

# INTRODUCTION TO CHRISTIAN WORSHIP

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# CONTENTS

<b>COURSE OVERVIEW</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>1. DEFINING WORSHIP</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>2. GOD AND THE WORSHIPPER</b>	<b>27</b>
<b>3. WORSHIP IN THE OLD TESTAMENT</b>	<b>43</b>
<b>4. WORSHIP IN THE NEW TESTAMENT</b>	<b>61</b>
<b>5. WORSHIP IN CHURCH HISTORY</b>	<b>81</b>
<b>6. MUSIC IN WORSHIP</b>	<b>95</b>
<b>7. SCRIPTURE AND PRAYER IN WORSHIP</b>	<b>119</b>
<b>8. PLANNING AND LEADING WORSHIP</b>	<b>145</b>
<b>9. OTHER QUESTIONS</b>	<b>169</b>
<b>10. A LIFESTYLE OF WORSHIP</b>	<b>191</b>
<b>APPENDIX A: OUTLINES FOR PLANNING WORSHIP SERVICES</b>	<b>202</b>
<b>APPENDIX B: SONG EVALUATION FORM</b>	<b>206</b>
<b>RECOMMENDED RESOURCES</b>	<b>207</b>
<b>RECORD OF ASSIGNMENTS</b>	<b>209</b>
<b>SCRIPTURES CITED</b>	<b>210</b>
<b>INDEX</b>	<b>212</b>



# COURSE OVERVIEW

This course introduces the basic principles of worship.

If studying as a group, take turns reading the material. You should stop periodically for any class discussion. As the class leader, you are responsible to keep discussion from wandering from the material being studied. It is helpful to have a time limit for each discussion period.

**Discussion questions** and **in-class activities** are indicated by arrow bullet points. Whenever you come to one of these, ask the question(s) that follows it, and let students discuss the answer. Try to make sure that all students in the class are involved in the discussion. If necessary, you can call on students by name.

Much **scripture** is used in the course. Passages that should be read aloud in class are also indicated by arrow bullet points. Please have students look up the verses and take turns reading them to the group.

Each lesson ends with **assignments**. Assignments should be completed and reported before the next lesson time.

There is a **test** for each lesson, which includes scripture memory. At the end of each class, the leader may review these questions with the students. The following class session should begin with a test over these questions. Tests should be taken without referring to the course book, written notes, Bible, or to classmates. A test answer key is available for download by the class leader from Shepherds Global Classroom.

In Lesson 1, students are assigned a **30-day project**. When this project is complete, each student should submit a one-page report summarizing what they have learned from the project. Students will not submit their project journal.

If the student wants to **earn a certificate from Shepherds Global Classroom**, he should attend the class sessions and complete the assignments. A form is provided at the end of the course for recording the assignments completed.



# LESSON 1

# DEFINING WORSHIP

## LESSON OBJECTIVES

1. Have a biblical definition of worship.
2. Understand that true worship affects all areas of our life.
3. Recognize the type of worship that is acceptable to God.
4. Appreciate the importance of worship in the Christian life.

## PREPARATION FOR THIS LESSON

*Memorize John 4:23-24.*

## INTRODUCTION

It is Sunday morning in America. Well-dressed Christians gather for worship in a beautiful sanctuary. Accompanied by an organ and choir, they sing grand hymns. An orchestra plays as the offering is collected. The worshippers pray silently while the pastor leads in prayer. During his sermon, the pastor quotes authors from his large library. After the sermon, the church celebrates Communion using a silver Communion tray, Communion wafers, and individual cups. This is worship.

It is Sunday morning in China. 30 casually dressed believers gather in an apartment. They sing praise songs and hymns with no instruments. The leader shares a truth that she recently learned through her study of scripture. During an extended prayer time, the members of this house church pray in turn for each other's needs. Following prayer, they celebrate Communion with bread and wine served in plastic cups. As people leave, they quietly place their offering in a basket near the door. The offering will be shared with members who have special needs. This is worship.

It is Sunday morning in Nigeria. Christians dressed in colorful clothes gather for an energetic worship service. A praise team accompanied by guitars, keyboard, and drums leads the congregation in songs projected on a screen. The band plays while members place their offering in a collection box at the front of the sanctuary. The sermon is practical, speaking to the needs of contemporary Nigerian society. The service concludes with a time of hand-shaking, hugs, and celebration. This is worship.

Worship takes many different forms. In every country and every culture, worship forms will differ. Worship is more than a particular type of service. In fact, worship is more than the service itself; worship involves all areas of the Christian life. In this lesson, we will look at a biblical definition of worship.

- » Read John 4:1-29. Discuss what it means to worship in spirit and in truth.

## ASPECTS OF BIBLICAL WORSHIP

Worship is recognizing and honoring God's worth. It means giving God the honor that is due to him.

- » Below are three definitions of worship. Memorize the definition that is most meaningful to you.
  - "Worship is the adoring response of man to the Eternal God." - Evelyn Underhill
  - "Worship is lifting up our heart in willing response to God." - Franklin Segler
  - "Worship is the response of all that we are to all that God is." - Warren Wiersbe

## Worship Is Reverent Submission

The primary Hebrew and Greek words translated "worship" in the Bible have the idea of bowing down before God.<sup>1</sup> This suggests the humble submission involved in worship. The physical act of bowing reflects the reverence of the heart. From at least the second century, Christians knelt in reverence when praying.

In Revelation 4:10-11, the apostle John saw the worship that takes place in heaven:

The twenty-four elders fall down before him who is seated on the throne and worship him who lives forever and ever. They cast their crowns before the throne, saying, "Worthy are you, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power, for you created all things, and by your will they existed and were created."

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1 The Hebrew word is *shachah*, which is translated "worship," "bow down," "fall down," or "reverence." The Greek word is *proskuneo*, which is translated "worship" or "bow down" in the New Testament.

When a conquered king was brought before Caesar, he was required to throw his crown at Caesar's feet and bow in submission. John shows that God, who is far more powerful and worthy than Caesar, deserves the humble submission of worshippers.

In the Old Testament, God rejected the sacrifices of the rebellious. "This people draw near with their mouth and honor me with their lips, while their hearts are far from me, and their fear of me is a commandment taught by men..." (Isaiah 29:13). Outwardly, they seemed to be worshippers; they said the right words and followed proper rituals. Inwardly, their hearts were far from God. True worship is reverent submission from the heart.

This same truth is seen in the New Testament. The Samaritan woman argued about the physical location of worship, Jerusalem versus Mount Gerizim. Jesus pointed to the spiritual location of worship, the heart. "God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth" (John 4:24). True worship requires submission to God.

True worship reveres the one worshipped. In some churches, worship fails to recognize the reverence due to God. As we will see in a later definition, worship includes celebration, but worship also reverences God. This does not mean that only one style of worship is appropriate. However, this first definition reminds us that as we decide on our worship practices, we must ask, "Am I showing respect to the God I worship?"

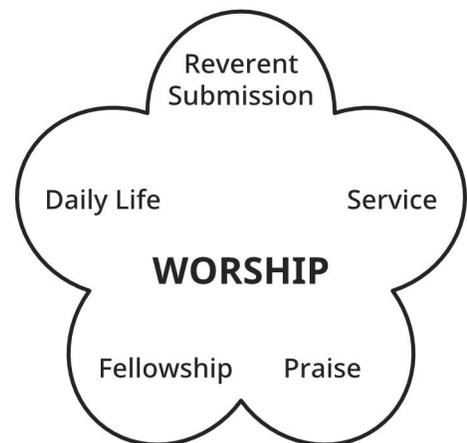
## Worship Is Service

I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship (Romans 12:1).

This verse connects our reverent submission with daily life. It is only as we submit ourselves as living sacrifices that our service, or worship, is acceptable to God. The regular meeting of a church is important; the early church valued corporate worship.<sup>2</sup> However, worship does not end when the public meeting is over. True worship affects all areas of life.

## Worship Is Praise

The word *praise* is used more than 130 times in the Book of Psalms. There are three Hebrew words translated "praise." The first word, *halal*, has the idea of



2 Corporate worship is **commanded** in scriptures such as Hebrews 10:25. Corporate worship is **assumed** in scriptures such as Acts 2:46-47.

celebrating or boasting. The second word, *yadah*, means to praise, give thanks, or confess. The third word, *zamar*, means “to sing” or “to sing praise.”

These words, particularly *halal*, suggest the joy of worship. *Halal* is the word that a Jewish person would use to brag on someone. In worship, we boast about God; in worship, we celebrate His goodness; in worship, we rejoice in God’s greatness.

True worship reveres God; however, true worship also celebrates God! In worship, we rejoice in the goodness of God. In Lesson 6, we will study the role of music in worship. Music is important in worship because it provides a way for the congregation to join in celebration and praise to God.

## Worship Is Fellowship

Worship is fellowship between God and man. Worship also involves fellowship between worshippers. The Greek word (*koinonia*) meaning fellowship or sharing is often used in the context of worship. Christians devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship (*koinonia*), to the breaking of bread and the prayers (Acts 2:42). As believers, we have been called into the fellowship (*koinonia*) of God’s Son, Jesus Christ our Lord (1 Corinthians 1:9).

The model for understanding worship as fellowship is the Trinity. In the same way that the members of the Godhead relate to one another in fellowship, we relate to one another and to God in worship. In a benediction that relates earthly worship to the eternal Trinity, Paul wrote, “The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all” (2 Corinthians 13:14). As we are one with Christ, we participate through the Spirit in the Son’s communion with the Father.<sup>3</sup> In worship, we experience the rich fellowship of the Trinity. Our earthly worship is modeled on the perfect communion of the Trinity.

Trinitarian worship is an experience of grace, not works. Worship is made possible through our high priest, Jesus Christ. He takes our unworthy worship, sanctifies it, and presents it spotless and without wrinkle to the Father. Our worship is accepted by the Father for Jesus’ sake, and we are united with Jesus in his life in the Spirit.

We worship not because it will earn God’s favor, but because through grace we have been given the privilege of participating in fellowship with God.

Our limited *koinonia* today (fellowship with God in worship **and** fellowship with other believers) is a foretaste of heavenly worship. As worshippers, we seek fellowship with fellow believers because worship on earth is rehearsal for eternal worship.

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3 James B. Torrance, *Worship, Community, and the Triune God of Grace* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1996), 20-21

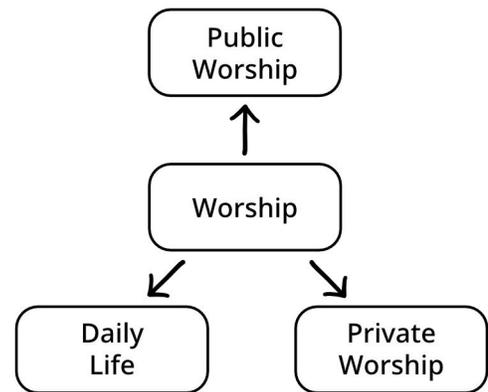
## Worship Involves All of Life

Another word used for worship in the New Testament is sometimes translated “religion”:<sup>4</sup>

If anyone thinks he is religious and does not bridle his tongue but deceives his heart, this person's religion is worthless. **Religion** that is pure and undefiled before God, the Father, is this: to visit orphans and widows in their affliction, and to keep oneself unstained from the world (James 1:26-27).

This word shows that worship is more than what happens on Sunday. Biblical worship includes all of life. A worship service is a focused expression of worship, but the worship service is not enough in itself. We must maintain a lifestyle of worship. Our weekly corporate worship must be seen in our daily life.

True worship is seen in daily submission to God. James shows that if I sing praise songs on Sunday, but fail to control my tongue on Monday, my worship is incomplete. Pure and undefiled worship includes both practical service (visiting orphans and widows) and daily obedience (keeping oneself unstained from the world).



In Isaiah 6, the prophet saw a vision of God on His throne. Isaiah's service as a prophet was transformed by this experience. Isaiah heard the Lord ask “Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?” Then Isaiah said “Here I am! Send me” (Isaiah 6:8). True worship transforms our life and makes us willing and effective servants of God.

- » Read Malachi 1:6-9, 1 Samuel 13:8-14, Leviticus 10:1-3, and Acts 5:1-11. What do these scriptures teach about worship?

## WHY IS WORSHIP IMPORTANT?

A.W. Tozer called worship the “missing jewel” of the modern church. He said that we know how to preach, how to evangelize, and how to have fellowship. However, with all our strengths, we often fail in worship. We watch the preacher preach; we listen to the choir, praise team, or soloist sing; we give money in the offering. But we often fail to truly worship; we allow activity to substitute for true worship.

Worship should be important to us because it is important to God.

<sup>4</sup> The Greek word usually refers to external aspects of worship. Acts 26:5, Colossians 2:18, and James 1:26-27.

- » Read Exodus 20:1-5 to see the importance God places on worship.

The first two commandments relate to worship. The first commandment tells us **whom we worship**. “You shall have no other gods before me” (Exodus 20:3). The second commandment tells us **how we worship**. “You shall not make for yourself a carved image...” (Exodus 20:4). Then, in the last verses of Exodus 20, God returns to the subject of worship. These verses teach Israel how to build their altars and how to approach the altar in a respectful way.

- » Read Exodus 20:23-26. Worship is important to God!

Worship plays a central role in scripture. Exodus and Leviticus give specific instructions for Israel’s worship. The Psalms provide a songbook for worship. In the gospels, we see people falling down to worship Jesus.

- » Read Matthew 2:11, Matthew 8:2, Matthew 9:18, Matthew 14:33, Matthew 15:25, Matthew 28:17.

In Acts, the church gathers for worship.<sup>5</sup> In his letters, Paul addresses worship practices in the church (1 Corinthians 11 and 1 Timothy 2). Revelation allows us to look into heaven for a glimpse of worship that is already happening at the throne of God. Worship on earth is rehearsal for worship in heaven (Revelation 4-5). Worship is important to God.

## Worship Is Important Because in Worship We See God

- » Read Isaiah 6:1-8. Discuss Isaiah’s experience in the Temple.

Isaiah 6 provides an important biblical picture of worship. It shows that in worship we see God. In the Temple, Isaiah saw the Lord exalted.

This truth is repeated throughout scripture. As he worshipped on the Lord’s Day, John saw his heavenly visions (Revelation 1:10). As Paul and Silas worshipped in prayer and song, God revealed His power (Acts 16:25-26). David endured suffering that caused him to cry out, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” (Psalm 22:1). In the midst of his suffering, David saw God through worship and praise; “You are holy, enthroned on the praises of Israel” (Psalm 22:3). In worship, we see God.

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5 The early Christians continued to worship at the Temple and synagogue (Acts 2:46-47, Acts 3:1-11, Acts 5:12, 21, 42). In addition, Christians met in homes for prayer, teaching, and fellowship. These are all aspects of worship (Acts 2:46-47, Acts 4:31, Acts 5:42).

## Worship Is Important Because in Worship We See Ourselves and Are Transformed

In the Temple, Isaiah not only saw the Lord exalted, he saw himself. When Isaiah saw God on His throne, he exclaimed, “Woe is me! For I am lost; for I am a man of unclean lips...” (Isaiah 6:5). True worship allows us to see ourselves as God sees us.

This is why liturgies have traditionally included a prayer of confession. A prayer of confession does not say, “We have rebelled against God’s law and committed willful sin.” A prayer of confession recognizes, “Even the most pure human heart is unclean when compared to the absolute purity of a holy God. We stand in constant need of God’s grace.”

In worship, we see ourselves through the eyes of a holy God. Apart from worship, this sight would be a terrifying experience. However, because we have already seen God, we are cleansed, not condemned. Because we have seen God and his grace, we see ourselves honestly, confess our need of him, and claim his grace in our lives.

Worship reveals who we are, but it does not leave us as it finds us. In the light of God’s purity, Isaiah saw himself as unclean. However, rather than causing despair, worship caused transformation.

Then one of the seraphim flew to me, having in his hand a burning coal that he had taken with tongs from the altar. And he touched my mouth and said: “Behold, this has touched your lips; your guilt is taken away, and your sin atoned for” (Isaiah 6:6-7).

Isaiah was transformed by his encounter with a holy God.

True worship changes the worshipper—Isaiah in the Temple, the Samaritan woman beside the well, and the disciples on the Mount of Transfiguration. An encounter with God transforms the worshipper.

## Worship Is Important Because in Worship We See Our World

In worship, Isaiah saw God; he saw himself; he saw the needs of his world. “I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips” (Isaiah 6:5). In response, he said, “Here I am! Send me” (Isaiah 6:8). It is in worship that we are equipped for effective service to a needy world.

Earlier, we saw that true worship affects all of life. Some churches have separated worship and evangelism. They say, “The focus of our church is evangelism. Other churches can focus on worship.” Or they say, “Our goal is worship.

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**“Enter to Worship  
—Leave to Serve”**

Sign above a church door

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We will leave evangelism and mission to someone else.” This shows a misunderstanding of worship. In worship, we allow God to show us the needs of our world. True worship will result in evangelism.

True worship revealed Isaiah’s need—and he was transformed by worship. True worship revealed the need of Isaiah’s world—and he devoted himself to transforming that world. In worship, we will gain a passion for serving our world. The necessary response to true worship is, “Here I am! Send me.”

Oswald Chambers warned prospective missionaries, “If you have not been worshipping in everyday occasions, when you get involved in God’s work, you will not only be useless yourself but also a hindrance to those around you.”<sup>6</sup>

Chambers recognized the importance of worship as preparation for effective service. In worship, God reveals the needs of the world around us and prepares us to meet those needs.

## **Worship Is Important Because Failure to Worship Separates Us from God**

- » Read Romans 1:18-25. What is the relationship between false worship and sin?

At the beginning of Romans, Paul shows why man stands condemned before God. He shows that man’s fallen state is the result of refusal to worship the true God. Notice the process Paul describes in Romans 1:21-25:

1. They did not worship God. “For although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him” (Romans 1:21). “They exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshipped and served the creature rather than the Creator” (Romans 1:25).
2. As a result “...they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened. Claiming to be wise, they became fools and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man and birds and animals and creeping things” (Romans 1:21-23).
3. In judgment “God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts to impurity...” (Romans 1:24).

Paul shows that the fall of mankind into folly, corruption, and lust was the result of people’s refusal to worship God. They did not worship God; they worshipped and served the creature rather than the Creator.

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6 Oswald Chambers, *My Utmost for His Highest*, (September 10 entry). Retrieved from <https://utmost.org/missionary-weapons-1/> on July 21, 2020.

Everyone worships. Christians worship God. A Muslim worships Allah. An atheist worships his own wisdom. Everyone worships. If we refuse to worship the Creator, we will worship the creature.

Worship is important. True worship of the true God transforms us into his image. Worship of a false god transforms us into the image of that god. We become like whatever we worship.

## THREE GOALS IN WORSHIP

Marva Dawn identified three goals of true worship.<sup>7</sup> In worship, we:

### 1. In worship, we encounter God.

Any worship service that does not bring us to God falls short of true worship. This does not mean that every worship service will be emotional or dramatic. It does not even mean that every service will have worship as its stated theme. But in every service, we should find ourselves in God's presence. This may be through a truth gained from the sermon; it may be through the reading of God's Word; it may be through a song that praises God; it may be in a time of prayer during which we gain new strength for our walk with God. In some way, each service should bring us into an encounter with God.

### 2. In worship, we form Christian character.

In worship, we see ourselves and are transformed. In worship, we learn truths that shape our Christian character. As we worship God, our character is recreated more and more into his image. We become like whatever we worship.

### 3. In worship, we build Christian community.

In worship, we see the world around us and commit ourselves to serving the needs of that world. As we do this, the church is built up, and believers grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ (Ephesians 4:15). True worship is an instrument for building true Christian community.

## WHAT TYPE OF WORSHIP IS ACCEPTABLE TO GOD?

» What kind of worship do you think God accepts?

Jesus told the Samaritan woman that true worshippers worship him in spirit and truth (John 4:23-24). There is a true worship that is acceptable to God; this implies that there is a false worship that is not acceptable.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>7</sup> Marva Dawn, *Reaching Out Without Dumbing Down* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995)

<sup>8</sup> Parts of this section are adapted from David Jeremiah, *Worship* (CA: Turning Point Outreach, 1995), 20-24.

Worship leaders often ask, “Did our worship move the congregation? Did it communicate in a style the people enjoy?” Scripture shows that the more important questions are, “Did our worship honor God? Did we worship God as he requires? Is our worship acceptable to him?”

## Worship That God Rejects

### God does not accept ignorant worship.

The Samaritan woman did not know what she worshipped (John 4:22). In Athens, Paul saw people who worshipped an unknown god (Acts 17:23).

In Lesson 2 we will study the nature of the God whom we worship. When we don’t truly know God, our worship is ignorant; it is worship of an unknown God. We go through the motions of a liturgy,<sup>9</sup> but our worship is of an unknown God. Worship must reveal the nature of God to the worshipper. We must sing songs that speak of God’s attributes; we must read scripture that speaks truth about God; we must preach sermons that reveal God’s nature. We must not accept worship of an unknown God.

### God does not accept idolatrous worship.

An idol is anything that takes God’s rightful place as the supreme authority in any aspect of life. In some areas of the world, idols are statues of pagan deities. In other areas of the world, idols are jobs, bank accounts, houses, and entertainment. Anything that takes God’s rightful place in our life is an idol. If we go to church on Sunday but allow other things to have final authority in our daily lives, we are serving an idol.

### God does not accept inferior worship.

- » Give some examples of inferior worship.

The prophet Malachi warned that Israel’s worship had become offensive to God. They protested, “How have we offended God?” Malachi responded,

“When you offer blind animals in sacrifice, is that not evil? And when you offer those that are lame or sick, is that not evil? Present that to your governor; will he accept you or show you favor?” says the LORD of hosts (Malachi 1:8).

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9 A liturgy is a plan used during public worship. A liturgy can be very organized with written instructions. It can be very informal with no written instructions for worshippers. In this course, the term “liturgy” will refer to any plan for worship. Some people criticize all liturgy, suggesting that planned worship is not true worship. We will use the term “liturgy” in a very general sense. Planned worship can be empty, or it can be filled with God’s presence.

They would never bring a lame animal as a gift to the governor of their state, but they brought lame animals as a sacrifice to the Almighty God of the universe.

Some people believe that the outward aspects of worship are not important because God looks at the heart. It is true that God looks at the heart. However, it is clear throughout scripture that the outward aspects of worship are important to God. Exodus and Leviticus give detailed instructions for God's requirements for worship. Instructions for the Tabernacle were precise. God gave detailed instructions for the clothing worn by the priests. In Exodus 39-40, the phrase "as the Lord had commanded Moses" is repeated 13 times to show Israel's obedience. The specifics of worship mattered to God. He required Israel's best.

We offer inferior worship when we give God less than our best. Although we no longer bring animal sacrifices to God, these principles are still important. The questions asked in Malachi suggest questions that we should ask about our worship today.

- **Pastors:** "Would I prepare my sermon more carefully if the governor were in the audience? Am I bringing a lame sacrifice to God?"
- **Musicians:** "Would I practice more carefully if a famous musician were in the audience? Am I bringing a lame sacrifice to God?"
- **Laymen:** "Would I listen more carefully to this sermon if the president was the speaker? Am I bringing a lame sacrifice to God?"

### God does not accept proud worship.

God does not accept a sacrifice that is less than our best. However, there is an opposite danger that we must avoid. God does not accept the sacrifices of a proud and arrogant heart. Although we bring our best to God, we must recognize that nothing we bring is truly worthy of God. Our best offering is only a small token of what God deserves. We come into God's presence with humility, never with an attitude of pride and self-worth.

### Worship That God Accepts

If these are characteristics of worship that is not acceptable to God, what type of worship does God accept?

### Acceptable worship focuses on God.

Like Isaiah 6, Revelation 4 opens a window into heaven. In Revelation 4, the attention of the worshippers is on the one who is seated on the throne. True worship focuses on God. True worship points to God as the One who is worthy of worship.

## Acceptable worship gives God the glory he deserves.

Psalm 96:7-8 shows the purpose of worship:

Ascribe to the Lord, O families of the peoples, ascribe to the Lord glory and strength!  
Ascribe to the Lord the glory due his name; bring an offering, and come into his courts!

Worship gives God the glory he deserves. Regardless of the songs we sing, the emotions we stir, or the response we receive from spectators, worship that does not bring glory to God has failed to accomplish its purpose.

The purpose of worship is not to gain a blessing for myself; the purpose of worship is to give honor and glory to God. As we worship, we will often be blessed – but our blessing is not the motivation for worship. The motivation for worship is honoring God.

Recognizing the purpose for worship changes a question we often ask about worship. Instead of asking, “Did I enjoy today’s worship?” we will ask, “Did today’s worship honor God?” As we better understand the purpose for worship, we will change our focus from self to God.

## Acceptable worship is worship in spirit and in truth.

In Jesus’ conversation with the Samaritan woman in John 4, he told her that those who worship God must worship God in spirit and truth (John 4:24). This is the right pattern for worship.

Usually when we discuss worship patterns, we discuss musical styles, the order of the liturgy, and other matters of form. Many people have been frustrated by the absence of detailed information about worship practices in the New Testament church. Think of all the things we don’t know about New Testament worship:

- **We know they sang psalms.** We don’t know what tunes they used; we don’t know what instruments they used; we don’t know what new songs they sang.
- **We know they prayed.** We don’t know if they all prayed aloud, if they prayed in small groups, or if an individual led the prayer. We don’t know if they used only written prayers (psalms) or spontaneous prayers.
- **We know they preached.** We don’t know how long they preached, what preaching style they used, or if every service had a sermon.

Apart from the New Testament and one text written a few decades later, we have little information about the early church pattern for worship.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> The *Didache* (The Teaching) is a short text from the late 1<sup>st</sup> or early 2<sup>nd</sup> century. The *Didache* includes teaching on Christian ethics, church rituals, and church organization.

For scholars, this lack of information is frustrating. However, perhaps this shows that the issues we consider most important are not what God considers most important! When Jesus discussed a pattern for worship, He focused on two issues: spirit and truth. These issues are most important to true worship.

Worship in spirit probably refers to the human spirit. Worship must not be a mindless ritual; it involves the spirit. This is worship that is genuine; it comes from the heart.

### WORSHIP IN SPIRIT?

In 1994, the Vineyard Church in Toronto reported a revival in which people laughed, roared like lions, and “crunched” (a vomit-like heaving to cleanse the emotions). During “holy laughter,” people sometimes went into hysterics. Rather than an emphasis on allowing the Word of God to work deeply in the hearts of seekers, the “Toronto Blessing” sought only an emotional response. Is this worship in spirit? Is it genuine worship?

Worship in truth corresponds to biblical teaching. It is more than a good feeling or emotional response. As pastors and leaders of worship, we evaluate each aspect of our worship, asking “Is this true?” The words we preach, the words we sing, and the words we pray must be faithful to scripture. God is not impressed with empty words; he is looking for worship in spirit and truth (John 4:24).

### WORSHIP IN TRUTH?

Pastor Bill understands the importance of music in worship. He appreciates the old hymns, but he also welcomes new songs. A song that has become popular in many churches teaches that believers continually fall into willful sin and then seek restoration. The song gives no promise of a victorious Christian life. Listening to the song, Bill said, “This song isn’t true to scripture, but it is just a song. People like the music; the words aren’t important.” Is this worship in truth?

## WORSHIP DANGERS: SUBSTITUTES FOR TRUE WORSHIP

Jesus spoke of true worship. If there is true worship, there will be false worship. Martin Luther often quoted a German proverb, “Wherever God builds a church, Satan builds a chapel next door.” Satan loves to encourage us to substitute false ideas for true worship. We have often allowed worship to follow the demands of culture rather than to follow the demands of the God we worship. What are some substitutes for true worship?

### McWorship

McWorship is worship that focuses on personal convenience, rather than on pleasing God. There are 35,000 McDonalds in the world. 68 million customers eat at McDonalds each day. This is not because McDonalds offers the best available food. It is not because they offer a diet that is unusually healthy. It is because McDonalds offers convenience, ease, and an entertaining environment. In McWorship, our primary concern is convenience, ease, and entertainment.

McDonalds and McWorship measure success by numbers. McDonalds boasts, “Over 300 billion served.” McWorship boasts, “We grew by 17% over last year.” Numbers rather than godliness becomes the measure of success.

There are few demands for McWorshippers. McWorship offers good music, entertaining speakers, and an attractive package – all at a low cost. McWorship draws crowds, but the spiritual food is often empty and does not promote spiritual health. It is good to seek to attract people to the gospel, but McWorship is not true worship.

### Museum Worship

The atmosphere in a museum is the opposite of McDonalds. In a museum, there is great emphasis on preserving tradition. The people are respectful as they look at the exhibits. Most museums do not emphasize personal participation and commitment. You are not invited to put your own painting on the wall of the Louvre Art Museum!

In Museum Worship, our primary concern is tradition and form. We sing the songs that the church has always sung. We pride ourselves in our faithfulness to tradition. But it is possible for people to attend week after week without being faced with God’s demand for personal commitment. It is possible to attend church each Sunday and look at the exhibits (the sermon, the songs, the prayers) with no life transformation. It is good to value our heritage, but Museum Worship is not true worship.

## Classroom Worship

In a classroom, the teacher is in charge. The teacher decides what the class learns. The teacher gives the lecture; the students listen and take notes. Participation is controlled by the teacher.

In Classroom Worship, the pastor is the central figure. The sermon is the central focus of the service; everything else is preliminary. The congregation is there to listen and take notes. Worship is reduced to an intellectual activity. It is good to seek to communicate truth in our worship; we must explain truth to our worshippers, but Classroom Worship is not true worship.

## True Worship

True worship is focused on God. True worship asks, “What does God want?” True worship helps me see myself through God’s eyes—and that is uncomfortable for a person who is not willing to be changed by God. True worship is about him. True worship involves a cross, a sacrifice, a surrender. True worship transforms the worshipper.

## CONCLUSION: MARTHA’S TESTIMONY

How important is worship? Listen to the testimony of Martha.

“I am a practical person. Someone must sweep the floors, cook the meals, and care for the details of a household. That is my strength; I have the gift of service.

“I remember the day Jesus visited our little house in Bethany. I was nervous about having such an important teacher in our home. I wanted everything to be perfect. Luke later wrote, ‘Martha was distracted with much serving.’ (Luke 10:40) I was busy trying to make everything perfect.

“While I was busy caring for the house, Mary sat in the next room listening to Jesus. I was not happy; I needed help! Besides, she is a woman; she doesn’t need to learn from the Rabbi.

“I became so upset that I marched in and said, ‘Lord, do you not care that my sister has left me to serve alone? Tell her then to help me’ (Luke 10:40). I will never forget his answer. Jesus looked at me and shook his head. ‘Martha, Martha, you are anxious and troubled about many things, but only one thing is necessary. Mary has chosen the good portion....’ (Luke 10:41-42).

“What was the Master saying to me? He didn’t mean that service isn’t important. Just before visiting us, Jesus told the parable of the Good Samaritan—a story about service (Luke 10:25-37). Jesus wasn’t saying that service isn’t important; He was telling me that **my**

**service must flow out of my worship.** The essential thing is worship. If I worship, service will flow naturally; I won't be 'anxious and troubled' (Luke 10:41).

"That day, I learned a lesson for life. Never again has my service taken priority over my worship. From that day on, I took time to join Mary at the feet of Jesus; I took time to worship."

## CHECKUP

Ask yourself, "How can I be a better worshipper?" Locate some areas where you can make your worship more closely match the biblical definition of worship.

## LESSON 1 IN REVIEW

### 1. What is worship?

- Worship is reverent submission (Revelation 4:10-11).
- Worship is service (Romans 12:1).
- Worship is praise (Psalms).
- Worship is fellowship (Acts 2:42).
- Worship involves all of life (James 1:26-27).

### 2. Why is worship important?

- In worship we see God (Isaiah 6:1-8).
- In worship we see ourselves and are transformed (Isaiah 6:1-8).
- In worship we see our world (Isaiah 6:1-8).
- Failure to worship separates us from God (Romans 1:18-25).

### 3. Goals for worship:

- In worship, we encounter God.
- In worship, we form Christian character.
- In worship, we build Christian community.

4. What worship is acceptable to God?

- Acceptable worship focuses on God (Revelation 4).
- Acceptable worship gives God the glory he deserves (Psalm 96:7-8).
- Acceptable worship is worship in spirit and in truth (John 4:23-24).

## LESSON 1 ASSIGNMENTS

1. How does the Bible describe worship? Write a one-page answer based on the following scriptures:

- Psalm 111:1-2
- Psalm 147:1
- Psalm 150
- Isaiah 6:1-8
- Revelation 4

If you are studying in a group, discuss your answer at your next class meeting.

2. At the beginning of the next lesson, you will take a test based on this lesson. Study the test questions carefully in preparation.

## COURSE PROJECT

### A 30-DAY JOURNEY OF WORSHIP<sup>11</sup>

You will work on this project throughout this course. At the end of the course, you will report that you have completed this project. You will not submit your journal to the class leader.

Each day for 30 days, you will spend a few minutes meditating on one of God's attributes. It is best to do the project in the morning so that you can meditate on the attribute throughout the day. To meditate means to think deeply about something.

Get a blank notebook to use as a journal. Begin each day with a prayer asking God to reveal himself to you. Then, open to the book of Psalms and begin to read. The goal for this project is meditation, not large amounts of reading. You may read only a verse or an entire Psalm.

As you read, look for one attribute of God or a metaphor for God. An attribute is some aspect of God's character – his mercy, his holiness, his care. A metaphor for God compares God to something else – he is a shepherd, a rock, our shelter.

When you find an attribute or metaphor that speaks to you, write the attribute at the top of a page of your journal. Under that, write the verse that refers to that attribute.

Think about the attribute and what it says about God. After you pray, write your thoughts about God and this attribute. This is not an academic paper; it is a personal journal of worship. Throughout the day, think about God and his character. Praise him for who he is. As you do this for 30 days, you will have a deeper knowledge of God.

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11 This project is adapted from Louie Giglio, *The Air I Breathe: Worship as a Way of Life* (Sisters, OR: Multnomah Publishers, 2003).

## LESSON 1 TEST

1. You were given three definitions of worship at the beginning of this lesson. Write the definition you memorized.
2. List four aspects of biblical worship.
3. When the Samaritan woman argued about the physical location of worship, Jesus pointed to the \_\_\_\_\_ location of worship.
4. In Psalms, the word \_\_\_\_\_ is often used to suggest the joy of worship.
5. According to James, worship that is pure and undefiled includes what two aspects?
6. List four reasons worship is important.
7. According to this lesson, what are three characteristics of worship that is acceptable to God?
8. Write John 4:23-24 from memory.



## LESSON 2

# GOD AND THE WORSHIPPER

### LESSON OBJECTIVES

1. Recognize the biblical picture of God and His role in our worship.
2. Understand God's requirements for worshippers.
3. Seek to conform to God's requirements for worshippers.
4. Appreciate God's grace in allowing man to enter his presence for worship.

### PREPARATION FOR THIS LESSON

*Memorize Revelation 5:9-14.*

### INTRODUCTION

A small group sat around a table discussing the week's Bible study topic. The question for discussion was, "What is God like and how do we worship him?"

Sarah spoke first. "When I think of God, I think of a grandfather with a long white beard. He sees us like grandchildren. It makes him sad when we sin, but he loves us and understands that we are doing our best. I don't think God cares how we worship as long as we show that we love him."

Hannah responded. "I think of God like a demanding father. He doesn't get very close to his children, but he watches to see if we obey. In worship, we need to show that we are submissive and obedient. I don't like songs that treat God as our friend; we must remember that he is our heavenly Master and we are his servants! I go to church to find out what God expects me to do."

Abigail wasn't satisfied with any of these answers. "I think of God like a friend. The Bible says that God loves to give good gifts to his children. I go to church to find out what God wants to do for me. I pray and tell him what I need. I listen to the sermon and music to learn how God will bless my life. God wants to give good gifts; I go to church to receive those gifts."

Each of these ladies has a different conception of God. Because of that, each lady has a different expectation for a worship service.

Sarah expects a grandfatherly God who did not care much about the details of our worship. In her ideal service, each person will worship in the way that makes him or her most comfortable. Sarah would have been surprised with worship in the Tabernacle. There she would have learned that God is concerned about every detail of worship.

Hannah sees God as distant and forbidding. She would be uncomfortable with the intimate language of the psalms and the honesty of Job's complaints to God. Her ideal worship service will maintain a distance between the worshipper and God. Prayer will be formal and structured. The music will be grand, but impersonal. Hannah would not enjoy the close fellowship found in first-century house churches.

In Abigail's mind, God is a servant who is there to meet the needs of humans. When Abigail leaves a service, her question is, "What did I get from it?" The music must appeal to her personal tastes. The prayers must focus on individual needs. The sermon must be practical and must speak to her felt needs. Abigail would have been disappointed with Temple worship. Temple worship was about bringing a sacrifice to God, not about God bringing gifts to man.

Each of these ladies looks for a worship service that reflects her conception of God. Our understanding of God has a great impact on our worship.

- » Discuss your concept of God. How does your concept of God affect your worship?

In this lesson we will look at two questions:

### **1. Whom do we worship?**

Since worship is giving God the honor that is due him, the more we know about God, the better we will be equipped for true worship. A distorted image of God leads to distorted worship.

The biblical picture of idolatry shows this principle. Baal was a fertility god, a god of uncontrolled excess. How did the prophets of Baal worship? With uncontrolled emotion and excess. "And they cried aloud, and cut themselves after their custom with swords and lances, until the blood gushed out upon them" (1 Kings 18:28).

## 2. What does God require of his worshippers?

Since God is holy, how do we enter his presence? What does God require of those who worship him?

False gods such as Baal and Molech were not holy; their worshippers did not need to be holy. The worshippers of Baal became like Baal, morally impure. We become like whatever we worship.

The true God is holy. Because of this, he requires a holy people. The worshippers of Jehovah became like Jehovah; they were to be a holy people worshipping a holy God.

## WHOM DO WE WORSHIP?

Imagine that you are admiring a beautiful sunset.<sup>12</sup> Suddenly you stop watching the sunset to take a picture of yourself: “Me Watching a Sunset.” This is called a “selfie,” a photograph of yourself. Your attention has moved from the sunset to yourself. A person who takes a selfie is more interested in their own presence than in the event they are watching.

God is worthy of our best worship. But when we focus on the quality of our worship rather than on the God we worship, we have created a religious selfie (“Me Worshipping God”). We must never allow our concern for the excellence of our worship service to replace our focus on God whom we worship!

C.S. Lewis wrote of the idolatry of giving more attention to the worship service than to God. More recently, D.A. Carson warned that we can be tempted to “worship *worship* rather than worshipping God.”<sup>13</sup>

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**“God, You are...  
Most high, most excellent;  
most merciful and most just;  
most hidden and most present;  
most beautiful and most strong;  
always working, always at rest;  
gathering, but needing nothing;  
sustaining and protecting;  
creating and nourishing;  
seeking, yet possessing all things.”**

**Adapted from Augustine**

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<sup>12</sup> Much of this is adapted from Warren Wiersbe, *Real Worship*, (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2000), Chapter 5.

<sup>13</sup> Adapted from D.A. Carson, *Worship by the Book*, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2002), 31.

Worship is not true worship until I lose myself in the adoration of God. In true worship I pay more attention to God than to the quality of my efforts to worship. True worship is focused on God, not on the quality of my worship experience.

As we saw in Lesson 1, the first commandment tells us whom we worship. “I am the LORD thy God.... You shall have no other gods before me” (Exodus 20:2-3). Since worship means giving God the honor He deserves, a study of worship should begin by asking who God is. Four hymns in the book of Revelation give a partial answer to this question.

## We Worship the Creator (Revelation 4)

- » Read Revelation 4 aloud. Take time to envision the heavenly scene. What does this chapter tell us about the God we worship?

With its window into heaven, Revelation 4 gives a glimpse of the Creator we worship.

### The Creator is sovereign.

God sits enthroned above the world. The word *throne* is used 14 times in this chapter. He is Lord God Almighty; he is sovereign. Worship must always recognize the sovereignty of God. In worship, we express our submission to the sovereign God. He is a loving Father, but he is sovereign.

### The Creator is holy.

All through scripture, God is seen as a holy God.

- God tells the Israelites, “I the LORD your God am holy” (Leviticus 19:2).
- God is praised, “Yet you are holy, enthroned on the praises of Israel” (Psalm 22:3).
- The prophet Isaiah sees angels worshipping around the throne, “Holy, holy, holy, is the LORD of hosts: the whole earth is full of his glory” (Isaiah 6:3).
- The Apostle John sees into heaven, where the living creatures say, “Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord God Almighty, who was and is and is to come!” (Revelation 4:8).

We worship a holy God.

