

THE MEANING

WEEK 1: Understanding Worship

Day 1: Worship Is a Way of Life

I vividly remember the moment I first realized the awesome power of praise. It was both amazing and life changing.


My journey of faith began at the tender age of 6 when I trusted Christ as my Savior. During those early years, God used many Christ-like teachers and mentors to help shape my understanding of him and encourage my Christian walk. However, it wasn't until college that I met someone who challenged my view of praise. His name was Marty. He was known across the campus as a guy who passionately loved Jesus—his walk consistently matched his talk.

One day during my freshman year, Marty invited me to gather with a few friends for some praise time. As he played and sang one song after another, something started to happen. Everyone's focus turned away from Marty and toward our King. Some songs were familiar to me, and some were not. But they all contained thoughts my heart wanted and needed to say to God. Some of the songs were taken straight from Scripture. I felt as though we were actually standing in God's throne room telling him how awesome he is.

You may have experienced this sort of thing many times. If so, count yourself extremely blessed. But I had never seen someone flow for 30 to 40 straight minutes from one song to the next in nonstop, vertical praise. That day—that holy moment—created in me a thirst to know God more and worship him with “all that is within me” (Psalm 103:1, King James Version).

Our Central Passage

Second Chronicles 20 tells a story about hundreds of thousands of people who all had their “light bulb” moment at the same time! Three large armies were marching against Jehoshaphat and the people of Judah. Jehoshaphat's response was to call everyone in Judah to a giant prayer meeting. Every week of this nine-week study, we will draw from a different element of this amazing narrative.

 Before you begin, take a moment to ask God to open your spiritual eyes to what he has for you in this passage during the next nine weeks. Then read 2 Chronicles 20:1-30. Try imagining yourself in these scenes.

I'm quite certain I wouldn't have responded the way the people of Judah did when they learned of their imminent danger. Simply put, they made the choice to *worship*.

What we have here is an incredible worship service. In the midst of naturally frightening circumstances, they had a *supernatural* encounter with almighty God. They saw him as he is and therefore worshipped him as they should. In fact, they fell down and worshipped him. According to Strong's Concordance, the word *worship* here means "to bow down, prostrate oneself, before a superior in homage, before God in worship." God is our superior; he is our Lord. Submitting to him as our master is the essence of worship.

We are to love the Lord, our God, with everything we are: heart, soul, mind, and body (Deuteronomy 6:4-5). When we do this, we are paying homage to him as our superior. Just as the people of Judah bowed in surrender, we must surrender to him as our Lord. Anything less is not biblical worship.


Jesus verified the priority of worship when he quoted from Deuteronomy 6:4-5. When he was asked, "Of all the commandments, which is the most important?" Jesus replied, "The most important commandment is this: 'Hear, O Israel! The Lord our God is the one and only Lord. And you must love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul, all your mind, and all your strength'" (Mark 12:28-30, New Living Translation).

People have asked me, "Isn't the Christian life really just a bunch of 'Thou shalt not's?'" To which I reply, "No, the Christian life is actually one big 'Thou shalt'...love God." It's really that simple: *Worship* him completely.

Worship is not just something we do on Sundays at church. And it's certainly more than singing or attending a service, although those are included. Worship is a lifestyle. It involves everything we do and think and are. It means loving God with every breath we take and every move we make. I love how Rick Warren sums it up. Worship, he says, is simply "bringing pleasure to God."¹

In 1 Corinthians 10:31 Paul wrote, "Whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God." Paul chose the examples of eating and drinking to illustrate how our most common and everyday activities can and should bring glory and honor to Christ.

So what does this kind of worship look like in everyday life? Is it really possible to worship God when you're at home or school or work? How can even your simplest and most common tasks bring honor and worship to God?

 Please spend a few minutes considering how you would answer these questions, and write your thoughts in the space below.

My Daily Praise

In the coming days, we will be “exercising” our praise before God in potentially new and exciting ways. Before a person exercises, it’s always a good idea to warm up a bit. As the children of Judah heard Jehoshaphat describing God’s faithfulness to them in the past and his promises to them for their future, no doubt their hearts started to “warm up” to praise.

