

The dangerous act of Christian worship

Study 1 true worship involves revealing reality

The chief way that our love for *God* is nurtured is in the practice of Christian worship. We often view worship as the thing we do to express our love for *God*. That's OK as far as it goes, but what is missing is the idea that worship is also the activity through which *God* wants to impress his love upon us. Worship is therefore an encounter, a meeting with the true and living *God*. You and I cannot come away from a meeting like that and remain the same. As *God* impresses himself upon us we are transformed. So worship is responding to *God* in order to have more of *God* to respond to. Worship is both a revelation from *God* and our response to *God*.

Think of man who has lived the whole of his life tied to a post facing the wall of a cave. He can only look forward. The light from the outside shines behind him on the wall he faces. Occasionally animals walk past the entrance, and their shadows are cast on the wall the man looks at. But to the man these shadows are reality, to speak to this man of a world outside the cave rich in colour and three dimensions is incomprehensible to him. To worship *God* is to peek outside our cave. When we worship *God* our vision of reality is sharpened.

1. In your experience of Christian worship, which of the following usually happens?
- A. You express your love for God, worship is your gift to God.
 - B. God impresses his love on you. God refuels your emotional tank
 - C. regular worship is a reality check that transforms your day-to-day life into love for God.
 - D. God gets something out of corporate worship, but it doesn't seem to connect to your world, so you get bored?
 - E. anything other?

Read Ephesians Ch 4 v 17-24

2. How does Paul describe our former way of life? V 22 That is, life before Christ?

3. Can you think of examples from life which illustrate the following

V17 futility of thinking?

V 18 hardness of heart?

V18 darkness of understanding?

4. In contrast to the former life, how is the Christian life pictured here?

5A. With reference to the former life, what does Paul urge us to do? V 22-24

5B. Why is it so difficult to 'toss out the old set of clothes'?

6. What do you find the most appealing or tempting about returning to or clinging to that old self?

7. With reference to the new self what does Paul urge us to do here?

8A. In its larger context Ch 4 v 25- Ch 5 v 4 what does the new self look like?

8B. In this larger context, what glimpses of God in worship does Paul give us?

9 How does your glimpses of God affect the rest of your life? E.g. work, family, leisure etc

10. How would you go about doing some of the things Paul commands here? Can you offer some examples specific to your situation

Renewing the spirit of your mind by?

Laying aside your old self by?

Putting on your new life by?

Laying aside falsehood and speaking the truth with

Worship quote to reflect on

G.K. Chesterton 20th Century author

Sometimes our religion is 'more a theory than a love affair'. Comment?

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Study 2. True worship involves a great drama

The Danish philosopher Soren Kierkegaard once wrote, 'In Christian worship God is the audience, the congregation is the performer, and those who stand up front and lead [speakers, worship leaders, singers] are the prompters.' He was making the point that God is the focus of authentic Christian worship. It is He who stands at the centre not us, or our experience of God. The point being that when we come to the heart of worship we cease asking, 'What will He do for me?' and rather ask, 'What can I do for Him?'

1. When have you lost yourself in applause prompted by performers on the stage or on the field of play?

- a. When your favourite team won the game?
- b. When the concert performer played your favourite piece of music?
- c. When the film used words or action to stir you?
- D. when the story line came to a dramatic, soul-satisfying conclusion?
- e. Other [explain]

2. What did this experience make you want to do afterwards?

3. when have you experienced worship that prompted spontaneous praise, hand clapping, cheers, dancing in the aisles, for God, not the performers?

Read Revelation Ch. 5 vs. 1-14

4. Project yourself into this heavenly service of worship.

4A what do you see?

4B what do you hear?

4C. What do you smell?

4D. What do you feel?

5. why does everyone in heaven want to see the scroll opened?

6. What makes the Lamb uniquely worthy to open the scroll?

7. When is the kingdom referred to in vs. 10 to be in place?

8. In this scene from heaven above, who is participating in the great ritual drama?

9. God is the audience of this service on worship. How does that compare with the expectations of typical churchgoers?

10 Make an evaluation of yourself, as honestly as you can, over the last couple of times you have been to a worship service at TVBF, how would you say you did the following areas of performance?

