



Discovery Series®

# WHAT IS WORSHIP?

LIVING IN  
RESPONSE TO GOD



**James Pittman**



*introduction*

# What Is Worship?

Living in Response to God

*What's the big deal about worship?*

**D**o you view worship as a boring or simply required activity? If so, your worship may have the wrong focus. Perhaps you have yet to grasp what it is to appreciate the most creative, imaginative, awe-inspiring Being in the universe.

Author James Pittman says that the human instinct to worship is inevitable, but much of what we call worship today is not really worship at all. “We worship what we love and value,” he writes, “but we value the wrong things. As these

lesser gods topple one by one, our worship turns into disappointment, bitterness, and regret.”

That’s why James has written this booklet—to show us from the pages of the Bible what true worship is, where we should place our focus, and why proper worship is so vital to our becoming fully human.

*Mart DeHaan*

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one

## What Is Worship?

**If you surveyed** the people on the streets of your community, you'd likely hear some of these opinions about worship:

***"It's a waste of time."*** Some may say that worship is unnecessary because there is no God to accept it. If heaven is empty, there's no point in having a heart full of gratitude for a God who isn't there.

***"It's a shot in the dark."*** "I don't know who or what to worship." Skeptics find it hard to worship someone they can't see. If they aren't sure what to believe

about God, then they can't be sure what kind of worship matters.

***"It's a personal thing."*** Some people say it doesn't matter who you worship or how you worship. What's important is that you devote your life to serving some higher power. All religions are different roads leading to the same God.

***"It's a matter of looking within."*** Those who accept this view say that God is in everything and that everything is a part of God. No distinction is made between the Creator and his creation. To get in touch with one's inner thoughts and feelings through meditation is to commune with deity.

***"It's better on the golf course."*** This view says that you can be as close to God<sup>1</sup> on the golf course or in a fishing boat as you can in a community of believers. Worship is seeing God in the beauty of the sparkling water, the strength of the towering trees, and the blue of a sunlit sky.

➤ This viewpoint is **technically correct**. But the person who typically subscribes to such a belief is usually not golfing or fishing in order to commune with the Creator.

***"It's something that happens at church."*** Some people feel they can worship only when the time and setting are right: Sunday morning, stained glass, traditional hymns, soft organ music, and a choir. According to this view, worship must occur in the sanctuary.

It may include following a set of repeated words or exercises, or wearing traditional garments.

Does anybody really know what worship is all about? Let's explore what the Bible tells us about worship and what kind of worship God expects from us.

## **Worship defined**

The surging power of the ocean. The breathtaking beauty of the Grand Canyon. The unleashed fury of a violent storm. The infinite expanse of a starlit sky. These inspire in us a sense of awe and wonder and make us feel insignificant and limited by comparison. Surely, if creation can affect us in this way, then contemplating the greatness of our Creator should cause us to explore those responses with worship.

But what *is* worship? The word *worship* comes from an old English word that contains the ideas of honor and worth. When we worship God, we're honoring him. We're recognizing his value. Like the angels in heaven, all true worshipers say, "You are worthy, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power" (REVELATION 4:11).

The Old and New Testaments translate a number of words as "worship." The Hebrew term used most often means "to bow down, to do homage" (SEE GENESIS 18:2). The most prominent Greek word for worship conveys the idea of "showing reverence" or "bowing down to God" (JOHN 4:21-24). A second Greek term means "to serve, to minister." Both are used in Matthew 4:10



where Jesus says, “Worship the Lord your God, and serve him only.”

Worship, then, involves both our attitude and our actions. *Worship is the attitude of reverence and adoration, as well as the action of humble, loving service to the God who is worthy.*



two

## Why Do We Worship?

**L**et's look at the dynamics of the kind of worship God is looking for.

### Who do we worship?

False gods or inadequate views of the one true God can nullify even the most sincere efforts to worship. The cult member<sup>■</sup> has a twisted perception of God's character. An idolater fails to see how inadequate his god is when compared to the greatness of the God of Scripture. A materialist clings to the god that

Jesus called “money” instead of the God who offers treasure in heaven (MATTHEW 6:24).

