

The Elements of Worship

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[0 : 00] Okay, we are going to, in a minute or two, pray. Each Sunday we take some time to pray. And we're going to, like we do most weeks at the moment, pray for our city, for Hong Kong, this great city in which we live.

But before we do that, I want to just say one or two things about some of the challenges that we as a city are facing and going through. And I know there's been so much that's been said. Some of us may be tired of talking about the protests and all the difficulty.

But I want to just, just three things for us as a church community to think about as we process this. The first is, I was chatting to a friend yesterday who was saying, and I fully agree with him, the thing that we think the devil wants to do in this time is to divide Christians and families and churches. And unfortunately, we're really seeing this, that sometimes churches and community groups, people don't want to be in the same room as someone who's got a different view to them and can introduce such division. And as a church family, I really want to say, guys, let's not let the devil do that to us.

Let's not let him divide us. Whatever your political views are, man, we are a family in Christ. Our primary identity is that we are in Jesus, not of a political view. And let's not let the devil have a field there with our church family.

[1 : 15] So the first thing is, this unity and division is what the devil's wanting to do. Let's fight against that with everything. The second thing I want to suggest is, I don't think we must underestimate the spiritual battle that's involved.

And we're going to start preaching through Revelation next Sunday. And as I've been reading through Revelation, you just realize how much spiritual battle and warfare there is in the world. And therefore, we must, must, must be a church that's praying.

And the reality is that very few of us here are going to solve political solutions. But we can be people that pray. And so I want to encourage us, whatever we do, Watermark, let's be a church that's praying for our city day in and day out.

Washing our city in prayer. And I want to read a quick quote from a guy called Philip Ryken, who years ago he was working at a church in Scotland.

And this is what he has to say. It's up on the screen. He says, And so just to say that we don't know how things are going to work out in Hong Kong.

[3 : 04] But when the final story of the world is written, who's to say what a praying church, what impact we had. As I really want to encourage us to be praying day in and day out for our city. I think God wants to do something with us.

And then the third thing I want to just encourage us is this. At our CG on Thursday, we were talking. And I was reminded of Esther 4.14, which is Esther's verse. And it says this in Esther 4.14.

It says, And so just, I don't know, I'm sure many of us here didn't grow up in Hong Kong. Many of us have either moved from other countries to Hong Kong or maybe you're born here and studied abroad. But for whatever reason, I'm convinced that God has called each one of us to Hong Kong and watermarked as a church to Hong Kong for such a time as this.

It's no accident that we're here. And so I want to encourage us, let's not just bury our heads in the sands and hope for things to pass over so we can get back to our lives. God has called us as a church for such a time as this.

[4 : 15] And let's stand up and speak and point our city to the hope of Jesus, to the one true hope that is Christ. Let's point people to the fact that peace and rest is found in Jesus. God has called us as a church and as Christians to this city for such a time as this.

Is that okay? So I want to encourage us to fight for unity, to be a praying church, and to stand up for this time that God has called us to be in Hong Kong for.

And on that note, let's pray. Let's pray for our city. Will you join me as we pray together? Heavenly Father, high and holy, meek and lowly, we come before you this morning both rejoicing in your goodness and your grace and yet carrying a heavy heart because of the brokenness of our own lives and of the world in which we live.

Father, this morning we are full of hope and celebration and also mourning that so much is not right with our world. And we find ourselves longing, God, for the new heavens and the new earth that you promise in your word.

Where every tear will be wiped away. Every sin banished. Every evil and wickedness finally dealt with. Where anxiety and fears and anger will be removed. Come, Lord Jesus, come.

[5 : 28] Come and bring your healing to our world, we pray, God. Father, as we pray for our city, we start off acknowledging our own sin. Father, no matter what anyone else has done in our city, whether we approve of it or not, we acknowledge that first and foremost, we are sinners.

We, too, have transgressed your law. We have given ourselves to other gods and idols, to the love of money, to pursuing our own comfort and convenience. We haven't loved the poor and the marginalized like you would want us to.

Heavenly Father, forgive us. Forgive us, Father. Father, thank you for your amazing grace, God. Thank you for your unending mercy.

