

Worship in a gathering

Encountering God together

Lisa Scheffler, author

Why should we go to church on Sundays? To some people who have gone to church as long as they can remember, that feels like an almost sacrilegious question. Of course you go to church on Sundays! It's what Christians do.

But why? With so many sermons and worship songs available online, and small groups of believers meeting throughout the week, many people are wondering why it's important to get up, get dressed and drive to a church service. Is it really necessary for us to worship in a gathering?

Since it's one of Christ Fellowship's Four Practices, you already know that we're going to say "yes." But through our focus on this practice, we hope that we'll all better understand and appreciate the reasons why it is essential that we come together as a local expression of the body of Christ. We'll recognize that coming to a worship gathering grants us an opportunity to experience the presence and activity of the living God together with our church family, and that because the Spirit moves in, through and among his people, our participation in these gatherings is a responsibility and a privilege.

This week, we'll consider what the New Testament tells us about gathering for worship, how we should participate in a worship gathering and take a closer look at one of the sacraments Jesus explicitly calls us to observe.

Day 1 | Worship with expectancy

In the modern church, we sometimes think of "worship" as the singing we do during a church service and forget that it's so much more than that. Worship is our posture toward God and must involve the whole person — our emotions, intellect, will and actions. In worship, we acknowledge and appreciate God for who he is and are reminded of our dependence on him. Collectively, we offer our praise and invite his activity. We do this through song, prayer, the Word, the Lord's Supper, baptism and our financial offerings. Ultimately, acts of worship are acts of faith and allegiance.

While there is no order of service or specific list of guidelines about worship services in the New Testament, we do know that the apostles had certain expectations about what the assembly should (and should not) do when it gathered to worship. Much of what the early church did when it gathered came from its Jewish heritage and its understanding of what Christ's life, death and resurrection accomplished.

A couple of weeks ago, we studied a section of Acts 2 as a model for biblical community, but let's look again at its description of a worship gathering:

Acts 2:41–43

⁴¹Those who accepted his message were baptized, and about three thousand were added to their number that day.

⁴²They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. ⁴³Everyone was filled with awe at the many wonders and signs performed by the apostles.

What practices were present in these gatherings according to verse 42?

According to verse 43, what experience did the people often have?

According to the description of the early church in Acts 2, the teaching of the Word, fellowship, prayer and the Lord's Supper were present during the assemblies of new believers. The baptism of new converts and singing hymns were part of these gatherings as well.

The Spirit was present and moved in these gatherings. "Signs and wonders" may have been performed by the apostles, but God always takes the initiative when it comes to demonstrating his presence and power. Surely these believers lived with an expectancy that the Spirit would be active in their midst. Should we have the same expectancy now?

Whether we should expect miraculous signs to occur routinely in a worship gathering is a matter of some debate among Christians. Some charismatic and Pentecostal churches put the onus on us — if we are not experiencing miracles, then it is because we are not inviting them; our faith is too small. Yet Jesus was clear that the Spirit moves where he will (John 3:8). He cannot be summoned or coerced.

Yet surely there is a problem with the other end of the spectrum. Many Christians seem to lack even a desire for, much less an expectation that, the Spirit will be active and present during our worship services. We arrive at church hoping for an uplifting sermon, good music, and a chance to see our friends. Do we come with a sense of anticipation that we will experience the living God?

Our worship gatherings should be a reflection of our relationship to God as our Creator, Lord, Father and Savior. As such we respond to him with trust, obedience and love. We are not coming to worship an empty, vacant façade, or a distant, absent deity, but the living God who is present and active in our world today. We recognize that among the many kindnesses we receive from God, including our salvation, we are gifted with his holy presence and empowering Spirit.

In his book, *You Are What You Love*, Smith reminds us that "the Triune God is both the audience and the agent of worship" Our worship is to and for God, and God is active in worship in and through the proclamation of the Word and the sacraments such as baptism and the Lord's

Supper.¹ We proclaim his goodness and respond with prayer and thanksgiving. He inhabits our praises, nourishes us with his Word and meets us in the sacraments. Worship is supernatural!

How have you experienced God as present and active in worship gatherings?

