

INTRODUCTION

This is the third message in the series "iFocus Apps to Win in 2010." Two weeks ago I challenged you to download God's Faith Application by memorizing and claiming Philippians 4:13 as your motto for the year. These ten words can change your life if you will quote them and claim them every day, "I can do everything through Him who gives me strength." Last week I introduced our exciting plans for Freedom Celebration this July 4th weekend. God is giving us great opportunities to bring people to Jesus and we're in the process of spending 40 days in prayer together. I hope you have been using your prayer guide every day this past week. Remember, it's not a devotional guide, it's a prayer guide—the written text is brief by design—so you'll spend less time reading and more time praying.

My goal in this teaching series is to encourage you to focus on four important Biblical truths. The ability to focus is important to achieve any goal. A lack of focus can hinder your growth.

I'd like to test your focus power with a little exercise. I'm going to show you a sentence and I want you to count the number of times the letter "f" appears:

FINAL FORMULAS ARE THE RESULT OF MANY YEARS OF SCIENTIFIC
FINDINGS COMBINED WITH A FEW YEARS OF SCIENTIFIC FAILURE

When the majority of people read that, they only count seven "f's" but there are actually ten. The word "of" appears three times, but most people just ignore "of," because our brain automatically passes over short words like "of." Those who counted ten "f's" disengaged their brain's automatic pilot and focused on each word.

Today I want us to focus on worship. What do you think about when I say the word, "worship?" A little boy was walking into church with his dad. He saw some American flags posted in the foyer. He said, "Dad, what are those flags for?" His dad said, "Those are put there in honor of the men and women who died in the service." The kid's eyes got big and he said "The 9:45 or the 11:15 service?" Your idea of worship may be a Sunday morning church service where a few songs are sung, followed by a long, boring sermon. Trust me, I've had to endure my share of boring sermons—and I was preaching most of them! If your idea of worship is warming a pew for 70 minutes on Sunday, then congratulations, you are the perfect candidate to discover the wonderful world of worship!

We do a lot of wonderful things through Green Acres. We have over 300 ministries to help hurting people. We're involved in missions and evangelism here and around the world. We are committed to teaching God's Word and making disciples. But the most important thing we do is worship the Living God. Give me a few minutes of your time, and I think you'll agree with me.

The Bible has a song book called Psalms. It is full of information about worship and invitations to worship. One of my favorite songs is Psalm 95:1-7. I don't know the tune, so I'll read the lyrics: "Come, let us sing for joy to the Lord; let us shout aloud to the Rock of our salvation. Let us come before him with thanksgiving and extol him with music and song. For the Lord is the great God, the great King above all gods. In his hand are the depths of the earth, and the

mountain peaks belong to him. The sea is his, for he made it, and his hands formed the dry land. Come, let us bow down in worship, let us kneel before the Lord our Maker; for he is God and we are the people of his pasture, the flock under his care."

Have you ever come into a worship service, and never really had a sense of God's presence? Sadly, that's what happens to many people who come to worship—but they never get around to truly worshipping.

Let me tell you a parable of the duck church. Once upon a time there was a group of ducks who waddled into duck church every Sunday to hear the duck preacher. On this particular Sunday, they woke up at the quack of dawn and waddled into their pews and waited for the duck service to begin. The duck preacher started by raising one of his feet to remind them about webs. Then the duck preacher began to eloquently expound on how God had given ducks wings with which to fly. He pounded the pulpit with his beak and said, "With these wings there is nowhere we ducks cannot go! We can soar high into the sky!" At first, the ducks in the pews thought he had quacked up, but then they looked and saw they really did have wings. As the duck preacher continued, the ducks began to cry out, "Quack, quack, quack" which is duck language for "amen! Preach it, brother!" The duck preacher continued, "Many of you have duck problems, and you're trying to solve your problems with a little duck tape...But with our wings we can fly over all the problems of life." The ducks replied, "Quack, quack, quack, quack!" which is duck language for, "That's right! WE ... CAN ... FLY!" When the service was over, every duck commented on what a wonderfully encouraging message they had heard from their duck preacher. And then they all left the church and waddled all the way back home.

