

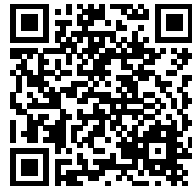
What Is True Worship?

STUDY GUIDE

**TRUTH
FORLIFE**

THIS STUDY GUIDE

contains twelve sessions designed to explore what the Bible says about worship. You will get the most out of this study by intently reading or listening to the sermons from Alistair Begg's series *What Is True Worship?* as you progress. Surveying key Old and New Testament passages on the subject, you will consider what it means to lead a life of God-honoring worship. The content for each session accompanies a particular sermon Alistair preached on worship.



FIND ALL 12 MESSAGES AT
[TFL.ORG/WORSHIP.](https://www.tfl.org/worship)

What Is True Worship?: Study Guide
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The following description of the *What Is True Worship?* sermon series provides a good summary of this study's purpose:

We live in a culture that is self-focused. Sadly, even our worship can become about how it makes us feel or what we get out of it. We may go to church because the songs and the routine give us warm feelings, or we choose to skip church because we don't feel like going. But the Bible is clear that worship is not about us. It's about God. His Word instructs us to worship because He deserves our praise.

In this series, Alistair Begg draws our attention to what the Bible says about worship. Genuine worship in spirit and in truth is only possible when we are captured by an overwhelming sense of awe and reverence in the presence of God. As we approach worship, we should prepare properly, engage our minds, and keep our hearts focused on the object of our worship, the one true God. Then, and only then, can we expect visitors to our services to exclaim, "Surely God is in this place!"

Each session includes four parts:

- 1) Getting Started:** a brief summary statement or commentary on the sermon, followed by an introductory question
- 2) Key Scriptures:** important Bible verses that were referenced in the sermon and are flagged for further meditation and memorization
- 3) Going Deeper:** questions to help you process the main ideas of the sermon
- 4) Giving Praise:** a hymn that can be committed to memory, incorporated in worship, and used as the basis for prayer about what you have learned and considered



SESSION ONE

“The Nature of Acceptable Worship” | John 4:19-26

Getting Started

God is not indifferent about our worship. It's the most important thing a believer will do, affecting every area of the Christian life. Indeed, the prospect of heaven will never be brighter than when God's children devote themselves to acceptable worship.

When you consider the topic of worship, what comes to mind?

KEY SCRIPTURES

“Let this be recorded for a generation to come, so that a people yet to be created may praise the LORD.”

PSALM 102:18

“God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth.”

JOHN 4:24

Going Deeper

1. Alistair says, "There can be no more vital theme for God's people to consider than the matter of worship." How so?

2. In what sense is it true that all people—those who fear God and those who do not—worship? How does this play out in our world? (See Rom. 1:18–23.)

3. How might we prepare our hearts and minds for corporate worship?

4. Worship involves thinking clearly and feeling deeply (John 4:23). What are the dangers of emphasizing one of these elements over the other?

5. How does true worship reorient our lives—our affections, priorities, worldviews, etc.?

6. How does Revelation 7:9–12 describe the environment of heaven, and how should these realities affect our lives today?

7. Acceptable worship is biblical, rational, and spiritual (John 4:21–24). Why are each of these three components crucial to God-honoring praise?

GIVING PRAISE

Crown Him with many crowns,
The Lamb upon His throne.
Hark! How the heav'nly anthem drowns
All music but its own!
Awake, my soul, and sing
Of Him who died for thee,
And hail Him as thy matchless King
Through all eternity!

