

# THE EIGHT PRINCIPLES OF WORSHIP

## 1. Worship Celebrates Christ

“Worship proclaims Christ through the Word and recalls the death and resurrection of Christ at the Table. Worship focuses on the victory of Christ over the powers of evil, the sacrifice of Christ, which brings forgiveness of sin, and the example of Christ’s self-giving love, which empowers our life in faith. It is the work of Christ that we celebrate in worship. For this is what extols the character of God and expresses the reason God is worthy of our worship. Principle One declares that worship is the Gospel in motion.”

...Robert Webber

### **A true celebration must be rooted in an event**

- The content of Old Testament worship is determined by the Exodus-event where God *reveals himself*.

God heard the \_\_\_\_\_ of Israel, and \_\_\_\_\_ the \_\_\_\_\_  
He had made with Abraham.

(Exodus 3:12) In this event, God reveals himself as a God \_\_\_\_\_ to his covenant. Consequently, the \_\_\_\_\_ of God is a dominant note in all of Israel’s history and worship.

- The content of New Testament worship is determined by the Christ-event. God *reveals himself* again.

*Magnificat* (Luke 1:46-55) – God \_\_\_\_\_ again.

*Benedictus* (Luke 1:68-79) – Zechariah states that God has \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ his people; God \_\_\_\_\_ his holy \_\_\_\_\_.

- The Christ-event is also understood in the context that *God has come to redeem His people*. Jesus told his disciples that he had come to give his life as a \_\_\_\_\_ for many. (Mark 10:45) In Paul’s second letter to the Corinthians, he says that: “...in Christ, God was \_\_\_\_\_ the world to Himself” (2 Cor. 5:7).

### **In both the Old and the New Testaments, God’s purpose in revealing himself, in redeeming, and in bringing a people into existence was to create a worshipping community to be a sign of his redeeming work.**

- When God entered into a covenant with his people, they met him at Mt. Sinai in the first public meeting between God and his people.
- In the book of Hebrews, we read that Christ “appeared once for all at the end of the age to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself” (Heb 9:26)
- In worship, we do not celebrate how wonderful it is that we believe in God, serve Him, and follow Him. We go to worship to praise and thank God for what He has done, is doing, and will do!

SUGGESTION: Think of worship as a reenactment of the Christ-event – a dramatic representation that symbolically communicates the victory of Christ over all forces of evil. The conflict between good and evil gets resolved! We leave worship once again with the personal assurance that the battle is won!

“CHRIST HAS OVERCOME ALL THE POWERS OF EVIL. BE AT PEACE!”

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## **2. Worship Tells and Acts Out the Christ-Event**

“If worship is truly a celebration of the victory of Christ over the powers of evil, then the order tells and acts out that event, bringing the healing and saving power of that event to the people who gather to celebrate. Principle Two declares that the order of worship rehearses our relationship to God.”

...Robert Webber

**Worship tells and acts out the life, death, resurrection, and coming again of Christ through the proclamation of the Word and Table.**

- The order of worship comes from above, not from below.
- Worship is patterned after God who \_\_\_\_\_ and God who became \_\_\_\_\_.
- The most basic and rudimentary shape of worship is fourfold: The Entrance, The Word of God (The Bible as the symbol of God \_\_\_\_\_), The Table of the Lord (bread and wine as the symbol of God \_\_\_\_\_ to save us), and The Dismissal.
- Each of these four parts of worship contains a variety of prayers, hymns, acclamation, testimonials, and responses.

### **1. Entrance:**

Can include any or all of:

- Acts of gathering
- The opening hymn
- Call to worship
- The invocation
- The acknowledgement of God
- The confession of sin
- The words of forgiveness
- Opening prayer

### **2. The Word**

The reading and preaching of the Word/Response to the Word.

The Kiss of Peace (Rom. 16:16 and 1 Pet. 5:14)

Since Christ has \_\_\_\_\_ us to God the Father, we are also reconciled to \_\_\_\_\_.

### **3. The Table – (taking, blessing, breaking, and giving)**

The significance of the bread. The single loaf of bread is a symbol of the \_\_\_\_\_ church of Jesus Christ. Through the bread and wine, Christ becomes \_\_\_\_\_ in his church and to his people.

### **4. The Dismissal**

Now that worship has re-presented Christ and his work to the glory of the Father, the congregation is to be sent forth to do the work of the kingdom. “In Christ, God was \_\_\_\_\_ the world to himself...entrusting to us the message of reconciliation. So we are \_\_\_\_\_ for Christ.” (2 Cor. 5:19-20)

**SUGGESTION:** Meditate on Form vs. Formless. Resolution vs. Unresolved

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## **3. In Worship God Speaks and Acts**

“If worship is the Gospel in motion, then we can expect the proclamation and celebration of Christ to be attended by a proclamation and celebration of Christ to be attended by a divine action. God who spoke will speak through the Word. God who acted will act in our worship. Principle Three asks for a restoration of the supernatural, an expectancy that God will be present to us in our worship to touch us, to heal us, and to make us whole.”

