

FORMATIVE DIMENSIONS OF WORSHIP NAMED BY EXPERIENCE

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Worship is an experience shared by a varied congregation of people on a weekly basis. If that experience is to be understood, it must be heard. In order to hear that experience, I had to listen afresh. I had to unlearn years of training and practice wherein I was taught to speak about, rather than listen to, the experience of worship. An ethnographic approach framed by James P. Spradley was the tool I used to train myself to listen. My approach was to listen closely as twelve different people described their experience of worship in order to discover any connection to or disconnection between worship and their daily lives.

I. TWELVE CHRISTIAN LIVES

Let me introduce you to the twelve people whose stories we will hear in this study. The twelve are Cindy Dunn, Bob Potter, Jim Smith, Gail Lawson, Liz Bianco, Louis Johnson, Cathy Ressler, Lloyd Butler, Doris White, Mark Fossey, Maxine Dillon and Libby Becker. All are actual people, but names and incidental details have been changed to protect their privacy.

Cindy Dunn

"You know, when you have seven kids, eight grandchildren and other concerns, it does take longer" to pray. Cindy is a grandmother in her sixties who carries herself with beauty and grace. She brings a smile and infectious warmth with her everywhere she goes. Her bubbly presence belies the pain and challenge she knew as a young mother abandoned by an unfaithful husband. Despite her self-described battles to build a sense of "self-worth," Cindy carries a sage Christian faith into her conversations about life.

She has attended the same church faithfully for thirty five years and has been active in its leadership and worship life. Her faithful, longtime second husband, does not, as a rule, attend worship with her. "Harry is wonderful and he listens to me, but it's [worship] not something that I can really share with him. I wouldn't trade him for anyone in the world, as he's so wonderful in every other way. But it is a void there." Family is very important for Cindy. As matriarch of an extended blended family, much of her time in retirement is spent listening and paying attention to children and grandchildren. She is always reaching out. She remembers that in her twenties, she was a "single mom, and it was important for me to come to church on Sunday. That was the highlight of my life. People were nice to me. People spoke to me. And I felt good. So, I guess as I get older ... it's time for me to give back."

Bob Potter

"I had seven months where I was writing these things [the prayers for worship]. I wrote a few of them myself." Bob served as the emotional glue that held his church together during years of trial and turmoil in the past. He has worshipped in the same church since 1964. Most of that time he served as Music Director alongside his wife who was the Organist. Widowed in recent years, Bob, a spry man in his eighties, spends much of his retirement time helping with a variety of handyman projects around the church.

Serving as a professional leader in worship for so many years has left a mark on the way that Bob participates in worship today. "I'm just conditioned to thinking what people are thinking, the congregation, and that's why [little details are] such a big deal to me." His concern for others is evident in all his relationships. A genuine Christian concern marks Bob's approach to worship. "I think one of the great things about the worship is ... that we share and ... support each other."

Jim Smith

In contrast to Bob, Jim is a recent member of the Presbyterian church. He was raised Catholic and over the years drifted away from those roots. He recently moved to Phoenix from the Northeast where his wife had been raised in a long line of Presbyterians. Church going is something new for him as an adult, but it has made a difference. "When I think something's getting me down, I think how lucky I am and how blessed I am in my life. And when I wasn't going to church I don't think that ever would have crossed my mind."

As a mid-level manager in the planning department of a growing city, he encounters ethical challenges at every turn. "When somebody calls me ... it's often about a project that I'm not directly involved with. They call me. 'I have a problem with this person.' 'Something's wrong with my plan. I can't figure out what it is. Can you help me fix the problem?' So I'm up, over to the other person saying, ... 'That's the problem, how can we fix it?' And I get a lot of that every day." The days are often a blur for this rising leader in his thirties, but the recent addition to his family of a long desired daughter has opened new pathways for spiritual exploration and engagement in the life of our congregation.

Gail Lawson

"Since I'm the one that stays at home I do most of the housework. We're old fashioned." Gail and her husband moved to Phoenix from Illinois and settled on their church "because it was the only Presbyterian Church we could find that had pews." Occasionally she teaches mathematics at a community college. But for the most part, as a recent empty nester parent in her fifties, her time is now devoted to the home and volunteer activities.

Both she and her husband have served on boards of the church. Gail's involvement with and awareness of church goes back a long way. "The old hymns that really mean something, some of those mean so much to me, because I can remember standing next to my dad when I was probably four singing with him. And some of them have other relations in my life that mean something."

Liz Bianco

Liz is an active and thoughtful Senior in high school. She has served as the only youth on our regular usher corps since her confirmation and commissioning a few years ago. Her work as a manager at the Cinnabon bakery, "making sure the people feel welcomed and ... making sure employees feel that they're part of a family there, that they're loved," is much like her role as an usher, "I take my place and then I just start welcoming people and helping them ... [I] prepare them. ... It's really warm sometimes.... I know picking churches is a really hard thing.... they get to know you and they're really happy to see you every week."

She has lived in the Arizona her whole life. Yet, as the youngest child in her family, the neighborhood in which her parents originally settled has greatly changed. "I go to kinda of a, not necessarily a ghetto, but a kind of gangster school. And so there's mostly people that just look like everyone else and I don't necessarily look like everybody there." Liz describes herself as "different" from others. She is a spiritually sincere young lady seeking to craft a unique and valuable role for herself in life.

Louis Johnson

Louis is a long time member and leader of the church who is active in denominational councils. He and his wife are wrestling with challenges that beset many people in their fifties. He recently buried his mother, his oldest daughter was just married, and his middle adoptive daughter is recently pregnant out of wedlock. Louis is a CPA who shares an office suite with some younger unchurched colleagues. "Most people know that I am Presbyterian. They give me a chance, I'll invite them. You know, I'll say, 'When are you going to come to church?'"

A strong sense of Christian duty was instilled within his heart as he grew up in a Spanish speaking Presbyterian congregation in Phoenix. This motivates his desire to witness in his life, even in his professional relationships. "I have another client that was going through bankruptcy.... I said, 'How are things going?' ... He was really down. I grabbed him by the shoulders and I told him that 'It was only money.' That 'It was only a company' and 'It was only money' and that 'It didn't really matter' and 'That mattered was life and what mattered was him and that nothing else really mattered.' I don't know if I -- he almost started crying. I don't know if I got through. I wanted to tell him, but I didn't because he was one of those guys that I don't think was very receptive. I don't think he goes to church. But I wanted to tell him that God was on his side, but I don't know if he would have understood that. So instead, I [thought], well maybe if I tell him I'm on his side."

Cathy Ressler

"The reason that I am involved with church, a lot of it, is my son or because of my son. Because, I was brought up in the church and we went to Sunday school and we went to church every Sunday, and I think that's important for him." Cathy was recently drawn back to church in large part by her only child. Like Cindy, Cathy's husband does not attend church. But she often feels tied to family in the church. "We'll sing "Amazing_Grace" and that was always my grandparents' favorite hymn. So, things like that can trigger memories."