“CROWN HIM WITH MANY CROWNS”

BY MATTHEW BRIDGES

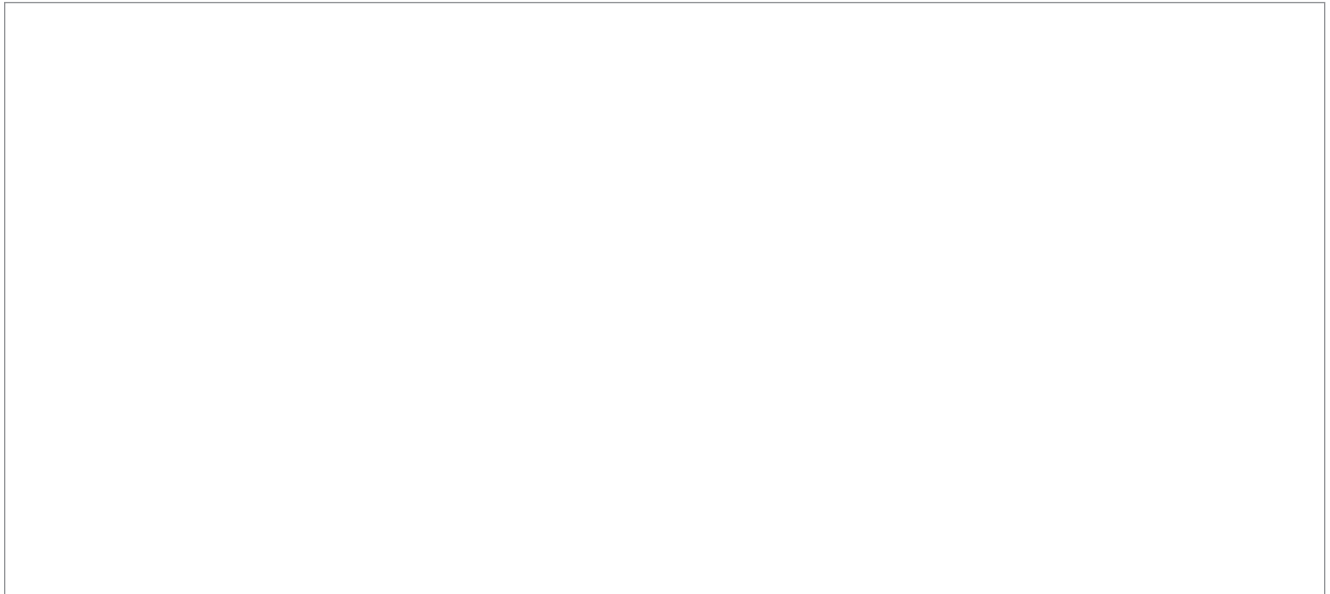
SESSION TWO

“Learning How to Worship: An Introduction” | 1 Thessalonians 5:16–18

Getting Started

Believers ought to pay attention to their worship, being careful that they’re approaching God in an engaged, reverent manner. Thankfully, Scripture shows us what kind of worship God requires.

If ideal worship is engaged and reverent, what might characterize worship that is *disengaged* or *irreverent*?



KEY SCRIPTURES

“Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you. Do not quench the Spirit.”

1 THESSALONIANS 5:16–19

“Do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery, but be filled with the Spirit, addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody to the Lord with your heart.”

EPHESIANS 5:18–19

Going Deeper

1. Alistair observes that the instructions in 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18 are corporate rather than individual. How does this view shape our interpretation of the passage?

2. What specific instructions does Paul give to the church in 1 Thessalonians 5:16-22? How is each of these instructions an expression of worship?

3. A worshipping congregation is spiritually alive, spiritually assisted, and spiritually active (Eph. 2:1-5; 5:16-18). Why must each of these qualities be true of those who worship God?

4. What does it mean to make God the object of our worship? How can we know whether or not He is?

5. In what sense is worship a conscious, not an unconscious or disengaged, act?

6. How might individual worship differ from gathered, corporate worship in approach, activities, expression, etc.?

GIVING PRAISE

O for a thousand tongues to sing
My great Redeemer's praise,
The glories of my God and King,
The triumphs of His grace!
My gracious Master and my God,
Assist me to proclaim,
To spread through all the earth abroad,
The honors of Thy name.

