

## The Way We Worship

### Week 5

Life has a rhythm to it. There's the rhythm of the seasons; there's the rhythm of the tides; there's the rhythm of work and rest, etc. And since life IS worship (or worship IS life...or what we're seeking is a life OF worship)...we can rightly expect worship to have a rhythm to it as well.

There's the rhythm of personal/private/individual worship and communal/corporate worship. There's the rhythm of quiet, contemplative worship and exuberant, energetic worship. There's the rhythm of planned, structured worship and spontaneous, extemporaneous worship. There's the rhythm of fasting and feasting. The rhythm of worship typically tracks with the rhythm of life.

And over the course of life, adjustments to our rhythms need to be made. This requires discernment and recognizing our time, season/stage of life, and our limits.

The wisdom and poetry of Ecclesiastes puts it this way...

*There is a time for everything,  
and a season for every activity under the heavens:*

*a time to be born and a time to die,  
a time to plant and a time to uproot,  
a time to kill and a time to heal,  
a time to tear down and a time to build,  
a time to weep and a time to laugh,  
a time to mourn and a time to dance,  
a time to scatter stones and a time to gather them,  
a time to embrace and a time to refrain from embracing,  
a time to search and a time to give up,  
a time to keep and a time to throw away,  
a time to tear and a time to mend,  
a time to be silent and a time to speak,  
a time to love and a time to hate,  
a time for war and a time for peace.*

*(Ecclesiastes 3:1-8)*

(Quick point of clarification...the wisdom and poetry books of the Bible are not typically what we build doctrine on. So take "a time to kill...a time for hate...a time for war..." with a grain of salt. But this is a rabbit trail for another time...)

The important thing to remember is that God is always present and active. So, whatever time or season we find ourselves in (a time of challenge or a time of ease; a time of health or a time of illness; a time of plenty or a time of scarcity; a time of celebration or a time of commiseration;

etc.) God is there and God is at work. Our goal, in worship/life, is to acknowledge God, be attentive to God, be awake and alert to God, and to avail ourselves to God. Or to say it another way, we simply want to recognize and respond to the God who IS. This is the reality we want to build our lives around. This is how we have a God-oriented life instead of a Self-oriented life.

- *If you had to give a title/name to the chapter/season of life you're currently in, what would you title it?*
- *What do you do (what practices, exercises, habits do you employ) in order to be mindful of God?*

Now let's get real nitty-gritty. Here's a little exercise for us. Think through the flow of a typical day and week for you, in all the minute details (even the little details like brushing your teeth, making the bed, preparing meals, commuting, taking the dog for a walk...all the details). Just for fun, maybe get out a piece of paper and write it all down.

- *As you consider the flow/rhythm of your day and week, what details do you impose upon yourself, and which are imposed upon you? Which are welcomed, and which are resisted (or perhaps resented)? Which are easy to be grateful for and which are more challenging to be grateful for?*

Now, again, here's what we want to remember...God is present during all the minutia...all the little nooks and crannies of life...God is there. In Tish Harrison Warren's marvelous little book, *Liturgy of the Ordinary*, she offers perspective on how we can be mindful of God in/through all the incidentals of life, and thereby imbuing all the seemingly trivial aspects of life with holiness. This is worship. This is transformative.

(And just to see who's paying attention and actually reading this...if you don't have a copy of *Liturgy of the Ordinary* and would like one, I've got several...just contact me and I'll be happy to give you one.)

Another way of looking at it, or another way to say all this, everything in life—the good, the bad, the ups, the downs, the big things, the little things—ALL of it, is an opportunity to worship...because God is present in ALL of it. The challenge is that we are easily distracted, easily take the Omnipresent for granted, we're easily forgetful and unfocused, etc. This is where/why learning to create rhythms/habits that help us to be alert and attentive to our ever-present, ever-loving God is so important.

- *As you consider the rhythm of your typical day or week, how much active time versus passive (down) time do you experience? Through the rhythm of your day/week, when are you more aware of God's Presence, and when do you tend to lose track of Him?*
- *What invitation might you be experiencing to "practice the presence of God"? In what detail of life might you use as a reminder of God's presence and goodness? How might you insert worship into the flow of everyday life?*

We've talked a lot about "rhythms" this year (we started the year with Ruth Haley Barton's *Sacred Rhythms*), we've become familiar with the language of spiritual exercises/practices/habits with James Bryan Smith's books (The Good & Beautiful series) back in 2022. Let me throw another term your way to offer even more perspective around this stuff...the word "Constraints".

