

iWorship

21 Days of Worship

Foreword:

Welcome to iWorship, 21 Days of Worship! Yes, that is correct – the little “i” for us, and the capital “W” is for worshipping our awesome and wonderful God!

Ironclad Guarantee! No money down! Just hop in and drive it away! We have all heard promises like these before...and we're definitely skeptical. Well, what if this twenty-one day journey with God into the realm of worship actually came with the best guarantee ever? Are we hesitant to believe it? Well, here it is...a hard and fast guarantee...a promise given up front, right from the Holy Spirit as found in the Bible book of James:

James 4:8a – Come close to God, and God will come close to you.

We would all do well to regularly take some time to ponder the implications of that one little promise from God. It calls for action on our part...and it promises a huge payoff! That's because every area of our lives will be enriched when God comes close to us.

Here's what is happening over the next twenty-one days:

- For the next three Sunday (four counting yesterday) our pastors will focus the messages around the theme of worshipping God. During those same Sundays, our Worship team will continue to help us engage with God. Our worship devotionals will make these times even richer.
- Also, this daily devotional guide is a key part of our journey together. We are hoping that all who attend New Life will work their way through this twenty-one day journey of connection with God. Each daily section of this devotional guide includes a focus for the day, scripture, and a suggested response.
- And last of all, our journey will conclude with a special Sunday evening iWorship service at 6:00 on October 11. Filled with moving worship activities and experiences, it will be an evening to remember!

The 21 Day Challenge:

As we all take this journey with God, we'll find out what happens when we 'come close to God' together!

Unless Otherwise Noted:

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God's Presence

On this first day of iWorship there is no better starting point for our journey with God than a baseline which approaches Him in faith and in the belief that He is with us as we proceed.

We may all be at different points in our walk with God, and undoubtedly many of us are experiencing difficult situations in life right now, but because we have chosen to take this journey, we can believe together that faith in God is very important, and we are looking to it for the basis of life and truth.

The Bible says that faith is a gift from God. Those who have strong faith will attest that God had some things to work through with them before they came to the point where they embraced this gift.

God's Word For Today

Hebrews 11:1 & 6

Faith is the confidence that what we hope for will actually happen; it gives us assurance about things we cannot see...And it is impossible to please God without faith. Anyone who wants to come to him must believe that God exists and that he rewards those who sincerely seek him.

In faith there is great comfort in knowing that the Lord God who created us also loves us. And to what extent? That Father God would have Jesus take the punishment for our sins upon Himself so we might be restored to a right relationship with Him. Because He went to such great lengths, we can be sure that He will also be with us each and every day, regardless of our circumstances. We cannot see it with our eyes, but Jesus actually suffers along with us when we suffer...and rejoices with us when we rejoice.

It is only upon this baseline which a life of faith can be built. As was described in our Word For The Day earlier, a life of faith begins when we realize that God is not only with us, but will reward those who sincerely seek Him.

Our Response For Today

As much as is possible, let's find a spot...that place where we can get quiet and meet with God...every day for the next 21 days. Prayer and worship can be verbalized or spoken to God within our hearts, so whether that place is a quiet living room before the family rises or a commuter bus on our way to work, we should be able to pray and worship each day.

During this journey we will explore various methods of prayer and worship...each designed to help us connect with God. For today let's baseline our prayers following Jesus' well-known instructions:

Matthew 6:9-13 – Pray like this: Our Father in heaven, may your name be kept holy. May your Kingdom come soon. May your will be done on earth, as it is in heaven. Give us today the food we need, and forgive us our sins, as we have forgiven those who sin against us. And don't let us yield to temptation, but rescue us from the evil one.

After praying this prayer, let's spend some time thanking God for the gift of faith, and then let's ask Him to enable this gift to grow within us.

God's Promises

Now that we are ready to approach God at the starting point of faith each and every day of iWorship, let's dive in a little deeper.

In writing to the earliest Christians, the Apostle Peter passed along the following information that is just as vital and true today:

God's Word For Today

2 Peter 1:4 – *And because of his glory and excellence, he [God] has given us great and precious promises. These are the promises that enable you to share his divine nature and escape the world's corruption caused by human desires.*

Throughout God's word we find that He has made many promises to His children. Peter says these are 'great and precious', so we should hold them in high regard because of the One who has made them. Peter also says that these promises 'enable you to share His divine nature and escape the world's corruption'.

Virtually all of God's promises in the Bible are conditional. In other words, they require us to 'share' in the promise in order to receive what is offered. For example in yesterday's Word For The Day we read a promise that said: "He rewards those who sincerely seek Him." Sincerely seeking Him is the way in which we share in that promise and are enabled to enjoy the result, which is receiving His rewards.

Our Response For Today contains another 'great and precious' promise, from the lips of Jesus. He tells us that within the worship of prayer, persistence is required and will be rewarded. A simple test of our faith! He follows it up with an illustration that compares our relationship to God with that of a child to its father.

Our Response For Today

Matthew 7:7-11 *Keep on asking, and you will receive what you ask for. Keep on seeking, and you will find. Keep on knocking, and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks, receives. Everyone who seeks, finds. And to everyone who knocks, the door will be opened. You parents — if your children ask for a loaf of bread, do you give them a stone instead? Or if they ask for a fish, do you give them a snake? Of course not! So if you sinful people know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your heavenly Father give good gifts to those who ask him.*

Let's do everything we can not to compromise finding our quiet place to be with God for this time of iWorship. It is easy for us to get busy and easy for us to compromise and do things on the run, throwing some quick prayers in God's direction...feeling a bit bad about it, but justifying our poor interaction as 'the best we could do under our circumstances'.

Today as we engage with God in prayer, let's try these steps:

1. Find our quiet place with as few distractions as possible.
2. Quiet our hearts before God...for this moment letting go of everything else and clearing our minds.
3. Draw near to God without words. As best as we can, let's allow our hearts to simply express faith in God, our love for Him, and our gratitude for His provision and care...doing all this without words.
4. Next, let's begin to bring our cares and concerns to God - asking, seeking, and knocking as Jesus directed. And let's do this believing that God knows how to give good gifts to those who ask Him...making sure we are open for God to answer in ways we don't expect.



Knowing God

On the night of His arrest Jesus came before Father God in prayer and asked that both the work He had accomplished and His followers would be strengthened and established. Amazingly enough, Jesus also took a long look down the tunnel of human history and added a prayer for us:

John 17:20-21 — *I am praying not only for these disciples but also for all who will ever believe in me through their message. I pray that they will all be one, just as you and I are one—as you are in me, Father, and I am in you. And may they be in us so that the world will believe you sent me.*

Did you know that Jesus prayed for you...was thinking about you...long before you were ever born? Jesus' prayer that night also included a very important piece of information that we all need to understand:

John 17:1-3 — *After saying all these things, Jesus looked up to heaven and said, "Father, the hour has come. Glorify your Son so he can give glory back to you. For you have given him authority over everyone. He gives eternal life to each one you have given him. And this is the way to have eternal life—to know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, the one you sent to earth."*

Did you catch that? Because along with thinking about us before we were ever born, Jesus wanted us to know that the eternal life God makes possible through Him is not just a thing...not just a ticket into some back corner of heaven. It enables us to actually 'know' God and Jesus Christ the one God sent to earth. God is not just counting followers. He is actually looking for a real and intimate relationship with each one of us. A central purpose of worship is getting to know God!

God's Word For Today

Romans 10:17 *So then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God. (NKJV)*

Let's look at this one more time from the Old Testament Book of Jeremiah:

Jeremiah 9:23-24 — *This is what the Lord says: "Don't let the wise boast in their wisdom, or the powerful boast in their power, or the rich boast in their riches. But those who wish to boast should boast in this alone: that they truly know me and understand that I am the Lord who demonstrates unfailing love and who brings justice and righteousness to the earth, and that I delight in these things. I, the Lord, have spoken!"*

For some of us, God still seems distant, and getting to Him seems like a very long journey. But let's not despair. Even the twelve Apostles walked in those shoes from time to time. Notice their request:

Luke 17:5 — *The apostles said to the Lord, "Show us how to increase our faith."*

Our Response For Today

Today let's make our approach to God in the way that is now becoming our practice. Our focus, as those who would follow Jesus and learn about following Him, should be to take God at His word and give Him the chance to prove Himself to us.

