

Clarifying Worship

Psalm 145

We will worship God for all eternity because it is His highest priority for our lives. But do we really understand worship? Discover the true meaning of worship as we clear up common misconceptions and learn how to practice this most vital discipline.

Turn to Psalm 145

My relationship with Julie did not begin well – and it's all my fault

- we were friends for months; we co-led a ministry at our church
- didn't take long to realize I wanted more than just friendship
- big deal for me – so I prayed, strategized with roommates, asked mutual friends for advice, got my pastor's permission
- and then I blew it!
 - o instead of, "Can I take you out on a date?"
 - o asked, "Want to meet for coffee?"
- since we led a ministry together, she assumed I wanted to meet to plan
- she said yes, planned accordingly, until the day of the date...
 - o friend: "So I hear you have a date with Blake tonight."
 - o Julie: "I do?"
- Guys, don't ever put a girl you like in that situation!
- Be clear with your words. Don't just assume she knows what you mean.

We do the same thing in church: we use words carelessly, assuming people understand .
Our failure to clarify creates confusion and misunderstanding.

Today: clarify a commonly misunderstood word you hear often in church: WORSHIP

Reason we're talking about this today:

- we are about to jump back in to 1 Corinthians
- rest of the book – chapters 11-16 – cover topics that all relate to the worship service in church

So, let's take this week and just talk about that word "worship"

What is worship?

- Psalm 145 – written by King David
 - o one of the best passages to find out what worship means
 - o David uses a lot of different words and ideas to describe the concept of worship
- **read Psalm 145:1-12**
- How does David describe worship?
 - o v1: "to extol" = "to lift up, to exalt" – raise someone up so all can see their greatness
 - o v1: "to bless your name" = to declare the greatness of God's attributes and actions
 - o v2: "to praise" = Halal – "Halleluiah" = to proclaim the greatness of God
 - o v4: "declare your mighty acts" = declare to others the great things God has done
 - o v5: "meditates" on God's splendor and works – He's reminding Himself
 - o v6&7: men shall "speak... tell... utter... shout..." of God's greatness
 - o v10: God's works shall "give thanks" to God
 - o v12: we "make known" God's mighty acts and glory

All of those verbs describe worship and help us arrive at a simple, straight-forward definition.

“worship” is simply to declare the great worth of God

to proclaim how great God is and what great things God has done

That’s actually the original meaning of the English word “worship”

- **derived from: “worth-ship”** = to declare the great worth of someone or something

As we saw in Ps 145, **we’re declaring God’s worth to God, to ourselves, and to one another**

- worship goes **up, in, and out**
 - o UP to God – speaking praise and giving thanks
 - o IN to ourselves – meditating on God’s goodness, attributes, actions
 - o OUT towards others – declaring to one another & the world how great God is

But how do we actually do this thing called worship? How do you declare God’s worth?

- When most people think about worship, what do they think about doing? SINGING
 - o that’s certainly a big part of worship
- But worship is much more than just singing in a big group of people
- **In the book of Psalms worship is described by a host of verbs:**
 - o *Sing, shout, speak, tell, proclaim, rejoice, exalt, give thanks, praise, be glad, call upon, come near, bow down, kneel, bring an offering, serve, remember, meditate*
 - verbs of thought: remember, meditate
 - verbs of speaking and singing
 - verbs of doing: bring an offering; serve
- **SO worship is any thought, word, song, or deed that proclaims the greatness of God**

Practically speaking, you are worshipping when...

- you sing songs to God together with us on Sunday mornings
- you listen to worship music in your car and let it engage your mind & emotions
- you read a Psalm and pray its truths back to God
- you serve your elderly neighbor & tell him it’s because you love Jesus
- you give your money to a fellow student in need because you love Jesus
- you even worship when you’re at work if you do your work as a service to the Lord
 - o **17th century French monk named Brother Lawrence**
 - every day before starting work in the monastery kitchen prayed...
“O my God, you are always with me. Since I must now in obedience to your will for me, apply my mind to my day’s work, grant me the grace I shall need to continue through it in your presence. Help me to do this work to your glory. Receive it as a spiritual offering. And let my desire be only to please you.”
 - turned a menial job into worship by doing well with a joyful attitude
- Anything can be turned into worship if you use it to declare the greatness of God

Worship is simply:

declaring the great worth of God,
to God
to ourselves
and to one another
in thought, word, song, or deed

With that definition in mind we can finally clear up a few common misconceptions

WORSHIP IS...

