

2007 YEAR OF RENEWING



Small Group Discussions for Adventist Youth

Prepared by
Youth Ministries Department
General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists

QUOTABLE QUOTES

"O come, let us sing to the Lord; let us make a joyful noise to the Rock of our Salvation!" Psalms 95:1 (KJV – Amplified).

"The duty to worship God is based upon the fact that He is the Creator and that to Him all other beings owe their existence. And wherever, in the Bible, His claim to reverence and worship, above the gods of the heathen, is presented, there is cited to evidence of His creative power." *Great Controversy* 436, 437.

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ABOUT THIS MANUAL

The year 2007 has been designated by the General Conference Youth Ministries Department as a year of Renewing (Worship). This is part of the yearly themes for the youth around the world.

This year, the Seventh-day Adventist around the world will be focusing on the joys and benefits of Renewing through Discipleship, Leadership, Evangelism and Service. The young people will learn how to close the gap that exists between belief and action, knowledge and practice.

These small group discussions have been developed to be used during Youth Meetings when youth meet for their weekly programs. There are enough programs for the whole year.

It is the prayer of the General Conference Youth Ministries Team that these discussions will help youth to grow in love with Jesus Christ and become active participants in the mission of the Church.

2007 - RENEWING (Worship)

"O come, let us sing to the Lord; let us make a joyful noise to the Rock of our salvation!"

—Psalm 95:1 (KJV – Amplified)

Wake up! Being refreshed and renewed involves more than sleep or rest; it involves action. Worship is love in action and it takes many different forms and expressions. Praise, thankfulness, petitions, acts of faith and trust are all part of worship that can happen any time and any where. There is no limit to God's power, and there shouldn't be limits on our worship.

Renewing through:



Discipleship



Leadership



Evangelism



Service

The terms "worship" and "praise" are used, more than 650 times in Scripture...as you can imagine, then, there is far more material than can possibly fit in a 52-week curriculum. To that end, following are some introductory notes...

First and foremost: What is worship? The English word "worship" comes from the Old English "worceship" – or "worth-ship" – which denotes the worthiness of the one receiving this special honor and devotion.

From the time of Creation, man was made to worship. Some have said each person has a God-shaped vacuum in their heart. People try to fill this void with any number of things, but only God can fill the hole. Our choice, then, is not whether we will worship but whom we will worship. When Satan tempted Jesus, he said to Him, *"All these things I will give You if You will fall down and worship me."* Then Jesus said to him, *"Away with you, Satan! For it is written, 'You shall worship the LORD your God, and Him only you shall serve.'"* (Matthew 4:9, 10).

Worship is the ultimate decision, then, and as such many misconceptions surround it. Worship is not an event, nor is it a spectator sport. Dr. James Kennedy defines what happens in many churches: "Most people think of the church as a drama with the preacher as the chief actor, God as the prompter and the congregation as the critic. What is actually the case is that the congregation is the chief actor, the preacher is the prompter and God is the CRITIC!"

Worship is a verb. How many times have you heard someone say, "Praise the Lord!" and others respond with the same, "Praise the Lord!"? The call to praise the Lord is a command to worship. To respond in the same manner is like someone yelling, "The building's on fire!" and, instead of everyone rushing out, they respond by calling back, "The building's on fire!" Worship is not passive but participative. That's what the psalmist is saying in inviting us to "sing...shout...bow...kneel..." (Note that these are all ACTION words.)

According to church statistician George Barna, "half of all church-going adults say that they did not experience God's presence in the last year. (THAT IS THEY DID NOT WORSHIP!) Two-thirds of all church-going adults cannot describe what worship is." [Seminar: Inward, Outward and Upward; Ministry that Transforms Lives.] Surveys also find that the younger the adult, the more likely they are to state that God is a distant, impersonal reality for them.

Gordon Dahl has said, "We have become a generation of people who worship our work, work at our play and play at our worship," while an anonymous author writes:

Some go to church to take a walk.

Some go to church to laugh and talk.

Some go to church to meet a friend.

Some go to church their time to spend.

Some go to church to meet another.

Some go to church a fault to cover.

Some go to church for speculation.

Some go to church to doze and nod.

The wise go there to worship God.

And with that, we ask for wisdom as we seek to learn more of the true worship to which God calls us through the following pages...

Introduction: **Lessons from Heaven** **DISCIPLESHIP**



Essence

It's interesting that when Revelation begins talking about future things, the first thing it focuses on is the Father.

Look at Revelation 4: *"After this I looked, and there before me was a door standing open in heaven. And the voice I had first heard speaking to me like a trumpet said, 'Come up here, and I will show you what must take place after this.' At once I was in the Spirit, and there before me was a throne in heaven..."*

So, ... John [is told] he's about to see "what must take place after this..." but instead of the horrendous pictures of War and Famine and Pestilence that people often associate with Revelation... instead, we find ourselves in God's throne room witnessing an awesome worship service - filled with strange sights and sounds:

- lightning and thunder and rumblings in the distance
- beautiful colors
- unusual creatures
- an inspiring example of how to praise God

...Why start here? Why? Because that's where God KNEW we had to begin. We have to realize when we read Revelation that it's possible to focus on the wrong things. TV Evangelists and radio preachers get caught up looking at the wrong things all the time. ... It's easy to understand why. Revelation can be a scary book. ... There are some frightening images in there.

God knows that... and that's why the vision starts in the throne room. Consider the image that this chapter places in our minds. It's awesome, unEarthly – there [are] odd creatures in this room – and yet somehow comforting (24 elders in white garments & crowns).

God is worshipped by everything in Heaven and on earth. Everything and everyone subjects itself to God. NOT because they have to, but because He is worthy. Everything is voluntary. Spontaneous.

Filled with excitement and joy.

There's a Sense of Power here... A Sense of Wonder... AND an assurance that – if this is my God – my enemies better watch out!

The images that follow in chapters 5 through 18 can be frightening and overwhelming. BUT our God is bigger than anything the world can throw at us. He occupies the higher ground, and nothing can stand against His power.

...Thus, Revelation 4 is not only telling you that you will overcome; I believe it is telling you HOW we can overcome! I believe we will overcome by following the example of those in the throne room.

Look at what they're doing: (Revelation 4:10-11)

- They're singing praises to God
- They're worshipping the Father
- They're focusing all of their attention on Him
- Everything is centered on [Him on the] throne in the midst of the room

Why? Because when we do that - when we praise and worship God, focus our attention solely on Him and His throne of power - we're focusing our attention NOT on our circumstances and difficulties, NOT on our failures and tragedies...

No. When we learn to worship and praise God as these in the throne room do, we are focusing upon the God who has the power and the majesty and the desire to lift us up out of our despair and hopelessness.

That's why the four living creatures cry out: "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God Almighty, who was, and is, and is to come."

God has always been there in the past, He's here in the present, and He'll be there in the future. He'll never leave us or forsake us, even in our darkest moments.

—Jeff Strite, *The Power of Praise*

Breakout time (divide in small groups)

1. Have someone record information on a flipchart or chalkboard/whiteboard as the group calls out everything the word “worship” brings to mind.
2. Read Revelation 4. Identify similarities/differences between this scene from heaven and what the group brainstormed.
3. Would you feel comfortable in the kind of worship described in Revelation 4? Explain your answer.
4. How is your church’s worship similar to/different from that described in Revelation 4? Your personal worship? What does a closer examination of this picture of worship in heaven entail for you personal/corporate worship?
5. GOING DEEPER: Explore common worship practices among diverse cultures. What role, if any, does culture play in how we worship? What are the positive and negative aspects of this role?

Introduction: **Lessons from Heaven** **LEADERSHIP**



Essence

[Psalm 95] gives us at least five characteristics of worship:

1. **Worship is collective.** Three times in verses 1 and 2 we read, "Let us..." While worship should have a private element to it throughout the week, the psalmist here is stating that worship is designed to be congregational, not merely individual.
2. **Worship is vocal.** Too often we think of worship as not only private, but silent as well. We may worship God in our heart or even sing quietly, but God is longing for us to sing out to Him.
3. **Worship is vibrant and vigorous.** We are to participate with joyful, grateful praise and to be exuberant in our worship. Someone has said that the characteristic note of Old Testament worship is exhilaration. ...The phrase, "sing for joy" in verse 1 could be translated, "shout for joy."

When we are told to "shout aloud" in the second half of verse 1, the Hebrew literally means to "raise a shout." This was done when the Israelites were anticipating a battle or celebrating a triumph, [as] in Joshua 6:20, when the Israelites were marching around the walls of Jericho... and 1 Samuel 4:5, where we read about what happened when the Ark of the Covenant was brought into the camp.

...Why is it that we're often critical of others whose worship is too animated and enthusiastic? While there are extremes that we should avoid, very few of us even come close to being too passionate. Our tendency is to react against such worship, much like Michal disdained David's joyful enthusiasm in 2 Samuel 6.

4. **Worship is God-centered.** This is a good reminder because we are not to just get emotional or sing loudly for our own sake. Our focus should not be on how worship makes us feel. Our worship must be centered on God alone.

5. **Worship is founded on truth.** In verses 3-4, the sovereignty of God is given as a basis for our worship. Verse 3 expresses God's rule in general terms. We are to shout aloud, sing for joy, and extol the Lord with music and song for He is supreme. The supremacy of God is the foundation for our joy.

- Brian Bill, *An Invitation to Worship*

Breakout time (divide in small groups)

1. Compare/contrast Psalm 95 and Revelation 4. In looking at this fuller picture of worship, are there any additional characteristics you can identify in addition to those listed above?
2. Discuss each characteristic of worship listed above, particularly the first three characteristics. Find Biblical examples for each point.
3. In contrast to the picture of worship, Psalm 95 also warns its readers not to "harden [their] hearts as ... at Meribah [and] Massah." Cross reference Exodus 17 and Numbers 20 and discuss the meaning of the warning in light of its historical context. How can you keep from "hardening your hearts"?
4. What is David's response to Michal's criticism of his praise in 2 Samuel 6? How does this example apply today? With which party do you identify most? Explain.

Introduction: **Lessons from Heaven** **EVANGELISM**



Essence

Romans 12:1 says, *“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 King James Version says that offering ourselves as living sacrifices is our “reasonable act of service.”

Nothing is more reasonable or more logical than worship.

If God doesn’t exist then worship is insanity. You’re worshipping someone that isn’t real. But if God exists then nothing is more logical or reasonable than worship. I don’t want this to come across as pejorative, but I want to make a point. If God exists, then anything less than all-out worship is totally illogical.

Worship is sanity. Anything less or anything else is insanity.

Blaise Pascal, the 17th century French Philosopher said it this way, “There are only two classes of persons who can be called reasonable: those who serve God with all of their hearts because they know him and those who seek God with all of their hearts because they do not know him.”

Those who don’t worship God don’t know God. If you know God you can’t not worship Him!

– Mark Batterson, *Self-Fulfilling Prophecies*

Breakout time (divide in small groups)

1. The above selection makes some very strong statements. Have each small group discuss one of the statements and why they agree/disagree and what the implications are for evangelism. Come back together as a whole and have each small group present, inviting further discussion. (Some of the statements as broken out below overlap, so if you have fewer smaller groups, some can be combined/omitted.)
 - a) Nothing is more reasonable or more logical than worship.
 - b) If God doesn’t exist then worship is insanity.

- c) If God exists then nothing is more logical or reasonable than worship.
 - d) If God exists, then anything less than all-out worship is totally illogical.
 - e) Worship is sanity. Anything less or anything else is insanity.
 - f) There are only two classes of persons who can be called reasonable: those who serve God with all of their hearts because they know him and those who seek God with all of their hearts because they do not know him.
 - g) Those who don't worship God don't know God. If you know God you can't not worship Him!
2. In these introductory weeks, we've been looking at examples of worship taken from heaven. Discuss the above ideas in the context of the "war in heaven," where 2/3 of the angels chose God, but 1/3 were cast out with the devil.

Introduction: **Lessons from Heaven** **SERVICE**



Note

Each week focusing on service will include possible service project ideas and less “study.” If your group is not already engaged in ongoing service, use this introductory lesson to explore the role of service in the Christian’s life and to plan future service projects.

Involve the youth in the identification of appropriate projects and discuss the need for various types of service, and how essential commitment and follow-through are in starting any given service project.

Quotable Quotes

For worship is the submission of all our nature to God. It is the quickening of conscience by His holiness; the nourishment of mind with His truth; the purifying of imagination by His beauty; the opening of the heart to His love; the surrender of will to His purpose; and all of this gathered up in adoration, the most selfless emotion of which our nature is capable and therefore the chief remedy for that self-centeredness which is our original sin and the source of all actual sin.

