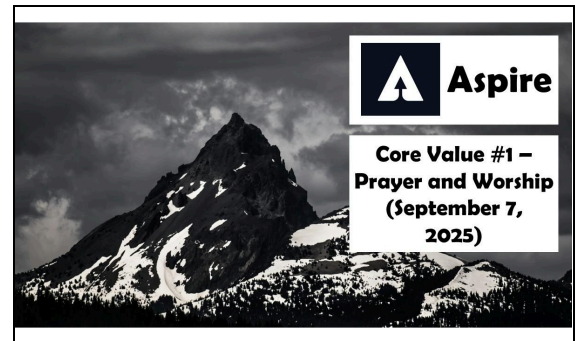


Aspire (Week 1) - Prayer and Worship  
**Yesterday's Sermon Summary**



1. St. Augustine, the great North African theologian from the 300s CE, noted that human beings are primarily creatures that desire, not primarily creatures that think. (Modern neurology has borne out the truth of his observation, incidentally). He goes on to write, "Our life is a gymnasium of desire...The entire life of a good Christian is in fact an exercise of holy desire. You not yet see what you long for, but the very act of desiring prepares you for it."

2. This sermon series is about what we - you and I individually and as a church family - desire to be. We express those in our six core values, the first of which reads as follows: "Prayer and Worship – Bringing Ourselves and Others Into God's Light...By praying and worshipping in all circumstances - our joy and sorrow, success and failure, hope and despair, satisfaction and regret – each of us invites God into our hearts and daily lives. When praying for others, we bring people closer to God and to His sustaining, comforting presence. When worshipping with others, we are unified by drawing spiritual nourishment from a common source."

3. We spent our time on Sunday talking about worship, namely the why of worship, not the how, the heart of worship, not the mechanics. We first heeded this observation by Adele Calhoun, a leading writer on spiritual formation: "Worship is a word most often associated with religion. But worship can be found in the lives of skeptics, secularists, agnostics, and even atheists. The simple truth is that everyone looks for something or someone to give their lives meaning. Worship reveals the something or someone we value most."

4. The two most common Hebrew words in the O.T. and the most common Greek word in the N.T. translated into English as "worship" all connote the same basic meaning: to worship is to bow before, pay homage to, yield to, submit to, and laud someone or something. And, per the previous Calhoun quote, we all have this worship impulse. We might "worship" our job, our success, our health, our own smug point of view, our anxieties, our tribe, etc. The common denominator in all those? We tend, practically and pragmatically, to worship ourselves.

5. Thus, we could summarize our first worship aspiration with the words of Evelyn Underhill, the great English writer on Christian spirituality from the early 20th-century: worship "leads us from our chronic self-occupation to God, the true source of life." United Church of Christ pastor/theologian Tony Robinson (in a piece you can read below) compares worship to play and sleep: all three at their best "get us out of our heads, out of our monkey minds, and out of our constant fretting, judging, scheming, and calculating" and such are a route to the healing and wholeness we so desperately seek.

6. We then observed that when most modern Americans, churched or not, hear the word "worship," they immediately think of "corporate worship" - that hour on Sunday morning when Christians gather together to sing, pray, hear God's word taught, and observe the sacraments together. Biblically speaking, that's far too narrow a definition of worship. In her landmark book on Christian spiritual practices, Marjorie Thompson contends that the scriptures show us that personal or individual worship is preparation for and precursor to corporate worship, and that our experience in the latter will be largely drive by our commitment to the former.

7. Many of the psalms of the O.T. show this connection between personal and public worship: so many of the psalms describe individual worship and praise, which then God's people and their religious leaders latched onto as a guide for how they might worship together, what they would pray together, and what they would sing together. That which was personal became the pattern for that which was corporate.

8. Thus, you can state our second worship aspiration no better than the late Dallas Willard: we should seek to lead LIVES of worship, not merely have TIMES of worship. Worship should become the constant undertone of our personal spiritual practice, habits, and rhythms. As The Message says it in Romans 12.1, "Take your everyday, ordinary life and place it before God as an offering which is holy and acceptable. This is what worship is."

9. Our last worship aspiration should be to play our two vital, indispensable roles in the "theater of worship," an image for worship used first by Danish philosopher and theologian Soren Kierkegaard. First, all of worship, be it personal or private, is done for an audience of One - God. On any given Sunday morning, those on the stage, in the pulpit, and in the pews/chairs are all performers and actors, and God is watching and enjoying. Even if we play no active part in a service up front, God is still paying attention to our openness, our willingness, our availability to His touch, His voice, or His nudge, etc.

10. Our second role in the "theater of worship" is different, namely, it is to realize that there is only one Actor in worship and it is God Almighty. Thus, in worship we must always be ready to respond to God's prompting; God gives, moves, and stirs, and we receive. As renowned Christian author Richard Foster says it, "We should come into worship with holy expectancy. We never know when divine initiative will come to fan the coals of our worship into a burning blaze."

## **Worship this Week**

Let's spend a week together aspiring to greater, deeper, more consistent worship - and not of ourselves and all that presses in around us in life, but of God our light and life.

- Intentionally, we didn't talk much about corporate worship yesterday. Pastor Chris will write about it a little bit in this week's Midweek Minute (the weekly Thursday email). So be on the watch for that.
- The most important thing we can do together this week is pay attention to and be intentional about our personal worship life: how do you worship individually, when do you do it, what practices help you do it, how do you carve out time for it, etc.?

These resources will give you some good ideas about how to make personal worship a key part of our week in, week out life:

- [Spiritual Disciplines - Worship](#)
- [What Does It Mean to Worship God? - C.S. Lewis Institute](#)

And here are a few more really good resources on worship, what it is, how we see it in scripture, etc.:

- [Understanding Worship - Richard J. Foster](#)
- [To Worship is to Touch Life - Richard J. Foster](#)
- [Worship: A Practical Guide - Adele Calhoun](#)
- [Sleep, Play and Worship - United Church of Christ](#)