

Preparing for worship

August 28, 2019

We expect pastors, church staff members, educated lay leaders, denominational officials and others who hold positions of responsibility to prepare themselves for worship.

But what about people without any special training or special responsibility for the care of God's people? How should the rest of us prepare for worship?

Preparing for worship by doing our homework

The first thing we must do to prepare for worship is probably also the most important. We must do our spiritual homework. Simply put, we must do the daily tasks of a disciple. Prayer, Bible study, fasting, silence and other spiritual disciplines must shape the daily rhythms of our lives.

As an example, a few weeks ago, I was engaged in a time of prayer, worship and solitude. As I reflected on a few lines from a popular worship song, I realized the words had become profoundly meaningful to me. They summarized all I had come to believe about God, and in so doing, they served as a conduit for God to pour out his peace and joy in my life.

I also realized something else. The lines I found to be so meaningful could be seen as intellectually vacuous and emotionally shallow by someone else. It was only because I had done the hard work of learning about who God is and walking with God through challenging circumstances that I was able to perceive their beauty and benefit.

Indeed, all expressions of worship are like that. The songs, dances,

paintings and other things we use in worship are not theological treatises, and they are not supposed to be. Instead, they are reminders—presented to us in evocative forms—of all we know about God and of all we have experienced of God’s goodness.

Preparing for worship through self-awareness

The second thing we need to do to prepare for worship may seem somewhat counter-intuitive yet is a vitally important task if we are to worship God well. We need to cultivate a clear and accurate awareness of our own spiritual and emotional status.

Many people think worship is all about God, and so suggesting we need to be self-aware seems out of place. It is important to remember, however, that the Psalms are as much about communicating the spiritual and emotional state of the worshiper as they are about extolling the greatness of God.

Worship—especially in its corporate expression but also in its private manifestation—is about connecting with God in a way that facilitates both our devotion to him and his presence in our lives, which cannot happen if we are unaware of the joys motivating our praise and any sorrows impeding it.

Distraction is always a temptation when we come to worship. Ironically, when we try to ignore “the elephant in the room,” we give it the space to crowd out our devotion to God. It quietly sucks away our spiritual and emotional energy, limiting our capacity to experience God and receive joy from that experience. The best way to combat distraction is to confess to God those things that might distract us from focusing on him.

Preparing for worship by intentionally shifting our focus

The third thing we need to do as we prepare for worship is shift our focus from possible distractions to the One we are worshiping. This doesn't mean we ignore important things in our lives, but that we choose to move those things to the background of our minds so we can bring God to the forefront.

Think of your life like a radio. Some stations are run by the world. They constantly remind us of all the demands life places on us and all the ways we are not enough. Some stations are run by the flesh. They remind us of all the things we want, particularly the things contrary to God's will. Some stations are run by the Enemy. They are direct conduits for his lies and seek to promote his propaganda at all times.

Our task is to ignore these radio stations and tune in to the station reminding us who God is. When we tune into that station, all of our joys, pains, problems and questions come into clearer focus.

We see this process on dramatic display in [Psalm 73](#) and [Isaiah 6](#). In both cases, the worshipper entered the sanctuary with a lot on his mind. In Psalm 73, the act of worship helps the worshiper reframe his understanding of reality. In Isaiah 6, the worshiper's experience of God allows him to see things—including himself—as they really are.

Preparing for worship is a daily task

These ideas are not new and should be part and parcel of what it means to be a follower of Christ. They are the building blocks of a spiritually healthy life and a healthy life of worship.

We cannot be all we ought to be for our Lord and Savior if we do not do the

hard work of relating to him on a daily basis, of carefully and accurately analyzing our own spiritual and emotional health, and of constantly refocusing our attention on him.

Although worship ultimately is not about us, we cannot get out of worship what we need unless we also do these things.

Wade Berry is a resident fellow at the B. H. Carroll Theological Institute, specializing in New Testament and biblical Greek. He has served as an associate pastor, youth minister and in a variety of lay leadership and teaching posts. This article first appeared on the [Carroll Community blog](#) and is adapted and republished by permission.