God or grow to be like him without a community.

[ 21 : 51 ] I've mentioned it before, and I'm probably going to say it several times throughout this series. C.S. Lewis' book, Four Loves, and I'd encourage you to get it if you haven't got it. Lewis was one of three best friends.

They were three of the best friends. B-B-B-B-F or something, I don't know what that is. Anyway, Lewis, there was Lewis, there was Ronald, and there was Charles. Charles died.

And as grieved as C.S. Lewis was about the death of Charles, he assumed that that would mean that he would get closer to Ronald and that he still got Ronald. And as the weeks and the months and the years passed, he came to discover that that was not the case.

He discovered that when it was just him and Ronald, he actually got less of Ronald. He realised that there was a side to Ronald that he himself couldn't bring out.

He made the point that we get more of a person, not less of a person, when the number and diversity of people with whom we share them actually increases.

[ 22 : 56 ] We cannot truly know a person one-on-one because we only bring out one part of the person. We will only bring out one part of the person.

It takes a whole community to really know a person because no individual is enough to draw the whole person out.

People are too complex and too deep. And that's exactly the same with God. We cannot fully know or worship God without others.

And unless we are willing to read, walk, pray, talk, worship together, then our view of God and our view of ourselves and our relationship with God will be entirely distorted.

That's why we keep putting this on week in and week out. Nine o'clock, 10.30, in case you're unfamiliar with the times. Week in and week out. That's why people are serving out there right now because it is so crucial what we're doing right now.

[ 24 : 06 ] Secondly, rhythmically. Notice in Psalm 95, there is praise for the first five verses, confession and submission in verses six and seven, and listening to God's word and a call to respond at the end.

Praise, confession, hearing of God's word and response. This psalm has had an enormous impact on what the church does when it gathers throughout history.

If worship is all praise and singing and dancing, it's not worship. Or if worship is all about me and looking at myself and my problems and 10 steps on how I need to improve my life, then it's not worship.

Or if worship is all about academics and just sermons and Bible knowledge and theological information, it's not worship. Worship is the rhythm of seeing God's excellencies, his greatness and purity and praising him for it.

It's also seeing our smallness, our frailty, our failure and acknowledging that. It's also hearing a word of grace from him to bring encouragement and hope and perspective and responding to it all with our next steps, St Paul's language, not biblical language, to push him deeper and deeper down in our lives as the controlling centre of our life.

[ 25 : 26 ] Every single part of a corporate service like this is essential from the very start to the very end.

Now, I understand that we all have our challenges. Some of them are ones that we're aware of and some of them that spring upon us on a particular Sunday.

And so I understand that sometimes we arrive late and we must leave early. But it shouldn't be a habit. You need to know from me, as your pastor, I'm not keeping a scorecard on that.

I'm not, you know, mental note. Oh, okay. That's not what's happening with me, mainly because I'll forget within half an hour anyway.

Anyway, it's a memory thing. But I want to say that it should never be a habit. It should never be a habit.

[ 26 : 31 ] If we are habitually late and we are habitually leaving early and rushing off to the very next thing, then the real issue is a lack of understanding of worship in connection with your scheduling issues.

It's a question of what is of ultimate worth. If you're getting agitated that the service is running 10 or 15 minutes later than what you'd want it to, then it's an understanding of worship and what's happening.

It's the engagement of the whole rhythm of worship that puts us on the path of change, not just the information of a sermon, and so the whole thing is crucial.

Thirdly, routinely. I'll say this really quick. Under the finished work of Jesus, the apostles taught Christians to worship on the first day of the week, which was the day, the resurrection day, the day of resurrection, in Acts 20, verse 7, Revelation 110.

In other words, the routine for Christian corporate worship is weekly. Fourthly, restfully. In verse 8, Do not harden your hearts as you did in Meribah, as you did that day at Massah in the wilderness where your ancestors tested me, they tried me, that they had seen what I did for 40 years.

[ 28 : 04 ] I was angry with that generation. I said, They are a people whose hearts go astray and they have not known my ways. And so I declared on oath in my anger that they shall never enter my rest.

