

# Essentials for Spiritual Growth

## Lesson # 5 -- Growing in Understanding and Practicing Worship

### Introduction

- A. **Question:** What is the most important, most valuable, and most productive activity in which a person could become involved? **Answer:** It is to worship God.
- B. All believers would accept the above answer. And yet, in the light of our daily priorities and practice, we may indicate (**perhaps prove**) that worship is not the most important, not the most valuable, and not the most productive activity in our life. We must consider the possibility that we may have allowed, perhaps through being untaught or through neglect, a pattern of life that is **not only hindering us from spiritual growth, but one that leads us into disobedience to God**. If this condition exists, in the life of a believer, then the results can only be that of confusion and frustration. More will be said about this below.

### I. The Definition of Worship

- A. The word "worship" means to "attribute worth" to someone or something. (Allen and Borrer, *Worship*, Multnomah Press, p. 16) Dr. James P. Gills explains the word in the following manner.

"The Hebrew word *shachah* is translated 'worship' in the Old Testament. It means to lower one's body, or stretch out with one's face to the ground as a means of paying honor, to bow, humbly ask in earnest, do obeisance, or to show reverence. We worship something when we pay it great respect, when we consider it extremely precious, enough to adore. In the New Testament, the word for worship, *proskuneo*, means to kiss, (as a dog would lick his master's hand); to bow down or crouch closer to, literally or figuratively, to lie flat before someone to show reverence, respect and adoration. (*The Dynamics of Worship*, Love Press, pp. 15,16)

While these explanations are helpful it must be kept in mind that worship is primarily a matter of the heart, as we shall see below, and the bowing down, etc., is an external manifestation of what is going on in one's heart. **It is important to see that the bowing down, etc., is due to a heart response of love, adoration, and awe.**

B. Explanation: "Worship is an active response to God whereby we declare His worth." (Allen and Borror) The authors go on to show that worship is also a way whereby the believer **celebrates God**, and points to Psalm 96, Psalm 100, and Revelation 5:12,13 as examples. (See also I Chron 16:25-29; Ps 29:2; 95:6; 99:5,9; Zech 14:16,17; John 4:20-24; Heb 1:6; Rev 4:10,11; and Rev 15:4).

1. An illustration of **celebrating God** in the Old Testament was when David led Israel in bringing the Ark of God back to Jerusalem.

Now King David was told, "The LORD has blessed the household of Obed-Edom and everything he has, because of the ark of God." So David went down and brought up the ark of God from the house of Obed-Edom to the City of David with rejoicing. When those who were carrying the ark of the LORD had taken six steps, he sacrificed a bull and a fattened calf. David, wearing a linen ephod, danced before the LORD with all his might, while he and the entire house of Israel brought up the ark of the LORD with shouts and the sound of trumpets. 2 Samuel 6:12-15

**At the time of this celebration David wrote a psalm to be sung to the Lord.**

That day David first committed to Asaph and his associates this psalm of thanks to the LORD: Give thanks to the LORD, call on his name; make known among the nations what he has done. Sing to him, sing praise to him; tell of all his wonderful acts. Glory in his holy name; let the hearts of those who seek the LORD rejoice... Sing to the LORD, all the earth; proclaim his salvation day after day. Declare his glory among the nations, his marvelous deeds among all peoples. For great is the LORD and most worthy of praise; he is to be feared above all gods. For all the gods of the nations are idols, but the LORD made the heavens. Splendor and majesty are before him; strength and joy in his dwelling place. Ascribe to the LORD, O families of nations, ascribe to the LORD glory and strength, ascribe to the LORD the glory due the splendor established; it say among it; let the fields sing, they will thanks to the O God our thanks to your LORD, the God of "Amen" and "Praise his name. Bring an offering and come before him; worship the LORD in of his holiness. Tremble before him, all the earth! The world is firmly cannot be moved. Let the heavens rejoice, let the earth be glad; let them the nations, "The LORD reigns!" Let the sea resound, and all that is in be jubilant, and everything in them! Then the trees of the forest will sing for joy before the LORD, for he comes to judge the earth. Give LORD, for he is good; his love endures forever. Cry out, "Save us, Savior; gather us and deliver us from the nations, that we may give holy name, that we may glory in your praise." Praise be to the Israel, from everlasting to everlasting. Then all the people said the LORD." I Chronicles 16:7-10, 23-36

