

## Essential Truths I: Living With God

# 17

## Worship

Worship is a vital part of the Christian life. It is not just “that part of the Sunday service which comes before the preaching.” Worship touches *every* part of the you walk with God and lies at the foundation of your relationship with God.

### Read Psalm 147:1

The verse describes the reason why we bring praise before God. Different versions of the Bible bring out different aspects of the original meaning:

**New International Version:** “Praise the Lord. How good it is to sing praises to our God, how pleasant and fitting to praise him!”

**New King James Version:** “Praise the Lord! For it is good to sing praises to our God; For it is pleasant, and praise is beautiful.”

**God’s Word:** “Hallelujah! It is good to sing psalms to our God. It is pleasant to sing [his] praise beautifully.”

**New Living Translation:** “Praise the Lord! How good it is to sing praises to our God! How delightful and how right!”

**International Children’s Bible:** “Praise the Lord! It is good to sing praises to our God. It is good and pleasant to praise him.”

**The Message:** “Hallelujah! It’s a good thing to sing praise to our God; praise is beautiful, praise is fitting.”

**The Amplified Bible:** “Praise the Lord! For it is good to sing praises to our God, for He is gracious and lovely; praise is becoming and appropriate.”

The Word  
 God  
 Origins  
 Jesus  
 The Cross  
 The Blood  
 Resurrection  
 Repentance  
 Faith  
 Grace  
 Water Baptism  
 Holy Spirit  
 Temptation  
 Fellowship  
 Generosity  
 Kingdom of God  
**Worship**  
 Prayer  
 Eternity  
 Second Coming  
 The Call

Praise is described as “pleasant and fitting,” “beautiful,” “good and pleasant,” “delightful and right,” and “becoming and appropriate.” When we see our lives in the perspective of the awesomeness of God’s love, power, holiness and wisdom, the only appropriate response is praise.

### Read Psalm 103:1

The *New International Version* translates this psalm with these words:

“Praise the Lord, O my soul; *all my innermost being*, praise his holy name.”

The *New American Standard Bible* renders it thus:

“Bless the Lord, O my soul; and *all that is within me*, bless His holy name.”

It is an awesome thought to consider that we have the ability to bless our Creator, but time after time in the Scripture we are exhorted to do just that. We bless the Lord through our praise and worship of him.

### Read Psalm 48:1

## Understanding Praise and Worship

There are two words often used interchangeably – praise and worship. But they do not have exactly the same meaning. Let’s take a look at both these words in order to understand what they mean to God.

### ***Praise***

Praise is an expression of admiration and appreciation. When we praise someone, we tell them how wonderful we think they are, or how great their accomplishments are. It is the same with the Lord. When we praise God, we are acknowledging his character and power.

### Read Psalm 63:3- 4

We are told to praise God for many reasons:

- Because of who he is (**Psalm 47:6-7; Exodus 15:11,21**)
- Because of what he does (**Psalm 52:9; 103:1-5**)

We are instructed to praise God:

- At all times (**Psalm 34:1**)
- In every circumstance (**1 Thessalonians 5:16-18**)
- Surrounded by God’s people (**Psalm 22:22; 34:1,3; 68:26**)
- On our beds (**Psalm 42:8; 63:4-6; 149:5**)
- In the morning (**Psalm 57:7-8**)
- Among the nations (**Psalm 48:10; 57:9**)

Praise is not simply directed in words toward the Lord himself. We also praise God every time we speak about him to others. Think about it this way: There are two ways I can praise someone I admire. I can praise them *directly* (to their

face), expressing my appreciation for their talent and skill; or I can praise them *indirectly*, telling others about my appreciation for that person. In the same way, we need to cultivate a praise habit which is *toward* the Lord (in personal praise) and *about* the Lord (to others).

**Read Psalm 34:2**

**Read Psalm 44:8**

**Read Psalm 45:17**

Praise is essentially a “boasting in the Lord.” Whether we are praying, singing or witnessing, we boast about the Lord’s goodness, grace, power and salvation.

