

What is Church? A People who Worship

We are a community who worship Jesus. A people who seek to know him, and try to love him in thought, in word and in action. We are a people who seek to worship Jesus on our own, and also recognise the importance of gathering to worship together. We are a people who love to worship.

But do we limit our understanding of what that means? Do we only expect to be able to worship when we are with other Christians, and the worship band is great, or when we have a good worship song to listen to? Do we limit worship to being about songs? We long for the times when we all gather to be an overflow of our hearts, a corporate expression of hearts that have connected with the Father every day, all week long. At work, at home, with family, with friends, when doing chores, in the exciting, in the mundane. We pray this community will always be a people that come to a service, not looking to the band and the preacher to give us our next 'fill' of God, but already worshipping, knowing that we can worship in our thoughts, in our words, and in our actions. That our worship times together are always an overflow of hearts already connected to, and worshipping the Father.

"So here's what I want you to do, God helping you: Take your everyday, ordinary life – your sleeping, eating, going-to-work, and walking around life – and place it before God as an offering."

Romans 12 v 1, The Message

I love this verse. This verse challenges me to remember that everything I do, every moment, can be something that I can use to worship Jesus. So not just a moment in my week, when I gather with others to sing to Jesus. But my ordinary life. My sleeping, eating, going-to-work, and walking around life. Teaching music, serving my children, feeding them, running the home, doing the school run, can be something I do for Jesus. I can worship him in the way I treat others, in the way I value the things that Jesus shows me he values - justice, mercy, truth, love, and bring them into the centre of what I am doing. As I worship him, I learn more about what he values.

When I was a teenager, I had a division in my life. I went to church. I was part of the worship team from the age of 11. I was in an amazing church full of mothers and fathers that nurtured me, encouraged me, released me. But I divided my life up. I didn't give Jesus every moment, every day. I didn't know many others my age who were Christians. And I followed the crowd. So my social life didn't quite reflect all that I believed. It was a division I was not happy with, but I allowed it. I thought I worshipped with all my heart, yet boxed things into segments of my life that I either allowed God into, or I didn't.

That changed around the time I went to university, and I felt God challenging me to live out more fully what I said I believed. I experienced his presence during worship times,

but there was a hunger in me for more. I wanted to know him more, everyday. I didn't want my lifestyle to push out this amazing presence I was feeling. I had to learn how to worship him in every moment, taking my 'everyday, ordinary life', and placing it before God as an offering. I'm still learning. But the more I do, the more I learn and experience the reality of this relationship with my creator. The more I hear him, the more He surprises me with His presence in the everyday, and the more I receive his love.

Why do we worship Jesus?

You may have been walking with Jesus for years. You may only be at the start of being aware of him in your life. Whatever point you are at, there is always more to learn about who Jesus is, and why we worship him.

Video [<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yzqTFNfeDnE>]

It's all for Jesus, about Jesus, to Jesus. We are a people who love him because HE IS WORTHY and he is the king.

"For in him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things have been created through him and for him. He is before all things, and in him all things hold together."

Colossians 1 v 16 – 17

Jesus calls us to love him first. For him to be our first love. For him to be the first thing we worship, above anything else.

"Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.' The second is this: 'Love your neighbour as yourself.' There is no commandment greater than these."

Mark 12:30-31

So what does it mean to worship Him? What does it look like to love him, to worship him, taking our everyday, ordinary life, and placing it before God as an offering?

Worship is a Lifestyle

Worship has to be about more than just the singing of songs. It has to be more than a service, or 'something for the musicians', or about what song we sing. It is our lifestyle, it is our first calling as followers of Jesus.

'Worship is not limited to singing songs, but is a life poured out in holiness, obedience, service, alms-giving, mission, sharing the Gospel with the lost, sharing our bread with the poor,

sharing our lives with one another. I believe God receives glory by the very birth of an infant, by bees making honey [. . .] when the painter paints, the singer sings, the architect designs, the teacher teaches, the athlete competes. Worship in song, in verbal praise is one part, a significant part of worship, of glorifying God, but not the only one."

