

# Principles of Congregational Worship

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**Bible Text:** Ephesians 5:18-19  
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Take your Bibles and let's go to Ephesians again. We are in that practical part of the book where the apostle is writing to this local church and he is exhorting her about, "Now here is the way you are supposed to live. If you've experienced the glories of sovereign grace that I poured out to you in the first chapters," at least we call it the first two chapters but Paul didn't organize it that way, for the lack of a better way of saying it, that's the first part of the book, the first two chapters. Anyway, he lays out all the glories of what God has done in saving us and making us God's child and changing us, then he begins in chapter 2 going into chapter 3 saying, "Alright, now here's the way you are to live. Here is the way you are to work together and function together as individual Christians and in connection with one another in the local church." No man is an island. You've heard that many times but it's especially true in Christianity. You were saved to be a part of a collectivity. You were saved to be a part of our family and Christianity loses the vital component, a vital component, I might should say, if you are not in fellowship in a local church. That's what this was written to, as a matter of fact, the great part of the New Testament Scripture is written in the context of local church family life and it really makes no sense without it.

But here we are in Ephesians 5 and we've looked at this verse but I want to pull something out of it for a real practical exhortation to the body tonight and that's from Ephesians 5:18 and 19. Now remember, in the context of the city or the culture of Ephesus where they were commonly involved in pagan worship services that involved drunkenness and ecstatic exuberant celebrations, gibberish, sort of the idea of an ecstasy experience and all of that kind of emotion and outpouring not unlike maybe a concert you would see today where people are just wild with the music, whatever is going on, isn't it funny how the flesh and its expressions hasn't changed in 2,000 years. So coming out of that wild, fleshly, ecstasy type of celebration, pagan experience, Paul says, "Okay, now you're going to get together with a new type of people and you're going to experience a new type of fellowship, a new type of music, a new type of singing because everything has changed." And that's where he is.

So here is what he's saying, verse 18, "And do not get drunk with wine," by the way, that was a part of the requirement of their worship in their pagan temples and drunkenness. Now we've got some reformed people trying to do the same thing in our churches today, saying that it's somehow spiritual. I'm not going to chase that rabbit very far. Get back to

verse 18, "And do not get drunk with wine," you used to do that in your pagan experience, "for that is dissipation, but," instead now, "be filled with the Spirit," you have the Spirit, now walk in this new Holy Spirit and fellowship in it. Well, what does that look like? Verse 19, "speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody with your heart to the Lord." So he says, "Now this looks a lot different than what you had before." So I want to pull from this what I'm calling "Principles of Congregational Worship," primarily the singing and the musical part of our worship service is what I want to address. Now once again, verse 19, that talks about singing, first of all singing and making melody with our hearts to the Lord and then letting that singing be together with one another and edifying and influencing one another. All of this comes off of verse 18 which is "be filled with the Spirit."

Now let me remind you on this Sunday night that the highest form of worship is the preaching and the receiving of the preaching of the word of God. We would not have anything to sing about if we didn't have the word to build the singing upon, and so just as you have to take effort in singing and you ought to, so you must take effort in receiving the preaching of the word just as I must take effort in preparing and in preaching the word.

Now, when I say that the highest form of worship is the preaching and receiving of the word of God, I say that because God has ordained that preaching of the word is the most, how shall I say it, is the highest way God reveals himself to his people. There is something about this God-ordained means of exegeting the text and presenting and preaching the text that makes Christ real to the people. I can't explain that. I didn't come up with that. As a matter of fact, the Apostle Paul writing to the cultural Corinthians told them, "And it is through the foolishness of preaching that God saves his children." In other words, "Your culture is going to say this can't be the most effective way to communicate, this can't be the most effective way to influence people or grow your religion," and Paul said, "Well, it is. You call it foolishness, God calls it wisdom." And so it is through this primary means that more is known or God chiefly reveals himself, however, that does not mean that our congregational singing is not important. As a matter of fact, according to Ephesians 5:19, it's more than just important, it's inevitable. Did you hear that? Worshiping together and singing is not just important, certainly it is, it's inevitable.

