

# ***Why Worship?***

*The first message in a five-part series on what it means to be a disciple.*

**Offered by  
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**February 21, 2010**

*And let us consider how to provoke one another to love and good deeds, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day approaching.*

*Hebrews 10:24-25*

*You* don't need to hear today's message, but someone you know does. *You* made the decision to worship God today. Something or someone convinced you that of all the things you could be doing right now—sleeping, reading the Sunday paper, cleaning the basement, or going to a basketball tournament--worshipping our Lord and Savior is the most important. But on any given Sunday millions of Christians choose not to worship, not here, not anywhere. And they're the ones I wish could hear this message.

I bet many of you struggled with some of those folks this morning. Maybe you tried to get your children or your parents or your spouse or roommate to worship with you today. Maybe you succeeded in convincing them through threats, bribes, or guilt. I'm familiar with the techniques. "You promised you'd go last week." "We'll go out to lunch together if you go with me; I'll pay." "If you don't go you're grounded." Or my personal favorite: "You have to go, you're the pastor!" Sometimes these techniques work. Most times they fail. It can be a challenge to explain why Sunday worship is an essential part of every Christian's life.

Today's message is for the husband who refuses to come to worship because he says it's a waste of time. It's for the roommate who says that she can be spiritual without being religious—she doesn't need to worship in a

church. It's for kids who want to sleep late on Sunday morning or skip out of worship early in time for their 11 o'clock soccer game.

But *those* folks aren't here; *you* are. And I suspect you know some of the people I'm trying to reach with this message. So in the next few minutes I'm going to equip you with some things you could say the next time someone asks you—in one form or another—"why worship?" You might even find that you need to answer that question for yourself some morning.

Let's look at some of the excuses people give for skipping Sunday worship. The most common excuse is, "I don't get anything out of it." When people say this they are revealing a basic error in their understanding of the point of worship: worship isn't about what *we* get out of it, it's about what *God* gets out of it. Worship isn't about *us*, it's about *God*. Many of us have forgotten that.

We worship not because we're going to get something out of it, but because God deserves our worship. When Moses took his shoes off by the burning bush, he didn't do it because he liked the feel of sand beneath his toes; it was because he was standing on holy ground. When Peter realized who Jesus was, confessed his sin, and proclaimed, "My Lord and my God," he didn't do it because it made him feel warm and fuzzy inside. These men worshipped because when we are in God's presence all we can do is bow down and humble ourselves.

I've heard people casually say, "When I see God I'm gonna ask Him a few tough questions." I doubt that. I suspect that when we come before the Almighty Creator of the Universe, when we stand before the One who gave his life on the cross for us, we won't be able to say anything except maybe, "Thank you." In the moment we see God face to face I think we will be simultaneously overwhelmed by a sense of God's tremendous purity, perfection, and power and a sudden realization of how unworthy we are even to *stand* in his presence much less *speak*. Worship is the only appropriate response to a clear understanding of God's great love for us.

Saying, "I don't get anything out of worship" makes it sound like the congregation is an audience and the worship leaders are entertainers, as if you've paid your money and now you expect a show in return. But that's not what worship is about. When we worship, *God* is the audience and *we--all of us--* are the ones offering Him our gifts of song, and prayer, and even

ourselves for God's glory and pleasure. The way to judge excellent worship isn't by asking, "Did you enjoy the service?" but by asking, "Do you think God was honored with what we just did?"

When people say they don't get anything out of worship, I want to ask them two things. First, how much do you put into worship? Do you bring an open mind and a contrite heart? Do you offer yourself completely to God? Do you listen, sing, and pray with your whole being? I've never met a person who did all that and found that worship was a waste of time.

The second question I want to ask them is, how do you know you don't get anything out of worship? When you eat a healthy meal, do you feel the vitamins going in? After every math class you took in school did you immediately realize how useful your new knowledge would be in later life? Of course not. Change, healing, and growth take time; and it's rarely obvious that it's happening. Just because a tree doesn't look like it's getting taller doesn't mean it isn't putting down deep roots beneath the surface. When we spend time with God growth is bound to occur.

A second popular excuse for avoiding Sunday worship is, "I don't need to go to church to worship God." This excuse is based on the logic that since God is *everywhere* I can worship *anywhere*, including my bed, the mall, or the closest trout stream. The problem with this theory is that loving God isn't a matter of logic.

Saying that you love God but don't "need" to worship Him in a church is like telling someone "I love you, but

- I won't admit it to anyone else."
- I don't believe in showing it."
- I don't need to spend time with you."
- I won't give up anything for you."
- I'd rather sleep, play, work or almost anything else than hang out with you and your friends."
- I don't want to listen to you what you have to say to me."
- I'm only in this so long as you are meeting my needs."
- We can only see each other on Christmas, Easter, weddings and funerals."

How long would you stay with someone who said that to you? When we refuse Sunday worship we're saying all those things to God.

