Sermon notes
6/14/09
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Liturgy

The best intro to liturgical theology is Jeff Meyers' *The Lord's Service*. In addition to an excellent overview of the Bible sacrificial pattern of worship, this book includes essays on a number of topics, such as the regulative principle, the pastor's uniform, the church calendar, etc.

There are several other books and articles on worship that are hugely helpful. I cannot even begin to list them all here. I will just mention a handful and some particular things I like about them. Marva Dawn's *Reaching Out Without Dumbing Down* is a very wise treatment of liturgy and worship. On the value of liturgy as a memorized tradition, see 120ff; on liturgy as a trans-cultural form of worship, see 254ff; and on the dangers of the church trying to be "relevant," see ch. 12 (Dawn demonstrates that when the church has failed in the past it is not because she failed to adapt to the culture, but because she over-adapted and became worldly). Dawn's follow-up work, *A Royal Waste of Time* is also excellent.

There are a number of books that explore the theme of "church as culture," which is vital to any true understanding of liturgy. One of my favorites is William Willimon's *Peculiar Speech*. This is a book loaded with liturgical and ecclesial wisdom. See especially ch. 4 on how the liturgy constructs an alternate reality, a new polis, for the church to inhabit.

Simon Chan's book *Liturgical Theology* does not have the biblical and exegetical grounding of, say, Meyers' work mentioned above. But it is still full of liturgical insights. Writers like Chan show that the works of theologians like Robert Webber have not been in vain. There are now many in evangelical circles interested in vintage Christian worship, brought into the present.

David de Silva's *Sacramental Life* is a quite helpful overview of the Anglican *Book of Common Prayer* and Mark Galli's *Beyond Smells and Bells* is a truly fine short intro to liturgy.

Those who are interested in liturgy, but finding themselves drawn to Rome or to Orthodoxy, should look at James Jordan's freshly reprinted *Liturgy Trap*.

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A couple of weeks ago, we looked at Christian community in Acts 2, and we saw that when the Father poured out the Spirit through the Son at Pentecost, the individual disciples were formed into a new humanity, a new community. It's not as if the Spirit came so that every individual disciple could have his own private relationship with God. No, the Spirit congealed the disciples into a new family, a new nation. We saw that community is essential to our humanity and to what God is doing in the world. God designed us to live in community because we are made (and now redeemed) in the image of the Trinity. God designed the gospel to travel along relational lines. The gospel does not strike individuals like a lightning bolt from heaven. Rather, it is passed along from person to person. When the gospel is accepted by a person, that person is baptized and brought into the corporate life of the church. The NT knows of no churchless Christian faith.

Last week we saw that salvation takes communal shape in the church because God's own life is communal. He is the original; we are the copies. We have been created and redeemed in the image of the Triune God. God is an eternal community of Father, Son, and Spirit. We learn from the Trinity that 'to be' is 'to be related.' Or as it's been put 'being is communion.' We cannot exist outside of relationship. We were made to live in relationship as a fish lives in water. Relationships are simply the medium of our existence.

The church is the body of people who have been brought into relationship with the Father, Son, and Spirit. The church is sort of the Trinity's extended family, invited into the shared life of the three divine persons.

Now, as we turn to liturgy, we find that these same core realities are at work. Liturgy is Triune – not only is the liturgy shaped by the Trinity (e.g., the church's worship was using Trinitarian formulas and pattern long before the church had figured out how to confess the truth in a formalized way), but the liturgy is actually a participation in the life of the Triune God. Liturgy is also communal – it is designed to be participatory. In our day the church has slid back into its pre-Reformational, late medieval condition, where the congregation gathers to watch the religious professionals put on a show. The Reformers, following the Bible, saw that worship had to engage the people, so that their singing, their prayers, their 'Amens,' their eating and drinking, their hearing, their confessing, their responding, etc. would be the core of the service. Otherwise the priesthood of the baptized has been denied.

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Liturgy is not just another word for worship. In one sense, we could say that worship includes liturgy; in another sense, liturgy includes worship.

If by "worship" we mean service given to God, then all of life should be worship. We should offer ourselves in obedience to God in everything we do. Thus, the weekly liturgy, in which we offer praise to God in a highly concentrated, formalized, explicit way, is part of our whole life of worship (and, indeed, the central part).

But if by "worship" we mean what we do on the Lord's Day when we gather, then we need to say that worship is only part of what happens on Sunday mornings – and, indeed, it's the less important part. In the liturgy, we receive God's gifts by means of word and sacrament. Our *response* to those gifts is thanks and praise (= worship).

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I have given much more detailed overviews of the liturgy and liturgical order in the past. See out liturgy page (which is obviously a work in progress): http://trinity-pres.net/liturgy.php

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In  Rom. 1, Paul diagnoses the problem with humanity in terms of worship. Man has become an idolater, exchanging the glory of the Creator God to worship that which is not God. When man turned away from God, he did not cease to worship, but he did start to worship something other than and less than God. As a result his soul shrank and shriveled. Man could no longer be and do that which God desired him to be and do.

In Rom. 12 when Paul finally summarizes the effect of salvation (or the gospel), he does so in terms of restored worship: "Offer your bodies a living sacrifice, for this is your Spiritual act of worship…" Renewed human life is liturgi-form. It is liturgically shaped. It is liturgical life. It is a life of worship. Worship of the living God is what makes us truly and fully human (cf. Rom. 4:18ff which answers to 1:18ff). The liturgy gives us a glimpse of what restored and glorified human life looks like. God's grand rescue operation has brought us out of idolatry and into the love, communion, and adoration of the Trinity. We are now to use our lives

to bring that Triune love, communion, and worship to bear upon a troubled and broken world. We are to go and share with others what we have received from God in his special presence, so that worship overflows into mission.

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Liturgy is simply the thing the church does. Liturgy is the church at prayer, speaking her native language. Liturgy is the church fulfilling her most basic vocation. Liturgy is the center and heartbeat of the church's life. The church is most fully the church when she is engaged in the liturgy.

If liturgy is the center of life, then mission is to be the ever-expanding circumference. Paradoxically, the more our worship services bring us to the true center, the wider our reach will be in mission.

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What is supposed to happen during confession? We humble ourselves before God. We admit that we have lived much of the previous week in exile, in Egypt, and we pave the way for asking God to renew us to right-standing in his kingdom, in the land of promise. That's not to say we get re-justified each time we confess our sin and hear absolution. But God does renew his promise of justification to us (1 Jn. 1:8-9). There is a real, gracious transaction, in which God's covenant is reapplied to us, so that he continually forgives our sins. The pastor, speaking as a representative of Christ, declares God's comforting word of pardon to the gathered people who bear his name. As that declaration is received in faith, we grow into full assurance of God's favor.

Why do we confess at the very beginning of the service? Confession is like wiping your feet on the welcome mat before entering God's house. It prepares us to enter into God's presence more fully as the service continues. It wouldn't make good sense to put the confession/absolution anywhere else in the service (especially right before the Lord's Supper, which is where some put it). Indeed, in the Levitical liturgy of the old covenant, the sin offering always proceeded all the other types of offerings.

We kneel for confession because confession is a miniature death. We come before God in lowliness, brokeness, and contrition -- and if you don't *feel* that way in your heart, as you should, the bodily posture serves to stimulate the right kind of emotion. Because of our sins, we deserve to fall into dust and ashes -- and so we

enact that by getting down on the ground, prostrating ourselves before God's holiness. But, once we've confessed, God invites us to rise up. The word "arise" is closely related to the term/concept for "resurrection." And that's what God is doing for us as we "Arise to hear the good news of God's forgiveness!" We arise out of the dust and ashes, receive his word of cleansing, and are then enabled to enter his heavenly presence (which is what the "ascension" portion of the service is all about -- more on that later).

Why do we not have a time for silent, personal confession? The entire liturgy is a public, not private, event. In truth, in the confession of sin in the service, we are confessing our *sinfulness* more than particular acts of sin. We have plenty of time to confess our particular sins particularly throughout the week. That's not what the Lord's Day gathering is for. (By analogy, there is time for receiving counsel from the Word addressed to your particular situation in private. The sermon is a public, and therefore general, proclamation of the Word.) I would urge you to confess particular sins at home during the week, as a way of preparing yourself for worship on Sunday.

Also, if we did have a time of silent confession in the liturgy, how long should it be? This is a real pastoral dilemma. If it's short (say 30 seconds), it all too easily suggests that maybe we're not really HUGE sinners -- because, after all, we can get it taken care of in half a minute! On the other hand, if that silent time goes too long (say, 5 minutes), inevitably, the minds of many will wander and the time will be wasted.

All that being said, we may still incorporate a time of silent confession at some points along the way, e.g., during the season of Lent.

Like John Calvin, I think there is some value in Christians confessing sin to one another in private and hearing another believer look you in the eye and proclaim God's promise of pardon. Many of us are reluctant to open ourselves up this way, but it is a healthy practice, and provides some accountablity. As your pastor, I'm always available for private confession and absolution. This is an important aspect of the pastoral office as Martin Luther and Calvin both noted. (This is really what most pastoral counseling is anyway! Indeed, I think in a lot of churches, many of the pastoral/counseling issues would go away if the people were trained in worship to regularly confess their sins and to receive absolution. Guilt feelings that are never dealt with in terms of the gospel, in an objective way, are at the root of all kinds of Spiritual problems.)

So this is the big picture: In the weekly confession of sin and absolution, God is renewing his baptismal promise of forgiveness to us. That word "absolves" is closely related to word for "solvent." God dissolves our sinfulness in the blood of Christ so that we can stand before him. The pastor speaks as God's mouthpiece, to apply his promises to the covenant people, so that they can rest in the assurance of God's mercy towards them. Of course, for confession/absolution to have real efficacy, you have to confess your sin(fulness) in sincerity and receive the promise of forgiveness in faith. There are subjective conditions. But the objective confession and promise give your faith something solid, something tangible, something outside of you, to cling to. Knowing you are forgiven is not a matter of searching in your heart for certain feelings (which may or may not be there, and cannot be trusted anyway); rather, it is a matter of hearing and believing the Word of God, as it is declared to you. So each week when you confess your sin, immediately prepare your heart to receive God's gracious promises of forgiveness and renewal.

I find myself returning to the liturgical forms we use for confession and absolution quite frequently throughout the week, in times of personal prayer/worship, as well as with my family. For example, when I have to discipline my children, I will usually take them through a confession/absolution sequence. Whenever they are confronted with their sin, I want them to be immediately reminded of God's grace to them, as members of his covenant people. Sometimes I will even use the exact form of words that we have used in church the preceding Sunday in order to proclaim forgiveness to them. It helps them (and me) to connect worship to the rest of life. It implants the promises of the gospel in their hearts.

By the way, the forms that we use for confession are almost always drawn from traditional liturgies. The promise of absolution also comes from historical sources, or from a series of biblical verses linked together.

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Note that we begin with a call to worship, as God summons us into his presence. We respond with singing and a prayer of adoration. But having seen a glimpse of God’s light, even from the temple courtyard, so to speak, we see our own spots and dirt, so we are immediately driven to confess our sins. God graciously invites us to tell the truth about ourselves, calling out for his mercy. He forgives our sins, and we again respond with another cycle of praise, this time actually drawing near to God in his heavenly sanctuary, the true most holy place.

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In a sense, all of worship centers around the table. Everything prior to the Supper is preparation. It's to whet our appetite. It's setting the table. Once we've eaten, the whole of the Christian life flows out of that meal. We have communed with Jesus; such communion empowers us for obedience and service the rest of the week. Jesus has given us free food, he has given us himself, which impels us to give ourselves freely for the life of the world as well.

The centrality of the meal also means the sermon should be understood as "table talk." Symbolically, it's a father gathered with his children around the table to give them fatherly instruction.

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We raise our hands in the Doxology during the ascension part of the service because we are like little children asking to be swept up into our Father's arms as we are lifted up into the heavenlies.

There is a quite a bit in Scripture about lifting our hands to the Lord in worship as an act of praise (Ps. 63:4, 134:2). Bodily posture matters. In fact, the word for "worship" in both OT and NT describes the bodily act of prostration. By prostrating ourselves, we are putting ourselves in a position where we can be lifted up by God's grace. Those who will not lower themselves in this way will not and cannot receive grace.

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The sentences we use before the offertory prayer are a somewhat creative innovation within the tradition (though I did not come up with them myself). They are not so much catechetical, as they are declaratory. In the very act of declaring these words we are giving ourselves to God in the ways we describe. We are binding ourselves to God and to his covenant, promising to demonstrate our loyalty to God in these ways.

