

### **After I Believe #4 – Spirit and Truth:**

We’re in a series on what is central to being a follower and a disciple - an apprentice to Jesus. We have looked at what it means and what kinds of actions we should take when we become an apprentice of Jesus. We have also looked at the importance of spending time with God. Last week we looked at the importance of belonging together with others in a faith community, the church. In our final message today, I want to look at the importance of worship in the Christian life.

**<sup>19</sup> “Sir,” the woman said, “I can see that you are a prophet. <sup>20</sup> Our ancestors worshiped on this mountain, but you Jews claim that the place where we must worship is in Jerusalem.” <sup>21</sup> “Woman,” Jesus replied, “believe me, a time is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem. <sup>22</sup> You Samaritans worship what you do not know; we worship what we do know, for salvation is from the Jews. <sup>23</sup> Yet a time is coming and has now come when the true worshipers will worship the Father in the Spirit and in truth, for they are the kind of worshipers the Father seeks. <sup>24</sup> God is spirit, and his worshipers must worship in the Spirit and in truth.” John 4: 19-24.**

This is of course, Jesus and his interaction with a Samaritan woman at a well. He broke racial and cultural barriers to have this conversation and completely confused his disciples, **<sup>27</sup> Just then his disciples returned and were surprised to find him talking with a woman. But no one asked, “What do you want?” or “Why are you talking with her?” John 4: 27.**

As the story unfolds the conversation turns to ideas around worship. **<sup>20</sup> Our ancestors worshiped on this mountain, but you Jews claim that the place where we must worship is in Jerusalem.” John 4:20.** There is disagreement about where to worship. Jesus challenges the notion of the importance of a place of worship and replaces it with what would have been a strange concept for her to grasp. It’s not on her mountain or in Jerusalem but in spirit and in truth.

There is the hope that this kind of worship will unite Samaritan and Jew alike as they worship the father through Jesus. It is a time in which the Holy places now dividing Jew and Samaritan will no longer matter. This points to a time when the church will spread out all over the world and not be limited by geographical places to worship God but be freed to worship him everywhere. Dorothy Lee calls Jesus the new **“sacred site”** of worship and no barrier of race or gender can stand in the way of such gift.

However, what might be the meaning of God as spirit and of worshiping the father in spirit and truth. God is spirit means that God is life giving action. Also, it means that he is invisible. He is not to be worshipped in the form of idols or images and he does not live in temples made by human hands. This does not overrule churches worshipping together in buildings made for honouring God. It’s just pointing out that temple and the temple system will pass away.

He is free to spring surprises and inspires truth seeking, teaching, witnessing and loving service. Just as God is love and God is light, God is spirit. **<sup>34</sup> For the one whom God has sent speaks the words of God, for God gives the Spirit without limit. John 3: 34.**

God as father is the giver of life in love and the father of Jesus on whom the spirit permanently rests. John’s Gospel often refers to the Psalms and their worship. For John to enter worship more deeply involves acknowledging who Jesus is and having a living relationship with him. Truth is also identified with Jesus, <sup>6</sup> **Jesus answered, “I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. John 14:6.**

I think ultimately, Jesus is saying, “this is the way I would like you to worship”. Further, he is affirming that only those born of the spirit can worship in spirit and truth. <sup>5</sup> **Jesus answered, “Very truly I tell you, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless they are born of water and the Spirit. John 3:5.** God wants to be our father and longs for us to worship him. In these six verses (John 4: 19-24), the word worship is used seven times.

We must become a worshiper of God who is worthy of our worship. Unless you worship God, you will never experience the spiritual depth and vitality that you were designed for. **In fact, of all the spiritual investments that can be made, this may be the deepest, most personal, life-changing investment of all. Pastor James Emery White.**

Firstly, worship helps you encounter, and experience God and it should bring change to your life. While worship should always be a part of the gathered church, it must also be part of our daily life. The ordinary can be filled with spiritual meaning. It’s in everyday life that we seek purpose and direction. So, it follows that worship should also be part of that life.

It’s in our everyday life that we experience growth, wellbeing and challenge. It’s in our everyday life that we need to express our faith. It’s also in our everyday life that we need to experience that God is with us. So, the grace we are looking for may come on a Sunday but we also long to experience this in our ordinary day by day lives. As author Richard Foster has noted, **“If worship does not change us, it has not been worship.”**

While worship can affect our daily lives, God is present in the gathered community of worship in a way unlike any other moment. His presence is there for all to encounter. We want to engage God; we want to experience God. and God wants that for us too. He’s designed the way for it to happen - worship. Let me read you this promise from Jesus: **Where two or three come together in my name, there am I with them. Matthew 18:20.**

Secondly, worship helps you respond to and celebrate God. When you love someone, it’s natural to want to let those feelings be known. You want to tell them, show them, do something for them. Worship is one of the most personal, sincere, authentic ways to respond to God relationally. When you articulate your feelings, expressing yourself verbally and emotionally and physically, it deepens your relationship with God.

