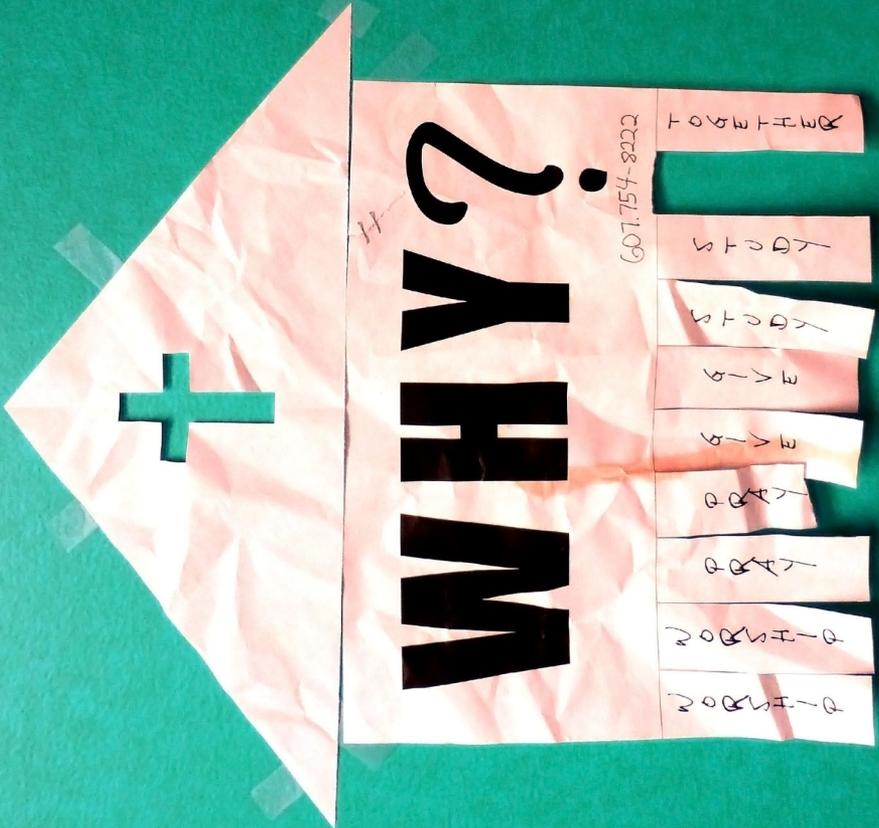


GOING DEEPER

DISCUSSION GUIDE

April 19, 2015



Discussion Guide

Why Worship?

Connecting:

45 minutes

(The following questions are intended to provide your group with a way of connecting with one another so that you might partner in the work God is doing in your lives.)

- In what ways did God move in your life this week? In what ways did you respond to him?
- What was your biggest challenge this week? In what ways, if any, did you invite God into this challenge?
- How honest have you been with us? (Graciously thank group members for their honesty if they answer that they have held back.)

Getting Started:

10 minutes

- When you hear the word “worship,” what comes to mind? Would you explain?

Diving Into the Text:

60 minutes

(The following questions are intended to provide your group with a simple road map through the text. Feel free to use these questions in ways that best fit your group and the dynamics of your own meeting.)

- Using the notes, explain the context of worship.
- Read Genesis 1.26-28.
- When God created us in his image, he made us to engage with him (worship). In what ways, if any, do you feel the desire to worship?
- Do you see this desire to worship in the world around you? Could you elaborate?
- Read Psalm 29.1-2.
- According to the Psalmist, what is the proper content and context of worship?
- What content and context for worship do people provide? In your understanding, where might these come from?
- What implications, if any, do the exhortations of the Psalmist have for modern discussions about and understandings of worship? could you elaborate?
- Read Hebrews 10.23-25.

- What reasons do you see for worshipping corporately, with other believers?
- What reasons have you heard given to encourage corporate worship? In what ways are these reasons similar or dissimilar to those in Hebrews?
- Have you ever experienced a time during which you did not worship with other believers? What happened? How might the encouragement found in Hebrews 10 address your experience? Would you elaborate?
- Consider concluding your time together with a discussion of what it might look like to incorporate worship into your gatherings. (Hint: Singing is not the only form of worship that exists!) Consider talking about how the addition of worship might impact your fellowship of Christ.

