

Gravity and Gladness on Sunday Morning - Lesson 4a

by John Piper

Worship should be a God-centered, Bible-based, and emotionally engaging experience that prioritizes the vertical focus of worship and minimizes horizontal intrusions.

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Scripture: Matthew 5:11

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Description

In this sermon transcript, the speaker discusses the potential risks of moving towards a performance mentality in worship services when there are multiple services. He emphasizes the importance of maintaining undistracting excellence in singing, playing, praying, and preaching to keep people's attention focused on the substance of worship. The speaker also addresses the issue of levity in worship, distinguishing between natural life humor and contrived communication humor, suggesting that true worship can be hindered by excessive levity. Overall, the sermon emphasizes the need for a God-centered philosophy of music and worship, rooted in biblical principles and focused on pursuing God wholeheartedly.

Transcript

The following message is by Pastor John Piper. More information from Desiring God Ministries is available at www.desiringgod.org Okay, lots to do. It gets more practical now all the time as far as the functioning of Sunday morning, which is what I think people are most interested in and may find most help from.

So we'll try to pace ourselves here and just do the best we can. So, unit number four. What unites us in worship? A philosophy of music and worship at Bethlehem.

And what you're going to see here in these eleven points is, I hope, what grows out of the dynamic that we've just seen biblically in the last three units. So, I wrote these little phrases, God-centeredness, going hard after God, and so on, I think in 1992. I've expanded them for this course, but they really were written, let me just say, in a time of fairly high-level stress at the church in which we were arguing with each other about lots of things, about the nature of worship and whether we should have a big organ, for example, and how fine things should be and how much folk there should be.

You see, that's number five, fine and folk in worship. And what I tried to do to hold the church together is to write down a list of things that we all agreed on, even if we couldn't agree on whether to have an organ or couldn't agree on whether to sing this or that. What did we agree on? And I would recommend every pastor or worship leader to do that for your church, because if you can hold up in front of people when they all think we're being torn apart here by our various preferences and whatnot, if you can hold them and say, look what we really do cherish, it becomes very, very significant.

And so, that's where this came from. God-centeredness is a high priority at Bethlehem, a high priority on the vertical focus of our Sunday morning service. The ultimate aim is to so experience God that he is glorified in our affections.

So, we say things like come on the lookout for God and leave on the lookout for people. And what I mean by that is I really would like to discourage noise in the sanctuary before the service. I know some churches do exactly the opposite.

They call it the litany of friendship and they love the roar. And it is OK if that's your self-conscious philosophical decision to have the congregation just a roar with conversations as people greet one another and talk to one another. It creates a great feeling of friendliness.

But my sense is that let's do that at the end. Come on the lookout for God. Leave on the lookout for people.

Doesn't mean you can't greet anybody, but your greeting isn't going to be over last night's ball game or the headlines or whatever. It's going to be Godward. And you'll see as many people bowed in prayer in the pew five minutes before the service as you see people conversing in the aisles or outside.

And so a Godwardness in the service, you can cultivate over years by encouraging your people to go hard after God. And if you know, as you do, that they come not really primed to meet God, they're not all that fired up and ready to engage with God. You can teach them.

Take the five minutes. Get here a little early. Sit in the pew.

We'll do our best to keep it quiet. We'll provide some piano or organ or synthesizer or guitar or violin or something so that it just provides a peaceful Godward orientation. And you can deal with God and ask him to come meet you in this service.

That's the main thing Prelude is for, in my judgment. And I would love to encourage that among our people. And sometimes we teach on it more explicitly.

Sometimes we let it go for a season. Remove the horizontal intrusions between vertical acts. Now, here's what I mean by that.

These are little tips for pastors and for worship leaders and for any of you who has an influence in how worship is done in your church. As I go around the country and watch worship happen corporately, it is amazing to me how unthought through the transitions usually are from act to act. So suppose you are singing, Lord, you are more beautiful than silver and so on.

Precious than silver. You sing that a couple of times and then there's going to be a congregational pastoral prayer of some kind. Somebody's going to lead out in prayer.

You come to the end of that. And the person walks up and says, now let's pray. You don't need to say that. You were just praying. Or didn't you know that? It gives the impression you didn't know that. You didn't know what we were just doing.

We are now praying. We are saying you are precious. You are beautiful.

And then somebody says, now let's pray. Just don't say that. Just keep quiet.

Keep quiet. Think you've got your people here in the presence of God. Some of them are being touched by God.

Some of them are flowering right here. And abuses that they experienced all week long are being healed as they get near to God. And you get up there in the way.

Don't get in the way. You get with God, too. This is what makes me think many pastors aren't worshipping. They are just not doing it. They are thinking about, now I am supposed to pray in just a minute. What should I say? And so you come to the end.

More beautiful than diamonds. Nothing has the last line. I just compares to you.

And if you have a good pianist, she won't just stop dead. She'll just go on and let it trail off a little bit. You come to the microphone and you say, yes, Lord.

Yes, Lord. You are more beautiful than you move into your praise. You hold it there.

