

## What is Primary in Worship?

I have worshiped our Lord Jesus Christ with other redeemed sinners in stadiums and in houses, in urban church settings and in rural church settings. Every Sunday Christ is worshiped in ornate cathedrals and in crowded basements. Christ is worshiped outside to the banging of drums and inside to the booming notes of pipe organs. In just about any setting we can imagine that God's people have gathered to worship Him.

Our modern English word "worship" comes from the Old English word "*weorthscipe*," which combines the two Old English words for "ascribe" and "worth." When we worship God we are ascribing worth to God. When we worship God we are attributing to God the greatest value. Psalm 40:5 says that none can compare to God. God has no equals. As the sole eternal one, the sovereign creator, the redeemer, God is of greater worth than any animal, plant, person, or spirit. And when we worship God we ascribe that infinite worth that is His to Him. Such worship is grounded in God's self-revelation, Scripture, and leads us to live for God. As John Piper puts it, "The essence of worship is to know God truly and then respond from the heart to that knowledge by valuing God, treasuring God, prizing God, enjoying God, being satisfied with God above all earthly things. And then that deep, restful, joyful satisfaction in God overflows in demonstrable acts of praise from the lips and demonstrable acts of love in serving others for the sake of Christ."

We often dwell on externals. The architecture and decorating of a building. The style of music. How people are dressed. We get hung up with these, and that is nothing new. In John 4 Jesus is at Jacob's Well when a woman from Samaria comes for water. Jesus engages this woman in a fascinating conversation revolving

around his identity. In verse 20 the woman says that she perceives that Jesus is a prophet and then says, "Our fathers (Samaritans) worshiped on this mountain, but you (a Jew) say that in Jerusalem is the place people ought to worship." Here we have an ancient version of worship wars. This woman is hung up on where one is to worship. She is asking, is it more righteous to worship God in a house or church building? On this mountain or in Jerusalem?

Both Samaritans and Jews believed that God's people should gather to worship God but they fought over the external—where—God was to be worshiped. Jesus responded in a shocking manner considering that the Temple was in Jerusalem. Jesus tells the woman that place, and all other externals, are not primary when God's people come together to worship Him. Jesus says beginning in v. 23, "the hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father is seeking such people to worship him. God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth."

When God's people come together every Sunday with the direct purpose of worshiping God what matters most is that they worship God in the truth. God's word is truth (Jn. 17:17). We worship God according to how He says He is to be worshiped. We worship God for who He says He is in His word, and what His word proclaims He has done. We confess God as holy and righteous in accordance with His Word. We confess ourselves to be sinners as His word makes plain. We praise God for Jesus and His salvation as Scripture expounds for us. We put our hope in Christ's return and the making new  
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## Worship

In this issue we focus on "Worship" – a foundation of faith, honoring God & impacting lives.



"You shall worship the Lord your God and him only shall you serve."

*-Jesus, Mt. 4:10 quoting Deut. 6:13*

"God is to be praised with the voice, and the heart should go therewith in holy exultation."

*-Charles Spurgeon*

"I can safely say on the authority of the Word of God that anyone who is bored and turned off by worship is not ready for heaven."

*-A. W. Tozer*

"A mature Christian is easily edified. Sometimes I get to sing with my preferences, enjoying the songs, styles, and sounds of music that resonate with my cultural place. Other times, I defer to others in my church family, joining my voice with their choice of music. Grace makes that deference joyful. As I join my voice with the diverse community of faith around me, I also join my voice with saints from all of the past two thousand years. Together, we sing and shout, teach and admonish, and experience the rich joy of God's indwelling Word. We sing with grace, and we sing because of grace."

*-Mike Cosper and Chip Stam*

"Worship works from the top down, you might say. In worship we don't just come to show God our devotion and give him our praise; we are called to worship because in this encounter God (re)makes and molds us top-down. Worship is the arena in which God recalibrates our hearts, reforms our desires, and rehabilitates our loves. Worship isn't just something we do; it is where God does something to us. Worship is the heart of discipleship because it is the gymnasium in which God retrains our hearts."

*-James K. A. Smith*

## **Worship in the Old Testament**

In a discussion about “worship” we first need to take a look at the definition of the word. In its verb form, “worship” is defined by Merriam-Webster’s dictionary as, “(1) to honor or show reverence for as a divine being or supernatural power; 2) to regard with great or extravagant respect, honor, or devotion.”

Where does the first instance of worship of any kind appear in the Bible? In Genesis chapter three, when Eve and Adam fell for the deceiver’s lie, and showed him honor by following his lying word, rather than adhering to God’s command, this was an act of worship of the deceiver. In a sense, the original sin of mankind began as an act of false worship, a showing of respect, honor, and devotion to a false god rather than to the Creator God.