✎ A **cult** is a group that may appear similar to genuine Christianity, but promotes a theology unsupported by careful interpretation of Scripture. Cults usually follow a charismatic leader who claims to have “new” knowledge or revelation that deviates from or “improves” on the gospel. The Bible clearly warns us against such false teachers (GALATIANS 1:6–9; 2 PETER 2:1–3).

Our worship is worthwhile only when we worship God as he is described in the Bible. Jesus said, “Worship the Lord your God, and serve him only” (MATTHEW 4:10). God has the right to be the sole object of our worship because he alone is worthy. And that worthiness is clearly seen as we reflect on his character and his works.

**What is God like?** Through the Scriptures, God has revealed to us what he is like. He is not, as some describe him, an impersonal force. God possesses all the qualities of personality—intelligence, emotions, and self-determining will—in their ultimate and infinitely wonderful forms (ISAIAH 46:10; JEREMIAH 29:11; JOHN 3:16). Though immeasurably greater than we are, he can relate to us and we can relate to him with our minds, hearts, and wills (DEUTERONOMY 6:5).

God is eternal. His value is seen in the truth that he is “from everlasting to everlasting” (PSALM 41:13). Unlike any other being, he never had a beginning

and he will never have an end. He is, for every generation of worshipers, the Ever-living One.

God is spirit. Jesus taught us that God can't be contained or limited by physical places, forms, or buildings. He is spirit (JOHN 4:24) and does not exist in a body that can be seen or touched. Therefore, he must not be reduced to a physical image of any kind.

God is all-knowing, unlimited in his knowledge, calling each of the innumerable stars "by name" (PSALM 147:4–5; MATTHEW 10:29; ROMANS 11:33). He knows

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**"Worship is the believer's response of all that he is—mind, emotions, will, and body—to all that God is and says and does."**

WARREN W. WIERSBE

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everything there is to know about us, our world, and the universe. His knowledge is not hindered by locked doors, darkness, or distant places.

God is all-powerful. He can do anything he chooses to do (GENESIS 18:14; PSALM 115:3; MATTHEW 19:26). No good thing is beyond his ability to do. No army, government, or civilization can frustrate his purposes.

God is everywhere-present. There is no hiding or escaping—no way to avoid the all-powerful One. No locked room or secret meeting place can keep

him out. No matter where you go in the universe, God is there (1 KINGS 8:27; PSALM 139:7–8; JEREMIAH 23:23–24; ACTS 17:27–28).

God is sovereign. Regardless of the apparent turmoil, confusion, or chaos in our world, the God we worship is the One who does all things according to his own will and purpose (ISAIAH 46:10–11; DANIEL 4:35; EPHESIANS 1:11). He is, has been, and always will be in control of all history. Nothing can escape his ever-present hand.

In his character, in his purpose, and in his ability, God never changes (JAMES 1:17). He has never been nor ever will be less good, less loving, less true, or less powerful. The God that Abraham praised and relied on is the same God we worship.

God is good. “Taste and see that the LORD is good” (PSALM 34:8). Because of his goodness, he gives blessings and joy to his creatures (PSALM 145:9). His goodness to us should cause us to offer our praise to him (PSALM 86:5; 100:5; 135:3; JEREMIAH 33:11).

God is righteous and just. He deals fairly with all his creatures (GENESIS 18:25; PSALM 7:9–12; 18:24–26; 145:17). Because of his perfect knowledge, love, and holiness, he is absolutely just.

Not only is he the one true God (JEREMIAH 10:8–10; JOHN 17:3; 1 THESSALONIANS 1:9; 1 JOHN 5:20–21), but whatever he says is true (NUMBERS 23:19; PSALM 119:160; JOHN 3:33). We can trust all of his promises and his principles.

God is holy and completely free of any moral defect, compromise, or contamination (EXODUS 15:11; ISAIAH 6:3). Because he is the standard of all

excellence and honor, he deserves our unending praise (PSALM 96:9; 99:9).

We worship God because of who he is! We also worship him because of what he has done.