There are really two parts to this:

1. As we learned on day one, it is our job to sincerely seek Him. The short promise which we have just read in "God's Word For Today" is that faith will come as we hear the word of God. We have been hearing God's word for at least three days now as we read through our iWorship sessions, so we are well on our way!
2. And as we learned on day two, Jesus wants us to ask, seek, and knock on God's door. So let's make this our prayer for today:

"Lord I want to know You. I'm asking that over these days of iWorship that You would reveal Yourself to me more and more... that I may become close to You and learn what it means to be Your child and follower."

Accepting God's Plan

Yesterday we took a look at a key understanding – that God is not just interested in our knowing ‘about’ Him...but that He actually wants us to ‘know’ Him. In some cases English isn’t as clear as it could be. For instance, we use the same word ‘know’ for both ‘understanding facts about’ and ‘having a personal relationship with’. In the language the Bible was originally written in, different words were used for these two very different concepts. Regardless of the language, God leaves no doubt that His intent is that we would have a personal and individual relationship with Him!

Did you know that God already knows you...not knows about you or what you did today...but actually knows you? That’s right, He already knows you through and through. Along with all other humans, you were created in God’s image:

Genesis 1:26a & 27 Then God said, “Let us make human beings in our image, to be like ourselves”. So God created human beings in his own image. In the image of God he created them; male and female he created them.

This verse makes it very clear that God understands how humans work... because in many ways we get our ‘nature’ or ‘image’ from Him. But what about me specifically? Does God have any plan or purpose for me? Was there any rhyme or reason to why I look the way I do, or for why I was born into the family and place on earth and time of history that I arrived in?

God's Word For Today

Psalm 139:13-16 — You made all the delicate, inner parts of my body and knit me together in my mother's womb. Thank you for making me so wonderfully complex! Your workmanship is marvelous—how well I know it. You watched me as I was being formed in utter seclusion, as I was woven together in the dark of the womb. You saw me before I was born. Every day of my life was recorded in your book. Every moment was laid out before a single day had passed.

2 Corinthians 6:16b — For we are the temple of the living God. As God said: “I will live in them and walk among them. I will be their God, and they will be my people.”

Perhaps it is the culture in which we live or it just be our human nature, but we tend to spend a lot of time and energy ‘not liking’ who and what we see in the mirror. Not just the mirror on the wall but the mirror of our extended family...of who we feel we have or have not become...of our financial status...and the list goes on and on.

But God has a very different plan for how we should feel about ourselves:

Our Response For Today

Here is what we need to think about today: If we are honest about it, does any of this time and energy spent on rejecting who we are, what we look like, or bemoaning our current circumstances really bless either ourselves or God? Doesn’t it actually take away from the time we might spend with God focusing on who He intended us to become? Isn’t it actually an insult to God when we spend so much time unhappy about some feature of our physical appearance which He either created or allowed to happen for some greater purpose?

Can we choose to push the big reset button today? To come to God in prayer, quietly at first as before, and in prayer ask His forgiveness for how much time and emotional energy we have invested in our rejection of the circumstances of our lives which He wants to use for His own purposes?

After we refocus with Him in this way, let’s then begin to thank Him and rejoice in what God’s Word For Today says: “I will live in them and walk among them”. And let’s pray a prayer of thanksgiving for each part of our lives, recognizing He is making them part of His great plan for us, and has fortified us with everything we need to live victoriously...regardless of our circumstances..



Repentance

Hopefully through yesterday's response we all experienced a bit of 'house cleaning' as we began to give more of the focus of our lives over to God... trusting that He created each of us on purpose, and that He has a plan for our lives as we continue to worship and seek Him...instead of focusing on self-rejection and negativity. Even if our particular circumstances do happen to be bad ones at this time, the straightest path forward, and the one which will lead to blessing is to focus on God and what He wants to do, rather than on how bad things are.

In the language of the Bible, this house-cleaning is called repentance. And it is a very important part of worship as we continue on our path of knowing God more intimately. The word 'repent' is translated in our English Bibles from an original Greek word that simply meant 'to turn around'...that is to take a different course. When we first come to Jesus for salvation, our need is to discontinue the path we have been on, 'turn around', and begin going Jesus' way as His followers. Even after becoming a Christian there will be many times throughout life when God will want us to repent and make changes in various habits and behaviors. Agreeing with God and making the changes He requests is all a normal part of worshipping Him and growing spiritually in Jesus. So, we can and should expect this from time to time.

But what about the imperfections (even significant ones) that remain in our lives? What about the things we continue to struggle with? Hasn't God asked us to aim at having an eternal relationship with Him? Aren't we supposed to become like Jesus? In God's Word For Today Paul writes about his own struggles, and his writings will help us get a proper perspective on our own.

God's Word For Today

Philippians 3:12-14

I don't mean to say that I have already achieved these things or that I have already reached perfection. But I press on to possess that perfection for which Christ Jesus first possessed me. No, dear brothers and sisters, I have not achieved it, but I focus on this one thing: Forgetting the past and looking forward to what lies ahead, I press on to reach the end of the race and receive the heavenly prize for which God, through Christ Jesus, is calling us.

How did Paul teach that pressing on to receive this prize was to be achieved?

Philippians 4:6-7 — *Don't worry about anything; instead, pray about everything. Tell God what you need, and thank him for all he has done. Then you will experience God's peace, which exceeds anything we can understand. His peace will guard your hearts and minds as you live in Christ Jesus.*

Unlike God, we don't know all and see all, but we can rest and take comfort in knowing that God does:

1 Corinthians 13:12 — *Now we see things imperfectly as in a cloudy mirror, but then we will see everything with perfect clarity. All that I know now is partial and incomplete, but then I will know everything completely, just as God now knows me completely.*

Our Response For Today

As we approach God today in prayer and worship, let's take some time to reflect on the verses of scripture we just read. Yes, He has invited us on an incredible journey into eternity with Him...and yes, the calling is high - to follow Jesus and become more and more like Him. But no, we are not to give into our natural tendencies to panic, worry, or fret about God's unfolding plan for our lives. Instead we are to trust Him in prayer and experience His peace.

If we are ready, we can pray our own prayers of worship and thanks today. If not, we can pray the following suggested prayer:

"Lord I come to praise You this day, to worship You simply for who You are. You are my God, my Creator, the One who has kept watch over my life, my Savior and Lord. Your loving kindness and patience towards me are wonderful things to experience. Thank you for the life you are leading me into. I bless and thank You in the name of Your Son Jesus. Amen"



Worship As A Lifestyle

The fourth chapter of John records the conversation between Jesus and a woman who had gone out to the town well during the heat of the day to draw water. She was a Samaritan, an ethnically mixed group of people who had lived near the Jews for centuries and whose religious practices were as mixed as they were. At one point the woman questioned Jesus about the correct place to worship God.

John 4:19-24 — "Sir," the woman said, "You must be a prophet. So tell me, why is it that you Jews insist that Jerusalem is the only place of worship, while we Samaritans claim it is here at Mount Gerizim, where our ancestors worshiped?" Jesus replied, "Believe me, dear woman, the time is coming when it will no longer matter whether you worship the Father on this mountain or in Jerusalem. You Samaritans know very little about the one you worship, while we Jews know all about him, for salvation comes through the Jews. But the time is coming—indeed it's here now—when true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and in truth. The Father is looking for those who will worship him that way. For God is Spirit, so those who worship him must worship in spirit and in truth."

