

Worship - Living the Life (Lori Lower)

Psalm 96 / John 4:21-24

Today, I'd like to talk about Worship and how we can live a life of worship or have a lifestyle of worship. Now I know that I could go a hundred or more different ways with this, but I want to focus on what worship is and what that means to us as Christ-followers. With this global pandemic and the social-distancing restrictions and the loosening or tightening of the mandates, there is a lot going on in the political versus religious (Christianity) realm concerning churches and worship services, but that's not where I want to go. In fact, you might even find this message to be an antidote to all of that - at least, I hope so. I may take a few side steps off the path, but not too far that we lose sight of our topic. I'm sure we've all thought a bit more about worship over the last few months and you may have ideas about what matters to you personally concerning worship.

I have some questions for you...

What do you think of when you hear the word "worship?" Do you think about a church service? Do you think about singing or the other things that take place during a "worship" service? Do you think about corporate worship - which is when we gather together - whether it's here in a church building or in Zoomland? During a recent Worship design team meeting, one member said what they missed most about worship was the fellowship. Yes, that's an integral part of corporate worship, but it's not the most important thing. Do you think about individual worship - which can be what you do or experience personally during a church service? Let's take it a step further. Do you think about worshipping not just on Sunday, but during the week, during each and every day?

In studying for this message, one of my sources stated that there are very few references to the word "worship" in the Gospels and that "many references to worship occur almost in passing. ...While the references to worship are almost incidental, however, worship itself is by no means peripheral. It is there in the Gospels in much the same way as the air that Jesus and the disciples breathed. It is so omnipresent [everywhere] that it is more assumed than mentioned." I like that phrase, "it is there...in much the same way as the air that Jesus and the disciples breathed." For me, I want worship to be as essential in my life as the air I breathe. Which is why I set out to explore what a lifestyle of worship could look like.

Let's see what Jesus himself says about worship. The text that I'm starting with, John 4:21-24, is towards the end of the account of Jesus with the Samaritan woman at the well. As Jesus reveals that he knows all about her private life, she quickly changes the subject in an attempt to divert the conversation.

I'm reading from the New Living Translation and I'm going to back up to verse 19.

¹⁹ "Sir, the woman said, "you must be a prophet. ²⁰ So tell me, why is it that you Jews insist that Jerusalem is the only place of worship, while we Samaritans claim it is here at Mount Gerizim, where our ancestors worshiped?" ²¹ Jesus replied, "Believe me, dear woman, the time is coming when it will no longer matter whether you worship the Father on this mountain or in Jerusalem. ²² You Samaritans know very little about the one you worship, while we Jews know all about him, for salvation comes through the Jews. ²³ But the

time is coming--indeed it's here now--when true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and in truth. The Father is looking for those who will worship him that way. ²⁴ For God is Spirit, so those who worship him must worship in spirit and in truth." Some scholars think that Jesus was referring to when the temple in Jerusalem would be destroyed in 70 AD. But I also think that it has some ramifications with what is going on around us today.

My Study Bible makes these observations. First of all, Jesus points out that the *location* of worship is not nearly as important as the *attitude* of the worshipers. Secondly, he states that God is Spirit and that he is not limited to one place. He is everywhere, and he can be worshiped anywhere, at any time. It is not *where* we worship that is important, but *how* we worship.

Now, before we go any further, it might be a good idea to define "worship." If you've been in church for any length of time, you have probably heard it put this way. And in fact, Pastor Keith says this on a regular basis.

Worship = "Worth"ship, to give worth to

Worship actually comes from an Old English word that I am not going to try to pronounce, which equates to "worthship." And over time the word became "worship." The definition of worship is reverence offered in respect or the feeling or expression of reverence and adoration. It is also the act of expressing reverence, to show reverence and adoration or to honor, often with religious rites. Did you catch that worship is both a noun and a verb? The reverence being offered as well as the action of expressing it. It can even be used as an adjective or descriptor, as in a "worship" service or "worship" song.

The primary Hebrew word for worship is Shachah - to bow down, to prostrate oneself. This is the word used in Psalm 96 that Wayne read for us.

The primary Greek word for worship is proskuneo - to kiss toward, as to kiss the hand of a superior, or prostrate oneself as in homage. This is the root word used in our John 4 passage. Later we are going to be looking at Romans 12:1 and the Greek word used there is latreuo, the ministration or service rendered to God, which can also indicate worship. As you can see, both the Hebrew and Greek definitions of worship are very similar.

