

# Lesson 7: Worship

**Key concept**  
Total life orientation

**Bible study**  
Psalm 95

**Memory verse**  
Hebrews 3:12-13

## Objectives

- ❖ Understand the meaning and significance of worship
- ❖ Understand where and when we can worship God

## Bible Study

**What is worship?** According to Psalm 95, worship is a total orientation of your life to Jesus Christ. The church has probably come to this psalm more than any other place in the Bible for insight on worship. It calls us to engage our emotions, our will, and our heart when we worship the God of the universe.

*“Come, let us sing for joy to the Lord; let us shout aloud to the Rock of our salvation. Let us come before him with thanksgiving and extol him with music and song.” (v.1-2)*

*“For the Lord is the great God, the great King above all gods. In his hand are the depths of the earth, and the mountain peaks belong to him. The sea is his, for he made it, and his hands formed the dry land.” (v.3-5)*

*“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. Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts.” (v.6-8a)*

In verses 1 and 2, the psalmist is beckoning the people to use their emotions as they come to God in worship. In verse 6, he extends worship into the volitional realm: you must make a choice to come, kneel, and bow down both physically and spiritually before the One who made you. That is a decision of the will. Finally, in verses 7 and 8, the psalmist mentions the heart. The heart is a summary expression for all of your being—the command center of your life. These verses together form the definition of worship in which all parts of our being are involved: worship is a total orientation of our lives to Jesus.

## NOTES

Notice in verse 3 that the psalmist compares God to other gods. In doing so, he acknowledges that all people are worshipers. The issue isn't *whether* we worship, but *what* or *whom* we worship: the great God, Jesus, or a lesser god. Even if you have never thought of yourself as religious, you worship something. G.K. Chesterton put it this way, "Every man who knocks on the door of a brothel is looking for God." The man going into a bar or brothel is hungry for love, for connection, for pleasure. These are all lesser gods; things that ultimately only the great God, Jesus Christ, can provide. Yet, we all to some degree try to orient our lives around them and pursue them for ourselves. This misplaced orientation and pursuit is worship of lesser gods.

Thom Yorke, the lead singer of the band, Radiohead, describes this well. The band is well-known and Yorke's musical career has been extremely successful. *Rolling Stone* magazine ranked him the 66<sup>th</sup> greatest singer of all time. Yet, when asked why he makes music, he said, "It's filling the hole. That's all anyone does." The interviewer followed up on this comment by asking, "What happens to the hole?" Yorke paused a long time before answering: "It's still there."

We all seek to fill the hole in our lives. If you are single you say, "If I just meet the right person to marry." The right person is a lesser god that we wrongly think will fill the hole in our lives. Or, we try to fill the hole in our lives with our children. Often mothers, though sometimes fathers as well, spend every waking moment thinking about the kids. Life's complete orientation becomes happy, healthy, smart, well-behaved children.

None of these are bad things. In fact, they are all good things. Meeting the right person is good. Having children and investing in them is good. The problem comes when we make really good things into bad things by making them our ultimate things. That is essentially what sin is. And all of us do it. All of us worship something other than Jesus. So, what the psalmist is calling us to do is to transfer our worship from a lesser god to the great God, Jesus Christ. To orient all of our lives around Him.

**Where do we worship?** Both in church and outside of church. The context of this psalm calls for worship in church. The worship leader, most likely a priest, is summoning the congregation in verse 1, "*Come, let us sing.*" Hebrews 10:25 is very clear about worship in church: "*Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing.*" This verse is saying that worshipping in the community of church is what you were made for. If you don't participate in that, you will miss out on the sacraments—the sacred rhythms for life instituted by Jesus. Notice that Psalm 95 doesn't say, "Come, let me sing" and worship alone in my car or shower. The whole psalm is plural in its call to worship; it is a call to a worshipping community, the church.

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But, church isn't the only place for worship.