As a design consultant in her early forties, she has established herself in Arizona. Cathy's work schedule is her own. She can often get quite busy and God is on the fringes. But church can make a difference, even if only for a little while. "Sometimes ... if I'm in a cranky mood then I come [to church] and I think I feel so much better. But when I get back in my environment, it comes back."

Lloyd Butler

"I've been to Catholic and then I went to Assembly of God, and Pentecostal churches and Baptist churches for several years." Lloyd is a young man in his twenties becoming acquainted with a different Christian tradition than he had known in his youth. He and his wife recently arrived in Phoenix from the Northwest. Both of them are active, young, urban professionals. The demands of his job are so great that one reason he comes to church is because, "I'm trying to filter out the noise a little bit" in life.

There have been a number of trying conversations with God recently. He and his wife are trying to conceive and facing many of the spiritual issues that surround that challenge. A small group at church is serving as spiritual reinforcement throughout the week for them.

Doris White

"When I was working for ten years I found it hard to come on Sunday morning. It was the only morning I didn't have to get dressed and so I kind of skipped it, but to be back now, it's very important and I'm very proud of this church." Doris is a woman in her seventies who was a member of the church for a long time, but had not experienced any significant sense of religious purpose or spiritual renewal until recently in her retirement.

She and her husband have lived in Arizona for many years. He has remained active with the Shriners and they both seem to appreciate ritual. "I like the comfort of the ritual that I'm used to very much. I like the dignity of it." Yet, Doris does not fit into a stuffy and traditional portrait. One senses a spiritual openness in her as she speaks:

It would be very easy for me to be very spiritual, cause I think I really am. And so, and all the words that you say, the sermons that you have given are, touch me spiritually very much.... I talk with God every morning ... I just know he's there because we couldn't have this wonderful earth and living things that we have. They just don't appear from nowhere. There has to be a Creator. ... And I feel -- maybe from the [worship] service-- that there is something to the power of prayer.

Mark Fossey

Mark is a single man, in his forties and head of a small construction firm. With his brother, he shares the responsibility for percussion in the worship band (which he affectionately calls the "God squad") in our contemporary service of worship. Mark had stayed away from church for many years because of his experience in another Presbyterian church in Phoenix as a youth. "I saw some hypocritical behavior that had a damaging effect in terms of my involvement, because

I found it hard to believe and relate.... So [now] I think I relate to the contemporary service as a new type of service."

He remains extraordinarily close with his siblings. They all have been discovering a renaissance of faith and family on Sunday mornings.

The seating arrangement basically is, we like to have a couple brothers on each side of mom. At that time we just reflect on how the week was: what's going on, family, family time and the church That's been a real interesting change and a real positive for me here because, ... we've all got our careers. Sometimes we would go months between holiday get-togethers. That's one of the reasons I became re-involved here ... the family camaraderie.

Maxine Dillon

"In the morning prayer I thank God that I was, that I get up and I was feeling good and ... I take a walk.... I think the early mornings are so beautiful.... To have that sun and trees, the flowers and all, it's such a good time to be alive and nature's so beautiful. So I thank God for all of that." Maxine is an active deacon in her eighties who is grateful for each day.

She raised her family and taught music in Phoenix for many years. Now widowed, she keeps in touch with her children and grandchildren, living quite capably alone. She volunteers her time and carries a sense of gratitude into all that she does. She often finds herself thinking, " 'How lucky I am to have these friends,' and, 'What can I do to help the friends?' "

Libby Becker

"Sometimes I know that He's working through me, sometimes I know that He's not.... It gets hectic and the phone's ringing, and I try to take a moment before those meetings to ask for His guidance and to be with us so I can relate back. It's really tough, but you get caught up in your day and you forget about what you've asked for." Libby is a very sincere Christian and a very busy woman. In her early thirties, Libby and her husband have just had their first baby at the same time that she has launched a new management company.

Libby grew up in the church where she now worships, drifted away in early adulthood, but has been quite active in leadership of the church through recent years. Leadership has changed her perspective on the church. "I can't look at the money that I give to the church as ever hurting me in any way or being a burden.... Because I know that God does not want my money otherwise. If it's not fully given with grace, you can keep your money. I know He feels that way." She is constantly seeking God's guidance for her life. "I ask Him to work for me, the Holy Spirit to work for me and guide me in truth."

Many Paths in Common Experience

Cindy, Bob, Jim, Gail, Liz, Louis, Cathy, Lloyd, Doris, Mark, Maxine and Libby bring a wide variety of life experience with them into the same space for worship every week. Each one can

define ways in which the experience of worship has made an impact upon them. Yet, the nature of that impact is about as wide as the life experience they represent. "I guess it's just part of the mystery of God," said Bob. "There's a lot of stuff I don't understand."

In the pages ahead, I invite you to join me in sorting through the varied mystery of experience which these people describe. To be sure, the stuff of God's inner workings will remain a mystery. However, as we sort through the accounts of these people, some common outlines of experience emerge. In this chapter, our concern will be to frame these common outlines in terms that are authentic and familiar to the stories that these men and women express.

The aim of each interview was to listen to people talk about their daily lives and their experience of worship. It was my hope to elicit connections, if any, between these two realms of experience. As I listened, it became clear that some people could make an explicit connection more easily than others. Yet, everyone could name qualities of the worship experience that seemed to touch them in some way. At times, it was clear that those qualities were related to something going on in their daily lives. Occasionally, they would describe a quality that appeared to be on a more sublime level of experience.

II. CONNECTIONS

For purposes of reflection, I have grouped the explanation of these experiences into two broad categories: connections; and qualities. I begin by examining explanations of the ways that worship has made a direct connection to their daily experience.

Out with the God Squad: Musical Phrases

"It was a very wild observation that I made. I'm singing in the shower, and then I'd make the self-observation that I was doing it! I'd just laugh. I'd go, 'Good Lord, I'm singing God Squad songs! This is great.' And at work I told Paul, ['My right-hand man']. 'Oh my god, I'm singing God Squad songs! This is wild.' 'White as Snow,' you know." Mark made the observation in the shower and at work that the songs he was preparing and leading for the worship band (God Squad), were now a part of his daily life. "This is wild," he said. Working alongside his assistant Paul, he found himself singing "White as Snow," its verse continues, "though my sins were as scarlet, this I know: he has cleansed and made me whole." Generally this tune is sung during worship in connection with the assurance of forgiveness. When Mark spoke about that part of worship he described it as, "an assurance of forgiveness that whatever I did that I wasn't happy with during the week, I've been forgiven for that." And Paul is the one who sees Mark in those unhappy moments:

As far as the work, since I started coming back to church: it's totally "planed me out" [*sic*]. I find if I'm getting irritated with someone --this happened last Friday-- I wasn't feeling well. I was starting to get sick and Paul, my right-hand man, he was doing a task and I was maybe being a little bit too controlling of the situation as far as how I wanted him to do it. And I could tell he was getting tweaked with

me and I had to go to a meeting and I came back and he was real quiet. And I said, "What's the matter?" (I know when he's quiet something's up.) ... He just looks at me and he goes, "You know, sometimes --across the board-- you're just a little too much," (in terms of my control).