You hold God-wardness and verticality. If it's been rocked by the Spirit of God in a song, you don't stand up and say, now we are going to do another thing called prayer. You don't do that.

You try to get yourself and your horizontal stuff out of the way and just join in what was happening right there by continuing it on with the way you pray. That's what I mean by removing horizontal intrusions. The reason we moved our welcome to the first of the service, which has some great disadvantages, but some bigger advantages, we think, is so that when the service begins now of actual moving God-ward.

And I'll tell you, I do try to do my welcome in a God-ward way. I try to think of language. I try to think of emphases.

I try to say it so that even the welcome, though it's an almost totally horizontal event, is God-ward in spirit and is saturated with the Scripture and so on. There's a way, pastors, even to do that, to do your welcome in a God-ward way, which takes a lot of thought. Sometimes I work on those ten minutes for half an hour, say, to try to think through.

Now, what should I say first? How does the fighter-verse figure in? So-and-so died. A birth happened. There's this big retreat coming.

How can I get all that into a coherent, God-ward, horizontal moment that's not going to completely get people unfit for this event called worship that's about to happen? So work on that. But the reason for putting it at the front is so that we have about 30 minutes then with no horizontal intrusion. It's our effort anyway.

So that once we start singing, from there until the time I preach, it is uninterrupted God-ward. With nobody standing up making any comments about what we're doing. Nobody inviting anybody to do anything.

Although it is fitting, and Chuck does this from time to time, if we want to have a season of, say, confession where we get on our knees or where we're just quiet. There is a way and a way that if you have a gift to do this coming out of an act of worship, you can simply say, now, let's bow before the Lord and just let him know that you love him or what the sins are you're dealing with. And let's be quiet together.

Now, just a word like that is probably not very distracting. But you may not even need to do that if it's plain or if you have a piece of paper in front of you that tells you what's coming. So getting horizontal intrusions out of the way.

Choosing songs that make much of God and not man. There's a huge number of good worship songs and good hymns, good anthems that are very, very God-ward and Christ-ward. Even the welcome is God, is God-ward as possible.

I've said enough about that. Comments about, number one, God-centeredness. Number two, going hard after God, pursuing and expressing the deepest satisfaction in all that God is for us in Jesus.

Follows from the essence of worship, a satisfaction in God, I think. Expressing from the pulpit a long for God in Christ. I think we pastors must model for our people why we're there.

Namely, we are hungry to meet God, hungry to know God, hungry to see God, hungry to hear God. Encouraging prayer before the service and in the service. Oh, to have people praying even as they are worshiping.

Praying for you as you preach. Whenever I get sick, they do that a lot for me. I have people, they hear me coughing before the service.

Oh, pastor's not going to make it through the sermon. So, they'll pray like crazy that my voice will hold up. Well, I need that every Sunday.

That while I'm preaching, the Holy Spirit would be moving. And all the other times. Just a constant flow.

I can remember growing up, what a carnal, stupid guy I was. I had the mentality that I was in this room to be acted upon by somebody. And not here to commune with God continually when nobody was acting on me.

If there's a lull, you don't say, oh, what's supposed to be happening here? I wonder if they forgot something. Instead, you say, I can pray. I can talk to God.

I can listen. I can meditate. I can commune with him.

It's your business to take every act of corporate worship and turn it into a vehicle to express your affections upward and receive God's grace downward. Teaching the God word. Longing in all acts of worship.

So, we teach our people to go hard after God. Long for him. Yearn for him.

As a heart longs for the flowing streams. So, my soul longs for thee. Oh, God.

Number three. Expecting the powerful presence of God. We do not just direct ourselves toward him.

We earnestly seek his drawing near, according to the promise of James 4, 8. Draw near to God and he will draw near to you. We believe that in worship, God draws near to us in power and makes himself known and felt for our good and for the salvation of unbelievers in the midst. I think sometimes we have the notion that God is way, way far away.

And since his eyesight is so good, he can he can see this tiny distant dot of worship down there happening. And he can hear it because he's so good at hearing. But he is far away.

And we're doing these things and it'll cross the light years and it'll arrive there and he'll be pleased with it. And there's some truth to that. But also a great and glorious truth is where two or three are gathered, there am I in the midst of them.

And if you draw near to me, I will draw near to you. And the very presence of God by the Holy Spirit can sometimes palpably be felt in a congregation as the word of God is sounded or the people are singing with all their hearts to the Lord. Or there's a still moment when nothing is happening except people's quiet communion with God, anticipating being ready for his moving among us.

Now, now, expect that, ask for that, look for that. The demeanor of those who stand before the face of God, will you look differently? Will you stand differently? Will you sit differently? It is a little bit disconcerting to me to see some of the lounging that goes on in worship service, especially lounging of girls on guys. And I would just encourage you to shape up in that regard.

I don't know if any of you are guilty of that sort of thing. But if you're in the presence of God, I've told my boys, I mean, I really get on my kids case because teenagers are, you know, they're not into being what they ought to be. They're into pushing the edges of ought.

