We are today going to finish our two part series entitled “The Beauty of Worship.” Before we stand for the text, let me just quickly review part one. Remember I am using the word beauty as an acrostic and so last week we looked at the letters B, E and A. The B was big picture. We want to remember that worship is source and summit of our Christian life. The E was enter as one. We want to remember that my worship is second to our worship. And then the A was add nothing, which is the gospel should be the only offense in our worship. I trust that you have had an opportunity to reflect upon those things, meditate on them, pray through them and search out the Scriptures as Berea Christians would to see if these things be true.

So please stand and we will continue today. But we want to first honor God’s Word. They key text is Psalm 96:9. We will read it together even though, as I said last week, I am not going not exegete this particular verse. Let us read this together now. It is there on your projected for you.

“Oh, worship the LORD in the beauty of holiness! Tremble before Him, all the earth.”

Let us pray.

And now, may the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts be acceptable in thy sight, oh Lord, our rock, our kinsman redeemer. And we say together Amen.

You may be seated.

So last week I opened with an illustration about the background programs that are running on a computer at any given time and we hopefully recall from that that even though you may not be aware of these programs, what they are doing, they are there and not to have them would cause considerable problems for your computer.

Well, likewise, in the context of any gathered worship serviced, there are certain things happening in the background that are essential to have some awareness of it at all possible, even if you are not consciously aware of each of these individual points. There
is surely in your mind and in your heart a recognition that there are things happening behind the scenes in worship. And we want to, in this series, again, emphasize what those are and recognize that without them it is safe to say our worship will devolve into something less than honorable to God and if it is not honoring God our worship is not good for us. Your soul does not receive nurture and transformation from worship that is less than biblical. Your soul will receive deprivation and mutation in a bad way if you consistently participate in less than biblical worship. So there is a lot at stake in considering what these background programs are. Can you say amen to that? Amen.

All right. So let’s begin with the U in our acrostic in the word beauty. The U is understand spiritual formation. Say that with me. Understand spiritual formation. The notion of spiritual formation is this. From the time someone becomes a part of the body of Christ until they leave this physical life, there is a process by which they are made more and more into the image and likeness of their Savior. They are formed spiritually. No one starts mature. We become mature. Spirituality is something you grow into over time. Well, if worship is the central event of the Christian life, the source and summer—and it is—then it makes sense that our spiritual formation is intimately tied to worship. If we come to worship, however, and don’t acknowledge that we are being formed, we may not understand why certain things happen and certain things don’t happen.

Let me give you a way to think about this. And it has to do with the way we worship and what we believe. And here is the idea. Our beliefs are reflected in our worship and our worship shapes our beliefs. So let’s take the first part of that and consider it. Our beliefs are reflected in our worship.

Anyone visiting any Christian church at any time during the time of worship should be able to discern, based on the way they worship, that is, in terms of the things they do, the things they say, the things they see, the events that occur, anyone should be able to look at a Christian church and say, “Those are Christians.” How do I know that? Because I watched them worship.

And you should be able to understand a little bit, although not everything, a little bit about what people believe in a given congregation by the way they worship. And that is why I said our beliefs are reflected in our worship. Most of us don’t have any problem with that notion. You are singing about Jesus. You are singing with the angels, holy, holy, holy. You are talking about casting crowns before him, et cetera. And you get that. Well, when I say that, I am talking about what I believe which is Jesus, ok? So most of the time people don’t have any issue with our beliefs are reflected in our worship. The latter half of the sentence, however, is where we run into trouble. We don’t often realize that our worship shapes our beliefs.

In the ancient church there was a phrase that came out of a controversy—and this is just a little church history lesson for you—between Saint Augustine and his followers and what was considered at the time the arch heretic in the church Pelagius and his followers. And it was basically about can man save himself or not. And that is a huge implication of
a pretty significant historical event. So you will just have to let me paint with a board brush for a minute.