He continued:

My initial reaction was to spout off a little response cause I wasn't feeling well ... and I wasn't in the mood. But I caught myself. You know, going "No, no, no, no, don't go there." And before [starting to go to church] I would have made a comment. Then he would have made a comment and --you know.... the point is, ... I found myself kind of going "no, just calm down." So that really has been an observation lately. The way I handle situations. He's even said to me, ... (I was, oh, solving a conflict) ... he made a comment to me, something about "that's not a real Christian attitude" or something like that and I'm like, "Oh. Good point."

Mark's testimony echoes that of others regarding the power of music to place direction into common life. Cindy finds that a song helps shape her actions:

If I'm driving a long way I may even sing, (which I don't do well), but "Surely it is God Who loves me," you know, "I trust in Him and not be afraid." Those type of things. So that I use that time to really think about who I want to be, what I want to be and I maybe even in a prayerful way do that too, ... If I'm going someplace that I feel uncomfortable about, or maybe listening to a friend. I use that time to ask God to guide me, give me the wisdom to say and do the right things. Because I have a great, (like I said), feeling of inadequacy, so I feel like I need all the help I can get. And I, I do.

Libby also finds that a tune can bring about introspection in her life:

I'll wake up with that [tune] in my head during the week. During the day I can hear that tune. So that reminds me of the church and my commitment, if I have that tune. ... Some of these, the hymns that I sing, that are with me through the week --"Surely It Is God Who Saves Me"-- it makes me think about the song and it makes me think about how God plays a role in my life.

There is an overlap of music between the classic and contemporary services in the church that these people attend. It is interesting to note that it is phrases from contemporary tunes such as those listed above that are most frequently mentioned in direct connection to personal reflection throughout the week. Libby, who prefers the classic service, describes it in this way, "the contemporary music is more related to where I can understand it, to where it would mean more, so it's more personal." Yet, not only Libby and Mark, in their thirties and forties respectively, are touched by those tunes. Cindy, in her sixties, draws comfort from the tune "Surely it is God who loves [sic] me." In fact, she "mentioned it to Pat [a friend in her fifties battling cancer], and she said the same thing. So I think that some of those short little --whether it's a song or a verse-- seem to be a source of comfort." Even Maxine, a musician in her eighties, attends the

contemporary service with its new book of songs. She said, "I like the book. I think some of the themes in this new, in the little book, are wonderful."

Words that I Need to Have: The Way A Message Sticks

There are elements of worship that remain firmly with people throughout the week. In what follows, we will see the lasting impact of words, phrases, gestures and emphases that have lasting impact.

Phrases. During the sermon, said Doris, "I'm listening. I'm listening. And many times it's, it's, they're words that, that I need to have. Many times they're words that I want my husband to have. There's just so much to be given, to be here and listen." Something remarkable can happen for people during a sermon. "Many times I have tears during your sermon." Words are expressed and the listener takes possession of them. They are words, as Doris said, "that are reaching me."

Doris admits, "The [congregational] singing, ... I think it's okay. That isn't my most favorite thing." Unlike others I interviewed, the songs don't remain with Doris in the way that spoken words can. "Maybe it's because I really can't sing very much anymore."

The spoken word can have great meaning for daily life. When asked to name what most relates worship to daily life, Jim Smith said, "the biggest parts for me are relating things to current events, putting the turmoil out there kind of into perspective and saying, 'Keep the faith' and 'Do the right thing' and 'Fight the right fight' and, you know, 'Keep doing' that is the message that I take with me and ... that part of the message comes through the sermon." For Jim, "Keep the faith," "Do the right thing," "Fight the right fight" and "Keep doing" are words he needs to have as he does battle in the city planning office. Somehow those phrases go with him into daily life.

Cathy said, "I listen to the sermon and try to --I can't say that I stay with it 100%, but-- I get bits and pieces from it." Sometimes it is the bits and pieces, the small phrases that stick most firmly in people's minds as they go about their week. Gail said, "A particular phrase or something ... can stay with me through the week." Sometimes that phrase may even last beyond a week. Gail even went "way back to when we were still in the Chicago area."

This pastor, he preached on Barabbas.... He was the one who was let go and ... [the sermon] told what he did after he left. And then he came back to Calvary and he looked up and he said, "that was my cross." He saw Jesus and he said, "that was my cross." And that's something I think of once in a while, that that is my cross. You know? That should have been my cross.... So that's one that I've thought of a lot over the years.... that was probably 20 years ago.... [now] I see a cross, sometimes I'll think, yes, that should have been my cross and I'll think what he said, what the pastor said, "that was my cross."

The spoken word has the power to set a phrase within a person's daily life for twenty years. But Doris clarifies, "This is not with every preacher, believe me.... Some preachers are, you know, they just, you just kind of endure."

Personal ties. Gesture and emphasis have a lot to do with the way in which the spoken word is received. They are Louis said:

I like the fact that you get out from behind pulpit and present and become -- preach more, what's the word, contemporaneously? ... Not that you probably haven't worked and thought about what you were going say, but I think you do that well. And usually that makes it more personal because people can hide from behind the pulpit, especially in a big pulpit. People hide from behind the pulpit and say things that affect the congregation that probably by hiding, by being behind the pulpit they say 'It affects you but it doesn't affect me.' The fact that you come out makes it much more personal. It's a nicer effect.

The "personal" dimension of expression is the most effective means by which words are shared and received.

Lloyd spoke about a sermon that had an impact upon him and his wife as they worried about health concerns and pregnancy at Christmastime. "That one service, it meant a lot to me personally, but I think as much for the message as for how the message affected my wife." It was "learning that you and your wife had such a difficult pregnancy and you talked about your own story, about how hard it was. That was a pretty powerful message." Sometimes the words that connect are common stories. "There'll be certain things said, maybe in your prayer, or maybe in the sermon, but they hit, 'That's me!' 'That's the way I feel!' 'That's what I want!' " said Maxine, "That happens quite often when I'm at church." If words are expressed in a personal manner, the worshiper is left feeling, as Doris said, that "there's just so much to be given, to be here and listen."

By contrast, even the most valuable phrases will never make it out of the church doors if they are poorly expressed. This is especially true with the younger generation. Liz said, "If I'm going to get something out of a reading. If they give expression to it, it's more attractive. But if it's like most of the time, it's kinda like blah, blah, blah, you know? ... When people read it like that, I think of it more as --just like reading it: 'You have to follow these rules.' But when people read it with expression it's more like sharing rather than: 'This is what you have to do.' " Friends share gifts with each other. In worship, the valued gifts can be "words that I need to have" to get through the week.