God's Word For Today

Worshipping God in spirit - Tomorrow's devotion will focus on this. But for now, let's look at what worshipping 'in the Spirit' of God will do in our lives.

Galatians 5:22-23 — *But the Holy Spirit produces this kind of fruit in our lives: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. There is no law against these things!*

Worshipping God in truth - Monday's devotion will focus on this. Again for now, let's look at what worshipping God 'in truth' will do in our lives.

Ephesians 4:22-25 — *Throw off your old sinful nature and your former way of life, which is corrupted by lust and deception. Instead, let the Spirit renew your thoughts and attitudes. Put on your new nature, created to be like God—truly righteous and holy. So stop telling lies. Let us tell our neighbors the truth, for we are all parts of the same body.*

It does not matter 'where' we worship, for God is Spirit, so those who worship Him must worship in spirit and in truth. In fact, according to Jesus, God the Father is actually looking for those who will worship like this because they are the true worshippers

Actually, what God desires most is that our whole lives would be a form of worship of Him..

Philippians 1:9-11 — *I pray that your love will overflow more and more, and that you will keep on growing in knowledge and understanding. For I want you to understand what really matters, so that you may live pure and blameless lives until the day of Christ's return. May you always be filled with the fruit of your salvation—the righteous character produced in your life by Jesus Christ—for this will bring much glory and praise to God.*

Our Response For Today

True worship, the kind which honors God, takes many forms. When rightly understood, worship isn't just an act or set of activities we engage in; it's a mindset and heart attitude that we must choose each day. And when we make this choice, then whatever our mind, hands, and heart find to do can and should be done to bless God. It becomes, then, part of our worship to Him.

Today as we come to that quiet place with God, let's take some time to let Him show us the areas of our lives where more of the 'fruit' of His Spirit is needed... and where we may have opportunity to 'speak the truth' with those He has brought into our lives.

"Father, I choose a mindset and heart attitude of worshipping You in spirit and in truth today. Please lead me in each thought and action today as Your worshipper. I am asking you this in Jesus' name. Amen".



Worshipping With Our Spirit

John 4:23 — *But the time is coming—indeed it's here now—when true worshippers will worship the Father in spirit and in truth.*

Today let's focus on the first part of being a true worshipper of God, that is, worshipping God in spirit. What did Jesus mean by this?

Genesis 1:26a & 27 — *Then God said, "Let us make human beings in our image, to be like ourselves. So God created human beings in his own image. In the image of God he created them; male and female he created them.*

We looked at this scripture during day four; however, let's now consider what being created in the image of God should have on our worship. Among other things, it means that we have a spirit...just as God does. In fact, yesterday we noted that Jesus said, "God is Spirit." The truth is our spirit and soul are the most 'real' parts of us because only they will continue for eternity.

Simply stated, our spirit is the part of us which connects with God. But this connection isn't automatic. In fact, disconnection from God is often more natural to us than connecting with Him.

God's Word For Today

Ephesians 2:1-5 Once you were dead because of your disobedience and your many sins. You used to live in sin, just like the rest of the world, obeying the devil—the commander of the powers in the unseen world...All of us used to live that way, following the passionate desires and inclinations of our sinful nature...But God is so rich in mercy, and he loved us so much, that even though we were dead because of our sins, he gave us life when he raised Christ from the dead. (It is only by God's grace that you have been saved!)

Taking this a little further, let's go back to the scripture we read on Day 1.

Hebrews 11: 6 — *And it is impossible to please God without faith. Anyone who wants to come to him must believe that God exists and that he rewards those who sincerely seek him.*

Faith is more than just a product of our soul (mind, will, and emotions). It resides and springs from the very depths of our spirit, that part of us which connects with God. In fact God's Word For Today indicates that before we began to open ourselves up to God in faith, our spirits were actually 'dead'. Our consciences were closed off to Him, and our worship had no foundation. The mission of Jesus has always been to reconnect the spirits of people with the Spirit of God.

So what happens when we go through the motions of worship, but our spirits never actually connect with God? Unfortunately, God is all too familiar with this lifeless form of religion.

Isaiah 29:13 — *And so the Lord says, "These people say they are mine. They honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me. And their worship of me is nothing but man-made rules learned by rote.*

Our Response For Today

Our goal in iWorship is to draw near to God in a renewed spirit, enabled by the sacrifice of His Son Jesus...for our spirits to connect daily with His Spirit...and for our worship to be from our heart and in good conscience. These are the connectors between our soul and spirit...so our worship will not be just religion from our lips.

Let's bring our prayers and worship to God today in this light.

"Father in heaven, I offer You my heart and conscience. I ask that my faith may grow so that we may connect each day and so that my worship of You would never become routine or dead. Heavenly Father, I thank You for Jesus, who gave Himself for me so that my spirit may be alive in You."

If God brings anything to our minds during prayer that would hinder our pure worship of Him (hardness of heart, bitterness, sin, etc.), let's repent of it as we pray, and then let's ask Him to show us what we need to do to rectify it, if it's a matter that involves another person.



Worshipping God In Truth

John 4:23 — *But the time is coming—indeed it's here now—when true worshippers will worship the Father in spirit and in truth.*

Today's focus will be on the second part of being a true worshipper of God – worshipping Him in truth. Obviously God values truth; therefore true worship can only come from those who are truthful with Him and willing to walk in His truth – not that we could actually conceal anything from Him anyway.

Hebrews 4:13 — *Nothing in all creation is hidden from God. Everything is naked and exposed before his eyes, and he is the one to whom we are accountable.*

From the perspective of God's word, there are actually three levels or layers to the concept of truth:

The first and most important understanding about truth is that it isn't just a concept or an idea. Truth is actually an expression or extension of who God is. It is part of His eternal nature.

God's Word For Today

John 14:6-7 *Jesus told him, "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one can come to the Father except through me. If you had really known me, you would know who my Father is. From now on, you do know him and have seen him!"*

The second is an understanding that truth (reality) is based on absolutes that God has placed in our world, and it isn't subject to change or our approval or disapproval. In other words, truth is true whether we choose to accept and believe it or not. It is transcendent and governs all that God has made.

And the third is simple honesty – a decision and commitment God requires us to make in order to live truthfully and honestly in life. It demands that we tell the truth in all situations. And it also prevents us from lying, cheating, stealing, or deceiving others in any way.

Worshipping God in truth then, would encompass all three – seeking, believing and embracing all of His revealed truth; aligning our lives with what He teaches in His word; and living truthfully in all of our interactions with others. It could be accurately said that truth is the foundation that worship is built on.

Our Response For Today

Throughout the Bible there are many scriptures which can be used in worship to help us express to God what is already in our hearts. The book of Psalms is particularly filled with verses of worship expressing the full range of the human experience before God.

For today let's use a relevant part of Psalm 51 as we come before God in prayer and worship. Let's put ourselves in the writer's shoes, allowing our spirits and emotions to join the psalmist in calling out to God.

Psalm 51:6-7 *But you desire honesty from the womb, teaching me wisdom even there. Purify me from my sins, and I will be clean; wash me, and I will be whiter than snow.*

(After some time of connection with God, let's bring our cares and concerns up to Him.)

Our New Life In Jesus

One of the key reasons for worshipping God is the new life He enables us to live. At least three different dimensions of this new life deserve our attention on this ninth day of iWorship.

- Our own salvation is the first. The sin of our lives carries with it a sentence of eternal separation from God. Nothing sinful or impure is ever allowed to enter and mar the peace and beauty of heaven. Through Jesus, God has provided us with complete forgiveness, enabling us, then, to be brought into His very presence, where we will live throughout eternity. And what is more, we didn't have to earn or buy this salvation. It is a free gift from God, offered in love to those who were created to be His sons and daughters. Who could ask for more! This is why salvation is a theme common to many songs of worship.
- The second is the new identity that comes with our new life. We, who were separated from God by sin, have now been adopted into His royal family as His sons and daughters. And He has given us new official credentials. The first is His name. We are now called CHRISTIans. We are now known and identified by His name. Additionally, the presence of His Spirit in us identifies us as belonging to Jesus. And this Spirit is so different from our own natural spirit that struggles so hard in following God. The Spirit that Jesus gives us is one that draws us to God instead of struggling with Him. What a difference! What a reason to worship!

