

Like most Christians, I find myself increasingly challenged to live and work in a world that seems to pay less and less attention to the God to whom I am committed. Recently, I came across an old book, *Celebration of discipline: A path to spiritual growth*, by Richard Foster. I remembered enjoying reading it some years ago and found that I was quickly challenged by its contents. I thought it might be my challenge to relate some of the issues raised in this book to us as Christian teachers and educators.

#### **Part 4. Worship**

One of the things that I have always been uncomfortable with in education is our ability to take commonly understood words and give them new and different meaning, for example, benchmark, authentic and even outcome. As Christians, I am not sure we all have a common understanding of worship.

When you read the title of this article as "worship" what came to mind? Did you think it would be about singing and music, about living one's whole life for God, about being thankful to God for what he has done for us, about acknowledging who God is or, as the Nicky Chiswell song says "it's all about Jesus"?

*The true worshiper will worship the Father in spirit and truth for they are the kind of worshipers that the Father seeks.* John 4:23. It is God who seeks and we who respond. Our response to God, to who he is and especially to what he has done for us in Christ, is both in truth and spirit, mind and heart. Such worship is kindled within us when the Spirit of God touches our human spirit.

If this is the case, then much of what we anguish over in our churches - structure of services, types of music, lay involvement, forms of prayer, ways of teaching- is pointless. Indeed, the New Testament provides freedom and is silent about what expressions of worship are appropriate.

The essence of worship is that we need desperately to see who God is, for as Jesus said, *Worship the Lord your God and serve him alone.* Matthew 4:10. It is not knowing who God is that can lead to false worship, idolatry.

Our response to knowing who God is, is repentance and confession. To understand his grace is to understand our sin and be freed to acknowledge who he is and thank him for what he has done.

#### **Preparation for worship**

How does what we do, individually in our lives and corporately when we come together as Christians, become worship?

When the people of God came together in both old and new testaments there was a huge expectation of God being present. In the New Testament they knew that the curtain had been rent in two and that they were now be in the presence of God with Christ was in their midst. As scary or comforting as it might be, we need to recognise that God is with us every moment of every day and that we should be open to him and listen. This is about relating everything we do to God and bringing him into each task each day. It's about hesitating before doing or saying something and asking God if this is what he wants? Is what I am about to do and say honouring to him? Am I open to his leading?

As teachers and educators there is a clear connection between worship and work. Bringing God into all these daily decisions takes discipline and practice. Having been called by God to teach, our teaching can be an act of worship where, in contact with Jesus, we lift our expectations about his involvement in our work and we allow him to come into our relationships and teaching. For the Christian teacher, to teach well is an act of worship for it reflects who God is, revealing his nature to the learner. It is our response of thankfulness to him for what he has done for us in Christ.

When we come together as Christians, what is our expectation about God's presence? He has promised when two or more gather together in his name to be there in our midst. Here are some practical ideas from Foster's book and from me about how we can change religious practice to worship:

1. Spend some time before going to church in prayer and meditation about the service and if you know the bible readings before hand, read them.

2. Get to church early. Church is about corporate worship. Getting to know whom those are worshipping with is important. Look to see if there is someone new or someone who looks to be "down", and spend some time with them.
3. If people meet before church to pray, join them.
4. Set your mind and spirit on serving your brothers and sisters through being together and not on what the service will do to meet your needs. As a result, the style of service, music, prayer and teaching will be incidental and not central.
5. Participate. Remember that we are called to make a "joyful" noise to the Lord not necessarily an accurate or high quality one.
6. Listen to God. Expect him to speak to you both individually and as a community.
7. Remember that worship is about everything we do. For me one of the most misleading practices, which I have been guilty of, is to label certain parts of a service, usually the singing, as "worship" or, even more confusingly, "praise and worship".

Now you might be wondering how this set of possible actions might apply to your work in a school? Try and put them into practice for your next school staff meeting and see if you can worship God through that meeting. If you can plan such initiatives with other Christians on your staff, you might manage to not only have greater influence on decisions and discussions but also change the whole culture of your school.

Finally, Foster's book brings us into some ideas on avenues for worship and here the focus on being still before the Lord, of divesting yourself of the daily cares and troubles, and being individually and corporately open to him. He emphasises that praise is not always worship but can lead us into worship because worship is not solely cerebral and involves the whole being, including emotions. It is not always rational and involves the body, mind, emotions and spirit. For an Anglican like myself, I know I have yet a lot to learn about worship in public.

The object and consequence of worship is that it (God) will change us. *Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom, and as you sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God.* Colossians 3:16

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