

All of the disciplines we have looked at over the past month are a part of worship. Today we'll look at corporate and individual worship as a necessary discipline for spiritual growth.

The first place a word appears in Scripture helps us to define the word. In the case of this word, worship, we first see it when Abraham takes Isaac up Mount Moriah in obedience to God's command to sacrifice him there. ⁵ *Then Abraham said to his young men, "Stay here with the donkey; I and the boy will go over there and worship and come again to you."* Genesis 22:5 (ESV)

Many Christians today are embarrassed about this story. You shouldn't be! This is an amazing account that is filled with spiritual depth, prophecy, faith and grace. To mock the story as barbaric simply shows one's ignorance of its richness and implications, but that is another sermon. Today we are focusing on the fact that Abraham used this word "worship" to describe sacrificing to the LORD that which was dearest to him. They were acting in obedience to God to honor Him as their Sovereign.

In the Hebrew culture, sacrifice included the idea of substitution. It was acknowledging one's guilt before God and the costliness of that guilt. Blood was considered as the physical life source, and so by shedding blood for sin, they acknowledged the utter depravity of sin, and the just sentence it deserved. (Leviticus 17:11) At the same time the act sought the grace of God to accept a substitute. The Gospel message is the same from the beginning of Genesis.

For Abraham and Isaac, this first use of the word was incredibly rich. Abraham was acknowledging that everything he had was from the hand of God and that God had a right to take it back whenever God so chose. But it also showed great faith in God's ability to keep His word. Abraham believed that if he obeyed God, God would raise Isaac from death because God had promised Abraham that though Isaac, he would be the father of nations. (Hebrews 11:17-19) Of course, God stopped Abraham at the last minute and provided a substitute. That whole process was **worship: obedience, honor, letting go of what is dearest, acknowledging a substitute, faith, and overwhelming gratitude.**

The word for worship in Hebrew is used to describe bowing or prostrating oneself before someone of great esteem. You will often find "bow down" in connection with the word "worship". (Genesis 24:26) The first of the Ten Commandments is about worship. We are to have no other gods. We are not to make images. ⁵ *You shall not bow down to them or serve them,* Exodus 20:5a (ESV) **Bow down in that verse is the Hebrew word**

Commented [notes1]: Leviticus 17:11 (ESV)

¹¹ For the life of the flesh is in the blood, and I have given it for you on the altar to make atonement for your souls, for it is the blood that makes atonement by the life.

Commented [notes2]: Hebrews 11:17-19 (ESV)

¹⁷ By faith Abraham, when he was tested, offered up Isaac, and he who had received the promises was in the act of offering up his only son, ¹⁸ of whom it was said, "Through Isaac shall your offspring be named."¹⁹ He considered that God was able even to raise him from the dead, from which, figuratively speaking, he did receive him back.

Commented [notes3]: Genesis 24:26 (NIV)

²⁶ Then the man bowed down and worshiped the LORD,

shahah – to worship. Now you know why Mordacai would not bow to Haman (Esther 3:2), and why Daniel’s friends could not bow to the king’s image. (Daniel 3:11-12) It meant to worship. (Exodus 34:14)

Posture is a significant part of worship because it communicates. It may be different in different cultures, but whatever the posture or expression, it should signify submission and reverence. Kneeling still suggests reverence even in our culture today, though it is slowly disappearing in our pride of independence and self-esteem. Kneeling says that I esteem the other more highly than myself. Certainly we can have a reverent heart without kneeling, but there are times when our heart commands our body to express what is within. The Psalmist wrote, ⁶ *Oh come, let us worship and bow down; let us kneel before the LORD, our Maker!* Psalm 95:6 (ESV)

Worship can be a set apart time when we individually or as a group honor and adore God for who He is and His goodness in our lives. The New Testament commands us to take such times of worship together. ²⁴ *And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works,* ²⁵ *not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near.* Hebrews 10:24-25 (ESV)

The verse does not contain the Greek word for worship, but we see from other passages that this was the reason that they came together. (Acts 20:7; 1Corinthians 16:2) It was worship that encouraged them and inspired them to live a life of love and good works. They met on the LORD’s day, Sunday, and read from the Scriptures, expounded on them, and sang songs of praise, took collections, and ate together. All of this was a part of their communal worship. (1Corinthians 14:26)

The Greek word has a different flavor from the Hebrew. They definitely overlap in meaning, especially in the sense of bowing. You see it first in Matthew when the Magi told Herod they had come to worship the new king. When they found Jesus they bowed down and worshiped Him and presented their offering. (Matthew 2:11)

The Greek word is compound word **“unto – dog” *proskyneo***. Now I’m sure you are wondering, “What in the world?” But think about it. If you’ve ever had a half way decent dog, they think you are god, right? They are always happy to see you. You may have forgotten to feed them, or just have scolded them for something they didn’t know they shouldn’t have done, but when you approach them they are so happy to see you. Their tails wag and they want to jump up and give you hug and lick your face to show you how happy they are that you gave them a little of your attention. They look to you for everything. They long to spend time with you. I think it is a great description of worship.

