

INTRODUCTION

Unlike almost every other church, the Lord's church refuses to use instruments of music in worship. This is entirely appropriate; the Bible gives us no authority to do so, and we obey Him by maintaining our position and defending it. However, a *capella* song by itself does not automatically constitute pleasing worship. The Bible contains numerous other commands and examples that tell us what our worship should be.

This book is intended to help Christians everywhere fulfill God's plan for worship. In order to accomplish this end, it explains how worship works, describes how the process of worship can break down, and then provides solutions for those problems. It concludes by examining Biblical examples of worship so that we ourselves can understand the nature of a sacrifice of praise. In addition, it contains hymn lyrics at the end of each lesson that we can study as we consider what God wants the hymns we use to be like. By the end of this study, all of us should have a better understanding of what is required by the worship of God.

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1

The Path to Worship

Introduction.

1. In your own words, what is worship?
2. What do you now consider the thing you do best in worship? Why?
3. What's your worship weak point? Why?
4. How do you think you could become a better worshipper?

Exploring the Path to Worship.

Scriptural Form. Most people in the church are already aware that there is a right way and a wrong way to worship. Often, this attitude causes us to focus on the form worship takes. This material is not going to be particularly form-focused, but the proper form still needs to be mentioned.

According to Ephesians 5:19, our worship needs to take the form of "songs, hymns, and spiritual songs," three different types of religious song employed by the first-century church. Because God commands us to sing, that command excludes all other kinds of activity that might become part of our musical worship. No music other than the song of the saints can be pleasing to God.

Furthermore, the way we participate in worship is also important to God. In Colossians 3:16, Paul informs us that our song worship must involve "teaching and admonishing one another." Just as the command to sing excludes worship modes ranging from organ music to a Christian rock band, so this command to teach excludes an audience-choir arrangement. All of us must be taught in worship. All of us must be admonished. However, we ourselves must teach and admonish too. This is why our singing must be congregational. No so-called "worshipper" who chooses to be silent can hope for God's approval.

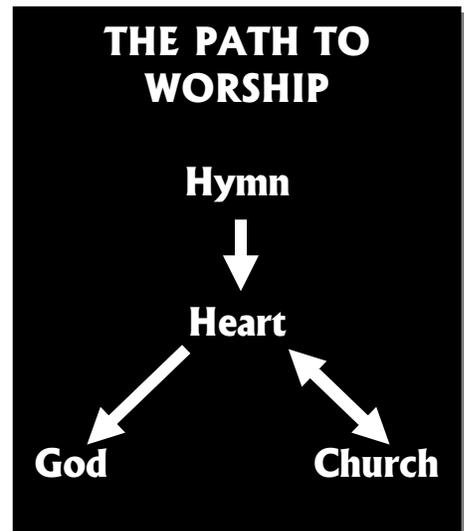
The Path to Worship. In our focus on these formal requirements for song worship, we do well. The Bible makes abundantly clear that God delights only in those who adhere to the teachings of His word. However, this focus on form has caused us to lose sight of other, equally important things that our worship must be. It is possible for us to be singing together as a congregation, yet be utterly displeasing to God. Our outward show of godliness may conceal a godless apathy of mind and heart.

This danger is very real, and it is all the more dangerous because it is so subtle. I can tell within ten seconds of the opening hymn whether a church is engaged in congregational song or not, but I may never know that the brother who has sung beside me for ten years has failed to worship in the eyes of God. Unless I examine myself, I may never even realize that I also have ceased to worship. For this reason, we must consider the path of our own worship, so that we can learn from our own lives whether we are doing what God requires.

This path to worship begins with a **HYMN**, which can be any of the three types listed in Ephesians 5:19. Without a pre-written hymn, it is impossible for a congregation to worship together. Hymns provide the spiritual idea and impetus for congregational worship.

This hymn must stimulate the **HEART** of each congregational worshipper. In order to understand this, we first have to understand the way "heart" is used in the Bible, which is much broader than the way we use it today. The Bible uses "heart" to describe much more than the seat of the emotions. In Biblical language, "heart" can also represent concepts ranging from desire to intellect to wisdom to will.