Of course it *is* possible to worship God outside of church walls. In fact private worship and devotion is every bit as essential to the Christian life as is public worship and praise. But worshipping on your own isn't a substitute for worshipping here. In Sunday worship we confess sin, give gifts, thank God, ask for God's help, listen for God's guidance, and receive the grace that comes in the Lord's Supper and Baptism. We just can't do all of that on our own. And we certainly can't do it from the comfort of our beds, the mall, or the Letort Spring Run.

The third most common excuse Christians use for skipping Sunday worship is, "I'm too busy." I can understand this. There just aren't enough hours in the day or days in a week to do everything we'd like to do, are there? In the end, it comes down to choices: what do you choose to do with the limited time that God has given you? It's not like God hasn't given us guidance in answering the question. "Remember the Sabbath and keep it holy," seems like a pretty clear command that we shouldn't let anything in our lives get in the way of worshipping him.

But we do. A while back I was part of a team leading a Confirmation ministry. When I explained to the students what was going to be required of them in the program and how much time it was going to take, I got panicked looks and blank stares in return. Then one student was bold enough to say, "there's no way I can fit all this into my schedule, Pastor Jeff." And I said, "Congratulations, you've already learned the first lesson of discipleship. Christians don't fit God into their schedule; they build their schedule around God."

Is any one of us really too busy and important to stop and worship God for a few hours each week? If you need to sleep late on Sunday morning, do really have to be out so late on Saturday night? If you need to catch up on work Sunday morning, is it possible that you're just plain working too hard? If you can't come to worship because your team practices on Sundays, could it be that your coach and your teammates have their priorities messed up?

God needs to be the first priority in every Christian's life. When God slips to second or third place we've got things backward. Imagine that you

and a friend decide to get together every Wednesday morning for breakfast. After a few weeks she calls and says, "Sorry the kids are sick, can't make it today." Then, "Can't make it, we're going to be out late the night before." Then, "Can we change to Tuesdays, I signed up for an exercise class on Wednesday mornings?" How many more variations on "I'm too busy" would it take before you realized that the relationship really wasn't that important to your friend? How long before you realized you weren't a priority in her life? I think it's that way with God sometimes.

What do your worship habits say about the priority you place on building your relationship with God? Do you build your weeks around worship or is Sunday worship something you plan on doing until something "better" comes up?

I know that it's hard to get here sometimes. I know that some of you are working very hard to make ends meet, that you really need the extra sleep, that you had to turn down other activities in order to be here with God. All that makes your presence here all the more meaningful to God. God knows how hard it is for you. God knows the struggles you go through to get here. God sees you trying to get all the kids out the door with or without a spouse's help. God hears the endless debates with the voices inside your head telling you, "just one more hour of sleep, just one more hour of sleep." Let me tell you this: the effort you expend in getting here is part of your gift to God this morning. I really believe God appreciates the sacrifices we make to honor Him with our presence here on Sunday mornings.

Lent began a few days ago with Ash Wednesday. It's the beginning of a season of spiritual growth when some people give up something for God. I want to encourage you to give up something *to* God: a season of worship. Make plans to worship every Sunday you possibly can between now and Easter. Reserve these dates now in your Blackberry or I-Phone or whatever you use to keep track of things, so that nothing will keep you from worshipping God on those days, too. If you are leading a family, make worship a family priority, too, for this season. And if you've already made Sunday worship the cornerstone of every week, why not invite a friend to join you. They really will get something out of it. Better yet, God will. Amen.

## ***14 Reasons to Get Out of Bed on Sunday Morning***

We come to worship to

1. Receive instruction on how to live the good and truly rich life that God has planned for us.
2. Support others as they seek healing and hope.
3. Share our prayer concerns with God and God's people. A joy shared is doubled; a grief shared is halved.
4. Praise God for all that God is—loving, strong, faithful, and more.
5. Thank God for all that God has done for us.
6. Sit in God's presence and simply be in awe of God's majesty.
7. Be inspired and filled with the Holy Spirit so that we may be empowered to do God's work in the world.
8. Receive comfort and healing that come from experiencing God's love through prayer, song, Word, and Sacrament.
9. Be challenged. Someone once said that a good sermon comforts the afflicted and *afflicts the comfortable*.
10. Connect with others through fellowship and communion.
11. Confess our short-comings (sin) and receive assurance of God's forgiveness (grace).
12. Receive God's grace through the Sacraments (the Lord's Supper and Baptism).
13. Be reminded of God's story of passionate love for humanity (as recorded in the Scriptures of the Old and New Testament).
14. Make an offering and respond to God's love with a tangible act of commitment.

*Dear Friend,*

*I hope you have been blessed by this message. You can request a free audio-tape or CD recording of this sermon by contacting the church office. We also have a complete sermon archive (including audio-files and PDFs) on-line at [www.GrowWithSecond.org/sermons](http://www.GrowWithSecond.org/sermons)*

*Second Presbyterian Church is a thriving congregation celebrating over 175 years of service to God and God's people. It would be our joy to help you grow in faith, hope, and love. Please consider being our guest for Sunday worship at 8 or 10:30am. Children's Church and infant and toddler care are always provided.*

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