

UNDERSTANDING WORSHIP

Rediscovering Intimacy With God

Discussion Guide Group Leaders Notes

Chapter One

Suggested Answers

1. The word 'worship' comes from the old Anglo-Saxon word 'weorthscipe', meaning 'worthness' or 'acknowledgement of worth'. This origin highlights that worship involves recognising and demonstrating the worth of God through actions of veneration.
2. These words describe actions and attitudes such as reverence, fear, service, and ministry, indicating the need for an active engagement in worship.
3. These words emphasise honour, devotion and service as key components of worship.
4. These Greek words describe reverence, adoration and various forms of service, indicating that worship in the New Testament involves a deep sense of devotion and is associated with (but importantly, is not synonymous with) active service.

Suggested discussion insights

1. The verbs for worship in the Bible (e.g., to bow down, to lift one's hands) emphasise that worship is not a passive or static activity but an active engagement that involves the heart, spirit and physical actions.
2. Viewing worship as dynamic highlights the necessity of an ongoing, lived response to God's worth, challenging the misconception that worship can be reduced to a mere intellectual or doctrinal exercise. This understanding encourages believers to engage with God in a more wholistic and heartfelt manner.

Chapter Two

Suggested Answers

1. The two main characteristics of worship identified are: Set apart (holy) devotional attitude and heart expression toward God. Set apart (holy) actions of religious service and/or duties dedicated to God. They are distinct in that the first involves personal, heart-felt expressions of reverence, while the second involves practical, outward acts of service. However, they are connected as both are active responses to God and are essential components in the offering of true worship.
2. This type of worship is demonstrated through various postures such as bowing down, lifting of hands, bowing down on knees, falling down before God, falling prostrate on the face, clapping of hands and dancing before the LORD. These actions are physical expressions of reverence, awe and devotion towards God.

Suggested discussion insights

1. In the Old Testament, 'service' often involved duties related to the tabernacle or temple, such as the Levites' work (Numbers 3:5-9). These duties were considered acts of worship as they were dedicated to God. In the New Testament, 'service' includes presenting one's body as a living sacrifice (Romans 12:1) and performing acts of ministry (1 Corinthians 3:16; Galatians 2:20). This form of worship involves living a life dedicated to God's purposes for His glory.

- Translations like the NIV sometimes use ‘worship’ and ‘serve’ interchangeably, which can obscure the distinct meanings and contexts of these actions. For instance, ‘serve’ might refer to obeying commandments or serving others, while ‘worship’ specifically involves acts of devotion and reverence towards God. Distinguishing between these terms is important to understand the full scope of what it means to worship God and to avoid conflating different types of responses and duties.
- Neglecting the ‘devotional attitude and heart expression’ characteristic can lead to a dry, mechanical form of worship that lacks heartfelt reverence and connection to God. Neglecting the ‘acts of service’ characteristic can result in a faith that is all sentiment and no action, missing the practical outworking of one’s devotion to God in daily life and ministry.

Chapter Three

Suggested Answers

- Thanksgiving: A response to God’s goodness, His loving-kindness, and His provision. Praise: A response to God’s greatness, awesome nature, and character. Worship: A response to God’s holiness. Each of these areas reflects a different aspect of God’s character and helps believers to focus their hearts and minds on Him. Thanksgiving acknowledges what God has done, praise acknowledges who God is, and worship acknowledges God’s holiness.
- Examples of the ‘devotional attitude and heart expression’ from the Old Testament: The Israelites fell on their faces in response to God’s ‘*Shekinah* glory’ (Leviticus 9:22-24); Solomon’s subjects bowed down and worshipped God (2 Chronicles 7:1-3); Isaiah recognised his sinfulness and need for cleansing (Isaiah 6:1-8); entering God’s presence with thanksgiving and praise (Psalm 100:4). Examples from the New Testament: the magnificent worship scenes in heaven described by John (Revelation 4,5,19). These examples highlight that true worship involves a heartfelt, reverent response to God’s presence and holiness.
- ‘Practising the presence of God’ involves intentionally seeking to remain aware of and connected to God’s presence throughout daily life. This practice includes humbling oneself, exalting God, and maintaining an attitude of praise and adoration. Believers can cultivate this practice through regular prayer, meditation on Scripture, and conscious efforts to acknowledge God in all circumstances.
- Thanksgiving and praise are gateways to worship. Thanksgiving acknowledges God’s actions and goodness, praise exalts His greatness and character, and worship honours His holiness. Together, they lead believers into a deeper experience of God’s presence. Understanding this progression helps believers to enter worship with the right heart attitude and prepares them to encounter God more fully.

Suggested discussion insights

- Experiencing a revelation of God’s holiness leads to a deeper understanding of His majesty and purity, which evokes a profound response of worship from believers. It brings an awareness of one’s own sinfulness and the need for God’s grace and cleansing. Reflecting on God’s holiness helps believers to approach worship with the appropriate reverence and awe.
- The angels’ continuous worship, expressing awe and joy at God’s never-ending revelations of His glory, illustrates the depth and intensity of true worship. This imagery shows how worship in heaven is an ongoing, dynamic, and joyful response to God’s infinite majesty. This vision of heavenly worship can inspire believers to pursue a more passionate and continuous worship experience on earth.

