

Worship Aimed at the Heart

By Burt Burleson

This presentation follows Doyle Young's presentation on a "Sacred Anthropology," which will have looked at the more ancient understanding of a human being and the multi-dimensional nature of the inner life. In that talk Doyle explained that Spiritual realities are known at the level of the "heart." Not our emotional center as we sometimes use the word but in that part of us that is designed to mediate between the material realm and the spiritual realm. The New Testament often refers to this as the "mind" or the "nous" or the "soul." It's also called the "heart." At DaySpring worship is aimed at the heart. It is not aimed at the emotions... nor is it aimed at the intellect.

Introduction

It's important as we talk about how we worship at DaySpring to remember that anytime we have an encounter with Spirit, it's in this inner heart. Remember John 4, Jesus and the Woman are talking and she starts to talk about where to worship and who's doing it right and Jesus says, **"worship happens in Spirit and in truth."**

When God's Spirit... the Spirit... permeates our being and our existence, worship happens.

That may happen in high and holy Episcopalian service...

In a Cowboy Church...

In something Pentecostal or something Quaker.

So... by describing what we do, we don't mean to do so in comparison or judgment and certainly not with pats on the back for having discovered the "true way," but simply in trying to understand worship and what our part needs to be here in this place and time.

We simply want to understand whatever it is of this mystery we can understand.

I. IT'S NOT ABOUT FORM... It really is about heart.

I do need to begin there and make sure we understand that "worship aimed at the heart" is not a matter of finding the right form, the right activities and putting them together in some clever way. We're going to talk about form and forms but that's not central to what enables worship to engage the heart.

Here's what I think is, however, and I want us to think first in terms of dispositions that are important.

1. Stepping aside – Like Moses who sees something sacred and turns away from what he is doing... what he does day in and day out... worship that engages our inner being requires this of us.

This isn't business as usual. We stop what we're doing... what is normal and we do something that is not normal. And there must be a willingness to do that... where you take off your shoes because you are on holy ground and have intentionally entered a different kind of place... and time.

In the Benedictine Monasteries they stop for prayer 7 times a day. They're busy... planting some crop or making something or cleaning something... ministering in some way... and they stop when they hear the bell. They put down what they're doing and go to pray.

And the very act of turning aside is a way of saying to the self... **“I am more than this shovel. I'm more than what I do. And my doing will be here when I return and the world won't have fallen apart.”**

The more conscious we are of this as a community... of turning aside intentionally in order to enter something different... the more likely our hearts will be engaged.

2. Expectancy - When you do turn aside and you drive here and you walk in, do you believe God will meet you here? Do you expect to have an encounter with Spirit.

Consciousness changes things. Your attitudes, expectations, predispositions, have a great deal to do with what actually happens in life. Expect folks to let you down, they will. Expect your day to be a downer, it probably will be. Expect nothing when you drive down Renewal Way... nothing is liable to happen.

3. Presence – If you've pulled aside with expectancy, then being here and being present is a possibility. But it's also possible, you're thinking about the roast, or about the fight you had with your spouse over who would get the baby ready. Or you might be organizing your week... preparing for a meeting. Or just letting your passive imagination run free... thinking about this then that... and before long you aren't here... you're back in high school thinking about that time in Algebra when you got in trouble.

And... you're talking with folks but not really with them.

Singing... but not conscious of the truth's expressed.

Unaware of what's taking place inside.

God is present but you aren't. We don't tend to think here in terms of "Invoking" God's presence. God is always present. It's our presence... our attention that is often lacking.

4. Spiritual Depth and Relational Health – Vertical and Horizontal maturity. Simply put... the some of us have to be awake and alive and in the right place.

There must be folks who are spiritually in tune... like tuning in an old car radio. A frequency that only the inner heart can hear. These people become conduits of Spirit. The aperture is wide and Spirit floods through.

In addition to that spiritual health and maturity, we need to remember that what is taking place in the room is impacted by what is beyond it. Jesus says, **"If your brother has something against you, leave your gift at the altar and go to him."**

Grudges... broken relationships... anger... resentment... if that is in the room, in our fellowship, worship will be impacted by it.

When Jesus went home to Nazareth, the gospel writer says, **"He couldn't do any miracles there."** He couldn't because of what was in the peoples' hearts and relationships.

II. IT'S STILL NOT ABOUT THE FORM YET – It's really about what we value.

1. Discontinuity – Worship is not the world... it's not normal. It should feel different in here than it does out there. If we've been intentional about coming away, then what this place and time feels like and looks like, ought to be different.

2. Unhurried, uncluttered, simple – Less is more. We aren't in a race. This isn't a production.

3. Contained – It is form that intensifies spirit. Certain things can dissipate Spirit... formlessness dissipates Spirit.

4. Familiarity and Creativity - The heart needs ritual and the heart needs surprise.

5. Community – Worship is not an act of isolation. We have to pay attention to one another.

6. Human – It must be honest and real.

III. Forms and Elements

Having affirmed that worship is about intent... spirit... and values, we can now talk about how that looks at DaySpring on a Sunday morning. Understanding that forms are not ultimate, let's talk about our forms.

Remember, we're trying to engage people at a level that is beyond rational thinking or sentimentality. This is the level of the heart. Now, while DaySpring's worship may in fact manifest in emotional expression in the room, and often it does... this is not the aim. It's also a place that can be intellectually stimulating and challenging. People learn and are formed spiritually as they worship but again, this is not the aim. The aim is for worshippers to enter the spiritual realm... to encounter God.

So worship is prepared and led and done to that end. How do we bypass the mind and the emotions? How do we aim worship at the heart. One way to consider this question is to simply be aware of what we see, hear, and say and what we don't see, hear, and say in the context an hour of worship.

What is it we see? Windows... light, life, plants, trees, we're invited to see beyond. We see high ceilings, we look up. There is stone and hard floors, we trust. We see symbols... a cross, a table, a pulpit... color, cloth, candles, we're drawn into a story. We see openness... white space in the worship guide, there is room to be. We see art and imagine. We see people, people we know and love, moving up to the pulpit, we're invited to express.

All of this is designed to by-pass the "thinking-mind" and make a beeline to the inner heart. Much of it is bodily. Without thinking one rational thought, the heart has been engaged.

We should mention what has not been seen as well. Flags, clocks, technology, media, a choir loft, ministers in chairs, clutter, posters and ads for church life. All this, we believe, might derail the movement to the heart.

What do you hear? ... Bells chiming the hour, we're awakened, drawn. Voices, various voices from the congregation, each unique. We hear the voice of The Congregation reading something together, one voice, unity. You hear own voice, the sound of you, your tone. There is simple music, settling us. Children. Laughter... silence.

What do you not hear? You do not hear complex sounds. An overwhelming organ. Music during transitions.

What is said and how is it said? We say what is familiar... the Lord is with you, the peace of Christ be with you. We use the language of Scripture, poetry, lyric, and litany. We're asked to say it and we say it. We

use narrative, story. All of this helps us not to get stuck in the rational. Thinking and feeling are not the first aim.

So, we don't use a lot of subjective, prosy talk. Nor do we have a lot of wasted words... or chatty, casual talk. We don't do proposition and argument in the sermon or at least not primarily. The sermons are not long.

Certainly, there are parts of a service that are intended to connect with other parts of who we are. We might read a creed for instance, challenging us to think doctrinally. Or we might hear an offertory from an old hymn that tugs at our emotions. This is okay and right. However, these are not the real shaping influences of worship at DaySpring. The real organizing principle is to aim worship at the heart.