The Heart of Worship: Part 2

In what ways do we worship the Lord? Consider Romans 12. Paul begins this chapter by saying: “Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God’s mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God—this is your spiritual act of worship. Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God’s will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will” (1–2 NIV1984). What is involved in this renewing of your mind and knowledge of his good, pleasing and perfect will?

Love: Love must be sincere (Rom 12:9). At the heart of worship is love: Love God and love everything that God loves! Many Christians are in a like relationship with God, much as they are with others on Facebook (click here to “Like”). For them, Christianity is a matter of self-satisfaction and convenience. But God’s love is different. He calls us to earnestly seek the best for others, to think beyond self and relate to every other person in life in such a way that our contribution to their life helps them encounter God’s love for them and helps lead them to experience God’s best for their life. The more complete our submission is to the Lord, the more we will be able to love others in the way that Christ loves us. If Christ-followers would live out passages such as Romans 12:9–21; 1 Corinthians 12:4–7; and Philippians 2:5–11 (among many others), we would experience worship on a level far greater than we can experience on Sunday morning in our sanctuaries and the witness of our lives would lead more powerfully to the Christ of Scripture.

Praise: Do not think of yourself more highly… (Rom 12:3). It may seem odd to think of praise from this vantage point. And yet to truly praise the Lord involves an attitude of humble submission that allows us to exalt the Lord in true worship and praise. How much of our corporate worship is motivated by our personal preferences of musical style and how we respond emotionally to that style or content of the songs we sing? Would it be possible to worship God apart from the musical styles we prefer? Are we more moved by the majesty and glory and grace of God or by our emotional responses to the music we utilize in corporate worship? I have worshiped in Catholic monasteries; Episcopal, Baptist, Nazarene, and Assembly of God congregations; and many others. Were the styles and forms of worship different in each of those settings? Absolutely! Was I in theological agreement with each of those places? Certainly not! Was I able to worship God? Yes! And why was that? Because genuine worship is a matter of the heart, not the form of worship! When we get over ourselves and truly seek to honor the Lord, we will find that worship can occur almost anywhere at any time.

Service: Never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervor, serving the Lord (Rom 12:11). How do we serve the

(continued on page 2)
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Lord? We serve through obedience to his Word and to his will. If you love me, you will obey what I command (John 14:15). Loving service is what we offer our world as the Holy Spirit dwells in us and lives through us. The basin and towel (John 13) are the weapons of God’s transformational movement. It is time for the church to live the Word, not just read it. We are not first an institution; we are the body of Christ, and it is time that we live like it. We honor and lift up the Lord when we serve our world in Jesus’ name.

Stewardship of life: If it is possible, as far as it depends on you... (Rom 12:18). God has entrusted life to us to be lived for his honor and glory. He sent his only Son to set us free from the power of sin and his Holy Spirit to lead us in the experience of holiness and unity. We are stewards—caretakers—of this life. No one else can be the steward of my life; it is my task alone to submit to the lordship of Jesus Christ and to live this life in honor and glory to the Father. I can share the journey with you, but I can never relinquish my responsibility to the Lord for the content of my life. To live each moment in honor of the Lord is true worship. I worship God when I love him and others. I worship God when I serve in the power of the Holy Spirit. I worship when I raise my hands in praise in corporate worship and when I reach my hand to serve one in need in the name of the Lord. I worship him when I am so overwhelmed by his presence that my only response is silent awe. Whatever the nature of my response to the Lord, I want it to be an act of worship; that is the privilege and responsibility I have to live in response to the grace of God in offering me life created in divine image and redeemed through the sacrifice of Jesus my Lord.

I love the experience of coming together with God’s people to honor him. It has been at the center of my life’s experience and will continue to be so. But my understanding of worship is much larger than that time of corporate gathering. I am experiencing a much more meaningful relationship with my Lord that invades every part of my life. The deepening relationship that I have with the Lord transcends anything I have ever experienced in corporate gatherings. If you aren’t enjoying that experience of worship in your daily walk, please join me on the journey. It is a journey worth taking!

Unless otherwise noted, SHAPE articles are written by Paul Dreger. He has served the Church of God for thirty-eight years as pastor, area administrator in Tennessee, and currently national director of SHAPE (Sustaining Health and Pastoral Excellence).

Trust

I learned self-reliance at an early age. Several key events led me to believe, perhaps more unconsciously than consciously at first, that if I was going to make it in life, I would have no one to depend upon but myself. Later experiences confirmed consciously that people could not be trusted and that I had no one but myself to really depend upon.

But I was dealing with another issue as well, and I didn’t really understand how it connected with my self-reliance and inability to trust others. That issue was my need to perform perfectly and my expectation that the world around me should function accordingly. The dilemma was that I was not perfect and this burden of perfectionism was a constant source of condemnation. It is difficult to trust others when you cannot trust yourself. I lived within a constant undercurrent of fear that I would never be good enough to succeed. You perhaps can imagine that other people then became competitors and my life was filled with comparison, condemning of others (only internally, of course), and usually coming to the conclusion that I had been treated unfairly or that I could never live up to the expectations that others had of me or the unrealistic expectations I had placed upon myself. Yet in spite of all that, ultimately, self-condemnation was the end result of my struggles.

So what does all this have to do with trust? More than we might imagine! While we can quote Proverbs 3:5–6 and profess our trust in God, we may not realize that this trusting God with our “whole heart” affects our relationship with self and others as well. We will find it very difficult to trust others if we have not discovered the healing touch of God upon our own life and come to peace with who we are as beings created in divine image for the purpose of living in intimacy with God as his beloved.