Let’s stretch our souls right now. How has God recently shown himself as gracious, merciful, or powerful in your life? Thank him for how faithful he has been. In the space below, write some things about God that you find especially heartwarming at this moment.

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My Daily Surrender

Ask God to reveal any of your actions or attitudes that are not honoring to him. Write them down; then ask the Lord to forgive you and help you worship him in everything you do today.

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Day 2: Created for His Praise


Yesterday we discovered that worship is a lifestyle. Everything in our lives—driving a car, mowing grass, doing schoolwork, even eating a cheeseburger—can qualify as pleasing acts of worship. But have you stopped to think why God is interested in even our most menial tasks?

My wife, Sonia, and I have been blessed with two vivacious boys that are three years apart in age. While there’s no danger of them ever being called little angels, we do know that they are on loan from God. I am convinced that being a dad is the best calling on earth! Those boys can almost always make me smile, no matter what they’re doing. I enjoy watching them play with their GI Joes and

Rescue Heroes. I love to hear them laughing as they watch their favorite cartoon or play in the dirt. Sometimes I stand in their rooms late at night just to watch them sleep.

These guys don't have to be *doing* something in order to please me. They bring me joy and pleasure simply because of who they *are*: my *sons*.

Do you remember what God said when he finished creating man and woman on the sixth day? He said it was "very good" (Genesis 1:31). Think about that. They had not even had the chance to *do* anything, yet he was pleased with them. He enjoyed their company as he walked in the cool of the day with them. They were made in his image; they were a reflection of him. They brought him glory. As God's children we bring him glory, too. Like Adam and Eve, we are created to praise him with our lives.

 Read Ephesians 1:3-14. As you read, did you notice that Paul keeps repeating this awesome theme: "to the praise of his glory"? Paul wanted us to see the purpose for our being created. All God has done for us and in us is "to the praise of his glorious grace." Amazing as it may sound, because he loves us he has raised us up and seated us with Christ in heavenly realms so we can one day be trophies of his grace.

H.A. Ironside believed that one of these days we are going to have a part in a great exhibition. From every part of the earth there will be gathered together all who have been redeemed. As Dr. Ironside explains it, the Lord will then show "to all created intelligences how it has been the delight of His heart to show great grace to great sinners. That is our future—a future that does not depend on our faithfulness but on His, who saved us by grace in order that we might show His glories forevermore."²

Not only will we be his trophies in the coming ages, we are his witnesses now as living *proof* of his goodness and mercy. First Peter 2:9 states, "You are a chosen people. You are royal priests, a holy nation, God's very own possession. As a result, you can show others the goodness of God, for he called you out of the darkness into his wonderful light" (NLT). In the Old Testament, God chose Israel to represent him to the nations. God called Israel his witnesses (Isaiah 43:10). He said, "I created him [Israel] for my glory" (Isaiah 43:7, KJV). It's no wonder Jehoshaphat, in his prayer in 2 Chronicles 20, reminded God of his dealings with the Jews in the past. God had always displayed his might and willingness to protect and provide for his people.

Second Chronicles 20:29 clearly states that the nations feared the *Lord*, rather than the children of Judah. It was the *Lord* who won the battle. He alone prompted those enemy armies to turn on each other. The people of Judah did nothing but obediently "stand still and see the salvation of the Lord" (verse 17, New King James Version). Once again God worked through his people to bring glory and praise to himself.

And so it should be in every aspect of *our* lives. The fact that we are even living and breathing is a testament of his grace and goodness. No wonder the people of Judah shouted, “Praise the Lord, for his mercy endures forever” (2 Chronicles 20:21, NKJV). May our lives shout it so loud this world can’t help but take notice!

My Daily Praise

Meditate on Ephesians 1:3-14 for a few moments. Take the time necessary to let the truths of this passage soak into your soul: Your life has indescribable and unfathomable purpose both now and for eternity. Oh, the love and grace of our Lord! Why not throw yourself your own private praise party to the Lord right now? (Just try to spill a little of that praise over onto this page. You may want to look back to this moment later.)