(Full disclosure, I'm indebted to the work of Jared Patrick Boyd and his book *Finding Freedom in Constraint: Reimagining Spiritual Disciplines as a Communal Way of Life* for this perspective. And what is it with people with 3 names?)

Please allow me to share a little from that book...

*"The only way to freedom is through the experience of our belovedness, our unique 'being loved by' God. The only way we can experience the love of God is in humility. And we have humility when we have need, are willing to admit that we have need, and receive the help and love of God. Sometimes the love of God comes to us directly. But much of the time it comes to us through others.*

*Humility is necessary. But humility is something that we have to learn. And we learn humility through the experience of constraint.*

*There are two types of constraints—those we have chosen and those we have not chosen. We choose some constraints in our lives and we consent to other constraints that we have not chosen as practices of training our lives toward humility, so that we might be able to see the help of God in our weakness."*

Did you catch that? There are some constraints (or limitations if you prefer) that we chose, and there are some we consent to. The argument he develops in the book (rather convincingly, I might add) is that, paradoxically, freedom comes through constraint. (The incorrect assumption most people believe is that freedom is the absence of constraint.) For example, I wake up at a specific time every morning so that I can exercise before work. I try to eat healthy, and go to bed early enough to get enough sleep. These are chosen constraints, and the "freedom" I'm hoping to gain is health. Or to say it another way, I'm choosing certain limitations, in the hopes of staving off unwanted limitations that come from being unhealthy. Really, most "disciplines" are chosen constraints we do because they are good for us.

Now, all of us were born with certain constraints that we had no control or choice over (where we were born geographically and culturally; the family into which we were born and all that came with that; our race and sex; etc.) Certain limitations came "built in" as it were. While we didn't choose them, we can/do choose how we respond to them. Learning to embrace them, as challenging as they can be sometimes, are constraints we consent to.

- *What is your initial response to the idea of constraints? Do you sense more invitation or resistance?*

A major part of the Christian life is being healed: realizing that we need to be healed, allowing/trusting God to heal us. We are all in need of healing. And healing is something we consent to. We can't do it ourselves. What do we need to be healed from? Primarily, unhealed passions and disordered desires. To be clear, passions and desires are not bad. In fact they can be quite good, so long as they are healed and properly ordered. This is where God comes in, and where constraints (chosen ones, and ones we consent to) come in.

Choosing constraints with the goal of growing closer to God, of growing in love, devotion, loyalty, allegiance, attentiveness, etc., is worship. Consenting to God's healing is also worship. The spiritual life, or the God-oriented life, is one of embracing constraints.

Incidentally, and just to riff on the importance of constraints, relationships—marriages, families, friendships, communities, churches, societies—require constraints if they are to work. When we see breakdowns in relationships, it's often due to an unwillingness to accept constraints. We are living in a time when the very notion of constraint is laughable, and we're experiencing the ill-effects of it. Healthy constraints are something worthy of discernment and conversation, which is why I'm bringing it up.

Just to be clear, not all constraints should be consented to. One obvious example is abuse. Sadly, many people stay in abusive relationships, or are coerced/manipulated into staying in abusive relationships, for supposedly "spiritual"/"religious" reasons. This is NOT the type of constraints we're talking about here.

- *What are some of your chosen constraints? What are some constraints you've consented to?*
- *What constraints or rhythms do you think God might be inviting you into?*
- *As you consider the relationships in your life, what constraints naturally come with them? Describe your experience of those constraints.*

Humans are relational creatures. So as should be expected, relationships are the context for our formation/transformation. The passages chosen for Lectio Divina this week highlight the worship, the rhythms and practices, of the early Church. As you engage in Lectio Divina this week, try to consider them through the lens of constraint.

## Soul Training Exercise ~ Lectio Divina ~ Acts 2:42-47, 4:32-35

*Latin for Divine Reading. The desire is to encounter and surrender to the Living God by attending to Scripture. Lectio requires a humble, listening posture that is alert to the voice of God in Scripture.*

### Lectio

First read the text (lectio). You give it a slow, focused and naive reading of the passage.

### Meditatio

Then re-read the same passage paying attention to what word or phrase stands out.

### Oratio

Third, offer a simple prayer in response to God.

### Contemplatio

After prayer, the text is read for the third time with the focus on listening for the Voice of God (contemplatio). This is a gift of grace and cannot be forced. Here is where you are hoping to interact with God, listening for His voice. You can ask the question, "*Lord, what do you want to do inside me?*"

### Actio

Finally consider your response to God's Word and grace (actio). How can you make your life a gift to others in response to the Word?