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Some say nothing much happens in the liturgy. They do not have any way of distinguishing the Lord's Day gathering from a mid-week Bible study or family

worship times. Sunday is just Bible study with a few more formalities. In reality, what happens in the Lord's Day liturgy is unique. It is a unique time of covenant renewal and entrance into heaven.

If we understand that liturgy takes place in heaven, our questions about music, style, dress, etc. will all be contextualized by worship's true environment: What's appropriate for heaven? Read Revelation 4-5 and decide what belongs there. It's an issue of propriety. When the angels sing to God around his throne, it's as though they use up every "glory word" they can think of (Rev. 5:12). We've got to keep ransacking the dictionary to find words to suit the occasion. If you understand who God is and where worship takes place, you will realize how much we need to use "glory language" (as well as glorious music, etc.).

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All analogies are imperfect, but here's one to try on (picked up from somewhere else, no doubt):

What's the difference between hanging out with friends and a party with friends (like a big birthday bash)?

A party goes beyond mere hanging out. It includes formal invitations, a formal setting, a dress code, the offering and receiving of gifts, an order (e.g., light candles/sing "Happy Birthday"/cut cake/eat cake/open presents), and eating and drinking (including alcoholic beverages!).

Your daily prayer time and family worship time is hanging out with God. Liturgy turns "hanging out" into a party (including the free alcoholic beverages!).

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The church today all too often tries to turn worship into entertainment. But the liturgy aims more at enchantment then entertainment.

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Quinn Fox has a wonderful little comparison of liturgical worship to Starbucks (http://www.rca.org/Page.aspx?pid=3168):

Recent reports have some in the post-baby-boomer generations returning to traditional expressions of Christianity, including Eastern Orthodoxy. At the same time, there abound "pundits" who have all but written off the so-called "Generation X" from the church, contending that they are too "lost" for any outreach. Meanwhile, both denominational officials and ecclesiastical entrepreneurs are hatching strategies to do what they can to get young adults back inside the church.

My impression of the upshot of all this is that many think that the church is just not "user friendly" (some would say "seeker sensitive"). The music is too old; nor do the lyrics "speak" to young people. And for any liturgy still left, the language is too foreign for any but the elect. On our church staff we have the occasional conversation about whether Sunday morning services are "user friendly" enough. Frankly, I'm not convinced that we need to be as nearly "user friendly" with liturgy and lyrics as many experts recommend. Starbucks has challenged my thinking.

I did not inherit my parent's commitment to coffee. Rather, "I found it" in my late 30's. Initially, I liked the*idea* of drinking coffee more than the actual flavor. Thus I acquired a taste for steamed milk in my java (if the milk wasn't steamed, the whole thing turned into a lukewarm light-brown soup). By and by I discovered the difference between a *caffè latte* and *café au lait*. A latte (Italian for milk--it has less foam than a *cappuccino*) is *espresso* with steamed milk, while café au lait is drip coffee with steamed milk. By the time I found my way to Starbucks a few years ago, I was fluent in *café au lait*. I quickly discovered that French isn't spoken at Starbucks. They don't speak English either. At Starbucks a *café au lait* is called a*caffè misto* (because it is a "mix" of equal parts steamed milk and drip coffee). At Starbucks the language of coffee commerce is Italian--with a few exceptions (e.g., a size "Tall" is the smallest on the menu). So I have learned Italian. And so have you, if you frequent Starbucks. If you are part of the minority who never have, it is worth dropping in just to listen to the liturgy.

At busy times an orderly (if slow) processional of the faithful crowd toward the counter. An order may be something like "I'd like a *grande*, non-fat, triple shot, 2 pump peppermint *latte* with extra whip cream." The money changer loudly relays the request. And one should not worry if the strangeness of the terms causes a stumble. The temple assistant mediates these early morning "sighs that are too deep for words" by translating

them into flawless coffee Italian. The Barista (it even sounds a little like "priest") who feverishly prepares coffee drinks behind the espresso bar repeats the petition verbatim, as if by uttering the words s/he speaks them into being. At the more relational franchises, the customer's name will be attached to the order. When the brew is ready, complete in all of its uniqueness, the Barista chants the request once again, just to indicate that the unction is complete.

By the way, there are no printed liturgies--no Italian-English "cheat sheets." At Starbucks, ordering coffee is baptism by immersion. It's sink or swim. Oh, sure--there are one or two people per million who walk out without ordering because they can't take the awkwardness of a menu that isn't "user friendly." For the most part no one leaves.

Starbucks is probably smarter than the church when it comes to marketing. For one, once past the initial awkwardness of not knowing how to order, Starbucks is one very hip place to hang out. And it's not just coffee that Starbucks sells. It offers community, or at least post-Christendom's approximation of it. And we feel virtuous drinking coffee. By consuming a nearly five-dollar coffee (made from free trade beans), we make the world a better place by reducing third-world poverty. There's even a brochure pushing a "Starbucks Mission Trip." Well, actually, it's an ecological service jaunt sponsored by a coffee shop. After 9/11, donations at Starbucks probably exceeded the receipts of some of America's smaller Christian denominations.

The point is that the church might learn about corporate worship language from the language of coffee. Starbucks realizes, it seems, that a distinctive menu that people need to learn is not a bad thing. All of this suggests that if Americans (who largely eschew foreign languages) are willing to learn Italian to get good coffee, they might well learn the Lord's Prayer (in English) in order to get God. And we won't even have to put it in the bulletin every Sunday.

Starbucks has created an entirely new “coffee culture.” In the same way, a good liturgy forms the church as a distinct culture. Yes, it can take some learning, but it’s not out of reach. Besides, why shouldn’t we be willing to learn some skills and new vocab in order to worship the living God? Isn’t he worth it?

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A very important aspect of worship is bodily posture. Our bodies do not exist merely to get our brains to church; worship (= "to prostrate onself") is as physical as it is spiritual. Here are a couple of snippets from John Calvin to enlarges upon the point in a variety of places:

> Commentary on Acts 20:36:
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> The inward attitude certainly holds first place in prayer, but outward signs, kneeling, uncovering the head, lifting up the hands, have a twofold use. The first is that we may employ all our members for the glory and worship of God; secondly, that we are, so to speak, jolted out of our laziness by this help. There is also a third use in solemn and public prayer, because in this way the sons of God profess their piety, and they inflame each other with reverence of God. But just as the lifting up of the hands is a symbol of confidence and longing, so in order to show our humility, we fall down on our knees.
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> Commentary on 1Timothy 2:8:
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> Lifting up pure hands As if he had said, "Provided that it be accompanied by a good conscience, there will be nothing to prevent all the nations from calling upon God everywhere. But he has employed the sign instead of the reality, for "pure hands" are the expressions of a pure heart; just as, on the contrary, Isaiah rebukes the Jews for lifting up "bloody hands," when he attacks their cruelty. (Isaiah 1:15.) Besides, this attitude has been generally used in worship during all ages; for it is a feeling which nature has implanted in us, when we ask God, to look upwards, and has always been so strong, that even idolaters themselves, although in other respects they make a god of images of wood and stone, still retained the custom of lifting up their hands to heaven. Let us therefore learn that the attitude is in accordance with true godliness, provided that it be attended by the corresponding truth which is represented by it, namely, that, having been informed that we ought to seek God in heaven, first, we should form no conception of Him that is earthly or carnal; and, secondly, that we should lay aside carnal affections, so that nothing may prevent our hearts from rising above the world.
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> In the *Institutes*, we find these comments:

> As for bodily gestures customarily observed in praying, such as kneeling and uncovering the head, they are exercises whereby we try to rise to a greater reverence for God….
>
> Let us take, for example, kneeling when solemn prayers are being said. The question is whether it is a human tradition, which any man may lawfully repudiate or neglect. I say that it is human, as it is also divine. It is of God in so far as it is a part of that decorum whose care and observance the apostle has commended to us. But it is of men in so far as it specifically designates what had in general been suggested rather than explicitly stated….
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> ...nothing prohibits a man who cannot bend his knees because of disease from standing to pray.

I found these quotations helpfully drawn together here: http://www.baylyblog.com/2009/06/is-worship-that-is-cerebral-only-in-any-way-reformed.html#trackback

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Germans (Lutherans) have a clever name for the Sunday sacramental gathering (which was also used by some Presbyterians and Anglicans). It's the terms gottesdeinst, meaning the "The Lord's Service." The service is foundationally the Lord's service to us in word and sacrament. But it is also our service to him, as we respond with thanks and praise.

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James Torrance describes the Trinitarian, Christocentric dynamics of worship:

> Christian worship is... our participation through the Spirit in the Son's communion with the Father, in his vicarious life of worship and intercession. It is our response to our Father for all he has done for us in Christ. It is our self-offering in body, mind and spirit, in response to the one true offering made for in Christ, our response of gratitude (*eucharistia*) to God's grace (*charis*), our sharing by grace in the heavenly intercession of Christ. Therefore, anything we say about worship...must be said in the light of him whom it is a response…..

> There is only one true priest through whom and with whom we draw near to God our Father.... There is only one offering which is truly acceptable to God, and it is not ours.... There is only one who can lead us into the presence of the Father by his sacrifice on the cross….
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> [To] participate by the Spirit in the incarnate Christ's communion with the Father is to participate in the eternal Son's communion -- a relationship which is both *internal* to the Godhead and *externally* extended to us by space. In this understanding of worship, we can discern a double movement of grace -- (a) a God-humanward movement, from (*ek*) the Father, through the Son (*dia*), in (*en*) the Spirit, and (b) a human-Godward movement to the Father, through the Son in the Spirit. This double movement of grace... is grounded in the very... being of God... What God is toward us in these relationships, he is in his innermost being…
>
> We are baptized into the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, and are taught to confess it, praise it, live it, proclaim it in a wonderful life of communion.... It has semantic content.... It is the name through which God discloses himself personally to us to draw us into intimate communion with himself in worship and prayer.

Charles Drew puts it this way:

> At the most profound theological level, worship is a spectator sport. We gather to watch the Father vindicate his Son in the preaching of the gospel and to watch the Son give praise to the Father in the praises of our lips. For the Spirit of Christ indwells us, and that Spirit lives to extol the Father and Son…When next you gather for public worship, why not ask the Lord to catch you up into the praises of the Godhead? Ask him to give you in abundance the Spirit of Christ so that your songs might be the songs of the One who loved his Father to the end, and your joy might be the joy of the Son who was lifted from the tomb by the Father's embrace.

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As Piper says, mission exists because worship does not. When the liturgy ends, the mission begins.

Of course, worship itself has a missional character, and mission feeds back into liturgy, so there is a liturgical/missional loop all Christians participate in.

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In the sermon, I said that even our response is given to us in Christ. Of course, you should already know this from the words of the liturgy:

> O Lord, open our lips!
> **And our mouth shall proclaim your praise!**

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Here is something I wrote on the Psalms a while ago:

> **The Psalter: Revolution Through Music**
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> The Psalms are many things: praises to God, giving thanks for who he is and what he has done; lamentations, for when life's circumstances do not seem to jibe with God's promises; petitions, for God to act, blessing his people and overthrowing his enemies; confessions of sin, when the psalmist has violated God's law and stands in need of forgiveness; and wisdom meditations, reflecting on God's perfections as revealed in creation and redemption. But the Psalms are also messianic, which means they are political and prophetic. More than anything else, the Psalms call upon God to usher in his promised kingdom and the renewal of all things through his Son. The psalms are wars songs, petitioning God to overthrow the wicked, save and vindicate his covenant people, and establish the reign of the righteous over the earth.
>
> The Psalter is ultimately about the coming of Christ. This is obvious in enthronement and royal Psalms like 2, 45, and 98. But in reality, the Psalter as a whole is an anticipation and celebration of the promised kingdom, fulfilled in the coming of Jesus. Now that the hoped for kingdom has arrived in history through Christ's death and resurrection, we continue to sing the Psalms, but we sing them as "new songs" with a deeper understanding and greater power. The prayers of the Psalmist have been answered – but there is still more to come for those who keep praying these prayers and singing these songs.
>
> The world's songs, whether rock or some other genre, can only shape (and reflect) passing fads. But in the Psalms, God has given us a special hymnal full of world-changing prayers and eternal praise. The sad reality is that the world believes it has music with the power to save the

world, when in reality it does not, while the church *does* have songs that can bring renewal to the world, but often fails to employ them.

