



SPIRITUAL PRACTICES

Session Two | Worship
Dr. Barry Stricker

READ

Psalms 95:1-4; Psalm 95:5-7; Psalm 95:8-11; Psalm 96:1-9; Psalm 96:10-13

INTRODUCTION

Few aspects of our faith are more familiar than worship. At the same time, we struggle to understand the depth and meaning of this central expression of our response to God. In simplest terms, worship declares that God is worthy of adoration, praise, and reverence.

THREE WAYS TO THINK ABOUT WORSHIP

There are at least three different ways of thinking about worship:

First, **worship can be seen as our day-to-day attitude toward God.** In this very broad understanding of worship, we honor God by the way we live and act and speak. The way we carry ourselves through life is an expression of our respect for God. Our work is a way of giving our best to God. This understanding of worship is especially good because it erases the line between what we call “the sacred” and “the secular.” Because everything belongs to God, all that we do can be an act of worship. Martin Luther (and others) encouraged people to see even mundane work as an act of worship to God.

Second, **worship is an act of devotion offered by an individual to God.** In some traditions, believers are encouraged to develop the practice of a daily quiet time. During this time, a believer might read Scripture, pray, reflect, journal – and worship. This kind of worship might involve listening to songs of praise, singing songs of praise, being silent, writing or saying prayers to God, and many other activities. This kind of worship is intensely personal and private, and it is the activity of an individual before God. This is truly worship as well.

Third, **worship is what happens when believers gather together to celebrate the activity of God.** Normally, this is what people envision when they hear the word “worship.” They think of a group of Christians gathered in some place set aside for this distinctive purpose of “a worship service.” This service of worship might involve all sorts of activities, expressions, and responses – but all of that together is considered “worship.”

All three understandings of worship are genuine, authentic, and appropriate.

During this unit as we focus on the spiritual practice of worship, be attentive to all three ways of looking at this most central part of our faith.

FIVE POSTURES OF WORSHIP

Tim and Kathy Keller, in *The Songs of Jesus* (A Year of Daily Devotions in the Psalms), highlight five movements or postures in worship that are illustrated in Psalms 95 and 96. As you worship this month, focus on these five postures – and the corresponding attitudes that lead to these postures:

- Rise up in adoration (Psalm 95:1-4)
- Kneel down in humility (Psalm 95:5-7)
- Listen intently to God (Psalm 95:8-11)
- Speak out the good news of God (Psalm 96:1-9)
- Look forward to what God will do (Psalm 96:10-13)

In your daily life, in your daily worship, and in those times when you gather in community for worship, watch for these five movements or postures. And then ask yourself these questions: Which posture is most prominent in my worship? Why? Which posture is least present? Why? How do these various postures affect the way that I live? (In other words, what attitudes and behaviors do these postures lead to?) Which of these postures brings me the greatest joy? Which one is the greatest struggle? Why are these five postures essential – not just in worship, but also in life?

Let’s pay careful attention to worship. And let’s grow in our understanding of this precious gift of God.



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DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. How exactly can the spiritual practice of worship open the door for spiritual transformation? How does our encounter with God in worship change us?
2. Can you identify the reasons behind the different activities and movements in a worship service? In other words, why do we do what we do in worship?
3. How do you personally feel about worship? Do you look forward to worship, do you find yourself eager to gather with God's people, are you hungry for an opportunity to meet God – or are you reluctant to worship, disinterested, and bored? What is it exactly that causes you to feel this way?
4. Do you see your work as an expression of your relationship with God? Do you see your work as a way of worshipping God? Why or why not?

NEXT STEPS

1. Pray that God would give you a hunger for worship – and that you would be open to whatever God wants to do in your life as you worship.
2. Commit to the spiritual practice of worship as a priority in your life.
3. In the week ahead, stop several times each day and intentionally think about God and his presence with you. Choose to be sensitive to God's presence and pay attention to what he might be doing in your life.
4. Using the image of Bible scholar Elizabeth Achtemeier mentioned in the video, what is "sinking into your bones" as you worship? What are you learning about God in worship? How are you being changed as you worship?