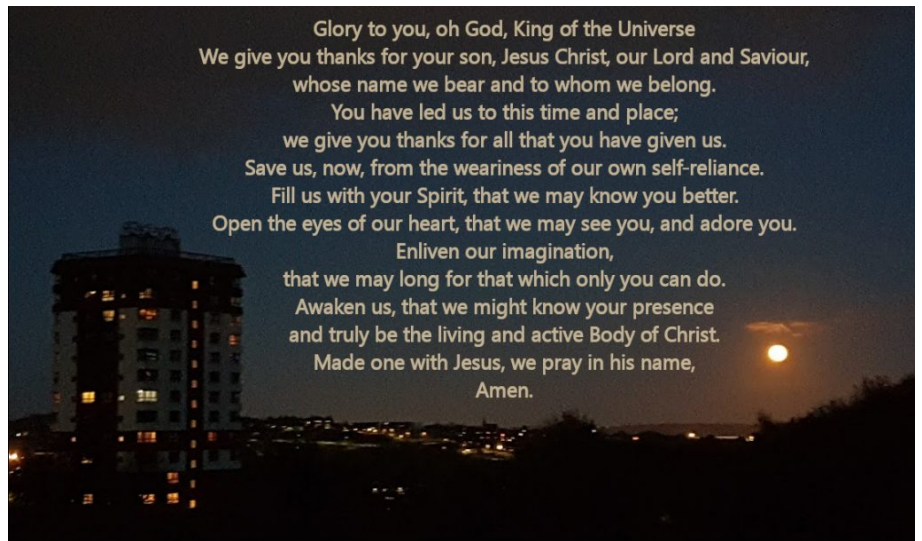


A Prayer For Our Church

Last week I was at a conference where the following words were used to describe our current circumstance:



Volatility
Uncertainty
Complexity
Ambiguity

I won't unpack those words here; they speak for themselves. They certainly describe something of what it's like to be working, living, and breathing within the context of a parish church (as well as more widely). The normal means and methods of planning and strategising are being lashed by this perfect storm.

And that's OK.

In fact, in so many ways, these are the exact circumstances in which the church of God should revel and excel. This is not because we are more stable, certain, simple, and clear than any other part of society, but because the gospel we cling to speaks of a God who is! He is a rock and a refuge. Lo, he is with us always, to the very end of the age. Including in the storms.

In the light of this, I have been struck, recently, by how St. Paul prayed for his churches in the midst of their own

volatile, uncertain, complex, and ambiguous days. He didn't pray, first and foremost, for a change in their circumstances; he prayed for an opening of their eyes to see and *know* the one who is *with* them in all things.

¹⁶ *I have not stopped giving thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers. ¹⁷ I keep asking that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, so that you may know him better. ¹⁸ I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in his holy people, ¹⁹ and his incomparably great power for us who believe.*
Ephesians 1:16-19a

This is my prayer for the church, also.

⁹ *...since the day we heard about you, we have not stopped praying for you. We continually ask God to fill you with the knowledge of his will through all the wisdom and understanding that the Spirit gives, ¹⁰ so that you may live a life worthy of the Lord and please him in every way: bearing fruit in every good work, growing in the knowledge of God, ¹¹ being strengthened with all power according to his glorious might so that you may have great endurance and patience, ¹² and giving joyful thanks to the Father, who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of his holy people in the kingdom of light.*
Colossians 1:9-12

We have so much. We have theological and teaching resources. We have freedom to worship, and people to proclaim the word of life. We have resources of time and money. We have the necessary institutional frameworks. We absolutely have the

opportunities to serve, care, and speak of the way of Christ. We might pray for more of these things, but we have them already.

Our plate is full, so to speak. What we *need* is a desire to eat and drink of that which has been given to us. This is eucharistic mystery: “Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood; has eternal life and I will raise them up on the last day” (John 6:54). We are happy to arrange the room, set the table, even welcome and serve the dinner guests; we have planning meetings and strategy documents and even some slick slideshows to prove it! We would do it all, but one thing we lack: to sit down and *eat and drink* of Jesus himself.

Oh that we would behold him. See him. Know him better. Yearn for him. Long for him. That we would be in *orbit* around him and have *confidence* that when he is known, and followed, as the Way, Truth, and Life, then – and *only then* – will the life-filled kingdom of God be on earth as it is in heaven.

So “open the eyes of our heart”, Lord! Just as Paul prayed long ago. Give us the Spirit by which we may see you and *know* you. *Enlighten* us with a revelation of how you are with us, and call us, and shape us, and change us, and move us. *Awaken* us, Lord, to the truth of who you are. *Enliven* us that we might overflow with the marks of the one to whom we belong. The rest of it will come from that. Without that, the rest of it is wearying and ultimately worthless; and I think we know that in our hungry spiritual bellies.

To that end, I’ve written a prayer for the church communities to which I belong. It’s not particularly precise or poetic, but I wonder if you might join me in praying it with me each day as we head quickly towards advent, the season in which we wait for the Lord. We *will* wait for the Lord.

Glory to you, oh God, King of the Universe

We give you thanks for your son, Jesus Christ, our Lord and

Saviour,
whose name we bear and to whom we belong.
You have led us to this time and place;
we give you thanks for all that you have given us.
Save us, now, from the weariness of our own self-reliance.
Fill us with your Spirit, that we may know you better.
Open the eyes of our heart, that we may see you, and adore
you.
Enliven our imagination, that we may long for that which only
you can do.
Awaken us, that we might know your presence
and truly be the living and active Body of Christ.
Made one with Jesus, we pray in his name,
Amen.

Review: The Reset – Returning to the Heart of Worship and a Life of Undivided Devotion

The deconstruction is real. The pandemic season is lingering and the waves of its wake are more disruptive, more disturbing, more confusing than the sudden crisis with which it struck.

THE RE SET

RETURNING TO
THE HEART OF
WORSHIP AND
A LIFE OF
UNDIVIDED
DEVOTION

JEREMY RIDDLE

It's real everywhere. It is, certainly, in the church. Now is the time when things are being questioned. Now is the time of being undone.

We used to have forms and structures and predictable routines; we could hide in them and deflect away those deeper things we feared to face. Perhaps we imagined easing back into comfortable unchallenging modes of common life. But covid has ripped the covers off of us, and the substance, or otherwise, of our exposed core cannot be unseen. It *moves us*, it *frightens us*, it *shakes us*. Is it any surprise that even the biggest American denominations are being rocked and refined by scandal after scandal. It's in the UK too. Covid was not a *crisis* for the church, it has been a *catalyst*; the crisis is coming. Are we ready?

Jeremy Riddle is a world famous worship leader, currently on the team at Vineyard Anaheim in California, and formerly of Bethel. You *will* have heard his music. There might perhaps be one higher level in the pantheon of professional praisers (the Order of St. Tomlin perhaps?) but he's up there at the pinnacle of the religio-industrial complex. Wonderfully, beautifully, and above all *Christianly*, he's questioning it all.

I'm writing this book in the midst of a global pandemic that has shut down church services, programs, conferences, and Christian events of almost every kind. This is a moment of reset (Page 119)

The book isn't long. It isn't actually all that insightful, in the sense of saying something new. For instance, we've all known for some time that there is something "off" in the industry of Christian worship. It's refreshing to have it explicated from someone in the know. "The model [of the "Christian" music industry"] may still be useful to Christian music artists and bands," he says (page 88), "but apart from a deep work of repentance and reformation, I don't believe this industry is fit to carry and release the new sound of worship God is about to pour out." Later, he writes about the "lack of kingdom ethics and practice", "secular leadership", and the lack of witness and accountability within the supplier space of the Christian market. He looks for reformation with regard to event management, stage production, performance drive, social media, and influence. They are important critiques, and this isn't merely a tearing-down whinge; it's the launching place for a positive vision (more on that in a minute). And he shows his working.