### The Creator is eternal.

He was and is and is to come (Revelation 4:8).

David pointed to the wonder of creation as a window on the glory of God. “The heavens declare the glory of God, and the sky above proclaims his handiwork” (Psalm 19:1). The first chapter of Genesis begins with God as the Creator; the last book of the Bible reminds us again that God is the Creator and that he will reign eternally over his created beings.

This emphasis shows the proper focus for worship. We the created worship God the Creator. Worship is properly about him, not about us. As we lose ourselves in the worship of the Creator, the heavens again declare his glory.

## **We Worship the Redeemer (Revelation 5)**

- » Read Revelation 5 aloud. What does this majestic scene tell us about the God we worship?

As Christians, we must never lose our sense of wonder when we remember that the King of the universe has provided for our redemption. In Revelation 5, we watch as the Lamb of God, the Redeemer of the world, is worshipped. Jesus is called “the Lamb” 28 times in the Book of Revelation. This is one of the central images in Revelation.

### **We worship the Redeemer because of who he is.**

He is the Lion of the tribe of Judah. He is the Root of David. He is the Lamb that was slain. He is the Lamb that has seven horns and seven eyes (Revelation 5:6), the symbol of perfection. In worship, we honor Jesus for who he is. Worship is a “feast of the glorious perfections of Christ” (John Piper).

### **We worship the Redeemer because of where he is.**

In Revelation 5:6, Jesus is at the center of heaven’s worship. He is between the throne and the four living creatures and among the elders. The writer of Hebrews gives the wonderful promise that our advocate is seated at the right hand of the throne of God (Hebrews 12:2).

### **We worship the Redeemer because of what he has done.**

In an attempt to focus on the worth of God, some teachers have wrongly suggested that we should worship God only for who he is, not for what he does for us. John the Revelator shows that heavenly worship praises the Lamb for what he has done. “Worthy is the Lamb who was slain...” (Revelation 5:12).

This pattern is seen in the Psalms. Psalm 134 commands us to bless the Lord. It does not give a reason; we praise him because he is God. This is followed by Psalms 135-136, which praise God because of what he has done in Israel’s history. God’s character, but also his mighty acts, are worthy of praise. We should praise God for who he is **and** for what he has done.

## We Worship the King (Revelation 11:15-18)

Revelation 11 provides another view of heavenly worship. In this scene, the elders worship the King who has taken his rightful throne. Although earthly kingdoms rebel against him, they must ultimately surrender to his authority. “The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ, and he shall reign forever and ever” (Revelation 11:15).

In this hymn, the King is praised for His righteous judgment over the world. This hymn reminds us that God reigns in great power. Though the nations were angry, God judged them righteously.

Worship is worship in truth. True worship does not minimize the awesome judgments of God. Again, the worship of Revelation is consistent with the worship of the Psalms. Psalm 96 is a new song to the Lord. In this song, God is praised among the nations. He is feared above all gods. He is praised because he will judge the people righteously. True worship knows that we must fear God; we worship him as King.

## We Worship the Conquering Bridegroom (Revelation 19:1-9)

In a Bible survey class, a teacher asked, “How many of you enjoy the Book of Revelation?” Very few students raised their hand. When the teacher asked, “Why do you dislike Revelation?” one student answered, “It is scary!”

The reason these students find Revelation scary is that they ignore the best parts of the book. They focus on the judgments that fall on those who rebel against God. That is certainly an important message in Revelation. But for Christians, the primary message of Revelation is the ultimate victory of our God!

Revelation 19 illustrates this message. The chapter includes a description of the lake of fire that burns with sulfur (Revelation 19:20) and of birds that eat the flesh of kings, the flesh of captains, and the flesh of mighty men... (Revelation 19:18). This is the fate of those who rebel against the King. For those who worship the King in reverent submission, Revelation 19 is a song of rejoicing. The great prostitute who corrupted the earth with her immorality (Revelation 19:2) is destroyed. The bridegroom conquers his enemies and welcomes his holy bride to the marriage supper of the Lamb (Revelation 19:9).

In response to this great victory, John heard “what seemed to be the voice of a great multitude, like the roar of many waters and like the sound of mighty peals of thunder, crying out, ‘Hallelujah! For the Lord our God the Almighty reigns. Let us rejoice and exult and give him the glory, for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and his Bride has made herself ready’” (Revelation 19:6-7).

In worship, we praise the conquering Bridegroom. Our worship anticipates the future that Jesus is preparing for his bride. One reason worship is important is that worship empowers us to live a victorious Christian life in an antagonistic world. In worship, we remember that “our citizenship is in heaven, and from it we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will transform our lowly body to be like his glorious body, by the power that enables him even to subject all things to himself” (Philippians 3:20-21).

These four hymns from Revelation give a glimpse of the God we worship. In worship, we focus not on ourselves but on God. In worship, we bow before the Creator; in worship, we praise the Redeemer; in worship we celebrate Christ the King; in worship, we anticipate eternity in the presence of the conquering Bridegroom.

This is the God we worship. This leads to the question, “Who can worship? What does God require of those who come into His presence?”

## WHAT DOES GOD REQUIRE OF THE WORSHIPPER?

In his conversation with the Samaritan woman,<sup>14</sup> Jesus made a remarkable statement. After telling her that true worshippers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, Jesus said that the Father is seeking such people to worship him (John 4:23). God is seeking a particular kind of worshipper, one who worships in spirit and truth. God seeks worshippers.

What are the characteristics that God seeks in those who worship him? Anyone can attend a worship service; anyone can sing songs of praise; anyone can say prayers. However, God has given specific guidelines for the characteristics of a true worshipper. One place to see this is Psalm 15.

- » Read Psalm 15. What does it tell us about the life of a worshipper?

Psalm 15 is a liturgical psalm. It describes a conversation between a priest and a worshipper at the entrance to the Temple. The worshipper seeks entrance into God’s holy Temple. In response to the worshipper’s question “Who may enter?” the priest lists the requirement for entrance. This same pattern is used in Psalm 24:3-6 and Micah 6:6-8. Psalm 15 divides into three parts:

1. Question: Who may worship?
2. Answer: A description of the worshipper
3. Closing observation: A promise to the worshipper

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14 Much of this is adapted from “The Worshipper’s Approach to God” by Ronald E. Manahan, found in Chapter 2 of *Authentic Worship*, edited by Herbert Bateman. (Grand Rapids: Kregel Books, 2002).

## The Question: Who May Worship? (Psalm 15:1)

At the entrance of the Temple, a worshipper asks, “O LORD, who shall sojourn in your tent? Who shall dwell on your holy hill?” These questions suggest three qualities of the worshipper.

### A true worshipper knows godly fear.

This psalm shows that entrance into God’s presence is never a casual matter. A true worshipper understands that God is holy and that we are separated from him.

Throughout scripture, there is a sense of fear associated with the presence of God. At Mount Sinai, the people were warned to stay away from the mountain where God talked with Moses (Exodus 19:7-25). On the Mount of Transfiguration, the disciples were very afraid (Matthew 17:6).

For the believer, godly fear is not terror that drives a person from God’s presence. Instead, it is respect that causes the worshipper to approach God in humility. A worshipper must not walk into God’s presence unprepared.

### A true worshipper worships in humility.

The worshipper asked, “Who shall sojourn in your tent?” Sojourners are resident aliens in another country. They are guests, who do not have the rights citizens have..

Psalm 15 requires the worshipper to recognize that we are guests in God’s presence. Because God is holy and his home is holy, we do not deserve to be there. Whatever our position in life, we must enter God’s presence with an attitude of humility. We are his guests.

### A true worshipper celebrates God’s grace.

Because we recognize God’s holiness, we celebrate God’s grace when he welcomes us into his house. The worshipper who asked, “Who shall dwell on your holy hill?” asked this question in confidence that they would be invited into God’s house. God had established relationship with Israel; Jewish worship celebrated this gracious relationship.

Psalm 103 is an invitation to worship, “Bless the Lord, O my soul.” Psalm 103 contains a beautiful reminder of the grace that allows us to enter God’s presence.<sup>15</sup>

“As a father shows compassion to his children, so the LORD shows compassion to those who fear him. For he knows our frame; he remembers that we are dust” (Psalm 103:13-14). The God who formed us out of the dust has graciously called us to worship! When we enter

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15 This observation comes from Richard Averbeck, “Worshipping God in Spirit.”

worship, we remember God's grace. It is grace that allows dust to enter the presence of the Creator of the universe.

True worship involves godly fear, humility, and grace. Each of these aspects of worship was seen in Temple worship. Jewish worshippers treated the Temple with respect because it was the house of a holy God.<sup>16</sup> They carefully prepared for worship in order to show proper humility before God. They also celebrated in worship. Jewish worship was filled with singing, instruments, rich scents, and an atmosphere that celebrated God's grace to his people.

Today, we should enter God's house with a sense of godly fear. We should recognize our unworthiness before God. But our worship should also celebrate God's grace that welcomes us into his presence. An old Communion liturgy says, "We come not because we are worthy, but because we are invited." This is worship that celebrates God's grace.

### **The Answer: A Description of the Worshipper (Psalm 15:2-5)**

In response to the question, "Who can enter God's house?" the priest gave a description of the worshipper. The worshipper walks blamelessly before God. He is careful in his treatment of others. He rejects those who reject God, but he honors those who fear God. He seeks to model his character after the character of God. The person who truly worships God will become more and more like God.

This answer reminds us that worship affects all of life. Entrance into God's presence requires complete obedience. David could not imagine a person who said, "I am God's child, but I do not live in submission to God's law." Scripture does not allow a person to say, "Jesus is my Savior, but he is not Lord of my life." Entrance into God's presence requires submission to God's authority.

#### **A true worshipper lives a godly life.**

Psalm 15:2 gives a general description of the worshipper. Those who enter God's presence are to walk blamelessly; this suggests a life of integrity in all areas. They are to consistently do what is right. They are to speak truth in (or from) the heart. These phrases describe the ongoing life of the worshipper. All of life is affected by worship.

#### **A true worshipper lives in right relationship with the community.**

Just as David could not imagine a person who said, "I am God's child, but I do not obey God's law," neither could he imagine a person who said, "I am righteous before God, but I do not treat my neighbors righteously."

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<sup>16</sup> By Jesus' time, this respect had been lost and the entrance to the Temple had become a marketplace. Jesus drove out the moneychangers who disgraced the Temple, making it into a "den of thieves" (Matthew 21:12-13).

The person who enters God's presence is to be a person who lives in right relationship to the community. He:

- Does not slander with his tongue.
- Does not evil to his neighbor.
- Does not take up a reproach against his friend; he does not gossip.
- Opposes those who reject God.
- Honors those who fear God.
- Is true to his word.
- Does not exploit the poor with unjust loans.
- Does not wrong the innocent by accepting bribes.

The person who sojourns in God's tent is a righteous person, both inwardly and outwardly. The true worshipper is a person of integrity. The true worshipper does not allow the rituals of worship to replace a daily life of obedience.

### **The Closing Observation: A Promise to the Worshipper (Psalm 15:5)**

Psalm 15 ends with a promise to the worshipper; "He who does these things shall never be moved" (Psalm 15:5). The person who lives in obedience to God's commands is promised God's protection. Psalm 15 parallels Psalm 1 with its description of godliness and its promise of God's blessing on a godly person.

Psalm 15 shows what God requires of those who worship him. Psalm 15 should be read both as a command ("This is what God requires") and as a promise ("This is what God will do for those who ask him"). In light of Isaiah 6, we understand that it is God who empowers the worshipper for obedience; it is God who purifies unclean lips; it is God who makes the demands of Psalm 15 possible. True worship relies on God's grace. It is achieved not through our feeble efforts, but through God's grace in the life of those who seek to worship him. Never forget God's grace in worship; the Father seeks true worshippers, *and* the Father makes worship possible.

## CHECKUP

Ask yourself, “Do I have the heart and hands of a true worshipper?” Read Psalm 15 as a test. After each phrase, ask “Does this describe me? Am I prepared for worship?”

Read Psalm 15 again, as a personal prayer. “Lord, empower me to walk blamelessly and to do what is right.... Give me grace to avoid gossip and slander...” Finish by hearing God’s promise, “He who does these things shall never be moved.”

## WORSHIP DANGERS: HYPOCRISY

Jesus spoke to people who considered themselves experts on worship. The scribes and Pharisees were careful to observe every detail of worship, both biblical commands and Jewish traditions. They were quick to condemn anyone who failed to follow every detail of their rituals. However, Jesus condemned their worship because they were hypocrites.

The Pharisees complained that Jesus’ disciples did not follow ceremonial rituals for washing their hands. Jesus responded, “You hypocrites! Well did Isaiah prophesy of you, when he said: ‘This people honors me with their lips, but their heart is far from me; in vain do they worship me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men.’” (Matthew 15:7-9) The Pharisees, like the false worshippers of Isaiah’s day, were called hypocrites by Jesus because of two failures:

1. Their worship was external, not from the heart (Matthew 15:8).
2. Their worship was based on human tradition, not God’s commands (Matthew 15:9).

We must be careful to avoid the danger of hypocritical worship. Our worship must come from the heart, and our worship must be guided by God, not by traditions that have been elevated to a status equal to God’s Word.

## CONCLUSION: TESTIMONIES OF WORSHIPPERS

If we read Psalm 15 without remembering the role of grace in the Christian life, we might get the false idea that we must earn the right to worship. However, Psalm 15 shows what God does for us, not what we do, to receive a welcome into his house.

Who is invited to worship? Listen to some surprising testimonies of worshippers. They show that worship is not about being worthy; worship is about coming humbly into God's presence and being transformed by his grace.

A Pharisee speaks:

"I'm sure you can understand why I'm offended by Jesus' teaching. I am a good man. I don't break the commandments. I fast and pay tithes. If anyone deserves God's favor, it should be me! I come to God's house to show that I am a good person. How can God reject my worship?"

A publican speaks:

"Honestly, I'm as surprised as the Pharisee! I wasn't even sure I could enter the Temple. I stayed as far away from the good people as possible. I hoped no one would notice me. I sought God's mercy even though I don't deserve mercy. To my amazement, I went home justified. My life was transformed in worship."

A rich man speaks:

"I give a lot of money to the Temple. I think Jesus should be impressed with my offering. That is my worship. When I drop my offering in the box, everyone knows 'Mr. Money' is here. I hope God notices how much I give!"

A poor widow speaks:

"I was ashamed to put my offering in the box. I only had two small coins. Everyone else was giving large donations; I had almost nothing. But worship is about giving God your best. It wasn't much; but I gave all I had. I hoped that no one would notice my little mite, but someone did notice. Jesus saw what I gave! And he said that I gave more than anyone else. I'm not sure what Jesus meant by that statement, but I am glad I gave my best!"

## GROUP DISCUSSION

- » For practical application of this lesson, discuss the following:

*John has been a Christian for several years. He knows that church attendance, Bible reading, and prayer are important, but it is hard for him to feel God's presence in these activities. They seem to be nothing more than form. How can you help John see God in his worship?*

## LESSON 2 IN REVIEW

1. Our understanding of God is important to worship because a distorted image of God will lead to distorted worship.
2. Worship must be focused on God, not on the quality of our worship experience.
3. Revelation gives a picture of heavenly worship:
  - Heavenly worship is worship of the Creator who is sovereign, holy, and eternal.
  - Heavenly worship is worship of the Redeemer.
  - Heavenly worship is worship of the King.
  - Heavenly worship is worship of the Conquering Bridegroom.
4. Psalm 15 is a worship psalm that summarizes God's requirements for worshippers. True worshippers:
  - Know godly fear.
  - Worship in humility.
  - Celebrate God's grace.
  - Live godly lives.
  - Live in right relationship with the community.
  - Receive God's promise of protection and blessing.

## LESSON 2 ASSIGNMENTS

1. Psalms 120-134 are a collection of songs for pilgrims traveling to Jerusalem. These psalms teach about worship in different circumstances. Read these psalms as you answer the questions in the table below.

PSALM	QUESTIONS TO ANSWER
120	Where is Meshech and Kedar? Why is worship in Jerusalem important for a pilgrim who lives in Meshech or Kedar?
122	What does this psalm teach about our attitude towards worship?
123	What does verse 2 teach about the worshipper's relationship with God?
124	What do you learn about praise in difficult circumstances from this psalm?
126	How does worship relate to mission among the nations? Note verse 2.
130	What does this psalm teach about the role of confession in worship?
131	How does the psalmist prepare himself for worship? What are practical steps you can take to follow this model?
133	Psalm 133, John 17:20-23, and Ephesians 4:1-16 all speak of unity and all relate to church life in some way. How does unity relate to worship and the life of the church?
134	How is Psalm 134 an appropriate ending for this series of worship psalms?

2. At the beginning of the next lesson, you will take a test based on this lesson. Study the test questions carefully in preparation.

## LESSON 2 TEST

1. List three things that we learn about God the Creator in the hymn of Revelation 4.
2. List three reasons for worshipping the Redeemer in Revelation 5.
3. What is the primary message of Revelation for Christians?
4. Psalm 15 is a liturgical psalm divided into three parts. List the three parts.
5. What is the attitude of the worshipper who understands he is a guest in God's presence?
6. What are two important characteristics of a true worshipper from Psalm 15:2-5?
7. Why did Jesus call the Pharisees hypocrites?
8. Write Revelation 5:9-14 from memory.



## LESSON 3

# WORSHIP IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

### LESSON OBJECTIVES

1. Appreciate God's grace that makes worship possible.
2. Approach worship with a heart of obedience.
3. Know the role of ritual in worship.
4. Practice praise as a central element of worship.
5. Recognize the importance of the proclamation of God's Word in worship.
6. Avoid the danger of imbalance in worship.

### PREPARATION FOR THIS LESSON

*Memorize Micah 6:6-8.*

### INTRODUCTION

A group of pastors meets each month to discuss issues in their churches. Recently they have discussed worship. There are significant differences between these pastors on the topic of worship. Even though they share the same doctrinal beliefs, they differ greatly on the matter of worship styles.

James is the pastor of a church that follows a traditional approach to worship. Enoch serves a growing church that uses many contemporary ideas in worship. Gideon is still trying to find the type of worship that is most appropriate for his church. These pastors have had

many discussions about worship, but they are frustrated in their attempt to agree on basic principles for worship.

Today, Jason says, “Maybe we have been looking at this wrong. We keep asking, ‘What kind of worship do we enjoy? How do we want to worship?’ Maybe we should ask, ‘How does God want us to worship? What kind of worship does *he* enjoy? If God were to design worship, what would it look like?’ If we learn what biblical worship looked like, that may give us a model for worship today.”

- » If God were to design worship, what would it look like? Summarize what you already know about biblical worship.

## INTRODUCTION: GOD REQUIRES PROPER WORSHIP

In Lesson 2, we saw from Revelation that true worship is worship of a holy God. We saw from Psalm 15 that God requires his worshippers to be holy. In Lesson 3, we ask, “How does a worshipper approach a holy God?”

Some people say that God doesn’t care how we worship; he only cares that the heart is right. It is true that the heart is at the root of worship. However, we have ample witness from scripture that God cares greatly about how he is worshipped.

The form of worship is important because **our worship affects our understanding of God**. In the previous lesson, we saw that a distorted image of God leads to distorted worship. It is also true that distorted worship distorts our image of God. When Israel worshipped Jehovah in the way that the Canaanites worshipped their gods, they soon believed that God’s nature was like the gods of the Canaanites. They began to believe that God was vindictive and unreliable, just like the gods of the Canaanites.<sup>17</sup>

The form of worship is important because **how we worship is often a reflection of why we worship**. A heart of love delights to bring worship that honors God; a heart of begrudging obedience wants to do worship my way rather than God’s way.

Many college classes have certain requirements for the form of research papers. They require a cover page, footnotes, and a certain margin. These details are not the most important part of the paper; the content is most important. However, many teachers have observed that a student who is careful with details is usually careful about content; they want to do their best. On the other hand, a student who ignores these requirements is often careless with the content. The form of the paper often reflects the content of the paper. The way we worship often reflects the attitude of our heart. How we worship is often related to our reason for worship. Because of this, God cares how we worship.

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17 In Micah 6:6-7, religious leaders try to bribe Jehovah with child sacrifices. They think that Jehovah expects the child sacrifice that Molech demanded.

- Cain brought an offering to the Lord. Cain was a worker of the ground. He brought fruit of the ground, but the Lord had no regard for Cain and his offering. Cain's failure to worship properly showed the attitude of his heart. Cain's offering was convenient for himself, but God did not accept his worship (Genesis 4:1-5).
- Aaron built a golden calf to use in the worship of Jehovah. He said, "Tomorrow shall be a feast to the LORD" (Exodus 32:1-5). Perhaps Aaron convinced himself that he could worship God in a way that pleased the people, but God did not accept his worship.
- Nadab and Abihu saw the God of Israel on Mt. Sinai (Exodus 24:1-11). They had been closer to God than anyone other than Moses, but on their first day of priestly service in the Tabernacle, they offered unauthorized fire before the Lord. In response, fire from the Lord devoured them. Moses explained God's judgment to their grieving father; "This is what the LORD has said: 'Among those who are near me I will be sanctified, and before all the people I will be glorified.'" (Leviticus 10:1-7). These priests offered incense in their own way, instead of following God's commands. God did not accept their worship.
- Uzziah was a great king. He did that which was right in the sight of the Lord. 2 Chronicles summarizes his reign: "...He was marvelously helped, till he was strong" (2 Chronicles 26:15). Sadly, this is not the end of Uzziah's story. "But when he was strong, he grew proud, to his destruction. For he was unfaithful to the Lord his God and entered the temple of the Lord to burn incense on the altar of incense" (2 Chronicles 26:16). He tried to worship God in his own way and was struck with leprosy (2 Chronicles 26:1-21). God did not accept his worship.
- The post-exilic Jews brought deformed sacrifices to the Temple. Their failure to bring proper sacrifices showed the careless attitude of their hearts. They did not truly love God, so God did not accept their worship (Malachi 1:6-14).

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**"If you were an Old Testament priest, and you served God as you serve Him now, how long would it be before the Lord killed you?"**

**Warren Wiersbe**

(regarding the seriousness of worship)

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God cares about *how* he is worshipped. These examples suggest that, left to ourselves, we will not approach God in a way that honors him. What seems appropriate to us may not be acceptable to God. We must have his guidance for our worship.

Since worship means giving honor to God, our worship must be determined by God's character rather than our desires. We cannot determine for ourselves what is pleasing to God; we must look at God's Word to learn how to worship in a way that pleases God.

## WALKING WITH GOD: WORSHIP AS A RELATIONSHIP OF GRACE

The first biblical picture of worship is in the Garden of Eden, “And they heard the sound of the LORD God walking in the garden in the cool of the day...” (Genesis 3:8). This shows God’s ideal for worship: unbroken fellowship between man and his Creator. Before the Fall, communion between man and God was not hindered by sin. Worship in the Garden was simple and uncomplicated.

In the Garden, we see that God desires fellowship with his creatures. Until the Fall, man enjoyed complete fellowship with God; it was only after sin corrupted man’s nature that man hid himself from God.

Throughout the Old Testament, the term *walked with God* is used to show that worship involves relationship with God. Enoch walked with God; Noah walked with God; Abraham was commanded to walk with God (Genesis 5:24, Genesis 6:9, Genesis 17:1). Each of these examples shows a person who built relationship by spending time with God. Right worship is based on right relationship with God.

Genesis 3:8 shows that worship was based on relationship. It also shows that worship is possible only because of God’s grace. Pagan gods expected man to find a way to worship properly to appease the gods. By contrast, Jehovah graciously provided the proper means of worship. Three examples illustrate this.

### God Made Worship Possible for Adam and Eve

Following the Fall, God was not obligated to seek or even accept worship from Adam and Eve. They had broken God’s law; they had corrupted his creation; they deserved nothing but judgment.

After they sinned, Adam and Eve hid themselves from the presence of the Lord (Genesis 3:8). There was no other action for Adam and Eve; they could expect nothing but death. The only response they knew was to hide from the Lawgiver, but in grace the LORD God called to Adam. Worship is made possible by God’s grace. Left to ourselves, we have no means for approaching a holy God. It is only through his grace that we are called to worship.

### God Made Worship Possible for Abraham

» Read Genesis 18:1-8.

In Lesson 1, we saw that one of the Hebrew words for worship (*Shachah*) means “to bow down” or “to worship.” This word is used first in Genesis 18:2. The Lord and two angels appeared as Abraham sat at the door of his tent. Abraham ran from the tent door to meet them and bowed himself to the earth. Abraham bowed himself—he worshipped.

Note that God took the initiative in this story; he came to meet Abraham. God made worship possible. In the Old Testament as in the New Testament, worship is made possible only by grace. The Old Testament sacrifices are not a means to appease an angry God who does not desire relationship; they were devised by God himself as a means for reconciliation between God and sinful man. Even in the Old Testament, worship is made possible only through God's grace. In ourselves, we do not have the ability to worship properly.

## God Made Worship Possible for Jacob

- » Read Genesis 28:10-22. What does this story reveal about God's role in worship?

One of the most surprising biblical pictures of worship is found in Genesis 28:10-22. Nothing in Jacob's past suggests the qualities of a worshipper. He doesn't meet the qualifications of Psalm 15. He isn't seeking God; in fact, he is running from problems that he created with his own deceitful actions. No book on worship says, "Acceptable worship comes from cheaters who are running away from the results of their own sin."

However, God revealed Himself to Jacob in spite of Jacob's unworthiness. God's grace makes worship possible even for someone as unworthy as Jacob. Warren Wiersbe wrote, "God graciously breaks in on us when we least expect it – or even deserve it. **When worship ceases to be an experience of grace, it ceases to be an experience of glory.**"<sup>18</sup>

It is only through grace that God invites us into his presence. Our worship is in response to his grace. Nothing we do in worship is worthy of him; it is only his grace that empowers us to worship.

The story of Jacob demonstrates one of the great differences between worship of Jehovah and worship of false gods. Worshipers of false gods built altars in an attempt to win the favor of their god. On Mount Carmel, the prophets of Baal "called upon the name of Baal from morning until noon, saying, 'O Baal, answer us!' But there was no voice, and no one answered. And they limped around the altar that they had made" (1 Kings 18:26).

- » Read 1 Kings 18:20-39 to see the contrast between true worship and false worship.

The prophets of Baal attempted to convince Baal to reveal himself to them. This pattern is seen repeatedly in idol worship. Altars and sacrifices are an attempt to earn favor with the idol.

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**In false worship, a person builds an altar to gain an idol's favor (works).**

**In true worship, a person builds an altar to celebrate God's favor (grace).**

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By contrast, God graciously reveals himself to His people in worship. Elijah built his altar in full confidence that the God he served would answer his prayer.

O Lord, God of Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, let it be known this day that you are God in Israel, and that I am your servant, and that I have done all these things at your word (1 Kings 18:36).

In Genesis, the patriarchs built altars not to gain God's attention but as memorials to the places at which God revealed himself. The altar did not gain God's favor; it celebrated his grace. Jacob shows us that worship is possible only through grace. We must never think that our worship makes us worthy of God's favor; we worship because of grace.

What happens when God makes worship possible? Jacob was transformed. It was 30 years before this transformation was complete, but the transformation started at Bethel. Worship (even the imperfect worship of an imperfect person like Jacob) changes us and does for us what we could never do for ourselves.

## CHECKUP

Ask yourself, "Am I being transformed by worship, or am I going through empty motions? When did I last change my actions, beliefs, or attitudes because of an encounter with God in worship?"

## ABRAHAM: WORSHIP REQUIRES OBEDIENCE

- » Read Genesis 22:1-19. What are the requirements for worship in this story?

Abraham's sacrifice of his son was a supreme act of worship. In this story, notice the emphasis on Abraham's obedience. God said, "Take your son... and go... and offer him..." Three commands. Abraham "took his son Isaac..... And arose and went... and took the knife to slaughter his son." Abraham obeys each command.

Abraham's sacrifice of Isaac shows that true worship requires complete obedience. Worship is more than feeling or emotion; worship is more than listening to a singer or preacher; worship is an active response to God.

Go back to the story of Abraham in Genesis 18. At the beginning of the story, we see worship as obedient service. Abraham sees three strangers approaching his camp. He bowed himself to the ground. He worshipped.

We then see Abraham busily serving. He offered water to wash their feet; he hurried into the tent to have Sarah make cakes; he prepared food and set it before them. Taking the position of a waiting servant, he stood by them under the tree while they ate. This is all the language of a servant giving his best service to his master. The true worshipper has an attitude of willing service.

The necessity of obedience in worship is seen throughout the Old Testament. Abel's sacrifice was accepted because it met God's requirements for sacrifice. Abel brought of the firstborn of his flock and of their fat portions (Genesis 4:4). Abel obediently brought his best. By contrast, Cain wanted to fulfill his duty in the easiest way possible.

The necessity of obedience in worship is seen in the life of Saul. When Saul disobeyed God's command to destroy all the animals of Amalek, he tried to excuse himself by claiming that the best animals had been spared for a sacrifice. Samuel responded, "Has the Lord as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices, as in obeying the voice of the Lord? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to listen than the fat of rams" (1 Samuel 15:22).

» Read 1 Samuel 15:1-23.

God will not accept worship from a rebellious heart.

True worship inspires a deepening relationship with God. Look again at Abraham's story. Genesis 18 begins with Abraham's service to God; the chapter ends with relationship. The Lord asked, "Shall I hide from Abraham what I am about to do...?" After hearing God's intention, Abraham boldly negotiated with God over the fate of Sodom. What happened? The servant of God is also the friend of God.

It is in worship that we come to truly know God. It is in worship that we learn the heart of God to the point we can ask boldly. It is in obedient worship that our relationship with God grows deep. Acceptable worship includes both obedience (service) and relationship. Abraham the worshipper is both a servant of God and a friend of God.

## BIBLICAL WORSHIP TODAY

Have you wondered why some people attend a service and are brought into God's presence while others attend the same service and see nothing of God? Some give in the offering and are blessed; others give and are unhappy. The difference is an obedient heart.

No matter how beautiful our worship, no matter how talented the musicians, no matter how powerful the sermon, if worship does not come from an obedient heart, it is the worship of Cain. The worship of Cain says, “I can bring my own sacrifice in my own way. It is good enough.” True worship comes from an obedient heart.

## CHECKUP

Ask yourself, “Am I an obedient worshipper? Does my worship come from the heart of Abel or the heart of Cain?”

## SACRIFICES: WORSHIP AS RITUAL

Before the Fall, worship occurred in a simple relationship between God and man. After sin corrupted man’s nature, man needed a process for coming into God’s presence. In grace, God provided the system of sacrifice. Sacrifices were instituted by God in the garden when he killed an animal and used its skin to make clothes for Adam and Eve. Leviticus organized the sacrificial system for Israel’s worship (Leviticus 1-7 and 16).

As we read Exodus and Leviticus, it becomes clear that the details of worship are important to God. To those who argue that “God doesn’t care how we worship as long as we worship,” Exodus and Leviticus show that how we worship is important to God! God gave explicit instructions for worship. This, like God’s revelation to Adam and Eve after the Fall, is a sign of God’s grace. Jehovah gave clear instructions, “This is how you must approach me.” This was an act of grace.

For Israel, worship started before they entered God’s house. The process of preparing for worship showed their reverence for God and his house. The Songs of Ascents show that even the journey to Jerusalem was worship (Psalms 120-134). The rituals of worship were not empty; each aspect of the sacrifice reminded the worshipper of the importance of true worship.

### Sacrifices Represented Complete Submission to God

Some Christians have misunderstood the Old Testament sacrificial system. They have imagined a system in which Israelites willfully broke God’s law, brought a meaningless sacrifice, and then immediately returned to the same sins with no change of heart.

It is true that this happened in some situations. In response, God said, “I hate, I despise your feasts, and I take no delight in your solemn assemblies. Even though you offer me your burnt offerings and grain offerings, I will not accept them” (Amos 5:21-22).

However, this was man’s failure, not God’s. The sacrificial system failed when man failed to do what God commanded. God’s plan was for sacrifices that reflected true heart repentance.

The rituals associated with the feasts showed Israel the importance of the actions of worship. Every detail communicated Israel’s reverence for Jehovah. Israel’s worship was not empty ritual; these rituals signified the reality of their surrender and obedience. By laying his hands on the head of the animal, the worshipper identified himself with the death of the sacrifice. In doing so, he was confessing, “This should be me. My sin deserves death” (See Leviticus 1:4).

## God Honored True Worship with His Presence

The worship of Israel was organized further with the building of the Temple. As with the Tabernacle, each detail of the Temple signified Israel’s reverent obedience to God (2 Chronicles 1-7). The solemnity of the sacrifices and the formality of Temple worship reminded Israel of the majesty of Jehovah and the humility with which he must be approached.

The careful planning of worship rituals for Temple worship did not hinder God’s presence. One of the most organized services in history must have been the dedication of the Temple. David had planned the Temple years before. After the Temple was complete, Solomon led the dedication in a beautiful service described in 2 Chronicles 5. Musicians played cymbals, harps, and lyres. 120 priests sounded trumpets. A choir sang songs of praise. As they sang, “the house, the house of the Lord, was filled with a cloud, so that the priests could not stand to minister because of the cloud, for the glory of the Lord filled the house of God” (2 Chronicles 5:13-14).

## BIBLICAL WORSHIP TODAY

Some people react against any structure and form in worship. They believe that any planned liturgy hinders heartfelt worship. However, biblical worship was structured.

If we determine to bring God our best, his worship deserves careful planning. We plan a service not to impress others with the beauty of our service, but to bring God our best offering of worship.

In the Bible, both carefully structured worship (like the dedication of the Temple) and less structured worship (like the meeting of house churches in the first century) were blessed with God’s presence. And, both carefully structured worship (like the Temple worship of Jeremiah’s day) and less structured worship (like the chaotic worship of Corinth) could be

done without God's presence. The issue is not the degree of structure; the issue is obedience to God and a hunger for God's presence.

## CHECKUP

Ask yourself, "Does my public worship (no matter how formal or how informal) come from an obedient heart?"

## THE PSALMS: WORSHIP AS PRAISE

The book of Psalms was Israel's book of worship. It was a hymnbook; it was a collection of prayers; it was a guide to right worship; it was a manual for righteous living. The book of Psalms was central to Israel's worship.

### Praise in Worship

The book of Psalms shows that true worship includes a great emphasis on praise. With the exception of Psalm 88, every psalm includes some statement of praise. The rituals of Leviticus remind us of the solemnity of biblical worship; the psalms remind us of the joy of biblical worship. Psalms 120-134 show the joy of Jewish pilgrims as they traveled to Jerusalem for worship. Praise is central to worship.

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**"Be sure to maintain a constant delight in God."**

**Richard Baxter**

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The praise found in the book of Psalms reflects the joy of true worship. Praise shows our delight in God. True worship includes a celebration of God and his works.

### Lament in Worship

The psalms of lament show another aspect of biblical worship; worship allows complete honesty between the worshipper and God. In psalms of lament, the psalmist expresses frustration at the injustice of this world. In Psalm 10:1, the psalmist asked, "Why, O LORD, do you stand far away? Why do you hide yourself in times of trouble?" Why does God allow evildoers to act in rebellion and pride. Because worship is based on relationship with God, the worshipper can speak with honesty and openness.

Psalm 10 ends with a declaration of trust in God.

The Lord is king forever and ever; the nations perish from his land. O Lord, you hear the desire of the afflicted; you will strengthen their heart; you will incline your ear to do justice to the fatherless and the oppressed, so that man who is of the earth may strike terror no more (Psalm 10:16-18).

This declaration is based on trust in God. Though evildoers continue to commit injustice, the psalmist speaks with confidence that God will do what is right.

We see the same honesty in the book of Job. Such honesty is based on a close and intimate relationship with God. This is true worship, worship that is acceptable to God.

## BIBLICAL WORSHIP TODAY

The psalms include two types of praise. Some psalms state a reason for praise; other psalms simply command praise with no stated reason. Praise for the character and mighty acts of God is called “descriptive praise.” Praise that is not specific is called “declarative praise.” Examples of descriptive praise include psalms such as Psalm 19, 105, and 136. Examples of declarative praise include Psalms 148-150.

In today’s worship, these two types of praise are often represented by praise choruses (declarative praise) and hymns (descriptive praise). Both should be a part of worship. The simplicity of a chorus invites the worshipper to adore God. The depth of a hymn teaches profound truths about the nature of God.

### Declarative Praise

Oh, for a thousand tongues to sing  
My great Redeemer's praise,  
The glories of my God and King,  
The triumphs of his grace!<sup>19</sup>

### Descriptive Praise

A mighty fortress is our God, a bulwark never failing;  
Our helper He, amid the flood of mortal ills prevailing.<sup>20</sup>

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19 Charles Wesley, “Oh, For a Thousand Tongues.” Accessed January 12, 2023.

[https://library.timelesstruths.org/music/Oh\\_for\\_a\\_Thousand\\_Tongues\\_to\\_Sing/](https://library.timelesstruths.org/music/Oh_for_a_Thousand_Tongues_to_Sing/)

20 Martin Luther, tr. by Frederick Hedge, “A Mighty Fortress Is Our God.” Accessed January 12, 2023.

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## CHECKUP

The praise of the psalmist shows his delight in God. Ask yourself, “Do I truly delight in God?”

## THE PROPHETS: WORSHIP AS PROCLAMATION

The laws of sacrifice, the Tabernacle, and the Temple show the value of ritual in worship. However, the prophets show that ritual that is not accompanied by heart worship is empty. When the people of Israel began to follow rituals without obedient hearts, the prophets brought God’s message of judgment. They proclaimed that God no longer accepted the sacrifices of an apostate nation.

The prophets show that the proclamation of God’s message is worship. In our services, we should not separate worship from preaching. The proclamation of the Word is worship in truth. Preaching affirms God’s authority over us and his wisdom for our lives. This is worship; it honors God.

### The Message of the Prophets

#### Ritual without reality is not worship.

Amos announced that God had rejected Israel’s sacrifices. Why? Because the lifestyle of the worshippers was sinful (Amos 5:21-22). Isaiah declared that Israel’s feasts were a tiring burden to God. Why? Because her hands were full of blood.

Before worshipping, worshippers are commanded: “Wash yourselves; make yourselves clean; remove the evil of your deeds from before my eyes; cease to do evil, learn to do good; seek justice, correct oppression; bring justice to the fatherless, plead the widow’s cause” (Isaiah 1:13-17).

God is not impressed with rituals that do not reflect the reality of the heart.

### **True worship requires our best.**

Abraham offered his son to God; he gave his best. Abel brought the firstborn of his flock; he gave his best. Leviticus required the best of the animals for sacrifice. David refused to give an offering which cost him nothing (2 Samuel 24:24). In each case, worship requires our best.

This message is continued in the prophets. Malachi warned against bringing inferior animals for sacrifice (Malachi 1:6-8). Haggai warned of judgment because the people cared more for the condition of their own houses than for God's house (Haggai 1:8-11). True worship requires our best.

### **True worship involves all of life.**

Amos gave a practical response to Israel's apostasy. The solution was not more sacrifices; the solution was a righteous life. "Let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream" (Amos 5:24). The prophets were not opposed to Temple worship and sacrifices.<sup>21</sup> They were opposed to worship that is not accompanied by a righteous life.

Throughout the Bible, we see that true worship involves all of life. In the Pentateuch, laws about worship are next to laws about moral behavior; there is no separation between them. In the historical books, Israel's disobedience in daily life results in the destruction of Israel's place of worship, the Temple. The prophets declare that God has rejected Israel's worship because of her disobedience. In the New Testament, Jesus reminds the Pharisees that worship practices such as Sabbath observance mean nothing without a life of mercy (Matthew 12:7).

### **The Example of the Prophets: Preaching and Proclamation is Worship**

The prophets show that the proclamation of God's Word is worship. Imagine the absurdity of Jeremiah standing before the Temple and saying, "Go into the Temple to sing the Psalms and offer your sacrifice. That will be worship. When you are finished, I will preach God's message to you." No! Jeremiah's proclamation was itself an act of worship. Jeremiah preached that God had rejected Israel's worship because of their sinful lives. This was worship. It recognized the purity of a holy God; it recognized God's worth.

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21 Some scholars say that the prophets rejected the Temple system. However, many prophets were closely associated with the Temple. Isaiah saw the Lord in the Temple. Ezekiel prophesied a restored Temple filled with God's glory. Haggai encouraged Zerubbabel to rebuild the Temple. The prophets did not reject the sacrifices; they rejected misuse of the sacrifices.

## BIBLICAL WORSHIP TODAY

Some churches separate worship and preaching. They announce, “We will begin with worship time.” After worship is done, they move to preaching. This has two dangers.