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My Daily Surrender



Please read Romans 12:1-2. In view of God’s mercy, Paul tells us that our spiritual act of worship is to lay ourselves down on an altar of surrender. God wants our hearts yielded to him, pure and simple. That’s what is acceptable to God: giving up control and allowing him to do whatever he wants to do in us and through us. The King James Version calls presenting our bodies as a living sacrifice to him a “reasonable service.” As we lay our lives down for him to fill and to use, we become expressions of praise to him. And, considering we were *designed* to bring him glory, such an act is very “reasonable.” Write a prayer of surrender right now.

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Day 3: Worship in All Directions

At some point in your life, you may have been as I was (and so many in our pews still are!). Anytime you heard the word *worship*, you assumed that word mostly referred to singing, clapping, and talking to God. This week we have already seen that worship is actually much more than that: True biblical worship encompasses our entire lives. In fact, in his book *The Ultimate Priority*, John MacArthur Jr. explains that for our worship to be “whole-life” it must include three aspects or *directions*. Most certainly, we worship God when we focus directly on him, pointing our worship *upward* (as we normally think of worship). However, we should also worship God *inwardly*. The third direction we should worship him is *outwardly*, to those around us.³

Three Directions of Worship: Inward, Outward, Upward

You might think of three-directional worship like this: Imagine you say to your boss, “You are the greatest boss to ever walk the face of the earth. Furthermore, this is the best job I’ve ever had or ever will have. In fact, I practically worship at your feet for just letting me do this job every day.” (Am I laying it on thick enough yet?) OK, having said such a mouthful *upward* toward your boss, how should you behave when no one’s looking? If you really meant what you said, you’ll talk well of your boss and your job when your boss isn’t around, and you’ll work hard and enthusiastically even when no one’s watching you. Why? Because *inwardly* you really do love your boss and you want to please him or her.

Now let’s take this idea a step further. Let’s say you’re in the service industry, and your job involves assisting other people. Every time you cheerfully seek to help someone, every time you go out of your way to meet someone’s needs, you are *outwardly* honoring your employer and saying by your actions how much you appreciate working for him or her. In much the same way, our God is honored—or worshipped—not only by what we say to him, but also by how much we love him on the inside and by how we respond to those he died for.

Today let’s take a closer look at the inward and outward directions of worship. Then tomorrow we’ll explore my personal favorite, the upward direction.

The *inward direction* of our worship refers to who I am when no one is looking. It’s not really difficult to lift up praises to God when we’re at church or around other Christians. In those environments we’re encouraged, even expected, to do so. But what about when we’re in the privacy of our own homes, browsing the Internet, or glancing though a magazine on the newsstands? Are we being careful to please God with our private thoughts, with the things we see, with the places we visit? (Ouch!)

Worshipping inwardly by being good is perhaps the litmus test for all of worship. If our hearts’ desire is to please God, we can no longer enjoy our former sins. Second Corinthians 5:17 says, “If anyone is in Christ, he is a new

creation; the old has gone, the new has come!” This refers to a change inside of us. According to Psalm 51:16-17, God wants a broken and contrite heart more than our outward sacrifices. He knows that if our hearts are purely devoted to him, that can’t help but affect our outward behavior.



Read Proverbs 4:23. A wellspring is the source from which water flows. Likewise our hearts are the source of all our thoughts, motives, and actions. The importance of this inward direction of worship cannot be overemphasized. As I read 2 Chronicles 16:9, I find that God is searching the earth *not* to support those who sing the best or shout the loudest. Rather, he seeks for those “whose hearts are fully committed to him.” As worshippers and worship leaders, that must be our foremost goal. Without that commitment, all other expressions of worship are actually sickening to God (Amos 5:21-23; Psalm 51; Revelation 3:16). (In a moment you will be asked to respond to today’s lesson, but if you sense God’s leading now, skip to “My Daily Surrender,” and write what’s on your heart. Please don’t put it off, even for a few moments.)

Now let’s consider the *outward direction* of worship. There are actually four distinct outward ways we can bring glory to our Lord, and they all have to do with our relationships with other people.