Commented [notes4]: Esther 3:2 (ESV)
² And all the king’s servants who were at the king’s gate bowed down and paid homage to Haman, for the king had so commanded concerning him. But Mordecai did not bow down or pay homage.

Commented [notes5]: Daniel 3:11-12 (ESV)
¹¹ And whoever does not fall down and worship shall be cast into a burning fiery furnace.
¹² There are certain Jews whom you have appointed over the affairs of the province of Babylon: Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. These men, O king, pay no attention to you; they do not serve your gods or worship the golden image that you have set up.”

Commented [notes6]: Exodus 34:14 (ESV)
¹⁴ (for you shall worship no other god, for the LORD, whose name is Jealous, is a jealous God),

Commented [notes7]: Acts 20:7 (ESV)
⁷ On the first day of the week, when we were gathered together to break bread, Paul talked with them, intending to depart on the next day, and he prolonged his speech until midnight.

Commented [notes8]: 1 Corinthians 16:2 (ESV)
² On the first day of every week, each of you is to put something aside and store it up, as he may prosper, so that there will be no collecting when I come.

Commented [notes9]: 1 Corinthians 14:26 (ESV)
²⁶ What then, brothers? When you come together, each one has a hymn, a lesson, a revelation, a tongue, or an interpretation. Let all things be done for building up.

Commented [notes10]: Matthew 2:11 (ESV)
¹¹ And going into the house they saw the child with Mary his mother, and they fell down and worshiped him. Then, opening their treasures, they offered him gifts, gold and frankincense and myrrh.

Worship in both the Old and New Testament happen in planned times, but also spontaneously when people sensed God's presence or goodness in their life. (Exodus 24:1; 33:10; 34:8; 2Chronicles 7:3; 1Corinthians 14:25) These are very special moments that should cause us to pause and thank God for His steadfast love and faithfulness. Sometimes it happens when we are reading the Word or listening to a song or hear of an answered prayer. All of the sudden we hear the voice of God to our hearts and we are overwhelmed with his love. We say with Jacob, *¹⁰ I am not worthy of the least of all the deeds of steadfast love and all the faithfulness that you have shown to your servant...* Genesis 32:10a (ESV) When these special times happen in your life, take time to worship. Revel in His love. Just stop and soak there awhile as you praise and adore Him. We miss so many opportunities to worship and be blessed by worship because we are in such a hurry. Make the discipline of worship a priority.

These times of private worship include those morning hours when we rise to spend the first part our day in the word, meditation and prayer. They continue as we go throughout our day and remember how that word applies to us and as we encounter that sense of God's presence in our day. At our breaks for a meal, we should lift our hearts in worship for his goodness in providing for us. Sometimes a song rises in our hearts as we think about His goodness to us.

Even our work should be an act of worship. The Shakers exemplified this. They did their work to the glory of God and were known as some of the finest craftsmen in the world. **All of life should be an act of worship** as we continually listen for the Spirit to speak to our hearts. Then our words and actions will have their source in God.

We were made as creatures designed to worship. If we do not worship God, we will worship something else. The Scriptures warn us of the destructiveness of worshiping the creation. (Deuteronomy 30:17-18; Romans 1:25) What you spend your time focused on is what you worship. Some bow before the bottle. Some bow to human form. Some bow to wealth. The question we must each ask ourselves is this, "To whom do we bow down?" **What occupies our thoughts and thrills our hearts? What is our goal in life?** Answer these questions and you will know what you really worship. What you worship is your god. Is it a part of creation or is it the Creator? What you devote the best of yourself to is what you worship.

We have special times of individual worship, and all our life can be an act of worship. But we also need those times of coming together to worship as I mentioned earlier. Have you ever noticed how worshipping together seems to have a dimension that private worship does not have? There is something about our unity in the Spirit that amplifies worship. David recognized it and said that he was glad when people called him to the LORD's house. He came expecting to meet God there with others. (Psalm 122:1)

Commented [notes11]: Exodus 24:1 (ESV)

¹ Then he said to Moses, "Come up to the LORD, you and Aaron, Nadab, and Abihu, and seventy of the elders of Israel, and worship from afar.

