

ENCOUNTER

GOD

Welcome

Thanks for downloading the Speaker Notes for the Worship Central Course.

In this second session, we've outlined the structure and key points for the talk, and left room for you to add your own examples. Feel free to personalize the examples and make it your own, but we'd please ask that you keep the core material the same, as we want people to be able to get the same Course wherever they are.

We pray this course will be a great blessing to you and your worship team, and we stand with you as you seek to encounter God, equip the worshipper and empower your local church.

Tim Hughes & Al Gordon

Introduction

Welcome to the second session of the Worship Central Course. Last time we looked at why worship is central to everything we do, how it's our purpose, our priority and our great privilege. In this next session we're going to look at six key values that will help realign and centre our worship. We believe these six foundations are essential if we are to keep worship central.

On the evening of the 10 January 1610, a little-known scientist was staring into the Italian night sky. It was a glorious night; the heavens were sprinkled with a thousand burning stars and planets danced in the clear winter air. He had just built an ingenious device using polished glass that allowed him to see the planets close up. Tonight it was Jupiter's turn. The great planet loomed into focus, and ... the scientist could not believe his eyes! Not only did Jupiter have four moons, but all four of them were breaking the laws of physics.

In those days, the universe was a simple place; the sun, the moon, the stars and planets all revolved around earth. We were the centre, the focus, the constant and everything else spun submissively around us. Jupiter's moons, however, were in rebellion. They seemed to be happily spinning around Jupiter, not us. After much frantic lens polishing and lots of sleepless nights, Galileo's discovery rocked the scientific world like a cosmic earthquake. The truth hurt; theories would need to be reworked, libraries pulped, schoolbooks updated, calendars recalculated. People really didn't like the idea that we weren't the centre of it all.

Likewise, the truth is that we are not the centre of the worshipping universe, even if we sometimes make the mistake of thinking that we worship for our benefit. It's easy to fall into the trap of saying, 'I really didn't get much out of that time of worship' or 'those songs didn't do much for me'? We've probably all done it. But the point of worship is not to make us feel better or happier or fulfilled: worship is not about us. "Worship of the true and living God,"

says David Peterson “is essentially an engagement with him on the terms that he proposes and in the way that he alone makes possible.”

C // Christ Centered

So, our starting point for worship is this: our worship must be Christ-centered. We get a glimpse into this reality at the end of the Bible, in the book of Revelation. The writer describes a breathtaking scene: every living creature in heaven and on earth gathered worshipping, countless millions of angels, Kings and rulers, amazing looking creatures, all focussing on one throne, one symbol of authority, power and adoration. Day and night they are crying out their worship. And there, at the centre of it all, standing in the middle of this panorama of praise, is Jesus: “Then I saw a Lamb, looking as if it had been slain, standing in the centre of the throne.” (Revelation 5:6)

Jesus – the slain yet risen Lamb – is at the centre. Just as it is in John’s vision, so it must be for us. True worship is centered on Jesus: it is in Jesus, through Jesus, to Jesus, for Jesus. He is the name that is above every name, our great adventure, the One our worshipping universe revolves around. In Jesus, God has made it possible for us to worship without getting lost in translation: our worship is given direction, a destination, a face. The key is to keep the focus on Jesus.

“Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom, and as you sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God. And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.” (Colossians 3:16-17)

When we really begin to understand this we discover that we are free to worship at all times and in all places because we worship ‘in Christ’. Every time we gather together to break

bread, to sing songs, to love the poor, we remember salvation's story and are given an opportunity to worship our Saviour. When we turn away from the things we know are wrong and choose to make Jesus the centre of our universe, we are freed from sin, freed from our selfish nature – and become the kind of worshippers the Father seeks. Everything we do now is to be an act of worship. In Christ, we're encouraged to “take your everyday, ordinary life – your sleeping, eating, going-to-work, and walking –around life – and place it before God as an offering.” (Romans 12:1 MSG) - that's what being truly Christ-centered looks like, and it's the key to the most dynamic, exciting, fulfilling way of life you could ever hope to pursue.