Basic Things that We Should All Know

Sometimes the contact between the week and worship comes in the form of basic direction. "Coming to church and worship, ... I think," said Cathy, "gets your head on straight. Because it kind of gets you in the direction I think you should be going. Which, during the week, you're going 90 miles an hour and trying to keep up with everything and, at least for a period on Sunday, you can at least get some direction." Sometimes that direction comes from the basic elements of worship.

Measure up. The Prayer of Confession is, "the point where I look at it and kind of measure up. You know, what I did in the past week or how I think I can incorporate those things into my next

week. So kind of that reflection point there is something that really sticks with me." Running from one problem to another at work, Jim said:

It's the Prayer of Confession for me. And I think when I am running around. Okay, "Am I being fair to this person?" "Am I being patient?" ... It's like I'm remembering the moment. Okay, "This week I'm trying to be more patient with people" or "I'm trying to let people explain their problems to me before I tell them whatever." You know, it's kind of those things that kind of got lost there for a little while but then a situation comes up that I remember and I reflected on that on Sunday morning, and 'That's something that I was trying to do,' and 'Why don't I try to do it in that situation.'

Jim describes the prayer of confession like the ten commandments: as one of, "the fundamental things." Here is what that means for Jim:

I guess, fundamental in the sense that, you know, being raised Catholic. That was an important part of the church. It's something you learn early on. When you're a Christian, you learn those things. But you know, if you had asked me last year what were the Ten Commandments? Frankly, I don't know if I could do them all. So, for me, it's just the fundamental things of the Christian faith are continued here and these are kind of like reminders. "I know these things." There's no harm in me repeating them again, you know. I think it's good for me to do that.

Sometimes the connection between worship and the week comes in the form of a reminder of the direction we "should be going." Cindy reflected upon the summary of God's law which follows the assurance in her worship:

I like that because as raised in Missouri Synod Lutheran church we were drilled on those Ten Commandments and so forth. (But I must say, becoming a Presbyterian has given me much more hope)... But I think this is good. I think that things like this I like because it's the basic things that we should all know. We may not be able to recite them ... all, (I'm not sure that I could myself), but it's just a little reminder that, "yes, this is what we need to focus on."

Both Cindy and Jim came to the Presbyterians out of another, more strict and moralistic, Christian experience. Each has a critique of the experience they had in those respective traditions, but each also finds a valuable connection between an element of worship about which they had been "drilled" and their weekly experience in common life. The little reminders make a difference. However, others that were not raised in a strict Christian experience also find the reminders to be valuable.

Shot in the arm. Like Cathy, Liz appreciates the sense of direction found in worship. Liz reflected upon the confession and assurance sequence of worship, "I just really like that part because it sums up the week. In a way, it starts the new week where people can start off fresh and just be free of any burdens that they have or anything that seems to bother them that they've done. Or something just to reassure that they're just not terrible people or anything like that: that

‘Everybody makes mistakes.’ ” Reminders that "everybody makes mistakes" help people "start off fresh" in the right direction. As Maxine simply described the prayer of dedication, "This should be the shot in the arm to ‘Go forth now, do it.’ ‘You’ve heard it, now go do it.’ ”

III. QUALITIES

As we mentioned above, explicit connections between worship and daily life were fewer than qualitative descriptions of the way that worship touched the lives of these people. What follows are a few ways that their qualitative descriptions can be grouped.

A Way of Life

One quality of the connection between worship and daily life is found in the patterns that are ingrained in worshipers. In the sections that follow, we will see some of the ways that people find themselves patterned into a faithful way of life.

Empty vessels. "I have to paraphrase Paderewski," said Bob, "I think he’s the one that said he missed his piano rehearsal one day and he knew it. He missed it two days, his friends knew it. If he missed it three days, everybody knew it." So it is with worship. "I was brought up by a pair of good parents who cared," said Bob. "And my mother was quite a prayer person.... So, you know, it’s just a way of life.... I think if I stopped going to church, I’d notice a difference.... I like what Paderewski says, ‘If I miss it, I know.’ ”

Bob’s words were echoed by nearly everybody who was interviewed. Louis said, "unlike what some people say, ‘Well, I can worship God outside the church.’ I can’t. And I don’t really think they can. That’s probably just an excuse. But I guess without a worship service, without the ability to come to church ... it’s something that I will miss. It’s that feeling that the vessel wasn’t filled that week."

Mysterious evolution. The need for worship is passed down from one generation to another. You’ll remember Cathy said, "I was brought up in the church." She continued, "so, I like him [her son] to participate. You know, stand up and sit down and that kind of thing. I want to make sure that he’s at least --he may not always do it-- but I want him to be aware: ‘This is the hymn and we’ll find it.’ You know, those kinds of things. I like teaching at the same time." The way of life is passed on through simple gestures: stand up, sit down and find the hymn. Then, worship becomes "sort of the rhythm that I need to stay in," according to Mark. "I think it grounds me. It kind of refreshes me every week, gives me some new thoughts and a lot of times I’ll try to apply what I’ve heard to that week. But I think it’s a general sense."

Worship is passed on through gesture and practice. It is a general sense, a rhythm and a way of life that makes a change. Often, Bob figures, it is a subtle change. He shares:

It's plain that we human beings can't understand. I think those things just happen. I don't know whether circumstances change, but I suspect it's that I change and people respond differently. I think that's the difference. And I think prayer works that way probably more than anything else. I don't understand that. But I think that happens. So, I guess it's just part of the mystery of God. There's a lot of stuff I don't understand. Don't expect to in this world.

Bob is perhaps the most honest of all about the mystery of human transformation.

Jim tries to describe it in this way:

I kind of feel like going to church for me is like an evolution. I mean, if you keep going, going and going, you eventually, evolve into a different person. For a person who had not gone to church for a long time and started going, --and I think I do take it home, but in a general sense. I mean, it's not a specific thing that I learned in church today. It's kind of wrapped all together somehow and I do take it home.

Bob said, "I don't miss much of it [worship], [I] take it with me. I'm just more conditioned." But how do we become more conditioned?

Growing up. Many are conditioned by their parents. Maxine was conditioned to say the Lord's Prayer. She made note of a time when it was missing from the contemporary service and explained why she missed it. "Well ... I start my personal prayers with the Lord's Prayer at night. I think it's important to me mainly probably because it's been routine. It's just important to me. Growing up, it's one of the first --other than the children's prayers and things-- it's one of the first things, prayers, that I ever learned and it's been a part of me always." For Maxine, worship is a reinforcement of love, sharing and giving in her life. It has been a part of her always and, as she puts it: "the whole thing ties together."

Cathy is seeking to condition her son with that kind of reinforcement. She wants him to participate in worship and tries to teach him at the same time. Here is the way she describes what she is teaching him through worship:

I'd like him to learn about God, and that He is the everything, and about Jesus and the Bible stories. And that's what he can get out of here. But then there are also, -- to learn to live a Christian life: and I think that is to help other people when you can, and think about others beside yourself. ... I think it's even more important than when I was a kid. In fact, I basically came back to church after I had him because I felt that was important.