And so they tend to slouch down like, you know, see if you can make me interested in this. And I've even seen my own sons sit like that. And I've taken them aside in years gone by and said, what are you saying by your posture? Well, I'm not saying anything.

What do you mean? Doesn't mean anything. It does. It does mean something.

It does mean something when you lie, half lie down during the preaching of the word of God or during singing. It means something. What do you think it means? Just guess what people might read off of it.

Make a guess. And I just try to help them see that your body says something. It's speaking something.

And I love to see when I say, let's pray. I love to see postures change. Not to have some kind of physical statement.

I am now moving more focusedly into your presence or on you. Focus on you. Probably is not as helpful.

And you can hear what I'm doing here. Now, I'm almost going back to what I rejected at the beginning. Because I'm getting at it from the inside out.

Now, I'm saying. Place. I've got a whole section on architecture, but I don't know if we'll get to it.

And why we have the building we have with its sparse lean. We don't have crosses everywhere and statues everywhere and windows with figures in them everywhere. Why is that? Why? Why do you do it that way? All that is significant.

But it's only significant if it is coming from from inside out and saying things biblically. Expecting the presence of God. And when he's there, we act in certain ways.

Number four, Bible based and Bible saturated. The content of our singing and praying and welcoming and preaching and poetry will always conform to the truth of Scripture. The content of God's word will be woven through all we do in worship and will be the ground of our appeal to authority.

It makes sense. The content of God's word will be woven through all we do in worship. It's the ground of our appeal.

That's the authority we have. Preaching expository exaltation will thus be central. So not just preaching, though.

All the hymns are put through the seal of Scripture. All the prayers should be saturated with Scripture. The announcements, the beginning should have Scripture shaping and permeating them.

Confession, everything is shot through with the Bible. Seeing and savoring God happens by means of his self-revelation, which he gives through his word. So if you want to see him and savor him, which is what happens in worship, then the word must permeate everything.

Check unfitting human intrusion and inventiveness by testing all by the word. When I'm trying to teach my family to pray at home, it's just amazing how quickly you can fall into ruts of phraseology that have no spiritual content to them. Like, Father, help things to go well at school today.

That's a zero prayer as far as I'm concerned. Because that's not quite zero, it could be worse. But until you fill the word well up with some biblical content, I don't know what you mean.

Go well, does that mean get an A on the test? Or does it mean make you bold and witness? Does it mean keep you pure sexually or does it mean to make you popular? What does go well mean? Go well is so blah. It's not a spiritual word. And so I love it when the people pray in small groups and in church, their words are just saturated with the biblical values.

And you know that they're asking things that God wills that they ask instead of just general words. Bless the missionaries. Well, if you fill that up a little bit, then it will be more God honoring and I think more heartfelt.

God is honored when his word is prominent and pervasive. So Bible based and Bible saturated. Number five, head and heart worship that aims at kindling and carrying deep, strong, real emotions toward God, but does not manipulate people's emotions by failing to appeal to clear thinking about spiritual things based on shareable evidences outside ourselves.

Keeping these together, head and heart is the difference between emotion and emotionalism and between intellectual and intellectualism. So here's what I mean by that. If you target only the head, you'll be intellectualistic.

If you target only the emotions, you'll be emotionalistic. But if you target the emotions through the head, you will be truly emotional. And if you target the head for the sake of the emotions, you'll be truly intellectual.

So when you put the little word *ishtic* on the end of intellectual or emotional, what you're meaning is you're ripping apart what God has put together and thus you are manipulating the emotions by doing an in run around the head. Do it with music. Do it with some tone of voice.

Do it with some look on your face. Do it with whatever means you choose. You know how to work an audience.

You can get them to laugh and you can get them to cry. And you can I mean, effective orators are dangerous preachers. And so to to know how to work an audience to get their emotions where you want them is a dangerous thing, which is why preaching should be expository exaltation.

I do want emotions to flow in our church. I do want actions to change in the lives of our people. But I don't want to do an end run around truth so that they are emotively driven to those affections or those acts just because I can somehow pull the strings of their hearts.

Like tell a story about a lost son. Never, never refer to the Bible. Just pulling one heart string after the other with some emotion laden illustration.

That's very weak preaching. You can build a big church around it. People think you're very powerful because you touch their hearts emotionally.

But there's no truth being built in no fiber. And that kind of preaching won't help them suffer. It won't help them die.

It won't help them take risks. It just makes them feel touched, like, you know, like like a song on the radio. And it doesn't have to be a Christian song.

Just, you know, bridge over troubled waters or something that God makes you feel good. Any content that says anything just makes you feel good because the tune is so good. Maybe so.

A sense of closeness to God that isn't rooted in truth is a fragile sense. So God is more glorified when known and enjoyed or enjoyed and known rather than either alone. Thinking and feeling can conflict.

But in the long run, the tension produces deeper, more durable feeling and wiser thinking. I realize that in targeting the head, that is in having a kind of preaching that is challenging intellectually. Does sometimes work against the emotions temporarily.

