

One of the key points to come out of our church weekend was the need to deepen our worship. What will have the biggest impact on our Sunday morning services is the attitude of our hearts. As Steve reminded us at the church weekend, we are all called to be active participants in worship – performers not the audience! And the attitude of our hearts on Sundays in turn depends on the extent to which we have focussed our hearts on God during the previous week. So deepening worship is not just about Sunday mornings but the whole of our lives.

So as an introduction I want to explore what worship is and the relationship between Sunday worship and daily worship

Much of what I'm going to say comes from the book *Whole life Worship: empowering disciples for the frontline* by Sam & Sara Hargreaves (extracts are in blue)

Mark 12 ²⁸, A religious teacher asked Jesus 'Of all the commandments, which is the most important?' ²⁹ 'The most important one,' answered Jesus, 'is this: "Hear, O Israel: the Lord our God, the Lord is one. ³⁰ Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength." ³¹ The second is this: "Love your neighbour as yourself." There is no commandment greater than these. ³² 'Well said, teacher,' the man replied. 'You are right in saying that God is one and there is no other but him. ³³ To love him with all your heart, with all your understanding and with all your strength, and to love your neighbour as yourself is more important than all burnt offerings and sacrifices. ³⁴ When Jesus saw that he had answered wisely, he said to him, 'You are not far from the kingdom of God.'

1st commandment = worship. Jesus was asked what is *THE [single]* greatest commandment but he seems to give 2 for the price of one. Because he wants us to realise that loving God is not just about us expressing our love for him in Sunday worship or private prayer – if we really love God then we will of necessity love those whom God has created in his own image, those whom God loves and that of course is every single human being in the world. We might add that it will also include loving all of God's creation – looking after this beautiful planet that God lovingly designed and formed to be our home. So true worship is of necessity *whole life worship*

Romans 12 Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God – this is your true and proper worship.

The Message ¹⁻² So here's what I want you to do, God helping you: Take your everyday, ordinary life—your sleeping, eating, going-to-work, and walking-around life—and place it before God as an offering.

Hebrews 15 ¹⁶ (**The Message**) Make sure you don't take things for granted and go slack in working for the common good; share what you have with others. God takes particular pleasure in acts of worship—a different kind of "sacrifice"—that take place in kitchen and workplace and on the streets.

So what is the role our Sunday worship in all of this? How does our worship together help us continue to worship God in our Monday-to-Saturday life?

Romans 12 ² Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is – his good, pleasing and perfect will. CEV ² Don't be like the people of this world, but let God change the way you think. Then you will know how to do everything that is good and pleasing to him.

We probably all agree with the idea that true worship should be part of our whole life but because we are human there is no way we can make that a reality or sustain it for any length of time in our own strength. *Nor will it come through intellectual persuasion but only by deep heart-change as we open up our lives to the eternal God in worship.*

Colossians 3 ¹⁶ (In the context of how we live together and behave towards one another) *Let the message of Christ dwell among you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom through psalms, hymns, and songs from the Spirit, singing to God with gratitude in your hearts.*

Paul is talking about the importance of our gathered worship, but then goes straight back to the worship of the way we live in our everyday lives. ¹⁷ *And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.*

One Christian has said *'I love it when corporate worship on a Sunday has a relevance to my working week and that church is not an escapist experience. I don't leave my burdens at the church door; I bring them in with me.'*

Worship plays a decisive role in transforming congregations into whole-life disciples. There is the potential that each person can be refreshed, inspired, empowered and sent out to make a difference wherever he or she happens to be; that our songs, services and sacraments can proclaim God's heart for the renewal of creation, and infuse each person with a sense of his or her role in God's plan.

The problem is when our gathered worship is disengaged from the everyday lives and ministries of the congregation. This is sometimes called the 'sacred-secular divide'. This is an unnatural split.

A few years ago, we were leading the youth venue at a national conference, with the typical blend of bright lights, loud music and caffeine-fuelled Christian fun. Sara led a section of prayer for God's world, holding up an inflatable globe as a symbol. As she closed the prayer time, the band began to play an upbeat worship song. We bopped the globe out into the crowd, inviting the teenagers to pray for a part of the world when they caught it. Most of the teenagers got into the spirit of the activity, bouncing the globe around as the song continued, and we soon moved on to another section of the service. We were surprised, then, to receive a couple of feedback notes at the end of the evening: 'Please do not throw inflatables out into the congregation during worship. I found it most distracting.' These were unexpected comments from some otherwise relaxed teenagers. The story of this distracting inflatable world became a parable to us. Maybe we should be open to God's world bumping us on the head every once in a while? To remind us of his heart for the whole world and our whole lives. Perhaps we need to be distracted sometimes – not from God, but from our preoccupation with ourselves and a purely inward experience. Or do we continue to pass on to the next generation the idea that 'worship' means 'Close your eyes, raise your hands, sing loudly, and whatever you do don't let yourself be distracted'?