So how important is worship? Or how important *should* it be to us? I appreciate that the Brethren in Christ affirm worship in their Core Values, which is stated this way - We value heartfelt worship that is God-honoring, Spirit-directed, and life-changing. While the chapter on this core value in the book, Focusing Our Faith, implies that they are talking about worship within the context of corporate worship, worship that is God-honoring, Spirit-directed, and life-changing applies to our personal worship and lifestyle, as well.

I've been working my way through a small devotional book, Words on Worship, by worship leader, musician and author, Charles Billingsley. In fact, I'm going into my third time through it and it's starting to show its wear and tear. He states that worship is the **most important thing you can do in your life!** He mentions Mark 12:28, 30, where a religious leader essentially asks the same question, phrased like this: "Of all the commandments, which is the most important?" To which Jesus replies, "Love the Lord your God with all your

heart, all your soul, all your mind, and with all your strength.” Billingsley contends that this is what worship is: “to love the Lord with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength.” This command points back to the Old Testament passage of Deuteronomy 10:12; “What does the Lord require of you? He requires only that you fear the Lord your God, and live in a way that pleases him, and love him and serve him with all your heart and soul.”

I want to take a moment to break this down for us; what does it mean to fear the Lord? To live in a way that pleases him? To love him and serve him with all your heart and soul?

TO FEAR THE LORD means to show him deep respect, reverence, and honor. Which certainly lines up with the Hebrew word for worship.

TO LIVE IN A WAY THAT PLEASES HIM. You may have heard this phrase from what is known as the Shorter Catechism, “Man’s chief end is to glorify God, and to enjoy him forever.” Billingsley says that the “purpose of worship is so that you and I can fulfill our purpose in life.” We were created to worship God. Ps. 24:1 says that “The earth is the Lord’s, and everything in it. The world and all its people belong to Him.” We need to accept God’s grace, his gift of salvation, and have faith, which is belief in God and believing He will do what He says He will do. Then live in obedience to Him.

TO LOVE HIM AND SERVE HIM with all your heart and soul (mind and strength)

We should love God with all of our heart, the part of us that is captivated and captured by him. The heart is the inner seat of motivation, the ruling center of the whole person, where desires lie. Beyond the heart is the soul - the deepest part of our nature that stays alive after we are dead, the entire inner person. The soul is eternal. To love God with our mind, where we do our thinking, is difficult, because the average brain has over seventy thousand thoughts a day! It takes vision - seeing where you want to be and discipline (strength) - what we need to do on a regular basis to get there.

Speaking of vision, Max Lucado wrote an article titled, Are you suffering from poor “I-sight?” Not eyesight, of distorted vision, but I-sight, a distorted view of self. Some see themselves too highly and others see themselves on the other end of the spectrum. Lucado says that the truth is smack-dab in the middle - based on our identity in Christ and as children of God. And how do we get there - Worship. “Honest worship lifts eyes off self and sets them on God. Worship places God on center stage and us in proper posture.” This means that whatever or whoever we focus on is the center of our passion.

If you’ve listened to Christian music over the years, you’re probably familiar with the song “The Heart of Worship” by Matt Redman. But do you know the story behind it? According to an article I read on crosswalk.com, the song dates back to the 1990’s when Matt’s home church in Watford, England was going through a period of apathy; they were trying to find meaning in their musical outpouring, as they called it. There was something missing, so the pastor did something very brave. He decided to get rid of the sound system and band for a time and they gathered using just their voices. His point was that they’d lost their way in worship,

and the way to get back to the heart of worship would be to strip everything else away. He wanted his church to not just be consumers on Sunday, or coming to be entertained, so to speak. Through that experience, they gained a new perspective and the song describes what happened.

“When the music fades, all is stripped away, and I simply come / Longing just to bring something that’s of worth that will bless your heart... / I’m coming back to the heart of worship, and it’s all about you, all about you, Jesus...”

I’m grateful to be part of ABC’s Worship Design team; we regularly discuss how to help you as a congregation focus on God in worship. We don’t want the focus to be on us, or even on the style of the music.

