

Today I am starting a new series of messages on something we do together every week, but rarely do we talk much about. This series is going to be on the subject of worship. I'm calling it Worship: In Spirit and Truth.

I have been a Christian since I was about 6 years old. I rededicated my life and made my faith my own when I was a freshman in high school. Most of that time I have been in church. I felt a definite call on my life for full-time ministry when I was a junior in high school.

Worship is something I grew up doing...but I never stepped back and asked, "why?" It just sort of came natural to me. Regardless of how long you have been a Christian and attending church, I imagine it is the same for many of you.

Worship is something I have done most of my life. But, I can never remember hearing a sermon, let alone a series of sermons on worship. And I have never studied worship, let alone teach on it. I've just sort of followed suit of those around me, it's what we do, and I like to sing, and I like music, so I never questioned or found it difficult to worship.

Over the years I've heard some people actually complain about why churches do so much music, because in their mind, the meat and potatoes are in the message. "I come to church for the teaching! The music? I can take it or leave it."

Some come to service after the music just to get the message. Others leave as soon as the teaching is over; worship to them seems like an addendum, like reading the preface or the appendix of a book—okay... not necessary to get the core.

There is also plenty of confusion, debate, and uncertainty about certain forms of worship. And understandably, because some groups have become unhinged from the truth, they have stepped beyond the truth of Scripture in their worship. Other churches are unquestionably anchored to the fundamentals of scripture, but there is no passion, emotion, or heart in their worship.

God actually called his people out on this through the Prophet Isaiah, "The Lord says: "These people come near to me with their mouth and honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me. Their worship of me is based on merely human rules they have been taught."-Isaiah 29:13. And Jesus actually quoted Isaiah to some of the Jewish folks in Matthew 15:8.

There is also plenty of uncertainty and angst over how expressive one should be in worship. What's appropriate Biblically? What pleases God? What is authentic? What is theatrics? Is the more expressive worshipper more spiritual, more pleasing to God? Should the less expressive person be judged to be less spiritual and less pleasing to God? Is one approach to worship better than another?

In this series we're going to address questions like these. We're going to take a step back and examine what worship really is? When did it start? Why did it start? What does it accomplish? Why has the gathered church consistently engaged in it for centuries?

And by the way, what's God doing during our worship? What does worship do for us? Is worship limited to the more formal, structured occasions set apart to do it? What does the Bible mean when it tells us to do all, whether we eat or drink or whatever we do, to the glory of God (1 Cor. 10:31-32)? Perhaps worship is potentially all of life.

Here's my heart for this series for us: My deepest desire for us in this is that our consideration of the meaning, purpose, and calling to worship will refresh and revive your engagement in worship. My hope is that

perhaps you will feel more freedom in your worship...not freedom to worship like I think you should or like Ryan thinks you should...but freedom to worship with your style and your way...freedom to worship out of who you are in your temperament and your personality...freedom to worship without the pressure of meeting expectations of those around you.

Now, as we get started, let me orient you on something. There are very few passages in the Bible that are dedicated to teaching about worship. Instead, worship is commanded and called for from cover to cover. It's as if worship was like the air the ancients breathed...they didn't instruct a lot about it...it was just what they did! It's as if it was just a part of who they were as God's people.

And so, while we typically try to anchor our messages in key sections or books of the Bible, this series will in many ways be a survey style series, touching down on a number of the literally hundreds and hundreds of passages that refer to it, assume it, or command it. This series will try to pull together all those pieces into a helpful, inspiring guide to your worship experience in your life.

One of the few passages in the Bible that offers direct teaching about worship is in John 4. I have chosen to use it as our anchor text for the series. Turn to John 4:23-24.

Jesus said, 23 Yet a time is coming and has now come when the true worshipers will worship the Father in the Spirit and in truth, for they are the kind of worshipers the Father seeks. 24 God is spirit, and his worshipers must worship in the Spirit and in truth."-Jesus

The "time" Jesus is referring to is the hour of his glorification—his suffering, death, and resurrection. That ushered in a new era or age in humankind's relationship to God. And Jesus is teaching us that it has impact on our worship of God.

In the context of his conversation here with the Samaritan woman at the well, Jesus is making a point about the location of worship. His big idea: It's not about place as much as it is about how it's offered.

Then he talks about the kind of worshippers the Father seeks. The kind of worshippers the Father seeks, Jesus insists, are those who worship in the Spirit and in truth.

"In spirit" here refers to worship that is both empowered by the Holy Spirit {to emphasize this the NIV adds the article "in THE Spirit"} but also, this worship is to be offered to God from one's spirit or soul. The original language and construction here is not pointing to simply one or the other. It's a "both, and." Worshippers the Father seeks practice a worship that is empowered and inspired by the Holy Spirit and offered from the heart and soul of the worshipper. IN other words worship is to be offered out of an interaction between the Holy Spirit and our spirit.

Truth, here, refers to the revelation of God through his Word and in his Son, as well as generally what is in alignment with reality. It's use here stands in contrast to what a person may subjectively think or feel no matter how sincerely they think or feel it. It's a kind of boundary description. In other words, true worshippers that the Father seeks don't decide what's true and worthy in worship....the Father does.