What's the point? Too often we come into a worship service and leave totally unchanged. It's possible to come to a worship service, but never actually worship. Worship means you meet God and you express your adoration to Him, and every time you encounter God, your life is changed. I want to share three important principles about life-changing worship.

I. The substance of worship has never changed

In its purest meaning, "worship" really isn't a religious word. People worship many things. Our English word "worship" means "worth-ship." It means anything we value as having great worth. Did you hear about the girl who was getting married and her friend asked her if she really loved her fiancée? She said, "I certainly do. I worship the very ground his daddy discovered oil on!"

I've been reading a great little book on worship by Louie Giglio called *The Air I Breathe*. Louie correctly observes that everyone worships. His definition is a good starting point to understand worship. He writes: "Worship is our response to what we value the most." Non-religious people who aren't in church today might say, "Oh, I don't worship." But they're wrong. *Everyone* worships—it's just a matter of whom they worship or what they worship. Louie writes, "Everybody has an altar and every altar has a throne. How do you know where and what you worship? It's easy; you simply follow the trail of your time, your affection, your energy, your money and your allegiance. At the end of that trail you'll find a throne; and whatever, or whoever is on that throne is what's of highest value to you. On that throne is what you worship."

In fact, some of the purest expressions of worship don't happen in a church. Just visit Jerry Jones' \$1 billion shrine to the Dallas Cowboys some Sunday. 100,000 people will be doing a lot of the things the Bible describes as worship. They'll be standing, shouting, lifting their hands, and even singing along with the music: They are worshipping. They just aren't worshipping God.

Or go to a music concert if you want to observe worship. I've watched old videos of Elvis in concert. Fans were standing, swaying, lifting their hands, singing along. In one particular shot the camera zoomed in on a female fan. She had a look of utter awe in her eyes as tears rolled down her cheeks. That's worship. But that's worship of the wrong king.

So worship is our response to what we most value. And of course, in this message I want to encourage you to truly worship the Living God.

A. Private worship creates intimacy with God

God invites us to worship Him privately as well as publicly. Worship is too important to be a once-a-week activity. I've said many times the key to having intimacy with Jesus is to have a daily quiet time, but it doesn't have to be quiet. A quiet time just means that you find a place and a time when all the distractions from the world are silenced so you can concentrate on the presence of God.

Sometimes people ask me, "Pastor, I don't know how you do all you do." I smile and think that the source of my energy and strength comes from devoting the first and best part of my day to personal worship. During my times of private worship, I read God's Word, pray, and sing songs to Him. I love to be riding in my car and sing along with praise music. Some of the best praise times I've ever had have been just me, Chris Tomlin, and the Lord!

King David was a consummate worshipper. There were many times when He worshipped God privately. In one of his songs he wrote, "On my bed I remember you; I think of you through the watches of the night. Because you are my help, I sing in the shadow of your wings. My soul clings to you; your right hand upholds me." (Psalm 63:6-8)

If you wake up in the middle of the night, trying worshipping. Of course, don't sing loud enough to wake your spouse! If you don't have a dynamic, exciting personal worship, then chances are that you will lose the joy of your salvation and your weekly worship with other believers will be dull and meaningless. You can start having a time of personal worship tonight, or tomorrow morning. Get alone with God and start worshipping Him!

B. Corporate worship magnifies God and creates joy

When I use the word "corporate" I'm not talking about GE or IBM. The word *corpus* means "body" or "group." Corporate worship is when you worship with others. It may be family worship, or small group worship. But for our purposes today, I will talk about corporate worship as it relates to what happens right here on Sunday mornings.

In our text, David was in awe as he considered God's creative greatness. David looked up into the sky and sang, "When I consider your heavens, the work of your fingers; the moon and the stars, which you have set in place...what is man that you are mindful of him?" (Psalm 8:3-4) True worship magnifies God. He becomes larger in our lives, and we become smaller and smaller in our own eyes. Our universe bears witness to God's greatness. There's a popular song that says, "I'd like to think that planet earth turns slowly." But the truth is, the earth is spinning at 1,000 miles per hour at the equator. Since we live north of the equator, the circumference is smaller, so we're only spinning at 800 miles per hour. And at the same time, our planet is zooming around the sun at 67,000 mph. So why aren't we all flung out into space? There is a delicate balance that keeps everything together. And the Bible says God does that. In Colossians 1:17 we read that Jesus is "before all things, and in him all things hold together." When you truly understand God's greatness you'll feel small and God will be bigger than any box that you think you can keep Him in.

