

## Preamble

The purpose of this paper is to summarize what God taught us and reminded us about worship in the fall of 2012. To listen to Him and each other, we spent three weeks in personal study as well as studying worship in our Sunday gatherings and small groups. During that time we also heard each other's hearts in a town hall gathering as we sought to answer the question, "How can we at RRCC unite in wholehearted worship that brings pleasure to God?" Our "Worship Discussion Paper" explains how loving God supremely and loving each other, as Jesus loves us, results in such worship. And as we live out together the ideas expressed below, we will come to more fully share a common understanding and approach to worship.

## How We Define Worship

Jesus' defense of Mary gives us a concrete picture of worship. Mary poured expensive perfume on Jesus' feet because she loved Him. She helps us to see that worship is doing a beautiful thing to the Triune God—pouring out our love on Him. (Matthew 26:1-16; Mark 14:1-11; John 12:1-8)

We understand that worship is our response to God's worth. As John Piper expresses it, "Worship is a way of gladly reflecting back to God the radiance of his worth." We do this to express our love to Him.

## How We Express Worship

The intergenerational character of our RRCC family is a high value for us. We reflect this value in our sensitivity to one another as we plan and express worship. We also reflect it in our Celebration Sundays, when the whole church worships together in a way that embraces the understanding and engagement of as many as possible.

A volunteer-driven worship ministry as compared to a professional-driven ministry is also a high value for us. At RRCC, the body of Christ leads the body of Christ in worship. While we strive for excellence, we do not strive for a perfection that eliminates wholehearted worshippers from leadership because of unrealistic skill or time expectations.

In addition, we seek a breadth of expression in God-honouring worship, rather than maintaining uniformity from Sunday to Sunday or emphasizing one aspect of worship at the expense of another. Because God is infinite and humans are complex, we understand that expressing worship is multifaceted, as expressed below.

- *Music and Whole Life*  
We value music as God's wonderful gift to us to empower heart-felt expressions of love to Him in unity with one another *and* we recognize that

we have an even more far reaching obligation to worship God gratefully with who we are and everything we do (Romans 12:1). We worship God when we serve Him together in practical projects. We bring our everyday worship into corporate worship through our heart attitudes. Our corporate worship extends beyond music to include every element in the worship order (greeting, hearing community announcements, praying, reading, giving, listening to the explanation and application of God's word, reflecting in silence, receiving God's blessing, and more).

- **Internal *and* External**  
Worship is a matter of the heart *and yet*, just as in human relationships, physical expressiveness is important. Our goal is to worship with all our inmost being (Psalm 103:1) *and, at the same time*, appropriately express our feelings physically. We are inspired by the psalms where we find worshippers clapping, singing, bowing down, kneeling, lifting hands, shouting, playing numerous instruments, dancing, and standing in silent awe.
- **Continuity *and* Change**  
We value worship that is rooted in the ancient words and unchanging truths of the Bible and in historic songs and readings *while* valuing, *at the same time*, new approaches to worship that are also faithful to eternal truth (Psalm 96:1). Within this broad continuum, we do not resolve the tension between historic and recent music with mathematical percentages but rather by viewing all songs as expressions of worship and selecting music on the basis of theme, all the while being sensitive to one another.
- **Variety *and* Familiarity**  
We delight in diversity within our church family—ages, origins, personalities, and preferences. We recognize the value of variety (music genres, special music, prayers, liturgies, scripture reading, worship leaders, sermon styles, testimonies, ordinances, worship order, use of the arts, prayer ministry) to keep our experiences of worship rich and fresh. *At the same time*, we most easily enter into worship when we are familiar with the material used. We particularly value thoughtfulness in assisting us to learn new songs.
- **Personal *and* Communal**  
We accept each other as unique individuals, who prefer some worship languages to others, finding they make it easier to express ourselves to God. Yet, love for one another gives us the desire to help each other worship well. We do this by embracing each other's worship languages and helping others learn ours. We see forgiveness and reconciliation as prerequisites for unified worship. In corporate worship we multiply not only volume but also expressions of love for God and each other.

- Truth *and* Experience  
We value prayers, readings, lyrics, and preaching that are theologically rich *and* those that express our personal experience of God.
- Emotion *and* Mind  
“The engagement of the heart in worship is the coming alive of the feelings and emotions and affections of the heart. Where feelings for God are dead, worship is dead.”<sup>1</sup> Yet, worship that is only emotion is also dead. We express feelings in worship *and* we engage God with our entire mind, thinking truth and reflecting on God’s worth.
- Reverence *and* Exuberance  
The Bible’s Hebrew and Greek words for worship and praise move us to worship with reverence *and* praise with exuberance.
- God’s Pleasure *and* Our Satisfaction  
When we seek God’s pleasure in worship, we are deeply satisfied because we are doing that for which we were made. We guard against worshipping worship—enjoying worship for its own sake. When a song or service element does not appeal to us, we seek to maintain our focus on God and His truth.
- Focusing on God *and* Impacting Others  
While true worship focuses on God and cares little about what others think of us as we worship, we take seriously the fact that worship rightly impacts others for good. Authentic worship, by focusing on God in a way that is sensitive to others, builds up believers and powerfully attracts seekers.

## How We Respond to What God is Saying to Us

Having asked God to guide us in our approach to worship, our pastors and elders have summarized what we believe the church family is hearing from God. We invite us all to continue the conversation with further thoughts and insights.

Our collective responsibility now, even as we continue listening to each other, is to *act on* what we are learning in order to unite in wholehearted worship that brings pleasure to God. To reach for the worship about which we read in Revelation four and five, worship we will one day enjoy in eternity, *worshippers and worship leaders must join together as one grand worship team to the glory of God.*

Conscientious preparation is fundamental to our success. With that in mind, we conclude with suggested reflections for us all.

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<sup>1</sup> John Piper, *Desiring God* (Sisters, OR: Multnomah, 2003), 68.

### Reflections for Worshippers

- Do I daily give myself to God as a gift of worship? (Romans 12:1)
- Do I prepare my heart for our corporate worship? (Psalm 27:8)
- Are we being realistic about our weekend schedule so that we can usually arrive on time and unhurried for corporate worship? (Psalm 122:1)
- Do I pray through the week for God's work in and through us as we gather? (Psalm 85:6)
- Do I come to worship with a desire to delight God's heart and serve my fellow worshippers? (Matthew 22:37-39)
- Do I remember that we not only *gather* to be strengthened by connecting with God and each other but we also *scatter* to impact our world for God? (Acts 8:4)

### Reflections for Worship Planners and Leaders

- What is the theme?
- Does the prelude assist worshippers?
- How are we inviting God's people into worship?
- Is God honoured and the Gospel communicated?
- How are we making the most of scripture and prayer?
- How are we inviting worshippers to give financially?
- Are we hearing believers' voices—males and females of varying ages and life circumstances?
- Is it thoughtful of believers and sensitive to unbelievers?
- Are these the best musical choices?
  - Easily playable and singable?
  - True to God's Word?
  - Appropriate in mood?
  - With staying power?
  - Exalting of Christ and His cross?
- How are we inviting response to God?
- What is the flow of meaning, tempo, mood, and activity?
- Can I picture God's pleasure as we offer our best?

*Then I heard every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and on the sea, and all that is in them, saying:*

*"To him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb  
be praise and honor and glory and power,  
for ever and ever!"<sup>2</sup>*

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<sup>2</sup> Revelation 5:13