***What has God done?*** The Scriptures tell us of God's works as Creator, Sustainer, Savior, and Judge. In the very first words of the Bible we meet the God of our worship in all the wonder and awe of his creative power: "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth" (GENESIS 1:1). He says the word, and nothingness becomes something. He speaks, and all the elements of this earth—atmosphere, water, and land—find their appointed places. At the sound of his voice, oaks, octopuses, ostriches, and orangutans appear. He reaches into the dust, forms the perfect man, and breathes life into him. God's mighty work of creation should inspire reverential awe in all of us and cause us to worship him (PSALM 33:6; ISAIAH 44:24; REVELATION 4:11).

He is the sustainer. The God who deserves all honor and praise not only created all things but also holds it all together. No other truth about God should humble us any more than this one. We couldn't live another moment without his help. Everything God has made is dependent on him. He cares for all things according to his own purpose and plan (PSALM 104:27–28; MATTHEW 6:25–34). Apart from his supporting and sustaining hand, everything would explode, unravel, and decay into disorder and chaos (COLOSSIANS 1:16–17; HEBREWS 1:3).

He is our Savior. This should inspire our greatest praise! He “gives life to the dead and calls into being things that were not” (ROMANS 4:17). By an inexplicable strategy of love, he declares repentant sinners righteous and gives eternal life to dying souls (ROMANS 3:19–28). Could we ever give enough thanks to the One who has loved us like this? Could we ever give him enough praise, honor, and love?

The reality of our accountability to God should cause us to fear him. For some, unfortunately, fear drives them away from God. But for others, fear causes them to repent of their sins and seek his forgiveness.

God’s acts in history prove that he is the judge of all human beings. He judged the human race in sending the flood (GENESIS 6–9). He judged humans by confusing their language (GENESIS 11). He judged them by destroying wicked cities (GENESIS 19). And one day he will judge his enemies by casting them away from his presence forever (REVELATION 20:11–15). No thought, no decision, no action will escape his ever-present, all-knowing eye.

Yes, the wonderful works and matchless characteristics of God make him the only One worthy of our worship. Knowing who we are worshiping, then, is vital. But it’s also important to know *why*.

## THINKING IT OVER

Read Exodus 3:1–4:17, Isaiah 6:1–8, and Revelation 1:9–20. What was each person’s reaction when they saw the glory

of the Lord? Take a few minutes to reflect on God's character and works and then offer a prayer of praise to him.

*"Come, let us bow down in worship,  
let us kneel before the LORD our Maker;  
for he is our God  
and we are the people of his pasture,  
the flock under his care." (PSALM 95:6-7)*

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We were created to find fulfillment in God by responding with thankfulness to his greatness and goodness. Had that continued from the beginning, we would have avoided not only every social problem and disease known to the human race, we also would have had uninterrupted enjoyment of God.

But we fell from such original worship. Romans 1 tells us that our ancestors stopped worshiping the God who is clearly seen in his creation. They stopped glorifying him as God. They ceased being thankful. They stopped responding to the truth that God made all things (vv. 20-23). The result is that human beings suffer inexpressible pain as our thoughts and hearts are captured by a twisted and contaminated world. We still worship what we love and value, but we value the wrong things. As these lesser gods topple one by one, our worship turns into disappointment, bitterness, and regret.

A teacher of religion asked Jesus, "Of all the commandments, which is the most important?" "The most important one," answered Jesus, "is this: 'Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. Love



the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength” (MARK 12:28–30).

Is love the same thing as worship? This kind of love is, because it is the worshipful adoration of God. When we love those who are undeserving, it’s an act of mercy. But loving God is an act of worship. We love him not because we are good and loving. We love him because he deserves every ounce of affection, adoration, and allegiance possible.

In one sense, God doesn’t need our worship. He doesn’t need our praise, affirmation, or congratulations. He doesn’t need our worship any more than he needs our food, our money, or our service. He is totally complete without us!

However, as far as his saving purpose for our lives is concerned, he has chosen to ask for our worship. Worship is an essential part of his plan. As we give him honor, he puts us in a position that enables us to know and enjoy his goodness. What love! God asks to be given something that benefits us! His “need” is nothing more than his means of bringing us to himself.

Because true worship brings us to God, worship pleases him. He takes pleasure in any attitude of heart that bows us low or lifts us up in appreciation of his matchless wonder. The psalmist said, “The LORD delights in those who fear him, who put their hope in his unfailing love” (PSALM 147:11).

