

Series: OUT OF THE ORDINARY!

**WORSHIP IS NOT SHOWING OFF FOR GOD
1 Corinthians 14**

I. INTRO

- A. As little kids, we love our parent's attention—and, if encouraged, we'll put on quite a show. We swing really high at the park, **Lookit me! Lookit me!** We get the solo at band, or score a goal—and we look for our parents—silently saying, "**Lookit me! Lookit me!**"
1. Of course, then we move into our teen years. And we **still** want attention! But not from our parents; from our **friends**. I remember one moment that didn't go so well for me in that department. I was walking home from school, trying to pretend I didn't notice two cute girls across the street—but hoping they'd notice me. Then I tripped over a crack in the sidewalk and went from Mr. Cool to Mr. Clutz. Actually, I didn't realize that I had **always** been Mr. Clutz!
 2. But that's just kids, right? I mean, we outgrow our **Lookit me! Lookit me!** thing, right? **Right?** Actually, I'm not sure we do. There is this part of us that is **very** conscious of what other people think. And sometimes that **Lookit me!** thing follows us right into gatherings like this!
- B. When Jesus taught on prayer, fasting and giving, he made it clear that even **this** could be twisted away from giving glory to God—to giving glory to **us**--spiritual impression management.
- In fact that's what some of the most religious people of His day were doing. Jesus said that when we do that, we've just cancelled any benefit we might get from it!

And this is a problem, isn't it? It's possible to drag pride and image management and the **Lookit Me!** mindset right into the arena where only God belongs. Doing really, **really** good things can become all about us and misused to prop up our egos, make us appear more spiritual, more desirable—more special than others.

1. The word **worship** originally comes from the word **worth-ship**. Worship is what you attribute ultimate worth to in your life—not by what you say, but by how you live. Defined that way, people worship all kinds of things—a boyfriend, a car, a job, money. If you come to a gathering like this and it's all pretty much about you—guess what you worship?
2. And our struggle is that this attitude is really, **really** subtle! No one **ever** intends for their worship to center around themselves—to do the **American Idol** thing in the middle of the church—but it sneaks up on you. And it hijacks the attention away from God and what He's up to and Who He is.
3. We've been studying a letter written by the Apostle Paul to a church in Corinth. It was one hoppin' place—lots of excitement going on—but, from what Paul says, their pre-occupation with themselves and what their spiritual score was leaked into everything they did. Including worship.
-The issues for us may be different—but in a culture as obsessed with self as ours—we face some of the same dangers—if we're not careful.

-So, if you're okay with this—I'd like to talk about true worship—and some of the dangers of putting **self** in the middle of it!

II. WHEN WORSHIP GETS CRAZY

A. Now, let me just define some things up front for you—just so we're on the same page.

Worship is singing and praying and studying God's Word together in gatherings like this. But it's way, **way** more than that. Worship is huge. Worship is the way we proclaim God's worth and greatness and beauty and pre-eminence in all we do—every moment of every day. Worship is **living** for the glory of God—and **giving** ourselves to God and others.. Paul says to the Roman believers:

And so, dear brothers and sisters, I plead with you to give your bodies to God because of all he has done for you. Let them be a living and holy sacrifice—the kind he will find acceptable. This is truly the way to worship him. (Romans 12:1 NLT)

-So, if **worship** is really about the ongoing act of proclaiming Jesus as Lord of all—and the center of life, what are these **gatherings** about that Christians have carried on for 2000 years? Right in the context of talking about believers living with hope—hope that helps them make it to the finish line and finish well, the Bible says:

Let us hold tightly without wavering to the hope we affirm, for God can be trusted to keep his promise. Let us think of ways to motivate one another to acts of love and good works. And let us not neglect our meeting together, as some people do, but encourage one another, especially now that the day of his return is drawing near. (Hebrews 10:23-25 NLT).

-See the point. Our gatherings are two dimensional—cross shaped. Looking toward God—up, and motivating and encouraging one another to be who we are called to be, live well—make good choices. Do **we** personally benefit? Of course—but point of gathering is **not**, “What can **I** get out of this?”—it's, “What can I give; how can I help others?”

1. What made things so crazy in the Corinthian Church was that they had singled out one gift as **the** gift to have. It was the gift of tongues, or speaking in an unknown language from their heart to God's heart. Having this gift made you and insider; it made you more spiritual than those who didn't.