Chapter by chapter he reveals his heart that we might "cease playing Christian music games" (Introduction). He reveals (Chapter 1) his perspective on the recent history of Christian music, and the "worship movements" which have dominated the charismatic world; he wants to reclaim something of the purer creativity that was there at the beginning of the charismatic renewal. I know what he means; I still separate the charismatic world into "old-school" Spirit-driven wing-and-a-prayer crazy-but-faithful, and the stage-managed program-driven risk-averse-consumerism dominant variant. He lays the foundation:

Worship is the sound of a covenantal people; a people

betrouthed to Jesus. It is the sound of their love, adoration, and zealous devotion to the only One found worthy! (Page 8)

He appeals for a greater purity (Chapter 2) that opposes idolatry, particularly that of *popularity*. He imagines worship that sounds a lot like **discipleship** – costly, eternally-minded, driven by love, and built on our weakness and the gift of life's pains in which we have nothing left but a life of faith. He wants to get our eyes off of our ourselves and onto Jesus (Chapter 3) and so be marked for a zeal for reform, beginning in the "internal temple" of our own hearts (page 37). Indeed, the shape of what it takes to become "wholehearted" (Chapter 4), is to embrace "*our death*" (page 41), the cruciform road of a life surrendered to God. This is the heart of worship, informed by the "joy set before" us (page 50).

If the call doesn't require you to lay your life down, it's less than the call of Jesus. If the call doesn't cost you everything you have to obtain it, it's less than the call of the gospel. (Page 47)

It was at this point, that my reading become less academic and more soul-searching. His deconstruction resonates with my own. In his chapter on "dreams" (Chapter 5), my own heart ached. I know what it's like to dream youthful dreams, and launch forward with missional zeal. I also know what it's like for my dreams to be my idols that were "keeping me from surrender" (page 53). But without dreams, the joy of the Lord is elusive. The chapter explicates the problem, and it took the rest of the book for that tension to resolve. Chapter 6 ("Born of the Spirit") begins to prod at that path. "The presence is a person", he says (page 64), and this is the beginning of the touchpoint for me. Here's **something I've learned from my own deconstruction: I miss Jesus.**

I've got a pretty good handle of the *doctrine* of Jesus. That

is necessary and good, and I appreciated how Riddle asserts the place of Biblical truth (Chapter 7). But, (to quote him quoting J I Packer), the goal of theology is *doxology* (page 77), and *that's* what I miss. In my youthful zeal, I was David dancing before the ark. In the desert of my undoing, I am Elijah in a cave of depression, missing the still small voice. I have struggled to yield to the Word of God, not because I despise it, but because, like Jeremiah, I don't want it to burn in my bones with nowhere to go. We often sit in silence, my Lord and I, and he is more patient than me.

I think, this is where I'm at in my deconstruction: I am learning to speak. Not the preaching, praying, performing type of talk, rather I am learning to talk to Jesus again. He is present as a person, you see. I am learning to trust. I am no passivist, but I cannot generate the Kingdom of God. I cannot even build it. My agency is not my own, it is his, and all I can do is be used each day. I've spent too many years hiding in the striving, or curled up in a wearied whirl. Now it is time to simply be, *with him*, content to know and be known by him. I *miss* it, because I know it from my childlike youth. I want to *discover it*, because I've never been here before.

So come on, Jeremy Riddle! Tell me about "mothers and fathers of worship who have allowed their voices to be silenced, quieted and tamed" for whom "the pain of life, disappointment, personal failure and misunderstanding have taken the wind out of your sails" (page 119). There is prophetic truth in your words about old flames burning in our latter years, hungry for true, deep, yielding, cruciform, intimate, worship. This shakes and wakes my heart.

Here is a picture of "the future" (Chapter 10). We have encountered a similar vision in a number of places; it's not about a particular plan or movement, but a bringing together:

Here is what I desire to see: I desire to see the worship movement marry the prayer movement and the missions movement.

I firmly believe that if worship is re-anchored in ministry to the Lord and ministry to the world, it will explode with fresh life, creativity and power. (Page 111)

Time and time again, at the moment, we find a visceral reaction against “going back to the ways things were.” No one has the passion to *merely* put back the forms of church. Rather, we are hearing language of *integration* at every level. At the structural level it’s there – a push back at specialisations and homogenous units (imagine worshippers and evangelists and prophets and pastors together in community!). And it’s there in a desire to integrate worship life and work life and home life and inner life. There’s a yearning to live out of rhythms of grace in a Kingdom that is not just for Sunday mornings, but breakfast tables, and conversations in the park, and for when life sucks. At the same time as churches are starting to count how many are “coming back”, dispersed monastic communities like the Order of the Mustard Seed are facing surges of interest. In fact, they put out a podcast this year on “apostomonasticism.” It captures a similar vision to Riddle’s.

In the end, though, it’s a challenge. It challenges me personally. This books imagines “a new expression of an ancient kind of worship leader... leaders whose lives of devotion are once again rooted in the rhythms of prayer and the mission of Jesus” (page 112). I yearn for this, I *aspire* to it. And here’s the rub: It can’t be striven for, not by myself. It challenges us leaders because it gets to the heart of it all, the necessary “mark of intimacy” (page 114). I miss Jesus. I need to talk to him again.

As covid begins to wane, the real crisis is appearing. For us leaders it will be a new set of expectations, perhaps some pressure to perform in some wonderfully Christian, churchy way. It’s easy to cry “let’s get back into it.” My self-exhortation is to only have one primary pursuit: prayer first,

intimacy with Jesus first, to be the sheep that knows the shepherd's voice. It feels like we're starting from scratch, but that's ok. This is a waking-up season, an open-the-door-after-the-storm season, a sort-through-the-rubble season. It's a stripped-back-to-the-only-one-who-is-truly-real season. It's the season to sit at his feet. We are in a grace-filled reset.

Q&A: How does the church move away from the “singing group leader” = “worship leader” model?

Anonymous asks:

How does the church, especially the evangelical/charismatic wing, move away from the “singing group leader” = “worship leader” model?

The same problem exists in the traditional robed choir churches. I recall hearing one Dean talking about the cathedral choir delivering “high quality” worship. I remember my first vicar preaching a sermon telling us that the same word is used for “worship” and “service” in Greek. I think we could do with some teaching on this issue at some point.

[This is a Q&A question that has been submitted through this blog or asked of me elsewhere and posted with permission. You can submit a question (anonymously if you like) here: <http://briggs.id.au/jour/qanda/>]

Thanks for the question.



To get to your final point first. What you describe is a *cultural* problem. It's something for which "teaching on the issue" alone is not enough. I can give something of a theoretical and theological response, but in the end this matter is one of the heart, of desire, of the orientation of our lives. It is, absolutely and in fact, a matter of devotion and worship.

I'm reminded of the complaint received by a pastor one Sunday: "Pastor, I didn't really enjoy our worship this morning." The response? "Well, that's OK, we weren't worshipping you."

To be frank, an honest assessment of our motivations for turning up on Sunday morning would probably reveal how self-centred we tend to be. That's not *necessarily* bad; we can come to church seeking relief, solace, or comfort, and while these are self-centred, God loves us and delights to graciously give us good gifts. However, we can also come to have our egos stroked, our angsts papered over, and our privileges decorated in virtue. "I'm not getting what I want from church! I'm not being 'fed'!" can be the genuine complaint of the spiritually hungry soul, or the entitled whinge of an acceptable form of ecclesiastical narcissism. Usually it's somewhere in between.

