WHAT DO YOU THINK OF WHEN YOU HEAR THE WORD WORSHIP?

Is worship only associated with the singing we do in our public worship services? Is worship only viewed as something distinct from the portion of the service that is devoted to preaching? Is the pinnacle of worship some kind of inexpressible, intangible feeling or emotional high? Here at WBC, we think the answers to these questions are NO.

We see worship as the result of everything we do in the life of our church. We envision our church family being passionately and completely engaged in biblical worship that consumes our worship services, ministries, and lives. We hope our church is a place where love for people springs from love for God, where joy permeates the air, and where people are one in spirit.

As we seek to make our vision a reality, we have a heart for our ministry to be based on the Bible. The Bible has much to say about worship. We believe the Bible defines worship in its most basic form as “acknowledging God and submitting your life to Him.” This includes making Jesus Christ the center of the things you love, desire, and imagine to be good. Everyone worships. The questions are who, what, when, where, how and why do we worship?

WHO DO WE WORSHIP?
- The Father, Jesus Christ the Son, and the Holy Spirit as one God in three persons.
  (Genesis 1:26, Hebrews 1:2, Genesis 1:1-2, John 17:1-5)

WHAT DO WE WORSHIP WITH?
- With all of our heart, soul, mind, and strength. Worship cannot be limited to one part of our body or area of life. (Mark 12:30)
- Preaching of the Word. (2 Timothy 4:2)
- With all kinds of music and other art forms. The Bible promotes several styles of music and art forms in worship.
  (Colossians 3:12-16, Ephesians 5:18-21, Exodus 31, Psalm 20:5, 2 Chronicles 3-5)

WHEN DO WE WORSHIP?
- All the time. Worship is not limited to a day. Worship is a lifestyle. (Deuteronomy 6:4-9, John 4:19-26)

WHERE DO WE WORSHIP?
- Everywhere. Worship cannot be limited to a building or a church service. (John 4:19-26)

HOW DO WE WORSHIP?
- As a family. The Bible promotes worship that is multi-generational. (Psalm 145)
- By pointing to the story of Jesus Christ and His mission in the world. Biblical worship is centered on Jesus Christ.
  (Hebrews 9:1-12)
- In an orderly fashion. The Bible speaks of a particular flow of worship. In the Old Testament the sacrifices generally followed this order: sin offering, ascension offering, and fellowship offering. (Lev. 7:16-21, 9, 1 Kings 8, Nehemiah 8).
  While the animal sacrifices were types and shadows that pointed to Jesus (Luke 24:27), their order was logical and relational. The New Testament also directs worship to be done in an orderly way. We seek to pro-claim the gospel story of Jesus Christ in the order in which we worship. (1 Corinthians 11-15)

WHY DO WE WORSHIP?
- To renew God’s Covenant with us. The Bible promotes worship that renews our relationship with God. Despite our problem of ongoing sin, God is faithful to forgive us and keep us.
- To be formed and edified by the Gospel of Christ. We are formed by the story of the gospel in our lives as we come together to practice the rhythms of adoration, confession, assurance, thanksgiving, petition, instruction, charge, and blessing.
  (Isaiah 6, Deuteronomy 5, 2 Chronicles 5-7, Joshua 24, Romans 11-15, 1 Corinthians 11-15, and Revelation 4-21)
**SUNDAY WORSHIP FAQs**

**What is the purpose of our worship? Who do we target?**
The primary focus of our gatherings is to worship God and to renew our relationship with Him through the edification of the body of Christ here at WBC. We know that non-followers of Christ are present at our worship gatherings, but evangelism is not our primary focus on Sundays. (1 Corinthians 14:24)

**What is the role of music in worship?**
Over the last few decades it has become a popular belief in the church that music is the extent of what worship is. Seeing music and worship in this way only fuels deep passions of relating to God in preferred worship styles. This belief can lead us in the wrong direction of forming people who are overly centered on worshipping God with their preferred music style in public gatherings. The problem here is that worshipping God in this way can become their only or most important way of relating to Him. We see music as only a small part of what worship is. We hope to shepherd our family in a way that forms us to connect with God in every area of our life with many different ways of expressing worship to Him. This includes music as well as other rhythmic practices like prayer, bible reading, fellowship, etc.

**Why do you sing both older hymns and new music?**
We believe that the Bible promotes a use of a variety of music styles and seek to worship that way. We also seek to be a church that promotes family instead of targeting only the emerging generation through a niche marketing approach that tends to exclude other age groups. Some have suggested that we need to decide what kind of church we are going to be by picking one group of people and their music preferences to focus on in expense of the other groups. It is our belief that we have decided to be a church that focuses on people of all ages coming together to worship God as a family by letting go of our individual preferences of music and worship styles. (Colossians 3:16, Psalm 95, Psalm 145, Titus 2:1-6, 1 John 2:12-14, 1 Corinthians 12:12-20)

**What is the role of the worship leader in worship?**
We believe that Jesus Christ is the one and only true worship leader. He is the one who intercedes and leads us. There is no need for a priest or a highly gifted worship person to lead us to the throne of God. Biblically speaking we don’t go to the throne of God to worship. He comes to us in the person of Jesus Christ. In light of this truth, we see our singers and musicians as servants in the Body of Christ, who are not so much seeking to spontaneously convey ways of worship between God and the congregation, but they are primarily charged with the important role of pointing our congregation to Jesus Christ in ways that call for all of us to participate and engage in every aspect of the service. There is not a spiritual gift of worship leading found in the bible. Worship should always be seen as “the work of the people,” and not something to sit back and listen to, or something only a few gifted people can accomplish. One of the ways that we seek to accomplish this is to have the Body of Christ (Team of volunteers) lead the music portion of our services. (Hebrews 4:10)

**What is the role of the Holy Spirit in worship?**
We believe the Holy Spirit indwells the bodies of His followers. He is personal and intimate with us in our daily lives and in our public worship. He is not far away seeking to show up when we get things just right or when the talent or gifts of the leaders is good enough to get us closer to His throne or His outpouring. There is no need for an outpouring of the Spirit because followers of Christ already have all the access to the Spirit that they need. The Holy Spirit is a person and not something to consume and then refill. If we are not walking with the Spirit it is us that has left God, so we seek to be careful not to grieve or quench the Holy Spirit. Eugene Peterson says this well: “Worship is the strategy in which we interrupt our preoccupation with ourselves and attend to the presence of God.” God is able to do more than we can ask or imagine according to the Spirit that is already in us. We seek for Him to come to us in fresh ways through His Word and other elements of worship in grace of His Spirit. We hope worship forms the fruits of the Spirit in our lives, so that they will be poured out of us to one another and the world. (Romans 8, Ephesians 3:20)
How We Got Here

Have you ever wondered why we, as the American church, worship the way we do? Do we worship in biblical ways or practice traditions of worship that were formed by man throughout history? Colossians 2:8 says “Be careful not to allow anyone to captivate you through an empty, deceitful philosophy that is according to human traditions and the elemental spirits of the world, and not according to Christ.”