-So, when they gathered—because of the prominence of this gift—there were occasions when they were all speaking in tongues at once—each person totally in their own little world. Throughout this whole chapter, what you find Paul doing is trying to, one the one hand, say “The gift of tongues is a valuable gift God has given to the church!” And on the other, “The way you're using this gift is **totally** inappropriate—and it's doing more harm than good!”

2. Now, why would they do this? Why tongues? Well, it was the gift of tongues that fell on the original disciples when the Spirit came—and then came to all the people groups Jesus had told them to reach; first Jerusalem, then Judea, then Samaria—and then the rest of the Gentile nations.

-It's also important to understand that this kind of ecstatic utterance was, for some of them, a part of their past when they worshipped pagan idols. In fact, it was considered the highest form of being connected with God. And the Christian gift of praying to God in unknown languages looked a lot like that.

-Now, let's just do a little review of what Paul has already taught about gifts - which we talked about a couple of weeks ago:

- a. First, there are many gifts, they are all necessary, and no gift is more special than any other.
 - b. Second, there is no one gift that everyone has—which would include tongues. Gifts are tools, not a signal for who's more spiritual.
 - c. True spirituality is **love**. And because spirituality is defined by love, the lack of love nullifies a gift. Any gift!
 - d. Finally, and this is **very** important; the gifts I have are **not** about me. And your gifts are not about **you**. The gifts are given to the Body of Jesus to help **everyone**. To use a gift for yourself or to promote yourself is to misuse it.
3. In 1 Corinthians 14, Paul gets very specific about the use of the gift of tongues in public gatherings. Let me read what he says at the very beginning of the chapter, because it sets everything else up:

Let love be your highest goal! But you should also desire the special abilities the Spirit gives—especially the ability to prophesy. For if you have the ability to speak in tongues, you will be talking only to God, since people won't be able to understand you. You will be speaking by the power of the Spirit, but it will all be mysterious. But one who prophesies strengthens others, encourages them, and comforts them. A person who speaks in tongues is strengthened personally, but one who speaks a word of prophecy strengthens the entire church. (1 Corinthians 14:1-4 NLT)

- a. Now, the point Paul makes again and again through this entire passage—hoping we'll get it--is that what happens in the gathering of believers needs to be intelligible to everyone there. Including the undecided persons who come. If it's **not** intelligible to everyone—if there's no clarity—then it doesn't pass the test of encouraging others to keep on, to do good, to not lose hope.
-Paul uses a number of different illustrations to make this point;
*an instrumentalist that can't find the melody line;
*a bugler that can't give the right signal—and the army is stuck, not knowing **what** to do
- b. In the light of this, Paul makes a very enlightening statement:

I thank God that I speak in tongues more than any of you. But in a church meeting I would rather speak five understandable words to help others than ten thousand words in an unknown language. (1 Corinthians 14:18-19 NLT)

c. Here's the overall point. When you gather in a larger group—where the span of education, age, language, and experience is broad—**make it clear! The point is that NO ONE feels left out, stupid, or on the outside looking in!** To speak in an unknown tongue in that context totally misses the point of gathering.

4. Sometimes people think, “Well, if the initial coming of the Spirit caused people to speak in other languages—shouldn't it be the same today?”

-The point of what happened when the original disciples spoke in tongues on Pentecost, even though it seemed weird, was to **eliminate** a language barrier—not create one. It was the reversal of the curse of Babel, where God confused people's speech when they were unifying out of contempt for Him.

In 1 Cor.—it becomes clear that the gift of unknown languages is one of many gifts—not the primary sign gift that proves that the Spirit is there.

That's why Paul says, “Pray, speak and sing **both** with your spirit **and** with your mind—so that **everyone** can benefit and **everyone** can be included!”

5. The other gift Paul references a lot in this passage—and tells them to desire and use in their gatherings-- is the gift of prophecy. Now, **fore-telling** the future is a part of this gift; but it is more typically the **forth-telling** of what God has to say. This gift, throughout the Bible, is used to warn people about where they're at—and also **comfort** and **encourage** them—or **challenge** their value system. The point of prophecy is to move us toward **worth-ship**—proclaiming the worth and power and truth of God with all of our lives—every day!

