

SESSION THREE [Abbreviated Outline and Notes] Roadmap: Part One: Communion with God Through His Read Word in the Corporate Setting. Four primary teaching areas: Listening To The Voice of God through the (1) Preparation of Yourself Before Entering Worship (1) Scripture Reading; (2) Call to Worship; and (3) Benediction. Part Two: Communion with God Through The Sung Word in the Corporate Setting. Part Three: Communion with God Through The Preached Word in the Corporate Setting.

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**\*SO...**let's shift our thoughts from an Individual Setting with the Word to a Corporate Worship Setting.

I want to turn your hearts and minds to listening to the Voice of God through the Read Word (Scripture Reading, Call To Worship and Benediction), followed by the Sung Word and Preached Word.



**Introduction.** No experience on earth should delight the soul of the believer more than coming to worship on the Lord's Day. It is the high point of our week and establishes the rhythm of our lives. As believers we live life from Lord's Day to Lord's Day. We dare not **"neglect meeting together, as is the habit of some"** (Heb.10:25). Therefore, as we approach corporate worship, we must seek to do so with purpose. We should not intentionally attend it casually. If there is one thing consistently observable in the Scriptures, it is surely the reality that meeting with a holy God is anything but casual.

When men and women come into God's presence, they know it. Moses takes off his shoes (EX.3), Israel is struck with fear (EX.20), Isaiah quakes (Isa.6), Job silences his lips (Job 40), John falls down as though dead (Rev.1). Even the elders and angels who are worshipping day in and day out before the throne aren't casual in their worship (Isa.6; Rev.4). Casual worship of the living, true, holy, sovereign God just doesn't exist. There is a seriousness that must mark it, a solemnity and honor that must attend it, a gravity that must saturate it.

**"WORSHIP THE LORD WITH REVERENCE AND REJOICE WITH TREMBLING." (PSALM 2:11)**

**\*PREPARATION TO ENTER GOD'S HOUSE TO HEAR HIS WORD** [Excerpt From *The Beauty and Glory of the Word of God* by Joel R. Beeke]

**\*First, before coming to God's house to hear His Word, prepare yourself and your family with prayer.**

As the Puritans were fond of saying, we should dress our bodies for worship and adorn our souls with prayer. Pray for the conversion of sinners, the edification of saints, and the glorification of God's triune name. Pray for ears to hear and hearts to understand. Pray for yourself and your family, saying: "Lord,

how real the danger is that we will not hear Thy Word as we should! Of the four kinds of hearers in the parable of the sower, only one kind heard properly. Focus our minds, Lord, to concentrate fully on Thy Word as it comes to us so that we may not hear the Word and yet perish. Give us faith to hear and profit from it. Let Thy Word have free course in our hearts. Let it be accompanied with light, power, and grace. Pray that your minister will be empowered by the Holy Spirit to open his mouth boldly to make known the mysteries of the gospel (Eph. 6:19). Pray for an outpouring of the Spirit's life-giving, illuminating, and convicting power to work through God's ordinances in the fulfillment of His promises so your entire family is motivated for good (Prov. 1:23).

**\*Second, stress the need for every family member to come with a hearty appetite for the Word.**

A good appetite promotes good digestion and growth. Peter says, "As newborn babes, desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby" (1 Pet. 2:2). A good appetite for the Word means having a tender, teachable heart (2 Chron. 13:7) that asks, "Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?" (Acts 9:6). It is foolish to expect a blessing if we come to worship with unprepared, unbelieving, hardened hearts. [Thomas Watson, Puritan].

**\*Third, discipline yourself and encourage your children to meditate on the importance of the preached Word as you enter God's house.**

The high and holy triune God of heaven and earth is meeting with you and your family to speak directly to you. Thomas Boston wrote, "The voice is on earth, [but] the speaker is in heaven" (Acts 10:33). What an awe-inspiring thought! Since the gospel is the Word of God rather than the word of man, come to church looking for God. Teach your children that ministers are God's ambassadors who bring you the Word of God (2 Cor. 5:20; Heb. 13:7). James Manton wrote, "So much preparation there must be as will make the heart reverent. God will be served with a joy mixed with trembling."

**\*Furthermore, teach your children that on every Lord's Day they are offered spiritual food and supplies for the coming week. The Puritans called the Sabbath "the market day of the soul."** [James T. Dennison, Jr., The Market Day of the Soul: The Puritan Doctrine of the Sabbath in England]the Puritans went shopping for food each week, so we must stock up on spiritual goods for the week by listening to sermons, then meditating on them throughout the week to come. All of that must be reinforced with daily family worship and Christian living.

**\*Fourth, remind yourself and your family periodically that as they enter the house of God they are entering a battleground.**

Many enemies will oppose your listening. Internally, you may be distracted by worldly cares and employments, lusts of the flesh, a cold heart, or a critical spirit. Externally, you may be distracted by behavior or the dress of others, noises, or people moving about. Satan opposes your listening to God's Word, knowing that if you truly hear it, he will lose you. So, Satan tries to disturb you before the sermon begins, distracts you during the sermon, and tries to erase the sermon from your mind as soon as it is finished. Like a bird plucking away a newly sown seed, Satan attempts to snatch the Word from your mind and heart so that it cannot take root. Resist him by the power of Christ. [Richard Owen Roberts].

