

You, Me and God

Worship: Beyond the Ritual series

by Chris Famisaran

Good morning, everybody. You all survived the week. We got a busy, busy week ahead. [VBS]

I have a question for you all. Why are you here? Fellowship. Got to go to church because of what I'm supposed to do. See, my friends, my mom and dad made me do it. I think we all probably have different reasons as to why we're here, but the one thing that I hope and pray that we're all here is to come together and worship together, our God, but also to be a church family.

Father in heaven, thank you for the opportunity to come together as we dive into. Why is group worship so important? Why is it being together so important? Be with us now. In Jesus name, Amen.

Today I'd like to look at a couple passages, and I have to apologize. I didn't realize I was dyslexic, but Hebrews 10:42, 45 should be 24 through 25. So my fingers betrayed me. But I'd actually like to go to Matthew 18, verse 20. And Jesus says something here that is very powerful. Matthew 18:20. We'll come to Acts later. Matthew 18:20. All right. Are we all there?

It says, *for where two or three gather in my name, there am I with them*. I do believe, though, that God is with us always. But especially, too, when we're gathered together as friends, whether it's going to dinner, worshiping here, spending time studying. It's important that we're not alone. I think that group worship reminds us we're not alone. And ultimately we're strengthened by the collective.

One of the things that I loved doing as a kid growing up was going to the beach. Usually we went to San Eljejo State Beach. And in the evening, it was one of my favorite times, because what did we get to do? We got to build a fire. And sometimes we'd make small fires, and sometimes we'd make big fires. But towards the end, there would always be, what? Some coals. And

you could see that as the fire burned down, and especially if a coal maybe got moved off to the side, what would happen? It would slowly go from bright hot orange to a slight, barely slight ember.

I think it was DL Moody who shared a story once where there was a man of faith who visited a fellow church member who had stopped attending church. And he just wanted to check on him and say, hey, how you doing? The man said, well, I can be a Christian on my own. I just got to believe in Jesus. I don't need church. I get my church in nature. I go to the beach. I do this. I serve others. Rather than arguing with him, he went over to the fireplace. And just like how I experienced at the beach, he saw that the fire was going and he took the tongs and he pulled a little ember out. And they just sat and they watched the fire. And slowly but surely, what did that little coal turn into? A small, barely flaming ember. And by that time, a church member who had been missing for some time suddenly realized what his friend was trying to tell him.

There is something to be said about a collective, of being with a group. I think many Christians think that they can maintain their spiritual journey and their passion in isolation. I think that we can follow God. And our personal walk with Jesus is certainly important, no doubt. But I don't think that God ever intended us to worship just by ourselves. I think that there was something more. And this coal, when did it burn the most? When it was closest to the fire so that the heat could be radiated.

When you think back even to the very beginning of Scripture, in Genesis, God created the heavens and the earth, but he also created who, Adam and Eve. And there they could gather together. They walked with God and worshiped God together.

One of the things that I love about being here is the fact that we can come together not just to worship God collectively, but there is power singing together, Amen. There is power praying together. There is power in studying together and to be of encouragement to one another. But some church is not something that we just go to and that we attend. I think it's also the same when all of God, all of the coals in a fire are burning together. There's power in that. Somebody once said, faith cools in isolation. Faith cools in isolation.

You could have a cold, eventually turn cold if it's alone. But a coal fire burns bright when it's with others.

Now, I'd like to go to another passage. Let's now go to Acts chapter two. Acts chapter 2. And if you're new to the Bible, that's a couple of books over. Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, and then the book of Acts, kind of about 2/3 of the way through the whole Bible. Acts chapter two. And let's start at verse 42.

Acts 2:42.

And it's here that we see that they devoted themselves to the apostles teaching and to what? Fellowship. To the breaking of bread and to prayer. Everyone was filled with awe as many at the many wonders and signs performed by the apostles. All the believers were together and had everything in common.

They sold property and possessions to give to anyone who had need. Every day. They continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily who were being saved.

I often think back, what would it have been like to be part of the early church that's just starting to develop and grow? What a time to be alive where literally thousands of people are joining the church daily. And it was not an easy time either, because their lives were being threatened.