6. Paul concludes this section with another concern. It's about people coming to a gathering of Jesus' people who are seekers; who are undecided about Jesus. He says, “If they come in and everyone's out control, speaking in unknown tongues—they'll think you're all nuts and leave. But if there's prophecy—if God speaks clearly and plainly to their heart in a clear and intelligible way—they'll be convinced that God is there with you!”

B. It's very clear from what Paul says here in this passage that the gatherings of believers—like this one we're in right now—are to build us all up, help us, encourage us, teach us, motivate us, inspire us to worship when we leave. To proclaim the worth and power of what God's doing in the world by engaging in His mission. Right were we are—wherever and with whomever we happen to be. Not talking religious talk—but by living God's mission of restoring all people and all things to Himself. Our **lives** should be intelligible to those watching. And the most intelligible language in the world is...**love**—through what we say and what we do. And there are some important principles that come out of what Paul says about gatherings like the one we're in right now.

1. The first one is that love—love and respect for God and love and respect for others—**always** needs to be at the forefront of everything we do—**especially** public worship gatherings.

2. It is **totally** unacceptable to show off—to do whatever you're doing to get noticed or impress others with full of the Holy Spirit—or how selfless—or how profound you are. Love doesn't boast. Love isn't proud!
3. Worship gatherings of any kind, large group or small group, are not about **taking**; they're not about me coming and getting what I want from church and God—and then just leaving. Worship is a community experiencing of giving and receiving.
4. God is a God of peace—and **meaning**. Reconciliation. Clarity. That's why He sent His Son. Peace and meaning is what everyone craves. What does it say about a gathering of Jesus' followers if an undecided person comes in and what they find is chaos and unintelligibility. It's an inaccurate, damning portrait of God!

III. THE SUBTLE TWISTS OF WORSHIP

- A. Now. I want to be very clear about something at this point. There are **all** kinds of churches—full of people who really love Jesus.
 - Some gatherings use chanting, or the music of a pipe organ. Worship gatherings are very liturgical, using a lot of symbols to celebrate Jesus and what He's done.. And they really, **really** love Jesus!
 - Some gatherings are high energy. People are jumping, dancing, shouting—I mean true worship is measured in terms of time—at **least** two hours—and the perspiration factor! And they really, **really** love Jesus!
 - And there are notebook churches. There's a little singing at the top end—but most of the time is reserved for verse by verse exposition of the Bible. You can tell when the message starts—and when it ends—by the clicking of notebooks! And they really, **really** love Jesus.
 - Then there's us; The Olive Branch—probably somewhere in between. And we really, **really** love Jesus.
 - Here's the question: Who does **Jesus** love the most? Who's right? **We are!** He loves **US** best, right? Actually, He's allowed a **huge** amount of flexibility in how we worship, the size of our gatherings, how God's Word is taught, and the ways we find to encourage each other. There's the **wine**—living, active, powerful Word and mission of God on this planet. That **never** changes. The **wineskin**—the **bottle** does. God has lovingly given us tons of latitude in expressing our praise and gathering in ways that fits our personality and style.
 - But our worship **can** twist off in wrong, sometimes bizarre and sinful directions. It would appear that the Corinthians were dragging stuff right from their culture into their church.
 1. Anyone remember what **worth-ship** is? It's includes singing—but it's not singing; it includes praying—but it's not praying; it includes spiritual gifts—but it's not spiritual gifts; it includes gatherings like these—but it's not gatherings like these. **Worship** is when we declare Jesus to be Lord, the center, the point of life—with all of our lives. We declare Jesus to be worthy of the highest

honor, all of our life—and we declare his Mission among us all to be worthy of the very best we can give.

-To just worship with your mouth, with words you sing but don't mean—words you have absolutely no intention of living out in your life—is to fake it.

2. And that's precisely what's wrong when anything—like the gift of tongues or **any** gift—makes it's way into a place of prominence and determines who's spiritual and who's not; who's in and who's out.

-People either fake it, or just leave—because they want to belong! And what God longs for from our hearts as we worship is authenticity! Faking implies that maybe Jesus is fake—because, see, He's the One we represent!