God's Word For Today

Rom 6:23 *For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life through Christ Jesus our Lord.*

2 Corinthians 5:16-17 *So we have stopped evaluating others from a human point of view. At one time we thought of Christ merely from a human point of view. How differently we know him now! This means that anyone who belongs to Christ has become a new person. The old life is gone; a new life has begun!*

Ephesians 2:13 *You lived in this world without God and without hope. But now you have been united with Christ Jesus. Once you were far away from God, but now you have been brought near to him through the blood of Christ.*

- And the third is the lifestyle of our new life in Jesus. No longer trapped in the darkness and bondage of sin, we now live in freedom and light. Our 'dog-eat-dog' way of living has been exchanged for one of mutual blessing and partnership. Destructive habits that dominated our lives melt away as His Spirit takes dominion of our hearts. Our appetites turn from self-indulgence to selfless service. In short, the presence of Jesus' Spirit in us transforms the ugliness of our earthly lives into the beauty of His divine life. This, too, becomes a great platform for endless worship and praise!

Our Response For Today

Let's take these three things to God today in prayer and worship.

- Having found our quiet place.
- Having removed those things which externally and internally lead to distraction.
- Having drawn close in spirit to the One who loves us more than we could imagine.

Let's pray:

- By starting with gratitude for the free gift of salvation which God has made possible through Jesus Christ.
- By continuing with praise and thanksgiving for the new identity that we have as followers of Jesus. Let's bless Him for granting us the privilege of wearing His own name. And let's thank Him for placing His Spirit in our hearts as a part of our new identity in Him.
- By concluding with great thanks for the new lifestyle He has made possible for us. Let's worship Him for transforming us - changing us from selfish and destructive sinners into selfless saints who bless and serve.

"Father, I worship You and bless You in the name of Jesus. Amen."



God's Identity

For the next three days we will be spending our iWorship time getting to know God better by getting to know more about Him. Today's question is: Who are you, God?

The Bible doesn't reveal the source or origin of God. It simply asserts that He exists, and that He has existed "from everlasting to everlasting." Since the evidence for His actual existence abounds in our world, God expects us to accept by faith that He has always existed and will always exist. It's not surprising, then, that the Bible doesn't begin with an explanation of who God is. It simply states:

Genesis 1:1 — In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.

However, throughout the scriptures we are shown in many ways 'who' God is and what He is like – sometimes through His own words and/or actions, and sometimes through the words He instructed others to write about Him.

During his famous encounter with God at the burning bush, Moses asks God what His name is, and God's answer gives great insight into what He is actually like.

God's Word For Today

Exodus 3:13-15 But Moses protested, "If I go to the people of Israel and tell them, 'The God of your ancestors has sent me to you,' they will ask me, 'What is his name?' Then what should I tell them?" God replied to Moses, "I Am Who I Am. Say this to the people of Israel: I Am has sent me to you." God also said to Moses, "Say this to the people of Israel: Yahweh, the God of your ancestors—the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob—has sent me to you. This is my eternal name, my name to remember for all generations.

Actually, when God used the words 'I Am' as His name, He was referring to the Hebrew word 'Yahweh' which means the Self-Existent Eternal One. It's Latin form is 'Jehovah', which is often translated into English with the all-capital letter word 'LORD'. No matter the form, the meaning is still the same.

This means God is in a class all by Himself. Jehovah has always existed. All other creatures (angels, people, animals, etc.) were brought into existence by the One who has always existed – Yahweh.

But God is too great to have only one name or title. Let's take a look at three other names and titles given to God.

- **El-Shaddai** — This is a Hebrew title that meant 'God Almighty.' As the All Powerful One, He deserves our worship and respect, because we can trust His ability to take care of us and even answer our prayers.
- **Shepherd** — In the well known 23rd Psalm, David says "The Lord is my Shepherd." And then he paints a beautiful picture of how God shepherds us – feeding, guiding, resting, protecting, and blessing us.
- **Healer** — In Exodus 15 God tells His people that he is the Lord who heals them. Once again, the Eternal and Self-Existent God is the One who blesses, and we are the ones who receive His blessings.

Some Bible scholars claim that there are more than 20 different titles for God found in the Bible. Exactly how many there are isn't important. But understanding that the God we worship is a self-existent, all-powerful, saving, blessing, shepherding, healing, loving, and protecting Father who rules over all and whose plan and desires eventually prevail...now, that is important, above all else.

Our Response For Today

- *Lord, I believe that You have always existed and will exist throughout eternity. And because of that, I find great comfort in trusting You with my life. I worship You as the One who is above all and worthy of my praise.*
- *Lord, I recognize now that when I ask You for peace, or healing, or protection, I am really asking for more of You, because You are all of those, and more. I worship You for bringing each of these into my life.*
- *Father God, thank you for being my Shepherd...for caring about my soul and spirit even when I didn't know or acknowledge You...and for promising me an eternity of life with You. I worship You for more blessings than I could ever count. You are an amazing Father in every way!*



God As Jesus

Yesterday we learned that God's name and titles indicate He is in a class by Himself. Today we're going to see one of the specific ways in which He demonstrates that.

Unlike angels, humans, or animals, God has the power and ability to be one God and yet manifest Himself as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit...all at the same time. Because no parallel to it exists in our natural world, much of how this works lies beyond our ability to comprehend. However, by faith we accept it to be true because God declares it to be so in His word.

That has huge implications about who Jesus was and is. That's why the Bible makes it abundantly clear that Jesus was God in human flesh...and therefore, most worthy of our worship.

700 years before Jesus was born, God told the prophet Isaiah to write the following about Jesus.

***Isaiah 9:6-7** — For a child is born to us, a son is given to us. The government will rest on his shoulders. And he will be called: Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. His government and its peace will never end. He will rule with fairness and justice from the throne of his ancestor David for all eternity. The passionate commitment of the Lord of Heaven's Armies will make this happen!*

The Bible leaves no doubt. Jesus' presence on earth meant God was with us. God came to earth to share our humanity. He stepped into His creation to bring a cure for sin. As only God Himself could do, He became both the Son of God and God the Son at the same time!

The name 'Jesus' is our English equivalent for the Hebrew word 'Yeshua', meaning 'Yahweh Saves.' This corresponds to what the angel Gabriel told Joseph:

***Matthew 1:20b-21** — "Joseph, son of David," the angel said, "do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife. For the child within her was conceived by the Holy Spirit. And she will have a son, and you are to name him Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins."*

God's Word For Today

The title 'Christ' is the New Testament equivalent for the Old Testament 'Messiah'. Both mean 'The Anointed One', indicating that Jesus was the one Savior whom God promised would come to earth to bring forgiveness for the sins of all people.

As He taught, Jesus Himself clearly left no doubt that He was God in a human body. And it is equally clear that all who heard him understood His claim.

***John 8:58-59** — Jesus answered, "I tell you the truth, before Abraham was even born, I AM!" At that point they picked up stones to throw at him. But Jesus was hidden from them and left the Temple.*

***John 4:25-26** — The woman said, "I know the Messiah is coming—the one who is called Christ. When he comes, he will explain everything to us." Then Jesus told her, "I AM the Messiah!"*

***John 10:32-33** — Jesus said, "At my Father's direction I have done many good works. For which one are you going to stone me?" They replied, "We're stoning you not for any good work, but for blasphemy! You, a mere man, claim to be God."*

This is why much of our worship and praise centers around who Jesus is and what He has done for us. He is none other than the God of heaven who came to earth in the greatest expression of love in history...giving His life to pay the eternal penalty for our sins.

