

## Worship As Life

### Psalm 24:3-4, Romans 12:1-2, Ephesians 5:18-19, Psalm 150:3-5

Idea: Worship is a mindset & lifestyle that flows from our heart in a variety of ways in all of life.

#### **Introduction**

*A few years ago our international church in Cairo, Egypt was having our Easter service at night. We met outside under a tent canopy each week because of our size. Our time slot was 7 pm as many churches shared the facility on Easter. The worship band was playing joyfully with words of the songs up on the screen. We were very dependent on electricity so that over 500 people could participate.*

*Egypt had frequent rolling power outages at that time and a few minutes into our service, sure enough the power went out. My first impulse was to panic that our special Easter service would be ruined; our biggest celebration of the year would not happen. It was pitch dark so people could not read the words to the songs. We had to improvise. We pulled out some candles and the worship pastor strummed his acoustic guitar to our most familiar songs. Some used their cell phones to find the words.*

*A sense of community enveloped the room. We discovered God's presence as He showed us that worship isn't about style or facility or electricity. **Presence is more important than power!** Years later, people still say Easter that year was one of the most meaningful in their lives!*

A speaker once asked this challenging question: "Are you more drawn to God's hand or God's face?" He was really asking, "Do you desire the power that comes from God's hand, or the presence that comes as we seek His face? How would you answer that question?"

We continue our **Healthy Church Series** as we look at **Worship as Life**. Worship is more than music. Worship is more than a Sunday morning service. Unfortunately, worship is also a big area of conflict in churches. It's been said that when Satan fell from heaven, he fell into the choir loft!

Worship means to proclaim God's worth. Psalm 24:3a asks, Who may ascend the hill of the LORD? Ascend was to climb the hill up the Temple Mount to enter the presence of God to worship.

24:3b, Who may stand in His holy place? Stand is the right to come before God. Who has the right to stand before God?—an uncomfortable question! David said in Psalm 66:18, If I had cherished **sin** in my heart, the LORD would not have listened. Our character matters in worship!

Psalm 24:4 answers the question about who may worship: He who has clean hands and a pure heart, who does not lift up his soul to an idol, or swear by what is false. This doesn't mean perfection, otherwise no one could stand. Clean hands means your actions match your words. Pure heart is an uncompromised inner life. Swear falsely means a true worshiper of God stays true to their word even when it's hard. Their character is consistent in public AND private.

James 1 warns against being "double-minded"—one foot in the church, another foot in the world. Worship is more than thinking and acting right on Sundays. It encompasses our whole person and entire life. Worship is not just an emotional response on Sunday morning.

#### **1. Worship is a mindset and lifestyle.**

*When I was in Nepal, I saw the overt idolatry of Hinduism. It felt more creepy than when I lived in a Muslim country. I was relieved to return to America. So does that mean America doesn't have idols?*

An **idol** is anything that takes priority in your life before God. *Since returning from living in Egypt for 10 years, I have been struck by three big idols in America: materialism (what we own or desire to own), consumerism (what I want, when I want it, how I want it), and individualism (I am master of my life to decide what I want). Immigrants from collectivist cultures (e.g. Africa, Middle East, and Asia) often feel isolated and struggle to adapt to our individualistic culture.*

I don't know about you, but I feel inadequate to ascend God's hill. I have not been blameless. I keep facing my own imbedded attitude of consumerism like the old Burger King commercial "have it your way". I want worship my way and I get distracted from focusing on God if I don't like how worship is done. We extend our consumerism to corporate worship.

Over the decades, I have heard many examples of consumerism from all sides of the worship music debate. I have heard how Christian contemporary music is lyrically shallow, musically inferior, overly

repetitive, and self-absorbed. Yet lyrics for many contemporary choruses come from the Psalms which contain individual laments and will repeat phrases several times.

Younger generations criticize hymns as slow dirges that are boring. They fail to recognize (or care) how deeply and emotionally meaningful these hymns are for previous generations. Occasionally some have even said, “*we pay the bills so we should get the music we want.*” Is that why we give?

Truth is, each generation composes music meaningful and worshipful to them. The initial response to Handel’s “Messiah” in 1741 London was lukewarm. Awhile back, a teen told his father that he was tired of the hymns at church. His father said, “*If you think you can write something better, then then why don’t you?*” So in the early 18<sup>th</sup> century, Isaac Watts wrote “When I Survey the Wondrous Cross”, “Alas! and Did My Savior Bleed”, “God Our Help in Ages Past” and hundreds more new hymns.

Worship is not limited to one music style from one era. Worship IS limited when our attitude is about our preferences and not on God. God wants us to focus on Him, not our expectations.

Worship is our response to God. It’s our adoration, love, respect, thanks, and devotion to honor Him. Romans 12:1-2, <sup>1</sup>Therefore brothers and sisters, I urge you by the mercies of God to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your **spiritual worship**. <sup>2</sup>Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind.

How might we be conformed to the world in worship? Isaiah 29:13 describes how false worship can hide behind a religious façade of duty. The LORD says: “*These people come near to Me with their mouth and honor Me with their lips, but their hearts are far from Me. Their worship of Me is based on merely human rules they have been taught. Sometimes we have layered on so many expectations of what is and is not worship that we miss God’s heart. Worship then becomes an empty exercise that doesn’t engage our heart.*

*A husband recalls, “My wife Debbie contracted chronic fatigue syndrome. In three weeks her life changed from graduate student and adjunct professor to confinement in bed with low-grade fever, severe short-term memory loss, and barely enough energy to take a shower. Somehow most Sundays she made it to church. During worship she sat and wept. Something was happening inside her. The Spirit was praying from within; deep changes were occurring. The Spirit also works in us during worship.*

## **2. Worship comes from our heart not our duty.**

Does worship engage your heart? Do you access the depths of your soul when worshipping God? Or have certain church procedures and styles commanded more of your attention? A **healthy church** expresses a heart of worship as a natural part of everyday life.