"O FOR A THOUSAND TONGUES TO SING"

BY CHARLES WESLEY

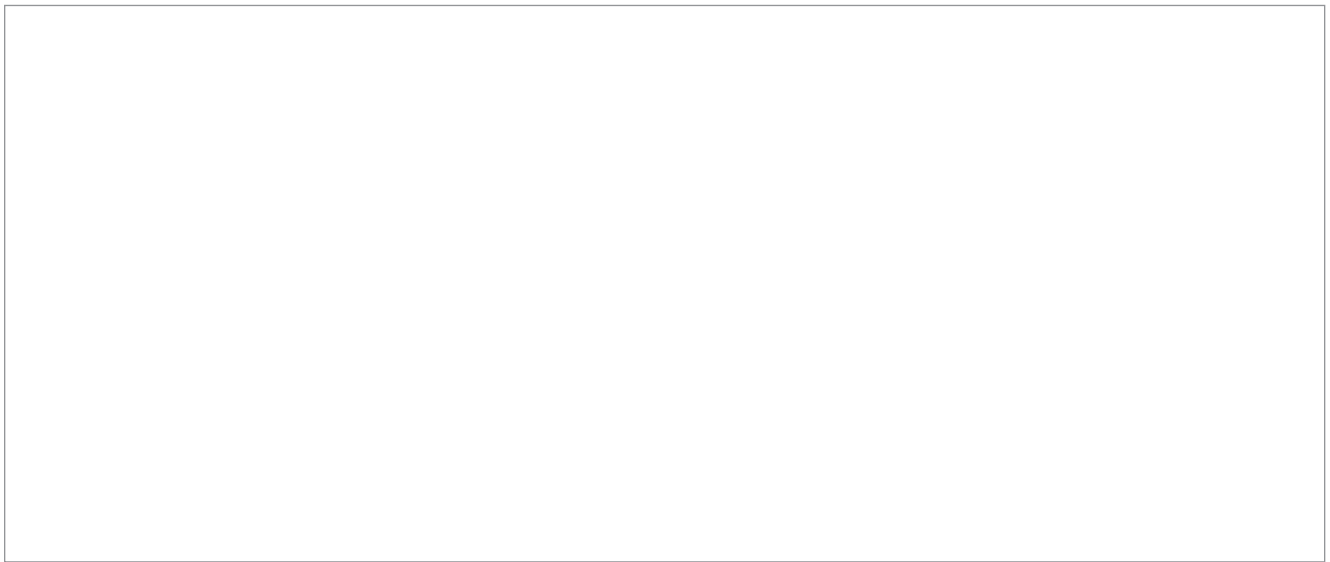
SESSION THREE

“Learning How to Worship: An Illustration” | Mark 14:3-9

Getting Started

In Mark 14, we read of Jesus’ unusual encounter in an unlikely place. As Jesus reclines in the home of Simon the leper, an anonymous woman anoints Him with costly ointment. Her actions illustrate the heart of genuine worship.

When you worship in a public setting, in what ways are you more concerned with what others think of your expression rather than with what the Lord finds acceptable? What are the reasons for this concern?



KEY SCRIPTURES

“While he was at Bethany in the house of Simon the leper, as he was reclining at table, a woman came with an alabaster flask of ointment of pure nard, very costly, and she broke the flask and poured it over his head.”

MARK 14:3

“David danced before the LORD with all his might.”

2 SAMUEL 6:14

Going Deeper

1. What details in Mark 14:3-9 support the fact that the woman's worship of Jesus was costly?

2. Alistair reminds us that there is always some cost associated with genuine worship, whether immaterial or material. What has your worship cost you?

3. How does understanding who Jesus is and what He has done change how we approach worship?

4. How is David's manner of worship in 2 Samuel 6:12-19 similar to the woman's in Mark 14? What do these accounts teach us about worshipping God with all our might?

5. What does the onlookers' response to the woman in Mark 14:4-5 suggest is going on in their hearts? Can you recognize similar tendencies in yourself?

6. What does genuine, heartfelt worship look like for you?

7. How can costly worship be an evangelistic witness to those who have yet to believe in Christ?

GIVING PRAISE

Holy, holy, holy! Lord God Almighty!
Early in the morning our song shall rise to Thee.
Holy, holy, holy! Merciful and mighty!
God in three Persons, blessed Trinity.

