

WALKING THE WALK – WORSHIP & PRAYER

Psalm 95:1-7

January 9, 2022

We are beginning this new year with some discipleship training on how we are to walk the walk towards godliness, as the Apostle Paul gives these instructions to his young understudy Timothy – **1 Timothy 4:7-9**, *“Have nothing to do with godless myths and old wives’ tales; rather, train yourself to be godly. For physical training is of some value, but godliness has value for all things, holding promise for both the present life and the life to come. This is a trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance.”* Paul is telling the church that we need to actively seek godliness for this reason – **1 Timothy 4:1**, *“The Spirit clearly says that in the later times some will abandon the faith and follow deceiving spirits and things taught by demons.”* We are definitely living in the later times, and we know this falling away is taking place all around us, so we here at SCCC need to be actively seeking godliness so that we would not become a casualty!

Paul is telling us here that physical training is valuable for our time here on this earth to keep us healthy and fit, but we are not to neglect the spiritual part of us, which is much more important than our physical lives, all because discipleship training (godliness/holiness) is not only valuable for us here while on this earth but will carry forward into eternity. Jesus’ invitation given to His disciples 2000 years ago still stands for us today: *“Come, follow me,”* and to follow Christ faithfully and grow deeper in this coming year of 2022, we need to incorporate the following essential spiritual exercises and disciplines into our daily lives:

1. Worship and Prayer.
2. The Study of God’s Word.
3. Serving others.
4. Generosity.
5. Sharing our Faith.

Today we will be looking at worship & prayer. The basic essence of our times of worship and prayer is telling God, *“Thank you!”* And *“I love you!”* We have been created by God to be worshippers, and worship not only involves our singing, but everything else we do whenever we gather together. However, what I want to concentrate on this morning is our singing praises and the offering of our prayers to Almighty God. We were created by God to sing His praises and God delights in hearing His people worship Him, so choosing to sing or not sing is never an option.

Every church has gifted singers, good to average singers, and singers that can't carry a tune in a bucket, but regardless of where you fit in this mix, the important part is that we are all created by God to use our voices, to sing His praises nonetheless. Everyone that is born with vocal cords has been enabled by God to make a joyful noise unto the Lord, and God longs to hear our voice whether we're in tune or not. Singing praises always starts within the heart of the believer, and then comes out through our lips, so God is far less concerned with the quality of our voice or our staying in tune than He is with the condition of our heart. Worship comes from the overflow of our love and devotion to God. And worship is also important in bringing the hovering presence of the Holy Spirit among us, building up our faith and opening us up to hear His voice clearly through the prayers, the testimonies, the Bible readings, and the message. We gather to experience the fullness of the Holy Spirit!

Worship is how we give glory to God, and in fact everything that God created reflects His glory. When we look at the trees and plants around us, they display God's glory and worship Him with their beauty. When we hear the birds singing during the day and the crickets singing at night, they are singing praises to their Creator, and the insects and bees buzzing around us are also giving God glory. When we see the leaves turn brilliant colours in the fall, or the flowers blooming during the summer, or the snow blanket the earth in the winter, or the daffodils and tulips poking their heads out of the ground in spring – all of creation displays God's glory and worship Him in their own unique way. Then on a clear night, when we look up into the sky, the moon, planets, and stars as well declare God's glory.

All of nature doesn't have a choice in whether they will praise God or not – it's their God given nature, they do it automatically because God created them to worship their Creator, but of all created things, humans are the only ones that have a choice as to whether they will praise God or not. So, on this topic of worship and prayer, we get to choose whether we will worship or pray. We get to choose whether we will bring an offering of prayer and praise before Him or not! God never forces us to worship, but longs to hear our praises and prayers, much like an earthly father, He desires to spend quality time with His children. So, as we gather together here at SCCC let us never neglect in giving our Lord our full attention in worship!

