

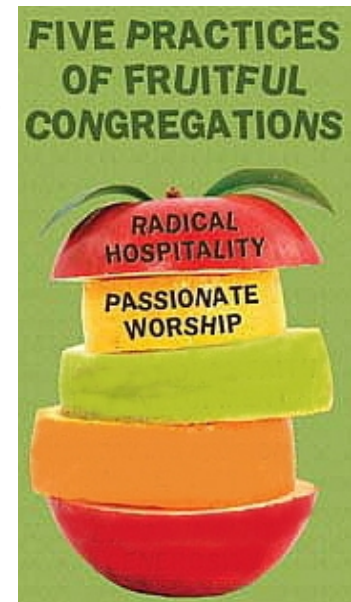
FIVE PRACTICES OF FRUITFUL CONGREGATIONS

Devotion Guide Week #2= July 19th-23rd

Worship describes those times we gather deliberately seeking to encounter God in Christ. God uses worship to transform lives, heal wounded souls, renew hope, shape decisions, provoke change, inspire compassion, and bind people to one another.

The word **passionate** expresses an intense desire, strong feelings, and the sense of heightened importance.

Passionate Worship, whether traditional or contemporary, means an extraordinary eagerness to offer the best in worship, honoring God with excellence and with an unusual clarity about the purpose of connecting people to God. It is not performance; it is devotion and celebration expressing our love of God. (Schnase, *Cultivating Fruitfulness*, p.26)



Day One

"You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind; and your neighbor as yourself." Luke 10:27
Understanding the meaning of worship requires looking beyond *what people do* to see with the eyes of faith *what God does*. God uses worship to transform lives, heal wounded souls, renew hope, shape decisions, provoke change, inspire compassion, and bind people to one another. Worship expresses our love for God, our devotion to the creator, redeemer, and sustainer of life.

What is your earliest positive memory of worship? What made it memorable and positive?

Prayer: *Holy God, help me to look beyond myself and see the world through your eyes. May I continually be changed through my worship of you. Amen*

Day Two

"How lovely is your dwelling place, O Lord of hosts! My soul longs, indeed it faints for the courts of the Lord." Psalm 84:1-2

Through worship, God pardons sin, restores relationships, and changes lives. Worship is the most likely setting for people to experience the renewed relationship with God that Christians call "justification", in which a person realizes that she or he is pardoned, forgiven, loved and accepted by God. This is sometimes experienced as a sudden "conversion" experience, and sometimes as a gradual shaping and nuanced change over time. God expects lives to change in worship: attendees become disciples of Jesus Christ, and a crowd becomes the body of Christ.

If you took away all the worship experiences from your life - all the sermons, scriptures, hymns, prayers, fellowship you ever experienced - how would you be different? How has God used worship to change you and to shape you?

Prayer: Lord cause us to be what you called us to be: shaped by your Holy Spirit and changed by our love for Christ. Amen

Day Three

“He (Jesus) would withdraw to deserted places and pray.” Luke 5:16

Another way we express our love to God through worship is in our daily prayers and devotions. People who practice loving God in return carve out time in each day to intentionally focus on God, to express gratitude, offer private confession, and lift petitions and intercessions. Prayer at fixed times, such as morning prayers when rising, grace before meals, or evening prayers at the close of the day help us create a space in our lives for God. Daily habit provides the same restorative, centering, and encouraging quality to daily life that community worship adds to weekly life. Short devotional reading, reciting a prayer, or the simple observance of silence settles us in God. We orient ourselves a little each day toward God. Daily prayer blesses us.

How do your daily prayers help you connect to God?

Prayer: Lord create in me a desire to spend time daily with you in prayer. Help me remember that you are closer to me than the air I breathe. I worship you. Amen

Day Four

“Make a joyful noise to the Lord, all the earth. Worship the Lord with gladness; come into his presence with singing.” Psalm 100: 1-2

In spiritually passionate communities, there’s a palpable air of expectancy as people gather for worship. Musicians, ushers, and greeters arrive early; and with care and eagerness they prepare for worship, giving attention to the smallest of details to make the service go well for worshipers. The gathering congregation, even when it includes many first-time visitors, never feels like a crowd of strangers. The pastors, music leaders, and worshipers expect something important to take place, and they’re eager to be part of it. They expect God to speak to and through them.

How do you prepare your own heart before attending worship? Rather than looking for performance, listen actively for what God desires to say to you through the music, prayers, scripture, sermon and fellowship.

Prayer: God who is near, may I always be eager to offer you my very best. Let my worship be authentic, alive, and marked with a passionate longing for you. Amen.

Day Five

“This is the day that the Lord has made; let us rejoice and be glad in it.”

Psalm 118:24

People who practice Passionate Worship attend worship frequently and consistently until it becomes a valued and sustaining pattern for them. Worship becomes a priority and they shift schedules to attend when conflicts arise. They love worship because they love God. They enter worship with hearts and minds prepared. They eagerly anticipate how

God may connect to them. They pray for the pastors, the church staff, the musicians, and all who lead worship. People who love worship offer their services to enhance the experience for others. If they are able, they sing in the choir or praise band, serve as ushers, greeters, sound/media assistants, or Communion servers. They offer their service to make the worship space more inviting and warm. They assist with leading the children in worship with children's sermon or children's church.

How have you made worship a priority in your life? What changes would it take to make worship a higher priority?

Prayer: *Lord, move in my life and in our church that we may worship you with passion and expectancy. Guide and direct all those preparing to lead us in worship this week.*

Amen