Our Response For Today

In our quiet place and before the Lord today, let's think about what we have just read. What greater perspective have we gained about Jesus? In what way have we become more grateful for who Jesus is...or for what He has done for us?

Whatever the answer, let's turn it into a prayer of praise and thanksgiving, coming from our hearts directly to His.

Also, let's listen for what He might be saying to us in our spirit. Perhaps He has an area of struggle in our lives that He wants to address. Or, it may be a new area of service or ministry He wants to move us into. Listening to God is just as worshipful as talking to Him.



God As Spirit & Creator

Today is the last in our three day series of getting to know God better. Remember Jesus words from day six? *"For God is Spirit, so those who worship him must worship in spirit and in truth."*

The scriptures are very clear that along with being our heavenly Father...and along with being Jesus who is God the Son...that God is Spirit. And even more importantly to us, it is the Spirit of God that actually comes to live in our hearts when we choose to follow Christ.

Colossians 1:27 — *For God wanted them to know that the riches and glory of Christ are for you Gentiles, too. And this is the secret: Christ lives in you. This gives you assurance of sharing his glory.*

How powerful is the Spirit of God that lives in us? It was this same Spirit of God that powered creation.

Genesis 1:2 — *The earth was formless and empty, and darkness covered the deep waters. And the Spirit of God was hovering over the surface of the waters.*

God also wants us to know that all of creation is infused with His Spirit. In fact, He makes it clear that the world is actually a living display of His Spirit, majesty, and glory.

Psalms 19:1-4 — *The heavens proclaim the glory of God. The skies display his craftsmanship. Day after day they continue to speak; night after night they make him known. They speak without a sound or word; their voice is never heard. Yet their message has gone throughout the earth, and their words to all the world.*

The purpose of the creation is to reveal God's invisible qualities – His eternal power and divine nature. The evidence is everywhere. And even though we can't actually see God, we can see evidence for His existence and also what He is like.

God's Word For Today

Romans 1:20 — *Ever since the world was created, people have seen the earth and sky. Through everything God made, they can clearly see his invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature. So they [people] have no excuse for not knowing God.*

Here are some examples that are available for all of us to see:

- The amazing design that exists in all of creation...designs that the best and brightest have studied for millennia without fully understanding...point to the existence of an all-knowing God.
- The limitless power that exists in even the smallest atoms would indicate that an all-powerful God must have been its source.
- The beauty and infinite variety of creatures would point to the existence of a loving and creative God.
- The fact that most things in creation have the ability to heal and become as good as new again would point to the existence of a gracious God who believes in forgiveness and fresh starts in life.

This last concept brings us to one of the greater purposes God's Spirit brings to our lives when He comes to live in us — transformation. God's Spirit wants us to be more than forgiven...He wants us to be changed. And as we are changed, we find a whole new reason to worship God.

Our Response For Today

As we meet with God today, let's ask Him to reveal to us what the next area of our lives that He wants to transform. It could be a habit that brings bondage where we should be experiencing freedom. It could be a daily routine that is too hectic, undisciplined, and ineffective. It could be an attitude of judgment toward others. It could be that we love and worship something (clothes, a hobby, money, etc.) more than we love and worship God. The point is, it could be anything. God already knows what it is, and He is waiting for us to ask, and then listen for the answer.

Responding to His answer with surrender and a real desire to experience change in this area is a form of worship that God loves. So let's pray...then listen...and then respond.



Worship – Planned Or Spontaneous?

The past twelve days have been the first leg of our journey – the preparation or alignment process. In order to become a worshiper of God, we had to, first of all, obtain a working knowledge of what worship is and then get ourselves properly aligned with God and His plan for us. Now that we have explored those subjects, the last leg of our journey will focus our attention on the actual experience of worship.

Should our worship of God be a planned or spontaneous event? Some would say that planning and preparing for worship makes it “canned” and less authentic. Others believe that failing to prepare for worship means we don’t give God our very best...that we’re just throwing our ‘leftovers’ His way. Which is correct?

Scripture actually teaches both. There is a proper time and place for planned worship...there is a proper time and place for spontaneous worship...and God loves and accepts both.

David, the King of Israel that God caused to write most of the Psalms, had a great heart for worship. While just a shepherd boy, he learned to play the harp, and often as the sheep grazed he strummed, wrote songs, and sang in worship to his God. Later, when he became king, he decided to make worship a central part of his reign. As he set up a place of worship in his capital city Jerusalem he organized regular worship services that were planned and well prepared for. Notice what the Bible says:

1 Chronicles 15:19-22 — *The musicians Heman, Asaph, and Ethan were chosen to sound the bronze cymbals. Zechariah, Aziel, Shemiramoth, Jehiel, Unni, Eliab, Maaseiah, and Benaiah were chosen to play the harps. Mattithiah, Eliphelihu, Mikneiah, Obed-edom, Jeiel, and Azariah were chosen to play the lyres. Kenaniah, the head Levite, was chosen as the choir leader because of his skill.*

God's Word For Today

We might not be able to pronounce all their names, but it is obvious that this worship was organized, planned in advance, and well prepared by skilled musicians. We can be sure that God is thrilled when we take the time to be creative, prepare, and then present our worship to Him.

But God also loves it when we encounter His presence unexpectedly, and in that moment we stop to offer a sort of spontaneous burst of praise. Immediately after God parted the waters so the Israelites could cross on dry ground, they held a spontaneous worship service.

Exodus 15:20-21 — *Then Miriam the prophet, Aaron's sister, took a tambourine and led all the women as they played their tambourines and danced. 21 And Miriam sang this song: "Sing to the LORD, for he has triumphed gloriously; he has hurled both horse and rider into the sea."*

Oftentimes it is helpful to remember that the Christian walk is like any other relationship. Spouses love it when we remember special days like anniversaries, birthdays, and other holidays...planning special events that are carefully chosen and well thought out. But they also like it when we just stop by the store on our way home and pick up a card and flowers...just because we love them.

Our relationship with God is no different. Whether planned in advance, well rehearsed, and well presented...or on the spot and without rehearsing, God loves it when our worship finds its base in a strong and deep connection between our heart and His. Both carry equally well a very important message – WE LOVE HIM!

Our Response For Today

In our special place for connection with God, let’s sit quietly and give ourselves the time we need to connect with God at a heart level. Fully aware, now, of His presence, let’s take some time to list our blessings...perhaps even writing them down on a sheet of paper, if necessary. As He brings to our minds blessing after blessing, let’s allow our hearts to overflow with thanksgiving and praise. And if a song comes to mind that conveys our feelings well, let’s sing it to Him...or recite the words out loud (if we don’t sing well). We’ve included the lyrics to some well-known worship songs in the back of this devotional guide. Reading through one or more of them might help guide our hearts as we begin.

And let’s resolve to come to church tomorrow with hearts that are ready to worship - well prepared to join in with every worship song and every prayer.



Worshipping Though Prayer

Connecting with a God whom we cannot see, hear, or touch is neither natural nor intuitive. And yet, worship depends entirely on connecting to a God just like that. No wonder the Bible says, “Without faith it is impossible to please God.”

Prayer is one of the great dimensions of worship, and because it is, it is not optional for us.

Luke 18:1 — *One day Jesus told his disciples a story to show that they should always pray and never give up.*

1 Thessalonians 5:17 — *Never stop praying.*

Ephesians 6:18 — *Pray in the Spirit at all times and on every occasion.*

Prayer doesn't become worship until we properly understand the purpose of prayer. When we pray as God intended, our hearts not only connect with His, our hearts get changed to become like His. Prayer isn't about changing God's will. It's about getting in God's presence, sharing our hearts with Him, and then waiting for Him to make the next move.

In a wonderful way that perhaps only God fully understands, His will is released into our world as we worship Him through prayer.