Now Saint Augustine and Pelagius were going at each other. Pelagius was saying man is capable of saving himself. Augustine was saying, wrong, wrong, and wrong. We must have salvation. So their followers came to a point of understanding what has been the church’s teaching on this, because Pelagius and his followers were saying, “This is what the church teaches.” And Augustine was saying, “This is never what the Church has taught.”

So what did they do? They came up with this phrase and they went to a worship service and evaluated it. They said *lex orandi, lex credendi*, which means the law of prayer or worship is the law of belief. In other words, if we can show you in our worship that we believe something, then you must accept that is our belief, because our worship expresses our belief and our belief is shaped by our worship. And so what they did is they went back to the place in the worship service appealing all the way back to Saint Paul where he said, “I want the men to pray for their leaders, that they would be saved. And they said, “If Saint Paul tells us in our worship service to pray for our leaders to be saved, we must believe we can’t save ourselves.

Now we all say, well, yeah. That was a huge issue in the early Church. And it is interesting. Consider what I just said. It is interesting that the way they settled the issue in terms of what do we believe, is they said, “Show me your order of worship.” And if I can show you in your order of worship what you are doing, I will tell you what you believe and I will tell you what you will believe if you continue to worship that way. Ok? Because our beliefs are reflected in our worship and our worship reflects and shapes our belief.

So what does this mean? Well, it means this. If you have a less than robust and healthy worship service that you consistently participate in week in and week out, what do you become? A less than healthy and robust Christian, because the way you worship will shape how you believe. If your worship, for example, is filled with songs about God but not songs to God—and that is really one of the differences between hymns in some instances and choruses. Hymns sometimes tend to be about God and choruses sometimes, many times tend to be to God. If all you have are hymns about God, over time you start to perceive God as distant, you start to perceive God as more of an idea than a person. And you start talking about I believe that instead of I believe in. Likewise if all you have are worship choruses, where you consistently emphasize the immanence of God, that he is right with us and you are constantly reflecting on your direct communication with him and it is almost as though he is sitting next to you and I don’t mean anything disparaging by saying that, but if intimacy is such a focus and you forget the holiness of God and you forget that he is transcendent, he is beyond us, then what you end up over here is Jesus is my buddy, but he sure isn’t my Lord. It is about balance.

So you can see the content of your songs will shape what you believe about God. You
have to have both. You have to have songs about God. You have to have songs to God. You have to have prayers that reflect who he is and you have to have prayers that ask him to do something because of who he is and so on and so forth. And it is hard to maintain a balance perfectly. But if you miss the balance you will absolutely start to believe the wrong things. And when you start to believe the wrong things it is a vicious cycle. As you believe the wrong things your worship then starts to be mutated by wrong belief. And then the wrong belief shows up in your worship and it reinforces the wrong things in your belief. And pretty soon you have so far left the mark that no one can really discern what you are doing in your worship service from what non Christians do in a rally or other instances.

Now that is obviously the worst case scenario. And there is no chance, I don’t believe, that that is happening here. But, beloved, we must understand that spiritual formation is occurring in worship and our worship is a reflection of what we believe and what we believe will be shaped by our worship. Let me give you one example from Israel’s history.

You have heard of:

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You probably don’t say it like that. You have heard:

“Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one!”

Jesus used that as the summary of the 10 Commandments. He said, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind and strength and you shall love your neighbor as yourself.” That phrase was a required part of worship in Israel. And so if you are a child growing up in that Jewish culture, day in and day out as you gather with family as you gather at synagogue, as you go to temple, you hear this

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The Lord our God, the Lord is one. And you may not know what that means when you first hear it. But by the time you come to the age of accountability, to a bar mitzvah age where you become a son or a daughter of the law, you have a deep abiding conviction that there is one true God and he is Israel’s God and we are to love him and to love others. How did you get that conviction? You got that conviction by worshipping in the right way. Does that make sense?

So worship is absolutely essential to how we are formed spiritually. And I will say this as I transition to the next point. If you have a sense that your soul is shriveling, if you have a sense that your soul is malnourished, if you find a group of believers who struggle to ever move to any real level of maturity it is directly connected to their worship. It will never be separated from their worship.

