

## **The Worship Pastor, Philosophy of Worship Questions Ch. 3**

**Answers come from the Free Methodist Book of Discipline  
and The Pastors and Leaders Manual.**

If you would like an electronic copy of either of these resources, let me know, and I can send them over to you.

### **1. Defining Worship**

**How do you define worship as a transcultural human reality, and how does this definition play into your understanding of how human beings live and make decisions?**

Worship is the giving of ultimate worth, loyalty, love, attention, and obedience to something or someone. In that sense, every human being worships. People are always orienting their lives around what they believe is most valuable, whether that is God, self, family, money, nation, comfort, success, or approval.

The *Book of Discipline* warns against “false worship,” naming idolatry not only as the worship of another god or spirit, but also “the idolatries of the heart — the worship of things, pleasures, and self.” So worship is not just what happens in a sanctuary; worship is the center that directs our loves, choices, habits, and allegiances.

**How do you define Christian worship, and how does this definition inform the Christian’s life and decisions?**

Christian worship is the grace-enabled response of God’s people to the Triune God, revealed in Jesus Christ and made known by the Holy Spirit. It is reverence, praise, thanksgiving, obedience, and whole-life surrender.

The *Pastors and Church Leaders Manual* defines worship as “encountering God, then offering to God, with the believing community, what God is uniquely worthy to receive — honor, praise, thanksgiving, adoration, petition, expressed in word, song, and action.” It also says worship is “retelling and celebrating the good news story” of what God has done in Jesus and offering “the living out of our whole lives in obedient service to God.”

So Christian worship shapes decisions because the Christian life is lived before God. We do not merely ask, “What do I want?” but “What response is worthy of God?”

### **How do you define gathered Christian worship?**

Gathered Christian worship is the church coming together to meet the holy God and respond in obedience and love through Word, prayer, song, sacrament, confession, thanksgiving, offering, and sending.

The *Book of Discipline* says, “In worship, the church comes together to meet the holy God and to respond in obedience and love.”

The Manual describes gathered worship as communal, intentional, and God-directed. The congregation is the primary “actor,” God is the audience, and worship leaders are “prompters” who help the people offer worship to God.

### **How do these three definitions relate to one another, and how does that relationship inform the worship pastor’s role?**

All human beings worship because they give ultimate worth to something. Christian worship redirects human worship toward the one true God revealed in Jesus Christ. Gathered Christian worship is the regular, communal practice where God’s people are re-centered in true worship and sent back into whole-life worship.

This means the worship pastor is not primarily a musician, performer, or service planner. The worship pastor is a theological and pastoral guide who helps the congregation turn from false worship to true worship, encounter God, rehearse the gospel, respond in obedience, and live worshipfully in the world.

The Manual says the pastor or leader should see themselves as “the lead worshiper,” planning worship with care, excellence, Scripture, prayer, singing, preaching, sacraments, lay involvement, and expectation of fresh encounters with God.

### **Who is worship for? God? Us? The World? All Three?**

Primarily, worship is for God. The Manual says worship is “not primarily about us, but about God.”

But worship also forms us. In worship, we are reminded who God is, who we are, what Christ has done, and how we are called to live.

And worship has a witness to the world. The FMC mission is “to love God, love people, and make disciples,” and its vision is to bring wholeness through holy people multiplying disciples, leaders, groups, and churches.

So the answer is: **worship is directed to God, formative for the church, and missional toward the world.**

### **What role does gathered worship play in the Christian life? Is it merely beneficial? Or necessary?**

Gathered worship is necessary, not merely beneficial. The *Book of Discipline* says the Lord’s Day is set apart for worship, renewal, and service, and that corporate worship with the Christian community is the “essential activity” of Sunday.

That does not mean God only works in gathered worship, but gathered worship is one of the ordinary and essential means by which God forms His people.

### **Does God do anything unique in gathered worship?**

Yes, though not in a way that limits God's work outside the gathering. In gathered worship, God uniquely forms His covenant people together. He meets the church through Word, prayer, sacrament, fellowship, confession, proclamation, and sending.

The Discipline describes gathered believers as united around the Trinitarian presence of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, with Jesus honored and His presence recognized when even two or three gather in His name.

The sacraments, in particular, carry a unique corporate significance. Baptism and the Lord's Supper are "means of grace through faith," through which God works to "quicken, strengthen, and confirm our faith."

### **What is happening in gathered worship? Is supernatural activity taking place?**

Yes. Gathered worship is a formative ritual, but not merely a ritual. Supernatural activity takes place because God is present and active through the Holy Spirit.

So in gathered worship, God reveals, convicts, forgives, cleanses, assures, teaches, nourishes, sanctifies, unites, gifts, and sends His people.