Simon Ponsonby

So what does this look like for you? What does it look like for you to worship? What does it mean to take who he created you to be, and do what he created you to do, and worship him? Do we need to play worship music on repeat? Imagine, as you are in the middle of the shops, asking around if there is someone with a guitar, and asking everyone to be quiet and join in with a song? Stopping a work meeting mid flow to all suddenly sing to Jesus? Having a worship band at your work? Worshipping for an hour together before you start work? Anyone who works for cap may have that! But Is this what we mean by a lifestyle of worship?

What does it look like for you to worship Jesus every day? At Tuesday 10am or Thursday 4pm? What are you doing? Are you working? Are you serving your family? Are you making choices about what you do with your money? Are you with friends?

I teach music for about 11 hours a week, and the rest of the week is spent between looking after our three kids, and serving this church. I see all this as part of my worship to Jesus. I teach, using the gifts he has given me, trusting that He has placed me there, and doing the best I can. I seek to encourage young people in their musical giftings, encouraging them to be all that God has created them to be. I believe I can worship God by listening to these young people and supporting them, as well as by teaching them. I also see running the home, serving my family, as worship to Jesus.

But I also deliberately turn my attention Jesus during the day, in the middle of washing up, cleaning, doing the school run, while I'm teaching music, whatever. I try to be aware of His continual presence, and remind myself of the truth that I am loved by him, and that nothing can separate me from his love. And the more I try to turn the Father, the more I get to know him. The more I receive his wisdom, the more he speaks to me. And the more he surprises me with his presence, in the middle of shopping, or during a conversation with a friend. I don't need 200 people and a worship song playing during a meeting, to be able to worship him. And the more I deliberately turn to worship Jesus, the more other things I do flow from that intimate relationship with Jesus.

I am still discovering all that it means to take 'sleeping, eating, going-to-work and walking around life' and place it as an offering before God. But it's a fantastic journey. How amazing we get to do this. How amazing that Jesus died so we can know this intimacy, this presence. How amazing he calls us sons and daughters that he loves to be close to.

Helen and I have always tried to adopt a holistic approach to worship in our life together. Firstly, we have sought out work which facilitates our gifts and passions and desires. We actively try to blur the boundaries between work/play/family/church. We invite people we work with into our home. We share stories about our home life and church life with colleagues. We sit and talk with people we work with, making ourselves available, if they maybe want to share something with us. We offer to pray for people we work with. We also share stories about our work, with our children.

I have my own business, renovating and improving peoples' homes and gardens. In my work, I work as though working for Him. That means I work hard, and I do the best job I can, and I go the extra mile. I make the most of what he has given me. And I am actively trying to build a successful business. Now, I can't always control the way others receive my work, or value it or appreciate it, but I can trust that God sees my work, and if my attitude to my work is honouring to Him, that's enough for me.

I have found over the years, that a number of the guys who have come in to work with me have been quite broken, and have been struggling through really challenging life circumstances. Some have gone through real relationship struggles. Some have had financial problems. Some have just been really lost, with no real purpose or vision for where their life is heading. I have an opportunity with each of these guys, to demonstrate His values. Kingdom values: Consistency in a working relationship. To model trust in finances. Pay them on time and in full, for the work done. To recognise their identity and encourage strengths and giftings. To take the time to say "You did what I asked, and here is your pay, but I thought you did that really well, and I appreciate it. You are really good at that".

If I can try to summarise this attitude:

Worship. We do what we do to glorify God. Not because it benefits us (though it might), but because what we do points those around us toward the person of Jesus, living inside us. This is how I can take my everyday life, and give it to him, as an offering.

