

## ***Dynamic Corporate Worship: Ten Years On***

### ***Preface:***

Today we're continuing our walk through our Core Values by talking about our Dynamic Corporate Worship core value. It's the most tested of the Core Values we hold, I think, and definitely worth our time revisiting. I'll pray, read through it, remind us of things we already know—but could think more about—and acknowledge how our present moment is impacting us as we live up to this Core Value.

Let's pray.

### ***Prayer:***

#### ***So:***

So. Let's read through this Core Value together. Listen along, if you can. As I read, let your mind flit from thing to thing; think about what I'm saying, because we're coming back around to it and how it relates to our right now, this moment, very soon. And this time I'll read through the entire thing, rather than go from section to section.

## ***Dynamic Corporate Worship***

***A. We realize that people often think of worship as primarily musical. However, we believe that worship extends to baptism, three-part communion, confession, prayers, preaching, spiritual disciplines,***

***and the like. More fully, we believe that worship consists of being what Paul calls “living sacrifices,” in which our whole lives bring glory to God and acknowledge God’s present and future reign over creation (Rom 12:1). The book of James agrees with this more holistic view, noting that we must “care for orphans and widows”—those without advocates in society—as a paradigmatic act of worship (James 1:27). This said, SRBC often uses the term “worship” to refer to the activities we engage in when we gather together.***

***B. This notion of “gathering together” highlights the corporate dimension of our worship. At Smoky Row Brethren Church, we worship as a unique part of God’s Church in the world, one particular community of people, who form, with others, what Paul calls “the body of Christ” (Rom 12; 1 Cor 12). As a church—a body composed of particular people—we are explicitly concerned with the community we form together, and the corporate nature of our existence.***

***C. Our times of joining together in worship are dynamic; they propel us forward in our attempts to live out our statement of purpose and our core values both as a community and as individuals.***

### ***Regarding Worship:***

So first of all: Worship is more than simply singing songs, right? Although it of course includes that. But Worship does

not equal how well a musician played, doesn't equal singing and/or instruments. This is worth saying, because in many congregations, this really is what "worship" means.

Someone will ask "How was the worship?" or "We had great worship." And what they're talking about is whatever was musical that morning, and nothing else.

And it's not great, because worship, as our core value points out--really is more or less all the things we do when we gather together. When the church is being the church, it is worshipping.

### ***Regarding Worship: Words***

When we read the word worship in the Bible, and the New Testament especially, the word that we're reading means to "bow down to," to bow before. God's People are called to bow down to God alone--the point being, that when you "bow down to" something, when you worship something or someone, you're saying that objectively, given the state of everything in the universe, this being is the one who has a rightful claim on your loyalty, your obedience, and your life.

And of course we would say that there is only one place, one being who is worth that kind of attention: God, right? The Father, Son & Holy Ghost. And our english word "Worship" affirms this, too, because it comes from the Old English word "Worth-ship," to honor someone as worthy, as worth our loyalty, obedience, and whatever else they ask of us.

And the fundamental purpose of the church, really, is to worship. Is to--through everything we do--honor God as worth whatever God asks of us. And we know that what God asks is that He have a voice in every decision we make, every word we say, every thing we do.

And Jesus is the image of the invisible God, as Paul tells us: And we know what Jesus's mission in the world was, right? "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor." And so James can say that what the church should be about, what real worship is, is to not simply be hearers of the word, or speakers of the word, singers of the word, players of the word, but also: doers of the word, to act like Jesus acted and care about what Christ cared about.

This is the call of the church; to be the worshipping body that we are called to be, a body that through word & deed acknowledges God's worthiness to receive from us all the hard work and--

You know, what? Let me interrupt myself.

