



# Central Peninsula Church

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Selected Scripture  
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## Why Come To Church?

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How many of you would really want to go to a church like that? No one does. Even though sometimes we're more like that than we admit. But no one really wants to go to a church that is all about them.

This morning we're taking a detour from our study of the Gospel of Luke because I want to talk about church. I want to talk about why we come to church and what ought to happen while we're here.

Some people come to church just out of habit. It's like Saturday morning pancakes—it's something they've always done. Others come to church out of obligation. Church attendance was drilled into them and if they miss they carry a load of guilt. Still others come to church to socialize. Perhaps they want to make friends or find a mate or drum up some business. I think a lot of people come just because it makes them feel better or helps them. It might be the music or the message or the prayers, but when they leave they feel more equipped to deal with life.

There are a lot of reasons to come to church and some are better than others. But the most important reason to come to church is to worship the Lord. I know that sounds obvious, but it needs to be said. It's not really about ME; it's about worshipping the living God. I would even go so far as to say that that is the ultimate purpose why we exist. The first words of the Westminster Confession of Faith say it best, "The chief end of man is to glorify God and enjoy him forever." That's not only the chief end of man but the chief end of the church. If we come to church and we don't encounter the living God in an act of worship, we've failed.

You may then ask the question, "Well, what is worship? Is it those 15 minutes of singing we do before the sermon? What is it? The word "worship" itself originally came from the Anglo-Saxon word that meant "worthship" with the idea of attributing worth to someone or something. We talk about people who worship money or their children and we mean to say they value those things; they attribute worth to them. But when WE talk about worth-ship we're talking about God. To worship God is to attribute to him ultimate worth. With that in mind, let me give you a definition of worship, "*Worship is an active response to God in which we declare his*

*supreme worth.*" Notice that it's not passive, but it's active. It's not simply a mood; it's a response. It's not just a feeling; it's a declaration.

### I. God seeks true worshippers.

Throughout the Bible, this is God's desire for his people. In John 4 Jesus is talking to a Samaritan woman by a well. They end up in a discussion about worship, and Jesus makes a comment that's very significant. He says, "**But an hour is coming, and now is, when true worshippers will worship the Father in spirit and truth; for such people the Father seeks to be his worshippers**" (Jn.4:23). Think about that. We ask, what is God looking for? What is he really after? It's right here. God is on the lookout for people who will worship him in the right way. That's what he seeks; that's what's he's looking for.

Remember Cain and Abel? What's that story all about? It's about worship. Way back in Genesis 4 they each brought an offering to the Lord. It's the first expression of worship in the Bible and somehow Abel got it right and Cain didn't.

Remember the Patriarchs—Abraham, Isaac and Jacob? Every once in a while you see those guys building an altar. Why? To worship. As a matter of fact, the first time the word "worship" is used in the Bible is in Gen.22 when Abraham is about to sacrifice his son, Isaac, on the altar. Old Abraham says to his friend down at the base of the mountain, "**Stay here with the donkey, and I and the lad will go yonder; and we will worship and return to you**" (Gen.22:5).

Remember the Exodus? The people of Israel were slaves in Egypt. Over and over again, Moses announced to the King of Egypt, "**Let my people go that they might worship me**" (Ex.8:1,20;9:1,13;10:3). I always thought that was kind of a half truth. They didn't want to worship; they wanted to escape. But I know now that worship WAS the reason they were delivered from slavery. The first thing they did after passing through the Red Sea was sing a worship song to the Lord (Ex.15). After that God gave them the Ten Commandments. And what were the first few commandments about? They were all about worship: "**You shall have no other gods before me. You shall not make for yourself an idol... You shall not**

**worship them or serve them”** (Ex.20:3-5).

But it didn't end there. While Moses was up on the mountain, God gave him instructions for building the tabernacle, which later became the pattern for the temple in Jerusalem. Seven chapters of the Bible devoted to how to build a portable tent. What was that all about? It was all about worship. As a matter of fact, when the prophets came around, guys like Isaiah, Jeremiah and Amos, and they started pointing the finger at Israel, what was their chief complaint? Isaiah said, **“Your land has also been filled with idols; you worship the work of your hands, that which your fingers have made”** (Is.2:8).

And so when we finally get around to the time of Jesus we're prepared for worship to be a big deal. When Jesus entered Jerusalem at the start of his ministry, he walked into the temple, the place of worship, took a whip, and dealt with the corruption of worship in a very severe way (Jn.2). After he was crucified and raised, he established his church. And right from the get-go the early church is described as meeting together regularly to worship the Lord (Acts 2:42-47). In Phil.3:3 Paul makes a great statement about the church. He says, **“For we are the true circumcision, who worship in the Spirit of God and glory in Christ Jesus and put no confidence in the flesh.”** So we're uniquely identified not by physical circumcision, as the Israelites were, but by the fact that we worship in the Spirit and glory in Christ and put no confidence in ourselves. That's what sets us apart.