**\*Fifth, pray that you might come with a loving, expectant faith (Ps. 62:1, 5).**

Come pleading God's promise that His word will not return to Him void, that is, not having accomplished the purpose for which He sent it forth (Isa. 55:10-11). Pray that you and your family might be able to say with the psalmist in Psalm 119, "Thy word is very pure: therefore thy servant loveth it"

(v. 140), and to love God's testimonies "exceedingly" (v. 167), more than gold (v. 127), and to the point where they nearly consume you (v. 20). The psalmist's love for God's Word is so fervent that he would meditate upon it "all the day" (v. 97). In dependence on the Spirit, cultivate such love for the Word of God in yourself and in your children.

As the Holy Spirit blesses such preparations, we will find ourselves ready to receive the message God is giving us through the ministry of the Word

### \*ENSURING WE HAVE A COMMON UNDERSTANDING OF OUR WORSHIP STRUCTURE



So...let's turn our thoughts from an individual setting with the Word to a corporate worship setting. First let's answer two questions: (1) What does the New Testament say that churches should include when they gather in corporate worship? (2) What are our benefits?

### \*What does the New Testament say that churches should include when they gather in corporate worship?

Different theological traditions have structured worship differently, but in general the Reformed tradition seeks to worship only according to Scripture's commands. Essentially, this means that everything we do in worship should have some biblical warrant, though applying the Bible's guidance on worship is not always simple. We will not go far wrong, however, if we see worship primarily for God and not for ourselves. Our goal should be to approach Him with reverence and awe, not to create worship experiences geared to entertain or to amuse. Worship conducted decently and in order (1 Cor. 14:40), under the authority of called and qualified elders, that includes the sound teaching of Scripture, songs that explore the depth of our Creator and His attributes for His praise and glory, heartfelt prayer, and the right administration of baptism and the Lord's Supper is pleasing to God.

Based upon what is specifically prescribed in the New Testament, the Word includes five expressions in corporate worship. They are:

- ◆ **\*Reading the Bible with godly fear:** Paul told Timothy to "devote yourself to the public reading of Scripture" (1 Tim. 4:13). Churches should read Scripture, out loud, in their gatherings.
- ◆ **\*Preaching the Bible: Sound preaching, and conscionable hearing of the Word, in obedience unto God with understanding, faith and reverence.** Paul told Timothy, "Preach the word" (2 Tim. 4:2). Paul himself declared "the whole counsel of God" to the church in Ephesus (Acts 20:27).
- ◆ **\*Praying the Bible:** Paul urges that prayers be made in the gathered church (1 Tim. 2:8, 3:14-15). The content of these prayers should be biblical in order to edify all present (1 Cor. 14:12, 26). They should be biblically rich.
- ◆ **\*Singing the Bible with grace in the heart:** Paul told the church in Colossae, "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly... singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God" (Col. 3:16). This doesn't mean that churches should sing only Psalms or only the words of the Bible, but it does mean that churches should sing songs that are saturated in the language and theology of the Bible.

- ◆ **\*Seeing the Bible:** We say “see the Bible” because the ordinances of baptism and the Lord’s Supper are, to use Augustine’s phrase, “visible words.” In baptism and the Lord’s Supper we see, smell, touch, and taste the Word. Christian churches should celebrate baptism and the Lord’s Supper during their gathered, public services (1 Cor. 11:17-34).



\*With this knowledge in hand, I think we could benefit from hearing John Owen’s stern but needed warning, “To make a pretense of coming unto God, and not with expectation of receiving good and great things from him, is to despise God himself . . . and deprive our own souls of all benefit thereby.” “The word we hear — not only in the sermon but in the songs, prayers, and Supper — is filled with “good and great things,” even with “all that our souls do stand in need of,” Owen goes on to write. So, if you would both honor God and serve your own soul, go to the gathering as a mother might go to a weekly market: eager, prepared, and expecting to bring something good home.”

### LISTENING TO THE VOICE OF GOD THROUGH THE READ WORD IN CORPORATE WORSHIP

\*There is nothing more important in worship than the reading of the Scriptures, God’s holy, inspired, inerrant, authoritative Word. In 1 Timothy 4:13, Paul says to Timothy: “Until I come, give attention to the public reading of Scripture, to preaching and teaching” So, for Paul, reading the Word aloud when the congregation gathers is just as important as the sermon. And this idea does not originate with Paul. It is rooted in the whole history of the people of God, beginning in the days of Moses.

\*Rooted In The Whole History Of The People Of God, Beginning In The Days Of Moses.

#### PUBLIC SCRIPTURE READING IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

\*The first place that we find the public reading of Scripture in the Bible is at the foot of Mount Sinai in Exodus 24. This is also arguably the first place that the corporate public worship of God is fully described in the Bible. Thus, it is not insignificant that it was in this key context, after the Israelites had been rescued from slavery in Egypt, that Moses “took the Book of the Covenant and read it in the hearing of the people” (Ex. 24:7).

Following this formative moment at the foot of Mount Sinai, where God established His covenant with Israel, we find numerous other places where this practice also appears. In Deuteronomy 31, the Lord commands the Israelites through Moses to read the entire law at the end of every seven years “before all Israel in their hearing” (v. 11). In other words, God’s people were called to remember the covenant that they had entered into with the Lord, and an essential part of preserving this memory was the public reading of Scripture.

\*This kind of covenant renewal ceremony, in which the public reading of Scripture played a central role, is exactly what we find described after the Israelites first entered into the Promised Land. Joshua 8:34–35 records that Joshua “read all the words of the law, the blessing and the curse, according to all that is written in the Book of the Law. There was not a word of all that Moses commanded that Joshua did not read before all the assembly of Israel, and the women, and the little ones, and the sojourners who lived among them.”

