

Worship 101

Worship is the natural expression of what is at the center of our lives.

The reason I'm passionate about praise and worship is because I believe it permeates all we do—not just on Sundays in the songs we sing or postures we practice—I'm not passionate about gathering on Sunday morning to worship—worship is living all of life to the glory of God! There's my passion: People living their lives to the glory of God. Eating, drinking, laughing, loving—when done to God's glory, it's worship.

A life lived to the glory of God is the result of a person in love with God. To be a worshiper of God and lover of God is the greatest commandment of God—**Deut. 6:5, the Shema**—“Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might.” Jesus picked up on this when he was asked, “What is the greatest commandment?” He quotes the Shema. Nothing new here, nothing controversial or revolutionary. But then Jesus does the unexpected, he attaches another command to it, this one from Leviticus 19:18: “Love your neighbor as yourself.” And this is the genius of Jesus—he shows us that loving God, worshiping God, is intricately connected to loving people. Love God, Love People. Peter said, “yes I love you Lord!” “Then Feed my sheep.” Love your neighbors. “Love me? Then love people.”

What Jesus is doing here is showing us that to be lovers of God is to be lovers of people. We all know that to worship God is more than singing songs or raising hands; to worship God means to live life a certain way! To worship God involves reaching out to the hurting, helping the hungry, fighting injustice, showing mercy and compassion, and so much more... And what Jesus is getting at here (as do other characters in the Bible) is that it's not OK to stretch out our hands to God and **not stretch out our hands to the world**.

In our culture there is a severe and wicked disconnect between the Love of God and the Love of people.

In Isaiah's day, God rebuked his people for their expression of love for him because it was unaccompanied by a love for people. These worshipers brought the right offerings and performed the right postures, but their worship was found unacceptable because the rest of their lives were characterized by sin, oppression, greed, and injustice.

God says to Israel, (**Isaiah 1:13-17**) *“Bring your worthless offerings no longer... When you spread out your hands in prayer, I will hide my eyes from you, Yes, even though you multiply prayers, I will not listen. Your hands are full of bloodshed...Cease to do evil, learn to do good; seek justice, reprove the ruthless; defend the orphan, plead for the widow.”*

That’s the worship God was looking for. Not their prayers and offerings.

Hebrews 13:15-16 says, *“let us continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of lips that give thanks to his name. And do not neglect doing good and sharing with others; for with such sacrifices God is pleased.”*

Same point here: God doesn’t look at our worship only as an isolated event where we come in and love him and express worth to him... Yes, that’s an important part! But it’s **only** a part. We worship God as much by “doing good and sharing with others” as we do by “giving thanks to his name.”

The thing is: God knows us! We give ourselves the benefit of the doubt in our relationship with God—“Yeah we love him! We love to worship too!” But Jesus is saying we can know how we’re doing vertically by how we’re doing horizontally... It’s sort of tough sometimes to evaluate how we’re doing at loving God, but it’s easy to see how we’re loving other people. This is the crux of what it means to be a worshiper, and the crux of what it means to be a Christ-follower: One who loves God, and loves people.

In Philippians 2:17, Paul referred to himself in his service as a "libation" or offering like an OT sacrificial offering. His actions and life as a whole were compared to an act of worship. And in Romans 12 Paul tells us to present our bodies as a living sacrifice—for this is our reasonable service of worship.

So, with that said: **Worship is everything you do, done to the glory of God.** It’s the natural expression that God is at the center of your life.

But what does that mean, and what does that look like when we gather together then for “corporate worship?” I believe that incredible things happen in the heavenly realms when God’s people gather to deliberately give him glory! And this is where we as the Church could benefit from some biblical teaching and direction.

We must always remember that worship is about God. Worship always begins with God. Apart from his willingness to share himself with us we would never see his face, forever stranded from his intimate embrace. It's all about God.

It's not about us, what we "get out of it;" it's not about us "feeling" close to God, etc... although we are often very blessed as a bi-product of worship. God does speak to us and meet with us. But to think that worship is about what we get or feel would be like thinking that one gets married for the purpose of having someone around to cook, clean house, watch the kids, or fix the plumbing! You get married because you LOVE someone, not because they'll unplug the toilet every once in a while! We worship because we Love Jesus.

Studying through the Bible you'll find several different flavors and styles of praise and worship. It may help to begin by distinguishing the one from the other—what is praise, and what is worship?

Simply put, to praise means to celebrate, to adore, to extol, or to applaud. All of the Hebrew words for praise demand exuberance, excitement, and passion!

Halal: To praise the Lord by celebrating, by dancing and shining forth, by acting clamorously foolish. 99X this word occurs.

Ps.150 *Hallal ye the Lord, Hallal God in his sanctuary; hallal Him in the firmament of his power.*

Yad-ah: To praise the Lord with extended hand (yad), to throw out the hand.

Ps. 138:2 *I will worship toward thy holy temple, and Yadah thy name.*

Shabach: To praise the lord with a shout and a loud voice.