In order to worship with our hearts, we must engage all of these different areas of our being. For example, we must be intellectually involved in worship. In 1 Corinthians 14:15, Paul notes the importance of understanding in worship even when he is singing a hymn that has been given to him by the Holy Spirit. Unless we have some spiritual idea in mind, something that directs our intellect to God, it is impossible for us to worship.



However, this does not mean that our worship should be purely intellectual in nature. We can understand and consider every word in a hymn, but unless that understanding provokes joy, love, and thanksgiving within us, it has been a useless exercise. Numerous Scriptures throughout the Old and New Testaments describe the emotion that must be a part of worship, of which Psalm 84:2, Luke 1:46-47, and Colossians 3:16 are just a few. We cannot directly hear emotion in worship (although we can guess at its presence or absence), but God is keenly aware of its existence.

Indeed, **GOD** is one of the next steps in this progression. As Romans 15:6 implies, glorifying Him is one of the primary objects of our worship. God loves to hear us praise Him, both in a proper way and in a proper spirit. If we forget that our hymns are directed to the Almighty, we have forgotten one of the main reasons why we sing.

However, just as we sing to God, so too we sing to the **CHURCH**. This is the way in which we fulfill our Colossians 3:16 responsibility to teach and admonish one another in song. We need to be aware of our brethren as we worship, and sing in a way that edifies them as well as it glorifies God.

We must also remember, though, that the Colossians 3:16 process is not a one-way street. Just as we seek to edify them, we must learn to consider what they are saying, once again with the **HEART**. Thus, each of us teaches and admonishes the other. This process sets up a feedback loop. As we

consider the song of our brethren, it moves us emotionally and causes us to take our praise to a higher level. As they listen to our heightened praise, they also worship more intensely. Ultimately, the reinforcement we receive from the congregation is a powerful tool we can use to make our worship acceptable to God.

Thus, the path to worship can be summarized in this way: The spiritual thought of a hymn provokes our hearts, which then sing praises that are heard both by God and by the church. In turn, the church sings to us, which stirs our hearts again. This is the pattern for praise that is pleasing to God.

The Sacrifice of Praise. However, it is not enough to understand or even to half-heartedly practice this pattern. The Bible tells us that God is a jealous God (Exodus 20:5), and He requires worship from us that demonstrates His pre-eminent place in our lives. The consequences of failure in our worship are recorded in the book of Malachi.

In the time of Malachi, the Jews had repented of their idolatry and were at least nominally servants of God. However, their service proclaimed their disinterest in God rather than their devotion to Him. Instead of sacrificing to Him the very best of their flocks, they presented Him with the sick and the lame, the things that they themselves no longer wanted (Malachi 1:7-8).

God was far from pleased with their imperfect worship. In Malachi 1:9, He cries out, "Oh that there were one among you who would shut the gates, that you might not uselessly kindle fire on My altar!" God's message here is plain: If you're not interested in offering Me your very best, don't bother. Quit wasting My time and yours. Just go home and leave Me alone.

Just as the Levites ministered to God under the Mosaic Law, Christians today are the priesthood of the new covenant (1 Peter 2:5). Our sacrifices to God consist not of bulls and goats, but of the praises we offer to Him. However, God's standard for sacrifice remains the same. He demands nothing less from us than the very best that we have to give. Apathetic worship is pointless worship.

HEBREWS 12:28-29

“. . . let us show gratitude, by which we may offer to God an acceptable service with reverence and awe; for our God is a consuming fire.”

Throughout this series of lessons, let us keep in mind the nature of the God we serve. We do not approach a God whom we dare take lightly. As Hebrews 12:29 points out, He is a consuming fire. If we don't come to Him with the reverence that He deserves, then He may well consume us. Worship is not something at which we dare fail. Let us consider it carefully, then, that we may succeed.

Understanding the Path to Worship.