Every time we gather together as His church – we have this invitation to come before God in worship. Hear His invitation in today’s reading, **Psalm 95:6**, *“Come, let us bow down and worship, let us kneel before the Lord our Maker.”* And then the beginning verses of this Psalm indicates how we are to approach God in worship: *“Come, let us sing for the joy of 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.”* As God’s people, we are called to come before Him in thanksgiving and come in expectation whenever we gather together. Music and singing is important, in fact it’s vital in helping to quiet us down from the stress and busyness of life, helping to get us focused and in the right frame of mind to listen to God’s voice speak into our lives during the worship service. Worship helps us to get ourselves in the right place to hear from God and sense His presence, and if the praise time doesn’t go well, or you can’t shut down your mind, then it is very difficult to have the words of the songs we sing, or the prayers we pray, or the passages of Scripture we read, or the message we hear speak into our heart, bringing us to God’s Heavenly throne room.

The person or persons leading worship have the important job of helping the congregation to focus on God, setting the tone and mood of the service, and the songs that are chosen are key to bring us into His holy presence. Then, it’s also the congregation’s participation in the singing that is vital for us to hear from God, and when everyone participates, we achieve unity and harmony. We may have gifted singers and musicians leading worship; however, the congregation is the ultimate choir, and everyone needs to be engaged in order to bring the required unity and harmony to the worship service to experience God’s holy presence and power. Singing together brings unity in spirit as our voices (the good, the bad, and the out-of-tune) become knit together in praise and adoration, as we become one in Spirit. And when we become one in Spirit, the power of God will be put on full display. Unity, being one in Spirit releases God’s power among His people, and the key is worship!

That’s how God has designed every earthly choir – whenever His earthly choir praises God here on this earth in unity and harmony, then God’s heavenly choir can join in with their angelic voices to bring Heaven down to this earth. What a wonderful sound that must be to our Heavenly Father’s ears when the Heavenly angelic choirs and earthly choirs combine their voices in praise and adoration to God their Creator. So, we are not here to impress others with our talent in playing an instrument well, or our musical ability and gifting to be able to sing every note

in perfect pitch; instead, we are here to praise God and to build each other up in the faith according to **Ephesians 5:18-20**, *“Be filled with the Spirit, speaking to one another with psalms, hymns, and songs from the Spirit. Sing and make music from your heart to the Lord, always giving thanks to God the Father for everything, in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ.”* Worship is a wonderful gift from God, and in some mysterious and miraculous way, music spiritually connects us to God, our Heavenly Father!

The hymns and songs we sing tell Gods’ story – they also tell the story of our faith journey through both the good times and the difficult times. The hymns and songs we sing are our witness to unbelievers, telling them why we are so devoted and committed to serving God and serving each other, and why we have such hope. So as believers, we should be compelled to sing about our salvation, sing about God’s amazing love for us, a love that sent His one-and-only Son, Jesus Christ, to die for our sins. We should be compelled to sing in gratitude and in appreciation for Jesus’ sacrificial death on the cross so that we may live a joy filled abundant life here on this earth, as we await our home being prepared in heaven for us. As Paul tells us in **2 Corinthians 5:14-15**, *“For Christ’s love compels us, because we are convinced that one died for all, therefore all died. And he died for all, that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for him who died for them and was raised again.”* Our motivation to sing comes from the ONE who died for us and was raised again. So, our motivation to sing is driven by our heartfelt desire to not only thank God, but also to tell others, who don’t yet know Christ, that what Christ did for us He can also do for them as well. So, how we sing shows others how committed we are to Christ and to sharing the Gospel message, and if you sing half-hearted or if you choose not to sing, how will others know that you are a committed and on-fire follower of Christ. What has taken inwardly needs to be expressed outwardly!

I am sure all of us, have been affected in some way by music. In some mysterious and miraculous way, God designed it so that music spiritually connects us to Him. This happens because we have been designed by God to appreciate nature, art, music, and creativity. As well, God has designed us to learn through music. As young children we learned the alphabet plus many other things about life through rhyming songs; then as adults, music is a powerful force that engages our senses and helps us to remember and memorize many things that stay with us throughout life. A song brings us back to a distant joy we experienced not only with God, but also with a loved one. God’s gift of music, both Christian and secular music,

draws people together in ways nothing else does. There are numerous documented cases where severe dementia patients can still sing songs that they once knew, perfectly, word-for-word and in tune, yet can't function in any other way. A familiar song not only has the power to prompt a memory, but also transport us back to some other place and time, and that's why music therapy is important to senior residents in nursing homes. Music is a gift! Music is an important part of our lives!