God's Word

James 4:2 — *You do not have, because you do not ask God.*

This doesn't always happen immediately. No, sometimes God's answer doesn't come until we have prayed many times. And sometimes it doesn't happen at all because our motives for asking are wrong.

James 4:3 — *And even when you ask, you don't get it because your motives are all wrong—you want only what will give you pleasure.*

When we pray like this, we are not really worshiping God. We're bowing down to our own selfish desires, and asking God to make them happen for us.

Now, let's contrast that attitude with its opposite. What happens when we come to God in prayer with a heart full of worship that really wants only His will?

John 15:7 — *If you remain in me and my words remain in you, you may ask for anything you want, and it will be granted!*

How can this be true? If we're listening, during our prayer sometimes God will direct our spirits in a different direction. What we were sure we wanted when we started to pray, we no longer want. Through our connection with Him, He has changed our hearts to desire something else – something more in line with His will. And when our hearts connect with God's to the point that His words remain in us, then we are really worshiping God through prayer...and we can be assured that our prayers will be answered.

This is also why Jesus instructed us to pray “in His name.” This phrase, usually included at the end of our prayers, presumes that we have identified ourselves with Him. Actually, we wear the name ‘Christian’ which includes His name. It also presumes that any requests made are requests that would be considered in alignment with His desires, much the way one who represents another would make a request in his name or on his behalf.

Our Response For Today

In our quiet time today, let's focus on worshiping God through prayer. Instead of just coming to Him with a list of things we'd like to see happen, let's focus on worshiping Him. Let's praise Him by sharing with Him the ways in which we see Him actively working in our lives, our church, our community, and our world.

Then, once our hearts are fully connected with His, let's carefully choose and present our requests to Him with confidence...making sure we listen and give Him the opportunity to change our heart and requests. We can be sure that we are His children and He will hear and answer us according to His perfect will. For His word says,

“Let us go right into the presence of God with sincere hearts, fully trusting Him.”



Personal Worship

God sees and is intimately familiar with every person...every church...every society...in every location...and at every point throughout human history! Wouldn't it be great if God looked down on 'our' moment in the sun, 'our' slice of human history, and said to Himself, "I am well pleased with how my children in this place and in this day and age connected with Me...interacted with Me in worship...chose to follow Jesus...and gave themselves to understanding how to serve others. They truly embraced Me!"?

This can only happen as we continue to grow in our walk with God. No wonder Peter wrote to the Christians of his day:

2 Peter 1:2 — May God give you more and more grace and peace as you grow in your knowledge of God and Jesus our Lord.

Nowhere is this more evident that in the development of our own personal worship of God. In one sense, gathering together as a church to worship God is much easier than developing a personal lifestyle of worshipping God as an individual. Corporate worship is planned and prepared for us. All we have to do is just show up and participate.

However, there is something else that we should consider. Our corporate worship can only be as deep and rich as our personal worship of God is outside of church. In other words, worship during a church service is really supposed to be the overflow of what we've already been expressing to God all week long. No amount of planning and church preparation can replace that.

A key question, then, is – What is my personal worship of God supposed to look like? To help us understand this, let's look at the teaching of Jesus.

God's Word For Today

Matthew 6:1-18 – Don't do your good deeds publicly, to be admired by others, for you will lose the reward from your Father in heaven... Give your gifts in private, and your Father, who sees everything, will reward you...When you pray, go away by yourself, shut the door behind you, and pray to your Father in private. Then your Father, who sees everything, will reward you...When you fast, comb your hair and wash your face. Then no one will notice that you are fasting, except your Father, who knows what you do in private. And your Father, who sees everything, will reward you.

From His teaching we can learn the following things about growing in our personal worship:

- It is possible to do 'worshipful' things without actually worshipping God. Jesus made it obvious that God would not be pleased (worshiped) when our deeds of worship are only done in public or for the purpose of impressing others.
- Personal worship of Him would include giving, praying, and fasting. Each is an important component of our worship of God. Let's take a brief look at each.

Giving, whether to others in need or to God's church and kingdom, is a natural and important part of our worship. Giving is a natural expression of a heart that truly loves another. And when we love God and have a desire to worship Him, we find great joy in giving to Him.

Yesterday our entire devotional was on praying. Here we will only add one additional thought. Worshipping God through prayer must begin with personal prayers offered to Him. When our praying is only or primarily done in public, it ceases to bless Him or us, and no longer qualifies as worship. It's merely a religious activity.

And finally, fasting is a part of our worship of God, as well. Most people think of fasting as refraining from eating food for a specific period of time, but fasting is really far more comprehensive. Rightly understood, fasting is setting aside a specific period of time for the purpose of connecting more deeply with God. Refraining from certain or all food during that time is done to intensify our search and remind us that seeking after God is actually more important than food itself. And, once again, Jesus reminds us that if we do this to be noticed and considered 'spiritual' then even our fasting ceases to be worship.

Our Response For Today

For today, rather than focus on God's interest in New Life, let's focus on His interest in us individually. As we give to God and others this week, let's do it from a platform of worship, and not duty. Let's make each gift our 'present' to God. And let's pray also from the platform of worship, making each of our prayers a carefully chosen act of worship. And let's set aside a lunch or an evening for the specific purpose of connecting more deeply with God.



Worship – In Every Circumstance

At New Life we sometimes sing a song with the following lyrics:

*Blessed Be Your Name; In the land that is plentiful;
Where Your streams of abundance flow; Blessed be Your name.
Blessed Be Your name; When I'm found in the desert place;
Though I walk through the wilderness; Blessed Be Your name*

*Blessed be Your name; When the sun's shining down on me;
When the world's 'all as it should be; Blessed be Your name.
Blessed be Your name; On the road marked with suffering;
Though there's pain in the offering; Blessed be Your name.*

*Every blessing You pour out I'll turn back to praise;
When the darkness closes in, Lord, Still I will say'
Blessed be the name of the Lord; Blessed be Your glorious name.*

This song is based on the response that Job, a man in the Bible, had to an incredible string of tragedies that came into his life. But it declares a truth that is woven through the entirety of Scripture – worship of God is appropriate...even expected...regardless of the circumstances of life. The mountaintop of joy is an appropriate place for worship. But so is the valley of trial and tragedy. And everywhere else in between.

That's why Paul wrote this to the people in Thessalonica who were undergoing persecution for being followers of Jesus.

God's Word For Today

1 Thessalonians 5:17-18 *Pray continually; give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus. – NIV*

Solomon noted that the scope of human experience is broad and diverse.

Ecclesiastes 3:1-8 — *For everything there is a season, a time for every activity under heaven. A time to be born and a time to die. A time to plant and a time to harvest. A time to kill and a time to heal. A time to tear down and a time to build up. A time to cry and a time to laugh. A time to grieve and a time to dance. A time to scatter stones and a time to gather stones. A time to embrace and a time to turn away. A time to search and a time to quit searching. A time to keep and a time to throw away. A time to tear and a time to mend. A time to be quiet and a time to speak. A time to love and a time to hate. A time for war and a time for peace.*

Each of these is a natural and normal part of our human experience. God knew this all in advance, and He gave us the resources necessary to cope with each successfully. But what are those resources? And, how can we tap into them?

One of the chief resources that is available to us is worship. When we experience tragedy, worship reminds us that God is still good, life is still a blessing, that the tragedy hasn't escaped God's notice, and that He will provide all that we need to make it through this tough time. And when we experience prosperity, worship reminds us that it has come from a God who loves us, that we shouldn't fall in love with prosperity, and that we have been blessed to be a blessing. In this way, worship helps us keep our perspective and equilibrium no matter what life brings our way.

Our Response For Today

Even though life has many peaks and valleys, let's be grateful that God has enabled us to worship Him through it all. Let's personalize and pray the prayer that David wrote, probably as he took care of his father's sheep.

Psalm 23

LORD, You are my shepherd; I have all that I need.

You let me rest in green meadows; You lead me beside peaceful streams.

You renew my strength; You guide me along right paths, bringing honor to Your name.