Worshiping God involves more than going through the motions and it’s more than experiencing only feelings. How many times have you said to yourself, “I didn’t get anything out of today’s worship.” Well, guess what, as I’ve just described “worship” - worship isn’t about you!

The other day I asked my dad if he was watching baseball, he’s a Cleveland Indians fan, and what he thought about the empty stands. I then told him about the guy whose cardboard cutout got hit by a ball during a Dodgers game last Saturday and it “hit” *me* that this could make a good sermon illustration. You might have seen this on Facebook or someplace else in the news. The Dodgers had sold cardboard cutouts with fans’ photos to display in the stadium to replicate the ballpark experience. Austin Donley and his dad had purchased two cutouts since they’re usually in the stands attending games every summer. Austin was at the beach while the game was going on, and when he checked his phone around the eighth inning, he had over 30 text messages. Will Smith, the Dodgers catcher, had hit a home run ball which hit Austin’s likeness in the neck during the game and some of Austin’s friends and family had seen it. So they were texting him to make him aware of it. This got me to thinking that how often do we come to church; we come to worship and while we’re “worshiping,” we’re not “really here?” Or we check out when we don’t like or don’t know the songs? When the sermon topic might not be very interesting? When we’re not being entertained?

We’ve defined what worship is and why it’s important, but you may be asking, “Ok, Lori - we understand all that, but the big questions are “How do we apply this? How do we live a life of worship? What are some steps we can take to help us cultivate a lifestyle of worship?” Or maybe you’re on this side - “I think I’m doing pretty well in the area of worship - what can I do to make it better?”

Living a life of worship takes *practice* - practicing Worship means creating new habits. As any musician or athlete will tell you, practice leads to muscle memory - the more you do it, the more comfortable you are with the music or the movement or execution of a play, that it becomes second nature. You still have to think about it, but it is so ingrained in you, that it *becomes you*.

You may have heard the experts say it takes three weeks to make a habit. I found this interesting...have you heard about the 21/90 rule? “The 21/90 rule states that it takes 21 days to make a habit and 90 days to make it a permanent lifestyle change. ... Commit to your goal for 21 days and it will become a habit. Commit to your goal for 90 days and it will become a part of your lifestyle.”

During the quarantine, I was in... a... funk - which is the best way I can describe it. (If you want to read my "confession," you can look up my blog post on The Seed online.) I came to realize that routines were important to me, and while my routines had only changed slightly, I needed to create new ones, new habits, which involve taking better care of myself physically as well as spiritually. You know how some people, instead of making New Year's resolutions, pick a word or thought or action to focus on for the year? I normally don't do either one. Well, my word came halfway through the year - **Intentional**. I think Gary's glad that it is no longer "balance" or the motto "everything in moderation!" I decided that just going with the flow wasn't going to cut it and I needed to really *think* about, be *intentional*, about what I was doing as well as how and why I was doing it. I also decided that I need to be more **intentional** about worshipping God in my day-to-day life.

Romans 12:1 states in the NIV: "Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God -- this is your *spiritual act of worship*." The New Living Translation says: "And so, dear brothers and sisters, I plead with you to give your bodies to God because of all he has done for you. Let them be a living and holy sacrifice -- the kind he will find acceptable. This is truly the way to worship him." But I really like how Petersen's paraphrase in The Message puts it: "Take your everyday, ordinary life -- your sleeping, eating, going-to-work, and walking around life -- and place it before God as an offering." It goes on..."Embracing what God does for you is the best thing you can do for him... Instead, fix your attention on God. You'll be changed from the inside out."

I heard this in an online devotional video on the John 4 passage: "To Worship God in Spirit and in Truth" can be understood this way. "We offer worship as the *outward* action (or actions) which reflects our *inward* devotion to God and what we offer as response is in agreement with the Word of God [truth]. It's not just singing praises to God, all day long, but it's in the choices we make."

It sounds *easy*, doesn't it? Choosing to worship God with our lives, giving or sacrificing ourselves to Him and His service? Worshipping God doesn't mean we have to go around singing or reciting poetry or praying every minute of every day. There are things that will distract us, things that will keep our focus away from God. This is where **intentionality** comes in. This is where practice, practice, practice is important.

How do we worship God in the midst of mundane chores and daily activities? I have a list of some suggestions. I borrowed some of these and added others to the list; they're not in any particular order, but I think I would put numbers 3 and 4 at the top of the list...

