

**Christ Presbyterian Church  
Edina, Minnesota  
March 3 & 4, 2012  
John Crosby  
Spiritual Disciplines: Worship  
Hebrews 10:19-25**

Last week we said that one of the keys to becoming like Jesus is not trying harder. It is practice, practicing small things. I have a daughter who is practicing for a half-marathon in a couple of weeks. She is going to run 13 miles today and if I wanted to, I could just go and run right along with her, right? Not a chance. It wouldn't matter how much I wanted to run 13 miles with her today because unless there was a car nearby, I could not do it no matter how hard I wanted. Because she has practiced half-mile by half-mile by mile by two by four by six miles, she is now able to run farther than her father thinks the human body should be able to do anything. That is the difference between desire - I want to be a good Christian, I want to follow Jesus - and practice. If I do small things now, I can do other things later. That is what John Ortberg talked to us about. Remember John said, "A spiritual discipline is any activity that we do that allows us by repetition to do what we cannot currently do by desire." If we do small things now, we will be able to do things that we cannot right now.

We talked about how silence is the foundation to hearing God speak, a sort of first step, a first practice step. So maybe the second step after being quiet alone would be to see what happens when we get together, when we gather to hear God's Word. Worship is seen as one of the spiritual disciplines, one of these tools that God uses. It is the only thing that is unique to the church if you think about it. Everything else that we do, somebody else also does. We do good things for the poor but, you know, so does the Red Cross. We develop good friendships, but so does Rotary and the Lions Club and all those other groups. We teach people, but so do schools and educational systems. The only thing that the church does uniquely is to say that there is an invisible God around us and if you listen closely, together, you can hear God speak. We call that worship. We turn aside from the daily routine, the way Moses did. Remember Moses? He was herding his sheep and all of a sudden, he sees a burning bush and he turns aside and goes there and finds he is on holy ground. God talked to him. Isaiah goes to sleep, and he says, "All of a sudden in the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord." That is worship.

Worship is when we turn inside to focus on God and try to listen to what God would say. It is not about religion at all. It is you saying something to God and God saying something to you. That is why worship is supposed to be so incredible. Is that your usual experience in worship? Or not? Do you usually just come because it is 11 o'clock or do you come because somebody has dragged you here? Or because you will see your friends? Worship in America has changed, and we need to figure out what has changed. I got an example of what worship is really like from a church in California this past week. I thought I would show you. It is about two minutes long.

*(Video begins.)*

Thank you for worshipping with us today. For the consideration of those around you, kindly turn off all cell phones and electronic and messaging devices at this time. If your device should go off during announcements today, in addition to your regular weekly offering, you will be fined \$25. Should your device go off during the prayer concerns, your fine will increase to \$50. If your device goes off during our sermon today, you are going to hell. God wants your complete attention. Thank you and enjoy the service. Westminster Presbyterian Church in Burbank has Sunday services at 9:00 and 10:30. No shoes, no shirt; no service.

*(Video ends.)*

Now I'm not sure if that church has a lot more people going to it or a lot fewer people going to it, but people know that something different is happening there, right? It talks about our culture as much as it talks about our worship, and it is a struggle. It has always been a struggle to worship. That is why the writers of the Bible would speak to people who are now following Jesus and say, "This is why you should worship." The author to the Hebrews says this,

<sup>19</sup> Therefore, brothers and sisters, since we have confidence to enter the Most Holy Place....

Not like going to the Jewish temple but like going into the Holy of Holies.

...by the blood of Jesus, <sup>20</sup> by a new and living way opened for us through the curtain, that is, his body, <sup>21</sup> and since we have a great priest over the house of God, <sup>22</sup> let us draw near to God....

Worship.

...with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith....

So worship helps faith.

...having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience and having our bodies washed with pure water.

So somehow worship makes us clean.

<sup>23</sup> Let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess....

So coming to worship should give you hope.

...for he who promised is faithful. <sup>24</sup> And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds.

So what happens in here should affect us out there.

<sup>25</sup> Let us not giving up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing....

Back then already, Christmas and Easter people.

...but let us encourage one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching.

It has been a challenge to worship God right from the start. I've got to tell you, it's been a challenge for me. As many of you know, I grew up in a Catholic background. When I was very young, there was something mysterious about it and God was there at church. I got over that pretty quickly, and the Mass became just a very boring, hard 47-48-49 minutes to go through. As soon as my parents stopped making me go, I stopped going. In college when I came back to Christ, when I started to believe in God, I went back to church but it had not changed. It was still pretty boring, whether I was Catholic or Protestant, and I found it hard to go. I had come to Christ in Campus Life, that is like Young Life. All these kids were my age. They sang all these great songs, and the people there talked about God and had a great time. The speakers were incredible. But then I went to church, and it wasn't like that at all.