Psalm 63:3 *Because thy lovingkindness is better than life, my lips shall Shabach Thee.*

Towdah: To thank God for things at hand, as well as things not yet received.

Psalm 50:23 *Whosoever offereth Towdah glorifies me.*

Tehillah: A praise from your spirit; the residual (new) song of the Lord from the heart of the believer. The book of Psalms in Hebrew is titled, "Tehillim."

Psalm 22:3 *Thou art holy, O thou that inhabitest the Tehillah of Israel.*

Zamar: To praise the Lord with the playing of an instrument.
Psalm 108:1 *O God, my heart is fixed; I will sing and give Zamar.*

Gil: To circle in joy, to dance in circles and rejoice.

So this is the heart of what it means to praise: To celebrate, to shout and applaud, to loudly commend and even to dance in joy. It's an upward explosion of energetic expression to God!

Worship is very different. The words for worship take the opposite direction. Worship involves a downward, reverent, submission:

Barak: To worship the Lord by kneeling or bowing; to humbly recognize God as the origin of all power, success, or victory.
Psalm 95:6 *O Come, let us worship and bow down: Let us Barak before the Lord our Maker.*

Shachah: To worship by falling down, bowing, or prostrating your self.

And so we see how vast is the difference between praise and worship!

One is dancing, the other is bowing;
One is shouting, the other is kneeling;
One can be raucous, the other silent;
One is leaping, the other is prostration;
One is exulting, the other debasing;
One is rejoicing, the other is trembling.

**And in the Bible we see it all--a vast array of expressions in praise and worship:
Shouting | Dancing | Kneeling | Leaping | Falling | Lying prostrate**

We see worship with the lips: speaking, singing, shouting
We see worship with the hands: clapping, raising, playing music, blessing others
We see worship with the entire being: standing, dancing, kneeling, lying facedown

Seeing all of this, I can't help but wonder if much of our praise and much of our worship today, here in 2004, is more cultural than it is biblical.

Heb. 12:28 *Let us show gratitude, by which we may worship acceptably, with reverence and awe; for our God is a consuming fire.*

Acceptable worship implies there is unacceptable worship.

How are we to know what is acceptable worship? Only by heeding the Bible's teachings and examples. The Bible is our HOW TO manual. Its pages are **resplendent** with teachings, commands, admonitions, and examples for us regarding praise and worship.

For example: There's not one verse in the bible that tells us to Bow our heads OR close our eyes when we pray. But we all do it, every time we hear, "Let's pray."

OK. So some of our forms may be a little off... Of course, Form isn't everything! The form can be right on and the heart still be dead wrong (Ex. 32, Pharisees too). Just because you demonstrate postures outwardly doesn't necessarily indicate a heart of worship inwardly.

Heb. 12:28 implies that we can unknowingly worship God in unacceptable forms. So the heart can be right and the form wrong (Cain)!

Regarding outward form: What we do on the outside **is a key reflection** of what's going on inside. Out of the overflow of the heart the mouth speaks and the lips sing and we dance and we bow low.

God has wired each of us certain ways. When we are thrilled and excited about something, we are hard-wired to stand up, throw our hands up, and shout quite loudly, sometimes even dance in circles or leap up and down. You don't see anyone sitting in their seat at the SuperBowl with their hands in their pockets saying, "I'm excited on the inside!" No, it comes out!

God has wired us this way, and the **point of posture** in worship is not to become someone or something you are not—it is to become exactly the most genuine YOU that God made You to be. He knows you're wired to jump up and down; He's just saying, "Be THAT you—here with me." He's created you to express things certain ways—posture is just one way that we can express our hearts back to Him.

So which is it then?! Does God want us dancing and shouting, raising our hands and leaping for joy? Or does God want us to show reverence by bowing, kneeling, even worshiping face down?

As is most things with God, the answer is not an **either-or, but a both-and**. The most **profound and wholesome** worship contains elements of both. Rejoicing, and Trembling, like we see in **Psalm 2:11**: *“Worship the Lord with reverence, and rejoice with trembling.”* Perfectly captures the **fusion** of joy and reverence, the friendship and the fear. Its’ the WOW and the WOE of worship. The gladness, and the gravity.

2 Chronicles 20:18-19 also shows the balance:

Jehoshaphat bowed his head with his face to the ground, and all Judah fell down before the Lord, worshipping the Lord. And the Levites...stood up to praise the Lord God of Israel, with a very loud voice.

Leviticus 9:24 captures it too:

*Fire came out from the presence of the LORD and consumed the burnt offering and the fat portions on the altar. And when all the people saw it, they **shouted for joy and fell facedown.***

Shachah/Barak: Facedown Worship

(notes taken primarily from Matt Redman’s “Facedown”)

On several different occasions, the Bible allows us a glimpse into an open heaven, and there’s a whole lot of facedown worship going on. In Revelation, John encounters the risen and exalted Jesus—whose eyes blaze like fire and whose face is shining like the sun in all its brilliance. Overwhelmed to the core, John shrinks to the ground in reverence and fear! (Rev. 1:17) A few chapters later, the elders too are falling down in holy devotion, and the further you go the more facedown worshipers you find.

