

# DEEPENING YOUR WORSHIP

A Bible Study on  
Worshiping God Extravagantly

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# INTRODUCTION

Welcome to *Deepening Your Worship*! I am so excited that you have decided to share this journey with me. More than anything, I pray that together, we will learn to extravagantly worship God; not that we merely go through the motions of worshipping God but rather that we learn to passionately and extravagantly worship him, a worship that completely consumes us. I know that God will bless our time together and will reveal some amazing truths about worship as you study his Word and deepen your relationship with him. I cannot even begin to tell you the passion I have for God's Word and its transforming power in our lives. *I came to a relationship with Christ by reading God's Word.* Let me digress for a moment and share a little about the amazing power of God's Word that changed my life.

When I was in college, I met my husband, Shawn, who was a Christian. At the time, I did not have a personal relationship with Jesus Christ even though I attended church. Over time, my husband and I discussed spiritual things, but I was confused by the different religious systems. How could I know truth? Was truth relative? Why should I believe one religious system over another? As I sought to discover truth, I felt like I faced a wearisome and overwhelming struggle.

In anguish and desperation, I finally cried out to the Lord. I asked him to show me the truth if I read the Bible. So I sat down and read the Bible cover to cover. By the time I finished reading it, I knew that I was a sinner before a holy God and that Jesus was the atoning sacrifice for my sins. I also knew that salvation was through faith and not works, a free gift of God. Soon, I surrendered my life to Jesus Christ and accepted him as my Lord and Savior. I had been in such darkness and now was in such beautiful light. Because I was saved by reading the Bible, I

have a tremendous passion for the Word and its ability to change our lives and to bring us true joy.

*Deepening Your Worship* is an eight-week Bible study centered on the topic of worship. Each week of the study discusses a different aspect of worship like obedience, serving, faith, holiness, praise, and prayer. Each week contains five days of homework, so if you have a crazy day (and we all have crazy days) and do not complete the homework, you will not fall behind in the study. The homework takes about thirty minutes to complete and allows you to study God's Word for yourself and to grow deeper in your faith. The homework includes a variety of questions like fill-in-the-blank statements, multiple choice questions, yes/no questions, and matching questions. There are also exercises, which allow you to take the material and personally apply it to your life. All scriptures are based on the New American Standard Bible unless otherwise noted. I know that thirty minutes a day may seem daunting, but the result will be amazing. You will find a renewed passion in your relationship with God as he opens your eyes to the wonder of his truths. God has so much to share with us through his Word!

You can do *Deepening Your Worship* on an individual basis or as a group. If you do it as a group, there are suggested group questions, which can be found in the free Leaders Guide at [www.captivedbygod.org](http://www.captivedbygod.org). These are only suggested questions, so please allow the Holy Spirit to direct and lead your group conversation. If you have more time and desire to go deeper into the Word, there are challenge questions. There are also free audio lessons containing each week's topic at [www.captivedbygod.org](http://www.captivedbygod.org). So are you ready to deepen your worship? Are you ready to learn how to worship God extravagantly? Let's begin!

# WEEK 1: OUR HIGHEST CALLING



## DAY 1: CREATED TO WORSHIP

For they exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever.

Romans 1:25

Michelle was a worshiper. She had dedicated herself to serving her lord, and she did not allow other things to interfere with her worship. She rose early to worship and stayed up late to worship. She had been a true worshiper now for about ten years, starting in her mid-twenties. She was focused, loyal, and enthusiastic. Nothing dampened her zeal and passion. People had even commented on the dedication and fervor of her worship.

The problem, however, was the object of Michelle's worship. Michelle worshiped her career instead of the Lord. She worked countless hours and expended her time and energy on her career, all to ascend the corporate ladder. It was the highest priority in her life and the object of her strongest devotion. She had bowed before its altar time and time again. Michelle had substituted worship of her Creator for worship of one of his created things.

Michelle is not unlike us. We are all worshippers at heart. As believers, we worship the true Lord, Jehovah; but you know what, even nonbelievers worship. Everyone on this planet, every person you will ever meet, every friend you will ever have will worship something or someone. What defines us is what we choose to worship. Many people transfer worship for the Creator to one of his created things—money, sex, comfort, material possessions,

pleasure, family, even themselves. “For they exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever” (Romans 1:25). So it is not really a question of whether we will worship, but rather a question of what we will worship. Will we worship the Creator or one of his created things?

For whom does all of creation exist (Romans 11:36)?

- The angels       God       Satan

What do you learn from Isaiah 43:7?

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What has God set in the hearts of men (Ecclesiastes 3:11)?