There was once a little girl sitting playing a piano in the lobby of a very smart hotel. Her playing was terrible, so poor that it was irritating the guests around her, causing a number of them to complain. All of a sudden, a man sat down beside her and began to play along with her. He began to fill in all the chords around her notes, correcting her errors by supplying the right notes, and suddenly a breathtaking sound filled the hotel. Everyone was speechless, and stood listening to the wonderful music. It emerged that the man was the girl's father, the famous 19th Century Russian composer, Alexander Borodin.

In the same way that the man in this story took the discordant and limited playing of his little girl, transforming it into something beautiful and glorious, so Christ receives all that we offer up to God and turns it into something wonderful and pleasing. Jesus is our great high priest, our once-for-all sacrifice, the only one capable of offering perfect worship. He is, as Calvin wrote, “the great choirmaster who tunes our hearts to sing God's praise.” It is through him that our worship becomes holy and acceptable to God. Because of this, we must take care that our worship is directed to Jesus.

Our worship must be Christ centered. The next five values all flow from this, and together they spell the word C-H-R-I-S-T.

So C is for Christ-Centered, next H is for Holy Spirit Led

H // Holy Spirit Led

Secondly, our worship must be Holy Spirit-led. Paul uses the phrase in Philippians 3:3 ‘...we who worship by the Spirit of God...’

Worship is only made possible by the Holy Spirit. When things aren’t going well we can all find it tempting to play louder, faster or speak more forcefully in order to create a response in worship amongst a congregation. But this rarely seems to work. Why? Because - as we’ll discover in more detail in the next session - the only way to truly lead people in worship is to allow the Holy Spirit to take the reins.

Christ centered worship only happens through the power of the Spirit - the same Spirit that brings revelation, opens our eyes to the wonder of his new life, love, mercy, kindness and infinite power. He alone leads us to the place where we glorify Christ and acknowledge that “Jesus is Lord” (1 Corinthians 12:3).

It is easy to get caught up with the things that we can control - like which songs we sing, the sound quality, the lighting, how the band look, and the general atmosphere. But they are nothing without God’s Spirit, and when we rely too heavily on them things go wrong. A. W. Tozer warned: “If God took his Holy Spirit out of this world, what the church is doing would go right on and nobody would know the difference.” Without the Spirit we are left with lifeless religion, something dead and mechanical, something fruitless, something worse than useless. Bono once said, “I often wonder if religion is the enemy of God. It's almost like religion is what happens when the Spirit has left the building.”

[Insert Story]

Insert your own humorous story here about trying to ‘make worship happen’ in your own strength. For example, Tim tells a story of being at a church youth group meeting and the whole group being reprimanded for not singing with enough passion. After that they carried on, but the sound and the soul was hollow. Share a story from your own experience of a time when worship was a case of ‘going through the motions’.

Spirit-led worship is not a new thing. In fact, it is the heritage of the Church throughout the ages. Spirit-led worship can be found where incense is wafted, candles are lit and traditional robes are worn, just as much as where exuberant dance takes place and people sing in tongues. Allowing God’s Spirit to lead our corporate times of worship isn’t an issue of style or preference. It is a foundational truth that is essential in our worship today, as it was for the early church.

Paul, writing to the church in Ephesus, said, “Do not get drunk on wine which leads to debauchery. Instead be filled with the Holy Spirit. Speak to one another with psalms, hymns and spiritual songs. Sing and make music in your heart to the Lord, always giving thanks to God the Father for everything in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.” (Ephesians 5:18-20) As we are filled with the Spirit, our hearts overflow with worship. We respond with a life of gratitude and songs of devotion.

While God’s not looking for formulas or quick-fix solutions, there are a few simple habits we can get into if we want to get better at letting go and letting the Spirit take over. Firstly, we need to acknowledge the need.