Worship has a variety of experiences and expressions—anytime, anywhere. The key is a Spirit-filled heart as Ephesians 5:18-19 says, <sup>18</sup>be filled with the Spirit, <sup>19</sup>speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody to the Lord with your heart.

Worship is more than music. Worship includes speaking to one another. Readings, testimonies, dramas, liturgy, offerings, and preaching are forms of group worship. Roman writer Pliny testified to Emperor Trajan about Christians, “*They are wont on a fixed day to meet before daylight [to avoid persecution] and to recite a hymn among themselves by turns, to Christ, as if being God.*”

Worship includes talking about God with one another. Psalms 145:4-5, <sup>4</sup>One generation **commends** Your works to another; they tell of Your mighty acts. <sup>5</sup>They speak of the glorious splendor of Your majesty. Is worship of God a natural part of *your* everyday conversations?

Psalms were songs structured like OT Psalms: personal, emotional expressions of praise and lament to God. Half of all Psalms are individual cries out to God.

NT hymns predate what we call hymns today. Our hymns are generally from the last 150 years and often teach doctrine. In ancient times, secular hymns were written to honor a deity. So NT hymns focused on exalting who God is.

Spiritual songs (odes) were short poems set to music or sung. It refers broadly to any kind of song with a spiritual message. For us today, there are a variety of musical expressions available to worship God, including traditional hymns, contemporary choruses, and countless other styles of music.

Singing can also be done in a variety of ways: group singing, choirs, solos, duets, trios. Some Psalms were originally sung responsively where a leader sings a line and the congregation responds. Antiphonal singing was where each side of the congregation sings back and forth to each other as in Nehemiah 12.

Making melody literally means, “to pluck or vibrate through touch.” So it could refer to playing a stringed instrument such as the guitar. It adds yet another type of musical expression to worship.

Psalm 150:3-5, <sup>3</sup>Praise Him with the sounding of the trumpet, praise Him with the harp and lyre, <sup>4</sup>praise Him with timbrel and dancing, praise Him with the strings and pipe, <sup>5</sup>praise Him with the clash of cymbals praise Him with resounding cymbals. Worship can be quiet and meditative OR loud and celebratory! Worship is creative!

### **3. Worship has a variety of expressions.**

One of my favorite ways of worship is to walk in nature to experience God’s beauty and creativity. Psalm 19:1 says, The heavens proclaim the glory of God. The skies display His **craftsmanship**.

I also like to listen to worship music while I walk. Whatever your preferred form of worship music—from hymns to hip-hop, you now can listen while you sit at home or walk or commute.

What’s your preferred mode of worship? Make it a regular part of your daily routine!

### **Conclusion**

*The favorite wife of Indian emperor Shah Jahan died. Devastated, he resolved to honor her by constructing a temple that would serve as her tomb. Her coffin was placed in the center of a large parcel of land, and construction of the temple began around it. No expense was spared to make her final resting place magnificent. That world famous temple called the Taj Mahal still stands in India today.*

*As the weeks turned into months, the Shah’s grief was replaced by his passion for the project. He no longer mourned her absence. Now the construction consumed him. One day, while walking across the construction site, he bumped into a dusty wooden box. The prince brushed the dust off his leg and ordered the worker to throw the box out.*

*Shah Jahan didn’t realize he had ordered the disposal of his wife’s coffin—now forgotten—hidden beneath layers of construction dust and time. The one the Taj Mahal was intended to honor was forgotten, but the temple was erected anyway. Could someone build a temple and forget why? Could someone construct a palace, yet forget the king??*

*Author Max Lucado writes, “You can tell the people who come to an assembly of worship who remember the Slain One [Jesus]. They’re wide-eyed and expectant. They’re like children watching the unwrapping of a gift. They are servants standing still as a king passes.*

*You can also tell the ones who see only the temple. Their eyes wander. Their feet shuffle. Their hands doodle, and their mouths open—not to sing, but to yawn. For no matter how hard they try to stay amazed, their eyes start to glaze over. All temples, even the Taj Mahal, lose their luster after a while. The temple gazers don’t mean to be bored. They don’t mean to grow stale. But still, something is missing.*

*The Jesus they once planned to honor hasn’t been seen very often. ... But those who have seen Him can’t seem to forget Him. They find Jesus, often in spite of the temple rather than because of it. They brush the dust away and stand ever impressed before His tomb—His empty tomb.”*

Are you wide-eyed and expectant when you come before God? Do you come to worship in awe of God, or do your eyes get a bit glazed? Do you look forward to spending time with Him during the week to refresh your spirit and renew that vital relational connection, or is your schedule too crowded?

A **healthy church** worships from the heart rather than being distracted by preferences and styles.

### **Benediction:**

Psalm 145:1-3, 5-6, <sup>1</sup>I will exalt You, my God the King; I will praise Your name for ever and ever. <sup>2</sup>**Every day** I will praise You and extol Your name for ever and ever. <sup>3</sup>Great is the LORD and most worthy of praise; His greatness no one can fathom. ... <sup>5</sup>I will **meditate** on Your wonderful works. ... <sup>6</sup>I will **proclaim** Your great deeds.