

**September 24, 2017**  
**Services: What We Do and Why We Do It**  
**John 3:1-24**

**Introduction: What is a worship service and why do we do it.**

*"From time to time the church should take stock of that which is most central, most important, most vital in our common life together,"* comments New Testament scholar, Tom Wright. *"Worship is nothing more than love on its knees before the Beloved,"* he adds. So he paraphrases 1 Corinthians 13, Paul's great passage on love, to describe our worship: *"Though we sing with the tongues of men and of angels, if we are not truly worshipping the living God, we are noisy gongs and clanging cymbals. Though we organize the liturgy/service beautifully, if it does not enable us to worship the living God, we are mere ballet-dancers. Though we repave the floor and reface the stonework, though we balance the budgets and attract lots of visitors, if we are not worshipping God, we are nothing."*

*"Worship is humble and glad. Worship forgets itself in remembering God. Worship celebrates truth as God's truth, not its own. True worship doesn't put on a show or make a fuss. True worship isn't forced, isn't half-hearted, doesn't keep looking at its watch, doesn't worry what the person in the next pew may be doing. True worship is open to God, adoring God, waiting for God, trusting God even in the dark."*

*"Worship will never end. Whether there be buildings, they will crumble. Whether there be committees, they will fall asleep. Whether there be budgets, they will add up to nothing. For we build for the present age, we discuss for the present age, and we pay for the present age; but when the age to come is here, the present age will be done away. For now we see the beauty of God through a glass, darkly, but then face to face. Now we appreciate only in part, but then we shall affirm and appreciate God, even as the living God has affirmed and appreciated us. So now our tasks are worship, mission, and management, these three; but the greatest of these is worship."*

**Call to Worship** – This is an opportunity for us to focus in and remind ourselves why we are here. In a worship service, it seems we assemble for a performance – we sit back as the audience, evaluate the performers (the musicians and pastor), and then debrief about what we liked or we got out of it. God? God is the topic under discussion. That is totally backwards. In reality, God is the audience. The pastor and musicians are the leaders. And the congregation are the performers. Worship is for God, not for us. Communion, specifically, is all about Jesus. It's not about what we like or dislike.

So we typically read a passage like Psalm 100 to remind us of why we gather:

*Shout with joy to the Lord, all the earth!  
Worship the Lord with gladness.  
Come before him, singing with joy.*

*Acknowledge that the Lord is God!  
He made us, and we are his.  
We are his people, the sheep of his pasture.  
Enter his gates with thanksgiving;  
go into his courts with praise.  
Give thanks to him and praise his name.  
For the Lord is good.  
His unfailing love continues forever,  
and his faithfulness continues to each generation.*

**Worship Songs** – Why do we sing songs? Our attitude in worship? Matt

Songs

**Offering Prayer** – Why do we do an offering? What does it mean?

This is the season of the year for giving thanks. One of the great characteristics of the church – you and I – is that we have so much for which to be thankful. We are thankful for God's amazing creation, that He loves us so much He came among us in Jesus, died on the cross that we might be forgiven, and rose from the dead. We are saved. We have eternal life (now and hereafter). His Spirit is in us. These are BIG things about which we can be thankful.

But on a year-by-year, month-by-month, day-by-day basis we have so much to be grateful for as well. We take so many blessings for granted: our health, family, country, daily bread, friends, job, health care, homes, pensions, educational opportunities, church, ability to talk, freedom, clothing, city, transportation, security, ability to hear, savings account, schools, recreation opportunities, ability to see, emergency services, life experiences, and so much more ...

Throughout the Bible, we are encouraged to "tithе." Tithing is about giving thanks to God. Tithing is a spiritual discipline in which we give the first part of what we have to God as an expression of worship and as an expression of our thanks for His good gifts. Tithing is what thankful, grateful people do. They appreciate that all they have is a gift from God, and they delight to offer the first part of it back to God in worship.

The Biblical principle of tithing arises from a genuine relationship with God. As we reflect on how much God has done for us in the past and is doing for us, right now, we WANT to express our gratitude to Him. Giving a tithe – the first part of our income – is one way to do that. We may gripe a lot about life in Canada, but compared to most of the world, we are doing very well. *"He brought us to this place and gave us this land flowing with milk and honey,"* writes Moses. *"And now, O Lord, I have brought you the first portion of the harvest you have given me"* (Deuteronomy 26:9-10). What are you thankful for?

Tithing is not a tax. It's not "the-church-wanting-my-money." It's not even about

providing financial support for the ministries of the church (although that happens through our tithes). Tithing is an essential part of our worship of God. Tithing is our grateful response to God's love, care, provision, and salvation. Tithing is a tangible way we show our love for God. We literally put our money where our mouth is.

Tithing is also a practical way we put our faith into practice. Money is the hardest thing to give away for many of us. It's just tough. Tithing challenges us to deal with that deeply embedded desire "to hold on" and "be safe." Do you control your pocketbook or does your pocketbook control you? Can you give to God? Do you really trust God care for you?

**Worship Songs** - How do we choose songs (the flow of worship)? Matt

Songs

**Children's Moment** – Worship is for everyone, including kids Bruce

Jesus loved spending time with kids! In a world where only adults (only adult men) mattered, Jesus loved hanging out with kids. He blessed them. He used their straightforward faith as an object lesson. His disciples grumbled about this. But Jesus pushed back – the Kingdom of God belongs to these (Mark 10:13-16).