Rev. 7:11 *All the angels were standing around the throne and around the elders and the four living creatures. They **fell down on their faces** before the throne and worshipped God.*

The book of Ezekiel gives us another glimpse into heaven, and we find more of the same. Ezekiel, the prophet, sees the “appearance of the likeness of the glory of the Lord,” and he responds: **(Ezekiel 1:28)** *When I saw it, I fell **facedown.***

Facing up to the glory of God, he soon found himself facedown in awe and astonishment. When we **face up to the glory** of God, we soon find ourselves facedown in worship as well.

Facedown worship is the overflow of a heart humbled and amazed by the glory of God. It's the posture of a people so desperate for the increase of Christ that they find themselves decreasing to the ground in an act of reverent submission.

In the book of Daniel we see yet another glimpse into heaven, and Daniel cannot stay on his feet: *I bowed with my **face toward the ground** and was speechless. (Daniel 10:15)*

When it comes to worship, the throne sets the tone.

Journeying through the Bible we find a whole host of facedown worshipers:
(In addition to the aforementioned Ezekiel, Daniel, Jehoshapat, and Levites)

Gen 17 **Abraham** fell facedown

Num 16 **Moses** fell facedown

Num 20 **Moses and Aaron** fell facedown and the glory of the LORD
appeared to them

Joshua 5:14 **Joshua** fell facedown to the ground in reverence...

1 Samuel 24 **David** bowed down and prostrated himself with his face to
the ground.

1 Chronicles 21:16 **David and the elders** fell facedown

Matthew 17 The **disciples** fell facedown

Luke 5 **Jesus** fell facedown

Acts 9 **Paul** fell facedown

All of these men greatly used by God were worshipers who worshiped facedown. You can see an inextricable link between **Adoration and Revelation** in the pages of the Bible. God shows himself to his worshipers. Jesus even told the woman at the well that the Father seeks those who worship him in spirit and in truth. **2 Chronicles 16:9** says the same thing: *"The eyes of the Lord move to and fro throughout the earth that He may strongly support those whose heart is completely his."* A heart that is completely His is a heart of worship. **Psalm 145:14** has the same message: *"The LORD upholds all those who fall and lifts up all who are bowed down."*

To worship facedown is the ultimate **outward sign of inner reverence for our Holy God**. I say this because God's Holiness means God's "Otherness." He's set apart, other, completely different. He's holy.

Now, we have lots of expressions to show praise and worth these days—we raise our hands and shout for joy at baseball games, pep rallies, monster truck shows and rock and roll concerts (to name just a few)—but: we need to reserve something for only God Himself. Certain postures should be given only to God himself. We need some expressions that we give to no one and no-thing but God himself. And this is exactly the posture of Shachah.

Bowing facedown is a physical gesture that **we do not offer to any other**, which makes it a fantastic response to the "set apartness" of God—an act of reverence for his praises only.

Lately we as the Church have found great intimacy and joy in worshiping the Father for his nearness and immanence, his friendship and Fatherhood, his love and compassion. Praise the Lord for this! (Psalm 73:28—the nearness of God is my good.)

However! We need to keep this in tension with worshiping God also for his greatness, his transcendence, his majesty and mystery. He is a consuming fire! God is completely other! So our worship should reflect WONDER. Perhaps there is no greater worship than wonder. In **Psalm 50:21** God confronts those who'd become too comfortable with his closeness—*You thought I was altogether like you.*" He is not like us! He's altogether holy, altogether other.

And so this is the God we worship. This is the God we praise.

Our God who is near and yet almighty.

He reveals and He conceals.

He invites and He hides.

He confounds and He confides.

He is the God who rests but never sleeps.

He thunders and whispers, terrifies and befriends.

His anger lasts a moment, but his favor lasts a lifetime.

He is all-consuming yet kind;

All knowing, yet capable of forgetting the sins he forgives!

The God who wounds and binds up, who injures and who heals.

The King whose footstool is the Earth,
yet humbly washed the earth from the feet of those He disciplined.

Who reigns in righteousness yet carried our shamefulnes.

Who walked in the Garden of Eden in the cool of the day,
yet sweated drops of blood in the Garden of Gethsemane one agonizing night.

The God of the smallest detail and the grandest design,
who issued ornate designs for an extravagant temple
yet found pleasure in the humblest offering of a widow's two tiny coins there.

The suffering servant who commands the universe.
The sinless friend of sinners.

The Savior who hung in agony on beams of wood He Himself
had called into being.

He is fearsome yet welcoming, unfathomable yet knowable.
The God of kings and beggars, presidents and paupers.
Who fathers the fatherless and works through our weakness.
Burning with holiness, yet refreshingly graceful.

He who is worshiped by the multitudes of heaven
yet rejoices over a single returning heart.

This is the God we worship---the God of all Mystery.

Now unto Him be all glory, all honor, all blessing, praise, and worship, both
now and forevermore.