...Robert Webber

**Throughout church history, God’s initiative in grace has always been accompanied by tangible and concrete signs**

- Both the Old and New Testaments are rich in illustrations of God’s communicating with people through signs. First the OT:
  1. After The Fall, the “*garments of skin*” – a symbol of God’s \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ \_\_\_\_\_ for them.
  2. After the Flood, the *rainbow* (sign of the \_\_\_\_\_ between God and man)
  3. After the covenant with Abraham, the “circumcision” (another sign of the covenant). A continual reminder that God is for us.
  4. The early tabernacle and later the Temple were filled with signs pointing to God.
  5. The sacrifices were also instituted by God.
  6. The very plan of the tabernacle and the temple furnishings were signs established by God as symbols of eternal mysteries. They told a story without \_\_\_\_\_.

New Testament signs not so elaborate. Hebrews 10:1 indicates that the OT signs were a “shadow of the good things to come – instead of the true form of these realities”

- All the signs of the OT are fulfilled in Jesus Christ, who is the \_\_\_\_\_ sign of God. New signs are established in the NT to communicate the presence of God in Christ Jesus.
- The Bible and the sacrament of the bread and wine/The water of baptism/The oil of healing/The apostolic writing/Signs established by the church such as the fish, the dove, tongues of fire, the shepherd’s staff and the sign of the cross.
- The significance of a sign is that it is a visible means through which the Gospel of Jesus Christ is proclaimed.

### **God speaks through the Word**

- The Bible is the record of God’s covenant with us. It reminds us of how He initiated a relationship with us, sought us out, and brought us to himself.

### **God acts through bread and wine.**

- The central key to the Table is not what I do, but what God does in and through the bread and wine. God acts to proclaim his saving reality and presence to the believer. The real meaning of remembrance is a celebration of Christ’s resurrection and presence.

SUGGESTION: Meditate on: “The emphasis on verbal, logical, and verifiable truth has all but replaced truth communicated to us in less obvious ways...signs reveal heavenly realities known more to the heart than the head.”

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## **4. Worship is an Act of Communication**

“Principle Four recognizes that if God really does speak and act in worship, then worship is an act of communication from above. In worship then, there is not only divine action but the actual experience of divine presence, an experience that confirms God’s people in faith and builds the community of God.”

...Robert Webber

### **Worship communicates in two ways: Verbally and Symbolically**

- Worship as an act of communication contains the ingredients of speech, symbol, dialogue, interaction, and relationship.
- Each of the four parts of worship can include both a verbal and symbolic dimension.
- One symbolic action can be worth a thousand words
- The “primary” symbols that God has given us are each worth more than thousands of words:
  - The sacred scriptures
  - Bread and wine, (the Holy Communion or Table of the Lord) – in OT it was Passover
- Worship comes alive even more when the primary symbols are supported by the use of “secondary” symbols:
  - Preparation
  - Dismissal
- Worship is more than form and order, well-spoken prayers, beautiful hymns, and a creative use of the arts.
- Worship has to do with our heart, our interior person, our longing for God, our openness to his Spirit.
- Both the Preparation and the Dismissal are symbols.
  - One symbolizes a beginning by preparing the congregation for worship through Word and Table
  - The other symbolizes an ending by sending us forth into the world.
  - Both should tell a story
    - Preparation tells the story of how we come before God
    - Dismissal tells the story of how we should be of service in the world.

SUGGESTION: Meditate on:

- Worship as a communication event educates me in the Christian life
- Worship forms me spiritually.

“When I am thoroughly involved in worship I not only hear and see, but I become. I am to become God’s Word and God’s Bread to the world. To be formed by worship is to take on the characteristics of Christ, to be shaped by his presence within”

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## **5. In Worship, we respond to God and Each Other**

“Principle Five grows out of the conviction that divine action demands a human response. As God speaks and acts among his people, the people are to respond through word and deed. Consequently, the structure of worship is dialogic, based on proclamation and response.”