Like if you use a hard concept that's difficult to grasp. I mean, deal with something like predestination, say, or election or the providence of God in suffering. And the mind is being, oh, man, how in the world can God be this way and that way? That at that moment, the emotions are not, you know, just praise you, praise you, because they're all confused.

If we don't help people through some of those seasons to come out at the other end with a deeper confidence in what they do believe about God, their emotions are going to be on sand with regard to the providence of God and suffering in the world and whether God chose them or they chose God or how did all this work? So I am willing to risk putting the emotions on hold for a season in order to get the head

clarified in the hopes that greater, deeper, stronger emotions will be the product. And I've seen it happen over and over again, that if you can help people over a paradigm shift with regard to the sovereignty of God, then when you visit them in the hospital, when their child is there for six months in the intensive care unit for six months, wondering if it's going to live, you see the fruit of that preaching. I remember when I visit Dave and Laurie Rose week after week, this baby was what, eight months in the hospital over there.

And I wondered the first few times after I went, the baby had been there several weeks and they weren't giving it very much hope. I sat with Laurie Rose. How many kids do they have? Four, I think.

And her motherly, profound confidence in the goodness and sovereignty of God, rooted in all the things she'd seen of God over the years we spent together here, was worth all the preaching you could ever want to do. Because at that moment, to be sustained in love to God and dependence on God and joy in God. Didn't just happen because emotions were whipped up around here for eight or 10 years, but rather because a vision of God who can handle this and his sovereign in and over and through it sustains those strong emotions.

Number six, earnestness and intensity, avoiding a trite, flippant, superficial, frivolous atmosphere, but instead setting an example of reverence, passion and wonder. I think that people are really hungry for this, really hungry for this. And I said last night, the TV is void of this entirely, which is why I think people created in the image of God get hungry for it.

If they don't become deadened to it. We here at Bethlehem are very serious about being happy in God. And for many people, those two words cannot go together.

Serious about being happy. We are blood earnest about joy. Jokes are rarely fitting.

I've never told a joke in the pulpit in 20 years. Never, not once. But we laugh as a congregation.

Levity makes true worship harder. There is a difference between natural life humor and contrived communication humor. Natural life humor is just what happens in the world.

And sometimes things that happen in the world are absolutely hilarious. And they happen in church, too. And people will.

I was trying to get somebody to do the fighter verse two weeks ago. And I said, OK, there's a hand and they didn't have their hand up for that. And then somebody at the back was they stood up to change seats.

OK, go ahead. And they were standing up to give the fighter verse. I was OK.

It happened three times. It was a it was a total bust that morning to try to get the fighter verse. And the story I love to tell is when I was comparing the dolphin with the jellyfish.

And I was saying, you want to be a dolphin that cuts through the seas and has a goal and goes where you want to go. And not a jellyfish just floating with the tide. Nobody wants to be a jellyfish, do you? And a little girl down here says, I do.

Right out loud so everybody in the church can hear. Well, we roar with laughter, as we should have done. We're not so crusty that that we think worship can't be connected to that kind of real life humor.

But but to be taught homiletically that you got to break the ice of the congregation by starting with a joke. It's just universal. It seems like with some preachers is that you start with a joke or some silly little story.

And I think one of the reasons is that when you get people laughing, you know, you've had an effect on them. And it feels good to have an effect on people. Whereas if you just get right into the truth, you're not sure whether they're being affected or not.

And you'd like to know if they're being affected. And so tell them a little joke. And if they laugh, good.

I'm having some effect here. I just think that's weak. I think that's weak.

There's enough real life humor that comes out and jokes may have a place. Otherwise, I don't know many jokes. I tend to forget them all.

But I do know some and I like to share them. My dad, my dad loves jokes. Every time he came home from evangelistic crusades, we'd hear two things.

The triumphs of God in the salvation of sinners and five new jokes that he learned on the road. And just the way he was and still is. Yeah.

As far as I think, even if you want to look at the seriousness of their worship, there is a perception that being happy and joy and all those types of things was really kind of void from that. And I think maybe there's a real understanding that people even now think that that's the way church is. And so there's an emphasis to try to push it in the extreme.

I think that's right. So what he's pointing out is that since the perception in the world and former church goers, maybe is that church is boring. It's it's it's somber.

It's lifeless and joyless. And so many churches, in order to overcome that preconception, push it the other direction and try to liven it up and make people feel more happy with humor. My approach is just different than that.

I think what you work at is intensity and earnestness and intensity and earnestness over grace is going to be very joyful. What's wrong in the churches that those people have in their heads is that probably the seriousness did become somber and not joyful. There is serious joy and there is serious somberness and serious somberness doesn't own up to the glory of joy.

The Bible is just riddled with commands to be happy in God. Rejoice in the Lord. And again, I will say rejoice.

Blessed are you when men persecute you and say all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. Rejoice in that day. And Luke says leap for joy, leap for joy.

