

24/7 Worship

We live in a 24/7 world. Banker's hours were 10-3. Now we can bank 24 hours a day online or at an ATM. Casual conversation between customer and merchant in a physical shop was once an everyday part of the social exchange in shopping. Now we can shop alone 24/7 from home without talking to anyone. Personal contact is no longer required for many things we do.

What about worship? We can easily broadcast worship services to be viewed alone. Thousands of sermons are posted online weekly. One person recently told me they had no need to "go to church." If they had a spiritual need they could just talk to a "religious" friend. Still for many others in materially affluent western countries there is no "need" to believe in God or worship Him. Sunday for them is just another 24 hour shopping/work day or "fun-day." Most people perceive Sunday as part of the "week-end" instead of what it is, the first day of the week, the "week beginning." For those who still choose to worship God can we worship Him 24/7 by ourselves?

To start answering this question, what about 24/7 worship in the early church? While electricity was yet to be discovered, first century Christians did have great oil lamp technology perfected over thousands of years that would allow them to see each other through the night. We have the example of Paul speaking until midnight at Troas (Acts 7:7). The Hebrew writer exhorted early Christians to "encourage one another *day after day*, as long as it is still called '*Today*,' so that none of you will be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin" (Hebrews 3:13). Without electronic technology in the first century obeying this seven day/week exhortation to encouragement required personal contact which was much easier in their smaller denser cities and farms. Letters were an alternative for the literate.

We see a vivid picture of early church worship in Acts 2:42-47a: "They were continually devoting themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. Everyone kept feeling a sense of awe; and many wonders and signs were taking place through the apostles. And all those who had believed were together and had all things in common; and they began selling their property and possessions and were sharing them with all, as anyone might have need. *Day by day* continuing with one mind in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they were taking their meals together with gladness and sincerity of heart, praising God and having favour with all the people."

From Luke's description we see the fundamental dimensions of worship pleasing to God: hearing the Apostle's teaching in public preaching (first century believers heard it directly from the Apostles, now we have Jesus' and their teachings in writing), fellowship, breaking of bread, prayer, sharing with all through gracious acts of charity, praising God publicly witnessed by others and encouraging one another *day by day*. "Having favour with all the people" meant a real presence in their wider community.

Which of these key aspects of worship may we do alone without other Christians? Well, on our own we can certainly read the Apostles' teachings, pray, praise God and share

what we have with others in our communities. And, we can, and should, do the first three of anytime 24/7.

Fellowship, on the other hand, is something we share with others. So is encouragement. The root meaning of “church” (*ekklesia*) in the first century was “assembly,” being together, closely akin to *synagogue*, “gather together.” The word *ekklesia* was commonly used for trade guild members meeting together, for public and official meetings (Acts 19:32,39) and the church assembled on earth and in heaven (Hebrews 12:23). The church of Christ is those assembled in Him: “For where two or three have gathered together in My name, I am there in their midst” (Matthew 20:12).

The richness and depth of fellowship *in Christ*, sharing joys and sorrows, are best when we are physically present with one another. Encouragement is also something we can do well in each other’s presence. It is true too that many other forms of encouragement are possible through “snail mail,” a card or letter, and electronically.

When it comes to encouragement and developing deep and lasting relationships, including our relationship with God, there are advantages and disadvantages to our 24/7 world.

On the downside, every technology comes with a hidden price not advertised on the box like the warnings on cigarette packaging. In some of our provinces, for example, traffic deaths from texting have surpassed deaths from impaired driving. Yet cell phone packages do not have images of dead teenage or adult texting drivers on them.

On a less ominous more positive note, young people have said publicly in the media and to me in person that even with all the modern means of connectivity: texting, Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Snapchat, email, Skype, ooVoo, etc., personal face to face conversation while we “hang out” together is still essential in developing rewarding and deep lasting relationships.

Further on the plus side, we see the dynamic 24/7 nature of our relationship with God in Romans 12:1, “Therefore I urge you, 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*.” A dead sacrifice was good one time. As living sacrifices, our bodies are with God for His service 24/7. We are engaged in His mission 24/7. Being “transformed by the renewing of your mind” can happen 24/7 through His Word and Spirit.

Paul’s use of plural imperatives, pronouns and nouns, recognizes this living sacrifice is something that applies to all of us Christians together. English is a great language but it doesn’t distinguish between singular and plural second-person pronouns. In an individualistic culture we tend to read “me, myself and I” when Paul literally writes you plural, all of us together. When he says, for example, in Philippians 2:12, “Work out your own salvation,” “your” is plural as is the imperative command. We work on our salvation together. We need the strength we draw from each other to live faithfully until death when we receive the crown of life (Revelation 2:10). This is especially true when we are

engaged in the challenging work of interpersonal evangelism which, like night shifts and trench warfare, can be exhausting.

So what about 24/7 worship today? People of all generations living in this 24/7 world have learned that, notwithstanding marvels of technology, personal presence remains the best way to share the deepest parts of our souls with one another. Our worship as the living body of Christ has unique spiritual synergy that is encouraging and uplifting and of course pleasing to our Father in heaven who commanded it for our edification and His glory.

As we worship together we can use technology to connect and maintain relationships with members of Christ's body who are infirm, ill or isolated. It was a joy for us to connect with worship in our home congregation from eight time zones away when we were travelling by the Sea of Galilee, another week when we had worshiped with the church in Nazareth in the morning, and on other occasions of travel to remote areas where no congregations meet. Technology also enables us to reach out to internet searchers looking for God.

There are dimensions of worship we offer to God that can and should take place anytime 24/7: prayer, praise, digging into Scripture and acts of compassion to those in need anywhere. Reading Jesus' and the Apostles' teaching and the presence of God's Spirit are two of God's 24/7 instruments for "the renewing of your minds." We should also use our technology to "encourage one another *day after day* as long as it is still called 'Today.'" As we offer our total selves as living sacrifices in these ways and expend ourselves in God's 24/7 mission we will be eager to assemble with our brothers and sisters in Christ to encourage each other, renew our souls and worship Him together as the body of Christ whenever the doors of the church building are open! We in the church of Christ cordially invite you to join us in worshipping Him!

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