

## Philosophy of Worship and Music

A Christ Church of Elizabeth Position Paper

**Hebrews 12:18-24** <sup>18</sup> For you have not come to what may be touched, a blazing fire and darkness and gloom and a tempest <sup>19</sup> and the sound of a trumpet and a voice whose words made the hearers beg that no further messages be spoken to them. <sup>20</sup> For they could not endure the order that was given, "If even a beast touches the mountain, it shall be stoned." <sup>21</sup> Indeed, so terrifying was the sight that Moses said, "I tremble with fear." <sup>22</sup> But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to innumerable angels in festal gathering, <sup>23</sup> and to the assembly of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven, and to God, the judge of all, and to the spirits of the righteous made perfect, <sup>24</sup> and to Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel.

### What is "worship"?

Definition: Worship is responding to God in ways appropriate to His worth and works.

**RESPONDING:** Worship is us responding, not us initiating. It is reactive, not proactive. In fact, worship is not *primarily* something we give to God at all. This understanding protects our worship from formalism (i.e., lip service), emotionalism (i.e., experience for its own sake), and legalism (i.e., trying to earn God's favor via our worship).

This understanding also indicates how desperately dependant we are upon God to help us engage in worship that is acceptable to Him. He decries outward forms—e.g., attending, singing, listening—that do not reflect an inward condition of the heart (Mt 15:7-9). This is why we must regularly ask Him to open our eyes (Ps 119:18), unite our hearts (Ps 86:11), and satisfy our souls (Ps 90:14-15).

**TO GOD:** The focus of true worship is God (Ps 96:8-9). The simple truth is this: no matter what we might be doing with our body (even sitting in a "worship service," singing, or playing an instrument), if our mind and heart are not preoccupied with God, we are not worshipping.

**IN WAYS APPROPRIATE:** Worship involves all of life. We worship when we desire or praise or surrender or obey or thank or serve or trust or rejoice or regret or love. Every one of these is an expression of worship because each of these indicates that something has value to us. In this sense, all of life is worship—not *potential* worship but *actual* worship of someone or something. This means that worship is not reducible to a Sunday gathering or a single activity like singing, for instance (contrary to how we so often use the word "worship"!).

There is no one-to-one relationship between the English "worship" and any word in Greek or Hebrew. There are two primary word groups:

- "bow, bend, pay homage" (Hb: hx'v' = *shachab*) (Gk: **proskune,w**) (Ps 95:6, Mt 2:2)
- "labor/service" (Hb: db;l' = *abad*) (Gk: **latreu,w**) (Ex 3:12, Lk 2:37)

Both words appear often throughout the OT, but when we come to the NT, something remarkable happens. Both words appear throughout the gospels during the life and ministry of Jesus (and in Revelation), but when we come to the epistles—the letters to churches and church leaders—these

words disappear almost entirely. Why? We find the answer in the words of Jesus, from His conversation with the woman at the well:

**John 4:19** *The woman said to him, "Sir, I perceive that you are a prophet. <sup>20</sup> Our fathers worshiped on this mountain, but you say that in Jerusalem is the place where people ought to worship." <sup>21</sup> Jesus said to her, "Woman, believe me, the hour is coming when neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem will you worship the Father. <sup>22</sup> You worship what you do not know; we worship what we know, for salvation is from the Jews. <sup>23</sup> But the hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father is seeking such people to worship him. <sup>24</sup> God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth."*

Jesus is anticipating a worship unbound by specifics of outward form. He deliberately shifts categories from place ("neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem") to internal essence ("in spirit and in truth"). This corresponds exactly to how worship is described in the epistles:

**Romans 12:1** *I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship.*

**Hebrews 13:15-16** <sup>15</sup> *Through him then let us continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of lips that acknowledge his name. <sup>16</sup> Do not neglect to do good and to share what you have, for such sacrifices are pleasing to God.*

Christians are made holy by Jesus' blood – i.e., their whole existence is set apart to God. Thus, our whole life is worship.

