

LIFE with Jesus in Community
Corporate Worship

WORSHIP IN COMMUNITY

It's easy to picture Jesus as a lone wolf—working out His ministry in isolated places and removing Himself from the religious associations of His day. But this would be to miss how much of Jesus's life and ministry centers around the synagogues and the temple and how passionate He was about establishing a worshipping community.

In John's gospel, one of the first things Jesus does is to go to Jerusalem, make a long whip, and use it to lash moneychangers and vendors out of the temple court. His astonished disciples remark that He is "consumed with zeal for God's house." In other words, He burns with passion about how we worship God together. He didn't come to abolish worship in community, but to purify it. He cared very much what happened in that place where His people gathered to worship, the place He called "my Father's house."

He goes on to do much of His ministry—teaching, healing, and casting out demons—in communal centers of worship. He summarizes, "I have always taught in synagogues and in the temple, where all Jews come together," John 18:20.

He also makes it a practice to worship with others on the Sabbath: "And he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up. And *as was his custom*, he went to the synagogue on the Sabbath day, and he stood up to read," Luke 4:16.

Lastly, He declares that He came to build a church: "I will build my church," Matthew 16:18.

To follow Jesus, then, is to follow Him in community with His church, gathering regularly for worship. He came seeking people willing to do this, as he announced to the Samaritan woman at the well: "True worshippers will worship the Father in spirit and in truth, for the Father is seeking such people to worship him," John 4:23.

Making the commitment to "go to church" frequently – to gather with other believers to sing to God, profess what we believe, hear God's word, and be side-by-side and face-to-face with fellow Christians is a primary way that we live the two greatest commandments: "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind" . . . and "love our neighbor as ourself," Matthew 22:37-39.

Driving out of our neighborhoods, where others may remain in bed, and through our cities, where others may be shopping or recreating, to gather with fellow Christians as the church is a

profound act of faith, obedience, and love to God. It's a way of saying to God, "I intend to order my life with you at the center, together with others who also place you at the center."

On top of that, when we gather for corporate worship, Jesus is with us in a way He is not when we are alone. This allows us to receive grace from His Holy Spirit—encouragement, truth, joy, comfort, correction, or exhortation—that we will never find by ourselves. We are more together than we can ever be apart.

Theologian Wayne Grudem asserts, "Those who neglect the fellowship of the church willfully cut themselves off . . . from most of the ordinary means that the Holy Spirit uses to bring blessing to his people," Wayne Grudem.

Paul, one of the writers of the New Testament, uses the metaphor of the church as a body; he says the church *is* Christ's body. To take up his imagery, how can a foot be a foot without a body? How can a hand do anything apart from the arm and the circulatory system and the nervous system? Jesus's church is His living, spiritual body, and it only thrives through being connected to one another in Him. The first and primary way this happens is through worship in community.

THE PRACTICE

Center your life more firmly around Jesus, growing in your love for Him and uniting your life with the lives of other followers of Jesus by making the commitment to regularly worship in community at your church.

HELPFUL SCRIPTURES

"Where two or three are gathered in my name, there I am among them," Matthew 18:20.

"And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds, not giving up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching," Hebrews 10:24

"Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, as you teach and admonish one another in all wisdom, and as you sing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs with thankfulness in your hearts to God," Colossians 3:16.

"Christ is the head of the church, his body," Ephesians 5:23.

"Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her," Ephesians 5:25.

INTERESTING QUOTES

“He cannot have God for his Father who will not have the Church for his mother,” Augustine.

“Personalities united can contain more of God and sustain the force of his greater presence much better than scattered individuals. The fire of God kindles higher as the brands are heaped together and each is warmed by the other’s flame. The members of the body must be in contact if they are to sustain and be sustained by each other,” Dallas Willard.

“To worship is to experience reality, to touch Life. It is to experience the resurrected Christ in the midst of the gathered community,” Richard Foster.

“I do want to speak up on behalf of one weekly habit that is utterly essential to any healthy, life-giving, joy-producing Christian walk: corporate worship. And it is all too often neglected, or taken very lightly, in our day of disembodiment and in our proclivity for being noncommittal. In fact, I do not think it is too strong to call corporate worship the single most important habit of the Christian life,” David Mathis.

“The church’s worship is at the heart of discipleship. Yes, Christian formation is a life-encompassing, Monday through Saturday, week in and week out project; but it radiates from, and is nourished by, the worship life of the congregation gathered around word and table. There is no sanctification without the church, not because some building holds a superstitious magic, but rather because the church is the very body of Christ, animated by the Spirit of God and composed of spirited practices. . . He meets us where we are, as creatures of habit who are shaped by practices, and invites us into a community of practice that is the very *body* of his Son. Liturgy is the way we learn to ‘put on’ Christ,” James K.A. Smith.

“In worship God gathers his people to himself as center: ‘The Lord reign’ (Psalms 93:1). Worship is meeting at the center so that our lives are centered in God and not lived eccentrically. We worship so that we live in response to and from the center, the living God . . . Without worship we live manipulated and manipulating lives . . . People who do not worship are swept into a vast restlessness, epidemic in the world, with no steady direction and no sustaining purpose . . . People who do not worship live in a vast shopping mall where they go from shop to shop, expending enormous sums of energy and making endless trips to meet first this need and then that appetite, this whim and that fancy,” Eugene Peterson.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Before you try this practice:

1. Talk about your responses to or thoughts about the material in this practice.
2. What has been your practice of worship in community?
3. Do you belong to a church? If not, what makes committing to a church difficult for you?
4. If you do belong to a church, what blessings can you perceive have come to you through attending worship?
5. If you worship online or virtually, talk about this experience. How do you find it the same as or different from worshipping in person?
6. What challenges do you experience as you attempt to participate in worship at your church?
7. How do you think the Lord might be inviting you to alter your schedule or priorities to make attending worship in community a more regular practice for you or your family?
8. Pray for one another about these things.

After you try this practice:

1. What changes have you tried to implement toward the goal of attending worship more regularly?
2. What did you find challenging about this?
3. What experiences of blessing or encouragement did you discover?
4. How do you think the Lord may be inviting you to implement this practice going forward?