**Read 1 Corinthians 1:29**

### ***Worship***

Whereas praise is an expression of *admiration and appreciation*, worship is a deeper expression of *love and adoration*. It is possible to admire someone and appreciate what they do without being in love with them. In the same way, worship has to do with our love of the Lord. It can only be expressed with the giving of our whole heart and life to Him.

**Read Mark 12:33**

The religious rituals and ceremonies of Israel in the Old Testament became detestable to the Lord because their heart was far from Him (**Isaiah 1:11-17; 29:13**). Today, also, God is only interested in sincere worship that comes from the heart.

When most people think of worship, they think of singing, but worship doesn’t *necessarily* involve song. While it is impossible to *praise* God silently (it must be expressed verbally – note **Psalm 51:15; Hebrews 13:15**), *worship* can sometimes involve a quiet hush, a bathing in his love, a waiting in deep adoration in the presence of the One we love. As James Russell Lowell once exclaimed:

“There may be worship without words!”<sup>1</sup>

The Bible even describes our walk with God as an act of worship. The *New International Version* translates **Romans 12:1** in this way:

“Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God’s mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God – *this is your spiritual act of worship.*”

Right throughout Scripture, *worshiping* God and *serving* God go hand in hand.

**Read Matthew 4:10**

**Read Romans 1:25**

**Read Judges 2:19**

**Read 1 Kings 9:6,9**

**Read 2 Chronicles 7:19,22**

Thus, from a truly scriptural viewpoint, worship is far more than just a nice song

we bring to God. It involves our whole life. When we sing, we are simply loving the Lord “with all [our] heart and with all [our] soul and with all [our] strength” (**Deuteronomy 6:5**) through the mode of song. This is what true worship is!

The one common factor in all worship, no matter what the mode, is that it comes from the heart. Unless our singing expresses true praise and worship – out of a sincere love for God – it is nothing more than “a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal” (**1 Corinthians 13:1**).

## True Worship

Worship holds a high priority in the heart of God. In **John 4:23**, Jesus tells us:

“Yet a time is coming and has now come when the *true* worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, *for they are the kind of worshipers the Father seeks.*”

So high is worship on God’s priority list, that it is one of only two things that the Bible says God is specifically seeking for (the other thing that God is seeking for is the lost – **Luke 19:10**). Note, however, that the Father is not seeking for *worship*. He is seeking for *worshipers*. Worship is simply the expression of a heart in love with the Lord – and that’s what God is after! (note **Psalms 63:7-8**).

### *In spirit*

Our spirit can be termed the “inner man” - the real you on the inside (**Ephesians 3:16**). Worship is your spirit communing with God’s Spirit (**John 4:24**). Worship results when the inner man, in response to the promptings of the Holy Spirit, is released in love and adoration toward God. This can take the form of vocal worship or silent adoration. Only those who have been “born again of the spirit” (**John 3:5-8**) through faith in Jesus Christ can truly worship God.

### Read Philippians 3:3

### *In truth*

To worship God in truth involves two things:

- To worship God genuinely and sincerely (**Psalms 51:6; 145:18**)
- To worship God in full understanding of who he is, what he is like and what pleases him (**Romans 1:25; 1 John 1:6; 2:4**)

To be “in truth” simple means that our hearts and minds are aligned with the heart and mind of God. This is only possible through the Lord Jesus, who is *the* Truth and came to reveal the Father to us (**John 14:6; 1:17-18**).