Chapter Four

Suggested Answers

- Adoration-type worship must come first because it focuses on the relationship and intimacy with God. When believers prioritise acknowledging God’s holy presence, their acts of service will be more effective and Spirit-empowered. Placing service above adoration can lead to a focus on the actions themselves rather than on God, which can result in sterile, formulaic individual and corporate worship.

2. The story teaches that seeking intimacy with Jesus (as Mary did) is more important than being preoccupied with service (as Martha was). Jesus commended Mary for choosing the better part, indicating that personal devotion and listening to Him need to come before service activities.
3. Tozer means that humanity's primary purpose is to worship God in holiness. Disobedience and sin represent a failure to fulfill this purpose. Worship is not just about actions but about a heart that is aligned with God's holiness.
4. Emphasising service over worship can lead to man-centred religion, legalism, and unbelief. It can result in dry, sterile worship that lacks the intimate connection with God. When service becomes the focus, the worship itself can become the object, rather than a means to glorify God.

Suggested discussion insights

1. Answers will be individual.
2. In Revelation, worship is primarily depicted as an act of adoring God's presence among the heavenly hosts and saints. Chapters 4, 5, and 19 show heavenly beings and elders bowing down and worshipping God, proclaiming His glory. This emphasises the centrality of devotional worship in the eternal state. Worship in the heavenly realm is described as continuous adoration of God's presence, suggesting that worship is an eternal activity. This understanding highlights the importance of cultivating a heart of worship now, as it prepares believers for eternal worship in God's presence.
3. Answers will be individual.

Chapter Five

Suggested Answers

1. Activities that cannot be rightly called worship include singing songs merely about God, listening to songs about God for recreation, singing about the Church or biblical characters, singing spiritual songs to one another instead of to God, engaging with songs predominantly produced for education, setting a goal to be 'touched by God', and choosing to honour God with daily thoughts and actions as acts of service.
2. The concept of 'whole-of-life' worship is considered a misconception because it conflates honouring God through everyday actions with the specific, dedicated heart-devotion required for true worship. While daily actions can honour God, they do not replace the intentional, undivided devotional attention necessary for worship as defined in Scripture.
3. The primary focus of true worship is giving undivided devotional attention to God, exalting Him and acknowledging His holiness. This should influence the selection of songs for corporate worship by prioritising those that direct praise and adoration to God, rather than those that are educational, about the Church, or aimed at personal edification.

Suggested discussion insights

1. Honouring God with daily actions involves living in obedience and reflecting God's principles in everyday life, such as making ethical choices and serving others. Worshipping God with undivided devotional attention, however, involves specific acts of reverence and adoration directed solely towards God, such as prayer, praise, and worship in a gathered community, which cultivates intimacy and acknowledges His holiness.
2. It is important to distinguish between worship and service to ensure that worship remains focused on God's glory and not on human activities. Conflating the two can lead to a performance-oriented approach where the acts of service become the focus, potentially leading to legalism and a lack of genuine personal connection with God. Properly distinguishing them helps maintain the purity of worship and ensures that service flows from a place of genuine adoration and devotion to God.

Chapter Six

Suggested Answers

1. The ultimate goal for believers who worship in Spirit and truth is to glorify God! Following this, it is to achieve increasing intimacy with the living, loving God of the Bible, in Christ Jesus, through the enabling power of the Holy Spirit.
2. Paul describes the intimate nature of worship by comparing the inappropriate physical union with a prostitute to the spiritual union with the Lord and every believer. He explains that joining oneself to the Lord in spirit results in becoming one with Him, indicating a deep, intimate spiritual connection.
3. It is important to distinguish between true worship and soul-worship because true worship focuses on glorifying God and engaging with His Spirit, while soul-worship seeks personal emotional or intellectual gratification. True worship bears lasting fruit through the Holy Spirit, whereas soul-worship may lead to short-lived, superficial experiences that do not glorify God.

Suggested discussion insights

1. The marriage metaphor illustrates the deep, intimate, and exclusive relationship that God desires with His people. Just as marital intimacy involves a profound connection and commitment, true worship involves a heartfelt, devoted relationship with God. This metaphor helps believers understand that worship is not just about actions or rituals but about a loving, intimate relationship with Father God that requires faithfulness and devotion.
2. Worshipping in Spirit and truth can lead to practical changes by fostering a deeper relationship with God, which transforms the believer's heart and mind. This transformation can result in godly service, compassionate actions, and a commitment to spreading the gospel. In a community, true worship can unite believers, enhance their individual and collective spiritual growth, and empower them to address social and spiritual needs more effectively, reflecting God's love and power to the world.