God, we pray, don't only forgive us, but change us, God. Make us more compassionate, God. Help us to understand those that we differ with. Father, thank you that confession of sin always, always leads to life and to healing.

Come and heal us, we pray. Make us more like you, we pray, God. Jesus, we want to have your heart. We really do want to see the world like you. We want to have compassionate hearts like you do.

[6 : 38] Come make us more like yourself, we pray. Father, this morning we acknowledge that you've called us as a church family to Hong Kong for such a time as this. You've called us to be salt and light to the city, to shine in the midst of the darkness, to point out to our city the hope of Jesus.

God, come and help us, we pray. Jesus, we don't want to hide the light of the gospel. We don't want to bury it under a bowl. We want to put it on a stand for all to see. We want to point our city to the one true hope, that is Jesus.

God, give us wisdom to know how to do that. Father, where fear has taken over our hearts, come and give us faith. Where self-preservation has become first and foremost in our minds, God calls us to love and serve others.

Jesus, where we're tempted to blame and point the finger and find fault with others, help us to point our city rather to the lasting hope that is found in you. Jesus, our city needs you.

We need you. Come and guide us. Come and have your way. Come and be both Lord of our city and Lord of our own hearts, we pray. In your gracious and glorious name, amen.

[7 : 48] Amen. O.T. is going to come and read the scriptures to us this morning. The scripture reading comes from Exodus, Psalms, and Ephesians.

Please follow along in your bulletins or on the screen. In Exodus 15, we read, Then Moses and the people of Israel sang this song to the Lord, saying, I will sing to the Lord, for he has triumphed gloriously.

The horse and his riders he has thrown into the sea. The Lord is my strength and my song, and he has become my salvation. This is my God, and I will praise him.

My Father's God, and I will exalt him. In Psalm 100, we read, Make a joyful noise to the Lord. All the earth, serve the Lord with gladness, coming to his presence with singing.

Know that the Lord, he is God. It is he who made us, and we are his. We are his people, and the sheep of his pasture. Enter his gates with thanksgiving, and his courts with praise.

[9 : 12] Give thanks to him. Bless his name. For the Lord is good. His steadfast love endures forever, and his faithfulness to all generations.

And in Ephesians 5, we read, Be filled with the Spirit, addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody to the Lord with your heart.

Giving thanks always and for everything to God the Father, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ.

This is the word of God. Okay, great. Thanks, Oti. Great. Okay, well, Jeremy, do you want to come up here and join me? This morning, we're going to do something a little different. And this morning, we're not going to have a sermon as we normally do, which, if you're new here, this is very unusual.

[10:11] We haven't done that once since I've been part of Watermark, and we probably won't do it again for a long time. I must confess, as a preacher, a little part of my heart is dying, not preaching today.

But we've been part of this sermon series for the last three weeks, or today is the third week, called Why Worship or Why We Worship. And we've been talking about why it is that we come to church on Sundays and why we do what we do.

If you're not used to church culture, it's quite a strange thing to, you know, people gather and we sing songs and we listen to Scripture and then we go home. Why do we do that?

What's the point of all this? And so we've been on this journey exploring why we gather for worship and what our attitude is. And so, Jeremy, we're going to have a conversation for 20 minutes or so. And then after that, we're going to sing some more.

And we've actually, it's pretty chilled afterwards. Jeremy's got some ideas of where we're going, but we really are trusting that the Holy Spirit's going to lead us, even in song, and we're going to see what happens.

[11:14] So that's the plan for the next little while. So, Jeremy, maybe you can just recap for us, for those that haven't been here the last two weeks. Why do we gather on Sundays? Why do we sing specifically?

What's up with that? Yeah, I think in short, to boil it down to a couple sentences, it's about encountering God. It's like every week there are forces, there's the enemy, there's idols that are pulling us away and trying to cover us with all these other things that draw our attention away. And so we have this image of being washed in the gospel. Every week, week after week, we need to come back and be washed in the gospel again. Not that you've become unsaved and then now you're saved again, but you just really need to be reminded of who Jesus is, what he's done for you, and respond to God anew and to tell one another this good news once again.

Okay, and singing in particular? Is it? Why do we sing? Why can't we just listen to a monologue, be reminded, go home? Actually, who was here last week? You guys should know this answer.

