



What IS Worship? Leaders' Notes



What IS worship?

And how can it be truly meaningful? By my late teens I was searching for an answer to these questions. I had certainly decided that there was much more to worship than just the 'hymn/prayer sandwich' of the adult services at my home church. It sometimes felt like we were just going through the motions of some kind of little concert. However raising my hands or clapping in a lively charismatic meeting could also be an empty experience.

Is worship sometimes boring/difficult?

Let's be honest. Many of us find worship times to be boring at least sometimes. If we don't, our young people almost certainly do and we should give them the freedom to talk about this so that we can resolve it.

"Worship – the missing jewel of the evangelical church." A. W. Tozer

One issue is that the words 'worship' and 'singing' have become almost interchangeable in many churches. Whilst one natural response of a worshipful and grateful heart is to sing, worship is far broader than that and did not originate with singing. This is good news for those who do not feel comfortable being asked to sing. Music can be used to create an atmosphere of worship without this. And perhaps some of us need to get out of our musical ruts.

What do we mean by 'worship'? Where did it come from?

Origin of the words for 'worship' http://www.ch-of-christ.beaverton.or.us/Worship_1.htm

- Histachawah or hishtakhve" = Hebrew = "to prostrate oneself", "to bow down" or "to worship". It is the main word used in the Old Testament for worship.
- Proskuneo = Greek = "to kiss towards" or "to go towards in order to kiss". This originates from ancient times when the worshipper would kiss the hand or feet of the one being worshipped or even the ground in front. An act of homage to a king might involve kissing his hand.
- Sebomai = to revere", emphasizing the feeling of awe or devotion.
- Threskeia is translated in James 1:27 as "pure religion" and refers to lifestyle.
- The Hebrew word 'abôdâ' originally signified the labour of slaves or hired servants and refers to service.
- The Greek word 'latreia' also refers to service

- The English word “worship” comes from the Anglo-Saxon ‘weorthscipe’ or ‘wyrthscipe’. It refers to being worthy or honorable. It came to be applied to a religious activity, such as a prayer, church service, or other rite showing reverence or devotion for a deity.

And the early acts of worship recorded in the Bible centre on offerings and sacrifice – gifts in other words.

So:

- To bow down
- To kiss
- To be in awe of
- To serve
- To offer gifts

These are all actions which – unless done out of pure duty – express love, respect, gratitude, devotion.

Love on a human level has famously been broken down into five ‘love languages’ –

- Time
- Touch
- Words
- Service
- Gifts

In what ways are these lists similar and in what ways are they different?

We show love to different people in different ways. We might show our love to our parents by giving them a hug or by helping them to do a chore. It’s the same with God. Worship is about different ways of expressing love to God.

“...for millions of Christians, God is no more real than he is to the non-Christian.

They go through life trying to love an ideal and be loyal to a mere principle.” A. W. Tozer

Worship in its’ broadest sense is anything that we do which expresses our love for God. It includes not only worshipping alongside others, perhaps in large popular gatherings but also in the privacy of our own space. It includes finding out as much about him as we can.

If God has always seemed distant then any act of worship is likely to feel like a duty. It is only as we enter a relationship with him and we start to ‘see’ him, that worship becomes more meaningful. And if ‘love’ feels like too strong a word for some people at first then ‘gratitude’ may be an easier one to begin with.

It’s difficult to love someone who may not seem real to you. One of the roles of the Holy Spirit is to make God real to us, to bring the reality of God’s presence into our lives. We can ask him to do this for us.

“When I was young I used to envy those who had had a dramatic conversion experience because it seemed that it was easier for them to love and appreciate God. As I have grown older it has become easier for me to worship in a meaningful way because I have experiences of God helping me through difficult times.”

For those of any age who take the time to seek him, God can be very real. He promises that those who seek him will find him and that he will draw near to those who draw near to him. (Jeremiah 29:13 / James 4:8)

The idea of service involves every aspect of our lives. In the broad sense we can worship God in the way we do just about anything e.g. our work, our speech, the way we treat people. Anything we do in a way which brings honour to God is an act of worship. Of course we can serve out of duty or we can serve out of love. If we are going through a difficult time, it might feel like we are serving out of duty. This is sacrificial worship and it is very precious to God. Habakkuk 3:17-18

What can hinder our worship and how can we resolve this?

- God has never really felt real to you.
Keep seeking God
Pray that his Holy Spirit will fill you and reveal God to you,
Ask others to pray for you
- A wrong attitude or unconfessed sin
Ask God to show you what is wrong and clear the blockage between you
- A worship style that is really uncomfortable for you.
Do something different!
- If you are a leader, remember to focus on worship rather than performance
- Other? Discuss

Which expressions of worship are most natural for you? (Interdenominational list)

Here are some that are currently in use. Perhaps try something new

- | | |
|---|---|
| • Praying – silent, spoken, collective or written/painted | • Reading the Creed |
| • Giving an offering | • Lighting a candle |
| • Contemplating a Bible reading | • Burning incense |
| • Taking Communion | • Playing an instrument |
| • Collective reading of Bible verses, prayer or liturgy | • Silence Habakkuk 2:20 |
| • Singing / Clapping | • Giving ourselves – Romans 12:1 |
| • Raising hands | • Serving – Joseph of Arimathea |
| • Dance / Waving a flag | • Loving/caring for others – Isaiah 1:11-20, especially v17 |
| | • Other? |

What different positions are there for worship/prayer?