While the church's musical praise is not limited to the Psalter, there can be no doubt that Christians are commanded to sing psalms (Eph. 5:18ff). Psalm singing is not an option, but an obligation. The Psalter must have central place in the worship and ministry of the church. God wants us to call upon him using the words he has given us. Studying the psalms can never be a mere academic matter; we must learn to use the Psalms as God intended. When we do so, we may rest assured that his kingdom will come and his enemies will be scattered!

**Background to the Psalter**

The main author of the book of Psalms is David. Moses, Solomon, Asaph, and a handful of other figures also made contributions, as the titles in the Psalter indicate. It is important to understand that while many Psalms may have originated in a private context, these songs have been brought together into a book intended for public, corporate use. We should not think of the Psalms as David's private prayer journal, but as Israel's (and the church's) foundational hymn book. The experiences of the Psalm writers should be considered personal, but not private. The Psalms give us a paradigm for understanding, exploring, and expressing the life of faith, including its pains and struggles, in the context of the covenant community.

One of the church fathers, Diodore, wrote,

> When our souls find in the psalms the most ready formulation of the concerns they wish to bring before God, they recognize them as a wonderfully appropriate remedy. For the Holy Spirit anticipated all kinds of human situations, setting forth through the most blessed David the proper words for our sufferings through which the afflicted may find healing.

Martin Luther called the Psalter "the Bible in miniature" in which "you have before you a fine, bright, spotless mirror that will show you the kind of thing Christianity is." John Calvin spoke in glowing terms about the Psalter, saying "I have been accustomed to call this book, I think not inappropriately, the anatomy of all the parts of the soul," meaning that it covers the whole breadth and range of human experience from a sanctified perspective.

The fact that the Psalms were written largely by David – a great man, but also one who stumbled many times, as we do – comforts us. We can truly use the Psalms as a textbook of our own souls, for the psalmists share in our weaknesses and trials. There is a Psalm for every legitimate human emotion and every situation we face.

For many men today, poetry seems effeminate and church music in general seems wimpy. David would beg to differ. He was both a warrior and a poet. His songs are full of passion and fire. Singing the Psalms will form our character in unique ways – certainly very few uninspired hymns cover the same territory as the Psalter (e.g., Psalm 139:19-22). Singing the Psalms can make us tough enough to face the kinds of battles David faced, such as when he killed a wild bear and took down Goliath. In a narcissistic, therapeutic culture like our own, the Psalms get us out our own little private, self-centered worlds, and help us to focus our energies on God's warfare against evil and oppression in the world. The psalms are distinctively militant, calling on God to bring judgment against those who oppose his kingdom and stand in the way of his grace.

But if the psalms can make us tough, but they can also make us tender. Several Psalms, if sung faithfully, will tenderize our hearts and minds to God's grace and to the needs of others. In the Psalms we learn how to confess our sin; we learn true humility; we learn our smallness before the overwhelming majesty of God; and we learn the importance of showing mercy to others in need even as the Lord has shown us mercy. The psalms teach us about the importance of community with other believers and our obligation to pursue the lost with the good news of God's gracious reign. The Psalms fill us with a desire to worship the living God and give us a heart for the global mission of God's kingdom.

Of course, the most important function of the Psalms is to point us to Christ, who fulfills them all. Christ is the King the psalmists prayed for; more than that (as we will see), Christ prayed through the psalmists as his forerunners. In this book, we not only have prayers *about* Christ but prayers *of* Christ. The Psalms have rightly been called the war songs of the Prince of Peace. The Psalter celebrates his gifts of forgiveness and renewal, as well as his ultimate victory over his enemies.

The Psalms are certainly the words of men towards God. They must be read in the context of their original, historical situations. But they are also inspired by God, and therefore possess a meaning that goes well beyond the intent of the original human authors. Moreover, the Spirit enabled the Psalm writers to perfectly express their emotions and convictions in these prayers in a God-centered, God-honoring fashion. The

Psalms are therefore the standard and model for all other Christian devotion, including all our songs and prayers. Again, Calvin is helpful:

> There is no other book in which there is to be found more express and magnificent commendations, both of the unparalleled liberality of God towards his Church, and of all his works; there is no other book in which there is recorded so many deliverances, nor one in which the evidences and experiences of the fatherly providence and solicitude which God exercises towards us, are celebrated with such splendour of diction, and yet with the strictest adherence to truth; in short, there is no other book in which we are more perfectly taught the right manner of praising God, or in which we are more powerfully stirred up to the performance of this religious exercise (pp. xxxviii-xxxix).

The Psalms can also serve to train us in righteousness:

> Moreover, although the Psalms are replete with all the precepts which serve to frame our life to every part of holiness, piety, and righteousness, yet they will principally teach and train us to bear the cross; and the bearing of the cross is a genuine proof of our obedience, since by doing this, we renounce the guidance of our own affections, and submit ourselves entirely to God, leaving him to govern us, and to dispose of our life according to his will, so that the afflictions which are the bitterest and most severe to our nature, become sweet to us, because they proceed from him (p. xxxix).

Because David is a paradigmatic figure, representing the entire covenant people, his experience sums up the experiences of all the godly in all the ages. Because David is a type and shadow of the Coming One, his prayers can serve to point us to Christ, giving us a sketch of the inner life of the promised Greater David. To conform our prayer life to the Psalms is to conform it to Christ.

David and the other psalmists were brilliant composers, and these songs display their consummate wisdom and skill. The Psalms are musical poetry at its finest. As poetry, the Psalms make use of a number of literary forms. Literary analysis of these songs usually pays rich dividends. We cannot explore all these literary features, but a few major ones should be mentioned. The Psalter is full of metaphors, symbolism,

and lively imagery. But we will focus more on the literary structures the authors built into their texts.

The poetry we are familiar with in the modern West tends to use rhyme or meter as a structuring device. For the Hebrews, parallelism was the basic poetic form. One cannot understand the Psalms without understanding the role and function of parallelism. For example, consider these lines from Psalm 2:

Why do the nations rage,
And the people plot a vain thing?

Or these lines from Psalm 139:

Where can I go from Your Spirit?
Or where can I flee from Your presence?

In each case, the second line repeats, but elaborates on the first. Traditionally, when the Psalms would be used in a liturgical setting, the first line would be called out by the leader; the people would then echo back with the second line. In other words, the psalms are designed for congregational participation.

There are a wide variety of parallelisms, including synonymous, in which the two lines reverberate with the same basic meaning (e.g., Psalm 1:1); antithetic, in which the two lines form a sharp contrast (e.g., Psalm 44:3); and climatic, in which the meaning intensifies (Psalm 29:3-9).

C. S. Lewis pointed out that parallelism is the only poetic form in the world that can be translated from one language to the next without loss. The Psalms were obviously designed by God to ultimately function as the basic hymnbook of an international, multi-lingual church. Other literary forms in the Psalter do not carry over to other languages, but they are not nearly as foundational to the structure and usage of the Psalms as parallelism.

Chiasm is another literary form deeply pervasive in the Psalter. A chiastic structure follows the kind of pattern seen in Psalm 70:

A. Appeal to God: "deliver me O God; hasten to help me" (70:1)
B. Malediction towards enemies (70:2-3)
B.' Benediction towards those who seek God (70:4)
A.' Appeal to God: "hasten O God; you are my help" (70:5)

There are chiasms of various sizes in the Psalter, from just a few lines to entire, lengthy Psalms. The matching sections are generally mutually interpretative.

Some Psalms use an acrostic (or partial acrostic) device. In these Psalms, each line (or section) begins with each successive letter of the Hebrew alphabet. (Obviously, this cannot be captured in translation.) Examples include Psalm 9-10, 25, 34, 119 (a celebration of the law of God "from A to Z"), and 145.

Finally some Psalms use refrains (e.g., Psalm 136). These repeating lines are by no means the "vain repetition" Jesus condemned (Matt. 6:7). Instead, they are ways of powerfully driving the truth into the minds and hearts of those who sing and pray them. Like water flowing over a rock, slowly softening its edges, repeated phrases and lines in the Psalter mold and shape us with regular usage.

**Significance of the Psalter in History**

The Psalter came to hold a unique and central place in the life of old covenant Israel. It's been rightly said that ancient Israel enjoyed life as a whole through the medium of music. Psalm singing was central to their corporate life and culture. They not only sang psalms in temple and synagogue worship, but also made liberal use of the Psalter in the midst of daily activities. They were a musical people and the Psalms served as the soundtrack of their lives.

David, the chief author of the Psalter, was also responsible for organizing Israel's priesthood to include trained musicians, orchestras, and choirs. The record of David's kingship in 1-2 Chronicles pay special attention to his musical reforms, which must stand among his life's greatest achievements. If Moses was responsible for organizing Israel's worship through the sacrifice of animals, David was responsible for organizing their worship through the sacrifice of musical praise. He glorified the national liturgy by giving sacred song a new place of prominence.

From the earliest days of the church, the Psalms have formed the basic prayer book and hymnal for Christians. Clement of Alexandria gives a little snapshot of how psalm singing fit into the joyous, thankful life of the Christian:

> Holding festival, then, in our whole life, persuaded that God is altogether on every side present, we cultivate our fields, praising; we sail the sea hymning…And his whole life is a holy festival. His sacrifices are prayers, and praises, and readings in Scripture before meals, and psalms and hymns during meals and before bed, and

> prayers also again during the night. By these he unites himself to the divine choir.

For Clement, Christians sang psalms not only to shape noble character, but to express thanks and praise to God. This was considered the highest function of music.

Other church fathers, like Basil, also extolled the importance of the Psalter in the life of the church:

> A psalm drives away demons, summons the help of angels, furnishes arms against nightly terrors, and gives respite from daily toil; to little children it is safety, to men in their prime adornment, to the old a solace, to women their most fitting ornament. It peoples solitudes, it brings agreement to market places. To novices it is a beginning; to those who are advancing, an increase; to those who are concluding, a confirmation. A psalm is the voice of the church. It gladdens fast days, it creates grief which is in accord with God's will, for a psalm brings a tear even to a heart of stone.

John Chrysostom urged Christians to make wide ranging use of the Psalter:

> [T]each your children and wives also to sing such songs, not only while weaving or while engaged in other tasks, but especially at a table. For since the devil generally lies in wait at banquets, having as his allies drunkenness and gluttony, along with inordinate laughter and an unbridled spirit, it is necessary especially then, both before and after the meal, to construct a defense against him from the psalms and to arise from the banquet together with wife and children to sing sacred hymns to God.

Another early Christian, known as Pseudo-Chrysostom, wrote about the significance of David's songs:

> In the churches there are vigils, and David is first and middle and last. In the singing of early morning hymns David is first and middle and last. In the tents at funeral processions David is first and middle and last…What a thing of wonder! Many who have not even made their first attempt at reading know all of David by heart and recite him in order. Yet it is not only in the cities and the

> churches that he is so prominent on every occasion and with people of all ages; even in the fields and deserts and stretching into uninhabited wasteland, he rouses a chorus of angelic hosts, and David is first and middle and last. In the convents…David is first and middle and last. In the deserts men crucified to this world hold converse with God, and David is first and middle and last. And at night all men are dominated by physical sleep and drawn into the depths, and David alone stands by, arousing all the servants of God to angelic vigils, turning earth into heaven and making angels of men.

Likewise, Jerome wrote to Demetrias that she should, "always [pray and sing psalms] at the third, sixth, and ninth hours, at evening, in the middle of the night and at dawn." In another case, he advised a young Christian woman to "learn the Psalter by heart." (163) One of the reasons for the spread of early Christianity though the Roman Empire was the beauty and attractiveness of its psalmody and hymnody.

At the Reformation, the book of psalms played a vital role in theological and liturgical reforms. Calvin commissioned musicians to put the psalms to singable melodies, which became known as "Genevan jigs" for their lively style. According to Calvin, the psalms give us the gospel:

> In one word, not only will we here find general commendations of the goodness of God, which may teach men to repose themselves in him alone, and to seek all their happiness solely in him; and which are intended to teach true believers with their whole hearts confidently to look to him for help in all their necessities; but we will also find that the free remission of sins, which alone reconciles God towards us, and procures for us settled peace with him, is so set forth and magnified, as that here there is nothing wanting which relates to the knowledge of eternal salvation (p. xxxix).

The Reformation was, among other things, a revival of congregational Psalm singing, the likes of which had not been seen since the early days of the church.

Historian James Hastings Nichols explains the centrality of the Psalter in Reformational church life and piety, focusing especially on the French Reformers, known as Huguenots:

> As the staple of private and family worship as well as of the services of the church, the psalms became known to many by heart. No other book of the Old Testament, at least, could rival the psalms in the affections and knowledge of Reformed laymen. Ministers frequently preached from the psalms also; the Psalter was the only Old Testament book on which Calvin preached on Sundays. For every occasion, it seems an appropriate verse would leap to the tongue of a Huguenot.