“HOLY, HOLY, HOLY! LORD GOD ALMIGHTY!”

BY REGINALD HEBER

SESSION FOUR

“Learning How to Worship: An Application” | Selected Scriptures

Getting Started

Joy, prayer, and thankfulness—these are routine words in a Christian’s vocabulary. But how well do we bear these three marks? Writing to the Thessalonian church, Paul instructed the believers to rejoice always, pray continually, and express genuine thankfulness. Yet though these commands are simple, they aren’t always easy to live out.

How do joy, prayer, and thankfulness factor into your living? In which are you strongest, and in which could you grow the most?

KEY SCRIPTURES

“Let all who take refuge in you rejoice; let them ever sing for joy, and spread your protection over them, that those who love your name may exult in you.”

PSALM 5:11

“Oh come, let us sing to the LORD; let us make a joyful noise to the rock of our salvation! Let us come into his presence with thanksgiving; let us make a joyful noise to him with songs of praise!”

PSALM 95:1-2

Going Deeper

1. Read Psalm 100:1-5. What do these verses suggest about the difference between worship that is reverent and that which is dull or gloomy?

2. How is it possible for the Christian to “rejoice always” (1 Thess. 5:16)?

3. Paul instructs the Thessalonians to “pray without ceasing” in verse 17. What does cultivating an attitude of prayer involve?

4. Do you find it difficult to pray, whether privately or publicly? What aspects of prayer are particularly challenging for you?

5. How does the Gospel enable us to “give thanks in all circumstances” (1 Thess. 5:18)?

6. In his sermon, Alistair describes Christian joy as “solid joy.” What imagery does this phrase evoke in your mind? What does it reveal about the nature of the joy that God gives?

7. In what sense is prayer a form of worship?

GIVING PRAISE

Joyful, joyful, we adore Thee,
God of glory, Lord of love;
Hearts unfold like flow'rs before Thee,
Op'ning to the sun above.
Melt the clouds of sin and sadness,
Drive the dark of doubt away;
Giver of immortal gladness
Fill us with the light of day.

“JOYFUL, JOYFUL, WE ADORE THEE”