1. It means that worship is limited to the music. This approach to worship focuses only on the emotions. True worship must be more than music and song.
2. It separates proclamation from worship. Everything we do in a church service should be worship. The music, the prayer, the scripture, the sermon, and even the offering are all part of worship.

### CHECKUP

Ask yourself, “Is my preaching an act of worship? When I preach, do I speak as God’s messenger who is honoring God’s worth?”

## WORSHIP DANGERS: IMBALANCE IN WORSHIP

### 1. The danger of overly casual worship

When we forget that biblical worship demands submission, we can begin to treat God as a casual friend who receives no respect. An overly informal approach to worship can encourage this attitude. We must never forget that God is an awesome God who requires complete obedience. He is “the King of the ages, immortal, invisible, the only God” (1 Timothy 1:17). Some churches forget God’s majesty; worship becomes little more than a cup of coffee with an old friend.

### 2. The danger of overly formal worship

When we forget that biblical worship is worship of a God who desires to build relationship with us, we can begin to treat God as a distant deity. An overly formal approach to worship can encourage this attitude. Some churches allow no opportunity for a believer to experience intimacy with God; the emphasis is entirely on his majesty and greatness.

In worship, we should experience both God’s majestic authority over his creation and his intimacy with his children.

## CHECKUP

Think back to your most recent worship service. Ask yourself, “Which parts of the service encouraged worshippers to honor God’s majesty? Did they leave the service with a sense of our great God?” Then ask yourself, “Which parts of the service encouraged worshippers to experience God’s intimate friendship? Did they leave the service knowing that God deeply loves them?”

## CONCLUSION: TESTIMONY OF AN EYEWITNESS TO THE TEMPLE DEDICATION

What would it have been like to be at the dedication of the Temple? Perhaps it could be expressed like this:

“I was there at the dedication of the Temple. I’ll never forget that day. We had looked forward to that service for years.

“Years? Yes, years! King David had made the plans for building the Temple and had given them to Solomon before his death. Now the Temple was complete, and the long-awaited service of dedication was held.

“It was a beautiful setting and a dramatic service. Imagine...

- The sacrifice of 22,000 oxen and 120,000 sheep
- A choir of hundreds singing Psalms of David
- An orchestra of cymbals, harps, lyres, and 120 trumpets
- Priests and Levites dressed in the finest white linen
- One of the most beautiful buildings ever built
- Gold and silver vessels for each act of worship

“It was a beautiful service, but the beauty of the program is not what is most important in my memory. What I remember most is that as the musicians began to play and sing, ‘the glory of the Lord filled the house of God.’ God’s presence filled the Temple until the priests could not perform their duties. A service **to** God had been taken over **by** God!

“It has been years since that memorable service. I do not claim that every service I have attended since that day is marked by the same visible signs of God’s presence; that was a special day. However, in every service I attend, I anticipate God’s presence.

“Sometimes, his presence is dramatic; sometimes, it is quiet. Sometimes, his presence is felt in the singing; sometimes, he speaks through the sermon. Sometimes, my emotions are touched; sometimes, his truth speaks to my mind and will. Sometimes, I leave encouraged; sometimes, I leave convicted.

“Regardless of how God chooses to be present, I value his presence. I may never again see such a dramatic instance of God’s visible presence, but I can enter his presence each time I worship.”

## GROUP DISCUSSION

- » For practical application of this lesson, discuss the following:

*Esther is a sincere Christian and loves to attend the worship services in her village. The energetic music and fellowship provide a welcome change from the difficulties of daily life. She loves the feelings and emotions she experiences as she worships God with all of her heart. However, Esther finds it difficult to put the same energy into her marriage and the duties of daily life as she puts into Sunday morning worship. How would you counsel Esther?*

## LESSON 3 IN REVIEW

1. God cares how we worship because:
  - The form of our worship affects our understanding of God.
  - The form of our worship shows why we worship.
2. Worship is relationship - walking with God.
  - God provided the means of worship for Adam and Eve.
  - God took the initiative to make worship possible for Abraham.
  - God’s grace made worship possible for Jacob.
  - When we walk with God, our lives are transformed.
3. Worship begins with obedience.
  - Worship is more than emotion or feeling.
  - Worship is an active response to God’s commands.
  - Obedience to God deepens our relationship with him.

4. Worship includes ritual (the Old Testament sacrifices).
  - The sacrifices represented complete submission to God. (Romans 12:1)
  - God honored true worship with his presence. (2 Chronicles 5)
  - The public ritual must come from an obedient heart.
5. Worship includes praise (Psalms).
  - The book of Psalms shows that worship includes praise.
  - The book of Psalms shows that worship includes lament.
6. Worship includes proclamation (the Prophets).
  - Worship is more than praise; it is also proclamation of truth. Preaching is worship.
  - The prophets taught that ritual without reality is not worship.
  - The prophets taught that true worship requires our best.
  - The prophets taught that true worship involves all of life.

### LESSON 3 ASSIGNMENTS

1. List three principles about worship that you have learned from this lesson on Old Testament worship. Write one page in which you discuss practical ways to apply each principle in the worship of your church.
2. At the beginning of the next lesson, you will take a test based on this lesson. Study the test questions carefully in preparation.

## LESSON 3 TEST

1. From this lesson, list two biblical examples of worship that was rejected by God.
2. The term *walked with God* shows that worship involves \_\_\_\_\_ with God.
3. From this lesson, name three unworthy people whom God graciously enabled to worship him.
4. Abraham's sacrifice of Isaac shows that true worship requires complete \_\_\_\_\_.
5. What was the difference between the worship of Abel and the worship of Cain?
6. What was the significance of the worshipper laying his hands on the head of the animal to be sacrificed?
7. In the Book of Psalms, there are two types of praise. Praise for the character and mighty acts of God is called "\_\_\_\_\_ praise." Praise that is not specific is called "\_\_\_\_\_ praise."
8. The prophets show that the \_\_\_\_\_ of God's message is worship.
9. List three aspects of the prophets' message about worship.
10. List two dangerous imbalances in worship.
11. Write Micah 6:6-8 from memory.

## LESSON 4

# WORSHIP IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

### LESSON OBJECTIVES

1. Understand how Jesus fulfilled worship.
2. From the Gospels, Acts and Revelation, recognize false types of worship.
3. Make a personal commitment to both worship and evangelism.
4. From the Epistles, know the primary elements of worship in the early church.
5. Experience worship that is focused on God.

### PREPARATION FOR THIS LESSON

*Memorize Romans 12:1-2.*

### INTRODUCTION

Pastors James, Enoch, Gideon, and Jason met again to discuss what they had learned about worship from the Old Testament.

James, who values traditional worship, said, “I think the Old Testament proves that my church is doing worship right. Worship in the Temple was formal and organized. That is what we try to do.”

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**“Worship is the supreme and only indispensable activity of the Christian church. It alone will endure... into heaven, when all other activities of the Church have passed away.”**

**W. Nicholls**

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Enoch laughed, “Yes, but did you read what the prophets said? The formal worship of the Temple meant nothing! Worship that pleases God is worship from the heart. That’s what we do in our contemporary worship; we are touching the hearts of a new generation.”

In frustration, Gideon said, “We are no further than when we started our study of worship. Why doesn’t God just say, ‘This is how you must worship me?’”

Jason spoke up. “Let’s not give up. We are New Testament Christians; maybe the New Testament will answer our questions. Let’s study worship in the New Testament and see what it says.”

- » How did worship change in the New Testament? How was the worship of the early church different than the worship of the Tabernacle and Temple? Summarize what you already know about New Testament worship.

## THE GOSPELS: WORSHIP IS FULFILLED IN JESUS CHRIST

Of all the times the word *worship* is used in the New Testament, half of the occurrences are found in the four gospels. The gospels show that Jesus is the ultimate fulfillment of worship. He fulfills worship in two ways.

1. In his humanity, Jesus modeled worship.
2. In his deity, Jesus is worshipped.

### In His Humanity, Jesus Was the Supreme Model of Worship

Jesus modeled true worship. Jesus told the Samaritan woman that God is seeking those who worship Him in spirit and truth (John 4:24). In his own worship practices (Bible reading, prayer, attendance to the synagogue and Temple), Jesus showed what it means to truly worship in spirit and in truth.

#### Jesus loved the place of worship.

Luke shows Jesus’ love for the place of worship. Even as a child, Jesus recognized the Temple as his Father’s house (Luke 2:41-49). He had a passion for the purity of Temple worship; he twice drove out those who were abusing the Temple.<sup>22</sup>

Early in his public ministry, Jesus went to the synagogue in Nazareth on the Sabbath as his custom was (Luke 4:16). Throughout his earthly ministry, Jesus often visited synagogues.

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22 John 2:13-16 tells of the first cleansing. Matthew 21:12-27, Mark 11:15-17, and Luke 19:45-46 report a second cleansing during the last week of his earthly ministry.

## Jesus refused to worship anyone or anything but God.

In the wilderness, Jesus rejected the temptation to false worship.

» Read Matthew 4:9-10.

The temptation to worship the creature rather than the Creator is a constant theme through scripture. It is the root of idolatry in the Old Testament. Revelation shows the contrast between worship of the dragon and the beast, and worship of God and the Lamb. Jesus refused to worship the creature.<sup>23</sup>

## Jesus habitually prayed.

Prayer was important throughout Jesus' ministry. Fifteen times, the gospels report that Jesus prayed. On some of these occasions, He spent the entire night alone with his Father. Before choosing the twelve apostles, he spent the night in prayer (Luke 6:12). During his last hours with his disciples, Jesus prayed for the disciples and for all who would later believe in Him (John 17). Facing the cross, he went to Gethsemane to pray (Matthew 26:36-42). Prayer was important in Jesus' worship.

## Jesus explained true worship.

In addition to modeling worship through his own actions, Jesus consistently taught about worship. He taught the Samaritan woman about true worship. Jesus taught a model prayer to the disciples and taught about prayer through parables (Luke 11:5-8, Luke 18:1-14).

» Read Luke 11:1-4.

Jesus' model prayer shows that prayer must come from a heart of worship. The prayer begins, "Hallowed be your name." To hallow is to honor as holy. In prayer, we recognize God as holy.

## Jesus rebuked false worship.

If true worship is worship in spirit and truth, false worship is anything that falls short of this. Jesus rejected:

### 1. Hypocritical worship

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus warned that it is possible to do the right things for the wrong reasons. Giving to the poor, prayer, and fasting are all aspects of worship. Jesus

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<sup>23</sup> Jesus was not like the people spoken of in Romans 1:25.

warned against those who do these acts to impress others; they are hypocrites (Matthew 6:1-18). True worshippers do these acts out of a desire to give worship to God.

In Matthew 23, Jesus condemned religious leaders who teach the right things about worship, but whose hearts are far from God. Jesus said that their teachings were right, but their hearts were wrong; they are hypocrites.

## 2. Legalistic worship

One danger is hypocritical worship; worship intended to impress onlookers rather than to please God. Another danger is legalism; worship intended to earn God's favor through fulfilling certain requirements. When we seek to earn God's favor by our acts of worship, we lose the reality of true worship. Worship becomes work by which we earn God's approval instead of a joyful response to God's goodness.

Jesus offended Israel's religious leaders when He broke their traditions.<sup>24</sup> Jesus did not violate the law or even the spirit of the law; he violated human traditions that had grown up through years of Pharisaic legalism. To the Pharisees, these traditions were as important as the law itself. They believed that observance of the law gained favor with God. This defines legalism: the attempt to earn God's favor by fulfilling requirements. Jesus rejected legalism as strongly as he rejected hypocrisy.

## In His Deity, Jesus Is Worshipped

After his death and resurrection, **Jesus sits at the right hand of the Father and rightfully receives worship** (Revelation 5:12-14). Paul wrote about this transformation in Philippians 2. Because of Jesus' voluntary humbling of himself, he is now exalted and worshipped.

Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father (Philippians 2:9-11).

In Matthew 18:20, Jesus testified that he is worthy of worship. In Jewish tradition, 10 male members were required before a synagogue could meet for prayer and worship. Jesus said to his disciples, "For where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I among them." In the Church, **Jesus' presence, not the number of people present, determines worship.**

Through his impact on the crowds who observed his miracles, Jesus shows that he deserves worship. When they saw his miracles, **the people glorified God**, an act of worship. The people who saw his healings were all amazed (Mark 1:23-27).

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<sup>24</sup> Matthew 12:1-14, Luke 13:10-17, and John 5:8-18, among others.

On his last night with the disciples, Jesus ate the Passover. While this meal followed the traditional pattern of a Jewish Passover meal, Jesus gave it new meaning when he told his disciples that the bread “is my body which is given for you” and the cup “is the new covenant in my blood” (Luke 22:19-20).

» Read Luke 22:13-20.

He commanded them to do this in remembrance of him. **The Lord’s Supper focuses on Christ, the perfect fulfillment of Passover.**

## BIBLICAL WORSHIP TODAY

Jesus’ rebuke of false worship and his own example of true worship shows that our worship must be sincere, not for the sake of impressing others. True worship must be aimed at pleasing the Father, not at pleasing others.

This is a constant temptation for church leaders. Because preaching and worship leadership is done publicly, we can be tempted to performance rather than worship. When we focus on pleasing an audience rather than honoring God, we perform rather than worship.

What is the temptation to false worship for a leader?

- A sermon text chosen because we know it will be popular with the audience
- A prayer that talks more to the listeners than to God
- An offering given in a way that draws attention to the giver
- Music that draws glory to the performer rather than to God

**The teaching and example of Jesus reminds us that true worship belongs to God alone.** Worship is about him, not about us.

### CHECKUP

Ask yourself, “Who is honored in my worship leadership? Do I preach, sing, pray, and give for God’s glory, or for my own recognition? Am I truly worshipping?”

## ACTS: WORSHIP AND EVANGELISM

Worship is closely related to evangelism. Unbelievers become worshippers when they hear and respond to the gospel. Acts shows the link between worship and evangelism.

Isaiah 6:8 shows that worship results in evangelism; Isaiah's response to worship was "Here I am! Send me." When we truly worship, we gain a passion for evangelism. In worship, we see God and we see the needs of our world through God's eyes. Worship creates evangelists.

Worship inspires the church to evangelism. As the church leads unbelievers to Christ, new believers become worshippers. These new worshippers are then inspired to evangelism.

Acts shows this process in action. After Paul preached in Ephesus, the people turned away from Diana and the worship of gods made with hands to the worship of the true God (Acts 19:26-27). As we preach Christ, new believers are drawn into the kingdom; they become worshippers. Evangelism creates worshippers.

### True Worship Inspires Evangelism

Acts begins with the disciples worshipping; they were with one accord devoting themselves to prayer (Acts 1:14). Acts ends with Paul evangelizing in Rome; he was "proclaiming the kingdom of God and teaching about the Lord Jesus Christ with all boldness and without hindrance" (Acts 28:31).

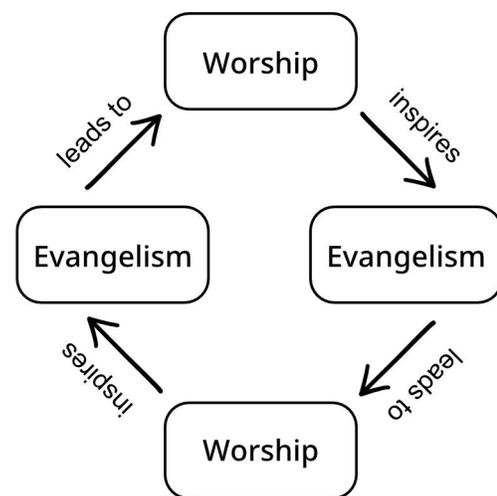
The worship of early Christians led to evangelism. The call of Paul and Barnabas took place in the setting of worship.

While they were worshipping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, "Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them." Then after fasting and praying they laid their hands on them and sent them off (Acts 13:2-3).

True worship inspires evangelism.

### Effective Evangelism Creates Worshippers

Throughout Acts, the disciples were engaged in worship. At Pentecost, 3,000 people were saved. These new believers became worshippers; they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers (Acts 2:42).



- » Read Acts 2:42-46 for a picture of worship in the early church.

Jewish Christians continued to worship in the Temple.<sup>25</sup> In addition, Jewish Christians and Gentile proselytes met at the synagogue for worship. In most cities, Paul began his ministry in the synagogue, showing Jesus as the fulfillment of the Old Testament promises.<sup>26</sup> Worship also took place in private homes. Believers went from house to house for fellowship and worship (Acts 2:46). Paul's letters include greetings to churches meeting in homes.<sup>27</sup> The evangelistic outreach of the early church created a new body of worshippers.

## Evangelism at Mars Hill

Paul's message at Mars Hill is a classic text showing the relationship between evangelism and worship (Acts 17:16-34.). At Athens, Paul confronted a culture that was full of idolatry. Paul showed the contrast between the false worship of idols and the true worship of Jehovah.

### The Athenians were very religious (Acts 17:22)

The people of Athens were worshippers, but they did not worship the true God. Their worship was false. Worship in itself is not enough; worship must be focused on the right object.

### The Athenians worshipped ignorantly (Acts 17:23).

They did not know whom they worshipped. Paul proclaimed the Lord for whom they had been searching. He told them that God has made all nations to feel their way toward him and find him. This is a phrase that suggests someone groping in the darkness. Man's hunger for God provided an opening for the gospel.

### The Athenians worshipped an inadequate god.

Jehovah is not worshipped with men's hands, as though he needed anything. He is the one who gives all people life, breath, and all things (Acts 17:25). The Athenians' worship was false because their god was inadequate. The true God gives life to all; he needs nothing. We worship God because he deserves our worship, not because he needs our worship.

Paul contrasted the idols with the true God.

- 1. God is the Creator.** He made the world and everything in it... He is Lord of heaven and earth (Acts 17:24). Unlike idols that were made with men's hands, God made man. He is not a foreign god (Acts 17:18); he is the creator of all the world.

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25 Acts 2:46, Acts 3:1, 11-26; Acts 4:2, Acts 5:12, 42

26 Acts 13:14-15, Acts 14:1, Acts 17:1, 10; Acts 18:4, 19; Acts 19:8

27 Romans 16:5, 1 Corinthians 16:19, Colossians 4:15, Philemon 1:2

2. **God is nearby.** He is not far from each one of us (Acts 17:27). Although God is transcendent, he has entered our world and is close to every worshipper.
3. **God will judge those who refuse to repent** (Acts 17:30-31). Worship in truth recognizes that God is a righteous judge who will not tolerate rebellion. In our worship, we submit ourselves to his sovereignty.
4. **God raised Jesus from the dead, showing that Jesus is worthy of worship** (Acts 17:31). Jesus voluntarily humbled himself unto death; he has now been exalted by the Father, “so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father” (Philippians 2:10-11).

Paul’s message at Athens confronted the false worship of idols with the gospel of true worship of Jehovah. Effective evangelism creates worshippers.

## WORSHIP DANGERS: WORSHIP WITHOUT EVANGELISM

Many churches separate worship from mission and evangelism. Some churches say, “We are committed to evangelism. Our passion is for reaching the lost.” These churches give little attention to worship. They see themselves as evangelistic churches. Other churches say, “We believe the primary purpose of the church is worship. Other people can do evangelism; our goal is worship.”

Acts shows that the church must be devoted to both worship **and** evangelism. True worship gives us a passion for evangelism. Effective evangelism creates new worshippers.

We must not divorce worship from evangelism. Worship that does not inspire evangelism is likely to become self-centered worship that is done primarily for our own inspiration. Evangelism that does not lead to worship will raise up shallow Christians who fail to truly see God.

In biblical worship, we gain a new passion for evangelism. Like Isaiah, our view of God will be accompanied with a view of a needy world. Like Isaiah, our worshipful commitment to God will lead us to say, “Here I am! Send me.”

## CHECKUP

Ask yourself, “Does worship motivate me to share the gospel with unbelievers? Do I have a passion for bringing new worshippers to God?”

## THE EPISTLES: WORSHIP IN THE EARLY CHURCH

Unlike the Old Testament with its specific directions for Jewish worship, the New Testament gives few directions for worship in the church.<sup>28</sup> There is no complete description of a worship service in the New Testament, but the epistles show some elements of early Christian worship.

### Scripture Reading

Scripture reading was important in early Christian worship. Colossians 4:16 and 1 Thessalonians 5:27 instruct the churches to read Paul’s letters publicly. In 1 Timothy 4:13, Paul reminds Timothy to give attention to the public reading of scripture.

The importance of scripture reading is suggested in Colossians 3:16, “Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly... in all wisdom.” The psalmist described the blessed man; he delights in and meditates on the law of the Lord (Psalm 1:2). Our public worship shows the value we place on scripture.

### Preaching the Word

Along with the reading of scripture, a leader was responsible to preach the Word (2 Timothy 4:1-4, Titus 2:15). From the time of Ezra, scribes interpreted scripture for the people. Ezra and his colleagues read from the book, from the Law of God, clearly, and they gave the sense, so that the people understood the reading (Nehemiah 8:8). Jewish synagogues in the New Testament era continued this practice (Acts 13:14-15). Giving the sense of scripture is the foundation of early Christian preaching.

The sermons in Acts show the content of early Christian preaching.<sup>29</sup> Important themes in these sermons include:

<sup>28</sup> Much of this content is adapted from Franklin M. Segler and Randall Bradely, *Christian Worship: Its Theology and Practice*. (Nashville: B&H Publishing, 2006), Chapter 2.

<sup>29</sup> Important sermons in Acts are found in Acts 2, 7, 10, 17.

- Jesus was the fulfillment of the Old Testament prophecies.
- Jesus did mighty works through the power of God.
- Jesus was crucified and then raised from the dead.
- Jesus is now exalted and made Lord.
- All who hear should repent and be baptized.

## Public Prayer

Public prayer was important in early Christian worship (1 Timothy 2:1-3). Many scholars believe that the prayers included in Paul's letters were used in public worship. The congregation's "Amen" indicated their agreement with the prayer.<sup>30</sup>

## Singing

Singing was important in the Temple and continued to play a role in early Christian worship. Along with the Psalms that Christians brought from their Jewish worship, new hymns praised Jesus as Messiah. This is suggested by Ephesians 5:19 and Colossians 3:16. Many Bible scholars believe that Philippians 2:5-11 was an early Christian hymn. In addition, the song of Mary in Luke 1:46-55 and the prayer of Simeon in Luke 2:29-32 may have been sung in worship services.

## Offerings

On some occasions, an offering was part of public worship. 1 Corinthians 16:2 and 2 Corinthians 9:6-13 direct the church in Corinth to collect an offering for the suffering Christians in Jerusalem.

## Baptism and the Lord's Supper

The ordinances of baptism and the Lord's Supper were part of worship. Paul wrote to correct abuses in the Corinthians' celebration of the Lord's Supper. Instead of a commemoration of Christ's sacrifice, it had become a feast. Paul warned of the seriousness of the Lord's Supper. Communion remembers the most sacred event for the Christian; it must not be treated lightly.<sup>31</sup>

Beyond these indications of the elements of the worship service, we know little of early Christian worship. The epistles do not prescribe a particular order for worship, the setting of worship, or other details regarding public worship in the early church. Because of the variety of religious and cultural backgrounds represented in the early church, it is likely that public worship looked much different from place to place. Jewish Christians probably

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30 1 Corinthians 14:16 is based on this practice.

31 Matthew 28:18-20, Acts 2:38-41, 1 Corinthians 11:20-34

continued to worship in a manner similar to synagogue worship. Gentile Christians would not have been familiar with Jewish practices and may have worshipped in a different manner. It is clear, however, that the early church placed great emphasis on scripture and the preaching and teaching of God's Word.

## BIBLICAL WORSHIP TODAY

In many churches, the public reading of scripture has become rare. It is not uncommon to see evangelical churches in which only a few verses of scripture are read during a service. Scripture should be a priority in our worship. Through songs based on scripture, Bible readings, or the careful exposition of scripture in the sermon, we should be known as "people of the Book." The Bible must maintain a central place in our worship.

### CHECKUP

Ask yourself, "Does my worship include each of the elements that were a part of the worship of the early church?"

## REVELATION: WORSHIP AS ADORATION

Worship is central to the message of Revelation.

- John was in the Spirit on the Lord's day when he heard the voice of Alpha and Omega (Revelation 1:10).
- One of the central themes of Revelation is the contrast between those who worship Jehovah on his throne and those who worship the beast.

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**“Finish then Thy new creation,  
Pure and spotless let us be;  
Let us see Thy great salvation  
Perfectly restored in Thee:  
Changed from glory into glory,  
Till in heaven we take our place,  
Sing and cast our crowns before Thee,  
Lost in wonder, love and praise!”**

**Charles Wesley**

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- Revelation promises that God will defeat his enemies, and all nations shall come and worship before him (Revelation 15:4).

To understand worship in Revelation, it is helpful to review the historical setting for the book. First century Christians were confronted by two competing claims. On one hand, they knew that Jesus Christ is Lord (Philippians 2:11). Faith in Christ requires commitment to the authority and lordship of Jesus Christ. On the other hand, Rome required everyone under the empire's authority to testify that Caesar was their lord and god.

It was impossible for Christians to give ultimate allegiance to anyone other than God. The root of the conflict between Rome and first century Christians was, "Who is worthy of our worship?" In this setting, Revelation says, "Jesus is Lord." Even in a world that does not recognize his authority, Jesus is Lord. He is worthy of worship. Revelation gives a picture of true worship.

## Heavenly Worship Contrasted with Failed Worship

Revelation begins with messages to the seven churches of Asia Minor. Asia Minor was one of the strongest centers of emperor worship. There were imperial temples in each of the cities addressed in Revelation. Worship of the emperor was almost universal throughout this province.

The messages to the seven churches show failures in the worship of several of the churches. While all seven churches worship God, five of the churches are reprimanded. The reprimands show that these churches failed to worship God acceptably.

1. **A lack of love hinders true worship.** Ephesus did many things well, but they had left their first love. Emptiness in worship may be a sign that we have lost our love for the God we worship.
2. **False teaching hinders true worship.** Both Pergamum and Thyatira tolerated false teaching. This danger can be seen in churches that substitute signs and wonders for biblical truth.
3. **Dead works hinder true worship.** The city of Sardis had twice been defeated when sleeping watchmen failed to see an approaching enemy.<sup>32</sup> John warned that the church of Sardis was asleep because she trusted in her good works. An encounter with God in worship would awaken Sardis from her lethargy.
4. **A lack of passion hinders true worship.** Laodicea showed the lukewarm spirit that the church has often seen in times of prosperity. The Laodiceans' lack of passion

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32 This happened when Cyrus attacked in 547 B.C. and again when Antiochus III attacked in 214 B.C.

was encouraged by their wealth and self-sufficiency. True worship reminds us of our dependence on God.

## Heavenly Worship Is Focused on God

Revelation 4-5 shows that heavenly worship is focused on God and his glory. Heavenly worshippers worship the Eternal King and the Risen Lamb.

Can you imagine an angel saying to John, “Is there anything we can change to make you more comfortable in worship?” Of course not! Worship is about God, not about me. Worship blesses the worshipper but that is not the primary purpose of worship. The purpose of worship is honoring God. The worshippers around God’s throne sing a hymn of praise to God:

Great and amazing are your deeds, O Lord God the Almighty! Just and true are your ways, O King of the nations! Who will not fear, O Lord, and glorify your name? For you alone are holy. All nations will come and worship you, for your righteous acts have been revealed (Revelation 15:3-4).

Heavenly worship takes place in God’s presence. From the time Adam and Eve were driven from the garden, man has been separated from God. In heaven, worship will again take place in God’s presence free from any influence from evil.

Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God (Revelation 21:3).

## Heavenly Worship Shows True Reality

When he wrote Revelation, John was in exile on the island of Patmos. Christians throughout the Roman Empire were suffering persecution. From an earthly perspective, the future was dark. However, Revelation shows a heavenly perspective on earthly events.<sup>33</sup>

On earth, we see only one side of history. We are tempted to think that the world around us is ultimate reality. Worship and heaven seem far removed from the struggles of the real world. The glimpses of heavenly worship seen in Revelation 4, 5, and 15 show us a picture of the real world.

For Christian workers, Revelation is an important reminder that the struggles of this world are temporary. Worship is not a weekly escape from reality; instead, worship shows reality from God’s perspective - and this transforms our view of our world. In Revelation, God says,

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33 For example: 6:1-7:8 are on earth; 7:9-8:6 are in heaven. 8:7-11:14 are on earth; 11:15-19 are in heaven.

“Things are not as they appear to be. Things are not out of control, Satan has not won, evil has not triumphed. Look through the door and get a glimpse of reality. God is on his throne.”<sup>34</sup>

## BIBLICAL WORSHIP TODAY

“He is risen!” “He is Lord!” These proclamations are central to worship. It was the resurrection that declared Jesus as Lord (Romans 1:4).

The early church recognized every Sunday as a celebration of the Resurrection; every Sunday was Easter. Christians did not fast on Sunday; Sunday was a day of celebration.

Today, our worship should be a time of celebration. Yes, there is a solemnity associated with entering the presence of the Most High, but there is also rejoicing as we celebrate the risen Lord. Our worship should include opportunities for celebration.

Worship includes songs of praise and testimonies of God’s grace in the lives of members. A church in Nigeria celebrates as they give an offering. Members march around the church as the offering is collected. These worshippers know the joy of the Resurrection. Worship must include opportunities to celebrate the victory we have gained through Christ’s victory over death.

### CHECKUP

Ask yourself, “Is my worship a celebration or only a duty? Do I rejoice to enter worship, or do I attend worship only because it is my obligation as a Christian?”

## PERSONAL APPLICATION

Take time to meditate on the God we worship. Think of what scripture tells us about him.

WHO GOD IS IN SCRIPTURE <sup>35</sup>	
In Genesis	He is the Creator of the Universe
In Exodus	He is the Passover Lamb
In Leviticus	He is the Perfect Sacrifice
In Numbers	He is the Cloud
In Deuteronomy	He is the One True Prophet
In Joshua	He is the Captain of the Lord's Army
In Ruth	He is the Kinsman Redeemer
In 1 and 2 Samuel	He is the Prophet
In Chronicles	He is the Heavenly Temple
In Job	He is the Mediator
In Psalms	He is the Shepherd
In Isaiah	He is the Prince of Peace
In Ezekiel	He is the Son of Man
In Hosea	He is the Healer of the Backslider
In Haggai	He is the Desire of All Nations
In Malachi	He is the Sun of Righteousness
In Matthew	He is the Promised Messiah
In Mark	He is the Servant
In Luke	He is the Son of Man
In John	He is the Word
In Romans	He is the One Who Justifies
In Philippians	He is our Joy
In Colossians	He is the Fullness of the Godhead
In Hebrews	He is the Great High Priest
In 1 and 2 Peter	He is the Chief Shepherd of the Flock
In Revelation	He is the Lamb that was Slain, the King of Kings, and Lord of Lords!

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35 This is adapted from Vernon Whaley, *Called to Worship*. (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2009), 331-333.

## CONCLUSION: APOSTLE JOHN'S TESTIMONY

“My name is John. My life has been transformed by worship. From the time I first met Jesus of Nazareth, I have been a worshipper.

“I was there on the Mount of Transfiguration. We heard the voice from heaven, we saw his glory, and we fell on (our) faces, and were terrified (Matthew 17:6). We worshipped imperfectly. Our actions during Passion Week showed that we did not understand what we had seen on the Mount.

“I was there on the mountain in Galilee when Jesus appeared after the resurrection. We worshipped, although some doubted (Matthew 28:17). We worshipped imperfectly. We knew he was risen, but we did not understand all that it meant.

“I was in the upper room as we devoted ourselves to prayer with one accord (Acts 1:14). As we worshipped, the Holy Spirit came upon us. Worship became the motivator for evangelism; we took the gospel to Jerusalem, Judea and Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth.

“While in exile on Patmos, I was in the Spirit on the Lord's day when I heard a loud voice like a trumpet. It was the voice of Alpha and Omega, the first and last (Revelation 1:10-11).

“I was there when God opened a door in heaven and allowed me to see the worship around the Throne of God.

“I will be forever in the new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven (Revelation 21:2). In that city, our worship will finally be perfect because we will see the face of the One we worship. In heaven, ‘the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God’ (Revelation 21:3).

“I am John. And I will spend eternity in worship of my God and Redeemer!”

## PERSONAL APPLICATION

Before leaving this lesson, take time to worship. Read the songs of Revelation 4, 5, and 15 or Psalm 19. Sing a song that praises God. Pray a prayer of adoration. Listen as God speaks to you. Take time to truly worship God.

## GROUP DISCUSSION

- » For practical application of this lesson, discuss the following:

*Tim pastors a church that is passionate about evangelism. New converts are baptized every month. It is an exciting time in the church.*

*However, Tim is concerned that the church is not truly worshipping. Most of the preaching is geared to unbelievers and new converts. It is difficult to use great hymns because new people do not know the songs. Tim is afraid that his church will be large in size but shallow in spiritual depth. He wants to focus more on worship. Discuss what Tim can do to maintain an emphasis on evangelism while also deepening the worship of the church.*

## LESSON 4 IN REVIEW

1. The Gospels show that worship is fulfilled in Jesus Christ:
  - Jesus provided a model for worship.
  - Jesus rejected the temptation to false worship.
  - Jesus modeled the importance of prayer.
  - Jesus will be worshipped throughout eternity.
2. Acts shows the relationship between worship and evangelism.
  - True worship inspires evangelism.
  - Effective evangelism creates worshippers.
  - Worship that does not lead to evangelism will become self-centered.
3. The Epistles show important elements of worship in the early church. Worship in the early church included:
  - Scripture reading
  - Preaching the Word
  - Public prayer
  - Singing
  - Offerings
  - Baptism
  - The Lord's Supper
4. Revelation shows that worship is adoration of God.
  - Worship blesses the worshipper, but that is not the primary purpose of worship.
  - The primary purpose of worship is bringing honor to God.
  - Heavenly worship reminds us that the world we see is not ultimate reality.

## LESSON 4 ASSIGNMENTS

1. List three principles of worship from this lesson. For each principle, write one paragraph discussing practical ways to apply the principle in your church.
2. At the beginning of the next lesson, you will take a test based on this lesson. Study the test questions carefully in preparation.

## LESSON 4 TEST

1. List three ways Jesus modeled true worship.
2. What does the teaching and example of Jesus remind us about true worship?
3. What two statements summarize the relationship between worship and evangelism?
4. How is the false worship of Athens described in Acts 17?
5. How is the true God described in Acts 17?
6. List five elements of early Christian worship in the Epistles.
7. List two examples of hindrances to worship found among the churches of Asia Minor.
8. Write Romans 12:1-2 from memory.



## LESSON 5

# WORSHIP IN CHURCH HISTORY

### LESSON OBJECTIVES

1. Respect differences among various worship traditions.
2. Understand the difference between unchanging principles for worship and changing worship practices.
3. Recognize that worship both reflects our theological beliefs and influences those beliefs.
4. Apply lessons from the worship of various church traditions to worship today.

### PREPARATION FOR THIS LESSON

*Memorize Psalm 100:1-5.*

### INTRODUCTION

James values traditional worship. At their monthly meeting Enoch, who leads a contemporary worship service, asked, “Why don’t you try something new in your services?”

“We are biblical,” James answered. “If the Bible doesn’t command a particular worship practice, we are not free to simply add to the worship practices of the early church. Who are we to change biblical worship? In our church, we sing only psalms. Those songs were the songs of the early church; they are good enough for us!”<sup>36</sup>

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36 This is called the “regulative principle” of worship. Taught by John Calvin, it prohibits any worship practices that are not instituted in scripture. Originally, this prevented any instrumental music (since instruments are

Enoch responded, “It sounds to me like you think that history stopped at the end of the book of Revelation. How can we limit ourselves a worship style that is 2,000 years old? As long as the Bible doesn’t prohibit a practice, and as long as the practice doesn’t divide the church, we should adapt worship to the needs of our generation. In my church, we sing many new songs. If God wanted to prohibit new songs, the Bible would expressly forbid them.”<sup>37</sup>

Jason’s response was practical. “We have studied what the Bible says about worship. We know principles of worship from scripture. We need to see how other Christians have applied these principles in each generation. What does worship look like in the history of the church?”

Jason understands an important principle when discussing worship. Though the biblical principles of worship are unchanging, each experience of worship in the Bible is different. The details differ; the essential elements of worship remain the same. We have seen the essential principles of worship in the last two lessons, but the details change. Consider:

- Abraham was at the door of his tent when he worshipped. Someone might read this and say, “True worship happens when you are at home.” But...
- Isaiah was in the Temple when he saw the Lord exalted. Someone might read this and say, “True worship happens when you are at church.” But...
- Job was covered with boils from head to toe when he said, “I have heard of you with the ear, but now I see you” (Job 42:5). Someone might read this and say, “Aha! True worship happens when you are miserable.”

Do you see the point? Worship happens in many different circumstances, in many different ways, and following many different patterns. We often confuse the changing circumstances of worship with the unchanging principles.

In this lesson, we will see how the church has applied the principles of worship throughout history. This will give you a sense of the variety of ways in which God’s people worship. Hopefully this will help you see that there is no single pattern for worship that must be followed by all people in all situations. Rather, we must seek the guidance of God’s Spirit to determine how to apply biblical principles of worship to our situation.

In this lesson, we will also see that how we worship reflects our beliefs. Our worship practices are influenced by our beliefs about God and how we approach him.

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not mentioned in New Testament worship) or the use of any songs other than the Psalms. Some churches that follow this principle today have added instruments and hymns; but they continue to avoid newer approaches to worship.

37 This is called the “normative principle” of worship. This approach teaches that any worship practices not prohibited in scripture are permitted, as long as they do not disrupt the peace and unity of the Church.

This understanding is crucial as you make decisions about worship. Do you conduct your worship service in a way that communicates your beliefs, or are you simply copying another church's pattern? If you are copying another church, you must make sure that you share that church's beliefs about God and how we approach him. Our worship shows what we believe.

- » Before continuing this lesson, discuss your current worship services. If a person knew nothing about your doctrine, what would your style of worship say to them? What would they learn about your view of God, your view of our relationship to God, and your view of evangelism as a result of your worship service?

## A PICTURE OF WORSHIP IN THE SECOND CENTURY

Our earliest picture of worship after the New Testament comes in a letter from A.D. 113. Pliny, the governor of Bithynia, described Christian worship in a letter to Emperor Trajan.<sup>38</sup> He wrote that Christians, “gather on a stated day before dawn and sing alternately a hymn to Christ as to a god, and that they take an oath... to commit no theft, no fraud, no adultery.... It is their custom to part and return later to eat a meal together.”

According to Pliny, Christians met before sunrise on Sunday to sing hymns and pledge ethical conduct, probably in response to the reading of scripture. Later in the day, they ate a meal, which probably included the Lord's Supper.

Forty years later, Justin Martyr gave a more detailed description of worship.<sup>39</sup> Justin wrote to defend Christian worship to the Roman emperor who suspected Christians of immorality and disloyalty to the Empire. Justin assured the emperor that Christian worship was not a threat to Rome. According to Justin, Christian worship included the following elements:

1. **Reading of scripture.**
2. **A sermon by the leader of the assembly.**
3. **Prayer.** Individuals prayed silently; then the leader led a formal prayer, to which the people responded, “Amen.” At the end of prayer, worshippers greeted one another with a holy kiss signifying the presence of the Holy Spirit.
4. **The service was concluded with Communion.** After the service, two deacons took the remaining bread and wine to Christians who were sick or who were in prison awaiting martyrdom.

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38 Pliny, *Letters* 10.96-97, Retrieved from <https://faculty.georgetown.edu/jod/texts/pliny.html> on January 26, 2023.

39 Justin Martyr, (Translated by Marcus Dods), *The First Apology of Justin* (Chapter 67). Retrieved from [https://en.wikisource.org/wiki/Ante-Nicene\\_Christian\\_Library/The\\_First\\_Apology\\_of\\_Justin\\_Martyr#Chapter\\_67](https://en.wikisource.org/wiki/Ante-Nicene_Christian_Library/The_First_Apology_of_Justin_Martyr#Chapter_67) on January 26, 2023

- 5. At the end of the service, those who had money or food brought their gifts forward to the leader.** The offerings were taken to the “orphans and widows, those who are needy because of sickness or any other reason, and the captives and strangers in our midst.”

One of the strengths of second-century worship was congregational participation. Both Pliny and Justin Martyr described a simple service, nothing like the elaborate rituals common in the pagan mystery religions of Rome. Worship was intimate, as small groups gathered in private homes.

Another strength was the clear connection between worship and life. Pliny’s letter mentions the Christian’s commitment to ethical behavior; Justin Martyr mentions gifts to help the needy. Worship involved all of life.

- » What aspects of worship in the second century might benefit your worship? Do you see any dangers in second century worship?