Context and Background

Worship

The English word “worship” denotes the practice of acknowledging the worthiness of an individual to receive honor. Within the Christian context, worship addresses the orientation of one’s life around God, a life which acknowledges God’s worthiness to receive honor. As such, worship speaks to the entirety of a Christian’s life (1 Corinthians 10.31) a life which in all aspects gives glory to God. However, “worship” is often used in a more specific sense to refer to words and music which Christians direct to God in praise. In this specific sense, worship is the activity of glorifying God with one’s voice and heart.

The Church has a long history of gathering together for worship, something called corporate worship. The most basic acts of worship in the early church—the reading and exposition of Scripture, prayers, the singing of psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs, and the observance of the practices of the Lord’s Supper and baptism—all derive from Jesus. Yet, a careful study of history will reveal that all but the Lord’s Supper and baptism come not directly from Jesus but from his life practices because these elements were practiced within the context of worship in the Jewish synagogue. Thus, Christian worship, minus what have been referred to as the sacraments (baptism and the Lord’s Supper) rest upon ancient Jewish worship practices.

In true worship, God is the subject (John 4.23-24). In worship, the worshiper acknowledges that God alone matters. (This ends the battles over worship styles!) As such, worship is about bringing gifts and offerings to God rather than

seeking to receive from God. The modern focus on the individual in worship—being entertained, pleased, or “fed,”—is rooted in a consumer culture rather than a heart of worship. In true worship, the worshiper is a contributor rather than a consumer. The modern consumerist trend in worship is destructive because it puts people at the center rather than God, something the Bible calls idolatry, a practice strictly forbidden (Exodus 20.1-6). Idolatry is forbidden because worship transforms the worshiper into that which he worships (Isaiah 6.9-10; Romans 12.1-2). Therefore, to worship anything other than God is to misshape a person into an image he was never meant to bear (Genesis 1.26-28). The trend of focusing on the individual in worship creates an environment in which people ask things like whether worship is an experience or a feeling and whether church services created the appropriate feelings. This inherently divides the body of Christ because not all believers share the same experience in a single gathering; thus, they inevitably rate a worship experience as superior or inferior which sets up the possibility of judgment and condemnation of one’s fellow believer or leaders. From a biblical viewpoint, worship is essentially an engagement with God on the terms he proposes and in the way he alone makes possible.

The Text

Genesis 1.26-28: *Made to Worship*

When God created people, he made them in his own image; that is, God put a piece of himself in people. While the identity of the image of God has raised no little debate, the purpose of bearing God’s image is plain. People bear God’s image for at least two purposes: the image of God enables people to experience God’s life, specifically creative rule and community (Genesis 1.26-27; Genesis 2.18), and the image of God enables people to experience God’s presence, making a way for physical people to experience a spiritual and holy God (Genesis 3.8-9; John 4.24). It is this last aspect of bearing God’s image which pertains to the issue of worship. Worship is about engaging with God. Thus, when God made people in his image, he made them to engage him; that is, God made people to worship.

Psalms 29.1-2: *The Content of Worship*

The Psalms are the ancient hymnbook of the Jewish people. In these ancient songs, we discover not just the words used to worship God, but the invitations and instructions for such worship. In this Psalm, David begins with such an instruction. David invites the celestial beings to engage in worship which puts God at the center. The content of this worship involves ascribing (acknowledging) God’s glory,

strength, splendor, and holiness. Two truths about worship and its content come to the fore in this invitation: true worship puts God at the center as the audience, and true worship reflects back to God who he is. It is important to note that David uses a phrase which can include not just angelic beings but people as well (sons of God). Therefore, proper worship for people puts God at the center and involves people reflecting to God who he truly is. This is something for which people are inherently well-suited because they already bear God’s image (Genesis 1.26-28).

Exodus 20.1-6: *Made to Worship Just One*

One of the greatest temptations people face is the temptation to worship something or someone other than God. People are made to worship, to reflect glory, but the irony is that they often reflect the glory of something other than God. Scripture defines the worship of anything other than God as idolatry, a practice which God strictly forbids. The first two commandments explicitly forbid the practice of idolatry and the second two implicitly forbid the practice. In fact, the entirety of the Decalogue is built upon the assumption that idolatry is forbidden because God claims to be the Lord and God of people (Exodus 20.1-2). Because he is Lord and God, no other gods exist (Exodus 20.3) and no other gods are to be created by making created things out to be the Creator (Exodus 20.4-6). God not only forbids the practice of idolatry but he claims that he is jealous of people’s worship and will punish those who do not worship him.

