

6 Ways to Worship 'in Spirit and Truth'

As God's worshippers, how can we navigate the paths of justice in our congregational gatherings? It will mean matching the mission of Jesus with the music and expressions of worship we embrace and facilitating worship as lifestyle. It may also require us to take practical steps toward personal change:

1) Refocus. Reductionist Western worship is possible because we have lost a sense of awe and reverence for who God is, fashioning instead a God in our own image. Author Mark Labberton writes in his book *The Dangerous Act of Worship*: "The God we seek is the God we want, not the God who is. We fashion a god who blesses without obligation, who lets us feel his presence without living his life, who stands with us and never against us, who gives us what we want, when we want it." Let's refocus on who really matters.

2) Repent. The failure to incorporate laments for justice into corporate worship underscores that we misunderstand what worship really is. It is neither the rhythmic pursuit of a euphoric high nor the somber embrace of silent reflection. Jesus describes true worshippers as those who worship "in spirit and truth" (John 4:23, NKJV). Paul says: "Do not conform to this world"—trendy fashions and such—"but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God" (Rom. 12:2). Where our will conforms to the world's patterns and trumps God's will, let's repent for rejecting true worship.

3) Remember. The holy God we revere is also our righteous king who exacts justice on behalf of His people. Moses and Miriam remembered when they praised Him for demonstrating justice in His dealings with Pharaoh and liberating His people (see Ex.

15). Hannah remembered when she thanked God for His justice on her behalf (see 1 Sam. 2). King David remembered when he declared, "The Lord reigns!" and embraced a heavenly king who ruled above him and all others. Let's also remember that our Lord Himself loves justice (see Is. 61:8).

4) Reconnect. No longer should worship gatherings embrace the first part of the Great Commandment, "Love the Lord your God with all your heart, mind, soul and strength," at the expense of the second part, "Love your neighbor as yourself." Let's reconnect His love into a coherent whole.

5) Realign. Justice and worship at their core each deal with power and the abuses of power. By emphasizing God's kingship, His rule over all creation, and His impeccable character, we intentionally create space for the Most High to address the fallen powers in our churches, states, nation and world. Let's realign our congregations under God's power rather than under the abusive power structures dominating the world.

6) Rediscover. As we identify and proclaim the laments of marginalized people with a deep understanding that their cries are our cries, we will begin to see our perspectives shift and the power of God move in ways that we never would have imagined. Let's rediscover the unleashed, all-powerful God, not our tempered and controlled god-in-a-box. Like Aslan of Narnia, He may not be safe, but He is good.