The ancient tabernacle where Israel worshipped God gives us a one picture of the interaction between God and the worshiper. For example, God had the people build an altar of incense to be lit daily inside the Holy Place (Exodus 30:1–10). The fragrant smoke would waft outward and upward, filling the chamber. Scripture often likens incense to prayer (Psalm 141:2; Revelations 5:8). This image helps us envision our praise, confession, thanksgiving and requests being lifted up to God as a pleasing aroma. Our worship is an offering to God that he is happy to receive. It is a response to the grace he has showered on us. We offer because we have received.

Also in the tabernacle was the table of the showbread, sometimes called the bread of presence. Each week, the priests were to put twelve loaves of bread on the table. This bread resembled the food offerings pagan nations offered to their gods, but there was a significant difference. God instructed the priests to eat the bread in his presence. As part of their worship of Yahweh, the priests not only brought him offerings, but were nourished by him as well. They were welcomed to his table and invited to fellowship with God.

We see bread used as a symbol throughout Scripture to remind us that our God provides for us, desires fellowship with us and nourishes us. It is often connected to the Word of God. During his temptation, Jesus rebuked Satan by quoting Deuteronomy, “Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God” (Matthew 4:4). The prophet Jeremiah says to God, “When your words came, I ate them; they were my joy and my heart's delight...” (Jeremiah 15:16).

We will talk more in depth about the Lord’s Supper tomorrow, but here we see another example of God’s provision and fellowship. There is a strong connection between the act of physically ingesting the elements of the Lord’s Supper and being spiritually nourished by the Holy Spirit.

In our worship gatherings, we experience God’s provision and presence through the Word and the table. What’s more, we do this together, as the body of Christ. As individuals who make up the body, we offer ourselves to him in worship and please him with our prayers. God is present and active in our worship gatherings. The question we need to ask ourselves and each other is: Are we prepared to meet him there?

Prayer for the week:

Heavenly Father, I am so grateful that I have the opportunity to gather together with other believers to worship you each week. Thank you that I can do this publically and without fear. I know many of my brothers and sisters in Christ around the world cannot

¹ James K. A. Smith, *You Are What You Love: The Spiritual Power of Habit* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos, 2016), 70.

do so. This week, help me grow in my understanding of this privilege. Help me approach the Sunday worship gathering with greater joy and anticipation. Teach me how I should participate in these gatherings so that my worship is pleasing to you and I am a blessing to others. I love you and long to grow closer to you.

Day 2 | Worship through the Lord's Supper

God has given us freedom in our worship gatherings. You will find great differences in the way Christians throughout the centuries and around the globe “do church.” Yet the Lord's Supper is something that is regularly observed in worship gatherings.

On the night before he was arrested, Jesus had his last meal with his disciples before his crucifixion. Most scholars believe that the group was observing the Passover. Jesus deviated from the traditional Passover observance by associating elements of the meal with himself — the bread with his body and the cup with his blood. He instructed the disciples to remember him when they ate this meal. Depending on the church tradition, we now call this meal the Lord's Supper, Communion, or the Eucharist.

Yesterday we talked about how God is present and active in our worship gatherings and the Lord's Supper provides us an opportunity to encounter God. Today we're going to consider that opportunity.

In his letter to the Corinthians, Paul recounts Jesus' words to the disciples during the last supper and helps us understand their significance. If you've attended church services for a while, these words may be so familiar to you, so let's try to look at this passage with fresh eyes.

1 Corinthians 11:23–26

²³ For I received from the Lord what I also passed on to you: The Lord Jesus, on the night he was betrayed, took bread, ²⁴ and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, “This is my body, which is for you; do this in remembrance of me.” ²⁵ In the same way, after supper he took the cup, saying, “This cup is the new covenant in my blood; do this, whenever you drink it, in remembrance of me.” ²⁶ For whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.

Look closely at what Jesus said. What is the bread? What is the cup?

What phrase does Jesus repeat?

What does the Lord's supper proclaim?

The Passover celebration had been instituted by God to commemorate Israel's liberation from

Egypt. It was to remind the Israelites of God's grace, power and mercy and transmit the story of the Exodus to future generations. (Exodus 12:24–28). By infusing the Passover meal with new associations, Jesus was instituting a new ordinance that would commemorate an even greater exodus where people would be liberated from sin and death. By tying his body to the bread and the cup to his blood, Jesus was explicitly connecting the observance of the Lord's Supper to his atoning work on the cross. Jesus' blood was spilled and his body was sacrificed to provide salvation and redemption.