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According to Genesis 1:26–27, when God created man, he created him in

- His image       Power       Beauty

When God originally created man and woman, he created them in his *image* and *likeness* (Genesis 1:26–27). This distinction allows men and women the ability to worship God, unique and apart from all of God’s other creatures. At heart, men and women are spiritual beings with an innate desire to worship God. Blaise Pascal, the French mathematician and physicist, captured it well when he said, “There is a God-shaped vacuum in the heart of every man which cannot be filled by any created thing, but only by God, the Creator, made known through Jesus.” Solomon phrased it another way: “he has also set eternity in their heart” (Ecclesiastes 3:11b).

From the depths of eternity, God envisioned our creation. We have not been randomly created, left up to fate. God carefully, deliberately, and lovingly made each one of us for a purpose. That purpose is to worship him. A believer’s true desire is for God to

be glorified in this world. “Your name and renown are the desire of our hearts” (Isaiah 26:8b, NIV). The Westminster Shorter Catechism summarizes our great calling by saying:

What is the chief end of man?

*Man's chief end is to glorify God and to enjoy him forever.*

We were made by God for God to bring him glory. In fact, everything in creation exists for the sole purpose of bringing glory to God. Yet in a world filled with intoxicating pleasures and enthralling diversions, we sometimes stray from our God-given purpose. We sometimes substitute true worship of the Lord with worship of his created things. We may look to this world, to entertainment, to hobbies, to sports, to material goods, to our families, or to our careers to find fulfillment; but in the end, all will be found wanting because ultimately, we were never made for the things of this world but for our Lord. We were created to worship God and only in fulfilling this purpose will we find true joy and eternal fulfillment. The great theologian Augustine notably remarked: “you made us for yourself and our hearts find no peace until they rest in you.”<sup>1</sup>

As we talk about worship, I want to emphasize too that although we worship God, he does not actually need our worship. Our worship brings him glory and pleases him, but its main purpose is to help us deepen our relationship with him and to conform us to Christ. This is what results in our true joy and eternal fulfillment. Worshiping God actually refreshes us and helps us to grow in our Christian walk. It nurtures our hearts and souls, breathing true life into us. So in choosing not to worship God, we are only depriving ourselves of true joy and fulfillment.

Read Romans 1:25. Have you ever substituted worship of one of God's created things for worship of God himself? Explain.

---



Skim or read about Adam and Eve in Genesis 3:1–24 and answer the following questions.

What did Adam and Eve do? \_\_\_\_\_

What happened as a result? \_\_\_\_\_

What additional insight do you receive from Romans 3:23?  
\_\_\_\_\_

Read 1 Peter 2:9 and answer the following questions.

How are Christians described? \_\_\_\_\_

What are Christians to do? \_\_\_\_\_

God created man, and man was his crowning achievement, beautiful in form and intelligent in design. Then it happened. Adam and Eve sinned, and mankind lost the ability to worship God. Sometimes we speak of all the terrible consequences of the fall—physical death, hard labor for Adam, painful childbirth for Eve, and so forth—but the greater loss that day in the Garden of Eden was the effect on man’s ability to worship God. Sin tainted everything—man’s desire to worship God, his heart for his Creator, even the way in which he worshiped. Man now desired his plans instead of God’s plan. He wanted to do things his way instead of God’s way. Sin caused a dramatic shift in man’s focus, away from his beautiful Creator to himself and the created.

Satan was probably pleased that he had succeeded and caused the fall of mankind. After all, he himself had rebelled against God and chosen sin and imperfection over holiness and excellence. I wonder if Satan thought God would be done with man, that he would wash his hands of all humans. Do you think Satan ever expected the grace of God to be poured out on mankind?

God, however, had a plan, and he was not to be deterred by the sinfulness of Adam and Eve. For in the depths of eternity, God had already determined a way to allow mankind to regain his ability to worship him—through the atoning sacrifice of Jesus Christ. “In this is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins” (1 John 4:10). A. W. Tozer, the great twentieth-century preacher, summarized it well when he said, “Jesus was born of a virgin, suffered under Pontius Pilate, died on the cross, and rose from the grave to make worshippers out of rebels!”<sup>2</sup> God did not just redeem us so that we could escape the fires of hell and enjoy a comfortable life. We were redeemed for a purpose far greater than that—to proclaim God’s majesty and greatness to this world, to worship him and bring him glory.

Man was made to worship God, and yet from the beginning, there has been a battle for worship. Initially, Satan incited almost one-third of the angelic creatures to follow him and worship him. Imagine, these angels saw the glory of God and yet chose to worship Satan. Then Satan attacked Adam and Eve and their worship of God, causing them to sin (Genesis 3). We do not have to go much further to see man’s worship attacked again. In Genesis 4, Cain killed his brother Abel over an offering. Can you imagine? Cain murdered his own brother over worship. The first murder in all of man’s history, and it happened over worship. Whether we realize it or not, a great battle is being fought over our worship. It started in the beginning, and it continues on today. Will we worship our Creator and fulfill our true purpose in life, or will we instead worship one of his created things and live a distracted life?