*"Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts as you did at Meribah, as you did that day at Massah in the desert, where your fathers tested and tried me, though they had seen what I did. For forty years I was angry with that generation; I said, "They are a people whose hearts go astray, and they have not known my ways." So I declared on oath in my anger, "They shall never enter my rest." (v.7-11)*

The way we defined worship should make it clear that worship doesn't only take place in church. Worship is a total orientation of your life to Jesus Christ. In fact, verses 8-11 point out how the Israelites didn't worship God by orienting their lives to Him behaviorally as they were wandering through the desert. Worship wasn't just expected in church but also out of church in the desert, all day, every day. It was expected in the way they trusted and obeyed God and learned to orient their lives around Him in their journey through the desert. 1 Corinthians 10:31 makes this point as well: *"So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God."* A pint of Guinness for the glory of God; a burrito for the glory of God; spreadsheets for the glory of God; changing diapers for the glory of God. This is all of life lived as worship.

I remember talking to Bradford about 1 Corinthians 10:31 when we were engaged. We were talking about the implications of this for our sex life when we got married. So, I said, "Sex should be worship. Sex for the glory of God." And she ended up doing what girls do, which is telling her girlfriends about this conversation. Her girlfriends gave her a bridal shower, and one of the presents was a tight, low-cut v-neck white t-shirt that was air-brushed in the tackiest way you can imagine. Guess what it said on the front: "Let's worship." Whenever that shirt comes out at our house there is a resounding chorus of hallelujahs from the preacher, and we worship.

The point is that each one of us must figure out how to worship in all that we do, including our sex lives, our work lives, and our leisure activities. St. Augustine aptly summarized this by saying, "A Christian should be an alleluia from head to foot." Praise and worship are meant to be an expression of all that we are and all that we do for God's glory.

**When do we worship?** Both when we feel like it and when we don't.

Remember that the beginning of Psalm 95 focuses on the emotional aspect of worship (v.1-2). These are expressions of joy and happiness, singing, shouting and giving thanks. These are the times when in your deepest being you want to lift your hands and dance before the Lord.

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Or, if that charismatic stuff makes you a little nervous, that's OK. The point is that when you feel like worshipping, let it rip in whatever way is appropriate for you given your personality and context. When we are "feeling" the Spirit, we should respond emotionally and with passion.

However, and this is critical, the psalmist also talks about the importance of worship even when we don't feel like it. This involves an act of the will over the emotions. He highlights the two examples of Meribah and Massah, which were the occasions where the Israelites were grumbling and really just got angry at God. They didn't like the food selection in the desert and weren't too pleased with the accommodations. They felt like they deserved to stay at a 4-star hotel, or 3 at the lowest, and they just weren't satisfied.

This is often how we respond, as well, when we find ourselves in the Meribahs and Massahs of life. We get sick, lose our jobs, have conflict in relationships, lose loved ones, can't pay our bills, our kids are acting out—these are the difficult places of life. And when we are there, God says, in verse 7, "*Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts as you did at Meribah.*" The psalmist is pointing out the volitional aspect of worship. Don't harden your hearts; choose to worship whether you feel like it or not.

In his book, *A Long Obedience in the Same Direction*, Eugene Peterson says: "I have put great emphasis on the fact that Christians worship because they want to, not because they are forced to. But I have never said that we worship because we feel like it. Feelings are great liars. If Christians worshipped only when they felt like it, there would be precious little worship... We live in what one writer has called the "age of sensation." We think that if we don't feel something there can be no authenticity in doing it. But the wisdom of God says something different: that we can act ourselves into a new way of feeling much quicker than we can feel ourselves into a new way of acting. Worship is an act that develops feelings for God, not a feeling for God that is expressed as an act of worship."

Peterson says that feelings aren't necessarily the best guide for when we should and should not worship. He points out that we live in a generation that strongly values authenticity, and we wrongly think it wouldn't be authentic to do things we don't feel like doing. Therefore, if we don't feel like worshipping, then we shouldn't worship because it would be inauthentic. But Peterson says this is wrongheaded, that it is far easier to act yourself into a new way of feeling than feeling yourself into a new way of acting. That is important.

