

Giving God Our Best

Written by Jim Johnson

As I have traveled from place to place and in my home congregation as well, I have observed a few things that I think could be improved upon in our worship. Obviously, these are not things concerning matters of doctrine, for we haven't the authority to "improve" God's plan of worship. These are things you and I can do personally to make our worship better. We need to ask ourselves the question, "What if everybody regarded the worship service like I do...always late to service, disinterested in singing, too little study for the sermon, etc.?" What would the worship service be like? We want to make the worship service all it can be. I maintain that having the best service possible begins long before the first song is led. How do you prepare for worship? Many things should be considered—our pre-service activities, things listened to, things read, etc. I think having a good worship service begins in our minds. John was in the spirit on the Lord's day. We must learn to channel our thinking. As the worship hour draws near, get to the meeting place. Get there at least 10 to 15 minutes early. It sure makes it easier on the man in charge of arranging the service, plus it gives you time to select appropriate songs, meditate on your prayer thoughts, think seriously about your responsibility if you are asked to serve at the table. It is not good to interrupt the worship by our willful tardiness to the service. Granted, there are sometimes things beyond our control that may cause us to be late. However, with an honest heart toward God, we won't be habitual latecomers to the worship hour.

When the brother in charge asks you to do a particular part in the service, of which you are capable, accept graciously with the determination to do your very best. No part in the service should be deemed menial or disdained in our eyes.

Singing

When selecting your songs to lead, select according to the occasion. You wouldn't select a song with difficult leads or harmonies for an invitation song. The preacher has worked hard to expound God's Word to convict our hearts. Select a song of encouragement that would move an individual to act upon his convictions. Sometimes we just need to be reminded that Jesus is tenderly calling or that to be almost persuaded is to be lost. Brother, an aside just here. Announce your invitation selection before the sermon. If you wait until he's done preaching, call out your number from the back row, walk to the front, pitch your song and start singing—you have killed that good brother's efforts to persuade the sinner to repent or obey the gospel! Call out your number before the sermon and come out of your seat singing and lead your song. Learning new songs has a time and place other than Lord's day morning worship. Watch the song leader—sing together—don't run away with the song nor should you drag it to death. Brother, the singing can make or break our worship service. Pay attention to the words you sing and make sure you mean them.

Prayer

Brother, when you lead our prayer remember that...it is our prayer. Speak clearly and loudly enough to be heard. Think about what you say. The meat of the prayer is far more important than its length. Jesus cautioned against the attitude of the Pharisees, thinking they would be heard for their much speaking. Prayer is not a place for big words or flowery speeches. Remember the contrasting prayers of the Pharisee and the publican. We are speaking to God (not Jesus) and his nature has always been to appreciate simple things. Keep that prayer simple. You are not trying to impress anyone in the audience and surely not the Father in

Giving God Our Best

Written by Jim Johnson

heaven. A word to the participants in prayer; if you agree with what the brother says, make that prayer your prayer-say Amen. Teaching

We teachers have an unbelievable responsibility as we preach God's Word. Know your sermon! Put some time and effort into its preparation. As with prayers, the length of the sermon is nothing to put stock in. One brother observed that he'd finally mastered talking for an hour. There's a world of difference in talking and preaching. Many a sermon is all talk and no preach. We've all sat at the feet of a brother, oblivious to the passing of time, only to discover that he'd fed us and encouraged us for an hour and a half. We sat there with rapt attention because we were being fed. In his case, time was unimportant. On the other hand, a brother, perhaps young, may bring a 15 or 20 minute talk and give us more food than we can digest in a week. The key, brother, is to know your message. Study! Put some meat in our sermons. Sometimes our people are starving to death and we are either too blind or too lazy to see it. We often don't study enough to satisfy the smallest of appetites. Brethren, teaching is a serious matter. Let's give it the attention it deserves. We men, when we teach, need to remember a few things as well. We don't want to get off on a political rant or engage the audience with secular "story hour." The accusation is sometimes rightfully made, 'all he does is tell stories and entertain'. The pulpit is not the place for comedians. This is not good! We have a great load on our shoulders as teachers. Peter said it simply, "Feed the flock."

