

It is also important to approach God in a spirit of obedience and submission to his will. In the book of James we are exhorted, "Do not merely listen to the word... Do what it says" (1:22).

Concentrate on God. Put your heart into it. Lay aside all other thoughts and distractions and focus only on God and spiritual things. Express your love with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength. (See Lk. 10:27).

What Does It Mean When... ?

... people raise their hands while singing or praying? Raising hands toward God is a symbol of agreement or response to what is being sung or prayed. It can also signify surrender to the will of God. These actions are not required, but some people find them to be a meaningful physical expression of their emotions.

... people go forward to kneel at an altar? The altar is nothing more than a piece of wooden furniture, but it is used as a convenient place to kneel for special prayers. Sometimes it is used for special praise, thanksgiving, or supplication. Sometimes sinners are invited to the altar to pray a prayer of repentance. It is a sacred place for Christians because God often meets the needs of people there.

Something to Do

This lesson is different from the previous ones. There are not a lot of questions to answer or Bible texts to look up. Worship can only be learned by experience. Please participate in the following exercises, and check the appropriate box when each is completed.

- 1. Attend a public worship service and try to apply the principles learned in this lesson.
- 2. Set aside a special time to read the Bible, meditate, and pray alone.
- 3. If you have a family, try to get together to pray.
- 4. Look for at least three opportunities during the day to worship God for an experience you are having.
- 5. The next time you sing a hymn, concentrate on the meaning of the words. Make them *your* words.
- 6. When a public prayer is offered, pray along with the leader. You may silently think, "Yes Lord, I want that too. Amen, I agree with what he is saying. Please do what he is asking, Lord." Etc.

Lesson Eight Worshipping God

What is worship?

Worship is the act of recognizing God for who he is. It includes an attitude of reverence, devotion, and adoration as a person thinks about God. Worship is the human reaction to the glory, majesty, and power of God.

Worship can also be thought of as celebration. God's people meet to celebrate the resurrection of Christ, and to rejoice over what God has done and is currently doing in and through their lives.

The Elements of a Worship Service

Music

Across the ages music has been an important element in worship. It has a large place in the Bible. For example, the Psalms are basically hymns. We are often exhorted to worship with songs and musical instruments. Music is often used to "set the mood" or prepare our hearts and minds to worship. It also enables us to express our feelings in beautiful, or inspiring language.

Sometimes we direct our singing to God. This is usually the case in what we call hymns. On other occasions "gospel songs" may be directed to each other or the unbelievers in our midst. It is important to meditate on the meaning of the words as we sing.

Prayer

Prayer is almost always included in worship as we praise and give thanks, or present our requests to God.

In a church service the pastor may pray a "pastoral prayer" in which he/she presents the needs of the congregation to God.

Praise and Thanksgiving

Praise and thanksgiving may be expressed not only in prayer but through singing and personal testimony.

An Offering

"No man should appear before the LORD empty-handed: Each of you must bring a gift in proportion to the way the LORD your God has blessed you" Deut 16:16-17. It is very appropriate that we express our

gratitude in a concrete, practical way. It should not be thought of as an imposition, but as a true act of worship from the heart.

Bible Reading

One of the most important aspects of worship is hearing God's Word. God speaks to us through his Word.

A Sermon

In public worship a sermon is usually included as a part of the service. True preaching is based on Bible-truth. As God's Word is preached, we receive blessing, inspiration, strength, and guidance.

The Sacraments

Periodically the sacraments are used in worship. A sacrament is a symbolic ceremony that represents an internal experience. There are two sacraments: (1) Baptism, and (2) The Lord's Supper, commonly called Communion.

Baptism with water is symbolic of being born again and the beginning of a new life by a new believer. (More attention will be given to baptism in a later lesson.)

The Lord's Supper was established by Jesus himself. It is done by eating a small piece of bread which represents his broken body, and drinking a small amount of grape juice which represents the shed blood of Christ. Jesus commanded us to do it in "remembrance" of Him. (You can read more about it in Mt. 26:26-29; and 1 Cor. 11:23-29.)

Different Kinds of Worship

While all worship is essentially the same, it may take place in varying circumstances.

Public Worship

Public or social worship usually takes place in a church service or a gathering of believers. The Bible exhorts us, "Let us not give up meeting together ... but let us encourage one another" (Heb. 10:25). Christ also gave the promise, "Where two or three come together in my name, there I am with them" (Mt. 18:20).

The important thing to remember about public worship is that the participants are not mere spectators. The pastor or worship leaders may direct our thoughts, but they are also worshipers. They do not do the worship while others watch. All present are to join together as they lead in the act of worship.

For example, when the pastor or another person leads the congregation in prayer, all persons present should join with him/her in prayer and faith, praying for the same thing in a united way.

Private Worship

Private worship can take place in two ways: (1) as a regular routine at an appointed time, (2) as a spontaneous act anytime, any place.

When a person sets aside a certain time every day to worship, it is usually called "personal devotions" or "quiet time." The basic elements are reading the Bible (sometimes adding an inspirational passage from a devotional book), and prayer. Most Christians have found it best to do it at the beginning of the day.

Personal worship may also take place anytime. It may be inspired by a beautiful scene or a sunset. A lovely flower or a friendship may prompt us to give thanks to God. A close call in a dangerous situation may evoke a response of thanksgiving. There are many circumstances that can turn our attention to God for a moment of worship.

Family Worship

It is very important for families to worship together. Families that pray are happier families. It should be done on the level that is understood by children present. It may include reading a passage from the Bible, talking about the meaning of the passage, a song, and prayer (the leading of which may be rotated among the family members). It should be kept relatively short, interesting, and meaningful to current experience.

The Benefits of Worship

The benefits of worship are many, including:

1. We receive inspiration and blessing in the presence of God.
2. We are strengthened through His Word by the Holy Spirit.
3. We receive truth and instruction. We grow in knowledge.
4. We enjoy fellowship with God's people. When we worship together, we are made conscious of our unity in the family of God. We pray, "Our Father ..."

The Correct Attitude in Worship

For a worship experience to be meaningful a person must be absolutely sincere with God. You cannot fool Him or play games with Him. He already knows what is in your heart!

He is not interested in what is only empty ritual or ceremony. Of this kind of worship the Lord said, "These people come near to me with their mouth and honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me" (Isa. 29:13).