\*This is the same practice we find described later in Israel’s history after the law, which had been lost for a time, was found in the temple. When God’s Word was rediscovered, King Josiah brought about

reforms that began with the public reading of Scripture: “Then the king sent, and all the elders of Judah and Jerusalem were gathered to him. And the king went up to the house of the Lord, and with him all the men of Judah and all the inhabitants of Jerusalem and the priests and the prophets, all the people, both small and great. And he read in their hearing all the words of the Book of the Covenant that had been found in the house of the Lord.” (2 Chron.34:30).

\* This is the same practice we find after God’s people returned from exile under the leadership of Ezra and Nehemiah. They read for hours “from early morning until midday” on a special “wooden platform” that appears to have been the first “pulpit” in history (Neh. 8:3-4).

## PUBLIC SCRIPTURE READING IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

\* This story of the public reading of Scripture reaches a high point when Jesus famously launched His public ministry by standing up to read the Scriptures. “And he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up. And as was his custom, he went to the synagogue on the Sabbath day, and he stood up to read” (Luke 4:16). When Jesus stood up to read in the synagogue at Nazareth, He was practicing the same ancient practice that began with Moses at the foot of Mount Sinai and continued through Joshua, Josiah, Ezra, and Nehemiah. And yet, when Jesus stood up to read, He could also say, “Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing” (Luke 4:21). Here was the Word not only read but made flesh.

\* As we continue to read the New Testament, it is clear that the practice of the public reading of Scripture is normative for the church. Consider Paul’s words to the church at Colossae: “And when this letter has been read among you, have it also read in the church of the Laodiceans; and see that you also read the letter from Laodicea” (Col. 4:16). Or, similarly, consider Paul’s letter to the church at Thessalonica: “I put you under oath before the Lord to have this letter read to all the brothers” (1 Thess. 5:27).

\* In fact, the last book in the Bible begins with this remarkable encouragement: “Blessed is the one who reads aloud the words of this prophecy, and blessed are those who hear, and who keep what is written in it, for the time is near” (Rev. 1:3).

So, for thousands of years, from Moses’ time to Jesus’ day, the public reading of Scripture was central to the gathering of the people of God. And no wonder, since “All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work” (2 Timothy 3:16-17).

\* **The Public Reading Of Scripture Is An Essential Element Of Christian Worship For The People Of God. The public reading of Scripture is a part, an element to be exact, of corporate worship.** It is not an option. When it is neglected an essential aspect of Christian worship is lost irreparably. As the *Westminster Confession of Faith* notes: “The reading of the Scriptures with godly fear, the sound preaching and conscionable hearing of the Word, in obedience unto God, with understanding, faith, and reverence, singing of psalms with grace in the heart; as also, the due administration and worthy receiving of the sacraments instituted by Christ, are all parts of the ordinary religious worship of God” (23.5). Not reading the Scriptures is in the same order as not having a sermon or omitting congregational singing.

**\*The Public Reading Of Scripture Is A Means Of Grace.** It not only serves as an opportunity whereby we openly and corporately stand under His word— acknowledging his authority, acknowledging our dependence upon the initiative of his self-revelation, acknowledging our glad surrender to the Lordship of his word—but it is also a God-appointed means whereby we are strengthened by and receive his favor. The Lord has designed to bless and edify His people by it.

In the reading of God’s word, God speaks most directly to His people. And so, this act of worship, in which the verbal self-revelation of God is addressed unedited to the hearts of his gathered people.



**\*Why should the corporate reading of Scripture consist as an essential element of worship in the service?** A composite of my readings from Puritan and Reformed Church sources suggests at least six reasons why...

**[PK]1. It Upholds the Scriptures’ Supremacy (supremacy)** God’s Words are sweet to the taste of His people (**Ps 119:103**) and to read God’s Word corporately is to uphold its supremacy and sweetness.

**[PK] 2. It Obeys the Biblical Command (obedience)** Until I come, give attention to the public reading of Scripture (**1 Tim 4:13**). This is a command, given by Paul, to Timothy and applies to the church today.

**[PK]3. It Instructs the Church Corporately (instruction)** Indeed, whatever is written in earlier times, in the Word, has been written for our instruction (**Rom 15.4**). Godly and God honoring is the flock that welcomes divine instruction as the Word is publicly read regularly. –

**[PK] 4. It Edifies the Truly Regenerated (edification)** Strong is the church that hears God speak to it every week! The psalmist prayed for God to strengthen him according to His Word (**Ps 119.28**). Everything we as a local church does should promote, enhance, and foster the edification of the flock (**1 Cor 14.26**). True believers hear the voice of God (**John 10.27**) and find great comfort in it (**Ps 119:50**). All believers need to hear from God as frequently as a baby needs milk.

**[PK] 5. It Demonstrates the Church’s Authority (authority)** The only binding authority for all believers is the written word of God, the Bible. The Bible — alone — presides in the highest place since God has magnified His Word above His Name (**Ps 138.2**). The Bible alone is eternally fixed in the heavens (**Ps 119.89**).

**\*As Believers, we would do well to stand in awe of God’s Word every time it’s read. We should have the same posture as David, who says in Psalm 19, “More to be desired are they [the Scriptures] than gold, even much fine gold; sweeter also than honey and drippings of the honeycomb.”**

A friend of well-known theologian, author, teacher and pastor Ligon Duncan often said to him, “the reading of the word of God ought to be an event.” It ought to be arresting to the congregation. It ought to grab their attention. It ought sometimes to make them tremble and other times rejoice. It ought to be elevated to the same status and gravity as the other biblical elements of worship.