Likewise, where does the first instance of worship of God appear? In the time-line of history, the first recorded instance of worship was at the time of creation of the earth. In His conversation with Job in Job 38:6-7, God says of the creation of the earth, “On what were its bases sunk, or who laid its cornerstone, when the morning stars sang together and all the sons of God shouted for joy?” Here we see that at creation, the spirits, the heavenly host, worshiped God, praising Him joyfully. In scripture, and first in human history, in Genesis 4:4 we see that, “...Abel also brought of the firstborn of his flock and of their fat portions. And the LORD had regard for Abel and his offering.” Jesus Himself referred to Abel as “righteous” in Matthew 23:35, and the writer of Hebrews affirms Able’s worship of God thusly, “By faith Abel offered to God a more acceptable sacrifice than Cain, through which he was commended as righteous, God commending him by accepting his gifts. And through his faith, though he died, he still speaks.” (Heb. 11:4)

The first place where the word “worship” appears in the English translation is Genesis 22:5 where Abraham worships God by his willingness to sacrifice his son of promise Isaac, “Then Abraham said to his young men, ‘Stay here with the donkey; I and the boy will go over there and worship and come again to you.’” However, the original

Hebrew word “*shachah*”, translated as “worship” in Genesis 22:5, is used for the first time even earlier in scripture in Genesis 18:2, translated as “bowed himself” to describe Abraham’s response to a visit from Yahweh, the LORD Himself in human form when, “He [Abraham] lifted up his eyes and looked, and behold, three men were standing in front of him. When he saw them, he ran from the tent door to meet them and bowed himself to the earth...” This was clearly an act of worship of Yahweh, God, by Abraham.

Already, in the book of Genesis, we have both good and bad examples of worship. There is worship of Yahweh, the Creator Himself, but also worship of lying spirits who portray themselves as false gods. Sadly, we continue to see examples of false worship throughout the whole of the Old and New Testaments. But praise God that there are clear examples of the faithful such as Abel and Abraham, and those who worship by example, as in Enoch who “...walked with God,” (Genesis 5:22, 24), and Noah who was accounted as righteous and also faithfully “...walked with God” (Genesis 6:9). By these examples, we see that those who “walk with God” worship Him as they walk.

What does God desire of us? In Psalm 50:14-15, God pleads with us to, “Offer to God a sacrifice of thanksgiving, and perform your vows to the Most High, and call upon me in the day of trouble; I will deliver you, and you shall glorify me.” God delights in our thanksgiving, dedication, and His deliverance of us to reveal His glory. Through the prophet Isaiah, God says, “I do not delight in the blood of bulls, or of lambs, or of goats,” and “Come now, let us reason together, says the LORD: though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red like crimson, they shall become like wool.” God delights in delivering us from even the ugliest of sin! David writes of God’s desire in Psalm 51:16-17, “For you will not delight in sacrifice, or I would give it; you will not be pleased with a burnt offering. The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a

broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise.” Our best worship is therefore when we completely give and dedicate ourselves to God, daily walking with Him. The result will then be as God said in Isaiah 1:17, we will, “...learn to do good; seek justice, correct oppression; bring justice to the fatherless, plead the widow’s cause.” James reiterated this in chapter 1, verse 27 of his letter, “Religion that is pure and undefiled before God the Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their affliction, and to keep oneself unstained from the world.”

By studying examples of worship throughout the whole of scripture, worship that is pleasing to God, worship that bears fruit of the Spirit, we can learn lessons that will inspire us to a deeper worship of God, praising the glorious name of Jesus from our hearts and in our thoughts and deeds.

-Joe Council

### **“Primary”**

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of all things as God’s Word would have us. We pray, sing, preach, and encourage one another with His Word.

And when God’s people come together to worship Him they worship Him in spirit. Being born by the Spirit we are to worship in the Spirit. The ministry of the Holy Spirit is to magnify the Son. In John 16:14 Jesus says of the Holy Spirit, “He will glorify me, for he will take what is mine and declare it to you.” Therefore, our worship is not centered on ourselves, or the preacher, or current events, but on Christ. As D. A. Carson said, “To worship God ‘in spirit and in truth’ is first and foremost a way of saying that we must worship God by means of Christ. In him the reality has dawned and the shadows are being swept away (Hebrews 8:13). Christian worship is new-covenant worship; it is gospel-inspired worship; it is Christ-centered worship; it is cross-focused worship.” Brothers and sisters, let’s not get hung up with externals that are not primary. Let us instead worship God in and through Christ and His salvation.

-Matt Peery

## Worship - Behind the Scenes

Here is an interview with Todd Dablemont [TD] aka “the sound guy,” conducted by Pastor Matt [MP].

