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## Summer Family Reunion (Part 2)

### Why We Gather to Worship

Pastor Ted Cunningham and Charles Billingsley

Ted: Welcome our new friend, Charles Billingsley who just led us in worship. It feels very appropriate to have you kicking off the Summer Family Reunion. We're going to start calling him Uncle Charles because he's going to be around a little more often. I asked him for 20 times a year, he said no. I said how about 10, no. So, we're going to get about a handful of times a year Charles is going to come and visit. But all that said, he's a teaching pastor at Thomas Road Baptist Church in Lynchburg Virginia. He teaches at Liberty University, does concerts all over the country, and worship ministries. He's passionate about Jazz and golf, but I'm going to let you share the rest.

Charles Billingsley: I've been married to my beautiful wife Shae for 31 years and we've got two boys, a 25-year-old son named Caleb. He lives down in Orange Beach Alabama. He is starting a brand-new job tomorrow, which he's really excited about. And then my other son works for Liberty University, and he just got married to a real live girl, so we are excited about that. She's really cute and we love her, and they've been married nine months now and they just got a little one-pound kitten so now I'm the grandfather of a new kitten. So, that's exciting.

I've been doing this a long time, been on the road and leading worship pastoring in California and then Lynchburg, I've just been on the road a long time. It's pretty rare that I get to be in such a wonderful church with such a wonderful pastor as Woodland Hills. I am really honored to be here, so thank you.

Ted Cunningham: We are glad that you're here. We thought today would be a perfect day to talk about one of our five purposes and that's the purpose of *worship*. If you've been to Starting Point, you know we cover the five purposes in detail. We try to cover them multiple times throughout the year, but just to give all of us a refresher today as we talk about why we gather to worship, I don't want to start with 2020, but every time I see

the word *gather*... Do you know where you were in 2020? That was a sad couple of months in March and April. I wasn't doing really well here in an empty room, trying to speak. I had to bring Travis Brawner up as my emotional support teaching team member. And then pastors started saying things like we don't need to gather. That just got all over me because we do need to gather. Today we are going to look at why we gather to worship. That's the **first purpose** and we don't prioritize the purposes, we balance them. We want all five purposes as Jesus clearly lays them out in the great commission and the great commandment. As you read in Acts 2: 42 – 47, the first century church practiced these five purposes regularly, so we want to be about all five purposes. Worship we define... we're going to talk all about this today, but worship is expressing love to God.

The next purpose is **Fellowship**. This is where we express love to one another, brothers and sisters in Christ. The Baptist term for fellowship is Potluck. That's the Hebrew term for this. I just want to say again... I know we started the gathering today with this, but let's again welcome 112 people who stepped into the water last Sunday. We had 51 scheduled and 61 spontaneous. We hope to keep that going. We think we'll talk about baptism almost every Memorial Day as we explain that and hopefully see the Lord continue to work in that on those special Sundays, grateful for it. If you missed it last week, we'll have this video posted. Fellowship is all of us gathering to enjoy one another. The Bible says in Acts 2 that they ate together with glad and sincere hearts.

The next purpose is **Discipleship**. Some people see this word and they think students, but we see this word *discipleship* and we believe this means becoming more like Jesus. We want what we believe about Jesus and how we live to match. Another way of saying it is we want our orthodoxy and our orthopraxy to match. The way we live and what we believe.

**Ministry** is meeting needs in love here in the church together. You just gave generously in the offering, you're meeting needs in our church, in our community, and around the world. That's ministry. And we want to continue to be all about going outside of this church as well. And Evangelism is sharing the good news.

Today, we are going to talk about **worship**. The first gathering was fantastic, and I hope to pull that out of you in the Q and A.

A couple of things before we jump in about why we gather to worship. We gather to worship on Sunday, but you need to know it's more than a day of the week. We want to make sure you're not limited to Sunday as we talk about this. So, do we worship when

we gather on Sunday? Yes, but we also worship on Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday... We gather to worship on campus, so we do gather corporately at a place, but it's more than a place and it's more than a building. So, some people will point to a place and go *that's my church, that's where I worship*. The church is far more than that place you are pointing to. Church is not a building, but it's a place... The church isn't a place that we point to, it's something we live out in our daily lives. But yes, I don't want to jump to that... Sometimes we can jump to that and lose sight of that and think corporate worship isn't important. Gathering in a place to worship together is important. We sing when we worship... Charles, you talked about this quite a bit in the last gathering, but it's far more than music.

