

# The Art of Working While Worshiping

Jesus often bumped heads with the Pharisees, who had such a ridiculously harsh interpretation of the Sabbath that they accused Jesus of sin for the so-called crimes of healing on the Sabbath and plucking a few heads of grain while walking through a field. Jesus used common sense to refute the Pharisees, pointing out that there were several things that might seem like work, and yet were entirely appropriate to do on the Sabbath day; for example, providing water for animals (Luke 13:15) and rescuing a child from a well (Luke 14:5).

Another example Jesus used is found in Matthew 12:5, “Have you not read in the Law, that on the Sabbath the priests in the temple break the Sabbath and are innocent?” Jesus’ meaning in the context is very clear: the priests had to perform sweaty, messy work while conducting worship services for the rest of the nation. Outside the context of the tabernacle they would be breaking the Sabbath, but they obviously were excused because they were serving a higher purpose.

But this passage brings up another point. Though we no longer have a separate priesthood whose members collect the blood of animals and arrange hunks of meat to burn on the altar, and who don special clothing to enter the tabernacle to offer the incense and refill the golden lampstand, we do have men who are entrusted with certain responsibilities *during* the worship service. These men work so that everyone else can have a seamless, comfortable, reverent time of worship. And I can testify from experience that it is difficult to maintain an attitude of praise and thanksgiving when carrying out these duties.

I am thankful that God understands, and I hope he will excuse me for not being in the best frame of mind for worship because I am busy enabling others to worship. I have to confess that it is one of my greatest pleasures to slip in to another congregation for a gospel meeting or singing service and be able to sit and worship. It’s refreshing. Maybe this is why the priests and Levites rotated their tabernacle duties (Luke 1:8–9).

But at the same time (and here’s the real point of this lesson) let those of us who are called upon to facilitate worship do the best we can under the circumstances to worship God, too. Though God understands that our responsibilities are distracting, let’s not use that as justification to play

around.

Song leaders, though you are concentrating on pitch, time signature, rhythm, and tempo, try to devote just a little brain-space to making melody in your own heart. Practicing your songs ahead of time helps you to be expressive rather than methodical.

Ushers, though you spend half the service watching out the door for late-comers and visitors, try to hear what's going on inside the auditorium. Maybe keep a songbook with you, and bow your own head in prayer when you can. Just because you're not in a pew with people staring at you doesn't mean you should ignore the service and goof off with the other ushers.

Prayer leaders, though you are trying to formulate your prayer and remember all the sick people to mention, relax and remember that prayer is simple communication with God. If you can't devote yourself to worship while managing the list in your head, consider writing some things down to use as a reference while you pray. This way, your mind will not have to tread water until your moment comes.

Sound system operators, though from start to finish you have nests of knobs and wires to monitor, microphones to switch on and off, and tapes to manage, try as best you can to participate in what's going on. Do non-essential jobs like copying and labeling tapes after the worship service is over.

Lord's table servants, though you must pay attention to which rows got the trays and whether or not you need to check the nursery, try to pause at the back of the auditorium at the end for a few precious seconds, in order to meditate on the sacrifice of our Lord. In fact, except when absolutely necessary, all worship leaders should be able to set aside their notes and jobs to share as one in the body and blood of Jesus Christ (1 Cor. 10:16).

Preachers, though the words and illustrations you want to use are swarming in your mind, try to settle them down to worship God. Remember that He, not the congregation, is your main audience. Don't get in the habit of finishing your sermon in the half-hour before you are scheduled to take the podium. Spending that time in your pew reviewing your notes and shuffling your pages is not a good example to the rest of the congregation. A wise preacher once said to me, "if you don't know it by now, you aren't going to know it," and he was probably right. Likewise, have your handouts copied and organized long before worship services begin.

Treasurers, though you must count heads and stay late for counting the collection, don't start sorting the trays until after the services. Lord's Supper preparers, you too have a lengthy job of cleaning up messy trays, but it would be best to save the work for after the closing prayer.

For the same reasons of needing to "work while worshiping," let's all be understanding of parents with small children, who try their best not to disturb the service, but often must break their own concentration in prayer to correct a misbehaving child, or must walk out in the midst of the sermon. I am confident that God is completely understanding, and so should we be, too.

According to Matt. 12:5, God holds innocent the worship leaders for dealing with a measure of distraction that would not be appropriate for everyone. It's how we help everyone else to have the best worship service possible. But let's not abuse God's patience. —*John*