When we think about worship, it is important to “be careful” that we are not following traditions of men. As we begin, it is helpful to point out that traditions are not in and of themselves bad. In fact, tradition is inescapable. No matter how a church worships, if you do something more than once it is, by definition, a tradition. Also, it is impossible to worship in new ways all the time. The book of Ecclesiastes tells us that there really isn’t anything “new under the sun.” God Himself is a God of rhythm and governs over all His creation in a repetitive cycle of seasons, and as Psalm 8 says, when we “look at the stars and the moon that He has made” we realize that we, too, are blessed to be included in these rhythms of governing with Him.

Traditions are an active part of worshipping God, and Colossians 2:8 is not saying that all traditions are bad. The heart of the passage and much of the book is to make sure that our lives and traditions are centered on Jesus Christ and not the human, elemental spirits of the world.

How can we tell if our ways of worship are centered on man or Christ? One way we can do this is by researching the history behind our worship and see just how we got to this place in time and how we developed our traditions. Mike Cosper has a nice summary of the history of Christian worship in his book, “Rhythms of Grace.” Here is an excerpt from that book.

Two thousand years is a long time. Jerusalem is a long way from North America. Somehow, in that span of years and distance, the church’s gatherings have adapted from meetings in synagogues to elaborate liturgical services in iconic cathedrals and the high-dollar productions of North American megachurches.

Some of these changes are merely cultural, like the style of music and the manner of gathering, but some are philosophical and theological. Not all churches meet for the same reasons and expectations. It’s helpful to know a little bit of history in order to understand how we got here.

For the early church, its exclusive hope in Jesus became a catalyst for persecution, and Christians were forced to scatter. Their gatherings became more secretive in their hopes of staying alive. They had to leave the temple and synagogues, and eventually they had to go underground altogether. Despite the best efforts of Roman emperors like Nero, Trajan, and Marcus Aurelius, the church survived. It eventually even prevailed.

In 313, the emperor Constantine issued the Edict of Milan, ending persecution against Christians and legalizing the practice of all religions throughout the empire. During his reign, Christianity spread like wildfire throughout Rome, and Christianity grew to be the most powerful and influential religion in the empire. Christians went from gasping for air under the fire of persecution to having the official religion. The church spread far and wide. Authority in the church centralized in Rome under the leadership of Gregory the Great, and thus the papacy was born, and the church became an institution in an entirely new way.

Over the generations that followed, the church became a hierarchical political power. The gospel became clouded and buried behind a church bureaucracy, a dead language, and a new priesthood. The unfettered access given to the church by Jesus was dis-
torted, and mysticism and religiosity characterized the church for hundreds of years.

This happens over and over in church history. There’s gravitation away from the gospel, a tendency to couch it in man-made structures and hierarchies, to hide it behind cultural hedges, or to trade in the grace of Jesus for a less scandalous system of religion. It happened as early as the age of the New Testament writers, when the Judaizers infected the Galatian church. It happens now too.

It’s tempting to skip straight to the Reformation, to the efforts of men who brought the gospel and worship back to ordinary people. But first, I want to mention a couple of things about the legacy of the darker years in between. It’s easy to look at this history purely through our own post-Reformation eyes. We see power consolidation under the pope as an unfortunate affair, but in its day, it preserved the church against the momentum of Gnostic and docetic heretics, who undermined the doctrine of the Trinity. To many Protestants, the church calendar may seem like an arbitrary regulation, a testimony to authority and micromanagement from Rome, but for its authors, it was designed pastorally. The church calendar was designed to walk believers through the story of the gospel every year, from the incarnation to the ascension. If we allow historic prejudice to color our perspective too heavily, we lose sight of the brilliant, pastoral creativity that shaped some of the church’s inventions.

The error, of course, was to elevate ecclesiastical authority to equal footing with Scripture. The church calendar, as a pastoral and contextual concept for teaching people to live in the gospel story, is a great idea. As a binding regulation ordered with absolute authority, it distorts the purity of worship given to us by Jesus and the authors of the New Testament. Likewise, creeds, confessions, and orders of worship, when seen through the lenses of gospel-given freedom, represent an opportunity to connect with the past and acknowledge, as we gather with God’s people, that we’re not the first ones to discover and love the gospel. When they are mandated steps for finding acceptance by God, we end up confusing the gospel and worship. Worship is an opportunity afforded through the mercy of Jesus, who met all the requirements of the law and leaves us liberated from the burden of getting it right in order to stand in the presence of God. In the light of that fact, we need to be wary of anyone who offers us three easy (or ten complicated) steps to God’s favor and fellowship.

In those dark years, the gospel became veiled behind the trappings of religiosity and a profound distinction between clergy and laity. Worship was hierarchically controlled by religious officials, and the actions of the gathered church became more divided between the clergy and laity. More of the work was done by the priesthood, and the church itself became passive observers. Services weren’t for the sake of mutual encouragement and blessing. They were the means of salvation in and of themselves. One had to attend the service and participate in the Mass - the Catholic name for the worship gathering - to have any assurance of God’s mercy. The priest, in serving and praying over the Communion meal, or Eucharist, was facilitating “transubstantiation” - the transformation of bread and wine into the actual body and blood of Jesus.

In the eyes of the church, the meal was itself a sacrifice, made by the priest on behalf of the people for the sake of satisfying the wrath of God. As one might imagine, church rulers became very powerful during this era. The clergy literally held salvation in their hands, and submission to the priest was an essential part of religious obedience; he took over mediating between God and men.
Imagine being a Christian in the year 1400. Worship services were in a language you didn’t speak, and your vague comprehension of the gospel would be based upon the little understanding passed on to you by others or discerned from the Mass you attended. You would passively observe the clergy as they sang (you weren’t allowed to sing), and you would listen as they read Scripture and carried out various rituals on an altar at the far end of a cathedral. At some point, they would serve the Eucharist through a mysterious set of actions that led to your only real participation in the service - taking a bite of bread and a sip of wine from the hands of a priest.