2. An illustration of **celebrating God** in the New Testament is recorded in the Revelation.

Then I saw in the right hand of him who sat on the throne a scroll with writing on both sides and sealed with seven seals. And I saw a mighty angel proclaiming in a loud voice, "Who is worthy to break the seals and open the scroll?" But no one in heaven or on earth or under the earth could open the scroll or even look inside it. I wept and wept because no one was found who was worthy to open the scroll or look inside. Then one of the elders said to me, "Do not weep! See, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has triumphed. He is able to open the scroll and its seven seals." Then I saw a Lamb, looking as if it had been slain, standing in the center of the throne, encircled by the four living creatures and the elders. He had seven horns and seven eyes, which are the seven spirits of God sent out into all the earth. He came and took the scroll from the right hand of him who sat on the throne. And when he had taken it, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb. Each one had a harp and they were holding golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints. And they sang a new song: "You are worthy to take the scroll and to open its seals, because you were slain, and with your blood you purchased men for God from every tribe and language and people and nation. You have made them to be a kingdom and priests to serve our God, and they will reign on the earth." Then I looked and heard the voice of many angels, numbering thousands upon thousands, and ten thousand times ten thousand. They encircled the throne and the living creatures and the elders. In a loud voice they sang: "Worthy is the Lamb, who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and strength and honor and glory and praise!" Then I heard every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and on the sea, and all that is in them, singing: "To him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb be praise and honor and glory and power, for ever and ever!" The four living creatures said, "Amen," and the elders fell down and worshipped. Revelation 5

**Comment:** Perhaps the most significant truth that could be drawn from these two passages is that **the Lord God is worthy** to receive all the attention, praise, adoration, worship, glory, and thanksgiving that could ever be given to Him. And the second significant truth is the clear recognition of the **priority of the spiritual**. It is this priority that we must accept as true and shape our life, time, and effort to reflect it. As we have read how the angels worshipped God the request of the Lord Jesus takes on more significance. He said we are to pray, "Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven." From Rev 5 the will of God seems to be summarized in a celebration in heaven and earth of praise and adoration for our Lord.

- C. It is also helpful to keep in mind that worship is a declaration of truth. In our worship we ascribe to the Lord God praise and adoration for Who He is, what He has done, what He is going to do, and for the excellency of His decrees and work. Worship is a declaration of these truths, a way of extolling them, placing them in proper priority, and expressing our gratitude.

\ **Comment:** One way to be involved in this type of worship is to sing to the Lord. A point or two of the above material is reflected in the following verse from the well known hymn, **Holy, Holy, Holy! Lord God Almighty**, by Reginald Heber.

**Holy, holy, holy! Lord God Almighty!  
All Thy works shall praise Thy name  
in earth and sky and sea;  
Holy, holy, holy! merciful and mighty!  
God in three persons, blessed Trinity!**

## II. The Object of Our Worship

**(This section is only a brief outline. Many important truths have been omitted. All that will be said applies equally to the Father, the Lord Jesus, and the Holy Spirit.)**

### A. We are to worship God because of Who He is: The Adorable Trinity.

1. God describes Himself as a Person -- not some idea or abstract power.

No one is like you, O LORD; you are great, and your name is mighty in power. But the LORD is the true God; he is the living God, the eternal King. When he is angry, the earth trembles; the nations cannot endure his wrath. Jeremiah 10:6,10

**Comment:** As a person God thinks, plans, makes decisions; He loves, cares, can be grieved and made angry; He has personality, character and rights. We must acknowledge Him, recognize Him, and respect Him for Who He is.

2. God describes Himself as the One True God.

But the LORD is the true God; he is the living God, the eternal King. When he is angry, the earth trembles; the nations cannot endure his wrath. Jeremiah 10:10

**Comment:** In contrast to idols God alone is alive. He is Reality and the source of all existence. While idols cannot speak or care for their worshippers God has spoken, He does speak to us, and he cares for us. It is a sin to treat Him as though He did not care.