Worship is how we respond to a Creator who is worthy of our admiration, our reverence, our awe, our thanksgiving, and our praise. Worship acknowledges God's glory, majesty, greatness, power, and goodness, which He desires from His followers. Satan has done a good job of deceiving the church in keeping many of us quiet and reserved, keeping us from getting all excited about singing His praises. I believe Satan hates music because Lucifer was a high and exalted angel, created by God to be the worship leader in Heaven, leading the angelic choirs. When Lucifer fell and became Satan the devil our accuser, our praise and worship of God aggravates him, infuriates him, reminding him how far he had fallen from God's throne and reminds Satan of his ultimate destination – the lake of fire – where there is no music, no praise or worship – only darkness, suffering and the only sound that's heard is weeping and the gnashing of teeth.

Then, we also sing from the overflow of the joy we have, despite our problems, health issues or circumstances. Nothing should stop us or prevent us from singing! We can worship in spite of our difficulties, heartaches and our circumstances, because as **Romans 8:38-39** tells us, we are convinced that nothing can separate us from the love of God, ***“For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels or demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Jesus Christ our Lord.”*** We can sing because we are secure in our faith, knowing that we are being held safe and secure in God's almighty hands. Destined for a glorious future regardless of what we may be going through presently!

The New Testament Book of Acts tells us what the early believers did whenever they gathered together, ***“They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer...They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying the favour of the people”*** (Acts 2:42-47). From the very beginning of the church,

worship and prayer was not something believers just attended or watched from the stands like attending a hockey game, it was something they did together; they all participated. The early believers did not gather to be entertained, but to respond to God's love and grace. In the same way today, pastors, musicians, and others involved in the worship service are not to be seen as performers on a stage hoping to entertain the congregation; instead, they are offering themselves in humble service to God in order to lead the people in worship and prayer, drawing worshippers to a deeper love and a deeper commitment to God, their Heavenly Father. Whenever we invite the Holy Spirit to be present, saying "*Come Holy Spirit,*" He shows up. The Holy Spirit is present with us in a way in which we can't experience Him anywhere else. That's why Jesus said in **Matthew 18:20**, "***For where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I with them.***" Corporate worship and prayer magnifies the Holy Spirit's presence!

We gather together here at SCCC because those relationships we build here at SCCC around our shared faith and beliefs are critical to our spiritual health and critical to our mental and to our physical health. Studies have shown that those connected and involved in a church have better physical, emotional, and mental health, they are happier in life, and live longer! That's why this verse we find in Hebrews is so important to us, especially during this season of COVID, which has made it very difficult for us to gather and follow this command from the Lord – "***Let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess, for he who promised is faithful. And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds, not giving up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encourage one another – and all the more as you see the Day approaching***" (Hebrews 10:23-25). The worst thing we can do is to stop attending worship services when we need our church family the most – we need to stay connected, and that's why I'm so thankful for technology to keep us connected whenever we can't meet in person during this COVID pandemic. Fellowship is critical to our faith and Satan is using COVID to keep us isolated, but thanks be to God for our modern technology that is keeping us connected!

And then our souls – like our smart phones need constant recharging. Whenever we come together in worship, in unity as the body of Christ, together we get plugged into our source of spiritual power. In the midst of our worship services, as we give thanks, pray, praise, testify and open our hearts to God, we get plugged into the power of the Holy Spirit. We can lay our burdens before almighty God and upon our brothers and sisters in Christ, and in exchange receive

encouragement knowing that we are not on this journey alone. The important part is that we walk out our faith journey together as a family, the family of God, brothers and sisters who love Christ and love each other. Worshipping in community is a gift from God!

So, one essential practice in our Christian walk is to participate in weekly worship services with others – and then there's the importance of those daily private times of worship in our personal lives as well, and the most important part of that personal time is our time in prayer. In our personal private times of prayer – we praise God, we confess our sins and short-comings, we petition God for help, and the most important part is in giving thanks. In giving thanks we realize that our life and everything we have is a gift from God: our spouse, our family, our job, our church and the people around us are all gifts from our heavenly Father.