## A PICTURE OF WORSHIP IN THE MIDDLE AGES

For a second picture of worship, move to the 12th century. In the intervening years, Christianity had become the official religion of the Holy Roman Empire. After Constantine’s *Edict of Milan* in A.D. 313, congregations began to build increasingly grand church buildings. Many of the great European cathedrals were built during these 1,000 years.

In the Middle Ages, worship became increasingly grand. On the positive side, cathedral worship showed God’s majesty. Stained glass windows portrayed biblical events to those who could not read. Choirs sang beautiful anthems. Worship was dramatic and beautiful.

### Weaknesses of Worship in the Middle Ages

#### Beauty was more important than spirituality.

Use of beautiful things for worship was emphasized: incense, elaborate music sung by trained singers, bells, and special clothing for the priests. The artistic became more important than the spiritual.

#### The people could not understand the services.

The service was in Latin, a language that few people understood. Many local priests were too poorly trained to preach a sermon. The prayers were a patchwork of passages from many different sources and often did not fit together intelligibly.

### The people were onlookers, not active worshippers.

There was little involvement by the people. The congregation was a group of onlookers watching a drama, the Mass. The priests acted out the events of worship while an audience watched. The focus of the service was Communion rather than scripture.

The Roman Catholic Church taught that the bread and wine were transformed into the actual body and blood of Christ. (This is called the doctrine of *transubstantiation*.) Most laypeople received Communion only at Easter. The priest drank the wine and shared only the bread with the congregation.

### The gospel was replaced with ritual.

Our worship shapes our beliefs. We see this principle at work in the Middle Ages; Roman Catholic worship shaped their theology. God was seen as far removed from human concerns. Laypeople did not feel they could approach God; instead, they could speak to God only through a priest. The priest became the mediator between God and man.

The strength of worship in the Middle Ages was its sense of majesty and awe before God. Through architecture, music, drama, and beautiful artistry, worship portrayed God's glory.

However, the weakness of worship in the Middle Ages outweighed its strengths. The ordinary Christian was a mere spectator in the worship service. In many ways, the worship of the Middle Ages was a tragic departure from the worship of the New Testament.

## WORSHIP DANGERS: MEANINGLESS WORSHIP

We must take time to teach our congregations why we worship as we do, otherwise meaningful traditions may seem meaningless to worshippers.

One new believer asked his pastor, "Why do we say 'Amen' at the end of prayers? Is 'Amen' a magical word that makes God do as we ask?" The pastor realized that he should explain the details of worship. Something as simple as "Amen" can be meaningless if we don't teach our congregation about worship.

It is not necessary to remove the symbolism and mystery from worship. The solution is to teach the congregation the meaning of our worship practices. They should know why we use the language we use; they should know why congregational singing is important for the congregation; they should know what the scriptures mean.

- » What aspects of worship in the Middle Ages might benefit your worship? Do you see any dangers in the worship of the Middle Ages?

## A PICTURE OF WORSHIP IN THE REFORMATION

The Reformers knew well that our worship shapes our theology. Because of this, they knew that the theological truths of the Reformation would be lost unless worship reflected Reformation theology.

A primary theological concern of the Reformers was the priesthood of the believer. This means that believers worship God directly; we do not go through a priest. The Reformers also strongly believed that the Word of God must be available to every believer.

Worship in the Reformation sought to involve every worshipper. Worship was in the language of the people, not Latin. Scripture was read and preached so that all worshippers could understand God's Word in their own language. Congregational music allowed each worshipper to participate in worship. Martin Luther was a hymn writer, and his hymns are credited with helping spread the Reformation.

Beyond these common areas, there was much disagreement among the Reformers regarding worship. Lutherans and Anglicans retained much of the ceremony of the Roman Catholic Church. Luther believed that, unless they were forbidden in scripture or caused conflict in the church, new worship practices should be allowed.

Calvin and his followers held on to some rituals but rejected any worship practices that were not specifically discussed in scripture. Calvin encouraged congregational singing, but only the singing of psalms. He believed that "Only God's Word is worthy to be sung in God's praise."<sup>40</sup> He returned to congregational participation in Communion, suggesting that the Lord's Supper be served at least once per month and preferably every Lord's Day.

The Anabaptists and Puritans rejected most ceremony and returned to a simple form of worship. These groups sometimes worshipped only in private homes and saw themselves as the only ones who truly followed first-century worship.

The strength of Reformation worship was its return to congregational involvement. Although there were differences among different churches of the Reformation, all the Reformers sought to model the priesthood of the believer in worship.

- » What aspects of worship in the Reformation might benefit your worship? Do you see any dangers in the worship of the Reformation?

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40 Quoted in Donald P. Hustad, *Jubilate II* (Carol Stream: Hope Publishing Company, 1993), 194.

## A PICTURE OF WORSHIP IN THE FREE CHURCHES

Following the Reformation, some churches rejected state control. These churches, called “free churches” included Anabaptists, Puritans, Nonconformists, Separatists, and Dissenters. Many of these also rejected fixed liturgies and rituals.

Features of free church worship:

1. **Preaching was central.**
2. **Congregational participation was important.**

The nature of the congregation’s participation varied from church to church.

- In some churches the congregation sang hymns. In other churches, there was no music in public worship.
- In some churches members of the congregation prayed aloud. In other churches the pastor prayed on behalf of the people.

There was little distinction between the laity and the clergy. Most free churches had no special clothes for the clergy.

3. **All worship was in the language of the people.**

An outline of a service in 1608 includes the following (the service lasted four hours):

- Prayer
- Scripture reading (1-2 chapters with explanation)
- Prayer
- Sermon (of one hour or more)
- Spoken contributions by the laypeople
- Prayer
- Offering

Worship was no longer dominated by Communion and a priest. The worship services of the free churches looked much more like the worship of the New Testament church.

There are dangers in this approach to worship. Although free churches taught the priesthood of the believer, in practice the preacher sometimes replaced the priest as the focal point of worship. In some churches, there was little congregational involvement.

Perhaps one of the greatest dangers in free worship was the danger of extreme individualism. If the doctrine of the priesthood of the believer is not accompanied by a doctrine of the unity of the church, the church becomes a collection of individuals rather than the body of

Christ united in worship. This is seen when worship is only about “Jesus and me” with no sense of the church as a body.

- » What aspects of worship in free churches might benefit your worship? Do you see any dangers in the worship of free churches?

## A PICTURE OF WORSHIP IN THE WESLEYAN REVIVAL

John Wesley was influenced both by the tradition of corporate worship he received from the Anglican church and by the emphasis on personal spiritual experience he received through contact with the Anabaptist tradition. At a time when Anglican worship was following the medieval Roman Catholic Church into empty ritual, the Wesleys and their followers (called Methodists) revived the reality of worship that brought worshippers into God’s presence.

Emphases of early Methodist worship:

1. **Preaching.** The sermons of John Wesley were published and became a doctrinal foundation for Methodist worshippers.
2. **Frequent Communion.** John Wesley received Communion an average of five times per week. He encouraged his followers to receive Communion at least once per week.
3. **Hymn singing.** The hymns of Charles Wesley spread Methodist doctrine through the British Isles and to the New World.
4. **Small groups.** The class meetings were central to Methodist discipleship.
5. **Corporate worship.** The Methodists met together frequently, and even after many Anglican priests rejected the Methodists, Wesley encouraged his followers to attend Anglican worship.

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### Methodism and Eighteenth Century Worship

Methodism arose in reaction to failures in eighteenth century worship.

**“When the sacraments were on the margin of church life, early Methodism put them at the center; when religious zeal was in disrepute, Methodism made enthusiasm essential; where religion was confined to the churches, Methodism took it to the fields and streets.”**

### James White in Robert Webber

*Twenty Centuries of Christian Worship*

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6. **Evangelism.** Thousands of new converts were won to Christ as the Methodist revival spread through England and beyond.

Methodist worship included hymns that glorified God, discipleship that built mature believers, and preaching that proclaimed truth both to the church and to a needy world.

- » What aspects of worship in the Wesleyan revival might benefit your worship? Do you see any dangers in the worship of the Wesleyan revival?

## A PICTURE OF WORSHIP IN EARLY AMERICA

English people first settled on the eastern coast of the land that is now called the United States of America. During the late 1700s and beyond, people continued to move west into unsettled territory to find land and build homes. People faced many challenges as churches, schools, and law enforcement gradually developed. In history this territory that was gradually settled is called the American Frontier.

The purpose of studying worship in the early history of America is not to propose the American model as a pattern for all worship, but to compare it to worship that develops in young churches in other places. The same challenges are faced by newly established churches in many countries.

Features of worship in early America:

1. **Independence from denominations and formal forms of worship.** American frontier churches tended to be independent of denominational control. They gave minimal attention to ritual and fixed orders of worship (although John Wesley adapted his pattern of worship for use in the colonies). Church buildings and worship services were simple and plain.
2. **Rare opportunities for Communion.** In England, the Wesleys had emphasized the importance of regular Communion. On the American frontier, a lack of ordained clergy meant that believers had little opportunity to practice the Lord's Supper.
3. **Preaching of the Word.** Preaching continued to be the primary emphasis in the worship services. Even untrained preachers read the sermons of the Wesleys and other ministers. The focal point of the church was the pulpit, not the Communion table. The primary emphasis was on the preaching of the Word.
4. **Lively singing.** Singing was lively. American churches sang the hymns of Charles Wesley alongside simple songs of testimony in a style that was easy for an uneducated congregation to learn.

- 5. Prayer, evangelism, and revival.** Prayer was informal and often led by laypeople. Evangelism was important, and periods of revival in America saw the conversion of thousands. The sermon was usually followed by an invitation for unconverted people to come forward and pray a prayer of repentance. As an emphasis on Christian holiness spread through America, the invitation called unbelievers to conversion and believers to complete consecration.

As with other traditions, there were strengths and dangers in this worship. Strengths included personal involvement and passion. Dangers included an emphasis on personal experience with little emphasis on doctrine. It was easy for false teaching to spread through frontier regions because there was little accountability.

- » What aspects of worship on the American frontier might benefit your worship? Do you see any dangers in the worship of the American frontier church?

## WORSHIP DANGERS: CONFUSING CHANGING PRACTICES WITH UNCHANGING PRINCIPLES

We are often tempted to confuse changing worship practices with unchanging principles of biblical worship. Consider:

- In some churches, worshippers bow on their knees to show humility when they pray. In other churches, worshippers raise holy hands when they pray.
- In some churches, the organ plays softly during prayer. In other churches, there is silence while the pastor leads prayer. In other churches, everyone prays aloud.
- In some churches, choruses are projected on an overhead screen. In other churches, the people sing from a hymnbook.
- In some churches, the pastor reads scripture at the beginning of his sermon. In other churches, a layperson reads scripture before the pastor preaches. In other churches, there are two or three scripture readings.

None of these are wrong; they are matters of practice, not principle. We must not think that our way is the only biblical way. True worship is not a matter of style; it is God's presence.

There are certain principles that are unchanging. We have seen these principles in the lessons on worship in the Bible. These principles are not optional. As Christians, these principles guide us in our approach to God.

In the next few lessons, we will look at worship practices. Principles do not change; practices vary in different places and times. Because of this, we should be tolerant toward those who

worship differently than we worship. This does not mean that practice is unimportant; but it means that there will be more flexibility regarding practice than regarding principles.

Oswald Chambers wrote about making room for God in our lives. This applies to worship:

As servants of God, we must learn to make room for Him... We plan, but we forget to make room for God to come in as He chooses. Would we be surprised if God came into our meeting or into our preaching in a way we had never expected Him to come? Do not look for God to come in a particular way, but do look for Him. The way to make room for Him is to expect Him to come, but not in a certain way...

Keep your life so constantly in touch with God that His surprising power can break through at any point. Live in a constant state of expectancy, and leave room for God to come as He decides.<sup>41</sup>

## CONCLUSION: A PICTURE OF WORSHIP TODAY

What does worship look like in the 21<sup>st</sup> century? It is a question that cannot be answered simply. Worship in the 21<sup>st</sup> century takes many different forms. Some churches value ritual and tradition; other churches reject ritual in favor of personal freedom in worship.

Rather than attempting a description of worship today, Take time to make your own description. What does worship look like in your church? If you are studying in a group, discuss differences and similarities between worship in the churches represented in your group.

At this point in the course, the purpose of this description is not evaluation. The question is not, “Are we right or wrong?” The question is simply, “What do we do in our worship service?”

The reason for this description is to lay a foundation for the following lessons. Once you have a description of what you currently do in worship, you can begin to ask, “Why do we do what we do?” and “How can we do it better?”

Decisions about worship reflect theological beliefs. The elements in our worship show what we believe about God and how we relate to him; the elements in our worship show what we believe about the church and how we relate to each other; the elements in our worship show what we believe about the lost and how worship can reach them.

Let’s take one example – congregational singing.

- The absence of congregational singing in the Roman Catholic Church reflected the belief that laypeople could not understand scripture (including sung scripture). Just

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41 Oswald Chambers, *My Utmost for His Highest* (January 25 entry). Retrieved from <https://utmost.org/leave-room-for-god/> on July 22, 2020.

as a lay person was not allowed to read scripture on their own, a lay person was not allowed to sing the songs of worship. Worship was done by a priest.

- The emphasis on congregational singing in the Reformation reflected Luther's belief that every Christian could worship as part of the body of Christ.
- Calvin's refusal to allow hymns other than psalms reflected his belief that only the Word of God was acceptable in worship.
- The Methodist emphasis on congregational singing and on teaching doctrine through hymns reflected the Wesleys' conviction that every believer should sing and that what we sing affects what we believe.
- The simplicity of frontier singing showed the Methodist conviction that salvation was for all people. Because of that conviction, they involved everyone in enthusiastic singing.

As we continue this course, we will be looking at many elements of worship. Your first question regarding worship is likely to be, "Do I like it?" That is not the important question. More important is, "What does my worship say about what I believe? Does it show a right understanding of God and man's relationship to Him?"

Our worship shapes what we believe, but the opposite is also true: our beliefs shape how we worship.

## LESSON 5 IN REVIEW

### 1. In the early church:

- Worship was informal and intimate.
- Worship emphasized lay participation.
- Worship involved all of life.

### 2. In the worship of the Middle Ages:

- Beauty was more important than spirituality.
- The people could not understand the services.
- The people were onlookers, not active worshippers.
- The gospel was replaced with ritual.

### 3. In the Reformation:

- Worship demonstrated the priesthood of the believer.
- Worship was in the language of the people.
- Luther, Calvin, and the Puritans disagreed on the role of ritual in worship.

4. In the free churches following the Reformation:
  - Preaching was central.
  - Congregational involvement was important.
  - The doctrine of the priesthood of the believer was important.
  - All worship was in the language of the people.
  - Extreme individualism was a danger.
5. Early Methodist worship was marked by:
  - An emphasis on preaching
  - An emphasis on frequent Communion
  - An emphasis on hymn singing
  - An emphasis on small groups
  - An emphasis on corporate worship
  - An emphasis on evangelism
6. Worship in early America:
  - Promoted personal involvement and a passion for evangelism
  - Sometimes emphasized personal experience at the cost of doctrinal integrity
7. Our worship today reflects our beliefs about God and how we relate to him.

## LESSON 5 ASSIGNMENTS

1. Justin Martyr described the worship of the second century church in a few paragraphs. He was writing to someone who had never seen a Christian worship service. Write 2-3 paragraphs in which you describe your worship service to someone who has never attended a Christian church. Carefully consider what is most important about your worship. How can you explain your services in a way that will communicate what is central to Christian worship?

If you are studying in a group, discuss the answers of each member of the group in your next class meeting.

2. At the beginning of the next lesson, you will take a test based on this lesson. Study the test questions carefully in preparation.

## LESSON 5 TEST

1. List three elements of second century worship described by Justin Martyr.
2. List three weaknesses of worship in the Middle Ages.
3. What were two primary concerns of the Reformation related to the priesthood of believers?
4. Identify the group(s) in the Reformation that best match each description.
  - Allowed any worship practices not forbidden in scripture: \_\_\_\_\_
  - Did not allow worship practices that are not discussed in scripture: \_\_\_\_\_
  - Rejected most ceremony. Sometimes worshipped in private homes: \_\_\_\_\_
5. List three features of free church worship.
6. List three emphases of early Methodist worship.
7. List three characteristics of worship in early America.
8. Write Psalm 100:1-5 from memory.

# LESSON 6

# MUSIC IN WORSHIP

## LESSON OBJECTIVES

1. Recognize biblical, theological, and practical reasons for music in worship.
2. Understand that music speaks to the mind, heart, body, and will.
3. Commit to biblical principles that guide the choice of music in worship.
4. Apply biblical principles to practical questions related to music in worship.

## PREPARATION FOR THIS LESSON

*Memorize Colossians 3:15-17.*

## INTRODUCTION

Matthew wants to resign from his position of pastor at his church. He arrived at Lakeside First Church with great excitement and hope. He loves studying and preparing sermons. He enjoys visiting people and bringing comfort to those who are hurting. He is thrilled to have the opportunity to share the gospel with unbelievers. His church members love his sermons. New people are attending. Matthew should be excited as a pastor. But something is wrong. It all comes down to conflict over music.

Every Monday morning, Josiah calls the church office. “Pastor, yesterday’s music was terrible! I didn’t know the last song. The keyboard was too loud. I can’t stand it. You have to do something about the music in this church!”

Then every Tuesday, Matthew meets with his music director, Thomas. Thomas has a different complaint. “Pastor, why are we still singing so many old hymns? The choir is tired of these songs. Sunday, we sang two old hymns and only one new song. Why can’t we get rid of these hymnals? All the big churches have changed. Please let me change the music!”

By Tuesday night, Matthew feels like quitting. Part of Lakeside First Church loves the old hymns; they complain each time a new song is introduced. Part of Lakeside First Church hates the old hymns; they want to sing only praise and worship songs. Matthew can't find a solution.

- » What advice can you give Pastor Matthew? How can the music of his church minister to each group in his congregation?

## REASONS MUSIC IS IMPORTANT IN WORSHIP

In an interview about music in the church, a pastor once said, "We don't need music in worship. If I preach the Word of God effectively, singing isn't necessary." This pastor did not see any value for music in worship.

- » How would you answer this pastor? Why is music important in our worship?

Christians are a singing people. Muslims don't gather to sing. Buddhists don't gather to sing. Hindus don't gather to sing. Christians gather to sing. Not every Christian preaches, leads in prayer, or publicly reads scripture. All Christians can and should sing. Here are a few reasons that music is important in Christian worship.

### A Biblical Reason for Music in Worship

Music is important in worship because music is important in the Bible. There are nearly 600 references to singing and music in scripture. 44 books of the Bible refer to music.

Biblical songs related to various kinds of events:

- Israel praised God for victory over Pharaoh's army (Exodus 15).
- Israel praised God after Deborah's victory over Jabin (Judges 5).
- Singers worshipped at the dedication of the Temple (2 Chronicles 5:11-14).
- Singers led worship at the rebuilding of the Temple (Ezra 3:10-12).
- The book of Psalms is a collection of hymns for Jewish and Christian worship.
- Jesus and the disciples sang a hymn at the Last Supper (Matthew 26:30).
- Paul and Silas sang praises in prison (Acts 16:22-25).
- John saw that singing is part of the worship in heaven (Revelation 4 and 5).

### Theological Reasons for Music in Worship

Jewish worshippers sang as they worshipped. Early Christians sang with thankfulness in their hearts to the Lord (Colossians 3:16). Music was an important part of Christian worship.

Unfortunately, in A.D. 367 the Council of Laodicea forbade congregational singing. The Roman Catholic Church did not allow laymen to read the Bible; the church believed that only trained priests were capable of properly interpreting God's Word. This same reasoning led the council to forbid congregational singing: "If an individual believer does not have the ability nor the privilege of personal interpretation of the scriptures, neither should he be allowed to sing the songs of the Church."<sup>42</sup> During the Middle Ages, only trained church choirs sang in worship; ordinary believers were spectators.

An important theological emphasis of the Reformation was the priesthood of the believer. Every believer has the privilege and responsibility to come directly to God in prayer; no Christian needs a priest to serve as an intermediary. Every believer has the privilege and responsibility to listen to God speak through his Word, and every believer has the privilege and responsibility to sing in worship.

Martin Luther saw a connection between the reading of scripture and singing. He said, "Let God speak directly to his people through the scriptures, and let his people respond with grateful songs of praise."<sup>43</sup> Congregational music expresses the theological principle of **the priesthood of the believer**.

A second theological principle expressed by music is **the unity of the church**. Most biblical references to singing are congregational singing, the singing of all the people. Paul commanded early Christians to teach and warn one another with song (Colossians 3:16). As the church sings together, we express the unity of the church.

## WORSHIP DANGERS: THE LOSS OF CONGREGATIONAL SONG

Isaac Watts' great hymn says,

"Let those refuse to sing who never knew our God.  
But children of the heavenly King may speak their joys abroad!"<sup>44</sup>

Martin Luther said, "If any would not sing and talk of what Christ has done for us, he shows that he does not really believe."<sup>45</sup> The privilege of congregational song that was lost in the Middle Ages was returned by the Reformers. They believed that worship in song belongs to the people. Sadly, in many churches this privilege is again being lost.

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42 David Jeremiah, *Worship* (CA: Turning Point Outreach, 1995), 52

43 Quoted in David Jeremiah, *Worship* (CA: Turning Point Outreach, 1995), 52.

44 Isaac Watts, "We're Marching to Zion." Accessed January 12, 2023.  
[https://library.timelesstruths.org/music/Were\\_Marching\\_to\\_Zion/](https://library.timelesstruths.org/music/Were_Marching_to_Zion/)

45 Quoted in Ronald Allen and Gordon Borrer, *Worship: Rediscovering the Missing Jewel* (Colorado Springs: Multnomah Publishers, 1982), 165.

The musical expression of the priesthood of the believer is threatened by music that is inaccessible to the ordinary singer. This happens when trained choirs sing music that is too difficult for most people. It happens when praise teams sing new songs that few people can learn. We should never allow small groups to replace congregational song.

The musical expression of the unity of the church is threatened in churches that divide the congregation into separate services based on different worship styles or generational differences. It is difficult to see the church as one body when the older members of the body never see the younger members.

Imagine Paul's directions to the Ephesian church retranslated for some modern churches:

- Those who sing psalms will meet on Sundays at 8:30 a.m.
- Those who sing hymns will meet on Sundays at 11:00 a.m.
- Those who sing spiritual songs will meet on Saturdays at 7:00 p.m.

No! Paul was talking to *all* church members when he urged them to be filled with the Spirit, addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody to the Lord (Ephesians 5:18-19).

In practice, this means that each part of the body of Christ surrenders some of its preferences for the sake of the unity of the body. A teenager sings a hymn with a tune that isn't very exciting. Why? Because he is part of the body, and the body is singing an old hymn. An older saint joins in a new praise song that she doesn't enjoy. Why? Because she is part of the body, and the body is singing a new song.

A trained musician in a small rural church sings songs that are not musically challenging. Why? Because he is part of the body, and the body includes members who do not appreciate great music. An untrained church member may say "Amen" at the end of a song sung in a style she doesn't fully appreciate. Why? Because she is part of the body, and the body includes members who sing music beyond her appreciation.

This principle goes further than music. A pastor simplifies his sermon to make it understandable to children and new believers. New believers study to understand a sermon text that stretches their limited knowledge of the Bible.

Teenagers sit in a service that seems too long. Why? Because they are part of the body and know that some aspects of the service may be above their understanding. Older saints welcome a baby who cries aloud in the service. Why? Because they are part of the body, and they rejoice that the body includes young, noisy life.

Is this part of worship? Absolutely! A biblical theology of worship includes an appreciation for the unity of the church. This means giving up personal preferences for the sake of the body. It means singing a song that isn't your favorite. For leaders, it means choosing songs

that minister to all parts of the body, not just favorite hymns. Congregational songs must minister to the entire church, not to limited groups.

- » Think of the music you have used in worship during the past four weeks. Did you sing songs that speak to every part of your congregation? As a leader, have you willingly chosen songs that are not your favorite, but that speak to the congregation? Does your music demonstrate the priesthood of the believer and the unity of the church by encouraging the participation of every member of the congregation?

## REASONS MUSIC IS IMPORTANT IN WORSHIP (CONTINUED)

### Practical Reasons for Music in Worship

Along with biblical and theological reasons, there are practical reasons to value music in worship. The power of music comes from its ability to speak to all aspects of our being.

#### Music speaks to the mind.

School teachers know that setting a grammar rule to a simple tune makes it easier for children to memorize. Singing scripture makes it easier to learn. Some people who say, “I can’t memorize the Bible” already know many scripture verses; they sing them in praise choruses. Some of the best praise songs are scripture verses set to memorable melodies.

Two principles related to music and the mind are important.

#### **1. Music should speak to the mind, not the emotions alone.**

Music is emotional; that is part of its power. There is nothing wrong with the emotional power of music, but music must also speak to our mind.

Some worshippers think they can turn off their mind when they sing. The guitar is loud, the beat is strong, the music is emotional, so they assume they are worshipping. We must never forget that Paul said, “I will sing praise with my spirit, but I will sing with my mind also” (1 Corinthians 14:15).

When our music speaks to the emotions without speaking to the mind, we are in danger of false worship. There is nothing wrong with music that speaks to the emotions; the danger is music that speaks to the emotions without speaking to the mind. Wise pastors will make sure that worship music does not bypass the mind.

## 2. The message we sing must be true.

Music speaks to the mind, so songs are a powerful tool for teaching doctrine. One reason the message of assurance of salvation and grace for all spread so widely was the power of Charles Wesley's hymns. John Wesley preached that God's saving grace was freely available to all mankind; Charles' song "And Can It Be" brought this message to the farmer who didn't read theological texts:

"'Tis mercy all, immense and free,  
For, O my God, it found out me."<sup>46</sup>

Pastors, if you allow unbiblical songs, you weaken the effectiveness of your ministry. People will remember the song long after they forget the outline of your sermon. Spend time to plan the music for services. Make sure the songs support the truth of the sermon.

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**A Methodist should sing  
"as a means of raising  
the spirit of devotion,  
of confirming his faith,  
of enlivening his hope,  
and of increasing his  
love of God and man."**

**John Wesley**

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### CHECKUP

Are your worship songs true to biblical doctrine? Many churches sing songs that either teach error **or** teach nothing (the words are empty). Do your songs teach the reality of victory over sin? Do your songs teach that salvation is available to all? Do your songs teach the promise of a pure heart?

### Music speaks to the heart.

Jonathan Edwards said that we are commanded to sing praises to God because singing "moves our emotions."<sup>47</sup> While a focus on emotion for its own sake is dangerous, emotion is a normal and worthy response to music. Singing brings an emotional response to the truth. Music speaks to both the mind and the heart.

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46 Charles Wesley, "And Can It Be?" Accessed January 12, 2023. [https://library.timelesstruths.org/music/And\\_Can\\_It\\_Be/](https://library.timelesstruths.org/music/And_Can_It_Be/)

47 Paraphrase from Bob Kauflin, *Worship Matters* (Wheaton: Crossway Books, 2008), 98

Some western Christians fear music that speaks deeply to the emotions, but people in the Bible who entered God’s presence always felt an emotional response. The best worship music speaks to the mind and demands a response from the heart:

Have Thine own way, Lord! Have Thine own way!  
 Thou art the Potter, I am the clay.  
 Mold me and make me after Thy will,  
 While I am waiting, yielded and still.<sup>48</sup>

### Music speaks to the body.

Watch a child at a concert; if the music has a beat, they will move. Music speaks to the body.

Music that speaks only to the body is sensual. However, when the Bible speaks of worship, it often talks about the physical position of worshippers: raised hands, bowed knees, prostrate bodies, and physical movement. Our posture and physical gestures sometimes communicate more powerfully than our words.

In Psalm 149:3, Israel is called to “praise his name with dancing, making melody to him with tambourine and lyre.” Although some modern cultures dance only in terms of sensual motion; the Bible uses the word *dance* to describe any physical movement in worship. The psalmist recognized that even the physical body is involved in praise.

This is not the sensual dance of the nightclub, but neither is it sitting quietly in formal pews. Biblical dance involved some degree of movement during songs of worship. When we lift our hands in praise or move in some way to the music, it fits the biblical term *dance*.

While the meaning of physical gestures differs from culture to culture and generation to generation, we must never allow the sacred worship of God to be modeled after the profane practices of our surrounding culture.

- » Review Exodus 32 for worship that combined a sacred so-called “feast to the Lord” (32:5) with the profane images of Egyptian worship (32:4) and the shameful practices of pagan culture (32:25). Our worship must influence the surrounding culture through evangelism. The surrounding culture must not determine our worship practices.

Wise pastors and leaders will find music that avoids profaning worship, but that also speaks to the whole person, allowing the congregation to truly worship in song.

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48 Adelaide Pollard, “Have Thine Own Way, Lord.” Accessed January 12, 2023.  
[https://library.timelesstruths.org/music/Have\\_Thine\\_Own\\_Way\\_Lord/](https://library.timelesstruths.org/music/Have_Thine_Own_Way_Lord/)

## CHECKUP

Does your worship music speak to the body in a manner appropriate to worship? Do your worshippers physically express their praise and worship without profaning worship with sensual practices?

### Music speaks to the will.

Music often calls for a response of the will. Paul commanded the Colossians to admonish one another in psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs (Colossians 3:16). To admonish is to correct an error. A rebuke asks for a response; a correction asks a person to make a change in their behavior. Paul expected music to be a cause of change.

Outside the church, we see how music speaks to the will. When African Americans (campaigning for civil rights in the 1960s) sang “We Shall Overcome,” the song spoke both to hearts and to the will. This song became an invitation, “Will you join us in the battle for freedom?”

Music calls the will to a response. Think of the commitment involved when we sing:

“Take my life and let it be  
Consecrated, Lord to Thee.  
Take my moments and my days;  
Let them flow in ceaseless praise.

Take my hands and let them move  
At the impulse of Thy love.  
Take my feet and let them be  
Swift and beautiful for Thee.

Take my will and make it Thine;  
It shall be no longer mine.  
Take my heart—it is Thine own,  
It shall be Thy royal throne.”<sup>49</sup>

Music in worship is important because it speaks to the whole person. Because of this, music is both valuable and dangerous. It is valuable because it can present truth in a powerful way. It is dangerous because it can make false teaching attractive. Warren Wiersbe warned, “I

49 Frances Havergal, “Take My Life and Let It Be.” Accessed January 12, 2023.  
[https://library.timelesstruths.org/music/Take\\_My\\_Life\\_and\\_Let\\_It\\_Be/](https://library.timelesstruths.org/music/Take_My_Life_and_Let_It_Be/)

am convinced that congregations learn more theology (good and bad) from the songs they sing than from the sermons they hear.... [Music] can become a wonderful tool in the hands of the Spirit or a terrible weapon in the hands of the Adversary. **Naïve congregations can sing their way into heresy before they even realize what is going on.**<sup>50</sup>

Music is powerful; use it wisely.

## CHECKUP

Think of the songs you have sung during the past four weeks. Did you sing songs that spoke to the whole person?

- Name a song that taught doctrine to your congregation.
- Name a song that spoke deeply to the emotions of your congregation.
- Name a song that challenged your congregation to a deeper commitment to God.

## PRINCIPLES FOR CHOOSING MUSIC FOR WORSHIP

We began this lesson with a story of conflict over worship music. If you are a pastor who faces this type of conflict, realize that this is not a new problem! In every generation, the church has struggled to determine the type of music that is appropriate for worship. For many churches, music has become a source of conflict rather than a means of true worship.

Music is central in worship services. In many churches, half the service involves music: prelude music, congregational singing, special songs, a postlude, and soft music during prayer. Because music is important in worship, conflict about music becomes serious.

People have strong preferences for music styles. Many people do not want to tolerate styles of music that they do not enjoy.

Conflict comes from differences of opinion about the morality of music styles. Here are three common perspectives:

1. Some people believe that certain music styles are evil. They choose to use music styles that they believe to be pure.

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50 Warren Wiersbe, *Real Worship* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2000), 136. emphasis added

2. Some believe that music styles cannot be good or evil, and therefore every style is acceptable. These people usually want to use the music styles of culture for worship.
3. Some believe that music styles are morally neutral yet have emotional and cultural associations that affect their usefulness for worship. These people evaluate each style to consider whether it will help the congregation worship in a way that honors God.

In this section, we will look at biblical principles that address the music in our worship.

## The Text of Worship Music Must Clearly Communicate Truth

The primary focus of scripture is on the content of song text, not on the style of the music.

Regardless of the musical style, songs with a false message (or no message) are inappropriate for worship. Warren Wiersbe warns that many texts are “vague and sentimental, not theological.”<sup>51</sup> One test for our musical message is, “Could a deist, Hindu, or Muslim sing this text without changing the words?” If you can substitute the name Buddha without changing the song’s message, it is inappropriate for worship. If a song does not speak truth clearly, we should question its value in worship. Our songs should express our faith. If they do not, our songs will not point worshippers to God.

Listen to a song from scripture:

Praise the Lord!  
 Praise the Lord from the heavens;  
 Praise him in the heights!  
 Praise him, all his angels;  
 Praise him, all his hosts!  
 Praise him, sun and moon,  
 Praise him, all you shining stars!  
 Praise him, you highest heavens,  
 And you waters above the heavens!  
 Let them praise the name of the Lord!  
 For he commanded and they were created.  
 And he established them forever and ever... (Psalm 148).

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### The Twenty Year Rule

**“If someone grew up singing our songs for twenty years, how well would they know God? Would they know that God is holy, wise, omnipotent, and sovereign? Would they understand the glory and centrality of the gospel?”**

### Bob Kauflin

*Worship Matters*

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51 Warren Wiersbe, *Real Worship* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2000), 137

Compare this to a recent popular song:

“It’s alright to dance when you dance in Jesus’ name  
It’s alright to dance when you’re dancing for the Lord...”<sup>52</sup>

Which song proclaims God’s Word? Paul warned against worship that is unintelligible. He said, “I will sing praise with my spirit, but I will sing with my mind also” (1 Corinthians 14:15). When we study the songs of scripture, we find that they teach with clarity. The text of our worship music must communicate biblical truth.

### Song Evaluation Form<sup>53</sup>

	WEAK	AVERAGE	STRONG
Is the text doctrinally true?			
Is the text faithful to Christian experience?			
Will the congregation understand the text?			
Does the style of the music fit the words?			
Is the tune easy for the congregation to sing?			

### CHECKUP

Are your worship songs truly biblical? Would a new believer recognize the God of the Bible in the songs at your church?

### Styles of Worship Music May Differ

God is a God of infinite variety. He inspired four Gospel records in the New Testament, not one. He spoke through the unique personalities of each writer. He created thousands of species of fish, not one. He created the human eye with the ability to distinguish between 8

<sup>52</sup> James Roberson, “Everybody Dance!” Accessed January 10, 2023.  
<https://genius.com/James-roberson-everybody-dance-lyrics>

<sup>53</sup> Adapted from Constance M. Cherry, *The Worship Architect*. (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2010), 202-203.

million color differences. Creation displays God's glory in its variety and beauty. He created unique individuals, not just one personality type. God shows infinite variety.

Our music should reflect the creative variety of the God we worship. In Colossians 3:16 Paul lists three types of songs that should be used for worship: psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs (See also Ephesians 5:19.) Paul did not give definitions of these three styles. Many writers have defined them like this:

- *Psalms* probably refers to the book of Psalms.
- *Hymns* are probably humanly composed songs. Many writers limit this term to songs sung to God or about God. This may include biblical songs other than the book of Psalms.
- *Spiritual songs* are the most difficult to define. Some writers define these as informal songs; others consider spiritual songs to be songs about the Christian life and songs of personal testimony.

Regardless of the definition, these verses show that the church sang a variety of music from its earliest days.

Warren Wiersbe speaks of the principle of authenticity. He writes, "Expressions of worship must be authentic, revealing the cultural distinctions of the people."<sup>54</sup> Authentic worship speaks the living Word of God in the language of each culture. In every generation, Christians have written songs that communicate praise to God in the musical style of their culture. We should not assume that the music of our culture is the only authentic sacred music. Instead, unless a style contradicts clear principles of scripture, we must allow each culture and each generation to praise God in their language.

## CHECKUP

Does the music of your church show the creative variety of our God?

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54 Warren Wiersbe, *Real Worship* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2000), 139

## Not Every Style Is Appropriate for Every Situation

Though many people have attempted to define a biblical music style, the Bible does not command a specific music style. After studying the philosophy behind music styles, Francis Schaeffer wrote, “Let me say firmly that there is no such thing as a godly style...”<sup>55</sup>

Musical sounds do not communicate ethical content. A musical chord is neither godly nor ungodly. Does this mean that every music style is appropriate for worship? No. Some styles are so associated with sinful culture that they will not communicate a godly message in worship.

Musicians and missionaries have found the same thing: people respond to musical sounds in different ways. If two people are listening to the same music, one may begin to cry because of how they are affected by the song. The other person may feel nothing in response to the music.<sup>56</sup>

The ultimate test for worship music cannot be, “Do I like it?” or “Does it inspire me?” The ultimate test is the glory of God. This means that we must evaluate what a musical style communicates within our cultural context. We must ask, **“In my cultural context, does this musical style glorify God?”**

Even if all things are lawful, not all things build up (1 Corinthians 10:23). If one goal of worship music is to edify believers, the style we use must not hinder this purpose. The same music may be a help to worship in one culture, and a hindrance in another culture. A careful worship leader will choose music that is appropriate for the people he leads.

How do we determine if a particular style of music is appropriate? As a leader, you are responsible to help your people work through this question in your cultural setting. What is appropriate in one culture may not be appropriate in another. Because of the religious connotations of a particular style or because a style has become associated with sinful practices of the surrounding culture, a musical style may not be appropriate for worship. You must evaluate music in terms of its appropriateness for your situation.

Paul commanded us to test everything and then to hold fast what is good (1 Thessalonians 5:21). We must accept nothing without testing and proving it. This includes the music we sing.

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55 Francis Schaeffer, *Art and the Bible* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1973), 51

56 Gerardo Marti, *Worship across the Racial Divide: Religious Music and the Multiracial Congregation*. (England: Oxford University Press, 2012)

## CHECKUP

Do you sing songs that are inappropriate within your cultural setting? Does the music communicate a sensual or worldly style **in your culture**? Does the message of the music contradict the message of the text?

### There Should Be Balance in our Worship Music

The book of Psalms shows that God values variety in worship. The book of Psalms contains praise, laments, cries for help, and thanksgiving for deliverance. Psalms speak to the worship needs of all worshippers.

One mark of maturity in the church is diversity (1 Corinthians 12:4-6). The body of Christ includes different cultures, different languages, different personalities, and different gifts. Our worship, including our music, should speak to all members of the body of Christ. In fact, our worship should speak beyond the church itself to give the gospel to unbelievers. Songs in the Bible speak to three audiences.<sup>57</sup>

### Music should proclaim praise to God: “Singing and making melody to the Lord” (Ephesians 5:19).

» Read Psalm 92:1-4.

Psalm 92 shows that we sing to the Lord. Music should express praise to God. From the song of praise in Exodus 15 to the heavenly songs in Revelation, biblical songs praise God for his greatness. The primary theme of music in the Bible is praise. Psalms of lament, request, or praise are often addressed to God.

Sing through the book of Psalms and you will sing:

- “I cried aloud to the Lord...”
- “Answer me when I call, O God of my righteousness!”
- “I will give thanks to the Lord with my whole heart.”
- “I will sing to the Lord.”
- “I love you, O Lord.”

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<sup>57</sup> This is adapted from Herbert Bateman, editor. *Authentic Worship* (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 2002), 150-155.

## Music should proclaim truth to the church: “Teaching and admonishing one another” (Colossians 3:16).

Many worship leaders have said, “We shouldn’t sing to other audiences; we sing only to God.” However, many of the psalms sing to Israel. While it is true that many biblical songs speak to God, it is also true that many biblical songs speak to the congregation.

Ephesians 5:19 instructs believers to speak **to one another** in psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs. Colossians 3:16 is more specific regarding the purpose of our singing: “Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, **teaching and admonishing one another** in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God.”

Paul shows that the word of Christ is proclaimed through the church’s singing. As we sing, we speak God’s truth to our fellow worshippers. Through song, the church teaches one another. Through song, believers are built up and the body of Christ is edified.

## Music should proclaim the gospel to the world: “Declare his glory among the nations...” (Psalm 96:3).

The psalmist called us to sing as a testimony to the nations:

Oh sing to the LORD a new song; sing to the LORD, all the earth! Sing to the LORD, bless his name; tell of his salvation from day to day. Declare his glory among the nations, his marvelous works among all the peoples! (Psalm 96:1-3).