3. God describes Himself as the Living God.

But the LORD is the true God; he is the living God, the eternal King. When he is angry, the earth trembles; the nations cannot endure his wrath. Jeremiah 10:10

**Comment:** As the Living God He is active in history -- our daily history -- working out His will and plan. Our Lord is the Author of history -- nations rise or fall at His command. We may not think of God as though He were not in control, as though He had no plan for us, or as though He had not made provision for our daily life.

4. God describes Himself as the LORD.

But the LORD is the true God; he is the living God, the eternal King. When he is angry, the earth trembles; the nations cannot endure his wrath. Jer 10:10

**Comment:** This word is the translation of the most famous name that God gives to Himself: Yahweh (Ex 3:11-14). It points to His loving provision of mercy for us in redemption and covenant. The Lord Jesus said that name was fulfilled in Himself (John 8:24). It is a great sin to treat God as though He were not merciful or as though we had to obtain salvation by our good works.

**B. We are to worship God because of His attributes - He is Spirit - not an abstract idea.**

**(We must keep in mind that God is infinite in all His attributes - without any limit.)**

1. God is Holy -- righteous in all His ways.

I am the LORD your God; consecrate yourselves and be holy, because I am holy... I am the LORD who brought you up out of Egypt to be your God; therefore be holy, because I am holy. Lev 11:44,45

For it is written: "Be holy, because I am holy." I Peter 16

**Comment:** As holy God always does what is right. His character is the basis of all His thoughts and actions. Because He is holy He is fully trustworthy and dependable.

2. God is Love -- compassionate in all His ways.

And so we know and rely on the love God has for us. God is love. Whoever lives in love lives in God, and God in him. I John 4:16

**Comment:** It is His love that is the basis for all His redemptive mercy and grace. His love is always holy love -- full of compassion. Because God is love He is trustworthy and dependable.

3. God is Truth -- faithful in all His ways.

Jesus answered, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. John 14:6

**Comment:** Because God is Truth He always does what is honest and true. His actions of truth are always holy and loving actions. Because God is Truth He is trustworthy and dependable.

**Observation:** The three attributes mentioned above relate to our Lord's moral perfection. There are a number of additional attributes that speak of His infinite greatness: His immutability (He is unchanging in character), His unity (He is one), His eternity (He always has been and always will be), His immensity (His nature is without extension/limit), His omnipresence (He is everywhere without going there), His omniscience (He knows all things at once), and His omnipotence (He is all powerful). Reflection on these attributes leads us to say with David --

**Great is the LORD and most worthy of praise; his greatness no one can fathom. Psalm 145:3**

### **C. We are to worship God because of the greatness of His works.**

1. His greatness is demonstrated in the activity of **creation**.

But God made the earth by his power; he founded the world by his wisdom and stretched out the heavens by his understanding. Jeremiah 10:12

**Comment:** Consider the wisdom and power necessary for creation -- the universe, the "laws of nature," the seasons of the year, the "life" in some types of matter (trees, etc.), the greatness and power of angels, the wonder of our bodies and abilities, and the entire animal kingdom. And -- our Lord produced it all by simply speaking!

2. His greatness is demonstrated in the activity of **providence**.

For by him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things were created by him and for him. He is before all things, and in him all things hold together. Colossians 1:16,17

**Comment:** Our Lord rules over all creation and maintains it according to His plan. He is in control. He laughs at those who try to thwart Him (Psalms 2:1-4).

3. His greatness is demonstrated in the activity of **kingship**.

No one is like you, O LORD; you are great, and your name is mighty in power. Who should not revere you, O King of the nations? This is your due. Among all the wise men of the nations and in all their kingdoms, there is no one like you. Jeremiah 10:6,7

Out of his mouth comes a sharp sword with which to strike down the nations. "He will rule them with an iron scepter." He treads the winepress of the fury of the wrath of God Almighty. On his robe and on his thigh he has this name written: KING OF KINGS AND LORD OF LORDS. Revelations 19:15,16

**Comment:** Not only is all the universe subject to and ruled over by our Lord, but all angels, all nations, all in authority, and every person. He is the sovereign King. While His reign is absolute, He has given to angels and mankind free will, and has chosen to give to us a limited freedom. All mankind will give an account to Him in eternity.