[MP] Todd, you play a unique role during our worship time on Sunday mornings. Do you mind to share with those who may not know what it is you do sequestered in the back during church on Sunday mornings?

[TD] On Sunday mornings I control the volume of all the microphones and instruments to make sure everyone can hear whoever is speaking or singing. I also project any song lyrics, scriptures, or videos that need to be displayed on the front screen that particular morning. With the changes we made during Covid, I now control what is displayed on the tvs in the overflow, nursery, and fellowship hall including adjusting the video camera as needed. Also, I record the sermon so that I can post it on our website later that day.

[MP] We really appreciate what you do. Why is the quality of sound important as the church sings to God and hears God’s Word preached? I could just yell.

[TD] That’s true, but then people would be thinking about your yelling, rather than what you were sharing. If a preacher, worship leader, or musician is too quiet, people will struggle to hear what’s being shared. If the same people are too loud, people will be thinking about how they wish it wasn’t so loud. It all comes down to minimizing distractions. Everyone at church that day should be focused on what they’re hearing and not how it sounds. When I’m training someone to run the sound system, I always tell them, that you’ve done your job well as a sound guy if you get through a whole service and no one has thought about you.

[MP] It’s hard to worship when we’re distracted is it not?

[TD] It can be very hard. I believe the number one goal of everyone who has a part in the worship service is to point people to God. That’s certainly the job of the preacher and worship leader. Even though they are up in front, their job is to point people to God and not themselves. It goes beyond just them though. The custodian cleans the building so we’re not thinking about a stain in the carpet or the dirty bathroom

we just came out of when we should be worshipping. Our trustees keep our facilities in good shape, including the heating and cooling, so that we’re comfortable and not distracted. We could go on and on with different positions in the church. We all have different roles, but our overall goal for the worship service should be the same: Point people to God.

[MP] While I am preaching I have noticed that you often have your Bible open even as you deal with the sound. You are worshipping with the rest of the church and with an open Bible. Why is it important that you also join in the worship of the church, and why is it good for us to worship with our Bibles open?

[TD] Whether you have a role during the service or not, we’re all there to worship God and learn from Him. What better place to do that than His Word? It’s my job during the service to always be thinking about how something sounds, so I have to try extra hard to also hear what’s being said. But I need to hear what God is saying as much as anyone else, and I want to worship him with my church family.

[MP] Some others from the church have recently been with you as you run the sound. Why is this and what is your hope for the role you are currently in during worship?

[TD] A few people have recently shown interest in learning what I do and how I do it so that they can help out and also serve in that way. I’m always thrilled when people want to help out in any capacity, so I’m happy to help train them to run the audio and video systems during the worship service. Long term, I would like to have several people who are capable of filling that role to where I’m only in the sound room occasionally. I believe I started running the sound system 23 years ago when I was 14 years old. It was a way I could both serve and fill a need in the church. Before that my dad was leading worship and running the sound system at the same time. I still enjoy the position and serving in that way, but I also appreciate getting to sit and worship with my family. It’s good for my kids to see their dad

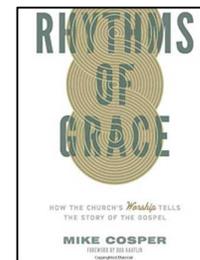
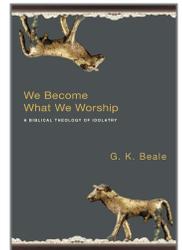
singing to God, opening his Bible, and listening intently to the preacher.

[MP] Lastly, and maybe this is a bad question, what is your favorite part of our worship time on Sunday mornings?

[TD] It’s hard to pick a favorite part. Mostly I’m thankful that there is this worship time set aside every week where my number one job is to focus on God, worship Him, and learn from His Word. Life is busy and there are more distractions than there is time. God has infinitely more going on than I do, and yet somehow, he’s always able to focus on me. The worship time is a chance for me to come together with my brothers and sisters and give God just a fraction of the attention he gives me.

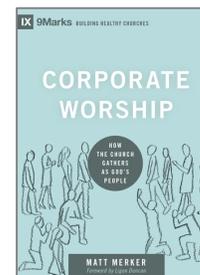
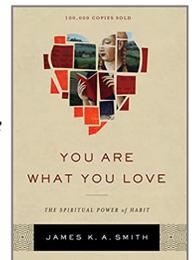
### Recommended Books

**We Become What We Worship**  
Greg Beale



**Rhythms of Grace**  
Mike Cosper

**You are What you Love**  
James K. A. Smith



**Corporate Worship**  
Matt Merker

## ***Worship with Zeal***

I grew up in a southern baptist church in Cambridge, Massachusetts. When I'm asked what the music at my church was like, I have a hard time describing it. Some people stood still when they sang, some people moved around a bit, sometimes we clapped, sometimes we just had a piano and a guitar, sometimes we added in a trombone. This diversity in music styles and in how the congregation worshiped I think gave me more of an openness when it comes to what it looks like to worship.