When the Huguenots were facing persecution, they turned to the Psalter for strength and encouragement. Again, Nichols:

> And all over France, wherever Huguenots of the first generation were confined, often sometimes by the score, guards and jailers became familiar with the psalms, even to the prisons on Santo Domingo and Martinique. The colporteurs who carried the psalters, with Bibles and catechisms, all over France, were frequently caught and burned. Many martyrs died with the words of the Apostles' Creed, but it is surprising to what a range of the psalter was drawn on by others.
>
> The courage and joy of these martyrs who, like the ancient Christians, could have had release for a word, won converts among the onlookers. The authorities tried gags, but the cord would burn and from the smoke the psalm would again begin. The bishops then ordered that the tongues of the Huguenots should be cut out before they were burned. This became the general practice…
>
> When the fifty-seven Protestants of Meaux were led off to the dungeons they lamented [using Psalm 79]…the fourteen of them who were later led out to execution sang from the same psalm until their tongues were cut out…
>
> When armed resistance began, Ps. 68 became the Huguenot [war chant]…
>
> At the Battle of Coutras, the Reformed soldiers knelt and prayed and sang. Roman Catholic courtiers, observing, cried out that they were afraid and were confessing, but a more experienced officer said it was not so. They were singing [Psalm 118]…

It's hard imagine any other songs sustaining these saints as they faced such suffering and grueling tests of faith.

Even after a temporary peace was established for Protestants in France, attacks on psalmody were a focal point in the Roman Catholic counter-Reformation. Nichols continues his account:

> To know and love the psalms was the mark of a Protestant. The use of the psalter became a significant issue in the long nibbling away of the assurances of the Edict of Nantes. In 1623 singing of psalms was forbidden in streets and shops. In 1657 it was prohibited at executions; in 1658, anywhere outside "temples," as Protestant places of worship must be called. In 1659 psalms could not even be sung privately if audible outside, and in 1661 the singing of psalms anywhere in French territory became a felony.[1]

Of course, the Huguenots are hardly alone in their love for psalm singing. Throughout church history, the Psalms have played a vital role in Christian faith and practice.

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I have pasted in a number of quotations on various liturgical issues—

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The justly famous Internet Monk gives a good summary of where worship has gone in the evangelical church (http://www.internetmonk.com/archive/the-big-worship-goof):

> One of my major premises in the writing I'm doing these days is that evangelicals have become a movement actually destroying itself.
>
> At no point does that seem more obvious than in the recent evolution of worship within evangelicalism.
>
> Does anyone- I mean, really, seriously- have any idea what is actually happening within the worship culture of evangelicals?
>
> We have, within a matter of 50 years, completely changed the entire concept of what is a worship service. We've adopted an approach that

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[1] James Hastings Nichols, Corporate Worship in the Reformed Tradition (), .

demands ridiculous levels of musical, technical and financial commitment and resources.

We have tied ourselves to the Christian music industry and its endless appetite for change and profit. We have accepted that all of our worship leaders are going to be very, very young people. Traditional worship - a la Tenth Presbyterian in Philly- is on the verge of becoming a museum piece.

The reformed- of all people- have led the way in this revolution. I attended a seminar last week where a room full of reformed were instructed in why the optimum worship leadership option was "the band." Not the choir, the worship team, etc. But "the band." Does anyone realize what that means for public worship?

Diversity, generational compatibility, even simplicity are all being blown up. Worship is now a major audience event, led by skilled entertainers, aimed at a demographic and judged by the audience reaction.

God? God has been moved around to be things like a reluctant Spirit we sing down with our songs or a divine innovator always blessing as much radical change as possible.

Why do I call this a goof? Because there is no way for this to end well. This is like a NASCAR car with the throttle stuck open. We're stuck on a roller coaster and we can't get off.

Worship has now become a musical term. Praise and worship means music. Let's worship means the band will play. We need to give more time to worship doesn't mean silent prayer or public scripture reading or any kind of participatory liturgy. It means music.

Even singing is getting lost in this. As the volume and the performance level goes up, who knows who is singing?

And who can stand for 20, 30 or 40 minutes?

We have a lot of happy people right now. They have no idea what Biblical worship is outside of the context of their favorite songs played by a kickin' band. They have little idea of worship in vocation, in family, in ordinary work or in silence. They credit their favorite songs as major spiritual events.

> We have goofed up. Simple, plain liturgy. Diversity and inclusion. Appreciation and full Biblical understanding. Cross generational intentionality and suspicion of the profit motive. Renouncing the spirit of competition. Hearing the prophetic warnings about God's disgust with much of Israel's "big show" worship culture. We need all of this.
>
> We need Jesus shaped worship, and we need worship that promotes a simple, direct, uncompromising Jesus shaped spirituality.

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Peter J. Leithart on the meaning of "mass" (this post does bring it out, but note the way this traditional terminology deeply links liturgy and mission; the church's gathering goes by the name 'sent' because even when we gather we do so as God's sent people):

> The name "Mass" comes from the final dismissal: Ite, missa est: Go, it is a dismissal. Jungmann explains: "it is puzzling indeed that, as a matter of fact, it has been designated by a separating, a going apart. Such, however, appears to be the case in regard to the word which both in Latin and in the modern languages of the West has practically supplanted all other names, the word missa, 'Mass.' For today there is no doubt at all as to the original and basic meaning of the word: missa = missio = dismissio. It meant, in late Latin, a dismissal, the breaking up or departure after an audience or public gathering."
>
> As Jungmann explains it, though, this is not a mere "prosaic announcement" that the Mass is at an end, but "a definite ecclesiastico-religious act, a dismissal in which the Church once more drew her children to herself with motherly affection before sending them on their way with her blessing." During the time of Hippolytus, the catechumens weren't simply sent out, but sent out with hand-laying, and Jungmann says that "thus it continued for centuries both in the Mass and outside." Thus missa is not merely a dismissal but "became a designation for the concluding blessing, and then for the blessing in general."
>
> The word could be used in both a narrow and wider sense: "In a sense the priestly praying was always a sort of missa, for it always drew down God's favor and blessing upon all who bowed down before Him in adoration; but especially was this true where Christ's Body and Blood

became present through the word of the priest. So the name missa was gradually appropriate to the Eucharist, not (for a long time) exclusively, but at least by preference." This attachment meant that even when there was no one to dismiss, the mass was the missa, the sending out of blessing.

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C. S. Lewis on liturgy:

> Novelty, simply as such, can have only an entertainment value. And they [conservative church goers, which he believes make up the majority] don't go to be entertained. They go to use the service, or if you prefer, to enact it.
>
> Every service is a structure of acts and words through which we receive a sacrament, or repent, or supplicate, or adore. And it enables us to do these things best...when, through familiarity, we don't have to think about it. As long as you notice, and have to count, the steps, you are not yet dancing but only learning to dance. A good shoe is a shoe you don't notice. Good reading becomes possible when you need not consciously think about eyes, or light, or print, or spelling. The perfect church service would be one we were almost unaware of; our attention would have been on God.
>
> But every novelty prevents this. It fixes our attention on the service itself; and thinking about worship is a different thing from worshipping.
>
> Novelty may fix our attention not even on the service but on the celebrant. You know what I mean. Try as one may to exclude the question, 'What on earth is he up to now?' will intrude. It lays one's devotion waste. There is really some excuse for the man who said, 'I wish they'd remember that the charge to Peter was Feed my sheep; not Try experiments on my rats, or even, Teach my performing dogs new tricks.
>
> Thus my whole liturgiological position really boils down to an entreaty for permanence and uniformity. I can make do with almost any kind of service whatever, if only it will stay put. But if each form is snatched away just when I am beginning to feel at home in it, then I can never make any progress in the art of worship. You give me no chance to acquire the trained habit...

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Frederica Matthews-Green writes:

> A little church on Sunday morning is a negligible thing. It may be the meekest, and least conspicuous, thing in America. Someone zipping between Baltimore's airport and beltway might pass this one, a little stone church drowsing like a hen at the corner of Maple and Camp Meade Road. At dawn all is silent, except for the click every thirty seconds as the oblivious traffic light rotates through its cycle. The building's bell tower out of proportion, too large and squat and short to match. Other than that, there's nothing much to catch the eye. In a few hours heaven will strike earth like lightning on this spot. The worshipers in this little building will be swept into a divine worship that proceeds eternally, grand with seraphim and incense and God enthroned, "high and lifted up, and his train filled the temple" (Isaiah 6:1). The foundations of that temple shake with the voice of angels calling "Holy" to each other, and we will be there, lifting fallible voices in the refrain, an outpost of eternity.
>
> If this is true, it is the most astonishing thing that will happen in our city today.

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Tom Wright:

> Worship means, literally, acknowledging the *worth* of something or someone. It means recognizing, and saying, that something or someone is *worthy* of praise. It means praising someone or something so far superior to oneself that all one can do is to recognize their worth and to celebrate it….
>
> *You become like what you worship.* When you gaze in awe, admiration and wonder at something or someone, you begin to take on something of the character of the object of your worship…What happens when you worship the creator God, whose plan to rescue the world and put it to rights has been accomplished by the Lamb who was slain?...because you were made in God's image, *worship makes you more truly human*…When you gaze in love and gratitude at the God in whose image you were made, you do indeed grow. You discover more of what it means to be fully alive...the chance, the invitation, the summons, is there before us, to come and worship the true God, the creator, the redeemer, and to become more

truly human by doing so. Worship is the very centre of all Christian living.

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Lesslie Newbigin on liturgy (especially good on preaching):

> Christian worship is a protection for those who take part in it against the false standards and convictions of the world….[When we are] drawn week by week into this act of adoration and self-giving to the living Lord who is revealed to us in Jesus Christ…[worship becomes] the most powerful possible antiseptic against the infection of worldiness…
>
> We have to preach Christ. That is really our only business in the pulpit. The reason why preaching has a central place in the life of the Christian Church is that the word of God to men is Jesus Christ, and he has to be put before men. He has be put before men again and again in his flesh, in the concrete reality of his manhood - his life, his words, his deeds, above all his death and resurrection….
>
> [This preaching] means that people go out from the church not merely comforted with the assurance that they are saved, and not merely crushed by the unbearable knowledge that they are sinners, but rather re-enlisted in Christ's army as fighters for the rule of God in this world. This means they are liberated from care about their own salvation in order to be totally at his service for the world's salvation….
>
> [Such preaching] springs out of action and leads into action…[The pastor must be] standing beside [the people] in their battles with the world and in their trials and problems…
>
> [B]ecause of the partial failure of the Reformation, Christians became accustomed to a kind of worship which was robbed of its central element - the breaking of bread and the sharing of the cup…In some places even the last vestiges of congregational participation were eliminated, and the preacher had to say Amen to his own prayers - the ultimate limit of morose sacerdotalism…
>
> {In reality,] Christian worship is the corporate act of the whole body, in which everybody right down to the last man standing at the back of the church has a part to play….

> [In true worship] it is not only the congregation present which is involved…[but it is also] the act of the whole universal Church in earth and in heaven…[Worship must therefore] reflect the catholicity of the whole Church…[and be] recognisable as the worship of the universal Church….true Christian worship is an offering on behalf of the whole of mankind…. [since] the Church as a whole is called to be God's holy priesthood for all of the human family

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Robert S. Rayburn:

> Part of the reason why so many Christian worship services have no logic, no order, no movement, is because those who superintend those services of worship have not paid attention to the Bible's main instruction in the formation of a worship service *because that instruction is found in the Old Testament*…. It is this disregard for the importance of what is done in the worship of God and the order or logic with which it is done that has led to the common pejorative use of the words "liturgy" and "liturgical" in many evangelical and even Reformed circles. This is a mistake in more ways than one. Every church service is a liturgy, if it has various elements in some arrangement. That is what liturgy is. Liturgical churches are churches that have *thought* about those elements and their proper order. Non-liturgical churches are those which have not. It is no compliment to say that a church is a non-liturgical church. It is the same thing as saying it is a church that gives little thought to how it worships God.

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Jeff Meyers:

> That we do in fact enter into God's *special* presence in the midst of his gathered congregation must never be slighted or forgotten. True, God is present everywhere. But his omnipresence is not what I am referring to here. God has promised to be present with his people in a special sense when they gather on Sunday.
>
> The one who skips church for the golf course or shopping mall or state park may not argue from God's omnipresence to justify his not being in church. Sure, God is present on the golf course, just as he is present in hell. But this general presence of God doesn't do the people in hell much good.