Jesus' statement "This is the new covenant in my blood" looks back to the blood of the sacrifices that Moses sprinkled on the people to establish the old covenant with Israel. The blood Jesus shed in his death for us established the new covenant God had promised through Jeremiah (Jer. 31:31–34). Jesus is the mediator of this new covenant that promises complete forgiveness of sins, eternal redemption and an eternal inheritance (see Hebrews 8–10).

Jesus asked his disciples to observe this meal as a remembrance. With a few exceptions, Christians throughout the centuries have done so. The Lord's Supper "directs our attention to Jesus' crucifixion and the future fulfillment of his Kingdom."² Embedded in the Lord's Supper is the expectation that Jesus will return. We observe the meal until he comes again. The Gospel writers include Jesus' declaration that "I tell you, I will not drink from this fruit of the vine from now on until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father's kingdom" (Matthew 26:29).

Also, because it is a communal meal, it expresses our unity as the body of Christ. "At the Lord's table, we come together as equals, as persons who are given the gift of God's Spirit—unconditionally and impartially."³ We share the Lord's Supper with one another as brothers and sisters in Christ.

While the observance of the Lord's Supper is common among believers, debates about what happens during the meal have produced various theories. What did Jesus mean when he said, "this is my body" and "this is my blood?" On one end of the spectrum is the Roman Catholic view of transubstantiation which teaches "the change of the whole substance of bread into the substance of the body of Christ and of the whole substance of wine into the substance of blood of Christ."⁴ On the other end is the memorialism view which believes the bread and wine are purely symbolic and the Lord's Supper is only an act of remembrance.

Somewhere in the middle is the idea that while the elements are signs, "the signs and the things signified must be distinguished without being separated."⁵ Protestant reformer John Calvin believed that while Christ's body and blood are not physically present, they are spiritually present when believers take the Lord's Supper. What is happening on the earthly plane by eating the bread and drinking the cup, the Holy Spirit accomplishes on the spiritual plane. In other words, "those who partake of the bread and wine in faith are also, by the power of the Holy Spirit, being nourished by the body and blood of Christ." Calvin considered the Lord's Supper to

² John H. Armstrong, "Table Manners: Why We Take Communion Every Week," ChristianityToday.com, <http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2014/september/table-manners-why-we-take-communion-every-week.html>.

³ Ibid.

⁴ "Compendium of the Catechism of the Catholic Church". www.vatican.va.

⁵ Keith Mathison, "Calvin's Doctrine of the Lord's Supper" Ligonier Ministries, <http://www.ligonier.org/learn/articles/calvins-doctrine-lords-supper/>.

be a “divine gift given by Christ himself to his people to nourish and strengthen their faith.”⁶

How do you tend to think about the Lord’s Supper? Is it a meaningful part of corporate worship for you? Why or why not?

Yesterday we began our study by wondering whether we come to our worship gatherings expecting to encounter God. Though we perform ordinary acts of hearing and singing, sitting and standing, eating and drinking, are we aware of the activity of the Spirit who moves in, through and among us?

The Renaissance painter Tintoretto has given us an image worth contemplating as we consider the possibility of God’s presence and activity through the Lord’s Supper. The scene is Christ’s final meal with his disciples before his crucifixion.



Jesus is shown serving one of the disciples. It is a dark painting and the only light sources come from Jesus himself and a single lamp. Jesus glows from within and a halo of bright light emanates from him, illuminating the otherwise shadowy scene. From the lamp comes a secondary source of light, but also tendrils of smoke that curl into the forms of angels. The heavenly host float above the scene keeping watch. Light is shown surrounding some of the disciples as if they are reflecting Jesus’ shining glory.

⁶ Ibid.

Seemingly oblivious to these supernatural elements are the servants who are preparing the meal and the disciples themselves. A woman ladles grain out of a basket and hands it to the cook, while a hungry cat looks on. Most of disciples are turned away from Jesus and talking among themselves. It's as if only the viewer of the painting can appreciate what is really going on because the supernatural activity is completely unrealized by the those in the scene.

It is worth considering whether we are like the disciples and the servants in this painting. Are we missing the activity of God in the Lord's Supper because we are oblivious to even the possibility? Do we come to worship with the expectation that we will encounter the living God together, as his body?