## **2. Form and Content of Gathered Worship**

### **What role does Scripture play?**

Scripture is primary. The *Book of Discipline* says the Bible is God's written Word, uniquely inspired by the Holy Spirit, trustworthy, and authoritative over all human life.

The Manual says worship should include Scripture reading, preaching, prayer, singing, and sacraments in fresh and meaningful ways.

Scripture informs worship by governing its theology, filling its language, shaping its prayers, directing its proclamation, and testing its practices.

**Do we only do what Scripture explicitly commands, or are we free to do what Scripture does not forbid?**

The Free Methodist approach is: **Scripture governs worship, but it does not reduce worship to only explicitly commanded forms.**

The Manual allows music, spoken word, media images, visual art, drama, movement, traditional forms, contemporary forms, and creative blends, so long as worship remains God-centered, biblically truthful, and pastorally wise.

So we have freedom in forms, but not freedom from biblical authority.

**What roles do Christian tradition and history play?**

Tradition and history are important but subordinate to Scripture. The Manual explicitly values the Christian Year, the lectionary, historic prayers, creeds, calls to worship, and inherited worship forms.

The Manual also says healthy worship holds together "reformation" and "tradition."

So Christian worship today should not be cut off from the past. We do not worship as isolated modern consumers. We worship as part of the communion of saints. But tradition is received, tested, and adapted under Scripture.

## **What role does cultural context play?**

Cultural context matters because worship should be understandable and accessible to the people. The *Book of Discipline* says public worship, prayer, and sacraments should be “in a language understood by the people.”

The Manual says no single combination of components, styles, or formats will create balanced worship for every group, so leaders must exercise discernment in contextually appropriate ways.

So worship should both reflect and resist culture. It should speak the language of the people, but it should not be captive to consumerism, entertainment, nationalism, emotional manipulation, or individualism.

## **What role does the Holy Spirit play?**

The Holy Spirit is central. The *Book of Discipline* says the Spirit is the church’s life and witnessing power, makes the lordship of Jesus real, gives gifts, and builds up the church.

The Manual encourages leaders to anticipate fresh encounters with God and to balance worship “in the Spirit” with worship “in biblical truth.”

So the Spirit works through Scripture, tradition, order, preaching, prayer, music, and sacraments, but also surprises, convicts, renews, and sends. The Spirit does not negate form; He fills and sometimes disrupts it.

## **Should worship take on a specific structure or shape?**

Yes, though not rigidly. The Manual gives a typical order: call to worship, invocation, music and singing, prayer, Scripture reading, preaching, offering, invitation/response, benediction, and sacred actions such as Communion and baptism.

The gospel shapes worship as movement: God calls, we respond; God reveals, we confess; God gives grace, we receive; God speaks, we obey; God sends, we go.

Isaiah 6 provides the Manual's biblical model: encounter, confession, cleansing, call, commissioning.

### **Do Old Testament worship structures carry over?**

Yes, but fulfilled and re-centered in Christ. The FMC does not carry over the sacrificial system as though Christ's sacrifice were incomplete. The *Book of Discipline* says Christ offered "once and for all the one perfect sacrifice for the sins of the whole world."

But Old Testament patterns still inform worship: holiness, reverence, confession, sacrifice of praise, sacred time, Scripture, prayer, Psalms, thanksgiving, and gathered festivals all shape Christian imagination. The Manual specifically encourages reading or singing the Psalms as part of Christian worship.

### **What elements of worship are nonnegotiable?**

From the FMC sources, the clearest nonnegotiables are:

Scripture, prayer, singing/praise, preaching/proclamation, sacraments, response/obedience, and the gathered fellowship of believers.

The Manual says public worship should incorporate prayer, Scripture reading, singing, preaching, and the sacraments.

The Discipline's description of healthy church life includes teaching, testimony, prayer, singing, giving, Scripture, fellowship, and witness.

### **Is preaching nonnegotiable?**

Yes, in a normal gathered worship. The Manual says that worship gatherings include hearing God's Word preached and that the sermon is part of the whole worship gathering, not something separate from it.

Preaching should explain and apply the ancient Word in the contemporary world. Preaching can vary in style, length, tone, and form, but it cannot become detached from Scripture, doctrine, or pastoral application.

### **Are baptism and Communion nonnegotiable?**

Yes, though not necessarily every week in every service. The *Book of Discipline* names baptism and the Lord's Supper as the two sacraments commanded by Christ and as means of grace through faith.

The Manual notes that the Lord's Supper was central in early Christian worship and says Free Methodist churches are increasingly recognizing its central character and practicing it more regularly.

So sacraments are not optional decorations. They belong to the church's worshiping life.