Acknowledge the Need

We are finite and limited, but we worship a God who is infinite and limitless. His ways are higher than our ways, his thoughts so much higher than our thoughts. When we attempt to lead worship in our own strength, failing to acknowledge our need for God, we often end up pretending, effectively miming and producing nothing. For a while, especially if we're very good, we may fool a few people, but eventually people will realize. As worship leaders we desperately need God. We will accomplish nothing of significance without the breath of God. Without him we are nothing, we can do nothing, and we'll end up faking it. As John 6:63 says, "The Spirit gives life, the flesh counts for nothing."

Ask for More

There is a paradox to our faith: on one hand we have been given everything we need in Christ. The Bible reminds us that we have been blessed in the heavenly realms with "every spiritual blessing in Christ" (Ephesians 1:3). Christ's work is complete – it is finished. Yet we live in the now and the not yet. There's a longing within us for more. To ask for more is not to undermine all that God has done, it's to embrace more of the gift.

St. Augustine put it right with the words "God puts salt on our lips that we might thirst for him." To grow in the ministry of the Holy Spirit we need to get desperate, to seek and chase after God. Until we stand face to face before our Lord on that final day, there will always be more to discover.

Accept the Gift

Some of us may feel uncertain or apprehensive about the Holy Spirit. We don't quite understand him, we're afraid and unsure, and so we keep him at arms length. We become closed, consequently missing out on all that God has to offer.

[Insert Story]

Insert your own story about fearfulness turning into joy.

For example, Tim tells a story about buying a talking, crying doll for his daughter Phoebe when their second child was born. Phoebe was a little freaked out by the noises the doll made, but grew to love it. Share a similar story of seeing a child go from being fearful of an object to loving it. The point is simple: for Phoebe the doll was a good gift, but one that was misunderstood. It became an object of fear and misunderstanding. In a similar way we can sometimes react like this to God's gift of the Holy Spirit.

But what if we feel genuinely feel afraid or hesitant of the ministry of the Holy Spirit? Then, Jesus' words offer huge comfort. "Which of you fathers, if your son asks for a fish, will give him a snake instead? Or if he asks for an egg, will give him a scorpion? If you then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!" (Luke 11:9-13) Our Father in Heaven wants to give us good gifts and nothing is more amazing than the gift of the Holy Spirit.

In the New Testament, one of the words regularly used to describe the Spirit is 'Paraclete', meaning one who comes alongside giving comfort, strength, guidance and clarity. Isn't that what we all desperately need? In Luke's Gospel, moments before the Ascension, Jesus calls his disciples to stay in the city until they have been "clothed with power from on high" (Luke 24:49). The Greek word for power, 'dunamis' is the word from which we derive words such

as dynamite, dynamo and dynamic. The people of God filled with the Holy Spirit should be the most explosive people on the face of the earth. We should be making an impact wherever we go. This will only happen though if we learn to accept the gift of the Holy Spirit.

If we allow the Holy Spirit to be our chief worship leader, placing our trust ultimately in him, we will see explosions of life, freedom, joy, creativity, healing and blessing, because, “Where the Spirit of the Lord is there is freedom.” (2 Corinthians 3:17) We will have the privilege of joining in on the most exciting and exhilarating of journeys. John Stott wrote, “What we need is not more learning, not more eloquence, not more persuasion, not more organization, but more power from the Holy Spirit.”

R // Response to the Father

So our worship must be Christ Centered, Holy Spirit led and thirdly, R, it must be a Response to the Father... The very same Father who responds to us like this:

“But while he was a long way off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion for him; he ran to his son, threw his arms around him and kissed him.” (Luke 15:20)

This same God is utterly other. Majestic. Unfathomable. He is Sovereign, Sustainer, Creator, Almighty, eternal, all-powerful and terrifyingly holy. To see the fullness of the glory of God would be too much for us mere mortals to bear. In Hosea there is a verse that on first reading seems very strange: “They will follow the Lord; he will roar like a lion. When he roars, his children will come trembling from the west... I will settle them in their homes, declares the Lord.” (Hosea 11:10-11) No one in their right mind approaches a roaring lion.