So I Chuck and I, as we talk about how our services work, where we talk about the transitions and the flow and the move and that some Sundays there's going to be a real high energy, positive hand clapping kind of joy. And other Sundays there's going to be a quiet, peaceful, meditative, deep river running kind of joy. And these can't butt up against very easily each other in one service.

Sometimes you can, but that's what we work at a lot is, is can you? How do you do it? The question is, what do you do when a congregation laughs at a point where they really shouldn't laugh? And it's kind of

maybe a relief of tension or something. How do you respond to it? Frankly, I struggle with that and handle it in different ways at different times. I think you try to discern the moment whether when you said something and you meant it to be serious and even an indictment.

And they hear it because they're not on your wavelength as something very different. And there's this Twitter. Do you pause and comment on that or do you keep going without joining them? And that be the comment on that.

And I've done it both ways. And I just try to discern at the moment. I don't want to hurt people to the point where they'll, you know, get mad at me because I slipped up and left the wrong time.

Sorry. You know, I don't want to do that. But I don't want to pass over it as though that was something that was really funny.

It wasn't funny. Yeah. Just don't join.

You know, assume you won't. Don't join them. Just be focused.

I don't I don't laugh a lot. Some other people laugh when preachers are speaking. It wasn't funny to you.

Don't laugh. Well, what you think about? Think graciously that. Maybe they're just nervous and needed to laugh in order so they wouldn't cry or in order so that they could give some vent to some deep tension that they're feeling and then pray for them.

I think that's probably the best thing. If you think something's amiss here, pray. Greg, did you have your hand up? Yeah, I guess.

I just like you to comment for a second. Where do you think Charles Spurgeon as a model of paradigm of ministry would fit into this? I mean, he had a certain amount of strength. Spurgeon, I look at him as a model of ministry in many ways.

Spurgeon is the one from whom I got the distinction between levity and humor. Spurgeon has a great lecture to his students called Humor in the Pulpit or something like that or the Place of Humor. And he makes a distinction between levity, which is kind of the light hearted, manipulative use of language is constantly saying flippant things and is good at punning.

And so it's always making puns about situations at the most inopportune times on the one hand and humor, which is what I've tried to call natural life humor. Spurgeon, I think, was good at that. I doubt that Spurgeon ever, ever joked in the pulpit.

As I read his sermons, there's the only kind of humor you get is humor that is like Jesus humor, which was blood earnest humor. Like, it's easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to get into the kingdom. They probably would.

Camel through the eye of a. It was just kind of like it's not a it's not a slapstick kind of situation there. You've got a big camel. You got a little teeny eye of a needle.

A smile comes across your face and then they say, I think he's talking about us. Jesus told no jokes. He rarely ever laughed in the Bible.

Man of sorrow is acquainted with grief. I'm telling you that even Luther's quote last night. Absolutely.

Absolutely. I wrote an essay. I gave a message on Luther a few years ago and then I've just put it in a written form.

And Luther has some very profound things to say about why he talked the way he talked. He used foul language at times. Foul language.

Bathroom language. Four letter words. Luther was one violent verbal person.

And when called on it, he had some pretty remarkable things to say about why he did it. Let me give you what I said in response to Craig about punning and flippancy and levity. I'll give you an illustration of what I'm against and what I would like to discourage in the pulpit.

I think some people like Spurgeon and others are so clever in their minds. They can always think of a funny twist on any sentence or any situation. And if they don't keep a cap on it, every situation they're constantly making light of with a funny turn.

And they are funny. You know, and punning is the most common form of that. I was in an ordination service for David Livingston.

This was what, 25 years ago or so. And the pastor, who was a very good preacher and I loved him, still do. But he was given to this sort of thing now and then.

And it was a holy moment. David was kneeling on the platform and pastors were beginning to gather around him. And the pastor had called all the ordained people to come and lay their hands on David at this moment of ordination.

It was very quiet in the service. Nothing was happening. And he had he had called them to come, all the pastors to come.

And he knew that there were some out there who hadn't started to come yet and he wanted them to hurry up. And so he he leaned over into the microphone and he said, come on, all you shepherds, don't be sheepish. And there was this very uncomfortable Twitter.

As people said, if we don't laugh, he'll feel terrible. If we do laugh, it's totally out of sync with this moment. And they didn't know what to do.

It was a terrible thing to say. Come on, all you shepherds, don't be sheepish. Get on up here.

Just a little clever twist on shepherd and sheep. And I would say at that moment, stuff it. Don't say it.

Sure, you're clever. That's neat. But just this is a holy moment here.

If you need them to hurry, say you want to move forward. So let's make it as quickly as we can. Let's pray together.

You don't get in the way of a holy moment with a pun. I really believe there are pastors who are scared to death of seriousness for fear that it's going to start feeling unfriendly. What you said, a little bit too somber, a little bit too puritanical here in this moment.

And so they lighten it. They immediately intrude something lightening to get it back up to a more, we just got rid of that moment of somberness. And I don't worry about that.

I'm moving always in the other direction. I want earnestness. I want intensity.