Throughout this era, voices of protest emerged. Movements sparked up seeking to bring renewal or to point to another way, but for nearly a thousand years these movements failed, ending with men and women being martyred for the sake of the gospel. Power remained consolidated and the gospel remained hidden.

In 1517, Martin Luther nailed the Ninety-Five Theses to the door of a church in Wittenberg, and a fire was lit that would transform churches the world over. The Protestant Reformation brought Scripture back to the people of God and with it restored a biblical vision of worship. As Luther once said regarding worship, “We can spare everything except the Word. We profit by nothing so much as by the Word.” The Bible was translated into the native languages of the people, and worship gathering in the new, Protestant churches were full of prayers, songs, and sermons in the vernacular. The Word was made central to the life and worship of the church, and everything else that was done in the gathering was reformed and reinterpreted in the light of God’s Word - including the Communion meal.

The gospel began to spread and revival broke out in Europe. It was a return to the life-shaping rhythms of grace that punctuated the early church’s (and Israel’s) gatherings. Instead of a mysterious fog of religion, the clarity of the gospel was stressed again as God’s people imbibed in his life-giving and soul-shaping Word.

In England, the Reformation had its own flavor. King Henry VIII had led the charge to separate English churches from Rome. After he was denied a divorce, Anglicanism was born in 1534.

Like the Roman Church, the Anglican Church had a strict hierarchy attached to the king, and it regulated the worship of local congregations with the Book of Common Prayer. Behind this was an understanding that the church was under the authority of the crown - an idea that many Christians resisted in the wake of the Reformation around the globe. The “nonconformists” fought the hierarchy and (at various times) suffered greatly for it. For them, authority was ultimately in the Bible. It was an offense to have the state (or the bishop) tell them what Scriptures to read and preach and how worship was meant to be carried out each week. Their resistance gave rise to the Free Church (free from the regulations of the crown), the Puritans (a purified church), and the Congregationalists (a church ruled locally, autonomously, by the congregation). These movements eventually gave rise to the Presbyterians, Baptists, and many of the streams of contemporary evangelicalism.

When we look at most of the modern trends in worship (especially in North America) - from the gospel music of the Gaithers to the Passion Tours - we find their roots here, in the Free Church tradition.

A Scripture-alone approach went a long way to strip the gathered church of ceremony and tradition, allowing the glorious centrality of Jesus to shine. John Owen, one of the titans of this Reformation movement, said of Jesus in worship, “He freed them, by his teaching, from the bondage of Pharisaical, arbitrary impositions, delivering their consciences from subjection to anything in the worship of God but his own immediate authority.” The nonconformists believed that leading gathered worship was a pastoral task. In the Anglican Church, the entire worship gathering was dictated by the Book of Common Prayer - the selected Scripture readings, the prayers, and the sermon (which was just a small homily, read from the book). The nonconformist movement spawned countless seminaries and academic institutions because they believed that the pastor should be well equipped to preach the Word of God and shepherd his people. It gave birth to the hymns of Isaac Watts, John Newton, William Cowper, and all of the great English hymn writers. These men (and women like Anne Steele) wrote with a heart for shepherding and catechizing - training people in doctrine and a biblical worldview - through the songs they sang. Their legacy continues to be heard in the music of churches all over the world hundreds of years later.

Freedom from the hierarchy was liberating, but not without consequences. Over time, as Hughes points out,
“Free Church biblicism deteriorated into Free Church pragmatism.” Revivalism, led by nineteenth-century preacher Charles Finney, transformed worship from the banquet hall to the concert hall. Rather than worship being a formational process in the lives and hearts of believers over years of gathering and learning, it became an ecstatic experience driven by emotive preaching and decorated with music. The goal was a catalytic, life-changing moment. According to Hughes:

The structure of corporate worship became: (1) the preliminaries, (2) the sermon, and (3) the invitation...
Singing and musical selections were made in regard to their effect rather than their content. Gospel songs (celebrating experience) often supplanted hymns to God. Scripture reading was reduced so as not to prolong the “preliminaries.” Prayers were shortened or even deleted for the same reason. As to the sermon, the careful interaction with the biblical text so treasured by the Puritans was in many instances replaced with a freewheeling extemporaneous discourse.”

For many Christians in the years since, this has been the norm. Worshiping with the gathered church is about music and preaching, with preaching taking a central (and often primary) place, while music serves as an emotional warm-up. Preaching itself has devolved from the careful exegesis of the Reformers to vaguely Christian platitudes and techniques for self-help. Elements like prayer, Scripture readings, and greeting one another are seen as peripheral, decorative, and secondary to the real purpose of the gathering. In this economy, worship is defined as music, and its value is measured in its emotional impact more than its truth content.

Historically, this idea is a big disconnect. The synagogue was a place where the people of God gathered to immerse themselves in the Word and be shaped by it. From that life-changing culture, the church emerged. Believers gathered to continually remember the gospel, to be nourished by God’s Word, and to encourage one another. During the Reformation, that vision was restored, making Scripture comprehensible and enabling the congregation to participate actively in the gathering. But revivals rewrote the script again. Worship became a momentary experience, as music and preaching led the congregation through a journey to conversion or repentance.

From there, a variety of streams and traditions developed. Driven by an emphasis on experience, whole traditions emerged from the preferences of particular congregations. Worship wars were often style wars, pitting generations against one another not because of philosophy or theology, but because of culture. Musical styles changed and evolved because experientially they worked better.
Some, recognizing a lack of clarity about the purpose of the gathering, have sought to understand the emotion-driven movement of post-revival worship in a theological framework. Many have embraced what’s sometimes called the Temple Model (or the Wimber model, given its usual attribution to John Wimber, founder of the Vineyard movement of churches). This model likens the journey of worship to a pilgrim’s journey to the temple in Jerusalem. As one worship leader describes it, “We see the ‘Temple journey’ of worship from every day life, walking towards Jerusalem, into the Temple courts and finally into the deepest place of God’s presence.”

The journey begins in the “outer gates,” where the crowd assembles rambunctiously, with celebrative and energetic music. As worship continues into the inner gates and into the temple, music becomes more intimate and the presence of God becomes more imminent. The goal of worship is to enter the Holy of Holies, where God’s presence is most profoundly known and experienced. Once there, we sing only ballads and hymns, with tears streaming down our collective face.

Directly and indirectly, much of the church has embraced this model. It’s been advocated by worship leaders like Judson Cornwall and Andy Park. It’s also present in the way we talk about worship experiences, saying of worship leaders and teams, “They really led us to the throne room,” or “They ushered us into God’s presence.”

