

WEEK TWELVE

WORSHIP

“For the dead cannot praise You; they cannot raise their voices in praise.

*Those who go down to the grave can no longer hope in
Your faithfulness. Only the living can praise You as I do today.
Each generation tells of Your faithfulness to the next.”*

ISAIAH 38:18–19

By this time in the semester, hopefully you know one thing for certain: God’s love for you is real and vast. When we truly embrace the love God has for us, we begin to trust Him, and as our relationship with Him grows, we develop a great love for Him as well. Love for God allows our “religious requirements” to become relational joys. What we once saw as duty has now become devotion. It is our delight to know Him and follow His commands.

An overflow of your relationship with God is worship. Worship is more than singing songs; it is a lifestyle. Worship can be expressed through acts of service, words of praise, and giving, as well as singing, dancing and even shouting. Living this way honors our Savior and produces purity, confidence, and strength in us. Then, something amazing happens: We become warriors in God's Kingdom.

Ask yourself: Am I living the life of a worshipper?

LOVE & WAR

Worship is actually an act of warfare against satan and demonic forces! Our worship puts the devil on the run and increases our ability to fight against powers of darkness in the heavenly realms. Psalm 149:6 says, "Let the praises of God be in their mouths, and a sharp sword in their hands."

When we give God all of our attention, we strip the enemy of any power he has over our souls or our bodies as we enter the safety of God's presence. In His Presence, we are protected from every scheme of the enemy. We become like Jesus, who said that the ruler of this world "has nothing in Me". (John 14:30, NASB)

We are able to come boldly into the presence of God because of the blood of Jesus. Hebrews 9:22 says, "Without the shedding of blood, there is no forgiveness."

And without forgiveness for our sins, we cannot enter the presence of God. The blood of Jesus has removed every spot and stain from our lives and made a way for us to “approach God’s throne of grace with confidence.” (Hebrews 4:16 NIV)

NOTHING BUT THE BLOOD OF JESUS

When Adam and Eve sinned in the Garden of Eden, God said “You will surely die.” Obviously, He was referring to spiritual death, because they went on to live very long lives after they were banished from the garden. Remember: sin has consequences. But even though God departed from man’s spirit when man sinned, He did not abandon His creation. In response to Adam and Eve’s loss of innocence and awareness of their nakedness, He covered them with garments made from animal skins. This was the first blood sacrifice.

Throughout the Old Testament, sins were only forgiven when certain animals were sacrificed. God considered these blood sacrifices to be acts of worship. The blood of the animals would be poured on the horns of the altar that sat at the entrance to the tabernacle (sanctuary). The offering was then taken into the Holy of Holies, a sacred place containing the Ark of the Covenant, which housed the tablets with God’s Law written on them (The Ten Commandments). The blood would be put on the mercy seat (lid) of the ark, and when the sacrifice was appropriate and right, the presence of God would fall.

In the Holy of Holies, there was a thick veil that separated the Holy Place from the Holy of Holies (also called the Most Holy Place), where the presence of God dwelled. This veil represented the unapproachability of God to anyone but the high priest. When Jesus gave up His Spirit on the cross, the veil in the temple was torn from top to bottom.

Notice that it was not torn from bottom to top. God tore this veil from above because He was moving out of that place. A few weeks later at the feast of the Pentecost, God moved into the hearts of believers.

Truth Unveiled

“Suddenly, there was a sound from heaven like the roaring of a mighty windstorm, and it filled the house where they were sitting. Then, what looked like flames or tongues of fire appeared and settled on each of them.

ACTS 2:2–3

Write Acts 2:4.

This incredible experience with the Presence of God described in Acts 2 was made possible by the acceptable sacrifice of the blood of Jesus. Thank God for this new and better way for us to experience Him! “With His own blood—not the blood of goats and calves—[Jesus] entered the Most Holy Place once for all time and secured our redemption forever.” (Hebrews 9:12) This redemption includes eternal life with God, healing for our souls and our bodies, and deliverance from all the powers of the enemy.

Read Revelation 12:10–12. God says that satan, the accuser of the believers, who accuses us before God day and night, is overcome. Write verse 11.