So, the most important part of our private worship and times of prayer is expressing our thankfulness to God, our provider and sustainer. However, the problem is that by nature we tend to grumble and complain far more than we give thanks. As well, most of the time we take everything we have for granted, believing we are entitled to what we have, rather than being truly grateful that we are living here in Canada rather than in some third-world country, or in a place like Iraq or Iran where our lives as believers, would be in constant danger. Living a life of entitlement and privilege can be the greatest deterrent to our worship, believing we don't need God, believing we can go through life just fine without Him!

Expressing thanks is important not only as our appropriate response to God – but also because it's important for our emotional, spiritual, and physical well-being as well. It has been proven that a thankful person is a healthier person, who lives with less worry and anxiety, sleeps better and is more rested, all because they have taken their eyes off of their problems and complaints, and are focused instead on God, His goodness, and His blessings. A joint study was conducted by a hospital in California and one in Scotland on heart patients. One group in the study was asked to keep a gratitude journal for their eight weeks stay in the hospital, writing down each day what they were grateful for. At the end of the study the researchers concluded that the group who kept the gratitude journal were less depressed and had improved heart-related markers in their blood stream than the patients who did nothing during their hospital stay. Their conclusion was that a more grateful heart was a healthier heart. The apostle Paul would have endorsed those findings, as he encouraged the Thessalonian Christians with these words, ***“Rejoice always, pray***

continually, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus" (1 Thessalonians 5:16-18). When Paul tells them to *"give thanks in all circumstances,"* we need to realize that Paul penned these words from a dark, damp rat infested prison, a place where it would have been extremely difficult to *"give thanks in all circumstances!"*

There are at least 400 references throughout Scripture calling us to be worshippers – with at least fifty of these references being direct commands to sing His praises. So, we can't disregard the command to worship because we don't like the music, or the worship team, or because we are not in the mood. We can't disregard the command to sing because **Psalm 149** makes it very clear that God commands us to sing, *"Sing to the LORD a new song, his praises in the assembly of his faithful people...Let them praise his name with dancing and make music to him with timbrel and harp...Let his faithful people rejoice in this honour and sing for joy on their beds. May the praise of God be in their mouths...this is the glory of all his faithful people."* As God's people we don't sing half-heartedly; instead, we sing His praises with deep thankfulness and with enthusiasm like fans in a sports arena spurring on their team. God demands no less from His followers than those sports teams demand from their fans – which is to worship with unleashed passion and conviction! As well, worship is our spiritual weapon against the enemy's attack of worry, fear, and anxiety. Whenever the church worships, Satan and his demons flee, because worship is our battle cry of victory and hope for the wounded, the weary, the sick and for the lost!

*"Why is this series on discipleship important as we begin 2022? Because I don't want any of you to become another unfortunate statistic! Just as COVID was breaking out 2 years ago, the 2020 January/February edition of Faith Today Magazine featured an article on a special report called: **"Not Christian Anymore."** Here's the headline: *"A major new survey suggests half of Canadians are either agnostic, atheist or unreligious. And only a tenth attend religious services weekly...The new normal is not having attended a single religious service in the last 12 months."* What I found shocking in this article was that the biggest decline in weekly attendance was not found to be among the younger generations, but those born between 1925-1964, which represents most of us here this morning, confirming what Paul said about the last days – *"In the later times some will abandon the faith."**

Then, in another article in this Faith Today Magazine the question was asked, **“Will Christianity disappear from Canada?”** The author’s answer was that at the present rate of steady decline, many denominations will disappear by the year 2040. The author gives the following basis for his answer: *“In Canada political forces and other religions have not been the main challenge to Christian faith – instead the challenge here since the Second World War had been a continuous experience of prosperity and security. Yes, there are troubling signs that Christian faith is increasingly unwelcome, but in a global context it really isn’t all that hard to be a Christian in Canada. For most of our Canadian neighbours the question is: Why should we bother to be a Christian at all?”* Unfortunately, being a Christian in Canada is no longer attractive to un-believers, but we can change that if we are dedicated to grow in godliness, get on fire for the Lord, and start living the joy filled, power filled and victorious Christian life we find in the early believers. John Wesley, the founder of Methodism, said this, ***“Light yourself on fire with passion and people will come from miles to watch you burn.”***