And I forget the individual who said this, I apologize. But there are four characteristics that I was reading an article that we can take from this, and that is, number one, the church. It was a learning church. If you read back, it says that they were devoted to not just fellowship, breaking the bread and prayer, but especially the first thing was to the apostles teaching. And so they also shared life together.

Where were they meeting? In people's homes and also in the temple courts. But they all had this thread of Jesus. And you have many people who were coming from different perspectives, different cultures, and yet they all had one common cause. They were all aligned with this to follow Jesus. You had people who had plenty. You had some who were in want, they cared for another. They had different backgrounds. You have people of varying ages, I'm

sure, from babies to those who were more mature and had more trips around the sun. They came from different backgrounds and they helped to meet the needs through sacrificial generosity. Giving wasn't forced, it was voluntary. And in this faith, there was a true sense and a concern for others. It was a loving church, but they were devoted as well to learning together. They devoted themselves to the apostles teaching the through scripture. And one of the things I think that we, we often forget is you can't just go through life believing in Jesus.

You have to grow in Jesus. And how often do we take the time, not just by ourselves, to study, but to study with others? Because I think it's very beneficial when we study with others. What's the beauty of that? You get different perspectives. You see things from a different angle that maybe you didn't understand. You're able to help encourage one another to grow together. And the Holy Spirit, I think, caused these individuals to have such a passion and a hunger to know Jesus. So you have a learning church, a loving church, but also it was a church that worshiped together. They often met in their homes or in the temple courts, but they were devoted to what? They broke bread regularly, meaning they spent time together, did life Together, they prayed for one another. And whether it was a formal gathering when they were at the temple or in a more. Less formal area of just their homes, following Jesus wasn't something that you just went to. It was part of who you are. Church was not a weekly event. It was an everyday event. And these groups created much deeper relationships and spiritual growth than I think we could probably recognize.

Lastly, the church, was it static? No, it was growing by thousands each day. They maintained these relationships and went out into the community. They went to any place they could go and share Jesus with others. And the believers, how did they do that? They shared practically through service. Growth came from faithful witnesses of the believers, but also the Holy Spirit's work in people's lives. And by every day, God was adding thousands every day. So it's important now. We should get together. We should study. And if you're new here, twice a year, every spring and every fall, we have a small group. But I would encourage you, don't just wait for our small groups. Get together with friends, meet people, and say, hey, let's go grab lunch. Let's study together.

Earlier this year, on my birthday, I took the day off and I went to, I think it was Woodland Hills. And one of the areas I wanted to try, this restaurant I forget the name of, was a really nice deli. And I ordered whatever. I ordered some kind of sandwich. But then I sat down and I. I was just observing, and I noticed that there were, I think, three or four guys sitting at a table. And when I went to go grab something else, I noticed on the table, in addition to their lunch, they had Bibles on the table. And they were just passionately, passionately going through scripture. And what an awesome time of three or four friends just gathering together and talking about God and at lunch. I was amazed by their faith as well. The witness that they were showing. And it wasn't that they were trying to be show off, they weren't trying to show off their faith, but they were earnestly talking. And even I noticed that they were praying for one another. But whether it's at a cafe or in a home, get together regularly. They were building strong relationships with other believers.

But we also see that group worship also reminds us of the diversity of the kingdom. How many of you have had the opportunity to fly, especially outside of the United States? I've been fortunate to go around the world to other places and then fly around the country. And I remember many years ago, I was in. I think I was at Sea Tech. I was in Seattle, Tacoma, and it was. I think it was in the morning, and I could see a wide, diverse group of people. But what really caught my eye was there were. There were these businessmen, I think they were from Japan. And it was interesting because they all wore the same thing. Black suits, white shirt, black tie. And they knew where they were going. And as they were speaking, as they were talking, they were very passionate. It was so interesting to watch them and interact with people around them and within their own group. I think I've shared. I love to people watch. Not stalking people. People watch. Okay. Just to observe and in different parts. You know, I was at Schiffler Airport many years ago and looking and seeing. How did people act in the customs. Sometimes the bathrooms are also a little bit different. That's, you know, if you ever go overseas, research that kind of stuff. Right? Friendly tip. But their customs, the way they do things, it's not always the same that we traditionally, as Americans do. And how you greet other people is different.