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2 Deuteronomy 6:4.
Now that isn’t the only thing you do to become mature in form, but it is the primary thing you do. So U, understand spiritual formation.

T, tradition matters. Say that with me. Tradition matters. What do I mean by that? Well, there is good tradition and there is bad tradition. You have heard this talked about and Scripture commands us to embrace good tradition and it forbids us from embracing bad tradition. What is good tradition? Good tradition is tradition that is consistent with Scripture? Right? And it is helpful for the Church’s current expression. Bad tradition is not consistent with Scripture and it is not helpful.

Let me give you a real practical example and then we are going not look at a couple of instances in Scripture or one instance in Scripture. It is absolutely true that in the early Church when... and I am talking post apostolic era, so the last apostle has passed and you find the house churches that existed in the Roman Empire and you see how that they would gather. It is absolutely true that the tradition quickly developed that the teacher, in that case the one that they would refer to as the bishop or the overseer would have a teaching moment where he would sit in a chair and the people would stand around him and listen to the teaching and then many times they would move to another room and literally sit at a table to partake of the Lord’s supper. And then there would probably be a central collection location where people would after the service drop off those things that they couldn’t necessarily put into the regular offering, food, animals for the minister to eat and so on, literally. Ok?

That tradition is consistent with scripture. It is not a good tradition for us to try to embrace today. We don’t want to set a chair right out here in the middle and try to have everyone sit around whoever is teaching and it would be wholly impractical and very odd if when it came time for the Lord’s supper we all got up and went and sat at tables in the fellowship hall. There is nothing unbiblical about that tradition. It is just not necessarily helpful for this church’s current expression.

And so do you understand? You want to embrace tradition that is consistent with Scripture and tradition is just... what has the Holy Spirit been doing for 2000 years? Because it didn’t stop when the last apostle died. He didn’t stop working.

You want to embrace good tradition, but you have to stay just because it was new in AD 90 it might not work in 1920 or whatever the case may be. I know we are not in the year 1920, by the way, all right? Likewise, it is a bad idea just to say, “Well, because the Church did it we are going to do it.” This is the problem that many of my reformed brothers and sisters have. They look at church history as having climax at the Protestant Reformation and all they want to do is live in that moment.

I am so glad I am married to Amy. I am so glad that we tied the knot, as it were. But I am not trying to relive my wedding day every day. Nor is she. We have 17 years of maturity together now. And it would be very odd if every time we got together she put on the white dress and I put on the tux and we tried to go to Energy Baptist Church and
stand at the front again. That was right for the moment. We have moved on. And so we must look at these moments in Church history and say what was good and right then surely has application today, but we are not trying to reinvent that every time we gather.

And my reformed friends aren’t the only ones who struggle with that, but it is pretty obvious sometimes in those circles. And those who hear this will absolutely crucify me over saying that. Oh, well. That is just the way it goes, right?

So what we want to do is we want to remember that tradition matters. Let me take you to a passage in 1 Corinthians 14 where Paul touches on this. We have been in 1 Corinthians 14 quite a bit this morning. If you were here for Sunday school you remember we tried to dodge all the hard verses, but I couldn’t. I got called on. 1 Corinthians 14:36.

Paul here is dealing with a church that is struggling to avoid a tsunami of worship problems. And there are a lot of reasons for that. We don’t want to judge them too harshly. We don’t have their circumstances, but the bottom line is Paul finally had to put his foot down and say, “Here is the deal. You can do this. You can’t do that and here is why.” And he comes to this one particular point in verse 36 right on the heels of saying the women should keep silent in the churches and if they want to learn something they need to ask their husbands at home. And the point there is not that women can’t ever say anything in worship or you wouldn’t have been able to just sing with us, ladies, because that was saying something, right? It is broader than that. I don’t have time to nuance it, but it is broader than that. But notice what he says in 36.

“Or did the word of God come originally from you? Or was it you only that it reached?”