**NOTES:**



## TRANSITION TO The CALL TO WORSHIP in Corporate Worship

**\*“Come let us worship and bow down,  
let us kneel before the Lord our God our Maker” Ps. 95:6**

**\*Listening To the Voice of God Through The Call To Worship: God Is The Gracious Initiator.** As James K. A. Smith puts it, in his remarkable book *You Are What You Love*, the call to worship reminds us that God is both the first and primary actor in worship – not us. It teaches the congregation, from the very start of the worship service, “that God is the gracious initiator here.” Smith goes on to say that this displaces the priority of self and our own desires, locating our praise in the gracious work of God, who called us and the church into existence. So, he concludes, “the call to worship is a weekly reenactment of the primacy of sovereignty of the Creator in our lives: just as we are called into being by the God who creates, so we are called into new life by that same God, who redeems us in Christ by the power of his Spirit.” When we gather to worship we do so as both a response to and result of God’s gracious and sovereign initiative in our lives.

### **The Call to Worship Trumps How I’m Feeling**

In redirecting our gaze to God and his grace, the call to worship is an exhortation against being overly attentive to ourselves. Because, if we’re honest, we don’t always walk into church on Sunday morning raring to go, desperate to worship God. And that’s alright. The call to worship restates God’s gracious invitation to come before him, confident in the finished work of his Son (Hebrews 4:16). That is the unshifting and secure basis of any and all worship. When we stand at Grace for the call to worship – Sunday by Sunday – we’re reminded that how we feel today is always secondary to what we can know for certain: our glorious God has made a way for us to worship him.

When Robert Robinson penned the words, “Come Thou Fount of every blessing, tune my heart to sing thy grace,” he wasn’t speculating. He knew the reality of the human condition. We come from a long line of people who are restlessly prone to wander. The heart is a fickle thing and needs to be tuned regularly. The call to worship serves as a tuning of our hearts.

**\*Listening To The Voice of God Through The Call To Worship: God Calls Us To Worship... To Commune With Him.** There is a quiet reminder in the call to worship that worship is not our idea. We worship because it is God’s idea. **Psalm 117** is God’s word, which means it is God who is speaking to his people, commanding, inviting, and exhorting us to praise him (**verse 1**). This call is rooted in a firm commitment to both his glory and our joy. When God’s people are gathered in his name, he serves as the host. He has initiated and invited us into fellowship with him.

**\*Listening To The Voice Of God Through The Call To Worship: The Response of Worship.** The response in Psalm 117 implies a recognition of who God is — of his worth (**verse 2**). In the call to worship we recognize and remember that it is God alone who is worthy to have our hearts, lips, and lives. As truth rings through our bones, we are reminded of the object of our worship. This response of worship in Psalm 117 is one rooted in who God has revealed himself to be. The psalmist’s worship is informed. Likewise, we praise and exhort God because he has revealed himself to us in his Word. We worship him because of the beauty of his character. He is the God who has fixed his love upon us as his chosen people. He is the God whose faithfulness cannot be exhausted. He is the God who is worthy of worship from every tribe, tongue, people, and nation. Our theology leads to doxology.

\* **Listening To The Voice of God Through The Call to Worship: Hear the Call.** The next time a worship service begins — even today — pay close attention to the invitation that rings through the air. We are called not because of our righteousness, our works, or our piety. We are welcomed because God has chosen us, Christ has purchased us, and the Holy Spirit has sealed us for eternity. This call is for the weak and the weary, the poor and the helpless. The call to worship is a call to come and drink deeply from the well that will never run dry.

**Come, everyone who thirsts, come to the waters; and he who has no money, come, buy and eat! Come, buy wine and milk without money and without price. (Isaiah 55:1)**

### \* **TRANSITION TO The BENEDICTION in Corporate Worship**

\* The benediction in worship—it is more than a prayer, it is a blessing on God’s people

God has designed the pronouncement of a Scriptural blessing or benediction to be the conclusion or culmination of the corporate worship of his people. By it the people who have gathered together in God’s name and with his presence among them depart with the assurance that God has indeed been in their midst and that he intends to bless his people.

Benedictions serve as a confirmation that the people have met in the special presence of God in corporate worship and that they shall continue to receive its blessings. The benediction is not a prayer; it is a pronouncement. The congregation should not have bowed heads and closed eyes, but should look up to the heavens from which the Lord, the Maker of heaven and earth sends our help. They should be filled with joy and receive the blessing with faith as from the mouth of God himself. [Plumer reminded his readers that the benediction, “is not merely or chiefly the expression of the private wishes of the minister.” For this reason the minister is not to proclaim his own words. To do so would be to lose the force of the divine authority behind the pronouncement of the benediction.

When they hear the benediction at the close of the service, they should leave the special presence of God with their faith stirred toward his promises, knowing that they have been blessed and shall be blessed. Just as the OT priests proclaimed the blessing of God upon the congregation before marching out to war, so corporate worship closes with the proclamation of the blessing of God upon his people as they go forth to fight the good fight of faith with courage and boldness, knowing that their God shall never leave nor forsake them. <https://theaquilareport.com/the-benediction-in-corporate-worship/> Written by Ryan M. McGraw | Thursday, January 24, 2013

\* “The last thing said in the Bible is a benediction. **“The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all. Amen.”** So, the last thing in corporate worship should be a benediction as God’s people anticipate the face of God shining upon them in the new heavens and new earth. [Plummer].