A.W.Tozer—Christian pastor, author, Alliance magazine editor, and spiritual mentor who earned two honorary doctorates for his extensive work and writing; said this about worship in his classic book called, *What Ever Happened To Worship*, "Worship must be in the Holy Spirit and in truth. We cannot worship in the spirit alone, for the spirit without truth is helpless. We cannot worship in truth alone, for that would be theology without fire."

When you put this together, Jesus is teaching that the kinds of worshippers the Father seeks are those who offer their worship from within their spirits that have been enlightened and empowered by the

Holy Spirit. The worshipper worships God because of who he is, what he has done, what he is doing, and what he will do.

This will be our anchor text. This foundational text lays out the twin rails of Spirit and Truth in order to grow us into the kind of worshippers the Father seeks. I want our church to be filled with "true worshipers," as Jesus describes them. What is that exactly? What does that look like? How can we be that?

Another foundational truth of this series, which is important to understand as we begin this series is that you and I were actually created to worship. Turn in your Bibles to Genesis 1:26-31

You were created to worship

Here's what I want you to see in this creation account in Genesis. God said, "Let us make man in our own image." Then stooping down, God took up clay, shaped and formed man and blew the breath of life into his nostrils. God's man had become a living soul. Then the Creator asked the man to look around at the rest of creation, pointing out, 'This is all yours—and I am yours.' God basically said, 'I will look at you and see in your face the reflection of my own glory. That is your end. You are created to worship me, to glorify me, and to have me as your God forever.

In this way friends, when we worship we are our most real selves. We are the most human we can be. When we relate with God, we are our most real, human selves...doing what we were designed to do...reflect God's glory back to him.

The book of Ecclesiastes in our Bible was written by Solomon, the wisest man who ever lived. We stepped through a series on this book a year or so ago. The entire book is the account of a through search throughout the entire world for the meaning of life. What's our purpose? Where can we find satisfaction? What's the meaning of life?

And towards the end Solomon concludes, "Now all has been heard; here is the conclusion of the matter: Fear (= revere, honor, adore) God and keep his commandments, for this is the duty of all mankind." - Ecclesiastes 12:13

David echoes this truth in his prayer in Psalm 86:

"9 All the nations you have made will come and worship before you, Lord; they will bring glory to your name.

10" For you are great and do marvelous deeds; you alone are God.

11 Teach me your way, Lord, that I may rely on your faithfulness; give me an undivided heart, that I may fear {revere, honor} your name.

12 I will praise you, Lord my God, with all my heart; I will glorify your name forever. 13 For great is your love toward me; you have delivered me from the depths, from the realm of the dead. - Psalm 86:9-13

And John in his writing in Revelation records the dialogue of Heaven's worship service in Revelation 4:11, "You are worthy, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power, for you created all things, and by your will they were created and have their being."-Rev. 4:11

These are just a sample of a number of places in the Bible that show us that we were created to worship God. This is why the Westminster Catechism's number 1 question is this: What is the chief end of man? Answer: Man's chief end is to glorify God, and to enjoy him forever. - Westminster Catechism.

With this clear understanding that we were created to worship and we are to carry out that calling in Spirit and in truth, let me try to define and describe what worship is.

The meaning of worship - What is it?

Our word worship comes from the Old English word, "worth-ship" denoting the worthiness of an individual to receive special honor in

accordance with that worth. When we worship God we are declaring his worth.

Worship is an act of faith. It is the lifting up of the heart in willing response to God. Worship is never to be a means to an end. Adoration of God is humankind's highest privilege AND it is to be carried out for its own sake. When we try to worship just to get something from God, the act ceases to be worship, because then it attempts to use God as means to something else. We are to worship God purely for the sake of worshipping God! God is to be worshiped and served for God's glory alone!

Worship is fundamentally the acknowledgement and the celebration of the centrality of God in all of life. There are two primary aspects to this: Worship is our response to God for who he is, and all he has done.

At the same time, worship is also the celebration of the centrality of the church within the purposes of God. In other words, we worship him for who he is first, and for all he has done in us and for us next.

In short, you could define worship this way: Worship is the recognition and the celebration of God as the center of life and the center of our lives.

Understood this way...you can say each and every action, thought, or attitude that you display that originates out of your acknowledgment of God as the center of your life is a form of worship. So...

When you treat others, as Jesus would have, it's a form of worship.
(Classic text in Acts...2:42-47)

When you tend to and care for your home and landscaping, it's a form of worship (Genesis 1:27-31).

When you manage your money in alignment with God's values it's a form of worship (Proverbs 3:9).

When you use your gifts, abilities, education, and experience to fulfill your job, work, or calling in your life, it's a form of worship. This is why Paul said, "1 Whether, then, you eat or drink or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God." - 1 Cor. 10:31

The Bible uses different words to describe our worship; words like worship, glorify, magnify, exalt, praise, adore, revere, and magnify. Think of it this way, worship ascribes worth to God. It magnifies God and makes him big and more visible to those around us. So, all of life is potentially worship. Now, having said that, in this series I'm going to be primarily referring to worship in the more narrow sense, the worship we engage in as the gathered church.