That brings us right up to the present day. But we're not finished because the Bible describes heaven as consumed with worship. Do you know what's going on right now in heaven? In the book of Revelation the apostle John gets a glimpse of heaven and he sees four living creatures and 24 elders who **“fall down before him who sits on the throne, and worship him who lives for ever and ever...”** (Rev.10:10). So when we started worshipping today we were just joining in on something that was already going on in heaven! And when we get to heaven that's what we'll be doing.

The history of God's interaction with people is all about worship and that extends right into eternity. God created us for worship. Do you know why that is? It's because he's worthy of worship. He's a being of infinitesimal worth, beauty and glory. Think of the most beautiful thing you've ever seen and that will give you a faint image of God. Psalm 95 is a call to worship, but perhaps more importantly it tells us

why God is so wrapped up in us worshipping him. It says,

**O come, let us sing for joy to the LORD;  
Let us shout joyfully to the rock of our salvation.  
Let us come before His presence with thanksgiving;**

**Let us shout joyfully to Him with psalms.  
For the LORD is a great God,  
And a great King above all gods,  
In whose hand are the depths of the earth;  
The peaks of the mountains are His also.  
The sea is His, for it was He who made it;  
And His hands formed the dry land.** (Ps.95:1-7)

## **II. We worship the Lord by actively declaring his worth.**

Did you notice the call? It's a call to church. It's a call for God's people to come together and declare his worth because “he is a great God and great King above all gods.” “O come, let us...let us...let us...let us...” What do we do when we come together to worship him? What are the acts of worship?

Before we look at these, let me say one important thing. Worship should combine both heart and head. That's what Jesus meant when he said the father seeks those who worship him in spirit and in truth. A lot of churches are great with the head but their worship is about as exciting and passionate as watching a fundraiser on PBS. In other services emotions run wild but there is no content. We want our worship to be both passionate and rooted in the truth of Scripture. You might say that truth is the fuel of worship; the heart is the furnace of worship; and the Holy Spirit is the fire of worship. We need all three!

**A. We sing to the Lord:** So what do we do when we come to worship? One of the things we do is right here in the first line of Ps. 95. “Let us sing for joy to the Lord.” The Psalms are full of encouragement's to sing. Jesus sang a hymn with his disciples after the last supper. Paul commands us to **“teach and admonish one another with psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with thankfulness in your hearts to God”** (Col.3:16). James says, **“Is anyone among you cheerful? Let him sing praises”** (Jms 5:13). It's simply inconsistent to be a Christian and a non-singer. Singing is in our bones. I remember in high school, before I was a Christian, hearing about some Young Life meetings that some of my friends were going to. The thing that shocked me about this was that they actually sang at these meetings! That blew my mind! I couldn't imagine sitting around a home singing. It just sounded so cheesy! You know why? I had nothing to sing about. But two years later, after I met the Lord, guess who was leading songs?

**B. We pray to the Lord:** Another thing that is basic to worship is prayer. You see this in the next line of Psalm

95. He says in v.6, **“Come let us worship and bow down, let us kneel before the Lord our Maker.”** Notice how the mood of the Psalm changes from one of rejoicing to reverence. It reminds me of how as a kid in the Catholic church I went to confession and after I received my penance from the priest I went out in the sanctuary to pray. I knelt down on the kneeler and as I usually did I rested my rear end on the pew. As I was in the middle of my fifth Lord’s prayer I heard a voice, “Young man, sit up straight like a soldier!” I freaked out. I thought maybe it was God! But as I looked behind me I saw that it was just my priest! But, he had a point. I had become casual in my prayers to God. Reverent prayer is to be a primary part of our worship together. In the first four chapters of Acts we see the church in prayer together. In the days before Pentecost we’re told they were continually devoting themselves to prayer (1:14). After Peter’s first sermon 3000 people were baptized after which we’re told they devoted themselves to prayer (2:42). After Peter and John were let out of prison they returned to the church and we’re told the first thing they did was **“lift their voice to God with one accord”** (4.24). Prayer is to be a part of worship together as a church.

**C. We listen to the Lord:** A third act that’s basic to worship is listening to God speak. Again you see this in Psalm 95. At the end of v.7 David says, **“Today, if you would hear his voice do not harden your hearts as at Meribah, as in the day of Massah in the wilderness, when your fathers tested me, they tried me though they had seen my work.”** This corresponds to the whole aspect of worship where we listen to the preaching of God’s word. Paul told Timothy to **“preach the word, be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort, with great patience and instruction”** (2Tim.4:2). Notice that the Psalm says to do this right we need to to hear and obey the voice of God immediately (“Today”). When the scriptures are proclaimed in worship we’re hearing the voice of God. This isn’t just a lecture we evaluate on the way home. We’re hearing his voice. This is not a passive thing; we’re to respond. The word “hear” in v.7 really means “to pay heed to.” I’ve listened to enough sermons that I know this isn’t so easy. Most of us listening to a sermon look the same. We sit quietly with rapt, upturned faces, our eyes open (most of the time!), looking straight ahead. It looks like we’re listening to God, but that’s not always true. Some of us are playing golf. Others are making a business deal. Others are packing for their trip. Others are at the mall. But God desires that when his word is spoken we listen well and obey. You know, along these lines, I think it’s important that we still bring our own Bibles to church. We put the words on the screen for people who don’t have a Bible or know to bring one. But there is nothing like having your own Bible in your hands, looking up the verses, maybe jotting down a few notes so you can come back to it later.