The way worship is broadened and intensified in the New Testament leads to several implications:

- Worship is not merely the Sunday gathering, and it is especially not only singing.
- There remain no sacred buildings, no sacred rituals of approach to God.
- God does not measure the acceptability of our life by the fervency of our worship on Sunday. He measures the acceptability of our Sunday worship by the obedience of our daily life.

**TO HIS WORTH:** Our all-worthy God calls forth whole-person responses. Passive "onlooking" isn't worship. Worship requires us to be engaged with our whole person—mind, emotions, will, and body—at every moment.

**AND WORKS:** To keep our worship focused on God's worth and works, our meetings must be gospel-centered and Scripture-saturated. God's character and works are most clearly and fully revealed in the gospel, which is the point of the whole Bible. Furthermore, without revelation from God, we will drift into idolatry (usually some form of self-worship). Acceptable worship is something made possible for us by God alone. We cannot worship Him acceptably without His first drawing near to us.

<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Is anything off-limits in our worship meetings?</b></p>
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<p style="text-align: center;">The Regulative Principle: How we determine what's appropriate and what's not</p>
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On the one hand, the wrong kind of worship provokes God's wrath throughout the Scriptures (cf. Gen 4:3-7, Ex 32, Lev 10, Is 1, Acts 5). Acceptable worship can be a matter of life and death! On the other hand, the strict regulations of the OT seem to have given way to tremendous freedom and

variation from church to church in the NT. How do we reconcile this difference between the OT and NT?

We begin to see the answer when we take a closer look at exactly what is regulated in each period. In the OT, it was the articles and ceremonies associated with temple worship, specifically, the sacrificial system (Dt. 12:1-14). Anyone who violated the particulars of the sacrificial system was cursed. Other sacred assemblies, however, like local Sabbath meetings (cf. Lev 23:3) were not regulated, presumably because they did not include the trapping of the temple (incense, Levites, sacrifice).

In the NT, what is so carefully protected is the gospel message of salvation by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone. Paul can abide wrong motives for preaching the gospel (cf. Phil 1), but he cannot abide preaching the wrong gospel (cf. Gal 1:8). The familiar OT curse which guarded the sacrificial system now protects the gospel message in the NT.

Why this difference? Actually, there is no difference! Through the worship rituals of the temple and tabernacle, God was proclaiming the message of salvation through Jesus Christ – though in shadows and types. He was not fussing over some arbitrary principles; He was guarding the honor of His Son and the salvation to be found in Him alone.

This furnishes us with a regulating principle of corporate worship: whatever conforms to the gospel is most appropriate (cf. 1 Tim 1:10-11 for this language of “conforming to the gospel,” Gal 2:14 for conduct “in line with the gospel,” and Phil 1:27 for reference to living in a manner “worthy of the gospel”). Any element or style that is out of step with the gospel or obscures the message of Christ is inappropriate for worship.

### **What values for worship unite our church?**

What we’re aiming for and why

#### **1. God centeredness**

We believe God is entirely supreme over all things. In other words, God’s glory is the motive and goal for all that God does and all that exists, including worship. Biblical worship begins and ends with God. Furthermore, God exists as three persons, and Christian worship should recognize all three members of the Trinity.

We believe God is the greatest joy of the human heart. The paradox of worship is this: that deeply soul-satisfying worship is found only when we forsake our own joy and instead aim to bring joy to God.

This view of God is highly relevant to corporate worship because:

1. It furnishes the goal for our corporate worship: to glorify God.
2. It implies the standard for our corporate worship: the character of God.
3. It identifies the primary audience for our corporate worship: the Triune God.

