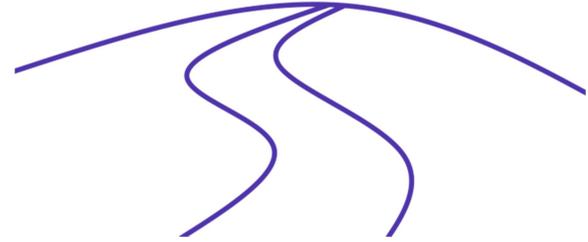


Worship

(9 Sacred Pathways)



What is worship and what are the various ways we can worship God?

Scripture

History is filled with ideas of what 'worship' is – ranging from sacrifices, to singing – it is even used as a way to describe when people are in love (*He worshipped the ground she walked on*).

Read through the Bible verses below and note what they teach us about worship.

1 Chronicles 16:1-36 (David brings the Ark of the Covenant back to Jerusalem).

John 4:1-26 (Jesus and the woman at the well).

In what different ways did King David and the Israelites worship God?

Why did they worship him?

In the story of Jesus and the woman at the well, what did Jesus teach about the future of worship?

What do you think it means to 'worship in the Spirit and in truth'?

Story

Here's a story from the Christian song-writer and worship leader, Matt Redman, about learning to truly worship:

'In the late 1990's[sic], Matt Redman's home church in Watford was going through a spiritually tough time. The worship band's musical creativity was on a high, making new and influential songs for the local church with an impact on church worship nationwide – even worldwide....

"Yet", recalled Redman, ... "there was a dynamic missing. So the pastor, (Mike Pilavachi) did a pretty brave thing." ...

Pilavachi asked his congregation what they were bringing to God in worship, or if they were just there as consumers, soaking up the music. his point was that the band and church had lost their way in worship, and the only solution was to strip out every diversion and distraction; and that included the entire sound system and the worship band....

Initially, Matt remembers, “unplugging” just led to an embarrassing silence. But eventually the congregation rediscovered their own voices, singing unaccompanied, offering up heartfelt prayers and encountering God in a fresh way.

By the time they felt sufficiently ready to reintroduce the musicians and sound system, the church had found a new perspective on worship: that it’s all about Jesus, and that it demands a response from the heart....

Matt’s song “The Heart of Worship” simply describes what occurred:

When the music fades, all is stripped away, and I simply come

Longing just to bring something that’s of worth that will bless your heart

I’m coming back to the heart of worship, and it’s all about You, Jesus

Matt’s recollection of writing the song is him scribbling it quickly in his bedroom soon after the church’s journey back to its core purpose. There were no grand intentions for it to become an international anthem. The words were simply his personal response to what he was learning about worship.’

Story from eden.co.uk; Aaron Lewendon, ‘Heart of Worship: The Story Behind the Song, April 27th, 2013, <https://www.eden.co.uk/blog/worship/heart-of-worship-the-story-behind-the-song-p11688>.

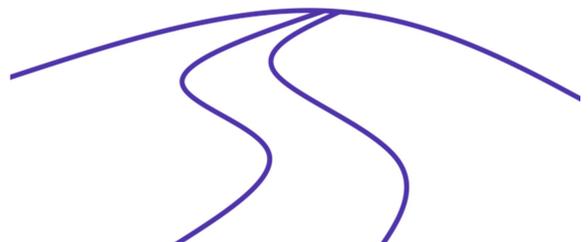
What do you think this story says about the purpose and heart of worship?

Shape

God made every one of us different. In the same way that we all have different preferences for food or music, we will have different ways that we prefer to worship God.

The following **Sacred Pathways** (taken from Gary Thomas’ book of the same title) lists 9 different ways that we can engage with and worship God. Each one helps us to engage with God in a different way or with different aspects of God’s character. We may have individual preferences, but a healthy worshipping community doesn’t limit itself to one pathway, instead it incorporates a mixture of them at different times.

9 SACRED PATHWAYS



Activism – Loving God Through Confrontation

The world we live in is far from what God’s Kingdom should look like! There is so much injustice and abuse – and as Christians we can be leading the shout for justice. James 1:27 says ‘Religion that God our

Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world.'

Asceticism – Loving God in Solitude and Simplicity

This is about shutting out the world and meeting God in solitude and simplicity. This is a preference for personal worship in a quiet place, rather than what might be perceived as the distractions of group worship. All-night prayer vigils, fasting and meditation would fall in this category.

Caregiving – Loving God by Loving Others

This is about drawing close to the Lord by providing care or meeting needs, in Jesus' name. In Matthew 25:31-46 Jesus tells a stark story about how God sees caring for others as caring for h. Serving others is a powerful way of showing that God is our priority.

Contemplation – Loving God Through Adoration

Contemplative worship is marked by an emotional attachment and surrender to God. This is about loving God by spending time in his presence – adoring him, listening to him and enjoying him. This includes activities like journal writing, where people can take time to explore their heart's devotion.

Enthusiasm – Loving God With Mystery and Celebration

This is about the excitement and celebration of group worship and usually involves exuberant music, clapping and creative forms of worship. It involves feeding off the enthusiasm of other believers and revelling in God's mystery and supernatural power.

Intellect – Loving God With the Mind

This is about loving God by engaging the intellect and using the powerful brain God gave us to learn more of who God is and what he has done for us. This includes studying the Bible as well as the work of other Christians to help us better understand God.

Nature – Loving God Out of Doors

This is about hearts opening up to God when we get outdoors. Seeing and celebrating God is the beauty and wonder of nature. This can include hiking under a big expanse of sky or sitting under a tree and thanking God for how great a creator he is.

Senses – Loving God With the Senses

This is about using the gifts God gave us of sight, sound, smell, taste and touch which he intended to help us learn more about who he is. This worship is about seeing, hearing, feeling, touching and even tasting God's presence. It can include creative art, music or things like communion, to engage our taste and touch as we remember what God has done for us.

Tradition – Loving God Through Ritual and Symbol

We can find great meaning by worshiping God according to ancient or historical patterns. Observing scheduled rhythms of prayer or festivals that believers have observed for centuries can be a real connection with God and a sense of continuing with the prayers that believers in the past have prayed. This can also include making use of historic Christian symbols.

Which of these forms does your experience of worship most look like? Which of these most appeal to you as you hear about them?

So What?

As a community, get a quick show of hands to see which of the Sacred Pathways people most resonate with and which they least relate to.

Spend some time as a community worshipping God using the pathway that most people resonated with.

Then spend some time worshipping God using a pathway that the community least related to and see if you can all worship God 'in spirit and truth' through these unfamiliar means.

Take some time to reflect on the groups experience and perhaps make a plan to explore some of the other Sacred Pathways to worship God in the future.

Grow Further

Memory verse:

John 4:24

'God is spirit, and his worshipers must worship in the Spirit and in truth.'

Other Bible Passages:

- Psalm 100
- Psalm 150
- Romans 12:1-2
- Hebrew 12:28-29
- Colossians 3:16
- Revelation 4:1-11

Other resources:

Gary Thomas, *Sacred Pathways: Nine Ways to Connect with God* (Zondervan Books, 2020).

Summary of Sacred Pathways and Assessment Tool <https://irp-cdn.multiscreensite.com/2988a589/files/uploaded/sacred-pathways.pdf>