C

ommunion

When we come to the communion service, we seem so inept at telling our people how important it is. My brother, when you serve at the table, don't re-preach the sermon just given. Your job is to help me to see Jesus in his suffering. Help me see that my sins crucified him. Another admonition: the communion service

is not the place to argue the cup question. To those who set the table, please remember how easily distracted we are. Make sure the cup and plate are clean. We don't want to give those who oppose truth on the single cup any reason to ridicule. Remove any unnecessary wrappers or covers. Take a little time with the cloths. Make sure they are pressed and clean. It seems we should be concerned as we try to give Him honor. Often times one of the first things a newly baptized brother is asked to do in the service is to pass the communion to the participants. Older brother, school the young man a little. Show him how to hold and transfer without dropping or spilling. If perchance the bread should be broken in two, teach him how to handle the situation. Teach them to offer it to all, allowing the individual the opportunity to discern his own heart to determine if he is at odds with God. That is his responsibility. We cannot make that judgment. My observation is that passing the communion is really a task that requires a good deal of responsibility.

Sisters, take time to make a loaf acceptable. There are two extremes, neither of which is good. It can be so brittle that it shatters when we break our portion or it can be almost raw dough, practically uncooked. If you have difficulty in performing this task to your satisfaction, ask advice of a good sister who has mastered it. There are many across the brotherhood who can help in this area. Is not this an area where our older sisters can teach our younger?

Giving

The collection is an item of service that generally has few challenges. Teach our children to be discrete in giving-no fan fare. The amount we give is between us and God and no attention should be drawn to our offering. Parents, if possible, give the children a bill instead of coins. How many times have the children dropped their quarters only to have them go rolling and

Giving God Our Best

Written by Jim Johnson

clanking across the floor. As an observer, is it good to pass the baskets to the hands of the little children, risking their dropping it? This is even more of a concern with the bread or fruit of the vine. We adults need to have our contribution ready before hand. It is so distracting to hear the check being torn out (often during the communion service) or the snaps and zippers of the purse being open and shut. Distractions

There are some general distractions that we need to eliminate at all costs. Often we parents are to blame for interruptions to the service. Don't allow whispering, passing of notes, or any other form of playing or signs of disinterest. Teach respect and reverence with a desire to worship and learn. There is another item that needs to be addressed just here. I speak from the perspective of a fellow worshipper as well as speaker. Mothers, be mindful of the distractions that come with the wailing child. Most mothers know when a child needs to be taken to the cry room. Mom, if you are being distracted from the sermon, your neighbor probably is too. This is a very sensitive subject with the young mother. It is a natural thing for your baby to cry or become upset. They are not the most patient while Mom gets the bottle from the diaper bag. Mom, do your best to hasten their quietness. If the crying persists, please remove them to the cry room. The listener and the preacher will be grateful. I've seen community visitors become very agitated and distressed at the continuously wailing child. Many a preacher cuts his remarks short because he simply could not compete. This is an issue that must be addressed with love and tact, but it must be addressed.

I go from place to place and see children 5, 6, 7, 8 years old, encouraged to draw, color, play with toys or otherwise be entertained. Don't tell yourself they are too young to learn from the service. Deep down we know better than that. The priest says, "give me a child until he is 7 years old and he'll always be a Catholic." We should teach them what worship truly is and tell them how it pleases God when the little children serve him in their innocent way.

Another thing concerning children: train them to use the restroom before or after the service. It can easily become a habit to be up and down, and it is very distracting. Make those trips the exception rather than the rule.

Speaking of distractions, please make sure to turn off all cell phones, or better yet, leave them in the car. Note: OFF! Except in extreme emergencies there seems to be no good in anything but OFF. There should be nothing more important to us than giving God our best in worship. Some have said, "I use my phone concordance or Bible dictionary, etc." As a speaker, this is a distraction as well. The speaker has something to share with you (The Word) that you need to hear.

You've no business answering a call or texting in the Lord's House, let alone during our worship to Him. Is it OK if I take the call in the foyer or restroom? I've actually seen sisters head for the back, phone in hand, to take the call. Remember, God doesn't like to play second fiddle...He wants our all in worship.

I realize you may deem these things we have discussed as trivial at best. But there is one question I'd like you to ask yourself: "What does the God I serve deserve in worship?" In light of that I submit these things for your consideration. -Mullin, TX