If you are anything like me, it usually feels wrong to do anything that you didn't grow up doing, or aren't used to doing. Coming to college in Missouri was a big culture shock. There were so many new things to see, so many new people to talk to. People ate casseroles, drove pick up trucks and didn't cut people off when merging – all of which I hadn't grown up doing. It might have taken a bit of convincing but even though I didn't grow up doing these things, they weren't wrong. The same principle can be applied to worship. We can worship God with a hymnal, on a rap track, playing a banjo or just using our voices.

Beyond just music though, we can worship Him with our lives. I know it's cliche but I think it's important to look at the definition of worship so we can all be on the same page. Merriam Webster says worship means "to honor or show reverence for a divine being or supernatural power". We can do this even when we are not in a designated time of music. We can do this while we go on a hike and take in the beauty of His creation. We can do this as we dive into His word and understand its holiness and power. We can do this as we do our school work, working diligently as for His glory and not for our own glory. We can honor, and therefore worship Him in all areas of our lives because He is our foundation, He sustains us and He has given us a life worth living through His Son.

It truly is a privilege that we as sinful people get the opportunity to worship the Lord of the universe.

In second Kings 10:16, Jehu, the King of Israel says, "Come with me, and see my zeal for the Lord". When we worship Him at church and in our daily life, we are able to say to those next to us, "Come with me, and see my zeal for the Lord" as we run errands, cook food, go to work, study, and sing praises to Him.

*-Elizabeth Stump*

## ***Worship with Reverence***

We were created by God to bring Him glory. "Everyone who is called by my name, whom I created for my glory." (Isaiah 43:7) Why should we worship with reverence? "Worthy are you, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power, for you created all things, and by your will they existed and were created." (Revelation 4:11)

God makes it clear that approaching him must to be done with the utmost reverence. The Ark of the Covenant was not to be touched as a matter of reverence. The Holy of Holies inside the tabernacle required absolute reverence. Unauthorized touching of the Ark of the Covenant or entering the Holy of Holies resulted in instant death. The purpose of such strict rules was to define holiness and impress upon us the necessity for reverence in the presence of the Lord. "You shall keep my Sabbaths and reverence my sanctuary: I am the Lord." (Leviticus 19:30)

Reverence means to set apart as holy. Jesus taught the disciples to begin their prayers with "Our Father, who is in heaven, hallowed be your name". Hallowed means "set apart as holy." God is holy and his name should be set apart as holy. The third commandment says "You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain, for the Lord will not hold him guiltless who takes his name in vain." (Exodus 20:7) Taking the Lord's name in vain does refer to using profane language in conjunction with God's name. However, another way of using the Lord's name in vain is referring to God in a flippant or disrespectful manner. It is irreverent

to do so, and it does not glorify God. At the name of Jesus every knee shall bow in reverence to him.

Worshiping God with reverence is not a mechanical or robotic exercise. When we go to the Lord in prayer, why do we bow our heads? Too often we bow our heads because it is habit or tradition. When it comes to worshiping God, we should ask, "What are we doing, and why are we doing it?" In all things we must glorify God. Paul reminds of this in I Corinthians 10:31, "Whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God." We should not bow our heads out of tradition, habit or to be seen by others. We need to bow our heads in reverence to our Holy God. Jesus sets the example for us to follow. Look at Hebrews 5:7, "Jesus offered up prayers and supplications, with loud cries and tears, to him who was able to save him from death, and he was heard because of his reverence." When we go to God in prayer, He wants it to be done with reverence.

When I think of going to God in prayer, I think of the song, "We are standing on Holy Ground". Think about the account of Moses and the burning bush. In the book of Exodus God said, "Do not come near; take your sandals off your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground." God is saying, "I am holy and everything associated with me is holy – humble yourself and remove earthly things so you can worship me." In Psalm 33:8 the psalmist said, "Let all the earth fear the Lord; let all the inhabitants of the world stand in awe of him!" When we worship God with awe and reverence we are standing on Holy ground.

Reverence starts with our heart and is evident by our actions. Jesus stressed the importance of showing him reverence by telling us to deny ourselves. In Romans 12:1, the apostle Paul implores us to take actions that show reverent worship. "I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship." This is stated another way in Galatians 2:20, "I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the  
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## “Reverence”

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flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.” Sacrificing self and living for Jesus are actions that reveal reverence to him. They are essential to bring glory to God and for sanctification.