But it's always fascinating for me when I sit down in an airport, especially an international airport, and how people talk to each other and interact with one another, how they dress. And it's so beautiful to see that. The differences, I think, build up, you know, and you see again, different nations, different languages. I think churches also like that. We gather together here on Sabbath, and we're reminded as we sit here that God's kingdom is probably a bit bigger than we give God credit for.

You know, we. I think the kingdom is much bigger than our preferences, our age groups. We all come together and sit. We all have different stories, we have different perspectives, different thoughts, but we're all aligned by one thing. And what's that? Jesus, our Savior.

If you go to Revelation 7:9, it talks about there are people from every tribe, tongue, nation, and people standing together before the throne of God. Somebody pointed out that the diversity of the church reminds us that the kingdom is larger than ourselves. One of the big themes of Matthew is that the kingdom, the kingdom is not just something that we should look forward to, but the kingdom is also. Now are we living the kingdom, heavenly principles that God desires us to live out?

Another thing, too, that stands out. You know, I've been a lifelong musician, and one of the things that I really love is I love classical music. And if you listen to a symphony, for instance, it's made up of different instruments. You have violins, violas, trumpets, flutes, drums, cellos. And they all sound different, they're all unique. But the beauty that comes from each instrument, it's amazing. And I think that the church, in many ways, somebody said it's God's orchestra. You have the young, the old, the rich, the poor, the extroverts, the introverts, people of different countries and cultures and backgrounds. We all have different gifts, all different perspectives. And yet when we come together and we blend together, how much more stronger and capable we are as followers of Jesus. Amen.

And so our diversity shouldn't be that which keeps us apart, but should bring us together. There's a beauty in the diversity of the kingdom, and I think it also shows and reveals how artistic and how creative God was when he created humanity. Someone once said, one of the reasons God gives us the church is

so that we won't mistake our small corner of the world for the entire kingdom. Every Sabbath, we're reminded that heaven will be bigger, will be broader and more diverse than we ever imagined. Amen.

The last point I want to point here is that group worship is a snapshot of what's to come. Have you ever been to a family reunion? Some of you are saying that with joyful, a joyful heart. And some of you are like, yeah, I've been to a family reunion. It's interesting when reunions happen. Oftentimes family will maybe fly in from different parts of the country or maybe from a different country, right? You have the grandparents, you have the parents, you have the teenagers, the toddlers, maybe even some newborns, right? And some are loud and outgoing, some are maybe a little bit more quiet, maybe a little bit more reserved. Some may be wealthier, some are maybe struggling. But each one of these individuals has a story, has their own personality experiences, and some of it's a little blended because we're family, right? We influence each other. And. And maybe it's at a house. And as people arrive, the house starts to begin filling up with what? Conversation, Hugs, laughter, joy, Reminder of stories shared. You've probably said that same story 10, 15, 100 times, right? You ever get that Grandpa or uncle who just tells the same story over and over? And in a sense, that brings a warmth to my heart that you can always count on that story. You've heard it 100 times, and you could hear it another hundred more. And yet sometimes is family perfect. Sometimes it can also maybe be awkward at times. There may be disagreements, there may be some unfinished issues, but none of that changes the reality.

Because what we are there because we belong to one another as a family. And I think often every Sabbath here is like a... It's like a family reunion. We're all spread out throughout the week. We go to our homes, we work, whatever we do. We come back here every Sabbath to reunite. And here we sing, we pray, we praise God, we hear God's word together and remind ourselves that we are bigger. We're part of something that's much bigger than ourselves. And even though it's only once a week, it's a preview of that which we are ultimately looking forward to is that being reunited with Jesus. Amen. And so every Sabbath gathering is a snapshot of that joyful reunion that we look forward to. A little taste, a little appetizer of what it will be like to live forever with Jesus.

So until that big, great reunion, I want to jump to Hebrews 10, 24 and 25. Not 42 through 45, but Hebrews 10 24, 25. Hebrews is towards the end. Okay, verse 24.

And let us consider how we may spur one another toward love and good deeds. Not giving up meeting together as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another. And all the more, as you see the day approaching,

What is something that we're called to do? It is to be of encouragement to one another, that we influence one another to not only just encourage, but also to do good. How can we serve this church, but also our community? How do we serve one another? I think by listening.

