

WHAT KIND OF WORSHIP IS GOD LOOKING FOR?

Do you view worship as a boring, burdensome activity? If you do, your worship has little to do with God. You have yet to know what it means to appreciate the most helpful, patient, kind, loving, honorable, valuable, creative, imaginative, amazing, exciting, powerful, awe-inspiring Person in the universe!

Much of what we call worship today is not really worship at all. That's why James Pittman has written this booklet, which shows us what God's Word says about the kind of worship God expects from us.

STREET TALK

If you could survey the people you pass daily on the streets of your community, you might get some of the following opinions about worship.

It's a waste of time. The atheist says that worship is unnecessary because there isn't a God to accept our worship. If heaven is empty, there's no point in having a heart full of gratitude for a God who isn't there.

It's a shot in the dark. The agnostic says, "I don't know who to worship." He finds it hard to worship Someone he can't see. And if he isn't sure what he can believe about God, then he can't be sure what kind of worship will please Him.

It's up to the individual. Some people say that it doesn't matter *who* you worship or *how* you worship. What's important is that you devote your life to serving some higher power. All religions are said to be different roads that lead to the same God.

It's a matter of looking within. Those who accept this view say that God is in everything and everything is a part of God. No distinction is made between the Creator and His creation. To get in touch with one's inner thoughts and feelings through meditation is to commune with deity.

It's better on the golf course. This view says that you can be as close to God on the golf course or in a fishing boat as you can in a stained-glass sanctuary. Worship is seeing God in the beauty of the sparkling water, the strength of the towering trees, and the blue of a sunlit sky.

It's more common than you think. Some people worship a religious leader, a special object, or an idea instead of the God of the Bible. It happens in cults when a leader receives the honor and obedience that only God deserves. It also happens when a house, a car, a job, a mate, a child, or a form of recreation is given the attention that should be given to God.

It's all in the liturgy. According to this view, worship is following a set of repeated religious words or exercises. Emphasis is given to standing up, sitting down, bowing, or participating in some other ritual. Traditional clothing and religious phrases are also involved as key elements.

It's something that happens at church. Some people feel they can worship only when the time and the setting are right: Sunday morning, stained glass, traditional hymns, soft organ music, and a choir. According to this view, worship occurs only in "the sanctuary."

Does anybody really know what worship is all about? The following pages will separate opinion from fact as we explore what God's Word tells us about the kind of worship God expects from us.

WHAT IS WORSHIP?

The surging power of the ocean. The breathtaking beauty of the Grand Canyon. The unleashed fury of a violent storm. The infinite vastness of a starlit sky. These inspire in us a sense of awe and wonder, and make us feel insignificant, weak, and limited by comparison. Surely, if creation can affect us this way, then contemplating the greatness of our Creator should cause us to explode with worship!

But what is worship? The word *worship* comes from an old English word that contains the ideas of honor and worth. When we worship God, we are honoring Him. When we worship God, we are recognizing His inexpressible, indescribable, infinite value. Like the angels in heaven, all true worshipers say, "You are worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honor and power" (Revelation 4:11). True worship not only recognizes the worthiness of God, it rejoices in it.

The Old and New Testaments have a number of words that are translated "worship." The Hebrew word used most often in reference to worship means "to bow down, to do homage" (Genesis 18:2). The most prominent Greek term for worship conveys the idea of "showing reverence" or "bowing down to God" (John 4:21-24). A second Greek word means "to serve, to minister" (Matthew 4:10).

Worship, then, involves both our attitude and our action. Worship is the attitude of reverence and adoration, as well as the action of humble, loving service to the God who is worthy.

THE DYNAMICS OF WORSHIP

Would a doctor be successful in his medical practice if he didn't know what he was doing? What about an auto mechanic? Would his business be prosperous if he tried to fix cars without knowing the essential elements of his trade? Hardly!

In a similar sense, we cannot worship God in the way that He seeks if we don't know what we're doing. We need to understand the essential principles of worship and then put them into practice. In the pages that follow we will look at the dynamics of the kind of worship that God is looking for.

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THE DYNAMICS OF WORSHIP

WHO DO WE WORSHIP?

The answer we give to this question reveals whether or not our worship contains the first and most essential ingredient to the kind of worship that God is looking for. Our worship is right only when we worship God as He is described in the Bible.

