

Everyday Liturgies - Formation Requires Repetition

by Michael Flowers

Liturgy is a formational process that leads to spiritual growth and transformation through repetition, discipline, and authenticity.

Duration: 22:40

Scripture: Genesis 1:1, Psalm 150:1, Matthew 6:33, John 3:16, Romans 12:1-2, Philippians 1:9-11, 1 Timothy 2:1-2

Topics: "Liturgy"

Description

In this sermon, the preacher emphasizes the importance of embracing the process of life, including the mundane and trying times. The ultimate goal for believers is union with God and the complete restoration of all creation. The preacher uses examples from sports, such as tennis and racquetball, to illustrate the need for transformation and discipline in order to achieve success. Repetition, ritual, and discipline are highlighted as essential elements in becoming skilled and creating beauty in various forms of art, including music.

Transcript

Today, we're going to address the question, why? Why liturgy? Why liturgy? Why do Anglicans use written prayers, creeds, and other forms of liturgy in worship? What we have to do, first of all, is just ask, what does it mean? Anybody? The work of the people. Right. The work of the people.

What does that imply? Does that imply an atmosphere of spectating? Participation. We work together, Derek. Yeah, it does.

It implies an atmosphere of participation rather than just spectating, kind of watching somebody do everything. And so that's the power of the united people of God locking in, in the power of the Holy Spirit, proclaiming truth and praise together with one voice. The liturgy gives us one voice in worship.

Liturgy, you could say, is just an order of the way we do things. Take it out of the realm of the work of the people. It's just simply, it's an order.

Most public gatherings have liturgies. Most public gatherings have a sense of order, a beginning and an end, an outline that we follow. Right.

If you go to a meeting or a staff meeting, you follow a particular order. Certain board meetings have very specific rules of order. Not our board meetings, but some board meetings.

All right. We do more prayer than anything, but it's great. So in our everyday lives, we are caught up into all sorts of liturgies in our everyday lives.

Let me recommend a book to you that I've enjoyed reading about this. It's by James K.A. Smith, and it's called *You Are What You Love*. And so why liturgy then? Why don't we just make it up as we go and be spontaneous and be moved by the spirit where every meeting is completely different? One of the answers that I can tell you why liturgies is because Nova, my granddaughter, won't allow it.

When we get together, when she comes and visits us, it's so precious and we go out to eat or we sit down at the dinner table before we can get to let's pray. Nova starts bowing her head and sticks her hands out like this. Right.

Let's pray, you know. And then if we try to put Nova down at night without reading to her and praying with her. Because she's in the habit of doing this right.

She will not have that. We must read to her every night and pray over her or she will not sleep well. I mean, she will not forget it either.

She'll let you know the next day you didn't pray for me last night or you didn't read to me last night. Now, what does that say? Nova is caught up in a liturgy. And liturgies are formational.

And in fact, kids that are not raised in formational healthy liturgies are at a great deficit. Right. And so we need to understand that liturgies and formation starts at a very, very early age.

Right. Yes, absolutely. And so we as Christian parents have this insight of passing on Christianity to the next generation, not just in memorizing scripture, which is very important, very important, but there's more than just knowledge.

Right. In a formational process, there's more than just knowledge. Let me let me read you this out of Philippians.

Philippians one, beginning with verse nine. And it is my prayer that your love may abound more and more. That's the goal right there, that your love may abound more and more with knowledge and all discernment.

With knowledge and all discernment so that you may approve what is excellent and to be pure and blameless for the day of Jesus Christ, filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ to the glory and praise of God. Now, it would be very easy to read that and turn that into an exercise of gaining knowledge and discernment. Right.

I mean, that's what our Western minds really want to go to. But Paul is saying that there's something beyond knowledge. That must be embodied into the rhythms and the rituals of our lives and the very attitude.

Have this attitude in yourselves, which was in Christ Jesus. It's it's beyond head knowledge. It's love that your love may abound more and more with knowledge and all discernment.

And a lot of times we can put all the emphasis on this head of mine where we're just brains on a stick. You know what I'm saying? Put brains on a stick. And that's basically how we approach Christian formation.

A lot of times. Is just through the intellect, but there is a formational process happening right with Nova when she anticipates reading to her and praying for her and touching her and laying hands on her and asking God to bless her. What's going on beyond just she's not memorizing the prayers that we're praying over her.

She's not getting any of that at that moment. What is she getting? She's getting love. She's getting flesh on flesh and a sense of security and peace and belonging that can only be imparted through an embodied and embodied liturgy.

And it has to be every day. It can't be haphazard. Right, you can't just do this every now and then and hope that that Nova is formed properly as a child, much less as a Christian child.

Right. So it's a beautiful it's a beautiful thing. What can happen in a Christian household with children as we get a hold of this and we realize that, wow, Christ is being formed in this person, Paul told the Galatians, he said, I'm in labor.

I'm in this childbirth process until you memorize the Old Testament. Don't hear me saying that that's not that's not good. And we need to do that.