## Expressions of Praise and Worship

The Bible has been written to reveal God’s heart to us. In the Bible, we see praise and worship the way it pleases God:

***With the mouth***

- Singing (**Psalm 9:2,11; 28:7; 69:30; 95:2; 107:22**)
- Praising (**Psalm 34:1; 63:4; 71:8**)
- Shouting (**Psalm 47:1; 71:23; 95:1**)

***With the hands***

- Lifting (**Psalm 63:4; 134:2; 141:2**)
- Clapping (**Psalm 47:1**)
- Musical instruments (**Psalm 150**)

***With the feet***

- Standing (**Psalm 134:1**, KJV)
- Kneeling, bowing (**Psalm 95:6**)
- Dancing, leaping for joy (**Psalm 30:11; 2 Samuel 6:14-15**)

These are outward expressions of what is coming from the heart. Without heartfelt praise, the outward form is empty and displeasing to God. God is always looking at our heart (**1 Samuel 16:7**). But when our heart is overflowing with gratitude and love for God, it is impossible to be silent. We will use all the outward means – our mouth, our hands and our feet – to express the praise that is in our hearts.

**Worshiping in Song****Read Psalm 65:8**

God has created you with the capacity for song. Of course, some of us are better singers than others, but regardless of our singing talent, song is an incredible vehicle for true worship.

**Read Psalm 69:30**

Song can be either accompanied by musical instruments (**Psalm 68:24-26; 92:1-3; 150:1; Isaiah 38:20**) or unaccompanied (**Ephesians 5:19-20; James 5:13**). It can be by yourself or in company with others. It can be a learned song or a “new song” that you have made up in praise to the Lord (note **Psalm 40:3; 98:1,4; Psalm 100:2**).

**Read Colossians 3:16****Points of Warning**

Worship is so important to God that its purity (in spirit and in truth) must be guarded jealously. There are four points of warning we must always keep in mind when we are worshiping. If any of these four things begin to happen, we must reassess our worship before the Lord.

## ***When worship becomes ritual***

### **Read Mark 7:6-7**

Any time we become overly familiar with a song or a mode of worship, worship begins to lose its edge. We often find regular patterns in our meetings comfortable and predictable, but this detracts from our worship. While variety doesn't necessarily mean you have true worship, a varied format and mode of worship can help guard against the ritualization of worship.

## ***When worship becomes performance***

The entertainment ethic of the world cannot be imported into church life without killing true worship. The essence of a performance-style approach is that the focus is on the people, in order to make them feel good.

The critical question in worship is always this: Where is the focus of your singing? Is the focus on the Lord or on yourself? True worship is God-focused.

Skill in music is valuable (note **1 Chronicles 25:7; Psalm 33:2-3**), but *only* when it enhances true worship. After all, we must remember how Jesus defined the kind of worship that the Father is seeking. He did not say, "...the *true* worshipers will worship the Father in excellence and skilled performance..." He said, "...the *true* worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth..."

## ***When worship becomes separate from lifestyle***

### **Read Ezekiel 33:30-32**

Note the message of the Lord that came through Ezekiel:

"My people come to you, as they usually do, and sit before you to listen to your words, but they do not put them into practice. With their mouths they express devotion, but their hearts are greedy for unjust gain. Indeed, to them you are nothing more than one who sings love songs with a beautiful voice and plays an instrument well, for they hear your words but do not put them into practice."

God is not looking for nice-sounding songs. He is looking for worshipers. The worship we bring to the Lord can be no more pure than the purity of our hearts before God. Our worship and our lives are inseparable.

### **Read Amos 5:23-24**

## ***When worship is blended with worldly methods***

### **Read 2 Kings 16:10-19**

This story tells of how King Ahaz, on one of his trips to Damascus, is enthralled by the design of an altar he sees in the pagan temple there. So beautiful is the design, Ahaz makes a sketch of the altar and sends detailed plans for its construction to Uriah the priest. By the time he returns to Jerusalem, the altar has been built.

Now notice what happens after this. Ahaz replaces the bronze altar, which had been prescribed by God, with this pagan altar. The Bible does not record, however, that Ahaz offered sacrifices to the gods of Damascus. What he did was offer the prescribed sacrifices *to the Lord* on the pagan altar.