But there is a byproduct of corporate worship: Joy. The Bible says, "My soul will boast in the Lord; let the afflicted hear and rejoice. Glorify the Lord with me; let us exalt his name together." (Psalm 34:2-3) Corporate worship has a positive effect on people who worship—the afflicted (and we're all afflicted in one way or another) hear worship and we rejoice. The Bible says, "you will fill me with joy in your presence." (Psalm 16:11) True worship that exalts the Lord and produces gladness and joy.

II. The styles of worship change with every generation and culture

The substance of worship never changes, but worship styles have varied throughout history and according to different cultures. Worship is more than music, but when it comes to different styles, music plays an important role. God created worship to be used to adore Him. For the first 1,500 years of Christian history, the only songs sung (or chanted) were the Psalms and a few verses from the New Testament. But in the 1600s a radical worship leader named Isaac Watts started writing songs that weren't scripture. He was considered a heretic for writing such modern songs as, "Oh God Our Help in Ages Past" and "Alas and Did my Savior Bleed." After a few years however, some of the more progressive churches started singing his modern songs. In the 1800s John Wesley's brother, Charles, had the nerve to write Christian lyrics to the tune of well-known British drinking songs. The established churches were appalled and most churches banned such trashy songs as, "Christ the Lord is Risen Today" and "Oh, For a Thousand Tongues to Sing." But the next generation sang his songs.

Fast forward to the 20th century, and there was a time when most churches only sang songs if they were printed in the Broadman or Baptist Hymnals. In the 1970s when those radical song writers, Bill and Gloria Gaither's songs started creeping into churches, many people didn't like it one bit. But now their songs are considered old-fashioned to some!

The point I'm making is each generation has its own songs. There isn't one style God prefers. *We're* the ones who have musical preferences. Much of it has to do with culture. I was in Odessa, Ukraine in December, and they worshipped differently than us. Cowboy churches wouldn't make it in Boston. We all know Texas is a different culture than Southern California, and East Texas is even a different culture than West Texas. As we think about different music

styles, I'm happy to announce that beginning this August we're moving from three worship services to four, and we're offering two different worship styles.

First we will continue to offer

A. Celebration Worship here in the Worship Center

For the past few years, the main style of Green Acres has been the awe-inspiring worship led by a large choir and orchestra. I call it the "majesty effect." When many people visit here the first time and walk in and hear this crowd and the choir and orchestra exalting God, it creates a sense of wonder and awe.

This worship style is a favorite of all of us Baby-boomers and even older folks, but we're living in an age when there's a couple of generations of younger believers who prefer a different music style so in August we're going to add

B. Crosswalk Worship in the Crosswalk Conference Center

Now, we're intentionally calling it Crosswalk worship and *NOT* "contemporary" worship. In fact, as we've talked about this for months, I've jokingly told our staff that if anyone accidentally calls it contemporary worship, they have to pay me a dollar on the spot and I put it in the Building Fund. The terms traditional, blended and contemporary are all relative. Does contemporary mean you sing NEW songs? Sure at Crosswalk they might sing, "How Great is Our God" but that's not contemporary, that song is five years old! Besides, we sing it in here too. Crosswalk worship is all about a different setting and style. After Crosswalk Worship music, then they'll watch me on a large screen preaching God's Word live.

I'll be talking more about the new schedule later this spring, but for now, I want you to be praying that we will find just the right leader for Crosswalk Worship. I'm really excited, because I believe we will reach a lot of people who are looking for that worship style. Be praying about where you will worship and serve. You won't be confined to one or the other. It won't be segregated by age. You can be 72 and if you prefer Crosswalk Worship, go for it! You might be 22 but you prefer a service that offers a choir and orchestra, come on in. We're just trying to provide people with more opportunities to lift up Jesus in worship.