1) ...not always joyful

- Listen to KSBJ – always upbeat; happy; makes you feel good
- **Read Psalm 55:1-2,4-5**
Give ear to my prayer, O God, and do not hide yourself from my plea for mercy! Attend to me, and answer me; I am restless in my complaint and I moan...My heart is in anguish within me; the terrors of death have fallen upon me. Fear and trembling come upon me, and horror overwhelms me.
 - I'm just waiting for the Chris Tomlin song about horror overwhelming me!!
 - Look at David's emotions in worship: **Heartache, loneliness, fear, anguish**
- **That's not what sells in Christian music... but it is worship!**
- Wide range of emotions that accompany worship
 - joy, thankfulness... sorrow, despair... anger, grief... boredom, apathy...
- **I've experienced them all...**
 - joy – singing a cappella hymns on top of Enchanted Rock
 - anger – singing about God's faithfulness while going through infertility
 - thankfulness – singing about God's faithfulness after He gave us Luke & Gracie
 - anguish – singing about God's love when so many people I love aren't here
 - and sometimes I don't seem to feel anything at all – tired, bored, distracted
- **The essence of worship: not a particular emotional state, but the choice to declare God's worth in the midst of whatever emotions you're feeling**
 - David was a great worshipper because he took his happiness, anger, fear to God
 - He didn't suppress his emotions or feel guilty
 - He acknowledged his emotions & asked God to invade and reveal Himself
- **I hope this will be FREEING for some of you**
 - Feel like less of a Christian because you don't feel happy, joyful, passionate, "into it"
 - Feel pressure to feel a certain way
 - I struggled with that for a long time until I studied the Psalms
 - Go to Breakaway and everyone else seems so into it
 - Felt guilty because I didn't feel joyful and passionate and into it
 - God must really be disappointed in me!
 - NO! He's not... because **the quality of my worship...**
 - **is not determined by a particular emotional state...**
 - **it's determined by my choice to declare the worth of God** regardless of my emotions at the moment
- **So whatever emotions you're feeling when it's time to worship...**
 - acknowledge your emotions to God – He already knows!
 - ask God to invade your mind, heart, and emotions and draw you near to Him
 - ask Him to use both your joy and your pain to grow your love for Him

2) ... not a performance

- In the Old Testament there were professional worship leaders = Levites – they led
 - But it was never a concert – it was never entertainment
 - All the Israelites participated in worship
- That's even more obvious when we get to the New Testament – no mention of leaders or bands
 - One of the few New Testament references to musical worship...
 - **Eph 5:18-19**
...be filled with the Spirit, addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody to the Lord with your heart
 - This is a command to all of us, not worship leaders and band
 - When we gather for worship, we are all expected to participate

- **Worship is not...**
 - **a spectator sport** – where we watch professionals perform
 - **a passive exercise** – where we watch others worship on our behalf
 - **no one else can worship for you** – YOU must choose to declare God's worth
- **So what does that mean?**
- **1. When we gather to sing on Sunday mornings... you've got to sing!**
 - You are not worshipping unless you are actively participating
 - **But what if you're not a good singer? Doesn't matter! I'm not either!**
 - Eph 5 doesn't give an escape clause "...unless you can't carry a tune"
 - Think about it: God gave you your voice AND commanded you to sing
 - He's not surprised or embarrassed
 - And if people around you are bothered... that's their problem!
- **2. It doesn't matter whether you enjoy the music or not**
 - This is hard for us! We all have strong preferences about worship music
 - hymns, Chris Tomlin, gospel, a cappella
 - me: give me 100 men belting out "A Mighty Fortress is Our God"!!
 - When our preferences aren't met, we feel frustrated – harder to worship
 - "How was worship this morning?"
 - "I didn't really get anything out of it"
 - **That statement tells us – we're missing the point of worship.**
 - If it was a U2 concert it would matter if we got something out of it
 - because it's a performance – it's about entertainment
 - But this is NOT a performance – this is worship
 - Doesn't matter what *WE* get out of it - Matters what *GOD* gets out of it
 - Doesn't matter if *WE* enjoyed it - Matters if *GOD* enjoyed it
 - Worship is FOR GOD – our enjoyment is not the point
 - **So the measure of great worship: not our enjoyment; our participation**
 - Did we choose to participate whether we liked the songs or not?
- **Practical:**
 - if you don't enjoy a particular song or worship leader – find yourself struggling
 - bow your head, remind yourself this isn't about you, it's about God
 - pray for God's help to fully participate

3) ...not just singing songs

- In Isaiah 29, the Lord was angry with His people Israel and told them why in v13...
 - **Isaiah 29:13**

"...this people draw near with their words and honor Me with their lip service, but they remove their hearts far from Me, and their reverence for Me consists of tradition learned by rote..."
- Their worship was just lip-service
 - sang right songs; went through right motions
 - but didn't mean it; just ritual, ceremony
- That's not worship
 - It's not enough to just sing the right words
 - real worship requires **engagement** – **you must mean what you are saying**
 - **it must engage your heart and mind, not just your mouth**
- So if you are singing the words but thinking about Aggie's next game... not worship!
- **But what if you can't stop thinking about the Aggies?! How do you focus your distracted mind on worship?**