Cathy has her son stand up, sit down and find the hymn in worship. He goes to Sunday School. She prays the Lord's Prayer with him in worship. All of this is part of her effort to help him "learn to live a Christian life."

As a teenager, Liz can be clear about the connection between her actions in worship and her actions at work. She sees that her service as an usher is related to her service as a manager at Cinnabon's "because I feel when I'm doing the ushering or something like that I'm leading people and helping out and I really think the way of God is helping people and teaching people and so I try to do that throughout my life --its teaching people." For Liz, the Christian life runs weekly through worship.

Close connections. Jim confesses that worship has an effect on common life that is "subliminal almost." It uses simple things such as the Lord's Prayer, songs and the sacraments. Through regular practice, usually alongside people of personal significance, it instills certain qualities within the worshiper. Mark describes the renewing effect that communion has upon him in this way:

I've held Communion, always, with a lot of reverence. For me, it's a symbolic way of demonstrating God's gift to us and the sacrifices he made by him dying for our sins.... I take it really seriously. That's my time of most meditation [sic]. - -And a lot of real early thought. It's interesting, [remembering], taking Communion with my mom and dad as a kid [his dad died when Mark was 20]. It's just a real special thing. I think it's a real important thing to me and, in a way, it bonds my family. ... It kind of takes me back and I get feelings way back to childhood and it kind of refreshes that, which is good, a real good feeling: to be back with her [mom] doing it again and know what it means and be a part of it.

Like Mark, Cathy finds a connection with the past when, "We'll sing Amazing Grace and that was always my grandparents' favorite hymn. Things like that can trigger memories and it makes me think of them being up with God. You know, being close, a connection.... Quite often, I'll get kind of choked up in church, ... [by the] personal things."

When Worship Misdirects or Doesn't Shape

Sometimes worship has little to no effect upon the participants who gather. Other times it expresses values that may be unintended or undesired.

Mouthing the words. Without a personal connection, the routine things --stand up, sit down, find the hymn--may have little meaning. Gail finds that much of what we do in worship can be "neutral." She claims that worship is neutralized when, "you just get through the words: mouthing the words without thinking about them." Louis asserts that "sometimes, when people get up there and just read it [scripture] and they read it so quick without any emphasis as to what is being said. It kind of leaves it a little dry. Because I wonder if they're paying attention to what they're saying or what they read." Cathy, for example, finds the Affirmation of Faith to be "kind of rote to me, a little on the automatic side." Standing up and sitting down can be done with little feeling according to Doris. She said without enthusiasm, "We just have to do it."

The wrong message. Impersonal elements of worship may not only be neutral. Sometimes they can leave the wrong impression. Lloyd finds himself chuckling during the doxology at the end of the offering. He said, "it's so overblown, ...everyone stands, I mean, it's this dramatic moment: 'Okay, we're bringing in the money!' Everyone stands up. 'Da-da-da-da-da.' Then they come down the aisle...and if you think about it, we seem so much more dramatic about collecting the money than when the children come forward. Some values there!" In instances such as this, a dissonant conditioning may form. Yet, the dissonance may not necessarily be internal to the pattern of worship.

External stuff. Sometimes the character of the previous week shapes the way that worship is received. Lloyd confesses occasions when he has not, "arrived in the right frame of mind." That "frame of mind" has impacted his ability to participate. On those occasions, he said, "my humanness has resisted all the best attempts of the congregation and my wife and everyone else to help me get into it." Even though worship often can be "a trigger" for Lloyd "that stops all of the external stuff long enough that I can focus on God." Sometimes he is too overwhelmed by the week. In those instances, he said, "I showed up that way and I left that way."

A varying interchange of personal dynamics constantly affect the way that worship conditions its participants. Yet, when worship triggers a halt from the external stuff, it is able to create a different kind of world --even while the offering is being received!

Out from the Different World: A Way of Life Reprise

As an usher, Liz passes the offering plate during worship. She notices expressions on the faces of people as she moves up the aisle. She said:

Sometimes I see a lot of people that are really smiling and they seem like they're really completely happy --you know-- they feel like they are, --I don't know,-- out from the different world (that's cluttered up, they have to do errands, they have to do this thing), but then you [sic] can just sit there and just listen and participate and stuff like that and they can be happy and just kinda be with their family, like their second family.

The experience of worship can create a second family for its participants. Those relationships build personal connections that help people feel "out from the different world." It begins upon their arrival in worship. Lloyd admits:

It's extra neat when there's people here [in the narthex] that I've got a personal connection to because sometimes you give them a hug instead of a handshake. ... And there's always a gentleman over here and I can never remember his name but he remembers us as the Butlers and: "it's good to see the Butlers here today," and he'll give us our programs.

The simple gestures, when properly received with a personal connection, are able to condition a different way of life into the lives of worshipers.

Paderewski said, "If I miss it, I know it." A different way of life begins every week in worship. It is an evolution of change that continues into daily life and sometimes lasts a lifetime. "I don't understand that," said Bob. "But I think that happens."

Fade the World to Black: Sacred Space

In the following sections, those interviewed describe a change in perception that takes place as they enter worship. Sometimes there is a conscious personal change in outlook while other times an element of worship will present a different point of view to those who gather.

Taking that breath. Something can happen to people when they enter worship. A different attitude is liable to overtake them. Mark describes a "worship attitude" that begins with the call to worship. He said that is the point "where I make the transition." In worship, "the rest of the world doesn't really exist." Mark said it is a time where "I let the world go away and I just kind of fade the world to black."

"I do try to get quieter with myself," Cathy explains. "And try to get a little more focused with myself and with God." People describe a distancing process that takes place in worship. Usually, there is conscious effort undertaken by worshipers to create space in their lives for God. Cathy said, "it's mainly trying to push away all of the other stuff --whether it be who is here, physically, or what is going happen, to be thinking about having to do or get finished,-- that kind of thing. It's just trying to focus." Libby said she is usually rushing into church so that when she first arrives she takes a breath. "I think taking that breath helps me to get prepared and to listen better also: to be a little more focused on why I'm here."

Worship is an event of a community. It is a shared process. However, many people make a conscious attempt to create a solitary space amidst the people. Liz admits, "I sometimes like sitting by myself because I feel if I'm more by myself I can concentrate more rather than having all these people around rustling papers, or their head's in the way" She doesn't even want to be distracted by movement in the choir. If she can concentrate, she said, then it's "more to the imaginative." A different attitude can begin.

It brings God closer. Sometimes the elements of worship can aid the transition from the rest of the world. Cathy notes elements at the beginning of worship that let her know she is in a different kind of place:

I especially like the choir and the organ. That's the kind of music that I don't usually hear during the week and I can appreciate that. It really brings God closer. It seems like it's such a close tie. I like that. I enjoy that kind of singing even though I don't hear it all the time. It may not be the best but I really enjoy it.

