

“Worship—Loving God Together”

Matthew 22:37, Revelation 5:11-13



Rev. Patricia Campbell-Schmitt
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If somebody asked you to describe the Christian life in a few words, what would you say? If somebody asked you, “What does God want from us more than anything else?” What would you say? I believe that the essence of the Christian life can be summed up in two words, “love affair.” God wants to have a love affair with us. The Christian faith teaches that we were created as objects of God’s love. God made us to have a relationship with him and to love us. As a result the most important thing you need to know is life is that God loves you. And the most important thing you can do in life is to love God back. Jesus said it like this in Matthew 22:37 “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.” Nothing is more important. If you learn to love God and let God love you, you will fulfill your primary purpose in life.

Now there is a term in the Bible for expressing love to God. That term is “worship.” We think of worship as a ritual or a routine or something you do in a church. But worship simply means expressing love to God. Any time you are expressing love to God, you’re worshiping whether you’re by yourself, or in a small group, or in a large crowd, wherever.

That’s what we are going to talk about today, how we can express our love to God. And here is something I don’t want you to miss. Expressing our love to God is not only something we do individually, it is something we do together. In fact, as I reflect back over my Christian life, some of the most powerful and meaningful moments took place in corporate worship. Someone once described the goal of corporate worship as “making it easy to find God and making it difficult to forget God.” I like that.

One such experience is described in the book of Revelation where John gives us a glimpse into worship in heaven. He describes a day in the future where gathered around the throne of God for worship are not just thousands and tens of thousands, but millions of angels and living beings. Listen to John’s description, “Then I looked, and I heard the voice of many angels surrounding the elders; they numbered myriads of myriads and thousands and thousands, singing with a full voice, ‘Worthy is the Lamb that was slaughtered to receive power and wealth and wisdom and might and honor and glory and blessing!’ Then I heard every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and in the sea, and all that is in them singing, ‘To the one seated on the throne and to the Lamb be blessing and honor and glory and might forever and ever!’” Can you imagine such a scene? It’s mind boggling to try and imagine what this day will be like. In the meantime, we as a church get to practice for that great day. We do that each week as we come together in worship to express our love to God. And when we do it together, we do it better.

So this morning we are going to look at four ways we can say to God, “I love you.” And I would like to encourage you to take a self-test on each of these four ways. By the end of this service I hope you will feel more loved by God than you have ever felt before and that you will find it easier to express your love to God in a deeper level of worship. For others, you may understand for the first time that worship is a team sport, a time in which we can express love to God with other members of God’s family. So let’s look at these four ways.

The first way we express love to God is by SINGING TO GOD. You have probably noticed that music and love go together because music comes from the heart. It comes out of your soul, out of your emotions. There are many love songs in the world. But did you know that over the last 2,000 years more songs have been written about Jesus Christ than any other

topic in the world? Christianity is a singing faith. Why? Because it’s about a love affair. It’s about a relationship with God. Psalm 147:7 says, “Sing to the Lord with thanksgiving.”

Nothing will make you more aware of God’s love and God’s presence than singing and praise. The command to sing is given all throughout the Psalms, and you will notice that it is not just a directive to sing individually, but to also do it together. “Make a joyful noise to God, all the earth; sing the glory of his name,” we hear in Psalm 66:1. And again in Psalm 95:1 we hear, “O come, let us sing to the Lord; let us make a joyful noise to the rock of our salvation.” You need principles for your head and music for your heart. Music inspires, it refreshes, it rejuvenates, it revitalizes, and music also heals.

Don’t underestimate the power of coming together to worship. If you are a follower of Jesus, you come to church not just to receive, but also to give. Each Sunday, when we gather, it is not just to hear a message that we can apply to our lives. We also gather to corporately express our love to God. Christians all over the globe come together for times of corporate worship. And in many parts of the world where there is persecution, Christians put themselves at risk to come to a corporate gathering. So, why do they do it? Because there is power in the “together.” In each of these four ways of expressing love to God I am going to ask you to evaluate yourself. How often do you sing your thanks and love to God? Regularly? Occasionally? Rarely? Check which one represents your current experience and put a star at where you’d like to be.

The second way we can express our love to God is by talking to God. Talk is a key ingredient in every close relationship, between a husband and wife, between parent and child, between close friends. When we have deep-soul communication with others, our relationship grows, and when we have little or no deep communication our relationship decays. Because a relationship is never standing still. It’s either growing or decaying.

The same is true with God. On the days when you have deep, significant talk with God your relationship grows. On the days when you have little or no talk your relationship decays. When you really love somebody you don’t just want to spend time with them. You want to talk with them. What do you talk to God about if you want to express love to God? Anything that you would talk to your best friend about. Your hopes, your fears, your dreams, your anxieties, the things you’re embarrassed

about, the things you're proud of or ashamed of, your goals, your ambitions, your hurts, your cares, every part of your life—you come to God and you talk to God about it. In Psalm 116:1 we hear, "I love the Lord because he hears and answers my prayers. Because He bends down and listens, I will pray as long as I have breath." If you don't feel close to God and some of you don't...if your Christian faith has become routine, dull, joyless, and lifeless. There's no real spark any more. There's a simple remedy for that. Start talking to God again. Prayer is not some duty that you have to do. It's a privilege that you get to do. You get to talk to the creator of the universe.

