

## Why We Need Worship

1. Warm up: Imagine you're on a long trek through a desert. You've gone all day without water, hoping to find an Oasis over the next horizon. You're parched. When you're really thirsty, what is your favorite beverage for quenching your thirst?
2. One of the psalms we read on Sunday describes life as "a dry and thirsty land." As you make your way from week-to-week, what kinds of things tend to most drain your spirit?
3. For most of us, it often feels like there's too much to do, too many demands, too much conflict, too much stress, and too much pain. So how do we renew our spirit when we feel utterly drained? The answer is found in this week's scripture passages. Both passages describe how dry and thirsty our soul becomes in the give-and-take of everyday life. And both passages prescribe worship as the most powerful way to renew and replenish our soul. Read Psalm 42:1-5 and Psalm 63:1-5, as printed on p. 3.
  - a. Scientists tell us that we humans can only perceive a small portion of the reality that surrounds us. The part of reality that we can perceive with our senses represents only 5% of the total mass-energy content of the cosmos. The other 95% consists of dark matter and dark energy that's completely imperceptible to us. Jeff said, "It's the same when it comes to spirit versus matter. The material world that surrounds us is just a small percentage of the total reality in which we find ourselves. The rest is Spirit." Do you think he's right? If so, what are the implications of that for what it takes for us to survive and thrive here on earth?
  - b. Worship is the portal through which we transcend the confines of our material world and begin to tap into the unseen energy of the Spirit of God. ***That's the goal of worship – for my spirit to make contact with God's Spirit, so my soul can be recharged.*** Jeff described how on a typical Sunday morning, he comes into worship preoccupied with all kinds of pesky thoughts of things to do and to worry about. But he says that usually, by the second or third worship song, the music starts to break through, he feels something shifting inside his spirit, and a profound sense of relief and relaxation washes over him. Do you ever experience that? Describe how you experience worship music and how it affects you.
  - c. From the beginning of time, worship has been at the heart of living a life of faith. For every generation of believers, in every culture, worship songs have been a crucial part of their weekly spiritual gathering. When we see a consistent pattern like that across cultures, we should sit up and take note. Why do you think music is such an effective portal for awakening us to the presence of God?
4. As we go through life, we've often been told that we should worship, but usually nobody ever bothers to explain how. Jeff suggested there are three steps to having a powerful worship experience. ***The first step is Awareness, i.e., being reminded of the power and presence of God in a way that invites us into that presence.*** For most of us, worship music can do that. But the Awareness Phase is just the start of the process. It's God's

way of inviting us into worship. But an invitation does us no good if we don't accept it. ***So the second critical step is Permission, i.e., giving ourselves the permission to open ourselves to experience God's mystical presence as we begin to feel the music lifting us.***

- a. In Revelation 3:20, Jesus says, "Behold, I stand at the door and knock, if any hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and [commune] with them." What does this verse mean when applied to worship? During our worship music segment on Sundays, do you feel like you're "opening the door"? Explain your answer.
  - b. In his book *Letters to My Children*, Daniel Taylor answers his son's question about why, if worship is so important, so many people don't get much out of it. How would you answer Matthew's question? When it comes to worship, why do so many people feel like they're on the outside looking in?
  - c. Read Daniel Taylor's answer to his son Matthew, as printed on p. 3, then respond to the question stated there.
5. ***The third and final step in meaningful worship is Basking, i.e., spending time soaking in the presence of God like a sponge and recharging our spirit.*** On Sunday, Jeff told two stories about how worship made people "ready for battle again." One story was about a Romanian pastor who was arrested and brutalized during Communist times. A worship encounter he had with Jesus in his prison cell afterward being beaten renewed his spirit and made him ready for battle again in a way that dumbfounded his interrogators. The other story was about the first black regiment to participate in the Civil War. The night before a dangerous assault on Fort Wagner, the soldiers broke out in a spontaneous worship experience that renewed their spirit and made them ready for battle.
- a. Tell us about a time in your life when you had a particularly memorable worship experience. Describe the experience? What made it so special? How did it affect you?
  - b. How do you think your life would be different without a weekly worship experience?
  - c. Given all we've discussed, if someone asked you why weekly worship is so important, how would you answer?

## **Psalm 42:1-5**

<sup>1</sup> As a deer pants after the water streams, so my soul pants for you, O God. <sup>2</sup> My soul thirsts for God, for the living God. When shall I come and behold the face of God? <sup>3</sup> My tears have been my food day and night, while people say to me continually, ‘Where is your God?’

<sup>4</sup> These things I remember, as I pour out my soul: how I went with the throng, and led them in procession to the house of God, with glad shouts and songs of thanksgiving, a multitude keeping festival.

<sup>5</sup> Why are you cast down, O my soul, and why are you disquieted within me? Hope in God; for I shall again praise God, my help.

## **Psalm 63:1-5**

<sup>1</sup> O God, you are my God, I seek you, my soul thirsts for you; my flesh faints for you, as in a dry and weary land where there is no water.

<sup>2</sup> So I have looked upon you in the sanctuary, beholding your power and glory. <sup>3</sup> Because your steadfast love is better than life, my lips will praise you. <sup>4</sup> So I will bless you as long as I live; I will lift up my hands and call on your name. <sup>5</sup> My soul is satisfied as with a rich feast, and my mouth praises you with joyful lips.

## **Excerpt from Daniel Taylor’s book Letters to My Children**

Responding to his son’s question about why, if worship is so important, so many people don’t get much out of it, Taylor says:

“Truthfully, Matthew, the biggest reason that many people don’t get much out of worship is because we don’t want very much of God. We’re afraid of losing control of our own lives. We just want God to help us a little here, and forgive us a little there, and let us handle the rest. And so we try to make church a safe place where we can get a little bit of God but not too much. We don’t like surprises, not even from God. So we ask God to come, but only if God will be polite.”

Questions:

- a. What do you think Taylor means when he says “most people don’t want very much of God.” Do you think that’s true? Why or why not?
- b. Taylor refers to people who want “to make church a safe place where we can get a little bit of God but not too much.” What does that look like? In other words, what’s the difference between someone who’s trying to make worship “safe” verses someone who “surrenders” to it?
- c. For some people worship is uncomfortable, not because they don’t want more of God, but simply because they find worship unfamiliar or intimidating. What are some of the reason people might find worship uncomfortable or intimidating? And are there ways to push through that?