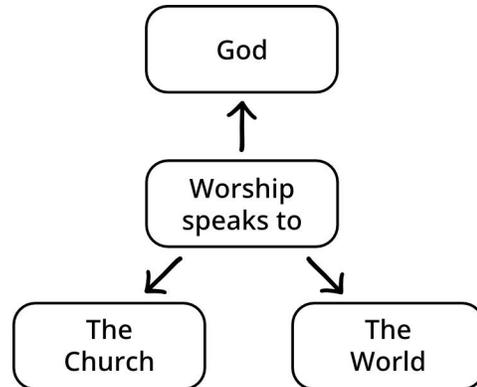
» Read 1 Kings 8:41-43.

When God is praised, the gospel is proclaimed to the nations. At the dedication of the Temple, Solomon prayed that even foreigners would worship at the Temple; he prayed that the name of the Lord would be known to all the peoples of the earth. As we worship, the gospel is proclaimed to a watching world.

Our worship music should speak to God and about God; our worship music should speak to the church; our worship music should proclaim the gospel to the world.

When we forget one of these audiences, our worship fails to achieve God’s full purpose for the church. When we forget that God is the ultimate audience for worship, our worship fails

### The Audience for Worship Music



to speak primarily to God. When we forget that the church is an audience for worship, we fail to teach and admonish one another in worship. When we forget that worship should proclaim the gospel to the world, we fail to evangelize and to fulfill the Great Commission.

## CHECKUP

In your songs do you speak to God, to the church, and to unbelievers? Not every song speaks to each of these; but throughout the service, we should speak to each of these audiences.

## PUTTING IT INTO PRACTICE

We have seen why music is important in worship. We have examined biblical principles for music in worship. We will finish this lesson by looking at practical ideas for music in worship. You can adapt these to fit your congregation and church setting.

In response to the principles listed above, a student asked, “If styles of worship music differ and if music styles are not inherently good or bad, are there any guidelines that can help us in choosing music for our church?”

Yes, there are practical guidelines that can help us. You must determine how to apply these to your particular situation, but some basic principles should guide our decisions about church music.

## The Most Important Music of the Church Is Congregational Singing

Since the music of the church expresses the unity of the church and the priesthood of believers, our most important music is the singing of the congregation. While choirs, solos, praise teams, instrumental groups and other special music are valuable, congregational

music is the most important music in Christian worship. There are some practical steps we can take to develop congregational song.

Remember:

1. **The accompaniment should not be so elaborate or loud that it draws attention from the singing.** In the New Testament, singing is the primary music of the church. Organists, pianists, guitarists, and drummers are not the primary music of the church. Let the church sing!
2. **Some songs are best sung with no instruments.** Prayer songs can sometimes be best expressed with quiet singing and no instruments. This allows the congregation to focus on the message of the text with no distraction.
3. **The music should not be so difficult or new that the congregation cannot participate.** New songs are good, but we should allow the congregation time to learn a new song well before adding more new songs. A constant diet of new songs becomes overwhelming until we cannot absorb the message. A good general approach is to add the new while keeping the familiar.
4. **Pastors must sing with the congregation.** If congregational singing is worship, you must worship. When the pastor does other things during congregational singing, his actions say, “Only my sermon is important in the worship service.” Pastors should model worship for the rest of the congregation.

## The Music Must Serve the Text

Since worship music is intended to proclaim praise to God, to speak truth to the congregation, and to proclaim the gospel to the world, the text is the most important element. Regardless of the style of the music, if the music hinders the communication of the text, we are not addressing one another in psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs.

This does not mean that instrumental music is unimportant. Instruments can help us concentrate our minds, emotions, and will on worship. Instrumental music can be valuable in worship, but in congregational song the primary focus should be the text.

## The leader must help the congregation focus on the meaning of the text.

Leaders can make the text more meaningful by how they lead. Two examples will show how a leader influences the message of the song.

Amos does not think carefully about the message of congregational song. Last week, Amos led two songs that speak of the Trinity. First the congregation sang, “Come, Thou Almighty King.” Amos said, “We will sing stanzas 1,2, and 4.”

What is wrong with leaving out stanza 3 of this hymn? Look at the text; it is a hymn about the Trinity. The message is weakened if you leave out a stanza about one of the three persons of the Trinity.

Stanza 1: Come, Thou Almighty King..... (about the Father)

Stanza 2: Come, Thou Incarnate Word.... (about the Son)

Stanza 3: Come, Holy Comforter.... (about the Spirit)

Stanza 4: To Thee, great One in Three.... (about the Trinity)

The next song was a praise song. Each stanza was worship and praise to a specific person of the Trinity. Amos said, “Let’s sing two stanzas.” Again, Amos forgot that a song to the Trinity must include all three persons. Leaving out stanzas of a hymn without considering the text hinders congregational worship.

Seth knows that the singing of the congregation is important in worship. On Sunday, he led an unfamiliar hymn. He began by saying, “This song is new to us. Listen to Psalm 150, the psalm on which this hymn is based.” With a few words, Seth helped the congregation focus on the meaning of a new song.

Later in the service, Seth led the contemporary chorus, “How Great Is Our God.” Before they sang, Seth read 1 Timothy 1:17; “Now to the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only God, be honor and glory forever and ever. Amen.” A song that the congregation had sung many times was made fresh as the worshippers heard the scripture that inspired the song. Connecting a hymn to its biblical foundation encourages congregational worship.

**If you use a projector, the person in charge of the projector is part of the worship leadership.**

The words on the screen can help worshippers focus on the text or can distract from the text. The person in charge of the projection should be careful in their leadership. Misspelled words, mistakes with the projector, or lines of the song divided at the wrong spot all distract from worship.

Look at three examples. In the first example, some words are misspelled. This will distract some members of the congregation; their mind will be on the mistakes, not on worship. In the second example, the words are there, but the division of the lines makes it difficult to

see the meaning of the sentence. In the third example, the singer can understand clearly a message of praise to our Almighty God.<sup>58</sup>

### EXAMPLE 1

Praise to the Lord, the almighty, the king of creaton!  
O my soul, priase Him, for He is thy haelth and savlation.

### EXAMPLE 2

Praise to the Lord,  
the Almighty, the King of  
Creation! O my soul, praise  
Him, for He is thy health and  
All ye who hear, now To His temple draw near; join  
Me in glad adoration!

### EXAMPLE 3

Praise to the Lord, the Almighty, the King of Creation!  
O my soul, praise Him, for He is thy health and salvation!  
All ye who hear,  
Now to His temple draw near;  
Join me in glad adoration!

Which version allows you to focus on the message of praise? The appearance of the words on the screen affects the congregation's singing.

In worship music, the music serves the text. Since this is true, worship leaders must help the congregation sing with meaning. None of this **creates** worship; worship is from the heart. However, eliminating distractions encourages the worshippers to focus on the true object of worship, God.

58 Joachim Neander, tr. by Catherine Winkworth, "Praise to the Lord, the Almighty." Accessed January 12, 2023. [https://library.timelesstruths.org/music/Praise\\_to\\_the\\_Lord\\_the\\_Almighty/](https://library.timelesstruths.org/music/Praise_to_the_Lord_the_Almighty/)

## PRACTICAL STEPS FOR IMPROVING CONGREGATIONAL SONG

1. **Teach the importance of worshipping in song.** Just as Christians must be taught the importance of prayer and other spiritual disciplines, so they must learn how God intends them to sing.
2. **Make sure the congregation knows why they are singing a song.** If it's a prayer, remind them. If it's a song of commitment, point that out. If it reflects the preached message, make that clear. People will sing more enthusiastically if they know why they are singing a song.
3. **Choose congregational rather than performance songs.** Congregational songs tend to have singable and memorable melodies. If you want all the people to sing, consider, "Can children sing this song as they are traveling home?"
4. **Turn down the musical accompaniment.** Don't allow guitars, organ, drums, or choir to drown out the sound of the congregation. The loudest sound in a room should be the voices of the congregation.
5. **Look for a balance between new songs and old songs.**
6. **Use songs that represent a broad range of Christian experience.** If all the music is joyful, you don't speak for the suffering members of the congregation. Like the Psalms, our hymns should have words for happy Christians, sad Christians, tempted Christians, and suffering Christians.
7. **The pastor and church leaders should model enthusiastic singing** even if they do not feel they sing well. Off-key singing is better than no singing. The pastor who is looking over sermon notes during the singing is saying, "Singing in worship is not very important."
8. **Remind the congregation that they are the primary instrument in corporate worship.** If the people do not sing with enthusiasm, congregational music fails in its purpose. Congregations must be taught that it is their privilege and responsibility to sing as an act of worship.

## CONCLUSION: GLORIA'S TESTIMONY

Does God speak through worship music? Listen to the testimony of a pastor from Taiwan.

When Gloria walked into our church, she had never heard the gospel. She wasn't looking for a sermon; she wasn't interested in becoming a Christian. Gloria wasn't looking for God, but God was looking for Gloria!

Gloria visited our church to improve her English. She had heard that our church offered free English classes, so she came to learn English. On her first visit, Gloria arrived late. As she walked into the sanctuary, the church was singing a simple chorus based on Psalm 42:1, “As a deer pants for flowing streams, so pants my soul for you, O God.”

A year later at her baptism, Gloria gave this testimony:

“I don’t remember anything of that service except the song you were singing when I sat down. As I listened to the song, I began to weep. For 30 years, I have been thirsting for God like a deer thirsts for water, but I never knew what I was thirsty for. I tried education; I tried money; I tried entertainment; I tried everything - and I was still empty. I decided to try English, so I came to your church.

“Instead of English, I found the water I needed. As I sat in the service, I wept to realize that God is the fulfillment of my heart’s desire. He is the real joy-giver. That day, I determined to give my heart to God. Today, he is the apple of my eye.”

## LESSON 6 IN REVIEW

### 1. Music is important in our worship

- Because music was important in worship in the Bible.
- Because it expresses the theological principle of the priesthood of the believer.
- Because it expresses the theological principle of the unity of the church.

### 2. Music

- Speaks to the mind, so the message we sing must be true.
- Speaks to the heart and touches the emotions.
- Speaks to the body and should not be modeled after profane practices.
- Speaks to the will and calls for a response.
- Speaks to the whole person. This makes it valuable when it teaches truth and dangerous when it teaches heresy.

### 3. Scriptural principles for worship music include:

- The text of worship music must clearly communicate truth.
- Styles of worship music may differ. *Paul refers to psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs. From its earliest days, the church sang a variety of music.*
- Not every style is appropriate for every situation. *We should ask, “In my cultural context, does this musical style glorify God?”*

4. Music should speak to three audiences:

- Music should proclaim praise to God.
- Music should proclaim truth to the church.
- Music should proclaim the gospel to the world.

5. Principles for church music include:

- The most important music of the church is congregational song.
- The music must serve the text.

## LESSON 6 ASSIGNMENTS

1. To appreciate the variety of music available for worship, make a list of 4 or more songs that address each of the following topics. Your list will be used as you plan a worship service in a later lesson. Look for songs that speak to the mind, the heart, and the will.

- 4 songs on the nature of God
- 4 songs on Jesus and his death and resurrection
- 4 songs on the Holy Spirit and the church
- 4 songs that call God's people to a surrendered, holy life
- 4 songs for evangelism and mission

If you are studying in a group, share your lists and then discuss, "How many of these songs have we sung in the past year? Are we proclaiming the whole gospel in our singing?"

2. At the beginning of the next lesson, you will take a test based on this lesson. Study the test questions carefully in preparation.

## LESSON 6 TEST

1. List three songs from the Bible.
2. What belief led the Council of Laodicea to forbid congregational singing?
3. List two theological principles that should be demonstrated in our worship music.
4. List four practical reasons for music in worship.
5. List four principles that should guide our choice of music for worship.
6. What three types of songs are listed by Paul in Colossians 3:16?
7. What is the ultimate test for our worship music?
8. Based on the songs in the Bible, list three ways that music should speak to different audiences.
9. What does Colossians 3:16 teach about the purpose of worship music?
10. Write Colossians 3:15-17 from memory.



## LESSON 7

# SCRIPTURE AND PRAYER IN WORSHIP

### LESSON OBJECTIVES

1. Appreciate the importance of scripture in worship.
2. Know practical steps for using scripture in worship.
3. Recognize preaching as a part of worship.
4. Value the importance of prayer in worship.
5. Lead the church in meaningful corporate prayer.
6. Understand that collection of the offering is an act of worship.
7. Observe the Lord's Supper as both a joyful celebration and a solemn memorial.

### PREPARATION FOR THIS LESSON

*Memorize Matthew 6:5-8.*

### INTRODUCTION

XYZ Church is well known for its worship time. Their services follow this pattern:

- Prelude and announcements
- Worship time (praise songs) 30 minutes
- Offering/Special Music/Prayer 15 minutes
- Sermon 30 minutes
- Worship time (praise songs) 15 minutes

People like the music at XYZ church. Visitors compliment the high-energy service. However, Pastor Bill has become concerned about the long-term results of his ministry. New converts soon drift to other congregations. Even worse, a survey of long-term attendees found that the church “is not producing solid disciples of Jesus Christ. Numbers, yes; disciples, no.”<sup>59</sup>

Bill believes that part of the problem is the church’s understanding of worship. At XYZ Church, *worship* equals *music*. Pastor Bill is beginning to ask, “Does true worship include more than music? Are we separating God’s Word and prayer from worship? Does this diminish the impact of preaching?”

- » Please respond to Pastor Bill’s concerns. Is there a difference between worship and preaching? How can XYZ Church connect all parts of the worship service in the minds of worshippers?

## THE IMPORTANCE OF SCRIPTURE IN WORSHIP

As evangelicals we teach that our doctrines and worship are guided by scripture. We believe that the Bible should hold a central place in our worship. God speaks to His people in the reading of the Word. Since Old Testament times, scripture has been central in worship.

Sadly, though we say that the Bible is at the root of our worship, many churches include little scripture in their service. It is possible to attend a service in some churches and hear no more than a few verses of scripture. This is far from the biblical model of worship.

### Reading the Word Was Important in Biblical Worship

- » Read Exodus 24:1-12.

In Exodus 24:7, Moses took the book of the covenant, and read in the hearing of the people. The people promised to follow God’s commands: “All that the Lord has spoken we will do, and we will be obedient.” Following this, God wrote a summary of the covenant (the Ten Commandments) on tables of stone. Israel was a people of the Book. The written covenant was central to Israel’s worship.

The Word of God was central in the Tabernacle and Temple. The annual feasts were the most important events in the Jewish year. At Passover, the Feast of Firstfruits, and the Feast of Tabernacles portions of God’s Word were read publicly. Every seven years, the nation gathered to hear the law read, and the covenant was renewed.<sup>60</sup>

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59 This is quoted from a survey done by one of the largest churches in America. They found that a majority of their converts had never come to a point of true discipleship.

60 Timothy J. Ralston, “Scripture in Worship” in *Authentic Worship*. Edited by Herbert Bateman. (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2002), 201

In the New Testament, Paul commanded Christians to read scripture publicly. This included the Old Testament, letters by Paul, and other writings classified as scripture.<sup>61</sup> He instructed a young minister to devote himself to the public reading of scripture, to exhortation, and to teaching (1 Timothy 4:13). The Word of God was central in New Testament worship.

## Preaching the Word Was Important in Biblical Worship

» Read Nehemiah 8:1-18.

After the return from Exile, Ezra read the Law to the people. The people gathered to listen as Ezra read the Law in the presence of the men and the women, and those who could understand; and the ears of all the people were attentive to the book of the law (Nehemiah 8:3). In response, the people said “Amen” and fell on their faces in worship. As Ezra and his associates read, they explained the scripture and caused the listeners to understand the reading. This is a biblical example of preaching, explaining, and applying God’s Word to the needs of the people. True biblical preaching inspires worship in response to the Word.

Jesus came to the synagogue on the Sabbath day as was his custom and read from the Isaiah scroll. When he was done, Jesus preached a sermon in which he showed that he had come to fulfill the promise of Isaiah (Luke 4:16-29).

In his sermon at Pentecost, Peter showed that the Old Testament promises were fulfilled in the ministry of Jesus and the coming of the Holy Spirit. He concluded his explanation of scripture with an invitation to repent and be baptized (Acts 2:14-41). Biblical preaching called for a response from the listeners. Preaching speaks to the mind, but it must also speak to the heart. Preaching must call for a response from the will. When Jesus opened the scriptures on the road to Emmaus, the listeners’ hearts burned within them (Luke 24:32).

Preaching was important in the spread of the early church. In Acts, the word of God is referred to more than 20 times. The apostles preached the word of the Lord; they spoke the word of God with boldness; they taught the word of God. In response, many people received the word of God; the word of God grew and multiplied; the word of God prevailed; and Gentiles glorified the word of the Lord. God’s Word was the foundation of the apostles’ message.

While preaching is not the only means through which scripture speaks, it is the primary means for bringing God’s Word to God’s people. In order to accomplish this purpose, a pastor

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### On Biblical Preaching

**“The blessing of true Bible exposition is an ignited heart, not an inflated head.”**

**Warren Wiersbe**

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<sup>61</sup> 1 Timothy 4:13, 1 Thessalonians 5:27, Colossians 4:16, 2 Peter 3:16

must never forget that God's Word must be central. Biblical preaching must begin in God's Word, explain God's Word, and call for a personal response to God's Word.

## Preaching the Word Was Important in Church History

Preaching was central to worship in the early centuries of the church. In the second century, Justin Martyr wrote that Christians gathered on Sundays to read the Epistles and the Prophets and to hear them explained. By the third century, portions of each major section of the Bible were read during worship.

During the Middle Ages, the Catholic church minimized the role of preaching, but the Reformers returned preaching to a central place in worship. The goal of Reformed preaching was not entertainment, the preacher's personal agenda, or the cultural demands of society. The goal of preaching was the careful exposition of God's Word; explaining scripture in a way that impacted listeners and called for a life-changing response.

## MAKING SCRIPTURE CENTRAL IN WORSHIP

If the Word of God should be central in our worship, how do we put this principle into practice? Practical steps for making scripture central in our worship include:

### Scripture Should Be Included in All Parts of Worship

We should not wait until the sermon to hear scripture in worship. There is no better way to begin worship than with the Word of God.

Consider two openings for worship. Which is a more effective invitation into God's presence?

1. "Thank you for coming to church today. The rain made travel difficult for some of you, but I am glad you came. Let's focus our attention on God and worship. Can you stand as we sing, 'Holy, Holy, Holy'?"
2. "'I was glad when they said unto me, Let us go into the house of the LORD!' Welcome to God's house! In the Temple, Isaiah saw the Lord high and lifted up. He heard angels singing 'Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory.' Join in praise as we sing 'Holy, Holy, Holy.'"

The first leader reminded us of the difficulties of travel; the second leader reminded us of the joy of worship. The first leader began with common words; the second leader began with the Word of God. The first leader announced an ordinary hymn; the second leader reminded us that the angels sing this hymn in their praise of God. Which church will sing with more enthusiasm?

After the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks in the United States, congregations gathered in their churches on Sunday for worship as usual. Compare the opening of worship services from these two churches:

1. “Thank you for joining us today. This has been a tragic week in our nation. Many of us are grieving. Thank you for coming to worship even in this dark time. We will begin by singing “The Old Rugged Cross.””
2. “God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. In these difficult times, we must not forget that he is our hope; He is our refuge. Join together as we remember that ‘A Mighty Fortress Is Our God, a bulwark **never** failing.’”

The first leader reminded the congregation of their grief; the second leader reminded them that God is their hope. Scripture and a hymn based on that scripture provided a solid foundation in a week when people’s confidence was being tested.

Scripture can be used in many parts of the worship service:

- The opening words of the service
- The invitation to the offering
- The words of the music
- Prayer

Our worship should be saturated with the Word of God. Worship is a response to God’s revelation of himself in his Word. Scripture should underlie all parts of the worship service.

## The Reading of Scripture Should Receive a Central Place in Worship

Have you ever heard a pastor say, “We are short of time today and I have a long sermon, so I will skip the reading of the text?” Which is more important, God’s Word or our words? We must give time to scripture in worship.

Because the reading of scripture is worship, we should pay attention to how we read it. It should be read clearly and distinctly. The reader (whether the pastor or a layperson) should practice before the service. In the first three centuries of the church, the position of reader of scripture was a sacred trust. The readers kept their assigned books at home and practiced the readings. When they read in worship, they were prepared to read clearly and expressively.<sup>62</sup>

Remember, this is God’s Word being read in God’s house to God’s people as an act of worship. If worship music deserves practice, God’s Word deserves practice. It is not a matter of pride

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62 Keith Drury, *The Wonder of Worship*, (Fishers, IN: Wesleyan Publishing House, 2002), 35

in our abilities; it is a matter of making sure that the Word of God is communicated to the listeners. This is God's Word; it is important!

We should make the reading meaningful. Using different types of reading will keep the scripture fresh in the ears of the listeners.

**1. Sometimes the scripture can be read by the leader as the congregation listens to God speak.** This type of reading is appropriate for much of the Pentateuch and most of the prophetic books.

**2. Sometimes the leader and congregation can alternate reading.** Many of the Psalms are suited for this type of responsive reading.

- » Read Psalm 136. Have the class leader begin each verse; the class should respond with the second half of each verse, "for his steadfast love endures forever."

The Beatitudes are appropriate for responsive reading (Matthew 5:1-10):

*Leader:* Blessed are the poor in spirit,

*Congregation:* for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

*Leader:* Blessed are those who mourn,

*Congregation:* for they shall be comforted.

**3. Some scriptures can be read by the congregation in unison.** Like congregational music, reading scripture as a body demonstrates the unity of the church. All the church joins in speaking God's Word. Prayers such as Psalm 124 are suited for unison reading.

Nehemiah's account of Ezra's reading of the Law shows the impact when scripture is central in our worship.

- » Read Nehemiah 8 again if you need to review this account.

Notice the details of the reading.

- Ezra opened the book in the sight of all the people. There was a visual connection with the Word.
- He stood above all the people. The reader could be clearly seen and heard.
- When he began to read, all the people stood up. There was a physical response to the Word.
- As he read, all the people answered, "Amen, Amen," lifting up their hands, and they bowed their heads, and worshipped the Lord with their faces to the ground. They expressed their submission to God's Word.

- The Levites read the law of God clearly, and gave the sense, so that the people understood the reading. They gave attention to understanding the Word of God. This is the goal of preaching today.
- The people wept, when they heard the words of the law. Nehemiah commanded them to rejoice, “for the joy of the LORD is your strength.” God’s Word inspired both repentance and joy.

While not every detail of this special occasion will be repeated in our services, this account shows the power of scripture. We must keep scripture central in our worship.

## CHECKUP

Does your congregation recognize the importance of Bible reading in worship? Describe some of the behaviors and responses that you see as you look around the congregation during the reading of scripture.

On an average Sunday, how many different scripture passages are heard by your congregation? Do worshippers know why each passage is included?

## The Preaching of the Word Should Be Central to Our Worship

Just as musical styles change in every generation, preaching styles change to meet the needs of each generation. Scripture does not define one musical style as *the* biblical style for worship music; scripture does not define one preaching method as *the* biblical style for preaching.

Style may change from generation to generation and from culture to culture; content must not change. scripture does not define musical style, but it does define content. In the same way, preaching styles may change from generation to generation, but the content must not change.

The sermons in scripture show that the proclamation of God’s Word is the primary responsibility of the preacher who stands before a congregation. A focus on God’s Word must remain central in contemporary preaching. Changing technology and learning styles may affect the style of preaching; the content must remain rooted in scripture.

## Preaching as Worship: Practical Implications

What are the practical implications of viewing preaching as worship? How will this affect our approach to preaching?

### Preaching requires careful preparation.

If preaching is worship, we are responsible to carefully prepare. We must bring our best gifts to God's altar. David would not give that which cost him nothing; we should not bring unprepared sermons as our gift to God. We should carefully prepare our sermon before the service (2 Samuel 24:24).

### Preaching requires a response from the congregation.

If preaching is worship, it requires a response from the congregation. In worship we see God, we see ourselves, and we see the needs of our world (Isaiah 6:1-8; See Lesson 1.). Our sermons should reveal God to the listener, our sermons should convict the listener of a need, and our sermons should inspire the church to reach a lost world. Preaching as worship will bring conviction to sinners and will inspire believers to evangelism.

### Preaching requires a response from the preacher.

If preaching is worship, we will recognize that preaching requires a response from us. If we prepare to preach as an act of sacrificial worship, we will see God; we will be convicted of areas of need in our own lives; and we will see the needs of the world around us. In response, we will cry out with Isaiah, "Here I am; send me." True preaching will change the preacher. We must not bring God's message to our congregations until God has spoken to us personally and we have responded.

Jesus did not rebuke the scribes (preachers) of his day for bad sermons; he rebuked them for failing to live what they preached. They knew scripture and how to explain scripture, but they were not changed by scripture. Jesus said, "They preach, but do not practice" (Matthew 23:3). If preaching is worship, we as pastors will be changed by the truths we

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**"If preaching is not an act of worship, then the church may end up worshipping the preacher rather than worshipping God."**

**Warren Wiersbe**

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**"Preaching, if not worship, is profane.... A true sermon is an act of God, and not a mere performance by man."**

**Adapted from  
J.I. Packer**

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preach. In turn, God will speak through us to change the hearts and lives of the people to whom we preach.

### **The preacher must be empowered by the Holy Spirit.**

If preaching is worship, the preacher must be empowered by the Holy Spirit. Just as all other areas of worship rely on the Holy Spirit for true power, a preacher must be anointed by God's Spirit if he is to be effective.

» Read 2 Corinthians 3:3-18.

We bring our best sacrifice of preparation to the sermon; however, after our preparation is complete, power in preaching comes through the Holy Spirit. Without the power of the Holy Spirit, we may speak to the mind, we may impress the congregation, and we may have good content, but we will not change lives.

## **CHECKUP**

Is your preaching an act of biblical worship? If a person listens to you preach regularly, will they hear balanced biblical truth?

## **WORSHIP DANGERS: THE LOSS OF THE WORD**

The Bible has lost its place in the daily life of many professed believers. Sadly, it has also lost its place in the weekly worship of many churches. Where the early church sang psalms, some churches today sing songs with little or no biblical content. Where the early church read long passages of scripture, some churches today read only a few verses prior to the sermon. In many services, scripture has been replaced with songs and a sermon that gives little attention to God's Word.

Some leaders in the contemporary worship movement insist that the public reading of scripture no longer speaks to modern needs. A well-known pastor recently asked his church staff to evaluate his preaching. They told him that he was using too much Bible! "It is good for you to base your sermon on the Bible, but you better get to something relevant pretty quickly, or we stop listening." This church staff did not think that the Bible was relevant to people today!

As worship leaders, we must maintain the centrality of scripture in worship. In worship, we speak to God through prayer and songs of praise. In worship, we hear God speak to us through the reading and proclamation of the Word. Regardless of our worship style, we must never lose the centrality of God's Word in worship.

- » Review Nehemiah 8. Make a list of every phrase that shows the value the people put on the reading of the Law. Compare this to the reading of scripture in your worship today. Discuss one practical step that could increase the impact of scripture in your worship.

## THE IMPORTANCE OF PRAYER IN WORSHIP

Mary<sup>63</sup> is a committed Christian. Even when she was in school, she took time alone with God each morning. Before breakfast, she spent time in the Bible and prayer.

But now that she is the mother of four children, prayer and Bible reading are increasingly difficult. One child is an infant and awakens Mary during the night. Mary finds that she often struggles to get out of bed in the mornings before the children are awake. By nighttime, she is too tired to focus on prayer and the Bible.

Mary is happy when Sunday arrives. Each Sunday, she receives a spiritual boost during worship, but during the week she becomes discouraged. She feels that her devotional life has become a total failure.

- » Please give Mary practical advice for her devotional life.

We began this lesson with a study of scripture in worship. We will continue with a study of prayer in worship. In scripture, God speaks to us; in prayer, we respond to God. Scripture and prayer should saturate our worship.

## Public and Private Prayer in Biblical Worship

We have seen that the book of Psalms was the hymnbook for Jewish worship. It was also the prayer book for Jewish worship. Psalms included prayers for public worship and for private prayer. Both public and private prayer was important for Jewish worship.

At home, faithful Jews prayed three times a day (Daniel 6:10).<sup>64</sup> Many psalms are private prayers. These can be recognized by the use of **I** instead of **we** in the prayer. Examples of psalms for private prayer include:

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63 Mary's story is borrowed from Keith Drury, *The Wonder of Worship*, (Fishers, IN: Wesleyan Publishing House, 2002), 17.

64 Daniel's practice was common among faithful Jews.

- Psalm 18 – a song of thanksgiving
- Psalm 32 – a prayer of joy for forgiveness<sup>65</sup>
- Psalm 38 – a prayer of repentance
- Psalm 41 – a prayer for mercy
- Psalm 51 – a prayer of repentance
- Psalm 88 – a lament in time of suffering
- Psalm 116 – a song of thanksgiving for God’s care

In the Temple, Jewish worshippers joined together in public prayer. At the dedication of the Temple, Solomon led in a national prayer for God’s favor on the people (2 Chronicles 6). Isaiah brought God’s message to Judah; “My house shall be called a house of prayer for all peoples” (Isaiah 56:7). After the Exile, synagogue worship focused on the reading of the Law and on prayer. Services in the synagogue began with a series of prayers.

The Hebrew pattern of prayer continued in the early church. First century Christians prayed three times a day at home. When Christians met together for worship, they prayed as a body. The Lord’s Prayer was part of each worship service. Other prayers were offered throughout each worship service.

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**“Far more Christians believe in personal devotions than actually have them.”**

**Keith Drury**

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## Prayer in Worship Today

If prayer was important in biblical worship, prayer should be important in our worship today. Both public and private prayer is important.

**Private prayer** connects us to the Vine and provides nourishment for our spiritual lives. A lack of private prayer may explain the lack of spiritual power in many churches. If Jesus needed times of private prayer during his earthly ministry, how much more we depend upon prayer for spiritual nourishment and power in ministry.

**Public prayer** is an important element of worship. Some churches give little attention to prayer. One pastor defended the lack of public prayer in his church by saying, “You can’t keep people interested when their eyes are closed.”<sup>66</sup> He believed that pleasing the audience is more important than pleasing God.

Corporate prayer corrects the false idea that Christianity is only about me and my relationship with God; we are part of a body. As we hear prayer requests and join in corporate prayer, we become aware of a fellow Christian’s illness, emotional hurts, and life circumstances.

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65 This psalm was probably composed immediately after David’s repentance in Psalm 51.

66 Quoted in Keith Drury, *The Wonder of Worship*, (Fishers, IN: Wesleyan Publishing House, 2002), 28.

Corporate prayer reminds us that the members of the church are one body. Corporate prayer reminds us that God cares about the congregation as a body.

Just as scripture should be used throughout the worship service, prayer should be offered throughout the worship service. From an opening prayer that welcomes God's presence in the service, to the focused time of prayer for the needs of the people, to a closing prayer of blessing as the members depart to minister in the world, prayer should give focus to our worship.

## MAKING PRAYER CENTRAL IN WORSHIP

What are some practical ways that we can make prayer a more meaningful part of public worship? Here are six practical suggestions.

### Cultivate Your Private Prayer Life

No one is prepared to lead others in worship until he or she has first worshipped. No one is prepared to lead public prayer until he or she has first prayed privately. It is only as we develop a private prayer life that we are equipped to lead in public prayer. As a worship leader, commit yourself to the discipline of daily private prayer.

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**“The key element in the Christian life is a daily experience of worship and adoration of God as the center of our personal existence.”**

**Dennis Kinlaw**

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### Learn How to Pray

Jesus' disciples asked, “Teach us to pray” (Luke 11:1). In response, Jesus taught the model prayer known as the Lord's Prayer. Prayer can be learned.

To some degree, prayer is natural to every child of God; however, prayer can be learned. A young child learns to talk without taking talking lessons. However, as a child grows, they learn more about language, vocabulary, and proper speech. In the same way, a young Christian naturally desires to talk to God, but as we mature in the faith, our understanding and appreciation of prayer is deepened.

Books on prayer can deepen your understanding of prayer. A few classics on prayer that can benefit every Christian are:

- *Power Through Prayer* by E.M. Bounds
- *With Christ in the School of Prayer* by Andrew Murray
- *Mighty Prevailing Prayer* by Wesley Duewel

## Pray the Words of Scripture

There is no better place to learn prayer than in scripture. The first school of prayer is the Bible. The Psalms and other biblical prayers teach us to pray effectively. Through church history, great Christians have filled their prayers with scripture. Some great prayers in the Bible include:

- **Prayers of adoration.** Exodus 15:1-18, 1 Samuel 2:1-10, 1 Chronicles 29:11-20, Luke 1:46-55, Luke 1:68-79, 1 Timothy 6:15-16, and Revelation 4:8-5:14.
- **Prayers of confession.** Ezra 9:5-15, Psalm 51, and Daniel 9:4-19.
- **Prayers of intercession.** Genesis 18:23-33, Exodus 32:11-14, Ephesians 1:15-23, and Philippians 1:9-11.

## Focus on Communing with God

Too many times, our prayer only makes requests to God. Some people give God a list of requests, thank him for answering yesterday's requests, and then say "Amen." True prayer must be more than a list of requests; prayer is communion with God.

The Lord's Prayer provides a model for prayer (Matthew 6:9-13). The Lord's Prayer included:

- **Adoration:** "Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name."
- **Submission:** "Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven."
- **Petition:** "Give us this day our daily bread."
- **Confession:** "And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors."
- **Prayer for Guidance:** "And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil."
- **Praise:** "For yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory, forever. Amen."

Many Christians follow a four-part pattern that includes each of the elements in Jesus' model prayer: adoration, confession, thanksgiving, and supplication.

### Adoration

Prayer should never omit adoration and praise. By beginning with praise, we make sure that our prayer is more than a list of requests for help. The Psalms provide a model for prayer that is grounded in praise. Even the psalms of lament include praise. If prayer is true worship, it will include adoration of God.

### Confession

Isaiah 6 shows that when we see God (adoration), we will see ourselves. When we see ourselves in the light of God's perfect purity, we understand our need of confession. No

Christian, no matter how mature, no matter how deep his walk with God, should reach a place where he says, “I have no need to confess. My perfection is absolute.” Jesus said to his disciples, “When you pray, say ...and forgive us our sins; for we ourselves forgive everyone who is indebted to us” (Luke 11:4). True worship includes confession.

## Thanksgiving

Adoration praises God for who he is; thanksgiving praises God for what he is doing in our world. Thanksgiving recognizes that every good gift and every perfect gift is from above (James 1:17). In thanksgiving, we thank God for what he has done in our life. The story of the 10 lepers shows the importance of thanksgiving (Luke 17:12-19).

## Supplication

In the Lord’s Prayer, Jesus showed that God values the requests of his children. God is not like an earthly ruler who is too busy to be bothered with the needs of an ordinary citizen. Instead, God is the perfect Father who delights in giving good gifts to his children. In the Lord’s Prayer, we are encouraged to pray for ordinary needs (“give us our daily bread”) and for spiritual guidance (“lead us not into temptation”).

In the Lord’s Prayer, we learn to submit our will to God when we make requests. As trusting children, we learn that his will is perfect; his “no” is for our good. Prayer is not a magical tool to force God to our will. Prayer is a spiritual discipline that brings us into joyful submission to God’s will.

## Align Your Priorities with God’s

Prayer often shows what is most important to us. What inspires our most earnest prayer, physical needs or spiritual needs?

In his prayer for the Christians at Thessalonica, Paul said, “we always pray for you, that our God may make you worthy of his calling and may fulfill every resolve for good and every work of faith by his power, so that the name of our Lord Jesus may be glorified in you, and you in him...” (2 Thessalonians 1:11-12). Paul’s greatest concern was that God would fulfill his purpose in their lives. These Christians were being persecuted, but Paul’s prayer was not for God to rescue them from suffering. Instead, he prayed that the name of the Lord Jesus would be glorified in them.

Just as our requests show our priorities, our thanksgiving shows our priorities. If most of our thanksgiving is for material blessings, material blessings may be what we value most. If most of our thanksgiving is for God’s help in our spiritual life, spiritual growth is what we value most.

In his prayer for the Thessalonians, Paul gave thanks to God because their faith was growing abundantly, and their love for one another was increasing (2 Thessalonians 1:3). His greatest thanks was not for temporal blessings; his greatest thanksgiving was for their spiritual growth. What gives you greatest cause for thanksgiving, a financial blessing or an evidence of spiritual growth in your life?

## Talk to God, Not to the Congregation

Through scripture, God speaks to the congregation. In prayer, the congregation speaks to God. Public prayer time is not the opportunity for the leader to tell the people (through the prayer) what he wants to say to them! Prayer speaks to God.

Jesus told his disciples how to pray in a spirit of true worship:

And when you pray, you must not be like the hypocrites. For they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and at the street corners, that they may be seen by others. Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward. But when you pray, go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you. And when you pray, do not heap up empty phrases as the Gentiles do, for they think that they will be heard for their many words. Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him (Matthew 6:5-8).

True prayer does not try to impress God or the congregation; it speaks simply and clearly to our heavenly Father.

- » What will you do to grow in your personal prayer life? How will you make prayer a more meaningful part of public worship in your church?

## THE OFFERING AS A RESPONSE TO GOD'S WORD

Prayer is a natural response to God's Word. Because of this, we should follow scripture reading and the sermon with prayer. In prayer, we respond to the truth we have received from God's Word; we commit ourselves to obedience.

The offering is also a response to God's Word. In the Old Testament, the sacrifice (offering) was the worshipper's response to the Law (God's Word). In the New Testament, the offering symbolizes the surrender to God of our entire being.

The offering is part of worship. The psalmist called worshippers to bring an offering, and come into his courts (Psalm 96:8). The writer of Hebrews connected worship with giving; "Do not neglect to do good and to share what you have, for such sacrifices are pleasing to God" (Hebrews 13:16). Paul told the Philippians that their gift to him was a fragrant offering, a sacrifice acceptable and pleasing to God (Philippians 4:18).

## A Theology of Worshipful Giving

Many churchgoers see the offering primarily as the way we pay the church's bills. This makes the offering a financial transaction rather than a spiritual act of worship. Christian stewardship should be understood as part of worship. Each of the following principles should be part of our theology of giving.

### Worshipful giving is motivated by grace, not fear.

Giving as an act of worship is motivated by gratitude for God's grace. Paul asked the Corinthians to give to help needy Christians in Jerusalem. He did not threaten them, "You *must* give because you may someday need help." Instead, he concluded his appeal with praise, "Thanks be to God for his inexpressible gift!" (2 Corinthians 9:15). Their giving would be motivated by thanks for God's gift of grace. If an offering is true worship, it comes from a willing heart.

### Worshipful giving is motivated by love, not reward.

True worship is motivated by **love for God**, not the desire for a reward. Monetary gifts are a symbol of our gift of ourselves to God. Paul praised the Macedonian Christians because "they gave themselves first to the Lord and then by the will of God to us" (2 Corinthians 8:5). Their gifts were a symbol of their love for God and for the apostles who brought the gospel to their region.

Just as music or any other worship activity can be done for the wrong reasons, giving can be motivated by a desire for reward rather than love for God. Some evangelists promise that God will repay monetary gifts with financial blessing. By twisting texts out of their biblical context, they promise a hundredfold reward for gifts to God. Such giving would not be an act of loving worship, but would be like buying a cosmic lottery ticket in which the giver hopes to hit the jackpot! Nowhere does the Bible commend this kind of giving.

Rather, the Bible commends the giving of Mary. When she anointed Jesus, there was no reward in sight. She poured out her savings with no thought of return. Even the disciples were angry because of her waste. Only Jesus saw and praised her gift, a gift that was motivated solely by love (Matthew 26:6-13).

Worshipful giving is motivated not only by love for God, but **love for others**. John reminded his readers that true love is more than words; it is action. The love of the Philippians for Paul was seen in their giving. A believer's love for others is seen in giving.

But if anyone has the world's goods and sees his brother in need, yet closes his heart against him, how does God's love abide in him? Little children, let us not love in word or talk but in deed and in truth (1 John 3:17-18).

### Worshipful giving is generous, not stingy.

Paul challenged the Corinthian church to generous giving when he said, “You will be enriched in every way to be generous in every way, which through us will produce thanksgiving to God.” Their generosity was an expression of their thanks to God. “For the ministry of this service is not only supplying the needs of the saints but is also overflowing in many thanksgivings to God” (2 Corinthians 9:11-12). For giving to be true worship, it must be generous.

### Worshipful giving is motivated by humility, not pride.

» Read Matthew 6:1-4.

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus warned of wrong motivations for giving. Some give to receive praise from others; their reward is praise. “They have received their reward.” Some give quietly, while praising themselves for their humility; their reward is self-satisfaction. Jesus said, “Don’t let your left hand know what your right hand does.” Don’t compliment yourself on your generosity. Instead, allow your Father in heaven to see and reward you as he chooses.