Now in Ephesians 4:11, he talks about the fact that he gives churches pastor/teachers. Your pastor, it doesn't have to be me, take the personality out of it, but the man in the office of the preaching pastor is God's gifted man who is a gift to the church. He's a gift to the church so that you might know the things of God as you need to and function together as the people of God as you ought to, and then if that is going on effectively plus, of course, you're in the word, you're having your Bible studies, you are memorizing Scripture, you are in your small groups, and then you're striving to be repentant of sin and be filled with the Spirit, the natural overflow of the word in your heart and the Spirit in your heart is singing one to another about the Lord and about the things of the Lord. That's why this is something of a crescendo in verse 19 where he says, "speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs." It kind of just carries itself.

When you have been born again and Christ lives in you and you start hearing the word preached and the Spirit for of God is taking that word through the understanding of your mind and impacting your heart and emotions, singing is going to come out because you just begin to love this one that you learned about. You begin to love him more because he saved you. You love him more as the Lord and the Master of your life and do you know what you find out? People always sing about the one they love. Have you noticed that? Turn on the radio station. Country music, pop music, I get so tired of all they've got to sing about is natural human love. Now I'm not saying that's wrong, that's okay to sing about that, it's a very real thing, it's a God-given thing, but there are higher and better things to sing about too like the love of God. But my point is we just end up singing about the one we love and very often, especially when they are young and they are "in love," they'll have a special song that's about each other, you know, that this is our song, because singing just comes out when you love. Well, that's what God does through the word and the Spirit, he deepens our love for Christ and singing about him one to another is just the natural overflow. Even some of you that are the stodgiest among us, sort of the most reserved among us, maybe you're just more dignified than the rest of us but if you're not careful, Brother Tom will get to leading and we'll start singing and you'll actually start singing too. It just kind of starts taking over your heart and it should. As a matter of fact, you need to repent and get on with it and loosen up with it more and sing about him more.

It's something like the fellow that went to one of those craft fairs, you know, where people had all kinds of things they were making, and he was over on one side and he just started investigating the whole place and he looked over there and far away on the other side there was some old fellow over there and he had one of those old-fashioned water pumps and, man, he was just going at it and water was just gushing out. So he looked around at a couple of other crafts and he looked back over there again and, sure enough, over in the corner that guy hadn't moved, hadn't changed, he's wide open, man, pumping that pump and water is just gushing out. A few minutes later, he looks back over there and the guy is over there just hard at it, man, he just hadn't changed, water is just gushing out. He said, "I've got to go and check this guy out. How in the world is this guy just consistently with such vigor pumping that water in that old-fashioned pump?" So he got over there and he got to look at it and he got closer and he thought, "Well, that's a stick man." He had a hinge in his elbow and what happened, they put an old pump on an artesian well and the water was pumping him. He was just hanging on. That's all he was doing. Just a stick man. Well, that's what God wants us to be like in the Holy Spirit, to be full of the word, to be full of the Spirit and it kind of flows up out of us one to another. That's what needs to be happening in congregational worship.

Now, there is no one way to lead the singing or do the singing in a church. As a matter of fact, I remember in my mind two of the most, I thought, spiritual and heartfelt worship services I've ever been a part of and both of them were very very different. One was in a township in Soweto in South Africa. Now the Soweto Township was a place for the African tribesmen and there was a Baptist church there that I was preaching in that morning and as we went in to the service, we just kind of sat there and all of a sudden, I

don't know what the problem was but the pastor's wife in the middle of the congregation would begin to sing and everybody would just follow her lead and sing with her. Then she'd sing another song and we'd all changed to that song and sing. And it was so beautiful and so sincere and I really felt that I was with God's people and in a great worship service. Then over here in America, it was probably 15 or so years ago and I was at Bethlehem Baptist Church in Minneapolis, Minnesota, and they sang just rich thoroughly biblical music and it was obviously Christ-centered. I remember my spirit rising with joy and I remember those are two very different styles or approaches but both of them were wonderful and true worship. Since that time, Brother Tom has come in and helped lead us and I sense that same thing here at Grace Life Church of the Shoals.

Now here are some points. I'll not spend very long on them but some principles now of congregational worship, a very practical exhortation but this is important stuff and you might say, "Well, that's stuff that you and Brother Tom and the elders take care of." Yes, but you need to understand biblically why we do what we do.