But, you know, we looked last week, there's something so unique about singing that even like physiologically, we can remember a tune when it's set to music.

[12:31] We can remember the lyrics. So when you are singing truth, it actually somehow embeds it in your own mind. And so singing is just an amazing God-given gift for us as a church to remember who he is, what he's done, but also in a congregational setting, as we said this morning, as you're addressing each other in these songs, you're actually serving one another by reminding one another of all these amazing truths.

And in a way, you're being washed by the gospel, but in some sense, you're also washing one another in the gospel. And I think that's just a really beautiful image. Yeah, I mean, I just think of how each week, the things that we go through, whether it's in our own hearts, fears and anxiety, whether it's circumstances outside of life, whether it's family dynamics, each week we're tempted to either trust in ourselves or make our own lives work.

And weekly we're coming and being reminded, hey, you're not the center of your world, God is. And trust in Him, look to Him. Exactly. And you need to be reminded because by tonight, I'll have forgotten some stuff already.

And just you need to be reminded day after day. Jeremy, I guess some people think, hey, we come to church to be inspired, a prep talk, go and do it, or to be motivated.

Yeah. Additionally, I think one of the things I've noticed over the last few years in church culture, there's this growing kind of consumerism. Like, I want to arrive at church, kind of like a service interaction.

[14:03] I pay my debts and I expect goods and services. Like, the show better be pretty good. And, you know, coming to church, the idea of what's in it for me.

Talk to us a bit about that attitude and how do we counter that consumeristic attitude? And what would it look like for us as a church not to come to church like that?

But, yeah. Yeah, no. Does that make any sense? Totally. It's really real. I'm glad you know what I'm saying. Yeah. In a sense, like, you kind of come in and in a way, when we get a gathering of this size, there kind of lends a little bit to that.

Even now, you might be thinking, you know, is this late night show an entertaining one? You know, will they bring on some other guests? Or was this worth my entrance fee, whatever I put in the box? And I think we can let sort of experiences and models that we've seen outside of the church actually influence how we perceive our gathering here.

Where it's actually maybe we should flip that around. And so, I think just consumerism is just ultimately, it's not the sense we don't want you to be enjoyed. But if your enjoyment is sort of dictating your experience or, like, how you feel about your church and whether you were entertained or amused or, you know, how many good jokes the preacher told.

[15:26] If those things are actually shaping your experience more than the gospel, then I think God is prompting us. Like, something maybe has gone awry. Something's askew. And so, I think really a key question that when you come in and to come into this gathering is instead of thinking, am I this or that or am I feeling this?

It's like, is God encountering me? Am I encountering God? Am I hearing His word? Because God is speaking all the time. I think that's crystal clear. So, the real question is, am I hearing it?

God is yearning to reveal Himself to us all the time. The question is, am I yearning to perceive it? Yeah. I think that's so good. How many of us, and I've totally done this hundreds of times, walk away from church and say, hey, did you enjoy church today?

And I'm learning that that's the wrong question. Like, the point isn't did I enjoy it like it is a show. The point is did I encounter God? Yeah. And I mean, even what's quite common for people who are in music is like, hey, they'll be like, hey, the worship was great today or the music was great today. And, you know, sometimes I'll just be like, oh, thanks. Sometimes if I have a chance, I'll ask like, hey, what do you mean by that exactly? And that's even a good question for me to ask when I go into a church service. Was it great just because they played well or I enjoyed the melodies or I enjoyed the songs?

[16:45] Again, none of those things are bad. It's great to enjoy music that's God-given. But if that's actually the dominant sort of thought process in my head after a gathering, then I think that's also a reminder that actually, hey, have I really missed what God has been saying to me?

Yeah. Great. Tell us. Good answer. Good answer. I think in Scripture, whenever we encounter God, both His majesty and His glory, but also His tenderness and His gentleness, it demands a response, right?

We don't just say, okay, that's interesting. I think of Isaiah. He sees God and he falls down his knees and he says, woe is me, I'm a man of unclean lips. And again and again, even in Revelation, John has a vision of God and he falls down.

This glorious, majestic God that we encounter, and He wants us to encounter Him, not just be entertained by Him or just to learn cerebral knowledge.