As a vicar, when I field complaints about church, ("The children were too noisy", "The livestream isn't family friendly", "I didn't know the songs", "The sermon was too

long", "The sermon was too short" etc. etc.), I have learned to parse the feedback through this frame. Is it genuine feedback that I really should listen to? (It often is.) Or is it a self-centred demand for a better performance from myself or others? (That happens as well.) I have learned to look for the issue behind the issue. I ask myself, and sometimes the person who's talking to me: "That's interesting. What are the expectations that are not being met? Is it actually my job to meet them?"

This, of course, raises the question of what the "job" of Sunday actually is. Your suggestion is helpful here. Yes, "worship" and "service" share some semantics, and the original greek words are worth exploring:

λειτουργία (leitourgia), from which we get "liturgy", relates strongly to the sense of "serving." It pertains to things such as a military or civic service, or the duty of giving alms to the poor. In a religious setting, the priests in the temple serve God, through offering sacrifices or administering other rites and ceremonies. It sounds dry and dusty, but there is a real depth to it. It is right to come to church for spiritual succour and solace, but we also come to serve God and to minister to one another.

λατρεία (latreia) takes it further. We find this, for instance, in Paul's exhortation to the Romans. If only we heeded it, Sundays would look a lot different! "I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God—this is your true and proper *worship*." (Romans 12:1) Here worship is a self-offering, a *giving of ourselves* to God. It is this form of worship that we should be modelling for our children, every day, rather than the consumerism that our generation has bought into.

προσκυνέω (proskyneo) is a verb and speaks of adoration and

devotion. This is worship in the form of a kiss of reverence, or of lying prostrate. In the gospels, many worship Jesus in this way, including the disciples in Luke 24:52 at the time of Jesus' ascension – "they worshipped him and returned to Jerusalem with great joy." This is the worship of surrender, and love, deep love of God.

To answer your question: The extent that our church culture can align with these forms of worship is the extent to which our focus will move away from the "singing group leader." Rather, the focus will be on a self-offering to God. In fact, the other reasons why we come to church will find their place. We come on Sunday for **worship**, and also **discipleship** and **fellowship**. *Discipleship* is about having our whole lives taught and shaped by Jesus by the truth of his word and the power of his Spirit. *Fellowship* is about doing that together, spurring one another on to righteousness (Hebrews 10:24-25) and being united around Jesus. All of that is *worship*. And in that sense our "worship leaders" will be our pastors, and prophets, and teachers, and all the other gifts at work.

But in the end, just as we said at the beginning, this is a matter of our collective heart. To make that move would require cultural change, including the need for repentance. Many, if not most, of our churches enable self-centred consumerism. When worship is about me... If I go to a church *service* so that I can be well *served*... then I will be attentive to how well the *servants* are performing for me. And so I will prefer the high quality choir, or the anointed "singing group leader", and that's where the focus will be. I will value the *performance* because it adheres to my self-absorption.

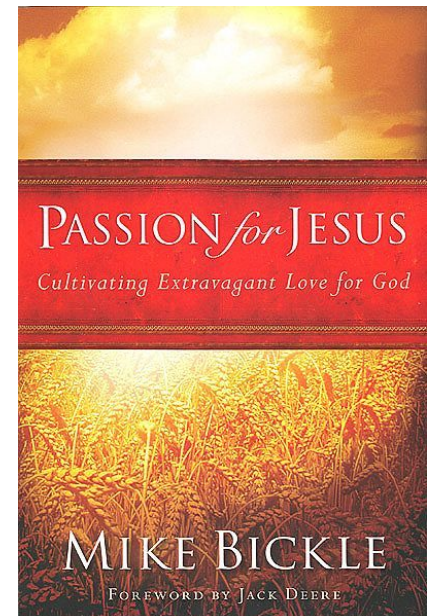
The irony is, of course, that it's actually in *real* worship, in *the* ministry (leitourgia) of our devoted (proskynew) self-offering (latreia) that worship actually becomes a moment of real fulfilment and self-discovery. I am "fed" by worship when it's not about me, and, consequently, not about the person on the stage.

Musical excellence is not irrelevant, of course, and it's worthy of some investment. But the musical leaders who truly serve (leitourgia) us are marked by humility, and self-effacement (latreia) and turn us to devotion (proskynew), not adulation. It's not easy for them. We love our celebrities, and we will always be attracted to those people through whom we have encountered the presence of God in some way. It is understandable that we will turn to them to seek more of the Lord. We will want to pitch our tents there, as Peter desired to stay on the mountain of Transfiguration. The wise worship leaders will simply echo the voice from the cloud on that day: "It's not about you, it's not about me; here is Jesus... *listen to him.*"

Photo Credit: Austin Neill on Unsplash

Review: Passion for Jesus – Cultivating Extravagant Love for God

At the core of human identity is what we *desire*. As the saying goes, “What the heart desires, the will chooses, and the mind justifies.” I think Cranmer said it, and it is true. I know it in myself; when I wrestle with who I *am*, I end up at questions of “What do I really love? What is my heart’s desire? What *moves* me at my deepest?”



It’s the same with church communities. We can talk about vision-casting and strategic planning and the rest of it, but 99% of the time a church’s problems come down to this question of passion. What *moves* us? What do we *want*? Whom do we *desire*?

To be frank, the honest answer for most churches is that we are enamoured with ourselves: our way of doing things, our past glories, our insecurities, our past pains, our desire to be bigger and stronger. Even when we are going about our worship (which is meant to be, by definition, God-focused), our eyes can drop to ourselves; to our feelings, our power, our benefits of being Christians. There’s a fine-line between thanking God for making us worthy, clean, and beautiful as his bride, and staring adoringly into a mirror.

Mike Bickle’s *Passion for Jesus* has, for this reason, been a refreshing read. Bickle is the founder of International House of Prayer, Kansas City (IHOPKC), a movement that is arguably the American correlation to the UK’s Pete Greig and the 24-7 *Prayer Movement*. This book is his definitive, slightly autobiographical, tome, originally released in the 90’s and updated a decade or so ago.

Bickle’s mission is to move people to pray. His wisdom

recognises that that is a thoroughly impossible task if we do not understand the centrality of God in our very identity, or if we misconstrue God and don't see his loving heart. And so he lays before us the truths of what God has revealed to us about himself. It's not just the theological categories of God's *nature*, but the personal categories of God's *character*, his emotions and passions.

...passion for Jesus does not come from natural human zeal or enthusiasm. Passion for Jesus comes first and foremost by seeing His passion for us. (Page 4)

Bickle explores this partly through his own story, and recounts the crises by which he came to reflect on and grasp God's love and affection. His project is to go to **the foundational place of desire in our walk with Jesus**. We could talk about Christian ethics, Christian morals, or the boundaries on the straight and narrow way that should bind our wayward heart. Bickle would rather talk about the beauty, glory, and intimacy of God. Rather than focusing on the edges of the path, he would have our heart be drawn down the road.

Expositions of *intimacy* with God are rarely adequate. Bickle is better than most when he urges us to be *lovers* "fascinated with God's beauty" (page 37). Like others on this topic, he draws on the Song of Songs – that romantic, even erotic, love song-play between King Solomon and the Shullamite girl. He does it reasonably well, despite some exegetical slips (I much prefer David Pawson's exposition of the Song). Nevertheless, Bickle draws some valuable insights, particularly around **the dynamic of absence in the growth and expression of desire** (pages 127-128). This is crucial, because the *absence* of God, rather than *intimacy* with God, is what most Christians predominantly *feel*. Yet the Beloved turns that sorrow of absence into *yearning* and *searching* and courageous abandonment of comfort and security because of her *desire*. These are helpful reflections.

