

**MAPPING FBC DNA:
GOD-CENTERED WORSHIP**

Psalm 63:1-8

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January 20, 2019

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Rick Warren says that every six weeks, a pastor needs to articulate a congregation's vision and mission. We are at the start of a new year, so this is a good time for us to think about who we are and where we're going. If you're new here, what a perfect time to see if this is where God wants you to serve; if you are a veteran, what a great time to clarify, motivate and recommit.

Remember those Sunday afternoons, early in our dreaming and visioning process, as approximately 300 of us visited around tables in the fellowship hall? The very first thing we did was identify those characteristics deeply imbedded in our church's DNA, what we considered central to our mission: God-centered worship, life-changing faith, authentic relationships, community transformation and global missions.

The first thing we identified was God-centered worship. Notice please: God-centered worship. We love God. A pastor once stood at the door following his sermon. A church member went out and said, "I want you to know I didn't get a single thing out of worship." The pastor replied, "Oh, good. I'm thankful. It wasn't directed at you!" It was the Danish theologian Soren Kierkegaard who gave us the model of worship. Instead of thinking of worship in which pastor and choir are the actors and the congregation is the audience, consider that we are all the actors and God is the audience.

William Willimon, always provocative, has written, "We need to stop worrying about ourselves as we worship—whether what we do looks good or is suitably relevant or makes sense or makes us feel comfortable—and let God start remaking us, and start enjoying the presence of the One whose grace reduces such worries to delightful irrelevance" [*The Bible: A Sustaining Presence in Worship*, p. 33]. It's really blasphemy, isn't it? Thinking that God is supposed to jump through our hoops on our schedule. "Come on, God, you've got exactly 60 minutes."

Psalm 63 opens with personal intimacy, the personal pronoun "my" God. Like a parched land, the soul longs for God. Have you ever watched livestock during a drought? They go nearly crazy when they sniff water. Water is a basic human need. And so is God. So is worship. We are incurably religious. Isn't ironic that our search for meaning and value would take away from God? The word "worship" has its derivation in an old word, "worth-ship." We discover our value not in focusing on it but on focusing on God.

The chapter is full of rich worship themes. There is a rhythm to worship. It's corporate (v. 2, in the sanctuary) and private (v. 6, at home, in bed). And each strengthens the other. There is a physicality to worship, lifting hands (v. 4). All parts of the mind and body are engaged. As we discussed our DNA, we discovered around the tables that we have different worship styles and we wanted freedom to worship as we are comfortable. There is no one style that honors God. Remember the story about the man who was visiting a church while traveling on business? When

he liked something in worship, he shouted, "Amen; preach it; hallelujah!" An usher came down to where the man sat and asked him to remain quiet, to which the guest replied, "I can't help it. I've got the Holy Spirit." The usher replied, "I don't care. You didn't get it here. Be quiet!"

But while we're not afraid of emotions, when our worship is truly God-centered, no worship should be about manipulation. People will occasionally say to me, "I'm sorry no one 'came forward' during the altar call." No! It's not about us. God is the center. God works in hearts. Many of us were raised in a revival culture. We know about those tactics to scare and guilt people into walking the aisle. Our church's DNA is different. We believe when God is the center of worship, you can let go of that approach. As Tony Campolo once said, "I'm sick and tired of people playing one thousand verses of 'Just As I Am' and come down just as they are and go out just as they were."

In v. 5, the image shifts from thirst to hunger, from water to food. How God satisfies the deep longings of our souls. Yes, God is the center of worship. But that doesn't mean that worship has no benefit to us. When we turn our eyes to Him, He turns his eyes on us. Notice the beautiful, peace picture of comfort, security and care the psalmist feels (vv. 7-8). Most scholars believe that this psalm was written by David when Saul was trying to kill him (1 Sam. 23:14, 24:1). When we make God the center of our worship, we discover the One who dries our tears, who also suffered, who knows every heartache. Note the imagery in v. 7. In worship, we experience the sheltering shadow of God's wings. We hear God call out, "These are my babies. Leave them alone. These are mine. I love them." We love God...we live in hope and offer hope, in Christ.