BY HENRY VAN DYKE

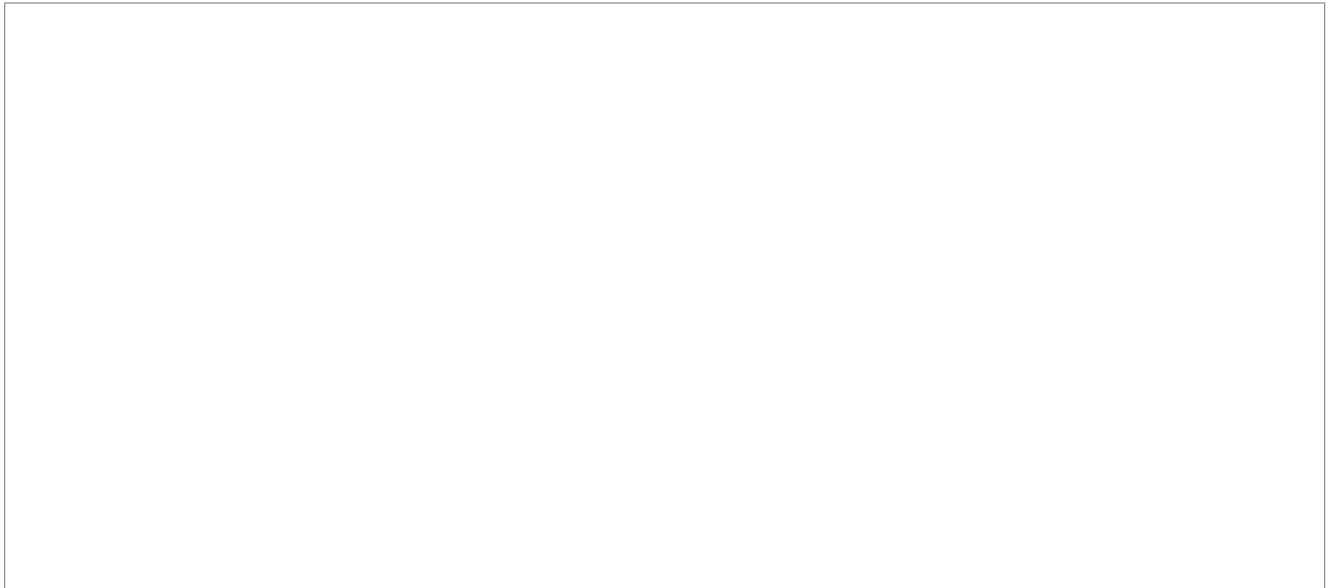
SESSION FIVE

“Concerning Worship” | Ecclesiastes 5:1-7

Getting Started

In Ecclesiastes 5, the author has in mind the person who approaches worship with a kind of casual indifference: He listens to the songs, taps his foot to the tunes, but never truly engages in heartfelt praise. To men and women such as this Scripture warns, “Guard your steps” (Eccl. 5:1).

What are some ways we can acknowledge the seriousness of worship when we gather as the church?



KEY SCRIPTURES

“Guard your steps when you go to the house of God. To draw near to listen is better than to offer the sacrifice of fools, for they do not know that they are doing evil.”

ECCLESIASTES 5:1

“Oh, magnify the LORD with me, and let us exalt his name together!”

PSALM 34:3

Going Deeper

1. Read Ephesians 2:19–22, where Paul describes the church as God’s temple. What are the implications of this truth for *where* and *how* we worship today?

2. Ecclesiastes 5:1 speaks of “the house of God,” or Solomon’s temple. What role does the building play in our corporate worship? Is it of great or little significance today?

3. According to Psalm 34:1–3, what themes should we emphasize in corporate praise?

4. Commenting on verse 7, Alistair says to fear God is to be “filled with a sense of breathtaking awe at the character of God.” How is this fear different from terror, and why is fear of the Lord crucial to proper worship?

5. The Preacher's instructions in Ecclesiastes 5 are clear: "Guard your steps," "Watch your mouth," "Keep your vows," and "Stand in awe." To which of these do you most clearly need to pay more attention? What would heeding it involve?

6. What warnings are contained in Ecclesiastes 5:2-3? If all worship isn't to be audible, then in what other ways can we worship?

7. What does it mean to "guard [our] steps" (Eccl. 5:1) when we gather for worship? How can we do this?

GIVING PRAISE

We love the place, O God,
Wherein Thine honor dwells;
The joy of Thine abode
All earthly joy excels. ...

We love to sing below
For mercies freely giv'n;
But, oh, we long to know
The triumph song of heav'n.

"WE LOVE THE PLACE, O GOD"
BY WILLIAM BULLOCK

SESSION SIX

“Worth-ship” | Colossians 3:16

Getting Started

Worship abbreviates the Anglo-Saxon word *weorthscipe*, or “worth-ship.” Simply, God is the Worthy One whom we approach in praise. Christian worship involves giving God the chief place in our thoughts and interests.

What would it look like for you to worship in the manner described above—namely, giving God chief place in your life?

KEY SCRIPTURES

“Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God.”

COLOSSIANS 3:16-17

“From the rising of the sun to its setting, the name of the LORD is to be praised!”

PSALM 113:3

Going Deeper

1. What gives corporate worship—the church gathering together for praise—its significance?

2. In what sense does true worship engage our minds?

3. We worship God based on how He has revealed Himself to us. What aspects of His nature and character stir your heart to praise Him?

4. What is the relationship between God's Word dwelling in us and our praise (Col. 3:16)? What steps could you take to deepen your expression of worship?

5. How does corporate worship express our unity in the Gospel?

6. Attitude, ability, and distraction hinder our praise this side of eternity. Which of these are most prevalent in your worship? How can you combat it?