In a similar vein, he spends an entire chapter outlining “twelve expressions of God’s beauty” (page 132): God’s beautiful *light*, his *music*, his *fragrance*, and other unashamedly affective contemplations. It’s a fascinating exercise, and has informed the counsels of my own heart when I am praying and dwelling on God in my everyday.

But the reason it all works, and what sets Bickle apart from other writers and speakers in the charismatic and pentecostal scenes, is that **he doesn’t forget the *theology***. It is good, *beautiful*, theology influenced by the likes of Tozer, Piper, Packer, Edwards and “the devotional classics written by the Puritans” (page 171).

This book is nowhere near the slightly Freudian caricature of loving God as a starry-eyed swooning at Jesus and a desiring to be filled by his powerful Spirit. **Here is an exposition that not only reveals God’s love and affection, but his *transcendence and sovereignty***. Bickle warns of how a blindness to God’s magnificence is a “shocking disregard for Him” (page 28) and that a dismissal of God’s holiness renders the cross of Christ insignificant. “They understand neither the greatness of their need nor the glory of God’s gift” (page 32). This is the antidote to the prevailing false gospel of today’s church, that we can have God on our terms.

When we gaze upon His loveliness, we will gladly die to those things that are not like Him. (page 35)

I particularly appreciated how Bickle makes use of Jesus’ famous prayer in John 17. It’s a prayer for *intimacy* (“that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you”) and it includes our Lord’s specific prayer for *us* (“for those who will believe in me through their message”). Too often this prayer gets turned into pious moralising manipulation: Don’t disagree with me, don’t you know that Jesus wanted us to be one, you wouldn’t want to

disappoint him, would you?" Bickle sees the prayer as a manifestation of God's sovereign heart; Jesus has prayed this prayer, as an act of love and affection for his people, and his Father *will* answer it. "The Holy Spirit *will* enable us to experience the deep things of God, as the apostle Paul taught" (page 42, emphasis mine).

It takes the power of God to make God known to the human spirit. This knowledge enables us to love God... it takes God to love God, and it takes God to know God... The church will be filled with the knowledge of God. Jesus said it. His promises never fail. The Holy Spirit will use the release of this knowledge to awaken a deep intimacy with Jesus. A revival of the knowledge of God is coming, and as a result the church will be filled with holy passion for Jesus. Divinely imparted passion for Jesus is on the Holy Spirit's agenda as seen in Jesus' prayer. (Page 60, emphasis mine)

I have looked at the lukewarm, compromising church of our day and wondered, How shall these things be? Will such a glorious revival come to pass? Then I remember Israel's negative spiritual condition during the time of Jesus' earthly ministry. The church's only hope is that God is rich in mercy. Therefore, at His appointed time, God will supernaturally intervene. The same flaming zeal in the heart of the Father that compelled Him to send Jesus the first time will manifest as He revives the compromising church in this generation. The zeal of the Lord of hosts shall perform it. (Page 62)

This book is not about twanging charismatic heart-strings, it is an eschatologically scoped book, standing awe-struck at the plans and purposes of God. It looks for a "church that is joyfully abandoned to Jesus' lordship" (page 76) as our Lord inherits the nations for his possession (Psalm 2:8).

I went to a concert last night, where Andrew Peterson lifted

our hearts and minds towards the things of God. We were *moved*. Ironically, I found myself downcast and dejected. I had been taken to something deep – to the plans and hearts of the Someone who made and bled for this world and for his people. And it had left me feeling lonely. This desire for God is the root and core of who we are. I delight that Gill and I have learned (and are still learning) to orbit it together. And there are many others to stand beside and share the awe. But, in general, I am weary of an unmoved church, especially in the West, consumed in itself and discarding its own on the path to self-preservation or self-engrandisement. I feel the same weariness in Bickle's book, but also hope, and joy, and confidence in Jesus. The gift of that is its value.

Missional Worship: A Mild Critique of the Five Marks of Mission

They came up in a discussion I was having recently: the so-called “Five Marks of Mission”, here taken from the Anglican Communion, in which they were developed over the last 30-40 years.



The mission of the Church is the mission of Christ:

- 1) To proclaim the Good News of the Kingdom*
- 2) To teach, baptise and nurture new believers*
- 3) To respond to human need by loving service*
- 4) To transform unjust structures of society, to challenge violence of every kind and pursue peace and reconciliation*

5) To strive to safeguard the integrity of creation, and sustain and renew the life of the earth

They are intended to “express the Anglican Communion’s common commitment to, and understanding of, God’s holistic and integral mission.” They’ve got a lot going for them.

They’re not perfect, of course. The Anglican Communion website recognises, for instance, that they don’t fit together like five equal parts.

The first Mark of Mission, identified with personal evangelism at the Anglican Consultative Council in 1984 (ACC-6) is a summary of what all mission is about, because it is based on Jesus’ own summary of his mission. This should be the key statement about everything we do in mission.

And this is a worthy observation. After all, you clearly can’t do 2) (teaching and nurturing) without also doing 1) (proclamation).

The last three are, in my mind, in a slightly different category, because they incorporate forms of activity in which the specific revelation of the gospel in Jesus is not entirely necessary. What I mean is this: It is conceptually impossible to proclaim the gospel of Jesus and nurture new believers in Jesus without actually having a faith in Jesus. However, it is possible to engage in loving service, transforming unjust structures, and renewing the life of the earth without knowing or speaking the name of Jesus.

This does not denigrate these last three. They are a necessary and important outworking of the gospel in the lives of Christians and Christian communities. Moreover, they are forms of mission where our cause overlaps with many other activists who do not follow Jesus. Not only are they achieving a good in their own right, they also facilitate the first two as we are

provided with opportunities to give reason for the hope that we hold (1 Peter 3:15).

In many ways I applaud them. I love it when the church is moved to *do*, rather than to sit apathetically behind rose-colour stained glass windows. As the saying goes, "It's not the the Church of God that has a mission in the world, it is the God of Mission who has a Church in the world."

My critique of the Five Marks, then, is not about what they say, but what they *don't* say. It's more than omission, it's like there's something askew. It's a slant that is often present in conversations about mission. I think of the "Mission Minded" tool that we used during my training years; in many ways it was excellent, but there was something missing. That tool outlined various activities that churches could be involved in, but there wasn't a clear place for something that seemed crucial to church life. That something was *worship*. Where is the *doxological* character of Christian mission?

Christian mission, for it to be something deeper than "mere" activism, must be essentially *worshipful*.

After all, the "chief end of man", as the Westminster Shorter Catechism states in its very first question is to "glorify God and enjoy him forever." What an excellent definition of worship! The "chief end" is not the making of Christians and the bringing of justice (although they are necessary corollaries) it is to the glory of God.

The Catechism is not going out on a limb here. Jesus, himself, would have us pray "hallowed be your name" even before we pray "your kingdom come, your will be done." The hallowing of God's name is not just prior, it is *integral* to our seeking the kingdom and the will of God.

Similarly, the mission of Jesus is not essentially *pragmatic* but is rooted and immersed in the adoring, loving relationship

between Messiah and God, Son and Heavenly Father.

Very truly I tell you, the Son can do nothing by himself; he can do only what he sees his Father doing, because whatever the Father does the Son also does. For the Father loves the Son and shows him all he does.

John 5:19-20

In the big-picture eschatological scope, the glory of God is also the chief point of mission. When Paul speaks to the Corinthians about the end of time, he speaks of Christ's mission as "putting all his enemies under his feet," and then submitting himself, and all that is under him (that is, everything!), to God his Father. Christ's mission is to ensnare all of creation into his own worship of his eternal Father.

But Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. For since death came through a man, the resurrection of the dead comes also through a man. For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive. But each in turn: Christ, the firstfruits; then, when he comes, those who belong to him. Then the end will come, when he hands over the kingdom to God the Father after he has destroyed all dominion, authority and power. For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet. The last enemy to be destroyed is death. For he "has put everything under his feet." Now when it says that "everything" has been put under him, it is clear that this does not include God himself, who put everything under Christ. When he has done this, then the Son himself will be made subject to him who put everything under him, so that God may be all in all.

1 Corinthians 15:20-28

When I was young, I was moved towards activism. I was moved towards *doing* mission. In my zeal I misunderstood or even

disparaged more “worshipful” aspects of our spirituality such as contemplation, adoration, and prophetic acts. At best, I used “quiet times” and “retreat days” as ways of stoking the fire for the “real work” of reaching people with the gospel or “building the church.” If I used the “up-in-out” triangle, my emphasis was on the “out.”

I was wrong. And I am not alone. The “up” must come first, because it is the heart of both the “in” and the “out.” Even now I run into situations where there is a false dichotomy between “worship” and “mission.” If there is a separation between doing the “work of God”, “drawing people to God”, and “adoring and worshipping God” then, frankly, we’re doing it wrong!

One of my greatest concerns for the contemporary Western church is our *entrepreneurialism*. When that speaks of innovation and focused pursuit of the gospel, I cheer it on. But sometimes it lapses into pragmatism, or even task-oriented rationalism, and, more often than we might care to realise, self-glorification. When we are at risk of asserting control for the sake of our own existence or empowerment, *even as we pursue the five marks of mission*, we risk losing the way of faith. **We must return to worship, attuned to a King who will bring all things under the father at the end, by being a living sacrifice now, hallowing his name. That is the chief mark of mission – to glorify God.**

We are encountering, more than we ever have, a growing number of people who are moved to worship. Sometimes it is through prayer and intercession; they travail, literally groaning as they filled with the Spirit. Sometimes they adore, and rest, and exhibit the peace, sometimes ecstasy, of that very same Spirit. Sometimes they offer words of knowledge and wisdom, speaking prophetic truths that do what all prophetic truths do; they call us back to hallowed ground where Father’s name is all in all.

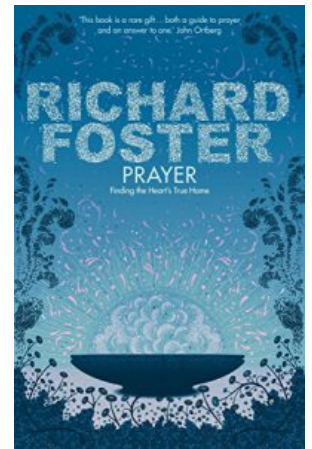
Many (but not all) of these feel homeless in today's church. They feel tangential to the missional machine, un-embraced and unreleased, because the missional return on investing in them is not clear to a "missional church." Yet, I am fully convinced, without their leadership, we have lost our way. Without their heart, we can do "our" mission, and find on the last day that we already had our reward.

This is not a new thing. And I'm not trying to paint a black picture. Different traditions have the tools to do the recalibration of mission around the heart of worship. The Catholic propensity to interweave mission and the eucharist encapsulates, at the very least, the missional value of simply bringing the presence of God to where it is needed and administering his grace. The Charismatic and Pentecostal world values times of "worship and ministry" as a place where the Holy Spirit administers healing, revelation, acceptance, and conviction; a space into which Christian and non-Christian like can be invited. The Liberal claim to self-effacement, to be followers of the Word rather than asserting ourselves, can line up with this. And the Evangelical posture of submission to the Word of God in all things, for its own sake, takes us to where we need to be.

For myself, as I think about mission in my own context, and have found myself being led by worshippers: Let us first turn our face to our Heavenly Father. Let our hearts and our very beings resonate in adoration. Let us cry "Holy Holy Holy" with the choir of heaven. The chief mark of mission is to glorify God, who made heaven and earth.

Review: Prayer – Finding the Heart's True Home

Richard Foster's *Prayer* is a classic of the early '90s but I'm glad that I have only just recently read it. I don't think I would have truly understood it, or been impacted by it, if I had come to it before I'd lived some life.



Foster is, of course, known for his teaching on spiritual disciplines with contemporary application. This book is in the same vein. It is a compendium of independent chapters, each considering the sorts of prayer that we see in the biblical narrative and in Christian experience. A quick look at the table of contents reveals the gist: “Simple Prayer, Prayer of the Forsaken, The Prayer of Examen, The Prayer of Tears, The Prayer of Relinquishment...” and so on.

Foster takes us to the base foundation of spirituality, to the character of God himself. God is a God who speaks, and who listens, and who creates and restores the relationship between himself and his people. How we interact with him, i.e. how we *pray*, is the question that takes us into these depths. Like similar relational questions (e.g. “How do I speak and be closer to my husband, my wife, my child?”) the answer is both simple (“Just speak!”) and profoundly deep, even mysterious. Like all relational issues, it requires both deliberate action and humble response. Prayer is not something to “master, the way we master algebra or motor mechanics” (page 8), but “we come ‘underneath’, where we calmly and deliberately surrender control and become incompetent.”

As I record my thoughts here I am not going to touch on every chapter, but on those parts that have challenged me, taken me deeper, or have reminded me of the gracious permission I have, as a child of God, to come to him in prayer.

Prayer of the Forsaken.

It is right that Foster touches on forsakenness early in the book. This sense, occasional or frequent, is part and parcel of the Christian experience; we feel as if we are praying to bronzed-over heavens, when everything would scream at us that God is absent. Foster has drawn on “old writers” to give me a new phrase, “*Deus Absconditus* – the God who is hidden” (page 17) for those times when God appears to have disappeared.

The prayer of the forsaken is the prayer of the pair on the *road to Emmaus* who stand with “downcast faces” because of their dashed hopes about the one who was “going to redeem Israel.” They walk with Jesus, but he is hidden from them. It is the prayer of Jonah in the belly of the whale. It is the *prayer* of David, and Jesus himself, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”

Times of forsakenness are a given in the Christian pilgrimage of life. And they are necessary. They take us to the bedrock of God’s *sovereign* grace where we are stripped of any pretence that we might manipulate God in relationship or prayer.

That is the next thing that should be said about our sense of the absence of God, namely that we are entering into a living relationship that begins and develops in mutual freedom. God grants us perfect freedom because he desires creatures who freely choose to be in relationship with him. Through the Prayer of the Forsaken we are learning to give God the same freedom. Relationships of this kind can never be manipulated or forced. (Page 20)

Such seasons are seasons of refining that burn hot. We

question ourselves, and “nagging questions assail us with a force they never had before” (Page 23)... “‘Is there any real meaning in the universe?’ ‘Does God really love me?’”

Through all of this, paradoxically, God is purifying our faith by threatening to destroy it. We are led to a profound and holy distrust of all superficial drives and human strivings. We know more deeply than ever before our capacity for infinite self-deception. Slowly we are being taken off vain securities and false allegiances. Our trust in all exterior and interior results is being shattered so that we can learn faith in God alone. Through our barrenness of soul God is producing detachment, humility, patience, perseverance. (Page 23)

In the last year we have experienced a sense of this forsakenness. One instructive experience stands out for me: At a summer festival in 2017, ironically surrounded by the joy and bustle of the worshipping people of God, we found ourselves in this dark place – a deep sense of being lonely, abandoned, forsaken. As I breathed and paced myself to get to the next workshop a leader approached me and gave me a word that had been impressed upon him as he saw me randomly within the crowd. What was that word of the Lord in the midst of emptiness, frailty, darkness, and lost hope? “God is saying, he is giving you the courage of a lion.” It broke me, I wept, and it was bitter. It was bitter, but right.