The problem with this model is twofold. First, it’s developed backwards. The theology of the Temple Model is a theological interpretation of an experience, and it is divorced from any kind of historical perspective on the gathered church. Second, it ignores most of what the New Testament teaches us about worship, the presence of God, and the temple. Instead of being led by Jesus through the inner curtain, we’re led there by a worship leader or a pastor - a pseudo-priest. God’s presence is measured in emotional impact, and it’s mediated through music and preaching, displacing Jesus from his role as our sole Mediator and worship leader.

Frankly, this isn’t far removed from the errors of Roman Catholic worship. Both revivalism and Catholicism measure the presence of God through the work of the church - the Communion service in one, music in the other. Both install a new priesthood responsible for leading the people to God and speaking for God to the people. In Catholicism, he wears vestments and doles out God’s presence in bread and wine, and in contemporary worship, using the Temple Model, he wears a faux-hawk hairstyle and an acoustic guitar.

It’s interesting, too, to see that Roman Catholic worship, by making the cathedral a place where priests serve and heaven comes to earth, is itself modeled after the temple. Somehow, both in historic Catholic worship (and, for that matter, its theological cousins in Anglo-Catholic and Orthodox churches) and in contemporary, experience- and emotion-driven worship, we are seeking to recreate a temple experience, mediated by human beings who lead us to an experience of heaven on earth that the New Testament tells us is profoundly inferior to worshipping the Father through the Son by the power of the Spirit. It’s not unlike in the book of 1 Kings, where the people of Israel have God as their King in an arrangement that makes them unique among nations. Even so, they aren’t content and they demand a human king. God gives them Saul, David, and Solomon, who despite their better achievements, are profoundly flawed. So it is with any human priest or mediator, we reject Jesus, our worship leader, and settle for Saul.

None of this is to say that worship isn’t meant to be experienced emotionally, or that the quality of experience and production in our gatherings is unimportant. Far from it. But what drives us? What do we consider the most important? What do we consider success? Do we think about our gatherings as catalytic, or cumulative? Are we looking for explosive, instantaneous impact or gradual, steady life change? Is it a concert hall or a banquet?

We come to our churches eager to hear deep truth and connect spiritually with our communities and with God. For many in North America, that quest ends at a gathering led by celebrated pseudo-priests who guide us through a fine-tuned emotional roller coaster. They lead us to “the throne room” and back, and invite us to come back next week for more of the same. Such a gathering paints a distorted picture of the kingdom of God, shaping hearts and forming identity via a heavy (if not exclusive) reliance on emotion, technology, and celebrity to do so.

But it’s not the way to gather. And that’s not to say that technology, culture, and emotions are evil. In fact, a faithful presentation of the gospel and the God of the Scriptures should result in an emotionally charged response. The Spirit of God has a tendency to do powerful things when Jesus is on display and when God’s people
gather. That’s a powerful recipe for life-changing worship: gather the people of God, display the glories of Jesus, and invite the church to respond.

We have to see that there’s a difference between a service that’s driven by a hunger to display the gospel and a service that’s driven by a desire to stir emotions through other means. We also have to see that the church needs to be equipped for more than emotional catharsis.

In conclusion, one of the things that can be taken away from Cosper’s historical summary of worship is that much of America’s popular approach to worship is largely based on the traditions of men. The main influence was Charles Finney. At the very least we should find this interesting, and hopefully this will cause us to explore our own traditions and challenge them with what the Bible says. The book of Colossians further develops this challenge for us beginning in verse 6 of chapter 2.

Just as you received Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to live your lives in him, rooted and built up in him and firm in your faith just as you were taught, and overflowing with thankfulness. Be careful not to allow anyone to captivate you through an empty, deceitful philosophy that is according to human traditions and the elemental spirits of the world, and not according to Christ. For in him all the fullness of deity lives in bodily form, and you have been filled in him, who is the head over every ruler and authority. Let no one who delights in false humility and the worship of angels pass judgment on you. That person goes on at great lengths about what he has supposedly seen, but he is puffed up with empty notions by his fleshly mind. Even though they have the appearance of wisdom with their self-imposed worship and humility achieved by an unsparing treatment of the body—a wisdom with no true value—they in reality result in fleshly indulgence.

As mentioned above, hopefully this article will challenge us to look at the strengths and weaknesses of our own views, traditions, and passions for worship to see if they are centered on Jesus Christ or man. See the chart on the following page that summarizes some of the strengths and weakness of the worship traditions found in this article. Following the chart we will discuss two important weakness that are found in American worship traditions that are worth considering in more detail.
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<th>Worship Tradition</th>
<th>Strengths</th>
<th>Weaknesses</th>
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| Roman Catholic            | • Worship as formation  
• Physical actions of worship  
• Creative pastoral leadership of shaping people with the Gospel  
• Focus of worshipping collectively  
• View of all the arts as truth | • Church government  
• National politics  
• Used a dead language  
• Unclear gospel  
• Perception of works-based salvation  
• Priests overshadow the participation of the people |
| Reformation                | • Worship as formation  
• Intellectual worship  
• Clear gospel  
• Participation of the people replaces the priests  
• Vernacular language  
• Focus of worshipping collectively  
• View of all the arts as truth | • Church government  
• National politics  
• Overly intellectual and logical |
| Free Church                | • Worship as formation  
• Emotional worship  
• Expositional preaching  
• Even more participation from the congregation encouraged | • Weak connection to the worldwide church  
• Individualistic worship  
• Weak view of the arts as truth |
| Revivalism                 | • Emotional worship  
• Gospel invitation  
• Focus on repentance and change of life | • Concert Hall approach  
• Separation of the service into music as preliminary to the preaching  
• Gospel preached but not used as formation  
• Individualistic worship  
• Emotionalism and experience driven  
• Self help preaching  
• View of arts diminished and highlights only music |
| Post Revivalism (Temple or Wimber Model) | • Focus on repentance and change of life  
• Gospel invitation  
• Expression of worship to God | • Concert Hall approach  
• Separation of the service into music as preliminary to the preaching  
• Gospel preached but not used as formation  
• Individualistic worship  
• Emotionalism and experience driven  
• Self help preaching  
• View of arts diminished and highlights only music  
• Personal preferences of music and ways of worship  
• Priests (worship leaders) overshadow the participation of the people |
One weakness found in some of the current worship traditions is a model of worship that sees worship methods as neutral.