God is present in heaven and hell, but he is not present *in the same way* in each of these locations. That is the difference.

Even if we cannot define it precisely, God is present in a special sense when his people gather as the church on the Lord's Day. He is present there *for us*. This is the place, the location where he gathers his people around the Word and Sacraments. He has promised to be there *for us* when his people gather.

It is not so much that God was not present in, say, Damascus, when the pillar and fire led the people of Israel out of Egypt or when his presence filled the tabernacle upon its completion; rather, the Lord was at these appointed places in a special, life-giving way. Similarly, it is not that God is absent from the food court in the mall on Sunday; rather, he has promised to be present in a special way, the way of salvation and blessing, at the Communion Table in church. He has not promised to be in the mall on Sunday *for you*. Actually, he may be present there *against you* so that you could very well experience his judgment and curse, rather than his promise of blessing, life, and salvation.

Moreover, when we are in God's special presence every week, receiving from him his promise through his Word and Sacraments, we can go forth out of church into the world with the full assurance that God will be with us and for us wherever we may be during the week. Without being in the Lord's special presence we have no assurance of his omnipresent help in every situation and location. See Gen. 3:8; 4:16; Exod. 33:14-15; Deut. 4:37; Deut. 12:7, 18; 14:23; 15:20; Judges 18:6; 2 Kings 13:23; 17:18-23; Matt. 18:20; 1 Cor. 5:4; 11:18ff.; etc.

Again, Meyers:

Often the giving of praise or glorifying of God is set over against the worshiper's expectation of *receiving* anything from God in church…. Here let me say that not only is the super-spiritual-sounding assertion that "we just gather together to give praise to God, taking no interest in what we might get from him" unbiblical, it may also easily slip into doxological hubris.

For us, as *creatures* of God, there can be no such thing as "disinterested praise." We simply cannot love or praise God for who he is apart from what he has given us or what we continue to receive from him. We are not his equals. The notion that pure love and worship of God can only be given when it is unmixed with thoughts of what we receive has no biblical grounding. To be sure, it sounds very spiritual and pious. It even comes across as self-denial. In fact, however, there is no such worship in the Bible

for the simple fact that we cannot approach God as disinterested, self-sufficient beings. We are created beings. Dependent creatures. Beings who must continually *receive* both our life and redemption from God.

Our "worship" of God, for this reason, necessarily involves our passive reception of his gifts as well as our thanksgiving and petitions. We cannot pretend that we do not depend upon him. We will always be receivers and petitioners before God. Our receptive posture is as ineradicable as our nature as dependent creatures.

We must be served by him. Recognizing this is true spirituality. Opening oneself up to this is the first movement in our "worship," indeed, the presupposition of all corporate worship. It is faith's posture before our all-sufficient, beneficent Lord. Praise follows after this and alone can never be the exclusive purpose for our gathering together on the Lord's Day.

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From James Jordan's *The Sociology of the Church*:

The Bible taught the early church how to worship, but in the later Middle Ages, great corruptions set in. The Protestant Reformers were primarily interested in the restoration of worship, rightly perceiving it as the center of the Kingdom. After all, when God called Israel out of Egypt it was not first and foremost to establish a theocratic nation, but to engage in a third-day worship festival. Unfortunately, within a hundred years, the liturgical dreams of the Reformers were mostly in shambles. The Reformers wanted three things. First, they wanted a return to Biblical regulation of worship. Almost immediately, however, this concern was sidetracked by a minimalist approach. The rule, "we should do in worship only what is actually commanded in Scripture," was taken in an increasingly restrictive sense. The Reformers had realized that God's "commands" are found in Scripture in "precept, principle, and example." Their heirs tended to exchange this wholistic openness to the Word of God for a quest for "explicit commands." Instead of reading the Bible to see the patterns presented there for our imitation, there was an attempt to find the bare minimum of what is actually "commanded" in the New Testament. The book of Revelation, which shows how worship is conducted in heaven ("Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven"), was ignored. Anabaptist minimalism soon overwhelmed the Reformed churches.

Second, the Reformers wanted a return to Old Catholic forms, as they understood them. A reading of the liturgies they wrote shows this. Though all of the Reformers tended to over-react against anything that

reminded them of Italo-Papal imperial oppression, they were not so "anti-catholic" as to reject the early church. Soon, however, sectarian reaction against anything that "smacks of Rome" overwhelmed their concern.
Third, the Reformers wanted participation in worship from the whole priesthood of all believers. They wrote dialogue liturgies in which the people had many things to say and sing. They had their congregations singing, for instance, the creeds, the Ten Commandments, and the Lord's Prayer. Soon, however, the strength of the Medieval devotional tradition reasserted itself in the "low mass" tradition in which the people only sat and watched and listened, while the minister did everything. *This Medieval tradition was the essence of the Puritan view of worship*. In worship, the Puritans departed from the desires of the Protestant Reformers.
It is important to understand that although the Puritans did uphold the theology of the Reformers, they rejected the Reformers' views on worship at some crucial points. After the Puritan Revolution failed and Charles II came to the English throne, there was a conference at Savoy between Puritan Presbyterian churchmen and the newly restored Anglican bishops. It is very interesting to note what the Presbyterians proposed. They wanted "to omit 'the repetitions and responsals of the clerk and people, and the alternate reading of Psalms and Hymns, which cause a confused murmur in the congregation': 'the minister being appointed for the people in all Public Services appertaining to God; and the Holy Scriptures … intimating the people's part in public prayer to be only with silence and reverence to attend thereunto and to declare their consent in the close, by saying *Amen*.' In other words, no dialogue, no responsive readings, no congregational praying of the Lord's Prayer or any other prayer. The Anglican bishops replied that "alternate reading and repetitions and responsals are far better than a long tedious prayer." They also noted that "if the people may take part in Hopkins' why not David's psalms, or in a litany?" In other words, if it is all right to sing metrical paraphrases of the psalms, why is it wrong to read responsively the very words of Scripture?
Originally the Puritan movement had not been opposed to prayerbook worship, but in time the combination of state persecution with the continuing strength of the Medieval quietist tradition led the Puritans into wholehearted opposition to congregational participation in worship.

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Michael Scott Horton:

In many conservative Reformed and Presbyterian circles, it is as if the prescribed forms for Baptism and the Supper were too high in their sacramental theology, so the minister feels compelled to counter its strong "means of grace" emphasis. In this way, the Sacraments die the death of a thousand qualifications. The same is true when we read the biblical passages referring to Baptism as "the washing of regeneration" or to the Supper as "the communion of the body and blood of Christ." Why must we apologize for these passages and attempt to explain them away? Our confessions do not do this.

Our liturgical forms (if we still use them) do not do this, but we feel compelled to diminish them these days. We hear quasi-gnostic sentiments even in Reformed circles these days, such as the "real baptism" that is spiritual, as opposed to "merely being sprinkled with water," or the "real communion" with Christ in moments of private devotion. How can we truly affirm the union of earthly and heavenly realities in the Incarnation? Or how can we regard the Word of God as a means of salvation if it is but ink and paper or human speech? A subtle Docetism (the ancient gnostic heresy that denied Christ's true humanity) lurks behind our reticence to see these common earthly elements as signs that are linked to the things they signify. Surely the Sacraments can remind us of grace, help us to appreciate grace, and exhort us to walk in grace, but do they actually give us the grace promised in the Gospel? The Reformed and Presbyterian confessions answer "yes" without hesitation: A Sacrament not only consists of the signs (water, bread and wine), but of the things signified (new birth, forgiveness, life everlasting)….

We simply cannot say that we take a literal approach to the text while interpreting these clear passages as allegorical of a spiritual reality detached from the obvious reference to physical sacraments…..

Rather than sharply dividing between an external and internal covenant of grace, as some have done in American theology, Calvin simply concludes that infants "receive now some part of that grace which in a little while they shall enjoy to the full" (*Institutes* 4.16.19)….

In Baptism, we have been swept into the new creation and in the Supper we are actually fed with the body and blood of Christ as pilgrims on the way to the Promised Land, and yet, by promise already living there.

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Scott Hahn (a Roman Catholic scholar who happens to be a pretty good biblical theologian):

Some people, romantics at heart, like to think that early Christian worship was purely spontaneous and improvised. They like to imagine the first believers so overflowing with enthusiasm that praise and thanksgiving just overflowed into profound prayer as the Church gathered to break bread….

I beg the patience of my romantic friends as I say that order and routine are not necessarily bad things. In fact, they are indispensable to a good, godly, and peaceful life. Without schedules and routines, we could accomplish little in our workday. Without set phrases, what would our human relationships be? I've yet to meet parents who tire of hearing their children repeat that ancient phrase, "Thank you." I've yet to meet the spouse who's sick of hearing "I love you."

Faithfulness to our routines is a way of showing love. We don't just work, or thank, or offer affection when we really feel like it. Real loves are loves we live with constantly, and that constancy shows itself in routine.

Routines are not just good theory. They work in practice. Order makes life more peaceful, more efficient, and more effective. In fact the more routines we develop, the more effective we become. Routines free us from the need to ponder small details over and over again; routines let good habits take over, freeing the mind and heart to move onward and upward.

The rites of the Christian liturgy are the set phrases that have proven themselves over time: the thank-you of God's children, the I-love-you of Christ's spouse, the Church.

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Stanley Hauerwas:

One reason why we Christians argue so much about which hymn to sing, which liturgy to follow, which way to worship is that the commandments teach us to believe that bad liturgy eventually leads to bad ethics. You begin by singing some sappy, sentimental hymn, then you pray some pointless prayer, and the next thing you know you have murdered your best friend.

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From an interview with Garrison Keillor (not exactly a liturgical expert, but still insightful here):

> Having grown up in the Evangelical, sort of free-form fundamentalist church, I love the liturgical church where we say words together that are not my words and not your words. That really means a lot to me. I grew up listening to men stand up and invent prayers and the idea was that the Spirit was leading them, but in fact they were composing them in their heads and they were writing in a kind of faux King James style—big prayers and they were impressive, and they were seeking to impress, there is just is no other way around it.
>
> And in the name of Devotion they were doing these big set-piece prayers in which they were bringing in stories from Scripture and admonishing people—that's not prayer. But, when we kneel down and go through a list, and we begin with prayers for leaders of our country and for the nations of the world and then we come down to prayers for other churches and for bishops and priests, and then we come down to those who are in need and those who are sick and we think or we speak their names—to me this is prayer. This is prayer in which one throws oneself before God without a heroic pose.

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Peter Leithart:

> The life of Adam and Eve was … to be completely circumscribed by worship. On the first day, they were to appear before the Lord in the Garden to worship and commune with Him, to enter into His Sabbath rest. Empowered by God's blessing, they were to go about their royal tasks for six days, only to return at the end of the week to offer themselves and their works to the Lord for His evaluation and judgment and to be refreshed for another week of royal labor. The life of Adam and Eve displays human history in miniature. Human history began in the Garden with Adam and Eve worshiping God, and will end with the church gathered in a glorious temple-city. Worship is the alpha and the omega of human life and history.

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William Willimon:

> Christianity is a distinct culture with its own vocabulary, grammar, and practices. Too often, when we try to speak to our culture, we merely adopt the culture of the moment rather than present the gospel to the culture. Our time as preachers is better spent inculturating modern, late-twentieth-century Americans into that culture called church. When I walk into a class on introductory physics, I expect not to understand immediately most of the vocabulary, terminology, and concepts. Why should it be any different for modern Americans walking into a church?
>
> This is why the concept of "user-friendly churches" often leads to churches getting used. There is no way I can crank the gospel down to the level where any American can walk in off the street and know what it is all about within 15 minutes. One can't do that even with baseball!
>
> The other day, someone emerged from Duke Chapel after my sermon and said, "I have never heard anything like that before. Where on earth did you get that?"
>
> I replied, "Where on earth would you have heard this before? After all, this is a pagan, uninformed university environment. Where would you hear this? In the philosophy department? Watching Mr. Rogers's Neighborhood? No, to hear this, you've got to get dressed and come down here on a Sunday morning."
>
> It is a strange assumption for Americans to feel they already have the equipment necessary to comprehend the gospel without any modification of lifestyle, without any struggle â€" in short, without being born again. The point is not to speak to the culture. The point is to change it. God's appointed means of producing change is called "church"; and God's typical way of producing church is called "preaching."