Well, 1. Congregational worship must be Bible-based and Bible-saturated. We need to be careful that what we sing, the lyrics in the songs, express the truth about God and God's word. Look, folks, it just doesn't matter if it stirs you and it just doesn't matter if it blesses you, is it true? That's what matters. Our God is the God of truth. The Scriptures have authority over all that we do, it has authority over what we do, and it has authority over how we do it. The content of God's word must be woven through all we do in worship. You see, the words of every Christian song should be biblical, they should be distinct and clear and accurate in reflecting the teaching of the word of God. It's tragic that so much music today that goes under the name of Christian music is a theological mishmash often reflecting much of the world's philosophy as it is God's truth. So much of it is just sort of a human sentimentality with a little Christian jargon thrown on it and people say, "Boy." I remember a man and bless his heart, he's no longer with us, and years ago, and I loved him, he was a good fellow but he'd say, "Man, I'll tell you what, I get more blessings out of the song service than I do the preaching of the word." Well, I understand that. I'm not saying that can't happen. I'm not saying that's wrong but my point is I knew what the song service was like that he was talking about. He was talking about sort of the chill bumps he'd get like you to get if you went to a country music concert versus a stirring joy and treasuring of the true God of Scripture.

So the goal and what Paul is saying here to the Ephesians is from the Spirit's influence, listen, the Spirit wrote this book. This is divine. This is inspired of God by the Spirit of God. The Spirit of God is only going to lead you to get excited about what's true from the Scriptures. He's not going to lead you to get excited about things that are more of sentimental value or, "That made me feel like I was back in grandmother's house. That makes me feel like I was back at the camp meeting when I was a boy." Well, that may be alright but those old sentimental values don't necessarily mean that truth was emphasized at all. So it needs to be thoroughly biblical.

2. Congregational worship must be led by men who are genuine worshipers and not performers. Genuine worshipers and not performers. In other words, we believe in lead

worshippers, not worship leaders. Did you hear that? We believe in lead worshippers, not worship leaders. You don't hire somebody to lead your music because they are gifted and talented, you hire somebody to lead in music because they love God and love the truth and hopefully have enough talent to keep us on track together musically, and that's why we love and appreciate Brother Tom so much. As a matter of fact, and Tom would be the first to tell you, that here at Grace Life Church, the lead worshiper here is not Tom Clay, the lead worshiper here is Jeff Noblit because I preach the word here primarily. It doesn't mean the other men are not lead worshippers too, they are but my point is it's not because someone has musical ability, it's because someone knows and loves the truth that they can help lead in worship. It's just a wonderful wonderful blessing that we have a man like Brother Tom who is a right arm to me and an extension of the preaching of the word in the way we worship and the way we sing.

So we must be committed that we're going to utterly denounce all sham, all hypocrisy, all pretense, and all posturing. We must avoid all artistic performance but develop an atmosphere of a radical personal encounter with God. It doesn't mean you can't do things musically excellent but it's the spirit of the leader and it's the spirit of the church, it's the spirit of the choir, it's the spirit of the musicians. Certainly it should be excellent, if it's not excellent it's distracting and it hinders worship, but it's not to be showy or an artistic performance.

III. Congregational worship should be marked by neither excessive extravagance or by shoddy performance. I've been in places that have had both extremes, where they would have such an emphasis on the fact that they have trained musicians and everything is just over the top in artistic ability, and then I've been in other settings where they almost bragged about the fact that it's a mess from the time they start until the time they end, and we shouldn't be trying to do either one of them. Either of the above will divert the attention from Christ and pull us away from the substance of what we are to be about. He says in verse 19, he says we need to be "making melody," the end of verse 19, "making melody with your heart to the Lord." It's not about you're not doing something well, it's not about we are performing this excellently, it's about we are loving and worshipping and honoring the Lord.

Now a lot has to be taken into consideration in this modern world. You just cannot believe the logistical stuff from a computerized lighting system to these computerized boards and all the things that are involved in all the musical instruments and all the technology and all the sound, and we can even have a lightning storm on Saturday night and short out something that we may not catch until the service starts. There is so much stuff and we have to spend a lot of time and a lot of energy on the sound system, the music we play, the lighting, the heating, the air conditioning, all the aspects of everything that's involved in the worship service so, why? So that it is not distracting to the Christ we want worship and the one we are to be focused on.

