

Created for the Joy of Worship
1 Peter 2:4-8

This sermon series is about seeking greater depth in our relationships with God, and after the first few weeks I've ordered a bunch of study Bibles and heard stories of God moving people to seek him more deeply. If God has been working in your heart in the areas of meditating on his Word or prayer, would you share that with me and the Vision Team? Please send me an email to let me know about what God is doing in your life (on screen).

This week we are moving on to the third practice that we need to incorporate into our lives in order to experience a deeper relationship with God, intimacy with Christ, and the fullness of the Holy Spirit, and I've basically been talking about this practice from the beginning of the series because it's really the aim and outcome of the other practices once rightly understood. We're going to be talking about the practice of worship – what it is, how we can incorporate it into our lives, and how it relates to the first two practices we've looked at, which are prayer and meditating on God's Word.

I'm not sure what comes to your mind when you think of worship, but it's probably something related to what we're doing here this morning – singing worship songs, praying, and listening to preaching from the Bible. (Picture) You see these kinds of things in Scripture as well, so I would guess we think of worship in these ways. And I think that's accurate to a certain degree, but to truly understand worship we need to make sure we go beyond the external practices and consider what's going on in our hearts and minds because that's what makes something worship and not just meaningless ritual.

You can do all the practices of worship and not really worship. The Israelites were really good at that. They went through the motions to satisfy the requirements of the law, but their hearts were far from God, so their worship wasn't really worship, and we need to be aware of the same potential in our lives. You can go through an entire Worship Service without really worshipping God. (Picture) I've done that! If your heart and mind are elsewhere – maybe you're distracted by your phone or the people around you or thinking about all the other things going on in your life, you're not actually worshipping. True worship must begin in our hearts and minds and proceed from there.

To understand worship I want to go all the way back to Genesis 1 and show you what I think needs to happen for us to truly worship. After God created the heavens and the earth and everything in it, including man and woman, it says this in Genesis 1:28-29: *“And God blessed them. And God said to them, “Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it, and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth.”²⁹ And God said, “Behold, I have given you every plant yielding seed that is on the face of all the earth, and every tree with seed in its fruit. You shall have them for food.”*

So after creating all the glorious wonders of the earth and Adam and Eve, the first thing God commanded them to do was to go and enjoy all the blessings he had given them. Go and make babies, spread out across the earth and take control of the awesome world he had just created for them, manage it, and enjoy eating all the amazing fruit and produce. God created all things for them to enjoy; he gave them a fulfilling mission, and he commanded them to enjoy his creation. What an awesome command!

Now, besides obeying his command, how do you think they should have responded to God? When he blessed them with all things for their enjoyment, how should they have responded? Well, Paul writes about it in Romans 1 because he talks about how neither they nor their descendants actually did what they should have done. Romans 1:21-25 says: *“For although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened.²² Claiming to be wise, they became fools,²³ and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man and birds and animals and creeping things.²⁴ Therefore God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, to the dishonoring of their bodies among themselves,²⁵ because they exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever! Amen.”*

What Adam and Eve should have done when they received all the good things from their Creator was to honor him as God and give thanks to him. That would have been a fitting response, and that is worship. They were created to enjoy God and worship him. So the heart of worship is seeing and experiencing who God is and all that he’s done for us and responding with praise, adoration, and thanksgiving. So it involves outward expressions, like

singing and praying, and appearing before him in worship, but it starts with adoration, praise and gratitude for him in our hearts and minds.

Jesus described worship like this when he was speaking to a Samaritan woman. Her understanding was that worship was the outward rituals and practices, but Jesus corrected her in John 4:21-24: *“Jesus said to her, “Woman, believe me, the hour is coming when neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem will you worship the Father. ²² You worship what you do not know; we worship what we know, for salvation is from the Jews. ²³ But the hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth (not just by rituals!), for the Father is seeking such people to worship him. ²⁴ God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth.””*

So true worship starts in the heart, where our spirit has been made alive to God. It also starts in our minds where we understand the truth of who God is and all the spiritual blessings he’s given. When the love for God in our hearts meets the truth of God in our minds, it proceeds from there in expressions of praise to God with our bodies and voices. And that’s worship. Delighting in God on the inside and praising him on the outside.