We were created to worship God. Worship is not an additional part of the Christian walk; it is the heart of our walk. To drift aimlessly in this life and to miss worship is to miss everything, our whole purpose in creation. I hope that through this study, you will glimpse how truly glorious God is and realize our great

privilege to worship him and not the things he has created. I pray that your heart and soul will be moved to worship him with every fiber of your being. God is so utterly magnificent and beautiful, and we have been given the greatest honor of all—to worship him. This is our highest calling and our greatest privilege!



## DAY 2: A WAY OF LIFE

Whether, then, you eat or drink or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God.

1 Corinthians 10:31

We were created to worship God, but what does that really mean? What is worship? Is worship going to church every Sunday? Is it singing songs with other Christians? Is it praying to God? If you were to ask a hundred people to describe worship, each would probably give you a different answer. Some see worship as Sunday-morning songs, while others assume it is adoration. Some view worship as formal prayer, others think of it as an emotional experience. Since there are many different ideas of worship, let's spend some time today and discover how the Bible defines worship.

If you had to explain worship to someone, what would you say?

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What do you learn about worship from the following verses?

Psalm 29:1–2 \_\_\_\_\_

Psalm 95:1–6 \_\_\_\_\_

In the Old Testament, the most common Hebrew word for worship is *shachah*, and it means “‘to bow down, to prostrate oneself, to crouch, to fall down.’ This verb is used to indicate bowing before a monarch or a superior and paying homage to him or her.”<sup>3</sup> In the New Testament, a similar Greek word is used, *proskuneo*, and means “‘to worship, do obeisance, show respect, fall, or prostrate before.’”<sup>4</sup> So the word *worship* basically means to pay homage or honor to something or someone. The object gains our strongest devotion and our highest priority in life. If we wonder what we worship, then we should ask ourselves what consumes our time, our passion, and our thoughts; this is ultimately what we worship.

If the word *worship* simply means to pay homage or honor to something or someone, then what exactly is Christian worship? For centuries, the great philosophers and theologians have discussed the meaning of Christian worship and have come up with several definitions. Here are some of my personal favorites.

“For worship is the submission of all our nature to God. It is the quickening of conscience by his holiness; the nourishment of mind with his truth; the purifying of imagination by his beauty; the opening of the heart to his love, the surrender of will to his purpose—and all of this gathered up in adoration.”

—William Temple, Archbishop of Canterbury<sup>5</sup>

“The total adoring response of man to the one Eternal God, self-revealed in time.”

—Evelyn Underhill<sup>6</sup>

God “wants to cultivate within us the adoration and admiration of which he is worthy...He wants us to be astonished at the inconceivable elevation and the magnitude and the splendor of Almighty God!”

—A. W. Tozer<sup>7</sup>

Our English word for worship comes from the Anglo-Saxon word *weorthscipe*, which later came to be “worth-ship.” And that is exactly what we are doing in Christian worship; we are acknowledging the worthship or worthiness of God. Christian worship gives honor to God and acknowledges his excellence through all of our faculties: our minds, our wills, our actions, and our emotions. It is the positive response to who God is and to what he does. Worship gives to the Lord the glory and honor that is rightfully due him and only him. “Ascribe to the LORD, O sons of the mighty, ascribe to the LORD glory and strength. Ascribe to the LORD the glory due to his name; worship the LORD in holy array” (Psalm 29:1–2).

Who is someone that you know who truly worships God?  
What stands out to you about this person?

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What does 1 Corinthians 10:31 tell you? Write out this  
verse and try to memorize it this week.

---

The theme of worship resonates through the pages of Scripture, from the earliest pages of Genesis to the last pages of Revelation. We often think of Revelation as focusing on end times, but the truth is Revelation is a book that beautifully describes the majestic worship of God.

Early in Scripture, the Lord revealed the importance of worship through his relationship with the Israelites. As soon as the Israelites departed Egypt, the Lord established a temporary place for them to worship him called the tabernacle. To better understand the significance of worship to the Lord, consider that it took the Lord only 31 verses to explain all of creation, but 243 verses to discuss the tabernacle and its articles.<sup>8</sup> That is almost eight times as many verses to describe the tabernacle as creation. God could have easily provided such detail about creation—describing

the different animals, tree life, the atmosphere, the location of the garden, and many other details—instead, he chose to briefly describe creation and leave us with a host of unanswered questions. When it came to the tabernacle, however, the Lord meticulously described the place and way in which he wanted the Israelites to worship him. Why such a detailed description of the tabernacle? To emphasize the importance of worship. This is the place where his people would join together and worship him.

Do you view worship more as a one-time act, such as on a Sunday morning, or a continual act? Explain.

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How does Revelation 4:8–11 describe worship?