Underpinning all of this, it is vital we spend time on our own with Jesus. We base our day around spending time reading the Bible, praying, worshipping, with nothing else going on. You may call them quiet times. The rest of our day will then flow out of this. We are called to live out of our connection with the Father. This is when He equips us, He gives us good gifts. He loves us. To live your days in an attitude of worship, you have to start in the quiet place with Jesus.

"I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing."
John 15 v 5

But let's not just stop after that quiet time with Jesus, and pick it up the next day. Everything we do can be based on worshipping Jesus, placing him as King in the midst of decisions, trusting He is who he says he is.

Sometimes, it is just easy. Sometimes, we can sense his presence, and we connect with him. Sometimes, life gets in the way. Stress, time pressures, circumstances, worries etc can all take our eyes off our loving father. And sometimes, it is just so hard to worship him when we are angry or confused about what is happening in our lives. But he calls us first to love him. And he meets us. He heals us. He provides peace when there is no understanding.

One of the hardest times for me to worship, was when I found out I was pregnant with Emma. After two boys, I had declared 'That was it!' I could not cope with any more. I found the early years of looking after my boys REALLY, really hard, and we had decided it was best to be a family of 4. I was training for a half marathon, both boys were potty trained, we had given away all our baby stuff. We were ready for the next thing in life. But it was not to be, and I found myself with an unplanned pregnancy, and I was completely devastated. I did not want to give up my body again. I did not want to go through those early months again (which had been horrific at times). At the same time, Phil's brother and wife had been trying for about 2 years to get pregnant with their second child, and the day after I found out I was pregnant, they learnt at the 20 week scan, that their little girl Joy had Edwards syndrome. This is a terminal condition which results with early death either in the womb, or within the first few hours or days of life outside of the womb. Our niece Joy was born four months before our daughter Emma, and only lived for two days. How could this be? This was not fair. This made no sense. Each time I came to worship, I would just weep. There was so much guilt, so much confusion.

The verse that stood out to me was:

"Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus."

Philippians 4 v 6-7

I had to let go of trying to understand, to be able to receive the peace that surpasses all understanding. I had to worship still. In spite of my circumstances. And he changed my heart. He gave me love for my baby. He showed me his love for her, and he showed me his love for our niece, Joy. It still made no sense. It still doesn't. Why He would give Emma to us, and why Joy was taken. But He met me in the midst of it all, and was with me. Just turning to him and worshipping him, keeping my attitude to Jesus one of submission, gave him access to speak to me, to love me, to give me his peace. What an amazing creator. As we turn and give to him, worship him, He gives us so much more back. But it was a leap of faith. A jump to trust that He was who he said he was. My provider, my guide. Trusting He would look after us, and give us all the emotional and

practical resources we would need to look after 3 children. So I turned to worship him, by trusting him that He would provide the strength, the wisdom, everything we would need. I worshipped Jesus by letting go of my understanding and trusting that He was with us. I worshipped Jesus by serving my family, and serving this new baby he had given us. I took the situation and placed it before God as an offering.

So let's look again at Romans 12 v 1.

"So here's what I want you to do, God helping you: Take your everyday, ordinary life – your sleeping, eating, going-to-work, and walking around life – and place it before God as an offering"

Romans 12 v 1, The Message

We long to see Sundays being an overflow of our hearts, a corporate expression of hearts that have connected with the Father every day, all week long. We want to be a people who come to Weekly Worship, not looking to the band and the preacher to give us our next 'fill' of God, but already worshipping, and our times gathering together being an expression of our hearts that are already connected to the Father.

So let's take our lives, our ordinary lives, our every moments, every decision, every choice, and invite Jesus into it. Let's worship Jesus with all our heart, soul and mind. With the work we do, with our relationships with one another, with our finances, with our time, with our thoughts. May he always be our first love. Because He is worthy, and He is good, and because He created us for this intimacy. He created us to work like this. He created us to know him in everything we do.

He created us to worship.

Phil & Helen Hicks

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