Mark said the music for gathering "starts to put me in a more serious mood and detaching my attention from those around me. You know: to the church, to the service, to the experience." Simple reminders such as music serve to remind worshipers that they have gone "out from the different world."

You will remember Lloyd described the way that worship can act as a trigger. He said it "stops all of the external stuff long enough that I can focus on God." It is a kind of quiet time for Lloyd "to filter out the noise a little bit and try to work on figuring out a way to get a better reception." Jim finds the silence during the prayer of confession to be a helpful way to reflect and consider how to incorporate the faith into his daily life. He said, "I like that because it's an opportunity. It's something everybody does together but then you have a moment to reflect yourself personally on how you're going to do these things and how they're a part of your life."

Jim likes the drama of the Lord's Supper. It helps when work is getting a little overly dramatic with one crisis after another. The drama of communion "puts it in perspective."

Mark said worship:

...starts a whole process for me. It's almost like a zone ... I get in when I play music. It's sort of on ... a different consciousness level. I just shift gears and start to reflect. What I find myself doing a lot of times is reflecting on the week.... How I would like to improve it or what I'm thankful for during the week. A lot of those thoughts come to me while the service is going on.

In a variety of ways, worship provides a reflective space to "fade the world into black" and put the week into perspective.

Practicing the Word: Spiritual Disciplines

Often there is a general relationship that people sense between worship and the common life. Frequently this sense is derived from the sermon. The worshiper may not be able to quote a specific story, (e.g. - Lloyd's personal connection with the sermon illustration about childbirth). Instead, what often seems to stick are general phrases or attributes. For example Libby said, "What I've gathered from a sermon, ... it has a lot to do with patience and the reason I have that patience is [that] I stop" in the middle of the week and remember the sermon from Sunday. She said, "I'm trying to practice the Word. ... I'm trying to take what you're talking about, or with scripture and putting it into my life."

Jim remembered a series of phrases (e.g. - " 'Keep the faith' and 'Do the right thing' and 'Fight the right fight' and, you know, 'Keep doing' ") that, in the actual sermon text, probably were not expressed as he remembered them. But the accuracy doesn't matter for him. The "message comes through the sermon" and provides a general sense of encouragement for his daily life.

"When you have 150 people in here on Sunday," said Jim, "150 people probably walk out with different degrees of what they took with them." Part of the mystery of worship is in the varying ways that God's spirit appears to interact from the same material in different people's lives. "The sermons," said Liz, "they can be good and bad, just depends on how much it relates to people's lives ... sometimes it'll relate to a certain person, sometimes they won't relate to a certain person but, every single time it gives you good aspect of different ways of life." Regardless of the specific issues, the sermon story provides a means for worshipers to gain a sense of sharing in a distinctive "way of life"

The sermon can provide an embodiment of the message. Louis underscored the power of a personal connection in a sermon when he said to me, "I like the fact that you get out from behind the pulpit ... that makes it more personal because people can hide from behind the pulpit ... and say ... 'It affects you but it doesn't affect me.' " Cindy identified the emotional power of representing a common way of life shared when she said to me, "I appreciate the fact that you come forward and are part of us ... with a warm smile. That's like, 'He likes what he's doing.' And that makes me feel good." Through this personal vehicle for communication, God regularly makes a powerful connection.

As a young adult, Libby was spiritually searching. At one point, she came back to church and here is what she found:

The sermon was usually referencing something I was going through at the time.... I know God was talking through you to me, whether it was to a hundred others, I don't know. But ... that was a fact because it was usually right where I was at, or what I was praying about and it made me know this is where I should be on Sunday mornings. ... When you relate back the scriptures to the beginning and have a story and laughter and a serious message, it helped me understand those scriptures. It would also help me use it and it helps me use it in my week, to understand it.

Many of the people interviewed like to have sermons that address current events. However, that interest always accompanied a desire to have a word that related to daily life. Where Jim held onto a series of phrases, Cathy looked for a standard by which to make judgments. She sought direction on "what God or Jesus might say or do."

Often the sermon serves as a springboard for further reflection with valued friends or family. Since church has provided a renaissance of family life for Mark, he said that his "family reconvenes [after worship and] we'll talk about the service and how it related to us. [Then] we'll do brunch afterwards and talk about the service and how good we feel about it." Jim and his wife will regularly sit down to lunch after church and talk about the sermon. But he confesses that it's, "Not too far into the week before that's ancient history for us." What remains are the general phrases of encouragement that he listed above.

Cindy describes the way a sermon engages her daily life:

I wish I could say that when I'm moved by a sermon that everyday I try to live that. But that's not true, unfortunately. It does make a difference in my life.... It is something I think about but maybe not every day because other things come in and you go, 'Ooohhh, I forgot about what was the most important thing.'

The onslaught of the week and general distraction may cause a message to be lost. However, for Jim, as well as many others, the sermon is "the most important part.... That's the connection that's most important to me. Taking the written word here and this is how we're living it, or this is a parallel today to this story. So that's the important part for me." When I asked Libby what

out of worship best helped her to deal with her boss, she said, "Your sermon, always the sermon."

The Ones You Love: The Communion of Saints

One of the most significant ways that worship connects itself to daily experience is not printed in the bulletin. The following sections describe the interpersonal relationships that make such a difference for people as they come to worship.

Warmth and support. A process of interconnection begins from the moment a person walks into the worship space. It is a visual, and often even tactile, phenomenon that ties the life experience of one worshiper to another. Cindy said that as she walks in, "I usually speak to people. But if I haven't seen some person for a while, I usually either touch them and give them a hug. Or walk on, depending upon what's going on. But, I feel like that's just part of Sunday morning worship - to be with the ones you love and care about."

Cindy feels that an important part of Sunday worship is when people are "hoping someone will ask them about the events of their life." She described the Sunday after Libby had just given birth to her baby. Cindy saw Libby's parents in church and "Of course, the light of their life is the new grandchild and, [I] saw the pictures." That kind of thing is what we need to do in worship, said Cindy. "We need to open up to one another and share whatever good or bad may have happened there that week." Even a formal element of worship can help in that process. Libby values the Passing of the Peace specifically because, "it allows us to open up to others."

Maxine opens her heart the moment she comes in the church. After many years of worship at Church, Maxine has developed teammates for the pew. She said that when she comes in, "I have two people who come for their hugs when we get in there so I usually give the hugs and then go sit down and then my teammates are usually there." The act of giving and receiving hugs is infectious for Maxine and many of her friends who also are widows. It builds a sense of teamwork in faith as they gather each week.

Cindy finds this sharing to be vital for her daily life. She said, "I like coming to Church. And I can look around and know that if I was in a real crisis state that I'd have lots of hugs and warmth and support. And I think that's just a very good feeling. God forbid that that day will come, but that just makes me feel good." She knows from experience that the church can provide that support.