Here's a question: What is God worth? What is Christ worth? We forget in the midst of all the stuff of life, and all the doing

that we do, and all the being that we be, and all the mess of our calendars and checkbooks and time-cards and hobbies and the overwhelming exhaustion of crisis fatigue, we forget that we have been brought out of darkness into light. That we have tasted, and seen that the Lord is God. That we have the Spirit living inside us, growing up over time Love, Joy, Peace, Patience, Kindness, Goodness, Gentleness & Self Control. We have the Church to meet those needs that we cannot meet alone; we have the Bible to guide us and teach us. We have resurrection to look forward to, and a life without pain and fear. And if these are the particular graces that come from Christ, we forget that behind them stand the common graces that God gives to all humanity: life, and rain, and sun, and a world to live in; lives that can be meaningful; basic human rights, and occasional joy.

Could you afford the Lord? Jesus is worth more than we can pay; but we are not asked to write checks for him, we are asked to worship him--which both sounds so reasonable, and can cost us so much.

### ***Regarding Community:***

And it is our task to worship together. Our core value reminds us that we join together in worship, and become a worshipping community. We are the body of Christ; and we worship as Christ's Body on earth, doing Christ's things, acknowledging God's worth in the things we sing and do and say and offer.

It is very nice to sing a hymn to yourself when you are tired and alone. We are supposed to turn our thoughts and attentions to the Lord as often as we can. Going to a quiet, alone place to pray is the rhythm of a Christian heartbeat. Each of us should, by ourselves, request of God the things we need, and offer to God the things we need to offer him. We are persons, unique and responsible for ourselves. Worship is part of our lives.

But we together are Smoky Row Brethren Church, and where two or three of us gather together we gather as the church, Christ with us, and we are called to prove God's worthiness through our behaviors, and position others to realize God's worth through whatever comes out of our mouths. We do this as a church.

### ***Boom!***

And whenever we join together in twos or threes or tens or dozens, and find ourselves worshipping, our Core Value reminds us that what we long for in these moments is to be propelled forward, pushed forward in power.

Dynamic, Dynamo, Dyanamite: They share a greek word "dynamis," which means, simply, the capability to get something done.

Actually: That's not so simple.

The word means “Power.” The power to follow through on our intentions, the power to get done what we want to get done.

And we tend to think of “might,” when we think of power. We think of force or strength. This isn’t bad or wrong, but it’s not the whole picture. There’s a reason why our stereotypical bad guys have henchmen, have thugs who can be their muscle. Force is part of the picture of power; but it’s only part, and if it’s all you have, you simply aren’t capable to get done what you want.

To accomplish a goal you also need, among other things, wisdom and skill and direction.

When they are at their best, our times of corporate worship are dynamic, which means that they position us to get done what we need to get done. They leave us with power--with strength, wisdom, skill, and direction. Again: strength, wisdom, skill, and direction. They leave us more capable to do what we long to do than we were when we first joined together.

And it’s worth saying this: The church is about God’s will, not our own. The direction that we’re given when we gather together is Christ-like direction. Does this make sense? Our worship enables us to do more of God’s will, not more of our

own. We don't gather together in service or in praise to get more things for ourselves; we do it for the Lord, we do it for the Lord who is worthy of our worship and our lives.

### ***Toward Conclusion:***

Dynamic Corporate Worship reminds us that God is worthy of all our effort and all our praise; and that we will not give up meeting together, like some are in the habit of doing, and frankly, like the world calls us to. It's easier, sometimes, not to gather in twos and threes and tens and dozens; but if we give up gathering together, we give up something dynamic. We gather together in worship because during our time of worship God gives us power: direction, strength, skill, wisdom. Our times of worship propel us forward to discover God's purposes for us, and they give us the power to accomplish them. And of course we would say that as Smoky Row, part of the way we're propelled forward is to better live out these core values and mission that God has given us.

But, how do we gather together?

### ***Right Now:***

Because, look: If the pandemic has impacted any of our Core Values, it's this one. This has taken the largest hit.