Day 3 | Worship with our whole selves

When a Samaritan woman encounters Jesus at the well outside her village, she asks him a question about where worship should occur. “I can see that you are a prophet. Our ancestors worshiped on this mountain, but you Jews claim that the place where we must worship is in Jerusalem” (John 4:19–20). Jesus answers with a statement about how worship would now occur “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” (John 4:23).

For centuries the temple in Jerusalem was the official location for worship. While Jewish people gathered in their local synagogues on the Sabbath, the temple was considered the dwelling place of God and where sacrifices must be offered.

Jesus changed everything.

Because his death provided the ultimate and complete sacrifice to atone for sin, the blood of animals was no longer needed. Because he is the great high priest, those from the line of Aaron were no longer called to intercede for the people. Because after his death, resurrection and ascension Jesus sent the Spirit, there is not one place where God dwells. All his people are indwelt by the Holy Spirit. The people of God can come together to worship him in the Spirit and in truth. We are true worshipers. How do we respond to such a privilege?

This week we are thinking about the importance of worshiping God in a gathering with other believers. We’ve determined that God is present and active in our worship and looked in detail at the Lord’s Supper. Today let’s think about how we are to worship. What should our response be to God’s invitation to worship?

Although this psalm was written to the Jewish people as a call to worship, from its early days, the Christian church has widely used Psalm 95 as (known as the *Venite*, from the Latin for ‘O come’) as a guide.⁷ Let’s see what we can learn about the way we should worship from this psalm.

Psalm 95

*¹ Come, let us sing for joy to the LORD;
let us shout aloud to the Rock of our salvation.*

*² Let us come before him with thanksgiving
and extol him with music and song.*

*³ For the LORD is the great God,
the great King above all gods.*

*⁴ In his hand are the depths of the earth,
and the mountain peaks belong to him.*

*⁵ The sea is his, for he made it,
and his hands formed the dry land.*

⁷ Derek Kidner, [Psalms 73–150: An Introduction and Commentary](#), vol. 16, Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1975), 375.

⁶ Come, let us bow down in worship,
let us kneel before the LORD our Maker;
⁷ for he is our God
and we are the people of his pasture,
the flock under his care.

Today, if only you would hear his voice,
⁸ "Do not harden your hearts as you did at Meribah,
as you did that day at Massah in the wilderness,
⁹ where your ancestors tested me;
they tried me, though they had seen what I did.
¹⁰ For forty years I was angry with that generation;
I said, 'They are a people whose hearts go astray,
and they have not known my ways.'

¹¹ So I declared on oath in my anger,
'They shall never enter my rest.'"

This psalm gives us action prompted by truth. Underline statements of truth and circle the actions.

Where do you notice a shift in tone and voice? Who is speaking? Summarize the main idea of the message.

Worship is a response to the truth of who God is, what he has done, is doing and will do. Through our worship, we are acknowledging that God is God and we are not. That may sound elemental, but if you consider our daily thoughts and actions, much of what we think and do fails to reflect that basic truth. Worship recalibrates and re-centers us by giving us the opportunity to express our faith and allegiance and experience the presence and activity of God. As Psalm 95 demonstrates, we worship with our whole selves — mind, body, emotions and will.

We worship with our bodies. Notice all the different actions mentioned in this psalm: singing, making music, shouting, extolling (praising), kneeling and hearing. Worship is not something that is bound up in our thoughts — it must be reflected in our emotions and expressed with actions. We rejoice in his goodness with our voices and express our reverence by lowering ourselves to kneel. In faith and with joy, we bring our financial offerings to God. When we respond to God with appropriate activity, we demonstrate our allegiance and conviction and reinforce our foundational beliefs. By the Spirit, the truth we know can become a reality we experience.

Our actions are in response to God. We aren't going through the motions when we sing hymns or shout praises; we are responding to the greatness of God! In Psalm 95 the assembly worships God as mighty King and powerful Creator. As the steadfast Rock and loving Shepherd. These are truths that have been revealed by God and recorded in Scripture. True worship is not built

around vacuous emotionalism on one end of the spectrum, or soulless repetition on the other. It is based in the knowledge of God as revealed by the Spirit in the Word.

We hear God's voice. The Spirit can move mightily through the proclamation of the Word. The book of Hebrews declares "For the word of God is alive and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart" (Hebrews 4:12). Scripture declares the immeasurable grace, love and goodness of God. It convicts us of all the ways we've wandered from him and calls us to return. God's Word is a soothing balm in the midst of suffering and doubt. It gives us hope and peace, not just for ourselves but for those we will encounter as we leave our gathering and return to the world.