We want to jump into this. Romans 12: 1 – ***Therefore I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God, this is your true and proper worship.***

I put about seven questions together that I was asking Charles over the last couple of weeks and months preparing for today, but we want to give four reasons... This isn't an exhausted list, but it's four reasons why we gather to worship.

**Number one**, we've already stated it with the purposes in that list. Number one is to express love to God. In the Great Commandment, we read Matthew 22: 37 – 38 ***Jesus replied, "Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all of your soul, and with all of your mind. This is the first and greatest commandment.***

I cannot encourage you enough... On Thursday, Amy and I went and saw *David* for the first time. How many of you have seen David at Sight and Sound? How many of you have it on your plans for this year? How many of you don't but now you will, after I talk about it?

Let me tell you, *David* is more than a show, it's a worship service. I was choked up I don't know how many times. When you come out of the intermission and into what they do on that first song out of the intermission... Much like when you study the Book of Acts, you correlate the epistles, Paul's writings to the church, throughout that book. They do a beautiful job of walking through the life of David and bringing the psalms in at just the right... And it is worship. And he had a heart for God. You see that over and over again. It was a thread through the whole thing, this love for the Lord. I was convicted by this line. He goes, "I've been all about building the kingdom and I've lost my heart for the Lord." Sometimes worship is such a realignment for us.

Charles, that's where I want to start by asking today. Last year, you led a workshop for just our worship team. You drew so much out of us to help us lead better, but let me ask, how can our church family better understand and engage in this purpose of worship?

Charles: Well, the first thing I would say is that you need to see it as the reason you exist. I don't know if you realize this, but you were not created to run a business. It might be what you do, but it shouldn't be who you are. You were created for much more than that.

In fact, in Colossians 1 there's this wonderful word that Paul writes about just who Jesus is, the preeminent one. But in the process of those verses, he says, "All things were created by him, being Jesus, and for him. I don't know if you've ever really thought about the fact that you were created not just by God, but for his good pleasure. You exist to be an all-out, sold out, expression of love for your creator. Which, when you see who you are as that, suddenly it changes everything that you do. It changes even how you speak to one another, it changes who you hang out with, it changes your vision, your goal, your purpose in life because now, suddenly, you don't exist for yourself, you are existing for the reason you were created to begin with, and that is to bring glory and honor and praise to God.

So, when you see yourself as having that purpose, it takes on a whole new meaning when you talk about the subject of worship. You begin to realize that everything has to do with worship. You will find worship on every page and scripture. In fact, I'd go so far as to say those other four things, fellowship, discipleship, ministry, evangelism, are all expressions of worship, but we have this mindset, in the American church at least, that worship is really just that Sunday morning hour. And even not even the hour. It's really relegated more to about four or five songs. And if you are a super happy church, it's six songs, but if you're a typical Baptist, and if you're really Baptist, more like three because we have the other things to deal with – announcements and all this stuff. And then there's this thing called an offering. Can I just say that the offering time can actually be the most powerful expression of worship that you do all week long because worship is not just about singing songs loudly, it's about sacrifice. And what's more costly of you, to give of your money and your resources or to just lift your hands and sing really loudly.

So, the fundamental understanding of worship is simply this – it is loving God. That's the best definition you can have. Ted mentioned earlier that it's the greatest commandment to love the Lord God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength. How is that fleshed out with Commandment number two, loving your neighbor as yourself, which is where

**fellowship** comes in. But on a Sunday morning experience, coming together like this, you just need to understand that worship is a two-fold thing. It's like a two-sided coin. It's corporate, like Ted just mentioned, but it's also individual. And if you don't worship as an individual throughout the week, what does that mean? Does that mean singing songs of praise at the red light? Well, maybe, but it's more than that. It's you falling in love with Jesus in and through every little aspect of your life. And that means on a walk with your wife or your husband, it means even on the golf course, which sometimes that's a very difficult thing to worship on the golf course because you're mad at the same time that you missed that shot.

But walk around nature. See the beauty of his creation. Get with each other, get with fellowshiping with one another and then step out of your bed every morning and step into his presence, dive deep into his word and what happens is you begin to grow as an individual worshipper. Then on Sunday morning, rather than coming in the room and worrying about the temperature or complaining about the songs or being upset because we did stand too long or whatever it might be. Instead of coming in and using that one little twenty minutes worth of music to fill you up, the difference is you will come in already full, and that Sunday morning experience now will be an overflow of what God's already doing in your heart, soul, mind, and strength and what makes a wonderful corporate worship experience for a church on a Sunday morning is when you feel that room full of individual worshippers who've been fellowshiping Jesus all week long, it's hallelujah time.

