

Our Priestly Calling

Worshipping Together

Worship is our highest calling in life! Twice in Scripture God is said to be seeking men. One group he seeks is the lost. The other group? Worshippers! A generation ago A.W. Tozer wrote, "God wants worshippers before workers. Indeed, the only acceptable workers are those who have learned to worship".

The Bible sometimes describes a life of devotion and obedience to God as worship (Exodus 23:25-26; Romans 12:1). So, it is appropriate to dedicate our lives to God and to offer our daily endeavors to him as acts of worship. However, in this study we want to think biblically about the times of worship we share together. These times of corporate worship prepare us to hear God's voice, keep in step with his Spirit, and minister to others in faith. What is involved in worshipping God, and how do we enter in?

⇒ **George Barna** asked Christians to define worship. 36% had a reasonable assessment; 25% gave answers too general to assess; 39% gave answers that were clearly erroneous (worship is . . . attending church, believing in God, feeling happy when I think of God, I don't know).

⇒ Most prominent definition among evangelicals seems to be: "a thematically unified, inspiring religious program". Pastors generally relate worship to preaching, to not one of Scripture's 800 references to preaching relate the two. Many Christians think that they've worshipped when they've taken good sermon notes.

1. WORSHIP BEGINS WITH A hunger AND thirst FOR GOD.

Psalms 27:4; 42:1-2; 63:1-2; 84:1-4; 143:6-7

⇒ In my childhood years, I noticed that we worshipped passionately when exposed to our guilt at communion times. In my teen years, I noticed that we gave ourselves to worship with passionate abandon after watching films about the rapture and the Great Tribulation. As a young pastor, I noticed my congregation worship as never before after the accidental death of a teenager. In each of these situations, we were hungry and thirsty for our Heavenly Father.

The music may be loud or serene, the atmosphere may be formal or loose, but those who hunger and thirst for the Lord will always worship him with passionate abandon.

A genuine hunger or thirst for God implies that we have turned away from the table set for us by the world, the flesh, and the devil. So, whether time is given in the service or we simply take time in preparation for the service, earnest confession and repentance find their place in the process of entering into God's presence.

J.I. Packer (author of *Knowing God* and *Keep In Step With the Spirit*)

"I've experienced God's presence most powerfully in worship, often during the singing, I suppose because when we sing to him, we are looking hard in his direction".

⇒How do we cultivate hunger? *Fasting* from excessive entertainment. *Focusing* on the lost and the lateness of the hour.

2. WORSHIP FLOWS FROM A heart engaged IN PRAISE.

Deuteronomy 4:29,39; I Chronicles 22:19; Psalm 103:1-5

As a church, we choose to give ourselves to expressions of extravagant praise that include clapping, shouting to the Lord, and dancing in his presence . . . WHATEVER IT TAKES TO BREAK OUT, BREAK THROUGH, BREAK INTO GOD'S PRESENCE.

God is worthy of our praise apart from our circumstances or emotional state. There is nothing hypocritical about praising our faithful God with sincere gratitude, even during the difficult moments of our lives (I Thessalonians 5:16-18).

We are grateful for worship leaders who avoid the temptation to cajole us to sing louder, clap our hands, or participate in other outward expressions of worship (Mark 7:6-7; John 4:24) when our hearts may not yet be engaged. Rather, we are stirred to praise when worship leaders simply model the expressions of gratitude and joy that flow from their own hearts.

⇒Our culture breeds a spectator mentality. Worship isn't inspirational entertainment. It's a participatory activity. We're interacting with the Living God in spirit and in truth.

3. WORSHIP IS EXPRESSED THROUGH voluntary physical INVOLVEMENT.

⇒Hebrew and Greek terms for worship denote physical activity: to bow down, to kiss, to serve.

Scripture calls us to give our bodies to God in worship (Romans 12:1) and illustrates many different forms of physical involvement. All of them are natural, childlike outward expressions of our inner responses to both the recognition of our need and the revelation of God's presence.

As surprising as it may seem to us, God recognizes and responds to our "body language." Just consider the many times Scripture refers to the fact that God sees us in moments of worship and prayer (cf. II Kings 22:19; Ezra 9:5, 15; Jeremiah 7:9-11). Our physical responses in worship communicate to the people around us, angelic beings, the powers of darkness, as well as to God.

⇒**C.S. Lewis**, *Screwtape Letters*. Screwtape advises Wormwood to tempt his Christian subject to think that it doesn't matter what he does with his body as he prays. Our bodies are connected to our souls are connected to our spirits. Our bodies may enter into worship and open a door for our souls and spirits to follow.

Lifting hands (Neh.8:6; I Tim.2:8) may express a desire to offer up oneself to God, surrender one's will to God, or to receive God's blessings.

Kneeling (Ps. 95:6-7), *bowing low* with one's face to the ground (Neh.8:6; Ps.95:6-7), or even *lying prostrate* (Num. 14:5; 16:22; Dan. 8:17; Rev. 1:10-17) may express humility, submission, reverence, awe, or personal desperation and dependence on God.

Standing (Psalm 134:1) may express respect and honor in the presence God.