– William Temple

Scripture

1. Look up the following texts and note what they reveal about the example Jesus sets for us:

Matthew 4:23-25 _____

Matthew 6:1-4 _____

Matthew 10:1, 7-8 _____

Matthew 19:13-15 _____

Mark 1:35-39 _____

Mark 6:31-34 _____

2. Look up the following texts and note how the early church continued in service after Christ's death and resurrection:

Acts 4:32-35 _____

Acts 6:1-7 _____

Acts 9:36 _____

Acts 11:27-30 _____

3. Read Matthew 10:24-25. In following Jesus' example, what is one thing we can expect to encounter?
4. Read Mark 10:13-15. How can service / interaction with the world help us in our Christian walk?

Do This

Discuss together the role of service in the Christian church, reflecting on the introductory quote and the texts you've just read. Make plans for how you can serve others more effectively, both individually and corporately.

An attitude of service instead of selfishness keeps you in a right attitude of worship, but as Martha's example shows us, service without worship too quickly becomes burdensome. Discuss the balance between worship and service, and the essential nature of both elements.

Reflections on The object of our worship/ nothing between... DISCIPLESHIP



Story

The Price of the Vision

"In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord..." (Isaiah 6:1)

Our soul's personal history with God is often an account of the death of our heroes. Over and over again, God has to remove our friends to put Himself in their place, and that is when we falter, fail, and become discouraged. Let me think about this personally – when the person died who represented for me all that God was, did I give up on everything in life? Did I become ill or disheartened? Or did I do as Isaiah did and see the Lord?

My vision of God is dependent upon the condition of my character. My character determines whether or not truth can even be revealed to me. Before I can say, "I saw the Lord," there must be something in my character that conforms to the likeness of God. Until I am born again and really begin to see the kingdom of God, I only see from the perspective of my own biases. What I need is God's surgical procedure – His use of external circumstances to bring about internal purification.

Your priorities must be God first, God second, and God third, until your life is continually face to face with God and no one else is taken into account whatsoever. Your prayer will then be, "In all the world there is no one but You, dear God; there is no one but You."

Keep paying the price. Let God see that you are willing to live up to the vision.

– Oswald Chambers, *My Utmost for His Highest*

Breakup time (divide in small groups)

1. Compare/contrast Isaiah's vision of the throne room with that of John's in Revelation. Combine the two visions along with other Biblical references to the throne room to compose a fuller picture of God's heavenly dwelling place.

2. Discuss how God has used “external circumstances to bring about internal purification” in your life. What has been your reaction to “God’s surgical procedure” in these circumstances?
3. Do you have other priorities – even good priorities – that are standing in the way of living up to the vision God has given you? How can you re-orient yourself so nothing is coming between you and God?
4. Have you really been born again? Explain your answer. [Use Jesus’ teaching of Nicodemus in John 3 for context.] Whatever your answer, what must you do next?

Reflections on The object of our worship/ nothing between... LEADERSHIP



Essence

This Experience Must Come

"Elijah went up by a whirlwind into heaven. And Elisha...saw him no more"
(2 Kings 2:11-12)

It is not wrong for you to depend on your "Elijah" for as long as God gives him to you. But remember that the time will come when he must leave and will no longer be your guide and your leader, because God does not intend for him to stay. Even the thought of that causes you to say, "I cannot continue without my 'Elijah.'" Yet God says you must continue.

Alone at your "Jordan" (2:14). The Jordan River represents the type of separation where you have no fellowship with anyone else, and where no one else can take your responsibility from you. You now have to put to the test what you learned when you were with your "Elijah." You have been to the Jordan over and over again with Elijah, but now you are facing it alone. There is no use in saying that you cannot go – the experience is here, and you must go. If you truly want to know whether or not God is the God your faith believes Him to be, then go through your "Jordan" alone.

Alone at Your "Jericho" (2:15). Jericho represents the place where you have seen your "Elijah" do great things. Yet when you come alone to your "Jericho," you have a strong reluctance to take the initiative and trust in God, wanting, instead, for someone else to take it for you. But if you remain true to what you learned while with your "Elijah," you will receive a sign, as Elisha did, that God is with you.

Alone at Your "Bethel" (2:23). At your "Bethel" you will find yourself at your wits' end but at the beginning of God's wisdom. When you come to your wits' end and feel inclined to panic – don't! Stand true to God and He will bring out His truth in a way that will make your life an expression of worship. Put into practice what you learned while with your "Elijah" – use his mantle and pray (see 2:13-14). Make a determination to trust in God, and do not even look for Elijah anymore.

Three nights later the menacing threat made in the phone call came true: a bomb exploded on the front verandah of the King home. Thankfully no one was hurt. But King was able to get through it: "My religious experience a few nights before had given me strength to face it." Time and again throughout his ministry Martin Luther King returned to that experience to strengthen him as he faced terrible difficulties.

— Oswald Chambers, *My Utmost for His Highest*

Breakout time (divide in small groups)

1. Chart your spiritual journey, identifying your “Jordan,” “Jericho,” and “Bethel.” Share what new understanding you gained of God and how you worshiped Him each step of the way.
2. If you have not yet gone through a particular stage, how can you prepare yourself for this time? Support your answers with Bible texts.
3. Most people can point to an individual – an “Elijah” – that brought them into the church, but at some point our focus must shift to Jesus. Who was your “Elijah,” and how has that relationship changed? Has your focus shifted toward or away from Jesus? Explain what makes the difference?

Reflections on The object of our worship/ nothing between... EVANGELISM



Quotable Quotes

The Key to the Missionary's Work

"Jesus came and spoke to them, saying, 'All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations...'" (Matthew 28:18-19)

The key to the missionary's work is the authority of Jesus Christ, not the needs of the lost. We are inclined to look on our Lord as one who assists us in our endeavors for God. Yet our Lord places Himself as the absolute sovereign and supreme Lord over His disciples. He does not say that the lost will never be saved if we don't go – He simply says, "Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations...." He says, "Go on the basis of the revealed truth of My sovereignty, teaching and preaching out of your living experience of Me."

"Then the eleven disciples went...to the mountain which Jesus had appointed for them" (28:16). If I want to know the universal sovereignty of Christ, I must know Him myself. I must take time to worship the One whose name I bear. Jesus says, "Come to Me..." – that is the place to meet Jesus – "all you who labor and are heavy laden..." (Matthew 11:28) – and how many missionaries are! We completely dismiss these wonderful words of the universal Sovereign of the world, but they are the words of Jesus to His disciples meant for here and now.

"Go therefore...." To "go" simply means to live. Act 1:8 is the description of how to go. Jesus did not say in the verse, "Go into Jerusalem, Judea, and Samaria," but, "...you shall be witnesses to Me in [all these places]." He takes upon Himself the work of sending us.

"If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you..." (John 15:7) – that is the way to keep going. Where we are placed is then a matter of indifference to us, because God sovereignly engineers our goings.

"None of these things move me; nor do I count my life dear to myself, so that I may finish my race with joy, and the ministry which I received from the Lord Jesus..." (Acts 20:24). That is how to keep going until we are gone from this life.

— Oswald Chambers, *My Utmost for His Highest*

Breakout time (divide in small groups)

1. How does the above shift in focus from the needs of the lost to the authority of Jesus Christ affect your evangelistic efforts?
2. In what way can your worship be a witness wherever you are?
3. Discuss how the idea that God chooses to use us in His work affects your worship?

Reflections on
**The object of our worship/
nothing between...**
SERVICE



Story

I used to be the chaplain for the Astros [baseball team] and the Oilers [US football team] when I was in Houston, Texas. After I'd do a chapel, they'd give me tickets. One time in the Astrodome I watched Earl Campbell run over everybody, his own men included, to get to the goal line. When he got to the goal line, he put the ball down. The place went crazy. People were giving high fives and jumping around. The scoreboard went off. The same thing happened when the Astros hit a home run. It was a ringing shout, because their man scored a touchdown.

I'm not saying that when you come to church you need to give each other high fives or do cartwheels down the aisle, but worship is a time of anticipation and expectation. We come together because all week God has been knocking home runs and scoring touchdowns in our lives.

Worship is a time to celebrate what God has done for us.

– Rod Cooper

Serving

SERVICE PROJECT IDEAS

1. Visit an orphanage – sing, perform skits
2. Identify children of prisoners to mentor

Reflections on **LIFE: worship through obedience** **DISCIPLESHIP**



Story

Vince Lombardi was one of the winningest coaches who ever coached in the [US National Football League]. Once, after losing a game, he called for a team meeting in the locker room. As he faced these seasoned, hardened men who knew the game of football inside and out, he held up a football and announced, "Men, this is a football!" He then began to remind them of some of the fundamentals of the game and said, "Men, we must get back to the basics." Lombardi knew the importance of never forgetting the basics – the fundamentals of the game. He believed that the strength of their game lay in the foundations of football – the very basics.

The secret to living a successful Christian life – the secret to living a life of love – the secret to worshipping God – likewise lies in the fundamentals – in the very basics. And one of the most basic tenets of Christianity is that you have to listen to God. And you have to play the game by the rules – you have to live life God's way and you can only do that if you listen to his teaching.

...Too many people today only want to listen to what they want to hear. Too many people today, even in many parts of the church of Jesus Christ, want to pick and choose which parts they like. But the teachings of the Bible are not mix-and-match. ...The whole purpose in listening to God is so that you can implement his plan. You hear God's word so that you can heed his word.

...True worship is a matter of obedience. Leonard Sweet, in his book *Aquachurch*, writes: "Our pews are occupied by people who want to be moved, but who don't want to move." In other words, our pews are occupied by people who want to be moved emotionally, but who don't want to move obediently. Someone once said, "Worship always leads to action." True worship must always lead to the implementation of God's plan and purpose for our lives.

– Steven Dow, *Loving God Through Worship*

Breakout time (divide in small groups)

1. What is the relationship between obedience and worship?
2. Use a Topical Index to find Biblical passages relating worship and obedience. Discuss how these passages expand your concept of obedience. In your search, you will likely find many passages that on the surface talk simply of the rewards of obedience and the punishment of disobedience – what role do such passages play in understanding obedience in the context of true worship?
3. How does “failure to worship through our obedience cause our hearts to harden”? Give Biblical examples?

Reflections on **LIFE: worship through obedience** **LEADERSHIP**



Quotable Quotes

Our worship is to be based on God's sovereignty as our Creator and His sufficiency as our Shepherd. Verses 7-11 [of Psalm 95] remind us that we must also worship God by our response of obedience. It's more than just the shouting of praises or our acts of reverence; wholehearted obedience is the evidence of true worship. If we worship God as our Shepherd then we must follow Him as the sheep of His pasture. Worship without obedience is worthless to God. In fact, verse 10 says that it makes God angry. Failure to worship through our obedience causes our hearts to harden, which is repulsive to God and destructive to us.

– Brian Bill, *An Invitation to Worship*

Breakout time (divide in small groups)

1. List ways you've been compelled to worship God based on:

- His sovereignty as our Creator; and
- His sufficiency as our Shepherd.

Identify ways in which the styles of worship might be similar/different depending on the role upon which you're basing your worship.

2. As a group, come up with a Biblical definition of "reverence." Compare/contrast this to what your personal conception of "reverence" was before developing the Biblical definition.
3. Why do you think the author feels we can best "apprehend something of the hatred of God for sin and his indescribable love for the sinner" at the foot of the cross? How can this help us love God and hate sin?

Reflections on **LIFE: worship through obedience** **EVANGELISM**



Quotable Quotes

Worship is a matter of obedience. Some people put on a show of worship but then don't obey the Lord all week long. Someone said, "It is not how high you jump, but how straight you walk when you hit the ground!" Bishop Ryle said, "The best public worship, is that which produces the best private Christianity."

– Travis Johnson, *What is Worship*

Breakout time (divide in small groups)

1. Discuss each of the statements contained in the above quote. Do you agree/disagree? Why?
2. Develop "Quotable Quotes" of your own that express your understanding of "Worship through Obedience."