- B. Let me bring out something else that I see when a passage like this gets misused. Let me read some verses for you and see if you can guess how they might get misused:

1. First example:

For God is not a God of disorder but of peace, as in all the meetings of God's holy people. (1 Corinthians 14:33 NLT

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-So, what do you think? How might this get misused? Well, in some cases, it's been used to stifle **anything** that might look like spontaneity...or **life!** We used to have this little game as kids: **No more laughing, no more fun. Quaker's meeting has begun. The first who laughs or shows his teeth, has to pay a penalty!**

-So—when people are filled with joy and hope and tears; when people want to raise their hands, or cry—or speak up—this has been used as a whip to keep the troops in line. Meanwhile—the context is a church whose meetings were total chaos—driving people away!

2. Another example—directly from this chapter:

Women should be silent during the church meetings. It is not proper for them to speak. They should be submissive, just as the law says.

(1 Corinthians 14:34 NLT

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-Now, can anyone imagine a way **this** verse might get misused? This verse was used for **years** to keep women out of leadership and teaching roles in the church. To solve the puzzle, all you have to do is read the very next verse. Paul was dealing with the issue of questions getting asked out loud right in the middle of a worship gathering. If you do a little digging, you find that there were women who were prophets and women who led whole churches and women who were apostles.

-The Bible was never intended as a tool to win arguments and reinforce a person's opinions.

3. Now, those are just two examples. But let me also mention the other side to this. There are churches that totally ignore what Paul says here about the use of the gifts and how they should be used. If we believe that the Holy Spirit

inspires all Scripture—then we don't have the option of editing out the parts we don't like—or cramming it into the mold of what we're already doing.

- C. Let me tell you what I believe is the greatest danger we face when it comes to worship gatherings. I don't think dragging our culture into the church of Jesus has anything to do with our style of music or the video clips we use, or in the fact that we sometimes wear jeans—or shorts and T-shirts.

-I think it's when we bring consumerism to church. You know, our tendency to live as spectators. To see ourselves as customers instead of servants. Think about the world we live in. In any given week, all of us are spectators of something—vicariously participating while someone else sweats or sings or acts or dances or cooks our meal.

1. A guy says, "I **love** sports!" One look at his middle tells you that participation is a **DISTANT** memory—dusty trophies on a shelf, maybe. What he means is, "I enjoy watching someone else play—while I drink beer and eat chips—or occasionally take a trip to the nose-bleed seats at the Air Canada Centre.

-Someone says, "I **love** music!" I.e., I love downloading it off the internet onto my I-Pod and tuning everyone else out.

-I'm not saying it's wrong to spectate. To watch sports, to go to concerts, to watch TV, go to movies.

I'm just saying that we sometimes bring that same mentality into a gathering of believers, maybe mumble along with the words of a song—but largely see ourselves as consumers at a spiritual shopping mall. If we don't find what we want, well, we do what **all** good shoppers do; complain to the management, or take our shopping elsewhere.

2. There's another mentality in our culture that feeds this. It's the **me-first** mindset. We are encouraged in our world to make life about ourselves; about our comfort, our status, our money, our health and our opinions. It's all about me.

-I hate to break your mirror—but **worship is not about you—or me!** Worship is about the gift of adoration and obedience that I **give** to Jesus. See, because He's Lord. It's saying, "You **alone** deserve to be at the center—not just of this gathering, but of **all I do, all I am, all I have--every day.**" It's **giving myself—along with all my problems and needs and gifts and assets** back to God. As Paul says, it's that kind of sacrifice of worship is the reasonable, the **smart** thing to do!

-If you see this time as the only time of worship in your week, you know, to kind charge your batteries—you're in trouble! This time is intended to **focus** our worship—the giving of ourselves to God during the week. **It's not about me! It's not about how good I feel, how loud I sing, how noticed I am, of how much I agree with what's been done and said. Whether or not I feel a buzz in my soul or a chill in my spine--It's about HIM! JESUS!**

3. There's one more thing—and this is critically important to understand. We are not a group of individuals who gather, do our thing individually, then go home in

our individual cars—pull in the garage, hit the garage door opener—then go watch re-runs of **FRIENDS** for the afternoon.

-We are a **Body**. Interconnected in vital ways. Worship, by its nature, is **not** what you receive; it's what you give to God **and others**. Paul says:

Well, my brothers and sisters, let's summarize. When you meet together, one will sing, another will teach, another will tell some special revelation God has given, one will speak in tongues, and another will interpret what is said. But everything that is done must strengthen all of you.

