

*A series of articles examining six practices that help disciples of Christ develop a faith that works in real life*

by **Greg Priebbenow**

As part of the 1998 Australian Community Survey, infrequent and non-attenders were asked to state their reasons for not attending church. Forty-two percent said church services were boring or unfulfilling. Thirty-four percent said they saw no need to go to church.

Thirty-one percent said they preferred to be doing other things. In other words, nearly a third considered

worship to be, relatively speaking, a waste of time.

From a human point of view worship might seem to accomplish very little. Words, songs and rituals do not amount to much in a world focused on efficiency and optimal time usage. Neither is worship particularly

entertaining in comparison to the many alternative ways of spending an hour or two on a Sunday. So why do Christians worship? What is the point? And why is it a practice that is worth making a regular part of one's life? In his book *Real Faith for Real Life*, Michael Foss gives four reasons.

**We worship in order to receive God's life-giving and sustaining gifts.**

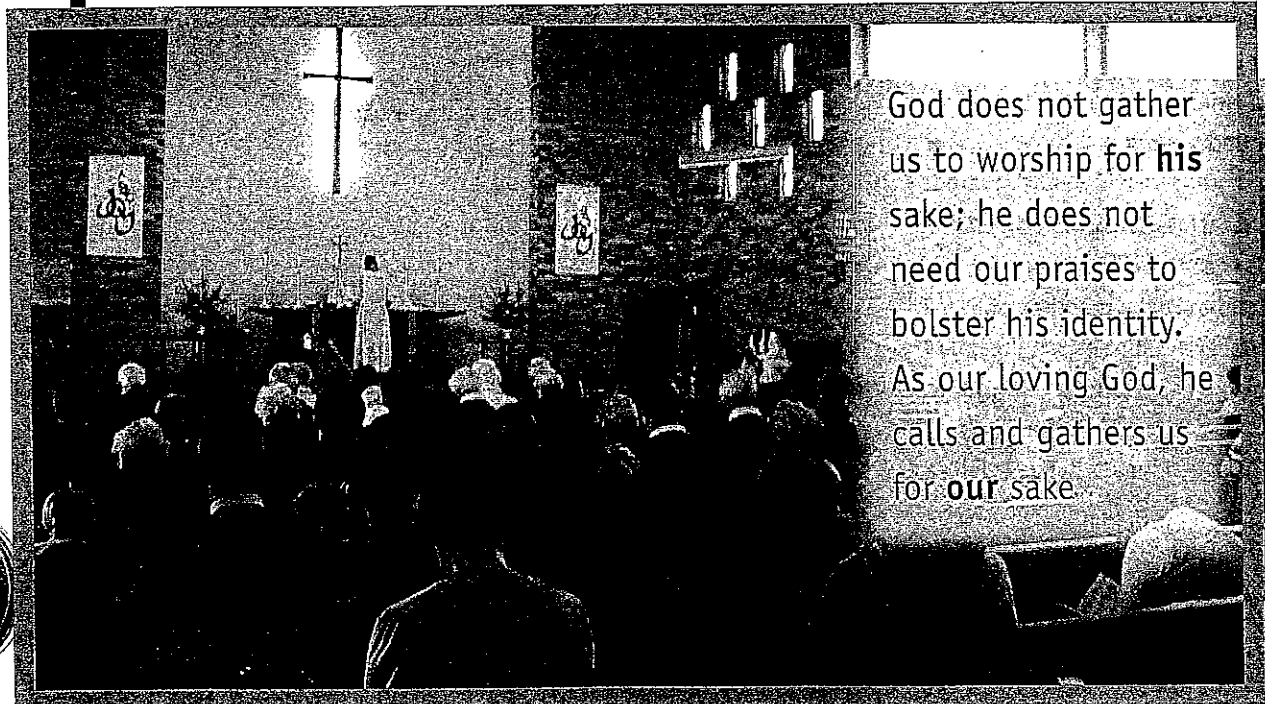
While many people think of worship as something we offer to God, it is God who is the true creator, actor and giver in worship. God does not gather us to worship for his sake; he does not need our praises to bolster his identity. As our loving God he calls and gathers us for our sake, to bring us into relationship with him and to sustain our life in him.

As we hear his word preached, God creates faith in us, builds our trust in him and ministers to us in the pains and struggles of life. Through the

# the practice of worship



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gospel of the absolution God announces that we are free from sin so that we might have an open relationship with him. Through the 'family meal' of holy communion, we are enlivened by the life of Christ, present and active in us. A life of faith that does not involve a commitment to regular worship is usually undernourished. In worship, God comes to bless us with what we need to live fully into our identity as his people.

**We worship to fulfil our essential purpose.** When God created the heavens and the earth his final act of creation was the seventh day. This day, set aside for humans to rest from their labours and simply be with God, was the pinnacle of his handiwork. It was not humans that were the zenith of his creation, but life in relationship with God. We humans were not created as our own end but to live beyond ourselves in relationship with our creator. Foss says that 'the human soul that does not worship shrinks into itself. That which was created to house eternity, that part of us that longs to be embraced by forever, shrinks to the

confines of its own desires ... Without worship we confuse the temporary satisfactions of pleasure for the eternal joy of God's gift of purpose for our lives.'

God gives worship to us as a weekly compass to reorient our lives towards that which is good and true

**We worship for the sake of others.** Many people conceive of worship as an individual activity for the sake of personal needs. Worship is then evaluated according to what one 'gets out of it'. This perspective of worship reflects the overriding mentality of our consumeristic society. Worship is understood as a service-delivery mechanism designed to satisfy the spiritual yearnings of attenders. But worship, like the faith it encapsulates, is essentially a community thing. We worship together with others and for the sake of others. By simply being present at worship we are a sign and encouragement to others in their faith. Through our prayers and caring interactions we bring God's power to bear in the lives of others. When our

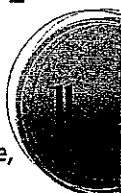


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focus in coming to worship is not on 'getting' but on 'giving', our hearts reflect the giving nature of God and we are more likely to recognise him at work. In the life of faith the 'getting' is often in the 'giving'. As Jesus said, 'it is more blessed to give than to receive' (Acts 20:35). So, come to worship ready for God to use you in the life of another.

**We worship to remain oriented towards the person and call of Christ.** In any given week there are many stresses, pressures and distractions that can shift our focus away from following Christ and pursuing his purposes. God gives worship to us as a weekly compass to reorient our lives towards that which is good and true. The longer a sea captain neglects the compass, the further the boat will drift off course. Regular worship keeps us attuned to God's voice and gives us ongoing strength for the 'race of faith'.

Greg Priebbenow is one of two pastors serving the St Paul's Box Hill congregation in Melbourne, Victoria.



## for reflection

- What gifts of God have you received in worship? How have these changed or formed you?
- What are your reasons for worshipping? In what ways do you worship for the sake of others?
- Is worship a weekly compass for you? Why or why not?