Reflections on **LIFE: worship through obedience** SERVICE



Quotable Quotes

- W WORSHIP GOD PROPERLY - ON HIS TERMS.
- O OVERFLOW WITH GOD'S PRAISE.
- R RECOGNIZE GOD'S POSITION.
- S SUBMIT TO GOD AS HIS POSSESSION.
- H HEAR GOD'S PROCLAMATION.
- I IMPLEMENT GOD'S PLAN.
- P PREPARE YOUR HEART TO ENTER GOD'S PRESENCE

– Steven Dow, *Loving God Through Worship*

Serving

SERVICE PROJECT IDEAS:

- Reading to individuals who are blind or have low vision
- Helping to refurbish a group home for individuals with developmental or other disabilities; spend time with the residents
- Any other idea you might have for Service Projects

Reflections on Preparing our heart for worship DISCIPLESHIP



Quotable Quotes

Prepared for Worship

*He will sit as a refiner and purifier of silver;
He will purify the sons of Levi, and purge them as gold and silver,
that they may offer to the Lord and offering in righteousness. – Malachi 3:3*

The quality of our worship is not based on our activities but on our character. Churches can mistakenly assume that the better the music, the more impressive the building, and the more eloquent the preaching, the more worshipful the experience will be. Genuine worship, however, originates from within our hearts. If our relationship with God is not healthy, all these things are nothing more than religious pageantry.

The Levites were the worship leaders of their day. Their task was to offer sacrifices on behalf of the people. God declared that before they could worship Him in righteousness, He would first refine them with His refiner's fire, purging them of any impurities. Merely being members of the religious profession, having official responsibilities in the temple, and going through the rituals of worship, did not guarantee that their religious activities would be acceptable to holy God.

Today, we tend to look to external things to enhance our worship. The true quality of our worship, however, rests within us. If we have not allowed God to purify us first, our worship will be void of His presence. If we do not have a pure heart, we may give offerings, but they will be unacceptable to God. Attending a religious service will not automatically ensure an encounter with God.

If you are not satisfied with the quality of your worship, don't be too quick to blame your environment. Look first to your own heart. Allow God to refine your heart until it is pleasing to Him, and you will be free to worship God as He intends.

– Henry T. and Richard Blackaby, *Experiencing God Day-by-Day*

Breakup time (divide in small groups)

1. In looking at worship in heaven, John Cuddeford notes “there was no choreographer or worship leader telling the elders, ‘Ok, now, this is the part where you’re supposed to fall down and worship.’ It was a natural, spontaneous response to God.... Far from being a passive, spectator sport, far from being simply a mood we’re either in or not in, worship is a response. A response of all that we are to all that God is.” If this is true, and the “true quality of worship rests within us,” what can we do to enhance our worship, both privately and corporately?

2. In light of the above, how would you respond to people who say they “just didn’t get anything out of the worship service” or that they came to church “looking for a blessing”?

Reflections on Preparing our heart for worship LEADERSHIP



Essence

Following are some ways you can make your worship experience more worshipful. The first is this, Come prepared to worship. You prepare for many other things. Football players go through a long game-day routine to get ready for the big game. You prepare yourself to go on a date.... You get prepared because something big is about to happen.

Well how do you prepare for worship? What effort do you put into getting ready to come and worship the Lord?

Let me urge you to come to worship prepared to worship. Pray before you come so you will be ready to pray when you arrive. Sleep before you come so you'll stay alert when you arrive. Read the Word before you come so your heart will be soft when you worship. Better yet, if you really want to be prepared to worship on [Sabbath] morning, then you need to be synchronizing your heart with the Spirit every day of the week. You need to be praying, and reading, and listening, and worshipping privately every day.... And if everyone did that, it would not only transform our worship, it would absolutely transform this church.

Next, come expecting God to speak and come hungry for God and willing to listen. You see this may come as a shock to you, but the responsibility to worship doesn't fall on the church or even the pastor, it falls on you. And if you don't get anything out of a service then it's not the church's fault it's yours. Now the church does have a responsibility to provide an atmosphere of worship, but the ultimate responsibility falls on you. ...

Our attitude about worship comes with a humble teachable heart that is eager to see God and learn from Him. So often we come to church to nit pick! "How did you like that special music, it was too loud for me. Did you like the sermon, the preacher wasn't at his best this morning. Did you notice the dust on the pews, when's the last time they were cleaned." It's as if the service is a performance and we're writing a critique for the ... morning paper. And if that's your attitude then you won't get much from it. But if you come with the attitude, "Oh Lord, search my heart. I fall so short. Teach me Lord, let there be something in this service that will cause me to be more deeply committed to you." Now if that is your spirit, you are going to be ready to be refined and molded into what God intended you to be.

– Barry Robinson, *More than Just a [Sabbath] Thing*

Breakup time (divide in small groups)

1. Write two “newspaper articles” regarding the last worship service you attended, one as a critique and one from the viewpoint of someone that came with a humble teachable heart. In how many different ways can the same service be viewed depending on one’s perspective?
2. Oxymorons are word pairs that contradict themselves (i.e., jumbo shrimp, freezer burn, boneless ribs, uninvited guest, etc.). Is “boring worship” an oxymoron? Explain your answer?

Reflections on Preparing our heart for worship EVANGELISM



Quotable Quotes

Preparing for the Presence of God

*"Prepare the way of the Lord; Make His paths straight...
And all flesh shall see the salvation of God."* – Luke 3:4, 6

If we are to receive the powerful presence of God, we must prepare ourselves. John the Baptist was God's messenger to help people prepare to receive the Savior of the world. John preached unwaveringly: *"Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand!"* (Matt. 3:2). Those who heard John's message and prepared their lives recognized Jesus when He came, and they left all to follow Him. This was especially true of the disciples, whose hearts God Himself prepared (Matt. 16:17). Preparation must precede God's presence!

God's instruction for preparation is specific: repentance! This involves a complete change of mind, heart, will, and behavior toward Him. He is Lord, and your life must be prepared to receive Him as your Lord. Anything less is inadequate. Some were obviously unprepared to follow Jesus and missed the opportunity (Luke 9:57-62). The religious leaders of Jesus' day were largely unprepared for His arrival. They knew the Messiah was coming. They even knew where He would be born (Matt. 2:4-6). Yet when word came that the Savior had been born, they made no effort to join Him, preferring instead their religious ritual.

If you are unprepared, you, too, will miss the opportunity to experience Jesus. You may practice religion, but you will miss God. While others encounter the Lord personally in worship, your heart will remain unmoved. As others receive a fresh word from God, you will experience a painful silence. Religious activity can never substitute for a heart that is pure before him. Purity comes only through repentance. Pray, as the Psalmist did, that God will examine your heart and reveal your need to repent of your sin (Ps. 139:23-24).

– Henry T. and Richard Blackaby, *Experiencing God Day-by-Day*

Breakup time (divide in small groups)

1. Look at the accounts of Jesus calling the various disciples. What are the similarities/differences in the call and the response?
2. Look at those who did not respond to Jesus' call. What was the difference between those that accepted and those that did not?
3. Discuss how one can "practice religion but miss God." How do you keep this from happening?
4. Are you prepared to receive the "powerful presence of God"? If not, what must you do today to be prepared.

Reflections on **Preparing our heart for worship** **SERVICE**



Quotable Quotes

We need to let go of our intellectual idea of worship and realize there is more to worship than a sermon; we have to let go of our evangelistic notion of worship and reckon with the fact that worship is not primarily directed toward the sinners who need to be converted; we must let go of our entertainment expectations and remind ourselves that we are not in church to watch a Christian variety show.

– Robert Webber

Serving

SERVICE PROJECT IDEAS

- Adopt a nearby park to clean up
- Help an elderly community member clean their house and make minor repairs
- Add other idea projects that you can get your youth involved within their communities

Reflections on **Praise** **DISCIPLESHIP**



Story

One of the biggest problems many of us face in praising the Lord openly is that of overcoming our natural inhibitions. We almost feel embarrassed to praise God, simply because nobody else is doing it! And all of us understand how difficult it is to do a thing that no one else is doing – especially if it is quite certain that the doing of that thing will bring ridicule from others.

I recall a childhood incident which illustrates this point. During the Depression, our family was often embarrassed by many things – but then almost everybody was poor, so the embarrassment was bearable. But I remember that my dad finally got an electrician's job in Enid, Oklahoma, so we moved there, thinking our circumstances might soon improve.

However, it wasn't long until he lost the job, and we were compelled to move back to our old home. The trip had to be made by bus, and Dad had only enough money to buy tickets for my mother, my sister and me.

...So he took us to the Enid bus station, where we were to wait until our bus arrived. My dad, however, left on foot for the edge of Enid, carrying his heavy electrician's gear.

About an hour later, we boarded the bus for our journey home. When we arrived at the outskirts of Enid, on the main highway leading out of the city, I suddenly spotted my dad standing beside the highway, hitchhiking [for rides].

When I saw him, I sprang from my seat and exclaimed, "That's my daddy!" My mother was most embarrassed by my excitement, because she felt badly that my dad had to hitchhike home while we rode the bus.

But I was proud to see my dad, and I said it again, "There's my daddy," as the bus rolled past where he was standing.

Everyone on that bus knew that was my father. And probably everyone knew why he was hitchhiking, but I didn't care. I was too young to realize how embarrassing this was to my mother. I only knew that I loved my daddy and was mighty proud that he had paid the price for my ride home.

– Don Gossett, *There's Dynamite in Praise*

Breakout time (divide in small groups)

1. Share something you did when you were too young to be embarrassed by it. Discuss how people “learn embarrassment.” What are the positive and negative effects of embarrassment?
2. As a group, brainstorm some of your “natural inhibitions” regarding worship.
3. The Bible describes countless ways to praise God. Identify the type of praise described in each of the following verses:

2 Chronicles 20 _____

Psalm 22:3 _____

Psalm 63:3 _____

Psalm 63:4 _____

Psalm 92:1 _____

Psalm 95:1-3 _____
4. Identify what the above types of praise have in common. Revisit your list of natural inhibitions regarding worship – are there barriers to worship you need to get over? If so, how can you do this?

For Further Reference

Hebrew Words of Praise

- **Barak:** to kneel by implication bless God; bowing before the Lord expresses our submission & expectation
- **Halal:** to be boastful, to be excited, to enjoy; connotes a tremendous explosion of enthusiasm in the act of praising
- **Ruah:** To shout in joy
- **Shabach:** To address in a loud tone, to shout triumphantly
- **Tehillah:** cheering and singing our praise, literally to sing our “halals”
- **Towdah:** The sacrifice of praising God through trials, pushing through adversities; praising in faith before God moves
- **Yadah:** to acknowledge in public, to throw out with extended hands
- **Zamar:** The idea of striking with the fingers properly, to play the strings or parts of a musical instrument

Reflections on **Praise** **LEADERSHIP**



Quotable Quotes

In my travels on the North American continent and across the seas, I've ministered to many races of people who speak different languages. However, one happy thing I've always discovered among God's people is that ...the word Hallelujah [– the very essence of praise – is found almost unchanged in every language].

The word Hallelujah means literally, "Praise ye the Lord." It is one of the most common words in the entire Bible, for it appears hundreds of times in God's Word. For example, the last five Psalms begin and end with the words, "Praise ye the Lord," which means Hallelujah. It would be a good thing if our speech always began and ended the same way each day: praising the Lord!

It is proper to use our tongues for praise, to obey the oft repeated command of Psalm 107:31: *"Oh that men would praise the LORD for his goodness, and for his wonderful works to the children of men!"* We can, of course, use our tongues in other ways if we choose. Some men use them to curse and blaspheme. Christians shrink from using their tongues in such a way, but some do use their tongues in other ways which are not pleasing to the Lord.

For instance, to use your tongue in grumbling, complaining, criticizing, gossiping – these uses of the tongues grieve the Lord.

If you choose to use your tongue in negative, gloomy talk, all you will get is a pickle-like disposition, and a sour-faced appearance, which will make you unwelcome company to others.

I want to challenge you to this Hallelujah living, this praising principle, that will keep your life full of joy and blessings.

– Don Gossett, *There's Dynamite in Praise*

Breakout time (divide in small groups)

1. Looks at the various psalms that contain "Praise Ye the Lord." For what different things does the psalmist Praise Him.

Psalm 104 _____

Psalm 105 _____

Psalm 106 _____

Psalm 111 _____

Psalm 112 _____

Psalm 113 _____

Psalm 116 _____

Psalm 117 _____

Psalm 135 _____

Psalm 146 _____

Psalm 147 _____

Psalm 148 _____

Psalm 149 _____

Psalm 150 _____

2. Going back to the idea of “lessons from heaven” on worship, explore Revelation 19:1-6, where the term “Hallelujah” is used four times alone. What is the context for these uses? What can we learn about “Hallelujah living” from this example?
3. Find other uses of “Hallelujah” or “Bless Ye the Lord” (may vary by translation) throughout the Bible. What do you learn from these additional uses?
4. In what ways can you commit to using your tongue for praising in the week to come, and not for “less exalted” purposes? Keep a record of any way your week is different than usual on account of this “Hallelujah living.”