Our worship declares him to others. His characteristics and works deserve to be acknowledged loudly and continuously so that all people will come

to know and worship him. When we worship God, we'll find him far too wonderful to keep to ourselves. The psalmist declared, "One generation commends your works to another; they tell of your mighty acts" (PSALM 145:4).

Yes, God is to be worshiped, and the Bible tells us why. It's also important to know *where* we are to worship, which is the next topic of our discussion.

## THINKING IT OVER

What benefits does God receive when you worship him?  
What benefits do you receive when you worship God?  
What benefits do the people around you receive when you worship? How can your outlook on the difficulties of your life change as you worship the Lord?

## Where Can We Worship?

A woman who met Jesus had this question on her mind when she said, "Our ancestors worshiped on this mountain, but you Jews claim that the place where we must worship is in Jerusalem" (JOHN 4:20). The woman who spoke those words had a lengthy conversation with Jesus at a well. They talked about water, her marital history, and even Jesus's true identity. They also talked about worship and where it should take place. As they discussed worship, three types were mentioned: Samaritan worship, Jewish worship, and a new worship through Christ.

The Samaritans were a mixed race with Jewish roots. However, the Jews hated them and always avoided them. This is why the woman was surprised when Jesus first spoke to her (v. 9). The Samaritans had their own system of worship. It was largely pagan with some Jewish elements. For a time, they had their own temple on Mount Gerizim. Even though they were worshipers of God, Jesus said they were in error (v. 22).

Jesus pointed out that up until then the Jews had been in a better position than the Samaritans to practice true worship. God had given them their system of worship with its laws, priesthood, feast days, temple activity, animal sacrifices. He had chosen them to be his special people, the ones through whom the Messiah would come and the ones who were to show forth his glory to the world.

Yet Christ also spoke of a new day with an expanded “place” of worship (vv. 21, 23). The Old Testament form was being replaced by a new and living way through Jesus Christ himself (HEBREWS 10:19–20). No longer would Jerusalem be the God-appointed center for worship. No longer would the Law with its ritual and sacrifices be needed. The sacrifice of Jesus would change all that. Through his death, burial, and resurrection, the way to God was open to everyone. All who place their faith in him would become the true worshipers of God. Jesus taught that through him it is possible to worship God by ourselves or with others.

Jesus said to the woman, “God is spirit, and

his worshipers must worship in the Spirit and in truth” (JOHN 4:24). He spoke these words to help the Samaritan woman understand that the worship of God is not to be restricted to a particular location. The line worker can worship in the factory. The student can worship in the classroom. The prisoner can worship in the cell. The patient can worship from the hospital bed. We can worship him anywhere, anytime the truth of his goodness touches our awareness.

There are many who see the personal side of worship without recognizing the importance of group worship. To think this way is to ignore the history of Israel, the example of the early church, and the direct commands of Scripture.

The early church worshiped together regularly. Their gatherings were a time of singing, praying, teaching, and giving. On these occasions all kinds of people (men and woman, adults and children, rich and poor, master and slave, Jew and Gentile) could meet and share a common purpose. They met on temple grounds or in private homes (ACTS 2:44-47).

The early church had to deal with the threat of religious persecution. Many believers wavered in their faith and tended to back away from public worship. Because of the tense situation, the New Testament letter of Hebrews was written to strengthen them in their commitment to Christ. It is from this letter that we get the timeless exhortation to keep meeting with other believers. It is a reminder

of our responsibility to give ourselves faithfully to corporate worship.

*Let us . . . not giving up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching* (HEBREWS 10:24–25).

## THINKING IT OVER

In what types of places do you find it difficult to praise God? Where do you find worship to be the most enjoyable? How could you use brief periods of time throughout your day to concentrate on worship? How faithful are you in joining together with others for times of group worship?



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## When Do We Worship?

**T**he words of Jesus to the Samaritan woman help us understand not only *where* we can worship but also *when*. As we consider what Christ said, we'll discover that our worship is acceptable to God when it is offered through his Son, assisted by the Holy Spirit, expressed from our hearts, carried out according to truth, and done in such a way that avoids the errors of the past.