### \* **TRANSITION TO The WORD SUNG in Corporate Worship**



The apostle Paul makes no exceptions when he says in **Colossians 3, “Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God.”** The only instrument referred to in New Testament worship is the human voice. That matters. It’s God’s design that the local church’s congregation is mostly an untrained choir of blood-bought saints. \* \*



## Listening To the Voice of God Through The Sung Word: We Sing To Remember God's Word... The Word Of Christ

\*<sup>14</sup> Then the Lord said to Moses, "Behold, the time for you to die is near; call Joshua, and present yourselves at the tent of meeting, that I may commission him." So Moses and Joshua went and presented themselves at the tent of meeting. <sup>15</sup> The Lord appeared in the tent in a pillar of cloud, and the pillar of cloud stood at the doorway of the tent. <sup>16</sup> The Lord said to Moses, "Behold, you are about to lie down with your fathers; and this people will arise and play the harlot with the strange gods of the land, into the midst of which they are going, and will forsake Me and break My covenant which I have made with them. <sup>17</sup> Then My anger will be kindled against them in that day, and I will forsake them and hide My face from them, and they will be consumed, and many evils and troubles will come upon them; so that they will say in that day, 'Is it not because our God is not among us that these evils have come upon us?' <sup>18</sup> But I will surely hide My face in that day because of all the evil which they will do, for they will turn to other gods.

\*<sup>19</sup> "Now therefore, write this song for yourselves, and teach it to the sons of Israel; put it on their lips, so that this song may be a witness for Me against the sons of Israel. <sup>20</sup> For when I bring them into the land flowing with milk and honey, which I swore to their fathers, and they have eaten and are satisfied and become prosperous, then they will turn to other gods and serve them, and spurn Me and break My covenant. <sup>21</sup> Then it shall come about, when many evils and troubles have come upon them, that this song will testify before them as a witness (for it shall not be forgotten from the lips of their descendants); for I know their intent which they are developing today, before I have brought them into the land which I swore." <sup>22</sup> So Moses wrote this song the same day, and taught it to the sons of Israel.

**Listening To God's Voice Through The Sung Word: We are being taught, admonished, and having our hearts provoked with responses of thanksgiving.**

*"Let The Word Of Christ Dwell In You Richly, Teaching And Admonishing One Another In All Wisdom, Singing Psalms And Hymns And Spiritual Songs, With Thankfulness In Your Hearts To God". Col. 3:16*

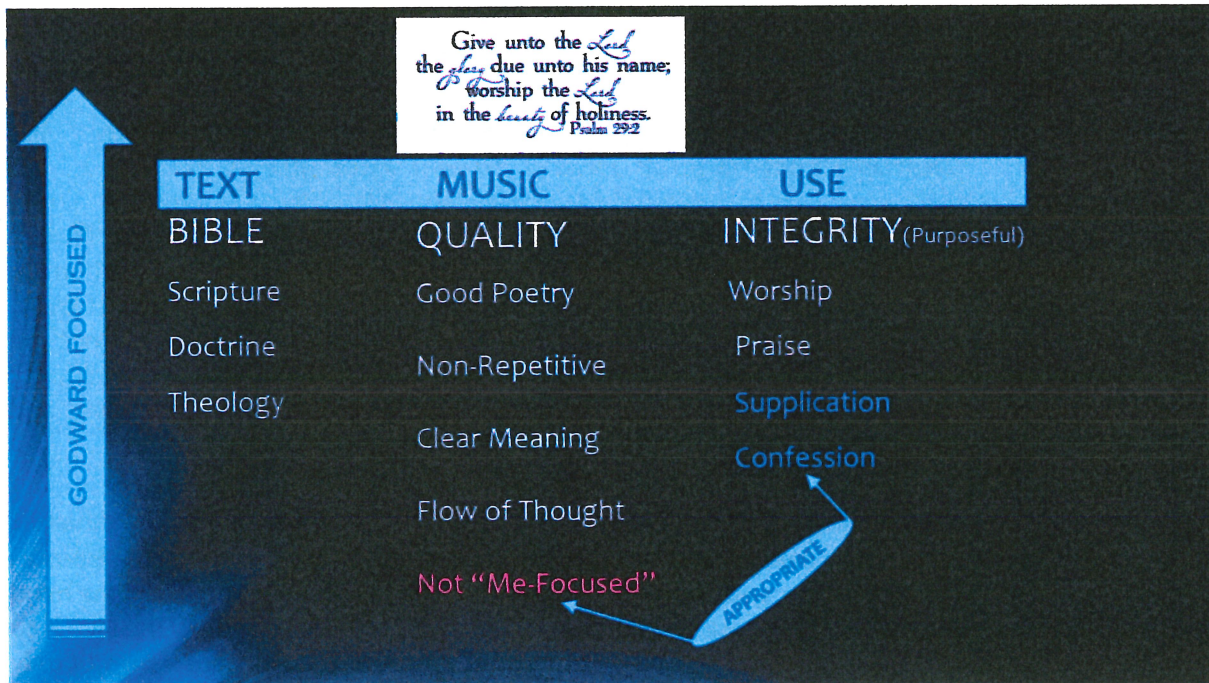
- ◆ **\*Hymns Teach.** While the New Testament is silent on many of the specifics of corporate worship, Scripture is clear that the Word of Christ must be central. When the hymns we sing are aligned with the Word of God, our souls are nourished by its truth. Singing is a unique way to "let the word of Christ dwell richly" in us. One, if not the primary, reason our songs should be closely tied to the Word of God is their didactic (instructive) effects. Singing for the believer is formative and responsive, and therefore must be informed by Scripture. We learn what we sing.
- ◆ **\*Hymns Admonish.** **Admonishing(3560)** (**noutheteo** from **noús = mind + títhemi = place**, this verb describing exertion of influence upon **nous** implying resistance) (warning, cautioning, gently reproofing, exhorting) literally means to place in the mind and so to warn or give notice to beforehand especially of danger or evil. The idea is to lay it on the mind or heart of the person, with the stress being on influencing not only the intellect, but also the will, emotions and disposition. Our songs ought to exhort and admonish. Our songs ought to encourage and remind. In this practice of song, God's people will be pointed to the Scriptures, reminded of truth, and rooted in the gospel of Christ.