What does it look like to respond to Him? And how do you think we can and should respond? What is appropriate response to the majesty of who God is? Wow. Falling your face down, like, you know, woe is me, I'm a man of unclean lips.

[18:13] I guess that comes to mind because you say that. I guess there's obviously a heart response, right? We're always looking, I think, you know, when Kevin, when we're talking about preparing the sermon and whatever, the goal as we prepare the sermon and the preaching team gathers, it's not, oh, will people enjoy this or will this?

It's like ultimately our goal is, can we speak to people's hearts? You know, the things that actually grip you. Because we're not trying to just change your mindset or whatever.

We're not trying to just give you the power of positive thinking. The narrative of scripture is that something has got a hold of our hearts. It's idols. It's our own desire to be our own king of our lives. And unless we address the things that are really gripping our heart, then that's, you know, you'll feel good. You might feel pepped up and energized for a day. But really, you haven't really addressed the idols of the heart.

So I think a true response always comes from, man, you know, I just feel something and I know something that I'm not worshiping my creator in the way that I should.

[19:18] So I think that's maybe more of a heart level thing. But that manifests itself in a lot of external and more visible things. So is that maybe something you've been... Yeah, so I think it's

really good. We're not just here for a cerebral, intellectual, academic exercise.

We actually want our lives and the control center of our lives to be reorientated towards God. And that does manifest itself in certain actions and postures and whatnot. Okay, we've got to come in a second.

Yeah. You spoke about we've got a planning meeting on Wednesdays. Yeah. So on Wednesday afternoons, the preacher, we feedback on last week. And then whoever's preaching the coming week presents kind of like his outline of flow and talk through it.

And then from that, you pick songs generally if you're leading. Or whoever's leading, yeah. And we've also got quite a specific flow of service. We actually got it in the outline here in the bulletin.

Yeah. A flow of worship. Talk to us about why is there a flow to our worship service? Why don't we just start off with a sermon or communion? Yeah. And then also talk to us about the songs that you pick.

[20 : 21] Why do you pick songs that you do? Yeah. I mean, so the flow, it's simple. Like we use the word liturgy. You can think about it as a story. You know, the Bible itself is a story. It's not just the whole kind of random haphazard scattering of texts.

And actually, there is an overall narrative that's really cool. So we start with adoration. You'll see that actually in your bulletins. And then we go to renewal. And then we go to commitment.

And so this idea of adoration is everything always starts with God. You know, in Genesis, in the beginning, God existed before any of us, anything. And so we always start with adoring God, who He is, what He's done.

And then from there, we need to be renewed. We need to be renewed by the gospel. We need to be renewed by the Holy Spirit. And then that moves into being to commitment. So now as we respond to God, as we've been renewed, we're going to be committed.

We're recommitting ourselves to God's mission, not just to each other, but to this amazing city. So that's kind of the flow. And so with the songs, we also actually want the whole service to flow there.

[21 : 24] But because we have usually songs in the beginning and towards the end, you'll see that it kind of matches that. Songs at the beginning will actually be focused more on God's character, His attributes, His activity.

And then as you move forward, it's more about or move later in the service, it's actually more about, okay, God's done all this for me. I've heard the gospel through the sermon.

How do I respond to that? How do I confess my sin? How do I repent? And how do I be commissioned out? So we're quite thoughtful about that. And then, and just really, and it's not even just the themes, but actually, if what we said before was true, which I believe is true in the sense that songs actually embed themselves deep in your psyche, you got to be really careful what you feed yourself and what you listen to because, you know, it'll be even subconsciously forming.

You know, some people say, and I believe this, you know, songs that you sing over and over again, they'll probably shape your theology in the long term far more than actually sermons will, no offense.

And so, and so actually, not even just what we sing, what we choose, so we take that very seriously. But even, hey, nowadays, you can just pick up your Spotify, your Apple Music, whatnot, and you load it up with Christian songs or any other songs.

[22 : 45] Are you being thoughtful and intentional about what you're listening to? Are you getting the whole spectrum of songs? I can talk a little bit about that, but, you know.

