

“Spiritual Fitness - Worship”

A Sermon in Three Parts

Ephesians 5

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What I am talking about can bring great joy and reveal great sorrow. It happens at the grocery store, the gas station, and in the line at Wal-Mart. It can fill a heart with gladness and drain a heart of bitterness. It happens in the car, the school drop-off line, and in the cafeteria. It happens at work, at McDonald's and on a bike ride or walk along Greenway Trail. It can make you feel strong and on top of the world, and uncover just how very small you really are. It is deeply personal and deeply communal.

It has grown churches by the thousands and split churches just as fast. It has helped and healed people of all makes and models. It has hurt and shunned people of all different makes, and models. It can bring people together and drive them apart.

It's purpose is obvious yet too often goes unseen or taken for granted. It's power is unmatched yet, too often untouched. It's place is everywhere yet too often unrecognized, therefore presumed nowhere.

You know it when you experience it but too often you aren't awake or aware enough to even notice it.

What am I talking about church? I am talking about worship. Worship - the feeling or expression of reverence and adoration for a deity; the act(s) that make up a formal expression of reverence.

How is your reverence workout routine doing these days? We are getting spiritually fit aren't we? That is what we have been discussing the past couple of weeks. Using the words of Paul in the letter to the Ephesians we have opened the topic of Spiritual Fitness. Today in this gymnasium of the soul, called Grace Church, we are talking about, I believe, the heart of it all - worship. Just like any other physical fitness regime, if your cardio isn't up to par, all the weights, strength training, and yoga bending won't get you through the long haul. You need endurance. You need to build your stamina. In the physical fitness world that means cardio training - getting the heart rate up, working it, letting it recover, and doing it again. Building your lung capacity and

muscle endurance. In the spiritual fitness world, your cardio is your worship and if your worship is lacking your spiritual life is lacking.

Worship is the core of spiritual fitness. It is the beginning and the end of all the rest and impacts everything in between. The purpose of worship is both simple and complex, and while we need not overthink or over analyse it. We DO need to understand, pay attention to, and trust the purpose, power, and place of worship in our lives as individual followers, as a gathered and intentional community of believers, and as a people of a much bigger movement.

Hear the words of Paul, once again speaking to the church in Ephesus as he instructs them on how to keep the main thing the main thing.

READ TEXT - Eph. 5

### **Purpose**

What is the purpose of worship? Worship is the expression of our adoration and reverence of God our Creator, Redeemer, and Friend. It is how we as a group of people called the church gather and show our honor, praise, devotion, admiration, and dedication to the One true God - Jesus - and Holy Spirit.

That expression takes the shape and form of prayers, songs, liturgies, reading of scripture, sermons, candles, colors, and symbols.

Worship is all those things and more. More because it is through all those actions, symbols, and connections that the Holy Spirit transforms us, molds us, empowers us. It is through all those actions, symbols, words, and sacred moments that we are connected and interconnected. We are connected to God and interconnected to one another in, through and by worship. Worship is both the heart beat (the mechanism that pumps life to the rest of the spiritual body) and the heart action (the response, expression, interaction, and engaging) of those who follow Jesus.

What I mean by this is that worship is an outward expression of an inner experience. Worship is both a pouring out and a filling up and it takes both for it to truly shape our lives into more of what God wants them to be. It is cyclical in that we come and worship in order to show God our reverence and adoration while at the same time in the showing, in the pouring out, we are filled back up with what we need to keep on keeping on. And somewhere in all that is the holy mystery that connects us to each other and followers around the world.

And like any fitness program or healthy lifestyle, we can't expect to practice only once a week or twice a month and call it good. That's not enough to develop strong spiritual fitness habits. Practice makes perfect - in the spiritual just as much as the physical. In this case, it is not "you are what you eat." It is "you are what and who you worship."

The purpose of worship is to keep us connected to the God who made us through the give and take of sacred / holy expression and experience. To keep us connected to one another through the common practices of prayer, song, fellowship, and God's word. The purpose is NOT to show off what we know or how good we are and how "put together" we are...far from it. The purpose is to share in our brokenness and imperfection - to accept one another for where we are and who we are on our journey of faith - and to be a group of Jesus followers who aren't afraid to say, I don't have all the answers but I am here. I messed up, I blew it, but I am here. I am angry but I am here. I am hurting like never before but I am here. I am scared, but I am here. The purpose is to come as we are and draw near to God to more than we are.

## SONG

### **Power**

There were about 15 of us. We woke while the sky was still dark and the coldest part of the night was yet to come. We stumbled in the dark tying up our shoes, grabbing a sweatshirt or jacket for an added layer of warmth, and tucking our water bottle, granola bars and a flashlight in our daypacks before heading out the door. The camp was quiet except for our sleepy voices and the scuffle of teenage footsteps traipsing across dirt and gravel.

"Ugh, it's cold up here."

"This better be worth it, that all I am saying."

"I can't see."

"Where is this place again?"

"Did anyone bring any gum?"

"Why did we get up this early again?"

"I'm still cold."

Those were just a few of the comments made as the gravel gave way to meadow grass and then alpine dirt and rock. After a good two hours of hiking, we found a place where the trees opened up and the rocks provided something to sit on.

The coldest part of the night met us there, just before dawn when the temperature drops and the earth waits for the sun to bring it back up. We sat there, a bunch of teenagers wondering what was so great about this particular place on the mountain above camp at this particular time of day.