Worship honors God and changes us. The abrupt change in tone beginning in verse 8 has caused some scholars to believe that rather than one psalm, these are two fragments put together. But commentator Derek Kidner sees the "austere conclusion" as a fitting balance to the "exuberant beginning." He sees the ending as resembling the exhortation of the prophets "with their call to match fine gestures with fine deeds."⁸

The reality of God as we experience him in worship should call us to live differently. Psalm 95 recalls the sin of the people who were rescued from slavery in Egypt, but rebelled against God and were sentenced to 40 years of wilderness wandering. God warns the assembly against making the same mistakes as their ancestors who, because of their lack of faith, hardened their hearts toward God. They allowed the difficulty of their circumstances to overshadow the goodness and kindness of their God.

Through worship, the Holy Spirit can penetrate our hearts with the love of God so that it becomes a reality we base our lives on. By the Spirit's power, we can encounter his goodness, mercy and grace so that our hearts are inclined toward him. Worship changes us and compels us to live differently because of what we experience together in the presence of God.

Reflect on what Psalm 95 tells us about worship and think about most church services that you attend. What principles taught by this Psalm are reflected there?

⁸ Ibid.

Day 4 | Worship together

We're talking this week about the importance of worshipping in a gathering as a spiritual practice. We are challenging ourselves to be able to answer questions about *why* it is important. In the modern world where you can download sermons and worship music to your computer or phone, why is it important to participate in a live worship gathering? Do you really need other people to "do church"?

While it's true that the Spirit of God moves powerfully through our individual time with God, corporate worship is still vital to our spiritual health. The analogy from Scripture of believers forming the body of Christ is a particularly potent one. It stresses our interconnectedness and dependence on one another.

Many of us aren't comfortable with that dependence, because we like to think of ourselves as strong, self-reliant and independent. But in reality, God created us to need others and to be needed by them. When we come together as a local expression of the worldwide body of Christ, we are acknowledging that truth.

This is a radical thought for many people. Because most of us come to church services for only what we might get out of them; very few come looking for how they can be a blessing to someone else. Yet this idea is thoroughly biblical. Consider the following verses from Ephesians:

Ephesians 5:18-20

¹⁸ Do not get drunk on wine, which leads to debauchery. Instead, be filled with the Spirit, ¹⁹ speaking to one another with psalms, hymns, and songs from the Spirit. Sing and make music from your heart to the Lord, ²⁰ always giving thanks to God the Father for everything, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.

According to verses 19 and 20, what should be some of the results of being filled by the Spirit?

Many of us have been taught verse 18 in isolation from the verses that follow. It's either been used to discourage the abuse of alcohol (which it does) or to encourage the filling of the Spirit (which it also does). But when you sever this verse from the ones around it, you miss the implication for how we worship together.

In these verses, Paul is teaching us how to relate to one another as believers. We know from Acts 2 that the early church often came together and shared a meal of which the Lord's Supper was a part. We know from 1 Corinthians 11 that some were getting drunk at these gatherings. Paul insists that we avoid debauchery and be filled with the Spirit. A result of that filling will be our ability to encourage one another in the Spirit with "psalms, hymns, and songs from the Spirit." Together we will praise and give "thanks to God the Father for everything, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ." When the Spirit is active in us, it will be active among us.

Hebrews provides us with further motivation to gather together for worship:

Hebrews 10:24-26.

24 And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds. 25 Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching.

What were some people giving up?

Literally the Greek word translated here as “give up” carries the idea of abandonment or forsaking (verse 25). Even in the early days of the faith, it was easy to get out of the habit of coming together for a worship gathering. It was an easy habit to lose then, and it is easy to lose now. But when that happens, we are not only prone to drift from God in our own lives, but we are no longer acting as an encouragement to our spiritual family. Our absence not only affects us, but others in the body as well.

The Greek word for “consider” is strong (verse 24). It means to “pay attention to, to look closely at.” We should pay attention to the ways we can encourage other members of the body of Christ. We should think about it beforehand. How can you be a blessing to someone else? Who might you encourage with a kind word or a prayer? Who needs kindness, reassurance, sympathy, or a hug?