False gods or inadequate views of the one true God can nullify even the most sincere efforts to worship. The cultist often has a twisted perception of God's character. An idolater fails to see how inadequate his god is when compared to the greatness of the God of Scripture. A materialist holds on to the god that Jesus called "Mammon" instead of the God who offers treasure in heaven (Matthew 6:24).

Jesus said, "You shall worship the Lord your God, and Him only you shall serve" (Matthew 4:10). God has the right to be the only object of our worship because He alone is worthy. And that worthiness is clearly seen as we reflect on His character and His works.

What Is God Like? Through the Scriptures, God has clearly revealed to us what He is like.

God Is Personal. He is not, as some describe Him, an impersonal force. He possesses all the qualities of personality--intelligence, emotions, and self-determining will--in their ultimate and infinitely wonderful forms (Jeremiah 29:11; John 3:16; Isaiah 46:10). Though immeasurably greater than we are, He can relate to us and we can relate to Him with our minds, hearts, and wills (Deuteronomy 6:5).

God Is Eternal. His inestimable value is seen in the mind-boggling fact that He is from everlasting to everlasting (Psalm 90:2). Unlike any other being, He never had a beginning

and He will never have an end. He is, for every generation of worshipers, the Ever-living One.

God Is Spirit. Jesus taught us that God cannot be contained or limited by physical places, forms, or buildings (John 4:24). As Spirit, He does not exist in a body that can be seen or touched. Therefore, He must not be reduced to a physical image of any kind.

God Is All-knowing. He is unlimited in His knowledge (Psalm 147:4,5; Matthew 10:29,30; Romans 11:33). He knows everything there is to know about us, our world, and the universe. His knowledge is not hindered by locked doors, darkness, or distant places.

God Is All-powerful. He can do anything that He chooses to do (Genesis 18:14; Psalm 115:3; Matthew 9:26). No good thing is beyond His ability to do. No army, government, or civilization can frustrate His purposes.

God Is Everywhere-present. There is no hiding or escaping--no way to avoid the all-powerful One. No locked room or secret meeting place can keep Him out. No matter where you go in the universe, God is there (1 Kings 8:27; Psalm 139:7,8; Jeremiah 23:23,24; Acts 17:27,28).

God Is Sovereign. Regardless of the apparent turmoil, confusion, or chaos in our world, the God we worship is One who does all things according to His own will and purpose (Isaiah 46:10,11; Daniel 4:35; Ephesians 1:11). He is, has been, and always will be in control of all of history. Nothing can escape His ever-present hand.

God Is Unchanging. In character, in purpose, in ability, God never changes (James 1:17). He has never been or ever will be less good, less loving, less true, or less powerful. The God that Abraham praised and relied on is the same God we worship.

God Is Good. "Oh, taste and see that the Lord is good" (Psalm 34:8). Because of His goodness, He gives blessings and joy to His creatures (Psalm 145:9; James 1:17). His goodness to us should cause us to offer our praise to Him (Psalm 86:5; 100:5; 135:3; Jeremiah 33:11).

God Is Righteous and Just. God deals fairly with all His creatures (Genesis 18:25; Psalm 7:9-12; 18:24-26; 145:17). Because of His perfect knowledge, love, and holiness, He is perfectly just.

God Is Truthful. Not only is He the one true God (Jeremiah 10:8,10; John 17:3; 1 Thessalonians 1:9; 1 John 5:20,21), but whatever He says is true (Numbers 23:19; Psalm 119:160; John 3:33). We can trust all of His promises and His principles.

God Is Holy. He is completely free of any moral defect, compromise, or contamination (Exodus 15:11; Isaiah 6:3). Because He is the standard of all excellence and honor, He deserves our unending praise (Psalm 96:9; 99:9).

We worship God because of who He is! He alone is worthy of praise and honor. He alone is worthy of our worship. We also worship Him because of what He has done.

What Has God Done? The Scriptures tell us of His works as Creator, Sustainer, Savior, and Judge.

He Is the Creator. Scripture introduces us to God in a way that should overwhelm us with awe. It says, "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth" (Genesis 1:1). In the very first verses of the Bible we meet the God of our worship in all the wonder and awe of His creative power. Just imagine: He says the word, and nothingness becomes something. What mystery! He speaks, and all the elements of this earth--atmosphere, water, and land--find their appointed places. At the sound of His voice, oaks, octopuses, ostriches, and orangutans appear. He reaches into the dust, forms the perfect man, and breathes life into him.

That's amazing! God's mighty work of creation should inspire reverential awe in all of us and cause us to worship Him (Psalm 33:6; Isaiah 44:24; Revelation 4:11).