True courage rests not on ourselves, but on faith. The prayer of the forsaken takes us deeper yet; faith rests on trust.

When you are unable to put your spiritual life into drive, do not put it into reverse; put it into neutral... Trust is confidence in the character of God... I do not understand what God is doing or even where God is, but I know that he is out to do me good.” This is trust. (Page 25)

We cry out to the infinite mercy of God. We learn that “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” finds its answer in “Into your hands, I commit my spirit.”

The Prayer of Relinquishment.

There is faithfulness in the simple prayer of petition, in which our needs are laid out before our Lord and provider. But I have noticed that this form of petition can actually play an opposite role; we often use it as a defense *against* the leading of the Spirit. We lay out our needs before God and say “Lord, bless us” with a heart that actually says “I am going this way. I am doing these things. Now do your part, God, and make them work.” We build self-reliant castles, and hold our petitionary facade as evidence of faithfulness.

I have noted this tendency in my own journey with Jesus, sometimes with a desperate internal monologue: “Look at these things, fix them, sort them, don’t let me fall! I’ve turned up to work, where are you?” In an era of church which is fundamentally performance-driven, and amongst my generation of church leaders who are so readily anxiety-driven, I have heard this insecure form of “prayer” echoed time and time again.

The prayer of relinquishment calls us away from this dysfunction. It is the spiritual equivalent of a trust exercise, or, as Foster describes, “a person falling into the arms of Jesus, with a thirst-quenching sense of ‘ahhh!’” (page 50). Yet while this “soul-satisfying rest” is the end result of the Prayer of Relinquishment, it is not the journey.

The journey is *Gethsemane*. It is “yet not my will but yours be done”, prayed not as a catch-all default at the end of a prayer, but as a positive deliberate choice to submit our plans, our desires, our lives to the will of God. “All of my ambitions, hopes and plans,” sings Robin Mark, “I surrender these into your hands.”

We pray. We struggle. We weep. We go back and forth, back and

forth, weighing option after option. We pray again, struggle again, weep again. (Page 53)

Indeed, “relinquishment brings to us a priceless treasure: *the crucifixion of the will.*” (Page 55) Personally speaking, given my first name, I can almost take this literally! And it is a treasure. In many ways, the battle of the cross was won at Gethsemane; from this point in the garden, Jesus endures for the sake of the *joy* set before him.

There is death to the self-life. But there is also a releasing with hope... It means freedom from the self-sins: self-sufficiency, self-pity, self-absorption, self-abuse, self-aggrandizement, self-castigation, self-deception, self-exaltation, self-depreciation, self-indulgence, self-hatred and a host of others just like them. (Page 56)

The Prayer of Suffering

When the journey with Jesus takes us to fields of forsakenness, or roads of relinquishment, our prayer can bear substantial internal fruit; we grow spiritually and the path leads to maturity. But prayer is not all about introspection. As his book concludes, Foster’s focus becomes increasingly external, even missional. He turns to intercession, to what he calls “radical” prayer, and to a vision for church as missional community (Page 268) that the rest of us are only just starting to realise.

The prayer of *suffering* embraces the missional concept of *incarnation*. This is not to undermine, as some have taken it, the salvation-bringing incarnation of Jesus. Rather, it takes the character of God in Christ as a *model* for how we obey the Great Commission and are *sent as Christ was sent*.

Christ serves us not from above and beyond our condition, but from *within* it. And so Paul can *speak* of a participation in

the afflictions of Christ as part and parcel of his participation in his mission. And Peter can extend that participation in both *suffering and glory* to his readers, and so to us. In this sense we talk about suffering as *redemptive*, the same sense in which confession, preaching, evangelism, and other forms of witness are redemptive. The prayer of suffering expresses it.

In redemptive suffering we stand with people in their sin and in their sorrow. There can be no sterile, arms-length purity. Their suffering is a messy business and we must be prepared to step smack into the middle of the mess. We are 'crucified' not just for others but with others. (Page 234)

This is a conscious shouldering of the sins and sorrows of others in order that they may be healed and given new life. George MacDonald notes, 'The Son of God suffered unto the death, not that men might not suffer, but that their suffering might be like his.' (Page 238)

As Foster points out, (page 233), the concept of suffering is almost anathema to the consumerist culture of comfort that coerces conformity in the contemporary church. But this, itself, can create the redemptive suffering. Uncomfortable prophets and travailing intercessors are politely pushed aside or even directly silenced; their suffering and sorrow embodies the plight of the church and they cry out in the anguish of the church's self-abuse. And so Jesus *yearns* for his Jerusalem and Moses refuses to give up the Golden-Calf-enslaved people of God:

'I will go up to the LORD; perhaps I can make atonement for your sin' (Exod. 32:30b). And this is exactly what he does, boldly standing between God and the people, arguing with God to withhold his hand of judgment. Listen to the next words Moses speaks: 'But now, if you will only forgive their sin – but if not, blot me out of the book that you have written'

(Exod. 32:32). What a prayer! What a reckless, mediatorial, suffering prayer! It is exactly the kind of prayer in which we are privileged to participate. (Page 257)

What I have learned from Foster here is that this form of suffering is not only *permitted*, but *valued* in the dynamic of Jesus with his followers. In recent years I have come across many of the faithful who have been all but submerged in the bloody mess that flows from the machinations of our religious organisations. I have come across the abused with their wounds flowing. I have witnessed the weary weeping of senior leaders overcome by the inertia of apathy. I have seen the delicate shells of those discounted, despised, condescended to and cut off by orphan-hearted panderers. I can count myself amongst both the wounding and the wounded.

The prayer of suffering turns this pain towards redemption. *Daniel* prays in the pain of exile, confessing the sins of those others that sent him there. Jesus, impaled by the nails of desperate human rebellion, *prays* for their forgiveness and Stephen *later* echoes him as the stones descend and Saul looks on. Their prayers avail much, redeem much. They are prayers of suffering.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer says that when we pray for our enemies, 'we are taking their distress and poverty, their guilt and perdition upon ourselves, and pleading to God for them. We are doing vicariously for them what they cannot do for themselves.' (Page 240)

There is intimacy in this prayer, and it brings intimacy to our mission with Jesus. Only in intimacy can we pummel the chest of our heavenly Father, offering prayers of "holy violence to God" (Page 241). Only in intimacy can the accusatory cry of the *martyrs*, "How long, oh Lord?" find its answer in the divine heart.

This is not anger. It is not whining. It is, as Martin Luther puts it, 'a continuous violent action of the spirit as it is lifted up to God'. We are engaging in serious business. Our prayers are important, having effect with God. We want God to know the earnestness of our heart. We beat on the doors of heaven because we want to be heard on high. We agonize. We cry out. We shout. We pray with sobs and tears. Our prayers become the groanings of a struggling faith. (Pages 241-242)

Foster has reminded us here that suffering can be redemptive and should be released, not suppressed, in prayer. It is not wrong to demand a divine audience. It is not wrong to be more persistent than the widow. It is entirely right to bring our cause before our righteous, just, and loving Father. Maybe our cause is unjust; he can meet us in our prayer and change our heart. But maybe it is true, and we have been unknowingly sharing the heart of God, who mourns with those who mourn, and is stirred to redemptive action.

Come, Lord Jesus.

Q&A: What does it mean to be co-heirs with Christ?

Sarah asks:

Hi Will,

What does it mean to be co-heirs with Christ in Romans 8:17?