GIVING PRAISE

Praise, my soul, the King of heaven;
To His feet your tribute bring.
Ransomed, healed, restored, forgiven,
Evermore His praises sing.
Alleluia, alleluia!
Praise the everlasting King!

“PRAISE, MY SOUL, THE KING OF HEAVEN”

BY HENRY FRANCIS LYTE

SESSION SEVEN

“The Pastor’s Role in the Praising Church” | Selected Scriptures

Getting Started

If we’re honest about our attitudes, we don’t always feel like singing in Sunday worship. Whenever we praise, our hearts have to be tuned with the truth of God’s Word—that He is good, merciful, forgiving, and so on. Reflecting on these truths helps us to enter fully into praise regardless of how we feel in the moment.

What are some reasons you don’t fully engage in corporate singing (e.g., distractions, song preference, self-consciousness)?

KEY SCRIPTURES

“I said: ‘Woe is me! For I am lost; for I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; for my eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts!’”

ISAIAH 6:5

“Whoever does not honor the Son does not honor the Father who sent him.”

JOHN 5:23

Going Deeper

1. Broadly speaking, what guidance does Scripture offer on the *manner* of Christian worship?

2. What should be true of the lyrics we sing in corporate praise?

3. Psalm 102:18 teaches that men and women are created to praise, but we tend to praise the wrong things. Why do you think that's the case?

4. How can churches strengthen their congregational singing?

5. This session has focused mostly on corporate worship. How should corporate worship affect our personal habits of praise during the week?

6. What is the pastor's role in leading his church to be a praising people? What is the members' responsibility?

7. Alistair reminds us that corporate worship should be biblical, rational, and spiritual. How might some worship today deviate from these guidelines? What are the dangers of drifting?

GIVING PRAISE

Songs of praise the angels sang,
Heaven with alleluias rang,
When creation was begun,
When God spake and it was done. ...

Hymns of glory, songs of praise,
Father, unto Thee we raise;
Jesu, glory unto Thee,
With the Spirit, ever be.

“SONGS OF PRAISE”
BY JAMES MONTGOMERY

SESSION EIGHT

“Congregational Worship” | Psalm 22:22–31

Getting Started

The late theologian Stephen Charnock writes concerning worshipping the Lord, “He is to be worshipped as God; as Creator: and therefore by all, since he is the Creator of all, the Lord of all Whatsoever is due to God upon the account of man’s nature, and the natural obligations he hath laid upon man, is due from all men, because they all enjoy the benefits which are proper to their nature.”¹

How would you explain to an unbelieving friend the reality and importance of worship in his or her life?

KEY SCRIPTURES

“I will tell of your name to my brothers; in the midst of the congregation I will praise you: You who fear the LORD, praise him! All you offspring of Jacob, glorify him, and stand in awe of him, all you offspring of Israel!”

PSALM 22:22–23

“I want you to understand that no one speaking in the Spirit of God ever says ‘Jesus is accursed!’ and no one can say ‘Jesus is Lord’ except in the Holy Spirit.”

1 CORINTHIANS 12:3

¹ *The Spirituality of God, and Spiritual Worship*, in *The Works of the Late Rev. Stephen Charnock, B.D.* (London, 1815), 1:355.

Going Deeper

1. Read Exodus 20:2-3. How do modern people fail to obey this old command concerning worship?

2. What does it mean to honor God's Son (John 5:23), especially as it pertains to our worship?

3. When we think of worship, singing usually comes to mind. But Alistair reminds us that preaching is also a critical component of corporate worship. How so?

4. Commenting on Psalm 89:5, Alistair observes that when we assemble as the church, we gather in the presence of Jesus. How should the fact of Christ's presence affect how we prepare for and engage in corporate praise?

5. What does worship that is both rational and emotional look like? Which of these do you tend to embrace most naturally, and why?

6. What can we learn about the manner of worship that pleases God from Psalm 22:22-31? (Observe the various activities described in the passage.)