Ted: Does that flow out of him or what? He's got no notes. Let me get back to the notes here. Number two... I love it. This is why we picked worship today. When something is so in someone... and I'm around you, Charles on the golf course, around you at a restaurant, around you while driving and you practice everything you just shared.

But something we say in worship that I love, it almost has become cliché for some to say it wrong, but when you say "We praise him for who he is and what he does."

Does anybody remember Sandy Patty? Sandy Patty sang this song: Lord I praise you because of who you are, not for all the mighty things that you have done... Go back and listen to it on I tunes. She added this word and it's so important because it makes it more doctrinally and theologically correct. You'll hear it in the first time she sings it, but not in the second, but she's setting it up. Now she's sings, Lord, I praise you because of who you are, not *just* for all the mighty things you have done, because the scripture calls us to

praise him for what he has done. You see it all through scripture. So we praise God for his mighty works.

I want to encourage you this week to study Exodus 14 & 15. I'm just going to read for you the end of Chapter 14 because it sets up the worship song that the Israelites sing to the Lord after crossing the Red Sea.

It says in Verse 30 of Exodus 14 – ***Thus the Lord saved Israel that day from the hand of the Egyptians and Israel saw the Egyptians dead on the seas shore. They are going to sing a worship song while looking at the horses and bodies on the seashore.***

***Verse 31 – Israel saw the great power that the Lord used against the Egyptians, so the people feared the Lord and they believed in the Lord and his servant, Moses.***

When you get to chapter 15, it is a worship song. Verse 1 says, then Moses and the Israelites sang this song to the Lord. I will sing to the Lord for he is exalted both horse and driver he has hurled into the sea.

I was studying it this week thinking about David because what David is asking the Lord to deliver him from his enemies. And there are times it happens and there are times that it doesn't. When it doesn't, we call those songs that David praised, a lament. His hands are still raised in worship, but now it's just a different song. It's I still trust you even when I'm not getting the results I think I should be getting. We praise him for his mighty works, and while we're still waiting, we praise him.

Both horse and driver he has hurled into the sea. The Lord is my strength and my defense, he has become my salvation. He is my God and I will praise him.

Number three, and I want you to speak about this one a little bit, Charles. We also gather to worship to declare what we believe and stir our affections for Christ This is another one Charles is going to get going for a little bit so I'm going to have to give him a few minutes.

We are going to end the service today with our anthem. I call it an anthem – We believe. When we gather and publicly proclaim with our mouths what we believe standing side by side with people believing what we believe. Do you understand the power that is in that, that we are worshipping in spirit and in truth, yet a time is coming... This is from John 4 – ***yet a time is coming and has now come when the true worshippers will worship the Father in spirit and in truth for they are the kind of worshippers the Father seeks.***

And, Charles, you are going to talk about this – the importance of emotions in worship, but also being balanced with the truth. I don't know if you remember our former governor, John Ashcroft, who was also the attorney general under George W. If you are ever in the Springfield Airport and you see a man wearing a suit, sitting at the gate, waiting for the the delayed flight like you are waiting, go up and talk to him. I can't tell you how many times I've walked up to him. You will see that his passion is worship. If you try to talk politics with him, you're not going to get a lot of politics out of him. What you are going to get is worship. He asked me... I'll never forget it, in Chicago Airport. He said, "Ted, do you think a lot about what words you're putting on the lips of the people of your church?" he said, "I don't think a lot of churches think that through. There is not a lot of discernment and that's the truth part, like how do we bring discernment to our worship?"

Charles: Well, there's a lot to this. First of all, to sing what you believe comes with a prerequisite that you actually know what you believe. We have a lot of students coming to Liberty, where I'm at. They have lots of spirit. They are so passionate. It's because they get wrapped up in the feeling, this euphoric feeling that a song can deliver. Let's be honest, music draws emotions out of people. If I were to throw cool and the gang on right now, and sing "Celebrate good times, come on!" You and I would immediately start dancing because that's what Ted and I do; we're dancers. But when we start singing about something that's a deeper truth, a deeper theology to it, then, first of all, it's important that the song has correct theology and doctrine which is why we're pretty careful about the songs that we present on a Sunday morning because we don't want to give you something that is an untruth or that is slightly off, which is why we have to edit here and there.

