# Introduction to Worship

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Lesson Objectives

By the end of this lesson, the student should:

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.

Lesson


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 worshipers pray silently while the pastor leads in prayer. During his sermon, the pastor quotes commentaries 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. Thirty 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.”
What is Worship?

The English word worship comes from an Old English word, “worthship.” To offer “worthship” meant to recognize and honor a person’s worth. At its simplest, worship is recognizing and honoring God’s worth. It means giving God the honor that is due to him.

The box at right gives three definitions of worship. Memorize the definition that is most meaningful to you.

- Worship is reverent submission

The primary Hebrew and Greek words translated “worship” in the Bible have the idea of “bowing down” or “falling down” before God. 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 four and twenty elders fall down before him that sat on the throne, and worship him that liveth forever and ever, and cast their crowns before the throne, saying, “Thou art worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honour and power: for thou hast created all things, and for thy pleasure they are and were created.”

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 worshipers.

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....” Outwardly, they seemed to be worshipers; 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 a Spirit: and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth.”

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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.
2 Isaiah 29:13, ESV.
3 Jn. 4:24.
True worship reveres the one worshiped. 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**

Another word that refers to worship in the New Testament is translated “service.”⁴ “I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service” or “…which is your spiritual worship.”⁵

The word “service” 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 use of the word “service” to describe worship shows that worship involves more than what happens in a church building. The regular meeting of a church is important; the early church valued corporate worship.⁶ 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 “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.

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⁴ The Greek word is *latreia*, translated “worship” or “serve.”
⁵ Rom. 12:1, *KJV* and *ESV*.
⁶ Corporate worship is [commanded](#) in scriptures such as Hebrews 10:25. Corporate worship is [assumed](#) in scriptures such as Acts 2:46-47.
Worship Is Fellowship

Worship is fellowship between God and man. Worship also involves fellowship between worshipers. *Koinania* means fellowship or sharing. The word is often used in the context of worship. Christians “devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship (*koinania*), to the breaking of bread and the prayers.” As believers, we have been “called into the fellowship (*koinania*) of his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.”

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 communion of the Holy Ghost, be with you all.” As we are one with Christ, we participate through the Spirit in the Son’s communion with the Father. 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.

This has a practical impact in worship. Apart from the Trinity, worship becomes another set of moralistic demands. This approach to worship seems to be the basis for today’s “worship wars.” The assumption of many discussions about worship is that the right style of worship will *earn* God’s acceptance. Some worshiper leaders believe, “Traditional worship earns God’s favor because it recognizes his majesty and holiness.” Other leaders believe, “Contemporary worship earns God’s favor because it is ‘from the heart.’”

Both parties assume that our worship, in itself, is worthy of God’s favor. Instead, we should rejoice that worship is not about being worthy of God; it is about offering back to God a worshipful response *that he has already provided through Jesus Christ.* 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.

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7 Acts 2:42, *ESV.*
8 1 Cor. 1:9, *ESV.*
9 2 Cor. 13:14.
11 The term “worship war” is used in many books to refer to conflicts over different worship styles.
Our limited *koinania* today (fellowship with God in worship and fellowship with other believers) is a foretaste of heavenly worship. As worshipers, we seek fellowship with fellow believers because worship on earth is rehearsal for eternal worship.

- **Worship Involves All of Life**

Another word used for worship in the New Testament is sometimes translated “religion.”

“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.”

This word shows that worship is more than what happens on Sunday. In some churches, “worship” is seen as only the church service. Some churches narrow it further: “Sunday morning is 'worship.' Sunday night is evangelism.” Some churches narrow it even more: “‘Worship’ is the music part of our service. We follow worship with preaching.”

A biblical definition of worship includes all of life. The 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 the practical aspects of service (visiting orphans and widows) and the daily discipline of 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. In the temple, Isaiah “heard the voice of the Lord, saying, Whom shall I send, and who will go for us? Then said I, Here am I; send me.”

True worship transforms our life and makes us willing and effective servants of God.