In ancient terms, idolatry involved literal statues. In modern terms, idolatry typically involves a focus upon the self; that is, our culture idolizes the individual. This self-absorption can be seen in our fascination with fashion and body image, but it can also be found in the modern emphasis on the person in the worship experience. Modern worship has become focused on the likes and dislikes of a person, typically expressed in terms of style. This is nothing short of an idolatry of self because it puts people at the center of the worship experience rather than God.

Isaiah 6.9-10: *We Become Like What We Worship*

God’s staunch stand against idolatry becomes reasonable when one considers the powerful outcome of worship. Worship transforms people into the very thing worshiped. Worship forms people’s image. Isaiah touches upon this in Isaiah 6. The book of Isaiah is a collection of prophecies spoken to Israel calling them back to God. While issues of social justice come to the fore, the primary

charge against Israel is that of idolatry (Isaiah 2.6-8). Throughout Isaiah, God mocks the foolishness of worshipping idols which cannot speak, hear, or act (Isaiah 44.6-23; 48.1-11).

When God commissions Isaiah (Isaiah 6), he tells Isaiah that the people of Israel will be unable to see or hear the message Isaiah will speak. Their ears are dull and their eyes are closed. Interestingly, this is the same description God provides for the idols the Israelites worship. They have become like what they worship. Paul picks up this same theme in Romans 12.1-2 as he notes that worshipping God—true worship—transforms people so that they know God.

Hebrews 10.23-25: *Worshipping Together*

Reflecting God's glory is the very thing people were made to do. People were made to worship. Thus, life itself becomes a means of worshipping God (1 Corinthians 10.31). However, the people of God have a long tradition of gathering together at set times to declare God's worth corporately. Within a discussion of Jesus as the great High Priest—a worship discussion!—the author of Hebrews notes the reason behind such corporate gatherings. While people might worship on their own, and they should if they live properly for God's glory, there exists a need to come together with other worshippers. This need is rooted in the mutual encouragement of believers to hold God at the center and to continue to live a life which reflects his character: love and good deeds. Thus, corporate worship is needed to keep a person properly aligned in their daily act of worship.

Real life with Blake:

Why do we worship? I don't mean the worship which marks our individual comings and goings. I am talking about what we do on Sunday. Why do we gather and sing? Why do we spend time listening to what God has to say? Are we gathering simply out of tradition? Is it duty? Are we just carrying on some old practice that has lost its meaning? Hardly. We worship because we were made to worship. God designed us to worship and to worship him alone. This is why we worship together. On our own, on my own, I easily fall victim to the temptation to worship something other than God. I will worship praise and achievement. I will worship status. I will worship others. I will worship myself. I have this terrible bent to turn my gaze upon things other than God, but my regular gathering with fellow believers calls me back.

In my times of weakness, I am strengthened by their exhortations that God alone is strong. In my times of need, I am sustained by their reminders that God is enough. In my times of doubt, their voices joined with mine makes me aware that I am not alone. I need to worship, not just to turn my face to God but to turn my face to God with others because in so doing I find the strength to focus in a way I cannot do on my own.

Real life with you:

The Sunday worship thing can be confusing, especially if you didn't grow up going to church. For those who did grow up in church, the whole Sunday thing can lose some of its shine, a matter of habit more than anything else. Add to this the whole debate of what songs to sing and what kind of preaching is right—we are just touching on the surface of the debates here—and many people want to run screaming, from worship that is. We need to worship. We were made to worship God and we need one another in that practice. Sure, we can worship God on our own. We do this when we live properly, living for God's glory, but we need a regular gathering, an opportunity to join our voices, minds, and bodies with others in worship. We need the whole Sunday thing. Why? Because apart from this we succumb to the temptation to worship something other than God. Somehow worshipping with others provides us with support, it gives us a reminder, it issues forth the invitation to do what we were made to do: worship God. As we worship God, we are called from our misguided focus upon the things around us, the things within us, and, our very selves and called to make God the center once more. This week, pay attention to the things around which you are orienting your life. As you notice these things, seek to notice what impact the orientation of your life around such things is having upon you, your attitude, your agendas, your priorities. After this week of noticing, attend a worship service at Union Center and seek to focus solely upon God, reflecting back to him who he is through song and word. Pay attention to yourself once more. What impact, if any, has the corporate worship experience had upon you? We are not talking about feelings but the deep things of your heart: your attitude, agendas, and priorities. Each week return to corporate worship seeking to focus solely upon God and notice the impact it is having upon you. The impact you notice is the power of worshipping with others.