

Living a Fruitful Life
Getting Rooted by Assembling with the saints
How to get more out of church

Intro: Last week we considered again the importance of the assembly in getting rooted in the word of God so that we can live fruitful lives. But it is also important that we make our times together as meaningful as possible. Last week we talked about the importance of preparation for worship (coming physically prepared, mentally prepared and spiritually prepared). And then we talked about the importance of concentration in worship (avoiding distractions and not being merely a spectator, but an active participant.)

Let me now suggest three things that will make your participation in worship more effective.

The importance of visualization

Last week in my parable of the football fan, I described Joe who prepared himself for the game and then upon arrival put himself totally into the action on the field, watching every play, accessing the result, and reacting to it. On the football field, this may be really easy; but in worship it takes more imagination. To some degree, worship calls upon us to use “eyes” that we are not accustomed to using—the eyes of faith.

What do you “see” in worship?

Someone may initially respond, “Well, I see the audience in front of me scattered throughout the building and someone is in the front leading the audience in worship.”

Let me suggest that if this is all we see, we are not seeing enough! We need to look beyond our physical circumstances and look with eyes of faith. In one sense we may be audience as we listen to those who lead the worship; but in another sense we need to remember that we are not the audience at all; God is the audience! I’ve been in assemblies where one might have gotten the impression that the worshippers were not aware of the presence of God.

Use your spiritual eyes to see spiritual realities!

In the singing, visualize the awesome scene of Revelation four where God is on His throne and four living creatures surround Him on every side and He is encircled with 24 elders who also sit on thrones surrounding Him. And then visualize this passage:

And when the living creatures give glory and honor and thanks to Him who sits on the throne, to Him who lives forever and ever, the twenty-four elders will fall down before Him who sits on the throne, and will worship Him who lives forever and ever, and will cast their crowns before the throne, saying, “Worthy art Thou, our Lord and our God, to receive glory and honor and power; for Thou didst create all things, and because

of Thy will they existed, and were created.” (Revelation 4:9-11)

Visualize Him as the great and glorious creator who made us. In the prayer, visualize God as a friend who loves you and cares for you, and is willing to hear your prayer. And think of Christ who intercedes in your behalf near the Father. The Hebrew writer sought to get believers to think of prayer as an entrance into the very throne room of God.

Let us therefore draw near with confidence to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and may find grace to help in time of need. (Hebrews 4:16)

In the ancient world, kings did relish the frequent appearance of their many subjects. Some even issued laws that forbade access to him and that allowed the king to punish unbidden suppliants with death itself. Yet God invites us to His throne to make our petitions known to him.

In the Lord's Supper, visualize the cross and the scenes surrounding it. Visualize the empty tomb. Visualize His appearance to the disciples and His ascension to heaven. Visualize Him seated at the right hand of God.

Paul tried to help the Galatians see vividly the sufferings of the Lord for their salvation.

You foolish Galatians, who has bewitched you, before whose eyes Jesus Christ was publicly portrayed as crucified? (Galatians 3:1)

We too need to keep these scenes before us. You might even benefit from reading the descriptions from the Bible or a song.

In the giving, think of the opportunity to put into God's hand some return of what He has given to you. Or envision those who will receive these funds so that they can devote themselves to the word of God.

In the preaching, think of God speaking to you words that were designed to help you go to heaven.

But if it is importance to see with our spiritual eyes it is important to hear with spiritual ears.

The importance of interpretation

Use your spiritual ears to understand the meaning of the things that you see. Paul stressed to the Corinthians the importance of not only of apprehending the miracle in the gifts they were given, but in making sure they understood the meaning and significance of what was being spoken.

What is the outcome then? I shall pray with the spirit and I shall pray with the mind also; I shall sing with the spirit and I shall sing with the mind also. (1 Cor. 14:15)

As you sing, think about what the song is saying. What story does it relate? What truth does it impress?

Did you ever have an experience on the road when you suddenly came to yourself and you had been driving for some time on “autopilot?”

Sometimes having a songbook can be a real liability, because we may find ourselves singing on “autopilot.” Try singing occasionally without a book and notice how you are forced to really think about what you are saying or you’ll not remember what to sing next!

As you pray, listen carefully to the thoughts of those who lead. What are they saying to God? Paul asks:

Otherwise if you bless in the spirit only, how will the one who fills the place of the ungifted say the “Amen” at your giving of thanks, since he does not know what you are saying? (1 Cor. 14:16)

Paul intended for all the church to be able after the prayer to affirm the truthfulness of what is prayed.

As you eat the Lord's Supper, think about the meaning of this spiritual meal. God has brought us together to remember what Jesus did for our salvation.

Our “presentations” get our thinking started. Consider keeping your Bible open and continuing to meditate on the passages our leaders mention and remember the words of the Lord himself:

“This cup is the new covenant in My blood; do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of Me.” (1 Cor. 11:25)

In addition, the Lord Supper affords us the opportunity to remember that we are one body in Christ.

Since there is one bread, we who are many are one body; for we all partake of the one bread. (1 Cor. 10:17)

Be mindful of the other participants in the Lord's Supper and remember that they too are guests at the table of the Lord; remember that they too share in the body and blood of the Lord and that together we are one body in the Lord—one family around God's table.

As you give, think about what this opportunity affords us. In giving we become partners with God in His work.

As you hear the lesson, think about the main message and the points being made, the scriptures being used to support the ideas. Try to do more than just listen for a “bottom line.”

The importance of appropriation

Use your spiritual hear to “own” what you understand. This has to do with personalizing what has happened, relating to it and expressing our feelings in connection with it. We need to “own” the experience of worship. We worship not only with the head, but also the heart. It is not just a question of “What does it mean?” It is a question of what does it mean to me?

Relying upon artificially created emotional effects is a poor substitute for each worshipper relating personally to all that is going on. One is true spiritual emotion; the other is a contrived emotionalism.

In song, put your heart into what you are saying. Is this the way I feel about God? Do I really intend to keep the pledges I'm making?

In prayer, add your own "amen" to the prayer. Make it your own.

Sometimes we urge people to "dismiss from our minds the cares of this world;" maybe what we need to do is to bring them at God's throne and leave them there!

In the sermon, look for how you can benefit from the words spoken.

Do I need this sermon? What can I learn to help myself? Avoid the "you really got on 'em today, preacher" syndrome.

In the Lord's Supper, think about what it means to you personally to be a Christian and to have the blessings of Jesus' sacrifice. Can you say with Paul:

"I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me, and delivered Himself up for me. (Galatians 2:20)

In giving, think about how God has blessed you and how glad you are to give back to him something to tell others about him.

Conclusion: It has almost become trite; but it's still true. We get out of worship what we put into it. And frankly, too many people in our society come to worship to do little more than watch the show. No wonder worship loses its power and people clamor for cheap tricks and stunts to keep it interesting.

Yet worship can still be one of the most powerful experiences of our lives...if we see with spiritual eyes, hear with spiritual ears, and relate with spiritual hearts.