1 Corinthians 9:22 says, “To the weak I became weak in order to gain the weak. I have become all things to all people, so that by all means I may save some.” What does the passage mean? Does it mean that the methods we use to communicate the gospel do not matter as much as the message itself? Absolutely not. This is not the point of this passage. In fact, Paul is saying the exact opposite of this. Paul’s overall point of the book was to correct wrong practices in the church. He was trying to encourage the church in Corinth to practice what they believed. The content of their beliefs was right, but the methods they were practicing in their church were wrong.

In chapter nine, Paul was addressing a specific issue of Christian freedom. The issue was “How can a Christian exercise freedom in relation to personal preferences and privileges?” In verse 22, Paul says that our actions and behavior communicate something to people and we need to be sensitive to those who are weaker in faith. Paul communicates that he will let go of his freedom of personal preferences in order for the gospel to be effective. Paul recognizes that methods of communication matter. It’s not just the content of the message that says something. The method that is used also sends a message regardless of the content. In verse 23, he says that the gospel is his priority both in what he says and the way he says it. He wants the way he says the gospel to be consistent with what he is saying. This is what it means to participate in an effective gospel for Paul. In verse 26, Paul goes on to say that the key to developing this kind of effective communication is to train our bodies. Paul uses the illustration of a boxer. Just like a boxer trains his whole body to work together for one purpose, so are we to focus both what and how we are communicating on Christ.

Chapter 9 is not addressing public worship. It could be generally applied to public worship but chapter 14 verses 23-26 point out that the way for unbelievers to be reached with the gospel in worship is for them to see the church engaged with God in worship. Paul does not promote the idea of making worship relevant to reach the lost. He does not apply chapter 9 by “becoming all things” to reach people in worship. Paul actually states the opposite when he tells us that unbelievers will come to Christ by observing the church in real worship (not a method of outreach). The unbeliever “will fall down with his face to the ground and worship God, declaring, ‘God is really among you.’” Then Paul closes the chapter by telling the church that the purpose of worship is edification, not evangelism or expression to God.

The main point of this section and much of the whole book of 1 Corinthians is that methods matter as much or more than the message. Both the message and the methods need to be centered on the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

There are many unintended consequences to not realizing the forming power of our methods. For example, using market driven methods in worship forms worshippers into spiritual consumers. Also, seeking to reach a specific age group in worship with a specific style of music produces people who desire only to worship in their personal preferred worship style. These consequences lead people to worship the act of worship instead of the person of worship. This is the essence of idolatry and realizing that effects of our methods can help protect us from getting off track.

In conclusion, when the church was selecting the books to go into the current Canonical bible one of the things they looked at was not only the content of the books, but also the form of the books. Many of the historical gospel accounts were labeled Gnostic and left out of the Cannon because their forms were not centered on the gospel of Jesus. We turn now to discuss Gnostic worship, another weakness found in some worship traditions.

Do Methods Matter?
Gnostic Worship

Hopefully it has become clear from the previous articles that most, if not all of us, have been shaped by worship services that were packed full of Revivalist and Free Church philosophies of worship. Over the last 100 years, these worship traditions have formed our beliefs and our passions about how we worship God. We turn now to discuss a second weakness of these traditions of worship in more detail. Many of these traditions promote tendencies of Gnosticism. This sad reality along with the fact that our current American culture also promotes Gnostic ways of life has left the modern church in a sea of confusion that needs the help that only the solid ground of Jesus Christ can provide. This article will seek to help us turn away from Gnostic worship.

What is Gnosticism? Gnosticism is a religious philosophy that sees the material and created world to be bad and not created by God. God’s world is only the spiritual world. In this view, humans should seek to pursue getting more gnosis or knowledge of God’s spiritual world. This knowledge is mystical and secret and comes to humans by denying ourselves and loving others. Angels mediate this knowledge. The denial of ourselves goes so far that it sees our own bodies as evil. The picture of the good life in this thought would be that wisdom comes to humans by helping others even to the point of things like personal poverty or complete sexual abstinence. These ideas develop a view of the world as the upper world of God and the lower world of the earth. God’s upper world is eternal and timeless. This upper world is in no way associated with the lower material world. Salvation for the Gnostic happens when he works to get enough knowledge to rise to God’s level. This happens in life as he “enters in” to God’s world and gets more knowledge to walk with Him on a daily basis and ultimately if he has “entered in” enough to get sufficient knowledge then his soul will reach perfection and eternal salvation with God. This view rejects Christian orthodox beliefs such as the resurrection of the physical body, the redemption of the physical earth, the physical reigning of Christ on this earth, the incarnation, the deity of Christ, and the doctrine of the Trinity.

Gnosticism is a false religion. All of the above Gnostic ideas, and the danger of falling into them, are not limited to the church of biblical times. Many modern worship services have little content that recognizes the Trinity, the Deity of Christ, or God as the creator of the earth. Much of the content of older psalms, hymns, and creeds has been removed to make way for the church to “enter into the throne room” of God and express themselves to God in worship.

Even a quick reading of the first three chapters of the book of Colossians can help keep us on the right track. Gnostics saw only the immaterial world to be created by God. They rejected the Trinity and the deity of Christ. Colossians chapter 1 points out that Christ created both the material and the spiritual worlds (vs.15-19). These same verses also support the incarnation of Christ and the doctrine of the Trinity.

Gnostics believed that knowledge saves. But verse 21 states that the real, physical body of Christ is what saves sinners. Gnostics believed that people should physically suffer as a way to gain salvation with God, but verse 22 tells us that Paul suffered for the benefit of the church and not for the prize of salvation. Gnostics believe that knowledge of God is found in another spirit world which has to be entered into. However, verses 25-27 reveal that the knowledge of God comes to the earth in the person of Jesus Christ and we don’t “enter in” to anywhere to get to Him. He comes to us. Gnostics reject the idea of the resurrection. But chapter 2 teaches that Jesus redeemed our whole body at the cross and that our physical body matters to God so much that it will be resurrected. We will live forever in a whole body with mind, body, and spirit (v. 11-14). Most recent worship traditions also neglect the topic of the resurrection in worship. For example, most of the songs written over the last 50 years talk about offering thanksgiving to God for the Cross of Jesus Christ. There is little mention of His resurrection in comparison to the abundance of songs talking about the atonement.