The blood of Jesus has overcome satan. As believers, we are fighting from victory—not for victory! The veil has already been torn; the victory has already been won; satan is a defeated foe. There is nothing separating us from God’s Presence! Now, we can be in an intimate relationship with Him. He has declared and expressed His love for us; we need only to receive that love and learn how to love Him in return.

First Love

God desperately longs to connect with our hearts. In Matthew 15:7–9, Jesus says there are people who honor Him with their words, “but their hearts are far from [Him]. Their worship is a farce.” Genuine worship comes from a heart consistently connected with God, and that connection happens in two ways: corporately (at church gatherings with fellow believers) and personally (anytime, anywhere).

Corporate worship is important because our faith increases when we join together with other like-minded believers. Even if we come to church or Small Group distracted and burdened by anxiety, our attitudes can quickly change in a worshipful environment.

Personal worship occurs when we take initiative, intentionally adjust our attitudes, and cultivate an atmosphere of praise. Wherever we are, any time of day, we can have the attitude of a worshipper and enjoy the presence of God.

Ask Yourself: Is my worship coming from a genuine place in my heart? What am I doing to create an atmosphere of praise in my daily life?

LESSONS FROM A RIVER

Though we desire to have a real relationship with God—one like we have seen in others and heard is available to us—sometimes it just doesn't seem possible. Have you ever tried to read the Bible but find yourself reading the same verses over and over without a breakthrough? Or have you tried to pray, but it feels like your prayers are hitting the ceiling? If so, you may need to evaluate your level of surrender. Do you trust God? He wants your trust as much as He wants your heart, because without your trust, your heart will never be completely His.

We often say, “You are my Lord,” but when there's a bump in the road, we grab for the steering wheel. Most Christians get distracted by striving to find the happiest, most pleasurable, most personally preferable way to live, but in order to discover God's will for our lives, we must surrender control. It starts when we say, “My life is not my own. I know I've been bought with a high price, and I am your servant by choice. What would you like me to do, King Jesus?” With that kind of attitude, we will live a far more fulfilling life than we ever could have imagined or obtained on our own.

Read Ezekiel 47:1–12. In this vision, the river symbolizes the presence of God. As we venture forward in our relationship with God, we have a tendency to want to keep our toes on the ground, ensuring our head stays above water and we are in control of our lives. But God is inviting us to trust Him, to go deeper, to experience the fullness of His presence. As we surrender control to God, we will be swept away by His love and freely enjoy our journey with Him. When we see that God is worthy of our trust, we will more easily give up control and live in spiritual order.

Four Levels of Worship

Ankle-Deep:

We can enjoy refreshing in God's presence, but we are in full command. We can splash and play, then choose to walk out of the river with no lasting effects on our lives.

Knee-Deep:

The current of God (His Presence) can be felt, but we maintain control. In knee-deep water, we have a good view of those who've ventured out into deeper waters, and we see that in His Presence there is "fullness of joy," (Psalm 16:11 NASB) but we still find security on the riverbank.

Waist-Deep:

Here, the stream of His presence is strong. We've walked into deeper water, but we fight the current and struggle to keep contact with the bottom. Often the fear of what others think or the fear of losing control will tempt us to go back to the riverbank. It is at this place that we make a crucial decision. Who will be in control: God or us?

The Middle of the River:

This is where we can experience the fullness of God's presence. We stop fighting for control, and instead, we pick our feet up and float, allowing His current to carry us. We go where He goes, and it is good.

Most people want to experience God in ankle-deep, knee-deep, or even waist-deep water, but they want to stay in control. In other words, many want to "do the God thing," but reserve just enough control that God doesn't take them too far.

Those who live this way have believed a lie that if they abandoned themselves to His control, He would make them do things they don't want to do. They think He would embarrass them or send them to some faraway place they don't want to be. But the truth is, God has only good things for his kids. You will never come to a place of true worship until you are honestly able to say, "God, have Your way."