4. Congregational worship is to be vertically focused but have horizontal impact. Vertically focused but have horizontal impact. In other words, he says you are to be filled with the Spirit. That's vertical. That's verse 18, 5:18, "be filled with the Spirit." Strive

when you come into God's house to be filled with the Spirit. I'll talk more about some practical things about that in a moment. Then also, strive that you are repentant. Look, you've made the choices to push the worldly amusements and worldly concerns out of your heart and mind so you can rekindle your joy in Christ for Sunday morning. That's something of what Sunday does, it's a disciplined, get my heart back where I know I really need it to be, and then making melody with your heart to the Lord, you then begin to have an impact on one another.

It's just amazing how that happens and I think one of the reasons why I'm so blessed in worshiping with you and when we sing our hymns together, is that the great majority of us have already been in small group. We've already been in the word, we've already been in prayer, hopefully we've already repented of some stuff in our lives, and we are more in tune, we are more filled with the Spirit when we come in here to sing together. And when folks are filled with the Spirit and loving Jesus, they help each other the best. It impacts each other. It's a vertical focus but it has a horizontal impact.

5. Congregational worship should have the blending of historic and contemporary music in heartfelt singing. Historic and contemporary music in heartfelt ringing. "Well, I'll tell you what, preacher, I just believe it ought to be like this. Or I just believe it ought to be like that." We've always had those sentiments and those feelings. As a matter of fact, some congregations today practice church splits. They practice being a split. They have one group that has their contemporary church service, then they step from that one and have a second group that has their traditional worship service. I've never understood that. You mean the power of the Gospel is not enough to change you enough to make you unselfish enough that you can't get together and worship together as one church? Why don't you just put a sign out front, "Come and worship here where the Gospel can't change anything." It can't even change us enough to get us out of our personal preference of music. We're supposed to be willing to die for each other and we can't even worship together because somebody might not sing the kind of songs or use the kind of tune I enjoy the best. Do you know what you need to do? You need to get over yourself, and if it's truth in the music, sing it. Do you know what? You might begin to like some of those things that you think you don't like, if it's truth. Now if it's not truth, that's a different story.

You know, there was a new fad in the church some time ago and when this new fad of singing came into the church, some of the old-timers had a real problem with this movement. I want to read you some of these new ditties that came out of this new faddish movement. Here are the lyrics to one of those songs,

"O for a thousand tongues to sing  
My great Redeemer's praise,  
The glories of my God and King,  
The triumphs of His grace!

My gracious Master and my God,  
Assist me to proclaim,

To spread thro' all the earth abroad  
The honors of Your name.

Jesus! the name that charms our fears,  
That bids our sorrows cease,  
'Tis music in the sinner's ears,  
'Tis life and health and peace.

He breaks the power of cancelled sin,  
He sets the prisoner free;  
His blood can make the foulest clean;  
His blood availed for me."

That's called "O for a Thousand Tongues to Sing."

Here's another little modern ditty that came into the church a while back that the traditionalists had a problem with.

"O for a thousand tongues to sing,  
Blessed be the name of the Lord,  
The glories of my God and King,  
Blessed be the name of the Lord.

Jesus, the name that calms my fears,  
Blessed be the name of Lord,  
'Tis music in the sinner's ear,  
Blessed be the name of the Lord.

I never shall forget that day,  
Blessed be the name of the Lord,  
When Jesus washed my sins away,  
Blessed be the name of the Lord."

And here's one more of those little modern ditties that came into the church some time ago.

"Hark! the herald angels sing,  
Glory to the new-born King!  
Peace on earth, and mercy mild,  
God and sinners reconciled.  
Joyful, all ye nations, rise,  
Join the triumph of the skies;  
With th' angelic host proclaim,  
Christ is born in Bethlehem.  
Hark! the herald angels sing,  
Glory to the new-born King!"

You see, this happened during what's called the Great Awakening and at that time before John and Charles Wesley and George Whitefield and a number of Baptist preachers began preaching and God sent that revival, there was only very stodgy, stiff, formal church music that quite honestly the great majority of people in the churches didn't understand, and as people were getting saved and actually new churches were being started, these men, the songs I just read to you, were written by Charles Wesley, these men began to write new songs based on the Bible but actually do you know where some of these tunes came from? They were more barroom tunes and they brought those over into the church but all of a sudden the people could think about the things they really were singing. All of a sudden they understood them. Of course, in the Catholic Church for centuries you could only sing in Latin so nobody knew what you were singing. But there was this concept in the church until the Great Awakening that church music had to be so high and distinct because God was so high and holy, but it was so high and holy it was no good for anyone. The point is, it really wasn't high and holy at all. But here's my point: it was a return to sound biblical singing in a way that the common man could relate to it and so this music would have been considered sort of crude and folksy and simple to so many of the church leaders of the day.