Practically, this value of God-centeredness means:

- We engage in corporate worship as an end in itself—namely, to give glory to God, rather than as a means to some other corporate or personal end.
- We evaluate all aspects of our corporate worship by how well they reveal and reflect God’s character and worth.
- We emphasize the gospel in our corporate worship, recognizing this is where God’s character and worth are best seen and enjoyed.
- We emphasize the Scriptures in our corporate worship, believing the Bible is the tool the Holy Spirit uses to reveal glory of God in the person of Jesus Christ.
- We name all three members of the Trinity in various elements of our corporate worship, demonstrating that all three are essential to worship and entitled to worship.
- We oppose the notion that worship meetings should be designed first and foremost to reach unbelievers, recognizing instead that the only “seeker” in biblical worship is God (cf. Jn 4:23).
- We expect our congregation to find deep, soul-satisfying joy as we worship God together, reflecting the paradox of “losing our life in order to find it.”

## **2. Cross centeredness**

We believe even our most heartfelt worship requires the purifying work of our Mediator before it is acceptable to the Father.

We believe nothing engages the mind, heart, and will of worshipers more deeply and more effectively than the gospel. Apparently, it will always be this way, since even the worshipping assembly in heaven continues to celebrate the glories of the Lamb who was slain.

Practically, this value of cross-centeredness means:

- We structure our worship meetings to conform to the gospel by including elements of adoration, confession/repentance, faith, and thanksgiving, recognizing that even the shape of our meeting communicates what we believe about approaching God.
- We deliberately include the specific content of the gospel in our songs, prayers, sermons, and other worship elements, desiring to prepare ourselves well for the worship of heaven.

## **3. Scripture saturation**

We believe acceptable worship is something made possible for us by God alone. We cannot worship Him acceptably without His first drawing near and revealing Himself to us. While God reveals Himself through many different sources—for example, creation and works of providence—the most specific and significant sources of revelation are the Bible and the Bible’s hero, Jesus Christ.

We believe our fallenness continually causes us to drift toward idolatry—i.e., false views of God. Without the correcting influences of the Holy Spirit and the word of God, our worship would soon become corrupt, self-centered, and lifeless.

Practically, this value of Scripture-saturation means:

- We read the Bible in every corporate worship meeting, reflecting our need for God’s revelation in order to worship Him acceptably.

- We sing songs with doctrinal depth and a clear connection to biblical truth, including psalms, utilizing the powerful gift of music as both a means of response and a tool for teaching.
- We preach the Scriptures in every worship meeting, understanding that God addresses His people through the proclamation of His word.

#### **4. Congregational participation**

We believe the New Covenant spreads out the priesthood to include all of God’s redeemed people. Through Christ, every redeemed man and woman is a priest before God with full access to His presence and full authority to bring their offerings directly to Him.

We believe worship is something we do – i.e., primarily a verb instead of a noun. Unfortunately, the self-centered, consumeristic, entertainment-driven society in which we live predisposes our own hearts toward getting not giving, evaluating not participating, and using not producing.

We believe corporate worship offers a setting where certain aspects of God’s character and certain facets of the Christian life can be most fully experienced.

Practically, this value of congregational participation means:

- We invite the whole assembly to participate actively in each part of the meeting, giving expression to our belief in the priesthood of all believers.
- We involve as many of our members as possible in simple expressions of leadership in the meeting, recognizing no hierarchy of function within the New Covenant community.
- We make congregational worship elements the norm rather than individual ones, endeavoring to counteract our culturally furnished appetite for entertainment.

#### **5. Cultural sensitivity**

We believe our worship must take heed to two distinct “voices”: the voice of the Scriptures and the voice of the secular society where we live as strangers and pilgrims. Though we will not listen to these two voices with equal deference, we want to be attentive to both.

We believe our worship is and should be shaped by our legacy, our traditions, and our past values as a church. While we do not hold the past as sacrosanct, we fully recognize that we did not invent what it means to “do church” in the last few years. Novelty is not necessarily a virtue. Our distinctiveness and effectiveness as a church are affected at least in part by God’s work among us in our past.

We believe our worship meetings should be hospitable to outsiders. We want our meetings to be understandable and applicable to everyone—guests and members alike, always endeavoring to distinguish between the unavoidable offense of the gospel and the avoidable offense(s) of obscure traditionalism.