Some churches have had worship wars and fussed over whether to sing choruses or hymns, but Green Acres has always been a multi-generational church where all ages serve and worship side by side.

That reminds me of the funny story about a farmer who visited his cousin's church in the city. When he returned home his wife, Martha, asked him how worship was. He said, "It was pretty good, but they didn't sing hymns, they sang these things called 'praise choruses.'" Martha said, "What's a praise chorus?" He said, "Well, if I sang, 'Martha, the cows are in the corn' that would be a regular song, but if I sang, 'Martha, Martha, Oh Martha, the cows, the cows, the brown cows, the black cows, the white cows, the little cows, the big cows. The cows the cows are in the

corn, in the corn, in the corn, in the corn.' Then if I repeated it four or five times and added drums and a guitar that would be a praise chorus."

But that's not the end of the story. A few weeks later, the city cousin visited his cousin's church in the country. When he returned, his wife, Annie, asked how worship was. He said, "Fine, but they didn't sing choruses, they sang hymns." She said, "What's a hymn?" He said, "Well, if I sang, 'Annie, the dogs are out of the yard' that would be a regular song, But if I sang, 'Annie, my dearest beloved, hear thou my cry. Incline thine ear to the words of my mouth. For the way of dogs, who can explain? For in their canine heads dwell no shadow of sense. Yeah, the dogs in glad rebellious delight, hath broken free from their shackles, and hither from this yard hath gone.' Then if you only sing the first, second, and last verse, that would be a hymn." Well, I'm sure we'll be singing all kinds of songs of praise to Jesus in both Celebration Worship and Crosswalk Worship. My final point is:

III. In worship, sincerity counts more than style

God accepts worship that is sincere. The only kind of worship that isn't received by God is when we go through the motions without truly connecting with God. This isn't a recent phenomenon. 2,700 years ago God complained to His people about their empty worship. He said, "These people come near to me with their mouth and honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me. Their worship of me is made up only of rules taught by men...you turn things upside down, as if the potter were thought to be like the clay! Shall what is formed say to him who formed it, 'He did not make me'?" (Isaiah 29:13, 16) Let me give you three marks of sincere worship:

A. Sincere worship is about the heart not the "how"

I've worshipped in Africa where the believers beat a drum and danced around a fire while singing songs of praise. God was honored because they were singing from their hearts. I've attended Episcopal churches where there was a strict liturgy and I sincerely worshipped God in that style. I've attended African American churches where everyone was clapping hands and swaying to the music, and those folks were worshipping from the heart. I've attended praise gatherings where people were lifting their hands, dancing with joy, and even bowing on their faces in worship, and they were sincere. God loves all worship that comes from the heart.

B. Sincere worship is about a Person not a place

When Jesus was talking with the woman at the well she asked Him a question about worship. She said, "Our Fathers worshipped on this mountain, but you Jews claim that the place where we must worship is in Jerusalem." Which place is right? Jesus told her "Neither. It's not about a place. He said, "The time is coming and has now come when the true worshippers will worship the Father in spirit and in truth, for they are the kind of worshipers the Father seeks." (John 4:20, 23) I love that statement because it means God is SEEKING true worshippers. Maybe you came here looking for, God, well, it's also true that He's here looking for true worshippers. I can just imagine God looking through this crowd and He smiles as He thinks, "there's one! There's another one!"

C. Sincere worship is about surrender not a show

Worship isn't for us to just feel good and enjoy God's presence. Worship isn't a spectator sport. When we bow down, we are submitting ourselves to the Lordship of Jesus Christ. Kneeling before God is a sign of submission and surrender. The Psalmist sang, "O Lord, open my lips, and my mouth will declare your praise. You do not delight in sacrifice, or I would bring it...The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise." (Psalm 51:15-17)

Baptists have usually been afraid of lifting their hands in worship, because they equate it with Pentecostal excesses. But the universal sign of surrender is raising hands. The Bible talks many times about lifting up your hands to the Lord. Don't do it for show, do it to reach out to God.