- **What do the following scriptures teach about worship?** Malachi 1:6-9; 1 Samuel 13:8-14; Leviticus 10:1-3; Acts 5:1-11

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12 The Greek word is *threskeia*. It usually refers to external aspects of worship. Acts 26:5, Col. 2:18, and James 1:26-27.
13 James 1:26-27, *ESV*.
14 Isaiah 6:8.
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. 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. “Thou shalt have no other gods before me.” The second commandment tells us how we worship. “Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image....” 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. 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. In Acts, the church gathers for worship. In his letters, Paul addresses worship practices in the church. 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. Worship is important to God.

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16 Look up these examples from the Gospel of Matthew: 2:11; 8:2; 9:18; 14:33; 15:25; 28:17.
17 The early Christians continued to worship at the temple and synagogue (Acts 2:46-47; 3:1-11; 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; 4:31; 5:42).
18 1 Cor. 11 and 1 Tim. 2.
19 Rev. 4-5.
Worship Is Important Because In Worship We See God


Isaiah 6 provides an important biblical picture of worship. It shows that in worship we see God. In the temple, Isaiah “saw the Lord, high and lifted up.”

This truth is repeated throughout Scripture. As he worshiped “on the Lord’s Day,” John saw his heavenly visions.20 As Paul and Silas worshiped in prayer and song, God revealed His power.21 David endured suffering that caused him to cry out, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” In the midst of his suffering, David saw God through worship and praise; “You are enthroned on the praises of Israel.” 22 In worship, we see God.

Worship Is Important Because In Worship We See Ourselves

In the temple, Isaiah not only “saw the Lord, high and lifted up,” 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....” 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 are able to see ourselves honestly, confess our need of him, and claim his grace in our lives.

Worship reveals ourselves, 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 despair, worship led to 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 was transformed by his encounter with a holy God.

True worship changes the worshiper - Isaiah in the temple, the Samaritan woman beside the well, and the disciples on the Mount of Transfiguration. An encounter with God transforms the worshiper.

20 Rev. 1:10.
22 Ps. 22:3, ESV.
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.” In response, he said, “Here am I; send me.” 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. 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 am I; send me.”

Oswald Chambers warned prospective missionaries, “If you have not been worshiping 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.”23 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.

23 Oswald Chambers, My Utmost for His Highest, Sept. 10.
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 results from his refusal to worship the true God. Follow the process Paul outlines in Romans 1:21-25.

For although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him (they did not worship God).

(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.

(In judgment) God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts to impurity...

(This happened) because they exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever! Amen.24

Paul shows that the fall of mankind into folly, corruption, and lust resulted from their refusal to worship God (“to honor him as God or give thanks to him”). They did not worship God; they “worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator.”

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 what we worship.

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24 English Standard Version.
Three Goals in Worship

Marva Dawn identified three goals of true worship. 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.

- Form Christian character
  In worship, we see ourselves and are transformed. In worship, we gain new truths that shape our Christian character. As we worship God, our character is re-created more and more into his image. We become what we worship.

- 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.” True worship is an instrument for building true Christian community.

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26 Eph. 4:15, ESV.
What Type of Worship Is Acceptable to God?27

What kind of worship do you think God accepts?

Jesus told the Samaritan woman that “true worshipers” worship him in spirit and in truth.”28 There is a “true worship” that is acceptable to God; this implies that there is a “false worship” that is not acceptable.

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 worshiped “what you do not know.” In Athens, Paul saw people who worshiped an “unknown god.”29

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, but our worship is of an “unknown God.”30 Worship must reveal the nature of God to the worshiper. 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 all aspects 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.

27 Parts of this section are adapted from David Jeremiah. Worship. CA: Turning Point, 1995, p. 20-24.
29 Acts 17:23.
30 Liturgy means a “plan used during public worship.” This liturgy can be very organized with written instructions. It can be very informal with no written instructions for worshipers. In this course, the term liturgy will refer to any plan for worship. Some people use liturgy in a negative sense, suggesting that a planned liturgy is not true worship. We will use the term in a very general sense. Planned worship can be empty or it can be filled with God’s presence.
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.” 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, “The outward aspects of worship are not important. 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 commanded Moses” is repeated thirteen 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.