Practically, this value of cultural sensitivity means:

- We utilize a blend of musical styles and song selections, desiring to remember our own past and yet still honor the society in which our church members live and minister.

- We make alterations to our corporate worship only when convinced change is necessary, upholding our past as honorable and respectable.
- We introduce change slowly and carefully, recognizing that our church culture will accept some changes more readily than others.
- We strive to explain Christian terms, worship activities, and church traditions in such a way that outsiders or immature believers will understand them.
- We examine our worship meetings for offenses or obscurities that would overshadow the gospel or misrepresent our church's values to outsiders.

## 6. Excellence and creativity

We believe worship should express the worthiness of God more than the worthiness of our worship. Nonetheless, we believe excellence and creativity help worshipers behold more of God's glory than shoddiness and monotony.

We believe excellence and creativity must be kept in balance, avoiding ostentatious display on the one hand and mediocre half-heartedness on the other.

Practically, our values of excellence and creativity mean:

- We utilize musical styles and arrangements that draw attention to the song lyrics, rather than to the music or the musicians.
- Our musicians, preachers, and other worship leaders prepare thoroughly and rigorously, intending to use their gifts to bring maximum glory to the God who gave them.
- We resist the tendency to settle into a single mold, desiring to reflect the resplendent display of God's own creativity.

## 7. Expressiveness

We believe our all-worthy God calls forth whole-person responses. Worship requires us to be engaged with our whole person—mind, emotions, will, and body—at every moment.

We believe what we do with our bodies both reflects and informs what is going on in our heart. Sometimes our body responds to our emotions and thoughts; at other times, we must act with our bodies in order to stir up our mind and heart.

Practically, this value of expressiveness means:

- We encourage worshipers to respond to God with all of their being, resisting the tendency to emphasize one aspect of personhood over another.
- We instruct worshipers on biblical forms of expression, striving to conform our preferences and traditions to the word of God.

## 8. Musical variety and breadth

We believe God's diversity and our own should be reflected in our worship music. Furthermore, the doctrinal content of the Bible covers a broad range of themes, calling for a similarly broad range of musical styles appropriate to those subjects.

We believe God's passion for the fame of His Son guarantees that every culture will someday possess a witness to the glory of Jesus Christ, including the vast array of contemporary musical cultures. God has not designated one particular style of music that we must use (or avoid) in corporate worship.

Practically, our value of musical variety and breadth means:

- We use a variety of musical styles, reflecting the diversity of God and of our worshiping community.
- We strive to select songs with lyrics which cover the broad range of singable doctrine.
- We portray a realistic view of the Christian life in our music, reflecting the emotions that accompany hardship, blessing, and every experience in between.
- We utilize the best songs from the past and the present, endeavoring to be as chronologically diverse as possible.

## 9. **Family togetherness**

We believe God has given parents the primary responsibility for passing on the faith to their children. The church's role in the faith formation of children is secondary and supportive. Parents must teach their children at home, both formally and informally, viewing the family as God's main learning community. We would much prefer our children learn to worship God from their parents rather than a group of their peers.

We believe God has ordained fathers to play the primary role in these relationships, providing spiritual leadership for the entire family by their own pursuit of God and theological instruction. Fathers exercise inescapable influence in shaping their family members' spiritual lives, including how they worship God corporately.

We believe it is impossible to overestimate the influence of families doing valuable things together week after week, yet we recognize that the hectic pace of American life leaves little time for significant togetherness. Furthermore, we believe worship is the most valuable thing a human can do. The cumulative effect of hundreds of worship meetings with Mom and Dad as a young person is incalculable.

We believe children's aptitudes are often far higher than we would guess. Furthermore, children absorb far more during worship meetings than merely the abstract truth-content of the sermon.

Practically, this value of family togetherness means:

- We worship God together on Sunday morning, providing childcare for only the youngest members of our congregation.
- We equip families, especially parents, to train their children at home, recognizing that a child's ability to sit through a worship meeting develops over time.
- We communicate to children that we are aware of and we value their presence in corporate worship, helping them to perceive the meeting as a time for them and not just their parents.