Yet in this picture we see God described as a lion—ferocious, powerful and kingly—towards whom his children come running. God is to be feared and revered and yet at the same time he draws his people close. Here in Hosea we see a stunning picture: the weak, frail, vulnerable and broken-hearted running towards the very thing that should most strike terror and fear. However instead of being destroyed they find protection and safety. The Bible tells us that ‘the friendship of the Lord is for those who fear him’ (Psalm 25:14 NRSV). He both terrifies and welcomes in.

Michael Edward Reagan was the adopted son of Ronald Reagan, the 40th President of the United States. At the funeral service of his father in June 2004, Michael opened his address with these words, “Good evening. I’m Mike Reagan. You knew my father as Governor, as President. But I knew him as Dad.” The most holy and awesome God is known as King of Kings, Lord of Lords, Creator and Sustainer of the Universe, but now to us he is known as Father.

It’s the great scandal of the universe, that the God for whom atoms dance and galaxies spin symphonies, the God who rules and reigns, transcendent above and beyond understanding invites us to call him Father. Through Jesus, “the image of the invisible God” (Colossians 1:15), God is revealed to us as a loving, tender parent. One who forgives, heals the broken-hearted, sings over us and loves us unconditionally. We find ourselves drawing close to a God who reveals himself not as a harsh judge, waiting to catch us out, but a Father who delights in us.

The great Chinese Christian leader, Watchman Nee, tells of a young man who came to see him in deep distress. “No matter how much I pray, no matter how hard I try, I simply cannot seem to be faithful to my Lord. I think I’m losing my salvation.” Nee said, “Do you see this dog here? He is my dog. He is house-trained; he never makes a mess; he is obedient; he is a pure delight to me. Out in the kitchen I have a son, a baby son. He makes a mess, he throws

his food around, he fouls his clothes, and he is a total mess. But who is going to inherit my kingdom? Not my dog; my son is my heir.”

No matter how we feel about ourselves, God has chosen us as sons and daughters, inheritors of his kingdom, called by name and unconditionally loved. The Bible tells us that we “did not receive a spirit that makes you a slave again to fear, but you received the Spirit of adoption. And by him we cry “Abba, Father.”” (Romans 8:14)

Next, I is for Intimacy. As we worship Christ, in the power of the Holy Spirit, and find ourselves responding to the Father, our worship leads us into true intimacy with God.

I // Intimacy

William Barclay, the great biblical commentator writes that, “True worship is when a person, through their spirit, attains intimacy and friendship with God.”

Intimacy involves both close affection and reverent awe. Throughout history, the church has tended to swing between over-emphasizing either the ‘immanence’ - or closeness - of God or the ‘transcendence’ - or otherness - of God, but the Bible teaches us to embrace both in our worship. This tension is well captured in the word most commonly used in the New Testament to describe worship, ‘proskuneo’. As we learnt in the first session, the word literally means ‘to come towards and to kiss in reverence’, a term of intimacy and tenderness, but at the same time of great respect.

This is the great paradox of intimacy: to truly understand the transcendent majesty of God, we have to draw near by faith to experience the immanence of God in Christ. Jesus, in his incarnation, reveals himself as a God who invites us to approach him in intimacy.

Brennan Manning writes that, “God entered into our world not with the crushing impact of unbearable glory, but in the way of weakness, vulnerability and need. On a wintry night in an obscure cave, the infant Jesus was a humble, naked, helpless God who allowed us to get close to him.”

So, what should intimate worship look like practically? Some of us love to worship using beautiful hymns and liturgies that are thousands of years old, while others love to jump up and down to songs that were written five minutes ago. Some love to worship by celebrating the Eucharist with thousands of others, while other love to sit quietly on their own in the middle of the countryside. All of us meet God in intimacy in lots of different way.

Our style or model of worship is just a model, not the model, and it’s only as important as a vehicle is to a journey. The destination, not the vehicle, is the point of a journey. The style is secondary: what really matters is that our intimacy gets expressed through obedience, through valuing closeness with God and through being close enough to perceive Jesus being revealed to us through the Holy Spirit. That’s what true intimacy looks like.

Not only is intimacy central to our worship, but we must lead worship in such a way that encourages others to come into a place of intimacy with God. Leading worship is a bit like being involved in a wedding.