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Let me illustrate. In a marriage, what do you do when you don't feel like loving your spouse? Let me play a scenario out for you in a marriage with young kids. Every day you both go to work doing whatever it is you do, then you get home and someone must cook dinner and someone must police the kids who are screaming and throwing stuff. When the meal is over, you've survived, eaten a few things, and now somebody must clean up, brush teeth, bathe the kids and get jammies on. And all that is within you just wants to go relax on the couch. That is what you *feel* like doing. Now, try that, night after night and see how that works out for you. "Honey, I really can't do the dishes or help with the kids tonight." Your spouse responds, "Why?" You think for a moment and say, "Because I don't *feel* like it. To do so would be inauthentic." See how well that goes over. You make a volitional choice of the will to love your spouse even though you don't feel like it. And when you do, here is what you will find. If you make that choice, over and over again, not just in the nighttime routine, but throughout life, the feeling of love is being nurtured and built.

The same is true with worship. Worship is an act (at times of the will) that develops feelings for God. That is why going to church, Sunday after Sunday, is important. That is why worship on Monday and Tuesday in the Massahs and Meribahs of life is ever so important. You are nurturing feelings for God, and your heart is growing soft towards God.

**What happens when we worship?** Much more can be said than we will cover, but we will simply focus on one thing: rest. When we worship, our heart rests because we are doing what we are made to do. We see this in verses 8-11, which can at first seem like an odd way to end the psalm. The psalm begins with a beautiful call to worship and joy, thanksgiving and songs, and then this sobering reflection on Massah and Meribah. It feels like a bit of a buzz kill.

Chapters 3 and 4 of the book of Hebrews actually help us understand why the psalm ends this way because the writer of Hebrews quotes verses 8-11 and helps us understand their relation to rest. The writer of Hebrews effectively says, "Think about it. The first generation who blew it at Massah and Meribah didn't enter God's rest of the Promised Land. The second generation, however, did enter God's physical rest of the Promised Land." But then, centuries later, the psalmist says, "Today don't miss out on God's rest" (v.7). Now, why would he need to do that if the Israelites were already back in the Promised Land and had achieved God's rest under Joshua?

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Answer: this really isn't about physical rest, but rather a deeper spiritual rest, the only thing that can ultimately rev down the RPM's of your heart. Hebrews 4:1-2 says, *"Therefore, since the promise of entering his rest still stands, let us be careful that none of you be found to have fallen short of it. For we also have had the gospel preached to us, just as they did [in the wilderness with Moses]; but the message they heard was of no value to them, because those who heard it did not combine it with faith."*

The writer of Hebrews says the secret to rest is found in the Gospel, the good news of Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ has finished the work that you should have done. Jesus cried out on the cross, "It is finished, Father." Now, the people can be made righteous; they can now be adopted; they can now be redeemed.

But the writer of Hebrews also says that it is faith that triggers that rest. Faith is, fundamentally, a transfer of trust from yourself to Jesus. Re-orienting, by faith, all that you are and ever will be to Him. If you do that, you will find rest. And if you do that you are worshipping, by faith, the great God, Jesus Christ. Worship, the total reorientation of your life to Jesus Christ, brings rest. This is why, according to the Bible, worship of Jesus is the only thing that will both bring rest and ultimately fill the hole that Tom Yorke described that is in all of us. Let's worship!

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**Memory Verse**

*See to it, brothers,  
that none of you  
has a sinful,  
unbelieving heart  
that turns away  
from the living God.  
But encourage one  
another daily, as  
long as it is called  
Today, so that none  
of you may be  
hardened by sin's  
deceitfulness.  
-Hebrews 3:12-13*

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Harbor Mid-City  
Followers Forming  
Followers

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## Individual Study and Group Discussion

### Opening Question

Based upon the reading, what did you find most helpful? Was anything confusing? What was most challenging?

### Study and Discussion Questions

1. What evidence is given in Psalm 95 that “*the Lord, the great God*” is greater than all the other gods?
2. What did the Israelites do at Meribah and Massah (see Exodus 17:1-7)? What was the result of their actions?
3. What is sin, and how does it affect worship?
4. Can you describe a time when you experienced spiritual rest in worship, either in church or out of church?
5. Is there an area of your life where you find it hard to say that you “*do it all for the glory of God*” (1 Corinthians 10:31)? What steps might you take to orient that part of your life to Jesus?