- ◆ **\*Hymns Provoke Thankful Hearts.** Singing is a holy practice. We sing because God has commanded it, and our songs should fill our hearts with thankfulness and delight in our great God. The aim of singing hymns is engaging both the head and the heart. The reason we read, study, and meditate on the Scriptures is not primarily so that we might amass knowledge, but so that our knowledge would lead to worship. The chief end of theology is doxology. We should sing songs that make our hearts rejoice. From the content of the lyrics to the movement of the melody, we want beauty and transcendence to come together and serve the people of God. In our pursuit of theological precision, let us not neglect the pursuit of heartfelt response.

**Listening To The Voice of God Through The Sung Word: “Why singing matters both in our private devotion and corporate worship?”**

**\*7 Biblical Reasons Why Singing Matters’ [Tom Olson, September 21, 2017]**

- ◆ You Obey God’s Will
- ◆ You Dig Roots Into The Word of God
- ◆ You Proclaim the Gospel To Unbelievers
- ◆ You Make War Against God’s Enemies
- ◆ You are Spiritually Strengthened For The Trails Of Life
- ◆ You Experience The Joy That Only Comes From the Holy Spirit
- ◆ You Glorify God



Note: John Wooten, Slide Developer

**\*So, sing and sing often, with great courage, and just know that your singing matters to God, and to the people, and to the angels in His kingdom. It even matters to Satan who will flee from you lickety-**

split when you start singing praises to God. So tomorrow morning if it's a beautiful day, rise up and sing with joy, and if trials hit, sing your way through them as well because singing really does matter.

\*It is Jonathan Edwards who would say, "The duty of singing praises to God, seems to be appointed wholly to excite and express religious affections. No other reason can be assigned, why we should express ourselves to God in verse, rather than in prose, and do it with music, but only, that such is our nature and frame, that these things have a tendency to move our affections."

And God made these song-awakened, song-carried affections for himself. Christian singing is the musical use of the voice to express truth that accords with God's word, and feelings that accord with God's worth. It is a gift beyond measuring.

Therefore,  
Make a joyful noise to the Lord, all the earth!  
Serve the Lord with gladness!  
Come into his presence with singing! (Psalm 100:1-2)

**\*Transition To The PREACHED WORD: Communion With God In The Corporate Setting. Ears To Hear The Preached Word.**

\*The duty of the listener is to hold to the Christian sermon as precious words of life that give life and empower Christian living. Cherish in your heart the preached Word that bestows on you Christ and His righteousness. This Word is the instrument of the Holy Spirit to work faith in you, to justify you, and to enable you to live a Christian life. Come with a Settled Conviction... that God Speaks through His Word. He changes the world with words. In the church, preaching is that holy 40 minutes or so each week when we, the assembly of the redeemed, close her collective mouth, opens her ear and heart, and listens to the uninterrupted voice of her Husband, through his appointed mouthpiece, fallible though the messenger be. Oh, if all of us could rise above our familiarity with our preacher, and be ready to expect some amazing things.

**\*The Power of the Preached Word – PLEASE READ THIS SLOWLY AND TRY TO COMPREHEND WHAT IT IS SAYING.**

When we put ourselves under the preaching of God's word, it is one of the precious few moments we button the lip, resist the temptation to respond right away, and focus our energy and attention on hearing with faith. There is something going on in Christian preaching, in the context of corporate worship, that is not the same as our private reading and study of the Bible. Here, as Richard Foster says, "things occur that could never occur alone," and according to Don Whitney, we come upon "some graces and blessings that God gives only in 'meeting together' with other believers." Private devotions can't replace corporate worship. No other experience in the Christian life compares to the sacramental power of the preached word. It is that moment when we hear, through the faithful preaching of a human voice, Jesus's own voice applied to our one local assembled body.

Now, As we conclude our time today, we turn our thoughts to answer the questions, as we sit under faithful preaching of the Word in corporate worship: (1) “why should we be under the preaching of our pastor physically present in the corporate worship setting, not remotely as our first choice?” (2) “what is the proper spiritual posture we should take for listening to the sermon?” and “what does that require?”; and (3) when we are “graced” by the receiving of our Triune God ‘s Word, what do we receive”?

### \*The Preached Word.



**FIVE REASONS** why you need to be under the preaching of our pastor physically present in the corporate worship setting, not remotely as your first choice

**FIVE RESPONSES** required of you when you hear the Word preached

**FIVE BLESSINGS/BENEFITS** received from hearing well the faithful preaching of God’s Word

\* **FIRST**, why do you need to be under the preaching of our pastor physically present in the corporate worship setting, not remotely as your first choice?