Commented [notes12]: Exodus 33:10 (ESV)

¹⁰ And when all the people saw the pillar of cloud standing at the entrance of the tent, all the people would rise up and worship, each at his tent door.

Commented [notes13]: Exodus 34:8 (ESV)

⁸ And Moses quickly bowed his head toward the earth and worshiped.

Commented [notes14]: 2 Chronicles 7:3 (ESV)

³ When all the people of Israel saw the fire come down and the glory of the LORD on the temple, they bowed down with their faces to the ground on the pavement and worshiped and gave thanks to the LORD, saying, "For he is good, for his steadfast love endures forever."

Commented [notes15]: 1 Corinthians 14:25 (ESV)

²⁵ the secrets of his heart are disclosed, and so, falling on his face, he will worship God and declare that God is really among you.

Commented [notes16]: Deuteronomy 30:17-18 (ESV)

¹⁷ But if your heart turns away, and you will not hear, but are drawn away to worship other gods and serve them, ¹⁸ I declare to you today, that you shall surely perish. You shall not live long in the land that you are going over the Jordan to enter and possess.

Commented [notes17]: Romans 1:25 (ESV)

²⁵ because they exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever! Amen.

Commented [notes18]: Psalm 122:1 (ESV)

¹ I was glad when they said to me, "Let us go to the house of the LORD!"

I have always heard complaints about the worship service. There is too much of this, or too little of that. It is too reverent or too boisterous. There are so many styles and flavors of worship services. We have traditional services and contemporary ones. We have become shoppers of churchianity. Everyone has their preferences and you can enjoy those to the full in your private worship. I find the most dissatisfied people are so not because of the worship style, but because they are looking to the worship service to supply what they are missing in their own private times of worship. A.W. Tozer is quoted as saying, "If you will not worship God seven days a week, you do not worship Him one day a week."¹

You will get the most out of the worship service when you are worshiping during the week. Then your worship with the family of God won't be just about meeting the hunger of your soul, but about joining together as the family of God, a supernatural divine unity takes place as together we come before God and worship as one. The Presence of God causes us to recognize His divine plan for us as a body of believers working together. This experience makes worship via the media a poor substitute.

We should come with the exciting expectation of knowing God will speak to our hearts from His word. Worship from our heart to the One true God can't be disappointing. Can you imagine the seraphim flying around the throne of God saying they are getting bored? (Isaiah 6:2-3) Every effort should be made to leave all the distractions in our minds at the door. The words of the songs should come from our hearts and prepare our hearts to hear the Word of God. Don't worry about how you sound; sing to the Lord and you'll find our hearts unite in the words of the song.

We have seen so many times that the LORD is in charge of the service. He speaks to the one that gives the call to worship and more often than not puts on his heart the theme of the message. Hang on to that theme.

Some people are embarrassed by the church offering, but it has always been a part of worship. (Deuteronomy 26:10) In fact, it has been the focal point of worship in much of the Bible. (Genesis 4:4; 1Chronicles 16:29) The offering is seen by many as an interruption of worship. Instead, we should see it in the place it has been given in Scripture, an opportunity to give to God as an act of showing the gratitude of our heart. (Isaiah 19:21) Don't let it become ritual. Pray as you give. "Lord, you have blessed me abundantly. This small offering is one expression of my gratitude. Use it for your glory!"

As the sermon is delivered, listen for that connection with the call to worship and the music. Listen for the voice of the Holy Spirit when He faithfully points out what the Lord has for you. There are no coincidences with God. I've had visitors say, "I had to come all the way from (their home town) to hear this message for me." It isn't because this church is special, it's because God is always ready to meet us when we come in faith expecting to receive. (Matthew 7:7)

Commented [notes19]: "If you will not worship God seven days a week," said A. W. Tozer, "you do not worship Him on one day a week." 6

Whitney, Donald S. (2012-01-05). *Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life with Bonus Content (Pilgrimage Growth Guide)* (p. 95). Navpress. Kindle Edition.

Commented [notes20]: Isaiah 6:2-3 (ESV)
² Above him stood the seraphim. Each had six wings: with two he covered his face, and with two he covered his feet, and with two he flew.
³ And one called to another and said: "Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory! E

Commented [notes21]: Deuteronomy 26:10 (ESV)
¹⁰ And behold, now I bring the first of the fruit of the ground, which you, O LORD, have given me.' And you shall set it down before the LORD your God and worship before the LORD your God.