So for a long time, it was a struggle for me to worship. I came back to God, saved by grace but that isn't supposed to be the end of the story. Dallas Willard says it well. He says, "Many people are not only saved by grace but they are paralyzed by grace." God isn't opposed to our effort. God is just opposed to our trying to earn our good way into heaven. But you have to try, so I had to come to worship. I would come, and one of the things that struck me right away when I started to worship as a young adult was that there were some who would come to worship every week and seemed to have a good time, but when they left they were grouchy and terrible, and they were no fun to be around. They came and they never changed. God never changed them, and I wondered why.

When we baptize a baby here, it is not like the kid automatically becomes a Christian any more than if you go to sleep in the garage, you are going to wake up a car. Just going does not do it. Some of you really think that the way to please God is to just show up in church, that you don't have to change. Others of you would like to change and you come here hoping that you will change, and you leave and you haven't changed. What you need are some tools for worship. It is about more than just putting your seat in the pew.

So I'll start by saying, what is challenging about worship? What makes it hard to worship? Why is worship boring in those *other* churches? I did this last night with the 5:15 crowd. They had some good reasons why worship in those other churches is boring. What are some things that make it hard to worship? Anybody? It is monotonous. It is the same every time. What else? The time it takes. Absolutely. It takes time, and I'm busy. What else? There are a lot of distractions. That's right. What else? It's not inspirational at all. I'm sure in those other churches, that is true. What else? Boring preaching. You've quit preaching and started meddling. I think that is enough from this crowd.

Hey, I wrote down some of the same things you did. Worship is hard because it takes so much time. Everything else in my life I can do fast, but I can't worship fast. Some of you come and say, "I wish the sermon was deeper." Some of you are sitting here going, "He just talked about the Book of Hebrews. Where is that?" There is such a variety in our knowledge of the Bible, it is hard to get on the same wavelength. Some of you find the obstacle to worship is music. Some of you are going, "What is that thing over there?" and for some of you, that is an obstacle. For others of you though, I think that the main obstacle is that you are consumers, and you have

developed a discriminating nose. You know a good car from a bad car, a good TV show from a bad TV show, good clothes from bad clothes, and you come in and you baffle to your way to worship. Too short, too long, too slow, too fast, too deep, too shallow, too whatever, and if it doesn't measure up, then you don't worship.

In the same way, I think that the biggest obstacle for people in worship today, maybe the biggest one, is that you come out of church and you go, "How was worship?" as if worship depended on the way you feel afterwards. As if somehow, whether I need God or not depends on how I feel during the hour. When you say it, it doesn't sound right but that is how we are programmed. "I felt the Spirit of God today." "I felt like I slept today." Which one met God? Maybe both. Maybe neither. So what I want to suggest is, there is more to worship than just sitting in the pew, and I want to offer you three spiritual practices that you should put into your life if you want worship to help you follow Jesus. The first one is easy. It is **be still**. The psalmist says,

<sup>10</sup> "Be still, and know that I am God...."

Because we live too fast, we have to adjust our speed. Right at this point, literally, at the 9:30 service, right up there, somebody's cell phone went off. Let me give you a spiritual discipline that is in worship, inconvenience. It is good that worship is inconvenient because that means that you go to a place that you don't choose at a time that you don't choose for a purpose that you *do* choose. I am fairly sure the person whose cell phone went off was one of the persons who said that their biggest obstacle to worship was that they could never get a parking space. It is inconvenient. I understand that.

Another spiritual practice to being still is association. What that means is that real worship happens when you are with some people that you like and with some people that you don't like for a purpose that you believe in. Real worship happens, but it is not about who is sitting next to you but about when all generations are together including people you don't like or don't know. C. S. Lewis says this in his book, *The Screwtape Letters*, about a devil tempting somebody away from heaven. The devil says, "I can't believe you let this person become a Christian." "Don't worry. The church is on our side. The first time they go to church, they are going to see people that they have been avoiding for years." That is part of the discipline of worship.

Be still. Can you be still? In the same way, the second spiritual discipline is, **be aware**. Only when you are still can you be aware. There must have been noise in the rest of my week, but it is just noise. I need to be aware. One of the words that I wrote down that helps us be aware is *ritual*. Now ritual has a bad connotation for us. We think of it like a rut, but ritual is doing the same things, that I may like or that I may not like, so that over time, it captures meaning. Same things over time, like or don't like, but it captures meaning. So for instance, here in this service we rarely say The Confession like we do at 9:30. "Here you go, God. We apologize that we have sinned against You in thought, word, and deed, by what we have done, and by what we have left undone...." And you say it a little faster every week. That is meaningless confession, but what if you stopped and closed your eyes for just a second and I said, "What is the first bad thing you have done that comes to mind? Raise your hand." I wouldn't even have to wait for all the hands that would go up. That is real confession.

So ritual helps us realize that confession is there. Laura got this in a fresh way when we were down in Florida. How many of you know what this is? Sign of the Cross, that's right. If you grew

up in a real church, the Catholic Church, you know that. But we went to an Episcopal Church for Ash Wednesday, and she saw this. She turns to me and goes, "What is that, the trifecta?" I said, "No, honey that is the Sign of the Cross that God will seal my mind and God will guard my mouth and God will be in my heart." She goes, "Well, that makes sense." That is ritual.

