

“To worship is to quicken the conscience by the holiness of God, to feed the mind with the truth of God, to purge the imagination by the beauty of God, to open the heart to the love of God, to devote the will to the purpose of God.” William Temple

“Worship begins in holy expectancy, it ends in holy obedience.” Richard Foster

*John 4:23-24*, “But the hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father seeks such as these to worship him. God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth.”

A small boy sat beside his mother in a worship service. Like most small children, and some adults, his attention was neither easily captured nor readily held. So much of what was happening in the service seemed uninteresting, unrelated unimportant. He was bored stiff. Suddenly his wandering eyes noticed a bronze plaque prominently placed on the side wall. There he saw stars, letters, and the outline of an American flag. Nudging his mother and pointing to the plaque, he asked, “What’s that?” Graciously his mother replied, “Those are the names of people from our church who died in the service.” There was a long pause. Suddenly, with a sense of concern bordering on panic, he asked, “Mom, was that the 8:00 or the 11:00 service?”

Why do we find this story humorous? Probably because we relate to the not-so-subtle implication that worship services can be dull and lifeless. Though Christians gather to celebrate a living God of resurrection power, the experience may lack energy, excitement, vitality, and a sense of God’s presence. Author Robert G. Rayburn wrote, “There remains among sincere believers...a woeful ignorance concerning the significance of true worship and the means of attaining the blessing of rich, rewarding corporate worship.” This morning we’re going to reflect on the second trait of a healthy disciple which is God-Exalting Worship. The healthy disciple engages wholeheartedly in meaningful, God-focused worship experiences on a weekly basis with the family of God. The word worship means “to attribute worth” to someone or something, and we become like what we praise, so who or what we choose to worship and praise is so important and life-shaping.

Dr. Perry Buffington reported that research psychologists have found there are at least three situations when we are not ourselves. First, the average person puts on airs when visiting the lobby of a fancy hotel. Next, the average person will try to hide his or her emotions and bamboozle the salesman in a new car showroom. And finally, as we take our seat in church or synagogue, we try to fake out the Almighty that we’ve really been good all week.<sup>1</sup> We can’t fake out God, but when we worship together, there are temptations to use worship as a time to impress other people, or to treat worship as a time when we don’t expect anything to happen

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<sup>1</sup> Dr. Perry Buffington, “Playing Charades,” Universal Press Syndicate, September 26, 1999.

to us, and we don't expect God's presence and power to touch us or change us as we worship. Even worse we can think worship is focused on ourselves—what we want, what we like, what we agree with, what we get out of it or receive—rather than on who God is and what the Lord has done, what God wants, desires, commands, and has already given to us..

When we turn to the Bible, we realize that God-Exalting Worship is a priority. *Psalm 84* begins, "How lovely is your dwelling place, O Lord of hosts! **My soul longs, indeed it faints for the courts of the Lord; my heart and my flesh sing for joy to the living God.**" In the *Psalms*, we're reminded again and again that worship engages our mind, emotions, spirit, and body. We read in the *Psalms* of shouting, clapping and praising God aloud in the congregation (*Psalm 47:1*); rejoicing and expressing thanksgiving (*Psalm 100:1,4*); being silent before the Lord (*Psalm 46:10*) and bowing down or kneeling in worship (*Psalm 95:6*). Lifting our heads and eyes (*Psalm 3:3*), waving our hands in praise (*Psalm 63:4*), playing instruments (*Psalms 33:2, 92:3, 98:6, 144:9, 150:4-5*) and even dancing before the Lord (*Psalms 30:11, 149:3, 150:4*). C.S. Lewis said, "The most valuable thing the *Psalms* do for me is to express the same delight in God which made David dance."

One of the most familiar and best known *Psalms* is *Psalm 100*, which is community thanksgiving about God-exalting worship. *Psalm 100:1-5*, "Make a joyful noise to the Lord, all the earth. Worship the Lord with gladness; come into his presence with singing. Know that the Lord is God. It is he that made us, and we are his; we are his people, and the sheep of his pasture. Enter his gates with thanksgiving, and his courts with praise. Give thanks to him, bless his name. For the Lord is good; his steadfast love endures forever, and his faithfulness to all generations."

