

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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