One time act                       Continual

*Challenge:* How did the temple illustrate continual worship? Read Leviticus 6:12–13 and 24:1–4 and answer the following questions.

How often did the fire burn? \_\_\_\_\_

How often did the lampstands burn? \_\_\_\_\_

Worship is more than just going to church on Sunday. Because we often call Sunday church “worship,” we sometimes have the mistaken belief that worship only happens at this time. But worship on Sunday is better called *corporate worship*, where we, as the body of Christ, meet and praise God together. Worship also consists of *personal worship*, where we seek to honor God in our lives every day. True worship includes both corporate worship and personal worship, and the two are interrelated. Personal worship empowers corporate worship. To a certain extent, corporate worship is an extension of our personal worship amidst our brothers and sisters in Christ. And yet corporate worship

also encourages our personal worship. As we jointly worship with other believers, our personal worship is enhanced and deepened. I cannot stress enough that true worship is a lifestyle in which we seek to honor God and not simply an act we perform occasionally. True worship encompasses all aspects of our lives at all times and on all days. Sometimes, we tend to create an artificial distinction between the sacred and the secular, compartmentalizing our lives. But if we are a Christian worshiping the Lord, then everything we do is sacred, everything is an act of worship. “Whether, then, you eat or drink or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God” (1 Corinthians 10:31).

In the Old Testament, worship entailed a continual act as displayed in the temple. The Lord required that the fire on the altar and on the golden lampstands burn continually. We see this same constant worship in Revelation 4:8–11 as the Seraphim continually praised God. They never stopped praising him for his wondrousness and majesty. Imagine, the Seraphim had seen so many amazing things but having beheld the glory of God, they can think of nothing better than to worship God.

As we end today, remember that every single person in this world worships someone or something and we do it *continually*. So every day, every hour, every moment, we are either worshiping our magnificent Creator or we are worshiping one of his created things. We are either giving glory to God or glory to a created object. And here is the thing: no one else can give God our worship; that is our privilege and ours alone to give. In my life, I am blessed to have people who can help me. So for instance, if I am baking and have no butter, my husband can go to the store and pick some up for me. If I am running short on time, my son can sweep and mop the kitchen for me. As much as they help me, however, neither my husband nor my son can give God my worship; that is mine and mine alone to give. God has given each of us the privilege of worshiping him, and no one else’s worship can ever take our place. So let’s not miss our wonderful opportunity to offer God our worship!



## DAY 3: A DIVINE ENCOUNTER

God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth.

John 4:24

Did you know that God actually *seeks* worshipers? That sounds a little odd, doesn't it? That God would actually seek people to worship him, but it is true. In John 4:23, Jesus told a Samaritan woman, "But an hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth; for such people *the Father seeks to be his worshipers.*" I love that because it is such an encouragement to us. God actually seeks us and our worship.

Read John 4:19–26 about Jesus resting at Jacob's well and answer the following questions.

What did the Samaritan woman ask Jesus?

\_\_\_\_\_

How did Jesus respond? \_\_\_\_\_

What stands out to you in this passage? \_\_\_\_\_

Read John 4:23 and fill in the blanks. True worshipers will worship the Father in \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_.

How is God described in John 4:24?

Loving       Merciful       Spirit



Based on Jesus's discussion with the Samaritan woman, is worship restricted to a particular place like a church?

- Yes                       No

Samaria was situated between Galilee to the north and Judea to the south and had served as the capital of Israel's northern kingdom. When the Assyrians conquered the Israelites' northern kingdom in 722 BC, they moved a large number of Jews to Samaria; at the same time, many non-Jews also settled in the area. As time progressed, some of the Jews and non-Jews intermingled and married and became known as Samaritans. The Samaritans created their own form of religion, which was similar to Judaism but also included some elements of paganism. The Jews hated the Samaritans and considered them unclean due to their intermingling; thus, great antagonism existed between the two people. In fact, the antagonism had reached such heights that many Jews would deliberately avoid Samaria while traveling from Galilee to Jerusalem.

As Jesus traveled to Galilee, however, he intentionally chose to pass through Samaria because he had a divine appointment with a Samaritan woman. While on his journey, Jesus became tired and stopped at Jacob's well where a Samaritan woman came to draw water. As the Samaritan woman talked to Jesus, she asked him where was the correct place to worship (John 4:20). When Babylon conquered the Israelites' southern kingdom, they destroyed the temple, which was located in Jerusalem. Later, when the Jews rebuilt the temple, they refused to allow the Samaritans to help because of their intermingling with non-Jews. As a result, the Samaritans built their own place of worship on Mt. Gerizim. Thus, the Jews worshiped in Jerusalem and the Samaritans on Mt. Gerizim. So the Samaritan woman was asking Jesus where was the proper place to worship. Was it in Jerusalem or on Mt. Gerizim?