Clapping (Ps. 47:1), *shouting* (Ps. 33:3), and even *dancing* (II Sam. 6:14-15; Ps. 149:3; 150:4) may provide a legitimate release of joy, thanksgiving, and celebration.

No one should ever feel compelled to respond physically to peer pressure. But all of us are free (II Cor. 3:17) to respond individually to God in physical expressions of worship during our gatherings --one standing, another kneeling, still another lifting hands toward God.

⇒Our body language either affirms or contradicts our words about God. Unbelievers, new Christians, and our children draw lasting conclusions about God, not only by what they hear, but also by what they see on Sunday morning.

4. WORSHIP IS heightened AS WE BEGIN TO INTERACT WITH THE HOLY SPIRIT.

⇒Worship includes interaction between God and his people. All relationships revolve around responses—exchanges of love. ILLUS: Carolyn Berry, “This worship is interactive!”

John 3:8, “The wind blows wherever it pleases. You hear its sound, but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going”. **Acts 2:1-4** . . . a hallmark of New Covenant worship is interaction with the Holy Spirit (as in the Acts of the Apostles)

God may give prophecies or tongues and interpretations to members of the Body, which when spoken, have dramatic power to heighten our awareness of God's presence, glory, compassion, and desires (Revelation 19:10; I Corinthians 14:24-25). Sometimes worship leaders will simply sense the "heaviness" of the Spirit of God's manifest presence in a room, and pause until he gives direction. When God does reveal himself through revelatory gifts during a worship time, we set aside our schedule and agenda to respond to him.

As we learn to worship, we'll discover that we're moving from (1) merely observing the worship team to (2) sincerely participating with the congregation, to (3) passionately responding to the Spirit of God—both CORPORATELY and INDIVIDUALLY.

⇒Non-Christians are coming to meet God, not just to hear about him. Pastors and worship leaders must open the door to experience and interaction. **ILLUS:** Steve Nicholson gives gospel invitations after worship, before the sermon.

5. WORSHIP PROCEEDS TOWARD personal intimacy WITH GOD.

⇒Worship provides us with one of our only opportunities for direct communication and interaction with God. **ILLUS:** Mary Chapin Carpenter's song, “Shut Up and Kiss Me”

Psalm 18:1; 59:9; 116:1

Skillful worship leaders attempt to guide us through horizontal expressions of praise in which we are speaking and singing to each other about God, to vertical expressions of worship in which we are speaking and singing directly to God.

Charles Wesley expressed such personal intimacy with God as being *"lost in wonder, love, and praise"*. When our hearts are pursuing personal intimacy with God, God-consciousness overwhelms self-consciousness about physical involvement in worship.

We value the practice of 'open worship' or 'singing in the Spirit'. During these musical interludes, the musicians lay down a harmonic foundation over which individuals may sing out heart-felt expressions of praise and worship through melodies and lyrics of their own making. These moments of free-flowing worship often become intimate interludes between the church, the Bride, and her bridegroom, Jesus Christ.

⇒ **George Barna**: How often does Sunday morning worship bring you into God's presence? Always, 27%; Usually, 12%; Sometimes, rarely, don't know, 27%; Never, 34%.

6. WORSHIP REACHES ITS zenith IN A PERSONAL OFFERING TO GOD.

I Peter 2:5, 9; Revelation 1:6; 5:10

In the Old Testament, men and women offered up animal or agricultural sacrifices to God on the temple's alter. God was quite specific, stating that no one was to appear before him empty-handed (Exodus 23:15; 34:20; Deuteronomy 16:16). To come before God empty-handed suggested a lack of preparation, perhaps some pretense, and even open disdain for God and his glory (II Samuel 24:24; Malachi 1:13-14).

Today Scripture calls us to serve God as priests, standing before the assembly and offering up spiritual sacrifices to God. Spiritual sacrifices include the offering up of ourselves to God (Rom. 12:1), the giving of our money to God's work (Phil. 4:18), prayers we direct toward heaven (Revelation 5:8; 8:3-4), words of praise from our lips (Heb.13:15), personal commitments to do good works (Heb. 13:16), and personal witness to God's grace (Rom. 15:16).

John Piper, *Desiring God* . . .

"The fuel of worship is a true vision of the greatness of God; the fire that makes the fuel burn white hot is the quickening of the Holy Spirit; the furnace made alive and warm by the flame of truth is our renewed spirit; and the resulting heat of our affections is powerful worship, pushing its way out in confessions, longings, acclamations, tears, songs, shouts, bowed heads, lifted hands and obedient lives".

7. WORSHIP, ESPECIALLY AS IT IS EXPRESSED THROUGH MUSIC, SERVES TO PREPARE US TO hear GOD'S VOICE AND TO RELEASE GOD'S power FOR MINISTRY.

I Samuel 16:23; II Kings 3:15

Having come this far together--to the very throne of God--we find ourselves cleansed, alert to spiritual realities, and spiritually empowered to minister to others in need out of our Father's abundance.

Music may legitimately be used as an effective tool to engage (not merely excite) our emotions. However, in the afterglow of worship, we attempt to "dial down" our emotions and wait quietly for the Spirit's leading.

⇒ **Sally Morgenthaler**, Worship Evangelism: worship, resulting in ministry, may be the most powerful apologetic for Gen Xers and Millennials