

Recovering from Me-and-Jesus Spirituality through Corporate Worship
Carl Park (carl.park@iws.edu)
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What is me-and-Jesus spirituality? That's what I am calling a hyper-individualized understanding of the Christian gospel (or the Story of God). It is pervasive in America. While the gospel does pertain to individuals in coherent ways, me-and-Jesus spirituality hyper-inflates the place of the individual and make a hyper-individualistic lens a normative lens, often understood as *the* Christian lens.

How We Got Here

- We rightly see elements of individual salvation through Christ. This is consistent with the New Testament, as well as with very old church traditions.
 - In Jesus' ministry narrated in the Gospels
 - In creeds and catechisms
- Enter Modernity/the Enlightenment/Aufklärung (late 1700s)
 - "Dare to think" and "Think for yourself" (Kant's "What is Enlightenment" [1784] and Paine's *The Age of Reason* [1794])
 - The individual becomes the ultimate authority, replacing God and king and clergy and lords
 - Today, we are still very Modern (even if we call it Postmodern or Post-postmodern): the primacy of the individual; no one can tell me what to do; I am my only judge; you do you; etc.
- Enter translations of the gospel that makes sense to Modern people—we have seen these for 250 years (and often made them *the* translations or "*the* gospel")

Me-and-Jesus Spirituality Lived Out

- Evangelism and salvation (above)
- Hope: we replace the hope of Jesus' return to make all things new with a sub- or not-Christian hope of my personal entrance into a heavenly after-life
- Missions to less-individualistic cultures with an individualistic version of the gospel
- Prayer
- How we read the Bible
- What we end up seeing in the Bible

- Piety and Christian practices, the main goal being “a transformed self, rather than a transformed world” (Greg Johnson, *From Morning Watch to Quiet Time*)
- “Discipleship”
- Ecclesiology
- Pneumatology

Me-and-Jesus Spirituality falls short of:

- The gospel, the story of God
- Biblical ecclesiology we have somehow ignored

Bad Consequences of Me-and-Jesus Spirituality

- Selfishness and self-centeredness (ripe for picking by prosperity preachers)
- Failure to live as part of a church; inability to receive guidance or rebuke from others, much less a church (ecclesiology)
- Inability to see and deal with and repent of sin at a corporate or institutional or societal level
- Ineffective evangelism to cultures and people who don't think as much in individualistic frameworks and use more group mindsets (including many Americans)
- A perversion of Jesus' teaching through Americanization: Jesus is committed to my individual rights and individual prosperity (Matthew 5? Philipians 2? 1 John on love?)
- Reductionism of biblical teaching about hope, mission, prayer, Scripture, church, the Holy Spirit, and so on

The Power of Worship to Combat or Ingrain Me-and-Jesus Spirituality

- *Lex orandi lex credenda*
- Worship forms us (Jaime Smith). Worship isn't just a container of theology; it's a generator of theology.

Worship in the Style of Me-and-Jesus

- Computer-lab-like encounter with God

- Me-and-Jesus hymnody
 - Exercise: name 5 songs your church sings a lot—do they encourage me-and-Jesus spirituality or corporate spirituality?
- Sermons and responses to sermon that are focused on individuals
- The Great Thanksgiving, celebrated individually
- Visual art that celebrates the individual (e.g., an image of one person praying or lifting hands by themselves)

Worship that is Corporate

- A truly corporate encounter with God, where all of us hear and say and feel the same things (cf. 1 Corinthians 12-14?)
- A corporate hymnody
 - Exercise: name 5 songs your church could sing more, to encourage a corporate spirituality and correct for me-and-Jesus spirituality
 - Exercise: edit or add a verse to these songs
 - “Build My Life”
 - “Goodness of God”
- Sermons addressed to a congregation, with congregational responses
- The Great Thanksgiving, together
- Visual art that celebrates the community (e.g., an image of groups praying or lifting hands)