[Insert Illustration]

Insert your own wedding illustration. For instance, have you been to a wedding and helped out? Maybe you were an usher or bridesmaid, or perhaps it was your own wedding. Use your experience to tell a story that illustrates how the friends of the bridegroom (the ushers or groomsmen) will do everything they can to make the service run smoothly (e.g. Remove screaming children, sort out the seating arrangements) so that at the moment of the

marriage, the Bride and Bridegroom are able to focus entirely on each other and enjoy their moment of public intimacy.

Our attitude, as worship leaders, is to be like that of a good usher at a wedding. John the Baptist makes a profound point in John 3:28-29 when he says, “the Bride” - that’s the people of God “belongs to the Bridegroom” - that’s Jesus. Our role as worship leaders, like that of John, is to decrease so that we don’t get in the way of encouraging intimacy with God. Our job is not to draw attention to ourselves. Instead we have a far greater privilege - to lead the church, the bride of Christ, into the presence of the bridegroom and then to allow that moment of public intimacy to happen.

So, our worship must lead us to Intimacy with God. Next, S is for Service.

S // Service

Paul writes, “Therefore I urge you, Brothers and Sisters, in view of God’s mercy to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God – this is true worship.” (Romans 12:1)

In this famous passage in Romans, the Greek word Paul uses for worship is *latreia*, the same word that is used to mean ‘service’. After *proskuneo* it is the second most commonly used word to describe worship in the New Testament and it reminds us that at the heart of worship is the activity of service.

As worship leaders and musicians we are called to serve God and to serve his people. Leading worship is certainly not an easy, glamorous task that you take up for the thrill of the stage. The privilege of leading worship is not that you are in the spotlight; on the contrary the privilege is that the Living God has called you into a ‘divine service’. So how can we devote ourselves to serving our churches and congregations?

Serve God's Story

We are caught up in to a story so much bigger than our own: a story of creation and new creation, a journey of fall and redemption, a narrative of brokenness and restoration. The Almighty, Most Holy and powerful God welcomes us into his story of grace.

To worship is to remember. To remind ourselves and each other of who God is and what he has done for his people. And yet as human beings we have a way of turning the narrative back to us. We sing 'It's all about you,' but judging by the way we live, we'd have more integrity singing, 'it's all about me.'

Some have criticized contemporary worship as being shallow in its subject matter. At times, perhaps the church has settled for the familiar and has found itself singing similar themes over and over again. Are we pushing into the heights and depths of who God is and what he has done for us? Are we chasing after the otherness of God, his beauty reflected in creation, and marveling at the new creation spring up in Christ? Are we losing ourselves in the mystery and hiddenness of God, finding ourselves weeping with Jesus the 'man of sorrows', or rejoicing in the risen King of Eternity?

The church calendar can be a great help to every one of us, keeping us on track and reminding us every year of the essentials of following God. Remembering God through seasons like Advent, Pentecost and Lent brings a depth to our faith journey and a depth to our worship.

Serve God's People

The Psalms are the hymnbook of the people of God through the ages, and they're rich in poetry and song that express the depth and intensity of human emotion. They contain celebration, sorrow, fear, joy and pain - and they are always raw, always honest. They are not a collection of twee musings or neat ditties; they are a raw cry from the heart in every season of life. They encourage us to present our whole lives before God in worship, and remind us as worship leaders that there is more than one emotion in true worship.

Often we find 'joy' the easiest emotion to communicate. And that's great - and Biblical too. God's chosen people were called to regular celebrations, to "Be joyful at your Feast" (Deuteronomy 16:14)

But what about the tears? What about when life isn't going so well? Should our songs be silenced? We need to be mindful that when we gather to celebrate Holy Communion, to hear from God's word, to respond through song, some people in the room will be experiencing great sorrow and disappointment. More than being mindful, we need to allow people to give voice to this pain in the context of worship. Thankfully when we gather to worship God, we don't need to check our emotions in at the door. The wonderful invitation of God is that all who are weary and burdened can come to him and find rest. It is here that we can serve God's people in allowing the articulation of the pleasure and pain of life.