7. According to 1 Corinthians 2:14 and 12:3, what is the role of the Holy Spirit in the believer's worship?

GIVING PRAISE

Before the throne of God above
I have a strong and perfect plea,
A Great High Priest whose name is Love,
Who ever lives and pleads for me.
My name is graven on His hands;
My name is written on His heart;
I know that while in heav'n He stands,
No tongue can bid me thence depart;
No tongue can bid me thence depart.

“BEFORE THE THRONE OF GOD ABOVE”

BY CHARITIE LEES BANCROFT

SESSION NINE

“Sing!” | Psalm 100:1-5

Getting Started

Psalm 100 is a beloved passage, used widely in such diverse settings as ancient Jewish gatherings and modern Christian churches—and for good reason. It invites all people on earth to worship the Lord with gladness, for He alone is God, and He alone is good.

Why do Christians sing to God?

KEY SCRIPTURES

“Make a joyful noise to the LORD, all the earth! Serve the LORD with gladness! Come into his presence with singing! Know that the LORD, he is God! It is he who made us, and we are his; we are his people, and the sheep of his pasture.”

PSALM 100:1-3

“I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship.”

ROMANS 12:1

Going Deeper

1. How is Psalm 95 similar to Psalm 100 in its themes?

2. Charles Spurgeon urges the Christian in worship “to think very much of God, much of the singing, and extremely little of yourself.”² What prevents you from praising in this way?

3. What commands are contained in Psalm 100?

4. How is serving a form of worship (Ps. 100:2)? (See also Josh. 24:14.)

² C. H. Spurgeon, “How Shall We Sing?,” *The Sword and the Trowel*, June 1, 1870, 277.

5. Why can the Christian worship joyfully even when circumstances are difficult? What promises from Scripture can you lay hold of to praise through trial?

6. What are some benefits of singing with the gathered church?

7. Alistair observes that biblical exhortations to sing are almost always framed in the context of what we know (Ps. 100:2-3). How does *singing* truth about God stir our affections for Him in ways other activities cannot?

GIVING PRAISE

Come, let us join our cheerful songs
With angels round the throne;
Ten thousand thousand are their tongues,
But all their joys are one. ...

The whole creation joins in one
To bless the sacred name
Of Him who sits upon the throne
And to adore the Lamb.

“COME, LET US JOIN OUR CHEERFUL SONGS”

BY ISAAC WATTS

SESSION TEN

“The Foundation for Praise” | Psalm 8:1–9

Getting Started

John Calvin writes, “Man never achieves a clear knowledge of himself unless he has first looked upon God’s face, and then descends from contemplating him to scrutinize himself.”³ True worship begins with God and His glory, not man and his need.

Spend a few moments contemplating God—His nature, character, and work in the world. Then consider yourself in relation to Him. What comes to mind when you contrast yourself with God’s majesty?

KEY SCRIPTURES

“O LORD, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth! You have set your glory above the heavens.”

PSALM 8:1

“We see him who for a little while was made lower than the angels, namely Jesus, crowned with glory and honor because of the suffering of death, so that by the grace of God he might taste death for everyone.”

HEBREWS 2:9

³ John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, ed. John T. McNeill, trans. Ford Lewis Battles (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1960), 1:37.

Going Deeper

1. In what sense is worship a response to who God is?

2. Using Matthew 21:16 and 1 Corinthians 1:26–28 for reference, explain how God uses our frailty for His purposes. How is our weakness a reason for praise?

3. Unbelievers often think of humanity as a mere combination of “cosmic chemical accidents.”⁴ How does this worldview differ from that of Psalm 8? How does the biblical worldview inspire praise?

4. Read Hebrews 2:6–9. How does this passage clarify Psalm 8:5–8?

⁴ George Weigel, foreword to *Light of the World: The Pope, the Church, and the Signs of the Times; A Conversation with Peter Seewald*, by Benedict XVI (San Francisco: Ignatius, 2010), x.