It isn't true that there are multiple roads to God, as many believe. According to the Bible, Jesus is the only way. He said, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through

me” (JOHN 14:6). The Scriptures teach that all of us are sinners needing a Savior (ROMANS 3:23). Jesus was sent by the Father to be that Savior (1 JOHN 4:14). By the sacrifice of himself for our sins, he provided the only way for us to be restored to God. And those who receive him by faith become true worshipers. Our worship begins when we receive the Son of God and become right with God through him.

When we receive Christ as our Savior, we’re given the gift of the Holy Spirit. The Bible identifies him as our “advocate” (JOHN 14:16). His work is to assist us in all aspects of our relationship to God—even our worship (PHILIPPIANS 3:3). When we allow the Holy Spirit to work unhindered in our lives, we enjoy true fellowship with God. It is life-sharing relationship in which God reveals himself to us, and we respond with adoring worship.

When Jesus explained worship to the Samaritan woman, he said that it was to be “in Spirit” (JOHN 4:23). Worship must come from the heart. More specifically, it must come from a heart that has been made alive by the Holy Spirit. This helps us to understand that our worship isn’t just a matter of saying the right words or using the right form. We must be sincere. It must be the true expression of our hearts. Hebrews 10:22 states, “Let us draw near to God with a sincere heart and with the full assurance that faith brings.” Our worship must spring out of the depths of our inner being.

As important as the emotional side of worship is, emotion cannot take the place of truth.

Much of our worship today is done either in spirit *or* in truth. But Jesus taught that it is not a matter of

“either/or” but “both/and.” The emotions of our heart must be trained, channeled, and prompted by the truth of the written and inspired Word of God.

Our worship must be intelligent. It must be informed. And God has given us his Word so we can learn the truth and worship him.

When our worship is wrong, God won't accept it. A number of examples in the Old Testament prove this to be true.

The book of Genesis contains the record of two brothers who worshiped God. Both Cain and Abel gave God an offering, but only Abel's was accepted (GENESIS 4:1–7). Apparently<sup>1</sup> his gift was offered in faith and Cain's was not (HEBREWS 11:4).

1 We can infer from the Bible that God instructed Cain and Abel as to **what to bring as a sacrifice**. Genesis records God speaking directly to his creatures on a number of occasions, even after they had sinned (3:8–19; 4:6–15; 6:13–21). Notably, Abel's sacrifice involved blood and Cain's did not. When God clothed Adam and Eve, he did so with the skins of animals (3:21). Sin brings death.

Shortly after coming out of Egypt, Israel failed to worship God properly. While Moses was on the mountain receiving instructions from God, the nation worshiped a golden calf (EXODUS 32:4). God rejected their worship and punished them by killing thousands of Israelites.

Much later, the prophet Malachi described the abuses of Israel's worship and called for someone to put an end to it.



*“Oh, that one of you would shut the temple doors, so that you would not light useless fires on my altar! I am not pleased with you,” says the LORD Almighty, “and I will accept no offering from your hands. My name will be great among the nations, from where the sun rises to where it sets. In every place incense and pure offerings will be brought to me, because my name will be great among the nations,” says the LORD Almighty.*

*“But you profane it by saying, ‘The Lord’s table is defiled,’ and ‘Its food is contemptible.’ And you say, ‘What a burden!’ and you sniff at it contemptuously,” the LORD Almighty.*

*“When you bring injured, lame or diseased animals and offer them as sacrifices, should I accept them from your hands?” says the LORD. (MALACHI 1:10–13).*

From other parts of Scripture, we learn that God rejects worship . . .

- *When it uses images or other misrepresentations of God (EXODUS 20:3–5)*
- *When it ignores the explicit instructions of God (LEVITICUS 10:1–2)*
- *When it substitutes human tradition for the commands of God (MATTHEW 15:3–6).*
- *When it verbalizes empty words without inward reality (MATTHEW 15:7–9)*

According to the Bible, we can’t worship God just any way we please. If we’re going to give him the worship he is looking for, it must contain the right elements.

## THINKING IT OVER

Have you taken the first essential step to becoming a worshiper of God by coming to the Father through Christ? What kinds of things hinder the work of the Holy Spirit in our lives and, therefore, hinder our worship (EPHESIANS 4:29–32; 1 THESSALONIANS 5:16–22)? How can you keep good, religious traditions from becoming dead rituals? Singing spiritual songs<sup>■</sup> can assist your worship, but do you think about what you're singing?

