

ENGAGING IN MEANINGFUL WORSHIP

Richard Foster urges us to go to church with "**holy expectancy**." However, attending church is often "fraught with frustration and distraction": *'Hurry up we are late!'* or *'Oh no, someone is sitting in my seat'* or *'The sermon was way too long today'*. Worship, remember, is an "**invitation** (not an obligation) and is not about meeting my needs as much as **shaping my soul**."

Here are guidelines (not laws) that may help make worship more meaningful:

1. Prepare through 'margin'. Getting to worship with the right attitude is a challenge for many of us. It's not our lack of desire but lack of what Smith calls "*temporal margin*". We can't cultivate the proper attitude for worship in the ten seconds we spend walking from the front door to the Sanctuary. We must prepare long before that. Going to go to bed early on the evening before worship allows us to awaken earlier, giving us a *time margin* to eat, dress and prepare our hearts for worship. *Time margin* is necessary in order to create *heart margin*.

2. Arrive early. A simple and effective way to become more attentive in worship is to arrive well before the service begins. This gives one time to become "*fully present*". Richard Foster offers this advice: *"Enter the service ten minutes early. Lift your heart in adoration to the King of Glory."* Smith finds that this helps him appreciate worship and reduces distractions that often happen when we arrive late.

3. Come with holy expectancy. Foster encourages a sense of *holy expectancy*. A simple prayer helps: *"Spirit, speak to me. Jesus, teach me. Father, let me experience your love and power."* Smith says, "I believe this is a prayer God loves to answer. And it is a prayer that awakens our desire."

4. Focus on one aspect of worship this week. There are many acts within a worship service (e.g. Holy Communion, Bible reading, singing, confessing, interceding, sermon etc.). Pick a different element of worship to focus on each week. *"For example, if you choose singing, pay attention to your body, to the sounds and to the words being sung. Reflect on its meaning—why do we sing? What is happening to us as a community as we sing?"* After a few months you will have reflected on nearly every aspect of worship, *"thus enabling an entire worship service to become an act of doxology."*

5. Apply one thing. "Foster wisely writes, *'Just as worship begins in holy expectancy it ends in holy obedience'*. Worship transforms us and leads us into new ways of living." Be alert to how God might be asking you respond: *"Is there someone you need to speak with? A change you need to make? A new practice you need to make as you walk with God?"* Keep it simple by aiming to discern *one* thing God may be asking of you, and then work to put into practice this week.

(Adapted from *The Good and Beautiful Community* by James Bryan Smith, pg. 186-187. Direct quotes in inverted commas.)
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