

# CHAPTER THREE

## What Do We Say?

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### EXERCISE (allow 15 minutes for this exercise)

1. Using just one sentence, write down on the first line something either from this study or from your own church's worship service that resonates most strongly with you.
2. Using just one sentence write down on the second line why this resonates with you.
3. Reword your statement into the form of a beatitude or blessing, as when Jesus said, "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." If you wrote on the first line, "I like singing the Gloria Patri each week," and for the explanation you said, "Because I feel connected to Christians all over the world singing that song," now format those two thoughts into the beatitude, "Blessed is the congregation that sings the Gloria Patri for they will truly experience what it means to worship with Christians around the world."
4. Now, trade books with the person sitting next to you and read one another's blessings, speak your blessings to each other, and take your pens and pencils and edit each other's blessings for clarity. If your partner has said something you don't understand, talk through it until you do.

### Discussion

#### Five Ways of Communicating with One Another about Worship

Here are five ways we communicate information to each other: We assert claims, we appeal to rules, we use reason, we speak from personal conviction, and we confer blessings. These ways of communicating information in general can be applied to communicating about worship in particular. But before we focus on worship, let's illustrate these ways of communicating by considering the seemingly simple question, "Who is Jesus Christ and how can I be saved?" Here is

how each approach might answer.

#### 1. Assertion

First, we could answer by making a statement of fact or an assertion. For example, if someone asks you, "Who is Jesus Christ and how can I be saved?" you could read from the Apostles' Creed, a set of statements about who God is. You could answer, "Jesus Christ was the only Son of God our Lord, he was conceived by the Holy Ghost, born of the Virgin Mary, he suffered under Pontius Pilate, and through him we have forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting." This way of communicating brings clarity, order, and understanding.

#### 2. Rules

A second way we could answer the question is by pointing to governing rules with demonstrable consequences. You are asked, "Who is Jesus Christ and how are we saved?" You could answer, "Well, the rule is that if you believe in the Lord Jesus, the Son of God, you will be saved. And if you don't believe, then you will spend eternity in Hell. That's how it works." Communicating by pointing to rules acknowledges that what we do matters and there are consequences to our actions.

#### 3. Reason

Some of us would prefer to answer by reasoning things out using rational arguments and appealing to universal ideals. A neighbor asks you the question, "How can a person be saved by Jesus?" You decide to say, "Well, we all know that we do wrong things sometimes. If we believe that God is holy and above all things, then there are consequences to these sins. So God decided to save us by coming to earth as a man, living a perfect life, and taking the consequences of our sins on himself. And we can choose to accept his gift and be saved." Reason allows us to find common ground using the language of our culture and of unbelievers.

### 4. *Personal Conviction*

Another way to communicate an answer is to speak out of our own personal experience and convictions. A friend asks, "Who is Jesus Christ and how can I be saved?" and you give the answer, "You know, I don't know much about creeds, about theology, or about apologetics, but I know that I was lost and now I'm found. When Jesus came into my life he changed me." The power of these statements of personal conviction demonstrates that God is at work through emotions and experiences.

### 5. *Blessing*

Finally, we could answer the question by bestowing an unconditional blessing or invoking God's favor on the questioner. Someone says, "What does it mean to be saved by Jesus?" and you answer, "It means that Jesus loves you and will never turn you away because he has called you his child." Or you could answer with John 3:16, "That God so loves you, that God so loved the world, that he gave his only son and whoever believes in him will have eternal life." Bestowing an unconditional blessing on someone, a forgotten but important art, acknowledges that that person's flourishing matters.

## Why Talk about Talking?

### 1. *Growing in Wisdom*

We need to learn about communication styles as we enter into these conversations about worship because we want to learn the wisdom to know when and why to use the appropriate way of communicating.

## ILLUSTRATION

Imagine your beloved niece comes to you and says, "I don't know if I'm a Christian or not." As you look through the various ways of replying to this statement, wisdom seems to say that answering using rules—"Believe in Jesus and you'll be saved; if you don't, you'll go to Hell"—may be a correct way to answer, but would be more hurtful than helpful. Instead, wisdom would be to speak to your niece using your personal experience or with a blessing or even reasoning with her, rather than confronting her with ultimatums.

Jesus used all of these ways of communicating to convey truth in different contexts. When he spoke to the moneychangers in the temple, he did not use reasoning, he used a rule: "You will

not turn my Father's house into a den of thieves." Or in Luke 8, when the woman admitted to touching Jesus' cloak to be healed, Jesus didn't use assertion and say, "I'm not sure you really understand how this whole healing thing works." He spoke a blessing; he said, "*Daughter, your faith has made you well.*"

## DISCUSSION QUESTION

Can I think of a time when I communicated with someone in church or in another context using a style of communication that was inappropriate to the setting?

### 2. *Learning to Love*

It is also important to understand how to communicate well because Jesus calls us to move toward one another in love, not to wait for others to move toward us. Each of us has certain ways of communicating that make us most comfortable. And we have a tendency to become suspicious of people who don't communicate in those same ways. As we continue our study of worship, we need to understand this about one another and ourselves so that we don't hurt each other as we expose these deep desires of our hearts.

## ILLUSTRATION

In many conversations about worship—on committees or around the dinner table—people can look like they are communicating because they are talking, but they are not listening to one another. One person might be speaking rule language, saying, "The early church used to sing psalms a capella and if we don't get back to our roots, we are going to be swept away by our culture." She says it over and over again, sticking with the rule. Next to her, her brother might be speaking with personal conviction: "I am so convicted that our teenagers need to have more opportunities to walk forward and make a profession of faith like I did when I was in high school." He simply repeats his personal conviction regardless of others' experiences and convictions. Next to him, his sister may argue using reason: "If we can just do an even number of hymns and praise songs or maybe break up our church into a traditional service and contemporary service, we might have an acceptable compromise." Everyone is using his or her favorite way of communicating, and each

is waiting to be heard by the others in the group. But no one is using wisdom in the choice of how to communicate, nor are they moving toward the others in love. When our brother speaks with conviction, we need to take his personal conviction seriously. When our sister speaks about history with rule language, we need to take her seriously. We need to learn to listen before we speak, and when we speak, we should speak with wisdom and love.

### DISCUSSION QUESTION

Which style of communication do I use most often?

love, and we know the way to get there is through humility. One way to humble ourselves before one another is to take each other's stories seriously. Do any of these statements sound familiar to you? "I'm not interested in your personal feelings about this; I'm interested in what's best for our church." Or, "I don't want to have a philosophical debate about this; I know what I feel." Underneath these statements is the hidden message: "I don't really care about your story." Until we experience the humility of laying down our lives for one another, we will never experience the freedom of bowing down before God in true worship.

## Lesson

The posture for Christian worship is the posture of humility. (Philippians 2:5-11)

This passage shows us the humility of Christ and encourages us to have the same attitude. We know we want to communicate with each other in

## Exercise

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## Discussion Question

1. Can I think of a time when I communicated with someone in church or in another context using a style of communication that was inappropriate to the setting?
2. Which style of communication do I use most often?

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## Lesson

The posture for Christian worship is the posture of humility. (Philippians 2:5-11)  
What are obstacles in our path to applying this lesson?

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Our Good Shepherd,  
Let not pride swell in our hearts. Help us to see ourselves with Your sight. Humble our hearts before You, and replenish us with the choice gifts of Your Spirit. When we are tempted to thinking too highly of our own wisdom, grant us the wisdom to see the power of our spiritual enemy, which is pride. Keep us humble, meek, and lowly, we pray. Amen.