I interacted with God's word where I saw myself as in a mirror

Yes / No / Not sure

I interacted with others, exerting some influence through prayer

Yes/ No/ Not sure

I listened actively to the message, no matter what my mood was when I came to church that day

Yes/ No/ Not sure

I was so emptied of myself and full of the Spirit that I was lost in adoration and thanksgiving

Yes/ No/ Not sure

Which of the above aspects of worship will you try to do something about this week, even today?

Worship quote to reflect on

A.W. Tozer. 20th Century Church leader

'Out of enraptured, admiring, adoring, worshipping souls God does His work. The work done by a worshipper will have eternity in it.'

How do you interpret this in relation to your approach to worship?

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Study 3. True worship involves a great story

The whole of the Bible tells the unfolding story of the 'drama of salvation'. Why it was needed, how it came about, and what it means for us today, and how it ends. The worship we engage in weekly helps us frame our daily lives with the meaning and the mystery of this drama. Not to pay our role in this great unfolding story is to miss our reason for living. The great story urges us to see our individual stories and work as part of a much larger thing that God is doing in the world. Our character is trained refined and shaped as we engage in worship week in and out, over our lifetime.

Some years ago someone said that in Western Europe, 'we worship our work, work at our play, and play at our worship.'

Think back to your childhood, in which, if any of these contexts did your family experience worship.

- 1A. When you were growing up, what did you like to collect?
- 1B. Do you still have anything from these collections?
- 1C. What is the difference between collecting and hoarding?

Read Luke Ch 12 vs.13-21

2A. As you read this story you see a drama unfolding within the story, so there is a story-within- a -story. What starts out as a family dispute takes on new meaning within its larger context. What is the initial family dispute all about, really?

- 3A. Why is this a problem for the brother in the crowd who complained to Jesus?
- 3B. What does Jesus see as the problem?

- 4A. How does Jesus' warning v 15 apply to this particular believer?
- 4B. How does it apply to believers in general vs. 21?

- 5A. How is the brother like the fool in the parable?
- 5B. What does it mean to be rich towards God vs. 21 also vs. 33?
- 5C. What kind of investment portfolio would build up these kind of riches from week to week?

6. What is the punch line of the parable? [that is, why does Jesus tell this story?]

7. How is your life and work like the story-within-a-story that Jesus tells?

8A. Jesus warning against believers' wanting more abundant possessions runs counter to most contemporary advertising and marketing. How do you resist the appeal of things?

8B. How can our weekly corporate worship help us fight the battle of worldliness and materialism?

Worship quote to reflect on

21st century Church leader Louie Giglio.

'Worship is a participation sport, in a spectator culture.'

What do you think about this?

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Session 4 The value of Sunday

Over the years Christians have disagreed about how to deal with 'the Sabbath'. So we often pile up rules to help us define how to keep Sunday special, this way it's more under our control. The only trouble with this is that the significance of the day can be lost under the pile of rules we form around it. We just need to stop and reflect on how we observe Sunday as God intended us to do so. We need to think about how we blend grace, freedom, hope and time, so that we avoid a rigid sabbatarianism or an irresponsible antinomianism, but rather build a responsible discipleship where we sharpen our focus on God and what it means to worship and serve Him. It is the writer Richard Foster who puts it 'the divine priority is this, worship first, service second.'

1A. Think back to the home you were raised in. What were, if any, the rules regarding how you spent your Sunday's? That is what could you do or not do?

1B. How do those rules you were raised with compare to the guidelines you now live with?

1C. What does this reveal about your attitude towards Sunday?

Read Exodus Ch .20 vs.8-11

2A. What was the Sabbath day?

2B. How was it to be 'remembered' or 'observed'?

3. Do you think that a specific day of the week matters, or just the principle of taking one day off from work every seven days? Can you explain your answer?

4A. Why was the Sabbath to be kept 'holy' vs. 8-11 see also Genesis Ch.2 vs.2-3?

4B. How does this impact and affect our personal and corporate worship?

4C. C.S. Lewis wrote 'the people who praise most are those who enjoy life most.' How does our view of the Sabbath help us in our praise of God?

5A. God blessed the Sabbath to be kept holy, v11, or set apart as a day of grace, freedom and hope. How has this become true for you?

