

Topic 21: Worship

Bringing God Glory in All You Do

“So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God.”

—1 Corinthians 10:31



Ask a few people what the word “worship” means to them, and you’re likely to get a wide variety of answers. And each of these can be an important *part* of a person’s worship of God.

What Does Worship Mean?

Common Responses	What That Means
“It’s what we call the gathering at our church on Sunday mornings.”	Worship is a meeting on a certain day at a certain place at a certain time.
“It’s what we do at church between the welcome and announcements and the sermon.”	Worship is spiritual music—it’s singing songs with other Christians.
“Worship is spiritual music—it’s singing songs with other Christians.”	Worship is a certain body posture or an outward act of enthusiasm.
“It’s turning away from secular stuff and focusing on spiritual truth.”	Worship is a retreat from earthly realities.

“Every man is bound somewhere, somehow, to a throne, to a government, to an authority, to something that is supreme, to something to which he offers sacrifice, and burns incense, and bends the knee.”
—G. Campbell Morgan

As has been stated before, a disciple is a person who follows Jesus—to *know* Jesus and his teaching; to *grow* more like Jesus; and to *go* for Jesus, serving others and making new disciples.

In other words, discipleship involves learning new insights, taking on a new character, and engaging in new behaviors. Some of these new behaviors are referred to as spiritual disciplines or practices.



When we think of the practices that shape a disciple, it's good to start with *worship*.

1. What words, images, etc. come to mind when you think of the word “worship”?

First, we'll look at the meaning of that word.

Worship Defined and Described

Read these verses, one from the Old Testament, and one from the New Testament:

- ▶ “Come, let us worship and bow down, let us kneel before the LORD our Maker.”
(Psalm 95:6, NASB)
- ▶ “But the hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father is seeking such people to worship him. God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth.”
(John 4:23–24, ESV)

The Hebrew word translated *worship* in Psalm 95:6 is *shachah*. It means literally “to bow down.” The idea is bending low or prostrating oneself as a way of giving honor or paying homage or expressing devotion.

The Greek word translated *worship* in John 4 is *proskyne*. It also conveys this same idea of bowing with respect and devotion (see Matthew 2:11, 4:9, and 28:9).

What about our English word “worship”? It is derived from the Old English term “worthship”—literally, having worth or value.

Put all those meanings together and in the most basic sense:

“It is not a thing which a man can decide, whether he will be a worshiper or not, a worshiper he must be, the only question is what will he worship? Every man worships—is a born worshiper.”
—Frederick Robertson

Worship is assigning worth and value to someone (or something), and then—out of respect, gratitude, affection, devotion, or fear—bowing one's life before that someone (or something).



Bible Study

Based on our definition and description of worship, there are two important implications:

1. Everyone worships someone or something.
2. A disciple seeks to worship God and God alone.

Everyone Worships Someone or Something.

If worship is about ascribing value, then every person does that. Everybody has things—people or goals or dreams—he or she considers valuable—and usually one “something” viewed as having supreme worth. So it’s never a question of “*Will* we worship?” but rather, “*Who* or *what* will we worship?”

Think of all the “created” things to which people can and do assign worth or ascribe value:

- ▶ Family
- ▶ Marriage
- ▶ Educational credentials
- ▶ Children
- ▶ Grandchildren
- ▶ A boyfriend or girlfriend
- ▶ Friendships
- ▶ A job, career, work
- ▶ A financial portfolio
- ▶ A dream (retirement, having your own business, vacation home, etc.)
- ▶ A political ideology
- ▶ The success of a sports team
- ▶ Health
- ▶ Fitness
- ▶ Physical appearance
- ▶ Acclaim
- ▶ The approval of others
- ▶ Sexual gratification
- ▶ Accomplishments
- ▶ Winning (being the best at everything)
- ▶ Popularity
- ▶ A reputation or image

“He who has not learned to worship will find God and this world wearisome. If you’ve trusted in Christ as your Savior, but you’ve really not learned to worship God, chances are you have found the Christian life disappointing.”
—Ravi Zacharias

Many of these items are good things—even blessings from God! But they are not as important as God. We must never let *good* things become *ultimate* things in our hearts.



Why Does God Command Us to Worship Him?

Isn't that vain and egotistical?

The eternal Triune God doesn't need our worship. He is complete. He lacks nothing. He is neither threatened nor diminished if humans refuse or fail to worship him.

God does command worship, however, because it is:

- Fitting
- Fulfilling

Worship of God is fitting.