It must be unfathomable, outrageous grace to inherit all that Christ has as God the Son!

This is way better than Eden isn't it?

What does being co-heirs with Jesus look like expressed in our relationship with him for eternity – how does it fit in with us being the worshippers and him being worshipped? I suppose I mean what does it mean to be alongside God as heirs but being glorified humans, not divine?

[This is a Q&A question that has been submitted through this blog. You can submit a question (anonymously if you like) here: <http://briggs.id.au/jour/qanda/>]

Thanks Sarah,



The passage you are quoting is (to use the NIV) Romans 8:14-17:

*14 For those who are led by the Spirit of God are the children of God. 15 The Spirit you received does not make you slaves, so that you live in fear again; rather, the Spirit you received brought about your adoption to sonship. And by him we cry, 'Abba, Father.' 16 The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God's children. 17 **Now if we are children, then we are heirs – heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory.***

To respond to your first two points. Yes, this is “unfathomable, outrageous grace” and yes, “this is way better than Eden”!

You ask what does it *mean*?

Firstly, we need to grasp what Christ's inheritance *is*. The

answer is big and simple: Christ's inheritance is *everything*. It isn't always spelled out; after all, how do you detail everything? What might it include? *Big things*, like "eternal life", the "new heaven and the new earth", and "peace." It's *everything*.

The go-to passage that helps us out is Hebrews 1:1-2

*1 In the past God spoke to our ancestors through the prophets at many times and in various ways, 2 but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed **heir of all things**, and through whom also he made the universe.*

You might also be familiar with the "attitude of Christ" that Paul espouses in Philippians 2:1-11. This passage talks about the "self-emptying" (the technical term is *kenosis*) of Jesus, "who, though he was in the form of God... emptied himself, taking the form of a slave... he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death – even death on a cross." Paul then talks about Christ's *exaltation*, and in many ways he is talking about Christ's *inheritance* – what God the Father *rightly* gives the Son who gave himself up for his people:

9 Therefore God also highly exalted him and gave him the name that is above every name, 10 so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bend, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, 11 and every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

Christ's inheritance is the *reverse kenosis*, that comes not from himself, but from his Father.

And it's not just every *thing*, it is also *all authority*. Just look at Matthew 28:18 or 1 Corinthians 15:24 and many other places. Jesus really *is* the "Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End (Revelation 21:6).

That's his inheritance. Of which we are *co-heirs*.

That's amazing.

We can pull it apart theologically, but the narrative is simple: The heart of God has always been to share the fullness of himself with his people. We see it in Eden. We see it as he reaches out to Abram, making his promises, intervening in history. We see it as his presence goes with his people out of Egypt, through the sea, and on into the wilderness years. We see it as he speaks through his prophets. We see it as he nurtures a king whose heart is after his own. We see it as he pours himself out as a child, and in sharing our humanity, *covers us* with his grace and his purpose. He now shares with us his sonship, his sweet heart of faith, his trust and dependence, his obedience even to the point of death, and the blessings that rightly flow from it.

We are "in Christ" as he covers us, and Christ is "in us" by his Spirit. Salvation catches us up into the relational dynamics of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Thinking of salvation without any sense of sharing in Christ's inheritance, is like conceiving of a banquet without any reference to food; you can sort of imagine something in the abstract, but it doesn't really make any sense.

But your secondary question draws the meaning out even more. You ask, "*What does being co-heirs with Jesus look like expressed in our relationship with him for eternity – how does it fit in with us being the worshippers and him being worshipped?*"

I think there's something here: God *is* a worshipper. The object of God's worship is himself. This is not vanity, it is

truthful *delight* and entirely appropriate. The Father *adores* the Son. The Son is *devoted* to the Father. The Spirit *raises up* the name of God! Surely we can say that Jesus, as the incarnate Son of God, rightly *worships* his Father, perfectly, throughout his life and especially in his death.

To be co-heirs with Christ is, therefore, to share in his role as a worshipper. In Christ, we offer our sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving and, in Christ, it is worthy and honourable and *received* in great delight by Almighty Creator God.

Again, there's something amazing about that.

But does our inheritance with Christ also mean an inheritance in the worship he *receives*? In some sense, yes, but I mean this very carefully: as Christ's people, we share in the worship *he* receives, not in any worship we receive, but in the worship *he* receives.

What I'm trying to grasp is in this account from the end of the book, in Revelation 21:9-27:

9 One of the seven angels... came and said to me, 'Come, I will show you the bride, the wife of the Lamb.' 10 And he carried me away in the Spirit to a mountain great and high, and showed me the Holy City, Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God. 11 It shone with the glory of God, and its brilliance was like that of a very precious jewel, like a jasper, clear as crystal.

John then goes on to talk about the gates and walls of the New Jerusalem and includes imagery of apostolic foundations and things like that. The overall picture is one of beauty, and purity, of the Bride of Christ, who shines (and this is the point) *with the glory of God*. Jesus covers his bride with *his* glory. *That* is our inheritance. It is not *our* glory. It is *his*. But we share in it. All creation will gaze upon us, his

people, and worship him.

And that brings us back to Romans 8:17, where we started, because there it is in the second part of the verse:

*Now if we are children, then we are heirs – heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that **we may also share in his glory.***

It *is* outrageously amazing.

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Holiness, Discipleship

Worship,

Have you noticed our tendency to *mechanise* the human and Christian experience of life?



Back in our church planting days, we noticed that much of the relevant theory viewed a new church as a *mechanism* which could be adjusted by programs and processes, techniques and good management. These things weren't bad ideas but they were more suited to expanding the *existing*, effective at cloning the sending church and often doing little towards connecting with the disconnected.

It was more useful to think of the church truly as a *plant*.

Leadership would thus turn towards more organic things such as nurture and care, and a *responsiveness* that recognised that ultimately we were reliant on Someone Else to provide the growth.

One of the current buzzwords in church life at the moment is *discipleship*. The tendency to mechanise has accompanied it: discipleship is conflated with programs and processes, techniques and good guidance. Again, these things have value, but they primarily help individuals and churches expand and improve the *current, existing* rhythms of life. They are less effective in fathoming new depths of ourselves and how we are called by God. At the extreme of it, we equate “discipleship” with spiritualised self-help programs that actually hinder our call towards a richer faith, a deeper transformative trust in God.

The growing wisdom that counters this tendency places discipleship on the foundation of *worship*. This is a thoroughly biblical idea. Everything from the Ten Commandments to the Lord’s Prayer and the prevailing narratives in between acknowledges first and foremost God’s Sovereignty, Lordship, and the simple *worthiness* of his adoration. It is the beginning of our response to him. Passages like Romans 12:1-2 demonstrate how the “living sacrifice” of discipleship adheres to worship.

Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God’s mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God – this is your true and proper worship. Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God’s will is – his good, pleasing and perfect will.

Discipleship derives from worship.

But finding the foundation of worship doesn’t totally avoid

our waywardness. After all, forms of worship in every tradition can also be treated mechanically and become emptied and disconnected. In the extreme, we are warned in these last days to be aware of actions that *“having a form of godliness but denying its power.”* (It strikes me as less and less odd as I get older and more cynical that the list of blatant vices that precede this statement in 2 Timothy 3 could ever have been mistaken as a “form of godliness”).

What, then, does our worship draw upon?

To be sure, it is a grace of God, a manifestation of the Holy Spirit that causes us to groan and cry out *Abba Father!*.