- ✓ **Our Christian’s Faith Is Fueled by Hearing God’s Word.** We will be most inclined to listen and engage with preaching by being present where it is preached alongside others who have also come for the express purpose of hearing and submitting to God’s Word proclaimed.
- ✓ **Hearing God’s Word from Our Own Shepherd Is Unique to Every Other Encounter with God’s Proclaimed Word.** It is an entirely different experience to sit in person and hear God’s Word expounded and applied directly to us from one of our elders, the men who knows our struggles, difficulties, and doubts, and who will give an account for our souls ([Heb. 13:17](#)).
- ✓ **Never Underestimate the Power of Personal Connection.** There is a powerful connection made between a shepherd and his flock when he preaches God’s Word to those he has been thinking about and praying for as he prepared.
- ✓ **\*Spiritual Fruit Comes from Hearing with Others.** When a congregation collectively sits under the preached Word, a level of accountability is established and nourished among the hearers to urge each other to go and apply that sermon. A greater obligation to “do something” with the Word preached and to rely on one another for help and strength to obey it exists in this kind of community life that is not present when we listen in isolation.
- ✓ **Public Sermons Lead to Corporate Discipleship.** When the whole church hears God’s Word proclaimed, that Word then becomes the basis for further conversation and growth in the one-on-one discipleship conversations that follow. The sermon gets everyone on the same page; personal discipleship expands on the details of that page. God has powerful and unique purposes for every believer in the local church. So many of those purposes are fueled when a group of God’s redeemed people covenant together to gather in person with one another weekly to hear the voice of God through his preached Word by their Pastor Teacher. (Calvin Institutes, 4.1.9.)

\* **SECOND**, my next question/s to you: What is needed for us to be able to effectively listen to God? What can we do to prepare our hearts so we are in a position where we can hear what the Lord is seeking to reveal or communicate to us *through the preaching of the Word*?

\*Let's listen to Ken Ramsey as he helps us to understand our responsibilities, "“Whereas I have shelves of books on how to preach, I have only one book on how to listen to sermons. This wonderful Catechism question (Q.160. Westminster Larger Catechism) helps to correct the misnomer that preaching is only upon the preacher. All of us as the Body of Christ have a part to play when it comes to the preached word and having the “ears to hear.” Let us therefore give greater diligence to the requirements of the word preached for our individual and corporate good.”\*

\***Q.** What is required of those that hear the Word preached? The Westminster Larger Catechism, question 160:

**A.** It is required of those that hear the Word preached, that they attend upon it with diligence, preparation, and prayer; examine what they hear by the Scriptures; receive the truth with faith, love, meekness, and readiness of mind, as the Word of God; meditate, and confer of it; hide it in their hearts, and bring forth the fruit of it in their lives.

**The first thing that hearers need to do is to attend on it with diligence, preparation, and prayer. In other words, benefiting from preaching requires active listening. You need to attend to it, prepare for it and pray for it.**

\*For congregations the hearing of sermons was the most momentous event of their lives, and the Puritans pleaded with worshippers to appreciate this fact, and listen to the word preached with awe, attention, and expectancy. Baxter put the point this way in the course of his “Directions for Profitably Hearing the Word Preached” in the Christian Directory: Come not to hear with careless heart, as if you were to hear a matter that little concerned you, but come with a sense of the unspeakable weight, necessity, and consequence of the Holy Word which you are to hear; and when you understand how much you are concerned in it, it will greatly help your understanding of every particular truth....

Jeremiah Burroughs, in his sermon “Gospel Worship” says “preparation consists in the readiness of the faculties of the soul and the graces of the spirit of God, presently to act upon the setting upon a holy duty. There are those that keep their hearts so prepared as at the very first moment that they set about the duty of Worship, all faculties and graces begin to act and to stir and are working towards God, as a fire, when all the matter is ready laid, presently it comes to be kindled and flame out; and thus it should be with our hearts:”

\***Second, what is required of us that hear the Word preached? “examine what they hear by the Scriptures 3.”** \*The Bereans, you remember in the Book of Acts, tested what they heard, according to the Scriptures (*11 Now these Jews were more noble than those in Thessalonica; they received the word with all eagerness, examining the Scriptures daily to see if these things were so. Acts 17:11*). We ought to also hear what is preached and examine it according to the Scriptures: is this faithful to what the Bible teaches?

\***Third, “receive the truth with faith, love, meekness, readiness of mind as the word of God.”** We are to receive the word of God with **love**, because our heavenly Father loves us; it is His word of love to us, and we are to receive it with love to Him. This also may indicate that we are to receive it with love for the one another as well – for we are gathered in one spirit in worship to our God. It is arrogant and prideful to place our opinion over God's. (Not the time to wordsmith the pastor or get into a silent debate.)

**\*There is a certain posture in which we should receive faithful preaching:**

- ◆ We are to receive the truth with faith.
- ◆ We are to believe what God says is true.
- ◆ We are to trust what God tells us to trust.
- ◆ We are to do what He tells us to do.
- ◆ We are to think how He tells us to think.

\*When you read the Bible or listen to faithful preaching, there is more happening than mere communication of ideas. The Word is more than ink and paper, and preaching is more than a speech. The Word is living, as the Lord is working effectually by His Holy Spirit through it. There are many pictures of this in Scripture:

- ◆ the Lord through His Word is sowing imperishable seeds (**1 Peter 1:23**),
- ◆ bringing about repentance and faith (**Rom. 10**),
- ◆ feeding our souls with the Bread of Life (**Matt. 4:4; John 6:35**), creating a source of living waters in our hearts (**John 7:38**),
- ◆ and washing His church (**Eph. 5:26**).