We should also consider how we can “spur each other on” (verse 24). The word “to spur” comes from a Greek word that can mean to provoke. The emotion associated with this word is not necessarily pleasant, but sometimes we all need some “tough love.” We need to provoke each other to love and good deeds and challenge one another to grow to be more like Jesus.

Before we go to a worship gathering, we can pray and ask God to give us the privilege of encouraging someone else. Sometimes it’s as simple as being an active participant in worship. When we are singing with enthusiasm or paying close attention to the sermon, we are encouraging others to do the same. We can also volunteer to serve others during the service by greeting people when they walk in, helping guests find their way or caring for children in Promiseland so moms and dads can worship without distraction.

Let’s ask God to open our eyes to see someone who is new and in need of welcome, or someone who is hurting and in need of compassion. If there is a friend we usually see who is not there, we can give them a call during the week, check on them and tell them they were missed. The body of Christ is strengthened when we spur each other on and encourage one another in Christ.

What are some other ways you can think of to encourage others during a worship gathering?

Public worship gatherings can also serve as a witness to our community. When people filled with the Spirit gather together for worship, the Spirit is active among them. We want people to know that our gatherings are a place to explore truth and encounter the real God. In the New

Testament, Paul is excited about unbelievers coming to worship gatherings. Paul writes: If an unbeliever or someone who does not understand comes in . . . he will be convinced by all that he is a sinner . . . and the secrets of his heart will be laid bare. So he will fall down and worship God, exclaiming, 'God is really among you!'" (1 Corinthians 14:24-25.)

Invite your friends who do not know God to come to a worship gathering and experience hundreds of people worshiping God with all their hearts. Allow them to hear the Word and encounter the power of the Spirit. God may use a worship gathering to call them to himself.

There are so many reasons why our participation in a worship gathering matters. Let's not neglect the habit of worshiping together, but let's come together as the body of Christ to experience and share the love of Christ.

Day 5 | Reflect, Connect, Respond

Our challenge from the beginning of the week was to consider why worshiping in a gathering is a vital spiritual practice. How has your appreciation for the weekly worship gathering changed or deepened this week? Spend some time today reflecting on what you've learned and ask the Spirit to guide your response.

Reflect

Based on what we studied this week, why is "Worship in a Gathering" an important spiritual practice?

This is the last week of our Restart series. Can you name all four practices? Can you re-create the Christ Fellowship "X"?

Connect

Many years ago, I heard a pastor address those struggling with an addiction to pornography. He said bluntly, "Worship got you into this mess, and it will take worship to get you out." He didn't tell them to install filters on their computers or find an accountability partner — at least not as the first step. He told them they needed to commit to worshipping God.

While it may seem like strange advice to give someone dealing with such a destructive compulsion, his point was that at our core we are all worshipers in search of something on which to fix our love, place our trust and satisfy our desires. There are a multitude of sins we can and will commit if we are seeking peace, satisfaction and fulfillment in anything other than God.

Over 1600 years ago, Augustine said, "You have made us for yourself, O Lord, and our heart is restless until it rests in you." He could have easily been talking about the modern industrialized world where we are offered every imaginable pleasure, and promised fulfillment in things we can buy or earn. But ultimately, we find that nothing fills the emptiness of a soul disconnected from its loving Creator. Only being in a right relationship with God can make us whole. Central to our connection with him is worship, because worship bends our hearts toward God.

In worship, we demonstrate our allegiance to God, our hope in his promises and our gratitude for his mercy and salvation. Worship turns our affections toward God. As we experience his goodness, faithfulness and love and we are changed. "Worship is the arena in which God recalibrates our hearts, reforms our desires, and rehabilitates our loves. Worship isn't just

something we do; it is where God does something to us.”⁹

We’ve talked specifically this week about the importance of worshiping alongside other believers at a gathering, but each of the four practices encourages a life of worship. We can be engaged in acts of worship as we encounter God one on one, in a small group or as we seek to impact others. So, let’s commit to the four practices and experience the transforming love of God.

Respond

What is your next step?

How could what we learned about worshiping in a gathering impact the way you think about and engage in worship services?

Since this is the last week of Restart, consider how you doing with the four practices?

What can you do to keep on going or to get started with them? (For example, do you need to structure your time differently so you can prioritize the four practices? Or is there someone you could ask to support, encourage and pray for you as you try to engage in each practice? How can you help them in return?)

⁹ Smith, p. 77.