***Psalm 100* very simply relates the Who, What, Why, and How of God-Exalting Worship.** First, it answers who is to be worshiped? **The Lord.** Who is to worship? **All the earth.** That means everybody and everything. In the *Book of Revelation*, we're told that in heaven there will be people from every tribe, language, people, and nation worshipping God. ***Revelation 7:9-10***, "After this I looked, and there was a great multitude that no one could count, **from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages**, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, robed in white, with palm branches in their hands. They cried out in a loud voice, saying, 'Salvation belongs to our God who is seated on the throne, and to the Lamb!'" John says these people will worship God day and night within his temple. The Lord who *Psalm 100* says is good, whose steadfast love endures forever, and whose faithfulness extends to all generations will be the center of worship. The common theme in *Psalm 100*, *Revelation 7:9-17* as well as *Isaiah 19:19-24* is people of all nations worshipping God. This is God's ultimate desire and it's reflected in both the *Old* and *New Testaments*. In *Psalm 100*, all the earth, all the nations, all the peoples are invited to worship God—making a joyful noise to the Lord, worshipping the Lord with gladness; and coming into God's presence with singing.

**What** attitude should we bring to worship? We are to worship the Lord with **gladness**. Let me tell you what that means in the Hebrew and other ancient languages and translations. It means

we are to worship the Lord with gladness. One of the things I feel good about is that I think there are a fair amount of people at BBC who would say like another *Psalms* says, "I was glad when they said unto me, let us go to the house of the Lord." Would people observing us say we were glad to be going to worship? I've encountered the attitude or belief in some people that almost seems like the more serious and sadder you look the holier you are. I'm not saying we deny the hurt, hardship or heartache in our life or our world when we worship God. In many ways, a community lament from the *Book of Psalms* is probably more fitting for how many people are feeling today than a community thanksgiving. However, the *Psalms* teach us an attitude of thanksgiving even in challenging times because we're glad in the midst of whatever challenge we're facing we can go to worship and re-focus on God and gain a sense of perspective and even hope. It pleases God when we take delight and pleasure in worshipping the Lord. Our attitude in worship is not just of gladness and gratitude, but also one focused on giving and not getting. Worship is not so much about what we come to get as what we come to give to the Lord who is the focus and the audience of our worship. That requires that we come to worship prepared to give. Worshipping the Lord with gladness presupposes a relationship that makes you want to be there.

A couple shared with me that when they drove to visit their parents, their young child who was still in a car seat would say when pulling into their grandparents driveway and seeing their house, "I want to get out! I want to get out!" He said this because he wanted to get out of the car as quickly as possible to get into the presence of people he knows love him and are good to him. Often we may think, "I want to get out, I want get out," during a worship service, not when we pull into the church parking lot. How might our experience of worship be different if when we pulled into the parking lot on Sunday morning, everyone in the car said, "I want to get out! I want to get out!" because you were so glad to worship the Lord you couldn't wait to get into the presence of God who loves you and is good to you. I bet you'd smile and maybe even laugh and you'd be on your way to worshipping the Lord with gladness.

**Who is to worship?** All the earth.

**What attitude do we bring to worship?** Gladness.

**Why are we to worship God?** Because we belong to God who is good, loving, and faithful. God made us. We didn't make ourselves. There is no such thing as a self-made man or woman, though claiming to be one may absolve God of being responsible for some people.

**Why do we worship? Because we are made in the image of God in order to worship and serve the Lord.** *Revelation 5* says we were made to be "a kingdom of priests serving our God." We are the sheep of God's pasture. The Lord is our Shepherd and we can trust and depend upon the Shepherd. We worship because of God's character of unfailing love and faithfulness. The reason "why" we worship is that we recognize that the Lord is God and no one and nothing else is. Our response to God's gift of life and of personal relationship is joyful, glad worship. It's praise, singing and thanksgiving that in the brevity, fragility and transitory nature of life, we can depend upon God's goodness, steadfast love and faithfulness. In

*Revelation 5*, two of the three songs being sung are about the worth of Christ and his sacrificial love.