**What music styles and song types should we use in corporate worship?**

How we find peace in the “worship wars”

**Presuppositions for this discussion:**

1. Music is a powerful means of communication and an emotional issue for people to discuss!

God created music with a unique power, the power to send messages directly into the heart. We memorize words to songs quicker and remember them longer than if they weren't put to music. Also, we can hear a song and immediately be in a certain “mood.” Certain songs immediately bring back certain memories we've attached to them. As a result, people attach powerful emotions to music, especially when you start discussing “right” and “wrong” styles of music.

2. The Scriptures do not specify a sacred style of music, nor do they provide many concrete guidelines about what style of music is acceptable.

There is a lot in the Bible about music but very little that would help us discern good from bad music—“bad” in both a moral and an aesthetic sense. Should music be balanced—i.e., proper proportions among melody, harmony, and rhythm? Are certain instruments inherently immoral? Is there a musical style that best reflects the glory of God? For that matter, what is “music” anyway? For these and a host of other questions, the Bible offers no definitive answers.

3. Music in and of itself does not communicate consistently or specifically.

A certain musical style creates different feelings and has different associations from culture to culture. Even within our own culture, music styles that once were “rebellious” and “crude” are now acceptable to and even enjoyed by most people. For example, what was once the only style of sacred music—the “Gregorian Chant”—sounds more like funeral music to us now.

4. Both unity and variety are biblical values for the church.

Unity is an obvious and undisputed biblical value (Jn 17, Eph 4). But variety is also God's design (1 Cor 12), including variety in our worship music (Mt 13:52). Compare the simplicity of Psalm 100 with the complexity of Psalm 119. Likewise, the “psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs” of Col 3:16 convey nothing if not a varied selection of music for use in the church.

5. “The world” and “the culture” are related but not identical. This distinction is important to see, lest we mistakenly categorize all culturally popular music as worldly.

Apart from a few references to “the world” as all humanity (e.g., Jn 3:16), the biblical terms “worldly” and “the world” refer to the cultural and social *environment* for humanity. Significantly, the Bible defines “the world” in moral categories—for example, pride, fleshly lust, covetousness (cf. 1 Jn 2:15-17). Human culture, on the other hand, may or *may not* reflect evil values.

This distinction between “the culture” in which we live and “the world” as biblically defined is crucial for our musical decisions. We must resist the tendency to label certain music styles as

“worldly”—and thus prohibit them from use in the church—simply because they have originated in our culture.

### **Principles for corporate worship music:**

1. Song lyrics are always primary. Unbiblical, confusing, and trite lyrics automatically render a song unacceptable for corporate worship, no matter how wonderful the music.

Christian music should reflect its purpose(s): to praise and worship God (Ps 7:17; 66:4), and to aid in the explanation and retention of God’s Word (Col 3:16). Good songs are full of good doctrine and scripture. Poor songs are full of half-baked, goofy, emotion-driven pseudo-doctrine.

2. Christian music should reflect the character of God. (1 Cor 10:31)

Christian music stands separate from the world’s music because it is, by definition, Christ-centered. While there is no particular “Christian music style,” even the style is not neutral, for it must totally serve and reinforce the message. Thus, the “new song” is a different and distinctive song, a more glorious song, a purer, truer and more beautiful song than the world can ever sing (Ps. 33:3; 40:3; 96:1; 98:1; 144:9; 149:1; Is. 42:10; Rev. 5:9; 14:3).

3. In the most effective songs, lyrics and music combine to send one consistent message.

Exhilarating truth in the lyrics fits best with an exhilarating style of music. Likewise, sober truth is most effective when set to sobering music. The most effective worship songs are those where the truth taught by the lyrics corresponds to the emotion created by the music. This combination of lyric and music, truth and emotion, head and heart is a potent aid to the singing congregation.

It might be worth noting here that the “message” conveyed by certain musical styles will change from one culture to another and from one time period to another. Since cultures change and people make new and different associations with certain music styles, we need to determine what each style communicates in *our own present culture*.