Reflections on **Praise** **EVANGELISM**



Quotable Quotes

By asking the Lord to open his lips, David showed how difficult it is to offer thanks to God. This is something God demands of us (Psalm 50:14). Talking about the Lord and thanking him publicly require an extreme amount of courage and strength because the devil is constantly trying to stop people from doing this. If we could see all of Satan's traps, we would know why David prayed for the Spirit's strength and asked the Lord himself to open David's lips. He wanted to tell the devil, the world, kings, princes, and everyone about the Lord.

Many things can keep our lips shut: the fear of danger, the hope of gaining something, or even the advice of friends. The devil uses these ways to stop us from offering thanks to God, as I have often experienced in my life. And yet, at important times, when God's honor was threatened, God stood by me and opened my mouth in spite of the obstacles. The Spirit urges us on, just as Peter says, *"We cannot stop talking about what we've seen and heard"* (Acts 4:20). The Spirit prays to God for us with many groans (Romans 8:26). Then, the Lord opens our lips to announce his praise.

Whenever Scripture talks about praising God publicly, it's talking about something extremely dangerous. This is because announcing his praise is nothing other than opposing the devil, the world, our own corrupt nature, and everything evil. For how can you praise God without first declaring that the world is guilty and condemned? Anyone who condemns the world is asking to be hated and puts himself in a very dangerous situation.

– Martin Luther, *By Faith Alone*

Breakout time (divide in small groups)

1. We may not always see it as difficult for David to offer praise, given his hundreds of psalms – discuss what things at different stages of David’s life may have made praise difficult.
2. Think of the author of the above piece; what would have happened if Martin Luther had not “opened his lips”? What might be the consequences of your not opening your lips?
3. What are the “dangers” you face in praising God? List some things that might keep you from opening your lips. How can you prevent this from happening?

Reflections on **Praise SERVICE**



Quotable Quotes

Worship does not satisfy our hunger for God – it whets our appetite. Our need for God is not taken care of by engaging in worship – it deepens. It overflows the hour and permeates the week.

– Eugene Peterson

The true spirit of praise doesn't drive people away: it attracts them. In Acts 2:47 the early Christians were *"praising God, and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved."* People desire reality in Christ. They don't want a dead tradition, a worthless formality. People crave reality. When we praise the Lord, we are not being obnoxious or disorderly. Praises unto the Lord are beautiful, harmonious with heaven, pleasing to God.

— Don Gossett, *There's Dynamite in Praise*

Serving

SERVICE PROJECT IDEAS

- Start a scholarship fund to send young people in your community to camp for the summer who wouldn't otherwise have the opportunity
- Leave gift baskets of non-perishable food anonymously for those in your community that might need it – Thanksgiving and Christmas baskets are traditionally done, but imagine the unmet need in the middle of the year

Reflections on **LIFE: worship through intimacy** **(with God and man)** **DISCIPLESHIP**



Essence

Worship is not something that is optional for God's people. Rather it is something that is specifically requested of them – even required of them. ... We are not to worship God on our own terms, but on his terms. ... Your take on worship is relatively irrelevant. For it is only God's viewpoint on worship that really matters.

...Most of us probably have a high degree of agreement on what it means to worship God, but may differ greatly when it comes to the style in which we prefer to worship God. The good news is that nowhere in the Scriptures does God prescribe a particular style of worship as the correct style.

Gary Thomas noticed that many Christians were stuck in a worship rut. He raised the question, "Since God has intentionally made us all different, why should everyone be expected to love (worship) God the same way?" Gary has discovered that for 2,000 years Christians have used many different paths to enjoy intimacy with God. In his book *Sacred Pathways*, Gary identifies nine ways that people draw near to God:

- Naturalists express love for God best when they are outdoors.
- Sensates express love for God best when all their senses are engaged.
- Traditionalists express love for God best when they are able to stick close to ritual, symbols and familiarity.
- Ascetics express love for God best in solitude and simplicity.
- Activists express love for God best when they are battling injustice and evil.
- Caregivers express love for God best through caring for those who hurt.
- Enthusiasts express love for God best by experiencing celebration.
- Contemplatives express love for God best through adoration and meditation.
- Intellectuals express love for God best when their mind is fully engaged.

...None of those ways has anything whatsoever to do with right or wrong or good or bad. They are just different ways of worshipping God and expressing love to him through being the kind of person that God made you to be. There are lots of different ways to worship God and there are

lots of different styles in which to worship God. And they are all acceptable as long as you come to him on his terms because his terms do not dictate style or methodology, that we may be also glorified together.

– Steven Dow, *Loving God Through Worship*

Breakout time (divide in small groups)

1. Identify a person in the Bible that would fit in each of the nine categories listed above. In what way do you find yourself most comfortable praising God?
2. The author above asserts that “nowhere in the Scriptures does God prescribe a particular style of worship as the correct style,” yet there is perhaps more dissension in the church regarding worship styles than anything else. Explain why you agree or disagree with the author’s statement, giving Biblical examples to defend your answer. If the author’s statement is true, how should we approach the feeling that there are “right” and “wrong” styles of worship?
3. List the “worship ruts” you see in your church. (Be sure to include your own.) Identify what contributes to these ruts (i.e., culture, personality, tradition, etc.). In what ways can you broaden your church’s worship experience.

Reflections on **LIFE: worship through intimacy** **(with God and man)** **LEADERSHIP**



Quotable Quotes

Intimacy is the state of being intimate, belonging to or characterizing one's deepest nature. Intimacy is marked by a very close association, contact, or familiarity....

How distant are you from God right now? Has your closeness with Him chilled? Could that be why your worship has become so perfunctory? Do you sing the songs while thinking about something else? Are you so critical of your brothers and sisters in God's family that you sound just like an unbeliever, even though you know your place after death will be with God in heaven?

Paul would respond this way: "My determined purpose is for that never to be true of me. I will pursue a relationship with Him that becomes so close He and I will walk consistently together through whatever pressures that occur." That's intimacy. That's our goal.

– Charles R. Swindoll, *So You Want to Be Like Christ?*

Breakout time (divide in small groups)

1. Read through Hebrews 11 and assign different "heroes of faith" to the various groups. Identify the "intimacy" with God each person exemplified. Note any examples of intimacy with fellow men, as well. What examples are provided for how we are to worship through intimacy?

2. The author quoted above uses the imagery of “walking consistently together” as a symbol of intimacy. Find Biblical examples (in addition to those given below) of “walking with God” – how do these examples expand your idea of intimacy with God? How does this translate to intimacy with mankind?

Genesis 5:22-24 _____

Micah 6:8 _____

3. Answer the questions above for yourself...How distant are you from God right now? What must be done to bring you into closer intimacy with God?

Reflections on **LIFE: worship through intimacy** **(with God and man)** **EVANGELISM**



Essence

True Worship

But the hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth; for the Father is seeking such to worship Him. God is Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth. – John 4:23-24

We are designed to worship God in spirit and in truth. As Jesus spoke to the Samaritan woman at the well, He sought to help her do this by imparting to her God's living water (John 4:13-14).

Jesus sought out this woman personally to give her abundant life. In the same way, the Father seeks an encounter with each of us that is real and personal. The Samaritan woman had heard about God; Jesus said true worship must be "face to face" with God. Worship is not religion or ritual; worship is an intimate and vital encounter with a Person. True worship includes the full recognition of who God is: Holy, Sovereign, Almighty, Loving, Merciful. This recognition brings about the realization of our own sinfulness.

True worship is life-changing! It creates within the worshiper's heart a hatred for sin. True worship results in repentance, obedient submission, and a desire for holiness (Isa. 6:1-8). True worship generates a desire to show mercy and to express forgiveness. It includes a joyful acceptance of all that God has provided by His grace. True worship is not exclusive. Just as the Samaritan woman rushed off to tell others of her encounter with the Lord, so true worship will compel the worshiper to include others. As a result of this woman's encounter with Jesus, many others from her village came to know Him as well. The one who has truly worshiped will have a sense of peace and a confident expectation of what God is about to do. True worship produces a transformed life, reflecting the One who has been worshiped.

– Henry T. and Richard Blackaby, *Experiencing God Day-by-Day*

Breakout time (divide into small groups)

1. Read John 4. What are the woman's questions regarding worship? What does Jesus' response reveal about what is important in true worship? Are there still questions today about less significant aspects of worship that keep us from the true worship to which Jesus' answers direct the woman? Do we respond as the woman, recognizing God, or do we continue to focus on the minutiae?
2. Identify concrete ways to express what are identified above as the "results of true worship":
 - Realization of our own sinfulness
 - Transformed life
 - Hatred for sin
 - Repentance
 - Obedient submission
 - Desire for holiness
 - Desire to show mercy and to express forgiveness
 - Joyful acceptance of all that God has provided by His grace
 - Compulsion to include others
 - Sense of peace
 - Confident expectation of what God is about to do

Reflections on
LIFE: worship through intimacy
(with God and man)
SERVICE



Quotable Quote

Worship is
Our response
Both personal and corporate
To God –
For who He is!
And what He has done!
Expressed in and by things we say
And the way we live.

– Louie Giglio, *The Air We Breathe*

Serving

SERVICE PROJECT IDEAS:

- Build a “Habitat for Humanity” house
- Go out of your way to seek out a non-Christian and witness to them only through service
- Add more ideas of service projects

Reflections on **Thankfulness** **DISCIPLESHIP**



Essence

Loving God for Who He Is

Mary said, "My soul praises the Lord's greatness! My spirit finds its joy in God, my Savior, because he has looked favorably on me, his humble servant." – Luke 1:46-48

Mary had total confidence that God was her Savior, even though she couldn't tell that this was true by seeing or feeling it. Mary was able to fully trust God because the Lord had placed this faith inside of her.

Mary put things in the right order in this verse. First, she called God her Lord. Next, she called him her Savior. Then, she proclaimed what God had done. By doing this, she teaches us to love and praise God for who he is. She shows us the right place to start. We shouldn't begin our prayers by selfishly asking what God can do for us. Mary's example teaches us to love and praise God for no other reason than his goodness. We should find joy and pleasure in who he is. This is an exalted, pure, and tender way of loving and praising God. It shows us Mary's extraordinary and tender spirit.

By contrast, some people are only parasites, always expecting to get things from God. They don't love or praise God because he is good. They're only concerned about how good God is to them, how much they feel his goodness, and how many good things they receive from him. The moment he hides his face and withdraws his goodness, leaving them in misery without anything, they stop loving and praising him. They no longer love and praise the goodness that they now can't see or feel. By doing this, they prove that they don't find joy in God, their Savior. They don't love or praise the goodness when it's hidden in God. They find much more joy in their salvation than in their Savior, in the gift than in the Giver, and in the creature than in the Creator.

– Martin Luther, *By Faith Alone*

Breakout time (divide into small groups)

1. Look up the following verses and discuss what they teach about thanksgiving:

1 Thes 5:18 _____

Gal 5:20 _____

Matt 12:34 _____

Ps 100:4 _____

Phil 4:6 _____

Find other verses related to thanksgiving and share these with the group.

2. Discuss the distinction between God as Lord and as Savior. Why is important to recognize Him as both?
3. Make a list of all the things God has done for you. (Presumably, you will run out of time before this is even remotely possible.) How does remembering what God has done in the past help us in our worship today? Find Bible texts that invoke this idea of “remembering” what God has done in the past. What can you learn from these passages about worship? Is there any danger in focusing on what God has done in the past? Explain.

Reflections on Thankfulness LEADERSHIP



Story

When We Feel Forgotten

Nevertheless, the chief cupbearer didn't remember Joseph. He forgot all about him. – Genesis 40:23

After being forgotten by the cupbearer, Joseph struggled with the temptation of becoming impatient and complaining. When the devil saw this, he attacked Joseph with even more fiery arrows. Christ himself felt these arrows when the devil tempted him: *"If you are the Son of God, tell these stones to become loaves of bread"* (Matthew 4:3). In the same way, the devil might have said to Joseph, "Go ahead and continue your miserable struggle. You know that your prayers are useless. You cry to God and believe in him – but all for nothing. You had hoped that God would free you and restore your honor because you interpreted the chief cupbearer's dream. Well, let God save you if he feels like it!" The devil continued to torment Joseph with his fiery arrows, even though Joseph was already weak and wounded.

