

## Week Five

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# *The Rhythm of Worship*

“They broke bread in their  
homes and ate together with  
glad and sincere hearts...”

## INTRODUCTION

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**A teenager raises her hands as the worship band plays. A man kneels, his eyes closed, his hands outstretched. A young woman dances. Children sing.**

Different people, different postures, all worshipping in different ways. But beneath the sound and the movement, what else is going on? What really is 'worship'?

For the early followers of Jesus, worship wasn't confined to music. It wasn't restricted to a particular day or to a specific sacred space. 'Worship' was an everyday thing – the outworking of a 'glad and sincere heart'.

This week, as we move our focus to the rhythm of worship, we'll look at different aspects of what worship means, using passages from the Old and New Testaments.

We'll talk about the things we love, and the power they have to grip our hearts – about why God is worthy, and what it looks like to put Him first.

As we do, our prayer is that 'worship' becomes something we intentionally do, wherever we go – in the busy moments of life and the quiet. And, that what happens when we gather together on a Sunday is simply an overflow of a lifestyle of worship.

Worship is what we were made to do.

## BIBLE PASSAGES

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Use the notes on 'How to read the Bible' to reflect on or study one of these passages each day in the week leading up to small group session.

### Day one

Reading: Exodus 32:1-6

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### Day two

Reading: Isaiah 6:1-8

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### Day three

Reading: Psalm 13

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### Day four

Reading: Luke 10:38-42

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### Day five

Reading: Romans 12:1

# 1 Rhythm of Worship | We all worship something

Reading: Exodus 32:1-6

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## DEVOTIONAL

We begin our focus on the rhythm of worship by looking at a well-known passage from the Old Testament.

Moses (the leader of God's people, the Israelites) has been off spending time with God, and the Israelites are worried he's not coming back. So they take matters into their hands, pooling their gold earrings and turning them into a cow-shaped idol.

It's easy to laugh at the Israelites for bowing down to a golden calf, or to mock religions that make idols of man-made things – but idol worship is a daily ritual here, too. Only, the idols are often much more subtle, and perhaps more dangerous, as a result.

In his book, 'Worship Matters', Bob Kauflin writes: "Each of us has a battle raging within us over what we love most – God or something else." The truth is, we all worship something. What we love most will determine what we worship – and when we love and serve anything in place of God, it is idolatry.

The most innocent of things can become idols when we place too much significance on them. A relationship. Our work. Family. The latest gadget, sports, money, a hobby. The most powerful idols are often things we can't even see – our reputation, other people's approval, power. We think, "If I just had that, then I'd be happy", looking to temporary pleasures to fulfil eternal desires.

Throughout the Bible, God repeatedly condemns idolatry. He hates it when, as His people, we go after other 'gods', because he knows that they're not really 'gods' at all. They promise much, but they deliver little. They are powerless to save us.

When Jesus was asked, what is the greatest commandment, he replied: You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. (Matthew 22:37)

God wants us to love Him more than our relationships more than our 'stuff', more than we love our own lives. That doesn't mean we can't love anything else, of course. But it means that we can't love anything in the right way unless we love God more.

## RESPONSE

What (or whom) do you worship? To think this through, try answering these questions: What does your mind drift to when you have nothing else to think about? What makes you angry when you don't get it? What do you fear losing the most?

## NOTES

## 2 Rhythm of Worship | He alone is worthy

Reading: Isaiah 6:1-8

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### DEVOTIONAL

In today's passage, Isaiah is worshipping in the temple – the same temple he has likely worshipped in countless times before. Only this time it's different. This time, he gets a glimpse of what has been going on behind the scenes all along. Isaiah gets a vision of God. And the vision is majestic.

Picture it. The train of the Lord's robe fills the temple. Angels worship Him – covering their eyes and feet in the presence of this glorious sight. Their repeated cry is 'Holy, holy, holy'. Perhaps the best definition of this word 'holy' is 'other' or 'altogether different'. These angels have been worshipping God across the ages – and they still haven't yet got over his 'otherness'.

When you get a big vision of who God is, it changes everything. Your perspective shifts. Things you've held in high esteem – things, even, that you've built your life around – suddenly seem small, insignificant and unworthy in comparison.

When Isaiah sees God as he really is, he sees himself as he really is. He realises that he's not the centre of the universe after all – that there's a being who is so glorious, so worthy of worship, in whose presence Isaiah is not even worthy to stand. And he's ruined. He is broken. He is undone by the Holiness of God.

One day, we will all stand, as Isaiah did, before this Holy God. I wonder, what will we think? What will we say? What will we do?

Here's the truly remarkable thing in all of this. When Isaiah gained this true perspective of God and of himself, he found that God was not only utterly glorious and unspeakably Holy, but also unimaginably kind.

The God who is so Holy, so 'other' has compassion for us. He cares for us. He says to Isaiah, "Your guilt is taken away and your sin atoned for." He says that to you, too, if you are a follower of Jesus. Your guilt is removed, your sin is paid for in full.

Our God is worthy of our worship. Nothing and no one else comes close to him. So we worship, simply because he is worthy.

### RESPONSE

Have you had a big vision of who God is? Ask the Holy Spirit to speak to you and show you.

### NOTES

## 3 Rhythm of Worship | Choosing to worship

Reading: Psalm 13

### DEVOTIONAL

It's amazing how often the writers of the Psalms seem in the depths of despair one minute, and lifting up God's name the next. This isn't because of a sudden miraculous change in their circumstances, but instead it reflects a deliberate choice to worship God in the midst of whatever is going on.