Now, the mingling of contemporary Christian music, the mingling of southern Gospel music along with high church music, I think and I believe God believes, is a very good thing. Let me make this side comment of where I think we are today. About 50 years ago, that would be roughly accurate, contemporary music came into the church but you've got to understand something: contemporary music today is very different than what John and Charles Wesley and George Whitefield were doing in the eighteenth century. As a matter of fact, they were bringing very thoroughly biblical lyrics into the music of the church. Today in the last half-century, contemporary music – now listen – began to deemphasize doctrine and deemphasize the Scripture but emphasize the beats, the tunes and the rhythms that everybody in modern culture enjoyed in their secular music. So the modern contemporary movement is a movement away from biblical fidelity where the Great Awakening contemporary movement was a movement to biblical fidelity. Do you understand the difference? And that's a very very important difference.

So sometimes people will go back to the Great Awakening and say, "Now wait a minute, they brought the world's music into the church." No, they brought some tunes from the world but they brought sound biblical lyrics and words into those tunes. Today we are doing right the opposite, we are bringing the world's music in along with the world's philosophies and we've got a lot of nonsense and a lot of mishmash as I said earlier, of shallow, weak and unbiblical things in our music. It doesn't matter if it's new or not, it matters if it's true or not.

But now back to this thing of contemporary music, southern Gospel music, and high church music. Now when we talk about more the southern Gospel and maybe some of our roots down south, we might call that a folk culture, and folksy music has a high priority on expressions of the heart and mind that typically an average person can enjoy without much care or concern. That's good. We need to sing some simple things, some



folksy things that we can all just readily grasp and embrace. Fine culture, on the other end, has a high priority on intellectual and artistic expression that requires an above the average ability and lots of discipline to understand and appreciate. I mean, you've got to be fairly sophisticated to really appreciate a 100 piece symphony orchestra. But it's good and it's good to try to appreciate it. Do you know why? Because our God is so big and so wonderful and so multifaceted he is praised and glorified by the simple folksy stuff and he is praised and glorified by the complicated high church stuff too. Were you here this morning? There are some truths about God that require you to get your mind going and there's music that requires you to get your mind going too and we need all of it in God's church. Both of them have God glorifying goodness.

So we need to meet the people where they are with folksy music, we need to be reminded that God loves common folks just the way he made them, and we need to remind ourselves there is a preciousness about the basic wonders of God but also in fine music or what we call high music, we need to remind ourselves that God's ways are higher than our ways. His ways are beyond finding out. There is complicating and loftiness to God also. It's not one or the other, it's all of the above.

Now lately we've been doing quite a few folksy things. Have you noticed that? "When the roll is called up yonder, I'll be there." Then tonight's music is kind of folksy, but then we may turn right around like we just did a while ago and we sang a song from the Great Awakening actually, the middle part of the eighteenth century. Then who knows, next Sunday Tom may pull out a fifteenth century hymn and sing it as a choir special. That's the way I'm convinced it ought to be. All of it brings glory to God.

Just to give you a little note on the need for the balance of some fine music or to work toward fine music in the church. Now look, I know a lot of congregations, they don't have a Tom Clay, they don't have a man of that ability, they don't have a Pam Noblit on the piano and these great instrumentalists and they can't do a lot of the things that we are able to do at Grace Life Church, and that's okay. God is not in any way, his glory is not diminished, but as a church can, it's not wrong and, indeed, I think it's even good to do some of these things and that's why I love the Shoals Christmas Praise. I just think it's a wonderful wonderful praise and honor to our God as we worship together with our choir and orchestra, and it takes some work. It takes the mind. It takes some discipline.

Listen to some verses here. Ephesians 3:18 and 19, he said, I want you "to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ which surpasses knowledge." Philippians 1:9, "And I pray, that your love may abound still more and more in real knowledge and all discernment." Colossians 1:9, "For this reason also, since the day we heard of it, we have not ceased to pray for you and to ask that you may be filled with the knowledge of His will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding." 2 Peter 1:2, that you may "be multiplied in the knowledge of God." So over and over, the apostle is writing to the church telling it, "Use your brain. Be disciplined about some things." And high church music requires a lot of that, but the main thing we want to remind ourselves, wherever we find ourselves in the spectrum and I think, again, it should be balanced, Scripture tells us we must worship the Lord in Spirit

and in truth. That's exactly where Paul is as he is exhorting the Ephesian church in Ephesians 5:18 and 19 to be filled with the Spirit, then sing to one another, making melody in your heart to the Lord. Make sure you are anchored in truth and filled with the Spirit.