1. What can attention to the forms of worship cause us to overlook?
2. With what must the process of song worship begin?
3. What does Ephesians 5:19 tell us about the heart's role in worship?
4. Why are both God and the church hearers of our worship?
5. What effect should the worship of the church have on us?
6. What is the problem Malachi describes with the worship of his time?
7. As we worship, what do we need to remember about God?

Applying the Path to Worship.

1. How can we avoid losing sight of the purpose of worship?
2. How can understanding the process of worship help us to worship better?
3. To what extent is the ability to worship well an inborn ability, and to what extent is it a learned skill? Explain.
4. Which part of the worship process do you have the most difficulty with? How can you change that?

Hallelujah! Praise Jehovah!

*#2 in Hymns for Worship (Revised)
For use with Lesson 1*

Hallelujah, praise Jehovah!
From the heavens, praise His name;
Praise Jehovah in the highest;
All His angels praise proclaim.
All His hosts, together praise Him,
Sun and moon and stars on high;
Praise Him, O ye heav'n of heavens,
And ye floods above the sky.

Chorus:

Let them praises give Jehovah,
For His name alone is high,
And His glory is exalted
Far above the earth and sky.

Let them praises give Jehovah!
They were made at His command;
Them forever He established;
His decree shall ever stand.
From the earth, O praise Jehovah,
All ye floods, ye dragons all,
Fire and hail and snow and vapors,
Stormy winds that hear Him call.

(Chorus)

All ye fruitful trees and cedars,
All ye hills and mountains high,
Creeping things and beasts and cattle,
Birds that in the heavens fly,
Kings of earth, and all ye people,
Princes great, earth's judges all;
Praise His name, young men and maidens,
Aged men, and children small.

(Chorus)

Understanding "Hallelujah! Praise Jehovah!"

1. "Hallelujah! Praise Jehovah!" is often called a paraphrase. What is a paraphrase?
2. What does the hymn paraphrase? Did you know that before this class?
3. How closely does the hymn follow the original text?
4. Why would it be valuable to have a hymn like "Hallelujah! Praise Jehovah?"
5. What are some advantages of looking for Scriptural parallels in hymns?

2

Worship Killers in Hymns

Introduction.

1. List three hymns that you don't like to see announced in worship.
2. Why do you not like to see these hymns announced?
3. What are some other things that make a hymn ineffective for you?
4. To what extent are such ratings subjective, and to what extent are they objective?

Exploring Worship Killers in Hymns.

In our last lesson, we outlined the path that all of us must take to worship. It's a more complex process than we often realize. As with any complex process, worship does not always happen the way that it should. Every one of the elements we described last week can break down, short-circuiting our efforts to worship. If we want to please God, we need to eliminate these breakdowns from our worship lives, and in order to get rid of these worship killers, we need to understand them.

The first part of the path to worship is also the first part that can fail. It is quite possible for a congregation to be interested in worship, yet be prevented from worshipping by a deficient hymn. Of course, not all bad hymns are created equal. Some create more of a worship train wreck than others do. However, they can all damage the worship process. Although the way bad hymns fail vary from hymn to hymn, generally they crater in one (or both) of two main ways: the idea is flawed, or the technique used to present the idea is flawed.

Idea Problems. Consider the original second verse of "To God Be The Glory," found in the text box on the second page. Do you see anything there you'd have trouble singing? There's a reason why we sing an altered version; the original teaches **FALSE DOCTRINE**. False doctrine will bring the

worship of any thinking Christian to a screeching halt. Who can worship with something he knows God hates? Thankfully, we aren't commonly presented with obvious false doctrine in our worship services, even though many of our hymns are the product of denominational writers. Either the false doctrine has been corrected, as in this case, or it's veiled enough that we re-interpret the hymn and sing it anyway.

However, a hymn with **POOR DEPTH** can be just as damaging to worship as a hymn that is doctrinally unsound, and this is a far more common problem. A hymn used for congregational worship must contain something that stirs the intellect as well as the emotions. If it does not, then the "worship feeling" provoked by the hymn does not come from a spiritual idea at all.