Then it happened - the sky gave way to a lighter shade of night, blue / black silhouettes of the massive rock formations began to appear, and we all seemed to hold our breath at the same time. It was like the hand of God was pulling the string on the living room shades; ever so slowly revealing the brilliance of a new day. Sunlight poured over the mountain peaks - proclaiming the power and presence of something far bigger than any one of us. A presence of hope, peace, awe, wonder, and joy.

We spent some time singing songs, hugging, praying, and lingering in moment as long as we could (or as long as the camp counselor said we could). The power of that worship-filled moment is as real today as it was 30 years ago.

The power of worship can move mountains - the mountain of pain, loss, and sadness. The mountain of anxiety, fear and worry. The mountain of bitterness, anger, and defeat. The mountain of illness, death, and addiction. Such mountains can be moved, shifted, changed, even transformed into places of healing and beauty through the power of worship.

The power of worship can provide beauty, goodness and truth. Beauty in the midst of the ugliness of our world, the times we live in, and the society we have become. It can reveal the goodness of humanity in a single act of kindness, a compassionate touch, a friendly smile, or an understanding glance. It exposes truth amidst the lies and false narratives so many people believe today.

The power of worship is found in the emotional connections we experience, the mental challenges that cause us to pause, ponder, ask why, and encourage us to step up, and in the spiritual growth we gain over time.

Paul is reminding the church to pay attention to and never underestimate the power of worship. Because the power is not contained in the four walls of this gymnasium of the soul, i.e., the church. The power is not limited to pastors, musicians, praise teams, sunday school teachers, bell ringers, organ players, or the good prayers.

The power of worship flows in and through you by the power of the Holy Spirit. The power to change someone's bad day at work or at school. The power to give hope

to someone overwhelmed by life. The power to keep us humble and mindful of others. The power to build up rather than tear down. The power to be a part of God's unfolding plan.

That is what happens with our plan aligns with God's Spirit and will. That is what happens when we pay attention, look and listen for God's presence among us.

\*set up introduction of Angela Richie as new Children's Director.

Offertory and SONG

### **Place**

I have the honor, joy (most days), privilege and terrifying job of raising two teenage boys. I love them more than they could possibly fathom - even on our tough days. I am proud of the young men they are becoming. AND I am so glad I am not a teenager today. That is one time I do not want to go back and relive. It is hard to be a teenager today. To try and find your place in this crazy, messed up, scary but at the same time hold out for hope world. They are faced daily with choices and situations that challenge who they are and where their place is as young men, as athletes, as students, as sons, as followers of Jesus, as pastor's kids, as cop's kids, as band geeks and choir nerds, as...fill in the blank, you get the idea.

Knowing your place and/or the place of anything can be difficult especially in our culture / world today.

Place. Everything has its place and there is a place for everything.

Worship is no different. Worship has its place too. Where? The obvious answer is right here - in the church, in this room called the sanctuary (although I kind of like gymnasium of the soul).

I hope however, that by now you are realizing that for a spiritually fit follower of Jesus, the place of worship is not only in the church. The place of worship is in God's created world and within you - within each one of us and therefore the place of worship is everywhere - all times all places.

The place of worship is a state of mind and heart. So whether you are inside or outside these walls, you are in a place of worship. Whether you are on your bike or swinging a golf club, you are in a place of worship. Whether you are by the campfire or

in the coffee shop, you are in a place of worship. That being said, hear what I am not saying. I am NOT saying you can worship just as well on the golf course, soccer field, or baseball diamond as you can in the church. I am NOT saying you can worship just as well at home in your jammies, or on the road as you can in actual church. I am saying, worship is in here (heart) and in here (mind).

I am saying that within those areas and arenas of your life you can bring a spirit of worship and recognize worship-filled moments. I am saying that a spiritually fit follower of Jesus recognizes the value and importance of spending time in the gymnasium of soul so that their time outside of the gym reflects who they are, who they worship, and what they believe. It prepares, feeds, and equips them to live a worship filled life. It is not about replacing or compromising time in the gym - it is about living out what you learn, gain, and practice in the gym in the other parts of your life because it is all connected.

I pray for the day, we as followers of Jesus will say not only there a place for everything but a place for everyone and everyone has a place a place...that place is worship.

No better place represents the reality of that prayer like the table of Jesus. The place of the most intimate, humble, compassionate worship is here. The spot that best illustrates the purpose, power and place of our worship is right here at this table, and all are invited.

The table is set to remind all who come of the purpose, power, and place of Jesus in our lives. It is about realizing and owning our purpose, power and place as followers. It is about the purpose, power and place of God and for God.

Come, all who are tired, weary, lonely, and afraid.  
Come all who are grief-stricken, overwhelmed, and lost.  
Come all who seek to know God and love Jesus.  
Come all who are having their best day ever and those who are having their worst yet.  
Come all who feel like an outcast and need a place to belong.  
Come all, as the perfectly imperfect people that we are.  
Come have a place at the table.

SONG - A Place at the Table

Prayer of Confession

Pardon

Hear the good news people of God - you are forgiven. You are loved. You have a purpose. You are filled with Holy power, and you have a place.

May God hear us now as we pray together the words Jesus gave us...Lord's Prayer.

Words of Institution

Communion

Closing Song