You talk about this all day. I could. But I think it's such a good point, right? If we're listening to songs that are telling us God thinks you're just the most wonderful thing in the whole world and He can't imagine life without you, that's going to tell us that we are actually the center of the world, not God, right?

And that's a secular version of Christianity. That's a fake gospel. It tells us that God exists to make me happy. And there are a lot of Christian songs that will actually reinforce that idea. Yeah, and it's just important to get balanced.

Like, obviously, God loves you. He loves you deeply and passionately. But if you're listening to a certain type or a certain style or genre over again, that might shape your theology more than, you know, having songs that are also really about just God's, His amazing holiness, His wrath, all these things.

So just really having a balanced diet. You don't want dessert three meals a day, you know. Your parents will tell you that'll kill you, right? You need your veggies. They might not be the most sort of enjoyable and pleasurable personally.

[23 : 52] I don't know what tickles your boat or whatever that thing. Tickles your fancy. Tickles your fancy or floats your boat. But, yeah, you do need a steady diet. And quick plug, Wednesday we're going to talk a lot about actually analyzing song lyrics.

So come check it out. Great. Jeremy, talk to us about our attitude with which we come to church. Yeah. Okay, I know a part of your soul just died when you heard that phrase, we don't come to church, we are the church.

I'm sorry. Jeremy's forever correcting me about that. I'm sorry. Okay, when we gather as the church, the attitude with which we come is really important, firstly, and secondly, our posture.

Like, there is something different about just like singing like this or actually our body language.

Yeah. It communicates something, but actually it also affects the way we encounter God.

Yeah, it's true. Like, if you're in an important meeting or someone's pouring their heart out to you and you're kind of just like, cool. Yeah. Or they're just like, or they tell you some amazing news.

Like, that, you're still sitting.

[24 : 57] You can sit like that or you can be like, yeah, yeah, I hear you. Oh, yeah, yeah, you know? And just stuff like that. That's a very simple but silly example of even like as you sit, there's different ways to sit.

And even in Scripture, I just love that there's, when you look at the Psalms, there's all these different postures that you can, that you can, and I'm going to just really quickly show you actually a couple of these.

Psalms say, stand. You who fear the Lord, praise him. All you offspring of Jacob, glorify him and stand in awe of him. There's something about standing that communicates something. It says, bow, you can bow and kneel.

Come, let us worship and bow down. Let us kneel before the Lord, our maker. So, you know, there might not be a ton of space for you to kneel, but actually you can spread out if you want. And even if you're not kneeling, actually, you can bow.

Like, there's a posture of bowing as you sit that is much more than just like kind of, okay. Yeah. La, la, la, la, la. And clapping, you know? You see that we're kind of moving towards more and more charismatic in some of your heads, right?

[25 : 58] But it's all in the Psalms. Clapping. It's actually in Scripture. Clap. You can clap and you can clap to the songs. You'll do our best. And if you throw the musicians off a little bit, that's okay.

Shout to God with loud songs of joy. It's not just whispers. Lifting hands. Lift up your hands in the sanctuary and praise the Lord. There's something about lifting your hands that are actually about honoring God.

And lastly, you can even dance. Who would have thought? Let them praise his name with dancing, making melody to him. Yeah, that's great. So, I mean, this is just a spectrum of actions and activities and postures that you can take.

And that's what we want to encourage. Obviously, we have certain leanings and that's okay. But we do want to encourage that. And just one thing. Dancing isn't necessarily like you don't need to learn moves or tango.

Like if you think about like a slow dance, really you're just moving your body kind of left and right. You know what I mean? There's just something about moving your body, letting your entire being respond to the song that I think is really cool because this is the temple of the Holy Spirit, right?

[27 : 01] So, even if I see kind of Kevin or Chris kind of sway and worship, like to me that's dancing. I can see his body responding to the praises of God.

Claire's getting very excited because I'm the world's worst dancer. And so, that's dancing in my mind too. So, I think it doesn't have to be choreographed. That's enough love. I'm a dancer. But I think just on the posture thing, for me, raising hands, either like this or up high.

For me, it's a posture of surrender. It's like, God, I'm not holding myself back. I'm not close to you. I'm open. God, come do what you want with me. God, I'm here to meet with you. And so, I think for me, actually, the physical posture of my body is a reflection of my heart and it helps my heart encounter God and engage with God.