...Robert Webber

**Worship cannot take place without our response to God himself, wherein our innermost selves reach out to him.**

- We respond to God himself
  - Do we tend to ignore the distance between us and God and treat him like a buddy or friend:
  - Or are we aware of God’s “transcendence” that demands that we recover a sense of the majesty of God in our worship services.
- We respond to God’s actions
  - OT – celebration of the Exodus event – Passover -- What God did to bring his people out of bondage.
  - NT – celebration of the Christ-event – proclaimed in the Word and Table – What God did to free his people from the bondage of sin.
  - Christ’s promise and the coming of the Holy Spirit – the church responded by proclaiming Christ as Messiah (Acts 2:36) and so powerful was their response that, after Peter’s electrifying sermon about three thousand people were converted and became a part of the church of God.
  - We ought to have a sense of awe, adoration, thankfulness and enthusiasm for what God has done for us. In the early church (Acts 2:42 ff)
  - The images in the NT of our relationship with God in worship teach and advocate a mystical, inner experience of awe and wonder, e.g. the church as the “bride of Christ”.
- We respond to the Specific
  - Our worship ought to be characterized by evocative symbols that recollect the Christ-event.
  - I respond in worship to God, whose person and work of redemption is represented to me through what is being done. (Alleluia, Amen, Thanks be to God) – This arises from the heart, from the innermost part of our being.
  - Although worship dramatizes an event that happened long ago, it brings that event into the present by the power of the Holy Spirit.

SUGGESTION: Meditate on these thoughts:

“Since God is speaking and acting in worship, response to God who speaks and acts is of great importance. In my response, I am once again saying yes to God.”

“This kind of response makes a difference. Worship is not something rote, mechanical, or intellectual. I do not worship because I have always done it. I don’t worship because of peer pressure or for a better social standing in the community. I respond to God because he makes a difference in my life”

“Worship reminds me of my commitment to Christ. Worship calls me to love not only God with my whole heart, but my neighbor as myself.”

“My response to God, who is present in worship, is the source of power for living. It sets my world in order. It determines my priorities in life. It puts me at peace with God, my neighbor, and my own life.”



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## 6. Return Worship to the People

“Principle Six sees that the natural result of the preceding principles demands an active participatory worship. Passive worship assumes that worship is something that somebody else does to you or for you. But active worship, which grows out of our response to divine action, breaks through the barriers of passive worship and returns worship to the people.”

...Robert Webber

**Congregation action cannot occur without two very basic ingredients: the congregation must understand what they are doing, and they must intend to make the responses that are part of worship.**

- Worship is a meeting between God and his people.
  - Like any other meeting between two or more people, a certain amount of form is necessary.
  - God has already established the structural ingredients needed in meeting with him, and we cannot improve on these forms.
  - In the worship experience, our relationship to God is established and sustained.
    - Mt Sinai (Exodus 24:1-8) – covenantal agreement with Israel
  - Worship that isn't a meeting with God doesn't provide the appropriate setting in which an interaction can take place.
- The Priesthood of all Believers
  - Medieval and pre-Reformation worship was clergy-centered
  - In the 16<sup>th</sup> century the reformers insisted on a form that was distinctly congregational.
  - Four centuries later, much of our modern worship has drifted back into the pattern of the medieval church
  - “Audience mentality” is the greatest barrier to the recovery of involvement of all God's people in worship.
  - This does not mean asking a few people to do something during worship. It means that everyone becomes so involved in worship that the whole community worships together as a body.
- Order and Freedom
  - Order without freedom may become mere unthinking ritual
  - Freedom without order may become equally unthinking and even chaotic
  - The four-fold order should enact the Gospel story.
  - We ought to urge a lively faith, an active and engaging commitment to what is being done, a freedom to be spontaneous within the context of order
- Worship as Dialogue
  - We need to find ways to break away from our passive roles as worshipers and recover an interaction between the worship leader and the congregation.
    - *Salutation – Amen --Thanks be to God -- Alleluia.*

SUGGESTION: Meditate on:

“Worship cannot be an end in itself...every service is followed by a comma instead of a period. We worship as pilgrims. Worship enables us to carry on in a journey of hope.”

“Since we pray for those who don't yet know God, we have a priesthood on their behalf. This puts a missionary theology into our worship, so when we go forth we should go with a sense of our mission.”

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## 7. All Creation Joins in Worship

“Principle Seven recognizes how the spirit of God and the spirit of the person in worship meet through various vehicles that are the means of encounter. In addition to Word, Table, and prayer, God has given us vehicles of time, space, sound, and movement as ways of experiencing our encounter with God. In this way all creation not only serves as a vehicle for worship, but actually joins in the praises of God.”

...Robert Webber

### **Renew the sacred sense of time**

- The original intent of worshipping within the framework of the church calendar was to guide the believer in his or her spiritual pilgrimage.
- Purpose is to relive the life of Christ, to walk in the footsteps of Jesus, to experience what Jesus experienced, to identify with his earthly life, and through that experience, to grow spiritually.