### **3. Expression of Worship**

#### **What human faculties should be expressed in worship?**

All of them: mind, body, will, and emotions.

The Manual rejects worship as "merely a feeling" but affirms that worship involves the whole person, including emotions.

It also describes worship in word, song, action, and obedient service.

So worship should engage:

- the mind through Scripture, doctrine, preaching, and truth;
- the emotions through praise, lament, thanksgiving, awe, and joy;

- the will through confession, commitment, offering, and obedience;
- the body through singing, standing, kneeling, coming forward, baptism, Communion, and other embodied responses.

### **What is the acceptable scope, range, and balance of human expression?**

The FMC answer is balance. The Manual says vital worship holds together joy and reverence, feeling and understanding, freedom and form, encouragement and rebuke, God's nearness and God's transcendence.

So worship may be loud, energetic, and celebratory. It may also be quiet, reverent, and contemplative. A healthy church should probably make room for both over time.

### **What roles do music and singing play in corporate worship?**

Music is not the whole of worship, but it is a powerful and ordinary means of worship.

The Manual says biblical worship is not merely music, but music has always been a powerful medium of worship, often expressing what words alone cannot.

Singing is valuable because it allows the congregation to participate together, confess truth, praise God, pray, remember the gospel, and be formed emotionally and theologically.

The Manual says worship gatherings usually include "psalms, hymns and spiritual songs," and that much of the music of worship should be participatory.

### **Is music unique among the art forms?**

In practice, yes. Other art forms may be used, but congregational singing has a uniquely participatory role. The Manual allows visual art, media, drama, and movement, but gives singing a central role because the congregation can participate together in truth-filled praise.

### **What factors determine appropriate musical styles?**

The Manual gives several criteria:

- Are the lyrics theologically sound?
- Is the song musically pleasing?
- Is the melody and rhythm singable?
- Does it fit a Wesleyan theological context?
- Does it speak truth to God, about God, or from God?
- Can the people identify with its language and mode?

So style is not purely amoral or merely preference-based. Style carries meaning. It shapes participation, theology, emotion, and accessibility.

### **Is special music appropriate?**

Yes, but with caution. The Manual says that some music may be offered by specially gifted people on behalf of the congregation for their blessing and edification, but much of the worship music should be participatory.

So special music is appropriate when it serves worship, edifies the body, and directs attention to God. It becomes problematic when it turns worship into performance or spectatorship.

### **What factors determine appropriate volume levels?**

The FMC documents do not provide a decibel rule, but their principles are helpful. Music should support congregational participation, not overpower it. It should be singable, truthful, heartfelt, and fitting to the moment.

So volume should be judged by pastoral questions:

Can the congregation hear itself sing?

Does the sound support or suppress participation?

Does it fit the emotional and theological tone of the moment?

Is it hospitable to children, elderly people, visitors, and those with sensory concerns?

Does it help direct attention to God?

### **How is worship's expression relative to cultural context?**

Worship expression should be contextual but not captive. The Manual says leaders must discern what reflects balance and wholeness for the people involved.

The *Book of Discipline* says worship must be in a language understood by the people. Worship should be understandable, faithful, hospitable, and formative.

### **How does the universal church, transcending cultures, times, and nations, inform local worship?**

It reminds the local church that it is not the whole church. Every congregation worships as part of the one body of Christ across time and around the world.

The Discipline emphasizes cross-cultural collaboration and celebrates a multicultural and multiethnic church in the U.S. and around the world. It says the FMC seeks to move beyond colonialism and ethnocentrism toward partnership in God's global work.

So local worship should include both local expression and awareness of the global church. That may include historic creeds, global songs, multilingual elements, prayers for the nations, and practices that remind people they belong to something bigger than their local congregation or nation.

### **Does a local church bear responsibility to reflect multicultural identity in worship?**

Yes, especially when the congregation or community is multicultural. The Discipline says unity in Christ overcomes divisions caused by race, class, status, wealth, or gender.

That does not mean every church must force artificial diversity into every service. But it does mean worship should resist ethnocentrism and make room for the broader body of Christ.

### **How does the church's transcultural identity address nationalism and patriotism in worship?**

The FMC documents strongly suggest caution. The Discipline says the Christian's supreme loyalty is to Jesus Christ as Lord and warns against any allegiance that conflicts with unconditional surrender to Him.

So patriotism should never be confused with worship. National flags, patriotic songs, and civic gratitude may have a place in some church contexts, but they must be clearly subordinate to Christ and should never blur the line between the kingdom of God and any earthly nation.

A Free Methodist worship philosophy should say: **we can pray for our nation, give thanks for blessings, honor appropriate service, and seek the good of our neighbors, but gathered worship belongs to the Triune God, not the state.**