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Thomas Howard's *Evangelical Is Not Enough: Worship of God in Liturgy and Sacrament*, on an aspect of the liturgy:

> The vicar would begin with a scriptural bidding, directing our attention to the Most High. So far all was smooth sailing for me. I was familiar with this approach. But then he would say, "The Lord be with you," and we would respond, "And with thy spirit." *What was this rote formula*? I wondered. It was an exchange that occurred again and again during the service. It seemed quaint at best and possibly gratuitous; the Lord is already with both of our spirits. Why this vocal wish for the obvious? What I did not know was that this was a formula that reaches back certainly to the beginnings of Christian worship and possibly further. It

> builds into the very structure of the act of worship itself the glorious antiphons of charity that ring back and forth in heaven and all across the cosmos, among all the creatures of God. It is charity, greeting the other and wishing that other one well. In its antiphonal ("responsive") character it echoes the very rhythms of heaven. Deep calls to deep. Day answers to night. Mountain calls to valley. One angel calls to another. Love greets love. The place of God's dwelling rings with these joyful antiphons of charity. Hell hates this. It can only hiss, *Out of my way, fool*. But heaven says, *The Lord be with you*. This is what was said to us in the Incarnation. This is what the Divine Love always says.
>
> In the act of worship we on earth begin to learn the script of heaven. The phraseology has very little to do with how we may be feeling at the moment. It does not spring from us spontaneously. We must learn to say it. It is unnatural for us, the way learning a polite greeting is unnatural for a child. But to the objection that we should leave the child to express himself in his own way we would all point out the obvious, that that sort of naturalness and spontaneity is a poor, poor thing and that the discipline of learning something *else* is both an enrichment and a liberation. Antiphony deepens the shallow pool of our personal resources and sets us free from the prison of our own meager capacity to respond adequately in a given situation. Rather than mumbling fitfully, we learn to say the formula, "How do you do?" or "The Lord be with you," and having learning it, we have stepped from solipsism into community. We have begun to take our appointed places among other selves.

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Calvin on the frequency of communion:

> All this mass of ceremonies being abandoned, the sacrament might be celebrated in the most becoming manner, if it were dispensed to the Church very frequently, at least once a week…. Thus we ought always to provide that no meeting of the Church is held without the word, prayer, the dispensation of the Supper, and alms.

Some have argued for less frequent communion in order to keep it "special." But communion is just Jesus. You can't make it more special by doing it less, or less special by doing it more. It is what it is. It's the body and blood every time – and we always need it. What we feel about it does not determine it's efficacy/meaning.

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Philip Lee from the excellent book *Against the Protestant Gnostics*:

> The eucharistic feast must be restored to its rightful place if the churches of the Reformation are to be reformed. The account given in the Acts of the Apostles makes it clear that teaching, preaching, prayer and the breaking of bread were from the beginning the essential elements of Christian worship. Indeed, the Church's teaching, preaching and praying culminate in the breaking of bread with Christ and all his people. "This is the joyful feast of the people of God" where and when the eyes of the faithful are opened and they recognize the Lord. Historically, the simple reenactment of the Last Supper and of the post-Easter meals of Christ and his disciples has been the central act of the Christian community.The irony of Protestant history is that although the sixteenth-century Reformers fought like tigers to restore the wine to the people, their descendents have now deprived the people of both bread and wine. The Protestant celebration, when it is on rare occasions held, has been spiritualized to the extent that it could scarcely be recognized as a meal at all. The purely symbolic wafer of the Roman celebration, which John Knox thundered against as a distortion of Christ's "common bread," has in most Protestant churches been replaced by minute, carefully diced pieces of bread unlike any other bread ever eaten by any culture. The common cup which the medieval Church withheld from the faithful is, except among the Anglicans, still the sole possession of the clergy. The unordained are now given thimble-like glasses filled with Welch's grape juice. The symbolism is quite clear. We all come before God individually; with our individual bits of bread and our individual cups of juice, we are not of one loaf and one chalice. Our relationship to Christ is private and personal. What may be even more significant is that by partaking of this unearthly meal with our unbreadly bread and our unwinely wine we are making a clear statement that the bread and wine of spiritual communion has no connection with earthly communion. It is an unmistakable gnostic witness against the significance of ordinary meals: common bread, wine, the table fellowship of laughter and tears….
>
> Frequent communion, of course, would call for a simple, less elaborate service than the unmeal-like ritual now practiced. The funereal procession of clergy and lay leaders passing the diminutive dishes to the solemnly sitting or kneeling communicants would probably have to be replaced by the crowded gathering of the faithful about the Holy Table for a breaking of the common loaf and the passing of a common cup. Those who argue

that the intimacy and the everyday quality of such a celebration would take away the sense of mystery simply do not understand the nature of drama and mystery. It was [French filmmaker] Jean Cocteau who said "vagueness is unsuitable to the fairy world … mystery exists only in precise things." Concreteness, the preciseness of home-baked bread and earthy red wine, in pottery plates and chalices, received with much chewing and swallowing, witnesses to the mystery of the Word made flesh. The present practice unwittingly undercuts the mystery and leaves us with the vague and unhelpful feeling that some undefined perfunctory act must be taking place.

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Gregory of Nazianzus, late 4th century, on worship and culture:

> What belonged to the theater was brought into the church, and what belonged to the church into the theater. The better Christian feelings were held up in comedies to the sneer of the multitude. Everything was so changed into light jesting, that earnestness was stripped of its worth by wit, and that which is holy became a subject for banter and scoffing in the refined conversation of worldly people. Yet worse was it that the unbridled delight of these men in dissipating enjoyments threatened to turn the church into a theater, and the preacher into a play actor. If he would please the multitude, he must adapt himself to their taste, and entertain them amusingly in the church. They demanded also in the preaching something that should please the ear; and they clapped with the same pleasure the comedian in the holy place and him on the stage. And alas there were found at that period too many preachers who preferred the applause of men to their souls' health.

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James Jordan:

> Worshipping in Spirit is not, contrary to a long tradition of error, worshipping with a proper heart attitude. The Spirit is the Breath of God and the Music of God (as well shall see). The Spirit provides the environment of worship, gathering the people together as the Divine Matchmaker bringing the Bride to the Groom. That environment of glory is seen in the Glory Cloud Chariot. It is an environment of great noise and music, which is duplicated in the Temple praise. The huge sound of this music, with its trumpets, massed strings, cymbals, and other instruments,

plus the voices of the Levites, flowed out over the mountains from the heights of Jerusalem. This is what worship in Spirit is.

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Thomas Chalmers:

> In bygone days when God's covenant people sought to strengthen their piety, to sharpen their effectual intercessions, and give passion to their supplications, they partook of the means of grace in all holiness with humble prayer and fasting. When intent upon seeking the Lord God's guidance in difficult after-times, they partook of the means of grace in all holiness with humble prayer and fasting. When they were wont to express grief—whether over the consequences of their own sins or the sins of others—they partook of the means of grace in all holiness with humble prayer and fasting. When they sought deliverance or protection in times of trouble, they partook of the means of grace in all holiness with humble prayer and fasting. When they desired to express repentance, covenant renewal, and a return to the fold of faith, they partook of the means of grace in all holiness with humble prayer and fasting. Such is the call upon all who would name the Name of Jesus. Such is the ordinary Christian life.

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David deSilva on the Nicene Creed:

> When we were baptized, we became part of the larger story of a community of faith, a story passed on in summary form in the Nicene Creed. This creed gives us our foundational story line, which in turn gives us our identity, our sense of direction and our orientation to the world - if we allow it! Like the confessionof sin, the creed uses*we* forms. It is an affirmation of our commitment to a story that we received from a community of faith that has struggled to live in line with this story across the millennia. Ours is not a private faith, nor is the story one that we are free to alter to suit our liking. Indeed, the Nicene Creed exists largely as a result of the church's working out the nonnegotiable contours of the story of God's interventions in God's world in response to some independent thinkers - who would come to be known as "heretics" - whose innovations were viewed as unhelpful tampering with that story. The early church leaders who wrestled with the formulation of the creed did so not only out of a desire to get the story and the characters straight. They also did so

out of a knowledge that the story we tell about God is the starting point for living out our lives before him and in line with him.

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Mark Galli:

Unfortunately, churches that perceive themselves as relevant often by their nature limit a full-bodied expression of the church—that is, they "target" 20- and maybe 30-somethings, and usually those of that group who are middle- and upper-middle-class white-collar types rising in income and influence. Few churches that consciously seek relevance want to clear the way to church for the poor, the homeless, welfare moms, drug-addicted men, or those trapped in nursing homes and convalescent hospitals. These "target audiences" are not very relevant to many "casual, contemporary" churches.

Liturgical churches know that as profound a reality as is the surrounding culture, there is an even more profound reality waiting to be discovered. This is one reason I thank God for the liturgy. The liturgy does not target any age or cultural subgroup. It does not even target this century. (It does not imagine, as we moderns and postmoderns are tempted to do, that this is the best of all possible ages, the most significant era of history.) Instead, the liturgy draws us into worship that transcends our time and place. Its earliest forms took shape in ancient Israel, and its subsequent development occurred in a variety of cultures and subcultures—Greco-Roman, North African, German, Frankish, Anglo-Saxon, and so on. It has been prayed meaningfully by bakers, housewives, tailors, teachers, philosophers, priests, monks, kings, and slaves. As such, it has not been shaped to meet a particular group's needs. It seeks only to enable people—people in general—to see God.

This may seem obvious—of course church is a place where we want people to see God! But we do get distracted. I was a pastor for ten years, an editor at a pastoral journal for four (at sister publication Leadership), and have been involved in leadership at my local church for 19 years. I can't tell you the number of times I've argued that the church have a "clear vision" or "passion for the lost" or "empowered laity" or "more spirituality" or "creative worship" and so on—all great things! How difficult it is to remember the fundamental need of our churches and the people who attend them: to see God.

Theologian and pastor Eugene Peterson talked about our desire for relevance in a CT interview a couple of years ago: "I don't think people

> care a whole lot about what kind of music you have or how you shape the service. They want a place where God is taken seriously, where they're taken seriously."

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Biblical liturgy is concerned not only with matters of structure and aesthetics, but also accessibility. Aesthetics is important because beauty and symbolism matter. Accessibility is important because the baptized constitute a royal priesthood and the entire body is called to offer a sacrifice to God together. Americanized Christians tend to want a liturgy/worship style suited to their particular subculture/demographic group, but the liturgy has to be "catholic," aimed at all of God's people, whatever their demographics.

All of this means worship must be child-friendly. After all, our children are members of the royal priesthood and must be included as well. I actually think classical Christian liturgy includes children more than any other type of worship. Because so much of it is "routine" each week, even pre-literate children can memorize it and participate.

But for this to happen there has to be a spirit of mutual cooperation on the part of parents and the rest of the church body. Keeping children in worship and training them to actually become worshippers takes effort and patience on the part of everyone involved.

Some thoughts on children in worship from Nancy Wilson:

> One of the things our church has sought to do is include the little ones in the service. We treat them as though they belong *with us*, because they do. We used to have a full-fledged Sunday school or children's church during the "adult" service way back when, but over the years it has fallen out of use. The parents wanted to keep the children with them rather than send them off to their own service. So we have many little ones of all ages, and they sit with us and participate at their own little level. From all I can tell, they love it. Now I know that some of you belong to communions with a different understanding of these things, and so I am just describing what we do here.

Now of course we have a couple of rooms available for parents (a mothers' room and a fathers' room) with piped-in sound, so parents can bail if they need to. Some parents go in and out quite a bit (especially with babies) while the kids are learning how to sit quietly. But we are used to a certain amount of childish noises, and we like it that way. They are a very important part of the covenant community, and we want them to join in with us. They learn to sing with us, they learn to speak with the congregation, to say their "amen" with us, to say the Apostles' Creed with us, many take the bread and wine with us, and they lift their hands during the Gloria Patri. We are their people, and they belong with us. They are not excluded from any part of the service.

My thirteen grandchildren are only a small fraction of the many children worshiping with us. At the end of the service a bunch of the grandkids go barreling up front to give their grandfather a big hug. Then they charge over to me for the candy. (Okay, so I'm the sugar nana.) Several other children have joined into this little liturgy, so I bring extras. There are many multi-generational families gathered together each week, and we are just beginning to see with our eyes the joy of God's covenant promises to our children's children.

It's quite an undertaking to teach the children to sit quietly through church, and I admire the parents who have patiently labored with their children on this: teaching, training, sometimes practicing at home, correcting, and rewarding. But eventually they get it, because I see two and three-year-olds sitting through the service. It's like everything else. You teach your children to sit at the table, to say "thank-you" and "please," to stay in their beds, and a host of other things. It is astounding how they can rise to the occasion, especially if it involves being with their parents.

