

The Way We Worship

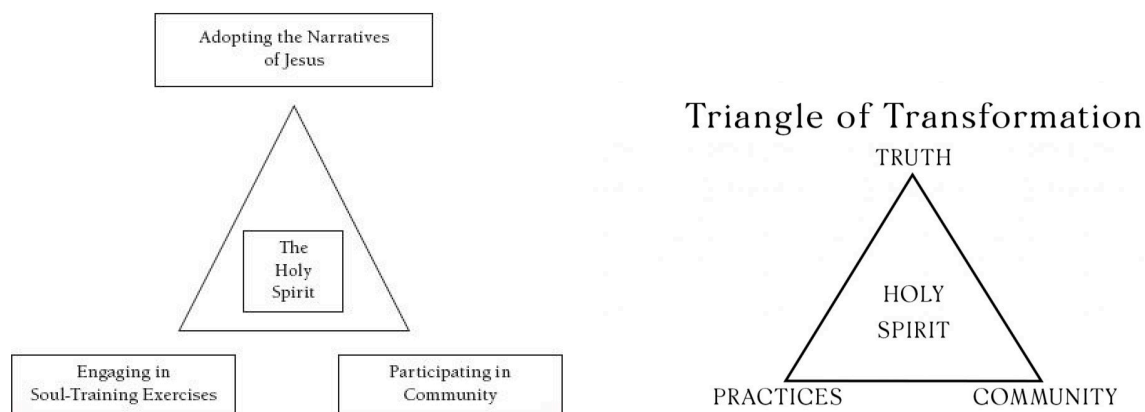
Week 4

For the first few weeks of this series we've tried to hammer home the point that Worship is ABOUT God...not about us. Having said that, nevertheless, Worship does AFFECT us. In other words, while the focus of Worship is God, there is a formational dimension to it...it is meant to change us. The process of going from a Self-oriented life to a God-oriented life is nothing less than transformational (perhaps even miraculous). That process brings God glory and fundamentally changes us. We BECOME what God intended us to be...people who reflect and represent Him to the rest of creation.

Or to say it another way, we BECOME like what we worship.

- *We're about halfway through this series on Worship. Time for a little pop quiz...*
 - *Why do we worship? When do we worship?*
 - *How do we worship? Where do we worship?*

This has me thinking about the process of formation/transformation. This is a call back to the Good and Beautiful Series that we went through in 2022. It was all predicated on an understanding of this process, which James Bryan Smith called the Triangle of Transformation. (See *The Good and Beautiful God*, chapter 1)



(Here's a couple of different versions of the same thing)

Let's break this down a little bit...

Truth/Narratives of Jesus

- To look to Jesus to understand what life is about, to see where history is headed, to embrace/adopt the story of Him as our story...that's worship. To allow His instructions/teachings to form us and guide us...that's worship. The challenge, of course, is that there are all kinds of competing and/or false narratives that get interwoven into

our consciousness so it takes a strong amount of discernment, with the help of the Holy Spirit, to navigate it all.

Community

- This is the source of most of our information. By “community” we mean anything from family, culture and society, education...basically anything/anyone that has a voice that we pay attention to. Whatever community/communities we participate in have a formative effect on us. (Actually, community is so impactful, we don't even have to be paying that much attention for it to have a profound effect on us.) We are, at our essence, relational creatures. We pick up cues from the people around us. To choose to be in a Christ-centered community that is trying to adopt the narratives and practices of Jesus as normative and formative...that's worship.

Practices (Habits)

- What we do repeatedly becomes ingrained in us. (Modern brain science bears this out.) The practices/habits we choose (consciously or unconsciously) typically come from the community we're a part of, and that community adheres (consciously or unconsciously) to a particular narrative or understanding of truth. To adopt new practices/habits for the specific reason of paying attention to the God who is present and active all around us...that's worship.



Perhaps a Venn diagram is more appropriate in order to see the overlapping nature of these three areas...how each area informs/impacts the other two. You and I are already formed and, interestingly, continuing to be formed. The questions we want to ask ourselves, then, are...

- *How have I been formed? (What narratives, practices, and communities have made me who I am today? Consider key people, events, seasons, etc. in your life.)*
- *How am I being formed? (What narratives, practices, and communities are currently forming/influencing me? Consider key people, activities, rhythms, etc. in your life.)*

- *How do I want to be formed? (In order to become who I want to be, or who I'm called to be, what changes need to be made in the area of narratives I believe, practices I do, and community that speaks into me and reinforces/encourages the narratives and practices I'm wanting to adopt?)*
- *Describe a time when you realized that a narrative you had been functioning from (be it a family narrative, a cultural narrative, a religious narrative, a historical narrative) was inaccurate, or at least caused you to pause and to question whether it was true or not.*
- *Who makes up your primary community presently? Who are the voices that you allow to influence you the most?*
- *Describe a healthy habit/practice of yours. Describe a habit/practice you would like to change or break.*

To say it another way, if I want to change, I need to address one or more of those areas. But let's not forget the role of the Holy Spirit in all this. All humans are formed. And all humans are formed through narratives, community, and practices. NOT all humans are formed into the character and likeness of Jesus. This requires the work of the Holy Spirit, linked with our desire to be so formed. (Though the Holy Spirit will use narratives, community, and practices to do that work...that's just how God designed it.)