Be aware. We are aware when it makes sense, but we are also aware when we are paying attention, and you can't worship unless you pay attention. Attention is waiting for what I may receive only by waiting, and sometimes you don't know what it is until it's over. What will God say to you today? It may already have happened in the children's sermon. It may happen at communion. It may be something that is said or sung. It may be a conversation you have on the way out. It may be some little old lady you help into her car. God knows. That is the key. God knows. Are you going to pay attention?

Not unless you are still and not unless you are aware. The third spiritual discipline is that **we are ready** when we worship God. Two examples out of a lot of them that I use is hospitality. People have to realize that it really isn't worship until it does something. Hospitality is using my presence and our space to make others feel welcome in the presence of our God. That is why you are wearing name tags. That is why we, literally, almost beg you to greet somebody afterwards. That is why the heroes are the people who invite folks to come and wait for them not to show up. That is why we love having greeters and ushers and you all because that is a little bit of what God wants us to do in worship, hospitality. In the same way, generosity. If it is not changing you, it is not worship. Generosity just says, "I will have a growing pleasure in being fruitful more than in being consumptive." Jesus talked about money all the time, and that is why. He wanted you to be free to be fruitful, to give and bless, as opposed to just being consumptive. That is why we give in worship.

There are a lot of other spiritual practices inside of worship. There is the spiritual discipline of hearing God's justice proclaimed, and that's not politics. It's justice. In the same way, if God created the Planet Saturn with rings around it, shouldn't worship be creative so you could see creativity? All right, we are just going to list all of them that we have mentioned up there. (*Slide shown: Confession, Solitude and Silence, Generosity, Self-Examination [the Examen], Worship*) Here is what I would like you to do. Look at that list. "Is there one of those that you like? One of those where you go, "I can do that. I can really do that." Is there is one of those that you like and that would help you worship? Just raise your hand. Look at the list. See which one it is. Just raise your hand. Okay, some of you see one. Not all of you. That is fine. Okay, now look at the list again. "Is there one of these that you struggle with? One of these that is hard for you? That you need to be aware of as an obstacle for you?" Look at the list. When you see one that you struggle with, raise your hand. Could I see the four of you that didn't raise your hand either time up here afterwards?

Worship is a tool, a gift, that God offers you to become more like Jesus but it is not sitting in the pews. It is what happens next that determines whether you are worshipping or not. In the Old Testament, the prophets would say, "I hate it when you go to church. Literally. I hate it when you go to church. I despise your sacrifices because you go to church and you sing the songs, and you leave and you oppress the poor and you don't do justice. God spits that out." Are you worshipping? Really? It is either that or maybe occasionally, God would touch you in worship. God would speak to you in ways that might actually change you.

Twenty years ago I was still struggling with this worship thing. I told the story of a great church in Chicago, Fourth Presbyterian. If you ever go to Chicago, it is the beautiful old church right across from the John Hancock Building on Michigan Avenue. Great church but very formal. The ushers here are lucky because in that church they wear morning suits, literally. When I went there the first time back in the early 80s, the ushers still wore gloves. The pastor not only wore a robe, he wore preaching tabs. He went up into a pulpit about 48 feet in the air and looked down on God. You know, this is a *real* church. It looks like a cathedral. It is right on Michigan Avenue.

One day they were having worship, and the preacher was just about to start preaching, walking up the stairs, and the back door on Michigan Avenue opens up and a street person comes in. The door is always open. They come in there to get warm. Well, he comes in, but there is somebody sitting in his usual spot in the back so he keeps stumbling forward looking for a place to sit. He is stumbling forward because he has probably had a little too much. He keeps going forward, but there are no places to sit and by now, everybody is watching just two things. Nobody is watching the preacher. Everybody is watching the street guy stumble forward, and everybody is looking back at the head usher to see if he has pulled his gun out yet because he is a very upright, uptight lawyer. Finally the street guy gets all the way toward the front and he finally just sits down, right in the middle of the aisle. People look back as the head usher starts to move forward. The head usher gets all the way up to the street guy and reaches down as if to grab him but sits down next to him. He pulls the Bible out of the pew, and he puts his arm around the street guy. Somebody worshipped that day. Will you?

Lord Jesus, I thank You for my sisters and brothers here, the ones who are just sitting in church and the ones who are worshipping and the ones who would like to know the difference. We come here and every month we take communion, and sometimes we are just going through the motions but sometimes we feel Your presence. I pray that this morning we would have the sense of Your presence, of Your great love, that You never give up on us and that You want to give us life, life that is really life. Take the juice. Take the bread, and turn them into Your Body and Blood for us. Help us to worship in Your Name. Amen.

*The nature of oral presentations makes them less precise than written materials; any lack of attribution is unintentional, and we wish to credit all those who have contributed to this sermon. Soli Deo Gloria.*