- **This is where your body can help!**
 - Worship in the Bible is remarkably active:
 - kneel, bow, fall on face, lift hands, dance – they got a workout!!
 - Advantage to all that physical movement: it engages our minds & hearts
 - Your body and spirit are united – one effects the other
 - You can focus your mind & stir your heart by moving your body!
 - So if you're struggling to focus – use your body!
 - **Try lifting your hands up**
 - That will feel weird to some of you – from a reserved background
 - You wonder what people will think
 - It doesn't matter what other people think! That's their problem.
 - The Bible fully supports raising hands in worship
 - So if that helps you engage in worship – do it!
 - **Sit, bow your head, and pray**
 - ask God to help you focus; pray for those around you
 - **Go lower – onto your knees – you can do that here!**
 - That's actually the most common biblical posture of worship
 - Sign of reverence – humbling
 - And it's hard to be distracted when you're on your knees!
- When we return to worship in a few minutes:
 - I hope some will be raising hands, some will be sitting, some kneeling
 - There is freedom here to use your body biblically to help you engage

A few practical ideas to help you improve your worship

- God wants you to grow as a worshipper!
- In fact, worship is His highest priority for your life
 - It's what you'll be doing for all eternity
 - In heaven, no evangelism, prayer, Bible study... just worship!
- Since that's our eternal job description, God wants us to get better at it!
- Here's some practical ways to grow your worship...

1) LEARN about the One we worship

- **True worshippers will worship in spirit and truth**
- **John 4:23**

But the hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father is seeking such people to worship him.

 - **"in spirit"** = your spirit engaged with God – not just ceremony or lip-service
 - **"in truth"** = what you are saying about God is TRUE
- **There's lots of people in this world who worship...**
- **But that worship doesn't honor God because it's not true worship**
 - they are not declaring truth about the One true God
 - they are worshipping false gods and false ideas about God
- **Worship that honors God must be built on truth**
- **And truth about God begins with Jesus**
 - Jesus said, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father but through Me."
 - Ultimate problem for Muslims, Hindus, Jews – they don't come to God thru Jesus
 - they come thru rituals, pillars, laws, good deeds
 - No! The only way to find the One True God is through Jesus, His Son
 - worship begins with belief that Jesus is the Son of God... died... rose...
 - You cannot worship God in truth unless you come to Him through faith in Jesus

- For those of us who have trusted in Jesus... for us to grow in worship, we must grow in truth
- Do something this semester that will deepen your knowledge of God
 - o Read a part of the Bible you've not read before or haven't read in a long time
 - Ask yourself, "What is this teaching me about God?"
 - o Join a small group Bible study
 - o Read Tozer's "The Knowledge of the Holy"

2) ROOT OUT sin in your life

- Words for "worship" in Hebrew & Greek both mean **"to bow down"**
 - o to bow down before someone was an act of submission
 - o you were dedicating your life and service in obedience to that person
 - o that's why it's almost impossible in Hebrew & Greek to separate concept of "worship" from "submission and obedience"
- **Biblically, you cannot worship a god whom you will not obey**
 - o Your disobedience invalidates your worship – falsifies it
- **So if you're living with unconfessed sin Mon-Sat, your worship on Sun is worthless**
 - o God doesn't accept it because it's a lie
 - o Doesn't mean you have to live a perfect life – just means you must REPENT of sin
 - confess that it's wrong
 - commit to fight against with God's help
 - o If you will repent, then God will cleanse you of sin and receive your worship
- **So if there is some sin that you've been living with... go before the Lord and repent**

3) PRACTICE throughout the week

- A.W. Tozer
 - "If you will not worship God seven days a week, you do not worship Him on one day a week."*
- **Our participation in public worship on Sundays is directly related to our practice of private worship the rest of the week**
 - o Sunday worship will be anemic if we've not spent time privately with God all week
 - o The Jews: required to worship God every day in their homes privately and with their families – that prepared them to worship together on the Sabbath
- So if you want to get better at worship, find a way to practice every day
 - o get alone with a Psalm or with an old-school hymnal
 - o listen to worship music in the course of your day
 - o get with your roommates or your kids and spend time giving thanks to God
- Find ways to worship everyday so that worship becomes a habit!

Now we're going to take the rest of the morning to practice worship together...

- Phil will lead us in a contemporary song and then a hymn – variety!
- Think about the words you're singing – engage your mind
- Use your body to help you engage and express your worship
 - o raise your hands – ½, ¾, all the way
 - o or sit and pray
 - o or get on your knees
- **Above all remember: this is not about the style of music, not about our enjoyment**
- **It's about God – declaring how incredibly worthy He is!**