

When Worship Stinks

Message for Sunday, January 28, 2018
by Bruce Fraser

Scripture: Isaiah 1:11-18, and many others

Children's Message:

I have some photos to show you. These are children just like you. The first photo are two children holding a sign: "Hungry. Please help." The next photos are from places where wars are happening right now. They show what has happened to their schools. In two pictures, the children are still going to school, even though the school was hit by a bomb, and much of the building was destroyed. These are children just like you.



How do you feel about this? *I will listen for their responses, and encourage discussion. I will attempt to answer any questions.*

They may say that something needs to be done for those children. If so, I will ask, "What do you think we should do?" I will list in detail all the ideas they come up with, such as food, medicine, school supplies, etc.

Then I will say, "This is excellent! You care about what's happening to other children, and you want to help them out. You've done a great job coming up with all these ideas. You've really made a difference in their lives. I'm proud of you.

Some of the children may point out we haven't actually done anything, just talked about it!

You're absolutely right. Let's listen to what the Bible says about this.

1 John 3:17-18, New Living Translation:

If anyone has enough money to live well and sees a brother or sister in need and refuses to help—how can God's love be in that person?

Dear children, let us stop just saying we love each other; let us really show it by our actions.

And there *is* a way that you can help children in need. Next month you'll be making cupcakes, and the money you raise from that goes to Sleeping Children Around the World. You can also help children right here around us. When you hear of someone who is left out, who is hurt, who doesn't have friends, you can show God's love by being a friend to that person.

Thanks to Harvey and Patsie Moore for this idea, from their book *The Droopy Flower Mystery*.

Message "When worship stinks"

This is part of a series of messages I'm doing on the theme of worship. Over the last two weeks, we've seen in the Bible how exciting it is to know God, to be in God's presence, to praise God.

What we're going to see today is that worship is not just about our relationship with God. Worship also involves how we relate to the people around us. We are to show compassion, justice, mercy, forgiveness and love to them, all of them—yes, even our enemies.

Here's an example of what I mean:

James 1:27, Today's English Version:

What God the Father considers to be pure and genuine religion is this: to take care of orphans and widows in their suffering and to keep oneself from being corrupted by the world.

Putting our faith into action is absolutely vital for true worship. God says that if we don't do that, then our *worship stinks!*

Isaiah 1:11-18, New Living Translation:

"I am sick of your sacrifices," says the Lord. "Don't bring me any more burnt offerings! I don't want the fat from your rams or other animals. I don't want to see the blood from your offerings of bulls and rams and goats. Why do you keep parading through my courts with your worthless sacrifices? The incense you bring me is a stench in my nostrils! Your celebrations of the new moon and the Sabbath day, and your special days for fasting—even your most pious meetings—are all sinful and false. I want nothing more to do with them. I hate all your festivals and sacrifices. I cannot stand the sight of them! From now on, when you lift up your hands in prayer, I will refuse to look. Even though you offer many prayers, I will not listen. For your hands are covered with the blood of your innocent victims. Wash yourselves and be clean! Let me no longer see your evil deeds. Give up your wicked ways. Learn to do good. Seek justice. Help the oppressed. Defend the orphan. Fight for the rights of widows." [my underline]

I once listened to a sermon on Jesus' commandment to love other people. The preacher quoted passage after passage from the Bible, each one reinforcing the theme. At the start, my reaction was, "Yeah, I know that." But when the speaker kept on quoting more passages, some of which I had never thought of in that way, it was like an avalanche. What is an avalanche? It's just a bunch of tiny little snowflakes, each one light and fluffy. When put together, however, those snowflakes have amazing power.

That's what I'd like to do today. Rather than listen to me spout off ☺, let's just listen to what God tells us in the Bible about this.

Jeremiah 7:21-23, New Living Translation:

This is what the LORD Almighty, the God of Israel, says: "Away with your burnt offerings and sacrifices! Eat them yourselves! When I led your ancestors out of Egypt, it was not burnt offerings and sacrifices I wanted from them. This is what I told them: 'Obey me, and I will be your God, and you will be my people. Only do as I say, and all will be well!'"