Whenever a group of like-minded people gather together for a reason they believe is positive, the group has energy. It just does. Positive or negative energy, anxiety, fear, or passion. And the quickest way to build positive energy in a



group is a great surprise; to build negative energy is to not meet the expectation of the people in the group. It was the way Jesus didn't meet the Hosanna crowd's expectations that

And right now our gathering together just doesn't meet all our expectations. We know what it can be when we've gathered together as a congregation "before Covid." And we've tried to approximate that, and it's been more than just okay. It's been good, often, in the ways Dynamic Corporate Worship can be. But we feel its incompleteness. We miss the energy of a larger group of us together, of kids running around, of the laughter and missteps that come when a bunch of people try to do a thing, and are humble in Christ as they do it. We haven't had our Fellowship Meals, our Communions, our big Property Care Days or any of these things. We've had tricky AV boondoggles that have had to be hunted down, and have made it so that we're split into two, having different experiences of the same moment. And we each always experience our times of worship differently--we are different. But we have been divided into two groups of different experience, and that's not in line with our one-body, "corporate" worship value.

So right now is hard, you know? It's hard. I've personally had to face my own discouragement of how our Sunday morning time of worship has been impacted by this pandemic. I've had to allow God to remind me of that deep truth that

worship is not about my experience at all, or about my desire to, oh, manage our collective experience in some positive, dynamic way.

In fact, what I've come to realize as I have thought about this that the way this thing we call our "Worship Service," this time we make to corporately shift our focus on God, ascribe God worth through song and message and prayer and recitation, the way this thing has been negatively affected by COVID, incomplete, really is a reminder of the fact that until Jesus returns, all our worship is incomplete. Life as we know it has something kind of wrong to it. I'm always wanting our times of corporate worship to be dynamic and to be somehow really set-apart, feel really different than regular life, but you know what: That's a rare, rare thing. And the only way we ever experience it is by remembering, again, that worship is about God, not about us, and whatever form it takes for any given congregation, if that moment--say, a worship service--really is one in which God is being ascribed worth, than it's literally worth-while. It's worth the while, the time we give to it, because God is getting what God is due, for a moment, a half hour, and hour. God is getting what God is due. To say that our corporate worship is meant to be dynamic, is meant to energize us, is to say, in the same breath, that it will always be a little bit unsatisfying, because ironically, we can't get around ourselves, our situation, our problems until Jesus does return. Every martyr who died as an act of worship

knows that much, much better than we do.

***A Tip:***

And let me leave us with, well, a challenge really: If we are going to be a community of Dynamic Corporate Worship, even in the middle of a Pandemic, one that has messed so much with our old, routine, known way of gathering together, then we have got to be a community that remembers who God is, what God has done among us, and the promises God gives to us. When we gather together-- however we do it--we need to be reminders to one another: Reminders of the promises of God: That nothing can separate us from the love of Christ, that God can use all things for our good, that God is our God and we are God's People; we are never left, nor forsaken, but, Lo! Jesus is with us always. We bear the comforter and counselor, the Holy Spirit inside us, and before we call God answers.

Incarnation, Life, Crucifixion, Resurrection, Revelation: If we are going to be a community whose worship together moves us forward, we can never forget our God, God's love for us, and the things God has done in our lives. We've got to remember.

"I have this against you, says the Lord: You have forgotten the love you had at first." We cannot forget the love we've had at first, it's zealously and it's crush; or the love we've had along the way as we've matured and deepened and

rooted ourselves in Christ. We must be a community of reminders.

***Conclusion:***

Let's gather together, then, in whatever ways we can. And do the work of ascribing worth to God in whatever ways we can. Let's keep our eyes, our hearts, our attention upon the Lord, knowing that the things we do--even if they don't meet our expectations, even if they feel like they are going wrong--these things are the things that God is using in order for us to worship Him.

God is worthy of whatever we can offer, and when we gather in whatever way we can in order to remember who God is, to offer God our lives and commitment in corporate worship, God will empower us with the skill, the direction, the strength, and the wisdom to accomplish whatever is asked of us. Even now; and maybe even more so right now than before.