But there is an emotional aspect to it, like when you were just reading what happen in Exodus, their response in worship was an emotional response. God had just saved their lives. And for so many of us, our most powerful worship experiences are as a result of something that happened, and it becomes an emotional thing. Look at the Book of Psalms. You cannot read the Book of Psalms, many of them written by David, and not feel the emotions. So, worship does have emotion with it. I remember when I was going through COVID in March of 2020 and really was in a very, very dark place physically. I was struggling pretty well. I was in the hospital, struggling to breathe.

I'll never forget there were certain songs I started listening to, songs like Great are you Lord... The chorus of it says, "It's your breath in our lungs..." I always thought that line was really weird until I'm laying in a hospital bed and I can't breathe. Now, all of the

sudden, this takes on a whole new meaning. So, I became very emotional during those days listening to that because God was pulling through the day.

Here's the thing: if you praise the Lord on the mountain tops and you don't do it the valleys, that's not praise of the Lord at all, that's just praise of your feelings. He's worthy, folks, of so much more than just how you feel for the day, which is why worship can't just be something that's drawn from an emotion, it has to be deeper than that. So, worship begins in the mind and then it's expressed through the heart. So, you may come in here on one Sunday morning and you've had a bad week and the last thing you feel like doing is praising the Lord. Here's my advice – praise him anyway. Because his worth doesn't depend on your mood or your circumstances or your situation. He's worthy all the time. So, because he's worthy all the time, it's our responsibility, as his child, to worship him anyway. And by the way, we don't get a choice. I was with Darlene Check one time, Ted and I'm coming off the stage, and it was me, Darlene Check, and Israel Houghton. One of these kids does not belong and it was me.

So, I come off the platform and she's just this icon. And I'm kind of this new worship leader guy and I go, "Hey, I would love if you any advice for me." She goes, "Okay." It was not really a question I expected to anybody to answer, I was just thinking well that would sound nice and humble of me if I asked her. I didn't think she would actually give me some advice.

So, she goes, "Okay, listen to me closely." And I said, "Alright." She goes, "Don't give them a choice. I said, "Excuse me? She goes, "When you lead worship, it's almost like you're apologetic about it. Don't give them a choice." I go, what do you mean?" She goes, "you're walking into the throne room of not just a king, but Thee king. She said, "you don't have a choice when you go into the throne room of thee King whether or not you are going to bow. You bow. And she said, "Lead people into the throne room of thee King and don't give them a choice of whether or not they are going to bow. It's not up to them." And it's not up to me.

Folks, when you walk into this room, if you will come with the mindset no matter how you're feeling, with a mindset that you're going to worship Thee king of kings, Thee Lord of lords no matter what it is your life is going through, but rather that is what you were created to do, it will change how you view every Sunday morning service you ever attend. It truly will. And when you ground that in truth and sing the songs from your heart, what will happen is it does get a little emotional at times. But in the end, what's most important is that you understand that what you believe is really what you're going to



sing, but what you're singing is also what you are really going to live. And when you begin to live a lifestyle of worship, what happens is the people around you get more encouraged, He says, "If I be lifted up, I will draw all men unto me." When you live a life of praise, you will have people coming to you wondering what on earth is wrong with you? Why do you have all this hope? And here you are in a hospital bed. Why do you have all this joy and here you are going through all this stuff. And then you'll have the privilege of telling them about the one you worship.

Ted: We discuss this a lot as a team and as a church. When we talk about worship styles and all that and excellence in worship. So, we believe excellence honors God and inspires others. But yet, people say it feels like entertaining. How do you keep worship... We want to be excellent in what we do, but we want to keep worship from becoming entertainment. Does that make sense?

Charles: It totally does. In fact, as a worship leader... And I do a lot of singing too. I do a lot of jazz stuff and other things. So, in the mindset of me as a singer, I'm kind of going through this okay, well, there's a time to entertain and there's a time to not. You're in a town that's full of entertainment and it's wonderful. You've got great singers and great players, and we have some of the best on this platform every Sunday morning. If you are not a regular here, it's always this good. These guys are great players and great singers, but the difference between going to a show down the street that's a wonderful entertaining moment and being in a worship service on a Sunday morning is just one thing and one thing only. And I don't care if you are Disney world, I don't care if you are at the greatest production known to man, some of the greatest concerts you'll ever see, the production is powerful, but the difference between great production in a concert venue like that and a worship service like this is the presence of God.