So, what does worship look like? What's involved in it?

What does worship look like?

Worship includes mystery

Worship is both revelation and mystery. In worship we experience both mystery (Gods' bigness, his transcendence) and revelation (Gods' closeness, his immanence). In other words, in worship we recite, rehearse, and review what we know or understand of God, but we also long for the full majesty of God with awe and wonder. We celebrate and declare our thoughts and emotions towards God, but at the same time we deeply long to experience the mystery and immensity of God. In short, we celebrate truth, as we open ourselves to the fullness of the Spirit.

Worship includes celebration

Worship is essentially the celebration of God for his own sake, as well as celebration of all the acts of God in history—God's creation; God's faithful provision; Gods' redemption; God's revelation of Jesus Christ in the flesh, the cross, the resurrection; and the manifestation of Gods' power through

the coming of the Holy Spirit. Worship is an expression of gratitude for all the works of God past, his present faithfulness and attending to our lives, and his promises sure to be fulfilled in the future.

Worship includes all of life.

As I mentioned already, worship is not limited to what happens in our gathering—the singing of songs, being in God’s word, or bringing our tithes and offerings. Because Jesus is the Lord of all of life, he is to be worshipped in every sphere of life. In its broadest sense, worship happens each and every time God’s creation lives out God’s design and calling.

In this way, the starry hosts, the sun and the moon worship him as they give off their light by day or by night. In this way, work can be worship, practicing Sabbath can be worship, play can be worship, sexual intimacy between a husband and wife can be worship, caring for others and showing loving kindness can be worship. Worship happens each and every time God’s creation lives out God’s design and calling on its life.

Worship includes Dialogue

Worship is a kind of dialogue between the human heart and God. It’s both revelation and response. For example, God takes the initiative and reveals himself to you through the Bible, through others in the gathering, through music, through symbols like the cross, or the communion elements, through human actions and through the power of his Spirit. Then each of us responds to God with words and music and acts of celebration and dedication. It’s sort of an encounter, then a response.

Worship involves offering

The purpose of worship is not primarily to receive blessings from God but to present offerings to God. Psalm 96:8, “Ascribe to the Lord the glory due his name; bring an offering and come into his courts.”-Psalm 96:8

The New Testament also emphasizes giving as central to worship.

Worship is more than speech; it is action. We worship with our lips, but

we are also to worship with our lives and a key part of that is worshipping God with our wealth.

We are to offer our total selves to God—our intellects, our emotions, our attitudes, and our possessions. Paul said, “offer your {whole} bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God—this is your true and proper worship” (Rom. 12:1).

When it comes to worship through giving, as we call it in our services, our outward gifts are the result of our inward dedication. Paul saw the gifts of money from the Philippians church as “a fragrant offering, a sacrifice acceptable, and pleasing to God.” -Phil. 4:18

Worship includes emotions

One of the things that often draw us to the Psalms is the emotion David shares with God. This makes Psalms relatable to us.

Psalms 100 echoes this with the opening command:

Make a joyful shout to the LORD, all you lands!

Serve the LORD with gladness;

Come before His presence with singing. (Psalms 100:1-2)

"And now, Israel, what does the LORD your God require of you, but to fear the LORD your God, to walk in all His ways, to love Him, to serve the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul." (Deuteronomy 10:12)

You see, our worship involves some emotion.

=>Again A.W. Tozer, said this about worship:

“Worship means ‘to feel in the heart’; that’s first—feel it in the heart. Now I happen to belong to that segment of the church of Christ on earth that is not afraid of the word ‘feeling.’ A person that merely goes through the form and doesn’t feel anything is not worshipping.”

=>Jonathan Edwards, in his book, Religious Affections, states his thesis:
"True religion, in great part, consists in holy affections"
– Edwards [Religious Affections, 23]

=>Calvin asks the question in his Institutes:
"But how can the mind be aroused to taste the divine goodness without at the same time being wholly kindled to love God in return? For truly, that abundant sweetness which God has stored up for those who fear Him cannot be known without at the same time powerfully moving us. And once anyone has been moved by it, it utterly ravishes him and draws him to itself." –Calvin [Institutes 3.2.41]

Worship is rehearsal for our eternity

It's interesting to realize, every glimpse of heaven we have in the Bible, shows them worshipping (Isaiah 6:1-6, Rev. 4:8-11; 5:6-14)

Worship is the ultimate and eternal function of the church. Worship, now, anticipates the coming time when we will be gathered around God's throne in heaven, people from every tribe, and tongue, and nation worshipping God and his Son Jesus in unison and with one voice.

I'm trusting this opening message in this worship series has given you some things to begin to think about. We are created and called to worship. What does it look like to be intentional about growing and maturing as a worshipper?

Let me send you into this week with a few questions for your reflection:
(Small groups...maybe you can process these together)

Did you realize worship was so central to God and your relationship with him?

What kind of worshipper are you? Engaged? Detached? Half-hearted?
Are you continuing to grow and mature as a worshipper?

As we give some in-depth attention to the whole theme of worship, will you commit to making it a matter of prayer? Ask God to help you be open to how he wants to grow you through this series.