### A Story of Joyful Giving

John Wesley had just finished buying pictures for his room when a maid came to his door. It was a cold day and he noticed that she wore only a thin gown. He reached into his pocket to give her some money for a coat, and found he had little left. He cried out, “I have adorned my walls with the money that might have protected this poor creature from the cold!”

Wesley began to limit his expenses so he would have money to give to the poor. In his journal, he recorded that one year his income was £30, and his living expenses £28, so he had £2 to give away. The next year, his income doubled, but he still lived on £28 and gave £32 away. In the third year, his income jumped to £90; again he lived on £28, giving £62 away. The fourth year, he made £120, lived again on £28, and gave £92 to the poor.

Wesley preached that Christians should not merely tithe, but give extra. He believed that with increasing income, our giving should increase. He practiced this throughout his life. Even when his income rose into the thousands of pounds, he lived simply and gave away surplus money. One year his income was over £1,400; he gave away all except £30.<sup>67</sup> He said that he never kept more than £100. He gave away most of the £30,000 he earned in his lifetime.<sup>68</sup>

67 For comparison today, this is the equivalent of earning \$200,000 and giving away all but \$5,000. During his lifetime, Wesley earned and gave away the equivalent of nearly \$3,000,000 in today’s money.

68 This story is adapted from Charles Edward White, “Four Lessons on Money from One of the World’s Richest Preachers” *Christian History* 19 (Summer 1988): 24. Available at <https://christianhistoryinstitute.org/uploaded/50cf76d05900d6.14390582.pdf> July 22, 2020.

The point of this story is not a legalistic command to poverty! The point is joyful and willing obedience to God. God does not give everyone the same income as John Wesley; God does not call everyone to give at the same rate as John Wesley. The test is not, “Am I giving as much as someone else?” The test is, “Am I giving in joyful obedience to God?” God calls us to worship with sacrificial giving.

## The Practice of Giving

Because giving is an act of worship, offerings should be collected in ways that contribute to a spirit of worship. Consider the following practical ideas.

### The emphasis in the offering should be worship, not needs.

Perhaps the reason that many Christians see the offering primarily as the way to pay the church’s bills is that the emphasis in the offering is on paying the bills! This is made worse when a financial crisis leads us to say, “The church will close” or “We can’t send a missionary” if a generous offering is not given. Sometimes a pastor apologizes for asking for an offering; “I wish we didn’t need to ask you for money.” Instead, the offering should be expression of joyful thanksgiving.

When taking an offering, the emphasis should be worship. The offering can be introduced with a scripture that reminds worshippers of the purpose for the offering. Scriptures such as 2 Corinthians 8:9, 2 Corinthians 9:7, Exodus 25:2, Acts 20:35, and even John 3:16 point to the true motivation for giving.

### The offering should be part of the worship service itself.

In some cultures it is common to encourage people to give their offering apart from the service itself. While this may be motivated by a desire to avoid show or to save time in the service, it tends to separate giving from worship. Taking the offering as part of the worship service helps worshippers understand giving as an act of worship.

Since the offering is our response to God, you may consider taking the offering after the sermon rather than before. This says, “We are giving to God in response to his Word.”

### Parents should introduce their children to giving in worship.

Just as we teach our children to sing, pray, and listen to scripture read and preached, we should teach our children to give joyfully. As our children learn that giving is a joyous act of praise, they too become worshippers.

### **The music during the offering should be worship.**

If the offering is worship, the music during the offering should be worship. This music can be instrumental or vocal; it can be a solo or congregational; it can be quiet and reflective or joyful and exuberant; regardless of the style, it should be a part of worship. Those who provide music during the offering should pray for spiritual guidance just as the worship leader prays for spiritual guidance. No part of worship should be taken lightly.

### **The offering should be followed by a prayer of dedication.**

Since the offering is a gift to God, an offering should be followed by a prayer of consecration. This reminds worshippers of the purpose for giving and provides a visible evidence of giving as worship.

### **Church leaders should be good stewards of the gifts of the people.**

In the offering, worshippers are entrusting their gifts to the stewardship of the church's leaders. Church leaders must be good caretakers of the gifts. An accounting to the congregation for the use of the money shows that the offerings are being used for God's work. This encourages giving and reduces the temptation to dishonesty in church leadership. In a world in which Christian leaders are viewed with distrust, we should do everything possible to show ourselves blameless.

The offering is much more than a way to pay the bills; it is an act of worship. Through his Word, God reveals himself to worshippers. We respond with sacrificial gifts given from joyful hearts. This is true worship.

## **CHECKUP**

Do the people in your church feel that they are worshipping when they give, or are they simply paying the bills? What practical steps can you take to make the offering an act of worship?

## THE LORD'S SUPPER

- » Discuss your church's observance of Communion. How often do you celebrate the Lord's Supper? When you observe Communion, is it an integral part of the service?

Just as God is revealed in the **written** Word (the reading of scripture) and in the **spoken** word (the preaching of his Word), he is revealed in the **demonstrated** word of the Lord's Supper.<sup>69</sup> The Lord's Supper is a reminder of Jesus' atoning death and a celebration of his resurrection. The Last Supper was related to Passover, but it also inaugurated the new covenant.

- » Read Matthew 26:17-30 and 1 Corinthians 11:17-34.

New Testament references to the Lord's Supper include accounts in the gospels and Paul's instructions to the church at Corinth.

Three questions are often asked related to observance of the Lord's Supper.

- What is the meaning of the Lord's Supper?
- How often should the Lord's Supper be observed?
- How should the Lord's Supper be observed?

### What is the Meaning of the Lord's Supper?

Observance of Communion is a meaningful part of worship.<sup>70</sup> Writing to the church at Corinth, Paul showed that in the Lord's Supper:

1. We look back to Christ's death ("you proclaim the Lord's death").
2. We look forward to Christ's return ("until he comes").

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**"The Supper is the Lord's appointment with his people. Those who keep this appointment with Christ can confidently expect that He will assuredly come to meet them."**

**Franklin Segler and  
Randall Bradley**

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<sup>69</sup> Franklin M. Segler and Randall Bradley, *Christian Worship: Its Theology and Practice* (Nashville: B&H Publishing, 2006), 178

<sup>70</sup> Image: "The Lord's Supper" taken by Allison Estabrook on Oct. 14, 2022, retrieved from <https://www.flickr.com/photos/sgc-library/52476662295/>, licensed under CC BY 4.0.

As we celebrate Communion, we remember his sacrifice, and we look forward to his promised return. The elements represent the body and blood of Christ and they remind us of our participation in the Lord's death. "The cup of blessing that we bless, is it not a participation in the blood of Christ? The bread that we break, is it not a participation in the body of Christ?" (1 Corinthians 10:16) The Lord's Supper is a powerful symbol of the continuing presence of the crucified and risen Lord.

## How Often Should the Lord's Supper Be Observed?

Neither scripture nor church history gives a definitive answer to this question. In the early church it appears that the Lord's Supper was taken every Sunday. Today, some churches celebrate Communion weekly while others observe it only once or twice a year.

As long as the Lord's Supper is a reverent aspect of worship, frequent observance does not diminish the meaning of the Lord's Supper any more than weekly Bible reading diminishes the significance of scripture in worship.

## How Should the Lord's Supper Be Observed?

Paul warned the Corinthians about eating and drinking "in an unworthy manner" (1 Corinthians 11:27).<sup>71</sup> Some practical steps can help us in observing the Lord's Supper in a manner worthy of its significance to Christians.

### Communion should be a central part of a worship service, not an addendum.

A natural time for the Lord's Supper is following the sermon. In this case, the sermon should lead us to a deeper understanding of the Supper. This can be done through a sermon addressed directly to the Lord's Supper, or through a sermon on a related topic (redemption, the atonement, grace, discipleship). For churches that celebrate the Lord's Supper frequently, it is not appropriate to focus the theme of every service on Communion. However, there should be a clear link between the observance of Communion and the preceding service.

### Communion is both a solemn and a joyful occasion.

Communion is a time of solemn self-examination and of joyful celebration of God's grace. The solemnity of the observance is reflected in the reminder that the Supper is eaten in remembrance of the Lord's death. The joy of the observance is reflected in the promise of the Lord's return.

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71 The KJV "drinks unworthily" has sometimes been interpreted to refer to the person being unworthy of the Lord's Supper. However, "in an unworthy manner" seems to be a better translation. No one is worthy of Jesus' sacrifice. The problem to be corrected in Corinth was not on unworthiness of the worshipper, but the disrespectful, unworthy manner in which they were observing this sacred meal.

On occasion, the celebration of the resurrection and anticipation of Christ's return may be the primary emphasis in Communion. At other times, the solemnity of Jesus' death and the importance of self-examination may be the primary emphasis. Both aspects are part of this observance.

We rejoice in Communion because the Lord's Supper is made possible by God's grace. At the Lord's Supper, we are reminded that grace alone provides our salvation. We recognize the solemnity of Communion because we remember that our participation in the Lord's Supper represents a commitment to flee from sin. At the Lord's Table, each worshipper must examine himself.

### **Communion should reflect the unity of the church.**

It is sad that Communion, an ordinance that was intended to reflect the unity of the church, has sometimes been the cause of division. Differences over how the Lord's Supper is served (individual cups, a common cup, dipping the bread into the cup) and differences over who can partake (all professed believers, only those who have been baptized, only members of the local church) have led to division between churches.

Paul reminded the church at Corinth that as they shared one bread, they must be one body. "Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread" (1 Corinthians 10:17).

We should remember that in Communion, worship is primary while procedures are secondary. The church must maintain procedures that are faithful to the gospels and 1 Corinthians. However, regardless of the manner in which the Lord's Supper is served, it should not become divisive. In the Lord's Supper, we celebrate the unity of God's family.

## **CONCLUSION: THE POWERFUL INFLUENCE OF WORSHIP**

Is worship important? Here is a testimony from 1945 that shows what can happen when an ordinary person worships through prayer.

During WWII, a converted Buddhist Japanese-American student at Baylor University became an instrument for revival. Reiji Hoshizaki worked as a janitor to pay his way through school. As he cleaned classrooms, he began to pray beside each desk.

One day, after weeks of prayer, Reiji was sitting in class when he was so overcome with a burden for his classmates that he dropped to his knees and began to weep and pray. Students asked, "What is wrong with Reiji?" Nothing was wrong with Reiji; his chair had become his altar.

Through Reiji's intercession, revival spread through Baylor University and then through the state of Texas. Dozens of student evangelists left Baylor's campus to take the revival through the entire southwestern United States. Prayer is an essential part of worship. As we worship, our world is changed by God's power.

## LESSON 7 IN REVIEW

1. We can make scripture central in worship by including scripture in all parts of our worship.
2. Since scripture is central in worship, we should make sure that it is read clearly, expressively, and with a variety that will keep the reading fresh.
3. Since preaching is part of worship:
  - Preaching requires careful preparation.
  - Preaching requires a response from the congregation.
  - Preaching requires a response from the preacher.
  - The preacher must be empowered by the Holy Spirit.
4. Practical ways to make prayer a meaningful part of public worship:
  - Cultivate your private prayer life.
  - Learn how to pray.
  - Pray the words of scripture.
  - Focus on communing with God.
  - Align your priorities with God's.
  - Talk to God, not to the congregation.
5. Since the offering is part of worship:
  - Giving should be motivated by grace, not fear.
  - Giving should be motivated by love, not reward.
  - Giving should be generous, not stingy.
  - Giving should be motivated by humility, not pride.
  - The way we collect the offering should contribute to a spirit of worship.
6. The Lord's Supper
  - Looks back to Christ's death.
  - Looks forward to Christ's return.
  - Should be observed in a worthy manner.
  - Should be observed in both a solemn and joyful manner.
  - Should be observed in a manner that reflects the unity of the church.

## LESSON 7 ASSIGNMENTS

1. In Lesson 6, you selected songs related to five different topics. For each of these five topics, find 3-4 scripture references that speak to the topic. Your lists will be used in a later lesson as you plan a worship service.
  - 3-4 verses on the nature of God
  - 3-4 verses on Jesus and his death and resurrection
  - 3-4 verses on the Holy Spirit and the church
  - 3-4 verses that call God's people to a surrendered, holy life
  - 3-4 verses on evangelism and mission
2. At the beginning of the next lesson, you will take a test based on this lesson. Study the test questions carefully in preparation.

## LESSON 7 TEST

1. List three examples showing the importance of scripture in worship.
2. Name three parts of a worship service in which scripture can be used.
3. List four practical implications of the principle *preaching is worship*.
4. List three practical suggestions for making prayer a meaningful part of public worship.
5. List four theological principles of worshipful giving.
6. List four practical ideas for making giving an act of worship.
7. List two aspects of the Lord's Supper recognized in 1 Corinthians.
8. Write Matthew 6:5-8 from memory.



## LESSON 8

# PLANNING AND LEADING WORSHIP

### LESSON OBJECTIVES

1. Recognize the importance of being spiritually prepared for worship leadership.
2. Understand the role of structure and theme in worship services.
3. Plan balanced worship services that speak to the whole body of Christ.
4. Appreciate the qualities needed in a worship leader.
5. Distinguish between leadership and manipulation of worship.
6. Apply practical steps for effective worship leadership.

### PREPARATION FOR THIS LESSON

*Memorize 2 Chronicles 5:13-14.*

### INTRODUCTION

- » How much planning time do you give to each week's worship service? Do you match the songs with the sermon? Is this type of planning necessary or does advance planning hinder the freedom of the Holy Spirit in worship?

Imagine a lady who is preparing a meal for special guests. As the guests arrive for dinner, the hostess says, "I don't believe in spending too much time cooking a meal. Here is some leftover bread, meat, and vegetables. Just put them together the way you want." Would you do this for special guests? Of course not! You want to give your best to your guests.

Imagine a pastor who is bringing worship as his gift to God. He says, “I don’t believe in spending too much time planning worship. I want to give the Holy Spirit freedom to speak through me, so I won’t plan anything. I let the Spirit guide me.”

Some leaders believe that the Holy Spirit cannot work through a well-prepared sermon or well-planned service. The Bible, however, shows the value of planning for worship. From the careful preparation of musicians for Temple worship to Paul’s directions regarding worship for the church at Corinth, scripture shows that planning is important for leading in ministry. We must not bring an offering that costs us nothing. Since worship is our sacrifice to God, God deserves our best offering.

In this lesson we will look at two aspects of worship leadership. First, we will study the importance of planning for worship. Then, we will look at effective leadership in the worship service.

## PREPARING FOR THE WORSHIP SERVICE

- » Read Exodus 28-29. Notice the careful preparation of those who led in Israel’s worship. How do you prepare spiritually, mentally, and emotionally to lead worship?

### Preparing the Worship Leader

Planning and preparing the worship service is important; preparing the **worship leader** is even more important. We cannot lead people where we have not been. Because of this, we must prepare our hearts before we try to lead others in worship.

In Lesson 2, we saw God’s requirements for worshippers. God calls his worshippers to have clean hands and pure hearts. Before beginning to prepare the worship service, we should prepare ourselves as worship leaders. We must be spiritually prepared to lead worship.

Begin worship planning with prayer and scripture reading. Spend time in God’s Word for your own spiritual development. A constant danger for worship leaders is allowing ministry preparation to substitute for personal spiritual development. We can study the Bible to prepare sermons to others while failing to allow God’s Word to speak to our own spiritual needs.

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**“A person who guides others into the presence of the King must have journeyed far into the King’s country and often looked upon his face.”**

**Charles Spurgeon**

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Before choosing scriptures and songs that speak God’s Word to the congregation, take time to let God’s Word and God’s Spirit speak to you as an individual. Then as you begin planning for Sunday’s service, ask God to guide you to the scriptures, sermon topic, and music that will speak to the needs of the people.

## CHECKUP

How do you develop a healthy pattern of private worship in your life? What hindrances do you face? How do you respond to those hindrances?

## Planning the Worship Service<sup>72</sup>

Fred Bock described the preparation of the pastor under whom he served, Lloyd John Ogilvie. Dr. Ogilvie planned his sermons for an entire year. Many times, a sermon topic chosen in January was the perfect fit for the needs of the congregation when it was preached in July. Why? “Our God is the God of yesterday, today, and tomorrow. He knows our needs well in advance, long before we do. ...And when we are prepared and organized, this makes us a more useable, pliable tool for the Holy Spirit.”<sup>73</sup> The Holy Spirit knows who will be in your service; he can guide you to the songs and scriptures that will speak to their needs.

Maybe you should not plan a year at a time, but planning worship is important. Careful planning frees us to focus on worship during the service instead of worrying, “What comes next?” When we don’t plan, we tend to fall back on what we did the previous week. Planning frees us to be creative.

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**“Spontaneity without order can become chaotic, and order without spontaneity can become lifeless.”**

**Franklin Segler and  
Randall Bradley**

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<sup>72</sup> Much of the content on planning worship comes from “The Nuts and Bolts of Worship Planning” available at <http://worship.calvin.edu/resources/resource-library/the-nuts-and-bolts-of-worship-planning> accessed July 22, 2020.

<sup>73</sup> Lois and Fred Bock, *Creating Four-Part Harmony*, (Carol Stream: Hope Publishing, 1989), 43

## Start with a structure.

Most of us like order in life. We prefer to eat breakfast in the morning and dinner in the evening. We usually read books from chapter 1 to the end rather than reading pages at random. No traveler wants to get on an international flight and hear the pilot say, “We haven’t decided what route to take today. We will just take off and see what happens.” We like structure.

Structure in worship does not limit our freedom to follow the Holy Spirit when he changes our plans! Structure gives guidance to worship, while remaining open to the Holy Spirit’s leadership if he overrides our structure. At the dedication of the Temple, there was a planned structure, but God’s presence changed the order for the service (2 Chronicles 5:13-14).

In Appendix A are outlines that some leaders use for worship planning. You may find it helpful to adapt one of these for your services. These are not a rigid format but can provide a structure that you can adapt to your needs.

Some common structures for worship planning include:<sup>74</sup>

### 1. Structure centered on the sermon

- Proclamation of truth: hymns, scripture, sermon
- Response to truth: invitation, offering, closing hymn

### 2. Structure based on the activity of God’s people in worship

- God’s people gather: call to worship, hymns of praise, prayer
- God’s people hear the Word: scripture reading and sermon
- God’s people respond to the Word: hymn of invitation, offering
- God’s people are sent out: closing hymn, benediction

### 3. Structure showing a dialogue between God and His people (based on Isaiah 6)

- God reveals himself (verse 1): call to worship
- God’s people respond with praise and confession (verses 3-5): hymns and prayer
- God speaks to his people (verses 6-8): scripture and sermon
- God’s people respond in commitment (verse 8): hymn and offering
- God commissions his people (verse 9): benediction

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<sup>74</sup> The structures included here are for an entire service. Some worship leaders use structures for only the music portion of the service. These are not included here because they tend to separate worship from the rest of the service. In the Bible, worship includes all the service, not a special music worship set isolated from the sermon.

#### 4. Structure based on Psalm 95

- Enter with joyful thanksgiving (verses 1-5): call to worship, hymns of praise
- Continue in reverential worship (verses 6-7): hymns of consecration, prayer
- Hear God’s voice (verses 7-11): scripture and sermon

#### Communicate a unified message.

Worship speaks to God, but it also speaks to the congregation. In worship, we bring God’s Word to the worshippers. When planning a service, it is helpful to ask, “What message does God want to bring to his people in this service?”

Have you ever attended a service like this?

<b>Hymns</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What a Friend We Have in Jesus (The benefits of prayer)</li> <li>• Shout to the Lord (Call to worship)</li> <li>• When We All Get to Heaven (Our hope of heaven)</li> </ul>
<b>Special Song</b>	Come, Holy Spirit (Inviting the Holy Spirit to our lives)
<b>Sermon</b>	Jonah’s Call to Nineveh – A Challenge to Evangelism
<b>Closing Hymn</b>	Come, Now Is the Time to Worship (Call to worship)

What message will remain with the worshippers? I’m not sure. In 90 minutes, we sing about comfort in trouble, heaven, the Holy Spirit, and a call to worship – all surrounding a sermon about evangelism. During the following week, will people remember the challenge to evangelism? Perhaps; but the structure of the service did not reinforce this theme.

Now consider a service planned around the theme of “Jonah’s Call to Nineveh”:

<b>Hymns</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Come, Now Is the Time to Worship (Call to worship)</li> <li>• O for a Thousand Tongues to Sing (Relates our praise to evangelism)</li> <li>• Jesus Saves (Summarizes the content of our evangelistic message)</li> <li>• People Need the Lord (Shows the need for evangelism)</li> </ul>
<b>Sermon</b>	Jonah’s Call to Nineveh – A Challenge to Evangelism
<b>Special Song</b>	So Send I You (A commission to evangelism)
<b>Closing Hymn</b>	I’ll Go Where You Want Me to Go (A response to the commission)

Because the leaders have planned the service to communicate one theme, the people are likely to hear God’s voice throughout the week, reminding them of the call to evangelism. As they drive past people whose lives are empty, perhaps they will remember that “People

Need the Lord.” As they are working on Tuesday, perhaps they will rejoice that “Jesus Saves” and remember that because Jesus has saved us, we must share this joy with others.

Can God work through a service with no central theme? Of course! However, we help our congregation focus on the message if we take time to plan carefully. Is this always necessary? No. A service will sometimes have multiple themes that God uses to speak to various needs in the congregation. We must never fall into the trap of thinking that God works through one system only. However, a unified theme often helps worshippers focus on the message of the service.

### **Maintain a balance in worship.**

All of us have favorites: favorite foods, favorite music, favorite books, favorite games, and favorite Bible books. In planning worship, it is important that a leader include more than his favorite songs, scriptures, and sermon themes. Balanced worship will speak the entire gospel to the entire congregation.

#### **1. Balanced worship shows both God’s majesty and God’s presence with us.**

God is an exalted God who reigns over all the earth; God is also a present God who dwells among his people. We see this balance throughout scripture.

After crossing the Red Sea, the people of Israel sang of God’s power; “Who is like you, O Lord, among the gods? Who is like you, majestic in holiness, awesome in glorious deeds, doing wonders?” They sang of God’s care; “You have led in your steadfast love the people whom you have redeemed; you have guided them by your strength to your holy abode” (Exodus 15:11-13).

Isaiah saw the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up. He was majestic and far above the earth. The Lord was exalted, but He spoke personally to commission Isaiah to “Go, and say to this people...” (Isaiah 6:1-13).

The psalmist praised the exalted God; “O Lord, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth! You have set your glory above the heavens.” This exalted God has stooped to become intimately involved with mankind; “what is man that you are mindful of him, and the son of man that you care for him?” (Psalm 8).

In worship, we give attention both to God’s majesty and to God’s presence with us. When our worship forgets God’s majesty, he becomes a casual friend who no longer requires obedience and service. When our worship forgets God’s present involvement with us, we worship Him as a distant God who cares nothing for our concerns. In planning worship, we should give attention to both aspects of God’s relationship with mankind. We must remind worshippers that we fear God; we must also remember that we delight in God.

## PUTTING IT INTO PRACTICE

Worship of the God who is both exalted and present with us means that we will sing songs that recognize his majesty (“O Worship the King”) and songs that recognize his relationship with mankind (“Immanuel, God With Us”). In prayer, we will praise him for his mighty works, and we will bring our intimate personal needs to him.

### 2. **Balanced worship is both corporate and personal.**

The Book of Psalms includes both corporate praise and individual praise. Some psalms speak of “our” praise; some psalms speak of “my” praise. At the Temple, Hebrew worshippers worshipped together; at home, they prayed as individuals. Jesus often went to the synagogue for corporate worship; he also went to a desolate place to spend time alone with his Father (Luke 4:16 and Mark 1:35). Biblical worship was both corporate and personal. In worship, we must provide opportunities for the congregation to worship as a body and opportunities for individual worshippers to express their personal devotion to God.

## PUTTING IT INTO PRACTICE

Worship that is both corporate and personal will affect all areas of the service. We will sing songs for the entire body (“How Great is Our God”); we will sing songs of personal worship (“You are My King”). We will pray to “Our Father in heaven”; we will have times of group prayer allowing each member to pray individually within the body.

More than at any time in history, corporate worship is a challenge. In an age of cellphones, tablets, texting, and constant internet access, we can sit in a worship service while remaining emotionally and spiritually detached. A commitment to corporate worship requires us to detach ourselves from distractions and worship with the body.

### 3. **Balanced worship includes both the familiar and the new.**

This balance is practical instead of theological, but it is important if we want to actively involve the congregation in worship. In planning for worship, we should balance the familiar and the new.

Too much of the new causes a congregation to become observers rather than worshippers; they cannot participate because they don't know the songs. C.S. Lewis once complained that many pastors forget that "Jesus told Peter to 'feed my sheep,' not 'teach my performing dogs new tricks.'" Too much novelty makes it difficult to focus on worship.

Too much of the familiar leads to empty routine. A service that has become completely predictable causes the congregation to lose focus and to disengage from worship.

Worship planning should include both the familiar and the new. For instance, "How Deep the Father's Love for Us" is a new hymn about the atonement. The hymn ends, "His wounds have paid my ransom." This new hymn showing the cost of the atonement could be followed with the familiar "Jesus Paid It All," calling us to respond to Jesus' sacrifice. A balance of the familiar and the new encourages the congregation to active worship.

#### **PUTTING IT INTO PRACTICE**

Worship that balances the familiar and the new will include both old and new hymns. It will include both familiar and less familiar scripture readings. Before reading a familiar passage such as John 3:1-21 in which Jesus teaches about the new birth, we can read a less familiar passage such as Ezekiel 36:16-38 in which God promises to wash Israel with water and to give his people a new heart. These two scriptures are closely related in theme. Reading them together will deepen the congregation's understanding of Jesus' teaching in John 3.

If you are introducing a new song, surround the new song with familiar songs. When we open worship with an unfamiliar song, the service begins on an uncertain note. It is wise to open with a familiar song and then to introduce the new song.

A church in Taiwan had a creative approach to introducing songs. Most of their congregation were new believers and did not know many of the songs that were sung. This church had a rehearsal before each service. Twenty minutes prior to worship, the people sang the songs that would be part of the worship service. The pianist played the melody so everyone could learn the tune. Since this was a rehearsal, the leader could stop and repeat a phrase until the congregation learned it well. By 10:00, the people sang even new songs with confidence.

### Plan as a team.

Ecclesiastes gives this practical advice; “Two are better than one; because they have a good reward for their toil” (Ecclesiastes 4:9). Worship planning should be a team activity. Everyone involved in the leadership of the worship service should have a role in planning.

As the pastor, song leader, and other church leaders meet together to seek God’s will for the service, each person’s gifts are joined together. By working as a team, the strengths of each member of the church leadership contributes to worship.

### Plan for the long term.

No single service includes the entire message of the Bible, but over time we should communicate all aspects of the gospel to our worshippers. Each of us has favorite topics; we must push ourselves to preach and sing the topics that are not our favorite.

Some pastors and worship leaders use a calendar that schedules themes for teaching through the Bible in three years.<sup>75</sup> Others plan weekly but are careful to work through the entire message of scripture over a period of time.

Even if you do not follow a strict teaching calendar, an awareness of the primary seasons of the Christian year will guide you through important aspects of the gospel. Important seasons in the Christian year are:

- **Advent** (four Sundays leading to Christmas): A focus on both the first and second comings of Christ.
- **Christmas**: A focus on the incarnation and the birth of Christ.

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75 Available online at <http://lectionary.library.vanderbilt.edu/calendar.php> July 22, 2020.

- **Lent** (six Sundays leading to Easter): A focus on the suffering and death of Jesus, as well as the demands of discipleship for every believer.
- **Easter**: A focus on the resurrection and ascension of Christ.
- **Pentecost**: A focus on the Holy Spirit and the church.

Whether you follow a formal sequence or plan on a weekly basis, make sure your congregation hears all the gospel as a part of worship.

### Plan peacefully.

Worship isn't about us; worship is our sacrifice to God. Our worship planning is part of that offering. We plan worship without the guilt-driven pressure of thinking, "Is this good enough?" We worship a God of grace. Our offering is accepted not because it is good enough, but because God accepts the willing offering of his children.

This is important in avoiding the pressure that "We must keep up with XYZ church." In today's world of technology and multi-media, many church leaders feel a constant pressure to be as up-to-date as other churches. Pastors compete to have the latest technology. Music directors compete to sing the newest songs. Worshippers become shoppers looking for a church that offers the newest attractions.

Do not yield to the temptation to try to impress God with your offering. Do not allow the tools of worship, such as music and technology to substitute the actual worship. Bring him your best knowing that the God of grace rejoices in the sweet smell of your sacrifice. Give him your best, and then trust him to accept your offering. Worship is not a competition with other churches; it is a gift to God.

## LEADING THE WORSHIP SERVICE

### The Most Important Question: Who Is the Audience?

- » What is the role of the congregation in worship? What is the role of the worship leaders? What is God's role?

Many people view worship like a concert. The congregation listens as the pastor and musicians perform. The sanctuary is a concert hall.

Barry Liesch described this view of worship like a football game:<sup>76</sup>

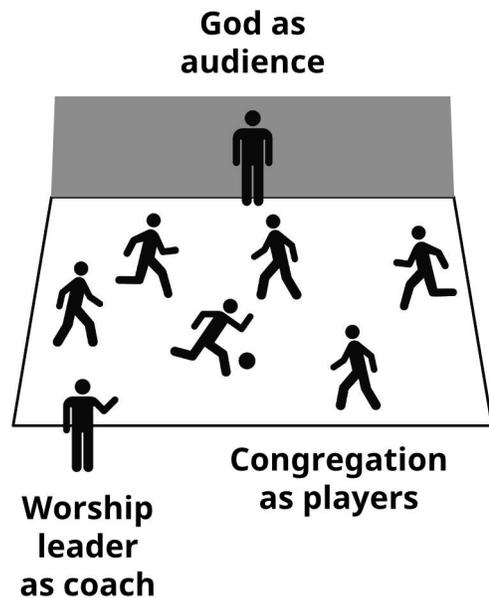
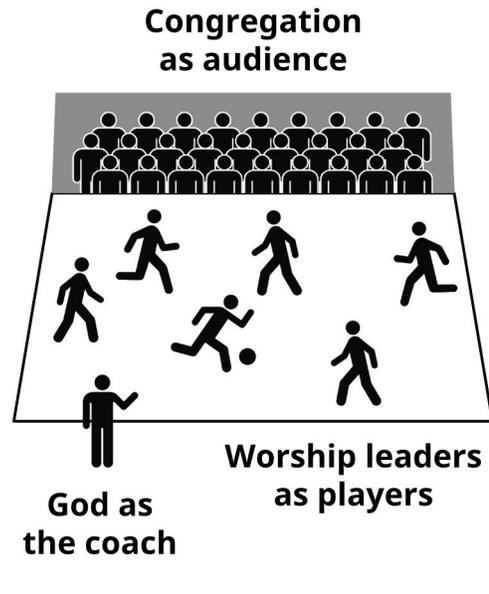
- The worship leaders are the players doing the worship.
- The congregation is the audience in the stands watching the game.
- God is the coach who tells the worship leaders what to do.

The biblical picture of worship is much different. In biblical worship, the congregation worships while the worship leaders act as coaches guiding the worship:

- The worship leader is the coach guiding the congregation.
- The worshippers are the players who doing the worship.
- God is the audience who receives our worship.

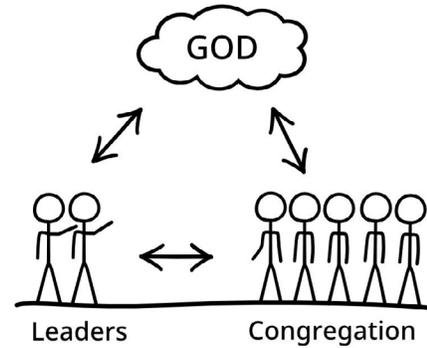
In a drama performance, you never notice the director. The director knows every line of the play and cues each actor when it is time to enter. If she does her job well, the audience never notices her. That is the role of worship leaders. Our job is not to worship for the people; our job is to guide the congregation in worship. The congregation worships, with the pastor and music leader, in the presence of God. Our goal in worship is to please God. In a biblical model of worship, God is the audience for our worship.

However, God is more than an audience; God empowers all that we do in worship. And, the worship leader is more than the coach or director. The worship leader is both a director and a worshipper. Worship involves multiple relationships:



76 Barry Liesch, *The New Worship*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2001), 123

- God invites worshippers, receives worship, and guides worship leaders as they minister to the congregation.
- Worship leaders guide the congregation in worship, listen to God’s voice, and participate as worshippers.
- The congregation offers worship to God, listens to God’s Word, and speaks to one another in worship.



## How to Avoid Worship as Performance<sup>77</sup>

1. Sing songs people know or can learn easily. Sing them in congregational keys. Use new songs in moderation.
2. Sing and celebrate the power, glory, and salvation of God. Serve your congregation. Fill them with the Word of God. Don’t sing songs with bad lyrics or weak theology.
3. Keep the lights up. Stop talking so much. Don’t let loops/lights/visuals become your outlet for creativity at the expense of the centrality of the gospel.
4. Adapt your worship leading and the songs you pick to the majority of your congregation. Lead pastorally.
5. Point to Jesus. Don’t draw attention to yourself.

## Qualities of the Worship Leader

Regardless of your title, as a worship leader you serve a pastoral role. If you are the pastor, you already understand this. If you are a lay leader, you must understand that your role places you in a position of spiritual leadership.

In choosing a worship leader, we must consider spiritual qualifications, not merely musical or personal qualifications. When the apostles chose deacons to care for the Grecian widows, they looked for men with a good reputation, full of the Spirit and wisdom (Acts 6:3). Ethical, spiritual, and moral qualifications were of primary importance.

In some churches, the choice of song leaders, musicians, and other leadership roles is based on popularity. If the deacons who served tables were chosen for their spiritual qualifications, certainly worship leaders should be chosen for spiritual qualities.

<sup>77</sup> Adapted from Jamie Brown, “Are We Headed For A Crash? Reflections on the Current State of Evangelical Worship.” Available at <https://worthilymagnify.com/2014/05/19/crash/> July 22, 2020.

If you lead worship in your church (as the pastor, musician, or other leader in worship), you should seek to develop qualities that make an effective worship leader.

- **Spiritual discernment.** “Am I sensitive to the leadership of the Holy Spirit?”
- **Sensitivity.** “Am I sensitive to the needs of the congregation? Do I choose songs and scriptures that speak to those needs?”
- **Cooperation.** “Do I serve effectively on a team? Am I cooperative when the pastor asks me to change the closing song? Do I yield to the needs of the entire team?”
- **Knowledge.** “Am I growing in my knowledge of God’s Word? Do I make God’s Word central in worship?”
- **Wisdom.** “Am I growing in wisdom to understand and respond to conflicts over worship? Do I discipline myself to be quick to listen and slow to speak?” (James 1:19)
- **Patience.** “Am I patient when the congregation is slow to respond to *my plan* for the service?”
- **Humility.** “Am I willing to sing a song that speaks to the needs of the less trained members of my congregation? Am I willing to preach in a simpler style that meets the needs of uneducated members of my congregation? Do I lead with humility, or do I see myself as superior to the church where God has placed me?” As a leader of worship, your creativity must yield to your pastoral responsibility. Your first obligation is to minister to the people.
- **Creativity.** “Do I look for ways to make worship meaningful? Do I avoid falling into a repetitious pattern in which every service is the same?”
- **Discipline.** “Do I discipline my creativity to avoid distracting from worship? Do I avoid making each service so new that people cannot focus their attention on God?”
- **Excellence.** “Do I bring my best offering each week? Am I continually growing as a worship leader?”<sup>78</sup>

## Practical Steps in Leading Worship

A leader cannot force people to worship; however, a leader can make it easier for the congregation to give their attention to worship.

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78 The quality of excellence does not mean that only professionally trained leaders can lead worship. Harold Best defines excellence as “the process of becoming better than I once was.” Since worship is our offering to God, we continually seek to become better than we were. Harold Best, *Music through the Eyes of Faith* (San Francisco: Harper Books, 1993), 108

## Leading by example

One of the privileges of leading in worship is the opportunity to worship *with* the congregation. The leader must worship while leading the congregation in worship.

Unfortunately, worship can be a challenge to the worship leader. We can become so busy leading worship that we fail to worship! If you are the music director, you may find yourself trying to worship while you think thoughts such as:

- “The soloist is late. I hope she gets here in time for the special song!”
- “People didn’t sing well on the first hymn. Is that song too difficult for our church?”
- “It feels like we are singing too slowly. Should I speed up the next verse?”

If you are the pastor, you may find yourself trying to worship while you think:

- “We have 10 people fewer than last week. Where are they?”
- “Should I finish the sermon with an invitation?”
- “That song doesn’t fit with my sermon! How can I move from a song on heaven to my sermon on the Judgment?”

We must not allow the mechanics of leading the service to replace worship in our lives. As we lead worship, we must worship. This inspires worship by the congregation. One speaker said, “As worship leaders we are not **sheep dogs** who nip at the heels of the congregation to force them in the direction we want. We are **worshippers** who invite the congregation to go with us into God’s presence.” A congregation doesn’t worship when the leader tells them to worship; they worship when the leader worships. The worship leader leads by example.

## Leading with encouragement

Susanna was up until 3:00 a.m. caring for a sick child. After three hours of sleep, she arose to prepare breakfast and get ready for church. She arrived at church exhausted from lack of sleep, discouraged because she reprimanded her son harshly when he forgot to put away a toy, and spiritually drained because she had little time alone with God this week.

Pastor Joel wants to see more involvement in worship. After the first song, he steps to the pulpit, “What is wrong with you people? We are in the presence of God. We are worshipping the King, and some of you look like you would rather be at home asleep! You should be embarrassed. Join in worship!”

Pastor Joel’s intentions are good. He wants his congregation to be active worshippers, but what does Susanna hear? “I’m a failure as a mother; I was too hard on my son. I’m a failure as a Christian; I missed my devotions yesterday. I’m even a failure at attending church; God is angry because I didn’t sing.” By using guilt as a motivator, Pastor Joel has made worship even more difficult for Susanna.

As worship leaders, we should encourage worship; we should model worship in our own life; we can then leave the results to God. It is God's grace that makes worship possible; it is God's grace that empowers true worship; it is God's grace that draws the heart of a worshipper.

We should encourage worship with positive words, but we should not try to manipulate worshippers with guilt or by trying to artificially stir the emotions. Our goal is to point worshippers to God. He inspires worship; worship is not dependent on our motivational techniques or emotional manipulation. We as worship leaders do not need to do God's job!

This section began with the story of Susanna. Let's finish with a true story of a humble, encouraging worship leader. David struggled to get youth active in worship. He found that they were more focused on text messaging than on worship. Some leaders would have started service with something like this: "Kids, we are here to worship. Put away those phones and pay attention to worship. You are being disrespectful to God!"

David did something much different. As the guitarist played a quiet song of worship, David gently said, "As we come into God's presence, I know you don't want to distract your neighbor from worship. Let's all put away our phones and listen to God's voice this morning." Every person in the room put away their phone. David humbly taught his youth to worship.

## Leading or Manipulating?

Listen to the testimony of a contemporary worship leader:

"As a freshman, I visited a church near my university; its... flashy lights and loud music [were] exciting. The worship leader had styled hair, jeans and an expensive guitar. At the beginning of the service, I noticed an unused microphone set up at his waist level. 'What purpose could that serve?' I wondered, and then I raised my hands and lost myself in the tunes.

"The sound was wonderful, the praise team was outstanding, and the music was carefully planned to lead to the last song. As the leader sang the final words ('I'm falling on my knees, offering all of me'), he fell to his knees. It was at this point that I realized the purpose of the unused microphone. It was placed at the perfect height so the leader would be able to sing and play the guitar while on his knees. I do not want to judge the intentions of this church, but I could not help but feel like I was being manipulated to react to this emotional moment, which had clearly been planned ahead of time."<sup>79</sup>

This example comes from contemporary worship, but we could also use examples from traditional worship. The problem of manipulation is not limited to one worship style.

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79 Joel Wentz, "Confessions of a Former Worship Leader." Available at <https://relevantmagazine.com/life5/1301-confessions-of-a-former-worship-leader/> July 22, 2020.

Regardless of our musical style or sincere intentions, we can treat the congregation as puppets that we manipulate into a particular emotional response.

Is emotion in worship wrong? No; we see many biblical examples of the emotional impact of worship. Is it wrong to attempt to inspire an emotional response? No; good communication touches both the mind and the emotions. However, if we are not careful, we can work to create a particular emotional effect, apart from the work of the Holy Spirit.

