

Jack Hayford, a pastor, author, and writer of the song “Majesty”, penned these words in the very first lines of his book, “Worship His Majesty” -

“I propose we drive a nail in the altar. Or the pulpit. Or the Communion table. Or the organ bench...or pipes. Or the Choirmaster’s music stand. Or any place visible and significantly shocking to provide a counterpart to the ancient door at Wittenberg. When Martin Luther nailed his Ninety-five Theses to the university entryway, the sparks from his hammer ignited the Reformation. Nearly a half-millennium ago, the church was shaken to its roots – dragged by the nape of its neck to confront the reality of God’s Word, and forced to face the fact that its forms had chained its people rather than freed them. We’re overdue for another one.”

If we look honestly at the state of the church in Scotland we’ll see a lot of denominations with a number of congregations in different towns and cities; a few large congregations but mostly smaller ones; a few with bands but most with organists; a few doing well financially but most struggling. Is it not time we had another reformation? The problem is that reformation is painful, it involves us questioning everything we do, discarding those things that haven’t worked for years except for the ‘already redeemed’ and doing whatever God calls us to do.

It would need to start with the question – what are you doing here? To enjoy the music, the preaching, the company? To catch up with friends? Because it’s what you always do? The time Christians spend together should be focussed on God – it’s worship that’s important. We do it in a variety of ways: by sacrificial giving; by praying or singing; by being open to God.....

This week is the first in a series on the church and if you’ve been coming here for a while you’ll know that there is a poem about the church that we’ve used to guide our thinking and our vision for the future. It starts off, ‘I dream of a worshipping church...’ and that’s where we start today.

“Worship does not satisfy our hunger for God—it whets our appetite. Our need for God is not taken care of by engaging in worship—it deepens. It overflows the hour and permeates the week.” -Eugene Peterson

This morning we are going to take a look at some non-negotiables of worship. These are things we should never forget in our worship times if we wish them to be pleasing in God’s sight. Let us pray that the Holy Spirit will speak to our hearts today as we uncover these non-negotiables of pleasing worship from our passage in Psalms.

Non-negotiable 1: Worship must be God centred

One of golf’s immortal moments came when a Scotsman demonstrated the new game to President Ulysses Grant. Carefully placing the ball on the tee, he took a mighty swing. The club hit the turf and scattered dirt all through the president’s beard while the ball placidly waited on the tee. Again the Scotsman swung, and again he missed.

Our president waited patiently through six tries and then quietly stated, “There seems to be a fair amount of exercise in this game, but I fail to see the purpose of the ball.”

In golf, the ball is the most important part of the game. After all, until it rolls in the hole, you cannot complete the hole. You can have the finest clubs, technique, clothes, and equipment, but if you do not have the ball, you cannot have a good golf game. The ball is the central focus of the game, and it is usually the most ignored piece of equipment.

In times of worship, we have a similar thing happening. We worry about what instruments we are to use. We wonder about the kind of songs we are going to sing. We become concerned about whether we follow the order of service. We let our thoughts become consumed with these things and we forget about the most important thing. We forget about God and that we are to be doing all of this for Him.

We are to have the King of Kings and Lord of Lords here every Sunday, and yet we make no special preparations. We do not tell our friends and family that we are going to meet with the Almighty. Why is this? It is usually because we have settled for mediocrity in our worship times, and so, there is nothing to tell others about.

We need to remember that we’re not here to ‘get something’ from the service – if we do that’s great – but we’re actually here to give our time, our thoughts, our talents, our money, ourselves to God. Hebrews 12:2 *Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith.* If you’ve ever had to speak to a teenager while they’re watching tv you’ll know how hard it is to get their attention. Their thoughts and minds are so consumed that nothing else matters.

We are told that it is, “fitting for the upright to praise Him.” In order for our words and deeds to be pleasing to the Lord, we must make sure that there is nothing keeping us from being upright or righteous. We must make sure that we cleanse ourselves from all sin so that we can go before His throne. In the morning before you get here, all you need to do is say a simple prayer. Something like, “God, I want to give you glory and praise today, so please take away anything that will hinder that,” should suffice. We need to prepare our hearts for worship by asking the Lord to cleanse us and to work in our hearts because worship does not happen on its own.

This is how we are to be when we come before God in worship. We need to fix our eyes on Him and nothing else. We are to be so consumed by the presence of God that everything else fades away. That is what it means to have God in the center of our worship, but many times it is not the case. We focus our attention of the new person in the back and wonder who it may be. We become concerned with what so and so is wearing. We think about what we are going to have for lunch when church is over. None of these thoughts seems like grave sins, but the devil places them before us to keep us from experiencing true, powerful worship. They keep our eyes off Jesus, and that diminishes the effectiveness of our praises. In a time of worship, we must make

every effort possible to put aside all other thoughts and focus our entire beings on God. God must be at the centre of our worship or He will not be here at all.