When faithful people are happy and when they sing, *"The Lord is my strength and my song"* (Psalm 118:14), the devil stays far away from them. All complaining and impatience soon end. As long as believers praise and thank God, then temptation, sadness, and unbelief disappear. Heaven is opened wide and hell is shut with words like these: *"I will thank the Lord at all times. My mouth will always praise him"* (Psalm 34:1).

But as soon as we stop praising God, miserable, lonely, sad thoughts return. That's what happened to Joseph when he remembered how his brothers had sold him. They were at home having a good time while he was lying in prison, tied up and miserable. This is how the devil works. When the water becomes troubled, he likes to fish. He uses these opportunities to tempt people to abandon their faith and give up in despair.

– Martin Luther, *By Faith Alone*

Breakout time (divide into small group)

1. Find examples in the Bible where people felt “forgotten.” How did they handle the situations in which they felt this way?
2. The author suggests that the devil stays away from believers as long as they’re praising and thanking God. Explain why you do or do not believe this.
3. We’ve looked at examples of where humans felt forgotten, but what of God? What is His response throughout the Bible when abandoned by His own creation.
4. List things for which you have to be thankful. Keep this list and a psalm on hand to help when you next feel forgotten.

Reflections On **Thankfulness** **EVANGELISM**



Quotable Quotes

Everyday Miracles

The Lord's deeds are spectacular. They should be studied by all who enjoy them. – Psalm 111:2

What the Lord does is spectacular. But in this passage, the psalmist points out that only a few devout people notice what God has done. Most people don't praise God or thank him. They never say, "The Lord's deeds are spectacular." Though they are completely surrounded by his gifts, they have gotten used to them. They take advantage of what God has given them, rooting around in God's gifts like a hog in a bag of feed. They say, "What's so special about the fact that the sun shines, fire gives warmth, the ocean provides fish, the earth yields grain, cows have calves, women give birth to children, and hens lay eggs? These things happen every day!"

Is something insignificant just because it happens every day? If the sun wouldn't shine for ten days, suddenly it would be a great thing when it began shining again. If fire only existed in one place on the earth, I think it would be more precious than gold or silver. If there were only one well in the world, I would imagine that a drop of water would be worth more than a thousand dollars.

God showers people with rich and wonderful blessings. But how ungrateful and blind people are! They don't recognize these blessings as amazing miracles from God, so they don't admire them, give thanks for them, or act happy about them. However, if a clown can walk on a tightrope or train monkeys, people are ready to admire and praise him for it. The psalmist points out that the Lord's deeds are spectacular, but these deeds are only appreciated in the eyes of God's faithful followers.

– Martin Luther, *By Faith Alone*

Breakout time (divide into small groups)

1. Using a concordance or Topical Bible, look up the many uses of “see” and “signs” in the Gospel of John. What would you say is John’s view of the role of miracles in a believer’s life? What is even more important (20:29)? Discuss the implications for your life today.
2. In light of Romans 1:18-25, discuss the role of “everyday miracles” in evangelism. What are the dangers of failing to recognize God’s “everyday miracles” (vv. 28-32)?
3. Have someone record on a flipchart or chalkboard/whiteboard as the group calls out all the Lord’s “spectacular deeds.” In reviewing the list, what ought our response to be?

Reflections On Thankfulness SERVICE



Quotable Quotes

A Real Thanksgiving

If I am thankful for any toys,
I must be glad to share.
If I am thankful for my friends,
I must show them that I care.
If I am thankful for my home,
I'll help to make it gay;
I'll try to like what others like
And not just my own way.
The "thank you's" that come just from lips
God has a right to doubt.
I'm trying this thanksgiving-time
To act my "thank you's" out.

– Edith May Cummings

The shortest, surest way to all happiness is this: Make it a rule to thank and praise God [in] everything that happens to you, for it is certain that, whatever seeming calamity comes to you, if you thank and praise God [in] it, you turn it into a blessing. Could you, therefore, work miracles, you could not do more for yourself than by this thankful spirit.

– Don Gossett, *There's Dynamite in Praise*

Serving

SERVICE PROJECT IDEAS

- Conduct a recycling drive
- Organize a "clean-up day" for a neighborhood park

Reflections On Petitions DISCIPLESHIP



Quotable Quotes

Holiness or Hardness Toward God?

"He...wondered that there was no intercessor..." - Isaiah 59:16

The reason many of us stop praying and become hard toward God is that we only have an emotional interest in prayer. It sounds good to say that we pray, and we read books on prayer which tell us that prayer is beneficial – that our minds are quieted and our souls are uplifted when we pray. But Isaiah implied in this verse that God is amazed at such thoughts about prayer.

Worship and intercession must go together; one is impossible without the other. Intercession means raising ourselves up to the point of getting the mind of Christ regarding the person for whom we are praying (see Philippians 2:5). Instead of worshipping God, we recite speeches to God about how prayer is supposed to work. Are we worshipping God or disputing Him when we say, "But God, I just don't see how you are going to do this"? This is a sure sign that we are not worshipping. When we lose sight of God, we become hard and dogmatic. We throw our petitions at His throne and dictate to Him what we want Him to do. We don't worship God, nor do we seek to conform our minds to the mind of Christ. And if we are hard toward God, we will become hard toward other people.

Are we worshipping God in a way that will raise us up to where we can take hold of Him, having such intimate contact with Him that we know His mind about the ones for whom we pray? Are we living in a holy relationship with God, or have we become hard and dogmatic?

Do you find yourself thinking that there is no one interceding properly? Then be that person yourself. Be a person who worships God and lives in a holy relationship with Him. Get involved in the real work of intercession, remembering that it truly is work – work that demands all your energy but work which has no hidden pitfalls. Preaching the gospel has its share of pitfalls, but intercessory prayer has none whatsoever.

– Oswald Chambers, *My Utmost for His Highest*

Breakout time (divide into small groups)

1. Discuss some of the struggles you have encountered in your prayer life. If applicable, how have you overcome these struggles.
2. Discuss the following statement given above: "Worship and intercession must go together; one is impossible without the other."
3. Discuss a time when you dictated to God how to handle a particular prayer request. What was the outcome?
4. Dissect the Lord's Prayer (Matthew 6:9-13; Luke 11:2-4), examining all the components – especially those concerning others – and the order of the model prayer. How can this example left by Jesus help you in your prayer life this week?
5. Within your group, develop a list of petitions to add to your prayer list in the week ahead. Be sure to share any answered prayers with the group next week.

Reflections on **Petitions** **LEADERSHIP**



Quotable Quotes

Reverence

"Therefore, brethren, having boldness to enter the Holiest by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way which He consecrated for us, through the veil, that is, His flesh." – Hebrews 10:19-20

Our generation lacks a sense of wonder and reverence toward God. We want to bring God down to our level, to the commonplace. He is God! Though we have direct access to Him as His children, we ought never to forget that this access was purchased with the precious blood of His only Son. No one who truly understands this ever enters God's presence without a sense of holy awe. No one who comprehends the incredible price paid at Calvary ever takes his relationship with God for granted.

We will never truly understand God and the way He relates to us unless we first comprehend a true sense of His holiness and His demand for holiness among His people. If we are in God's presence, we are on holy ground! We must never act as if it were God's purpose to make us successful. It would be preposterous for us to become impatient when God does not answer our prayers when and how we think He should! He is God, we are not!

As you meditate on the price Jesus paid to give you access to the Father, you will come to treasure your prayer times with Him. Worship will become a privilege you seize with gratitude. Scripture will be dear to you as you strive to be holy in all that you do (2 Cor. 7:1; 1 Pet. 1:15).

If you have lost your wonder at the incredible gift of salvation that has been given to you, you need to revisit the cross and witness your Savior suffering for you. How priceless God's gift of salvation is!

– Henry T. and Richard Blackaby, *Experiencing God Day-by-Day*

Breakout time (divide in small groups)

1. Define the following terms used above, using Biblical examples to back up your definitions.
 - Reverance
 - Holiness
 - Awe
2. Discuss the balance between “direct access” to God and the “wonder and reverence” toward God the authors describe. How do you achieve this balance?
3. Discuss the practical implications of the following statement: “If we are in God’s presence, we are on holy ground!”

Reflections on **Petitions** **EVANGELISM**



Quotable Quotes

[P]rayer and praise are the two wings of spiritual power. There is no conflict. *"In everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God,"* declared Paul in Philippians 4:6. Also, *"Continue in prayer, and watch in the same with thanksgiving"* (Colossians 4:2). ...

I encountered this great scripture: *"Thou art holy, O thou that inhabitest the praises of Israel"* (Psalm 22:3). The Lord inhabits our praises. That is, the Lord manifests Himself as we praise Him. The word inhabits means to "live in, dwell in." ...[T]he mighty God dwells in, lives in, manifests Himself in our praises...

– Don Gossett, *There's Dynamite in Praise*

Breakout time (divide in small groups)

1. Discuss the author's assertion the "prayer and praise are the two wings of spiritual power." Explain what you think this means and why you agree or disagree with the statement.
2. What does it mean that God "inhabits praise".
3. Use a Topical Bible and/or concordance to find texts linking prayer and praise. What do you learn from these texts.

Reflections on **Petitions SERVICE**



Quotables Quotes

Prayer is the peace of our spirit,
The stillness of our thoughts,
The evenness of our recollection,
The seat of our meditation,
The rest of our cares
And the calm of our tempest

– Jeremy Taylor

Worship is to feel in your heart and express in some appropriate manner a humbling but delightful sense of admiring awe and astonished wonder and overpowering love in the presence of that most ancient Mystery, that Majesty which philosophers call the First Cause, but which we call Our Father Which Are in Heaven.

– A.W. Tozer

Serving

SERVICE PROJECT IDEAS

- Provide food and clothing to individuals who are homeless
- Pay someone's rent (anonymously) who is in need
- Have a clothing drive – ask each participant from the church to not only use the opportunity to get rid of old things, but to either donate new items or one of their favorite outfits...take the opportunity to talk about *sacrificial* giving

Reflections on

LIFE: worship through right attitude

DISCIPLESHIP



Essence

[A] fascinating research study [of] Olympic medalists ... discovered that Bronze medalists were happier than Silver medalists. Here's why. [The study] found that Silver medalists tended to focus on how close they came to winning gold so they weren't satisfied with silver. Bronze medalists tended to focus on how close they came to not winning a medal at all so they were just happy to be on the medal stand at all.

I think that study reveals a fascinating facet of human nature: your focus determines your reality. How we feel isn't determined by objective circumstances. If that was the case, Silver Medalists would be happier than Bronze medalists because they had an objectively better result. But how we feel isn't determined by our objective circumstances. How we feel is determined by our subjective focus.

Here's another way of saying it: your internal attitudes are more important than your external circumstances.

John Milton said it best: "The mind is its own place, and in itself, can make a Heaven out of Hell, a Hell of Heaven."

That's so true isn't it? All of us know people who can find something good to focus on even in the worst of circumstances. And all of us know someone who can find something bad to focus on even in the best of circumstances.

[W]e tend to see what we're looking for. I think there are two basic types of people in the world: complainers and worshippers. Complainers can always find something to complain about. Worshippers can always find something to praise God about.

Acts 16 is exhibit A. ...

Acts 16:22 says, "A mob quickly formed against Paul and Silas, and the city officials ordered them stripped and beaten with wooden rods. They were severely beaten, and then they were thrown into prison. The jailer was ordered to make sure they didn't escape. So he took no chances but put them into the inner dungeon and clamped their feet in the stocks."

I think we read a story like this and it's almost tough to put ourselves in their shoes. I've had bad days before, but nothing like this. ...If I'm Paul or Silas I'm emotionally and physically and spiritually spent. I'm drained to the last drop. I've got nothing left to give.

Their backs are bleeding from their beating. They are black and blue all over. And they had to be ticked off. I've never had a mob form against me, but I'm guessing that'll set you off emotionally.

And to top it off they land in the maximum security cell in stocks!

It just doesn't get much worse than that. And that's why this next verse is so amazing to me. Acts 16:25 says, *"Around midnight, Paul and Silas were complaining about their circumstances."*

That's not what it says.

It says, "Around midnight, Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the other prisoners were listening."

Sometimes you've got to zoom out and look at the big picture. ...So how do we [do that]? ...Worship.

Worshipping is taking our eyes off of our external circumstances and focusing on God. We stop focusing on what's wrong with us or with our circumstances. We start focusing on what's right with God.

Paul and Silas could have ... complained about their circumstances. God, we cast out a demon and this is what we get? We're on a missionary journey and we get beaten and thrown in jail? Instead of "watching our back" our backs are bleeding from a beating! They could have complained till the cows came home. But they made a choice to worship God in spite of their external circumstances.