This expression of worship also has a community aspect to it. All through the Bible and through history we find pockets of Christians gathering for the purpose of prayer. Sometimes their prayers are prayers of praise. Sometimes they are prayers of intercession. Sometimes they are prayers for guidance or forgiveness. Sometimes they are prayers looking for comfort.

Now rate yourself on this way of expressing love to God. How often do you talk to God each day? Do you do it once a day? Ten times a day? Do you do it regularly? Occasionally? Rarely? Does your small group take prayer seriously? Is it a priority for your group? Some of you may be saying, "I'd like to pray more, but I just don't have the time." You'll never have the time; you must take the time to pray.

The third way to express your love to God is by listening to God. Listening is one of the greatest gifts you can give to someone. We all want to be understood and listened to. When you listen to someone, you're saying, "You matter to me. I value what you have to say. I value your opinion." God wants that from us too. And yet listening to God is the most misunderstood and left out part of prayer. Most of us think that prayer is just talking to God. But that's only fifty percent of prayer. The other fifty percent is being quiet and letting God speak to us. Usually we're in too much of a hurry to do this. We don't stop, wait, listen.

One of the most important steps we can take in listening to God is to set aside time for God. All of us have pressure packed, deadline-filled schedules. Our days and our souls are filled with noise. But God has a remedy, one day per week of rest and worship. Perhaps the reason some of us can't hear God is that our lives are so fast and so full and so noisy, that there is no room for God. We need to take time to listen to God. We need to stop and pause because God is speaking.

But how does God speak to us? In many ways. One way is through the Bible, and if you are not spending any time reading this book, you are going to miss out on God's word to you. Two, God speaks to us through the experiences we go through in life, even the times of struggle and trial. Three, God often speaks to us the loudest and clearest through the wise counsel of other Christian friends. Do you have a trusted group of friends to whom you can go to seek God's counsel? That is one of the important reasons why we need to be in community with other Christians. I hope your small group is becoming such a place for you. Finally, God will also speak to us through impressions, through a good idea.

Here's the question: How often do you pause to listen to God each day? Do you do it in the morning, in the afternoon, and in the evening? Occasionally? Regularly? Rarely? Do I pause and say, "God, is there anything you want to say about this?" regarding a decision you're working on, an event you're getting ready to go to, or somebody you're getting ready to talk with.

Today we are going to take the Lord's Supper together. The Lord's Supper is a good time to listen to God speak to you. Are we prepare for the Lord's Supper, just ask, "God, is there anything You want to say to me?" God wants to talk to you. God wants to speak to you. But you have to listen. That's one of the ways we show love to God.

The fourth way that we can express love to God is by giving to God. The first generation of Christians were givers and they did it together. It is amazing what can be done and accomplished when we each give our little bit. Listen to this description of the early church from Acts 4:33-34. "With great power the apostles gave their testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and great grace was upon them all. There was not a needy person among them, for as many as owned lands or houses sold them and brought the proceeds of what was sold." Did you catch the words of v. 34, "There was not a needy person among them." This month the people of southwest Portland are seeing what can happen when people of faith get serious about sharing with those in need. Last week and this Sunday it was incredible watching you bring to St. Andrew's bag after bag of food for the SW HOPE: FEED the HUNGRY campaign. Don't you sense God's grace touching this church in a special way right now? There is a joy and excitement flowing through this place that is undeniable.

Giving, at its core, is the essence of love. You spell "love" G-I-V-E because that's what love's all about. You can give without loving but you cannot love without giving. It is impossible to do that. If you love God, then it's going to show up in your generous lifestyle. The Bible says there is one way to really test the sincerity of your love. We hear it in 2 Corinthians 8:7-8, "Just as you excel in faith, in speech, in knowledge, and in complete earnestness, see that you also excel in the grace of giving. I am not commanding you but I want to test the sincerity of your love." God tests the sincerity of our love by looking at our giving.

You know what? So do others, particularly those outside the church community. Recently a well known national church data gathering company concluded that the people of southwest Portland, our neighborhood, were the least receptive to faith and more suspicious of organized religion than any community in the greater Portland area or even the state of Oregon. But you know what? Right now you are changing that. Your generosity through the SW HOPE: FEED THE HUNGRY campaign is giving God a good name here in southwest Portland. People will indeed know that we are Christians by our love.

In a few minutes we will be doing something that we do every Sunday here, giving our tithes and offerings. This time of giving is not just a time when we say, "OK! It's time to tip God." No, our offering is a serious act of worship. It is as much an act of worship as singing, praying, listening, and everything else. It's saying, "God I love you so much I want to give back to you. It all belongs to you anyway. And I know that there is no way that I can out give you."

Here's the bottom line: there are many, many ways to express our love to God. We just looked at four this morning. God made us and God loves us, and God wants us to love him back. God wants to use our hands and our feet and our eyes and our ears and everything we have to fulfill the purpose and mission that we were put on- this earth to do. God wants to use us to make a difference in this world. May that be so for you and you and you and me to the glory of God. Amen.