In John 4:24, Jesus said “God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth.” Looking at this scripture we could easily overlook the word must. To say that we must worship God “in spirit” means that it is not optional. Spiritual worship must come from a sincere heart and in reverence toward God. The Holy Spirit guides us to worship God in spirit. It is the Holy Spirit that opens our eyes to see the truth. We worship Jesus based on the truth of who he is, the truth of who we are, the truth of what he has done. Through Jesus, God has made a way for us to be reconciled to him. “For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God in him.” (II Corinthians 5:21) In the gospel of John, Jesus said “I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand.” Reverent worship describes our heartfelt feelings when we realize what Jesus has done for each of us.

Hebrews 12:28 reminds us, “Let us be grateful for receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, and thus let us offer to God acceptable worship, with reverence and awe.”

*-Pat Dunn*

## Worship: Focus on God

The term “worship” has many different meanings to believers, and appropriately so. It is accomplished in a variety of ways, and in diverse settings. Two of the “absolutes” concerning true worship are that it is both God-centered and God-exalting. Any activity that does not point us to Him and does not reflect a heart of praise and thankfulness totally misses the mark. There are some who would describe it simply as our time of singing, but that would fall far short of

capturing the full breadth of worship. Let’s look at some scriptures that speak to worship, and hopefully broaden our understanding of it.

### **John 4:24**

**God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth.”**

True worship comes from within us. It is not just an outward action but rather a heartfelt emotion of gratitude and praise for our Lord. It can’t be manufactured or artificially stoked by music, preaching fervor, or any other outward influence. If we are having problems with our worship, we should first look within ourselves. If we truly desire to worship in spirit, and we have genuinely received His Spirit, no outside factor will in any way dampen or impact our ability to do so. If we want to worship in truth, we must know the truth, and He has graciously provided it in the Bible.

### **Romans 12:1**

**I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship.**

Worship simply is impossible until we have surrendered ourselves to God, realizing we are “**not our own**” and are “**bought with a price**” (1 Cor. 6:19-20). Only then can we exhibit the gratitude and thankfulness we should have to the One who has redeemed us. If we are not our own, we are surely His! Acknowledge that fact, and glorify Him for it! David understood God was deserving when he stated, “**Ascribe to the LORD the glory due his name; worship the LORD in the splendor of holiness.**” (Psalm 29:2)

### **Hebrews 12:28**

**Therefore let us be grateful for receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, and thus let us offer to God acceptable worship, with reverence and awe,**

As children of God, we are adopted into His family, and become a part of His kingdom. This kingdom certainly exists now, and will be fully experienced upon His return. The joy and confidence that this brings should move us to reverence Him. This

mighty, all-powerful One has mercifully offered us a place in His family, and so we praise Him greatly for it!

This personal desire to worship is compounded mightily when we gather for corporate worship. What does the term “corporate” mean? It simply means we gather – as He has directed us to do – and share in our worship of Him.

### **Ephesians 5:19**

**Addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody to the Lord with your heart,**

And you thought you were just singing! When we gather together and sing to the Lord, our primary goal is to praise and glorify Him. But He brings about another benefit to this act by allowing us to “address” one another through it. We communicate our faith and encourage others by lifting our voices in the singing of hymns. One note that I cannot overlook in this scripture is the reference to “**making melody to the Lord with your heart.**” not your voice! How beautiful it is to hear a congregation that is singing from their hearts! This “joyful noise” requires no musical ability or gifted voice. All it needs is a heart that wants to exalt God. It is a joy and blessing to honor Him with our voices, and no child of God should feel their voice is not worthy to praise our Lord. He desires and commands us to do so.

Another encouraging aspect of corporate worship is also communicated in **Hebrews 10:24-25**, “**And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near.**”

How important is our regular corporate worship? We are reminded not to neglect it (as some surely do), but to recognize the important role it plays of encouraging each other in our walk before the Lord. We are truly “stirred up” to love and serve.

It is unquestionably God’s plan that we worship and praise Him as a collective body of believers. And while this certainly applies to the singing of hymns, it involves much more.

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## “Worship Focus”

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### Acts 2:42

**And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers.**

Our times of corporate worship are also marked by the study of God's word as shared by teachers of God's word, either in Sunday School or most notably by our pastor. I believe there is no greater worship than to reverence His word, to study it (personally and corporately) and absorb it. **Psalm 119** says, **“I have stored up your word in my heart.”** If you desire to honor God, to worship Him, then display a thirst for His holy scriptures in your life.