Let's celebrate kids – they are our future.

Let's learn from kids – to have a straightforward kind of faith, to enjoy Jesus, to enjoy church, even to play a little more ... ☺

**Prayer** – Why do we pray as a community? Bruce

Prayer is talking with God. Nothing more. Nothing less. We are a family. God is our loving heavenly Father, Jesus describes Himself as our brother. Families – healthy families – talk to one another. And listen to one another.

We can do that personally and individually. It is good to share with our Father one on one. I hope you do. Our reading and prayer guides can give you resources to help.

It is also good to do that corporately as a community. When we pray together it's like we're having a family meeting. And so we will bring some of our personal concerns: we'll pray for those who are struggling, those who have lost loved ones, those in crisis. Sometimes we'll ask people to share.

We also pray/talk with God about our family. We pray for specific ministries in the church. We ask for God's wisdom, direction, and help. We ask for His inspiration. We want to be doing His work, not just scurrying around keeping busy.

And we pray/talk with God about bigger issues. We pray "your kingdom come and your

will be done” and we recognize that we’re a long way from that in our world. We are aware that our extended family of believers circles the globe. We know there are literally billions of people who do not know about Jesus yet. There are hundreds of millions in dire straits – from natural disasters, war, political issues, etc. WE pray for our extended Christian family. And we pray for all people everywhere. God wants all people to know Jesus. He wants all people to be treated with justice and integrity. And so we pray.

Does prayer change God’s mind? Perhaps not as much as prayer changes us. When we talk with God – individually or together – we are also listening to God. We want our Father to speak to us. We want to know how we can change. We ask Him to sort out our priorities. Sometimes the greatest results in prayer come as we are transformed by listening to God ...

**Scripture:** We read God’s Word! Years ago our Regional Minister, Keith Churchill, commented, *“As I travel to different churches, I’m amazed how little Scripture I hear read.”*

We believe the Bible is God’s Word to us. We say it is our authority on matters of faith and conduct. And so we choose to read it in our services. Sometimes it is integrated into the sermon, sometimes it is more “stand alone.” But we will always have a strong Scriptural foundation for what we do and what we say. We won’t change that.

That does not mean God’s Word is always easy to understand! We may differ on our interpretation of some passages. That’s ok. We do, however, keep coming back to Scripture as God’s Word to us. Our sermons or teaching time, are reflections and applications of what we read in Scripture. As we move on to think about the message or the sermon, let’s think about how this works.

**Sermons.** Let’s take a familiar Scripture, perhaps the most familiar Scripture, John 3:16, *“For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.”* It’s good to read this often. I quote it about once a month in a sermon. Why? Because I think it says some really important things. We repeat the important things. And repetition helps us remember it.

Say you were going to preach a sermon on John 3:16. What would you do? What do I do? Here is a glimpse into my weekly world ...

1. **I/we pray about what we preach about.** This is something we work through as a staff community. We tend to either preach through biblical books or do topical series (like this series on the church). There are advantages to both ...
2. **I pray. I look at the bigger context.** John 3:16 is part of a bigger story. In John 2, Jesus is in Jerusalem for the Passover festival, a time when the Jewish people remembered how God had miraculously delivered them from slavery in Egypt. The Jewish powers-that-be are struggling to figure out who Jesus is. At night, one of the Jewish leaders, comes secretly to meet with Jesus. **Read John 3:1-21.**

3. **I pray. And I ask, "What was God/Jesus doing/saying back then?"** "What was His message to Nicodemus?" The basic message of John 3:16 is a key part of it, but it is not the whole thing ... What else is Jesus saying?
4. **I pray. And I ask, "What then is God saying to us, today?"** What do you think He is saying?
5. **I pray. And I ask, "How do I need to respond practically to this message? How can people respond practically to this message?"** How would you apply this?
6. **I pray. And I try to craft a sermon that somehow brings that all together, and has a practical application/challenge at the end.** If there is no practical application, it might be a nice theology lecture, but, in my mind, it's not a sermon.
7. **At the end of a sermon we pray, asking God to apply His truth into our lives.** It's a prayer for transformation.

Sermons teach us more about Scripture. They help us wrestle with applying God's Word to our lives. But they are just "teasers." In 20 minutes you just cannot do justice to a text like John 3:1-21. And, let's be honest, by this afternoon you will have forgotten most of it!

That's why I began doing the reading guides years ago. It's the takeaway to help you remember and wrestle more deeply. It takes the text and explores it in more detail. Every day you wrestle with the text and the issues it raises. And, like a sermon, I try to ask personal application-type questions.

**Closing Song** – Our closing song is chosen to continue to help us apply the lesson from God's Word. And it is a commission to go into the world and be God's people. We try to find songs that send us back into our world as God's missional people.

**Benediction** – "Benediction is a Latin word meaning "blessing" or "wishing you well." So we close our services with a blessing as you go about your week. Blessing simply means praying God's love, mercy, and grace over one another. It's a gift we can give one another. So my gift to you, my prayer for you, is this biblical blessing, that God will be with you, care for you, and be merciful to you this week: *"The Lord bless you and keep you; the Lord make his face shine on you and be gracious to you; the Lord show you his favour and give you his peace."*