How can we tell the difference between worship leadership and manipulation? Manipulation comes when the response of the congregation depends on the effectiveness of the leaders' actions rather than on the power of the Holy Spirit. Perhaps we can never perfectly distinguish between leading and manipulating, but there are some signs that suggest we may be crossing the line into manipulation.

1. **We are in danger of manipulating worship when we confuse emotion with worship.** We begin to feel that it is our responsibility to create an emotional response. Some worship leaders have even said, "Fake it until it is real. Fake the emotion until people feel it for real." This assumes that our job is to use emotion to create worship. Worship leaders lead worship; we do not create worship.
2. **We are in danger of manipulating worship when we assume that a state of high emotion is required for heart change.** God can work in a church service filled with emotion, but he can also work in quiet moments at home. We are in danger of trying to manipulate the congregation if we believe that it is only through our efforts that God can bring change in the hearts of those we serve.
3. **We are in danger of manipulating worship when we equate a particular physical action with worship.** Sometimes a leader wants the people to respond, so he says, "If you love Jesus, you will raise your hands." Obviously, it is entirely possible that someone in the congregation who does not truly love Jesus will have their hands raised! Or, someone in the congregation who does love Jesus may not have their hands raised. Worship is not equated with a particular physical action. Clapping while singing does not prove that we are worshipping any more than sitting quietly during prayer proves that we are praying. Only God sees the heart of the worshipper. **"When worship leaders make external actions the main test of internal attitudes, they are treading on dangerous ground."**<sup>80</sup>
4. **We are in danger of manipulating worship when we attempt to duplicate what God has done at another time or place.** We should not assume that because God blessed a particular song last week, he must bless the same song this week. When God works, he works in his own way. Worship leaders must leave God free to come

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80 Warren Wiersbe, *Real Worship* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2000), 215

as he chooses. There is no magic recipe that creates the same spiritual response in every situation.

5. **We are in danger of manipulating worship when we measure our ministry by our ability to gain a response from the people.** Any public speaker or musician loves to get a response from the audience; that is normal. But when we measure the effectiveness of our ministry by these reactions, we are in danger of relying on our skill rather than on the Holy Spirit.

This topic is difficult. Many times the same words spoken in two different situations represent very different motivations. On one hand, if we are careless we can begin manipulating worship. On the other hand, if we are too fearful of emotion we may provide no leadership at all!

Because of this, we should be slow to judge someone else's worship leadership but quick to evaluate our own leadership. We must ask God to show us our motives in leading. We must be careful to lead in worship without manipulating the worshippers to a particular response that we desire.

## Practical Questions

### How do we begin the service?

A bad example:

*At 10:00, it is time to begin service. The pastor is trying to find the song leader. Three ladies are sharing a recipe. Four men are talking about the lack of rain for crops. How do we move from all this activity into worship?*

One of the important responsibilities of the worship leader is the opening of the service. How do we invite God's people into God's presence?

- **Some churches begin with a moment of silence.** The leader simply begins, "Join us in a moment of silent prayer as we enter God's presence."
- **Some churches begin with a musical "Call to Worship."** This can be sung by a choir or individual, or it can be a chorus for the congregation. In some churches, the pastor will step to the front and begin singing a chorus such as, "I will enter his gates with thanksgiving in my heart...."
- **Some churches begin with a verse of scripture,** often drawn from the Psalms.

Oh come, let us sing to the LORD; let us make a joyful noise to the rock of our salvation! Let us come into his presence with thanksgiving; let us make a joyful noise to him with songs of praise! (Psalm 95:1-2)

Psalms that invite worshippers into God's presence include Psalm 15, Psalm 66:1-4, Psalm 96:1-4, Psalm 100, Psalm 105:1-3, Psalm 107:1-3, Psalm 149:1-2, and Psalm 150.

### Are announcements worship?

A Spanish pastor asked, "Where do announcements fit into worship? We try to focus on worship and God's presence in our church. We have a wonderful service and then end with a long list of boring announcements. This affects the spirit of the service. How do we make announcements part of worship?"

Regardless of where we put announcements, they can disrupt the service. Announcements are rarely worship; instead, they interrupt worship. What can you do? There is no perfect answer, but a few suggestions may help:

- When possible, print announcements rather than reading them aloud. When you must make public announcements, keep them short.
- Use an overhead projector to project the announcements before the service starts.
- Some churches have the announcements, a time of prayer, and then the service begins. There is one church that begins its service at 10:00. This church does the announcements at 9:50. The pastor said, "This accomplishes two things. First, it encourages people to come early because they won't hear the announcements if they aren't here by 9:50. Second, it allows us to focus entirely on worship from the first words of the service."
- Don't let announcements interrupt the spirit of worship. Instead, see the announcements as part of accomplishing the ministry of the church, make the announcements, and move on. When we recognize that the activities of the church (prayer fellowships, service to the community, outreach events, and church projects) are part of worship, the announcements of these activities are part of the church's worship. Just as a father might end a family's devotions by reminding the family of the week's plans, the pastor might end a worship service by reminding the church family of the week's activities. Announcements of the church's activities remind us that we are a family; the fellowship of the family is an important aspect of worship.

### WORSHIP DANGERS: "WE DO THIS BECAUSE..."

A new bride was cooking a ham for Sunday dinner. Before putting the ham in the oven, she carefully cut off one end of the ham and placed it in a smaller pan. Her husband asked, "Why do you do that?"

"That is how you are supposed to cook a ham. My mother always cut one end from the ham before cooking it. I think it helps the flavor." The young bride began to wonder, "What does

cutting the end of the ham do for the flavor?” She called her mother to ask, “Why do you cut off one end from the ham?”

Her mother said, “Because your grandmother, my mother, always cut one end from the ham before cooking. It must help the flavor. Let’s ask her.”

The young bride called the ancient grandmother. The grandmother no longer cooked, but she answered their question. “Yes, I remember why I cut the end from the ham. When your grandfather and I married, we could not afford many cooking pans. My only roasting pan was small. A ham wouldn’t fit in my pan unless I cut off one end!”

For 50 years the lady’s daughter and then granddaughter had continued a “tradition” that had no meaning. They had never asked, “Why?”

As worship leaders, we sometimes do things without considering “Why?”

Reasons churches do things in particular ways:

1. **Churches in the past did it.** There is value in tradition. If churches in the past did something, we should not throw it out without asking, “Why did they do it?” We may find good reason to preserve the tradition; but if “churches in the past did it” is the *only* reason, it may not be enough.
2. **Big churches do it.** There is value in learning from others. If a practice works in other churches, we should ask, “Is this practice beneficial to us? Why do they do it?” We may find that there is good reason for copying a worship practice; but if “big churches do it” is the *only* reason, it may not be helpful for our situation.
3. **People like it.** There is value in worship that encourages participation of the people. There is nothing in scripture that says, “Your worship should be boring!” We may find that a favorite song of our people is true and is worshipful. If so, that is wonderful; but if people like a song that teaches false doctrine, we must not sing it.
4. **It allows us to worship God in spirit and in truth.** This is the ultimate reason for what we do. In planning worship and in leading worship, we should ask, “Does this song help us to better worship God? Does this order of worship lead us into God’s presence? Will an invitation be the best way to invite a response to this sermon, or should we end with a song of praise? How do we worship God in spirit and in truth this week?”

## CONCLUSION: WHEN WE HAVE FAILED IN WORSHIP

The congregation sang the opening hymn halfheartedly. The choir had practiced, but they sang poorly that morning. The soloist forgot her words. The pianist played wrong notes. The pastor's sermon did not seem to connect with the people. The service was a disaster. Has it ever happened to you? What do you do when you have failed in leading worship?

### 1. Remember, all worship is rehearsal.

Our worship is rehearsal for heavenly worship. We are imperfect people, and our worship will always be imperfect. "We are called to give our best in worship, not to offer perfection."<sup>81</sup>

### 2. Next week is coming.

Don't resign on Monday. Wait till Tuesday to analyze the service. Learn from the failure and move on. In the service just described, the opening hymn was unfamiliar to the congregation. The director thought they knew that hymn; they didn't. He made a note in his hymnal, "Teach this hymn to the choir before the congregation sings it again." Learn from your mistakes, seek God's help, and allow God to work through you the next Sunday.

### 3. Remember, worship is about grace.

Many worship leaders are perfectionists; we are never satisfied. Worship is not about perfection; worship is about grace. God works even through our failures to achieve his goals. This is how it should be! As we realize that it is God who empowers worship, we are brought to a place of humility and submission.

### 4. If we have given our best, we have not failed.

That Sunday, the worship leader walked out of the church discouraged. As he left the building, Timothy was waiting for him. Timothy was shy and rarely spoke, but that morning he said, "You played 'Jesus Loves Me' for the offering." (Yes, the worship leader knew what he'd played – he had messed up!) But Timothy went on, "I needed to hear that song. This week the doctor told me that I have cancer; I needed to be reminded that Jesus loves me."

If we have given our best, we have not failed. God works through our feeble efforts to speak his Word to the people we serve.

- » Group discussion. Look at "Lesson 8 in Review." Are there any points with which you disagree? Which points do you feel are most important for your immediate use?

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81 This quote and the suggestions in this section come from Franklin Segler and Randall Bradley, *Christian Worship* (Nashville: B&H Publishing, 2006), 274-275.

## LESSON 8 IN REVIEW

### 1. How do we prepare for a worship service?

- Preparation for the worship service begins with preparation of the worship leader through time with God.
- A pattern for planning helps provide structure to the worship service.
- A theme for the worship service helps communicate a central message.
- Balance makes sure our worship speaks the whole gospel to the whole church.
  - Balanced worship shows both God's majesty and God's presence with us.
  - Balanced worship is both corporate and personal.
  - Balanced worship includes both the familiar and the new.
- Planning for worship should include the entire church leadership team.
- Planning for worship should look at the long term.
- We can plan without pressure because worship is not about us; it is about God.

### 2. What is important in leading a worship service?

- The most important audience in worship is God.
- The congregation, worship leaders, and God all interact in the worship service. The leaders do not perform worship for the audience.
- The worship leader must worship. He leads by example.
- The worship leader should be encouraging, not condemning.
- The worship leader must lead, not manipulate.
- Announcements should be handled in the least disruptive way possible.
- After planning worship, we should leave it to God to enter our services in the way he chooses to come.

## LESSON 8 ASSIGNMENTS

1. In Lessons 6 and 7, you selected songs and scriptures on five different topics. Plan a service based on each of the five topics. Be as detailed as possible in planning a unified service, including congregational songs, scriptures, a sermon topic and text, as well as any other items appropriate for your service. Use one or more outlines provided in Appendix A for this project.
2. At the beginning of the next lesson, you will take a test based on this lesson. Study the test questions carefully in preparation.

## LESSON 8 TEST

1. List the two main sections in a worship structure centered on the sermon.
2. List the four main sections in a worship structure based on the activity of God's people in worship.
3. List the three main sections in a worship structure based on Psalm 95.
4. What three things should we remember about balanced worship?
5. In a biblical model of worship, who is the audience for our worship?
6. List three qualities of an effective worship leader.
7. What are three signs that we may be manipulating worship?
8. Write 2 Chronicles 5:13-14 from memory.



## LESSON 9

# OTHER QUESTIONS

### LESSON OBJECTIVES

1. Recognize the importance of being faithful to scripture while respecting cultural differences in worship.
2. Evaluate worship in relation to both scripture and culture.
3. Understand the particular challenges for evaluating musical style.
4. Apply the principles of Romans 14 to worship.
5. Appreciate the importance of engaging children and youth in worship.
6. Beware of either over-emphasizing emotion or ignoring emotion in worship.

### PREPARATION FOR THIS LESSON

*Memorize 1 Corinthians 14:15-17.*

### INTRODUCTION

Warren Wiersbe wrote about his experience in a church that failed to understand worship:

“Be sure to be back for the evening service,” said the worship leader, with the voice and smile of a television game show emcee. “We are going to have a fun time.”

During the Sunday afternoon hours I wondered what that statement meant. “We are going to have a fun time” makes sense on a birthday party invitation, but how does it relate to a group of Christian believers gathered to worship the Lord of glory? Moses and the people of Israel didn’t have a fun time when they assembled at Mount Sinai....

John had some dramatic experiences on the Island of Patmos, but it's doubtful he was having a fun time.<sup>82</sup>

In these lessons, we have seen that worship is more than a fun time, more than a particular ritual, and more than Sunday morning activity. Worship is giving to God the glory that is due him. On paper, this is easy; in real life, it can be a challenge. In this lesson, we will look at questions related to worship. As you study these questions, remember that the ultimate question is not, "What do I like?" The ultimate question for worship is "What does God like? What brings honor and glory to him?"

## WORSHIP AND CULTURE

- » Discuss the worship style of your church. What aspects of your worship are commanded in scripture and which aspects are determined by culture?

*"The most difficult issue for worship in my country is cultural relevance. Most churches are importing a style of worship from abroad – whether it is contemporary or traditional. Our people adapt a style from the west simply because they want to be up-to-date, but neither 'traditional' nor 'contemporary' worship connects with the people because both are foreign. How do we worship in a way that honors God and that speaks to the world in which we minister?"*

### Culture or Bible?

A bride and groom were from two very different cultures. At the wedding feast, foods from the bride's culture were served. As one dish was passed, the groom asked, "What is that?" The bride told him and then said, "In my country, this is a delicacy." He responded with a frown, "In my country, it is disgusting!" Cultural differences can be challenging.

All of us are influenced by our culture. The reason some Christians eat with forks instead of chopsticks is not because forks are more biblical or even more efficient. They eat with forks because they grew up in a culture that uses forks. Their Christian friends in other parts of the world find chopsticks much more useful than forks.

Our worship is influenced by our culture. Many aspects of our worship are a matter of culture. Someone who grew up in a traditional American church may love the sound of a church organ. A church organ is not more biblical than a guitar; it is an aspect of culture.

In Lesotho, a church sings a call and response between a leader and the congregation. In this style, the leader sings a phrase and then the congregation sings the next phrase. That beautiful style of singing is likely never heard in an American church. If the music director

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82 Warren Wiersbe, *Real Worship* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2000), 169-170

at an American church tried it, the congregation would be confused. *Unison* versus *call/response* singing is a matter of culture, not biblical principle.

There are three questions that we should ask when we are examining worship style:

1. Are we confusing culture and scripture?
2. Does our culture contradict scripture?
3. How can our worship speak most effectively to people in the culture where God has placed us?

### Are we confusing culture and scripture?

This question is important when evaluating a worship practice that is different than our own. In that situation, we must make sure we do not confuse culture and scripture. It is easy for us to read our cultural values into scripture and then to insist that everyone else read the Bible the same way. We are prone to assume that our way is the biblical way.

Someone might say, “The organ is the right instrument for church music. Guitars have no place in worship.” However, in many parts of the world, an organ is impractical, while a portable guitar is very useful for singing. No one can argue that the house churches of the second century used organs! Someone may like the organ, but they must not confuse their cultural preferences with biblical principles.

Paul Bradshaw, a worship historian, has shown that even in the first two centuries of the church, there were a variety of worship forms. As the church spread, it is unlikely that worship remained the same in every setting.<sup>83</sup>

What is the practical impact of this question? When evaluating the worship styles of others or responding to new ideas from within our own churches, we must not confuse culture with scripture. We must not reject an idea simply because it offends our cultural preferences. If a worship practice does not contradict biblical principles, then **we should allow others to worship in the way they prefer.**

This is not to say that every worship style is appropriate for every church. A wise worship leader will lead in a style that suits the people to whom he ministers.

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83 Paul Bradshaw, “The Search for the Origins of Christian Worship” in Robert Webber, *Twenty Centuries of Christian Worship* (Nashville: Star Song Publishing, 1994), 4

## CHECKUP

Are there worship practices that you have rejected because of your cultural preferences, and not because of biblical principles? If so, are you willing to allow other believers the freedom to worship in their way, as long as it doesn't violate scripture?

### Does our culture contradict scripture?

This question is important when we are tempted to defend a worship practice simply because it is normal in our culture. If we find that what is normal in our culture contradicts scripture, **we must obey scripture rather than the expectations of our culture.**

The Reformers faced this issue when they made dramatic changes to worship. Medieval culture said, "Ordinary laymen should not read the Bible; they can't understand it." Wycliffe, Huss, Luther, and other Reformers came to realize that scripture was for all people. Their medieval culture contradicted the teaching of scripture. The Reformers risked their lives to confront their culture with the truth of scripture.

If culture contradicts scripture, we must reject our culture! God's Word is our final authority; we cannot compromise faithfulness to scripture in order to fit into the world around us. A paraphrase of Romans 12:2 reads, "Don't become so well-adjusted to your culture that you fit into it without even thinking."<sup>84</sup> We cannot let the world press us into its mold.

## CHECKUP

Are there areas where your worship contradicts the principles of scripture?

## How can our worship speak most effectively to people in the culture where God has placed us?

This question is important for reaching our world with the gospel. If we want to touch the world around us with the gospel, our worship must speak in a language they understand.

John Wesley faced this question when he began preaching in the fields. Like his Anglican peers, Wesley initially believed that the church was the only proper place for preaching. Under the influence of George Whitefield, Wesley began to understand that the Great Commission required him to preach outside the church.<sup>85</sup> Wesley was forced to consider, “How can I most effectively proclaim the gospel to coal miners who will never enter a church except for weddings and funerals?” The answer was to preach in the fields.

On April 2, 1739, Wesley went outside the city and preached to about 3,000 people who gathered in a field. This began a ministry that would change the English-speaking world of the 18<sup>th</sup> century.

Wesley had opposed field preaching so strongly that he once said, “I [would] have thought the saving of souls almost a sin if it had not been done in a church.” When he realized that his cultural prejudices were a hindrance to the gospel, Wesley was willing to change his practices. Many of his Anglican peers rejected this change. Within a month of beginning outdoor preaching, a bishop told Wesley that he was no longer welcome to preach in Anglican churches. Being willing to speak to your culture may be costly; it cost Wesley the respect of many of his fellow Anglicans. Jesus’ call to be light and salt is a higher priority than personal convenience.

Michael Cospers suggests three questions for understanding the relationship between our worship and the surrounding culture.<sup>86</sup>

### 1. Who is here?

This question looks at our congregation; “Who attends our worship services?” Sometimes we become so concerned about reaching the world that we fail to minister to the church. Our worship becomes inauthentic when we try to be someone that we aren’t. Since worship should speak to the congregation, we must ask, “Who is here? Who has God placed in our congregation?”

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85 This points to Question 2 – “Does our culture contradict scripture?”

86 Michael Cospers, *Rhythms of Grace: How the Church’s Worship Tells the Story of the Gospel* (Wheaton: Crossway Books, 2013), 176-179

## 2. Who was here?

This question looks at our heritage. As believers, we have a heritage reaching back to the early church and stretching around the globe.

This means that we will make the effort to introduce great hymns of the past to our generation. It means that we will connect people today with the history of the church. Young Christians need to know that they are part of a heritage that started long before we were born and will continue long after we are gone. We are part of the church universal made up of believers from all generations.

Our worship heritage goes back to Pentecost, back to God's revelation to Moses at Mount Sinai, and ultimately back to God's revelation to Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. Our worship should celebrate that history. When we sing "A Mighty Fortress is Our God," we are joining the worship of the Reformation. When we recite the Apostle's Creed, we are joining the worship of the second century. In worship we ask, "Who was here before us?"

## 3. Who should be here?

This question looks at our community. As we ask, "Who are the people who should be part of our church," we ask questions such as:

- Who are we trying to reach with the gospel?
- If our community came to church, what would our worship service look like?<sup>87</sup>
- How can we be true to our message while worshipping in a way that speaks to the people we are trying to reach?

These questions are harder in real life than on paper! Look at four scenarios. Each church has faced the challenge of speaking to the community.

### Church A: A church that failed to ask, "Who is here?"

Church A is located in a retirement community. The average age in the community is 70, and the average age in the church is 70. Two years ago, their pastor determined to reach young families. In a two-month period, he replaced the organ, choir, and hymnals with guitars, a praise team, and an overhead screen.

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87 John Wesley faced this issue. Anglicans realized that a worship service attended by coal miners, converted prostitutes and illiterate shopkeepers would be much different from the formal worship of upper-class Anglicans. Many priests decided they were not willing to allow their worship to be interrupted by the lower classes. This led to the formation of the Methodist societies.

Unfortunately, the pastor forgot to ask, “Who is here?” As a result, a church of 100 senior citizens has declined to a church of 35 senior citizens singing music they don’t like, watching a screen they don’t like, and grumbling about the loud guitars.

Should Church A be reaching out? Absolutely! But the people it can reach most effectively are the unchurched seniors in their retirement community. By ignoring the people who are already in the church, they are failing to worship in a way that speaks either to the church itself or to the surrounding community. Church A failed to ask, “Who is here?”

### **Church B: A church that failed to ask, “Who was here?”**

Church B is located in a fast-growing city with many young families. The church speaks the language of their community; their worship is exciting and enthusiastic.

Church B has a passion for evangelism. Unfortunately, the church has not asked, “Who *was* here?” Church B has forgotten its heritage as a church that preached a message of a pure heart and victorious Christian life. The pastor avoids preaching doctrine because he thinks, “People don’t want to hear doctrine; they want practical sermons.” The music director avoids songs with biblical depth because he thinks, “People don’t like songs with difficult words; they like simple songs.” As a result, the church has grown a generation of “baptized pagans.”<sup>88</sup>

Church B is growing in numbers, but few of her members are growing in godliness. Many people attend because it is an entertaining church that demands little commitment. Because Church B has no sense of her heritage, many converts soon drift to other churches that offer even better entertainment. Church B failed to ask, “Who was here?”

### **Church C: A church that failed to ask, “Who should be here?”**

Church C was started nearly 100 years ago in a small rural community. The worship, preaching, and music communicated to the people who lived in that town. In the intervening years, the community has changed completely. Church C is now surrounded by the inner city, but its worship is still designed to appeal to a rural middle class.

Sadly, many of the people who live near Church C pass her each week without knowing that the church has the answer to their deep hunger. Church C has the message that her community needs, but she doesn’t communicate clearly to the community. If Church C could worship in a way that communicated both to God and to a needy world, she could transform her community. Instead, Church C is dying because she failed to ask, “Who should be here?”

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88 Mark Dever’s term for professed Christians who have no biblical foundation.

## Church D: A church that speaks to the community

Church D shares many of the attributes of the previous three churches. The community has changed dramatically since the church was planted 40 years ago. Unlike the other churches in this survey, Church D has learned to communicate well to her community.

When the pastoral staff realized that many young converts did not understand the doctrine preached on Sunday, they developed discipleship groups to bring new believers to maturity. When the music leader realized that the music did not speak to many in their community, he began to include songs that are both doctrinally true and musically appealing.

As the church grew, they planted daughter churches in surrounding towns and allowed these churches to adapt to the needs of their communities. These churches are pastored by young men who were a part of Church D. Each daughter church is different, but each church is faithful to the gospel. Church D is thriving because she learned to ask “Who is here, who was here, and who should be here?” She has learned to speak biblical truth to the community in which God placed her.

### CHECKUP

Does your worship speak to the people who attend your church? Does your worship reflect the heritage of the Christian church? Does your worship speak to those who God wants to reach through your church?

## What about Music?

Church musicians in many parts of the world are faced with the challenge of finding songs that are biblically sound and culturally sensitive. We search for music that speaks the heart language of the community we are seeking to reach. Foreign music may not be culturally relevant, and some local cultural songs may not be biblical. How do we choose music that is both faithful to scripture and sensitive to the culture in which we pastor? Here are answers from pastors who face this issue:

*When it comes to selecting songs for church, one doesn't need to choose between being biblically faithful and being culturally sensitive. With “biblically faithful” I am looking for songs that are true and clear. With “culturally sensitive” I am looking for songs that are singable and engaging for the congregation.*

*Biblical faithfulness takes priority, but we don't have to choose between them. If part of the aim of singing is communication, should we not aim to choose a musical language that fits the cultural [environment] of our church? We are [foolish] if we think cultural sensitivity is irrelevant, and we will be irrelevant if our songs are untrue or unclear.*

(Murray Campbell, pastor in Melbourne, Australia)

*In training African pastors, we urge them to find the most scripture-saturated, God-centered, gospel-driven, edifying, and singable songs they can find, both old and new, and let them loose! In any culture, God's people need songs that will teach them to live and to die for Christ.*

(Tim Cantrell, teacher in Johannesburg, South Africa)

*The repertoire of theologically solid, contextually relevant songs in Hindi is very small. Most songs that have good theology have been translated from older Western hymns or contemporary worship songs. Although the words might be faithful, the music is not indigenous, and the local people find them difficult to sing. Also, such songs only confirm people's suspicion that Christianity is a Western religion.*

*On the other hand, Hindi songs that are musically contextualized are often light on theology, repetitive, and devoid of scripture. Sometimes songs pick up tunes that are used in the temples. We avoid both these kinds of songs.*

*The first thing I look at when choosing songs is its doctrinal soundness. If a song is theologically unsound, we won't sing it, however contextualized it might be. If the words are good but the tune is not Indian, we will not sing it. We choose songs with Indian tunes and faithful words. Granted, there are not many songs that fall in this category, but we are slowly building our repertoire.*

(Harshit Singh, Pastor in Lucknow, India)

Just as there is a verbal heart language in which a person speaks most naturally and feels most deeply, there is a musical heart language which speaks to a person most deeply.

Imagine a missionary who fails to learn the language of the people where he ministers. He might say (in his own language), "I am here to bring you the gospel. You can't understand what I am saying, but keep listening to me talk. Eventually, you will figure out what I am saying, and then you will know the good news." Of course not! Likewise, when we fail to use the musical language of a culture, we are making the good news more difficult to comprehend.<sup>89</sup>

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<sup>89</sup> This example is adapted from Ronald Allen and Gordon Borrer, *Worship: Rediscovering the Missing Jewel* (Colorado Springs: Multnomah Publishers, 1982), 168.

Sadly, as Pastor Singh wrote, in some cultures there are few biblically solid songs that use a non-Western musical language. This often leaves churches with two options: biblically strong songs with tunes that sound foreign or biblically weak songs with tunes that are musically contextualized. If we want to use music to build the church around the world, we should seek out music that is true to scripture and that speaks in the musical heart language of the people. I believe that God wants to call godly song writers in every culture.

If you serve in a culture where there is little quality worship music available, you can promote new music. This may require cooperation between two people; someone to write or translate excellent texts and someone to write the music. Few great hymn writers wrote their own tunes. Find a devoted Christian musician and get them to write tunes to hymns that speak biblical truth. By doing this, you can sing a biblical message in a musical language that communicates to your world.

We must always consider Question 2 above: “Does our culture contradict scripture?” If the musical culture contradicts scripture, we must not use it. However, when there is no biblical principle involved, we should seek to lead worship in the musical language of the worshippers.

While worshipping in his father’s church, a young man preparing for the ministry realized that few people understood the songs they were singing. Rather than worshipping, they showed little understanding of the truths they sang. When the young man complained about this, his father replied, “See if you can do better.” Young Isaac Watts accepted his father’s challenge.

English-speaking people sing the hymns of Isaac Watts today because a young pastor determined to write hymns that communicated a biblical message in language that people understand.<sup>90</sup> In our generation, we need hymn writers who speak biblical truth in languages that touch the hearts of the non-English speaking world.

## SOME CLOSING THOUGHTS ON MUSIC STYLE

Because music is such an important part of life, many of us have strong beliefs about music. Any discussion of music styles in worship tends to cause conflict.

Those who believe that certain music styles are evil say, “Only certain styles of music can be used in worship.” However, scripture does not give specific guidelines for music styles.

Those who believe that music styles are morally neutral say, “Find the music that people like and sing it. Style doesn’t matter; sing what you like.” However, scripture makes clear that

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90 “Joy to the World,” “When I Survey the Wondrous Cross,” and “O God, Our Help in Ages Past” are three of the 750 hymns written by Isaac Watts.

we must avoid anything that leads to sensual behavior. Because of cultural and emotional significance, some music is inappropriate for worship.

Writing about musical choices, Scott Aniol divided his discussion into two parts:<sup>91</sup>

1. **Texts: the right and wrong issue.** Regardless of the musical style, if the text does not speak truth clearly it is inappropriate for worship. This is a matter of right and wrong. There are many songs using traditional music styles that have texts that do not teach biblical truth; these are inappropriate for worship. There are many songs using contemporary music styles that have texts that do not teach biblical truth; these are inappropriate for worship.
2. **Music style: the unclear issue.** Since scripture does not speak clearly on the issue of music style, we should follow the principles of Romans 14. We should avoid music that is questionable because of its cultural associations. However, we should not judge others whose conscience leads them in a different musical direction.

## CHECKUP

Are there cultural areas in your worship that limit your ability to reach your world with the gospel? Are you willing to surrender your preferences for the sake of reaching your world with the gospel?

## What about Clapping?

What about clapping in worship? Is it right or wrong? Clapping occurs in two contexts, with two quite different meanings.

### Clapping as part of worship

Many churches clap as part of singing; clapping is part of their congregational worship. This is part of the physical aspect of worship expressed in scripture. “Clap your hands, all peoples! Shout to God with loud songs of joy!” (Psalm 47:1) Jewish worshippers were enthusiastic. Jewish worship included a variety of musical instruments, raised hands, and clapping.

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91 Scott Aniol, *Worship in Song* (Winona Lake, IN: BMH Books, 2009), 135-140

If clapping is part of your worship, the worship leader must make sure that it is appropriate to the song that is sung. Clapping during a song of prayer is not appropriate to the message. Clapping during a song of joyful praise is appropriate. The question for the leader is not always, “Is clapping right or wrong?” A better question may be, “Is clapping appropriate for this song and at this point in our worship?”

### Applause in response to worship

A more difficult issue is applause *in response* to a special song. There is no indication in scripture that Jewish or Christian worshippers applauded in response to worship.

Some cultures today are quick to applaud as an expression of thanks. In these cultures, it is natural to express praise to God through clapping. Other cultures associate applause primarily with recognition of a good performance. In these cultures, clapping in response to a choir or musician may create the atmosphere of a concert, rather than worship.

Since scripture does not directly address this issue, we should avoid absolute statements. If applause is a natural joyful response that expresses praise to God, it may be an act of worship. If applause communicates, “This person has performed well for our enjoyment,” it may detract from worship.

Both the congregation and the musician should look at the motivation for clapping. The people in the congregation should ask themselves, “Why am I applauding? Is my applause motivated by praise to God or by praise for a performer?”

The musician should ask, “Why is the congregation applauding? Did my song inspire a joyful act of praise to God, or did my song draw attention to my skills? Did I lead in worship?” As leaders of worship we should be careful that our ministry points to God, not to our abilities.

### CHECKUP

If your church claps during worship, is it truly an expression of praise to God or is it an expression of praise to a performer?

## Romans 14 and Worship Styles

» Read Romans 14:1-23.

Romans 14 offers important guidelines for questionable matters to which scripture does not clearly speak. Paul addresses those who disagree about eating meat or observing special days. He offers the following principles.

### 1. Don't judge others about questionable matters (Romans 14:1-13).

In areas to which scripture does not speak clearly, we must allow freedom of conscience to those who disagree with us. We must not be more definite than scripture itself!

### 2. Don't cause the weak to stumble (Romans 14:13-15).

Paul recognized that an immature believer might be harmed by the freedoms exercised by a more mature believer. In that case, the law of love requires us to limit our freedom on behalf of the weak. Do not destroy the one for whom Christ died for the sake of your freedoms.

Paul's statement is a powerful model for all areas of Christian behavior; "If food makes my brother stumble, I will never eat meat, lest I make my brother stumble" (1 Corinthians 8:13).

### 3. Act from faith, not from doubt (Romans 14:23).

This is a vital principle for young Christians. "Whatever does not proceed from faith is sin." We must never violate our conscience in order to please someone else. "Whoever has doubts is condemned if he eats, because the eating is not from faith."

When applied to worship styles, these principles caution us:

1. **Don't judge those who use a style with which you are uncomfortable.** If scripture does not speak clearly, you must be slow to judge.
2. **Don't use music that may offend a new believer.** If a believer comes from a lifestyle in which certain musical styles are associated with immoral behavior, that style may *never* be helpful for that believer. Love for a Christian brother should inspire you to avoid anything that could hinder his spiritual growth.
3. **Don't exercise freedom when your conscience has doubts.** You must not test the lines. Love for God should inspire you to avoid anything that raises doubt in your own conscience.

## ENGAGING CHILDREN AND YOUTH IN WORSHIP

*“How can we involve children and youth in worship? Should we put them in a separate service until they are old enough to understand the adult service? How do we encourage children and youth to truly worship?”*

Many churches separate children, youth, and adults in worship. There are two reasons for this: concern that young children will distract adults from worship and concern that children and youth will not understand what is happening in the worship service.

There is nothing in scripture forbidding separate services for youth or children. However, there are at least three things that should be considered:

- 1. In scripture, worship was intergenerational.** Scripture does not suggest that children and youth were treated differently in worship. In Temple worship, the family remained together for the ritual of sacrifice. There is nothing in the New Testament to suggest that the early church separated children or youth during worship.
- 2. Intergenerational worship unifies the Body of Christ.** Just as offering separate services for contemporary worship and traditional worship may undermine the unity of the Body, offering separate services for children and youth may lessen their awareness of being part of the church family. On the other hand, as children and young people are included in the worship of the church family, everyone understands that they are a valuable part of the Body of Christ (1 Timothy 4:12).
- 3. Through intergenerational worship, the faith is passed on to the next generation.** We learn to worship by worshipping. Unless it is carefully planned, a children’s service can become a time to entertain the children so that they don’t interfere with the adult service. If we do this, when do children learn to worship?

### Youth and Children as a Part of a United Worship Service

Youth and children can often participate in a united worship service that speaks to all ages. This may include a short children’s sermon on the same topic as the main sermon.

When we assume that children cannot understand deep truth, we fail to give them enough credit for spiritual discernment. It is the Holy Spirit who enlightens every listener, adult or child (1 Corinthians 2:10). Even in an adult service, the Holy Spirit can speak truth to their young hearts. Including children in adult worship requires us to teach them about worship. We can explain the service to the children. We can define difficult words in the scripture readings and hymns. Even adults sometimes need those words defined! By making room for children in worship, we allow them to grow as worshippers alongside the rest of the body.

## Separate Worship for Youth and Children<sup>92</sup>

Many churches offer separate services for youth and children. These services should be worship, not entertainment. If children and youth do not learn to worship, they will not grow to spiritual maturity. Just as a child does not develop physical health with a diet of candy, a child does not develop spiritual health with a diet of spiritual junk food.

If a church offers separate adult and youth/children's services, we must make sure that the service is truly a worship service. Youth and children's worship should include scripture reading. For children, attractive visuals can reinforce the truth of the scripture.

The service should include a sermon or Bible lesson that applies the Word of God to the needs of youth and children. The Bible itself should be lovingly held in the hands of the teacher. Children and young people learn to respect and use God's Word by watching it used by adults they respect.

The service should include songs that speak biblical truth. It should include a time of prayer, both praise and requests. It should include an offering that allows children to bring their gift to God. All elements of worship should be included in a worship service for children or youth.

### TEACHING CHILDREN TO PRAY: THE "PRAYER HAND"

**The thumb** reminds us to pray for those who are close to us (family).

**The pointer finger** reminds us to pray for those who point people to Jesus (pastors, teachers, and missionaries).

**The middle finger** is the tallest. This reminds us to pray for the leaders of our country, school, church, and home.

**The fourth finger** is the weakest. Demonstrate this by trying to lift only the fourth finger. This reminds us to pray for those who are weak and need Jesus.

**The fifth finger** is the smallest. This reminds you to pray for yourself.

Raising the **entire hand** reminds us to praise God.

This prayer hand can become a prayer pattern that elevates the prayer level of young worshippers.

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92 This section uses material from Mrs. Christina Black, Professor of Education at Hobe Sound Bible College.

## Summary

If we want to see our children grow into mature believers, we must provide them with spiritual nourishment. Whether in a unified service or in separate services, we must lead our children to worship.

### CHECKUP

Whether you have separate services for children and youth or a united service for the entire church, are you teaching your children and youth to worship?

## EMOTION IN WORSHIP

*“People in my country are very emotional, and our worship frequently reflects our emotional way of life. Our worship music is usually fast, loud, and rhythmic. It allows us to participate and to express emotion. However, I fear that the music is **only** emotion. I don’t know if our music lends itself to true worship.”*

True worship is worship in spirit and in truth. True worship includes emotion, but it is *more* than emotion. There are two errors related to emotion in worship that can lead us astray.

### 1. The error of denying emotion in worship.

Some worshippers deny emotion in worship. They see worship as an intellectual encounter with God; they fail to recognize the emotional aspect of meeting God. True worship speaks to the emotions. Our worship service should allow worshippers the opportunity to express their emotional response to God’s revelation of himself.

### 2. The error of over-emphasizing emotion in worship.

The opposite danger is the error of speaking only to the emotions in worship. Worship that speaks to the emotions while ignoring the mind violates 1 Corinthians 14:15; “I will sing praise with my

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**“Singing is a medium by which God’s people grab hold of his Word and align their emotions and affections to God’s.”**

**Adapted from  
Jonathan Leeman**

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spirit, but I will sing with my mind also.” Any aspect of worship can fall to this temptation: a dramatic sermon that is not faithful to the text of scripture; emotional music that fails to speak biblical truth; worship practices that manipulate the emotions of the worshippers. Worship that speaks only to the emotions is not true worship.

## True Worship: Worship in Spirit and in Truth

A biblical model of worship respects the importance of emotion while carefully evaluating the truth of what we preach and sing. Because music is an emotional medium, we must be particularly careful to evaluate the truth of what we sing. However, used properly, music can be particularly effective in communicating truth that speaks both to the mind and to the emotions.

John Wesley valued emotion in worship. He described one congregation as “Dead as stones - perfectly quiet, and perfectly unconcerned.” He believed that an encounter with truth should inspire an emotional response. At the same time, he was quick to criticize emotional expressions that detracted from true worship.

Wesley warned against either extreme; denying emotion or allowing it to control us. “Is there any necessity for our running into one extreme or another? May we not steer a middle course and keep a sufficient distance from the spirit of error and enthusiasm without denying the gift of God and giving up the great privilege of His children?”<sup>93</sup> This is a good model for us today: respecting the importance of emotion in worship, while avoiding extremes that distract our focus from God and his truth.

## Emotion and Truth: One Christian’s Experience<sup>94</sup>

“By nature, I am an emotionally sensitive person. Music can have a profound influence on my emotions. I learned a lesson a few years ago about putting too much faith in my emotional responses.

“As I listened to a song with a beautiful melody, I was deeply moved. As the song moved through a key change, I found myself crying. By the end of the song, I felt as though I had had a deeply spiritual experience.

“However, as I listened a second time, I discovered something shocking: this song was not worship of the God of the Bible. The song was singing praise to the god of a false cult. The words at that dramatic key change were heresy.

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93 John Wesley, *John Wesley’s Sermons*, “The Witness of the Spirit”

94 Letter from Dr. Andrew Graham. May 29, 2014.

“That day I learned that my emotions can be easily manipulated, particularly by music. That doesn’t mean that all emotional responses to music are invalid, but it does mean that I must evaluate the content of songs. I must ‘test the spirits’ to be sure that they are from God.”

## CHECKUP

Does your worship speak both to the mind and to the emotions? Are you careful to evaluate what you sing and teach to make sure that it is faithful to scripture?

## WORSHIP DANGERS: TRIVIALIZING WORSHIP

This lesson began with Warren Wiersbe’s warning against treating worship as a fun time.<sup>95</sup> He warned that we trivialize worship when we look for fun rather than God in our services. “Churches still use the word *worship* but its meaning has changed. Too often *worship* is only a word people use to give religious respectability to whatever they’ve planned for the congregation to do, whether or not God is the focus of the meeting.” How does this happen?

### We Move from Sanctuary to Theater

Worship can happen anywhere. Christians have worshipped in caves while hiding from persecutors. Christians have worshipped in private homes or ornate buildings. Christians have worshipped while lying in the hospital, flying on a plane, or while working. Worship can happen anywhere, but most corporate worship happens in a building of some type. “Church congregations have to meet someplace, and that ‘someplace’ will become either a sanctuary or a theater.”

What is the difference? A sanctuary “is a place where people gather to worship and glorify their Lord.” A theater is a place where people gather to watch a performance. Is your church building a theater or a sanctuary?

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95 Quotations in this section are adapted from Warren Wiersbe, *Real Worship* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2000), 169-174.

## We Move from Congregation to Audience

“A Christian congregation gathers to worship Jesus Christ and glorify Him. An audience gathers to see and hear a performance.” A congregation is focused on God; an audience is focused on the performer. A congregation consists of participants; an audience consists of spectators. Are you leading a congregation or an audience?