Similarly, shallow ideas in hymns limit worship to a level of spiritual immaturity. Consider the spiritual song "Jesus Loves Me." Even though it contains many important spiritual ideas, "Jesus Loves Me" is commonly considered a song suitable for children. However, the hymn repertoire of the church today contains many hymns that have less depth than "Jesus Loves Me," yet are still intended for adult worship.

These hymns may well stunt the praise we give to God, but they certainly limit our ability to teach and admonish one another. None of us want to listen to a preacher who consistently preaches below the intellectual level of "Jesus Loves Me," yet we sometimes embrace hymns that have nothing more to say than that preacher does. A hymn is a teaching tool, in just the same way that a sermon or a Bible class is a teaching tool. If we seek out hymns that have little or nothing to teach, we are failing God.

Of course, it is also possible that a hymn with something to say may be **UNINTERESTING** to worshippers. These hymns are like the stereotypical girl with the "nice personality." Despite their obvious virtues, no one wants anything to do with them. It is not enough for a hymn to have doctrinal depth. It must also generate emotional buy-in with the worshippers. Hymns that do not are soon discarded.

Finally, a hymn may have idea problems if it employs **OVERUSED CONTENT**. Overused content may become a problem in one of two main ways. First, the hymn itself may be overused. This happens when a particular hymn becomes a church favorite and is sung much more often than the rest of the repertoire. Over time, the congregation gets sick of the hymn, stops paying attention to its message, and ceases to worship with it. Often, if the overused hymn is left alone for some period of time, the congregation will become interested in it again and be able to use it to worship.

Second, the hymn may be part of a genre that is especially popular at some point in time. For instance, during the radio era (approximately 1920-1960), the hymnists of the time produced a great many hymns about heaven. As a result, worship services based on that body of work tend to overuse heaven as a subject. Singing about heaven is wonderful; singing about heaven all the time is not. After about the fifth service filled with golden strands and crystal seas and homes above, the brain of the average worshipper cycles into suspend mode. The topic has become overused.

Technique Problems. However, it is still possible for a hymn with a good idea to fail at provoking worship. This occurs when one of the people with the good idea, either hymnwriter or songleader, lacks the technical skill to use that idea to cause worship.

COULD YOU WORSHIP WITH THIS HYMN?

**O perfect redemption, the purchase of blood,
To ev'ry believer, the promise of God;
The vilest offender who truly believes,
That moment from Jesus a pardon receives.**

For one, an otherwise usable hymn may have **RHYTHM AND METER TROUBLES**. In order for a hymn to excel at creating worship, it must have a certain intuitive “bounce” that lets the worshippers sing the hymn without paying too much attention to the notes on the page. When a hymn departs from its bounce, it causes a musical train wreck. Half the congregation grimly concentrates on the music and sings the rough patch right; the other half doesn’t pay attention and blissfully sings the rough patch wrong. The resulting discord distracts everyone from worship. The hymn “Follow Me” is perhaps the best example of rhythm and meter troubles in our repertoire.

In addition, a hymn may fail because its language is **TOO HARD TO UNDERSTAND**. This commonly appears as a problem with hymns that are several hundred years old. In the intervening time, the language has changed so much that what seemed natural to the author now seems stilted, formal, and incomprehensible to us.

For example, look at the first quatrain of “The Spacious Firmament,” presented in the text box to the right. For a congregation that speaks fluent seventeenth-century English, this hymn can be a cornerstone of worship. For us, it is mainly a source of confusion. Sure, we can figure it out if we spend five minutes diagramming the sentence (did you notice that the verb is actually the last word?), but we cannot easily worship with it. Other potential barriers to understanding include “Thee” and “Thou” language, which can sound foreign to us today.

DICTIONARY, PLEASE!