5. Reread Psalm 8. What is this passage calling you to *believe* or *do* in response to the truths it teaches?

6. Alistair points out that in the Psalms, God speaks to us, and we speak to Him. How so?

7. Psalm 8 opens with the phrase “O LORD, our Lord” (v. 1). The first word translates to God’s personal name, Yahweh, where the second refers to His existence as the majestic King. How do these two divine titles affect how we approach Him in praise?

GIVING PRAISE

God, who made the earth,
The air, the sky, the sea,
Who gave the light its birth,
Careth for me.

“GOD, WHO MADE THE EARTH”

BY SARAH BETTS RHODES

SESSION ELEVEN

“The Living and Abiding Word” | 1 Peter 1:24–25

Getting Started

Scripture ought to inform every area of the Christian life, from conduct and belief to prayer and praise. When we sing lyrics that are grounded in God’s written Word, we can be confident that our worship is aligned with His purposes.

What are some benefits of singing Scripture?

KEY SCRIPTURES

“You have been born again, not of perishable seed but of imperishable, through the living and abiding word of God.”

1 PETER 1:23

“Do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery, but be filled with the Spirit, addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody to the Lord with your heart.”

EPHESIANS 5:18–19

Going Deeper

1. Read Isaiah 40:6–8 and Matthew 24:35. What do these passages teach about the nature and qualities of God's Word?

2. How does the Word of God work in a person to save him? (See 1 Thess. 1:8–9; 1 Peter 1:23; James 1:21.)

3. What is the difference between *knowing* Scripture and *trusting* it? How can you know whether you are trusting it?

4. Alistair remarks, “There is a direct correlation between the abiding impact of the truth of God’s Word and the overflow of the praise of God’s people.” How is the impact of singing Scripture different from hearing it preached, reading it devotionally, etc.?

5. What truths in God's Word especially lead you to praise?

6. While personal Bible study is important, it's incomplete when detached from the preaching of a local church. What are some advantages of and limitations to private study?

GIVING PRAISE

How firm a foundation, ye saints of the Lord,
Is laid for your faith in His excellent Word!
What more can He say than to you He hath said,
To you who for refuge to Jesus have fled?

“HOW FIRM A FOUNDATION”

SESSION TWELVE

“In Christ Alone My Hope Is Found” | Colossians 1:15–23

Getting Started

When the New Testament uses the word “hope,” it’s not uncertainty about what *might* happen but rather a confident assurance of what *will* happen. In the face of the hopelessness that marks this secular age, Christians have a new song to sing because of Jesus’ finished work for us.

What hope does the Gospel provide?

KEY SCRIPTURES

“He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things were created through him and for him.”

COLOSSIANS 1:15–16

“Keep yourselves in the love of God, waiting for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ that leads to eternal life.”

JUDE 21

Going Deeper

1. Read Colossians 1:5, 23, and 27. How does Paul use the word “hope” in these verses, and what do these usages reveal about Christian hope?

2. If worship is grounded in who God is, what basis does Paul’s description of Jesus in Colossians 1:15–20 provide for our praise?

3. What impact does our faith in the sufficiency of Christ’s work have upon our worship (Col. 1:19–22)?

4. In what sense is Colossians 1:23 both an encouragement and a warning?

5. The late Scottish minister Robert Murray M'Cheyne would urge his congregation, "For every look that you take at yourself, take ten looks at the Lord Jesus."⁵ In practical terms, how could you adopt this approach in your daily life?

6. Colossians 1:15–20 is most likely an early Christian hymn, indicating that early hymnody was grounded in theology. Why is it important that we sing sound, biblical doctrine in our churches?

7. What does Christ-centered praise entail?

GIVING PRAISE

The head that once was crowned with thorns
Is crowned with glory now;
A royal diadem adorns
The mighty Victor's brow.

The highest place that heav'n affords
Is His by sovereign right,
The King of Kings and Lord of Lords
And heav'n's eternal Light.

"THE HEAD THAT ONCE WAS CROWNED WITH THORNS"
BY THOMAS KELLY

⁵ For example, Andrew Bonar, *Memoir and Remains of the Rev. Robert McCheyne* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian Board of Education, 1844), 236, 253.

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