There must be space for expressing pain in our churches. We need a bigger picture of what worship is. Questioning God doesn't mean we are disobeying him. Expressing doubt doesn't mean we are lacking faith. Some of the most amazing worship stories in the Bible involve lament. There is something incredibly moving about the story of Job. Here we see a man, who in the eyes of the world had everything, reduced to nothing. Job was a man who feared God, who was blameless and upright. He had a beautiful family, owned large amounts of

land; he was clearly hugely successful. The Bible says he was the “greatest man among all the people of the East.” (Job 1:3) But on one horrendous day everything fell apart for Job. His cattle and livestock were destroyed, and most tragically of all his sons and daughters were killed. When informed of this grave news the Bible records, “At this Job got up and tore his robe and shaved his head. Then he fell to the ground in worship...” (Job 1:20)

Job didn't hide his anguish, but rather brought his pain before his Creator as he fell to the ground in worship. One of the fascinating aspects of this story is the reaction of Job's three friends. When these men heard of all the troubles that came upon Job they set out to comfort him: “When they saw him from a distance, they could hardly recognize him; they began to weep aloud, and they tore their robes and sprinkled dust on their heads. Then they sat on the ground with him for seven days and seven nights. No one said a word to him, because they saw how great his suffering was.” (Job 2:12-13)

Horatio Spafford was a successful lawyer and family man, based in Chicago. In 1870, life took a downward turn as their only son was killed by scarlet fever at the age of four. A year later, it was fire rather than fever that struck. Horatio had invested heavily in real estate on the shores of Lake Michigan. In 1871, the great ‘Chicago Fire’ destroyed all his property.

Aware of the toll that these disasters had taken on the family, Horatio decided to take his wife and four daughters on a holiday to England. Just before they set sail, a last-minute business development forced Horatio to delay. Not wanting to ruin the family holiday, Spafford persuaded his family to go as planned. He would follow on later. With this decided, Anna and her four daughters set sail for Europe while Spafford returned to Chicago. Just nine days later, Spafford received a telegram from his wife in Wales. It read: "Saved alone."

The boat that his family had been traveling on had collided with another vessel – it sank claiming the lives of 226 people, including Spafford's four daughters. His wife had

desperately tried to save the lives of her precious daughters – her last memory was that of her baby being violently torn from her arms by the force of the ocean waters. Upon hearing the tragic news, a devastated Horatio Spafford boarded the next ship out of New York to join his grief stricken wife. On passing the very spot where his daughter's lives had prematurely come to an end, Spafford penned the lyrics to the great hymn – 'It is well with my soul.'

*'When peace, like a river, attendeth my way
When sorrows like sea billows roll
Whatever my lot, Thou hast taught me to say
It is well; it is well with my soul.'*

In the midst of such pain and disaster, Spafford found an anthem of worship that has brought encouragement and hope to many throughout the years. So, finally, T is for Transformation. Our worship must lead to transformation.

T // Transformation

Martin Luther King Jr wrote, "This hour in history needs a dedicated circle of transformed nonconformists. The saving of our world from pending doom will come not from the actions of the conforming majority, but through the creative maladjustment of a dedicated minority."

Jesus makes his mandate clear. He has come to bring good news to the poor, to bring freedom to the prisoners, sight to the blind, to release the oppressed and tell the world that God looks at them and loves them. If we are to be like Jesus, then this is our mandate too. We are called to preach the good news, but also to be good news.