It is also interesting in this section of Acts, which is provided to us to portray appropriate conduct in the church, that our relationship with our brothers and sisters, our prayers, and even the breaking of bread are mentioned. Can we actually worship the Lord through our actions and concern toward others? Absolutely! **Matthew 25:40** states, **“Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brothers, you did it to me.”**

Here's a question we all have to answer. What (or who) do WE actually worship?? The Merriam-Webster dictionary defines worship as: *“to regard with great or extravagant respect, honor, or devotion.”* Obviously, that definition could include many things in our lives, and unfortunately often does. We often - with the best of intentions - allow activities, organizations, people and possessions to possess an exaggerated worth in our lives. When we let these, or any other items we admire, supersede our commitment to our Lord, true worship is impacted deeply. Our worship should be focused in one direction only.

### Luke 4:8

**And Jesus answered him, “It is written, “You shall worship the Lord your God, and him only shall you serve.”**

This requirement to worship Him will continue to the very end, as proclaimed in **Revelation 14:7**, **“Fear**

**God and give him glory, because the hour of his judgment has come, and worship him who made heaven and earth, the sea and the springs of water.”**

### Revelation 15:4

**Who will not fear, O Lord, and glorify your name? For you alone are holy. All nations will come and worship you, for your righteous acts have been revealed.”**

Until that day comes, let us personally and corporately worship Him who is worthy. After He calls us home, we will join with all nations in our continued praise!

### Psalm 95:1-11

**Oh come, let us sing to the LORD; let us make a joyful noise to the rock of our salvation! Let us come into his presence with thanksgiving; let us make a joyful noise to him with songs of praise! For the LORD is a great God, and a great King above all gods. In his hand are the depths of the earth; the heights of the mountains are his also. The sea is his, for he made it, and his hands formed the dry land.**

*-Marvin Dablemont*

## *Catechizing and Home Worship*

Following is a question-and-answer interview with Jenny Williams [JW], conducted by Pastor Matt [MP].

[MP] Most people at our church are probably not too familiar with catechisms. Can you give a brief description of what a catechism is?

[JW] Catechism is a precision tool to help a believer in their Christian walk. It is a simple system of question and answers, that some faithful and intelligent Christians came up with. These questions and answers sum up the truths found within Scripture. They help us to see the big picture. The word catechism comes from the Greek word which simply means “to teach orally.” It is an extremely easy way to teach a Christian the truth about God in a way that they can remember. It is so simple it can be taught to children but the bigness of the truths it teaches are life altering so adults should not

ignore it. And the way it is taught is through repetition so that the believer can memorize it and carry the truths with them in their heart for use down the road.

[MP] Some may associate catechisms with Catholicism. Are you a closet Catholic? Tell us the truth. No, but seriously, using is a catechism is not contrary to the gospel of grace. How have you found this to be the case?

[JW] 😊 That is a funny but valid question. I am not a closet Catholic but I am the granddaughter of devout Catholics with cousins who went through Catholic confirmation classes. I have seen from the sidelines the weaknesses and the strengths of using this tool in both Catholics and Protestants. The strengths are the knowledge they take with them. The weakness is that when done incorrectly a person can think they are saved by knowing the right answers to the questions. But the fact that a tool can be used incorrectly does not mean the tool itself is at fault. A person who un-successfully uses a hammer to unclog a toilet should not claim the hammer is worthless. They should learn the purpose of and how to use a hammer. When used correctly catechism helps to efficiently and effectively teach the truth of the gospel which every eternal soul needs. Many Baptist have made the mistake of deciding since the “hammer” has been used wrong before, then we should throw it out and not use it at all. That's silly. Instead we should learn how to use the “hammer” and thank God for the tool as it is very effective when used correctly.

[MP] Yes, we Protestants have a long history of using catechisms. What led you to start using a catechism at home?

[JW] The answer has multiple layers. The shortest answer would be that through ten years of being a foster parent I was given a glimpse into the lives of souls lost in darkness without Christ. I looked into the eyes of four different women who desperately wanted to raise their own children and be the mother they were created to be. But Satan had very efficiently and very effectively fed them several big picture lies since childhood.

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## “Catechizing”

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Lies on what the purpose of their life is. Lies on what the value of their eternal soul is. Lies on what would bring their hearts and minds peace. Lies on where to go to find truth on how to live. These lies had sunk so deeply into these women that they seemed to be chained to the darkness that was destroying them. They needed to see a different big picture than what they had been given. They were walking blindly through life and I was the bystander who tried to speak truth in little pieces as they continued down a road that literally destroyed their family. I want better for my kids than that. My kids are facing an entire society that is attempting to feed them lies and they need the truth of scripture. Catechism is a way to more clearly teach those big truths of scripture.

[MP] And what is some fruit you have seen God produce through you and your family using a catechism?

[JW] This was the first Catechism we memorized and I have seen the far reaching effects in our daily life from our learning this simple but big truth:

Q: What is the chief end (main purpose) of man?