As much as I can say it's about the heart, not our bodies, if I'm standing like this, it's just my heart is more closed towards encountering God. Yeah, I think it works both ways. Yeah, your posture informs your mentality and your mentality informs your posture.

So, sometimes, even if I'm not really feeling it, I'll still kind of, I'll just bow or I'll just raise my hands and just almost let my posture be saying, God, yeah, I'm here for you.

[28 : 14] Okay, last question. Tell us about your dream for Watermark family worship on a Sunday. Like, I haven't prepared you for this.

This is... I have a dream. Yeah. No, but, like, if you were to say, man, that's what I would love for our church to worship like that. I know worship isn't only singing. Yeah, yeah.

Worship is all of life. But I would love for Sunday mornings to look like that. Yeah. I mean, I think just hearing you guys sing is the most beautiful thing.

And you might not be looking at each other. Sometimes you guys might. But just looking out and seeing people engaged verbally, audibly, physically is the most encouraging thing.

And even so, sometimes I encourage you guys, if you're sitting in the back, look around at the people. Or even the front, kind of look around. Hear the voices. See people's physical engagement. And there's something that's just encouraging about that.

[29 : 15] So, I mean, that's one aspect of the dream. And just for people to come in and for us to see those postures. Again, not to act it out and not to, like, be fake and say, yeah, yeah, look at me.

I'm so spiritual. But actually to say that's, God's given us these postures to worship Him in. And it would be amazing for us as 100, 150, 200 people to actually be so engaged and passionate about singing to God.

Because that, He loves hearing our songs. Just when I think of postures, I just thought, not to put anyone on the spot, but Natalie, I just thought of you now. I remember a church that led in Cape Town.

The one night we had a worship evening. And like I was saying, like, me and dancing don't really go so well together. But there was this young lady. And she just came and danced for, like, five minutes in the front.

Just this most incredible dance. And it was almost like there was something spiritual about it. It was like a picture of her freedom in Christ. Where the whole city is, like, everyone's tense and stuff.

[30 : 17] And this lady just dancing extravagantly. It was such an incredible, I think, act of worship on her behalf. But it actually ministered to me. I was like, man, that's the freedom that Christ has given us.

And so just those postures that we might think that's not what we do in church. Man, those are acts of worship to God and can minister to each other. And we really need that. And just singing loudly. I mean, some of the most encouraging times is just hearing people sing out of tune.

Because even, like, good musicians sing out of tune. Because I know in that moment, they're singing with reckless abandon. They don't care about hitting the perfect notes. One of the times I felt so most engaged is when I just forgot what I was.

There was just no register of melody anymore. I was just singing and crying out the words. And, you know, out of tune, whatever. And I think that's something that's just so encouraging.

People using their voices. And you really call out and yell out when you're excited. When your favorite team wins, you don't care if your voice goes, right? So just that kind of passion and that sort of thunderous voice and rapture and sound from the church, I think, is amazing.

[31 : 24] Last thing is just my answer to my own question of my dream is that we as a church come here on Sundays, gather as the body, expectant to encounter God.

So it's not like, hey, I wanted Jeremy's good today, but expecting. Today I want to meet with God. We really do encounter God in the singing, in the preaching, in the prayers. And we can encourage and love one another and minister to each other.

That would be a beautiful thing. No matter whether the musicians are on key, whether the preacher is any good, if we can encounter God and bless one another, that would be a beautiful gathering to be part of. Amen.

Jeremy, do you want to lead us in song again? So can I invite us? Let's stand. And Jeremy's going to lead us for 10 or 15 minutes or so.

And as you get ready, can I pray for us? Let's close our eyes and, Holy Spirit, all this stuff we've spoken about, unless you come and minister to us, it's all in vain.

[32 : 29] Spirit of Jesus, we need you to come and open the eyes of our hearts to capture our eyes and our heart's attention again. And to help us fall fresh in love with Christ our King.

And so, Holy Spirit, come and have your way. Come and lead us and guide us. Holy Spirit, come and minister to some of the pain and the hurts. God, we need you.

We need you, God. Come and wash us freshly in the hope of the gospel. Come have your way, Lord. Amen.