

January 23, 2022

SOUL RESET-Worship is a Lifestyle

Psalm 100

Make a joyful noise to the Lord, all the earth. Worship the Lord with gladness; come into his presence with singing. Know that the Lord is God. It is he that made us, and we are his; we are his people, and the sheep of his pasture. Enter his gates with thanksgiving, and his courts with praise. Give thanks to him, bless his name. For the Lord is good; his steadfast love endures forever, and his faithfulness to all generations.

Romans 12:1-8

I appeal to you therefore, brothers & sisters, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy & acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship.

Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God—what is good and acceptable and perfect.

For by the grace given to me I say to everyone among you not to think of yourself more highly than you ought to think, but to think with sober judgment, each according to the measure of faith that God has assigned.

For as in one body, we have many members, and not all the members have the same function, so we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually we are members one of another.

We have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us: prophecy, in proportion to faith; ministry, in ministering; the teacher, in teaching; the exhorter, in exhortation; the giver, in generosity; the leader, in diligence; the compassionate, in cheerfulness.

This is the Word of God for the people of God. Thanks be to God!

It is so good to be back in worship with all of you! I'm excited to be preaching our third Sunday of the series SOUL RESET. Pastor Jess started us off well as she shared about empty margins in our lives and our church and needing to leave space for our loving God as revealed in Christ.

Then just last week she shared a powerful Word on finding our WHY as the people of God---wrestling with what that means individually as a follower of Christ, and as the First UMC here in Moorestown.

As I prepared for this series, I decided last month upon a deep dive into worship as our weekly chance to do a SOUL RESET.

I love that Rev. Junius Dotson in his book SOUL RESET has worship as a daily spiritual practice. He writes,

“Worship is more than simply a one-hour experience, one day a week. Worship is a lifestyle.” (p121)

Worship gives us opportunity day after day, week after week, month after month to fill those empty margins with a loving God as revealed in Christ and breathed into our lives by the Holy Spirit.

Understanding Worship as a lifestyle can be seen throughout Scripture and faith traditions.

From the earliest accounts of faith, people gathered to pray, sing,
listen for God's Word, and share in the common meal.

*Synagogue means "To bring the people together," and the Greek word for church, Ekklesia, means "called out of the world" and refers to the calling of people from their ordinary life to gather in sacred time and space.

Worship breathes life into the community of Christ's followers, forms identity
& provides a place for common learning about faith & deep listening to God.

Simply put, WORSHIP:

- Forms community as it Binds people to God and each other
- Shapes Souls – offering that SOUL RESET
- Corrects self-interest & moves us toward embracing God's interests/desires

God reaches out to us through worship services conducted in traditional forms
Or services marked with extraordinary spontaneity.

God speaks to us in beautiful sanctuaries and simple buildings,
In store-front gathering places and hospital chapels,
Outdoors under the open sky and in the homes of members.

Friends...in every imaginable setting, through worship, people seek to connect with God, allow
God's Word to shape them, and offer their response of faith.

God's Spirit changes us through worship. AMEN?

Worship was the reason given repeatedly for why God liberated the Hebrew people from
Egypt—"Let my people go, so that they may worship me." (Ex 8:1)

Worship defines God's people—"You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and
with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind; and your neighbor as
yourself." (Lk 10:27)

Worship bends hearts and minds toward God as it stretches hands outward toward others.

*I believe and trust that God EXPECTS lives to change in worship.

Remember Paul's challenging letter to the first century church and to US—

*I appeal to you therefore, brothers & sisters, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a
living sacrifice, holy & acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship.*

*Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that
you may discern what is the will of God—what is good and acceptable and perfect.*

God expects lives, minds, hearts, souls, and communities to be changed in and through worship.

Now while many may think that corporate worship is all that is being lifted up,
Worship also includes those practices done apart
from the physical presence of others in the body of Christ...
Such as thru personal devotions, private prayer, meditation & reading & Bible study

Friends, both communal worship & personal devotions depend upon each other;
they complement & reinforce one another,
adding richness to the experience of each.

Again, I love how Rev. Dotson phrases it—Worship is a lifestyle.
Its not just a one hour on Sunday thing.

Pastor Jess' challenge last week—"Why do we worship?" is a great one.

For me, three key answers to that WHY rose up. In my leadership as a pastor spanning 26 years and in my leadership as a District superintendent working with over 60 churches for 7 years, 3 core reasons "WHY" we worship God repeatedly came up.

Why do we worship?

- Worship changes minds
- Worship opens heart
- Worship challenges behavior

In worship we engage our intellect...our minds...as we are always trying to learn something about faith and its impact.

We learn about God, Jesus, the Holy Spirit, the stories of Scripture,
the practice of faith and the world around us.

*Worship changes minds & it can change our view about ourselves and our neighbors.

*Worship gives us an interpretive lens through which to view the world,
helping us see events, relationships, and issues through God's eyes.