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31 Mal. 1:8, ESV.
Worship That God Accepts

If these are characteristics of worship that is not acceptable to God, what type of worship does God accept? Gary Reimers identified three qualities of worship that are acceptable to God:

- Acceptable worship focuses on the right person
- Acceptable worship accomplishes the right purpose
- Acceptable worship follows the right pattern

Acceptable Worship Focuses on the Right Person

Like Isaiah 6, Revelation 4 opens a window into heaven. In Revelation 4, the attention of the worshipers is on “him that sat on the throne.” True worship focuses on God. Earlier, we saw that “worship” comes from the old English “worthship.” True worship points to God as the One who is worthy.

Acceptable Worship Accomplishes the Right Purpose

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

Give unto the LORD, O ye kindreds of the people, give unto the LORD glory and strength. Give unto the LORD the glory due unto 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, 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.

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Acceptable Worship Follows the Right Pattern

When we discuss “worship patterns,” we often 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. 33

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 hysteric. 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?

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33 The Didache (The Teaching) is a short text from the late 1st or early 2nd century. The Didache includes teaching on Christian ethics, church rituals, and church organization.
Worship “in truth” corresponds to biblical teaching. It is more than a good feeling or emotional response. As pastors and leaders of worship, we must ask of each aspect of our worship, “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 in truth.”

**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?
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. Sixty-eight 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 measures 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 McWorshipers. 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 worshipers, but Classroom Worship is not true worship.

* Starbucks Worship

Starbucks is all about me. Starbucks makes my coffee the way I like. At Starbucks I can have coffee hot or cold; I can have coffee with sugar or no sugar; I can have coffee with milk or no milk; I can have hazelnut flavoring, caramel flavoring, vanilla flavoring, or no flavoring. Starbucks lets me be me.

Starbucks Worship lets me be me. Starbucks Worship is the “me generation” in church clothes. Starbucks Worship promises my best life now. God wants me to be healthy, wealthy, and, of course, as holy as is convenient without too much struggle! God wants to give me a new car, a nice home, a good job. It is there for the asking; Starbucks Worship is about me.

In Starbucks Worship, there is no cross, no “living sacrifice,” no “blessed are ye when men persecute you....” In Starbucks Worship, the gospel becomes, “Come to Jesus and he will make you one of the beautiful people. He will give you everything you desire.” Starbucks Worship is not true worship.

True worship is focused on God. True worship asks “What does God want?” True worship sees myself through God’s eyes – and that is uncomfortable. True worship is about him. True worship involves a cross, a sacrifice, a surrender. True worship transforms the worshiper.
Conclusion

How important is worship? Listen to the testimony of Martha.34

“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.’ 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 to help me.’ 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.’

“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.35 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.’

“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.”

✓ Personal Checkup: “How can I be a better worshiper?” Locate some areas where you can make your worship more closely match the biblical definition of worship.

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34 Lk. 10:38-42.
35 Lk. 10:25-37.
Lesson Assignments

1. Take a test on this lesson. The test will include the scriptures assigned for memory.

2. 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.

Course Project
A Thirty Day Journey of Worship

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 thirty days, you will spend a few minutes meditating on one of God’s attributes. I suggest that you do the project in the morning so that you can meditate on the attribute throughout the day. To meditate means to chew on something, to think deeply about it.

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 thirty days, you will have a deeper knowledge of God.

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36 This project is adapted from Louie Giglio, *The Air I Breathe* (USA: Multnomah Books, 2003).
Digging Deeper

To learn more about the meaning of worship, please see the following resources:

Printed Sources

Online Sources
- “Sin and Worship in Romans” at http://www.seedbed.com/seven-minute-seminary/

Lesson 1

Key Points

- What is worship?
  - Worship is reverent submission to God. (Rev. 4:10-11)
  - Worship is service to God. (Rom. 12:1)
  - Worship is praise. (Psalms)
  - Worship is fellowship. (Acts 2:42)
  - Worship involves all of life. (James 1:26-27)

- Why is worship important?
  - Worship is important because it is important to God. (Ex. 20:1-5)
  - In worship we see God majesty and holiness. (Is. 6:1-8)
  - In worship we see our own need. (Is. 6:1-8)
  - In worship we see the need of our world. (Is. 6:1-8)
  - Failure to worship separates us from God. (Rom. 1:18-25)

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

- What worship is acceptable to God?
  - Acceptable worship focuses on God. (Rev. 4)
  - Acceptable worship gives God the glory he deserves. (Ps. 96:7-8)
  - Acceptable worship is worship in spirit and in truth. (Jn. 4:23-24)