Amos 5:21-24, New Century Version:

The LORD says, "I completely hate your feasts; I cannot stand your religious meetings. If you offer me burnt offerings and grain offerings, I won't accept them. You bring your best fellowship offerings of

fattened cattle, but I will ignore them. Take the noise of your songs away from me! I won't listen to the music of your harps.

"But let justice flow like a river, and let goodness flow like a stream that never stops."

Micah 6:6-8, Today's English Version:

What shall I bring to the LORD, the God of heaven, when I come to worship him? Shall I bring the best calves to burn as offerings to him? Will the LORD be pleased if I bring him thousands of sheep or endless streams of olive oil? Shall I offer him my first-born child to pay for my sins? No, the LORD has told us what is good. What he requires of us is this: to do what is just, to show constant love, and to live in humble fellowship with our God.

Matthew 5:23-24, Contemporary English Version:

[Jesus said,] "So if you are about to place your gift on the altar and remember that someone is angry with you, leave your gift there in front of the altar. Make peace with that person, then come back and offer your gift to God."

Matthew 23:23, New Living Translation:

[Jesus said,] "How terrible it will be for you teachers of religious law and you Pharisees. Hypocrites! For you are careful to tithe even the tiniest part of your income, but you ignore the important things of the law—justice, mercy, and faith. You should tithe, yes, but you should not leave undone the more important things."

Mark 11:25, New Living Translation:

[Jesus said,] "But when you are praying, first forgive anyone you are holding a grudge against, so that your Father in heaven will forgive your sins, too."

John 13:4-5, 12-15, New Living Translation:

Jesus got up from the table, took off his robe, wrapped a towel around his waist, and poured water into a basin. Then he began to wash the disciples' feet and to wipe them with the towel he had around him...

After washing their feet, he put on his robe again and sat down and asked, "Do you understand what I was doing? You call me 'Teacher' and 'Lord,' and you are right, because it is true. And since I, the Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you ought to wash each other's feet. I have given you an example to follow. Do as I have done to you."

John 13:34-35, New Century Version:

[Jesus said,] "I give you a new command: Love each other. You must love each other as I have loved you. All people will know that you are my followers if you love each other."

1 Corinthians 13:1-3, New International Version:

If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal. If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have a faith that can move mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. If I give all I possess to the poor and surrender my body to the flames, but have not love, I gain nothing.

James 1:26, Today's English Version:

Do any of you think you are religious? If you do not control your tongue, your religion is worthless and you deceive yourself.

James 2:1-4, New Century Version:

My dear brothers and sisters, as believers in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ, never think some people are more important than others. Suppose someone comes into your church meeting wearing nice clothes and a gold ring. At the same time a poor person comes in wearing old, dirty clothes. You show special attention to the one wearing nice clothes and say, "Please, sit here in this good seat." But you say to the poor person, "Stand over there," or, "Sit on the floor by my feet." What are you doing? You are making some people more important than others, and with evil thoughts you are deciding that one person is better.

James 2:14-17, New Living Translation:

Dear brothers and sisters, what's the use of saying you have faith if you don't prove it by your actions? That kind of faith can't save anyone. Suppose you see a brother or sister who needs food or clothing, and you say, "Well, good-bye and God bless you; stay warm and eat well"—but then you don't give that person any food or clothing. What good does that do?

So you see, it isn't enough just to have faith. Faith that doesn't show itself by good deeds is no faith at all—it is dead and useless.

1 John 3:17-18, Today's English Version:

If we are rich and see others in need, yet close our hearts against them, how can we claim that we love

God? My children, our love should not be just words and talk; it must be true love, which shows itself in action.

There are many more passages besides these ones. But that's enough for us to get the point. The point is: let's do it. Let's put our faith into action.

Remember this: the church is not primarily a social services agency. Yes, we *do* that kind of work, but the motive is key: we do it as part of our worship of God. It is grounded in prayer, and fueled by the Holy Spirit's power within us. The love of God is at the heart of all we do.

Next Steps:

- Pray: repent if you have been keeping to yourself, not reaching out to others.
- Pray: receive God's love in such abundance that it overflows and it becomes natural to pass it on to others.
- Pray: ask God to open your eyes to see needs and hurts in others, and open your heart to respond.
- Turn prayer into action. Involve others wherever possible; this is not a solo effort.