Okay, let's go to VI. Congregational worship must aim at the heart through the head. Congregational worship must aim at the heart through the head. In other words, we hope to stir deep emotions in you. We hope that our worship service has a strong emotional effect on you, turning you toward God but not manipulating emotions and absolutely not by bypassing your brain. Didn't I just read all those scriptures to you about the knowledge, the knowledge, the true knowledge, the understanding. Christianity does require the work of the Spirit but the work of the Spirit always works with the knowledge of the truth as revealed in the Scriptures. The Spirit uses the revelation of the word of God to cause us to feel that emotional response toward God and so we are and we've had some of this in our past and I hope we've grown to not anymore let this be any kind of a stronghold here, and that is first of all we definitely want to avoid emotionalism in our worship and emotionalism can be defined as failing to appeal to clear thinking about spiritual things that are based on biblical truth, or it's manipulating emotions apart from appealing to the mind. You know, somebody gets all excited and all worked up and all emotional and you ask him why and they can't really tell you. I would hope and pray after this morning's message, your emotions were stirred but I'd hope and pray you could articulate with your mind an understanding of the truth your emotions were stirred about.

It's the heart affected through the understanding of the mind and that's one of the reasons I don't want to chase this rabbit very far. There is something of a movement that puts emphasis on children always being in worship service, I mean very small children, that somehow that's better. I respect that. I'm not saying that's wrong or evil other than it can get challenging to preach and everybody hear the word effectively if you've got dozens and dozens of babies in the service because babies cannot hear and understand with their mind yet and it's the pagan superstitious religions that put an emphasis on the Spirit emanates into people's lives just by being in the geographical context to where the Spirit is working. That's paganism. That's not Christianity. Christianity works through the understanding of the mind as you understand the truth. Faith comes by hearing. You've got to hear it with the mind and then faith arises in the heart.

So we want hearts to be stirred but we don't want emotionalism, for emotionalism's sake, but we also don't want intellectualism. That's the other and we don't want and that's seeking to impress the intellects of the people without seeing their hearts moved or their hearts changed and their behavior changed. Look, God wants to be known and enjoyed. I'm going to say that again: God wants you to know him and enjoy him. And I've used the illustration so many times, if you love your wife and you begin to tell her you love this about her and that about her and that about her, "I love your blonde hair," and she's got brown hair. "I love your green eyes," and she's got blue eyes. You're in trouble. You don't know her. You've got some concept in your mind about her you are in love with and you are projecting it on her. Well, God's more important than your wife. God says, "Know me and learn to love me for whom I've told you I am." That's the proper intellectualism and

the proper emotionalism in proper balance. God is more glorified when we are learning of him truly and enjoying him genuinely from our hearts.

VII. Congregational worship has a greater potential to glorify God than individual worship. Congregational worship, I say has a greater potential, I think does more greatly glorify God than individual worship. "Well, I tell you what, I can worship God out in the deer woods." Well, I think you can, as a matter of fact, I do that but it's not nearly as powerful. You know, Jesus didn't say, "All men will know you are my disciples because you love me when you're deer hunting." No he said, "All men will know you are my disciples by the love you have one for another." When you get together in the church and you are from this background and you're from a different background, and you're a guy and you're a lady, and you're from this kind of culture and you're from another kind of culture, but we all get together in here and we all sing the songs of the faith and we are all in unity around the things of Christ, we all share the same Holy Spirit, and we all lose ourselves in the oneness we have, and in the truth and in the spirit, that shows the world something of God's great wisdom and power, to bring us all together. God forbid we have to cater to you like a baby. I'm not saying you, we don't have to cater to you, but I'm saying churches today begin to cater to their congregations like they are a bunch of little babies if they don't get their little particular praise songs, they'll go somewhere else to church. Here's what I'm telling you: you'd better grow up or get converted, one of the two. If your stick-to-itiveness, if that's a word, but you know what I mean, if that's all you've got, we don't have anything. God forbid we start being really persecuted here in America. Are you going to bail out on me because you didn't get your little praise song sung? I've got nothing if they come to lock me up for hate speech. I want some men that are going to stand with me because they love the truth and we love each other. Amen? All this nonsense today, "Well, I like this." We've got these little designer churches for all these little wimpy effeminates. I shouldn't get like that. I'm sorry but I meant it.