Gnostic worship was not centered on Christ. Verses 16-27 talk about having freedom in your worship practices, but to keep them centered on Christ. Chapter 3 encourages us to “let the word of Christ dwell” in us richly and that whatever we do in word and deed we need to do it all in the name of Lord. This passage is not limited to the topic of public worship, but it does point out that worship needs to be centered on Christ, both in the words and deeds of it. Doing this will let Christ dwell in it richly. Much of the Gnostic approaches to worship in biblical times did not center things on Christ both in physical form and content. The whole goal was to enter into another world that was not really connected to the physical earth. This Gnostic tendency also prevails in today’s worship traditions where the goal of worship is to enter in to the throne room of God and praise Him out of a heart of thanksgiving for what He has done for us at the Cross. This is not the goal for worship that Paul gives the Colossians. He tells them to pull away from the “entering in” approach and begin centering “words and deeds” of worship on Jesus Christ. We can’t program our music in a way to enter in. We can’t have enough human talent or skill to lead us the throne. We only get to meet with God in worship because He comes to us. We can’t get to Him not matter how hard we try to “enter in”.

The following chart seeks to unpack these ideas and other related Gnostic tendencies in more detail.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Worship Idea</th>
<th>Gnostic Tendency</th>
<th>Orthodox</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Presence of God</td>
<td>Found mystically in the air</td>
<td>Found in the Word and elements of the order of worship</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Flow of Worship</td>
<td>Enter in to the throne room to worship</td>
<td>God comes to us in worship</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Song Selection</td>
<td>Songs talk about feelings, experiences of worship, and longings</td>
<td>Songs talk about God and the saving acts of Jesus in history and our relation to Him</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Singing</td>
<td>Express ourselves to God</td>
<td>Strengthening of the Body of Christ</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Corporate Gathering</td>
<td>Find ways for people to worship in their individual private ways</td>
<td>Find ways to worship together with one another</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Preaching Emphasis</td>
<td>Start with the felt need of the people, self-help, personal testimony, or story</td>
<td>Start with the Bible and preach the historical faithfulness of God</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meditation</td>
<td>Find God in us</td>
<td>Meditate on scripture</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bible Interpretation</td>
<td>Metaphorical</td>
<td>Literal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Special Revelation From God</td>
<td>New extra-biblical revelation found in the moment of the worship experience</td>
<td>Found in the Cannon of scriptures</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Salvation</td>
<td>Found inside us</td>
<td>Only through Jesus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Head and Heart Knowledge</td>
<td>Heart knowledge is more important than head knowledge</td>
<td>Both are equally important</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physical Earth and The Human body (secular vs. spiritual)</td>
<td>Earth and human body are bad and evil and unredeemable</td>
<td>God will redeem the earth and human bodies when he fully reigns on the earth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>History</td>
<td>Not important</td>
<td>History is real and preserved by God. Jesus was real. His incarnation, death, and resurrection are historical events.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Baptism and Lord’s Supper</td>
<td>Not Important</td>
<td>Very central to worship and integrates worship as a holistic human experience in time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Creeds and Historical Traditions</td>
<td>Suspicious and not needed</td>
<td>Confess who we are in Jesus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Structure or Planning in Worship</td>
<td>Seen as an obstacle to individual expression and spontaneous worship</td>
<td>Key to connecting to the presence of God in the worship elements</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Heaven</td>
<td>Seen as only a spiritual place</td>
<td>Both a spiritual and physical</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
So where does this leave us? After tracing how we got to our modern worship traditions, and considered a couple of weaknesses of these traditions in previous articles, we turn now to promote some of the strengths of the historical approaches to worship.

Here at WBC, we seek to worship in a way that maximizes these strengths. We believe that doing this will more fully center our worship on the Bible and the person of Jesus Christ.

First of all, probably the most important strength of these traditions is that they see worship as very important to our spiritual formation. The Bible confirms this idea in 1 Corinthians 14:26 which states, “Let all these things be done for the strengthening (edification) of the church.” Paul is addressing a church that had some wrong worship practices. Much attention was given to the particular errors they were making, like speaking in tongues, but that is not really the focus of the passage. All churches are in danger of having wrong worship practices. The specific errors that we or any church could make will most likely differ from those found in this passage since we are in a different church context with different traditions, but the timeless truth that Paul points out here is that in your freedom of worshipping God, don’t forget that everything is done for formation. Not expression or evangelism, but edification in Christ and His story of salvation. So, here at WBC we promote that the primary purpose for worship is edification in Christ.

Second, each of the traditions highlight one area of the human body in the way they worship. Catholic worship promotes physical worship, Reformed worship promotes intellectual worship, Free Church and Revivalism worship highlights emotional worship. All of these ideas are also biblical. Deuteronomy 6:5 says, “You must love the Lord your God with your whole mind (Reformers),” Deuteronomy 6:5 says, “You must love the Lord your God with your whole mind (Reformers),” your whole heart, your whole soul, (Free Church and Revivalists) and all your strength (Catholics).” While each of the historical traditions fulfill one part of this passage, it is our goal to have more of a balance of the way we worship. That will lead us to love God with all of our heart, soul, mind, and strength. This means that, at times, we may use elements of worship that come from all of these traditions of worship instead of just focusing on one of them.

Third, another strength is worshipping collectively. This means that we are to place importance on worshipping together with one another. This is found in the Scriptures multiple times. Psalm 145 and other Psalms talk about “praising God from one generation to another.” Biblical worship is multigenerational. Here at WBC, we seek to worship God as a multigenerational family. We do not seek to only target the emerging generation through a niche marketing approach that tends to exclude other age groups. Some have suggested that we need to decide what kind of church we are going to be by picking one group of people and their music preferences to focus on in expense of the other groups. We are a church that focuses on people of all ages coming together to worship God as a family by letting go of our individual music preferences and worship styles.

In addition to worshipping as a family, we also seek to acknowledge one another in worship. The Bible does not tell us to get alone with God in worship as a way to reach His throne. Colossians 3:16 tells us that our worship should be about, “teaching and exhorting one another with all wisdom, singing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs, all with grace in your hearts to God.” Don’t miss the call here to sing to one another and to God with a variety of music.

Fourth, another strength from these traditions is a view of art as truth. This truth has been weakened in the church in the last 100 years, but is making a come back in many churches today. The Bible promotes several styles of music and art forms in worship. (Colossians 3:12-16, Ephesians 5:18-21, Exodus 31, Psalm 20:5, 2 Chronicles 3:5) We seek to use all the arts in worship of God at WBC. This includes music, visual arts, video, drama, and even dance on some occasions.
Fifth, another strength is to empower people to participate and so diminish the role of a priest in worship. Hebrews chapters 4-10 develop this idea. Beginning in verse 11 of chapter nine it says, “Christ has come as the high priest of the good things to come. He passed through the greater and more perfect tent not made with hands, that is, not of this creation,” and verse 15 says, “And so he is the mediator of a new covenant,” and finally verses 24-26 say, “For Christ did not enter a sanctuary made with hands—the representation of the true sanctuary—but into heaven itself, and he appears now in God’s presence for us. And he did not enter to offer himself again and again, the way the high priest enters the sanctuary year after year with blood that is not his own, for then he would have had to suffer again and again since the foundation of the world. But now he has appeared once for all at the consummation of the ages to put away sin by his sacrifice.”

