



So here's what I want you to do, God helping you: Take your everyday, ordinary life—your sleeping, eating, going-to-work, and walking-around life—and place it before God as an offering. Embracing what God does for you is the best thing you can do for him. Don't become so well-adjusted to your culture that you fit into it without even thinking. Instead, fix your attention on God. You'll be changed from the inside out. Readily recognize what he wants from you, and quickly respond to it. Unlike the culture around you, always dragging you down to its level of immaturity, God brings the best out of you, develops well-formed maturity in you.

Romans 12, *The Message*

The higher Christian churches—where, if anywhere, I belong—come at God with an unwarranted air of professionalism, with authority and pomp, as though they knew what they were doing, as though people in themselves were an appropriate set of creatures to have dealings with God. I often think of the set pieces of liturgy as certain words which people have successfully addressed to God without their getting killed. In the high churches they saunter through the liturgy like Mohawks along a strand of scaffolding who have long since forgotten their danger. If God were to blast such a service to bits, the congregation would be, I believe, genuinely shocked. But in the low churches you expect it any minute. This is the beginning of wisdom.

Annie Dillard, *Holy the Firm*

Monday Morning

Παρακαλῶ οὖν ὑμᾶς, ἀδελφοί, διὰ τῶν οἰκτίρμων τοῦ Θεοῦ, παραστήσαι τὰ σώματα ὑμῶν θυσίαν ζῶσαν, ἁγίαν, εὐάρεστον τῷ Θεῷ, τὴν λογικὴν λατρείαν ὑμῶν.

I appeal to you therefore, brothers and sisters, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God—what is good and acceptable and perfect.

Apostle Paul, Romans 12

Body and mind are to work together: again, no smell of dualism here. And, with grace and mercy as the bedrock of it all, we are to explore, in presenting our bodies as the true act of worship, what it means to be “well-pleasing” to God. Heirs of the Reformation are so drilled in justification by faith, which is of course one of the fundamental teachings of this letter, that we easily forget that when Paul comes to worship and obedience he delights, here and elsewhere, in declaring that what we do in Christ, on the basis of God’s mercy, is pleasing to God. This is not taking away one jot or tittle from justification by faith; here in Romans itself it is that to which justification by faith leads you. Fear of Pelagianism and Arminianism in their various forms, allied perhaps with various psychological pressures, has led us to neglect this vital element in Paul, but it is foundational to his ethics and his worship. For Paul, to draw back from “pleasing God” does not mean humility or reverence, but a failure in obedience; and it probably means, as well, that we are either pleasing ourselves or perhaps pleasing other people — perhaps, even, that we are pleasing the Empire.

N. T. Wright, “Spirit and Truth: Recovering Biblical Worship”

Eternal God, whom our words may cradle but never contain, we thank you for all the sound and silence and colour and symbol which through the centuries have helped the worship of your Church to be relevant and real. Here we pause to remember those who helped us come to faith, by singing songs or telling stories, by inviting us in when we felt distant, by praying for us without being asked. We name them now ...

Religious music is an attempt to convey
that which is within our reach but beyond our grasp.

Abraham Joshua Heschel

Song is a response which engages the whole self in prayer. Song unites the faithful in common prayer wherever they gather for worship whether in church, home, or other special place. The covenant people have always used the gift of song to offer prayer. Psalms were created to be sung by the faithful as their response to God. Though they may be read responsively or in unison, their full power comes to expression when they are sung. In addition to psalms the Church in the New Testament sang hymns and spiritual songs. Through the ages and from varied cultures, the church has developed additional musical forms for congregational prayer. Congregations are encouraged to use these diverse musical forms for prayer as well as those which arise out of the musical life of their own cultures.

Presbyterian Directory for Worship

There is nothing quite like music for opening up the soul to God. Music is a duty in worship for the same reason that prayer, offering, and study are duties – God commands it and God enjoys it. We are, after all, serving the living God in worship. That is our job. Certainly one of the perks of our job is the religious presence of mind, the awareness that we are in the presence of the Holy Spirit. And nowhere in the service is the presence of the Holy Spirit more obvious than in the corporate discipline of making “a joyful noise to God” (Ps. 66:1). The natural response of experiencing the Spirit is joy – as our sense of God’s presence increases, so does our desire to make a joyful noise. Thus we experience a spiraling effect. Joy produces music; music, in turn, produces joy, which then produces more music. I am convinced that the truest measure of spiritual vitality in a congregation is the level of energy that the congregation devotes to its hymns.

Dean W. Chapman, *How to Worship as a Presbyterian*

Take my voice and let me sing
always, only, for my King.
Take my lips and let them be
filled with messages from thee,
filled with messages from thee.

Frances Ridley Havergal, 1874

We were driving from one state to another,
my father already there,
and we'd been singing hymns, hymns
soaring from the car

with our joy at passing on to glory,
where loss would turn to gain,
our wounds would heal — and in the silence
after our last refrain

my mother said she'd known, known
before the call had come,
her father had died. She'd felt his passing.
She'd known "He'd come to harm" —

as if Death had enticed him. As if
he had returned to drinking
and wed Death's hootchie-cootchie girl,
Death's crude seducer. Thinking

"True Tales of the Supernatural!" I wondered
how I could tell this story
and make friends shudder. Or failing that,
— I was this predatory —

how I could make them laugh. I flipped
"There's a world beyond this world"
to "My mother is a silly woman" —
and back again, as we hurled

through darkness singing songs of hope.
She told her sacred story.
We sang. We laughed. She died. I wept.
Her story isn't mine. I'm sorry

— and not — about how I have told it.
Who knows what's coming after?
There may be another world. There may.
There will be laughter.

"Come to Harm" by Andrew Hudgins, from *American Rendering*