We ought to love the God of truth. You ought not be able to run somebody off. You can't run me off from here. Try it and see what happens. A bunch of them already have. You can try it too if you want to. You won't be the first one. Do you know why? Because I love being with you. I love being around you. I love singing God's praises with you. I love church planting with you. I love what we are together. It's just wonderful. Isn't it weird, isn't it strange, I've been here almost four decades, do you know how many people I know in the Shoals area who used to be church members here and right now they are on their fifth, sixth and seventh different church membership since I started here? Is that not crazy? Brother, you find the truth and you drive a stake in the ground and say, "I ain't going nowhere unless God leads." If God leads, I'll go, but not on a bunch of little silly preferences about style and feeling and excitement and modern media and drama and is it funny, is it exciting. No, is it true. Worship me in Spirit and in truth.

Well, I brought all that out of God wants us together corporately worshiping. Certainly worship when you are by yourself. Certainly have family worship. Certainly worship when you're on the job. Any time we are honoring and serving God, we are worshiping him but there is an essential component to coming together as a local church family and worshiping together.

8. We're almost done. Congregational worship is pursuing God and expecting God. Saturday night, you're full of some blooming ballgame, you're full of all this stuff that's not necessarily sinful or wrong but it ain't the best. Listen to me and I'm going to charge you again, I've done it before, and you see, I have to because I'm preaching. It's good that I get to. You need to work at getting ready for Sunday on Saturday night. Get that ballgame off as soon you can and say, "Now, God help me. God help me. I don't want to rob myself of the great pleasure and the great treasure and the great joys of chasing hard after you and finding pleasure in you." The Jewish Sabbath began on the evening before. I believe there is something to that. You need to go to bed on Saturday night getting your heart ready for worship on Sunday. Work at it. Put some effort into that. Pray hard for the worship service.

We have a little prayer time every Sunday morning, the elders do and the staff, and I thought about, you know, is that really important? As a matter of fact, a lot of Sunday mornings, I'm just wound up in my message. I don't feel like talking to anybody. Have you noticed that? I try to be friendly and sweet but I'm telling you, it's hard to lock yourself up, prepare to preach and then be happy Jack, slappy on the back with everybody. I'm just not geared that way but, but that prayer time always helps me. That prayer time is always invigorating and encouraging and we need to be praying hard for the worship. We need to be preparing on Saturday night. We need to be expecting God to draw near. "God, show me something new. God, inform my mind of greater things about you, more wondrous things about you, more glorious things about you." If you haven't learned anything in the last two Sunday mornings that has helped you to glory in and wonder over God, I can't help you, and the problem may be that you're not getting ready for it. You're not working to get yourself prepared for it. Oh, that's so important in our worship. In James 4:8, James writes, "Draw near to God and He will draw near to you." You might be getting out of it what you put into it.

Well, 9, our last one: congregational worship is expected to overflow into love for one another. It just helps you love each other better when you sing about your Lord together and worship him together. Corporate worship that is God-centered and corporate worship that is God-enthralled will splash over into a spirit of love for one another in the local church. We certainly do not build our worship service around what man thinks or what man wants or what man desires or what man needs. And I've told you this before, but oh my goodness, I can't even name to you the conferences, I mean massive nationwide conferences, thousands of pastors go to them, and the conference is predominantly about here's what people want today, here's how to get them into your church. That is sheer unadulterated idolatry. Worship is not about man and man's needs or man's wants or man's desires. I know what man needs, wants and desires. I know exactly what the fallen flesh needs, wants and desires but we are to be in here about what God wants, and disciplining ourselves to joy in what he desires, something higher than the world can give us. We are going to focus on God and the Spirit of love will then manifest itself more powerfully than ever before in our fellowship.

Well, those are some practical exhortations on corporate worship in the local church. Now I don't know about you, but I've been reproved by this and I hope you have too and encouraged and strengthened by it, to keep on keeping on for the glory of God.