Commented [notes22]: Genesis 4:4 (ESV)
⁴ and Abel also brought of the firstborn of his flock and of their fat portions. And the LORD had regard for Abel and his offering,

Commented [notes23]: 1 Chronicles 16:29 (ESV)
²⁹ Ascribe to the LORD the glory due his name; bring an offering and come before him! Worship the LORD in the splendor of holiness;

Commented [notes24]: Isaiah 19:21 (ESV)
²¹ And the LORD will make himself known to the Egyptians, and the Egyptians will know the LORD in that day and worship with sacrifice and offering, and they will make vows to the LORD and perform them.

Commented [notes25]: Matthew 7:7 (ESV)
⁷ "Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you.

Jesus spoke of two kinds of worship. One he called **vain worship**. It was meaningless and did not produce any change in a life. He described it as teaching doctrine, the commandments of men. (Mark 7:7) The Jewish rulers of that day had become experts at manmade rules to help you to be pleasing to God. Jesus calls all that ritual and rule keeping worship that is in vain. That's because it was based on what you could do. But we can never be good enough to please God. Only Jesus could do that.

Commented [notes26]: Mark 7:7 (ESV)
⁷ in vain do they worship me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men."

The other kind of worship he called **worship in spirit and in truth**. The Word of God is truth. Jesus is the Word made flesh. (John 1:14) If we are going to practice acceptable worship, it must be based on Jesus and the Word, not what man says or thinks. It is based on the revelation of God through the Scriptures. But what did Jesus mean by "in spirit"?

Commented [notes27]: John 1:14 (ESV)
¹⁴ And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.

Until man is born again, his spirit is dead. The new birth in Christ is the coming alive of the spirit in man so that the Spirit of God can indwell you. (1Peter 3:18) Your spirit becomes in tune with the Spirit of God. Then when the Word is preached, you can hear what the Spirit is saying to you. Then you can see the application that will transform the way you go about life. If worship does not transform our life, it is not true worship.² Then He can interrupt your day with revelations of God's glory. ²⁴ *God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth.*" John 4:24 (ESV)

Commented [notes28]: 1 Peter 3:18 (ESV)
¹⁸ For Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh but made alive in the spirit,

Commented [notes29]: President Calvin Coolidge said much more than he realized when he asserted, "It is only when men begin to worship that they begin to grow." ⁸

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As I went through all the Scriptures in the Bible regarding worship, I saw two themes I want to close with. One is that the day will come when the whole earth will worship the LORD. That is clear in prophecy. (Zephaniah 2:11; Revelation 15:4) It is also clear that some will not and will perish. (Revelation 9:20-21) That is the second theme.

Commented [notes30]: Zephaniah 2:11 (NIV)
¹¹ The LORD will be awesome to them when he destroys all the gods of the land. The nations on every shore will worship him, every one in its own land.

Commented [notes31]: Revelation 15:4 (ESV)
⁴ Who will not fear, O Lord, and glorify your name? For you alone are holy. All nations will come and worship you, for your righteous acts have been revealed."

Commented [notes32]: Revelation 9:20-21 (ESV)
²⁰ The rest of mankind, who were not killed by these plagues, did not repent of the works of their hands nor give up worshiping demons and idols of gold and silver and bronze and stone and wood, which cannot see or hear or walk,
²¹ nor did they repent of their murders or their sorceries or their sexual immorality or their thefts.

Commented [notes33]: Jeremiah 1:16 (ESV)
¹⁶ And I will declare my judgments against them, for all their evil in forsaking me. They have made offerings to other gods and worshiped the works of their own hands.

The use of the word worship was about evenly divided between worship of the One true God and worship of idols. Israel was warned over and over again. When judgment came upon them it was always because they had turned from worshiping God to worshiping the things their hands had made. (Jeremiah 1:16) The choice is the same today. It will be one or the other. **Worship of the one true God is a blessing we can experience now and forever.** The worship of anything or anyone else will lead to destruction. God is ever pleading with us to worship Him for who He is and to face the fact that the promises of other gods are lies. They may offer momentary pleasure, but their end is destruction.

The discipline of worship involves many of the other disciplines. Together they are the tools that God uses to change our lives and make us into the people the world so desperately needs today, people that are wise in a godly sense, filled with the peace of God, who see beyond the headlines to the spiritual need in hearts, people who are willing to love with patience and endurance, people who offer real answers and hope. Will you be a worshiper in spirit and in truth, not just on Sunday morning, but now and tomorrow and every day?

Questions

- 1 What can we learn from the Bible's first use of the word, "worship"?
- 2 What does the Hebrew word for worship mean? Application?
- 3 What is the Greek word for worship? Implications?
- 4 Recall recent moments of unplanned worship.
- 5 How should we prepare for church?
- 6 How is corporate worship different from private worship?
- 7 What role does the offering have in the Bible?
- 8 When is worship in vain?
- 9 What is true worship?
- 10 How is the word used in Scripture?