God led Ezekiel back to the riverbank, and suddenly, to his surprise, there were many trees growing on both sides of the river, and the river was now teeming with life! Ezekiel 47:9 (NASB) says, "Everything will live where the river goes." The leaves of the trees will not wither, their fruit will not fail, and they will bear fruit every month because of the living waters. The trees represent healing and the fish represent harvest. Wonderful things will happen when we abandon ourselves to God's will and His presence: Souls will be saved, people will be healed, and we will experience the life that is truly life!

Write Proverbs 3:5–6.

WAYS TO BE A TRUE WORSHIPPER

1. Give God your affection.

“The eyes of the Lord search the whole earth in order to strengthen those whose hearts are fully committed to Him.”

2 CHRONICLES 16:9

God wants to be in a covenant (devoted, unbreakable) relationship with you that involves much more than singing songs. He wants you to desire and enjoy His presence. Worship Him out of the overflow of your heart because He is worthy of the best you can offer Him. Psalm 84:1–2 is a song of craving to worship God. “How lovely is your dwelling place, O Lord of Heaven’s Armies. I long, yes, I faint with longing to enter the courts of the Lord.”

Finish this passage by writing out the second half of Psalm 84:2.

2. Commit to unconditional worship.

True worship means praising God even when we don’t feel like it. We must be committed to worshipping Him. It’s common for us to take a conditional approach to God, just as we do with sports teams.

As long as our team is winning and making great plays, we are excited and engaged in the game, but we lose interest and leave early when things don't go as we hoped. In the same way, we praise God when our lives are going well, but disengage and withdraw when things get difficult. The truth is, God is worthy of our worship in good times and bad, when we tangibly feel His presence and when we don't, when we see our prayers answered and when we don't.

The book of Daniel tells the story of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, worshippers of God who were sentenced by King Nebuchadnezzar to be thrown into a fiery furnace for refusing to bow down to other gods. They said, "If we are thrown into the blazing furnace, the God whom we serve is able to save us. He will rescue us from your power, Your Majesty." (Daniel 3:17)

Write Daniel 3:18.

The quality of our circumstances does not dictate God's worthiness of worship. We must make a commitment that whatever comes in our lives, we will continue to posture ourselves to worship God.

3. Include God in your daily life.

"I am the vine; you are the branches. Those who remain in me, and I in them, will produce much fruit. For apart from me you can do nothing."

JOHN 15:5

Many of us struggle in our relationship with God because our Sundays do not look like our Mondays. When our everyday world looks different than our "church world" we compartmentalize our lives and limit God's access to our hearts. Our secular and sacred worlds should look the same, equally reflecting the commitment we have made to worship Jesus.

Often, we don't know how to include God in our marriage, parenting, jobs, vacations, or hobbies. What would happen if we made God a part of every area of our lives? When you approach a new disciplinary challenge as a parent, ask God what you should do. When you have difficulty with someone at work, pray for wisdom to handle the situation well. When you have a headache, ask Him to heal you! Don't compartmentalize; God wants access to every aspect of your life. He cares about you and what happens to you. (1 Peter 5:7) Including God in all areas of our lives reveals our level of surrender to Him. As we invite Him to be a part of everything we do, we will have moments of worship every day.

Write Romans 12:1–2 in The Message translation (MSG).

4. Be obedient.

The first place where worship is mentioned in the Bible is a story that reveals a heart of unconditional love for God: the story of Abraham laying Isaac on the altar in Genesis 22. Abraham trusted God with his greatest treasure—his son. And God called this worship.

“Therefore, let us offer through Jesus a continual sacrifice of praise to God, proclaiming our allegiance to His name.”

HEBREWS 13:15

Write Hebrews 13:16.

The greatest sacrifice we can give to God is a heart of humility willing to serve Him with unconditional obedience. This kind of worship moves the heart of God toward us. Read this incredible promise from Jesus out loud:

“The person who has My commands and keeps them is the one who [really] loves Me; and whoever [really] loves Me will be loved by My Father, and I will love him and reveal Myself to him [I will make Myself real to him].”

JOHN 14:21 AMP

5. Show reverence.

“The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom; all who follow His precepts have good understanding. To Him belongs eternal praise.”

PSALM 111:10 NIV

In this verse, “fear” means respect. Our God is like no other—almighty, awesome, and beyond comprehension. It is only appropriate that we approach Him with awe and reverence. True worship requires that we fear the Lord.