When we're feeling overwhelmed, lost, turned around not knowing what we should do or what to think or where to go, we can restore our perspective, our sanity and our hope by worshipping the Lord. A woman bought a new car loaded with high-tech options. The first time she drove the car in the rain, she turned a knob she thought would start the windshield wipers. Instead a message flashed across the dash: "Drive car in 360 degrees." She had no idea what that meant, and so when she got home she read the car manual. While trying to turn on the windshield wipers, she had inadvertently turned off the internal compass, and the car had lost its sense of direction. To correct the problem, the car had to be driven in a full circle, pointed north, and then the compass had to be reset.

Each time we gather to worship, both privately and publicly, we are resetting our internal compass. We establish "true north" in our soul, remembering who God is and what God's word proclaims. That's why it's so important that we take time to prepare for Sunday worship during the week through reading the scriptures – perhaps making the passages for the upcoming Sunday our focus – as well as taking some time to pray and reflect; these habits prepare us to be able to give of ourselves to God when we come to worship on Sunday. The more we come to give in worship the more we will ultimately receive.

Finally, **how are we to worship?** Passionately with all our heart, soul, strength, and mind and every ounce of our being. We're to worship the Lord with deep attentive listening, moments of silence, joyful noise, with singing, thanksgiving, and praise, blessing God's name. Worship is a verb, it's an action word. When we come here on Sunday morning we shouldn't say we're going to church. Going to church means we're going to a place. Going to worship means we're going **to do something**. Worship in heaven is going to feature singing, movement and praise around God who is the audience and everyone else in existence is a worshipper. When we properly worship God we do benefit, but we're always to remember that worship is first for God and not ourselves. Graham Kendrick, who wrote many songs we sing at our early services said, "Worship is first and foremost for God's benefit, not ours, though it is marvelous to discover that in giving God pleasure, we ourselves enter into what can become our richest and most wholesome experience in life."

One of my favorite quotes about worship is the one by Archbishop William Temple. I appreciate how it highlights the different parts of our being that are impacted by worshipping almighty God. "To worship is to quicken the conscience by the holiness of God, to feed the mind with the truth of God, to purge the imagination by the beauty of God, to open the heart to the love of God, to devote the will to the purpose of God." God-exalting worship is inspiring and transforming. Worship that's focused on God gives us something to think about, moves our heart and emotions, and challenges us to keep moving forward on the adventure of discipleship even and most especially in times of anxiety and uncertainty. There's no mention in John's vision of worship in heaven in *Revelation* of individual moods, preferences or

circumstances. The focus of worship is Holy, Almighty God who has created all things and who is worthy to receive all glory, honor and power. John reminds us that our worship here at BBC takes place in the larger context of worship around the world and in heaven.

**Who** is to **be worshiped**? The Lord alone. **Who** is **to worship**? All the earth.

**What** attitude do we bring to worship? Gladness.

**Why** are we to worship? Because we belong to God who is good, loving and faithful.

**How** are we to worship? Passionately with all our heart, soul, strength, mind, and every ounce of our being.

So what are you going to say when you pull into the parking lot next Sunday?

**I want to get out!**

### **Questions for Discussion or Reflection**

1. Why is it important for worship to be about exalting God? What can get in the way of God being the focus of our worship?
2. What do we learn about worship from *Psalms 100*?
3. Why do you think Jesus tells the Samaritan woman, and by extension the rest of us, that (*John 4:23-24*), “true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father seeks such as these to worship him. God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth.” What does it mean to worship God in spirit and in truth?
4. Discuss or reflect on this quote by William Temple: “To worship is to quicken the conscience by the holiness of God, to feed the mind with the truth of God, to purge the imagination by the beauty of God, to open the heart to the love of God, to devote the will to the purpose of God.”
5. How will your approach to congregational worship be different than it previously has been as a result of hearing this week’s sermon and/or reading the chapter on God-Exalting Worship in *Becoming a Healthy Disciple*? What can you do to make your experience more about giving than getting?