Jesus answered profoundly by stating that worship is not limited to a particular place. Worship has little to do with physical location and everything to do with our hearts' attitudes, hearts that yearn and desire the Lord. Worship that only occurs in certain places, such as a church, is not better or more holy than worship that occurs at other places. Worship occurs at all places and at all times as we seek to honor and praise our Lord. Whether we are sitting in a church pew or standing in the kitchen washing dishes, we can worship our Lord.

John 4:24 describes God as spirit. Since God is spirit, we worship God in our spirit through the power of the Holy Spirit. It is the Holy Spirit who facilitates our worship by providing intercession and giving guidance on worship. Since it is the Holy Spirit who enables our worship and only believers have the Holy Spirit, Christian worship can only occur between a true believer and the Lord.

In John 4:19-26, Jesus had much to teach us about worship. The word *worship* was used eight times in the span of five verses. Jesus told the Samaritan woman that worship must occur in spirit and truth. That is an interesting description, isn't it? Jesus could have given a lengthy discussion on the mechanics and rituals required to worship God, but instead, he used two simple words to describe worship—spirit and truth—no meticulous instructions on what we should wear, the time of our worship, and the music to play; he cut through all the superfluous details and went straight to the basics—the heart.

I have to confess too that I love that Jesus chose to have this discussion on worship with a Samaritan woman. In those days, women were not highly respected and certainly not this sinful, Samaritan woman. What a great encouragement to us that when it comes to worship, God does not care about our background, our education level, our income level, or our social standing. In fact, it was during this conversation that Jesus first revealed that he was the Messiah. Rather than revealing this to a priest or a

rabbi, he chose this sinful, Samaritan woman, a woman who had five husbands. As long as we honestly seek God, he will reveal himself to us regardless of our backgrounds and our pasts.

Why is it important to worship in truth? Can you think of some groups who worship but who do not worship in truth?

---

Refer back to John 4:22. What did Jesus tell the Samaritan woman?

---

Is it okay to be zealous for God but not have a correct knowledge of who he is? See Romans 10:2.

- Yes                       No

Do you have an accurate understanding of who God is, his nature, and his attributes?

- Have an accurate understanding of God  
 Need to learn more about God

What do you learn from Philippians 1:9-11?

---

As we seek to worship God, our worship must be based on truth. In John 4:22, Jesus told the Samaritan woman that the Samaritans worshiped what they did not know. The Samaritans had created their own religion out of a mixture of pagan religions and Judaism and only followed the first five books of the Bible called the Pentateuch. Because they chose to limit their information, they did not have an accurate understanding of God. Similarly, if we only haphazardly read the Word or only read certain parts, we are limiting our knowledge of God's full revelation to us. Worshiping in truth means that we develop

our understanding of who God is based on Scripture in order to worship him as accurately as possible. In his book *The Knowledge of the Holy*, A. W. Tozer makes this interesting observation:

The history of mankind will probably show that no people has ever risen above its religion, and man's spiritual history will positively demonstrate that no religion has ever been greater than its idea of God. Worship is pure or base as the worshiper entertains high or low thoughts of God.

For this very reason the gravest question before the Church is always God himself, and the most portentous fact about any man is not what he at a given time may say or do but what he in his deep heart conceives God to be like.<sup>9</sup>

A wrong view of God makes us susceptible to false worship. There are many people who desire to sincerely worship God, but their worship is sincerely wrong. All false religions have some pieces of truth in them for Satan does a masterful job of deceiving the masses into false worship. Even within Christianity, we are susceptible to false worship if we worship a god we want and not the God who is; for instance, a god who always heals us or a god who always gives us money. In order to prevent us from inadvertently worshipping a false god, we must develop our understanding of who God is based on Scripture.

So how do we learn who God is? Through the Word of God. From beginning to end, Scripture is the revelation of God to us. When you think about it, it is really amazing that God took time to reveal himself to us. He did not have to make himself known to us, but he chose to because he wants us to know who he is.

As Jesus described worship in John 4, he balanced spirit and truth, the heart and the mind, emotions and knowledge. If our worship only involves the spirit and our heart, then our worship can be false and even heretical. On the other hand, if our worship only involves truth and knowledge, then our worship can become

legalistic and ritualistic. There is always a danger to emphasize one at the expense of the other, but Jesus reminded us that both are necessary to experience true worship.

One of the greatest privileges we have is to worship the Lord. Worship is not a set of pious rituals that we mindlessly complete. It is our hearts and souls excited and expecting an encounter with our holy and righteous God. There is no greater privilege than to be known as a worshiper of the Lord!



## DAY 4: DANGEROUS DELIGHT

Bless the LORD, O my soul, and all that is within me, bless his holy name.