What are some steps we can take to build trusting relationships? First, identify the issues within that cause you to doubt yourself. What past hurts, present burdens, or future fears keep you from peace and contentment? What is keeping you from trusting...
Here and There: SHAPE Happenings Across North America

Paul met with Regional Pastor Eric Livingston and Pastor Johnny Creasong at the state office near Decatur, Illinois, for initial planning for the training of leaders and launch of SHAPE in Illinois on February 11. Training of leaders for cohort 1 will begin April 7–8 at Camp Warren.

Oklahoma Cohort 3 Orientation Retreat took place March 20–21 in Sapulpa, Oklahoma. Leaders and participants in cohort 3 are Tim Busch, Danny Workman, Jon Ewers, Gary Underwood, William Wimmer, Jeremy Coolley, Ron Jackson, Kevin Clouse, David Treloar, Chris Shaffer, Joe Thompson, and Justin Brown.

Cohort 2 orientation for SHAPE in western Pennsylvania was held March 24–26 at the state office in Emlenton. Present were John Milliron, Sharon Goodwin, Amy Worline, Greg Smith, Barry Markle, Tim Coppess, Christy Pittman, Kyle Yates, and R. J. Hesketh. Regional Pastor Rebecca New-Edson and Paul led this retreat.

Cluster leader training continued in Louisiana, April 3–4, for cohort 3, which will be launched later this year.

(continued from page 2)

God completely? Deal with that and the path to learning to trust others will become more clear.

Next, take a genuine interest in others. Self-indulgence is one of the greatest obstacles to developing trusting relationships. Get to know others. Care about what makes them: their history, their relationships, their likes and dislikes, their joy and sorrows, their hopes and dreams.

Be willing to risk. Love and trust are risky endeavors. Be willing to risk sharing your life’s story with others. Be transparent. Be humble. The reason this willingness to risk does not come before the previous step is because it is very easy to be self-absorbed and project a spirit of arrogance if all we ever do is tell our story. Trusting relationships are give-and-receive relationships. Both must be done with grace.

Serve others in love. Be faithful; be trustworthy! Maintain confidences; don’t gossip! Building trusting relationships takes time; be patient! Make a commitment to journey through life building trusting relationships with a growing circle of like-minded people.

There is much more that can surely be said. But these steps set us on the right path and help us enlarge our circle of trust. How large can that circle be? Larger than it is now! But enlarging your circle depends first on you.

How large can your circle of safe, trusting, encouraging, growing relationships be?
When in a small group, as a SHAPE cluster is, it is often easy to get sidetracked by an event that someone shares. Our inherent drive, as pastors, to fix things will cause us to lose focus of a moment that is ripe for learning for the whole group. When we zero in on an event or issue, we actually lose sight of the process that may have contributed to the event and the ensuing results. The goal is always to help the person recognize the process—what is going on—and what, if anything, the person may be doing to contribute to the angst. At the very least, the person may be able to recognize the pattern, should it reoccur.

The following guidelines may help you, the facilitator, seize the moment and may help each person in the group get a broader understanding of the bigger picture—the relationship, the challenge, and the potential—that this event presents.

1. **Listen for the focus of a person’s sharing.** Often a person will repeat one word (e.g., hurt, afraid, thrilled, offended) when rehearsing an event that has taken place. Pay close attention to these repetitions. This is a clue to how the person is perceiving what is going on. You can then reflect upon the person’s word or phrase (e.g., “So this whole situation is making you afraid of something?” “Can you describe what you mean by afraid?”). This practice of reflection is known as active listening. Do not be surprised if the person does not remember saying that word, even if he has repeated it many times. It could be he is unaware of the reaction he is having to what has taken place.

2. **Do not assume you know how a person feels** (e.g., If she says, “I am pregnant,” she could be thrilled or she could be appalled). Ask the easy question, wording it in an open way, inviting further reflection from the person (e.g., “Is that a good thing?” “How do you feel about being pregnant?” “I don’t want to assume how you are feeling just now. Could you tell me a little more?”).

3. **Allow space and silence.** Every moment does not have to be filled with words. This may be the biggest mistake we make. We want so badly to allay any awkwardness that we will jump in and say something—anything—to cover the silence. Allow discomfort. Do not swoop in to save the situation. It may need some awkwardness. Give time for silent thought. This also helps the SHAPE cluster members know that you don’t have all the answers either. Let the comment drop into the space and leave it there before interrupting the moment.

4. **Encourage everyone to let the person sharing have that experience alone.** It is not necessary to connect her experience to a similar one you have had. This is a familiar challenge, for many of us in pastoral ministry have similar situations. Remind your group each time that the person’s story is hers only. It may be helpful to set a guideline with your cluster that they may only ask exploratory questions when someone is sharing. Then gently but firmly remind them, “This is Susan’s time. Let’s let her tell us how this circumstance has affected her.” Even if she is asking for advice, start first by getting her to explore possible options (e.g., “What have you tried?” “Now that you look back on this, what could you have done differently?” “What do you feel is going on in this circumstance?”).

5. **Do not try to fix a person or a situation!** Listen carefully to him. Empathize with him. We are all unique in our personalities, our address of challenges, and our perspectives of circumstances. Though you may hurt when your friend hurts, your solution is not another person’s, for he is not you and you are not he.