

“Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom, and as you sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God” (Colossians 3:16)

What do you think about when you see church doors open to everyone who wants to worship God there? A teacher asked her Sunday School class. A black junior student replied, “It is like walking into the heart of God.” Yes, it is true; worship is like walking into the presence of God; Worship is an encounter with God in spirit and word. Isaiah, before being called as a prophet, entered the temple to worship God and there he saw the Almighty God sitting on a throne –high and exalted- surrounded by holy angels. Then he proclaimed: “Holy, holy, holy is the LORD Almighty; the whole earth is full of his glory” (Isaiah 6:3). He offered the highest praise and glory to God; he met the Lord in the presence of God.

When have you ever experienced such a holy moment where you felt as though you were being surrounded by God’s presence through worship? Worship time is that time when God approaches us in His spirit as we approach Him with a glad and grateful heart. Through that passionate worship, we believers can connect with God and to one another. Vibrant, fruitful, growing churches offer *Passionate Worship* that enables people to connect with God and to one another.

“How lovely is your dwelling place, O LORD of hosts! My soul longs, indeed it faints for the courts of the LORD” (Psalm 84:1-2); “Let my people go, so that they may worship me” (Exodus 8:1). We Christians are people who are called to be a community of worshippers in the faith of Jesus Christ; freedom to worship God in Christ is granted to us; God through Christ actively seeks a relationship with us through worship. *Worship* describes those times when we gather deliberately seeking to encounter God in Christ.

God uses worship to:

- transform lives
- heal wounded souls
- renew hope
- shape decisions
- provoke change
- inspire compassion
- bind people to one another

The word *passionate* expresses an intense desire, an ardent spirit, strong feelings, and the sense of heightened importance. *Passionate Worship* means an extraordinary eagerness to offer our best in worship, honoring God with excellence and with an unusual clarity about the purpose of connecting people to God. It is not a performance; it is devotion and celebration expressing our love of God.

A woman entered a Haagen-Dazs store on the Kansas City Plaza for an ice-cream cone. After making her selection, she turned and found herself face-to-face with Paul Newman, in town filming the movie *Mr. & Mrs. Bridge*. He smiled and said hello. Newman's blue eyes caused her knees to shake. She managed to pay for her cone, then left the shop, heart pounding. When she gained her composure, she realized she didn't have her snack. She started back into the store to get it and met Newman at the door. "Are you looking for your ice cream?" he asked. She nodded, unable to speak. "You put it in your purse with your change." *When was the last time the presence of God quickened our pulse?*

What motivates you and I to offer passionate worship to God? What motivates us to worship God is "for the love of God": "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind; and your neighbor as yourself" (Luke 10:27). We serve the Lord with our gifts and talents for the love of God; we volunteer for the work of God for the love of God; we rejoice together during our worship for the love of God; I—as a pastor—preach sermons, visit shut-ins or the sick, and prepare worship for the love of God; we praise God and sing to the Lord for the love of God; we invite our friends and family to Christ and church for the love of God; the love of God is the genuine and authentic reason that we are called to form the family of faith in Jesus Christ.

In Passionate Worship, people are honest before God and one another and open to God's presence, truth, and will for our lives: "Make a joyful noise to the LORD, all the earth. Worship the LORD with gladness; come into his presence with singing" (Psalm 100:1-2). "I will sing to the LORD as long as I live; I will sing praise to my God while I have being" (Psalm 104:33).

Through worship, God pardons sins, restores relationships, and changes lives. God expects our lives to change in worship: attendees become disciples of Jesus Christ, and a crowd becomes the body of Christ.

As we worship God with our hearts and minds in spirit, *an hour of Passionate Worship changes all the other hours of the week*—enables us to live well over the coming week.

God in Christ changes people's lives through Passionate Worship. Worship stirs people's souls, inspires people, and strengthens people.

God calls each of you to be a passionate worshiper; "Enter his gates with thanksgiving and his courts with praise; give thanks to him and praise his name" (Psalms 100:4). Amen.

Prayer:

Generous God, may we offer you our best with glad and grateful hearts. Each week in this time together may we lift to you the worship you deserve. May we sing, pray, preach, and meditate in reverence and passion, gratitude and passion, so that you may be high and lifted up in our midst; in the name of your Son, Jesus Christ, we pray. Amen.