Here's what worship does. It restores spiritual equilibrium. It helps you regain your perspective. It enables you to find something right to praise God about even when everything seems to be going wrong.

Worship is zooming out and refocusing on the big picture.

It's refocusing on the fact that two thousand years ago, Jesus died on the cross to pay the penalty for my sin. It's refocusing on the fact that God loves me when I least expect it and least deserve it. It's refocusing on the fact that God is going to get me where God wants me to go. It's refocusing on the fact that I have eternity with God to look forward to in a place where there is no mourning or sorrow or pain.

Worship is refocusing on the fundamentals of our faith. And here is what happens: God restores the joy of our salvation. We regain our spiritual equilibrium.

Is it easy? Absolutely not. Nothing is more difficult than praising God when everything seems to be going wrong. But one of the purest forms of worship is praising God even when you don't feel like it because it shows God that your worship isn't based on circumstances. Worship is based on the character of God. ...

– Mark Batterson, *Focus*

Breakout time (divide in small groups)

1. Share a time when you did or did not praise God despite bad circumstances. What was the result?
2. Discuss the study of Olympic athletes. Have you ever experienced or observed something similar?
3. How does attitude affect any given circumstance? How can you ensure having the right attitude regardless of circumstance?
4. What do you think you would do if the same thing that happened to Paul and Silas were to happen to you and a friend today? Does who the friend is make a difference in the answer? Why or why not? How can you be sure, under such circumstances, that your response would honor God?

Reflections on **LIFE: Worship through right attitude** **LEADERSHIP**



Essence

Response-Ability

One of my all-time favorite books is *Man's Search for Meaning* by Victor Frankl. Frankl was a Holocaust survivor who wrote about his experiences in a Nazi concentration camp. Everything was taken away from these prisoners. They were stripped of their clothing, their pictures, and their personal belongings. They even took away their names and gave them numbers. Frankl was number 119,104.

Everything was taken away except one thing. Frankl said, "Everything can be taken from a man but one thing: the last of human freedoms—to choose one's attitude in any given set of circumstances."

...I think response-ability is one dimension of the Imago Dei or image of God. We have free choice. We are response-able. In other words, we have the ability to choose our response in any set of circumstances.

Paul and Silas were in prison. Their bodies were chained. But you can't chain the human spirit. That's what Victor Frankl discovered in the concentration camp. That's what Paul and Silas modeled two thousand years ago. Their bodies were chained, but their spirits soared.

This is one of the audio tracks I'd love to hear. I wish we had the MP3 of Paul and Silas singing. ... I think they sang with a conviction that caused their fellow prisoners to listen. They praised God at the top of their voices! And that choice to worship set off a chain reaction.

– Mark Batterson, *Focus*

Breakout time (divide in small groups)

1. Discuss the above statement that “Everything can be taken from a man but one thing... to choose one’s attitude in any given set of circumstances.”
2. Develop and act out a skit in which the main character has to choose his/her attitude in a difficult situation. Perhaps have difference reactions resulting in different endings. Discuss the choices made.
3. Find other Bible stories in which the person’s attitude – good and bad – in trying circumstances was significant.

Reflections on **LIFE: worship through right attitude** **EVANGELISM**



Story

Albert Einstein said, “You can’t solve a problem on the level it was created.” I think problems created on a human plane are solved on the supernatural plane. That’s what happens when we worship God. It changes the spiritual atmosphere.

...You can’t plan Pentecost. But if you pray for ten days, Pentecost might just happen.

I don’t think Paul could have planned this miraculous jailbreak. To make a long story short, there is an earthquake. The prisoners are set free, but they don’t leave! The jailer who is about to kill himself gets saved and his entire family is baptized in the middle of the night.

You can’t script that kind of thing. You can’t plan miracles. But when you worship God in the worst of circumstances you never know what is going to happen. Worship sets the stage for miracles! Worship causes spiritual earthquakes that can change the topography of your life. Worship is a shifting of the tectonic plates in your life. It may not change your circumstances. But it will change your life.

...Worship is the way we stay positive in negative circumstances. And it’s not a placebo! It’s reality. No matter how bad things get, as a follower of Christ, I have eternity in heaven to look forward to! My pain is real. But so is heaven. The good news is that this reality is temporary. That reality lasts forever!

The key is focusing on the right reality!

...In her book, *Mindfulness*, Ellen Langer says that all of us have “premeditated cognitive commitments.”

Translation: we tend to see what we’re looking for.

...Paul gives some priceless advice in Philippians 4:8. It’s a list of eight premeditated cognitive commitments. He says, “*Whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things.*”

A worshipper always finds something to praise God for because they’re looking for something to praise God for. Worship is a premeditated cognitive commitment based on ultimate reality.

The circumstances you complain about becomes chains that imprison you.

Worship is the way out.

It was worship that set Paul and Silas free physically. And it's worship that will set you free emotionally and spiritually. Worship sets off a chain reaction. The prison doors fly open. The chains break free.

Are there circumstances that you're allowing to imprison you? Have your complaints about someone or something become chains?

Stop focusing on what's wrong about you or your circumstances. Start focusing on what's right about God.

– Mark Batterson, *Focus*

Breakout time (divide in small groups)

1. Discuss how our choice of attitude / actions affects others, as Paul and Silas' not leaving the prison when freed of their chains saved the jailer's life both physically and spiritually?
2. Discuss why you agree or disagree with the premise that "we tend to see what we are looking for." Give examples?
3. Assuming the above premise is true, what should we be looking for?
4. Discuss how worship can change your life even if it does not change your circumstances. Cite Biblical / real-life examples?

Reflections on **LIFE: worship through right attitude** **SERVICE**



Quotable Quotes

Worship is a voluntary act of gratitude offered by the saved to the Savior, by the healed to the Healer, and by the delivered to the Deliverer. And if you and I can go days without feeling an urge to say “thank you” to the One who saved, healed, and delivered us, then we’d do well to remember what He did.

– Max Lucado

Back in 1992, when the Dallas Cowboys were preparing to play the San Francisco 49ers for the NFC Championship in San Francisco, the Cowboys had a pep rally at Texas Stadium. The audience cheered wildly for each player when he was introduced. The fans carried banners. They painted their faces and proudly wore blue-and-white outfits. They tried to get autographs. Not one fan walked away saying, “That event was a dud. It did nothing for me.” The event was a success, not because the performance was great (they didn’t play any football at all) or the player’s speeches inspiring (most of them weren’t very good speakers), but because everyone understood why they were there. The purpose was not to please the fans but to honor the team. The people walked away saying, “That was great! I hope the team understands how much we appreciate and support them!”

– Don Jones, *Path to Worship*

Serving

SERVICE PROJECT IDEAS

- Sponsor a joint service project with a church with a different racial composition than your own; plan a social activity after the service project to enable people maximum time to interact with those from different backgrounds
- Make and distribute welcome packets to area schools/colleges

Reflections on **Acts of faith** **DISCIPLESHIP**



Story

A parable is told of a community of ducks waddling off to duck church to hear their duck preacher. After they waddled into the duck sanctuary, the service began and the duck preacher spoke eloquently of how God had given the ducks wings with which to fly.

He pounded the pulpit with his beak and said, "With these wings, there is nowhere we ducks can not go! There is no God-given task we ducks cannot accomplish! With these wings we no longer need walk through life. We can soar high in the sky!"

Shouts of "Amen!" were quacked throughout the duck congregation.

The duck preacher concluded his message by exclaiming, "With our wings we can fly through life! WE ... CAN ... FLY!!! More ducks quacked out loud AMENS! in response.

Every duck loved the service. In fact all the ducks that were present commented on what a wonderful, powerful message they had heard from their duck preacher ... and then they left the church and waddled all the way home.

How often do we waddle to church, waddle through our worship and then waddle back out the same way we waddled in?

Breakout time (divide in small groups)

1. Discuss the above parable and its real-life application.
2. What do "acts of faith" have to do with the above story?
3. How can we ensure we don't "waddle back out" of worship the same way we "waddled in"?
4. Should you expect to be changed every time you worship? Why/why not.

Reflections on **Acts of faith** **LEADERSHIP**



Essence

How do we taste the goodness of the Lord? We enter His presence, we bathe in His Glory, we breathe in the Atmosphere of Heaven. And we do all this through Worship. I know that this may be a little different from the stuff we usually hear about the shield of faith, but any victory in the Word that I can find has an element of worship in it. As long as we understand God's definition of Worship:

- 1) Obedience
- 2) Unity
- 3) Humility
- 4) Faithfulness
- 5) Mercy
- 6) Giving
- 7) Singing/Praise/Dance/Music

All these things are a key to using our shield in worship! Because faith is the substance of things hoped for!

Nothing like worship builds your faith; Worship brings you into the very presence of God. Under the shadow of His wings, into the palm of His hand. He is our strong tower, and into Him we rush! Worship opens the door to the tangible presence of God, as it says in Hebrews 11.

Worship not only creates a shield, but it also confuses the enemy.

-Ian Johnson, *Shield of Faith*

Breakout time (divide in small groups)

1. Given what we have studied so far regarding worship, would you agree with the above definition? Why or why not? Would you add or delete anything to the above definition?
2. Discuss the statement that “any victory in the Word has an element of worship in it.” Be sure to cite Biblical examples in your discussion.
3. If you have not yet made a decision, what is stopping you?
4. Explain why you would agree or disagree with the statement, “Nothing like worship builds your faith.” Give examples.
5. What does it mean that “worship opens the door to the tangible presence of God”?

Reflections on **Acts of faith** **EVANGELISM**



Essence

God Chose You

"You didn't choose me, but I chose you. I have appointed you to go, to produce fruit that will last, and to ask the Father in my name to give you whatever you ask for." – John 15:16

A fierce battle has been raging in this world since the very beginning. Cain wanted to choose God on his own terms. He wanted God to value his work and his offering instead of his brother's. The world has followed Cain's example from that day until now. The world always wants to turn this verse in John around and say, "I don't want to be chosen by God, I want to choose him first." But God cannot and will not tolerate this. He turns the words back around and says, "You cannot and should not choose me. I must choose you. It won't happen the way you imagine, but the way I want it to. I want to be your Lord and Master. I don't want to be mastered by you." That's why throughout Scripture God condemns and throws away this type of choosing that goes against what he commands.

Even Paul condemns this vice. He says, *"Let no one who delights in [false] humility...tell you that you don't deserve a prize"* (Colossians 2:18). Likewise, he says, *"These things look like wisdom with their self-imposed worship, [false] humility, and harsh treatment of the body. But they have no value"* (Colossians 2:23). With these words, he described those who practice useless, self-chosen worship and justify it by saying, "I mean well and am doing it for God and to honor him. It will please him and so he will be merciful to me." These people are twice as bad as God's enemies. God called the Israelites out of Egypt and gave them the Ten Commandments, telling them what they should and shouldn't do so that they wouldn't invent ways to serve him. In the same way, God wants to tell us what it means to serve him.

-Martin Luther King, *By Faith Alone*

Breakout time (divide in small groups)

1. Discuss the story of Cain and Abel and the role faith played in their acts of worship. Can you find other Biblical connections between Faith and Worship? How should these examples help direct your worship today?
2. What might “self-chosen worship” look like today?
3. What role does helping people move from self-chosen to God-ordained worship play in evangelism?
4. Which of the following quotes is closer to the perspective held by people in society today? Which is closer to yours? “I want to know God’s thoughts: all the rest are details.
5. How can remembering all the different types of people God has used not only encourage you, but those to whom you witness? In what ways does this knowledge help expand the group of those to whom you would witness?

- Albert Einstein, *Time Magazine’s Person of the Century*

“It may be that our role on this planet is not to worship God – but to create him.”

- Arthur C. Clarke, *Science fiction writer and futurist*

Discuss: We are a society of worshippers. But judging by what we spend our time, money, and energy on, it’s rarely God that we worship

Reflections on **Acts of faith SERVICE**



Story

Suffering People

(John 9:1-38)

The old guy at the corner hasn't seen him. The woman selling the figs hasn't either. Jesus describes him to the scribes at the gate and to the kids in the courtyard. ...

No one has a clue.

For the better part of a day Jesus has been searching up and down the Jerusalem streets. ... The only time his feet aren't moving is when he is asking, "Pardon me, but have you seen the fellow who used to beg on the corner?" ... "He has a homeless look," Jesus tells people. "Unkempt. Dirty. And he has muddy eyelids."