### **Using the Church year calendar as a patter for worship**

- **Advent.** (begins four Sundays before Christmas) – the season for the preparation and anticipation of the coming of Jesus. Time of renewal, repentance, and self-examination. John the Baptist?
- **Christmas.** (Twelve day festival from December 25 to January 6) -- A season of joy, festivity, and fun. We are alive and free in the presence of our *Guest*.
- **Epiphany.** The manifestation of Jesus as the Christ (Magi, the Baptism, marriage feast in Cana) – time for sober reflection on our Christian responsibility. This time challenges us to proclaim Christ, to be bold in our witness for him.
- **Lent.** (begins on Ash Wednesday and continues for 40 weekdays until Easter) – the most rigorous and demanding of all the seasons. Our conversion is symbolically repeated and we are strengthened and encouraged in the faith. Baptism is the most fitting symbol of Lent. The passing from the old state to the new state.
- **Easter.** (fifty days of sheer celebration with God’s people) – to enjoy creation, revel in relationships, to affirm the great mystery of life, to rejoice in our new life in Christ and the church, his body.
- **Pentecost.** The end of the Easter season. A celebration of the in-rushing presence and power of the Holy Spirit which ushers us into a new experience in our spiritual pilgrimage.
- **Trinity season.** (May through November to the beginning of Advent again). Also known as Ordinary Time. Corresponds to the spread of the early church. Christ has ascended into the heavens and commissioned his apostles to be witnesses to the utmost part of the world. Our focus now is walk the missionary route of the apostles. We follow Paul to Galatia, Thessalonica, Philippi, Corinth, and Rome. We live with him in jail and travel with him to his last days. This is a time for study, for growth in our interpretation of Christ, for increased depth in our understanding and experience of the church.

### **Using the Church Year as a Pattern for Corporate Worship**

- Individualism is being replaced by the realization that the church is the *people*, among whom the mystery of God in Christ reconciling the world to himself is experienced
- By not following the Christian calendar, we have come to adopt secular guidelines for our spiritual time.
- The church calendar year provides us not only with a variety of events to celebrate, but also with varied periods of intensity and relaxation in our worship.

SUGGESTION: Meditate on:

“The church year is a gift to the church given by the Holy Spirit as a way of enriching our relationship to Jesus Christ – of restoring a sacred sense of time to our worship. It has stood the test of time and is worth of our adoption today.”





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## **8. Worship as a Way of Life**

“Principle Eight acknowledges that worship does not stop with the Benediction. Worship shapes the way we live in the world. We go from worship to love and serve the Lord in our families, our work, and in all our relationships.”

...Robert Webber

### **Making the connection between worship and life**

- Worship is not only the public acts we do as a gathered community, but our very way of day-to-day life.
  - Worship is all about the overthrow of the powers of evil through the death and resurrection of Christ.
  - Evil calls us to surrender to hate, greed, lust, ambition, success, materialism, sensualism, dishonest, grumbling, lying, and the like.
  - In worship our struggles with the powers of evil that disturb us and seek to dismantle our relationships and our lives are brought to Jesus the victor over all evil.
  - Worship is the “summit” toward which we always proceed.
- Worship and Prayer
  - Prayer is often separated from both public worship and our life in the world.
  - A meaningful way to break through to an integrated connection of public worship, life, and private worship is through the practice of the Jesus Prayer:

*Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God*

*Have mercy upon me a sinner.*

It is a prayer of the heart. Theology is strong: “Lord” speaks of the posture of Christ over all the powers of evil. “Jesus Christ” is the full name of our Lord, expressing both his human and divine nature resulting from the union of God and man in the womb of the Virgin Mary. “Son of God” (God truly incarnate). “Have mercy upon me” points to the work of Christ in his death and resurrection. “Sinner” expresses the plight of all who have wandered and continue to wander from God, the source of meaning.

- The Jesus Prayer is a constant reminder of God’s divine action toward me and of my response to his overwhelming love in Jesus Christ.
- Worship and the Family
  - The nuclear family is seen in a new and exciting way when placed under the umbrella of the Church family of God
  - The celebration of the Christian year in the home helps the family mark time “Christianly” in its posture toward the world.
- Worship and Work
  - Someone shaped by Jesus Christ is less apt to compromise Christian ethics for the sake of greater power and money.
  - Christians shaped by the vision of worship seek to bring that vision to bear on the structures of existence like work, even now in the world, in a particular time and place.
- Worship and Social Action
- Worship and Evangelism

SUGGESTION: Meditate:

“Worship is central to all that we do. And for that reason our whole life is both a procession toward worship and a procession out of worship. Life is a cycle of constant return to the source of our new life and to the empowerment for life that we receive from the Christ we meet and celebrate in worship.”