I don't know if you've ever been in a little camp where you're just singing around a campfire. How many of you remember a moment in your life where you just undeniably felt the Holy Spirit of God moving in your presence. And the fact is for many of us, it wasn't in some big concert, it wasn't in some big arena, it wasn't even a big room like this. It was just you having a little private moment with the Lord or just a few friends around a campfire or whatever. The truth is it doesn't take a ton of production for you to experience the presence of the Lord. But when you start looking at church services like this where we have a band and singers, what can be dangerous is if we allow the production of what's happening to override the importance of the presence of God moving. But in the scent of that, we also want to be excellent in our presentation. Because if you're not, it becomes a distraction to people's worship.

I ask the crowd in the first service, “Would you rather I sing the right notes or the wrong notes?” How many would rather hear the right notes? Although it would be really entertaining to hear the wrong notes at times, but you would rather hear the right chords from the guitar instead of the wrong ones. And the problem is if we don’t put a focus on excellence then what happens is that good is just fine, good enough. You have to raise the standard and the standard should always be raising because you want to present something that is holy unto the Lord without blemish.

The best sacrifice you can make... Read the Book of Malicai – we don’t want to give the Lord a faulty sacrifice of praise. So, we want to be excellent in that presentation while at the same time not becoming a distraction to your worship experience. So, if I’m too mouthy and we’re throwing down on legs, or the lights are too flashy or the smoke is too thick or whatever it might be, all of the sudden what could have been a wonderful moment for you with the Lord, being led by a wonderful team that loves the Lord is not becoming a distracting type of a show.

It is a very vicarious and tough balance to find between great presentation and also allowing the presence of God to move, but I think that you do a pretty wonderful job of it here at this church. So, if you get a chance, encourage your team because I think their heart is that. By the way, it’s just that. Yes, it’s performance because I’m trying to sing the right notes, but it’s not a performance in the sense that I want you to listen to me. So, a lot of the times, it ‘s about the motive of what’s happening up here as much as it is about the notes.

Ted: alright last one – fourth reason to encourage one another. I think sometimes this gets left out in worship, but this brings worship and fellowship together. Ephesians 5: 19 ***speaking to one another with psalms hymns and songs from the spirit. Sing and make music from your heart to the Lord, always giving thanks to God, the father, in the name of our Lord Jesus "Christ."*** I hear it all the time from people who were sitting by someone during worship and they could tell something was going on and through worshipping together, standing side by side, proclaiming what we believe, stirring our affection for Christ, expressing our love for the Lord, there was a great conversation after the service where they were able to encourage one another.

You already mentioned it, but how can a congregation encourage those who are leading us in the area of worship?

Charles: Well, first of all, sing with us. You may not feel like you have a good voice, but who cares? Nobody cares. It's so funny. I do a lot of women's conferences and when I do the women's conferences, they sing at the top of their lungs. I do a lot of men's conferences and when I do men's conferences and, the men sing to the top of their lungs. If I get men and women in the same room, nobody sings. I don't know why but it's the weirdest thing. Here's the thing – just sing. Sing loud. And if you don't know the song, don't worry about it. No need for an anonymous letter. The song is only four minutes; you'll get over and it will be fine. There might be another song that you like even more coming up after that. And, yes, there's a balance between teaching new songs, because we should sing new songs to the Lord. And also wrapping our arms around the great traditional hymns of faith and a lot of the older songs. So, there's a balance in there that we have to find because there are people in every congregation from eight to eighty years old and we have a lot of history. But in this worship revolution that we're in, with millions and millions of songs at our disposal, our job as worship leaders is to somehow engage into the presence of God. And when that happens, let them know. Send them a note, come up and give them a big ole hug and say man... sometimes it's not even about the notes. Sometimes it just like *man that smile. I love the color of your guitar*, whatever it might be. Just give them a note and a word of encouragement to help them know that what we're doing is not just playing notes and songs. But what we're doing is actually the most important thing we could possibly ever do in our lifetime, engaging the people of God in the presence of God. And by the way, it's the only thing we're going to do for eternity. So, I tell my church at home all the time, "Look if you don't like worship now, you're in trouble cause heaven is going to be one honking long worship service. So, learn to enjoy it and part of that enjoying it is to let the people up here, every once in a while, know how much you appreciate all their hard work.

And by the way, that doesn't just include these people. You see these guys sitting behind these cameras and those guys behind those computers and that little girl up there behind that computer named Katie... All of them. All of them are as much of an integral part of this worship experience as anybody else. So, if you see a guy walking around in a black tee shirt that looks like he does tech stuff, give him a high five and say, "Hey, I appreciate you."