How many of you are here today because you had a great week? A couple of you. How many of you had a really crummy week? Okay. The same people raised their hands. Two things could be true at the same time. You could have a great week, but you could also have a difficult week. And I think one of the things that I really appreciate about this church in particular is the fact that we truly care for one another. I know if I had to, I can pull somebody aside. Hey, I need some prayer right now. I'm dealing with a difficult situation. Are we nurturing relationships not just here in church? Are we nurturing relationships with our church family outside of church? Are you nurturing relationships even from people not of the church? How can you be an encourager? And how can you influence others to do good?

Another passage I want to get to. Ephesians, chapter two. Okay, let's go to the left. If you're new to the Bible. Ephesians chapter 2, Verse 19. I want to read 19-22. Ephesians 2. We all there. Okay. Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and strangers, but fellow citizens with God's people and also members of the household built on the foundation of the apostles and the prophets, but with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone. In him, the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord and in him. You two are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his spirit. Do you truly desire to want to know and seek God, but also be part of a family that worships together, builds and does life together, together to do good around and to grow together?

This week I want you to ask yourself, am I here to receive a message or am I ready to serve someone?

What does that mean? Am I here to receive a message or am I here to ready to serve someone? There's a conversation that I've had several times, and the gist of it is this. Somebody will say, and I just feel like I'm not being blessed by my church. I'm not receiving the message. I'm not doing this. I'm not getting this. I'm not getting that. Maybe the music was okay. And every time I've responded with this, where are you serving in your church? How are you serving? And I'm not saying that you necessarily have to join the band or, you know, help with audio, visual, or be a deacon, although we would love to have you serve in that capacity. But there are ways that we can serve one another here by simply asking, hey, how you doing? What can I pray for? Is everything okay? Can you pray with me? Are you studying together?

First Thessalonians 5:11 says, Therefore, encourage one another and build each other up, just as, in fact you are doing. I want to challenge us to not just come and receive or take, but also to serve.

So this week, I want you to connect with a fellow member of the church. I want you to either share a word of encouragement, a prayer request, I want you to study together, or simply just check on them.

I was talking earlier in Sabbath school, you know, we have these rectangular devices. We have never been more connected in many ways, right? There's so much information that you could just, with a tap of a few buttons or maybe speak into it, and you can learn so much. Kids, you are so lucky with these devices. Remember, those of us who are older, do you remember the Dewey Decimal System? Some of you, that brought a chuckle. How to look up books at the library, or you had to look up Encyclopedia Britannica. You had to really work to learn. And I'm not saying that what you're learning is actually easier. In fact, I think it's actually harder because more is expected of you now. But we're in an age, we're in an epidemic of loneliness. And one of the things that I really love and appreciate about this church is that we're here because we want to be here together. We want to see our friends, our family. This is why we are here and this is why group worship is so important. We're not just here to lift up and praise God. But that's also a great thing that's needed

because there's something very unique about coming together and praising God and praying together and studying together like this. But there's also that bond that we are creating.

And I think it's important that we don't forget that individual worship and your faith is important, don't get me wrong, but we're also called to be part of a collective. Why did God put the church together? Why did God call the disciples to go out to teach, preach and make disciples so that others may know the wonderful message about the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Amen. If you have something so awesome, why do you want to withhold it? Why not go and share it?

To be fair though, let me also say this though. There may be some who may be hesitant. They may say, I don't want to be part of a church because I've been burned or I was misled, or I was swindled out of money and I'm sorry that happened to you. But I want to ask, maybe rethink and just ask, what about this place? Give it a shot. Give it another try.

And I long look forward to that one day. I look forward to that day when Jesus will come in clouds of glory and we'll all gather together and that we will be able to worship God together in group worship. You, me, God. I long for that day and I hope you do too. So let's pray.

Father in heaven, thank you for your good and your mercy endures forever. Lord, give us courage, give us love, empathy, that we can serve one another. But ultimately, Lord, help us to point others to you not only personally, but may our witness as a church as well. In Downey, wherever we go, may people know that Downey is a place that they can come. They can learn about you, but also want to make a difference for you. In Jesus name, everybody said Amen,

Grace and peace, everyone.