That’s what we were created for, but as we saw in Romans 1, that is not what we’ve done. Rather than worshiping our Creator, we’ve worshipped everything else and rejected him. We’ve failed to fulfill our purpose and dishonored God, and therefore, as you read further in Romans, we deserve judgment – the wages of sin is death. But God didn’t leave us there. Because of his great mercy, he had compassion and gave us a Savior who paid the penalty for our sins by dying in our place. God did that so that our sins could be forgiven and we would be reconciled to him, and so that we would be restored to our ultimate purpose, which is worship. We were created for worship, and saved for worship.

Peter shows us that in 1 Peter 2:9-10: *“But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. ¹⁰ Once you were not a people, but now you are God's people; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.”*

So God created us and saved us and has blessed us in so many ways for the purpose of worship – to know him, see all that he has done, delight in him, and proclaim his excellences all the days of our lives, both now and in eternity. God wants you to find joy and satisfaction in him so that you'll turn to him in joyful worship. So worship is not to be heartless, thoughtless motions at a service on Sundays. It's to be passionate praise as you experience more and more of who he is and all he's done for you.

Now, how do we incorporate this into our lives and make it a habit? We've already talked about meditating on God's Word and prayer, and worship needs to go right along with them. They are distinct practices, but very much interrelated. And I believe the best way to practice them and make them a habit is to seek to do them together.

I'm a long jump coach and when I teach and train long jumpers we focus on three parts of the jump – the approach, the takeoff, and the landing. They are distinct parts, but in order to experience the fullness of a good jump, you have to execute all three. It starts with the approach where you get up to top, controlled speed. That leads into the takeoff where you convert speed into a vertical jump. Speed and height in your jump are what make you go far. And then you have to execute a good landing where you snap your arms and legs forward to get as far as possible before hitting the sand.

That's what it takes to experience a good long jump and the habits we've looked at so far in going deeper with God work the same way. It starts with meditating on God's Word, which leads into prayer, and worship is the landing. Worship is really the outcome or the goal of the other two. Meditating on God's Word and spending time in prayer lead into and make it possible to truly worship.

When you're meditating on God's Word, like we talked about two weeks ago, and speaking and listening to him in prayer, like we talked about last week, you're cultivating the spiritual soil of your heart and mind to be able to truly worship. You're stirring up your spirit with truth about God and delighting your soul in him so that you overflow with joy and praise.

That's worship, and I encourage you to aim for that in your daily devotional time with God. Use your time of meditating on God's Word and prayer to lead

you into worship. Depending on your situation and location you can worship by speaking praises to God, giving thanks, singing, writing, kneeling, raising your hands. Make it your goal to delight yourself in him. Spending time with God isn't just for gaining biblical knowledge or doing what you're supposed to do; it's for connecting with God and delighting in him in worship.

And then, after you've spent time throughout the week in personal worship, we have the wonderful opportunity to come together in corporate worship where God has gifted us with wonderful musicians to lead us in song and preaching to help us see and know God from his Word. We raise our voices together and join our hearts as we worship and adore our Savior and Lord.

Stories from 2-3 Vision Team Members

- Their practice of personal worship
- Testimonies of how they've been blessed in worship
- Further insight into the practice of worship

Read Psalm 95:1-7.

Oh come, let us sing to the Lord;

let us make a joyful noise to the rock of our salvation!

²*Let us come into his presence with thanksgiving;*

let us make a joyful noise to him with songs of praise!

³*For the Lord is a great God,*

and a great King above all gods.

⁴*In his hand are the depths of the earth;*

the heights of the mountains are his also.

⁵*The sea is his, for he made it,*

and his hands formed the dry land.

⁶*Oh come, let us worship and bow down;*

let us kneel before the Lord, our Maker!

⁷*For he is our God,*

and we are the people of his pasture,

and the sheep of his hand.