1. Give your best in whatever you're doing. Working as unto the Lord (Col. 3:23-24)
2. Take care of yourself - this points to Romans 12:1-2, which we already looked at.
3. Put Him first in your mind. Having proper I-focus and paying attention to our thoughts (2 Cor. 10:5). We can redirect our thoughts in and through worship.
4. Stay in the moment. How often are we doing something but our thoughts are a million miles away? I love the new song that Jeremy Camp came out with - Keep Me in the Moment. Some of the lyrics are :

"So with all of my heart this is my prayer

Singing oh, Lord, keep me in the moment,
Help me live with my eyes wide open
“Cause I don’t wanna miss what you have for me
Singing oh Lord, show me what matters
Throw away what I’m chasing after
“Cause I don’t wanna miss what you have for me”

Dr. David Jeremiah says that “living every moment in the wonder of worship will change the way you live every day.”

5. Serve someone else - look for opportunities to serve as God’s hands and feet (Sounds familiar doesn’t it? I think I have an ABC t-shirt with that motto on it.)
6. Say it or Don’t Say it. The next time a nice thought about someone enters your mind, don’t keep it to yourself - share it. Call them, check up on them. (Hebrews 3:13) Conversely, we need to filter out unkind or unproductive words before others hear them. (James 1:10)
7. Give generously; using our time, money, and talents honors God.
8. Be thankful, even when things are difficult. (I Thess. 5:16-18)
9. Think of worship as an *experience*, not an *event*. Have a sense of awe and wonder of God - experience Him. Adam and Eve experienced God in the garden, but when they were banished because of sin, worship became an event.
10. Be regular at appointed times of corporate worship (Hebrews 10:24-25) There is something special about worshiping together alongside other believers, whether in person or online. Sometimes it’s the boost we need to help us worship throughout the rest of the week.
11. Be regular at appointed times of personal worship. Some of us plan time with God while doing other things; I like to pray while I’m walking or even driving to work. However, it is hard to stay completely focused, as I have to be mindful of where I’m walking or be aware of other vehicles in traffic. We need to set aside priority time to be alone with God. And if you’re not doing that - don’t feel guilty - give yourself grace over guilt. But I would challenge you to start with 5-10 mins a day.
12. Be open to the practice of unscheduled worship. Take those discretionary minutes, otherwise known as wasted time, and get in the practice of redeeming the time to focus on the Lord. (Ps. 16:7, 63:6, 119:48)

“What are you practicing?” Are you doing some of the things listed? Are there other things that you do or think you could do to help you worship God in your daily life? Remember that whatever we practice gets stronger. Whatever we pursue, whatever we pay attention to, turns out to be our focus.

Living the Life – a lifestyle of worship - am I there yet? No, but I want to be. What about you?

As I close, I want to circle back to John 4:23-24; in The Message:

“It’s who you are and the way you live that count before God. Your worship must engage your spirit in the pursuit of truth. That’s the kind of people the Father is out looking for: those who are simply and honestly themselves before Him in their worship. God is sheer being itself -- Spirit. Those who worship Him must do it out of their very being, their spirits, their true selves, in adoration.”

In the Words on Worship devotional, Billingsley says this about a lifestyle of worship. “If you are not living a lifestyle of worship, then you are missing the whole purpose of your existence. The beautiful thing is, even though God should be the object of our worship, somehow He takes our worship and turns it into a blessing for us. So the purpose of our worship is to honor and bless the Lord, but the result of worship is that He, in turn, blesses us. Isn’t that just like God?”

What it boils down to - is that the ultimate goal of worship and having a lifestyle of worship, is that we come to *know* God.

And when we’re changed from the inside out by our worship of God, others will see that and we can be a testimony of what worshiping God with our lives looks like. Let’s go and live the life - of worship.

CLOSING PRAYER

Lord, God – We honor you as the Lord and Creator of all. We know that we’ve been created to worship you in many different ways but also *with* our lives. Please help us as we pursue worship of you in spirit and in truth. Help us keep our eyes fixed on you. And in the living out of our lives in worship of you, Father, we ask that your light shine through us to those around us, so they may see your love for them. Amen.

BENEDICTION

May the peace of God be in your heart, the grace of God be in your words, the love of God be in your hands, the joy of God be in your soul, and in the song that your life sings.

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