4. Worship music ought to reflect and stimulate a wide range of emotion.

Experiencing God provokes a wide range of emotion: joy, sorrow, hope, peace, expectancy, fear, wonder, etc. Additionally, the Christian life involves vastly different emotions from time to time. Thus, we must use a wide diversity of musical styles to stimulate the many appropriate emotions called out by God’s worth and to reflect the variety of experiences encountered in the Christian life.

5. Personal snobbery is a sin; musical snobbery is too.

The musical preferences in our congregation are wide and diverse. In addition, Christians of different cultures use vastly different musical styles. Love and mutual deference call us to resist the tendency to make our own musical tastes the standard for our church.

6. Music, like every other aspect of a worship service, should be intelligible in order to be edifying.

Just as we must use meaningful language in our worship meetings (cf. 1 Cor 14), so we must use meaningful musical styles. Intelligibility implies contemporaneity, at least to some extent. Today's people understand today's music; other styles can be and often are a distraction. This principle is not absolute, however, for it must be kept in balance with point 5 above: familiarity (to be meaningful) held in tension with diversity (to be deferential).

### **What about physical expression in our worship meetings?**

What we want people to do with their bodies

Because we believe worship calls for responses from our whole being, and because “expressiveness” is one of our worship values, and because this topic raises lots of questions, and because God's word does have something to say about it, we want to instruct worshipers on biblical forms of physical expression. Our goal, in short, is to conform our preferences and traditions to the word of God.

We must begin with two caveats. First, God's word requires us to consider the interests of others in our church (Phil 2:3, 1 Cor 14:12) even (perhaps “especially”) in how we respond to God in corporate worship. While we shouldn't let others dictate our behavior, we must be charitable.

Second, physical expressiveness in corporate worship admittedly has its limits. It is not a sure sign of engagement with God. In fact, physical expressions can offend God (Is 1:15) unless they proceed from a sincere heart (Mt 15:7-9) and are made holy through Christ (Hb 13:15, 1 Tim 2:8). Moreover, a doctrinally rich but staid worship experience is far preferable to a shallow, man-centered, enthusiastic “worship” experience.

#### **Arguments for physical expression in corporate worship:**

1. God's worth and works call out a variety of responses from every aspect of our being.

When God's glory elicits a response from every part of our being—heart, soul, mind, and strength—we magnify His worth *more* than if our response is *always* restricted to certain aspects of our being. To illustrate, when a man expresses his affection for his wife by holding her hand, he magnifies her worth more than if he only serves her by walking through the mall with her. Both forms of love signal her worth; combined, they do so more powerfully. In short, physical expressions of worship magnify the glory of God.

Coming at it from a slightly different angle, we could say that reverence and awe are not the only biblically appropriate responses to God. For example, the glory and wonder of Easter – especially after pondering the sorrow of Maundy Thursday and Good Friday – create such an intense joy that shouting, clapping, and dancing don't seem out of place at all!

Here's the bottom line: our responses to God ought to be gauged by His worthiness, not our own image or the impressions of others around us.

2. Our body and soul are inseparably connected.

Our body inevitably responds to what our soul feels—e.g., greeting someone at the airport, celebrating a touchdown, honoring an outstanding performance. Why would a worship meeting be the one place where our bodies never express what our minds are comprehending and our hearts are feeling?

In a healthy individual, heart, mind, will, and body all work together as God designed—one integrated personality. The Bible resists the tendency to emphasize one aspect of our being over another (particularly in the “order”—i.e., intellect first, then emotions).

It is well worth noting that this soul-body connectedness works both ways. Sometimes our body responds to what our heart feels, and sometimes our heart responds to what our body does. In other words, we can encourage our own heart to *feel* something more deeply by expressing ourselves physically. This is one of the great benefits of physical expression in corporate worship.

When we lack felt affection for God, we should acknowledge our lack of desire as a problem, ask God for a change of heart, and then act in faith with our other faculties—fill our mind with truth about God, engage our body in expressions of honor toward God, etc.