He Is the Sustainer. The God who deserves all honor and praise not only created all things but also holds it all together. No other truth about God should humble us any more than this one. We couldn't live another moment without His help. Everything God has made is dependent on Him. He cares for all things according to His own purpose and plan (Psalm 104:27,28; Matthew 6:25-34). Apart from His supporting and sustaining hand, everything would explode, unravel, and decay into disorder and chaos (Hebrews 1:3).

He Is the Savior. This should evoke the loudest and longest praise of all! He rescues from a lake of eternal fire, destruction, and dishonor all who will believe in His Son. He "gives life to the dead and calls those things which do not exist as though they did" (Romans 4:17). By an inexplicable strategy of love, He declares repentant sinners righteous and gives eternal life to dying souls (Romans 3:19-28). Could we ever give enough thanks to the One who has loved us like this? Could we ever give Him enough praise, honor, and love?

He Is the Judge. The truth of our accountability to God should cause us to fear Him. For some, unfortunately, fear drives them away from God. But for others, fear causes them to repent of their sins and seek His forgiveness.

God's acts in history prove that He is the judge of all men. He judged men in sending the flood (Genesis 6--9). He judged men by confusing their language (Genesis 11). He judged men by destroying wicked cities (Genesis 19). And one day He will judge His enemies by casting them away from His presence forever (Revelation 20:11-15). No thought, no decision, no action will escape His ever-present, all-knowing eye!

Yes, the wonderful works and matchless characteristics of God make Him the only One worthy of our worship. Knowing who we are worshipping, then, is very important. But it is also important to know why.

Thinking It Over. Read Exodus 3:1--4:17, Isaiah 6:1-8, and Revelation 1:9-20. What was each man's reaction when he saw the glory of the Lord? Take a few minutes to reflect on God's character and His works and then offer a prayer of praise to Him.

THE DYNAMICS OF WORSHIP

WHY DO WE WORSHIP?

We partially answered this when we answered the question, "Who do we worship?" We worship God because of who He is and what He has done. There is no better reason! There are additional reasons, however, for letting our minds and hearts and bodies respond to the goodness and wonder of God. For our worship to be right and acceptable, it must also be expressed because:

We Were Created To Worship. Man was made to be a responder. We were made to find our fulfillment by responding with thankfulness to the greatness and goodness of God. Had that continued from the beginning, we would not only have avoided every social problem and disease known to man, but we would have also had uninterrupted enjoyment of God.

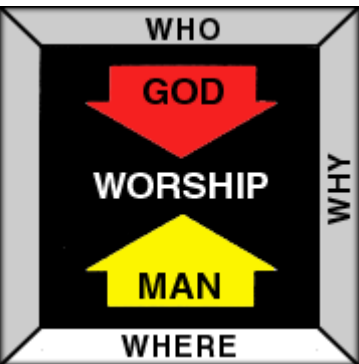
But we fell from such original worship. Romans 1 tells us that our ancestors stopped worshipping the God who was clearly seen in His creation. They stopped glorifying Him as God. They stopped being thankful. They stopped responding to the truth that God made all things (vv.20,21). The result is that man suffers inexpressible pain as his thoughts and heart are captured by a twisted and contaminated world. We still respond by worshipping what we love and value. But all too often our response turns into bitterness, disappointment, and regret as our "lesser gods" topple one by one.

We Are Commanded To Worship. A teacher of religion asked Jesus, "Which is the first commandment of all?" The Lord replied, "The first of all the commandments is: 'Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one. And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength.' This is the first commandment" (Mark 12:28-30).

But is love the same thing as worship? This kind of love is, because it is the worshipful adoration of God, who deserves our love. When we love those who are undeserving, it is an act of mercy. But loving God is an act of worship. We love Him not because we are good and loving. We love Him because He deserves every ounce of affection, adoration, and allegiance possible.

He Uses Our Worship To Accomplish His Purposes. In one sense, God doesn't need our worship. He doesn't need our praise, affirmation, or congratulations. He doesn't need our worship any more than He needs our food, our money, or our service. He is totally complete without us!

However, as far as His saving purpose for our lives is concerned, He has chosen to ask for our worship. Worship is an essential part of His plan. As we give Him honor, He puts us in a position that enables us to know and enjoy His goodness. What love! God asks to be given something that benefits us! His "need" is nothing more than His means of bringing us to Himself.