Psalm 103:1

As we studied yesterday, the Samaritans' worship lacked *truth* because they did not possess a full understanding of God. Sometimes, however, the problem is not a lack of knowledge but rather a lack of heart. In the New Testament, Jesus frequently rebuked the Pharisees because their worship lacked *spirit*. The Pharisees were the religious leaders of the day, who meticulously adhered to the Law. They were steeped in religion and ceremonies and zealous about studying and keeping the Scriptures. Yet Jesus criticized them for their hypocrisy, their zealous pursuit of outward piety while neglecting matters of the heart. They knew the Word of God, but the Word had not penetrated their hearts. God wants us to worship in *truth*, but he also wants us to worship in *spirit*.

Do you ever find yourself worshiping like one of these groups? Explain.

- Samaritans (lack of truth)
- Pharisees (lack of spirit)

What do you learn about worshiping in spirit from the following verses?

Psalm 51:6 \_\_\_\_\_

Psalm 103:1 \_\_\_\_\_

Philippians 3:2–3 \_\_\_\_\_

To worship in spirit means to worship the Lord with all our heart, mind, and soul through our words, thoughts, actions, and feelings. It is to worship the Lord with our inmost being, our inner self. “Bless the LORD, O my soul, and all that is within me, bless his holy name” (Psalm 103:1).

Read Isaiah 1:10–20 about the Israelites’ worship and answer the following questions.

For what did the Lord rebuke the Israelites?

\_\_\_\_\_

Why did the Lord condemn these practices?

\_\_\_\_\_

What did the Lord command the Israelites to do?

\_\_\_\_\_

Is the Lord fooled by our outward actions (1 Samuel 16:7)?

- Yes
- No

What warning did Jesus give in Matthew 15:7–9?

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Take a moment and reflect on the sincerity of your worship. As you sing the words to a song, do you mean what you are singing? Do you need to repent of any insincere worship? If so, try reflecting on Psalm 51. When you pray prayers, are you really willing to accept God's will?

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*Challenge:* Why did the Lord rebuke the Israelites in Malachi 1:6–14? Have you ever tried to offer the Lord blind and crippled animals (your leftovers instead of your best)?

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Worshipping in spirit means that there must be sincerity in our worship. In Isaiah 1:10–20, the Lord warned the Israelites of the importance of authentic and heartfelt worship. Though they were his people, he addressed them as people of Sodom and Gomorrah, a direct rebuke to the people's wickedness and decadence. The people had gone astray, led by their evil desires. As a cover to their iniquity, they wore the mask of hypocrisy, a religious veneer of outward piety, a mask of goodness. Their hypocrisy, however, did not deceive the Lord. The Merriam-Webster Dictionary defines hypocrisy as "a feigning to be what one is not or to believe what one does not."<sup>10</sup> In essence, hypocrisy is the inconsistency between external religious activity and the internal state of our heart. In the New Testament, the Greek word for hypocrisy is *hypokrisis* and literally means "stage-playing or acting." Thus hypocrisy in worship occurs when our worship is an act, a ritual we go through, without sincerity of heart. It is a desire to appear "good" before others, doing and saying those things which engender esteem and prestige before others without the conviction of heart.

The Lord condemned the Israelites' hypocrisy because he wanted authenticity and sincerity in their worship. The Israelites were performing the appropriate acts—going to the temple,

offering sacrifices, burning incense, and praying—and yet the Lord judged their actions. He saw that they demonstrated only an outward show of piety, one devoid of inward repentance and humility. The Lord is not fooled by our external worship. He looks straight into our heart, past all religious traditions and hypocrisy. “God sees not as man sees, for man looks at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart” (1 Samuel 16:7b). We can know theology. We can memorize Scriptures. We can even give sermons. But our worship can be hollow and meaningless if we lack sincerity in our spirit. If all our knowledge of God does not move us to a place of greater love and worship for him, then something is terribly wrong.

Through Isaiah and Jeremiah, the Lord warned the Israelites that he was “on their lips but far from their hearts” (Isaiah 29:13, Matthew 15:7–9). They talked about the Lord. They prayed to him. They extolled his virtues. But he was not in their hearts. It was nothing but a hollow, superficial act. What an indictment to the Israelites and to us. Do we sometimes have “fellowships” and yet never discuss the Lord? Do we sometimes repetitiously mouth words to songs without meaning it? Attending church in no way indicates that our worship is pure or acceptable. The Israelites attended Temple, and yet the Lord rebuked their actions. Amos 5:21–23 stresses God’s attitude on this:

I hate, I reject your festivals, nor do I delight in your solemn assemblies. Even though you offer up to me burnt offerings and your grain offerings, I will not accept them; and I will not even look at the peace offerings of your fatlings. Take away from me the noise of your songs; I will not even listen to the sound of your harps.

God’s words in Amos are striking, aren’t they? We must worship the Lord from the heart. We need to delight ourselves in the Lord, to let him be our consuming passion. When he is



our treasure, our hearts are right with him and we do not have to worry about insincerity in our worship.

