

worship: the key to drawing near to God

Read Acts 2:42-47. I wish I could transport you back in time to the early church, because I think the experience would change you forever. As you observed the believers devoting themselves to the apostles' teaching, to fellowship, to the breaking of bread, to prayer, and to praising God, I think you would say, "Wow, listen to how they speak to God! He seems so real to them! They seem to have such intimacy, such freedom, and such power!"

In those few minutes, you would witness worship in the early church, and would see how the Holy Spirit manifested the intimacy and awesomeness of God's presence to the believers as they praised and worshiped Him. Then, I think you would say, "I wish I could experience that too!" I believe you can.

What is worship? By definition, worship is ascribing worth to something or someone. But true worship is also a matter of the heart. It must be felt. It can't be ritualistic. It can't be just an external going through the motions. True worship is a heartfelt expression of love, adoration, admiration, fascination, wonder, and celebration. It's something that happens in your heart and soul when you begin to praise God for who He is and thank Him for what He has done.

Why is worshipping God so important? There is nothing difficult about worship . . . every human being was designed to worship, and does worship—something. Consider a group of sports fans watching and talking about a game. They worship. Consider a group of teenagers at a concert. They worship.

We readily worship food, sports, arts, and music. We worship comfort, control, power, achievement, work, money, and relationships, but God calls us to worship Him. He commands it, desires it, pursues it, deserves it. But if we choose not to worship God, we need to understand that we are worshipping something else. And whether we worship a job, achievement, money, or a person, we are doing so to our detriment. At some point, the object of our worship will fail to come through for us.

What happens when we worship? Perhaps the best way to illustrate what happens when we worship is to look at the worship experience of one of God's prophets recorded in Isaiah 6.

In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord seated on a throne, high and exalted, and the train of his robe filled the temple. Above him were seraphs, each with six wings: With two wings they covered their faces, with two they covered their feet, and with two they were flying. And they were calling to one another: "Holy, holy, holy is the LORD Almighty; the whole earth is full of his glory." At the sound of their voices the doorposts and thresholds shook and the temple was filled with smoke (v.1-4).

First, worship brings an upward look, a glance at God on His throne in all His glory. It refocuses our view of God. It pulls our affections off our idols and puts them onto God. It causes us to remember how good He is, how big, kind, powerful, and loving He is, and how holy He is.

Second, worship brings an inward look. *"Woe to me!" I cried. "I am ruined! For I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips, and my eyes have seen the King, the LORD Almighty." Then one of the seraphs flew to me with a live coal in his hand, which he had taken with tongs from the altar. With it he touched my mouth and said, "See, this has touched your lips; your guilt is taken away and your sin atoned for" (v. 5-7).*

When you see God for who He really is, as Isaiah did, you start to see yourself for who you really are. You start seeing things in your heart and in your life that really didn't bother you before. But notice that after Isaiah saw and confessed his sinfulness, he also experienced the mercy, grace, and forgiveness of God. That's what happens when you really worship.

But worship doesn't end there. Notice that Isaiah's inward look is followed by an outward look. *Then I heard the voice of the Lord saying, "Whom shall I send? And who will go for us?" And I said, "Here am I. Send me!" (v. 8)*

Genuine worship always leads to an outward look—a personal response or action—a desire to be obedient to whatever God calls you to do. Genuine worship isn't just singing songs and getting a good feeling in your heart. Genuine worship is seeing God for who He really is—and then giving Him what He's worth—the best of your time, your talents, your thoughts, your words, and your deeds. True worship is seeing afresh the tremendous worth of God and, in response, giving Him the best of everything you have.

1. Discuss the 3 directions worshipping God causes us to look (upward/inward/outward). Is any of this confusing, exciting, challenging, or new to you?
2. The article says worship brings an inward look—we begin seeing things about ourselves that didn't bother us before, things God wants to transform in us. Have you noticed this? What has it looked like?
3. The original word for worship was "**worship**," referring to giving God what He was worth—our entire life and our entire self. Singing is just a small part of how we worship God. How can we live a lifestyle of worship, worshipping Him with our "time, talents, thoughts, words, and deeds?" Be specific.
4. Everything can be sacred. Think of one way you want to practice worshipping God this week in a "normal" activity. Write it down, share & pray.