▶ A wide range of **musical genres** can and should be included in our worship, but don't neglect the old hymns. The best ones contain rich theology communicated to us in lyrical form. We in turn can offer these words to our Creator in the form of musical praise.

God desires our worship. And the kind of worship he is looking for recognizes him as its only true object. It's given to him because he deserves it. Such worship can be entered into anytime, anywhere. When it is given through his Son, by his Spirit, from our heart, according to the truth of his Word, and avoiding the errors of the past, then our worship is acceptable to him.

With the psalmist, let us say:

*Come, let us bow down in worship,  
let us kneel before the LORD our Maker;  
for he is our God  
and we are the people of his pasture,  
the flock under his care. (PSALM 95:6–7)*



four

# What Can We Learn from Others?

## Learning from Isaiah

A day in the life of the prophet Isaiah profoundly affected his worship. As we look at Isaiah 6:1–8 and consider his experience, we gain valuable insight into worship.

Isaiah's worship began with a personal encounter with God. He said, "In the year that King Uzziah died, *I saw the Lord*" (v. 1, emphasis added). This was a confrontation that gave the prophet an awareness that was essential to his worship and to ours. All human sovereigns die, yet God lives and remains

firmly in control. While other kings pass on, the Lord remains matchless and unmoved in holiness, power, and glory. We may not literally see God as Isaiah did, but a personal confrontation with God is always a part of real worship.

Isaiah's worship included a deep conviction of his own sin. Overwhelmed by God's holiness, he cried out, "Woe to me! . . . I am ruined! For I am a man of unclean lips" (v. 5).

As we worship God, his standard of perfection likewise convicts us. By comparison, it causes us to acknowledge our own sinfulness. We confess with Job, "My ears had heard of you but now my eyes have seen you. Therefore I despise myself and repent in dust and ashes" (JOB 42:5-6).

Isaiah's worship also involved a cleansing of his sins. His corruption was purged when an angel took a hot coal from the altar and touched his lips (ISAIAH 6:6-7). Like Isaiah, we too must be cleansed. As we worship God by confessing our sins, he will respond to us as he did to Isaiah by forgiving and cleansing us (1 JOHN 1:9).

Isaiah's worship included a call from God. After he was cleansed, he heard God say, "Whom shall I send? And who will go for us?" (ISAIAH 6:8). It was a call to represent God to others. We have this same call as worshipers. God wants us to represent him to the world. We are his witnesses (ACTS 1:8), called to show forth his praises (1 PETER 2:9).

Isaiah's worship also meant a personal commitment. After receiving the call, he replied,

“Here am I! Send me” (ISAIAH 6:8). He chose to do all that God wanted of him. It was a yielding of his will, a surrender of his life, a total commitment of himself to God.

What about us? Our worship of God requires the same. Like the prophet, we make the same choice. The Scriptures tell us to yield ourselves to God (ROMANS 6:13). This yielding is a once-for-all presentation of ourselves to him to do his good, acceptable, and perfect will (ROMANS 12:1–2). This is worship at work. It is adoration and gratitude displayed in a life of willing service.

Isaiah’s vision indeed was unique. However, his response to God contained what is present in all true worship. And, like Isaiah, our worshipful response to God should include a confrontation, a conviction, a cleansing, a call, and a commitment.

## Learning from Jesus

It may surprise you to learn that Jesus was a worshiper too, born under the Law of God with the same responsibility to love and serve his Father that we have (GALATIANS 4:4). Unlike the rest of mankind, however, he completely satisfied his Father (MATTHEW 3:17; JOHN 8:29). His attitude and actions were perfect expressions of human worship.

- *Jesus knew his Father in a personal way* (JOHN 8:29).
- *He praised and gave thanks to his Father* (JOHN 11:41).
- *He loved and honored his Father* (JOHN 8:49).

- *He prayed to and lived in dependence on his Father* (MATTHEW 14:23; 1 PETER 2:23).
- *He did not seek to do his own will, but the will of his Father* (JOHN 5:30).
- *He was completely humble and obedient to his Father* (PHILIPPIANS 2:8).
- *He lived to the glory of his Father* (JOHN 17:4).