As she mentioned above, the church "was the highlight of my life" during a time when her first husband was leaving her and her children. "There was a lot of bad stuff going on" in her life at that time. Yet at church, "People were nice to me. People spoke to me. And I felt good." That is the reason she comes to church. "I love the people here," she said. If physical appearances of the church were what mattered, "I would probably be going to another church that was fancier and more beautiful." But she said, "I don't need that."

The elements of worship that reinforce the support of the congregation for each other are most treasured for Cindy. She likes the prayer. It is valuable for her to be "praying for the world,

praying for the country and so forth. But I guess I get down to more people and feelings." She checks up on people for whom we are praying. During the worship service, in moments of distraction that worship leaders might consider are lost, she said, "I look around at the people and I'm wondering. You know, 'Well is so and so here.' 'Oh, so and so is here.' 'I wonder how they're doing?' Or, 'I haven't seen them for a long time.' "

Cindy spoke about a church she visited that greatly moved her. She was struck by "the love of the people, the caring. It just showed people were not holding back." As mentioned above, she liked to see me approach the congregation with a warm smile. It helped her feel that I was a part of the congregation. In those moments, it seems, she believes I am not holding back and the valuable connection of worship is made between people. She carries that feeling even into the formality of the Lord's Supper. As an elder, Cindy distributes the elements with a deliberate effort to share. Because of her strict upbringing about the sacrament, it "has not been an easy thing to do. But I do it. And I try to make eye contact with this person. You know, 'I care about you' and 'I'm giving you, I'm passing you the body of Christ.' "

They're all together. Many people find that the dynamic of sharing in worship is able to extend beyond the immediate experience of a particular congregation. When Jim takes part in the Lord's Supper, he finds himself reminded that "it's something that we're doing that Christ did centuries ago ... [and] all of the Christians were doing centuries ago --and continue to do: [It is] something we all share in common." Amongst the elements of worship, communion is especially able to drive home why we are here. "I really feel doing that together is a big thing and it connects everything together"

Maxine said "I think it [communion] brings out a closeness that I felt growing up. I was raised family-oriented in this little town." As Mark mentioned earlier when he remembered his dad, communion makes a link not only with those present in the Sanctuary, but also with people from the past. Communion reminds Maxine of those she loves who have died and gone ahead. "I don't know what they do in Heaven," she said. "I don't know how they're treated and what they're doing, but I have a feeling that they're all together. And I think that's a good feeling. That they're carrying on and they're all together up there again."

The Lord's Supper provides a vehicle for connections to be made by those sharing it. Libby said, "I look forward to it [communion] because it's a part of us.... We do it as a group and we're the people of God." We become more than we could be on our own. "So it's not a personal experience, but more a community experience, or a congregation of being the Lord's people meeting together in this place for the breaking of the bread." Sometimes, she said, "I feel the strength as a congregation gathered for worship."

A religious figure. The congregation can become a "second family" as Liz put it. It can provide strength in times of trouble. When Liz described verbal assaults that she endured at school, it was the memory of someone in the congregation who gave her strength. Bev "always reminds me to love the unlovable and I really think about that at school when I try to be nice to people who are just not nice at all.... I look up to Bev," Liz said, "because she's kind of a religious figure to me because she's always been there." In Liz's mind, Bev and worship have a link in meaning, because Bev is a singer each week in the worship band and "she's always there."

Not only teens find themselves inspired by the people who worship, but also adults. "I'm just in awe of these people with such strong, strong faith," said Cindy. The people with whom worshipers gather offer not only inspiration, but encouragement on a common journey. Libby said, "When I first came back I always thought that I must be this horrible person and all these good people are around me. And then as the years go by and I think as you get to know the people ... you find out that we're all the same."

Children of God. "I believe all of us are children of God," said Libby. So that everyone can benefit from the simple truths presented in the children's message. "The sermon may express a major theme," said Maxine, "and the Children's Message has a moral, but the moral is like a reflection of the major theme, only boiled down for kids." Libby said, "we sometimes need a little more simpler terms and somehow it [the Children's Message] lightens up the, this whole congregation." Doris said, "I know my husband just twinkles when the children have a part in the service."

The way that we treat our children in worship can build a sense of common purpose and community. Libby explains it this way:

We can smile through a child and we can laugh. And that brings us, I believe, to all knowing that we're children of God. When we can laugh and smile. And I will tell you, that's a lot of the time that I can have tears in my eyes: looking at a child of God. It's a lot of times that's when I feel the emotion of the service: through watching children understand the Word.

"I never know what's going to happen in the Children's Message," said Jim. "You know," he said, "that's kind of nice.... it's a couple of minutes where I get to watch somebody else who's trying to figure out what's going on ... I like that a lot." Often the time with children in worship becomes a moment where our imagination is more actively engaged. Mark said, "It's always a unique perspective. It's always [a] very happy time for me to see kids up there, cause the kids are so bright and unjaded." We pay closer attention and it often becomes, as Jim said, "a thing that I think about later in the week."

"You can't lose those kids," said Cathy. "Everybody's heart just melts when they get up there, I don't care what they do." In worship, we work not to "lose" people. "It makes me feel good and glad that we have the younger generation," said Gail. It "affects me when there are young children doing" parts of worship. The manner in which a congregation works with its children in worship reflects a measure of the values that it shares.

Time into these things. People learn about a community's caring not only by the way in which children are treated, but also through more subtle means. Liz said, "I like it when they have decorations when it gets close to Christmas. At Easter they have all the lilies and glitter and that's when everything gets really pretty. You can tell people put their time into these things and they're really, they really care a lot." The decorations express the care and welcome of a community. Simple things like the flowers can express people's care and concern. "I remembered Jenna Lee," Lloyd said on the Sunday before Christmas. His wife "had filled out

one of the [forms] for the poinsettias" in memory of a friend who had died young. He had forgotten about the flowers until he sat down to prepare for worship. Then he remembered. "So it was really nice." It became a moment to bring a friend's memory to life.

Come on in. When people arrive for worship, they are welcomed into all of this sharing. They are invited to stand amidst "the ones we love." Routine gestures take on personal meaning. Liz invites each person to "sit down and become just like part of the whole." She said, "you're trying to get people to come and follow you, you're asking people to 'Come on in,' and, 'Sit there,' and 'Experience all this.' Rather than, 'This is just part of the process.' "

"One of the great things about the worship is the community believers," said Bob. "That we share. I think everything we do in worship could be done by one person. But this is where it's shared. [We] support each other. And I think everybody who comes in there must feel something of that."