Our Worship Pleases Him. Because true worship brings us to God, worship pleases Him. He takes pleasure in any attitude of heart that bows us low or lifts us up in appreciation of His matchless wonder. The psalmist said, "The Lord takes pleasure in those who fear Him, in those who hope in His mercy" (Psalm 147:11).

Our Worship Proclaims Him to Others. When a spectacular event occurs in the world, news organizations quickly transmit the details to as many people as possible. For example, the first landing of men on the moon was proclaimed the world over. As one of mankind's greatest accomplishments, it deserved to be known by everyone.

But God is the most newsworthy of all. His marvelous person and works deserve to be acknowledged loudly and continuously so that all people will come to know and worship Him. When we worship God, we will find Him far too wonderful to keep to ourselves. The psalmist declared, "One generation shall praise Your works to another, and shall declare Your mighty acts" (Psalm 145:4).

Yes, God is to be worshiped. And the Bible tells us why. It is also very important to know where we are to worship, which is the next topic of our discussion on the dynamics of worship.

Thinking It Over. What benefits does God receive when you worship Him? What benefits do you receive when you worship God? What benefits do the people around you receive when you worship? How can your outlook on the difficulties of your life change as you worship the Lord?

THE DYNAMICS OF WORSHIP

WHERE CAN WE WORSHIP?

A woman who met Christ had that same question on her mind when she said, "Our fathers worshiped on this mountain, and you Jews say that in Jerusalem is the place where one ought to worship" (John 4:20). The woman who spoke those words had a lengthy conversation with Jesus at a well. They talked about water, her marital history, and even Jesus' true identity. They also talked about worship and where it should take place. As they discussed worship, three types of worship were mentioned: Samaritan worship, Jewish worship, and a new worship through Christ.

Samaritan Worship. The Samaritans were a mixed race with Jewish roots. However, the Jews hated them and always avoided them. This is why the woman was surprised when Jesus first spoke to her (v.9). They also had their own system of worship. It was largely pagan with some Jewish elements. For a time, they had their own temple on Mount Gerizim. Even though they were worshipers, Jesus said they were in error (v.22).

Jewish Worship. Jesus pointed out that up until then the Jews were in a better position than the Samaritans to know what worship was to be. Their system of worship (the laws, priesthood, feast days, temple activity, animal sacrifices) was given to them by God. He had chosen them to be His special people, the ones through whom the Messiah would come and the ones who were to show forth His glory to the world. They were therefore better able to practice the right kind of worship. Yet Christ also spoke of a new day and an expanded place of worship.

A New Worship. Even as Christ spoke, a new day of worship was dawning (vv.21,23). The Old Testament form was being replaced by a new and living way--through Jesus Christ (Hebrews 10:19,20). No longer would Jerusalem be the God-appointed center for worship. No longer would the Law with its ritual and sacrifices be needed. The sacrifice of Jesus would change all of that. Through His death, burial, and resurrection, the way to God would be open. And all who would place their faith in Him would become the true worshipers of God. Jesus taught that through Him it is possible to worship God by yourself or with others.

Worship by Yourself. Jesus said to the woman, "God is Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth" (v.24). He spoke these words to help the Samaritan woman understand that the worship of God is not to be restricted to a particular location.

For us, this means that the mother in the kitchen can worship. The worker in the factory can worship. The student in the classroom can worship. The sick person on a hospital bed can worship. The businessman in the office can worship. We can worship Him anywhere, anytime the truth of His goodness touches our awareness.

Worship With Others. There are many who see the personal side of worship without recognizing the importance of group worship. To think this way, though, is to ignore the history of Israel, the example of the early church, and the direct commands of Scripture (Matthew 4:10; Acts 2:46,47).

The early church worshiped together regularly. Their gatherings were a time of singing, praying, teaching, and giving. On these occasions all types of people (men and women, adults and children, rich and poor, master and slave, Jew and Gentile) could meet and share a common purpose. They met on temple grounds or in private homes.

Now all who believed were together, and had all things in common, and sold their possessions and goods, and divided them among all, as anyone had need So continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they ate their food with gladness and

simplicity of heart, praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved (Acts 2:44-47).

Corporate worship in the early church had to deal with the threat of religious persecution. Many believers wavered in their faith and tended to back away from public worship. Because of the tense situation, the New Testament letter of Hebrews was written to strengthen them in their commitment to Christ. And it is from this letter that we get the timeless exhortation to keep on meeting with other believers. It is a reminder of our responsibility to give ourselves faithfully to corporate worship.

Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some, but exhorting one another, and so much the more as you see the Day approaching (Hebrews 10:25).

The importance of worshiping with other Christians is illustrated with the following story.

A pastor went to see a man who didn't attend church very faithfully. The man was sitting before a fire, watching the warm glow of the coals. It was a cold winter day, but the coals were red hot, and the fire was warm. The pastor pleaded with the man to be more faithful in meeting with the people of God, but the man didn't seem to be getting the message. He said, "I think I can worship as well alone as at church."

After reflecting a moment, the pastor took the tongs beside the fireplace, lifted a live coal from the fire, and set it down at the side of the grate. As they watched, its color turned to gray and the heat slowly died. The church member got the point. After a long pause, he said, "I'll be in church Sunday."

Thinking It Over. In what types of places do you find it difficult to praise God? Where do you find worship to be most enjoyable? How could you use brief periods of time throughout your day to concentrate on worship? How faithful are you in joining together with others for times of group worship?

THE DYNAMICS OF WORSHIP

WHEN DO WE WORSHIP?

The words of Jesus to the Samaritan woman help us to understand not only *where* we can worship but also *when*. As we consider what Christ said, along with other passages, we

will discover that our worship is acceptable to God when it is offered through His Son, assisted by the Holy Spirit, expressed from our hearts, carried out according to truth, and done in such a way that avoids the errors of the past.

When It Is Offered Through His Son. It is not true that there are many roads to God as some believe. According to the Bible, Jesus is the only way. He said, "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me" (John 14:6). The Scriptures teach that all of us are sinners needing a Savior (Romans 3:23). And Jesus Christ was sent by the Father to be that Savior (1 John 4:14). By the sacrifice of Himself for our sins, He provided the only way for us to be restored to God. And those who receive Him by faith become true worshipers. Our worship begins when we receive the Son of God and become right with God through Him.

When It Is Assisted by the Holy Spirit. When a person receives Christ as his Savior, he is given the gift of the Holy Spirit. The Bible identifies Him as our "Helper" (John 14:16). His work is to assist us in all aspects of our relationship to God--even our worship (Philippians 3:3). When we allow the Holy Spirit to work unhindered in our lives, we enjoy true fellowship with God. It is a life-sharing relationship in which God reveals Himself to us, and we respond with adoring worship.

When It Is Expressed From Our Hearts. When Jesus explained worship to the Samaritan woman, He said that it was to be "in spirit" (John 4:23). Worship must come from the heart. And more specifically, it must come from a heart that has been made alive by the Holy Spirit. This helps us to understand that our worship is not just a matter of saying the right words or using the right form. We must be sincere. It must be the true expression of our hearts. Hebrews 10:22 states, "Let us draw near [to God] with a true heart." Our worship must spring out of the depths of our inner being.

When It Is Carried Out According to Truth. The best worship is heartfelt enthusiasm that comes from an enlightened understanding of God's Word. As important as the emotional side of worship is, emotion cannot take the place of truth.

Unfortunately, much of our worship today is done either in spirit *or* in truth. But Jesus taught that it is not a matter of "either/or" but "both/and." It is essential that the emotions of our heart be trained, channeled, and prompted by the truth of the written and inspired Word of God.

Our worship must be intelligent. It must be informed. And God has given us His Word so that we can learn the truth and worship Him.

When It Avoids the Errors of the Past. When our worship is wrong, God will not accept it. A number of examples in the Old Testament prove this to be true.

The book of Genesis contains the record of two brothers who worshiped God. Both Cain and Abel gave God an offering, but only Abel's was accepted (Genesis 4:3-5). Apparently his gift was offered in faith and Cain's was not (Hebrews 11:4).

Shortly after coming out of Egypt, Israel failed to worship God properly. While Moses was on the mountain receiving instructions from God, the nation worshiped a golden calf (Exodus 32:4). God rejected their worship and punished them by killing thousands of Israelites.

Much later, the prophet Malachi described the abuses of Israel's worship and called for someone to put an end to it.

"Who is there even among you who would shut the doors, so that you would not kindle fire on My altar in vain? I have no pleasure in you," says the Lord of hosts, "Nor will I accept an offering from your hands. For from the rising of the sun, even to its going down, My name shall be great among the Gentiles; in every place incense shall be offered to My name, and a pure offering; for My name shall be great among the nations," says the Lord of hosts.