Every word in the Bible that we translate as 'worship' refers to a posture or movement of the body. When would it be particularly appropriate to kneel – to stand etc?

- Barefoot:
Exodus 3:5 God to Moses at the burning bush - Take off your sandals, because you are standing on holy ground.

- Standing:
Exodus 33:10 Whenever the people saw the pillar of cloud standing at the entrance to the tent (of meeting), they all stood and worshipped, each at the entrance to their tent. NIV
- Kneeling:
Daniel 6:10 Daniel ... went to pray in an upstairs room in his house ... Three times each day Daniel would kneel down to pray... NCV
- Bowed low/prostrate:
1 Kings 18:42 Elijah ... bowed low to the ground and prayed with his face between his knees. NLT
Genesis 17:3 Abram bowed facedown on the ground... NCV
Genesis 18:1 The Lord appeared again to Abraham... When he saw them, he ran to meet them and welcomed them, bowing low to the ground. NLT
Joshua 5:14 Then Joshua fell face down to the ground in reverence, NIV
- With hands/arms raised:
Isaiah 1:15 When you raise your arms to me in prayer... NCV
- For the elderly in bed:
David 1 Kings 1:47 Then the king bowed his head in worship as he lay in his bed... NLT
- Other?

Joseph of Arimathea

There are many examples of people worshipping in the Bible, (some are in the outline plan). My own favourite example is that of Joseph of Arimathea. His actions in asking Pilate for the body of Jesus and burying it in his own tomb are not often seen as an act of worship. However this is one of the most beautiful, reckless, sacrificial acts of worship we could encounter. Somehow I feel that he and Nicodemus carried out this service personally rather than delegating it to servants. If that was the case, they would have excluded themselves from being able to participate in the Passover the following day because they had touched a dead body. Far more than that however, Joseph was a member of the Sanhedrin which had conspired to have Jesus killed. By making such a bold stand, he was committing political suicide and to what purpose? Was it not too late? Jesus was already dead. There is a line in a worship song which goes "Jesus, what can I give, what can I bring to so faithful a friend to so loving a King?" This surely expresses Joseph's thoughts and feelings as he watched Jesus die. He was desperate to do something and there was only one thing he could do, so he did it despite the potential cost to him personally.

What are the benefits of worship?

As well as the fact that God deserves and has a right to be worshipped, worship also blesses us. It takes us beyond ourselves, restores our sense of perspective, frees us from self-importance, renews our hope, refreshes our spirits, feeds our souls and empowers us to really live.

FAQ

What is the difference between praise and worship?

Let's look at this on a human level. Think of some situations where we **praise** people.

It can range from a parent or teacher affirming a child who has made an effort or accomplished something new to an outstanding achievement that gains a public prize accompanied by a speech.

It often revolves around words of thanks and/or appreciation

It may acknowledge what someone has done; what they are good at and/or some positive character traits.

'You did a good job – thank you!'

'You are amazingly good at xyz'

'It was so kind of you.'

When we praise God we thank him for his love to us, his gifts to us, his greatness.

Now think of how someone might hero **worship** a person- maybe a pop/film/sports star or even someone they know personally.

If you hero worship a person - You might enthuse about them a lot telling everyone how wonderful they are - in other words 'singing their praises' but it goes further than that. it is characterised by things such as:

- You hang on every word they say – listen, remember, quote
- You would do anything for them – follow them anywhere, cross the country/planet to see them.
- You find out as much as you can about them.
- You spend time thinking about them.
- You buy all their albums/books/ watch all their matches or concerts
- You spend a lot of your money on tickets (if relevant)

Worship is broader than praise and likewise worship songs are broader.

Take a look at the Psalms and pick out some that focus on praise and some that focus on worship.

Here's a start:

Psalms of praise include 34; 96; 103

Psalms of worship include 63; 84; 101

Further reading

<http://www.insight.org/resources/articles/christian-living/missing-jewel.html?l=christian-living>

Credits

Notes: Brenda Lord; Last updated: 8 July 2014;

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Bible references - condensed

2 Samuel 6:12 – 23

The Ark of God is there.” So David went and brought it up to Jerusalem with joy. David danced with all his might before the LORD. He had on a holy linen vest. ¹⁶As the Ark of the LORD came into the city, Saul’s daughter Michal looked out the window. When she saw David jumping and dancing in the presence of the LORD, she hated him. ²³And Saul’s daughter Michal had no children to the day she died. NCV

Amos 5:21-24

²¹ I despise your religious feasts; ...Away with the noise of your songs! NIV

Mark 12:41 – 44 The widow’s offering

Isaiah 1:11-17

¹⁵ When you raise your arms to me in prayer, I will refuse to look at you.

Even if you say many prayers, I will not listen to you,

Stop doing the evil things I see you do...

¹⁷ Learn to do good. NCV

1 Samuel 1:10-11 and 27-28. Hannah and Samuel

John 19: 38 – 42

³⁸Later, Joseph from Arimathea asked Pilate if he could take the body of Jesus...

Genesis 4:2-7 and Hebrews 11:4

The LORD accepted Abel and his gift, ⁵but he did not accept Cain and his gift.

⁴It was by faith that Abel offered God a better sacrifice than Cain did. God called Abel a good man because of his faith...

1 Samuel 16:7 People look at the outside of a person, (the outward appearance - NIV) but the LORD looks at the heart.” NCV

Romans 12: 1-2 I beg you to offer your lives as a living sacrifice to him... NCV

John 4:21 - 24

²¹Jesus said... ²⁴God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth.” NCV

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