In the Bible, God commands us to worship Him. He doesn't need us to worship. It isn't because of any lack or insecurity on His part. It's because He knows it does us so much good.

In Paul's letter to the Thessalonian church, Paul writes 'rejoice always'. We might be tempted to ask "Really, though? In all circumstances? What about when life is tough – when we face those things that threaten to rob us of joy? Toothache. Tiredness. Work pressures. Anxiety.

Or how about when the pain of life hits us so hard that it takes our breath away? Suffering, illness, bereavement, death? Do we simply smile through the pain?

In fact, worship isn't about denying the hardship we are facing. If anything, as we see in the Psalms, pouring out our hearts to God builds our relationship with Him. It becomes a part of our worship as we acknowledge that He is big enough to take it, strong enough to hear the truth of how we're feeling, and great enough to deal with all that life throws at us, to sustain us through it, and to bring us out the other end.

He brings us out the other side of our circumstances, and ultimately He will bring us through the other side of life – fully into His glorious presence. Now we see Him in part – one day, we will see Him as He really is, and live with Him forever.

And so, in all things, we choose to fix our eyes on Him. We consider that He loves us so much that, through unimaginable suffering, He gave himself for us. We catch a glimpse of his glory, we reflect on His kindness and His patience... and we are moved to worship as the only appropriate response.

And as we worship, we draw closer to Him, and our perspective on life comes more into line with His perfect view of things. Today, whatever the circumstances of life, we can sing the Lord's praise. **For he has been good to us.**

### RESPONSE

Have you ever had to make a deliberate choice to worship God, in spite of what you were facing? What happened? How did it change things?

### NOTES

## 4 Rhythm of Worship | An unhurried life

Reading: Luke 10:38-42

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### DEVOTIONAL

Even as I sit down to write this, I'm all too aware of my to-do list. Countless things to do, and so little time to squeeze it all into. Did God not know it would be like this? Was 24 hours a day really enough?

It's easy to sympathise with Martha in this story – particularly on those days when an unhurried life feels like a total impossibility. But it is there in black and white in the Word of God. Jesus' approval of Mary's choice is clear (as is, it should be said, His compassion and kindness to Martha.)

In Psalm 46, God says: "Be still and know that I am God." He says it because it is essential to our wellbeing. We may be busy. We may have responsibilities. But – we **need** to be still. We need to remember who He is, and who we are. **He is God and we are not.**

I have noticed recently my sheer delight when something that was in the diary is unexpectedly cancelled. Even if that thing was good, enjoyable, useful... It's just so lovely to have the space. Why do we find it so hard to deliberately create that space?

Partly, it's because we have an enemy who wants to keep us occupied with the less important things in life. The devil would love us to be caught up in busyness, if our endless activity keeps us away from God. But partly, too, we don't value rest highly enough. We must be careful. Hurry can be a great joy-robber. Our busyness can stand in the way of our worship.

If we are always rushing, when are we going to remember what God is like? When will we have a moment to consider his glory, the wonder of his creation, his incomprehensible love for us, or the distance he stooped to pick us up and set us free?

However busy we are, a rebalance is possible. There is a way to 'work from a place of rest' rather than 'resting from work'. So take a minute today – now even – to pause. To slow down. To breathe. And to focus on Him.

It's only as we take some time to be still, that we gain a proper perspective on life. He is God, we are His children. Nothing else matters as much as this.

### RESPONSE

Be ruthless with your calendar. What could you NOT do this week, in order to spend more time with God?

### NOTES

## 5 Rhythm of Worship | Whole life worship

Reading: Romans 12:1

### DEVOTIONAL

It's fair to say that Paul, who wrote today's passage, knew a thing or two about worship. We don't know if he could sing – or if he was any good on a guitar – but he understood what true worship was all about.

For Paul, worship was something that engaged his whole body, his whole being, his whole life, after he'd met with Jesus.

So, what does it mean to offer your body as a living sacrifice? This is how the Message translation of the Bible puts it: *'Here's what I want you to do, God helping you: Take your everyday, ordinary life – your sleeping, eating, going-to-work, and walking-around life – and place it before God as an offering.'*

True worship is about making a choice, day after day, to take our whole lives, and to place them before God as an offering to him. And so the simplest things, done with the right heart attitude, can become worship.

Our thought life can become part of our worship... the things we choose to focus on – the thoughts we allow to form and stick. The way we choose to see situations, or other people.

Our words can be part of our worship. The things we intentionally choose to say or choose not to say. What we write (or what we don't write) on social media.

How we use our bodies can be part of our worship. The choices we make about our relationships and our sex life. What we do with our hands, our feet. What we allow our eyes to focus on and our ears to listen to.

How we use our **money**. How we use our **time**. How we use the gifts we've been given. Worship is about ordinary decisions made in ordinary places on ordinary days. Taking our whole lives and choosing to use them to bring glory to God.

Of course, the word 'therefore', right at the start of the passage, is key here. Paul is saying we worship **in view of God's mercy**. In other words, worship is a response. We don't live like this to earn the love of God, we live like this because he first loved us.

Jesus gave his life as a perfect offering in our place. It is finished. He has done it. **Therefore**, as a daily response, what can we do but worship Him?

### RESPONSE

How are you using your whole life to worship God? Are there any changes you could make – things you'd like to start doing, things you'd like to stop – in order to worship him more?

### NOTES