

*Psalm 95:1-7 (NRSV)*

- <sup>1</sup>O come, let us sing to the LORD;  
let us make a joyful noise to the rock of our salvation!
- <sup>2</sup>Let us come into his presence with thanksgiving;  
let us make a joyful noise to him with songs of praise!
- <sup>3</sup>For the LORD is a great God,  
and a great King above all gods.
- <sup>4</sup>In his hand are the depths of the earth;  
the heights of the mountains are his also.
- <sup>5</sup>The sea is his, for he made it,  
and the dry land, which his hands have formed.
- <sup>6</sup>O come, let us worship and bow down,  
let us kneel before the LORD, our Maker!
- <sup>7</sup>For he is our God,  
and we are the people of his pasture,  
and the sheep of his hand.  
O that today you would listen to his voice!

*Romans 12:1-2 (NRSV)*

I appeal to you therefore, brothers and sisters, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. <sup>2</sup>Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God—what is good and acceptable and perfect.

*“We come today to our second holy habit, worship. Our worship of God is the only appropriate response to our Creator and Redeemer. And it is a necessary habit of all those who seek to be disciples of Jesus Christ.”*

Worship, the second of the seven holy habits, seems rather straightforward. Make a habit of attending worship each week. Be here at one of the five services. If I’m not here, attend worship somewhere. If I have a lake house that keeps me away from St. Andrew some weekends, then have a lake church. Visit churches when I’m away traveling.

Like I said, pretty straightforward and certainly something that can be embraced by a goal-oriented person. And, make no mistake, weekly worship attendance is necessary. It is foundational to growing in our faith, to being a disciple of Jesus. It isn’t optional, intended only for the weekends when I’m in the mood or willing to get up on time. The truth is that there is no healthy relationship with Jesus without a relationship to the church -- a regular, habitual relationship.

I get all that and I’ve written about it before. But there is always this nagging sense that I’m missing something when I come to the subject of worship. Across the board, Christians whom I respect want to talk to me about living a life of worship. Committing to weekly worship attendance, yes, but also more. It is about cultivating a life that is infused with my worship of our Creator and God. Yet, that often seems abstract to me. How do I make a worship-filled life concrete and tangible, not just a jumble of religious-sounding words?

*Voices worth hearing*

Richard Foster writes that “To worship is to experience Reality, to touch Life. It is to know, to feel, to experience the resurrected Christ in the midst of the gathered community. It is a breaking into the Shekinah of God, or, better yet, being invaded by the Shekinah of God.”<sup>1</sup>

N. T. Wright reminds us that our word *worship* is derived from an Old English word, *worþship*. God is the Almighty, holy and just, creator of all. He is worthy of our focus, devotion, and respect. Further, Bishop Wright offers us two “golden rules of true

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<sup>1</sup>“Shekinah” is a Hebrew work that speaks of God’s presence. As Foster puts it, “‘Shekinah’ means the glory or the radiance of God dwelling in the midst of his people. It denotes the immediate Presence of God as opposed to a God who is abstract or aloof.” These quotes are from Foster’s best-selling book, *The Celebration of Discipline*.

spirituality”:

- (1) *you become what you worship* and
- (2) *worship of the one true God makes you more truly human.*<sup>2</sup>

These two simple rules remind us that the way to find the joy, peace, purpose, and fulfillment that we all seek is to focus on becoming an ever truer

### Worship as Service

Typically, the biblical authors use the Greek word *proskyneō* to connote worship and it is used only in relation to God. The wise men bow in worship, the disciples worship Jesus. When Cornelius tried to worship (*proskyneō*) Peter, Peter stopped him, reminding Cornelius that worship is reserved for God (Acts 10:25-26).

Jesus reminds us that the worshiping of God is bound up with serving God. When Jesus was tempted in the wilderness, the devil showed him the whole earth promising “All these I will give you, if you fall down and worship me.” Jesus replied by quoting from the Hebrew scriptures (Deut 6:1), “Worship (*proskyneō*) the Lord your God, and serve (*latreōu*) only him” (see Matthew 4:1-11). In the New Testament, *latreōu* is most often translated “serve,” but is translated “worship” more than a dozen times!<sup>1</sup> Why? Because serving God is worshipping God! In the NT, *latreōu* always denotes service rendered to God, whether it is in a ministry of prayer (e.g., Acts 26:7), missionary work (2 Cor 8:18), or simply the service to God rendered by leading a righteous life (see Phil 3:3).<sup>2</sup> This is why you’ll sometimes hear Christians say things like “Our mission trip was an act of worship.” They are right. We acknowledge God’s glory and worth when we serve him. Worship includes our prayers and praise songs, but so much more!<sup>3</sup>