**To have the Word abide in us is to be in union with Christ and to be conformed to His will so that we learn to desire what is godly and holy (John 15:7).**

\*You are to receive the word of God with love, because your heavenly Father loves you; it is His word of love to you, and you are to receive it with love to Him. This also may indicate that we are to receive it with love for the brethren as well – for we are gathered in one spirit in worship to our God. It is also to be HEARD with readiness of mind. You are desirous of receiving what it is that the word of God is saying to you.

**Fourth, “to meditate and confer of it.”** \*If you study the Bible, you need to reflect deeply about what it says and what it means for you, for others, for the church, and for the world. And then you need to confer of it. Apply the Sermon Personally. It is essential for every person who is listening to a sermon to apply the sermon to them personally. Important questions to ask during and after a sermon include:

- ◆ What is God seeking to communicate to me?
- ◆ Through this text, did God reveal sin in my life?
- ◆ Through this text, did God encourage me in some way?
- ◆ How does this text affect my devotion to God?
- ◆ How does this text affect my worship of God?
- ◆ This text is more than a story. What is God seeking to do in my life through this sermon?
- ◆ Why am I uncomfortable? Could it be an indication of sin?
- ◆ What does this text communicate about our church as a whole? How can I benefit our church through obedience to Christ?
- ◆ What does this text reveal about my family? How can I communicate the truth to my family?
- ◆ What are the immediate applications that require action today and the long range applications that will require action days, months, or years into the future?

It's extremely important to approach the personal application of a sermon through prayer rather than a mere checklist of practical considerations. When praying through the personal application of a sermon, it can allow you to be honest with your anger, disunity, idolatry, materialism, or lack of contentment.

\*The Fifth exhortation is this: "hide it in your hearts and bring forth the fruit of it in their lives."

\*At the very least, that means there is some memorization going on. You're going to hide the word in your heart. There are certain words of Scripture that you store up in your heart

\*And then what? "Bring forth the fruit of it in their lives." We never want to be satisfied with simply being hearers of the word. How does Jesus finish the Sermon on the Mount? Be hearers and doers of the word. (Matt.7:24-27). How does he put it in the Great Commission? "Go make disciples . . . teaching them to obey all that I have commanded" (Matt.28:19-20)

**THIRD**, as we sit under the faithful preaching of the Word we are "graced" by the Triune God in so many ways. What are these blessings or benefits? I want to share five mentioned by David Mattis, habits of Grace:

- ◆ \* **TO FORGET OURSELVES** - One of the great blessings of good preaching is that it helps us in the life-giving act of self-forgetfulness. Faithful preaching exposes our sin and challenges us to change, but it does so in the stanzas, while the chorus calls us away from self to Savior. It is a glorious thing for our souls to be free from our regular pre-occupation with self, even if only for a few moments at the sermon's climax, so we are captivated by Christ.
- ◆ **TO FILL OUR FAITH** – We need an external word, "Faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ." (Rom.10:17)
- ◆ \* **TO GROW IN GRACE** – And according to 1 Cor. 15:1-2, (Now I would remind you, brothers, of the gospel I preached to you, which you received, in which you stand, 2 and by which you are being saved, if you hold fast to the word I preached to you—unless you believed in vain.) the preached gospel is not only what we have received in the past to become believers, but it is the grace in which we presently stand, and that which we will be finally saved, if we continue to receive and hold unto the gospel. The ongoing preaching of the gospel is vital to the ongoing life of faith.
- ◆ **TO BE EQUIPPED** – It is a great benefit of faithful preaching. God gave "the shepherds and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of the ministry, for the building up of the body of Christ" (11 And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, 12 to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, Eph.4:11-12).
- ◆ **TO ENCOUNTER JESUS** – Such will significantly change our perspective and experience of preaching. What if you came to worship in the next hour not merely to hear Pastor Ndzi, but to encounter Jesus?

## Conclusion



Brothers and Sisters, as you hear the preaching of God's Word from our Beloved Pastor/Teacher ask yourself this question: **"what is the proper spiritual posture I should take for listening to the sermon?"**

As you sit quietly and pray and meditate on the text and the songs, remind yourself of what **Psalm 19:10–11** says about the words of God: **"More to be desired are they than gold, even much fine gold; sweeter also than honey and drippings of the honeycomb. Moreover, by them is thy servant warned; in keeping them there is great reward."** So, because the Word of God is greater than all riches and sweeter than all honey, take heed how you hear. Desire it more than you desire all these things.

**\* As Proverbs 2:3–5 says, "If you cry out for insight and raise your voice for understanding, if you seek it like silver and search for it as for hidden treasures; then you will understand the fear of the Lord and find the knowledge of God."**

May God make us a people who hear the Word of God and bear fruit a hundredfold so that the lamp of our lives will be on a lampstand giving light to all who enter the kingdom of God. Take heed how you hear!

Yes, those are in fact Jesus' words to all of us: **"Take care how you listen" (Luke 8:18)**. We take care because how we listen to the sermon today reveals a lot about the condition of our own hearts, making Sunday a good day to evaluate our own posture of intake.

**May God make us a people who hear the Word of God and bear fruit a hundredfold so that the lamp of our lives will be on a lampstand giving light to all who enter the kingdom of God.**

*One more thought....*

*We must not listen to sermons as spectators but as participants. Our Pastor Teacher should not be the only one working. Good listening is hard work; it involves worshiping God continuously. An attentive listener responds quickly—whether with repentance, resolution, determination, or praise— and God is honored in this. As Proverbs 18:15 says, "The heart of the prudent gets knowledge; and the ear of the wise seeks knowledge." The verbs used here refer to energetic, mental action.*