The king's heart is in the hand of the LORD; he directs it like a watercourse wherever he pleases. Proverbs 21:1

#### 4. His greatness is demonstrated in the activity of **redemption and salvation.**

in For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus. God presented him as a sacrifice of atonement, through faith in his blood. He did this to demonstrate his justice, because his forbearance he had left the sins committed beforehand unpunished-- he did it to demonstrate his justice at the present time, so as to be just and the one who justifies those who have faith in Jesus. Romans 3:23-26

**Comment: The greatest "problem" of all time is the one involved in redemption. stated simply it is "How could God, in His perfect holiness, accept into fellowship those who have chosen to sin against Him, and as a result are fully unholy?" The solution is one that appears to be a moral impossibility -- That God Himself would bear the judgment of our sin and by that act exhaust its penalty and make reconciliation a reality for all who would accept it.**

**Worthy is the Lamb that was slain (3xx)  
to receive power and riches and wisdom and strength,  
Honor and glory and blessing!  
Worthy is the Lamb, Worthy is the Lamb,  
Worthy is the Lamb that was slain,  
Worthy is the Lamb!**

### III. The Importance of Worship

"Yet a time is coming and has now come when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for they are the kind of worshipers the Father seeks. God is spirit, and his worshipers must worship in spirit and in truth." John 4:23,24

**Comment:** The word "Spirit" when reference is to God indicates all He is as God. And when used in reference to worship it indicates we are to do so "spiritually," i.e. in harmony with who and what we really are -- as created in His image -- reborn by the Holy Spirit -- and now His temples. **The emphasis in on the heart**, the inner expressions of faith, love, hope, adoration, and thanksgiving. While not demeaning physical or material activity these must be seen as the symbolic expression of one's heart. The Scripture, as well as our personal experience testify to how easily the emphasis in worship moves from the heart to the lips, the hand, and the gift. Our Savior saw this happening among the people of His day.

He replied, "Isaiah was right when he prophesied about you hypocrites; as it is written: "'These people honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me. They worship me in vain; their teachings are but rules taught by men.' You have let go of the commands of God and are holding on to the traditions of men." And he said to them: "You have a fine way of setting aside the commands of God in order to observe your own traditions!" Mark 7:6-9

**Comment # 2 -- The reason why worship is so important.**

A. **Worship is the most important activity** because it is the practice of the highest priority shared by all believers: **to acknowledge and adore God**. Because we are created in the image of God every person has a list of priorities. Even the non-Christian will have some facets of the attributes of God high on his or her list. Consider the number of songs, movies, programs, and the amount of literature dedicated to extolling love -- or justice! And, most non-Christians, along with believers, will vote for and support projects that discern and preserve what is valuable to the human race. Consider the "message" of museums and art galleries. The careful preservation and honoring of artifacts clearly state that certain symbols of beauty, worth, justice, and human progress are worthy of preservation, displaying, and instruction. It may also be helpful to recognize that almost every person had a built-in belief that our leaders, and even our "heroes" should be moral and upright people. If this is not true then why are we so upset when it is discovered that our leaders, or even a sport's figure has been unjust, violent, or immoral?

B. **Worship is the most valuable activity** because in its practice we receive back so much of what is essential to us. **It is one of the most powerful "means of grace"** God has given to us. When we adore and praise God there is a personal receiving of love, joy, peace, cleansing, illumination, enablement, spiritual growth, a deeper understanding of who God is, who we are, and a refocus of our priorities. **When one lives without quality worship times -- the Christian life is a serious struggle and the resources available to such a person cannot be utilized. The result is a life characterized by weakness, confusion, and bondage -- which will eventually produce anger, bitterness, and some form of negativism.**

C. **Worship is the most productive activity** because in its practice we are doing what we were destined to do in our creation. And, in its practice we develop a context in which **we are enabled to understand and keep the most important commandment: loving God** (Matt 22:37-29). When we hold a person in some contempt we know it is very hard for us to love that individual, so when we fail to worship God we find it hard to love Him. Many believers ponder the problem why they have difficulty in keeping the first commandment without realizing that worship and love are two sides of the same virtue and practice. When we learn how to worship -- love finds ever more clear expression in our life.

