

WORSHIP & WITNESS

This Changes Everything Series (Part 1) | Acts 2:42-47

What Needs Changing?

Did any of you get a particularly exciting gift this past Christmas? I got a Weber Summit BBQ grill! Yep, it replaced the rusty old one that served our family for more than 20 years – and what an upgrade. I mean this thing's got lighted control knobs and polished chrome details I can see my reflection in. It has this cool side burner and a pop-up rotisserie motor. There's a smoker box and way more real estate to cook on. As my son, Reed, and I were putting the new grill together last Monday, I thought: **"This Changes Everything!"** We're going to have amazing meals coming off this grill. I can just see Amy smiling with pride and my neighbors and friends gathering around for these remarkable feasts. Maybe I'll get a cooking show?!

And then, two days later, I burned the chicken breasts on that magical grill. I mean they weren't a *fully* burnt offering, but they were really tough and dry. And it hit me: *"Maybe it wasn't the cooking technology that most needed upgrading. Maybe it was me!"* It's human nature, I guess, to look for solutions out there. I'll join that gym or buy that Peloton and it will change everything. I'll get that new job or trade-in this spouse or move to that place and it will alter everything. How many advertisers, dating apps, or politicians claim to be offering us the "THIS" that will change everything?

Long ago, the Apostle Paul wrote to a society as prone to seeking and selling quick fixes as ours is. This is what he advised: **Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind (Rom 12:2)**. In other words, if you want to experience real change, don't start by looking for it out there in the world; begin by pursuing a change in here – in your mind. **Offer yourself as a living sacrifice to God (Rom 12:1)**, i.e. "Fully turn your life over to God." Ask God to renew the way you THINK – which is to say the way you see, feel and react to what is coming at you. Let God renovate your mindset, and watch your life change.

Author, pastor, and onetime atheist Lee Strobel shares his own experience of such a transformation: *"My daughter Allison was 5 years old when I became a follower of Jesus... All she had known in those five years was a dad who was profane and angry. I came home one night and kicked a hole in the living room wall just out of anger with life. I'm ashamed of the times Allison hid in her room to get away from me. Five months after I gave my life to Jesus Christ, that little girl went to my wife and said, "Mommy, I want God to do for me what he's done for Daddy." What was she saying? She'd never studied [theology or the Bible]. All she knew was her dad used to be this way: hard to live with. But more and more her dad is becoming this way. And if that is what God does to people, then sign her up. At age 5 she gave her life to Jesus."* I tell you, *"God changed my family. He changed my world. He changed my eternity."*¹

I can't say for sure, but chances are there are some things in your life (or mine) that need transformation. They are messed up, knotted or confused – sort of like that tangle on the left of that graphic. God's desire is to re-order that part of you and your life – to make it something beautiful that honors him, helps you, and blesses others. So, how does that happen?

I think there are SIX particular "mind-sets" that can make a very big difference in the quality of our life and relationships and we're going to explore them together at the start of this New Year. Some of you will recognize these ways of approaching life because they are what we at Christ Church call our "Ministry Values." You'll find them on banners around our buildings. But these mindsets apply every bit as much to you if you're totally new to Christ Church or just visiting today. If you or I will lean into these ways of thinking and living, God will change us for the better and then we'll more easily help the people and world around us to change for the good as well.

We're going to break these Six Mindsets into pairs we'll cover over three weeks. I'm going to touch on just TWO of the six today – but the two are tightly related. Think of these two values we'll explore today as sort of like the right and left hemispheres of your brain. By the way: *Is it the left side or the right side of your brain that is important to you?* The smart answer is: "BOTH! I'd like to have both sides functioning well, thank you!" Same thing with these pairs of mindsets. You want both of these mindsets functioning because they reinforce and synergize with each other.

Be an Authentic Worshipper

So, here's the FIRST one. If you want to make life all that it can be as you move into this New Year, then pursue **Authentic WORSHIP**. Live with the mindset that **exalting and enjoying God is life's great purpose and pleasure**. A lot of us get our lives tangled and confused because we lack an ultimate purpose or dependable source of joy. We race every which way trying to find significance in this pursuit or satisfaction in that object. There's such relief and clarity when we finally figure out that the greatest purpose and pleasure of life is not found in these someTHINGS, but in a singular devotion SomeONE. To paraphrase the very first article of an old-time creed called the Westminster Shorter Catechism: *"The chief end of [humanity] is to glorify God and enjoy him forever."*

You and I have been created to exalt God with all that we are and to enjoy him for all that he is. The difference between **"authentic" worship** and "fake" worship has a lot to do with that word "ALL." For example, if just my body is going to a church service... or if I'm only partly-present because I'm buried in my phone a lot of the time... or if I've got the church on the screen while I'm at home multi-tasking... what is that saying? Authentic worship is the act of giving to God and seeking from God ALL that he is truly worth. In fact the word "worship" is actually a contraction of the phrase "worth-ship."

How many of you have seen a couple who is rapturously in love? They drink each other in. They want to be filled with the other. They keep poring deeper lest they miss anything about what makes the other happy or what the other's wisdom could mean to them. They never quite finish describing the things they admire and are grateful for in the other. In short, they sense what the other is worth. Now, picture the couple who sits at a restaurant with their nose in their device or newspaper and hardly talk. They might just be very comfortable with each other. But because meals are for communion as well as for calories, it could also be a sign that one or both of those people have lost their first love for the other. They are no longer ALL in.