As opposed to competing interpretive, "worldly" contexts in which people are immersed hoping to shape and change minds, such as:
fierce individualism, gluttonous consumerism, intense nationalism,
political partisanship, and hopeless negativism.

Worship helps us look at ourselves, our community, our relationships, our work,
and our responsibilities in ways that include God's revelation in Christ.

Paul tells us, *“Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God—what is good and acceptable and perfect.”* Worship changes minds.

My second key for WHY we Worship is that it opens hearts.

Through engaging the heart, God reaches the deep interior life of worshippers.

Our souls can be reset...transformed...made new again and again.

The incredible intimacy of worship helps us know mercy and compassion,
grow in hope & love, sense the presence of the Holy Spirit, experience grace,
and offer and receive forgiveness.

God touches the heart of each worshipper through music—no matter what the style or instruments used—through stories, prayer, and Communion & Baptism, and because of this... we experience belonging, support, and connection. Worship opens the heart.

And my final WHY is that Worship challenges behavior.

As a preacher I hope to always have a practical challenge for each of us to carry into the week to come. To become something more, something greater for Christ in our families, our schools, our jobs, our church, our community and world BECAUSE of our faith in Him.

Worship equips and encourages people, AND calls each of us
to alter our daily paths as we grow in faith...in our Christ-likeness.

Worship challenges behavior for this one hour...Pulling us away from whatever we are doing; shifting our attention to be focused upon God—not those other competing contexts, trying to take us down far too many rabbit holes.

Worship changes behavior for the hours that follow as we leave this place or turn off our FaceBook or YouTube Feeds. Challenges behavior for the week ahead...Worship is a lifestyle...not a one hour thing.

That powerful clip from Micheal Jr. that ended last week's sermon, said it well—When you know your “why”...your “what” becomes more impactful, Because your walking towards or in your purpose.”

Friends when you know WHY you worship each week...

WHY you come to this sacred space or jump on FB Live at 9am or 11am...

Why you find the recording later in the week to worship on your off day...

Your WHAT – your worship – becomes more impactful.

Worship changes my mind...it opens my heart and it challenges my behavior...To become that whom Christ needs me to be as a spouse, mom, a Gigi, a daughter, a friend and yes as a

pastor...I think Worship changes us as a community of faith to become something more, something greater TOGETHER.

A SOUL RESET...individually is a gift of radical grace that transforms each and everyone of us if we open our selves to it.

A SOUL RESET...as a community of faith, as a unique body of Christ called First UMC of Moorestown is a Gift of Hope and Possibility to each of us--yes & also countless others whom we haven't even met yet...but who are LONGING for a WHY that can change their life in ways they can only dream or imagine—but God knows desires fully.

Oh friends...

This is WHY we're developing new Mission and Vision statements...

This is WHY we offer different styles and means of worship each week...

This is WHY we offer virtual services and ministries that will continue long past the pandemic's concluding gasps and can be accessed 24/7.

Worship changes minds, opens hearts and challenges behavior—So we may know and discern the good and acceptable and perfect will of God.

I was asked a powerful question by Bishop Robert Schnase at a training event many years ago and it makes me still reflect deeply—he said: If you could extract all the worship experiences out of your life—all the sermons, Scriptures, hymns, prayers, sacraments, fellowship you ever experienced—How would you be different?

I know I would be so different...because I have been shaped, molded, changed, transformed by God thru so many Spirit-breathed corporate & personal worship experiences throughout my 57 years...so many SOUL RESETS when I needed them the most.

~I met my soul mate Rich at a Sunday morning worship service followed by a Covered Dish supper.

~I heard God call for me to become a pastor while I was worshipping at Delanco Camp in the woods during a youth retreat where I was a Jr Hi youth leader.

~I was able to deal with my grief and pain of a miscarriage, the loss of Rich's and my first baby through the sacred, intimate worship of prayer and laying on of hands by my pastor Walt Quigg; when he passed by my house going home and I was doing yardwork.

I don't remember a thing he said, but the Holy Spirit was fully, powerfully present in that spontaneous moment of worship on the curb of Abbot Ave in Ocean Grove. I can still feel his hands on my shoulders...not Rev. Quigg's...but Christ's.

~I have had the incredible privilege to lay hands upon folks, to pray, to teach, to reach so many people as they have come to a personal relationship with Jesus Christ.

I would not be who I am right now if it weren't for worship...Worship changes minds...opens hearts...challenges behaviors.

As you reflect back on your life experiences—

How has God used worship to change you? To shape you? To transform you?

So friends...what's your WHY? WHY do you worship?

Junius Dotson said-

“Worship is more than simply a one-hour experience, one day a week.

Worship is a lifestyle.

Worship is acknowledging that God is God and we are not.

We worship because God is holy.

We worship because God's faithfulness demands a response.

We worship because spending time with God makes us whole.

We worship because God changes minds, open hearts and challenges behavior.

How would you answer?

I worship because...

I worship because...

May you find your WHY and help make your worship and your life more meaningful and Christlike. Amen and amen.