Verse 8 there and onwards is referring to an incident in Israel's history. Israel were a nomadic people in the wilderness. They were constantly on the move. They packed up their stuff each day. They lumbered on their backs and they journeyed and they went around and around and around in circles for 40 years. They were wanting to cross into the promised land, which God had said they could.

They wanted to settle down and they wanted the place of rest, which is what the promised land was. And instead, they were wandering and burdened because they did not listen to God's word at a particular point.

And so the journey into the place of rest was delayed. In Hebrews chapter 4, Ash is going to unpack this for us in a couple of weeks. I'm not going to steal his thunder. Well, not too much of it anyway. [ 29 : 06 ] Acts chapter, sorry, Hebrews chapter 4 looks at this and says that the problem of Israel being burdened and not finding rest is actually representative of a much bigger problem.

And the basic message is that all of humanity has this problem. We are still burdened because we are still trying to save ourselves by gaining the whole world.

Most of our rhythms in life are attached to gaining the whole world. And the more that we pursue them with our rhythms in life, the more that becomes a burden on our life.

And we are restless. And we will always be restless. Until we hear and receive the good news of Jesus Christ and what he's achieved for us.

And then we enter that ultimate rest. Every single one of us looks to things like relationships, career, possessions, affirmations, experiences, morality, whatever it is, to see if I have those things then I will feel very valuable.

[ 30 : 14 ] And when we do, we will constantly be pursuing them. Burdened with a sense that it's never enough. It's never enough. And the word of grace, the word of grace for all of humanity is the gospel, the central message of the Christian faith.

Jesus Christ, the creator God, came into this world, his world, that has rejected him, that is burdened, that is restless. And he died as a substitute for our sin on a cross.

And for all of eternity, this God was at rest and peace and joy himself. And he left it to one side. He came into the wilderness of our restlessness.

And he took our burden for rejecting him and pursuing, gaining the whole world for ourselves. And he did that at infinite cost to himself.

He lost everything so that we might gain everything and be at rest. Why? Why? Why? Isaiah 53, describing the suffering of Jesus, says this in verse 11, after he has suffered, he will see the light of life and be satisfied.

[ 31 : 42 ] In other words, he will die, he will suffer, he will come back to life and when he comes back to life and resurrection, he will go, oh, that's good.

That's good. Another way of putting that, he will see the fruit of his suffering and he will be satisfied. You see, Jesus looks at everything that he surrendered, everything that he gave, his place of rest and became restless as a wanderer himself, no place to lay his head in this world.

And he looks at all of that and it says he will say that the result of all of that is so valuable to me. It is so precious to me.

Jesus, the one of ultimate value, was moved by the worth of something to give everything in order to have it. What was it?

What's the only thing that an infinite creator, God, existing in joy, happiness, peace and serenity for all of life, what's the only thing he doesn't have?

[ 33 : 00 ] You and me. Humanity. He's wandering restless people walking away from him is the only thing he didn't have.

His suffering got us back. We are his people. 1 Peter 2 puts it like this, you are a chosen people, a royal priest of the holy nation, God's special possession.

possession. So when we see him treasuring us, valuing us at infinite cost to himself, then ultimately he becomes our greatest treasure, our greatest, our ultimate worth.

And corporate worship is the first rhythm, a weekly rhythm that drives Jesus Christ and the gospel and God and his ultimate value deep into our hearts to bring about transformation in such of our lives so that when we leave here we display his ultimate value to the world.

That's what it does. That's the rhythm. I've heard that 80% of American Christians believe you can be a good Christian and not go to church.

[ 34 : 15 ] Not entirely sure what they mean by the definition of good in that statement but we'll leave it there. Sure. going to church doesn't make you a Christian any more than parking a car in a stable makes it a horse.

The two are not connected in that way but I can certainly say that it is absolutely impossible to grow and change and display the worth of God without deep investment in God and his people in corporate worship like we're doing now.

worship shapes what we ultimately value and what we ultimately value shapes us.

So take your next step in finding real joy and hope and freedom in Jesus by weekly gathering for corporate worship. so having heard a word of grace that the suffering of Christ gives us the affirmation the value and the security that we all are striving for in life his word of grace to us as his wandering people what we're going to do now is we're going to experience that physically in the Lord's Supper so I'm going to invite whoever's distributing this morning to come down and start distributing.