Now, when we consider Worship, we discover that Worship is a rather unique thing in that it functions as BOTH a means AND an end. (Recall the distinction we made in week 1 about ACTS of Worship and a LIFE of Worship.) In the process of transformation, ACTS of Worship fall in the category of Practices. But the intention of this practice (and all practices) is a LIFE of Worship. Or perhaps we could say it this way: the result/fruit/goal of Transformation is a LIFE of Worship.

- *Time for honest self-assessment/self-reflection...does your experience of Worship tend to be more compartmentalized (i.e. specific acts of worship at specific times and places) or is it more integrated (seeing all of life as an opportunity to worship)? What movement or change have you noticed in this over time? What are you desiring in regards to this? What challenges do you experience in this?*

Practices are worship because by them we honor God, demonstrating our love, loyalty, and allegiance to Him, AND because by/through them we are desiring to emulate God...to take on the divine nature for which we were created.

When practices become habits, when we do them without even thinking about it, when it's just second nature, then we're cooking with gas. That's when good, healthy fruit/progress is happening. (Side note: This is why transformation, or changed lives, is what a church really wants to "count", quantify, measure...not the number of attendees to a service/program...just FYI.)

- *What practices have you found to be most effective/helpful in...*
 1. *Turning your attention to God*
 2. *Having a positive formative effect on you*
- *What tools or elements do you use to help you worship (Examples: books, music, journal, candles, nature, silence, serving, stillness) and how do you use them?*
- *When/how do you feel particularly close to God? (i.e. when He has your attention and you feel as if you have His?)*

This transformation process also goes by another name. It's called Discipleship. The process of BECOMING like Jesus. As Dallas Willard states, "*Disciples are those who, seriously intending to become like Jesus from the inside out, systematically and progressively rearrange their affairs to that end, under the guidance of the Word and the Spirit.*" (If you would like to read the article/essay this quote is taken from in its entirety, click this link <https://dwillard.org/articles/how-does-the-disciple-live> Friends, this is gold right here.)

Oh, and just for fun, let's remind ourselves of the mission of our church, "*To make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world.*" And, of course, in order to make disciples we must first BE disciples. To lean into the process of discipleship..that's worship.

Some passages we may want to keep in mind this week are...

His divine power has given us everything we need for a godly life through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness. Through these he has given us his very great and precious promises, so that through them you may participate in the divine nature, having escaped the corruption in the world caused by evil desires. For this very reason, make every effort to add to your faith goodness; and to goodness, knowledge; and to knowledge, self-control; and to self-control, perseverance; and to perseverance, godliness; and to godliness, mutual affection; and to mutual affection, love. For if you possess these qualities in increasing measure, they will keep you from being ineffective and unproductive in your knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. But whoever does not have them is nearsighted and blind, forgetting that they have been cleansed from their past sins. (II Peter 1:3-9)

Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. And we all, who with unveiled faces reflect the Lord's glory, are being transformed into his image with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit. (II Corinthians 3:17-18)

As we conclude this week I can't help but reflect a bit on the Missions Fair. What struck me was that most of these organizations got their start in the heart/mind of worshippers responding to the work/activity of the Holy Spirit in their lives. As people turned their attention to God, they received vision, compassion, wisdom, courage, etc...that's worship.

Soul Training Exercise ~ Lectio Divina ~ Colossians 3:1-17

Lectio Divina

Latin for Divine Reading. The desire is to encounter and surrender to the Living God by attending to Scripture. Lectio requires a humble, listening posture that is alert to the voice of God in Scripture.

Lectio

First read the text (lectio). You give it a slow, focused and naive reading of the passage.

Meditatio

Then re-read the same passage paying attention to what word or phrase stands out.

Oratio

Third, offer a simple prayer in response to God.

Contemplatio

After prayer, the text is read for the third time with the focus on listening for the Voice of God (contemplatio). This is a gift of grace and cannot be forced. Here is where you are hoping to interact with God, listening for His voice. You can ask the question, "*Lord, what do you want to do inside me?*"

Actio

Finally consider your response to God's Word and grace (actio). How can you make your life a gift to others in response to the Word?