A: Man's chief end (main purpose) is to glorify God and to enjoy Him forever.

In my parenting it has guided me. In my encouragement and advice to my children from the little ones to the big ones it has been a steady aid. In one simple question and answer it points us to the truth daily. Are we attempting to use everything we have to glorify God, or in other words to point others to God? Are we making sure we are right with God ourselves so that we can enjoy Him forever? Is my purpose today to build wealth or use my wealth to glorify God? Is my child's purpose really to get good grades so they can get into a good college so they can get a good job so they can make a lot of money so they can have a good retirement and then only serve what pleases them in the day? Or is the goal to glorify God, whatever road they go down? Are they

gaining knowledge and wisdom and understanding so they can better glorify Him? Are they able to speak truth and stand for what is right to point people to Christ in whatever career they pursue? Will they be capable of pointing the next generation to Christ or will they be caught up in whatever lies the times promote? That one simple phrase changes the way we view the point of our lives. The point of our parenting. And it is totally supported by Scripture.

[MP] I believe you also use songs that match the catechism questions and answers? How does this work, and how has this helped you and your family grow deeper in Christ?

[JW] I came across a group of albums called the Westminster Shorter Catechism by Holly Dutton. There are four volumes. I originally started with it on CD but they are now available on iTunes with the ability to buy each song individually. Music is an amazingly simple way for my kids and myself to memorize. I make a morning playlist on my phone with the current catechism song we are learning and the current hymns we are learning. Then as we do our morning chores to prepare for the day or when we hop in the car to drive to town I can just hit play and they absorb it with out trying. Before I discovered this we struggled to memorize the questions and answers. This made it almost effortless. A little cheesy but highly effective.

[MP] I've often heard people critique catechisms by stating that their children don't understand what they are saying. What is your response to this?

[JW] This is absolutely right in the beginning but only in the beginning if done correctly. And in all honesty any kind of learning is not understood in the beginning. That's why it has to be learned. We show a child the number 2 to teach it to them. At first they don't understand it. That doesn't mean it's not worth teaching. Let me give an example. Many of the men in our church are good with tools. They know what tool is needed when and how to use it. A wise man

organizes his tools in an effective manner, for what good is it to have crescent wrench if you can't find it when you need it? Sometimes this organization is done with a pegboard full of holes. The board itself is worthless without the hooks that stick in the holes. These hooks can be used to hang up the tools so they can be easily found when needed. The man then grabs the appropriate tool, and uses it along with his wisdom to fix or create whatever is needed to benefit our lives in some way shape or form. Our thinking works the same way. God tells us to get knowledge. Then to get understanding. Then to get wisdom. They come in that order. A man with no tool can't use the tool. So transfer this concept to knowledge. Without knowledge of what our numbers mean ("2" means two of something) you can't understand addition. Without the understanding of what addition is and how it works you are not able to have the wisdom on when to apply addition to solve the math that pops up in your life. Our brains are like the pegboard in a man's workshop. The holes on the pegboard are our lack of knowledge. Our pegboard brain needs knowledge. Things to know. The big words in a catechism question are things to know and become familiar with over time instead of just weird random words. This knowledge is like a hook you stick in the pegboard to hold up and organize your tools. The peg of knowledge gives you a place to hang the understanding that follows. So to sum it up Catechism is a hook to stick in the pegboard. Many stop there and say it is enough. That's like saying having the hook is fine and no tool will be needed to hang from the hook. That's ridiculous. Instead we give them this hook of knowledge and then we keep going to give them the tool of understanding. As they learn the question and answer (the knowledge/hook) we start to explain what that question and answer means (the tool of understanding the question and answer). Over time as the understanding sinks in, we start teaching them how to use wisdom to apply this tool of understanding to life. We talk with them about how this affects our decisions in life as we go

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about living, and we teach them the verses in scripture that back it up.

My final example for this would be another catechism question:

Q: What rule has God given to direct us HOW we may glorify and enjoy Him?

A: The Word of God which is contained in the Scriptures is the only rule to direct us how we may glorify and enjoy Him.

Many Christians today turn to anything but Scripture and our society provides a lot of failing philosophies to choose from. But in this question we learn that Scripture is the one place where we can fully trust that God tells us how to fulfill our purpose in life: Glorifying Him to others so they may turn to Him and enjoy Him forever, and how we can enjoy Him forever ourselves. That's a big truth in a tiny question and sums up what many Bible verses say.

[MP] Is there anything else you would like to say regarding catechizing? Do you recommend it? Do you wish you would have been catechized as a child?