Here's the truth: God never loses his passion for you and me. So Jesus reminds us not to take this amazing Being for granted: **"Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind." This is the first and greatest commandment (Matt 22:37-38).** Our great purpose and pleasure in life is to EXALT God as the worthy Creator, Redeemer and Sustainer he is... to praise his name and his attributes... to seek for his will to be done... to bring a smile to his face by the way we live. The Psalmist puts it this way: **Ascribe to the Lord the glory due his name; worship the Lord in the splendor of his holiness (Psa 29:2).**

But in authentic worship we also ENJOY God. We enter into a communion with him that doesn't just bring him pleasure and glory, it is also meant to bring us joy and change us for the good. I love the way that William Temple, the former Archbishop of Canterbury puts it: *"WORSHIP is the submission of our nature to God's being; the quickening of our conscience by his holiness; the nourishment of our mind with his truth; the purifying of our imagination by his beauty; the opening of our heart to his love; the surrender of our will to his purpose; and all of this, gathered up in adoration."*

Authentic worship is the keystone habit of the Christian life. This communion with God changes everything. It's how we learn to see ourselves properly. It how God's character becomes our character, and his priorities ours, and his peace and power our strength. As G.K. Chesterton once remarked, it's not a minor problem when authentic worship fades in the life of an individual or nation: *"When we cease to worship God, we do not worship nothing; we worship anything."* The dominant cult of who or what is worshipped in a society produces it's culture.² Therefore, no practice you and I undertake in this year ahead is more important to us personally and to the world around us, than authentically worshipping the God we meet in Jesus Christ.

So, as we start this New Year, I invite you to let God renew your mind about worship. If you've been seeing it as an obligation or a task to be checked off or a place you go to, make a conscious shift. **Choose to see exalting and enjoying God as your life's great purpose and pleasure.** I hope you'll truly love and lean into what we do together when we worship as a church family. But let's also exalt and enjoy God wherever we go.

Be an Attractive Witness

Speaking of going, I read about a sales team that was rushing to catch a plane on their way home from a business convention. In their haste, one of the salesmen bumped into a table holding a display of neatly stacked apples that now tumbled, dropped, and began to roll everywhere. The gaggle of businesspeople rushed on, but one of them noticed the distress of the teenage girl whose applecart had literally been upset. Tears streamed down her cheeks in frustration as she groped for her spilled produce amidst the swirl of the crowd rushing by. The salesman realized: She's blind!

So he knelt on the floor with her, gathered up the apples, and helped her re-organize her display. As he did so, he took the apples that had become battered and bruised and set them aside in another basket. Finally, finishing up, the man took two twenties from his wallet, and said to the girl: *"Here, please take this \$40 for the damage we did. Are you okay?"* She nodded gratefully. As the salesman began to walk away, the bewildered girl called out to him: *"Mister...?"* He paused and looked back into those eyes hunting for light. *"Are you Jesus?"*

In his famous Sermon on the Mount, Jesus told his followers to change their mindset about themselves and their role in the world. You're not just saleswomen or fishermen or school teachers or students or businesspeople. Start thinking of yourselves as **the Light of the World**. Bring the light of my love, the light of my wisdom, the light of the gospel of my Kingdom's way to anyone in darkness. **Let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven. (Mat 5:14-16)**. For **You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth. (Acts 1:8)**

The New Year is starting. We'll soon go back to our schools and our workplaces and our familiar routines. Have this mindset, if you are a follower of Jesus: "My life's great purpose and pleasure is to exalt and enjoy God. But my most important job wherever I go is to be an **Attractive WITNESS. Living to draw others to Christ is my personal daily mission.**

I said earlier that each of the pairs of mindsets we'll be exploring in this series are like the two hemispheres of a single brain, working together. You won't have much to witness to if you're not authentically worshipping and your worship won't matter much if it's not making you a more attractive witness. ***Witness is worship walking.*** It is the way you reflect the glory of the God you worship and help others experience the light of his grace, truth and love in practical ways. What if all of us lived in such a way this New Year that some people genuinely asked: *"Are you Jesus? Have you been with him? Could you help me meet him?"* I think that if all of us set our mind on being a more authentic worshipper and a more attractive witness, it could change everything.

Let's pray together...

Lord, enrapture us afresh with the glory of who you are and illumine opportunities for us to share your light with everyone we can. Even though we know we won't do this perfectly, each of us resolves from this day forward to worship and witness more personally. In the name of Jesus, we pray. Amen.

¹ Excerpt from Lee Strobel's sermon, "The Case for Christ."

² "Religion is not a reflection or product of culture, but quite the reverse. As the great twentieth-century historian Christopher Dawson has argued, 'cult' [which in its original meaning referred to a system of religious worship] is at the root of culture..." Political philosopher Russell Kirk writes: "It is from association in a cult, a body of worshipers, that human community grows. When belief in the cult has been wretchedly enfeebled, the culture will decay swiftly. The material order rests on the spiritual order." From Charles Colson & Nancy Pearcey, *How Now Shall We Live*, p.37