Amy, a C of E worship and youth leader, *'A lot of our parishioners are business people who work in the city, so they are quite distant when they come back to our little village. There is the attitude that we leave our problems at the church door and escape reality. So when we sing our songs there is a sense of "I love you, God, but I would rather not talk about that problem in my week, or how I had this really scary business meeting, or how I had to fire someone."'*

We need to try and ensure that our songs, prayers and actions on a Sunday reflect God's heart for our everyday lives, for our broken world, for his kingdom to come and his will to be done: at the supermarket, and on the bus, and in our kitchens, and in the office, and on the playground, and at the bowls club, . . . as it is in heaven?

Studies have found that the attitudes of congregation members towards issues such as the environment, gender roles, race, ethnicity and political attitudes are shaped most significantly by 'seemingly insignificant messages' they receive from regular public worship. A separate 2014 survey conducted across a diverse range of congregations in the UK found that gathered worship was the most significant factor for people's growth in discipleship. The report noted, however, that 'Many of us, worshippers and worship leaders, probably do not think of worship as being deliberately formative.'

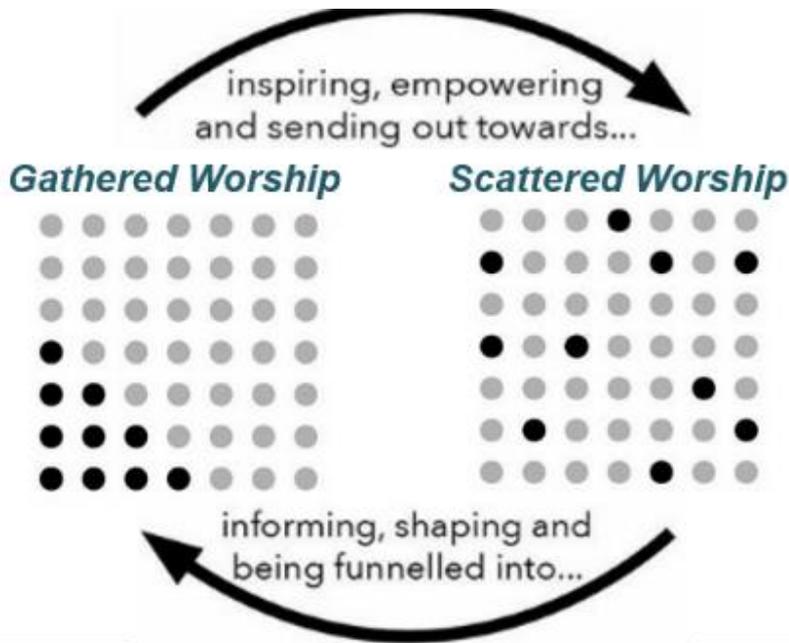
So we need to bear this in mind when we choose our songs – or the subjects of our intercessory prayers. Do we only commission "missionaries"?

This Time Tomorrow

What we share as testimony – only when it is sorted out and never ongoing struggles?

The importance of breathing properly when we sing – the same is true with regard to all of our worship

(see chart below)



Gathered worship is like breathing in
 Scattered worship is like breathing out
'We come back from our lives on our frontlines to share some of the encouragements and be healed from the hurts – that's what we do in our gathered worship. But that is not an end in itself, so we go back out to the frontline, in order to take Jesus with us.'

3 things in particular happen in gathered worship: we are reminded that we are different; we remember the story; we receive God's empowering.

we are different *'God's temple is sacred, and you together are that temple' (1 Corinthians 3:17).* gathering together as believers is vital because here we are reminded who we are – a sacred temple; the set-apart people of God. This is where we are transformed by the renewing of our mind.

remember the story; during the week we are bombarded with the world's stories: often stories of despair, hopelessness, greed, selfishness. When we meet together and sing and hear scripture and take communion, we are reminded of God's story, God's purposes and where we fit into them. This is a vital part of strengthening our identity and character as God's children, so that we can continue to live a life that worships God when we are out in an ungodly world.

Receiving God's empowering *gathered worship creates space to be refreshed by God's empowering Spirit. It is not that this is impossible when we are scattered. Yet there is a sense that gathering together helps us focus and receive in ways which we may struggle to replicate out on our frontlines. We see this happening to the believers in Acts 4, where shortly after Peter and John had been released from prison they went back to the gathered church to pray and worship. The result is that they were filled with the Holy Spirit and received boldness to go out and proclaim the gospel (4:31). Gathered worship can provide a context where we can be refilled*

Our chief purpose is to worship God: *to Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.*” We are hoping to run a special course for our service leaders and music leaders to help us think about how we can develop our worship on Sundays. But I want to encourage everyone in our church family to take part in the *whole life worship* course.

1. Worshipping engages our whole lives
2. Worshipping offers us fresh insight
3. Worshipping transforms our ordinary actions
4. Worshipping inspires our everyday speech
5. Worshipping focuses our wavering hearts

Our home groups will be doing it. If you are not already in a home group, then please sign up for the course on the sign-up sheet in church or speak to me. You can either join an existing group or if you prefer, I shall also be leading a new group specifically for the duration of the course on Wednesday evenings.

This just one part of a strategy to implement the vision of developing our whole life worship. We shall have a number of sermons during the Summer term which will be exploring a similar theme.

Andrew Petit