Yes, our Lord was truly a worshiper. His whole life was an eloquent testimony to that fact. As we consider him, we learn from his worship what should be included in ours. He personified the following expressions of worship that have always marked true worshipers of God.

Without a personal relationship with God, our worship is merely an empty exercise in religious form and ritual. Only when we truly know God does our worship of him become a reality. The words of David express this: “And you, my son Solomon, acknowledge the God of your father, and serve him with wholehearted devotion and with a willing mind” (1 CHRONICLES 28:9).

We should bless the Lord at all times, and his praise should continually be in our mouths (PSALM 34:1). As we contemplate his greatness, we’ll praise him (PSALM 48:1). As we meditate on his goodness, we’ll give thanks (PSALM 118:1).

Any worship that doesn’t include a heartfelt affection and reverence for God is unacceptable to him. According to his Word, we are to love and fear

him (PSALM 34:9; MATTHEW 22:37). Our worship then, is to be more than a religious exercise. It is to be the expression of our adoring reverence for God.

As we worship God, we commune with him in prayer. There is no true worship without prayer (EPHESIANS 6:18; 1 THESSALONIANS 5:17).

It's impossible to please God without faith (HEBREWS 11:6). For worship to be acceptable to God, it must reflect a genuine attitude of trust in him and his Word.

Acceptable worship always demonstrates a voluntary surrender that seeks to do everything to the glory of God (1 CORINTHIANS 10:31). If we are proud, rebellious, and disobedient, our worship will not be worship at all.

## **What can we learn from a burning bush?**

You're probably wondering what bushes have to do with worship—especially burning bushes. But since we've already explained that worship can take place anywhere because God is everywhere, it shouldn't surprise us that a burning bush can provide an opportunity for worship.

While caring for sheep in the desert, Moses saw a bush that burned without being consumed. When he approached the bush, God spoke to him. This incident became a worship experience that changed the destiny of a nation (EXODUS 3:1-4:17).

Today we don't meet God through burning bushes. However, like Moses, and like Isaiah, anyone who does meet the Lord has a spiritual moment that leads to a personal response, and that deepens our

relationship with God. In this sense, the experience becomes a “burning bush.” It is a *moment* of worship that leads to a *life* of worship.

It was the Angel of the Lord who spoke out of the burning bush to Moses that day. Many believe that this was the Son of God himself.■ If that is true, it is consistent with the New Testament teaching that God reveals himself to man through his Son. Moses, then, was worshiping or communing with God the only way that anyone can—through Jesus Christ.

▶ A **theophany** is the physical appearance of God to human beings in a way that we can physically perceive him. A **Christophany** is the appearance of the second person of the Trinity, the Son of God. Some theologians believe that every theophany in which God could be seen with the human eye is necessarily a Christophany, because God told Moses, “You cannot see my face, for no one may see me and live” (EXODUS 33:20).

Jesus said, “I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me” (JOHN 14:6). True worship is possible only for those who come to God through His Son. Apart from Jesus Christ, there are no burning bushes.

Perhaps you’re thinking to yourself, “Why do I need Christ? Why can’t I come to God my own way?” The answer to those questions can be found in the Bible. It declares all of us to be dead in our sins (ROMANS 3:23; 5:6–21). Because of his great love, God sent his Son into the world to rescue us from this helpless and hopeless condition (JOHN 3:16). Through the sacrificial



death of Jesus, we become spiritually alive and our relationship with God is restored (ROMANS 5:11, 18). This restoration does not take place until we receive Christ as our own personal Savior (JOHN 1:12). Without him, there is no true worship of God.

Perhaps you have received Christ as your personal Savior, but you no longer have burning bushes in your life. Have you lost the fellowship of God in your worship? Is it no longer alive and meaningful? If so, you should ask yourself:

Do I have unconfessed sin in my life? If we sin, we must confess it to God (1 JOHN 1:9). In this way, we maintain the fellowship of God in our worship. We keep the bushes burning.

Am I obeying the commandments of Christ? Jesus said that those who love him and obey his commandments will have God's fellowship (JOHN 14:21, 23). Through worshipful obedience to Christ, we maintain fellowship with God. That's how we keep the bushes burning.



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