As this passage says we believe that Jesus Christ is the one and only true worship leader. He is the one who intercedes and leads us. There is no need for a priest or a highly gifted worship person to led us to the throne of God. Jesus Christ has given us access to the throne as our high priest. In light of this truth, we see our singers and musicians as servants in the Body of Christ, who are not so much seeking to spontaneously convey ways of worship between God and the congregation, but they are primarily charged instead with the important role of pointing our congregation to Jesus Christ in ways that call for all of us to participate and engage in every aspect of the service. There is not a spiritual gift of worship leading found in the bible. Worship should always be seen as “the work of the people,” and not something to sit back and listen to or something only a few gifted people can accomplish. One of the ways that we seek to accomplish this is to have the Body of Christ (team of volunteers) lead the music portion of our services.

Finally, the last strength that we would like to highlight here is a passion to keep the gospel message clear and visible in our worship services. The most recent historical traditions of worship, Free Church & Revivalism, have made the mistake of limiting the proclamation of the gospel to only the spoken word part of the services and see the rest of the service as preliminary to that gospel presentation or teaching time. Unfortunately, this has weakened the gospel to an intellectual hearing instead of the deep and rich saturation of having the gospel consume every aspect of the service. This is talked about in the book of Colossians. Verse sixteen of chapter 3 tells us to “let the word of Christ dwell richly in your teaching and singing of psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs.” As this passage says, we believe worship should be centered on the redemptive story and person of Jesus Christ. We seek to unveil and reflect the gospel message both in the content and in the order in which we worship during each of our services. No matter what order of worship a church has it forms worshippers to have the view of God, and the spiritual life of the believer that it portrays in both the content and order of its worship.

Here at WBC we seek to form and edify our church family with the story of the gospel as we come together to practice the rhythms of adoration, confession, assurance, thanksgiving, petition, instruction, charge, and blessing. Some people have rightly been conscious about these rhythms of worship sense they look “liturgical” in the negative sense of the word. While not every church thinks of itself as “liturgical” or self-consciously puts together an order of worship, every church worships in a particular way. In this sense liturgy, like tradition, is inescapable; it’s not whether a church will have a liturgy but how the liturgy it does have will honor God and bless the worshippers. In light of this we do not want to be “liturgical” in the negative sense of the word. We do not want to dig up old ways of worship to get stuck in and just go through the motions, but we do want to hold fast to the gospel of Jesus Christ in our order of worship so that we are more fully formed worshippers of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

You can find more info about the order of our worship by watching a sermon by WBC Worship Arts Pastor Jay Trull at waxahachiebible.org.

We turn now to conclude our discussion of worship at WBC by looking at “Where We Are Going.”
Where are we going? For some us when we read these words we may get nervous and think that there is a big change coming on the horizon of worship at WBC. That is not the case. These things have been a part of the foundation of our worship for more than a decade, and there is no plan to change things. The one thing that we do hope to do differently is teach more about why we worship the way we do. So you are actually holding in your hands part of where we are going in worship. We are coming to you in love to help shepherd you in the area of worship.

Our last article concluded by looking at how we seek to center the order of our worship services around the gospel story of Jesus Christ. We turn now to look at why we seek to order our services this way.

Why do we follow the story of the gospel in our order? The simple answer is that’s how we are best edified and formed in Christ. To help explain this we need to look at a brief description of how the human mind and body work.

God created us to worship and everyone worships something even if they do not worship God. They may worship their self, someone, or something. But the reality is that we were all created to worship. At WBC we seek to lead you to worship Jesus Christ. We hope that everyone reading this has seen their need for a savior and are following Christ by faith and seeking to trust in Him alone to save us from our imperfect condition.

Since we were created to worship, we are primarily people of desire and imagination, not just creatures of intellectual thought. Certainly thought and intellect are a huge part of who we are, but at the heart of us is a desire to be loved and to love. The way we work out these desires is in our imagination, not just in facts or information. Our imagination allows us to put facts and information into action. This is how we process content.

It is very important that we get our content right by making it biblical and centered on Christ. But it is just as important that we relate to our biblical content in ways that are solidly centered on Christ. For example, studies have shown that people who have suffered an injury and experienced brain damage have often lost the ability to form their imagination. It has been proven that they understand all the facts and information of things, but because the part of their brain that allows them to imagine (how they would put facts into motion) has been damaged, they have lost their ability to control their motor skills and in most cases cannot walk or talk.

The part of the brain that is often damaged in these case studies is key to us in this discussion on worship. This part of the brain is called the corpus callosum. It is a bundle of fibers that runs along the center of the brain, connecting its right and left hemispheres. Most of us probably know that the left side of the brain likes order and words and deals in logic. The right side is non-verbal and sends our body signals to make expressions and emotional feelings. The corpus callosum is the part of the brain that connects the left and right hemispheres so they can communicate with each other and work in integrated harmony. For us as followers of Christ, this is the part of the brain that will allow us to put the information of our beliefs into practice. The corpus callosum works best through imagination, and as Christians we don’t just need to know information, we need to have our imagination formed so that we can do more than just believe facts. Forming our imagination includes forming our perception, motor skills, intellect, passions, affections, and our desires. If we can form our imagination with the gospel, our body can then walk in Christ-centered attitudes, habits, and actions that exhibit the fruits of the Holy Spirit (peace, love, joy, kindness, patience, self-control and long-suffering).

This may be a new idea in the church, but it is a reality that the world understands better than we do.

For example, marketing strategies of the world seek to target our imagination, not just give us information. They understand that we primarily desire to be loved and to love others, so they tell us a story about what they want us to love or what makes us feel loved. They may put up a picture of a new piece of clothing that looks good to the eyes so we imagine ourselves in it, and we feel better about who we are, or we imagine that if we have it, someone else will love us more. This kind of marketing prevails almost
endlessly in every industry, and the content is not really the issue. The things they are selling might be biblically good or worldly bad, but for the sake of this discussion, the point is that marketing targets our imagination, and it works. Social media is also a big player in this discussion. Many of us religiously interact with our smart phones and tablets and, whether we think about it or not, this is forming our imagination. This media tells us stories that we pursue or reject. Again, it’s not that the media is bad, but the fact that formation is happening. For example, if you follow some of your friends on Facebook while they are on vacation, you imagine yourself there with them on vacation. We do this without even thinking about it. Because of the creativity of Facebook, you are placed into their story, and as you follow them your desires are being formed by your imagination. This is true whether you want to admit it or not. It’s likely that you could then find yourself actually planning and going on a vacation. There are many other illustrations that can be used here.