Paul is basically saying this. have you forgotten that there were people doing this before you even thought about doing it? And have you absolutely concluded that you are here to reinvent the wheel because none of the wheels before you were round enough? That is what he is saying to eh Corinthians. That is what is known as just wanting to innovate for the sake of innovation. That is what is known as absolutely having Church history amnesia and forgetting where you came from.

See, the issue of tradition touches on this, because I if embrace good tradition and I say, “What has the Spirit been doing in the Church for 2000 years?” Then I have to say, “I might need to just keep doing something that someone didn’t... that I didn’t think of that someone else thought of.” I might just have to say, “Well, those older folks were right, or, well, that church actually was doing pretty well.”

Sometimes, however, we confuse two things. We confuse a sense of spirit’s purpose with our desire to innovate and get credit for something.

Let me say it again in using the wheel analogy. The Holy Spirit is not trying to teach you to make a round wheel. They have already been made. He is trying to get you to just roll on with him. When you come to tradition, you must humble yourself and say, “God, you

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3 1 Corinthians 14:36.
didn’t start speaking when I got saved. You have been speaking. There is a conversation that is so much bigger than me. Help me to humbly enter into it and learn from it so that I am not constantly trying to innovate in my worship.”

That is why Paul says, “What? Do you think it just started now with you? Come on.”

By definition, and some of you have heard this in maybe less than a charitable way, so I want to put some charitable nuance to it. My definition of contemporary means what is happening now. You understand that, right? Ok. Well, lets just go through that. Contemporary is what is going on right at this moment. You are my contemporaries in this room. Our contemporary culture is what is happening in 2012. If I go back 40 years, is that contemporary? No, that was contemporary 40 years ago. So in 1972, 40 years ago there was something that was contemporary then. If I go forward from 72 to 92 and I say, “I want to do what was going on in 92,” is that contemporary? No, that is 20 years old. Contemporary, by definition, changes as the clock ticks. So here is the caution that I would say. We must value what is contemporary because the Spirit continues to speak to the Church today. And we are making tradition that the Church in 100 years will need to consider. The Spirit absolutely continues to speak today. But if we are simply saying I want to be contemporary, then every day everything must, by definition change, because tomorrow doesn’t look like today necessarily and two weeks from now won’t look like tomorrow. So contemporary has to be nuanced with an anchor that holds us in the past on some level, not sinks us, connects us. It is not either you are contemporary or you have respect for tradition. It is both and. And we must embrace that because, as I said, tradition matters. We never want to be guilty of innovating for the sake of innovation.

Ok, so we have come to the Y and you may be saying, “Why is he even teaching this?” That is not what Y stands for. I guarantee you after you hear this Y some of you are going to conclude that like the Grinch, I have finally found a heart. You are. You are going to say, “Wow, there is hope for him.”

Y is year for encounter. Say that with me. Yearn for encounter. Her is basically what I am getting at. When you get up on Sunday and you know you are coming to worship, you must bear in mind that you are meeting with the thrice holy God. And you must expect that he intends to meet with you. And he is absolutely going to do something for you, with you and through you in that worship service. You will encounter God in biblical worship and you must yearn for that, which means you must also accept that there are some things that your type A personality just cannot plan for and control.

Some of you don’t know what type A is and you just think being out of control and flying by the sweat of your pants is normal. Well, from where I stand it is not. However, I may have the issue and I am willing to admit that. We must cultivate a desire for an encounter with God when we think about our worship.

Let me walk through this in light of John four. First go to John four. Jesus is talking to the Samaritan woman who later helps him lead her entire town to the Lord. I think that is a pretty good evangelistic conversation he was having there. John chapter four. In verses
23 and 24 there are some pretty powerful things that remind us that God is about encountering us in our worship. John four verse 23.

But the hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth; for the Father is seeking such to worship Him. God is Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth.4

Listen again to the end of verse 23.

“...the Father is seeking such to worship Him.”5

In light of my point that we are to yearn for encounter, here is what that looks like. We get up on Sunday and we want to go meet with God. And like God coming to Adam and Eve in the spirit of the day in the garden, God also wants to meet with us. And just like Adam and Eve we can run and hide and not have the encounter.