To me, what's at stake here, heaven and hell are stupendous realities that deserve a certain demeanor. And I so fear that our people are incapable of the kind of intense emotions that belong to heaven and hell that I'm just not interested in lightening things up. Seven.

Authentic communication. This is the seventh mark of worship that we agree on. Authentic communication, the utter renunciation of all sham and deceit and hypocrisy and pretense and affectation and posturing.

Not the atmosphere of artistic or oratorical performance, but the atmosphere of a radically personal encounter with God. This would mean manifest vulnerability of the participants that does not give the impression of hiding or flawlessness. I think one of the reasons many unchurched people don't like to go to church is because preacher preachers sound fake.

They just sound fake. They assume a kind of, oh, there's a certain tone of preaching. And I say, that's not real.

You don't talk like that. What are you doing? What is that? This is it's like it's like this, this posture or this persona comes over a man in the pulpit and he's he's doing this performance thing. And he's got certain tones of voice and certain religious phrases that he uses and certain gestures and so on.

And it just sounds phony. And I scared to death of that. I don't know whether I fall into that at times or not, but it is one of my highest fears.

I want to be authentic. So the biggest battle in preaching is not how you say a thing, but are you a certain way? Are you a certain person? Is the love you have for God real love? Is the fear real fear? Is the shame real shame? Is the tension in the marriage real tension not going to be hit at all? Is your struggle with your own kids real and there and everybody knows about it? Are you trying to constantly bury everything that's bad about you so that everybody thinks you're the perfect preacher? Yeah. Avoid tones or mannerisms that seem phony or stylized or affected.

Standing in front of a mirror practicing gestures has got to be one of the worst things in the world, I would think. I've never done it. And I don't think much about my gesture.

Sometimes people will point out to me that the TBI guys are pretty good now because they're all they're all modeling for us how we how we use our hands in certain ways. And that's good. That's good.

I think all those pastors who are married should give our wives free reign, probably not Sunday or Monday, but maybe Tuesday to do a little debrief about whether we do this every time we look down. I mean, almost everybody's got ticks. Almost all of our pastoral staff.

I could give you a little ticks of all of our pastoral staff and you'd know who I'm talking about. This would be one. And this is one.

And you can do this. And you just you fall into you. You fall into things and they all when they were making fun of me, they all reach for their hanky and went like this because my nose.

I'm just I'm trying to find the medicine that will dry up this endlessly dripping nose of mine in certain seasons so that that doesn't have to be one of my things. But goodness gracious, let us be authentic. It's OK to work to get rid of some of the barriers if we have ticks about us that are offensive to others or get in the way.

But by and large, what people want is reality. I think what young teenagers want is reality. And what older teenagers want is reality.

And 20 somethings and 30 somethings and 40 and 50. They want reality because the TV is never real. It's always unreal.

Advertising is always unreal. Everywhere you look in America, we're an unreal sales culture. We're a marketing culture.

And so you're always posturing to put your product in the best possible light and everybody knows yours isn't the best product. But you have to believe it is because you'll you got to sell it. And so everything around us is unreal.

Just about. And if you come to church and you get more of that, you don't need it. You just don't need it.

Model real, authentic communion with God. Notice this phrase. Lead worshipers, not just worship leaders.

That's a better phrase. Lead worshipers must worship authentically. So I say to Chuck, look, I don't know what you ask for people when they join your choir, but I'll tell you what I want in the choir more than I want anything else is worshipers.

Worshipers. Do they worship? And Chuck, you must worship. Chuck's got the hardest job because like I watch him out there right now, he's got this choir.

He's got this orchestra. He's tomorrow morning is gonna be thinking about a thousand details to hold this big service together. How in the world is he going to connect with God? Well, if you pray for him, he will.

If you pray for him, God will just catch him up and he'll be able to take care of the thousand details that hold the service together and commune with the living God so that everything comes out of his mouth and my mouth are real. Because we've seen and met God. Yeah.

Go ahead, Bob. Good. Thank you.

Yeah. Wouldn't hurt. Say start on Friday for us, for us.

Worship leaders is the the preparations toward the end of the week become intense. The manifestation of God and the common good. We expect and hope and pray, according to 1st Corinthians, 12, 7 to each one is given a manifestation of the spirit for the common good, that our focus on manifesting God is good for people and that therefore a spirit of love for each other is not incompatible with but necessary to authentic worship.

So here I'm trying to get at the horizontal dimension of verticality. Yes, we're Godward in what we do. It's intense.

It's radical. It's it's focused. It's persistent.

We want to go Godward. But we also know that each of us has a personality and gifts and facial expressions and gestures and everything that is having an effect on other people. And it's ministering grace or it's hurting other people.

And we want what we do to be a blessing to other people. And so it's not wrong to want this to happen in worship and know that it's going to happen in worship if we are loving towards one another and manifesting God, the spirit through our various gifts. Now, we don't design Sunday morning service as a small group where everybody uses his spiritual gift and we build each other in that way.