That's that's awesome. But he's saying that something beyond this, the one who inspired the Old Testament and the New Testament, the one who who spoke the worlds into existence, Christ himself be formed in you. Formation, spiritual formation.

And so we're saying that liturgy is all about formation. Because it's repetitive. So liturgy isn't merely something we do, our liturgies do something to us.

Liturgy is not something we merely do. Liturgies do something to us. Now, let me ask this question in terms of the generations from infants up to the elderly, who do you think are the most traditional? Oh, you spoiled it.

There needs to be more suspense. Oh, did I tell you that? Did I tell you that? Oh, oh, oh, I got it. Yeah, OK.

It's dueling preachers here now. OK, why would say Nova, why would she be considered the conservative? What do you think she's pure? No, she's not. She's three.

She's not pure. No, she's caught up in a liturgy and she won't let it go. She won't go, oh, that's OK, we're under grace and my mommy is not going to read to me tonight and things are fine.

She doesn't think that way. It's very conservative, very traditional. What happens as we grow older? We sort of let things fall to the wayside sometimes and we make up all kinds of beautiful excuses why we don't keep rituals and liturgies in our lives that are formational.

It's not just in the doing of the liturgy. The liturgy has a profound effect upon our lives. Now, there's a critique about liturgy.

Here's one. Liturgy is just formalism. It's dead and it's void of authenticity.

I can't be authentic when I'm reading prayers in a prayer book or when I'm trying to work through a service that I'm always trying to think, do I stand, bow, cross myself, you know, kneel. All the mechanics are there right in liturgies. But if we view worship merely as an emotive expression, an experiential, emotive expression that's validated by the way I felt, we really worshiped today.

You know what I'm saying? Worship was good today. These are innocent things, but it shows that we validate whether worship was good or not by the way it touched me, by the way it felt inside of me. And so therefore, truth becomes very subjective.

Everything is subjective when we do this subjectivity is good. We need that. We need to be touched.

We need to be in touch with our feelings, but our feelings cannot validate the truth. So if you feel bored going through the liturgy, that doesn't matter. That doesn't affect the liturgy.

Let the liturgy work in you as you're fighting through your boredom or your tiredness or a lack of sleep or or your distractions. Right. I mean, a lot of times I'm doing the liturgy and there's so many things coming at me and there's so much stream of consciousness in my head that I'm fighting against to get in touch with the words in the liturgy.

Right. But it's a worthy battle. It really is.

That's the goal is to become one with the truth in the liturgy. And so my feelings cannot validate the scriptures, worship, liturgy. I love for worship to be fun and experiential.

You know me. I mean, I come from that tradition, but also worship is also a formational process. We're called to worship because worship does something not only it doesn't affect God, it affects us as we give glory to God, we become more like God who is generous.

So generosity is the big thing of being able to give yourself to something, to a people, to a community, to a liturgy, to a structure. That that community is run by or aided by. And so worship involves a formational prospect process whereby I am changed.

Immediately, see, if you evaluate it based on clock time, you're missing the whole point. I'm talking about a life, a long life in the mundane, in the boring times and in the trying times and in the trials that are coming our way, sometimes I'm talking about all of life, the ups and the downs and in between, there is something going on if I give myself to the process and don't evaluate it emotionally all the time. You have to trust the process, you ever heard that enjoy the process.

The destination will come, we have a tell us we have an end in this, we have a goal and it's union with God, it's the marriage supper of the Lamb, it's complete restoration of all creation. That is our tell us that is our goal, that is our end, that is our aim, that's a life timing. It's not just so that, oh, well, if I follow God, I may get the new car or I may he may bless me where I can get an upgrade at my business or all of these sort of mechanical ways that we view obedience to God.

I do this. He does this. I do this.

He does. It's a transactional relationship which God does not play because God is God. And so worship involves a formational process.

I am changed in worship from glory to glory. Fix your eyes not on the things that are seen in the liturgy and in all of your life, but fix your eyes on the unseen, Paul says. So there's more than just the mere words that's going on or the intellectual content in the liturgy.

He fills all things. And it's the God who is at work in you, both the will and to do according to his good pleasure. It's not a transaction, it's an interaction, it's an interpenetration, it's a union, it's a communion that's taking place.

You see, it's even better than a transaction. Yeah, I am being transformed in worship and my feelings. Cannot validate or invalidate the process of being conformed to what? The image, the image of Jesus Christ, this thing about repetition, it's just so repetitive, it's ritualistic, it's routine, liturgy creates kind of spiritual robots.

And I'm sure that we've all been to liturgical churches where it feels like that sometimes with people are not engaged and it does feel like everyone's going through the motions. And so the liturgy does not replace repentance. And response to the gospel and response to his word, it doesn't replace anything like that.