Non-negotiable 2: Worship Must Be Passionate

How many of you know what an oxymoron is? Basically, an oxymoron is when you put two words together that self-contradicts each other. In fact, the word oxymoron is an oxymoron. It comes from the words “oxus” which means sharp, and “moros” which means dull. Here are some oxymorons that I have found.

- Jumbo shrimp
- Freezer burn
- Plastic silverware
- Cafeteria food
- Professional wrestling

I have even found some in the church.

- Brief committee meeting
- Pastor’s day off
- Contemporary hymnal
- Quiet toddlers
- Emotionless worship

There is no such thing as emotionless worship because if there is not passion in it, it is not really worship. If you look at our passage, the phrases “sing joyfully” and “shout for joy” resonate in it. It is telling us to put some oomph into it. We need to act like we really want to be here with God, and we need to show that we really do mean the words that are coming out of our mouths in worship.

I love reading old accounts of church history. You read about services where the singing was so loud that people would come in off the streets to see what was going on. You read about “Amens, Hallelujahs, and Praise the Lords” ringing through the congregation as the pastor spoke. These Christians were passionate about their worship in church. I also love the beginning of chapter 19 in Revelations. “After this I heard what sounded like the roar of a great multitude in heaven shouting, “Hallelujah! Salvation and glory and power belong to our God.” These people were excited about praise! Their worship is described using the words roar and shout. They were having a grand old time, and they were not afraid to be passionate toward their God. They showed passion, and passion leads to our next non-negotiable.

Non-negotiable 3: Worship Must Have An Aspect of Celebration

A little boy once asked his mother if she could remember the highest number she had ever counted to. The mother did not know, so she asked him what his highest number was. He answered, “5,372”. The mother was puzzled and asked him why he stopped at that particular one. The boy responded, “Well, church was over.”

I don’t know what kind of church these people went too, but if he had time to count that high, I doubt that there was any celebrating going on there. Every Sunday, we should be celebrating the victory that we have in Jesus. He conquered death. He has given us free salvation. We are going to inherit a mansion on a hilltop. We have so

much to celebrate, and yet we often just go about business as usual. To the typical non-Christian that visits a church, the services seem more like a funeral than a celebration, and no one wants to come to a funeral every Sunday. It's time we start partying and show some joy like we are told in our Scripture.

Psalm 9:1-2 goes on to clarify this further. "I will praise You, oh Lord, with all of my heart; I will tell of all Your wonders. I will be glad and rejoice in You; I will sing praises to Your Name, O Most High." Again, in chapter 95 we are told to celebrate and be joyous. "Come let us sing for joy to the Lord; let us shout aloud to the Rock of our salvation. Let us come before Him with thanksgiving and extol Him with music and song." The bottom line is that we have to wake up and have a bit of a fiesta. A boring service is an offense to God. He requires the opposite. When we draw near to God in our personal lives, we can't help but celebrate when we think of all He has done for us. We need to pray prayers like, "Shake me up," and "Shock me Jesus" so that we will have enthusiasm, fire, and power in our worship times.

Non-negotiable 4: Worship Must Be Done With Reverence

Our passage tells us, "Let all the earth fear the Lord; let all the people of the world revere Him." We must hold the Lord in high regard when we sing, pray, and worship. Now, you may be saying to yourself, "Wait a second. Isn't the pastor contradicting himself? He just told us to celebrate, and now he is telling us to be reverent." The reason this sounds like a contradiction is because we have a false definition of what reverence is. Contrary to popular belief, reverence does not mean silent or slow. It does not necessarily mean that we need to be solemn. Pastor Jack Hayford even states, "There is nothing reverent about slow." Reverence simply means to be respectful in our worship and to be mindful of the awesomeness of God. It means that we give our utmost attention to what God is doing through the pastor or worship leader. It means that we focus our thoughts upon Him. We lay ourselves down before the Lord so that He can be lifted up. We put all other cares aside and we worship with Holy fear and awe.

Non-Negotiable 5: Worship Will Be Diverse

I am just going to touch on this briefly since my time is going quickly, but that does not take away from the fact that diversity in worship is essential. We are told in our passage to, "Sing to the Lord a new song." We just need to mix things up with our song selection, because every person has a different song that makes it easy for them to worship. The passage also goes on to list the different instruments that were used to praise Him. This allows everyone, no matter what talent they have musically, to become involved. It also tells us different ways to praise God. We can shout or sing. We may dance or fall to our knees. No one way is better than the other.

God loves diversity. If he didn't, he would have made us all the same. Since we are all unique, we must allow each other to be different in our worship styles. Just because someone worships God in a way that is different than we are used to, we must not condemn them. We must allow them to express their gratitude to God in a way they are comfortable with. All of us have a unique way of worshipping, and every one of these ways is beautiful in the eyes of the Lord.

Non-negotiable 6: Worship is not just for church

Tony Evans says, “If you limit worship to where you are, the minute you leave that place of worship you will leave your attitude of worship behind like a crumpled-up church bulletin.”