## We Move from Ministry to Performance

“We minister primarily to **express** God’s truth; we perform to **impress** with our abilities. The minister knows that God is watching and that his approval is all that matters; the performer seeks the applause of the audience.” Ministry can become performance in many different ways: a musician who performs for the entertainment of the listeners, a praise team that seeks a particular emotional response, or a preacher who measures his preaching by the reaction of the people. Are you ministering or performing?

## CONCLUSION: TESTIMONY OF A MISSIONARY - ROMANS 14 IN PRACTICE

“I learned a valuable lesson about judging others because of their worship style when I attended a leadership seminar with a missionary friend and eight Filipino pastors.<sup>96</sup>

“We entered a large convention center and found our seats high in the bleachers. Huge screens and loudspeakers were hanging from the ceiling. The worship leader was a Filipino lady backed by a praise team. They were clapping their hands and leading an excited crowd in ‘Yes, Lord, Yes!’ It was far too lively for my taste.

“The repetitive music, loud singing, and bodily movement caused me great concern. We had challenged our Filipino pastors to be holy leaders, and now we were bringing them into this kind of worship! One of the Filipino pastors, a very spiritual leader, was standing there with his head bowed. He was praying quietly and not participating in the service.

“I struggled, ‘What do we do?’ Later, I saw this same pastor clapping and singing with all his heart. His face was shining, and he seemed caught up in worship.

“That evening, we shared what we learned about leadership at the conference. During the conversation, I asked this Filipino leader what happened to change his demeanor. ‘Why did you go from not participating to suddenly worshipping and enjoying the singing?’

“His answer was powerful. ‘I was troubled by the music. But as I prayed, God showed me that the worship leader and the people in this meeting were worshipping God with all their

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96 Testimony from Rev. David Black, former missionary to the Philippines.

hearts. They were giving God their best according to what they knew. The Lord said, “Can you leave them to me? Can you offer me your worship without judging others?”

“This pastor started worshipping God with all his heart the way he usually did rather than judging those around him. Did this change this pastor’s approach to worship? No; when he returned to his church, he did not imitate the worship style he saw that weekend.

“As a leader in our churches, this man often encouraged his fellow pastors to allow freedom in worship without manipulating the congregation. He encouraged his fellow pastors to balance two principles:

1. Carefully follow biblical principles of worship in your church.
2. Avoid criticizing the worship styles of other churches.”

## LESSON 9 IN REVIEW

### 1. Worship and Culture

- When evaluating worship styles, we must not confuse culture and scripture.
- When our culture contradicts scripture, we must submit to the commands of scripture rather than the expectations of culture.
- In order to reach the world with the gospel, we should ask how our worship can speak most effectively to our culture.

### 2. Three questions help us understand the relationship between a local church’s worship and the surrounding culture:

- **Who is here?** Looks at the congregation that is part of the church.
- **Who was here?** Looks at the heritage of the church.
- **Who should be here?** Looks at the community we are called to reach.

### 3. Because music is so central to our cultural identity, churches should choose music that is both biblically faithful and culturally sensitive.

### 4. If clapping is part of worship, we should ask, “Is clapping appropriate for this song and at this point in our worship?”

### 5. If clapping is in response to a special song, we should ask, “Is my applause motivated by praise to God or by praise for a performer?”

### 6. If we keep children and youth in the adult service, we should plan worship that will speak to all ages.

7. If we have separate services for children and youth, we should make sure that the services are worship, not entertainment.
8. We should neither over-emphasize nor deny emotion in worship.

## LESSON 9 ASSIGNMENTS

1. This lesson included several “Checkup” questions. Write a one-page response to one of these questions. Your response should include two parts:
  - An evaluation of what you presently do in worship.
  - A recommendation for changes that will make your worship more culturally relevant without moving away from biblical principles of worship.
2. At the beginning of the next lesson, you will take a test based on this lesson. Study the test questions carefully in preparation.

## LESSON 9 TEST

1. How should we respond to worship practices that offend our cultural preferences but do not contradict biblical principles?
2. How should we respond to worship practices that are accepted in our culture, but that contradict scripture?
3. What three questions should we ask to understand the relationship between our church's worship and the surrounding culture?
4. From Romans 14, list three principles related to worship.
5. List three considerations for intergenerational worship.
6. Name two errors related to emotion in worship.
7. Write 1 Corinthians 14:15-17 from memory.

## LESSON 10

# A LIFESTYLE OF WORSHIP

### LESSON OBJECTIVES

1. Recognize the relationship between corporate worship and a lifestyle of worship.
2. Understand that a lifestyle of worship changes a person's values.
3. Seek to live to the glory of God.
4. Be committed to the lifestyle of worship taught in Romans 12:2.
5. State a biblically based theology of worship.

### PREPARATION FOR THIS LESSON

*Memorize 1 Corinthians 10:31.*

### INTRODUCTION

In the same year, an African nation appears on two lists: “Largest Christian population in Africa” and “Most corrupt nation in Africa.”

The pastor of one of the largest churches in Asia is convicted of embezzling millions of dollars.

The leader of an American mega-church resigns after confessing marital infidelity.

What is wrong? There are many factors in these situations, but one thing is common to all of them: Sunday's worship doesn't affect Monday's life. Sunday is considered to be “worship” - emotion and enthusiasm. Monday is considered to be “real life”- unethical business practices and self-gratification. For too many people, worship activities do not result in a changed life.

- » Discuss how worship affects your daily life. How does your business operate differently because of your worship? How are your family relationships different because of your worship? Your morals? Your politics? Your financial practices? Are you living a lifestyle of worship?

## WORSHIP: MORE THAN SUNDAY

The problem described in the introduction to this lesson is not new. Amos spoke to people who brought sacrifices and observed Temple rituals, but failed to live godly lives (Amos 5:21-24). Jeremiah preached to people who cried out “the Temple, the Temple,” but who did not know the reality of God’s presence (Jeremiah 7:4). Jesus described those who observed every detail of the law, who tithed on the smallest items, and who were faithful to prayer, Sabbath observance and other worship rituals, but whose hearts were impure (Matthew 23:23). These people professed to be worshippers, but their worship was false. True worship affects all of life.

Paul wrote to believers who faced the issue of meat offered to idols. After addressing this problem, Paul concluded, “So, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God” (1 Corinthians 10:31). While Paul was addressing the issue of meat offered to idols, the principle applies to all areas of life. If we truly worship, our daily lives will be lived to the glory of God.

One definition of worship is “...the response of all that we are to all that God is.”<sup>97</sup> This definition shows that worship will involve all aspects of life. There are two principles that must be held in balance when defining worship.

### Corporate Worship: Worship on Sunday

Corporate worship refers to the gathering of a church body. This meeting may occur in a church building, in a house, or in some other setting. The setting is not important, but a time set apart for corporate worship is important. Christians are given the privilege and responsibility to assemble for corporate worship (Hebrews 10:25).

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**“A worship leader is to be a person who models worship in all areas of life; who pursues God with everything; who leads the church in an all-encompassing lifestyle of worship.”**

**Adapted from  
Stephen Miller**

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97 Warren Wiersbe, *Real Worship*. (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2000), 21

## Worship as a Lifestyle: Worship in All of Life

In the Garden of Eden, if you had asked Adam and Eve, “When do you worship?” they would have responded, “We worship constantly. Our entire life is worship.” This is worship as a lifestyle.

Worship is both a corporate meeting of believers and a life lived for the glory of God. The second-century bishop Irenaeus of Lyons said, “The glory of God is a human being, fully alive.” This is not man-centered humanism; it is a God-centered recognition that man’s ultimate purpose is to live for the glory to God. This is true worship.

As Christians we give all aspects of our lives, even the ordinary details, to God. Worship isn’t limited to Sunday. Our work, play, and common tasks are done to the glory of God. Romans 12:1 shows that worship involves offering our body as a living sacrifice; this is our spiritual service. A biblical view of worship cannot be limited to a weekly meeting; it is giving our entire lives to God.

**A biblical view of worship includes both corporate worship and daily life.** Both aspects are important. If we forget that worship involves daily life, we can attend worship services without seeing any effect on the rest of our life. This leads us to participate in corporate worship while failing to live in daily obedience to God.

However, if we only emphasize “worship is all of life,” we forget the importance of a regular time set apart for focused worship. Participation in corporate worship reminds us of God’s stewardship of life.

This principle of stewardship is seen in tithing and Sabbath. Christian stewardship means that all our money belongs to God; our belief in that principle is seen by our tithe. A Christian view of time means that all life belongs to God; we demonstrate that by devoting one day a week to worship and rest. In the same way, all aspects of our life are part of worship; we demonstrate that by assembling with fellow believers for corporate worship.

Bob Kauflin showed the relationship between corporate worship and worship as a lifestyle:

Sunday may be the high point of our week, but it’s not the only point. During the week we live lives of worship when we love our families, resist temptation, courageously speak up for oppressed people, stand against evil, and proclaim the gospel. In all these things we are **the worshipping church scattered**.

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**“The offering of our lives in service to God each day is our lifelong calling. Sunday morning worship is the continuation of that calling.”**

**Barry Liesch**

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But we grow weary in our battle against the world, our flesh, and the devil and need to be strengthened and encouraged by God’s Word and the care of other saints. We want to fellowship with those to whom God has joined us through His Son’s blood. So we meet to become **the worshipping church gathered**.<sup>98</sup>

## WORSHIP: LIVING TO THE GLORY OF GOD

### Worship Shows Our Values

We were created for worship. All of us worship something or someone. We worship that which we value most. Worship says, “This is what has first place in my life.”

Many people worship money, jobs, status, relationships, or pleasure. Those things take first place in their life. How do you know what you worship? Look at your life. What gets the most energy, time, and money? That is what you have decided is most valuable to you; that is what you worship.<sup>99</sup>

Only God is worthy of worship; everything else is secondary. A lifestyle of worship puts God first in everything. True worshippers have placed God on the throne of their life; He has the highest value. That means that for true worshippers, every part of life is lived to the glory of God.

### True Worship Changes Our Values

In Isaiah 6, we see that true worship is transforming. Worship not only shows our values, it also changes our values.

Worship, either of God or of idols, changes who we are. Psalm 115:8 shows that worshipping idols changes us for evil. “Those who make them become like them; so do all who trust in them.” Idol-worshippers become like their idols. Those who worship money become increasingly greedy; those who worship pleasure become increasingly enslaved to pleasure;

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**“Everybody has an altar. And every altar has a throne. So how do you know what you worship? It's easy: follow the trail of your time, your affection, your energy, your money, and your allegiance. At the end of that trail you'll find a throne, and whatever, or whoever, is on that throne is what's of highest value to you. On that throne is what you worship.”**

**Louie Giglio**

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<sup>98</sup> Bob Kauflin, *Worship Matters* (Wheaton: Crossway Books, 2008), 210

<sup>99</sup> Adapted from Louie Giglio, *The Air I Breathe: Worship as a Way of Life*. (Sisters, OR: Multnomah Publishers, 2003).

those who worship fame become increasingly self-centered. We become like whatever we worship.

In the same way, those who worship God become increasingly like him. “And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another” (2 Corinthians 3:18). In worship we are transformed into his image.

When we worship, our values are changed. As worshippers, we must ask, “Is worship transforming my life?”

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**Worship isn't just something we do; worship does something to us.**

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## Living to the Glory of God Involves All of Life

Worship as a lifestyle means that all of life is lived to the glory of God. Many Christians divide their lives into two disconnected spheres: the sacred (Sunday) and the secular (Monday–Saturday). They live as “Sunday Christians.” They attend church and profess the Christian faith, but Sunday worship has no impact on Monday’s business ethics, Wednesday’s family life, or Saturday’s entertainment.

The word *secular* refers to life in this world. The Christian is called to live secular life to the glory of God. The Christian is called to live on Monday in a way that shows the impact of Sunday’s worship. At the end of a worship service, we must ask, “What will I do tomorrow to put today’s worship into practice?” This is life lived to the glory of God.

## What Does Living to the Glory of God Look Like?

Living to the glory of God means that all of life is controlled by a passion for God. It means to love God to the point that our delight is what pleases him. One person said that to love someone means to be preoccupied with them. “You are in love with the person (or thing) that you think about when you are not thinking about anything else.”

In the same way, Louie Giglio suggests that “we know what is supreme in our souls by what comes out of our mouths.”<sup>100</sup> We talk about what is most valuable to us.

That may seem overly simplistic, but consider. What does a person who loves money talk about? Money. They glorify money. What does a sports fanatic talk about? Sports. They glorify their favorite sports team.

Does this mean that a Christian should talk about the Bible in every situation? No; it simply means that everything we talk about will glorify God. When we are making a business

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100 Louie Giglio, “Psalm 16” in Matt Redman and Friends, *Inside, Out Worship* (Ventura: Regal Books, 2005), 78

decision, we may not say to our colleagues, “This decision must glorify God,” but the glory of God will affect our decision. When we must discipline our child, we may not begin the conversation with, “Son, I want this spanking to glorify God,” but we will ask ourselves, “Will this discipline please God or am I just relieving my anger? Is this how my heavenly Father would discipline me?”

As Christians, we make every decision in the light of God’s glory. Worship as a lifestyle means that God and his glory is at the center of everything we do.

**Priorities**  
**Friends GOD Family**  
**Career Church**  
**Entertainment**

In an earlier lesson, we saw that apart from grace, corporate worship becomes legalistic, where we ask “How do we worship in a way that earns God’s favor?” In the same way, apart from grace, a lifestyle of worship becomes a legalistic burden, where we ask “What if this decision is not the best way to glorify God? If I mess it up, will God be angry?”

In contrast to legalistic worship, worship in the light of God’s grace becomes a wonderful privilege. Corporate worship in the light of God’s grace is an opportunity to celebrate who God is and what he has done. In the same way, a lifestyle of worship (when lived in the light of God’s grace) is an opportunity to glorify God in everyday life.

Monday’s business decision is not a joyless effort to obey God’s law; it is a joyful opportunity to glorify God with ethics that are consistent with his character. The discipline of a child is not a joyless effort to avoid displeasing God; it is a joyful opportunity to model God’s loving character to your child. Grace transforms a lifestyle of worship.

## A LIFESTYLE OF WORSHIP: A BIBLICAL MODEL

In Romans 12:1, the Christian is called to present himself as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God. This is our spiritual worship. Romans 12:2 shows how this sacrifice will be offered. This text is particularly important for understanding worship as a lifestyle.

After 11 chapters in which Paul lays the theological foundation for the Christian life, he moves to application. Since we have been justified by grace (Romans 1-11), we are to live in a certain way (Romans 12-16). These chapters provide a model for a lifestyle of worship.

### The Negative Aspect of a Lifestyle of Worship

Paul begins with a negative command: “Do not be conformed to this world.” We must not live in conformity to this world. We cannot surrender to both this world and the heavenly kingdom; we cannot worship both God and the spirit of this age.

J.B. Philips translated Paul's instruction, "Do not let the world around you squeeze you into its mold." When clay is put into a mold, it soon sets in the shape of the mold. The world wants to squeeze Christians into its shape. The world wants to force us to adapt to its demands. Instead, we are to live a lifestyle of worship, to reject the influence of this world.

This temptation is particularly dangerous because we can adapt without even becoming aware of the mold. The fish living in water does not think, "This is water." It is simply the world in which he lives. The worm crawling through the dirt does not think, "This is dirt." It is simply the world in which he lives. If we are not careful, the Christian living in a fallen world will not think, "This is a fallen world." It will simply be the world in which we live.

This is why corporate worship is important. The writer of Hebrews warned that we must not neglect meeting together. Why? Because this is how we fulfill these other commands:

- "Let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith..." (Hebrews 10:22)
- "Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering..." (Hebrews 10:23)
- "Let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works..." (Hebrews 10:24)

In worship, we are reminded that we are not of this world. In Babylon, separated from the Temple, unable to participate in the corporate worship of his people, Daniel prayed three times a day, with his windows open toward Jerusalem (Daniel 6:10). Worship strengthened Daniel against being conformed to the world of Babylon. As he faced Jerusalem, Daniel was reminded, "I am not a citizen of Babylon; I am a citizen of Jerusalem. I do not worship Marduk; I serve Jehovah."<sup>101</sup>

A lifestyle of worship means that we refuse to be squeezed into the mold of our world. This is more than resisting a set of temptations. It is more than observing a set of rules. It is more than a particular style of dress, code of behavior, or religious culture. It is an entire way of thinking and living. It means evaluating everything in terms of God's kingdom.

As Christians, we will never fit comfortably into the surrounding culture. After a class in China on the Sermon on the Mount, a student said, "In China, it is difficult to live like Jesus taught." The teacher responded, "Don't be surprised. In America, it is also difficult to live like Jesus taught." Whatever the culture, a lifestyle of worship will conflict with the spirit of this world.

## The Positive Aspect of a Lifestyle of Worship

Following the negative command, Romans 12 continues with positive instruction: "but be transformed by the renewal of your mind."

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<sup>101</sup> Paraphrased from Tim Keep, Bible Methodist Missions. Chapel sermon at Hobe Sound Bible College, November 2013.

The opposite of conformity to this world is not merely being different or asserting your own personality. The opposite of conformity to this world is being transformed until you know the will of God. Some Christians have conformed to a lifestyle different from their culture, but they have not been transformed to the will of God. Instead, they have substituted a particular political view, social view, or dress code for the culture of this world. They have not been transformed by the renewing of their mind.

J.B. Phillips translated, “Don’t let the world around you squeeze you into its mold” (the negative), “but let God remake you so that your whole attitude of mind is changed” (the positive). The rest of the book of Romans shows how a transformed mind will look.

- Romans 12: A transformed believer uses his spiritual gifts to serve others.
- Romans 13: A transformed believer respects civil authority.
- Romans 14: A transformed believer respects the convictions of fellow believers.

A lifestyle of worship is more than behavior; worship transforms our entire way of thinking. Consider the impact of a lifestyle of worship:

- What will the continent of Africa look like if Christian businessmen and politicians are transformed in their attitudes toward money and power?
- What will Asian churches look like if leaders see themselves as stewards of God’s money?
- What will marriage in America look like if Christians see infidelity through God’s eyes, rather than through the eyes of Hollywood?

A lifestyle of worship transforms the believer’s mind; a transformed mind will be seen in a transformed life; transformed lives will transform society. A lifestyle of worship will ultimately transform our world.

## WORSHIP DANGERS: WORSHIP WITHOUT OBEDIENCE

The prophets warned against worship without obedience. The people of Jeremiah’s day believed that the Temple would protect them from Babylon. Jeremiah responded, “Do not trust in these deceptive words: ‘This is the temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord.’” (Jeremiah 7:4) Instead

**If** you truly amend your ways and your deeds;

**If** you truly execute justice one with another;

**If** you do not oppress the sojourner, the fatherless, or the widow, or shed innocent blood in this place, and if you do not go after other gods to your own harm:

**Then** I will let you dwell in this place, in the land that I gave of old to your fathers forever (Jeremiah 7:5-7).

The people of Israel believed they could substitute ritual for obedience. The prophets preached that ritual without obedience is meaningless.

In some traditions, obedience is replaced with liturgical ritual. The elements of worship are present. The songs speak truth. Scripture is read and preached. Prayers are prayed. However, there is no obedience to the Word of God. Lives are not changed. This is ritual, not worship.

In some traditions, obedience is replaced with emotional response. The goal of the service is to generate certain feelings. The music stirs the emotions. The sermon leads to an invitation or time of commitment. However, the service is not followed by a life of obedience and surrender to God. This is emotion, not worship.

Worship in the Temple celebrated Israel's covenant with God and reminded Israel of her covenant responsibilities. In the early church, worship celebrated the new covenant provided through Jesus' death and reminded Christians of their responsibility to holy lives. Worship that does not result in obedience is false.

True worship transforms the worshipper. Throughout this course, we have seen that people who truly worship are changed. The goal of this course is not simply that you will be better at planning and leading worship services, but that you will be a worshipper who is transformed by worship. Then you will lead your church in worship that transforms each member of the congregation.

## CONCLUSION: TESTIMONY OF A PASTOR

What is the impact of true worship? Listen to the pastor of a Spanish church.

“In 1991, the spiritual climate of our church was at its lowest point. Immorality had trapped some of our members. When we disciplined the fallen members, the church became divided. Finally, at a spiritual and emotional breaking point, a new convert suggested that we fast and pray all day on a Sunday. We did this and God began to move among us.

“A few weeks later, we began our annual camp. Some division in the church remained. As the evangelist began his sermon on Wednesday night, he felt that God asked him to sing ‘How Great Thou Art.’

“As he sang this great hymn, the glory of God descended upon a hungry crowd. Some responded with praise; others began to seek God at the altar. A lady who had been at the root of the conflict in the church burst into tears. Standing before 400 people, she confessed, ‘I am a most unhappy woman because I have sinned against God and his church by har-

boring unforgiveness in my heart. I ask the Lord to forgive me, and I beg you as a church to forgive me.’

“As those words fell from her lips, others were reconciled. That evening, God restored unity in our church. As God’s people humbled themselves in prayer and fasting, and as God’s servant was obedient to the leadership of the Holy Spirit, we were brought into God’s presence. Sin was confessed; unity was restored. This is the result of true worship.”<sup>102</sup>

## LESSON 10 IN REVIEW

1. Corporate worship occurs on Sunday; a lifestyle of worship occurs in everyday life. Both are important for a biblical view of worship.
2. True worship shows what we truly value.
3. True worship changes what we value.
4. A lifestyle of worship means living to the glory of God. This means that God will be the center of all of life.
5. A biblical model for a lifestyle of worship is seen in Romans 12:2. It includes
  - A negative aspect: “Do not be conformed to this world.”
  - A positive aspect: “Be transformed by the renewal of your mind.”

## LESSON 10 ASSIGNMENTS

1. Write a 3-4 page paper titled “My Theology of Worship.” This paper should show how worship is based on scripture principles. The paper should be both biblical and practical.
2. Preach a sermon on true worship based on John 4:23-24.
3. Finishing your course project: Write a one-page report for the class leader that sums up what you have learned from your “30-Day Journey of Worship.” You do not need to turn in your journal.
4. For your last test, write 1 Corinthians 10:31 from memory.

# APPENDIX A:

## OUTLINES FOR PLANNING WORSHIP SERVICES

AN OUTLINE FOR WORSHIP STRUCTURED AROUND THE SERMON		
PURPOSE	WORSHIP ACTIVITY	WEEKLY PLAN
Proclamation of Truth	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Hymns</li> <li>• Scripture</li> <li>• Sermon</li> </ul>	
Response to Truth	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Invitation</li> <li>• Offering</li> <li>• Closing Hymn</li> <li>• Benediction (Scripture)</li> </ul>	

AN OUTLINE FOR WORSHIP BASED ON PSALM 95		
BIBLICAL MODEL	WORSHIP ACTIVITY	WEEKLY PLAN
Enter with Joyful Thanksgiving	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Call to Worship</li> <li>• Hymns of Praise</li> </ul>	
Continue with Reverential Worship	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Hymns of Consecration</li> <li>• Prayer</li> </ul>	
Hear God's Voice	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Scripture Reading</li> <li>• Sermon</li> </ul>	

AN OUTLINE FOR WORSHIP BASED ON THE ACTIVITIES OF GOD'S PEOPLE IN WORSHIP		
MOVEMENT	WORSHIP ACTIVITY	WEEKLY PLAN
God's People Gather	Praise <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Call to Worship</li> <li>• Hymns of Praise</li> </ul> Confession <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Prayer</li> </ul>	
God's People Hear the Word	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Scripture Reading</li> <li>• Sermon</li> </ul>	
God's People Respond to the Word	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Song of Response</li> <li>• Prayer</li> <li>• Offering</li> </ul>	
God's People are Sent Out	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Closing Hymn</li> <li>• Benediction (Scripture)</li> </ul>	

**AN OUTLINE FOR WORSHIP SHOWING THE DIALOGUE  
BETWEEN GOD AND HIS PEOPLE (ISAIAH 6)**

<b>ACTION</b>	<b>WORSHIP ACTIVITY</b>	<b>WEEKLY PLAN</b>
God Reveals Himself	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Call to Worship (from Scripture)</li> </ul>	
The People Respond with Praise and Confession	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Praise: Hymns</li> <li>• Prayer</li> </ul>	
God Speaks to His People	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Scripture Reading</li> <li>• Sermon</li> </ul>	
The People Respond in Commitment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Invitation Hymn</li> <li>• Offering</li> </ul>	
God Commissions His People	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Benediction</li> </ul>	

# APPENDIX B:

## SONG EVALUATION FORM

Song Title:			
	WEAK	AVERAGE	STRONG
Is the text doctrinally true?			
Is the text faithful to Christian experience?			
Will the congregation understand the text?			
Does the style of the music fit the words?			
Is the tune easy for the congregation to sing?			

# RECOMMENDED RESOURCES

## Lesson 1

To learn more about the meaning of worship, please see the following resources:

### Books:

Jeremiah, David. *Worship*. CA: Turning Point Outreach, 1995. (See Lessons 1-2.)

Reimers, Gary. *The Glory Due His Name*. Greenville: Bob Jones University Press, 2009.

Segler, Franklin M. and Randall Bradley. *Christian Worship: Its Theology and Practice*. Nashville: B&H Publishing, 2006. (See Chapter 1.)

### Online Resources:

“The Language of Worship: Seven Minute Seminary,”

At [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RqDCG\\_-cbrg](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RqDCG_-cbrg)

“Sin and Worship in Romans: Seven Minute Seminary,”

At <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6RyrW3aO0UI>

## Lesson 3

To study more about worship in the Bible, please see the following resources.

Peterson, David. *Engaging with God: A Biblical Theology of Worship*. Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1992.

Ross, Allen P. *Recalling the Hope of Glory: Biblical Worship from the Garden to the New Creation*. Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 2006.

Webber, Robert. *The Biblical Foundations of Worship*. Nashville: Star Song Publishing Group, 1993.

## Lesson 5

To study more about the history of worship, please see the following resources.

Segler, Franklin M. and Randall Bradley. *Christian Worship: Its Theology and Practice*. Nashville: B&H Publishing, 2006. (See Chapter 3.)

Webber, Robert. *Rediscovering the Missing Jewel: A Study in Worship Through the Centuries*. Peabody: Hendrickson Publishers, 1997.

Webber, Robert. *Twenty Centuries of Christian Worship*. Nashville: Star Song Publishing Group, 1994.

## Lesson 6

To study more about music in worship, please see the following resources.

Hustad, Donald. *Jubilate II: Church Music in Worship and Renewal*. Carol Stream: Hope Publishing, 1993.

Janvier, George. *Leading the Church in Music and Worship*. Nigeria: Africa Christian Textbooks, 2003.

Lloyd-Jones, D. Martyn. *Singing to the Lord*. Wales: Bryntirion Press, 2003.

Wolf, Garen. *Church Music Matters*. Salem: Schmul Publishing, 2005.

## Lesson 7

To study more about scripture and prayer in worship, please see the following resources.

Bounds, E. M. *Power through Prayer*. (Many editions are available.)

Drury, Keith. *The Wonder of Worship: Why We Worship the Way We Do*. Fishers: Wesleyan Publishing House, 2002.

Duewel, Wesley. *Mighty Prevailing Prayer*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2013.

Murray, Andrew. *With Christ in the School of Prayer*. (Many editions are available.)

## Lesson 9

Stauffer, S. Anita, ed. "The Nairobi Statement on Worship and Culture," in *Christian Worship: Unity in Cultural Diversity*. Geneva: Lutheran World Federation, 1996.

Witvliet, John D. "An Open and Discerning Approach to Culture." Video lecture. At <https://worship.calvin.edu/resources/resource-library/an-open-and-discerning-approach-to-culture>

# RECORD OF ASSIGNMENTS

**STUDENT NAME** \_\_\_\_\_

On the table below, initial when each assignment has been completed. The tests are considered complete when the student achieves a score of 70% or higher. All assignments must be successfully completed in order to receive a certificate from Shepherds Global Classroom.

LESSON	TEST	ASSIGNMENT		
1				
2				
3				
4				
5				
6				
7				
8				
9				
10				

Application for a Certificate of Completion from Shepherds Global Classroom may be completed on our webpage at [www.shepherdsglobal.org](http://www.shepherdsglobal.org). Certificates will be digitally transmitted from the president of SGC to instructors and facilitators who complete the application on behalf of their student(s).

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- Genesis 3**, 46  
**Genesis 4**, 45, 49  
**Genesis 5**, 46  
**Genesis 6**, 46  
**Genesis 17**, 46  
**Genesis 18**, 46, 49, 131  
**Genesis 22**, 48  
**Genesis 28**, 47  
  
**Exodus 15**, 96, 108, 131, 150  
**Exodus 19**, 34  
**Exodus 20**, 12, 30  
**Exodus 24**, 45, 120  
**Exodus 25**, 136  
**Exodus 28-29**, 146  
**Exodus 32**, 45, 101, 131  
**Exodus 39-40**, 17  
  
**Leviticus 1**, 51  
**Leviticus 1-7**, 50  
**Leviticus 10**, 11, 45  
**Leviticus 19**, 30  
  
**Judges 5**, 96  
  
**1 Samuel 2**, 131  
**1 Samuel 13**, 11  
**1 Samuel 15**, 49  
  
**2 Samuel 24**, 55, 126  
  
**1 Kings 8**, 109  
**1 Kings 18**, 28, 47, 48  
  
**1 Chronicles 29**, 131  
  
**2 Chronicles 1-7**, 51  
**2 Chronicles 5**, 51, 59, 96, 145, 148, 167  
**2 Chronicles 6**, 129  
**2 Chronicles 26**, 45  
  
**Ezra 3**, 96  
**Ezra 9**, 131  
  
**Nehemiah 8**, 69, 121, 124, 128  
  
**Job 42**, 82  
  
**Psalm 1**, 36, 69  
**Psalm 8**, 150  
**Psalm 10**, 52, 53  
**Psalm 15**, 33, 34, 35, 36, 37, 39, 41, 44, 47, 162  
**Psalm 16**, 195  
**Psalm 18**, 129  
**Psalm 19**, 31, 53, 76  
**Psalm 22**, 12, 30  
**Psalm 24**, 33  
**Psalm 32**, 129  
**Psalm 38**, 129  
**Psalm 41**, 129  
**Psalm 42**, 115  
**Psalm 47**, 179  
**Psalm 51**, 129, 131  
**Psalm 66**, 162  
**Psalm 88**, 52, 129  
**Psalm 91**, 108  
**Psalm 95**, 149, 161, 167, 203  
**Psalm 96**, 18, 23, 32, 109, 133, 162  
**Psalm 100**, 81, 94, 162  
**Psalm 103**, 34  
**Psalm 105**, 162  
**Psalm 107**, 162  
**Psalm 111**, 23  
**Psalm 115**, 194  
**Psalm 116**, 129  
**Psalms 120-134**, 40, 50, 52  
**Psalm 124**, 124  
**Psalm 133**, 40  
**Psalm 134**, 31, 40  
**Psalms 135-136**, 31  
**Psalm 136**, 124  
**Psalm 147**, 23  
**Psalm 148**, 104  
**Psalms 148-150**, 53  
**Psalm 149**, 101, 162  
**Psalm 150**, 23, 112, 162  
  
**Ecclesiastes 4**, 153  
  
**Isaiah 1**, 54  
**Isaiah 6**, 11, 12, 13, 17, 22, 23, 30, 36, 66, 126, 131, 148, 150, 194, 205  
**Isaiah 29**, 9  
**Isaiah 56**, 129  
  
**Jeremiah 7**, 192, 198, 199  
  
**Ezekiel 36**, 152  
  
**Daniel 6**, 128, 197  
**Daniel 9**, 131  
  
**Amos 5**, 51, 54, 55, 192  
  
**Micah 6**, 33, 43, 44, 60  
  
**Haggai 1**, 55  
  
**Malachi 1**, 11, 16, 45, 55  
  
**Matthew 2**, 12  
**Matthew 4**, 63  
**Matthew 5**, 124  
**Matthew 6**, 64, 119, 131, 133, 135, 143  
**Matthew 8**, 12  
**Matthew 9**, 12  
**Matthew 12**, 55, 64  
**Matthew 14**, 12  
**Matthew 15**, 12, 37  
**Matthew 17**, 34, 76  
**Matthew 18**, 64  
**Matthew 21**, 35, 62  
**Matthew 23**, 64, 126, 192  
**Matthew 26**, 63, 96, 134, 138  
**Matthew 28**, 12, 70, 76  
  
**Mark 1**, 64, 151  
**Mark 11**, 62  
  
**Luke 1**, 70, 131  
**Luke 2**, 62, 70  
**Luke 4**, 62, 121, 151

- Luke 6**, 63  
**Luke 10**, 21, 22  
**Luke 11**, 63, 130, 132  
**Luke 13**, 64  
**Luke 17**, 132  
**Luke 18**, 63  
**Luke 19**, 62  
**Luke 22**, 65  
**Luke 24**, 121
- John 2**, 62  
**John 3**, 136, 152  
**John 4**, 7, 8, 9, 15, 16, 18, 19, 23, 25, 33, 62, 201  
**John 5**, 64  
**John 17**, 40, 63
- Acts 1**, 66, 76  
**Acts 2**, 9, 10, 12, 22, 66, 67, 69, 70, 121  
**Acts 3**, 12, 67  
**Acts 4**, 12, 67  
**Acts 5**, 11, 12, 67  
**Acts 6**, 156  
**Acts 13**, 66, 67, 69  
**Acts 14**, 67  
**Acts 16**, 12, 96  
**Acts 17**, 16, 67, 68, 79  
**Acts 18**, 67  
**Acts 19**, 66, 67  
**Acts 20**, 136  
**Acts 26**, 11  
**Acts 28**, 66
- Romans 1**, 14, 22, 63, 74  
**Romans 1-11**, 196
- Romans 12**, 9, 22, 59, 61, 79, 172, 191, 193, 196, 197, 198, 200  
**Romans 12-16**, 196  
**Romans 13**, 198  
**Romans 14**, 169, 179, 181, 187, 190, 198  
**Romans 16**, 67
- 1 Corinthians 1**, 10  
**1 Corinthians 2**, 182  
**1 Corinthians 8**, 181  
**1 Corinthians 10**, 107, 139, 140, 191, 192, 201  
**1 Corinthians 11**, 12, 70, 138, 139  
**1 Corinthians 12**, 108  
**1 Corinthians 14**, 70, 99, 105, 169, 184, 190  
**1 Corinthians 16**, 67, 70
- 2 Corinthians 3**, 127, 195  
**2 Corinthians 8**, 134, 136  
**2 Corinthians 9**, 70, 134, 135, 136  
**2 Corinthians 13**, 10
- Ephesians 1**, 131  
**Ephesians 4**, 15, 40  
**Ephesians 5**, 70, 98, 106, 108, 109
- Philippians 1**, 131  
**Philippians 2**, 64, 68, 70, 72  
**Philippians 3**, 33  
**Philippians 4**, 133
- Colossians 2**, 11  
**Colossians 3**, 69, 70, 95, 96, 97, 102, 106, 109, 117
- Colossians 4**, 67, 69, 121
- 1 Thessalonians 5**, 69, 107, 121
- 2 Thessalonians 1**, 132, 133
- 1 Timothy 1**, 56, 112  
**1 Timothy 2**, 12, 70  
**1 Timothy 4**, 69, 121, 182
- 2 Timothy 4**, 69
- Titus 2**, 69
- Philemon**, 67
- Hebrews 10**, 9, 192, 197  
**Hebrews 12**, 31  
**Hebrews 13**, 133
- James 1**, 11, 22, 132, 157
- 2 Peter 3**, 121
- 1 John 3**, 134
- Revelation 1**, 12, 71, 76  
**Revelation 4**, 8, 17, 22, 23, 30, 41, 73, 76, 96, 131  
**Revelation 4-5**, 12, 73  
**Revelation 5**, 27, 31, 41, 64  
**Revelation 11**, 32  
**Revelation 15**, 72, 73  
**Revelation 19**, 32  
**Revelation 21**, 73, 76

# INDEX

## A

**Announcements**, 162

## B

**Balance in worship**, 56, 150–151

**Beginning worship**, 161

## C

**Calendar**, church, 153

**Children and youth**, 182–183

**Communion**, 70, 137–140

**Congregational singing**, 91, 97, 110

**Cultural issues**, *Lesson 9*

## E

**Elements of worship**, 69, 87–89, *Lesson 1*; *Lesson 10*

**Emotion**, 100, 184–185

**Evangelism**, 66–69

## F

**False worship**, 63, 67

## G

**Glory of God**, 195

**Grace for worship**, 46

## M

**Manipulation**, 159–161

**Model of worship (Christ)**, 62

## O

**Obedience**, 11, 35, 48, 51, 198

**Offering**, 133–137

## P

**Performance**, 156, 187

**Praise**, declarative/descriptive, 53

**Prayer**, 128–133

**Preaching**, 125–127

## R

**Rituals in worship**, 50, 54–55

## S

**Scripture in worship**, 69, 122–125

**Style issues**, *Lesson 9*

## V

**Values**, 194

## W

### Worship Dangers

Confusing changing practices  
with unchanging principles,  
90

Hypocrisy, 37

Imbalance in worship, 56

Loss of congregational song, 97

Loss of the Word, 127

Meaningless worship, 85

Substitutes for true worship, 20

Trivializing worship, 186

“We do this because...”, 162

Worship without evangelism,  
68

Worship without obedience,  
198

**Worship leader**, 146, 156–159

# SHEPHERDS GLOBAL CLASSROOM COURSE DESCRIPTIONS

## DOCTRINAL FOUNDATIONS COURSES

### **Christian Beliefs**

This is a systematic theology course, describing the Christian doctrines about the Bible, God, man, sin, Christ, salvation, the Holy Spirit, the Church, and last things.

### **Romans**

This course teaches the theology of salvation and missions as explained in the book of Romans, discussing several issues that have been controversial in the church.

### **Eschatology**

This course teaches the biblical books of Daniel and Revelation along with other sections of prophetic scripture and emphasizes essential doctrines such as the return of Christ, the final judgment, and the eternal kingdom of God.

### **Doctrine and Practice of the Holy Life**

This course gives a biblical description of the holy life that God expects and empowers for a Christian.

### **Doctrine and Practice of the Church**

This course explains God's design and plan for the church and biblical subjects such as church membership, baptism, communion, tithe, and spiritual leadership.

## BIBLE SURVEY COURSES

### **Exploring the Old Testament**

This course teaches the essential content and teachings of the 39 books of the Old Testament.

### **Exploring the New Testament**

This course teaches the essential content and teachings of the 27 books of the New Testament.

## **Principles of Biblical Interpretation**

This course teaches the principles and methods of interpreting the Bible properly in order to guide our life and relationship with God.

## **EVANGELISM AND DISCIPLESHIP COURSES**

### **Introduction to Apologetics**

This course teaches the scientific, historical, and philosophical basis for a Christian world-view, and shows how the Christian faith is consistent with reason and reality.

### **Faith Traditions of the World**

This course gives the evangelical believer an understanding of the teachings and proper responses to 17 religious groups.

### **Biblical Evangelism and Discipleship**

This course presents the biblical principles that guide evangelism methods. It describes forms of evangelism and provides lessons to use in discipling new converts.

### **Spiritual Formation**

In this course students learn to have the attitudes of Jesus, to relate to God the way Jesus related to his Father, to humble ourselves as Jesus did, to practice the spiritual and personal disciplines of Jesus, to endure suffering as Jesus did, and to engage in the Christian community (the Church) formed by Jesus.

### **Practical Christian Living**

This course applies scriptural principles to the use of money, relationships, the environment, relations with the government, human rights, and other areas of practical living.

### **Christian Marriage and Family**

This course gives a Christian perspective on human development through the stages of life and applies scriptural principles to family roles and relationships.

## **CHRISTIAN LEADERSHIP COURSES**

### **Ministry Leadership**

This course emphasizes Christian character while teaching leaders to guide organizations through the process of discovering values, realizing purpose, sharing vision, setting goals, planning strategy, taking action, and experiencing achievement.

### **The Life and Ministry of Jesus**

This course studies the life of Jesus as a model for ministry and leadership in the 21st century.

### **Principles of Communication**

This course teaches the theology of communication, methods for effective speaking, and methods for preparing and presenting biblical sermons.

### **Introduction to Christian Worship**

This course explains how worship impacts all aspects of the believer's life and gives principles that should guide individual and congregational practices of worship.

## **CHURCH HISTORY COURSES**

### **Survey of Church History I**

This course describes how the church fulfilled its mission and protected essential doctrine through the period from the early church to the Reformation.

### **Survey of Church History II**

This course describes how the church expanded and faced challenges through the period from the Reformation to modern times.