"But you profane it, in that you say, 'The table of the Lord is defiled; and its fruit, its food, is contemptible.' You also say, 'Oh, what a weariness!' And you sneer at it," says the Lord of hosts. "And you bring the stolen, the lame, and the sick; thus you bring an offering! Should I accept this from your hand?" says the Lord (Malachi 1:10-13).

From other areas of Scripture we learn that God rejects worship:

- when it is given without the proper attitude (Genesis 4:1-7).
- when it uses images or any other misrepresentations of God (Exodus 20:3-5).
- when it ignores the explicit instructions of God (Leviticus 10:1,2).
- when it substitutes human tradition for the commands of God (Matthew 15:3-6).
- when it verbalizes empty words without inward reality (Matthew 15:7-9).

According to the Bible, we cannot worship God just any way we please. If we are going to give Him the worship that He is looking for, it must contain the right elements.

Thinking It Over. Have you taken the first essential step to becoming a worshiper of God by coming to the Father through Christ? What kinds of things hinder the work of the Holy Spirit in our lives and therefore hinder our worship? (Ephesians 4:29-32; 1 Thessalonians 5:16-22). How can you keep good religious traditions from becoming dead rituals? Singing hymns can assist your worship, but do you think about what you're singing?

What Kind of Worship Is God Looking For? God desires our worship. And the kind of worship He is looking for is that which recognizes Him as its only true object. It is given to Him because He deserves it. Such worship can be entered into anytime, anywhere. Finally, when it is given through His Son, by His Spirit, from our heart, according to the truth of His Word, avoiding the errors of the past, then our worship is acceptable to Him.

With the psalmist, let us say,

Oh come, let us worship and bow down;
Let us kneel before the Lord our Maker.
For He is our God,
And we are the people of His pasture,
And the sheep of His hand (95:6,7).

LEARNING FROM CHRIST

Jesus Christ was a worshiper. He was born under the Law of God with the same responsibility to love and serve His Father that we have (Galatians 4:4). Unlike the rest of mankind, however, He completely satisfied His Father (Matthew 3:17; John 8:29). His attitude and actions were perfect expressions of human worship.

- Jesus Christ knew His Father in a personal way (John 8:29).
- He praised and gave thanks to His Father (John 11:41).
- He loved and honored His Father (John 8:49).
- He prayed to and lived in dependence on His Father (Matthew 14:23; 1 Peter 2:23).
- He did not seek to do His own will, but the will of His Father (John 5:30).
- He was completely humble and obedient to His Father (Philippians 2:8).
- He lived to the glory of His Father (John 17:4).

Yes, our Lord truly was a worshiper. His whole life was an eloquent testimony to that fact. And as we consider Him, we learn from His worship what should be included in ours. He personified the following expressions of worship that have always marked true worshipers of God:

A Personal Relationship With God. Without it our worship is merely an empty exercise in religious form and ritual. Only when we truly know God does our worship of Him become a reality. The words of David express this reality: "As for you, my son Solomon, know the God of your father, and serve Him with a loyal heart and with a willing mind" (1 Chronicles 28:9).

A Continual Expression of Praise. We should bless the Lord at all times, and His praise should continually be in our mouths (Psalm 34:1). As we contemplate His greatness, we will praise Him (Psalm 48:1). As we meditate on His goodness, we will give Him thanks (Psalm 118:1).

A Heart of Love That Seeks To Honor God. Any worship that does not include a heartfelt affection and reverence for God is totally unacceptable to Him. According to His Word, we are to love and fear Him (Matthew 22:37; Psalm 34:9). Our worship, then, is to

be more than a religious exercise. It is to be the expression of our adoring reverence for God.

An Attitude of Prayer and Faith. As we worship God, we commune with Him. And there can be no communing with Him without prayer. Therefore, there is no true worship without prayer (Ephesians 6:18; 1 Thessalonians 5:17).

A Life of Faith It is also impossible to please God without faith (Hebrews 11:6). It stands to reason, then, that worship without faith cannot please Him. For worship to be acceptable to God, it must reflect a genuine attitude of trust in Him and His Word.

A Humble Obedience to the Will of God. Acceptable worship always demonstrates a voluntary surrender that seeks to do everything to the glory of God (1 Corinthians 10:31). If we are proud, rebellious, and disobedient, our worship will not be worship at all.

