

“Acts: **Worship**, Fasting & Prayer – Part 1”
Pastor Wally Contreras
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“Now there were in the church at Antioch prophets and teachers, Barnabas, Simeon who was called Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, Manaen a member of the court of Herod the tetrarch, and Saul. While they were worshiping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, “Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.” Then after fasting and praying they laid their hands on them and sent them off. So, being sent out by the Holy Spirit, they went down to Seleucia, and from there they sailed to Cyprus.” (Acts 13:1-4)

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One of the “worship” songs we sang was “All Praise to Him” written by Matthew Merker and Bob Kauflin. A part of the lyrics says: “All praise to Him Who reigns in love; Who guides the galaxies above; Yet bends to hear our every prayer; With sovereign pow’r and tender care.” How astounding is this realization to me and why?

Pastor Wally spoke of “spiritual disciplines” such as worship, fasting and prayer. When I see the word “discipline” linked with the word “spiritual”, how much of me thinks that we’re talking about “Correction; chastisement; punishment intended to correct crimes or errors” (Webster’s 1828 Dictionary) instead of “To instruct or educate; to inform the mind; to prepare by instructing in correct principles and habits”) (ibid.)? Explain.

Dr. Don Whitney (Associate Dean of the School of Theology at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville) defines spiritual discipline to mean: “...those practices found in Scripture that promote spiritual growth among believers in the gospel of Jesus Christ. They are habits of devotion, habits of experiential Christianity that have been practiced by God’s people since biblical times...the Bible prescribes both personal and interpersonal spiritual disciplines. There are those spiritual disciplines that we practice alone and those that we practice with other Christians. So, for example, we are to pray alone. That is a personal spiritual discipline. We are also to pray with the church. That is an interpersonal or congregational spiritual discipline.” Pastor Wally said that there are those who practice corporate worship, but not personal worship, those who don’t practice fasting at all and those who will pray privately, but never corporately. Do any of these situations describe me? If so, how so? If not, why not?

Dr. Whitney went on to point out that “we are talking about things that are practices taught or modeled in the Bible. The reason that is important is otherwise we leave ourselves open to calling anything we want a spiritual discipline. So someone might say: Gardening is a spiritual discipline for me, or exercise is one of my spiritual disciplines, or any other hobby or pleasurable habit they could call a spiritual discipline.” Have I, in some way(s), made a “hobby or pleasurable habit” a spiritual discipline? If so, how so? If not, why not?

A thought struck me as listened to the message...Pastor Wally reminded me that Jesus' ministry lasted 3 ½ years...a president's term of office is 4 years. What does this tell me of the power and the love behind Jesus' message to a lost world that it continues to be shared and accepted throughout the centuries since He first brought His Gospel message?

Dr. Whitney said that “[t]he gospel takes the natural, worldly view that worship is a person justifying himself by reaching up to God and corrects it with the truth that worship is a person responding to the God who has reached down through the gospel of Jesus Christ.” Have I, at times, fallen into the worldview perspective of worship? Explain.

Dr. Whitney went on to point out that “[t]he gospel not only prepares us to worship, it guides our worship and sustains us in worship. In biblical worship, the gospel is proclaimed in Word and sacrament; in the worship of God, His gospel is read, preached, and sung. The same gospel message that kindled the initial fire of worship in the believer's heart rekindles worship as the gospel is proclaimed and remembered (emphasis added).” Most will agree that we attend a “worship service”, but do we truly understand (and accept) the total scope of that assertion or do we, at times, tend to exclude portions of the service as being “non-worship” related activities and if so, which ones and why?

How about on a personal level...is “His gospel read, preached (or meditated on) and sung” in my life and with what frequency or is this just a corporate/Sunday activity? Explain.

Dr. Whitney concluded his article by saying that "...worship — both public and private — should also be a discipline in that believers must sustain an intentionality about worship, and by this overcome the temptation to allow worship to be crowded out by "the cares of the world" (Matt. 13:22 — "As for what was sown among thorns, this is the one who hears the word, but the cares of the world and the deceitfulness of riches choke the word, and it proves unfruitful."). Love of the gospel and love of worshiping the God of the gospel are inseparable. A true grasp of the former leads to devotion to the latter." Have I allowed "the cares of the world" to crowd out my worship — either publically or privately? If so, how so? If not, what are the strategies in my life that I've employed to avoid this pitfall?

Pastor Wally pointed out that it is very possible to worship in vain. Jesus, in Matthew 15:8-9, tells me, "This people honors me with their lips, but their heart is far from me; in vain do they worship me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men." John Piper pointed out that "Jesus said, "This people honors me with their lips." That means they are singing. They are preaching. They are praying for nothing. Why is it vain? Why is it for nothing? "Because their heart is far from me." That is why I am asking this question. What experience of the heart magnifies the greatness of the glory of God? ...What is it? What is the experience? That is an important question...because the Bible, in Romans 12, calls all of life worship. (Present your bodies as a living sacrifice to Christ, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service of worship. (Romans 12:1)) This body in all that it does, is to be worship, which means it is to act from a heart condition that magnifies Jesus, that makes Jesus look good, makes him look as glorious as he really is. My body is to be moved — hugging, touching, giving, loving, rebuking, whatever this body does as it moves through the world — to be animated by the abundance of the heart. This part of the body speaks and all of the other parts of the body move. And my question in this message is: What is the experience of the heart that in itself shows God is infinitely valuable and beautiful and worthy and produces acts in the body which also display how valuable God is and how infinitely worthy he is?" And???

Pastor Wally spoke of worshipping "in spirit and truth" (Matthew 5:8-9 - But the hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father is seeking such people to worship him. God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth"...that worship involves both the heart and head. In Spurgeon's message preached on June 17, 1866, he said, "We ought ourselves to guard against falling into formalism by means of simplicity, for we may do it the one way as well as the other, by laying it down as a rule that a service must begin with prayer or begin with singing, that the preacher must preach at such a time in the service, that the service must commence, continue, and conclude in some fixed fashion; that seems to me to have a tendency to breed another form of ritualism inconsistent with worshipping God in spirit and in truth...I have hardly grace enough to worship God by two or three hours together in silence as our Quaker

friends do. I do enjoy a quarter of an hour's silence every now and then; to sit quite still seems to me to be an admirable way of getting into contact with God. Our service is so much words, words, words, that I am almost afraid you get to think as much of words as other people do of banners, and flags, and so on...Recollect that if you do not put your hearts into the worship of God, you might for that matter as well be at home as here; you are better here than at home for other reasons, because you are in the way where good may come to you; but for worship's sake you might as well have been in bed as here." In what way(s) do I need to better train myself to worship "in spirit and truth"...with heart and head, both on a personal and corporate level?

Do changes in the "routine" of worship (e.g., the sermon goes longer than anticipated, the music is too loud/too soft/too new/too old, someone is just a little too charismatic during the service, etc.) tend to have such a negative impact on my attitude? If so, how so? If not, how do I keep from letting distractions impact me?

There are probably more, but these twelve areas for spiritual training (aka disciplines) might need some (a lot) of my attention...how about you?

Study of God's Word (2 Timothy 3:16)

Prayer (Hebrews 4:16)

Fasting (Philippians 3:19)

Confession (Proverbs 28:13)

Worship (Chronicles 16:29)

Fellowship (Acts 2:42)

Rest (the Sabbath) (Matthew 11:28)

Celebration (Philippians 4:4)

Service (Colossians 3:23-24)

Generosity (Acts 20:35)

Chastity (1 Corinthians 6:18)

Disciple-making (Matthew 28:19)