3. Expressiveness encourages others.

When we express our worship in physical ways, God’s glory is magnified in the minds and hearts of other people around us.

Commenting on Acts 20:38 where Paul kneels to pray publicly, John Calvin put these first three arguments for physical expression together:

The inward attitude certainly holds first place in prayer, but outward signs, kneeling, uncovering the head, lifting up the hands, have a twofold use. The first is that we may employ all our members for the glory and worship of God; secondly, that we are, so to speak, jolted out of our laziness by this help. There is also a third use in solemn and public prayer, because in this way the sons of God profess their piety, and they inflame each other with reverence of God. But just as the lifting up of the hands is a symbol of confidence and longing, so in order to show our humility, we fall down on our knees.

4. The worship vocabulary of the Scriptures conveys physical expressiveness.

The most prominent Hebrew word for worship literally means “bow, bend, pay homage” (Hb: hx'v' = *shachab*, used 172x; Gk: **proskune,w**; Ps 95:6, Mt 2:2). Several other terms convey physical expressions: “bow down” ([r;K' = *kara*, used 36x; Ps 95:6), “bless, kneel” (%or'B' = *barak*, used 330x; Ps 95:6, Ps 96:2), “thanksgiving, praise, [lit] “to throw forth the hands” (hd'AT' = *towdah*, used 32x; Ps 42:4 “joy and *praise*”).

5. Scripture commands us to worship with our bodies:

- Sing (Ps 47:6; Ps 149:1; Col 3:16)
- Kneel (Ps 95:6)
- Lift hands (Ps 134:2, 1 Tim 2:8)
- Bow down (Ps 95:6)
- Clap (Ps 47:1)
- Shout (Ps 33:1)

- Play instruments (Ps 150:3-5)
- Dance (Ps 149:3)
- Stand in awe (Ps 33:8)

### **Concerns about physical expression in corporate worship**

1. Physical expressiveness can be self-glorifying and self-gratifying.

ANSWER: Only the individuals themselves know whether self is the focus of their physical expression. In addition, it is sometimes *more* self-gratifying (staying in one's comfort zone) and self-glorifying (retaining one's dignity and pride) to refuse to express praise to God physically.

2. Physical expression might draw the attention of others.

ANSWER: David is a great example here: "I will become even more undignified than this" were his words to his wife, who held him in derision for his fervent dancing before the Lord (2 Sam 6:14-22). A preoccupation with what people think might fall into what the Bible calls the "fear of man"—a sinful, enslaving condition where we are more aware of the eyes of others than the eyes of God. It's a sin, and the solution is to repent and apply God's grace to change.

3. Our church tradition doesn't do it like this.

ANSWER: Traditions are worth taking seriously, but sometimes they can be an excuse for laziness, lack of study, or longing for the respect of others.

4. Some people just aren't very expressive.

ANSWER: This is true to some extent. Not everyone shows their emotions the same way or to the same extent. But how much allowance should we make for personality versus obedience to the Scriptures? In our relationship with God, should we always act according to what comes naturally, or should we deliberately practice certain behaviors and become more natural in them over time? And if we are situated in a whole culture that is simply not very expressive, at what point does our Christian faith call us to be counter-cultural? Might it be reasonable to suggest that we might start with how we respond to the works and worth of our redeeming God?

Our ultimate goal in challenging worshipers about physical expressiveness is to get at their heart, not their body. We want worshipers to think hard about the worth and glory of our awesome God and what He has done for us in Christ. We firmly believe the more our worshiping congregation is captivated by the majesty of Jesus Christ, the more it will show up in every appropriate way:

**Psalm 34:5** *Those who look to him are radiant, and their faces shall never be ashamed.*

### ***Conclusion***

The Puritans called Sunday "the market day for the soul," the day we stock up on everything spiritual that we'll need for the rest of our week. We agree. Sunday is a great day, perfect for soul-

satisfying and God-honoring worship gatherings of the church. These guiding principles are intended to help us make the most of every single one.