I love being a grandfather. The other night I got to keep Caroline and Lizzie all by myself. My grandfather name is DeeDee. So I had "DeeDee duty." But it was a happy DeeDee duty time! Sometimes when I'm in the Bethany Suite, the girls will run in after Sunday School. Most Sundays Lizzie comes running up to me and lifts up her arms and says, "Dee Dee! Dee Dee!" Do you know what I do? I say, "Put your hands down you little, charismatic! We'll have none of that here!" Nope. I smile big and reach down and pick her up. And when we come before our Loving Father and lift up our arms with sincere adoration and say, "Abba, Abba!" He smiles at our worship.

CONCLUSION

I want to come back to my original claim that the most important thing we do as a church is worship the Living God. Our work for God must spring from our worship of God. Luke 10 tells the story of Jesus' visit to the home of Mary and Martha for lunch. Martha was in the kitchen working away while Mary was sitting at the feet of Jesus focusing on Him. Martha represents working for Jesus and Mary represents worshipping Jesus. Martha was angry and stormed into the room and demanded Jesus tell Mary to join her in her work. But instead, Jesus said, "Martha, Martha, you are upset and anxious about *many* things, but Mary has chosen the *one* thing that shall never be taken from her." That's the end of the story in the Bible, but in my imagination, I see Martha taking off her apron and sitting down to join Mary in worshipping Jesus. Then after awhile, they both get up and go into the kitchen and work together for Jesus. What's the lesson? Worship comes first and then work. If you work for Jesus without first worshipping Him, like Martha you may end up angry, anxious, and agitated that others aren't working like you. I've know some hard workers for Jesus who think worship is a waste of time, and they usually burn out after a few years.

But on the other hand, if you worship the Lord and it never leads you to work, then your worship is shallow, and self-serving. I've known some people who want to have a feel-good worship experience, but they don't want to get their hands dirty for Jesus. The lesson is the worship comes first and then work. Don't ever forget that sequence.

Jesus said Mary had chosen the ONE thing that would not be taken from her. What did He mean? One day this world will be gone, and the ONE thing that will not be taken away is worshipping Jesus. Worship is the occupation of heaven. That doesn't mean we'll be in an eternal worship service singing songs non-stop; it means we'll be focusing on Jesus, worshipping Him. So, you get to practice heaven here and now: Focus on Him and worship Him!

OUTLINE

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Psalm 63:6-8

B. Corporate worship magnifies God and creates joy

"When I consider your heavens, the work of your fingers; the moon and the stars, which you have set in place...what is man that you are mindful of him?" *Psalm 8:3-4*

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In August, GABC will offer two worship styles:

A. Celebration Worship here in the Worship Center

B. Crosswalk Worship in the Crosswalk Conference Center

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The Lord says, "These people come near to me with their mouth and honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me. Their worship of me is made up only of rules taught by men...you turn things upside down, as if the potter were thought to be like the clay! Shall what is formed say to him who formed it, 'He did not make me'?" *Isaiah 29:13, 16*

Sincere worship is about:

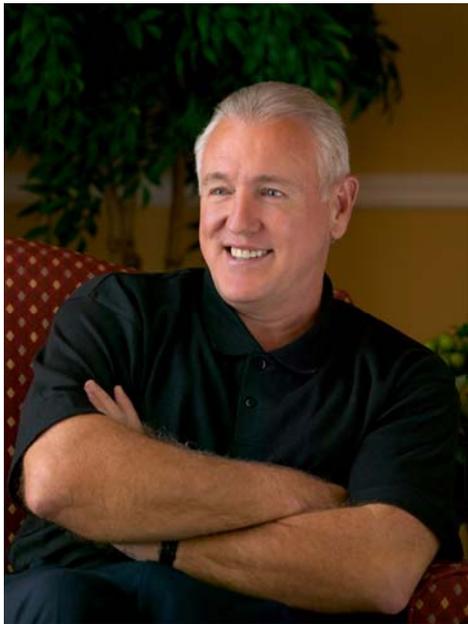
A. The heart not the "how"

B. A Person not a place

C. Surrender not a show

"O Lord, open my lips, and my mouth will declare your praise. You do not delight in sacrifice, or I would bring it...The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise." *Psalm 51:15-17*

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To put it in Texas terms, “You’re mighty welcome to use any and all of my ingredients; just make your own chili!”

For the Joy...
Pastor David Dykes