“But the time is coming—indeed it’s here now—when true worshippers will worship the Father in spirit and in truth. The Father is looking for those who will worship Him that way.”

JOHN 4:23

The Greek word for “worship” in this verse is *proskuneo*, which literally means “to kiss the master’s hand in reverence.” It indicates both love and

respect. This is a powerful combination. When we both fear God, and love Him, we feel safe in the shelter of His immense greatness. This reverent approach to worship allows us to enjoy resting in His presence, and if He tells us to jump, we say, “How high, Lord?”

IN SPIRIT AND TRUTH

“Here now is my final conclusion: Fear God and obey His commands, for this is everyone’s duty. God will judge us for everything we do, including every secret thing, whether good or bad.”

ECCLESIASTES 12:13–14

Each day, we have the opportunity to love God and live for Him by aligning our lives with the truth of His Word. We cannot separate our love for God from our submission to Him. God says He wants us to worship Him not only in spirit, with enthusiasm, gratitude, and affection, but also in truth. Worshipping in “truth” requires us to examine our lives and rid ourselves of anything that does not line up with His Word.

We need to ask God to purify us. True worship comes from a place of purity. We can’t expect God to be pleased by our jumping and clapping and singing if we do not allow Him to deal with our secret sin and areas where we have fallen short. Hear the heart of humility in this prayer:

“Search me, O God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts. Point out anything in me that offends You, and lead me along the path of everlasting life.”

PSALM 139:23–24

Ask the Holy Spirit to reveal anything in you that has grieved Him or reduced His presence in your life, and be willing to confront that area and align yourself with the truth of God's Word. As you go through this process, know this: The voice of the Holy Spirit convicts, but the voice of the devil condemns. You need to discern which voice you hear so that you can respond correctly. Condemnation says, "Here's the problem. Look at it. It's all your fault, and there's no way out." That is not the voice of God. Our Heavenly Father tells us there is no condemnation for those who belong to Christ Jesus. (Romans 8:1) He sent His Son to save you, not condemn you. (John 3:17 NIV) Conviction through the Holy Spirit says, "Here's the problem, but let's do something about it. There is hope and a way out."

Remember the blood of Jesus. In Isaiah 1:18, God says, "Though your sins are like scarlet, I will make them white as snow." Jesus has made it possible for us to walk in purity! Let's make every effort to worship Him with clean hands and pure hearts.

THE MIDNIGHT HOUR

When we are totally focused on God—His goodness, provision, healing, deliverance, holiness—we are actually in a posture of warfare against the enemy. Worship has the power to tear down strongholds and change our environments.

Worship not only brings freedom in our own lives, but it also has the power to set others free. In Acts 16:23–34, we find Paul and Silas in jail. They have been arrested and flogged and are now in the depths of a prison. Chained, weary, and surrounded by darkness, with every reason to be afraid, what do they do? They worship.

“Around midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the other prisoners were listening. Suddenly, there was a massive earthquake, and the prison was shaken to its foundations. All the doors immediately flew open, and the chains of every prisoner fell off!”

ACTS 16:25–26

Salvation came to many that night, including the jailer and his entire family. That is the power of true worship. Chains fall off, and people are set free. When God is the focus of our love and attention, we will see Him do immeasurably more than we can ask or imagine. (Ephesians 3:20) Choose to love Him with your whole life, and nothing will be impossible for you.

PRAYING FOR PURITY

God desires to purify you. If there is an area of sin in your life that you know you need to deal with, ask Him to forgive you. Use the prayer below as a guide.

Father, I'm sorry for offending You and going my own way. I make no excuses for it. I confess my sin right now. (Identify out loud any sin you need to release to God.) I want this sin out of my life, and I choose to turn away from it. Please forgive me, and make me clean. I receive Your forgiveness now. I know You delight to show me mercy. Thank You, Lord, for letting me off the hook. I make the decision to love You and worship You with all my heart. In Jesus' name I pray, Amen.

Journal: *Below is a space for you to write what you're learning, thoughts on this week's topic, or what you feel God is leading you to do.*