But a lot of them are used. If you if you understand gift is simply something unique about you that God has given through which grace is channeled to others. If you're willing to define gifts that broadly, you should do that every Sunday morning from the time you arrive in the parking lot or maybe before if prayer counts.

You're arriving in the parking lot. You're going to see people. Where do you park? That's a person park far.

Sit close. Talk soft. That's love.

Those are spiritual gifts flowing through you to others. And then how you greet people, whether you talk with them about something earnest, whether you pray with them, all that, whether you exhort them because you know what they've been through that week, all that happens in and around the service. Let's get that.

Keep moving here. Number nine, undistracting excellence. We will try to sing and play and pray and preach in such a way that people's attention will not be diverted from the substance.

By shoddy ministry or by excessive finesse, you see that the two extremes, their shoddy ministry at one end and excessive finesse or elegance or refinement at the other end. Between those natural, undistracting excellence will let the truth and beauty of God shine through. This has been very helpful over the years as we've tried to use it.

It affects the kind of piano playing that I shouldn't think should be played for prelude and postlude. For example, there can be too much flair so that people want to applaud. The performance at the piano during the prelude.

I don't regard that as helpful. It can be profoundly excellent, flawless and thus out of the way as the message of the music carries us Godward. Carol, I believe I didn't ask her about this, but she played an arrangement of Our God is an Awesome God two weeks ago.

That was so subtle that it hovered, I guess, on the border between this is remarkable and our God is an awesome God. And it was very helpful to me. I was so moved by that particular prelude.

Another example would be few things get me more upset as a pastor than lousy sound systems and or lousy sound system running. When when somebody stands up and their mouth is all muddy on a Wednesday night, I'm sitting there saying this is not undistracting excellence. This is very distracting on excellence and we're not being helped fix it.

We've got to get this fixed. It's all mud coming out of their mouth. Cannot you hear that? Who's ever up there? Fix it.

That doesn't help me. I would move it toward another event. The question was, how do you approach churches that have the parade their kids across the front to do some singing or something? And it doesn't seem to be for the spiritual point of it, but for the cuteness of getting kids up there so you can enjoy them.

I think there's probably a place for teaching kids to be up in front of people and having them do things, but probably not Sunday morning. At least if you conceive of it the way I do, that Sunday morning is the event of Mount Transfiguration and Sunday evening or Wednesday night would be more the event of the Mount of Olives. This is one of the distinctions I've made.

The Mount of Transfiguration is where Christ appeared in his glory and Peter, James and John went flat on their faces and didn't know what to say. And I want some place in our church to have an experience like that with God, where there's a sense of reverence and awe and wonder and verticality. And you don't distract from it with children's sermon or cute little drama or whatever else.

However, there's probably a place for drama in the church. And there's surely a place for our kids to do what they can do in quoting scripture or like we did last Wednesday night. Let them come to the microphone and say, I thank God for everything.

And everybody laughs at me. Wonderful. And that atmosphere on Wednesday night is just what it ought to be, probably.

But it's not Sunday morning. We don't. That's it's different, just like in your family situation.

There are there are times when a husband and a wife want to look at each other across a candlelit table and just talk about the deeper things of their relationship. And there are times when the kids are crawling all over you and everything. And that's wonderful, too.

But they're not the same thing, not so that one's evil and one's good. So I would just if I were in that situation, I would try to move those things into a setting more fitting for that. So all kinds of undistracting excellence.

So in preaching, for example, I must I must somehow be careful lest I that words come so easily that it sounds like some kind of rhetorical oratorical flair. Let's go. Oh, that was really good.

And what I said doesn't even matter. And the effect on the heart doesn't even matter. And yet, on the other hand, if I were constantly getting my grammar wrong in the service and people were going like this all the time, then that would be distracting, too.

So somewhere between shoddy communication and finesse and elegance and oratorical flair is reality that doesn't get in the way. It's mainly for what is being said here, not how it's being said. Number 10 determination to welcome people different from ourselves for the sake of Christ.

We aim to be more indigenous to the diversity of our metropolitan cultural setting, both urban and suburban. Racial togetherness says much about the power of God and his universal attractiveness. We're not very good at this yet.

That is, there's not a great mixture out there on Sunday morning, though there's more now than there used to be. And it's just one of our desires. I think this is a corporate desire, Bethlehem, that we be more reflective of the diversity of our racial makeup and our cultural makeup in the Twin Cities.

And there are things you can do. There are things you can do to help that. And they're very difficult to do because you can do them and they can be very offensive.

They can sound patronizing or look patronizing. Like if we try to do black music in the choir, my kids think it's absolutely ridiculous. They think that's not us.

That was ridiculous when the choir was going like this. Come on, they don't even know how to do it. They don't have any feel for it.

Don't do that. And I think that's probably almost right. But we can get close.

In other words, what? Well, as we talk to racial groups in the church of different Asian groups and and black and. We don't have any other major non Anglo groupings, though few there, the mature are thankful for anything. And we've got we've got a committee where we get the feedback.

