

1. The Master's Instructions about Himself

1.5 Worshipping God (Psalm 34:1-22)

Our worship of God should be both private and public. The Bible contains many records of people having times *alone* with God. Abraham was called to sacrifice alone. Jacob wrestled alone with God. Moses was shown God's plan for the nation while he was alone. Nehemiah was broken while he was alone in God's presence. Jesus was up early to pray alone to his Father. However, there are also many records of people worshipping God *together*. Their many voices were raised as one. Moses and the Israelites sang God's praises across the Red Sea. Solomon and the people saw fire come down from heaven together as they prayed in the temple of the Lord. All the people listened attentively as Ezra read them the book of the Law. They wept together and they rejoiced together. The early Christians prayed together for boldness and the place in which they were gathered was shaken by the Holy Spirit.

Worship is an outpouring of the heart to God. It is an overflow of the Spirit of God. It is being totally occupied with God. When you are watching a good film or sports match you become so absorbed in it that you are not really aware of anything else around you. True worship is being *aware* of God, being *absorbed* with God, and simply *adoring* God.

God is worthy of our worship

The hosts of heaven worship him (Revelation 4:11). His holiness demands we worship only him (Exodus 34:14). Jesus himself said: 'True worshippers will worship the Father in spirit and truth' (John 4:23).

The Bible's words of worship

In the Psalms we are encouraged to 'ascribe to the Lord the glory due' (29:1-2). 'To ascribe' means to give or to attribute. In the same verses we are encouraged to 'worship the Lord in the splendour of his holiness'. The word 'worship' means to bow oneself down to. In Psalm 34:1-3 we are exhorted to 'extol the Lord at all times', which means to praise him highly. We are to 'boast in the Lord', which means we are to take pride in him. We are to 'exalt his name together', which means we are to raise his name high above all else. Psalm 145:3 declares that the Lord is most worthy of praise. He is to be highly commended. He is to be declared glorious.

Therefore in our worship we should give ourselves to him. We should humble ourselves before him. We should praise him and declare our pride in him. We should speak out his greatness. We do not worship God to *get* blessing from him. We worship God to *give* pleasure to him.

The Bible's ways of worship

Without looking too hard we can learn that there is a variety in worship which is acceptable to God. Psalm 46:10 says: 'Be still.' Psalm 47:1 says: 'Clap your hands ... shout to God with cries of joy.' Psalm 104:33-34 says: 'I will sing to the Lord,' and asks for acceptable meditation of him. Psalm 105 asks that we give him thanks and that we tell others what he has done (vv.1-4). Psalm 134:2 says: 'Lift up your hands in the sanctuary.' Habakkuk 2:20 urges silence. When one of heaven's windows was opened, John saw angels and men 'down on their faces before the throne' worshipping God.

True worship does not depend on what we are doing, but on what we are before the living God. It does not depend on where we are geographically, but on where we are before the living God. Regarding form there is freedom, but our faith must be alive.

Worship is primarily an act of our will

If we have a holy fear of God and a healthy faith in him, we will also have a hunger for more of him. If there is no contention between us and God we will want to be with him. If we are conforming to his will, we will want to worship him. We will not allow anything to stop us from worshipping God because to stop would be to sin. Our faith may have to overcome our feelings. God is worthy of our worship whether we feel like it or not!

True worship is deciding that God is worthy of our praise and doing whatever helps us (and others if we are together) to do it.

Discussion guide on 'Worshipping God'

Read Psalm 34:1-22.

1. List all the words from this Psalm that describe what worship is. (You may find eight or nine). When you have your list, discuss what each word *means* - and how *you*, or other people, would try to do it.
2. Describe what it means to be "totally occupied with God" in worship. It may help to also describe what it means to be totally occupied with something else in life. What can you learn from these comparisons?
3. Discuss various *ways* we can worship God. The following Bible verses will give you some of the ways, but there will be more. Psalm 104:33-34; Psalm 105:1-3; Psalm 46:10; Isaiah 57:15; Psalm 47:1; Psalm 150:3-5; Habakkuk 2:20; Psalm 134:2; Revelation 7:10-12.
4. What does your outward appearance in worship mean to God? Why is your attitude of heart in worship more important than what you are actually doing? 1 Samuel 16:7, Luke 21:1-4.
5. God is always worthy of our worship, no matter what we feel like at the time. How can you worship God when things are apparently bad all around you in life? Psalm 19:1-4; Psalm 107:8, 15, 21, 31. Sometimes faith has to overcome feelings!
6. Psalm 34:11 says: "Come my children, listen to me; I will teach you *the fear of the Lord*". Discuss what this "fear of the Lord" actually is. How is this best expressed in our worship, both public and private?