

WGUMC July 17, 2016 "The How of Worship"

Part One: Psalm 90:1-2

Lord, you have been our dwelling place  
in all generations.

Before the mountains were brought forth,  
or ever you had formed the earth and the world,  
from everlasting to everlasting you are God.

Marcia McFee describes four "home patterns" for people who gather for worship. Home patterns are habitual ways of approaching life in general and encountering the holy in particular, and these patterns have a huge impact on the ways in which we worship God. Now no one of the four is the definitive pattern. Each pattern gives us a true, but incomplete, perspective on God. So in order to worship God more fully and inclusively, we need to pay attention to all four of these patterns.

One of the "home patterns" which we might call habits of the heart is that of the Shaper. Shapers like "organized religion." They want things to be done "decently and in good

order," as the Presbyterians like to say. Shapers don't go clamoring for change and often view it with hesitation, even suspicion. They prefer to stand on a firm foundation, seek assurance from the rock of their salvation, and look upon the familiar forms of worship as a mighty fortress to safeguard their faith.

Shapers believe in a God who has been their dwelling place in all generations, a God who is unchanging, unhasting, and everlasting, who is the same yesterday, today and tomorrow. And the time-tested traditions of the church remind them of God's steadfast love for them down through the ages. Shapers like pastors who preach from the pulpit, choir members who wear robes, children who sit quiet in the pews, and they will sing with gusto: O God, our help in ages past, our hope for years to come, our shelter from the stormy blast, and our eternal home." [#117, vv 1-3]

## Part Two: Psalm 146:5-9

Happy are those whose help is the God of Jacob,  
whose hope is in the LORD their God,  
who made heaven and earth,  
the sea, and all that is in them;  
who keeps faith forever;  
who executes justice for the oppressed;  
who gives food to the hungry.

The LORD sets the prisoners free;  
the LORD opens the eyes of the blind.  
The LORD lifts up those who are bowed down;  
the LORD loves the righteous.  
The LORD watches over the strangers;  
he upholds the orphan and the widow,  
but the way of the wicked he brings to ruin.

A second home pattern belongs to those who are always on the move, always on task, always going and getting somewhere. They are the "Thrusters." They are men and women of action. They have goals and achieve them. They make lists and check them. And they never let up. Thrusters don't have faith, they do faith.

For Thrusters, God is a verb. Like all those verbs in Psalm 146: God makes, keeps, executes, gives, sets, opens, lifts,

loves, watches, upholds. Ever active, God transforms the world and everything in it. And Thrusters think of worship as a pep rally to go and do likewise. They won't complain if the pastor preaches a sermon that wades into politics. They want to be spurred into making some kind of public response.

Worship services for thrusters are full of energy and movement and color and drama and typically end with a stirring call to action. They go out singing, "We are marching in the light of God." [#2235-b, "We Are Marching"]

### Part Three: John 3:7-8

Do not be astonished that I said to you, 'You must be born from above.' The wind blows where it chooses, and you hear the sound of it, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit."

Some, born of the Spirit and having lots of spirit, don't seem to worry too much about where they are coming from or where they are going. There are so many things to do, so many people to meet, so many connections to make. Marcia McFee calls these folks "Swingers" because they swing so easily from

one interest or activity or relationship to another. Swingers just can't seem to get enough of life or of love. They certainly can't get enough of other people. Faith, for them, is a very tangible, even touchy-feely reality and strength for the journey comes for them in community.

The God of the Swingers is Lord of the Dance of Life, a God who comes down and swoops them off their feet and is always taking them in some new direction, pointing out to them new possibilities, filling them with hope and opportunity. Swingers are always ready to party. It's hard to get them to sit still long enough to tell you about God, but just watch them move and learn something about the Spirit of God, because they are going to sing when the Spirit says, "Sing!" [#333 I'm Goin'a Sing When the Spirit Says Sing]

Part Four: Psalm 139:7-10, 13-14, 17-18

Where can I go from your spirit?  
Or where can I flee from your presence?  
If I ascend to heaven, you are there;  
if I make my bed in Sheol, you are there.

If I take the wings of the morning  
and settle at the farthest limits of the sea,  
even there your hand shall lead me,  
and your right hand shall hold me fast.

For it was you who formed my inward parts;  
you knit me together in my mother's womb.  
I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made.  
Wonderful are your works;  
that I know very well.

How weighty to me are your thoughts, O God!  
How vast is the sum of them!  
I try to count them—they are more than the sand;  
I come to the end—I am still with you.

Shapers. Thrusters. Swingers. That leaves the Hangers, the folks who come to church not to do or to connect, but just to be. Hangers are the "go with the flow" types that don't want or need a lot of external stimulation or interaction. There is a lot going on inside them, so they don't need a lot going on on the outside. They crave the meditative silence. The pregnant pause. They are drawn to the mystery. They want to be awed.

Hangers like to dive deep into the presence of God.

They'd take the wings of the morning and settle at the farthest

limits of the sea if that's where they could find a few alone moments with the Divine. Their God is like them: not doing so much as simply being. Hangers might think that if the others would just stop shaping and thrusting and swinging for once they might notice that surely the presence of the Lord is in this place. [#328 Surely the Presence]

**Response:**

Shapers, Thrusters, Swingers, Hangers. I suspect that you many of you can relate to all four of these home patterns, at least a little. But there is probably one or two that are your mainstays, your preferred modes of being in the world. The important thing to realize is that there are people of all four patterns in this church. These people have very different ways in which they encounter God, and so when they come to worship, they are looking for very different things.

Thrusters may not appreciate silent prayer, but Hangers do. Hangers may not feel the need to voice their prayers or

pass the peace but Swingers do. Swingers may not like the old hymns, but Shapers do. Shapers may not want to be challenged to change the world, but Thrusters do. The point is that no one finds meaning in every part of the worship service, but every part has meaning for someone. And our worship needs to be big enough and varied enough for everyone.

When we come to worship and find that there is something that doesn't speak to us, doesn't reveal God to us and may even annoy us, we have to remember that what is bothering us may very well be blessing the person sitting next to us. And who are we to take away that blessing?

As we go forward this fall in designing the How and deciding on the When and Where of worship, while holding fast to the all-important Why, we will be returning to this truth again and again: what is bothering us is probably blessing someone else.

For now, it would be helpful for us to know what the "home pattern" profile of this congregation is. What is your worship personality? I want you to fill out the slip of paper in your bulletin and then turn to your partner in the pew and share with them how you identify yourself. What is your home pattern or patterns? What does that say about how you like to worship God? After a few minutes, we'll let the music bring us back to prayer.