I am absolutely convinced—and you may disagree with this—had Adam and Eve entered faithfully into that first worship service and not let the serpent enter and tell them what to do, God would have given them to eat of the tree of life, because God wants to give eternal life to us. And later he would have given them to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

Adam and Eve refused to wait on God. They went expecting to tell him what to do, not to encounter him as he came to them and everybody else has paid the price for that. We live in a fallen world because of that worship moment. Do you think worship is not important? The fall occurs in a context of worship.

So we must year for an encounter because John is telling us here in the words of Jesus, God is seeking us in worship.

Now look again at another passage, 1 Corinthians 14:39 that emphasizes this in a little different way. Again, in 1 Corinthians 12, 13 and 14 Paul is teaching about the spiritual gifts and in this particular context there are a couple of hotly contested spiritual gifts going on in Corinth, prophecy and tongues. Because when people were prophesying and tongues were given with interpretation it was an amazing experience for the Church with God. When it was abused, it was an amazing problem for the Church. But everyone at Corinth went to worship knowing we are going to sing today. We are going to have the Word today. We are going to fellowship around the Lord’s table today. And somebody is going to prophecy and somebody is going to speak in tongues with interpretation and when the tongues and the interpretation come, look out. God is going to do something amazing.

They were so afraid of that, some of them, that they didn’t want anybody to do it. And

5 John 4:23.
others were so inconsiderate of those around them that they thought that was all that matters. So Paul is slugging it out in these chapters to say you just have to be balance. That is why this verse, 14:39 is so important. He is summing up his entire worship discussion. And listen to what he says.

“Therefore, brethren, desire earnestly to prophesy, and do not forbid to speak with tongues.”

I don’t want you to focus so much on the spiritual gifts, right there, for just a moment. Don’t focus on prophecy and tongues. But here prophecy and tongues as moments of encounter. People prophesied and somebody’s heart was laid bare and they got saved. Tongues were spoken with an interpretation and the room changed. So Paul is saying to the Corinthians, “I want you to earnestly desire to encounter God when you come to worship. You just have to do it decently and in order,” is how he finishes it up in verse 40.

So Jesus is saying the Father is seeking us to worship him. Paul is saying earnestly desire an encounter with God.

When you gather for worship, is it your yearning to have an encounter with God? Now, you have to balance your own need for an encounter, which is real and legitimate. You have to balance your own need for an encounter with the fact that you are doing this in a corporate context. So what really needs to happen is we need to yearn for God to come and be in our midst and fellowship in Christ and, God, I am going to be there so that I will have an encounter with you as well. But our first concern is, God, come to this body and do what is good for this body gathered and individually I will receive blessing for that.

I have had a consistent yearning in my soul for more from the Lord. I have had a consistent yearning in my heart to see God do greater things than just make me smarter. And you should yearn for that as well. I don’t know exactly what that looks like long term, but do know this. When we gather for worship, the big picture is this is what matters the most and, therefore, I yearn to encounter the one who matters the most.

You, beloved, now have an obligation, because you are accountable for these messages and you can go listen to them online and reflect on them.

You are saying, “T. J., you want me to go listen to you again?”

That is exactly what I am saying. Go listen online. Reflect on them again and begin to ask God to help you embrace the beauty of worship and ask him to make you beautiful and to keep you from making worship ugly and to know that it is beauty that transforms us, because Christ is the beautiful one. He is all together lovely one.

6 1 Corinthians 14:39.
Now we are going to close with a prayer and after the prayer I do have an invitation that I am going to extend. It is not related to any singing. So worship team, it is all good. This is something that has been stirring in my heart since early in the worship service and so let’s go ahead and pray and then I am going to come down and we are going to have a moment for invitation for particular things.

Father, we thank you for the day and the opportunity to finish this two part message. We pray that you would help us to embrace what is going on in the background of worship, the beauty of worship and particular today help us to understand spiritual formation to know that traditional matters and to yearn of an encounter with you. These things we pray together in the name of Jesus and we say amen.