This is why the Bible presents worship in terms of expression, such as in the Seventy-first Psalm, that says, <sup>22</sup> **I will praise you with the harp for your faithfulness, my God, I will sing praise to you with the lyre, Holy One of Israel.** <sup>23</sup> **My lips will shout for joy when I sing praise to you— I whom you have delivered.** <sup>24</sup> **My tongue will tell of your righteous acts all day long, for those who wanted to harm me have been put to shame and confusion. Psalm 71:22-24**

Also, in Psalm fifty nine, David, the king of Israel, said, <sup>16</sup> **But I will sing of your strength, in the morning I will sing of your love; for you are my fortress, my refuge in times of trouble.**<sup>17</sup> **You are my strength, I sing praise to you; you, God, are my fortress, my God on whom I can rely. Psalm 59:16-17.**

Worship also helps you celebrate God. To celebrate God is to take time to remember all that he’s done, and just say, “Yeah, God!” It’s like having a party in His honour and it’s supposed to have a festive atmosphere to it. No better expressed than in Psalm 96; <sup>1</sup> **Sing to the Lord a new song; sing to the Lord, all the earth.** <sup>2</sup> **Sing to the Lord, praise his name; proclaim his salvation day after day.** <sup>3</sup> **Declare his glory among the nations, his marvellous deeds among all peoples.** <sup>4</sup> **For great is the Lord and most worthy of praise, he is to be feared above all gods.** <sup>5</sup> **For all the gods of the nations are idols, but the Lord made the heavens.** <sup>6</sup> **Splendour and majesty are before him; strength and glory are in his sanctuary.** <sup>7</sup> **Ascribe to the Lord, all you families of nations, ascribe to the Lord glory and strength.** <sup>8</sup> **Ascribe to the Lord the glory due his name; bring an offering and come into his courts.** <sup>9</sup> **Worship the Lord in the splendour of his holiness; tremble before him, all the earth.** <sup>10</sup> **Say among the nations, “The Lord reigns.”** The world is firmly established, it cannot be moved; he will judge the peoples with equity. <sup>11</sup> **Let the heavens rejoice, let the earth be glad; let the sea resound, and all that is in it.** <sup>12</sup> **Let the fields be jubilant, and everything in them; let all the trees of the forest sing for joy.** <sup>13</sup> **Let all creation rejoice before the Lord, for he comes, he comes to judge the earth. He will judge the world in righteousness and the peoples in his faithfulness. Psalm 96: 1-13.** Now that’s a party!

Finally, Worship helps you receive spiritual encouragement and energy. The author of the book of Hebrews in the Bible writes, <sup>24</sup> **And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds, Hebrews 10:24.** Here, the author is speaking directly about not giving up on relationships; not giving up on people. We need those spiritual, strategic relationships in our lives

Also, we need the energy that comes by gathering with other people to worship God. The primary purpose of worship is not what we get out of it, but what we give to God through it. When you gather with others to worship, there’s no way you can walk away without receiving an injection of spiritual energy and encouragement.

When it comes to worship, Jesus taught two things: that we should worship God in spirit and in truth. Let’s start off with truth. To worship in truth means to the one and true God as revealed in Scripture. You are thinking as you worship, and they must be the right thoughts. You worship when you are thinking rightly about God and your relationship with God. That’s why the words that we sing matter.

However, Jesus also said to worship in spirit. To worship in spirit is to worship authentically with your heart, to have your act of worship be sincere, genuine and real. Jesus said it’s not just whom you worship that matters, but how you worship.

So, we are to worship in spirit and truth. What are some of the ways of doing that? Well, one of the most common is to worship God through music. There are different psalms in the Bible that encourage us to sing to God. To use music to worship God, you take the words to the

song and make them your words. You use them as a vehicle to express how you feel and what you want to say.

A second way you can worship is through your body. **I lift up my hands toward your Most Holy Place. Psalm 28:2. I spread out my hands to you. Psalm 88:9. <sup>5</sup> Ezra opened the book. All the people could see him because he was standing above them; and as he opened it, the people all stood up. <sup>6</sup> Ezra praised the Lord, the great God; and all the people lifted their hands and responded, “Amen! Amen!” Then they bowed down and worshiped the Lord with their faces to the ground. Nehemiah 8:5-6.**

We are physical creatures, and we tend to express ourselves physically. You can do the same when you worship God. Now you should never act in a way that draws attention to yourself and away from God - but when you worship, you might want to kneel, clap or close your eyes or just soak it all in. You might want to raise your hands as a symbol of praise. Your body is part of who you are, so feel free to use it when worshiping God.

A third way we can worship is through certain acts or events. Worshiping God with your finances or your offerings is worship. I think this is one we can easily overlook. I am amazed at how practical and relevant and specific and rich the bible is on this subject.

**<sup>19</sup> “Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moths and vermin destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. <sup>20</sup> But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moths and vermin do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal. <sup>21</sup> For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also. Matthew 6: 19-21.**

We also worship God by the giving of our money. Money is not a side issue to God. It’s not bracketed off as unimportant. Two thirds of all the stories Jesus told are on money management. Money is talked about in the bible five times more than prayer. Now the more cynical amongst you may say: The reason for that is all religions are money orientated and Christianity is just one of them.

Sooner or later we all must decide whether God can be trusted. Can you take God at his word when he makes a claim or a promise. Is God a trustworthy, promise keeping, faithful God. What you must understand is that giving money to God is much more a trust issue than a monetary issue.

At the very heart of the whole issue of giving money to the Lord is whether God can be trusted. It’s the key issue. We’re not talking about dollars and cents this morning but Faith. Faith, based on God’s track record in your life and in history. God has said if you give a portion of your income to me, I will pour out a blessing on your life, so great that you won’t be able to take it in.

Praying can be an act of worship. Reading or reciting Scripture can be an act of worship. Other creative gifts such as dance, drama, film presentation, poetry can all facilitate worship. As long as it honours and praises God.