1. For example, Luke 2:37, Acts 7:7, Acts 24:14, Philippians 3:3, and Rev 7:15

2. From Kittel’s *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* (abridged by G. Bromily)

3. One last observation. In the first centuries after Jesus, Christians stopped using the word *proskyneō* for worship because it was also used by pagans in reference to the worship of their gods. Instead, when referring to their own worshiping of the one true God, Christians used only the Greek word for serving, *latreōu*.

disciple of Jesus. Worship lies on every step of this path. Finally, Wright urges us to remember that Christianity, much less worship, is something that people do together.

Dallas Willard writes, “In worship we are ascribing greatness, goodness, and glory to God. It is typical that we put every possible aspect of our being into it, all our sensuous, conceptual, active, and creative capacities. We embellish, elaborate, and magnify. Poetry and song, color and texture, food and incense, dance and procession are all used to exalt God. And sometimes it is in the quiet absorption of thought, the electric passion of encounter, or total surrender of the will. In worship we strive for adequate expression of God’s greatness. But only for a moment, if ever, do we achieve what seems like adequacy.”<sup>3</sup>

In today’s Scripture passage from his letter to the Romans, Paul takes the Jewish worship practices in the temple, which centered upon animal sacrifice, and reshapes them around the believers’ worship of God revealed in Jesus Christ. Paul urges them “to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship.” This is a densely packed sentence, but conveys the sense of offering our whole thinking selves to God, holding nothing back, segregating no portion of our lives. All of it, every bit of us, laid before God.

Eugene Peterson puts Paul’s words this way: “Take your everyday, ordinary life – your sleeping, eating, going to work, and walking-around life – and place it before God as an offering. Embracing what God does for you is the best thing you can do for him.”<sup>4</sup>

### Habitual worship

Worshipping weekly with the gathered community is *the* foundational habit for disciples. If we are to move forward<sup>5</sup> in becoming who God has made us to be then communal worship is the place to begin.

But leading a worshipful life is all-encompassing, touching every part of our everyday life. It is experiencing the reality of God every day, letting God’s presence invade us in all moments so that we may become more like the one we worship. It is waking with a word of praise for being given another day. It is giving thanks to God for each meal. It is a kindness performed for another. It is time spent with Scripture each day so that we can come to know better the one we worship. It is time spent in prayer, pouring out our hearts to the

<sup>2</sup>From Wright’s book, *Simply Christian*.

<sup>3</sup>From Willard’s book, *The Divine Conspiracy*.

<sup>4</sup>From Peterson’s paraphrase of the Bible, *The Message*.

<sup>5</sup>We can only move forward or backward. Nothing stays the same for very long. Where growth stops, decay begins.

one we worship. It is caring for our neighbor. It is giving ourselves, our time, and our money to God's service. It is inviting others to "come and see" the one we worship. It is serving God in countless ways, as the page two text box highlights.

Each of the seven holy habits is the concrete expression of a worshipful life, lived before God, as we seek to become more Christlike, or to put it in a way that might surprise you, to become more human as God created humanity to be. These habits take what often seems abstract, the worshipful life, and makes it real and tangible. These are habits I can embrace and develop, that I can even set goals around. Perhaps the day will come when I don't need goals, when the habits will have become an indivisible part of me. But, for now, I'll embrace the habits as I seek to embrace God.

### Worship and the People of God

The worshiping of God by the people of God has always been foundational to our story. Indeed, one of the commandments brought by Moses to the Hebrews was that they were not to worship false Gods (Exodus 20:4-6). God told his people how they were to worship him. The sacrificial system centered on the tabernacle and then the temple was part of God's law, part of God's covenant with Israel. Even God's message to them that he didn't really want their sacrifices so much as he wanted their hearts was brought to Israel 700 years before Jesus by the prophet Micah (Micah 6:6-8).<sup>1</sup>

In his conversation with the Samaritan woman at the well (see the readings below), Jesus teaches the woman that the "hour is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem [the location of the temple]." Instead, Jesus tells her that God seeks those who will worship in spirit and truth. Still today, the basic patterns of our worship services go back to Luke's account of Jesus on the road to Emmaus when he "opened the scriptures" to his companions and then blessed and broke bread with them (Luke 24:13-35). Christians have always gathered to worship through the proclamation of God's word and the celebration of holy communion.<sup>2</sup> For John Wesley, worship was an "ordinary" means of grace, that is, one of the usual, non-spectacular ways in which God helps us along in our growth as disciples. Prayer, preaching, holy communion, hymns, and bible reading are all ways in which we can be drawn into "an encounter with the living God through the risen Christ in the power of the Holy Spirit."<sup>3</sup> This encounter is realized through the communal fellowship of God's people and is crucial to building thriving Christ-centered relationships among all believers.