Jesus told His disciples to let the little ones come to Him, and He blessed them. We are to imitate Him in this as in everything else. So we say, bring them all in. And if the service gets a little rowdy sometimes, then, good for us. Big families are like that.

More from Christopher Hall in *Touchstone* magazine (http://www.touchstonemag.com/archives/article.php?id=21-01-015-v):

Children's church seeks to reach children at a level cognitively and emotionally appropriate to their age, all the while allowing parents to be attentive to worship, but it does a disservice to the children, disconnecting them from the church gathered as the complete Body of Christ, sacramentally present, serving the Body of Christ with our Lord himself. It does a disservice to adults, too, subtly giving them the impression that church is like the evening news or a PG-rated musical: adult fare that requires some maturity.

We don't, and will never, offer children's church in the church I pastor, because the alternative—"adult church"?—is not just for adults. Worship is not simply a rational, intellectual exercise appealing to the hearing and understanding of adults. Nor is it a postmodern, emotional, narrative experience that, well, also appeals to adults.

It is an encounter with the Triune God, which does not depend upon our own mental faculties (or lack thereof) or upon our emotional backgrounds, baggage, or preferences. The Word of God works, despite our sin, despite our cognitive [in]ability, despite our age and experience.

The church fathers called worship "reasonable" or "rational," contrasting it with pagan worship, especially the mystery cults and the ecstatic worship of the gods. Irrational worship did not involve the intellect, but the basest appetites and impulses. Irrational worship was the entire giving of oneself over to the manipulation and influence of the gods, a losing of one's self and awareness in the emotional experiences of the moment.

Rational worship is sober, engaging the senses in the worship of the divine, but also—especially—engaging the mind as well. It controls emotion, submitting it to the God of order: "For God is not the author of confusion but of peace, as in all the churches of the saints" (1 Cor. 14:33).

Yet worship is not only the engaging of the rational faculties. Worship is the peaceful and ordered encounter with the revealed Triune God, who through his Word speaks not just to the mind but to the entire person, to the spirit.

The Word is "living and active" (Heb. 4:12). It lives and makes alive. We are formed by these words (and the signs that express them) because God is at work in them, because God creates faith by the Word: "Consequently, faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word of Christ" (Rom. 10:17).

This message, this "word of Christ" we believe, is not only a rational word of a human language, but the divine Word, the *logos* of John 1, the Word which does not return to God without accomplishing its purpose. "So shall my word be that goes forth from my mouth; It shall not return to me

void, But it shall accomplish what I please, And it shall prosper *in the thing* for which I sent it" (Is. 55:11).

I've seen only a few pre-kindergarteners singing the liturgy, at least not without skipping, swaying, or twirling. I've only heard a few lower elementary kids comment on a particular sermon. But they have ears. They have received the Holy Spirit, for God is at work in them, even if they do not understand intellectually. "Let the children come to me and do not hinder them," Jesus said. Jesus is there in those means of grace.

But I take this even further. We have a nursery for use during worship, and though my children are stuck there while I preside and my wife plays the organ, I wish my children were the only ones in it. Babies will never actively listen to a sermon, and even if they are happy and they know it, cannot clap their hands in children's church, but I want even the littlest of babes to be right there in the sanctuary, lying in his mother's arms as she tries to sing the "Alleluia" before the Gospel reading.

I want them there because they have faith, though it sounds strange to say it. Babies can trust; they know if they cry, their mommas will pick them up and they will be fed and loved and kissed. It is only a small step from trusting the father who will come running at their cries to trusting the Heavenly Father who gives us all we need and have.

God is no respecter of persons. Babies are welcome in my sanctuary even as they are welcome in Jesus' arms. He loves them. It's that simple.

A congregation my wife once attended was embroiled in a heated debate over whether to cover the tile floors with carpet. Several members were complaining about the loud clicking that the women's shoes made as they went to the altar to receive Communion, thinking it too distracting.

The pastor agreed that it was noisy. But it was a beautiful noise, he continued. It was the sound of people going to receive the gift of eternal life given in the body and blood of Christ and returning from an encounter with the risen Lord.

Likewise, the shrieks of a toddler, the clunk of toys hitting the floor, the incessant scratching of pencils coloring in the bulletins—these are the beautiful noises of a family, of the Body of Christ. All of us who have been mystically united with Christ are given faith, the gift of the Spirit, the active, powerful Word.

God serves us with his supernatural gifts, and they do not depend on our age, intelligence, or capacities. God does not show favoritism toward those who can speak or those who are developed enough to pay attention for fifteen-minute or fifty-minute sermons. For we all enter the Body,

becoming members of the Body the same way: through the gracious action of our God, despite our works, our abilities, and our sins.

Though members of the Body of Christ may appear weak, or useless for an age—after all, what's the use of an infant during the sermon?—each member has a role, a place. "For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and all were made to drink of one Spirit. For the body does not consist of one member but of many" (1 Cor. 12:12–14).

These many members of the Body of Christ are uniquely gathered at Sunday worship, and children's church and nurseries remove the children from the Body at the precise place and time the Body gathers as the Body. Do we want children's church to rupture that union at the one place during the week, or even in this world, where the Body is brought together?

Families who tragically lose a member, especially a child, sometimes acknowledge this loss of presence by keeping their loved one's bedrooms intact, by setting an empty place at the table. These things are memorials to them, signs that the family has been shattered and pieces are missing. Such a feeling of loss ought to permeate our congregations when the children are shuttled out of the worshiping congregation.

Sure, they may be in a "better place," yet their rightful place is within the Body, within the whole gathered together. God has given the kingdom of heaven to such as these.

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Robert Zagore's article, "The Liturgy Serves Us Until Our Dying Breath":

> When I was in my second year at seminary, a couple of friends asked me if I would help start an overnight chaplaincy program at a local inner city hospital. I thought of it as a great opportunity for mission work. The 11 p.m. to 7 a.m. hours would guarantee time to study, even sleep. I just had to be on site. The nurses would call if there was a crisis. I'd run in, proclaim God's Word, and allow the healing balm of the Gospel to bring relief -- or so I thought.
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> My vision of meaningful, humorous, reasoned, dialogues with the distressed and dying was soon demolished. On my first night I received a

call: "Code Blue". I ran down to the proper hospital wing and looked for the room. The bustle told me which it was. I stood in the doorway. The doctors and nurses worked furiously to revive an elderly man. I had decided to stand in the door, but a nurse grabbed me by the arm and moved me to the head of the bed. "We've been waiting for you," she announced.

I was speechless and overwhelmed. The sights and sounds flooded my senses. I had never seen someone dying before. I searched my brain for an appropriate response. I placed my hand on the man's head, and said the only words which would come into my mind, "Our Father, who art in heaven..." As I spoke, I noticed others were praying too. As the "Amen" rang out, I continued the pattern I learned from praying the "suffrages" in church. "I believe in God, the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth...." Around the room, lips moved in unison. Only the occasional doctor's order broke the liturgy of the unscheduled evening prayer. The room was no longer the valley of the shadow of death. It was the gate of heaven, through which, that night, a righteous man passed. "You did a nice job, thanks," someone said. At the time, I wasn't sure what I had done.

Time passed, and my experience grew. I began to learn the importance of the Church's prayer. Before, I thought of it as a Lutheran family heirloom. The liturgy seemed to be like grandmother's china. It was set out for family gatherings and special occasions. It wasn't for everyday use. Besides, it was so old; no one except the family could appreciate its beauty.

I was wrong. During those months of overnight chaplaincy, I would often be called to attend those who were in shock, unconscious, near death, critically injured. I was called in to speak to families during devastating trials. The work was always easier if they knew the liturgy -- and surprisingly many did. For some, the words were only the vague shadows from a childhood ritual. But they still were true. With others, I saw the time-ripened fruit of an ongoing relationship with God. I didn't have to teach them the words. They didn't have to struggle through their tears to understand. They knew the words, and the words brought hope. Christ crashed through their darkness and pain. They weren't alone.

In the emergency room one night, a nurse watched as a family gathered around their stricken father. I had learned to ask if they went to Church and where. With the answer, I knew how to proceed. "In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit." "Amen," "Lord have mercy..." "Our Father...." Christ was there in the words they had spoken with Him since childhood. The Church was there, as they spoke the same words they learned in the pew. I told the nurse what it meant. "I thought the room seemed crowded." she said, smiling. She was in Church the next Sunday, joining her prayer to theirs.

The scene was always much different with unbelievers. False hopes and worldly goals are little comfort when facing death or grave trauma. God's Word still brought hope, even created faith. But a deathbed is a hard place to teach the faith. It is much better learned day by day, week by week. In this way, the words of the liturgy make incremental deposits in our hearts and minds from which the fruits of hope are drawn in times of trial. The structure and timeless nature of the Church's worship calls order out of the chaos of a crisis. It perfectly provides pastoral care at the end of life, because the peace and hope it gives have been accruing for a lifetime. It is familiar, easily recalled, and theologically solid. The words revive a thousand moments in the presence of a merciful and loving Father, and bring us there again.

In the parish, I have found that this same truth holds. I have been the pastor of an Alzheimer's patient who struggled to remember even her daughter's name. But she could speak every word of the Divine Service. I witnessed her blessed relief as hope, faith, and peace-giving words broke through the hellish torment of a languishing mind. Christ had come to her. I was a gift from my predecessors. Because they had taught her the liturgy, she had the words to greet her God. When parishes cultivate a liturgical life, they arm their sons and daughters with words ingrained with the Gospel. They implant a resolute and joyous hope. Reinforced over a lifetime, they are unshakable, even by death.

Recently, a dear saint died. For thirty years she faithfully took her place behind the organ week after week. In her last decade, she couldn't leave her living room chair. During visits she recalled the Church with the coal-fired stove, and a foot-pumped organ, that graced the German settlement. The prayers and litany we spoke, and sometimes sang, she had learned as a girl. We prayed them through continued illness. We spoke them through

> tears when her only son was murdered. When I last saw her, she was in the hospital bed she would not leave alive. The last words I spoke to her were 3400 years older than she. Through three and a half millennia, these words had given what they promised. For nearly a century, they were the words with which her pastors had blessed her. "The Lord bless you and keep you. The Lord make his face shine on you and be gracious to you. The Lord lift up his countenance upon you and give you peace."
>
> She knew He would. The last word I heard her say, I overheard her say to God: "Amen".

This article is why I say that liturgy is the best cradle-to-grave pastoral care a church can provide for her members.

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Mark Earey:

> Corporate worship should engage, in a representative way, with things that matter in our daily lives: hospitality, listening to God, community, sharing the good news, serving our neighbour. This connection is not simply one-way (with worship reflecting life); nor is it an empty symbol. Because it is engagement with the living God, corporate worship, with its symbolic and representative nature, has the potential and the power to be formative; it can shape our lives in Christ and our understanding (including our unspoken assumptions) about God…At the heart of liturgy is an understanding of public worship that goes beyond the personal encounter with God (without denying it) to the corporate drama of being the people of God…. Liturgy is the rehearsal - the many rehearsals - for the part we are called to take both in the world now and in eternity with God. We each have a part to play in God's work in the world, and liturgy reflects this, but our personal engagement with God at an individual level finds its proper place within the 'duty and joy' of the corporate event.

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Jeff Meyers describes what it means to worship in Spirit and in truth, per Jn. 4:24 (http://jeffreyjmeyers.blogspot.com/search?q=worship+spirit+truth):

> A New-Testament-only approach to the regulative principle invariably ends up advocating an overly inward, rationalistic approach to worship.

The inward, spiritual, non-material movement of the mind is more important that the movement of the body (tongue or knees or hands) in worship. So anything material detracts from the true "spiritual" worship of the New Testament.

Here's an illustration of this: A long time ago in a church far, far away a seminary professor of mine, after participating in worship at our church, commented to me about how much he appreciated the times of silence in the service. "That was true spiritual worship!" he said. Now, I think times of silence in the worship service are fine, but they are definitely not more "spiritual" than when the congregation is belting out a vigorous hymn or Psalm. In the Bible the adjective "spiritual" means "of the Holy Spirit," not something non-material or inward or mental as opposed to the material, physical, and outward.