5B. Where do you fall short of this and 'violate' the Sabbath?

5C. What will you do differently next week to balance and observe, 'keeping holy' the Sabbath?

5D. How can you see the Sabbath as a 'holy moment' from God?

5E. As a result of keeping the Sabbath balanced and holy, and by honouring Jesus as Lord of your time, what do you hope to gain?

Worship quote to reflect upon

21st Century Christian leader John Piper

'Worship is a way of gladly reflecting back to God the radiance of his worth.'

How can this help you in your approach to worship?

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Session 5 The value of symbols

A few years ago someone put it that 'Communion was the focal point of God's presence in the ancient church, the Reformation made the Word the centre of God's presence, and today the presence of God is found in music.'

However, we need to hold together all three, God is present in his church at worship. God is there in the gathering in song, in Scripture reading, prayer, and in bread and wine. God is present in broken bread and poured out wine. The bread and wine, or grape juice we use, has nothing impressive about them. We simply use one to stand for the body of Christ, the other to symbolise his blood. But then offered to God and blessed, when received in faith, they become visible signs of an invisible reality. In a unique way they become the physical means by which we experience the grace and real presence of God.

1 when is God more real to you? Why?

A. At the communion in the 'bread of life'

B. At your desk/ workbench/ in the 'bread' [finance] you produce?

C. At the kitchen table as you eat your meal and count the blessings of daily bread?

2. Describe if you can a memorable Communion experience you have had. What made it so special?

Read John Ch.6 vs.35-59

3A. what claim is Jesus making here? Vs.35-40

3B. What kind of corroborating statements does Jesus make?

3C. What response did others initially give to these bold claims vs.36, 41-44,52?

4. How come the Jews of Jesus day didn't get it, but murmured or grumbled instead?

5. Do you tend to 'grumble' about certain aspects of communion? If so which ones?

6. What response does Jesus call for instead, repeatedly?

7. How does Jesus compare the 'bread' he offers to that of Moses vs.35, 48-51.

8. What sense do you make of Jesus' graphic expressions, 'eats my flesh' and 'drinks my blood'?

9. How can a re-freshed understanding of Communion help you appreciate God's presence in worship?

10. In the downcast period of life, how can you see Communion helping you look to God to feed you and raise you up?

Worship quote to reflect on.

20th Century Church leader William Temple.

'To worship is to quicken the conscience by the holiness of God, to feed the mind with the truth of God, to purge the imagination by the beauty of God, to open the heart to the love of God, to devote the will to the purpose of God.'

Is there anything you would like to question?

Is there anything you would like to add?

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Session 6. The hope filled future

The word hope has been described as 'hearing the melody of the future, and faith as dancing to it in the present.'

In our response to the revelation God offers us, and especially in our corporate times of worship we can hear this melody being repeated. So that as the promise of the future invades the present, our worship is filled with joy and energy. The truth is that God welcomes into his presence those who want him. The quest may be one of desperation, delight, frantic need, or loving hunger for fellowship, but whichever way we come, we can hear the melody of the future when we need it the most, and begin to dance when our present world is either overstressed in a mess, or just pure joy to us.

1A.What is your favourite pick-me-up or makes-me-want -to-dance music?

1B.When is it tough for you to get in touch with the kind of joy that this music produces inside of you?

Read Revelation Ch.7vs.9-17.

2A Can you identify the various groups, which are worshipping together in this scene?

Vs.9.11.14.

2B.When and where are the events of Revelation Ch7 taking place?

3.What do the white robes and palm branches symbolise vs.9-10, 14?

4.What motivates the various groups to sing God's praises vs.10, 12,15-17?

5.What have you experienced here on earth that comes closest to that heavenly worship scene?

6. What would it take you to learn to worship as these saints, angles, elders, four living creatures do?

7.What significance does this window on the future give to the worship routines that we are so familiar with?

8. What part of this heavenly worship service do you most look forward to participating in?

9.What part of this future hope can you apply to corporate worship next Sunday?

Worship quote to reflect upon.

21st Century singer songwriter Graham Kendrick wrote

'The priority of worship is to give pleasure and glory to the One who is the subject of our worship.'

How does this make you feel about the priority you place on your contribution to public worship?