Insincere worship can also occur in the type of offerings we present. In Malachi 1:6–14, the Lord rebuked the Israelites because they placed defiled food on his altar. Rather than offering their best, they offered their worst or leftovers—blind, crippled, diseased animals. When an Israelite brought a sacrifice before the Lord, it was to be perfect and without blemish (Leviticus 1:3,10, 22:18–25, Deuteronomy 15:21). They were to offer the Lord their best. Even the Levites needed to offer the Lord the best of the tithes they received (Numbers 18:29). The seriousness of the problem was evidenced by the Lord saying that it would be better for someone to shut the doors to the temple than to continue offering such meaningless sacrifices. What about us? Do we offer the Lord our best? Do we give the Lord the best of our time or only what remains when we are weary and tired at the end of the day? Do we give him the best of our money or only what remains after we have acquired our choice purchases? Think of it like this. Would we buy our children clothes with holes in them if we could afford better? Probably not. Why? Because we love them and desire the best for them, not second best, not leftovers. It is the same thing with God. He wants our best, not our leftovers. After all, he did not give us his worst; he gave us his best—his son—to redeem us.

Having been admonished for their hypocrisy, what were the Israelites to do? And what are we to do? Scripture tells us to repent and to start worshiping God from our hearts. No more hypocrisy, no more pretense, no more facades, only honest and heartfelt worship for the Lord. The Lord is always so gracious and compassionate. Even though we sin and fail him, he allows us to repent and to return to him. “The LORD’s lovingkindnesses indeed never cease, for his compassions never fail. They are new every morning; great is your faithfulness” (Lamentations 3:22–23). If we are honest, we all have our moments when we

go through the motions instead of truly worshipping God from the heart. So let's decide today that our worship will be sincere and heartfelt.

Authentic worship can be truly dangerous! It causes us to look deep within ourselves and assess the sincerity of our actions. Do we worship from a desire to see God exalted, or are we merely going through the motions? Are we willing to do whatever it takes to worship God, or will we hold a part of ourselves back? The results make it all worthwhile—a sense of fulfillment we have never experienced, a depth of relationship that overwhelms our souls, and a spiritual vitality that truly empowers us. Worship—it is a dangerous delight!



## DAY 5: STANDING IN AWE

Great is the LORD, and highly to be praised, and his greatness is unsearchable.

Psalm 145:3

Can you imagine a being who is absolutely perfect? Who possesses all knowledge? Who has all power? Who creates out of nothing? Who is glorious in character, majestic in holiness, and captivating in beauty? That is our God, Jehovah, the Great I Am. And he is truly magnificent, so much greater than anything or anyone we can even begin to imagine. When we take time to reflect on who God is, worship will naturally overflow from our hearts. So let's spend today reflecting on who God is and why we should worship him. First, we worship God for what he does and has done for us—creation, redemption, and care.

- **Creation:** God is worthy of worship for the simple reason that he created everything and holds all things together. “In whose hand is the life of every living thing, and the breath of all mankind” (Job 12:10). There is nothing in all of creation that does not owe its existence to God. Without him, there would simply be nothing.
- **Redemption:** God is also worthy of worship because he redeemed us. Jesus served as the perfect atoning sacrifice for our sins, the sinless dying for the sinner, the just for the unjust. By redeeming us, Jesus saved us from hell and restored us to a wondrous relationship with the Lord. The amazing part is that Jesus did not save us while we were his friends but his enemies (Romans 5:8). “Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power and riches and wisdom and might and honor and glory and blessing” (Revelation 5:12).
- **Care:** God also continually takes care of our needs. He graciously walks with us daily, guides us, and protects us as we navigate the difficulties and trials of this world. He gives us strength when we are weak, comfort when we are distressed, and peace when we are overwhelmed.

As you can see, we should worship the Lord for what he does and has done for us—creation, redemption and care. But we also worship the Lord for who he is intrinsically—his holy, righteous nature. Let’s delve a little deeper into this area.

What do you learn about God from Psalm 145:3?

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What do you learn about some of God’s attributes from the following scriptures?