As the perfect and majestic one, God deserves worship. He is worthy of all praise. Imagine how shocked you would be to watch someone spurn an exquisite gourmet feast prepared by the world's best chef, only to turn around and rave over a mediocre fast-food meal. To fail to worship the one who is worthy of infinite praise is an infinite scandal! This is why the heavens themselves shout the glory of God (Psalm 19:1). This is why God's throne is surrounded by angelic beings who forever worship him (Revelation 4:8).

God saying, "Worship me" isn't vain; it's right. It's common sense.

Worship of God is fulfilling.

The other reason God commands us to worship him is for our benefit. When we praise God we find satisfaction and joy. C. S. Lewis talked about this—how expressing our awe or wonder or appreciation to God "completes the enjoyment." Imagine not being able to cheer your favorite team after a last-second victory, or not being allowed to express affection to your beloved. Our delight and joy would be diminished.

2. In what ways is this idea that everyone worships someone or something a new concept to you?



A Disciple Worships God and God Alone

3. Look at these two verses, one from the Old Testament and one from the New:

- ▶ “Bring all who claim me as their God, for I have made them for my glory. It was I who created them.” (Isaiah 43:7, NLT)
- ▶ “For in him all things were created.” (Colossians 1:16)

According to these passages, why did God create us?

4. What does it mean to live for the glory of God?

What Psalms Teaches Us About Worship

“For me, the key to worship is simply quiet, undistracted time with my eyes closed. By setting aside a certain time of my day for God—and God alone—I am indicating in the best way I know that he is important to me. I will sit and love him whether I feel his presence or not. Of course, the Bible assures me he is with me, always, whether I sense his presence or not.”
—43-year-old woman

The Old Testament Book of Psalms was the “hymn book” for the Jewish people, including Jesus. These 150 prayer-songs are beloved because they speak to every situation and emotion of life. They show that God is worthy of our worship—our attention, allegiance, affection, and adoration—no matter what we’re facing.

When you read the psalms you’ll notice they include loud, expressive worship and quiet introspective meditation. Whether songs of protest or praise, an individual reeling in terror or a nation rejoicing in triumph, in the psalms we see God’s people:



- ▶ Bowing down before God (Psalm 95:6)
- ▶ Seeking his face (Psalm 105:3–4)
- ▶ Waiting for the Lord (Psalm 33:20–21)
- ▶ Dwelling in his house (Psalm 27:4)
- ▶ Lifting hands (Psalm 134:2)
- ▶ Shouting to him (Psalm 47:1)
- ▶ Singing to him (Psalm 104:33)

In short, the psalms show us that worship is not simply attending a “worship service” at some kind of “worship facility” and singing “worship songs.” Worship isn’t an event so much as it’s a mindset, a posture of life. It’s choosing to make God central. It’s cultivating the moment-by-moment practice of looking to God and saying from the heart, “I want to live for your glory!”

- ▶ In wondrous moments it’s exclaiming, “Wow! You are amazing!”
- ▶ In tough situations it’s crying out, “I need you!”
- ▶ In good times it’s saying, “Thank you!”
- ▶ In faith-testing circumstances it’s whispering, “Okay (gulp!) I am trusting you.”

Okay, now comes the fun part.

How Do We Engage in this Practice of Worship?

In the same way we have different personalities and relational styles, different strengths and interests, so we have different ways of worshiping or connecting with God.

In his book, *Sacred Pathways*, author Gary Thomas shows how, for some two thousand years, Christians have expressed their enjoyment and worship of God through a variety of “pathways.”

Though there are surely others, he cites nine primary ways people draw near to God and express their love and devotion to him:

- ▶ *Naturalists* are those who feel inspired to love God when they are out-of-doors, in natural settings.

“A friend of mine who was in medical school took me into the ‘cadaver room’ where she and other first year students learned about human anatomy by exploring bodies that had been donated to science. When she opened a ‘body bag’ to reveal a dissected human form, I almost dropped to my knees. I was struck, not by nausea but by awe. The complexity and intricacy of our bodies—we really are, as the Bible says, ‘fearfully and wonderfully made.’ In that moment, I worshiped, maybe more than I ever have in a church.”—30-year-old man



- ▶ *Sensates* worship with their senses. They appreciate beautiful worship services that involve their sight (art), smell (incense), and ears (music).
- ▶ *Ascetics* prefer to worship in quiet solitude and simplicity.
- ▶ *Activists* adore God through confronting evil and battling injustice in the world.
- ▶ *Caregivers* worship by loving others and meeting their needs.
- ▶ *Traditionalists* draw closer to God and worship him through rituals, liturgy, symbols, and unchanging structures.
- ▶ *Enthusiasts* worship through expressive celebration.
- ▶ *Contemplatives* love God through peaceful adoration.
- ▶ *Intellectuals* praise God by studying with their minds.