LEARNING FROM ISAIAH

A day in the life of the prophet Isaiah profoundly affected His worship (Isaiah 6:1-8). As we consider his experience, we will learn valuable lessons about worship. We discover that it involves:

A Confrontation. Isaiah's worship involved a personal encounter with God. He said, "In the year that King Uzziah died, *I saw the Lord*" (v.1). It was a confrontation that gave the prophet an awareness that was essential to his worship and to ours as well. It is an awareness that says, "While human sovereigns die, God lives and remains firmly in control. While other kings pass on, the Lord remains matchless and unmoved in holiness, power, and glory." Yes, personal confrontation with God is always a part of real worship.

A Conviction. Isaiah's worship involved a deep conviction of sin. Overwhelmed by God's holiness, he said, "Woe is me, for I am undone! Because I am a man of unclean lips" (v.5). As we worship God, His standard of perfection likewise convicts us. By comparison, it causes us to acknowledge our own sinfulness. We confess with Job, "I have heard of You by the hearing of the ear, but now my eye sees You. Therefore I abhor myself and repent in dust and ashes" (Job 42:5,6).

A Cleansing. Isaiah's worship also involved a cleansing of his sins. His corruption was purged when an angel took a hot coal from the altar and touched his lips (vv.6,7). Like Isaiah, we too must be cleansed. As we worship God by confessing our sins, He will respond to us as He did to Isaiah by forgiving and cleansing us (1 John 1:9).

A Call. Isaiah's worship involved a call from God. After he was cleansed, he heard God say, "Whom shall I send, and who will go for Us?" (v.8). It was a call to represent God to others. We have this same call as worshipers. God wants us to represent Him to the world. We are His witnesses (Acts 1:8), called to show forth His praises (1 Peter 2:9).

A Commitment. Isaiah's worship also involved a personal commitment. After receiving the call, he replied, "Here am I! Send me" (v.8). It was a choice to do all that God wanted of him. It was a yielding of his will, a surrender of his life, a total commitment of himself to God. It was the kind of worshiping response in which Isaiah was willing to lay it all on the line for the One who had revealed Himself to him.

What about us? Our worship of God requires the same. Like the prophet, we make the same choice. The Scriptures tell us to yield ourselves to God (Romans 6:13). This yielding is a once-for-all presentation of ourselves to Him to do His good, acceptable, and perfect will (Romans 12:1,2). This is worship at work. It is adoring love and gratitude manifested in a life of willing service.

Isaiah's vision indeed was unique. However, his worship or response to God contained that which is present in all true worship. And, like Isaiah, our worship, our response to God, should include a confrontation, a conviction, a cleansing, a call, and a commitment.

HINDRANCES TO WORSHIP

Our worship can be hindered by several factors. It's important to recognize these obstacles and do what is necessary to overcome them. Here are some of the common hindrances to the right kind of worship.

Ignorance. Many people worship gods but not the true God (Acts 17:23). They are "religious" but lack a vital relationship with their Creator. They are sincere but wrong (John 4:22). They need the truth.

Unbelief. When we come to God, we must approach Him with believing hearts. If we don't, we cannot expect Him to be pleased with us or to reward our efforts (Hebrews 11:4-6).

Unconfessed Sin. When we as Christians sin, we should confess it immediately to God (1 John 1:9). If we don't, it destroys our fellowship with Him and we become cold and insensitive to Him.

Wrong Attitudes. If we hold a grudge against someone, God will refuse our worship until we make things right with the other person (Matthew 5:23,24; 6:14; Ephesians 4:31,32).

Misplaced Priorities. When we allow other things to become more important to us than God, we take away from the honor He deserves (Matthew 6:33). Right worship recognizes His worthiness to be first.

Enemy Opposition. The world system of evil, the indwelling sin nature, and the devil are constantly opposing our worship (1 John 2:15; Romans 7:23; 1 Peter 5:8). But as we daily depend on the power of the Spirit of God, He will enable us to overcome our enemies (1 John 5:4; Galatians 5:16; James 4:7).

AIDS TO WORSHIP

As we strive to give God the worship He desires, we should use whatever means are appropriate to help us in that effort. The following suggestions are some of the things that can aid us.

Meditation. Taking time to quiet ourselves and to think of God and His goodness will help us to prepare our hearts for worship (Psalm 63:3,4; 89:1-11; 119:15; Philippians 4:8).

Confession. The person who truly understands the glory of God will realize his need for confession and cleansing (Isaiah 6:6,7). God wants worship that comes from a clean heart (1 John 1:7-10).

Music. The use of hymns and musical instruments can add much to our worship (Psalm 150; Ephesians 5:19; Colossians 3:16).