Finally a boy gives him a lead. Jesus takes a back street toward the temple and spots the man sitting on a stump between two donkeys. Christ approaches from behind and places a hand on his shoulder. "There you are! I've been looking for you." The fellow turns and, for the first time, sees the one who let him see. And what the man does next you may find hard to believe.

Let me catch you up. John introduces him to us with these words. "*As [Jesus] passed by, He saw a man blind from birth*" (John 9:1). This man has never seen a sunrise. Can't tell purple from pink. The disciples fault the family tree. "*Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he would be born blind?*" (v. 2).

Neither, the God-man replies. Trace this condition back to heaven. The reason the man was born sightless? So "*the works of God might be displayed in him*" (v. 3).

Talk about a thankless role. Selected to suffer. ...Which is tougher – the condition or discovering it was God's idea?

...[But just when you thought it couldn't get worse...] Look at the reaction of the neighbors [to his healing]: 'Is not this the one who used to sit and beg?' Others were saying, 'This is he,' still others were saying, 'No, but he is like him.' He kept saying, 'I am the one' (vv. 8-9).

These folks don't celebrate; they debate! They have watched this man grow up and trip since he was a kid (v. 20). You'd think they would rejoice. But they don't. They march him down to the church to have him kosher tested. When the Pharisees ask for an explanation, the was-blind beggar says, "*He applied clay to my eyes, and I washed, and I see*" (v. 15).

Again we pause for the applause, but none comes. No recognition. No celebration. Apparently Jesus failed to consult the healing handbook. *"Now it was a Sabbath on the day when Jesus made the clay and opened his eyes.... The Pharisees were saying, 'This man is not from God, because He does not keep the Sabbath'"* (vv. 14, 16)....

Will no one rejoice with this man? The neighbors didn't. The preachers didn't. Wait, here come the parents. But the reaction of the formerly blind man's parents is even worse....

Granted, to be put out of the synagogue is serious. But isn't refusing to help your child even more so.

Who was really blind that day? The neighbors didn't see the man; they saw a novelty. The church leaders didn't see the man; they saw a technicality. The parents didn't see their son; they saw a social difficulty. In the end, no one saw him. *"So they put him out"* (v. 34).

And now, here he is, on a back street of Jerusalem. The fellow has to be bewildered. Born blind only to be healed. Healed only to be kicked out. Kicked out only to be left alone. The peak of Everest and the heat of Sahara, all in one Sabbath. Now he can't even beg anymore. How would that feel?

...Do some people seem to be dealt more than their share of bad hands?

If so, Jesus knows. He knows how they feel, and he knows where they are. *"Jesus heard that they had thrown him out, and went and found him"* (v. 35 MSG). In case the stable birth wasn't enough. If three decades of earth walking and miracle working are insufficient. If there be any doubt regarding God's full-bore devotion, he does things like this. He tracks down a troubled pauper.

The beggar lifts his eyes to look into the face of the One who started all this. Is he going to criticize Christ? Complain to Christ? You couldn't blame him for doing both. After all, he didn't volunteer for the disease or the deliverance. But he does neither. No, *"he worshiped Him"* (v. 38).

And when you see him, you will too.

...Just as he came for the blind man, Jesus is coming for you. The hand that touched the blind man's shoulder will touch your cheeks. The face that changed his life will change yours.

And when you see Jesus, you will bow in worship.

- Max Lucado, *Next Door Savior*

Serving:**SERVICE PROJECT IDEAS**

- Hold celebration to honor unsung community leaders
- Conduct a voter registration drive
- Write letters to elected officials and newspaper editor about social problems and possible solutions

Reflections on **Trust** **DISCIPLESHIP**



Story

As we look at worship from a biblical standpoint, we see two ingredients that always seem to be present: a sense of awe and a sense of joy.

When I was 11 years old, I went with my parents to Chicago, Illinois, for my Aunt Pat's wedding. The hotel where we stayed had a restaurant. We were eating dinner in there one night when Muhammad Ali came in with his family. I couldn't believe it! There sat one of the most famous people in the world just a few tables away.

My dad and mom said that I should go talk to him. Yeah, right! They told me that since he was from Louisville, Kentucky, and we were from Elizabethtown (just south of Louisville) that he would be glad to talk to me and give me an autograph.

Very sheepishly I approached his table. He very graciously waved me closer. I just handed him the paper and pen and he autographed it for me. He asked me questions, talked to me for several minutes, said he knew several people in my hometown, and was just a very congenial person to be around. He even shook my hand. They were the biggest hands I had seen so far in my short life. His hand swallowed mine.

I didn't take his graciousness to mean that I would be on a first-name basis with him. I stood there in awe and respect of this world-famous person and still remember the encounter as one of the most awesome and fear-inducing experiences in my lifetime.

I tell that story because when the Bible describes any face-to-face encounter between man and God (even with an angel, one of God's messengers), the first reaction experienced was fear and reverence; a deep sense of awe, respect, and even dread at the thought of being in the presence of someone so holy and powerful.

When we come into the presence of the King of kings and Lord of lords, our appropriate response is one of wonderment and reverence.

Awe and reverence in the presence of God doesn't rule out a sense of gladness.

Biblical worship is characterized by an overwhelming sense of joy in the hearts of God's people.

The early church was filled with a sense of awe (Acts 2:43a).... But they were also filled with a sense of joy (Acts 2:46-47a)....

Their hearts were glad because the God of the universe had visited them in the form of Jesus

Christ.

They weren't worshipping a terrifying, unpredictable force that would destroy them at a whim, but a faithful, personal God of grace who loved them and had saved them through His Son Jesus Christ.

[They understood the words of Ps. 100.] They had an eternal purpose for living!

-Michael Luke, *Questions Concerning Worship*

Breakout time (divide in small groups)

1. So often we have images of angels as chubby, infant-sized cherubim, yet every time these heavenly beings appear in Scripture, their first words are, "Fear not!" Why is it important to adjust our view to that given in Scripture? How can we keep from taking in the wrong images presented by society and tradition?
2. Read Acts 2:41-47. Discuss the balance of awe and joy represented in this passage. Find other passages of Scripture that help you understand the balance between awe and joy in the presence of God.

Reflections on **Trust** **LEADERSHIP**



Quotable Quotes

Have you ever had microwave popcorn? If so, you probably have noticed something I have. Some kernels don't pop. They experience the same radiation in the same bag at the same time, but some kernels don't pop.

1. Some Christians read the same Bible passages, but some Christians don't pop.
2. They hear the same spiritual songs, but some Christians don't pop.
3. They hear the same sermon, but some Christians don't pop.
4. They are issued the same challenge to witness, but some Christians don't pop.
5. They know the same teaching to tithe, but some Christians don't pop.
6. They hear the same call to service, but some Christians don't pop.

Charles Stanley, in *Confronting Casual Christianity*, asks, "Why do you suppose that there are close to 100 million church members in America yet they are not making more of a moral and spiritual impact? Why is it that ... thousands of churches have more empty pews than full? ... Why is it that only 50% of the number on any church membership roll can be expected to attend? If Christians really believe in a real heaven and a real hell, how can we be so silent?"

He says, "The answer to all of these questions is tragically simple! God's people have made a decision about Jesus ... but have never made a commitment to Him."

When a pilot speeds his plane down the runway, there is a certain point where staying on the ground is no longer an option. When he crosses that line, he is committed to the air; He'll either leave the ground or a disastrous crash is going to happen.

At that point, the pilot can no longer change his mind. He's committed!

Unfortunately, churches are filled with members who've never gotten off the ground. They've been sitting there gunning their engines, making noise but getting nowhere. They've been planning on it, meaning to, wanting to, trying to, going to, aiming to, hoping to. The tragedy is that they've never gotten off the ground.

I think the reason why Christians don't pop, the reason they never get off the ground, is because there has been a misconception concerning worship. ... Worship has erroneously been seen as an

event that takes place at a given time. ...

The biblical teaching about worship is that it is a lifestyle and not an event. Romans 12:1-2 says, "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. Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will."

...William Barclay has said, "True worship is the offering to God of one's body and all that one does every day with it. Real worship is not the offering to God of a liturgy, however noble, nor a ritual, however magnificent. Real worship is the offering of everyday life to Him. Take your body; take all the tasks that you have to do everyday; take the ordinary work of the shop, the factory, (the office, the home); and offer that all as an act of worship to God."

...A. William Temple has said, "For worship is the submission of all our nature to God. It is the quickening of conscience by His holiness; the nourishment of mind with His truth; the purifying of imagination by His beauty; the opening of the heart to His love; the surrender of will to His purpose—and all of this gathered up in adoration, the most selfless emotion of which our nature is capable and therefore the chief remedy for that self-centeredness which is our original sin and the source of all actual sin."

– Michael Luke, *Making Worship a Lifestyle and Not an Event*

Breakout time (divide in small groups)

1. Discuss why you think some Christians "don't pop" or "get off the ground." Contrast different people in the Bible who underwent the same circumstances, but responded to God differently (for example, Joshua and Caleb as opposed to the other spies sent into the Promised Land). What are the lessons to be learned for us today.

2. How do you imagine Abraham – the “Father of Faith” – came to know God? Growing up in a polytheistic society, how did he come to the point of leaving his home to follow God in complete obedience? What examples of worship does Abraham leave for us today.
3. Are you committed? Have you given everything over to God? Do you trust Him with your all? Is there anything you’ve been planning, meaning, wanting, trying, going, aiming, or hoping to do, but haven’t gotten around to? What do you need to DO what God has called you to?

Reflections on **Trust** **EVANGELISM**



Quotable Quotes

C. S. Lewis' book titled *Reflections on the Psalms* is so good it bears repeating...

I had never noticed that all enjoyment spontaneously overflows into praise unless... shyness or the fear of boring others is deliberately brought in to check it. The world rings with praise . . . readers praising their favourite poet, walkers praising the countryside, players praising the favourite game, praise of weather, wines, actors, motors, horses, colleges, countries, rare stamps, rare beetles, even sometimes politicians or scholars. I had not noticed how the humblest, and at the same time most balanced..., minds praised most... I had not noticed either that just as men spontaneously praise whatever they value, so they spontaneously urge us to join them in praising it: "Isn't she lovely? Wasn't it glorious? Don't you think that magnificent?" The psalmists in telling everyone to praise God are doing what all men do when they speak of what they care about.

In worshipping Him, God is inviting us to enjoy him. To respond to who he is and what he has done. So we don't have to be in any particular mood to begin worshipping. Because worship ultimately begins, not with us, but with God. Worship is not a mood, but a response.

– John Cuddeford, *The Essence of Worship*

Breakout time (divide in small groups)

1. List everything you've praised openly to others in the past week. Is God on the list? What, if anything, is stemming your praise of God? What must be done to remove this obstacle?
2. How can we invite others to join with us in praise of God as naturally as we do with other things?
3. Write a psalm and share it with the group as a first step in inviting others to praise God with you.
4. Discuss: "Worship is not a mood, but a response." How does its originating with God change your perception of worship?

Reflections on **Trust** **SERVICE**



Quotable Quotes

We also believe that our joy shows the supremacy of God's value. If His greatness is the basis of our joy, then our joy is the evidence of His greatness. God is most glorified in us when we are most satisfied in Him. If we are not joyful, if we don't respond to this first call to rejoice, then we are not giving evidence of God's greatness.

– John Piper

Serving

SERVICE PROJECT IDEAS

- Hold blood drive / community health education fair

Reflections on **LIFE: worship through rest** **DISCIPLESHIP**



Quotable Quotes

The Purpose of Worship

Then God blessed the seventh day and set it apart as holy, because on that day he stopped all his work of creation. – Genesis 2:3

Human Beings were created primarily to know God and to worship him. The day of worship was not established for sheep and cows, but for people so that they might learn to know God. Even after the human race lost its knowledge of God because of sin, God intended that the command to set apart the day of worship as holy would stay in effect. Furthermore, God wanted people to use the seventh day for study of his Word and for participating in the kind of worship he had established. He did this so that, first and foremost, we would realize our fundamental calling and purpose in life is acknowledging and praising God.

In addition, this day was established to assure us of eternal life in the future. Everything that God commands us to observe on the day of worship gives us clear indications of another life to follow. ... In order to reach the next life, we need to know God and his Word in this life.

– Martin Luther, *By Faith Alone*

Breakout time (divide in small groups)

1. What role does Sabbath play in worship?
2. What does it mean to “rest” and how is this an act of worship?
3. How is worship through rest related to the promise of eternal life?