This "spiritualizing" of the regulative principle of worship is the fourth distortion to analyze. It is often justified by a misreading of Jesus' discussion with the Samaritan woman in John 4. Jesus' assertion in John 4:24 is often lifted from its context and dangerously misconstrued to function as a warning against all "outward" and "external" liturgical worship. A more literal translation, however, will help us understand what Jesus means by worshiping in "Spirit and truth":
The [Samaritan] woman said to him, "Sir, I perceive that you are a prophet. Our father's bowed down [proskuneo] on this mountain, but you say that in Jerusalem is the place where people ought to bow down." Jesus said to her, "Woman, believe me, the hour is coming when neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem will your people bow down to the Father. Your people bow down to what you do not know; we bow down to the one we know, for salvation is from the Jews. But the hour is coming and is now here, when true worshipers will bow down to the Father in Spirit and truth, for the Father is seeking such people to bow down to him. God is Spirit, and those who bow down to him must bow down in Spirit and truth." (John 4:19-24).
Jesus is not saying that God is non-material, so therefore his worshippers must unite with him by means of their spirits or souls. He is not disparaging the body in worship or advocating some sort of "immaterial" worship, whatever that might be.

The NIV study Bible is quite wrong in its explanatory note: "The place of worship is irrelevant, because true worship must be in keeping with God's

nature, which is spirit." Jesus is not redirecting genuine worship to inward, sincere worship. This follows from two considerations: 1) the meaning of the word proskuneo, often translated "to worship," and 2) the redemptive-historical context of Jesus' remarks.

First, the Greek verb proskuneo (used 9 times in 6 verses in John 4:20-26) means "to bow down," "to kneel," or "prostrate oneself." Even though my translation of this passage is awkward, I have tried to bring out the ritual dimensions of the conversation by consistently translating proskuneo as "bow down." One must remember the very concrete meaning of proskuneo in the ancient world. Doing "obeisance" means bending your body and placing yourself "under" another. When you proskuneo-ed before someone, you bowed down in their presence, even at their feet.

The English word "worship," especially as it is used in modern times, is not a very helpful translation. One of the problems with our word "worship" is that it now refers to all sorts of activities, both physical and mental. In fact, a recent fad is to stress that all of life is "worship" and that genuine worship is mental and happens every day and all through the day in our minds and hearts. In some sense this is true, but only in a very loose sense. When used in this sense "worship" denotes a mental disposition.

But this is not the sense in which this word proskuneo or "bowing down" is ordinarily used in the Scriptures. If you want to say that all of life is "bowing down," that is fine; but this can only be so in a very abstract or metaphorical way. If you are working hard on a painting job, for example, you may, indeed you should mentally give thanks and praise to God while you do so, but . . . you are not bowing down at that time with others in a congregation to offer praise and thanksgiving to God.

The woman and Jesus are not talking about this kind of mental attitude. Jesus is addressing the question of where one should bow down to the Father. It's all about the proper location. Jesus is talking about the ritual act of bowing down or kneeling before God in order to honor him and express one's proper devotion.

The Samaritan woman asks, in effect, "Where is the place, the location, where we should bow down to God?" We will see how Jesus answers that question in a moment, but for now simply attend to the kind of devotion

in question. The activity in view here is what we might call “special” as opposed to “general” devotion. It is special in the sense that it happens at a known location and it involves the people of God in acts of embodied ritual devotion before God. Furthermore, the bowing down in question has to do with corporate or public worship, not private worship.

Bowing down, then, is a kind of synecdoche for everything the people of God do when they gather together in corporate worship. It simply has to be this. Everyone, both Jews and Samaritans knew that one could pray and praise and petition God, one could even get down on one’s knees anytime or place. Individual bowing down was never restricted to the Temple or Jerusalem or in Samaria, to Mt. Gerizim. Individual, private, mental worship had no restrictions in the Old Covenant.

Please, pay careful attention to this point. The big point being made by Jesus in this passage cannot be that now in the New Testament individuals can individually bow down, pray to, or mentally worship God wherever they want. That had always been the case. The controversy here is about where the people of Samaria should gather to bow down in special corporate worship. All special, corporate worship in the Bible is external and bodily and involves the biblical ritual (among others) of kneeling or bowing down.

So what did Jesus mean when he said that the time is coming when people would "bow down in Spirit and truth"?

Jesus’ words—“worship in Spirit and truth”—must be understood according to the context of Jesus’ discussion with the Samaritan woman. She had asked where the proper place of worship should be—Mt. Gerizim in Samaria or Mt. Zion in Jerusalem? Jesus responds with a prophetic statement, an utterance about something that will soon be in effect. At the time Jesus spoke to the woman, Jerusalem was the place where God had placed his Name. The Spirit descended in glory upon the tabernacle and temple. If you wanted to be faithful to the truth and enter into the environment of the Spirit, you went to Jerusalem with the people of God. In contrast to this, the Samaritans worshipped in ignorance. They bowed down as a people in the wrong place. There was no guarantee of the Spirit’s presence on Mt. Gerizim. Jesus makes this clear. They were wrong to worship God on the mountain of their own choice.

But a time was coming—indeed, it was being inaugurated in Jesus' own ministry—when bowing down "faithfully" and "in the Spirit" could be done by God's people anywhere, not merely in Jerusalem. The post-Pentecost situation would radically decentralize corporate worship. Not individual worship. That had always been decentralized. The big change now would be that longer would worshipers gather together only at Jerusalem, but now the Spirit would be present wherever the church assembled in the Name of Jesus. That's what this passage is all about.

Today most commentators agree that in proclaiming worship "in Spirit and truth," Jesus was not contrasting external worship with internal worship. His statement has nothing to do with worshiping God in the inner resources of one's own spirit. The Spirit Jesus speaks of in this passage is the Spirit of God, not the spirit of man, as vs. 24 makes clear . . . . Jesus is speaking of the eschatological replacement of temporal institutions like the Temple, resuming the theme of 2:13-22. In 2:21 it was Jesus himself who was to take the place of the Temple, and here it is the Spirit given by Jesus that is to animate the worship that replaces worship at the Temple.

In John 4:24, therefore, Jesus is not emphasizing the importance of one's inner emotional experience. Jesus is not saying if you want to have genuine worship you must participate with your innermost spirit. If that was what Jesus was saying, then there would be nothing new about such an admonition. It was true in the Old Testament. If worship "in spirit" only meant that individuals should worship sincerely, honestly, with one's heart and soul, such an assertion could not have answered the Samaritan woman's question.

"Spirit" is not a description of God's non-material nature. We should not read this like this: God is a spirit. That is, God is in the category of what we call "spiritual, immaterial beings." That is not John's concern. The "S" should be capitalized. God is Spirit. This is not a statement about the "nature" of God, but of the way in which God is present to human beings, his dynamic relations with humanity. The Father gives the Spirit (John 14:1) and the Holy Spirit is the medium of his personal relations to us.

Compare this with 1 John 1:5 ("God is light") and 1 John 4:8 ("God is love"). These statements do not describe God's "nature," but his relational being. To say that "God is Spirit" in the context of a discussion about the

place where one should bow down means that God will be properly worshiped wherever his Spirit is. We must be “in the Spirit” if we are to be in God’s presence, the place where he is. This is similar to Jesus saying that one must be “born from above” and “born of water and Spirit” (John 3:3-8). The Spirit connects us with heaven, with the Father.

So if you want to worship the Father, you will be where the Spirit of truth is. Once again, I am not denying we can worship individually anywhere and anytime, and by the Spirit. That was true in Old Testament times as well. But there is a more specific sense of "in Spirit," which is in the community of believers gathered at a specific place for special worship. The context makes it clear that Jesus is speaking in this specific sense. It's as if the woman asked, "Where is the Spirit present so that we can be sure to be worshiping God in the right place? Is the Spirit in Jerusalem or on Mt. Gerizim?"

In the context of the Old Testament “bowing down in Spirit” meant gathering with the people of God for corporate, sacrificial worship wherever the tabernacle was pitched or at the site of the temple in Jerusalem. But not any more. The Spirit that descended and filled the old tabernacle and temple is the same Spirit that descended and remained upon Jesus, the true and final Temple.

In the new world, the place where God and man are united is in the flesh of Jesus. He is the new Temple (John 2:19-22). Jesus will ascend to heaven shortly after his discussion with the Samaritan woman, and he promised to send the Spirit to indwell and empower his body, the church (John 14-16; Acts 1:8; 2:1-4). When the church gathers, the Spirit is there. Where the Spirit gathers the church, there is Christ. She is the temple of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor. 3:16; Eph. 2:21). And so worship to the Father occurs through Jesus and in the Spirit where the earthly temple of living stones is gathered (1 Pet. 2:5). Thus, in the New Testament, people who worship “in Spirit and truth’ will gather with the Body of Christ to participate in Spiritual worship of the Father (1 Cor. 12:12-14).

Some have even used Jesus’ statement to argue that he was condemning all kinds of external and material worship—rituals, corporeal objects, and the rest. That doesn't work. No way. Jesus is not speaking here about individual, in-your-thoughts worship. But about people and what they do. The Samaritan woman asked where one should “bow down,” that is,

where is the proper place to bow down before God and experience his Spirit.

In the New Covenant God has not suddenly become available only to individuals who turn inward or seek some immaterial/spiritual means of communion. Nor has he become a "vagabond God" (Luther's phrase), wandering here and there apart from any place. Rather just as God limited and bound himself to specified places and times and people in the Old Testament, so also in the New. This has not changed in the New Testament. We have not become disembodied spirit beings! We have no independent, immaterial access to God in the New Covenant. What we have is a different set of physical means appropriate to the change made in the resurrection and ascension of Jesus.

In the Old Covenant the place of corporate worship was one place and people—the tabernacle, the temple, the ark of the covenant, the altar, and the physical rituals of sacrifice that were performed at these centralized sites. We Christians, however, unlike the believers in the Old Testament, are no longer bound to one geographical location, to one physical temple at the center of the world. We no longer go to one nation that has been given the ministry of priestly intercession and ministry. The Spirit no longer binds himself to one location or one people. This is evident even in this passage. The living water that the woman receives (i.e., the Holy Spirit) wells up in her such that when her fellow towns people hear her witness, they too receive the living-water Spirit and believe (John 4:28-30, 39-42). And they are nowhere near Jerusalem!

What Jerusalem and the Jews were to the Old Testament—the place and ministers by which God met with men and women—Christ and his Body, the Church, are today. Jesus' humanity is the place to which God summons us. Christ alone is the new sanctuary, the mercy seat, and the high priest through whom we must draw near to God. And Christ has given the Spirit to fill his Body, the Church, on earth so that she might be the place where humanity finds God. She is the New Jerusalem. If we wish to worship God in Spirit and truth, we will seek God among his people, where the Word is audibly read and preached, where the physical sacraments are given and received. He still embodies his presence by the Spirit, but it is no longer a centralized, geographically limited embodiment.

The Spirit is given by Jesus (as John 14-17 will make clear). He is the proper environment of worship. And the Spirit brings men and women together in various places by the Spirit in order that they might worship God through the Messiah. In union with the humanity of Jesus, we have access to the Father through the Spirit. We bow before God in Christ in the environment of the Spirit. Luther reminds us that the ministry of the Holy Spirit "is thoroughly external and completely available to our sense . . . we see and hear the Holy Spirit in the dove, in tongues of fire, in baptism, and in a human voice." Paul Althaus summarizes it well:

"Christ is present to us in very earthly ways. Everywhere in the history of revelation God embodies himself for us. His Spirit came in the form of a dove and the fiery tongues of Pentecost. And God still embodies himself for us. The Holy Spirit comes to us and brings Christ to us through the external, physical, sensible means of the word, of the human voice, and of the sacraments.

God meets with us at trysting places (Luther's evocative terminology). Where the people of God are gathered as the Church and there is baptism, the Lord's Supper, and the word of God on the lips of his ministers and all his believers—that is where God is. That is where we bow down in Spirit and truth.

Conclusion

I reject all four of the deformations of the Reformed regulative principle of worship. Much better is A. A. Hodge's simple comments on the Westminster Confession of Faith 21.1. According to Hodge, this section teaches,

"That God in his Word has prescribed for us how we may worship him acceptably; and that it is an offense to him and a sin in us either to neglect to worship and serve him in the way prescribed, or to attempt to serve him in any way not prescribed."

This is a very productive summary of the regulative principle. It avoids the dangers of an unworkable, overly strict formulation (like "whatever is not commanded is forbidden."). It does not, of course, answer all of our questions in advance. We must still do the hard work of biblical exegesis to determine precisely how God regulates worship. We can be confident, however, that God has prescribed for us in his Word how we may worship him acceptably. This authoritative prescription comes by way of command, principle, and example from both the Old and New Testaments.