<sup>1</sup> In these verses, God tells Israel that he doesn't require their burnt offerings or sacrificial rams. Rather, the Lord requires that we "do justice, love kindness, and walk humbly with our God." Service to God and worship are bound together tightly!

<sup>2</sup> Recognizing that there "should be a strong sense of the importance of Holy Communion in the life of the church," the United Methodist 2000 General Conference established a committee to develop a comprehensive document on the theology and practice of the Lord's Supper in the United Methodist Church. Their paper, *This Holy Mystery: A United Methodist Understanding of Holy Communion* was adopted by General Conference in 2004. A copy is available at [www.gbod.org/worship/holymystery](http://www.gbod.org/worship/holymystery).

<sup>3</sup> The quote is from the *UMC Book of Worship*, p. 13. For more on Methodists and worship, see William H. Willimon's, *Why I am a United Methodist*, 1990, Abingdon Press

## READING WITH HEART & MIND, JAN 13 – JAN 19

How do these passages inform our understanding of worship, the second holy habit? In what new directions are we pointed as we come to a deeper understanding of worship and its robust practice?

**Monday, Genesis 8:20-22** Noah worships

**Tuesday, Leviticus 16** The ritual of the Day of Atonement when sacrifice was made for the sins of Israel

**Wednesday, Micah 6:6-8** What does God require of us?

**Thursday, Luke 24:13-35** The Emmaus account. Two disciples meet the resurrected Jesus.

**Friday, John 4:19-26** Jesus talks with a Samaritan woman about worship.

**Saturday, Acts 2:42-47** Life and worship in the first Christian community

## Sermon Notes

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### **Winter Bible Academy starts this week!!**

To register go to [www.thebibleacademy.com](http://www.thebibleacademy.com)

We've got another great class line-up including the enormously popular *Alpha* class on marriage, as well as the *Alpha* introduction to religion and faith. We're also offering two one-day Saturday workshops: Rev. Michael Reeves will be teaching us *How to Study the Bible* and Laura Zuber will repeat her workshop on spiritual gifts. Scott Engle will be teaching classes on Jesus and on David. Frankey Commer is leading a class on Methodism. Bob Pannell's class is on the psalms. Laura Zuber is also leading a daytime class on Jesus' "I Am" sayings. You can see that there is the usual offering of diverse, interesting, and meaningful classes. Childcare will be provided.

### **Continuing This Sunday! Exploring World Religions**

Taught by Scott Engle at 11:00 in Festival Hall on Sunday morning

This series is an introduction to the major world religions - but with a twist!

Join us any week that you can, as each week will stand on its own.

### **Holy Habits Makeover with Rev. Doug Meyer**

Doug is offering a Bible Academy class on the holy habits. It is being offered at two times: Sunday mornings and Thursday lunch. The series will explore the biblical foundations and practical hands-on methods for growing our discipleship through intentionally focusing on the seven "holy habits."

The classes start this week! To register go to [www.thebibleacademy.com](http://www.thebibleacademy.com)

## **Questions for Discussion and Reflection**

1. Psalm 95 is a hymn of praise, expressing the psalmist's worship of God. Praise and thanksgiving are both expressions of our worship. The Psalmist can hardly contain his joy at the blessings done for him by his God. For what are you most thankful? Of the things for which you are thankful, what brings you the greatest joy? How do you express your own joy and thankfulness to God?
2. What are your expectations when you come to a worship service at St. Andrew? What do you hope to receive? What do you intend to give? What sort of worship service do you find most satisfying? Why? What do you think God wants from us in our worship services?
3. As noted in the study, in the first centuries after Jesus, Christians stopped using the word *proskyneo* for worship because it was also used by pagans in reference to the worship of their gods. Instead, when referring to their own worshiping of the one true God, Christians used only the Greek word for serving, *latreou*. How might our attitudes about service change if we see our service as an act of worship? How might our service acts themselves be changed? Why are so many of us reluctant to serve? Might this reluctance be overcome if we saw service as an act of true worship?
4. What are some ways that you can cultivate a worshipful life? Do you attend worship each week? If not, why not - what holds you back? What changes in your life would you need to make to worship every week?