Liturgy is a tool that becomes living and active in us as we allow it to interact with the God who is in us, both the will and to do according to his good pleasure. So this thing about routine and ritual and repetition, you know, life doesn't work that way, does it? A lack of routine, a lack of ritual, a lack of repetition. What if you lived your life with no repetition, with no ritual? What if you live that way? Anything done skillfully and thus expresses beauty involves repetition.

Let me say again, anything done skillfully and thus expresses beauty involves repetition, involves discipline, involves sacrifice. That's in the nature of God, God so loved they gave. Anything that is formative must be repetitive.

Anything that is formative. In your life must be repetitive, you ever heard that phrase practice makes. Yeah, how many golfers in here do we have? Any golfers.

OK, we got one. You can tell we're a nice urban church, I tell you, there's no golf courses. Good.

Hey, man, the analogy works with skateboarding, too, because I raised the skateboarder. Yeah, my son's a skateboarder. And I saw him practice and practice and practice and fall on the hard concrete and his mother was going like, oh, and yes, he has broken his wrists and he's broken And he's doing the same things, learning.

OK, but it's repetitive. It's very repetitive. That golf swing is incredibly repetitive.

It's very ritualistic. But isn't it a beautiful thing after years of learning the discipline and the form? If you do it in the wrong form, you can practice all you want. But if you don't do it with the right form.

It's no good, right? It's like me when I used to play racquetball. I used to love racquetball and then I tried to play tennis. Do you know the problem? It's not because it's not the lack or more of running the court and all of that.

It's right here the way you hold the racket. You know, you can't you can't play tennis like you play racquetball. It's all about the form.

You've got to be transformed if you're going to play, if you're going to transfer from one sport to the next, there must be a transformation and you have to train and you have to get muscle memory happening over time. This is what the liturgy does. How about the music of Bach, Beethoven or Joey Curtin, which I was listening to on the way to church this morning in her new album, right? Repetition.

Joey just didn't wake up, though, one day and just started writing songs and playing songs or Pat didn't do that with guitar either. There's a certain liturgy, an amount of ritual and repetition that has to take place to learn the scales and to learn the theory. And, you know, that's not what we enjoy.

We're not enjoying what it took for her to get to where she's at. Right. We didn't see the countless hours of practice and sacrifice that it takes in order to become beautiful, in order to display beauty.

What's behind the beauty? There's a sense of beauty and order in Joy's playing or in Bach's playing or in Mozart's Mozart's playing, you know, just anything, classical music, jazz, whatever it is. I love improv. I love jazz improv.

But they're not just letting their fingers do the walking. Perhaps you can do that in jazz. Right.

Alan Holdsworth, who, you know, God rest his soul. He said, don't let your fingers do the walking. That's the temptation is to learn all the scales and just mindlessly play and just impress everybody.

But Alan says, no, you have to take all of that and harness it in the way that you play the scales and the way that you leave notes out and the way that you apply everything. So that you can do more of a work of art, but it takes discipline, repetition, ritual to do that, to become an Alan Holdsworth or a Chick Corea or a Joey Curtin. Right.

I can remember trying to learn certain instruments and giving up and now taught guitar. And in fact, that's how Tom Thompson came to our church because he was my guitar student. And hallelujah, you know, that muscle memory that we talked about and we talked about calluses and being able to stretch those fingers out to get.

Oh, it's just a lot of pain. And I had so many students drop because they couldn't get past the pain of learning. And a lot of people drop out of liturgical church for the same reason.

They visit one time and go, that's not for me. Well, it's not. It's not one time.

It's not for anybody because it's not about what you get out of it. It's about a formational process. Do you want to enter into a formational process and be disciplined through the repetition and the ritual of the liturgies? It's not just Sunday morning.

It's the whole calendar year focusing on Jesus Christ and sanctifying time by marking time with the life, death, resurrection and ascension of Jesus Christ. That's what we live in. And that's the goal that we're headed towards.

He will come again to judge the living and the dead in his kingdom. We'll have no end. Modernity says that's bunk.

That's a fantasy, that's pre-modern medieval Catholicism. Count me in. I'm a pre-modern.

And if you believe the Bible, you must be pre-modern. You believe in angels? Yeah. Good.

You're a pre-modern. Yeah. Where nature and grace has not been split in half and where God is not this associated with his creation, but heaven and earth are full of your glory, Hosanna in the highest.

And so I'll leave us with that this morning. There's there's other questions that we need to address with liturgy, and we'll do that next week in terms of where does it come from? What's it based upon? Paul is prescribing liturgical forms in First Timothy, First Timothy two. I want prayers to go for all those in authority, prayers, petitions and the like.

Our liturgy is built upon the scripture. And all of monastic liturgy is built upon, it's all scripture. I mean, you know, if you get the four volumes of the daily office that the Benedictine monks do seven times a day, it's all scripture, repetitive psalms and gospel readings and New Testament.

And and they're praying this into the cosmos. There's a place for monasticism. Praise the Lord.

I love you. Thank you for hanging with me. Let's stand together.

And we'll recite the Nicene Creed.

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