(1 Corinthians 14:26 NLT)

- a. Paul is **not** saying—and I am **not** saying—“You **come**, you **give!**” There is no entry fee on worship. But giving, getting connected, having the gifts of others work in your life—and yours in theirs—is something you will want to do. It's what you **need**. But that will take a very different mindset. It will take the mindset of thinking as you walk into a gathering like this—or in a small group—“What can I give to others that will make a difference in them.”

-That's so different it sounds **weird** doesn't it?

But if we just mindlessly buy into our culture's obsession with consuming—we will church—Jesus' people—as a place to **take**. “What will I get out of this? Will they care for **my** kids? Will I get coffee and cookies and fudge?”

- b. There are some places that encourage that. Go to Wal-Mart, and that's what they expect. Go to a gas station, they **want** you to fill your tank and leave—and **pay** of course. But that attitude **kills** relationships. -Imagine marrying someone, and their attitude is, “Wow! This is great! Someone to give me attention, care, food, comfort and sex for the rest of my life—and push me around in a wheelchair when I'm old. What a **cool** deal!” How many of you think a marriage like that might work? How many of you are disappointed, cause that's what you thought marriage was all about?

-Come into **any** relationship where the focus is on you and what you'll get out of it—and you'll kill it. See, we were created in the image of God—and God is a giver, not a consumer—or a parasite. We were created in the image of God to be **givers!** Love **GIVES!** Love lives with open hands, open eyes, open ears and an open heart, toward God and others!

- c. Now, I know there are times in life when we get emotionally and spiritually wounded—and the gathering of Christ-followers is called to be a hospital; to give care; love, medicine. But there's also something in hospitals called **rehab**. Rehab is where big nurses force you to get out of bed and do what you don't **want** to do, use limbs that hurt; walk when you'd rather ride—cause, see, if you don't—you may **never** walk again!

-If you spend your life in gatherings like this consuming--looking for more and more and more--and better information; or looking for perfect people, or an experience that will zap charge you for the week; or people who will love you perfectly, solve your problems, encourage you when you're down and help you stand when you feel like giving up—that **won't** happen by consuming.

-But if you come to pour your life out to God—and into others; to help; to use your gifts; to join with other imperfect people who seek to imperfectly worship God—and to be authentic and real—people who don't try to fake what they don't have, well something really interesting will happen. When you **give** out of love to others; you receive more than you ever give.

4. One more thing. Remember that worship includes gatherings like this—but is **not** just gatherings like this. Gatherings like this are designed to encourage; to point us toward hope—and toward God; to help us persevere—and to equip us to worship **all through our week**—until we can gather again. And in gatherings like these, the point isn't how high you jump or how loud you shout—but whether you walk straight and have a heart devoted to God when you land!

-Worship gatherings like this are not intended to give you all the food and energy you need for any given week—any more than your Sunday dinner can give you enough energy for a week. It's intended to prime the pump; give you direction. Help you learn to feed yourself and connect with God meaningfully **every single day**. If you miss that—you will be disappointed—because there's not a church on this planet that can meet the totality of everyone's spiritual needs.

-Having said that—these gatherings are about mutual building up of each other; they're about connecting—not just here, but throughout the week. And they're about preparing people for the mission of Jesus in redeeming and reconciling—and bringing the peace and hope of God to the world. To **your** world! See, we can't **accomplish** your mission—only **you** can accomplish your mission. But we can help prepare you for it!

IV. CLOSING THOUGHTS

- A. As I look back over my life—and I've been in the church for over half a century—I realize how much I've changed. From suits, organs and pulpits—to choruses, video, guitars, drums—and throwing fudge!

-Maybe the **biggest** change in me has been from seeing and treating gatherings like this as a place to consume—and then thinking that I was responsible to help people have everything they need.

-But I was **so** wrong! What I now realize is that I'm just a tiny part of the massive gathering of Jesus in the world. Jesus' goal isn't just to get the gathered safely

into Heaven and make them rich and heal their boo-boos along the way.

Jesus goal is to create an army; an avalanche of redeeming love and grace and restoration; to use people in ways that exceed their wildest dreams. And **this** is where we **all** engage to equip each other to worship all through the week and advance Jesus' mission.

- B. Will you be a meaningful, operating, giving part of that army, that 24/7 avalanche of God's grace and peace and gratitude—slopping over the edge of your live into **your world!**