I Believe: Covenants of Faith

Something as simple as the Apostles' Creed can provide an anchor to steady a soul through the most trying of times. It supplies an inner assurance that survives and revives. Cindy powerfully articulated this truth:

'I believe' --you can't take it away from me.... I may not always be good to my neighbors, or honor thy father and thy mother. But, 'I believe' --I'll never waiver from that.... When my husband left me. I had no family out here. I did not care to share it with anyone. I was embarrassed. I felt dirty because I'd been raised with a Missouri Synod Lutheran mother and I had made a commitment. I had made a commitment to God that I was going to keep this marriage and I was going to do it. So I would put my babies to bed. Then I'd go to the far corner of my bedroom and I would talk to God and that got me through. I mean, God was my best friend in prayer and understanding. And I said, 'You know the truth. You know what's going on.' Even though there was a lot of bad stuff going on that I was accused of and so forth and I knew [the truth] , but I was even too frightened to tell my parents. I didn't want to hurt them. And so this again, 'I believe'... no one can take this away from me: They can't change that.

Jim said, "I'll take a good Sunday with me all week.... it's kind of the thing for me that helps me straighten out my keel, going down the road in the middle of the week." Somehow, worship is able to provide a quality of life that offers an even keel through busy weeks as well as through the rough spots of life. Lloyd calls it the slow burn that he has found since joining the Presbyterians:

I wanted to know what the middle ground was gonna be like: that even healed; this slow burn; the thing that in a marriage that helps. Its having that consistent slow burn. That consistent intensity. And this particular marriage is a long-term commitment ... that's kind of the same relationship I've found with God.

For Louis, "the most enjoyable part of a worship service ... is the Benediction." When I asked him why, tears began to well up in his eyes as his voice choked and he said, "because its a blessing." A blessing somehow transcends the successes and failures of life. It is a reminder of God's abiding presence through the changes of life. Louis admitted that sometimes, "I go through the week without even giving one thought [to God]. But I know when I come back [to worship] that I was not alone."

Cathy echoed Louis' words. "I like the Benediction. I love that. I really do. It really makes me feel good or emotional, [because] it's kind of a blessing. You were blessed for being here. [It] makes me leave feeling good." People walk out of worship with a blessing that cannot be taken away by life. It is a good feeling of God's commitment to us.

"I believe," said Cindy. It is a knowledge of God's steadfast abiding love. When we carry that with us, we never know when it may be useful. Cindy shares a time:

I have migraine headaches. I remember one time that the pain was so intense. I was home alone. I thought, 'I'm going.' I mean, 'This is it. I think my head's going to blow off.' I was stretched out on the couch. I don't know whether I went into unconsciousness or not. But I was pleased that I started saying the Apostles' Creed. And after I finished, the headache was lessening. I feel that is sort of a source of comfort.... And I was pleased to think that if I was leaving this world that, [the Apostles' Creed], would come to mind. You know? I wasn't thinking about canceling a hair appointment or something!

IV. DOES WORSHIP SHAPE?

In the first chapter, I expressed the desire to see if worship truly does shape our patterns of daily behavior. After sorting the material compiled above, it is clear that worship shapes in a great variety of ways. We must be sure to note the references to neutral routines that did not consciously affect people. In addition, we need to remember the occasional reference to worship's misdirection from the Christian way. However, the quantity, character and variety of references to the formative dynamics of worship listed above affirm the basic ability of worship to shape daily life.

V. SUMMARY: HOW DOES WORSHIP SHAPE?

As described above, my concern was to listen carefully to the way that people spoke about their experience of worship and its ties to daily life. You will remember that a wide variance of life experience was reflected in the people who were interviewed. Their common tie was current active participation in worship. However: their life experience spanned eight decades; the marital experience covered those who were single, widowed, divorced and married; there were parents, grandparents and a teenager; I listened to long time church goers, recent returnees and

newcomers to church; there were listened to homemakers, students, working parents, people of diverse work experience and retirees; people liked and attended either classic or contemporary worship; and there was a fairly even mix of men and women.

What is remarkable, given the diversity of the people with whom I spoke, is that there is such a coherence of themes in their experience of worship and life. As a casual observer, my transcriptionist remarked at the end of her work, "well, it just goes to show that all of us have pretty common lives." There are transcendent qualities of human existence and apparently, transcendent ties between worship and daily life.

Connections

As was displayed above, some of the connections between worship and daily life can be made in an overt manner. In most instances, conversation that fell into this domain of meaning involved reference to a specific incident that connected a part of worship with daily life. Out in daily life with the God Squad we saw the way that musical tunes attached into daily consciousness created space for reflection, comfort, or challenge. It also became clear that often it was specific words from worship that tied themselves to daily lives. A certain phrase could continue to shape a life twenty years after it first was heard. Words spoken that made a direct connection with the experience of the listening worshiper were able to provide specific guidance for daily living. Sometimes the connection was through a basic element of the Christian faith expressed in worship. Elements of worship often were applied as a measuring tool for daily behavior. Those same measuring sticks could be used to clearly point the way for daily living.

Qualities

Almost every person wrestled to come up with specific connections. Even if they were able to name specific occasions such as those listed above, they would emphatically express the way in which worship connected to their lives in a general sense. Sometimes this general sense came across when the person speaking was not aware of their expression. There were qualities of life that had been nurtured in worship that transformed each person's living.

One of the most common descriptions was a certain way of life. It often would first be described by the inarticulate sense of emptiness that would accompany an absence from worship. As people would start to describe the way worship changed their lives, they would speak of a mysterious kind of spiritual evolution. Often the process they described began in childhood. In fact, many spoke of attempts they made to pass on that process to their own children. The value of this process was so clear that they were able to describe a sense of connection with people they had known in the past that formed as a consequence of their worship experience. It was noted with honesty, however, that often the routine that built the spiritual evolution could fall into an empty pattern of mouthing the words. Sometimes the patterns would even leave the wrong impression upon worship participants. At times, the wrong impression was left because the concerns of the world had found their way into worship with the worshiper. Yet, one virtue of this way of life was that it could create a different kind of world than the world outside people knew throughout the week so that a fresh message for life could be spoken.

To make distance from the world outside of worship, a process of fading the world to black often was named. Most people could name a process of internal focusing that they would undergo as they entered worship. Yet often, that focusing process was aided by the elements of worship as a different world would be announced through a variety of media.

Almost every person listed the sermon as one of the most valuable elements of worship for their daily life. However, they were frequently hard pressed to name tangible connections. What seemed to remain from the sermon and readings of scripture was the value of particular qualities of the Christian life. A certain way of life was articulated that set in motion a pattern of living and reflection for those who worshipped.

A quality of almost universal value was the sense of the community of believers. Worship provides a place of warmth and encouragement for daily living. It grounds its participants in a company whose ties reach beyond death to those who shared the faith in ages past. Within the faith community, persons of significance and value arise to provide a model of support for people in daily life. As a family of God all ages are valued, especially the children. The simple decorations of a sanctuary accentuate the sense of warmth and community. Gestures of welcome and concern shape this awareness of community in worship for life.

Finally, worship seems to provide a confidence for daily living. It grounds our relationship with God in such a way as to weave that relationship into the fabric of our lives. The nature of God's constancy for us is reinforced by the weekly offering of our faith in liturgy.