Reflections on **LIFE: whorship through rest** **LEADERSHIP**



Quotable Quotes

Sitting at Jesus' Feet

But Martha was distracted with much serving, and she approached Him and said, "Lord, do You not care that my sister has left me to serve alone? Therefore tell her to help me." – Luke 10:40

Martha loved Jesus dearly and would have done anything for Him. Her struggle came in being still! Martha spent so much time serving Jesus that she had no time to enjoy His company or to get to know Him better. The harder Martha worked, the more frustrated she became with her sister Mary. Mary was sitting at Jesus' feet while Martha scurried around the house to make sure everything was in perfect order for Jesus. Martha's service, though it started out with gladness, deteriorated into resentment and envy.

It is good to want to serve Christ as an expression of love for what He has done for you. Yet when your activity consumes your time and energies so that you have no time for Him, you have become too busy! You may think, as Martha did, that if you don't do the work, it won't get done. That may be true, but Jesus taught that your highest priority must be your relationship with Him. If anything detracts from that relationship, that activity is not from God. God will not ask you to do something that hinders your relationship with Christ. At times, serving God and carrying out His mission is the best way to know and experience God. At other times, it is more important to sit quietly at His feet and listen to what He is saying.

We are not called to continually sit at the feet of Jesus, otherwise our service for Him would cease. Neither are we called to serve Him incessantly, without taking time to find restoration in His presence. Have you been serving God so diligently that you have not had time to spend with Him?

- Henry T. and Richard Blackaby, *Experiencing God Day-by-Day*

Breakout time (divide in small groups)

1. Discuss the balance between worship through rest and worship through service. How can we ensure that we have time to spend with Jesus and do all He calls us to?
2. How can we learn to say “no” to seemingly good things that might keep us from serving the Best?
3. Discuss the idea that “service without worship too quickly becomes burdensome.” How can rest reinvigorate our service and ensure a proper attitude.

Reflections on **LIFE: worship through rest** **EVANGELISM**



Quotable Quotes

Distance from God is a frightening thing. God will never adjust His agenda to fit ours. He will not speed His pace to catch up with ours; we need to slow our pace in order to recover our walk with Him. God will not scream and shout over the noisy clamor; He expects us to seek quietness, where His still, small voice can be heard again. God will not work within the framework of our complicated schedules; we must adapt to His style. We need to conform to His way if our lives are to be characterized by the all-encompassing word godliness...

One of our main problems is that in this chatty society, silence has become a very fearful thing. For most people, silence creates itchiness and nervousness. Many experience silence, not as full and rich, but as empty and hollow. For them silence is like a gaping abyss which can swallow them up. As soon as a minister says during a worship service, "Let us be silent for a few moments," people tend to become restless and preoccupied with only one thought: "When will this be over?"

Calling people together, therefore, means calling them away from the fragmenting and distracting wordiness of the dark world to that silence in which they can discover themselves, each other, and God....

In our chatty world, in which the word has lost its power to communicate, silence helps us to keep our mind and heart anchored in the future world and allows us to speak from there a creative and recreative word to the present world.

– Charles R. Swindoll, *So You Want to Be Like Christ?*

Breakout time (divide in small groups)

1. Spend some time in silence as a group. Discuss the different feelings caused by the silence. What are some practical ways to become more comfortable in silence?
2. What does rest have to offer in terms of evangelism?
3. Can people sense a “quietness” or “peace” in you that attracts them away from the “fragmenting and distracting wordiness of the dark world”? Explain.
4. How do we learn to wait on God? How can we show others the value of waiting on God and slowing “our pace in order to recover our walk with Him”?

Reflections on **LIFE: worship through rest** **SERVICE**



Quotable Quotes

Peace in the Midst

Two painters each painted a picture to illustrate his concept of rest. The first chose for his scene a still, lone lake among the far-off mountains.

The second threw on his canvas a thundering waterfall, with a fragile birch tree bending over the foam; and at the fork of the branch, almost wet with cataract's spray, sat a robin on its nest.

The first was only stagnation; the last was rest.

Christ's life outwardly was one of the most troubled lives that ever lived: tempest and tumult, tumult and tempest, the waves breaking over it all the time until the worn body was laid in the grave. But the inner life was a sea of glass. The great calm was always there.

At any moment you might have gone to Him and found rest. And even when the human bloodhounds were dogging Him in the streets of Jerusalem, He turned to his disciples and offered them as a last legacy, "My peace."

Rest is not a hallowed feeling that comes over us in church; it is the repose of a heart set deep in God.

– Mrs. Charles E Cowman, *Streams in the Desert*

LEISURE

What is this life if, full of care,
We have no time to stand and stare.

No time to stand beneath the boughs
And stare as long as sheep or cows.

No time to see, when woods we pass,
Where squirrels hide their nuts in grass.

No time to see in broad daylight
Streams full of stars, like skies at night.

No time to turn at Beauty's grace
And watch her feet, how they can dance.

No time to wait till her mouth can
Enrich that smile her eyes began.

A poor life this if, full of care
We have no time to stand and stare.

– W.H. Davies

We live in a society that tries to diminish us to the level of the anthep so that we scurry mindlessly, getting and consuming. It is essential to take counteraction.... Every one of us needs to be stretched to live at our best, awakened out of dull moral habits, shaken out of petty and trivial busy-work.

– Eugene Peterson, *Run with the Horses*

Serving

SERVICE PROJECT IDEAS

- Plan and implement own community service project
- Visit area prison or write letters to inmates
- Plan and start Christmas service project (i.e. gifts for children of inmates; nursing home residents; etc.)

Reflections on A life of worship DISCIPLESHIP



Essence

Worship

"He moved from there to the mountain east of Bethel, and he pitched his tent with Bethel on the west and Ai on the east; there he built an altar to the Lord and called on the name of the Lord" - Genesis 12:8

Worship is giving God the best that He has given you. Be careful what you do with the best you have. Whenever you get a blessing from God, give it back to Him as a love-gift. Take time to meditate before God and offer the blessing back to Him in a deliberate act of worship. If you hoard it for yourself, it will turn into spiritual dry rot, as the manna did when it was hoarded (see Exodus 16:20). God will never allow you to keep a spiritual blessing completely for yourself. It must be given back to Him so that He can make it a blessing to others.

Bethel is the symbol of fellowship with God; Ai is the symbol of the world. Abram "pitched his tent" between the two. The lasting value of our public service for God is measured by the depth of the intimacy of our private times of fellowship and oneness with Him. Rushing in and out of worship is wrong every time – there is always plenty of time to worship God. Days set apart for quiet can be a trap, detracting from the need to have daily quiet time with God. That is why we must "pitch our tents" where we will always have quiet times with Him, however noisy our times with the world may be. There are not three levels of spiritual life – worship, waiting, and work. Yet some of us seem to jump like spiritual frogs from worship to waiting, and from waiting to work. God's idea is that the three should go together as one. They were always together in the life of our Lord and in perfect harmony. It is a discipline that must be developed; it will not happen overnight.

- Oswald Chambers, *My Utmost for His Highest*

Breakout time (divide in small groups)

1. Discuss examples of how “worship, waiting, and work” were always together in the life of Christ. In what practical ways can you practice all three together in your life in the week ahead?
2. Think of recent blessings – have you offered them back to God? Share stories of how God has used spiritual blessings in your life to bless others?
3. Use a Topical Bible and/or concordance to look up other mentions of Bethel and Ai in the Bible. In what ways does this help you to understand the author’s premise of Bethel as the symbol of fellowship with God and Ai as the symbol of the world? What are your “Bethel”s and “Ai”s today? Have you “pitched your tent” appropriately.
4. Abraham set up altars to worship God wherever he found himself. What do I need to do to raise the level of my personal daily worship?

Reflections on **A life of worship** **LEADERSHIP**



Essence

Worshipping in Everyday Occasions

"When you were under the fig tree, I saw you" - John 1:48

We presume that we would be ready for battle if confronted with a great crisis, but it is not the crisis that builds something within us – it simply reveals what we are made of already. Do you find yourself saying, "If God calls me to battle, of course I will rise to the occasion"? Yet you won't rise to the occasion unless you have done so on God's training ground. If you are not doing the task that is closest to you now, which God has engineered into your life, when the crisis comes, instead of being fit for battle, you will be revealed as being unfit. Crises always reveal a person's true character.

A private relationship of worshiping God is the greatest essential element of spiritual fitness. The time will come, as Nathanael experienced in this passage, that a private "fig-tree" life will no longer be possible. Everything will be out in the open, and you will find yourself to be of no value there if you have not been worshipping in everyday occasions in your own home. If your worship is right in your private relationship with God, then when He sets you free, you will be ready. It is in the unseen life, which only God saw, that you have become perfectly fit. And when the strain of the crisis comes you can be relied upon by God.

Are you saying, "But I can't be expected to live a sanctified life in my present circumstances; I have no time for prayer or Bible study right now; besides, my opportunity for battle hasn't come yet, but when it does, of course I will be ready"? No, you will not. If you have not been worshipping in everyday occasions, when you get involved in God's work, you will not only be useless yourself but also a hindrance to those around you.

God's training ground, where the missionary weapons are found, is the hidden, personal, worshiping life of the saint.

– Oswald Chambers, *My Utmost for His Highest*

Breakout groups (divide in small groups)

1. What is the task closest to you now? Are you rising to the occasion or waiting on something else? Are you training for greater battles or will you prove unfit?
2. Read the story of Nathanael's calling in John 1:43-51. How did Nathanael's private relationship of worshiping God prepare him for this encounter? Share a story in which you were or were not prepared for an encounter based on your relationship with God at the time.
3. How does your personal, private worship affect the rest of your life? Your corporate life? Your service? Your evangelism?

Reflections on **A life of worship** **EVANGELISM**



Essence

Long Enough on the Mountain

The Lord our God spoke to us in Horeb, saying: "You have dwelt long enough at this mountain."
– Deuteronomy 1:6

If God allowed us to live on the "mountaintop," we would not experience trials, but neither would we achieve any victories. The Israelites had gathered at the foot of Mount Horeb while God spoke to them and gave them His law. It was a breathtaking experience! Fire and smoke covered that awesome mountain; lightning flashed, and loud trumpet sounds pierced the air in a deafening crescendo! The ground at the foot of the mountain shook, and the people trembled in fear (Exod. 19:16-25).

As important as it was for God's people to have this inspiring encounter with Him, their Lord had not rescued them from Egypt in order for them to settle around a mountain in the wilderness. God delivered them so that they could conquer the Promised Land. God wanted to demonstrate His power to the Israelites so that they would trust Him in their conquest of Canaan. Finally, God announced that they had been long enough at the mountain; it was time to go to battle.

The mountain is an enticing place to set up camp. Peter, James, and John were prepared to reside on the Mount of Transfiguration with Jesus, but their Lord knew that a demon-possessed boy needed their assistance down below (Matt. 17:4, 14-18). At times God will graciously provide you a mountaintop experience. These times come in many settings: during your time alone with Him, at a Christian conference, by reading a Christian book, or at a prayer meeting. You may wish you could spend the rest of your life basking in the glow of your encounter with God. But remember, these mountaintop encounters are God's way of preparing you for the battles that await you.

– Henry T. and Richard Blackaby, *Experiencing God Day-by-Day*

Breakout time (divide in small groups)

1. Describe a “mountaintop” experience in your life. How did it prepare you for the subsequent valley?
2. How do we take “mountaintop” experiences with us in evangelism? What is the proper/improper role for them in this context?
3. Read the stories of the Transfiguration and the subsequent healing of the boy with a demon (Matthew 17:1-23). What does this teach about the balance of “mountaintop” experiences and evangelism?
4. How do we help new believers understand they are not meant to “live on the mountain”

Reflections on A life of worship SERVICE



Quotable Quotes

Helpful or Heartless Toward Others?

"It is Christ ... who also makes intercession for us...the Spirit...makes intercession for the saints..."

- Romans 8:34, 27

...Beware of getting ahead of God by your very desire to do His will. We run ahead of Him in a thousand and one activities, becoming so burdened with people and problems that we don't worship God, and we fail to intercede. If a burden and its resulting pressure come upon us while we are not in an attitude of worship, it will only produce a hardness toward God and despair in our own souls. God continually introduces us to people in whom we have no interest, and unless we are worshipping God the natural tendency is to be heartless toward them. We give them a quick verse of Scripture, like jabbing them with a spear, or leave them with a hurried, uncaring word of counsel before we go. A heartless Christian must be a terrible grief to our Lord.

Are our lives in the proper place so that we may participate in the intercession of our Lord and the Holy Spirit?

- Oswald Chambers, *My Utmost for His Highest*

Serving

SERVICE PROJECT IDEAS

- Host New Years' party for elderly at nursing home; adopt a "grandfriend"