First of all, God is worshipped when we share our faith with someone or in some way play a part in a person’s coming to know Christ. In Romans 15:16, Paul says God gave him the “priestly duty of proclaiming the gospel...so that the Gentiles might become an offering acceptable to God.” What a privilege to take part in such an offering! Once we’ve helped someone become eternally transformed, we’ll be hooked on sharing our faith for life.

Second, we worship God when we help others. These days, old-fashioned neighborly help can be hard to find. And if we’re really honest, most of us are OK with that trend. We often lack the motivation to lend a hand. We build privacy fences so we don’t see our neighbors, and then we fill up our schedules so we don’t have time to notice if they need our help. But as followers of Jesus, we can’t afford not to be the good Samaritans he has called us to be (Luke 10:33). Jesus clearly taught us to give “a cup of cold water” in his name (Matthew 10:42).



Read Philippians 4:14-19. Notice that Paul described the Philippians’ gifts as “a fragrant offering, an acceptable sacrifice, pleasing to God” (verse 18). Giving financial aid to those in need is a third wonderful way to express our love for God. However, it’s imperative that we be cheerful when we give, not grudging, because that represents the real motives of our hearts (2 Corinthians 9:7). Once again, God considers our willing and compassionate hearts as the source of true worship.

The fourth way we worship God outwardly is by being sensitive to our weaker brothers and sisters. The entirety of Romans 14 focuses on strong and weak Christians. According to verse 13, we are to “live in such a way that you

will not cause another believer to stumble and fall” (NLT). Verse 18 shows God’s view of this: “If you serve Christ with this attitude, you will please God” (NLT).

For some reason, my father (who was not a Christian) didn’t think Christian women should wear shorts. So when I was growing up, I never saw our next-door neighbor wearing shorts. She chose not to wear them in front of my dad because she didn’t want to offend him. That’s the kind of selfless sensitivity God honors in us—and is honored in.

Because our entire study is based on 2 Chronicles 20, I want to close this lesson by focusing for a moment on Jehoshaphat, that story’s main character. The Bible says, “Jehoshaphat was a good king, following the example of his father, Asa. He did what was pleasing in the Lord’s sight” (1 Kings 22:43, NLT). He was obviously a man of character, a good man on the *inside*. He also respected his people and taught them the Word of God (2 Chronicles 17:7). He protected them. In fact, he had over a million men ready and willing to fight in his army! No wonder he was “highly esteemed” by the people (2 Chronicles 17:5, NLT). In short, Jehoshaphat not only said he loved and honored God, he exemplified his passion and commitment to God by who he was and how he acted toward others. He was a man who worshipped God with his *whole life*.

TO THE POINT



Four Outward Ways to Worship

- sharing the gospel
- helping others
- giving financially
- being sensitive to others

My Daily Surrender

Hebrews 4:12 says the Word of God “exposes our innermost thoughts and desires” (NLT). Who are you *really*? Be honest before God right now. Are any of your attitudes or actions offensive to another Christian? Do you cheerfully give your money as you feel led by God? Be honest and open with God as you write your thoughts in the space below.

Decide today to consciously and deliberately express your worship outwardly. Look for an opportunity to share your faith or give to someone in need. Pray and commit yourself to *whole-life* worship today.

Day 4: Lifting Up Thanksgiving and Praise

As we saw yesterday, worship is three-directional: inward, outward, and upward. Conveniently, Hebrews 13:15-16 touches on all three of these aspects of a worshipping life.



Please read that passage now. Notice that the passage concludes with these words: “for with such sacrifices God is pleased.”

The aspect we are focusing on today is the third: worship pointed *upward*, toward God. It’s what most folks think of when they hear the word *worship*. In Hebrews 13:15 the upward direction involves two specific actions: praise and thanksgiving: “Let us continually offer the sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of our lips, giving thanks to His name” (NKJV). Praise is primarily acknowledging God for who he is. Thanksgiving, on the other hand, is giving thanks to God for what he has done for us. Next week we will dedicate ourselves to a better understanding of praise, but today we will focus on the priority of being thankful.