This idea of forming our imagination is also a biblical one. The Bible is constantly talking about loving God with our heart. We do not have space for an exhaustive list of passages here, but it is a very common idea in the Scriptures for us to have the “desires of our heart” or the “meditations of our heart” centered on God. In the culture of biblical times the word “heart” had a different meaning than it does for us in our time. When we think of the word “heart,” we most likely think about the organ in our body that pumps our blood. In the Bible, the word “heart” means, “the hidden center of one’s being,” the place that we fix our eyes on, the things we pursue. In our time, this “hidden center of our being” is known as our imagination.

How do you form the human imagination? As you can probably see from some of the illustrations above, the best way to form our imagination is to use story. What does all of this have to do with worship?

The world is full of stories and media forms that seek to tell you what is true and good to pursue as a vision of the good life. Several years ago, MTV started reality TV, and now most networks have embraced this and seek to give a story of what they call the “real world” that forms you. But there is only one real story for this world to follow and that is the gospel story of Jesus Christ. The church needs to embrace the story of Jesus in worship so that we are all edified away from the wrong stories and formed by the one true story of the gospel. This is not to say that the gospel is the only good story, but it is certainly the foundational story that serves as a compass to gauge all other stories.

We not only need to be restor(y)ed so that our imagination is centered on Christ, we also need to repeat the story of the gospel from week to week.

Studies have shown that children often need stories to be repeated in order to help them form their mind in integrated ways. If a child is throwing a tantrum in reaction to a upsetting event, they are showing that there is confusion in the balance of their corpus callosum. The most effective proven way to deal with this is to retell the story of the upsetting event over and over again until the story forms their imagination in a way that allows them to process their body into the right behavior. Certainly this is good information for parents, but this is also key for all of us who are children of God. We all have struggles in our life of faith with Christ. Even as adults we are faced with upsetting events and a constant thrust of the wrong stories that need a consistent washing of the imagination with the story of the gospel.

All of these ideas are not just scientific or conspiracy theory. This idea of retelling the gospel story in worship is also a biblical one. All of the passages in the Bible that talk about the worship in the temple show us that they were centered on telling the story of the gospel of Jesus. For example, in 1 Kings chapter 8 we see that the sacrifices of the temple were focused on the worshipper coming to worship and seeking atonement for their sins that was represented by the blood of bulls and goats. This blood was a foreshadowing of the blood of Christ. Once the sin offering was made, there was an offering of praise (or acension) as well as a peace offering. The praise offering assured the worshipper of the grace of the gospel and the peace offering involved a meal that celebrated the gospel of...
Christ which is a foreshadow of the Lord’s Supper. There is not space here to develop this further, but these sacrifices were all a picture of the gospel that were repeated every time worship happened in the temple. Other passages to consider here are Leviticus 7:16-21, 9, Nehemiah 8, Isaiah 6, Deuteronomy 5, 2 Chronicles 5-7, Joshua 24, Romans 11-15, 1 Corinthians 11-15, and Revelation 4-21.

What does all of this have to do with were we are going on worship?

We hope to create a culture in our congregation who consider, understand, and embrace the ideas of worship that have been unpacked in this article. We want to be people who are worshipping God in ways that are centered on the traditions of Christ and not the traditions of man as well as people who understand that forming our imagination with the gospel of Christ is key to our spiritual formation and how we become mature disciples of Christ.

Consider these words from James Smith, a Christian professor:

> We have wrongly assumed that Christianity is primarily a “message” and is only defined by content. Along with this comes the assumption that forms are basically neutral containers for the message, selected on the basis of taste, preference, or cultural relevance. When this happens we begin to approach Christian worship as an event for disseminating the message and look for forms that are fresh and relevant. For example, we might distill the “message” in a “mall container”, a “coffee shop” container, or a “rock concert container.” Such strategies are in inherently “intellectualists”, because they reduce the gospel to a propositional “message” and they miss the formative power of the forms themselves. The forms of the mall or coffee shop are not just benign containers that carry any content. These forms are already “aimed and loaded” with complex rituals and practices that carry a vision of the good life. So we might think that we are making Jesus relevant, in fact we are unwittingly teaching worshipers and seekers to treat Jesus like any other commodity they encounter in the mall, because the formation of the mall unconsciously trains us to relate to the world as consumers. Unfortunately, because the church remains fixated on content and “messages,” it fails to see what’s really at stake: our imaginations. The world understands this and the power of story to form our imaginations. Why should the devil get all the best stories?

In response to this very interesting quote consider Luke 19:45-46 where Jesus responds to the people of His day who brought the shopping mall into the temple instead of focusing it on a prayerful telling of His gospel story.

> When Jesus entered the temple courts, he began to drive out those who were selling. “It is written,” he said to them, “My house will be a house of prayer”; but you have made it ‘a den of robbers.’

Hopefully, we can all begin to see the importance of focusing on forming our imagination in worship and the role that story plays in this. We do not want to become people who only relate to God with a bunch of separated facts of information and beliefs that are not put into practice. If we do not use the story of the gospel as the over arching way that we worship, then this is exactly the kind of people or order of worship will form. Simply because that is what we are telling people to imagine even if we don’t consciously think about it or say it with our words. We need to recognize this and begin to approach worship with more than a discussion about contemporary or traditional preference debates. Such strategies are shaping us into the wrong people. We have to do better than this. Our hearts and the hearts of our children are at stake.
Our Worship Strategy

We would like to conclude by offering you a visual of our church logo that summarizes the kind of culture we are seeking to create as we lead this church in worship.

We seek to carry Christ in the content, media, and the order of our worship services in order to develop Christ-centered methods of discipleship and people who carry Christ in their beliefs and life.

As the people of God we gather to tell, receive, and join in the story of the Triune God. We hope to tell the story of God in rich beauty to inspire the Christian imagination. We invite the people to be priests in the story. We develop a collaborative community of humble artists putting the story before the artist. We develop teams of servants, not superstars. Production supports the story it does not drive it. We value excellence and not perfection. We value feedback. We are lifelong learners.