**D. We give to the Lord:** Those three things are the staples of what we do when we come to church, but there are other things as well. Scripture speaks of an offering. Paul says to the Corinthians, **“Now concerning the collection for the saints, as I directed the churches of Galatia, so do you also. On the first day of every week let each one of you put aside and save, as he may prosper, that no collections be made when I come”** (1Cor.16:1-2). Did you know the offering is a part of worship? It’s not about giving money to the church; it’s about responding to God’s worth.

**E. We confess our faith:** Another thing that Scripture mentions but we don’t do very often is a confession of faith where together we speak and affirm what we believe about the Gospel (1Tim.3:16). Some people believe that the earliest creed which the church recited in worship was simply, “Jesus Christ is Lord.”

**F. We greet one another:** Scripture also speaks of a greeting. Both Paul and Peter encourage believers who are meeting together to **“greet one another with a kiss of love.”** That sounds scary, but there is to be an expression of warmth towards one another in our worship. This corresponds with something Jesus said in the Sermon on the Mount. He said, **“If you’re presenting your offering at the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your offering there before the altar, and go your way; first be reconciled to your brother, and then come and present your offering”** (Mt.5:23-24). There is a horizontal aspect to worship. You can’t worship God and ignore the people around you. Let me give you two examples that are relevant to us. First, how many of you parked in the Mormon parking lot this morning? We’re not supposed to do that. How can we come to worship and ignore our neighbor’s wishes? How can we come to worship and fight with some guy in the parking lot about who gets the space? Second, how do we treat our ushers? Our ushers have a hard job. They try to keep this a place where we all can worship, but they’re not bouncers! They’re not looking for a fight. I can’t tell you how many times they’re ignored or rebuffed. How can we come to church and treat people that way?

**G. We offer ourselves to the Lord:** Worship should also take the form of service. Listen to what Paul says, **“I urge you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service of worship”** (Rom.12:1). So worship involves offering all that you are to God. It involves your bodies. Do you teach a Sunday School class? Do you play an instrument up here? Do you serve as a greeter? Do you come early to make the coffee or get communion set

up? Do you work in the sound booth? All of that is an expression of worship. My dream is that every person who calls CPC their church home would see part of their worship on Sunday mornings as some form of service; that every person would do something. Sometimes we wonder why we don't feel connected. We don't feel like anyone would ever miss us if we were gone. We don't feel like we're part of a family. Well, volunteer to make the coffee, then if you don't show they'll miss you! One of the best ways to cure that feeling of isolation is to find a way to serve.

### III. When you come to worship the Lord, guard your steps.

I want to close by asking you to look at Ecc.5:1. It says, **“Guard your steps when you go to the house of God.”** We come to church to worship God and when we do that we should proceed with care. When you go to the house of God, don't let it become routine, perfunctory, and meaningless. Watch your step; stand in awe of God.

For the people in the OT the house of God was the Jerusalem Temple. That temple is gone, but the NT does speak of a new temple; not the church building, but the church gathering. In 1 Cor.3:16-17 Paul says to the church gathered, **“Do you not know that YOU are the temple of God and that the Spirit of God dwells in you? If any man destroys the temple of God, God will destroy him, for the Temple of God is holy, and that is what you are.”**

We're the temple of God. When we gather together, as we do here on Sunday mornings, God himself sits among us. Have you thought about that? Try to imagine what it would be like if you knew that Jesus Christ was sitting here among us. Maybe just incognito; dressed like we are, sitting in the back corner, watching. How would your singing be different? When the Word was read and explained, how would your listening change? What might you do different when the offering basket came by? Go back to last night. What would you have done differently last night if you knew Jesus would be here this morning? How might you have prepared for today? What time would you have set your alarm? What would you have worn? When would you have arrived here? Would you put your cell phone on vibrate just so you might not miss a call, or would you just turn it off, or maybe just leave it in the car? Don't tell me these things don't matter. You know they matter. If you knew that tomorrow morning you would be hosted at the White House by the President of the United States, you know that every single one of those things

would matter!

Well, I'm here to tell you this morning, that according to the Word of God, Jesus Christ is present when we meet for worship on Sunday mornings. It's not the only time he is present, and it's not the only place, but for us this is his house. And so these words apply to us: when you come to the house of God, come to worship God, and when you worship God, watch your step.

### CONCLUSION

Christmas is a great time to renew our worship. I think of those magi who came from the east. Remember what they said, **“Where is He who has been born King of the Jews? For we saw His star in the east, and have come to worship Him”** (Mt.2:2) Later it says that **“when they saw the Child with Mary His mother, they fell to the ground and worshipped him”** (Mt.2:3). And then they presented him with gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh. You see, that's why we come to church—we come to worship him; we declare his worth by offering all that we have and all that we are to him.

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