Orderliness. Our worship of God should not be haphazard or disorganized. It should be done in an orderly fashion (1 Corinthians 14:40).

Prayer. Talking to God helps us to focus our minds on the things of God and makes us conscious of His presence (1 Timothy 2:1-8; Hebrews 4:16).

Giving. By our gifts and offerings we express gratitude to God in a tangible way. We acknowledge His ownership of all that we possess, and we show that we are trusting Him to provide for our needs (2 Corinthians 9:6-15).

Bible Study. Whether it be from the pulpit, in a Sunday school class, or in a home Bible study, the instruction of God's Word helps to equip us to be better worshipers of God (2 Timothy 3:16,17; 4:1,2).

BENEFITS OF WORSHIP

The *Westminster Shorter Catechism of Faith* states, "Man's chief end is to glorify God and to enjoy Him forever." To glorify God--that's worship! To enjoy Him forever--that's the all-encompassing reward that includes these specific benefits.

Forgiveness. True worshipers recognize God's holiness and accept His forgiveness (Romans 5:1; 1 John 1:9). Through worship they are purified.

Guidance. Those who honor the Lord will be given wisdom and will receive His guidance day by day (Psalm 25:4-12; Proverbs 1:7; 3:5,6).

Provision. Jesus said that God will meet our material needs if we give Him first place in our lives (Matthew 6:33; see also Psalm 23; 37:3-6).

Love. The love of God is experienced in the hearts of all those who are true worshipers (Psalm 63:3; John 14:21,23; Romans 5:5).

Power. To all who give God the glory He deserves, He gives the enablement to do the things He requires of them (Ephesians 3:14-16; 2 Corinthians 12:7-10; Ephesians 1:15-19; Philippians 4:13).

Protection. He faithfully watches over all who acknowledge Him, and He keeps them in all of life's changing circumstances (Psalm 5:11,12; 1 Peter 1:5).

Glory. All true worshipers will one day be glorified. They will inherit a new heaven and a new earth and join a company of believers and angels in perfect, uninterrupted worship (2 Peter 3:13; 1 John 3:2; Revelation 19:1-10).

ARE THE BUSHES STILL BURNING?

You are probably wondering what bushes have to do with worship--especially burning bushes. But since we've already explained that worship can take place anywhere because God is everywhere, it shouldn't surprise you that a burning bush could provide an opportunity for worship.

Moses and the Burning Bush. While caring for sheep in a desert region, Moses saw a bush that burned without being consumed. When he approached the bush, God spoke to him. This incident became a worship experience that changed the destiny of a nation (Exodus 3:1--4:17).

People today are not meeting God through burning bushes. However, like Moses, everyone who does meet the Lord has a spiritual moment that leads to a personal response, and that deepens his relationship with God. In this sense, the experience becomes a "burning bush." It is a *moment* of worship that leads to a *life* of worship.

Christ and the Burning Bush. It was the Angel of the Lord that spoke out of the burning bush to Moses that day. Many believe that this was Jesus Christ Himself. If that is true, it is consistent with the New Testament teaching that God reveals Himself to man through His Son. Moses, then, was worshiping or communing with God the only way that anyone can--through Jesus Christ.

Jesus said, "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me" (John 14:6). True worship is possible only for those who come to God through His Son. Apart from Jesus Christ there are no burning bushes.

You and the Burning Bush. Perhaps you're thinking to yourself, "Why do I need Christ? Why can't I come to God my own way?" The answer to those questions can be found in the Bible. It declares all to be sinners and spiritually dead (Romans 3:23; 5:6-21). Because of His great love, God sent His Son into the world to rescue us from this helpless and hopeless condition (John 3:16). Through the sacrificial death of Jesus Christ, we

become spiritually alive and our relationship with God is restored (Romans 5:11,18). This restoration does not take place until we receive Christ as our own personal Savior (John 1:12). Without Him there is no true worship of God.

Perhaps you have received Christ as your personal Savior, but you no longer have burning bushes in your life. Have you lost the fellowship of God in your worship? Is it no longer alive and meaningful? If so, you should ask yourself:

Do I have unconfessed sin in my life? If we sin, we must confess it to God (1 John 1:9). In this way we maintain the fellowship of God in our worship. We keep the bushes burning.

Am I obeying the commandments of Christ? Jesus said that those who love Him and obey His commandments will have God's fellowship (John 14:21,23). Through worshipful obedience to Christ we maintain fellowship with God. That's how we keep the bushes burning.