Self-existence (Exodus 3:14) \_\_\_\_\_

Omniscience (Psalm 139:1–6) \_\_\_\_\_

Wisdom (Romans 11:33) \_\_\_\_\_

- Self-existence: God is self-existent, meaning that God exists within himself and does not depend on any external source for his existence (Acts 17:24–28). God is the great I Am (Exodus 3:14). He is existence. He is being. He Is. God has no cause but has always existed. Created beings have a point of origin, but since God is not a created a being, he has no cause, no point of origin from where he came into existence. God’s self-existence also embodies his self-sufficiency, meaning that he sustains himself. God does not depend on anyone or anything for his existence (John 5:26). As we reflect on God’s self-existence, the enormity is overwhelming. Quite simply, we exist only because God self-exists.
- Omniscience: God is omniscient, which means he has all knowledge and knows all things (Psalm 139:1–6, Psalm 147:5, Hebrews 4:13). Since God has all knowledge, he knows the past, present, and future. We spend our lives learning, amassing knowledge, and growing in wisdom, but God has always had perfect knowledge. Not only does God know all events, he also knows everything about us: our actions, our words, our ways, and our hearts. Since God has perfect knowledge, he sees the big picture that often eludes us. Scripture sometimes refers to God as El Roi, the *God who sees*. God sees what the rest of the world cannot see. He sees our grief and heartache as many of life’s events unfold. He hears our cries of anguish and pain. He knows, he sees, and he comforts.
- Wisdom: Since God has all knowledge—past, present, and future—God is able to be perfectly wise (Romans 11:33, 16:27). Wisdom results from the right application of knowledge. We cannot have full wisdom because we

lack full knowledge. We are limited in the amount of information that we receive and also in the way in which we process such information. God's wisdom, however, is based on full knowledge, experience, righteousness, love, and justice. This means that God is never wrong when he makes a decision. He never sins. He never errs. He never makes mistakes. He always chooses the righteous answer and provides that which is best for us in any given situation from an eternal perspective.

Do you stand in awe of the Lord? Are you overwhelmed by worship for him? Be honest.

Often                       Sometimes                       Rarely

Let's continue to explore some of God's other attributes. What do you learn from the following scriptures?

Omnipresence (Psalm 139:7–10) \_\_\_\_\_

Omnipotence (Jeremiah 32:17) \_\_\_\_\_

Immutability (Malachi 3:6a) \_\_\_\_\_

Eternality (1 Chronicles 16:36) \_\_\_\_\_

- Omnipresence: God is omnipresent, which means that he is present everywhere simultaneously (Psalm 139:7–10, Acts 7:48–49, Jeremiah 23:23–24). God transcends all space limitations for he is outside of space. God's omnipresence results in ubiquity, which means that God is present fully everywhere. For instance, I can fully experience God's presence in Houston as much as my best friend does in Chicago. Thus, the Lord can provide comfort, strength, and encouragement to us no matter where we are. We never need to fear being alone for God is always with us to reassure and console us.

- **Omnipotence:** God is omnipotent, which means he has all power (Psalm 62:11, Genesis 18:14, Jeremiah 32:17). Scripture uses various names to describe God’s power: El Shaddai “God Almighty,” El Elyon “The Most High God,” and Yahweh Sabaoth “The Lord of Hosts.” It is difficult to grasp the magnitude of God’s power. There are things God could do in his power that we cannot even imagine because our finite minds keep us from thinking in this dimension. This serves as a wonderful encouragement to us as we realize that God never runs low in resources. Because God possesses all power, everything is always under his control. No matter what happens, God always remains sovereign and retains control. Nothing and no one can thwart his plans (Isaiah 46:10).
- **Immutability:** God does not change in essence or being (Psalm 102:25–27, Malachi 3:6). God does not change with respect to his essence because there is no reason for him to change. He is already perfect, and he is perfect in every area. There is no area in life in which God needs to improve himself. He does not need to grow and mature over time. He does not need to gain wisdom or acquire knowledge because he has always possessed all wisdom necessary for all eternity. Imagine, God has never changed, not in one instance, not for one moment. We can do nothing but change, and yet God has never changed. Since God does not change, he is completely faithful to his promises, and we can trust him.
- **Eternality:** God is eternal, which means that he has existed for all time—past, present, and future. He has no beginning and no end. He is from all eternity (Psalm 93:2, 1 Chronicles 16:36). God has always existed. There has never been a time when God has not existed.

Scripture beautifully paints God's eternity in the many descriptions it gives him: *El Olam* (the Everlasting God), the Eternal King, the Rock Eternal, the King Eternal, and the Ancient of Days.

It is amazing to take a few moments and reflect on God, isn't it? If you have never had the opportunity to read in depth on the nature and attributes of God, I encourage you to do so. There are wonderful resources that can help you in this area, such as A. W. Tozer's *Knowledge of the Holy*, Stephen Charnock's *The Existence and Attributes of God*, or A. W. Pink's *The Attributes of God*. Try reading one of these books with friends as a book club or do it as your own personal Bible study. I promise you will not regret it.

After obtaining a brief glimpse into the nature of God, it is easy to see how beautiful and majestic God is and why he is truly worthy of worship. There is nothing that even begins to compare to him. God in all his splendor is absolutely breathtaking, his majesty overwhelming, and his beauty unspeakable. "How great you are, Sovereign LORD! There is no one like you, and there is no God but you, as we have heard with our own ears" (2 Samuel 7:22, NIV).