This is a picture of what we, as the Church, can so easily do. By taking the methods of performance and entertainment from the world, mixed with worldly attitudes toward music, we can create an altar upon which worship is simply not acceptable to God.

We are not talking here about *modes* of music. There is nothing wrong, for example, with the rock beat, but the flavor of the world\* must never creep into our worship. The flavor of the world has more to do with a “feel good” attitude to self, than it does with a particular musical style. Much of popular youth music today is narcissistic and hedonistic – self-centered, body-centered and pleasure-oriented. We must be careful that we don’t import the narcissistic/hedonistic emphasis of the world into our worship styles. The final test of any music style is whether it draws the focus of the worshiper back on himself/herself, and whether it distracts the worshiper from the Lord.

**Remember:** Worship involves a shift of focus from self to God, a change of orientation from me to the Lord. Unless it is truly “from God, through God and to God,” it is not true worship.

## Transformed in Worship

True worship does two things:

- It brings delight and satisfaction to the heart of God
- It transforms us into the likeness of the Lord

### Read Psalm 115:4-8

There is what appears to be a principle seen in Scripture that a person is conformed to what he worships. Here the Psalmist declares that the worshipers of stone idols will become like them – blind, deaf and without feeling. The characteristics of the object of worship is passed on to the worshiper.

The same principle works in true worship of the living God. Our worship initiates a transformation process – we are conformed to the likeness of the Lord. The “mirror effect,” which we examined in **Module 102**, is in part a product of our worship of God. As Richard Foster put it:

“If worship does not change us, it has not been worship. To stand before the Holy One of eternity is to change. Worship begins in holy expectancy; it ends in holy obedience.”<sup>1</sup>

And as A. W. Tozer once described it:

“More spiritual progress can be made in one short moment of speechless si-



lence in the awesome presence of God than in years of mere study.”<sup>2</sup>

Pure praise and worship release the power of God, not only in our lives but also on our behalf (**Acts 16:25-26; 2 Chronicles 20:21-24**). This is because worship involves a joining of heaven and earth. It is the sound of heaven itself which rings in our worship, as angels join in our worship before the throne of God (**Revelation 5:11-14**). This is why the purity of our worship is so important. We are following heaven’s lead, even as heaven echoes our worship.

### Read Hebrews 2:11-12

As in all things in the Christian life, we are linked to the Lord Jesus himself in our worship. He himself worships his Father, and he desires to worship in the midst of his Church. Louis Evely described the worship of Jesus in this way:

“What was our Lord thinking about as he walked along the roads of Galilee, so often alone? What were his thoughts in times of repose, during the journeys by boat that he liked making with his disciples after a day’s exhausting preaching? What occupied his mind among the hills where he liked to go alone, without even the disciples? The answer, we may think, is easy: he was thinking of men, of sinners and their salvation, and what he had to do to effect that salvation. But, surprising as it may seem to us, it wasn’t with us that Jesus was concerned. The constant object of his meditation, the natural orientation of his heart and mind and soul, the food that constantly nourished him, was his Father.”<sup>3</sup>

This attitude of worship – this “natural orientation of his heart and mind and soul” – has not changed. Jesus still sings to his Father, but now he sings his praises in the midst of the congregation of believers. It is understanding this one simple truth that sheds a bright light on the nature of worship. What is true worship? Simple. True worship is when Jesus can join with us in the worship of his Father.

As the writer to the Hebrews tells us in **Hebrews 13:15**:

“Through Jesus, therefore, let us continually offer to God a sacrifice of praise – the fruit of lips that confess his name.”

<sup>1</sup> Richard J. Foster, quoted from *Draper’s Quotations for the Christian World*, excerpted from QuickVerse 5.0.

<sup>2</sup> A. W. Tozer, quoted from *Draper’s Quotations for the Christian World*, excerpted from QuickVerse 5.0.

<sup>3</sup> Louis Evely, quoted from *Draper’s Quotations for the Christian World*, excerpted from QuickVerse 5.0.