In the book of Amos there's a Scripture that for any worshipper confronts and challenges. To the Israelite nation who had trampled all over the poor forcing them to give up their grain unjustly, building for themselves vast mansions at their expense, the Lord says:

"I hate, I despise your religious feasts; I cannot stand your assemblies. Even though you bring me burnt offerings and grain offerings I will not accept them. Though you bring choice fellowship offerings I will have no regard for them. Away with the noise of your songs! I will not listen to the music of your harps. But let justice roll like a river, righteousness like a never-failing stream!" (Amos 5:21-24)

The Post Modern Bible translates verse 24 saying, "Spare me the roar of your songs." Here the message is stark and simple – the songs we sing and the offerings we bring, are totally meaningless to God unless they are offered out of a lifestyle of worship, a lifestyle that includes the active participation in caring for the poor. Issues of poverty, justice and money are all over the Bible. Poverty is the second most common theme of the Old Testament, after the question of who people will worship. One in every sixteen verses in the New Testament and one in every seven in the Gospel of Luke addresses issues of poverty and justice. As Jim Wallis says, "If you start ripping out all these passages, pretty soon you are left with a Bible full of holes."

We can't fool God. If we're not living the life, if we're not looking out for the last, the least and the lost, then it doesn't matter how amazing our songs are, or how fantastic the band sounds, or how emotional the night was – God's not interested. It can be so easy to get consumed in songs, sounds and success. We are quick to ask whether people connected with that? Were they blessed? Were they impressed? Actually the first question on our lips should always be, 'God did that bless you?' And if it did then it wouldn't be primarily due to the great songs or the great playing, although important things these may be, it would be down to the activity of worship beyond the singing of a song.

We read these passages, like in Amos, we study them, listen to countless sermons on them and are challenged in the moment vowing to live differently, all be it sincerely, but the truth is that nothing changes. We become obsessed with the manual, ignoring the very thing God is calling us to do, 'to act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God.' To look after widows and orphans in their distress, to stand up for the last, the least and the lost, to love the unlovable, feeding the hungry, giving to those who have nothing. Cosy in our cocoons of comfort, we miss the whole point of what God is calling us to do. Reading the Bible is important – incredibly important – but it is pointless if we don't actually use it, if we don't do what it tells us to do, live as it tells us to live. (James 1: 22-25)

If there is a key to worshipping in ways that transforms us, then the answer is found in what we have already heard in this session: we must be Christ-centered, Spirit led and responding to the love of the Father.

In worship we begin to share God's heart and discover a passion for fighting injustice, extending mercy and upholding truth. We will also become like that which we worship, growing into the likeness of Christ. Finally our transformation will take the form of healing as we are increasingly made whole and renewed as we worship.

As well as transforming us, worship transforms the world. We are blessed to be a blessing. God empowers and equips us to make a difference and in true worship we worry less about how we feel or whether we're being blessed and instead prepare to be led away from ourselves to the place where we are desperate to see the transformation of society. And there, serving the poor and sharing our best with those clothed in pain and despair we discover that Jesus is already there.

If true worship is the total alignment of our heart, soul, mind and strength with the will of God, and if God's will is that we care for the poor, then surely our worship must lead us to meet

God in the poor. Mother Teresa was once confronted by a wealthy American visitor, who could not comprehend her fierce commitment to the poor in Calcutta. After hearing the man's concerns, Mother Teresa quietly responded, "We are a contemplative order. First we meditate on Jesus, and then we go out and look for him in disguise."

Encounter God

Our worship must be Christ Centered, Holy Spirit-led, a Response to the Father. We worship a God who is Trinity, and so this is where our worship must begin. We find ourselves standing in the Son, filled with the Spirit and embraced by the Father. Here we don't find a sombre silence, but an exuberant dance of joy. Like the child who runs onto the dance floor to be swept up between its parents, we find ourselves lifted off our feet as we worship, caught up in the very heart of God. It is here, in this place of intimate encounter that we are led to service and we see transformation.

We may be longing for a new encounter with God. We may feel our universe is out of sync and needs to realign. We may feel distant and long for intimacy. Let's ask God to come by his Spirit and to reveal Jesus to us in a new and powerful way today. Why don't we pray.

Prayer

Heavenly Father, we thank you that you don't leave us like orphans, but you sent Jesus to come and rescue us. We thank you that you're here today by your Holy Spirit. Now, come we pray and fill us with your power. Amen.

Next

Leave lots of time for prayer ministry, then break into small groups for coffee and discussion. The questions for the Groups are on the Notes, which can be downloaded from WorshipCentral.org