

Worship is great. For my family and myself, it is the highlight of our week. The time in prayer and singing and study and fellowship – it's the best. It is a privilege to start every week for the rest of our lives with God's people, proclaiming the worthiness of God – with a mid-week pick-me-up.

Worship is an awesomely productive tool throughout the New Testament:

Acts 2:46-47 – They worshipped, then spent time together, and the church grew.

Acts 4:23-24 – When under fire, disciples sang and prayed together and found boldness.

I Cor. 14:26 – Described order in worship, but for the betterment of edification!

Hebrews 10:22-25 – We wouldn't miss it since we draw to God together and encourage.

Worship has the potential to change your life, strengthen relationships, enthuse you in your walk, and make every single week begin with spiritual focus, faith and direction. So, this is probably why churches of all ilk put pretty heavy emphasis on worship.

- *We do. Bible-based churches are always talking about worship and the need to be there. Sunday morning, evening and even Wednesday – come to worship. We would tag it as the central key to your growth – and in terms of evangelism – getting people in the door for worship is huge.*
- *Denominations do. The church across the street is talking about worship, hiring the best preacher they can get, offering different types of worship services to draw folks.*
- *New Age Churches definitely do. There is a huge emphasis on the “worship experience” by Grace churches, fellowship churches, cowboy churches – every modern effect to get people to come.*

At this point, I'm not disparaging them, I'm saying – we all want people to come to worship!

Question: With all this nationwide emphasis on Worship: **Why isn't Worship Working?**

You might say, “well what do you mean?” I mean, look around – divorce, pornography, adultery, greed, worldliness, violence, meanness, hate... we aren't seeing those things move in the right direction. And more than that, on a national scale, we aren't seeing good trends with “Christians” either.

Here are a few results from a December 2016 Gallup Poll (they've been asking these same three questions since 1936, but I'll just show you the results from the last 20 years.

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| Do you identify as Christian: | 85% (1996) | 80% (2006) | 75% (2016) |
| Are you a member of a Church: | 65% | 60% | 55% |
| Worshipped in the past Week: | 45% | 40% | 35% |

So wait, in the internet age, when we can share sermons, broadcast events, get the word out about worship all over the Country – we are not only seeing moral standards decline, but a 10% decline over 20 years in 1) people who believe in Jesus 2) Christian church members 3) Church goers. Wow.

Okay, if we can identify what is going wrong with worship in our time, and we can do everything in our power to make worship as God intended it... two things happen: 1) this church and our worship becomes a function of God's plan and will work for people! 2) we can begin to help our discouraged friends of all different church backgrounds reevaluate the way they approach worship of God.

Here's the kicker. I have three things to show you about when worship goes wrong. And they are as old as the hills. In fact, this trend we see in our Country is nothing new at all. These same worship mistakes were being made by Israel and Judah centuries ago. The exact same things! So here's the good news, we can go back and look at that, and see it, and do better, and avoid their pitfalls.

When Worship Isn't Working... It Is Because...

1) It has Forgotten its Purpose

- a. **John 4:24** – “Worship HIM in spirit and in truth” – Worship is the act of magnifying and honoring the name of God. We don't worship, we Worship Him!
- b. So the spirit we bring to it is the attitude that Honors Him. And the truth we bring to it is His Truth, His will, because they Honor Him.
- c. For so many, worship has become about... US. It is done like we like it, in a way that entices our spirit, aligns with our truths, and tickles our ears. When worship becomes about what we get, instead of what we GIVE, it won't work. (*Music we like, stories we like, feelings we want*)
- d. **I Kings 12:27-33** – Jeroboam had an idea – if I alter worship to make it about THE PEOPLE, what fits them, then they will stay (more people at church). So he devises ideas that did not consider God but catered to Man. And the people came! But it was sin. This became the

beginning of the end for a nation that soon after introduced idolatry, increased in immorality and greed and yes, lost steam in worship.

- e. Once worship isn't about what Pleases God anymore, and becomes about what pleases us – we realize that people are impossible to please, and you can't please everyone. So people leave for churches that please them more. And they divide to build worship that will please more people. And when they decide they are more pleased at home...
- f. Why are we always talking about authority in worship? No Instruments over Instruments? Lord's Supper over no Lord's Supper? Men Leadership over women? What's the deal with that? **Matthew 28:18-20** – He is the King. We worship Him. This is about what pleases Him and His Father. And that's why we do things as He revealed.
- g. This... Works... because it teaches us to make our faith about God and not ourselves. And then we can live lives about God and not ourselves. Mis-purposed worship leads to mis-purposed lives. And fortunately the opposite is also true.

2) It has become Peripheral

- a. You might say, "Okay Kris, then why do we often see declining attendance and involvement in sound churches? The Truth is here. Why aren't more people?" Good question: the answer is as old as Israel -- when worship, even God-focused worship, becomes peripheral – a side thing – not prioritized, it stops working.
- b. In **Acts 2:42** – they were "continually devoting themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer." This became the center of their lives: Jesus as their King and fellowship with His people! Others were drawn to this community.
- c. When worship becomes peripheral, less important than our education, careers, recreation, families and ourselves, it doesn't WORK LESS WELL... it STOPS WORKING! Why?
- d. **Malachi 1:6-8,13-14** – They offered from excess and they did so wearily, already exhausted from having expended their best energy on the things that "really matter." God said: "shut the gate." **V10**. You see, when worship isn't an appendage to our week, though it be the time we proclaim the worthiness of God in full truth, that means God's glory is less important, and God reacts. Don't forget about Him. This is about our offering to Him. And once He refuses to accept our peripheral activities, we falter in blessings and faith.
- e. And so it hangs on for a while, but not long. Because it isn't helping. It can't. And God won't.
- f. So, Make Worship Nonnegotiable. Give God off the top, the best, first, "so that He Himself will come to have first place in everything!" Col. 1:18. Like the Dave Ramsey budget: God at the top.

3) It has substituted for Purity

- a. Russ Bowman spoke of this in Jacksonville last week and really inspired me for this entire study. He spoke of 70% of people identifying as Christians, but does that mean all the ongoing sin in the world is by the 30%. No. 35% went to church last Sunday, so no worries about road rage from one of three cars right? No. Look, sin is a battle for us all, but when worship stops working, it's because it becomes a token weekly activity to cover for an otherwise undisciplined life.
- b. For so many, worship, usually once per week, is a box check, just so I can tell people I'm a Christian and I am good with God and going to heaven. But many of those same people continue ungodly and unholy lives otherwise, and think that somehow that is okay.
- c. **Micah 6:2** – God is very upset with Israel. **6:6-7** – Solution: more worship! We'll give more, offer more, go more, do more. We'll even offer our first born. That's extreme. God says: **6:8** – I want you to actually live holy lives! The worship is good, but only if it promotes and leads to holy lives. You can't worship as a replacement for being holy people, no matter how much!
- d. I think try this for a while – go to church to overcome the guilt of not being godly. Then maybe they see through their own foolishness and make a choice: often that choice is the world.
- e. Two major realizations in my life. 1) When I realized that I came to worship to OFFER to GOD and that this is about GLORIFYING GOD. 2) When I realized that what I'm learning here FROM GOD, even as I worship God, is about equipping me to GO OUT THERE and GLORIFY GOD!

Conclusion: WORSHIP WORKS. You show me someone who worships FOR GOD in GOD'S revealed WAY – Someone who makes worship NON-NEGOTIABLE and puts it in the CENTER of their life. Someone who uses it to LEARN and GROW and GET STRONGER and MAKE OTHERS STRONGER – and I'll show you a Christian.