Even though I walk through the darkest valley, I will not be afraid, for you are close beside me.

Your rod and Your staff protect and comfort me.

You prepare a feast for me in the presence of my enemies.

You honor me by anointing my head with oil.

My cup overflows with blessings.

Surely goodness and unfailing love will pursue me all the days of my life.

And I will live in the house of the LORD forever.

Worship – When Life Is Good

Should our worship of God be the same during times of trial and times of prosperity? In some ways the answer is 'yes.' We don't decide to worship God by how we feel. And our worship of God shouldn't be more sincere during times of trial than it is during prosperity...or vice versa.

However, in another sense, our worship should change, depending upon whether we are on the mountain or in the valley. Our natural and God-given body language varies greatly as it reflects our present circumstances. God loves it this way and recognizes it as being consistent with how He made us.

This means, among other things, that if we try to worship God in the valley in the same ways that we worship Him on the mountain, our worship will not be completely authentic. It will not, therefore, bless God as it should, nor benefit us as He intended.

So how should we worship God when life is good?

God has given us natural ways of expressing ourselves when we know we are blessed...when we are really excited about something...and when we are thrilled. We clap our hands. We dance. We sing. We shout. And we get a little 'happy.' So we shouldn't be surprised, then, to find God wants us to worship Him with these same expressions of joy.

God's Word For Today

Psalm 47:1 *Come, everyone! Clap your hands! Shout to God with joyful praise!*

Psalm 150:4-6 *Praise him with the tambourine and dancing; praise him with strings and flutes! Praise him with a clash of cymbals; praise him with loud clanging cymbals. Let everything that breathes sing praises to the Lord!*

Even in heaven the angels worship Him with exuberance and extravagance — often even shouting His praise.

There are two precautions, however, that we should pay close attention to when we worship God during times of great prosperity.

As odd as it seems, the first precaution is restraint. Some of us were raised in very conservative settings where any form of real joy was considered inappropriate in God's presence. No one ever shouted at church (unless they were really angry). And no one praised God with tambourines, drums, the clash of cymbals, or dancing. Even though perfectly natural to our human spirit...and even though we were given these inclinations by God Himself...somehow they were considered irreverent. How sad that these natural expressions of human emotion that were given to us for the purpose of worshiping God, should somehow be taken away from us and declared 'unworshipful.'

The second precaution is unfaithfulness. When we experience times of great prosperity and blessing, history reveals that we almost always wander and drift from God. It's as if we fall in love with the blessing rather than the God who gave us the blessing. Trials often 'drive' us to our knees in prayer, but no one ever says, "I was driven to my knees by my continual blessings."

Aware of this, Moses warned the people of his day...

Deuteronomy 8:12-14 — *When you have become full and prosperous and have built fine homes to live in, and when your flocks and herds have become very large and your silver and gold have multiplied along with everything else, be careful! Do not become proud at that time and forget the Lord your God.*

Perhaps more than any other people in history, we who are citizens of one of the most prosperous nations in history need to pay attention to this warning. We are blessed...extravagantly blessed!

Our Response For Today

Let's get in our usual quiet place, but not be so quiet today. Let's break out some great worship song that inspires us to sing, clap, and even dance before God. And if we can't do that right now (because we're commuting on a bus, etc.) then let's reserve some time later today when we can get alone with God and 'let loose' in His presence.

In our prayers, let's praise Him for His great provision in our lives. And let's make a list...a long list...of His wonderful blessings, and then let's take some time to just bless Him for every one of those blessings. We are children of a Father who loves and blesses us extravagantly. Let's make our praise of Him extravagant as well!



Worship – When Life Isn't So Good

What a great time we had yesterday – listing our blessings and then singing and dancing before the God who gave them to us! Wouldn't it be great if that's all every day held? Actually, that day is coming. It's called heaven!

But for now we are all too aware that some days have little natural joy in them. In fact, some days don't seem to have any blessing in them. And worse yet, some days have great tragedy! How do we worship God then?

In the same way that God gave us natural ways to express our joy, He has given us equally natural ways to express our sorrow and grief. No one has to tell us to get quiet and introspective. No one has to coach us to weep and cry. These responses are built into us from birth. They're just part of being human.

Our worship during the times when life isn't so good takes the form of these natural expressions. The same David who encouraged us to clap our hands and shout to God with songs of praise also wrote these words about himself as he went through a valley:

God's Word For Today

Psalm 6:6-9 *I am worn out from sobbing. All night I flood my bed with weeping, drenching it with my tears. My vision is blurred by grief; my eyes are worn out because of all my enemies. Go away, all you who do evil, for the Lord has heard my weeping. The Lord has heard my plea; the Lord will answer my prayer.*

And James, the brother of Jesus, writes:

James 5:13-14 — *Are any of you suffering hardships? You should pray. Are any of you sick? You should call for the elders of the church to come and pray over you, anointing you with oil in the name of the Lord.*

In every case, weeping and concern are combined with prayer. But how should we pray when we are really confused...really upset...really discouraged? David reveals that God even likes it when our worship takes the form of 'verbal processing' with Him.

Psalms 10:1-3 — *O Lord, why do you stand so far away? Why do you hide when I am in trouble? The wicked arrogantly hunt down the poor. Let them be caught in the evil they plan for others. For they brag about their evil desires; they praise the greedy and curse the Lord. Arise, O Lord! Punish the wicked, O God! Do not ignore the helpless! Why do the wicked get away with despising God?*

It is important to note the difference between coming to God in an attitude of trust and honest confusion, and coming to Him with a heart filled with bitterness, resentment, and accusation. David isn't accusing...he's asking God an honest question. And because he was honestly and openly asking, God answered him. Notice how this prayer of David ends:

Psalm 10:16-18 — *The Lord is king forever and ever! The godless nations will vanish from the land. Lord, you know the hopes of the helpless. Surely you will hear their cries and comfort them. You will bring justice to the orphans and the oppressed, so mere people can no longer terrify them.*

A wise person once noted that every trial either makes us bitter or better. Worshipping God during these times ensures that we will end up better. Our faith in God will be stronger, our inner strength will be greater, and our ability and desire to help others during their trials will be increased.

Our Response For Today

Tucked away in a little known book in the Old Testament is one of the greatest prayers for times when life isn't so good. In our quiet place today, let's pray this prayer from our hearts:

Habakkuk 3:17-19 — *Even though the fig trees have no blossoms, and there are no grapes on the vines; even though the olive crop fails, and the fields lie empty and barren; even though the flocks die in the fields, and the cattle barns are empty, yet I will rejoice in the Lord! I will be joyful in the God of my salvation! The Sovereign Lord is my strength!*



Postures Of Prayer

In the last eighteen days we have talked about the spiritual, emotional and mental aspects of worship and praise. Today we get to look at the 'package' that produces our worship...our bodies. This will allow us to complete all four basic components of our nature.

Recently a friend of the New Life family and a worship leader passed away. At her memorial, a picture of her standing on the rocky shores of Guam's ocean was used throughout the service. She was standing with her head raised to the sky, arms outstretched and upward, with her eyes closed. Those who knew her were confident that as she stood in that pose, her mind was focused on the God of her existence and purpose of her mission. A mutual friend commented that every Christian should have one picture taken in that pose; surrender before the God we worship.

In all of history, and in every culture, there have always been outward physical expressions that communicate respect. Those in the military salute. Muslims bow to the ground five times daily in prayer. Young people at concerts reach out to be touched by the performers. Every culture and generation has its own protocol, but the purpose of each is still the same. Each is a gesture that communicates respect.

The Bible also reveals that eventually every human who has ever lived will assume this posture of worship before God. Even those who have rejected His salvation and forgiveness...yes, even those who have cursed His name and mocked His followers...every person who has ever lived will bow before the One who gave them life.

God's Word For Today

Romans 14:11 — "As surely as I live," says the Lord, "every knee will bow before me; every tongue will confess to God."