We said, how can we how can we adjust here so that there's a sense that there's respect back and forth between various ways of doing music and singing and preaching and so on? Anyway, it's a very sensitive, very difficult thing. And to care about it is to put yourself into a situation where you're going to get criticized one way or the other. But it seems to me that there's a spiritual reality here that Christ's body is universal.

It's around the world. It's in every people group or in every culture. Maybe not hasn't penetrated all the people groups yet, but it should.

And we need to reflect that in some way. Eleven, the mingling of historic and contemporary music in heartfelt congregational singing. So there's two things there, the mingling of historic and contemporary and heartfelt congregational singing.

When we asked as a a master planning committee and then as a search committee for a worship leader a few years ago, what do we want? The defining sound to be on Sunday morning. The answer was the people singing over against the choir singing or a big organ or a worship band with excellence or the defining sound that people walk away with and say, what was the defining sound? Is this people sing from their heart? That's what we said we wanted to aim at. And then the other part of this is historic and contemporary mingled.

Matthew 13, 42. Therefore, every scribe who has been trained for the kingdom of heaven is like a householder who brings out of his treasures what is new and what is old. The Bible says, sing a new song to the Lord.

But it also says, remember the great works of old and don't be chronologically snobbish. That's C.S. Lewis's phrase. A chronological snob is somebody who thinks his generation is the best.

And therefore, anything old is inferior. I would think almost the opposite myself, that anything new is inferior and the old is where the best is because it's had a chance to sift and separate out what's crummy. But that's not true either.

That's not true either. It is seeing a new song and the old mind, the riches of the ages speak the language and adapt some forms to the present. Now, this is a this a great cause.

This is the last point on this section, contemporary and historical. Some churches have gone entirely contemporary. Some churches are entirely historic in terms of hymns.

Some have one service, which is one and one service, which is another. And some like us, I would put us in this category, have sought and are still seeking to. And the stock word is blend.

The blended service that moves with the best of contemporary worship music and the best of historic hymnody and somehow weave them together week after week. So there's almost some contemporary and some historic dimension to every week. And I admit some Sundays would do it better than other Sundays.

And some Sundays we don't do it as well as we should. But the goal for now, anyway, and I think it's the way we ought to be, is to mingle them. Questions or comments about that? I would say that Sunday morning is not evangelism for us.

Primarily, Sunday morning is not an outreach service as a rule. That's the first thing I'd say. And therefore, the defining sound of this service is the defining sound of the people of God who they are.

Now, they are people of this culture. I dress like this culture. I wear a tie and a suit and it's like the business people downtown on Sunday morning.

And most everybody else looks like the rest of the world in the way they dress. And we have electric lighting just like the rest of the culture does and and so on. So there is an overlap.

And our people like a lot of the same tunes that average people like. And so there's going to be an overlap there. I think a lot of unchurched people come here and and think, hmm, it's not too stodgy.

This is sounds all right. The other thing I would say is. The world needs from us not simply a reflection of their values, but a shaping of their values.

And so they may be given whole hog to country, Western music or to rock music. But that doesn't mean that you should be given whole hog to it in the reaching of them. I'm probably more flexible on this than a lot of people in that I don't go on a campaign to, you know, shoot it.

Rock Christian bands and whatnot or country, Western kinds of stuff. But rather say to my kids, you know, there's something very limiting about that music you listen to. It's very narrow.

It's very confining. A little tiny slice of emotion and life and maybe of God is seen and felt through that broadened out, broadened out. Barnabas says you as you go, listen to some of this kind, listen to this kind, listen to this kind so that you're not a narrow, small adolescent who only has one way of getting your emotions kindled.

And that is with a hard driving rock type sound. That's just it's a small heart that can only be touched in that way. That's generally the way I I talk about it.

And then I just say no secular rock music in this house, period. So I walk by the room and I hear this stuff. I knock on the door.

I say, what's that? I say, it's Christian. It's Christian. Oh, I couldn't tell.

Well, we have this other rule. And I hear you see my flexibility as a father. I said, the other rule is no secular rock music in this house.

And the other kind of music should be felt by you to be building, enriching, ennobling, increasing your faith, enlarging your hope, refining your love. In other words, it should have a good spiritual effect on you. Now, some of the stuff he listens to, I just say, how in the world? I don't get it.

But I don't go on a crusade to make him listen to all classical or whatever. More comments or questions about these 11 things. I'm done now with number four.

Go ahead, Bob. I think so. I think so.

Question is, is there a greater risk of moving toward a performance mentality when you go to three services? And one of the reasons for that is you have to be so time sensitive that everything has to be polished a little more. The sermon has to be a little more tight. Welcome a little tighter.

Times of confession can't draw out very far. You can't linger and pray with people very long after the service. Everything has to move.

And when that's governing your mind, you lose something. So what do you do? When you got people driving through, can't find a parking place and they're leaving and come in. The family can't sit together and they're leaving.

What do you do? Well, you make compromises, probably. We'll see. That's a real situation Bob's asking about.

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