[JW] Yes, I do recommend it. Yes, I do wish I had been catechized as a child. The only other thing I would say is don't view it as a stiff and rigid ritual. In our home we listen to the music as we live life. We discuss meanings of it over dinner. We use it to point our kids and ourselves to the truth of Scripture during daily ups and downs and also when life slaps us in the face with unexpected circumstances. This doesn't happen over night. We have been slowly working on it over the years and are not that deep into it yet. It's just one step at a time. Catechism is not salvation, it is not just a misused “Catholic thing.” Catechism is a precision tool that can be very effective to help us better understand and teach scripture to all ages, from our oldest members to our youngest.

## Worship

### “We've Always Done It That Way”

What do we mean when we say, “we've always done it that way?” Who is the “we?” And how far back does the “always” refer to?

Typically “we,” refers to our small subset of Christianity. By “we,” we mean country-church, southern baptists, with less than 150 members who are predominantly white, middle-class, socially conservative. In a narrow sense this is who “we” are, and there is nothing inherently wrong with that. But it is important for us to remember that we are also a part of a broader “we” called the universal church. The

universal church is made up of all Christians spanning the globe. We are a part of the family that is Spring Creek Baptist Church, and we are also a part of the family of God of Christ's people numbering as many as the stars in the night sky as God told Abraham. Our narrower “we” easily makes up less than one percent of this broader “we” of all of God's redeemed people from every tribe, people, nation, and language (Rev. 5:9).

And not only is the universal church global but it is also historical. So, when we say, “we've ALWAYS done it that way” we typically mean as far back as we remember, or as far back as our grandparents. Yet, the church is two thousand years old. For two millennia believers in Christ have sought to be faithful to Scripture living by faith, following Christ by the Spirit. Yes, we have traditions but most of them are only eighty years old or younger. Many of our traditions date to the early 20th century when tent-meetings and revivalism radically changed church culture in our country. Other traditions of ours date back to the post WWII era when economic expansion, and the rapid boom of the suburbs radically changed our national culture. What is important for us to notice is that these developments that have shaped our traditions are relatively recent in view of the church's long history.

“We've always done it that way” is not an altogether bad explanation of why we worship God the way we do. But let's make sure we expand the “we” to include all of the church. And let's make sure that by “always” we mean the entire history of the church.

Let me give one example of how this could change the way we worship. When I was in my mid-twenties and serving for the first time as a pastor, I asked the church why we took the Lord's Supper every quarter. No one had an answer. Finally, one man piped up and said, “we've always done it that way.” Now, that is true, but only in the narrow sense of “we,” and only in the very recent sense of “always.” Globally the overwhelming majority of Christians take the Lord's Supper every Sunday. Historically the church has taken the Lord's Supper every Sunday. So, why do we not take the Lord's Supper every Sunday? It is what “we,” in the global sense, have “always,” in the historical sense, done. I've never heard a good response to this question. Instead some vague idea of it not being special if we do it every week is put

forward. Yet, we'd never say this about singing, or preaching, or tithing.

I am not sure why we have stopped taking the Lord's Supper every Sunday. We know that Baptists in England during the 17th century did so. We know that Baptists in our country did so through the 18th and 19th centuries. So, what happened? Again, I do not know for sure, but my guess is that the revivalism and consumerism of the 20th century played key roles.

With revivalism came the phenomenon of the “altar-call.” Revivals were open to the public and called upon non-believers to come forward to receive Christ. This was something new. Throughout the ages non-Christians became Christians by hearing the gospel, repenting and believing, and then making their repentance and faith public through baptism. The altar-call replaced baptism as the instrument of making one's faith known. The altar-call of revivals had such success that they moved from the revivals of tent-meetings and open-air preaching into the church. I believe that altar-calls replaced the Lord's Supper as how the church responds to God's Word being preached.

The Lord's Supper is also a communal act. The Lord's Supper is not to be taken privately or individually, but together with one's brothers and sisters in Christ. The consumerism of the 20th century brought with it an abundance of individualism and self-centeredness. Everything became about “me.” Shopping stores became catered to me, and I, the customer, was always right. This mindset entered the church making worship about “me” instead of about “us” and ultimately about God. As one pastor put it, church went from being a banquet hall where a community joined together and feasted on Christ, to a concert hall where musicians and preachers performed for individuals. Such a coming together has little room for the Lord's Supper.

Brothers and sisters there is no one verse in the Bible explicitly telling us to take the Lord's Supper every Sunday. Yet, the church over the centuries has interrupted the breaking of bread in Acts 2:42 describing what the early church devoted itself to as referring in part to The Lord's Supper. The church has seen that Paul in 1 Corinthians 11 is speaking of the weekly gathering of the church when he instructs them to take the Lord's Supper. Brothers and sisters, let's pray about making the Lord's Supper more central to our worship, more common, weekly even. It is what we've always done. For when we gather we gather in and through the body and blood of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

-Matt Peery