We can be sure nothing ever happens to us that our loving God doesn’t permit. After all, like Moses, he protects us “in the cleft of the rock” as he covers us with his mighty hand (Exodus 33:22, NKJV). His rod of correction and his staff of protection and direction should bring us great comfort at all times (Psalm 23:4). But let’s be honest here. We know we should be humbly grateful. Yet there are times when we are tempted to be grumbly hateful!


I once heard Dr. Ben Haden share a story during his radio broadcast of a young couple who entered the hospital to have their baby. Complications arose. Tests results showed that their child had Down syndrome. By this time, word had spread throughout the hospital about this young couple and their yet-to-be-born baby.


Word had also gotten around that these parents were Christians. So several nurses and employees began to speculate about how these “God-fearing” people would respond. Many, including the hospital switchboard operator, expected them to become angry at God. However, the couple maintained an upbeat attitude. Not to be proven wrong, the switchboard operator decided to listen in on their private phone conversations. What she heard would change her life forever. Rather than spewing bitterness and doubt toward God, the young mother repeatedly stated her trust and thankfulness in her Lord. She said that no matter what, they knew God would work the situation out for their good and his glory.

Not only did that operator surrender her life to Christ, but as a result of those parents' faith, over 20 nurses and doctors walked the aisle of that couple's church the following Sunday and trusted in Jesus!

Apparently that new mom and dad understood that God would be with them in the midst of unexpected or difficult circumstances. Before any of us can give thanks and praise to the Father and really mean it, we, too, must accept God's sovereignty in our hearts.

There is a throne in heaven. And it is *occupied!* Our great God, mighty and majestic Father, is sitting on that throne right now. This world may seem as if it's spinning out of control, but God is still the all-powerful, all-knowing, ever-present King of kings and Lord of lords—the same God who loves you and me.

 Stop right now and thank God for loving and watching over you at this very moment.

 Take a look at 1 Thessalonians 5:18. Notice that we are not told to give thanks *for* our circumstances, but rather *in* them. We are not expected to be thankful for problems and hardships that come our way.

However, if we clearly understand that God reigns and that he is using our circumstances to make us more like him and to bring him greater glory, then we can be thankful to him constantly, even while we're going through the tough times. This is sometimes called an attitude of gratitude.

I recently purchased a book for my boys titled *Hermie*, by Max Lucado. It's the story of two caterpillars named Hermie and Wormie. Hermie and Wormie are common caterpillars. So common and uninteresting, in fact, that they don't even have any stripes or spots on them. When they bring their complaints of commonness to God, he reminds them that he is not finished with them yet. He is giving them a new heart, he tells them. This makes them feel better for a while; nonetheless, each time they meet an insect with a unique ability they wish they had, they begin complaining again. (Sound familiar?) Eventually Hermie decides to simply be thankful for how God made him. Not so coincidentally, that same night he turns into a beautiful butterfly! His heart, however, had already been changed.⁴

My Daily Praise

An old song tells us, "Count your many blessings; see what God has done." From time to time, I've found it both humbling and thrilling to make a list of things I'm thankful for: the good, the bad, and the ugly. Take some time now to write down every blessing you can think of. (Remember, blessings can come disguised as heartaches.)


Talk to God about anything in your life for which you're finding it hard to be thankful. Be honest and open with him. He already knows what you're feeling anyway. Ask him to help you be thankful *in* that situation. Ask him to change your heart. Then decide to be thankful throughout your day today, deliberately looking for God's presence in each and every circumstance. Write your prayer in the space below.


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Day 5: True Worship Changes Us


My wife has the “green thumb” in our family. She loves and cares for her plants. She makes sure they get plenty of everything they need to be healthy and happy (if plants can be happy...). Occasionally she moves a plant closer to a window if she sees that it isn't getting enough sunlight. It always amazes me how quickly the plants perk up and look healthy (and happy) again.

Worshipping God has a similar effect on our souls. We cannot encounter his presence and awesome glory and not somehow be affected.


 Returning to the story of Jehoshaphat and the people of Judah, read 2 Chronicles 20:2-4. How do you think you would have felt if you'd received the news of the three approaching armies? According to verse 3, Jehoshaphat was alarmed. That so many people came together to seek the Lord indicates that they were fearful as well.