Here, as Romans 8 shows us, is a point of connection, the “Spirit bearing witness with our spirit that we are children of God.” This is an organic, relational, responsiveness. Our worship draws upon a childlike reaching out to God. It is the same spirit as Psalm 42:

*As the deer pants for streams of water,
so my soul pants for you, my God.
My soul thirsts for God, for the living God.
When can I go and meet with God?*

Such a thirst for God in worship is much more than a transcendent experience or a moment of inner awareness. The framework of the Old Testament places this worship in the dust of every day, and a longing for a Torah-shaped shalom. To thirst for God, is to thirst for his *holiness*, to have his *righteousness written on our hearts*.

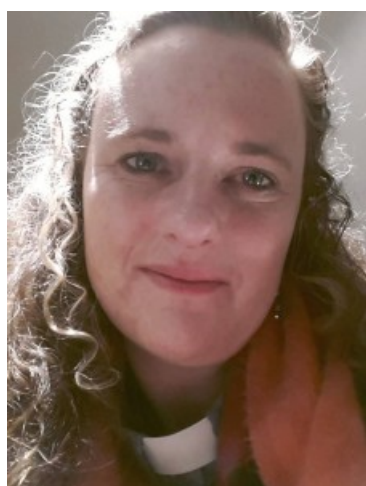
Discipleship derives from worship which derives from a thirst for holiness.

The renewed pursuit of discipleship is a welcome development within the church. There is a recognition that it isn't the pursuit of programs, but of cultural change. As we fathom the depths of what that means, we find the pure springs of God's

glory. How do we bring discipleship to his church? We need to thirst for him first, and hunger after his righteousness.

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Let everything that has breath (in honour of Gillian Briggs)



*Praise the Lord!
Praise the Lord, O my soul!
I will praise the Lord as long as I live;
I will sing praises to my God while I have my being.
(Psalm 146:1-2)*

This is Gillian Briggs. It's her facebook profile pic so I'm sure she won't mind me posting it here.

Today Gill turns 40. She enters her fifth decade. And judging by the sunrise this morning it is going to be an awesome one. She married me 18 years ago almost-to-the-day. I win ☐

The thing is, we almost didn't get married. Not because of anything relational, but because we almost didn't meet. Gill almost didn't reach decade number three. Twenty years ago complications with surgery almost took her from us.

There's a story she tells from that period of her life in which she was starkly faced with only having a finite number of breaths left. She tells of the resolve that Psalm 146 brought to her: *I will praise the Lord as long as I live; I will sing praises to my God while I have my being.* And Psalm 150 says it too: *Let everything that has breath praise the Lord. Praise the Lord!*

I have had the privilege of walking next to Gill and having her walk next to me for many years now. I have heard her troubled breaths, pain-filled breaths, laugh-filled breaths, weeping breaths, contented and relaxed breaths and downright frustrated breaths! But I listen to them, and I learn from them (when I'm not being a fool). Because each one of them has something that points me to divine truth and God's heart and therefore to life itself.

If you know me you will have heard me say that I admire Gill, and when asked to sum up that admiration I give two inadequate but accurate words: tenacity and vivacity. Gill is tenacious and vivacious. It's what happens when you have praise-filled breaths.

The tenacity is strength. Yes, sometimes it's stubbornness and immovability. But mostly it's just-keep-going-ness. It's more aware than blind perseverance; it's an unwillingness to close the eyes and descend into darkness, and to be able to respond when the heartbeat of God and hope break in when darkness does envelope. It's that sense of "this isn't good enough" that refuses to be content with injustice and half-heartedness and looks for gold when others think they have it right with lumps of lead.

The vivacity is beauty and life. Yes, sometimes it flashes with passionate anger. But mostly its a glow that fills the home, lightens hearts, and wakes people up. It can be fierce – what I see and hear when I wake up to hear music or singing, and I know that she is kicking down some darkness inside her or around her. But it's also warm, a cloud of understanding and discernment, and place of rest and connection for others, with someone who just “get's it” and knows how to speak life.

I would like to bear witness to Gill's strength. These last four decades have not been easy. Many are yet to see the fullness of the gift God has given to us all in her. I'm sure there is more adversity and difficulty to come – although I long for a season of release when she, and I, get to rise up on some wings together. But I also know that Gill is finding her voice, or perhaps finding a *renewed* voice (because she has always had one), and through it we will all be blessed by her tenacity and vivacity.

Today, on her birthday, Gill is singing with the Southern Gospel Choir in a combined performance with world-acclaimed grammy-award-winning acapella group *Take 6*.

Today, on her birthday, with every breath, Gill is praising the Lord.

It is very very right.

**Q&A: Having just looked up
Psalm 149.3 I came upon this...**

What do you make of it and what is your opinion?

Anonymous asks: *Having just looked up Psalm 149.3 I came upon this item*
(<http://www.freedomministries.org.uk/masters/idiom11c.shtml>)
What do you make of it and what is your opinion?

OK. Psalm 149.3 in the ESV is this:

*Let them praise his name with dancing,
making melody to him with tambourine and lyre.*

On the face of it, the psalm looks like a reasonably ordinary song of praise. The simple phrase *Praise the LORD!* in the first verse echoes the very clear sentiments of the very next psalm (150) – *Let everything that has breath praise the LORD! Praise the LORD!* Psalm 150 seems to be a simple call to exalting God “for his mighty deeds.. his excellent greatness” (v2) and, like Psalm 149:3 calls us to “Praise him with tambourine and dance” (v4). The two psalms seem to go together.

The link that Anonymous references is to an organisation started by one Andrew Dobbin with the following agenda, taken from the sites *About Us* page,

Freedom Ministries was started in 1990 by Andrew Dobbin who at that time was living in Bushmills, N.Ireland.

He began to be concerned about the “infiltration” of pop-idiom music and other forms of entertainment into the Church, things which by their very nature tend to entertain rather than teach and edify.

The application of this to the psalms is made by Peter Masters

(from the referenced page)

Some psalms refer to musical instruments which were not normally associated with worship at all, either in the Temple on feast days, or for accompanying psalms and spiritual songs. These other instruments were played on festive occasions and for enjoyment and recreation.

It is failure to identify these 'civil life' references that causes people to think that the Psalms condone a musical jamboree policy for worship.

With reference to Psalm 82, Dr. Masters continues:

The formula is the same as ever:- tambourines for national festivities and cultural dance, harp-like instruments for psalm-singing, and trumpets and cymbals used exclusively in the Temple orchestra under careful restraint for the sacrifices connected with these feasts.

And with reference to Psalm 149:3 he writes:

Psalm 149.3 is also quoted in support of today's pop-music activities, and is said to condone dancing in worship...

However, the question must be asked, is the psalmist speaking about acts of direct spiritual worship, or is he speaking about the cultural, recreational life of the nation? As we read through the psalm the answer becomes obvious.

The implication is that dancing and tambourines have no place in "direct worship" of the Christian kind.

This is classic overcategorisation derived from legalism. Let me point out

1. What on earth is "direct worship"? Can worship ever be "indirect"? Something is either worshipful or it is

not! There's a false dichotomy here.

2. This false dichotomy arises, it seems, from a correlation of "direct worship" with OT "temple worship." This implies an equating of direct Christian worship with OT temple worship which is simply not the case. This fails to take into account not only the significant unfoldings in the covenantal life of God's people from OT to NT it also simply an overrestriction of something general ("worship") into something very very particular (the temple).
3. And finally, what on earth is wrong with "entertainment"? Yes, for sure, there is an inconsistency between facile or vapid entertainment that does nothing but amuse, and true expression of worship. But God is a God of experience and expression – and worship rightly includes the entertainment of all our senses and the catching up of our whole being in bringing glory to God.

So pick up your tambourine and guitar (or pipe organ! – the beauty of which I am coming to appreciate despite the fact that you can't pick it up!) and dance before the Lord. Let our whole being and all that we are praise his holy name.

Amen.