When we physically bow, kneel, or raise our hands to God we are acknowledging that our position is of a lower standing than His. It is a posture or gesture of humility and respect.

Praying, singing, or just listening to God from any of these postures not only blesses God, it often intensifies our awareness of His presence. That's why God invites us to include various postures in our worship of Him.

As followers of Christ we find great joy in bowing before Jesus. He left heaven to come and rescue us from sin and eternal separation from God. His head was bowed in suffering and death. Ours is bowed in humility and appreciation. His arms were raised in crucifixion. Ours are raised in praise. His knees were bowed in suffering. Ours are bowed in reverence.

Our Response For Today

It is foreign to our culture to bow, kneel, raise hands, or drop to the ground before anyone for any reason. However, inside the loving, gracious, and forgiving arms of Jesus, and at the foot of the throne of an all-knowing, powerful, jealous and protecting God we call Father, comes the natural and loving response of a grateful and connected people to "reach out and touch" the very soul of the One we love and to have Him reach back and confirm that connection with us.

Psalms 95:6-7 — *Come let us bow down in worship, let us kneel before the Lord our Maker, for He is our God; and we are the people of His pasture, the flock under His care."*

Out of love and adoration, let us express our standing with the Almighty by kneeling; bowing out of the overflow of our hearts for the protection and provision that He has supplied in this lifetime and in our eternal future. Blessings and praise to our wonderful God!!



Worship Through Service

One of the most precious and memorable moments in a parent's life, is the dedication of their two year old who wants to help with everything. For a few years, the child feels honored to be given a task. The child 'worships' its parents and expresses it by loving to help them. But, somewhere around eight this ideal begins to fade. On very few occasions in our lifetime do we ever re-enter that pure and innocent level of admiration to anything or anyone.

One of those rare occasions is when we encounter Jesus; who came to earth to represent/demonstrate God and His nature. To reconnect us with God, He purchased forgiveness for the sins that scarred our lives and offers to help us rebuild. When we realize this, we find ourselves, once again with a childlike willingness to worship and 'help' our God...out of our deep appreciation and gratitude.

And God, being such a fun and loving Father, wants us, His children, to know that nothing brings him greater delight and happiness than heart-felt service.

Writing to the Christians of his day, the Apostle Paul encouraged them to worship God by serving Him. In fact, he called the work they did in ministry their spiritual act of worship.

God's Word For Today

Romans 11:33-36; 12:1 — *Oh! The depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God!!! How unsearchable His judgments and His paths are beyond tracing out!! Who has known the mind of the Lord? Who has been His counselor? Who has ever given to God that God should repay him? FROM Him and through Him and to Him are all things! To Him be the glory forever and ever! Amen...So, I encourage you, Christian family, 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.*

Paul is teaching us, in these verses, that offering our time, resources, and energies is an act of worship. "Service" is our response back to God for His goodness to us. We CHOOSE to demonstrate our childlike devotion to Him by 'helping out'.

God has provided New Life with a very practical way to worship Him through service today. This is our annual FALL CLEAN event. We're joining with the other churches of City Ministries...more than 500 volunteers...to work beside our city's employees to trim hedges, pick up trash, paint over graffiti, and other tasks that will improve our community. Reporting for duty in our work clothes at the fairgrounds at 8:00, we will represent Christ in a very tangible way as we serve our town.

Our Response For Today

To participate in "service worship" requires us to be selfless, humble, and desirous to make a difference in the world around us. When we serve we get the opportunity to step up closer to God. But first we must step down!

It is natural for children to want to choose which 'help' they will give. This usually produces more work for the parent. In the same way, we don't help God when we get picky about what we are willing to do for Him. Worship is not what I want to do **when** I want to do it!! It is being connected to God and hearing what He **needs** me to do and then be willing to obey.

Ephesians 6:7 — *Serve wholeheartedly, as if you were serving God, not men, because you know that the Lord will reward everyone for what good he does.*

Worshiping through service is always a win-win situation!



Worship – Special Occasions

The words ‘special occasion’ make us think of birthdays, holidays, and anniversaries. Certain milestones in life would also be special occasions — graduations, goals met, memorials, etc. From the beginning of time people have celebrated the good in life.

Early in scripture God records...even commands...feasts and celebrations which included song, food, dance, and even crafts. All were brought to Him as expressions of praise and thanksgiving for some accomplishment He brought in their lives.

Tonight, at 6:00, we will have an opportunity to mark a milestone — twenty one days of prayer and praise celebrating what we have learned about worship. We who share a common faith and trust in God will stand before our Father, raising our voices and hands, singing of what He has done for us. Some will bow in acknowledgement of who He is and what He is to us. For some, tears will come, as hearts are reminded or touched in the truth of God; the reality of what we would be without Him.

God's Word For Today

***Psalms 89:1- 2** — I will sing of the Lord's great love forever. With my mouth I will make your faithfulness known through the generations. I will declare that your love stands firm forever; that you established your faithfulness in heaven itself.*

***Psalms 86:8** — Among the gods, there is none like you, O Lord; no deeds can compare with yours. All the nations you have made will come and worship before you, O Lord; they will bring glory to your name.*

Through songs and prayer...and even silence...we will bless our Creator, our Savior, our King, and our Lord. With one heart and one voice we will ‘draw near to God so that He will draw near to us.’

Whether seeker or believer...young or old...experienced or inexperienced, this service is for everyone. Older children and teens will experience the joy of worship right along with their parents. Even those of us who have never personally experienced worship will find ourselves drawn in as we are directed and led.

For 21 days we have learned about worship and practiced it on our own. Tonight we get to experience it together!

Our Response For Today

Let's ask ourselves today: “What could be more important or more enticing than standing proudly...yet humbly...with others to worship the God who gave everything to save us?” And then let's structure our evening so we can be in place at this special service to worship God declaring...

***Jeremiah 10:6** — There is none like you, O God; you are great and great is your name in strength.*

Those of us who are just learning how to worship are on the threshold of a GREAT ADVENTURE. We will find that our gracious, mighty, and majestic God is delightful beyond imagining. And we will discover what a high privilege it is to praise and worship Him!

Songs:

Created To Worship

(Rita Springer)

I am your sacrifice, and I am your offering
I was created to worship You
There's nothing I could bring
That would mean more than this one thing
I was created to worship You

You are all I have, All I have is You

You are all I am, All I am is You

Whatever you ask of me
There's no one I'd rather be
Then one created to worship You
In all that comes my way
Poverty fame or pain
I was created to worship You

Without You there's nothing Lord
Now and forevermore
I was created to worship You

How Great Is Our God

(Chris Tomlin)

The splendor of a King, Clothed in majesty
Let all the earth rejoice, All the earth rejoice
He wraps himself in light,
And darkness tries to hide
And trembles at his voice,
And trembles at his voice

How great is our God, sing with me
How great is our God, and all will see
How great, How great is our God

Age to age he stands And time is in His Hands
Beginning and the End,
Beginning and the End

The Godhead, Three in one
Father, Spirit, Son
The Lion and the Lamb,
The Lion and the Lamb

Name above all names
You are Worthy of all praise
and My heart will sing how great is our God

How Great Thou Art

(Carl Gustaf Boberg)

O Lord my God, When I in awesome wonder,
Consider all the worlds
Thy Hands have made;
I see the stars, I hear the rolling thunder,
Thy power throughout the universe displayed.

Then sings my soul,
My Saviour God, to Thee,
How great Thou art, How great Thou art.
Then sings my soul,
My Saviour God, to Thee,
How great Thou art, How great Thou art!

When through the woods,
and forest glades I wander,
And hear the birds sing sweetly in the trees.
When I look down,
from lofty mountain grandeur
And see the brook, and feel the gentle
breeze.

And when I think, that God,
His Son not sparing;
Sent Him to die, I scarce can take it in;
That on the Cross, my burden gladly bearing,