 Now read verses 17-19. Notice the attitude of the people of Judah *after* God spoke through his prophet. What made them go from shaking with fear to shouting with joy? One big wonderful word: *GOD*. God showed up in that place, and their entire outlook changed. The people of Judah were full of fear as they gathered to seek God, but they left full of faith.

In Psalm 73 Asaph undergoes a similar change through worship. Talk about a major attitude adjustment!


 Please read Psalm 73:2-14. Notice Asaph's negative outlook in these verses. He was focused on the prosperity of the wicked. Now read verses 18-28. See how his whole focus changed? Rather than remaining so discouraged that he wanted to quit, he now saw the end of the wicked. He now proclaimed, “Earth

has nothing I desire besides you” (verse 25). In fact, Asaph suddenly turned all his attention toward God. While he barely mentioned God’s name in the first half of this chapter, now Asaph prayed directly to God. What made such a huge difference? I mean, imagine if a psychologist could tap into Asaph’s secret. He’d put Dr. Phil out of business! This was pretty potent medicine!

What did Asaph do that totally changed his outlook?  Please read the three verses we skipped (verses 15-17). When Asaph entered “the sanctuary of God,” he saw the final destiny of the wicked. There he turned his eyes back to the Lord and got a proper perspective of everything around him. Amazing!

Another great example of the transforming power of worship is in Isaiah 6. At the beginning of this chapter, Isaiah was mourning the death of his friend King Uzziah. Through a vision Isaiah found himself right in the middle of a heavenly worship service. He “saw the Lord seated on a throne, high and exalted” (verse 1). He went on to describe the seraphs all calling to one another, “Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God Almighty.” Their voices were so loud that the entire place shook. The Temple was filled with smoke, which represented the holy presence of God.

Can you imagine what that service must have been like? Wouldn’t you love to have been there with Isaiah? But notice that Isaiah wasn’t actually “in” the service at first. Verse 1 says he “saw the Lord.” He was an observer, an onlooker. Perhaps he was like some of those who come to our worship services—not really participating, just watching. But even the person in the farthest corner of the room will be somehow affected when God shows up. That’s exactly what happened to Isaiah. He couldn’t stay uninvolved for long.

 Take a look at Isaiah 6:5-8. Isaiah’s first response was to recognize his sinfulness. When God’s light of perfect holiness shines on us, it always exposes our *unholiness*. In God’s presence Isaiah’s sin was more than he could bear.

God never points out our sin to condemn us. Rather, he shows us our sin so we, like Isaiah, will acknowledge and turn from it. He “touches our lips” and hearts and forgives us.

Isaiah went from a downcast and reluctant worship spectator to a willing participant in anything God wanted him to do. He didn’t even wait to be singled out. He enthusiastically volunteered to go. That’s the amazing change God can make in people’s lives through worship. Perhaps you’ve been in a service in “the sanctuary of God” when people started coming to the altar during a powerful moment of worship without any formal invitation from the pastor. If so, no doubt you long to see that kind of outpouring toward God again and again.

My Daily Praise

In Psalm 63:2 David wrote, “I have seen you in the sanctuary and beheld your power and your glory.” Perhaps you remember a worship service or a personal quiet time in which, as he did with David, God gave you a glimpse of his glory. How did it affect you, and how were you changed? Now think about a song that expresses your praise and thanksgiving to the Lord. Sing it or speak it to God now.

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My Daily Surrender

What has God revealed to you that you need to confess or commit to him?

Pray now and ask God to “show up and show off” this weekend during your church’s worship services. Ask him to change lives—starting with your own. Use the space below to write your thoughts.

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1. Rick Warren, *The Purpose-Driven Life* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2002), 64.
2. H.A. Ironside, *Galatians and Ephesians* (Neptune, NJ: Loizeaux Brothers, 1983), 109-110.
3. John MacArthur Jr., *The Ultimate Priority* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1983), 14-16.
4. Max Lucado, *Hermie* (Nashville, TN: Tommy Nelson, 2002).