

What are you generally thinking about as you come to worship? My guess is that questions like these are near the top of the list: "Will we get there on time?" "I wonder what the special music will be?" "Will _____ be there?" "I wonder if I'll be able to sit with _____?" "I wonder what the sermon will be?" "I wonder whether the sermon will be interesting . . . or maybe even *helpful*?"

Those are all pretty normal questions, and I'd like to add some more questions to the list: "I wonder how God will speak to me through the service today?" "I wonder how my life will be different as a result of this hour?" **"I wonder what opportunities for ministry God will provide during this hour?"**

That last question may have been a bit of a surprise. I'd like to invite you to begin to consider the hour of worship as a ministry opportunity. I'd like to invite you to consider becoming a "player" in worship, not merely a "spectator." I'd like to ask you to become a giver, not just a receiver on Sunday mornings. Here's what I have in mind

What most people do when entering a worship space is to (1) head for their "reserved seats" or (2) look for friends to sit with. While both of these are normal behaviors quite common among humankind, I invite you to imagine what could happen if we began to think about the hour of worship as a real opportunity for ministry.



How might your own experience of worship become enhanced if you entered the worship space expectantly, making yourself available for God's Spirit to guide what you do next? For starters, you might try sitting in various areas of the sanctuary over several weeks, just to get the feel of the whole room. A number of perspectives are available, and you might discover something new!

Another approach might be to survey the room, looking for persons who appear to be sitting alone or for persons who might be guests. Approaching these folk, welcoming them, introducing yourself, and asking if you might sit with or near them could lead to lots of interesting outcomes. More than one guest has joined a congregation because an attentive member invited them to lunch after their first experience of worship.

Still another approach would be to ask yourself, "Who in this room might I be able to make welcome today?" "Who is here this morning whom has God brought for me to encourage?" The fact that a person has come to worship at all is the significant thing. He or she has come for some kind of spiritual purpose, and you might be the person whom God intends to advance that purpose. If you ask God for guidance, you might be surprised at the spiritual promptings that come. And I encourage you to ask for that guidance *every time you enter the room*.

If no particular guidance comes, my suggestion is that you choose an area of the room that is comfortable for you and then sit in that area most of the time. Although I know it runs counter to our normal behavior, I encourage you not to sit in the very same seat each week, even though you sit in the same area. There are several reasons for this. First, although

we don't intend to do it, if we sit in the same seat all the time, we frequently tend to become a little territorial about that seat, and if someone else happens to sit there (which will usually be a guest who doesn't know "the rules") we're likely to be so off balance that we may fail to be fully gracious to that guest, and we may become so distracted that our own experience of worship is diminished.

At the same time, there are significant advantages to sitting in the same general area of the room. Being regular in the same area provides the opportunity to meet all the other regulars and to develop relationships with them over time. Being regular in the same area also means that you can quickly recognize new faces and can provide appropriate welcome and encouragement for them, as described above.

One important part of the ministry I'm describing is to notice when persons are absent and to make contact with them to express care and friendship (Neville or I can usually provide contact info). If you're paying attention in this way, being a player rather than a spectator, you may actually be the first person to notice that someone has been missing for a week or two, and I would be grateful to be alerted to that awareness.

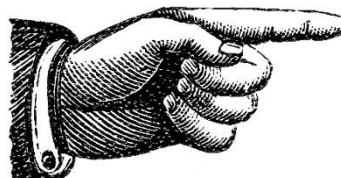
Then, when the service is concluded, the first persons out the door will nearly always be guests or persons who have been sitting alone. Giving just one hug or just one "howdy" to a friend in those first moments will result in missing the opportunity to speak a word of welcome or encouragement to someone who may badly need it on their way out the door. Friends will hang around and visit. Guests and burdened folk won't. Even if you don't actually sit with guests, if you position yourself near them as you sit down, you'll be in a much better position to speak to them later.

A term I like to use for such pro-active, pastoral worshipers is "**Sanctuary Shepherds.**" In order to experience the rewards inherent in such ministry, the only thing you have to do is to ask God to guide you each week as you enter the sanctuary. *Are you up for that?*

Dave



There's more . . .



- Sunday's L.O.V.E. Tea was as delightful as ever, and was the 10th annual such event. Our **L**adies **O**rganized for **V**olunteering and **E**ncouragement use this as a fund-raiser every year for college scholarships for our young people.



- L.O.V.E. has also provided a significant gift to help to underwrite the dozens and dozens of free meals we're providing to neighborhood children and youth on Wednesday nights. God is blessing us with LOTS of young people on Wednesdays, and if you'd also like to help with that ministry, just designate your gift for the "Wednesday Hosting Fund."

- Finally, our Deacons have begun a new ministry of being available at the St. John Prayer Chapel after worship for any persons who wish to have a listening ear or to have someone pray with them. The chapel is just to your left as you exit the sanctuary.