#### IV. Some Essential Characteristics of Worship

##### A. Adoration:

"You are worthy, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power, for you created all things, and by your will they were created and have their being." Revelations 4:11

##### B. Praise:

Praise the LORD. Praise the LORD from the heavens, praise him in the heights above. Psalms 148:1 (Praise is repeated nine times in the Psalm.)

##### C. Thanksgiving:

Enter his gates with thanksgiving and his courts with praise; give thanks to him and praise his name. Psalms 100:4

##### D. Reverence:

Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, let us be thankful, and so worship God acceptably with reverence and awe. Hebrews 12:28

##### E. Love:

He sang to the LORD the words of this song when the LORD delivered him from the hand of all his enemies and from the hand of Saul. He said: I love you, O LORD, my strength. Psalms 18:1

##### F. Declaration:

The LORD is my rock, my fortress and my deliverer; my God is my rock, in whom I take refuge. He is my shield and the horn of my salvation, my stronghold. Psalms 18:2

**G. Commitment:**

I call to the LORD, who is worthy of praise, and I am saved from my enemies.  
Psalms 18:3

**V. Some Physical Manifestation of Worship****A. Speaking:**

They will speak of the glorious splendor of your majesty, and I will meditate on your wonderful works. Psalms 145:5

**B. Kneeling:**

Come, let us bow down in worship, let us kneel before the LORD our Maker. Psalms 95:6

**C. Lifting Hands:**

Hear my cry for mercy as I call to you for help, as I lift up my hands toward your Most Holy Place. Psalms 28:2

**D. Falling Down:**

And the secrets of his heart will be laid bare. So he will fall down and worship God, exclaiming, "God is really among you!" 1 Corinthians 14:25

**Comment:** One unusual aspect of worship is seen in repetition. Some of the Psalms indicate that the practice of repeating over and over the same statement was a common factor in their worship at that time.

Give thanks to the LORD, for he is good; his love endures forever.

Let Israel say: "His love endures forever."

Let the house of Aaron say: "His love endures forever."

Let those who fear the LORD say: "His love endures forever." Psalms 118:1-4

The same statement, "His love endures forever" is found in Psalm 136 -- 26 times.

**VI. Some Suggestions as to How to Worship God****A. Use the names of God as a basis for worship.**

Example: Use the concordance or a book and write out the names our Lord gives to

Himself. Find a couple Scripture passages that explain the name. Meditate on the names. Turn the truths into worship, trust, and action.

B. Use the attributes of God as a basis for worship.

Example: Make a list of the divine attributes and look up passages where they are explained. Meditate on their meaning and praise Him for Who He is.

C. Use the works of God as a basis for worship.

Example: Meditate on the greatness, wisdom, and power that was/is necessary for creation, providence, revelation, redemption and salvation. Find verses that explain each subject. Turn it all into worship.

D. Use the examples in the Bible as a basis for worship.

Example: It will help to read the Bible aloud to our Lord in reverence, gratitude, and trust. Sing to Him by use of the hymn and chorus book. Pray and sing the prayers and Psalms of the Bible as your own manner of worship.

**Comment:**

1. There are a number of good books on worship. Look through some of these and purchase a couple that will help you perform this most important task.
2. While worship is our # 1 priority -- nothing seems to be more difficult -- unless it is genuine prayer and intercession. **The Devil is dead set against you learning how to do either. Do not give in to Him. He will oppose you in every conceivable way.** Set a time each day when you can be alone. Determine you will learn. Make this a matter of prayer. Ask others to pray for you. It may help to start worshipping with a small group of people. If we do not worship God, we are saying, "He is not worthy of worship".

**Most of us know all I have written in this lesson. And, we know we should take time to worship God -- but seem to be waiting or some more appropriate time. Allow me to remind you that such a "time" will never come unless you start now. Do not put it off any longer. Make a commitment to worship God, by yourself, when you are most alert. This will take patience and perseverance.**