5. What would you say is your primary “pathway” of worship?

6. What would be the value of sometimes participating in worship pathways that are not your first preference?

7. What worship advice would you give a person who says, “I don’t sense God. In fact, I doubt his presence in my life right now”?



Outside-the-Box Worship

Anything is worship when it is done with an eye on God and with gratitude to God.

Try these different ways of worship:

- ▶ Take a walk or hike and soak up God’s creation.
- ▶ Sit and gawk at a sunset.
- ▶ Sing. Being off-key or pitchy is irrelevant, which is why Psalm 95 tells us, “Make a joyful noise!” (Psalm 95:1, *ESV*) and not “Perform a beautiful song.”
- ▶ Climb a tree.
- ▶ Write a blogpost that would make God smile.
- ▶ Marvel at the complexity of science or the precision of an algebraic formula.
- ▶ Study a leaf, a flower, a caterpillar, a rock.
- ▶ Laughing with your toddler as he or she splashes in a puddle.
- ▶ Lie in a meadow on a cloudless night and watch shooting stars.
- ▶ Make or create something: a short story, a poem, a drawing, a painting, a sculpture, a video, a great meal, a woodworking project, an article of clothing, etc.

8. What are some other new and different ways you can think of to turn your heart to God and show your love and gratitude for him?

9. How do you feel God’s Spirit prompting you to alter your worship views or practices as a result of this study?

Take-Home Reflections



Quick Reminders About Worship

Thoughts or Feelings	Way You Can React
When feeling blah or sad	Don't pretend to be upbeat when you're not. Worship isn't a pep rally. It's being your authentic self in the presence of God. As the psalms show us, sometimes that means crying out in despair (not laughing, smiling, and jumping around).
When wondering if you're doing it "right"	First, there's no single "right" way to worship. Second, God is gracious and knows your heart. When you make a genuine effort to worship God you are worshipping God. Desiring to love God is loving God.
When you can't sense God's presence	Pray something like this: "God, you promise in your Word that you are always with me. That doesn't feel true right now, but I choose to trust what you say, rather than what I sense. Thank you for being right here."
When you feel dry or stuck	It's okay to have bad days: Don't be hard on yourself. Every worshiper experiences this. People go up and down depending on the amount of sleep or good food or how healthy they are or how much stress they are under.
When you don't feel like singing—maybe due to being tone deaf or having hearing problems or over-sensitive ears	Focus on the lyrics, or be encouraged in your heart by watching others love God through song.

Life Application

An important part of discipleship is learning how to apply God's truths to your life. Below are just a few ways you can start thinking about what you've learned and apply it to your daily life.

1. Memorize our memory verse, 1 Corinthians 10:31.

"So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God."

2. Ponder the chart "Worship Myths and Truths" on the next page.

3. Wrestle with one or two of these questions:

▶ In what new way could you worship God this week?



- ▶ Repetition can get stale, so how can you mix up your worship time?
 - ◆ A different Bible verse?
 - ◆ Reading a book about God?
 - ◆ Singing?
 - ◆ Focusing in on one attribute of God?
- ▶ What three things am I grateful for today?
- ▶ Where are you most dependent on God?
- ▶ Describe a time you felt God's power or closeness.
- ▶ Finish this sentence: I find myself worshipping and praising God when . . .

Worship Myths and Truths

Worship Myth	Worship Truth
Worship is a gathering at a certain time and in a certain place.	Worship is an all-day, every-day mindset. It's bowing down to God and his purpose for our lives.
That we "go" to worship.	We "live" worship, and bring it with us—or not.
Worship is a handful of "spiritual" activities such as singing, praying, taking communion, hearing sermons, etc.	All of life—even secular activities—can be worship, if we do them for the glory of God. For example, enjoying the beautiful world God created by taking a hike.
Worship is about externals such as music, song choices, body posture, how good the band or worship leader is, how expressive the congregation is, etc.	Worship is about the heart. It is setting aside quiet time alone and saying, "God, I love you. God, I trust you. God, I praise you."
God-honoring worship means having or coming away with a certain feeling.	God-honoring worship is approaching God by faith, and "in spirit and in truth" (John 4:24) whether having any sensations or not.
I am the judge of whether a time of worship was worthwhile.	I am to participate in worship—and leave judgments about its quality to God. Attempting to worship God IS to worship God. God accepts our attempts, no matter how feeble.
One kind of worship is better than others.	An infinite God can be worshiped in a variety of ways (privately, publicly; individually, corporately; silently, loudly; etc.)—whatever works for your personality and situation. No one way of worshiping is better than any other.