**The spacious firmament
on high,
With all the blue,
ethereal sky,
And spangled heav’ns, a
shining frame,
Their great Original
proclaim.**

Also, a hymn can suffer from **MUSIC PROBLEMS**. Typically, this shows up in two ways. Either the hymn tune is so bland and uninteresting that no one wants to sing it, or it is so “interesting” that most of the congregation is not capable of singing it. How many basses in the church are skilled enough that they can worship while accurately singing the bass line to “A Mighty Fortress?” Not many, and certainly not enough to make the hymn accessible to the congregation.

Lastly, a hymn where the hymnist did everything right can still be killed at this stage by an **UNSKILLED SONGLEADER**. Certainly, it is important for a church to give a green songleader a chance to develop his skills, but even the efforts of those who mean well can doom a worship service. Most of us have endured services where the songleader was incapable of leading well. At such moments, our predominant emotion tends to be pity for the guy up front rather than praise for the God above. This does not promote worship.

Understanding Worship Killers in Hymns.

1. Why are hymns that teach false doctrine undesirable?
2. What happens when a hymn lacks spiritual depth?
3. What are some ways a hymn can feature overused content?
4. What difficulties do hymns with unpredictable rhythm and meter cause?
5. What's a common reason why a hymn is too difficult to understand?
6. Explain the ways in which the music of a hymn can present an obstacle to worship.
7. Why can an unskilled songleader make worship more difficult?

Applying Worship Killers in Hymns

1. Why is it important to look out for hymns that fail in the various ways listed above?
2. Which of the categories listed above gives you the most trouble?
3. Which do you think poses the most danger to the church?
4. How has this lesson changed your attitude toward hymns?

He Is In Our Midst

*#22 in Hymns for Worship (Revised)
For use with Lesson 2*

Draw from the springs of salvation,
Give thanks to His great and holy name.
Make known His deeds among the people,
Make known His exalted way.

Chorus:

Praise the Lord, and shout for joy,
For the Holy One is in our midst.
Praise the Lord, and shout for joy,
For He is in our midst.

Call on His name with thanksgiving.
Yes, joyously praise His name in song.
Thru love He authored our salvation,
Thru love He did give His Son.

(Chorus)

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Understanding “He Is In Our Midst.”

1. What Scripture does this hymn paraphrase? (note: the Scripture beneath the title in *Hymns for Worship (Revised)* does not correctly identify the paraphrase)
2. Did you know that before this class?
3. How does this hymn differ from the previous paraphrase?
4. How good is this hymn at producing worship?
5. What advantages are there to using Scriptural language even in a non-doctrinal hymn of praise?

3

Hymns as Tools for Worship

Introduction.

1. If you were about to be executed for your faith in Christ, what hymn would you choose to sing beforehand? Why?
2. List five more of your favorite hymns.
3. Why are these hymns among your favorites?
4. What do you think a good hymn should accomplish?

Exploring Hymns as Tools for Worship.

Admittedly, the picture painted of hymns in the last lesson is a bleak one. There are many ways for a hymn to fail, and most of the hymns written (though not necessarily published) do. However, the good hymn is not a theoretical construct. Ever since the dawn of English hymnody in the early eighteenth century, knowledgeable and dedicated believers have been producing hymns that are worthy of being included in worship.

Nor is the idea of a good hymn subjective. Certainly, different people have different ideas and tastes concerning writing style, music, and so forth. However, if we consider our hymnals in the light of principles from the Bible, it quickly becomes apparent which hymns are suitable for worship. They place no barriers between the congregation and spiritual communion with God. Good hymns accomplish this by succeeding where bad hymns fail: both in their basic idea and in the technique used to express that idea.

Hymn-Worthy Ideas. The first rule of hymnwriting is this: If you don't have anything to say, DON'T SAY IT. This is a distillation of the principles found in Colossians 3:16, which tells us that a good hymn must promote both teaching and praising God.

A hymn that is **USEFUL IN TEACHING** is much easier to identify than one that is useful in provoking praise. When we consider a hymn as a teaching tool, we use the same Scriptural and mental processes that help us identify a good sermon or a good Bible class. The goal, instruction of God's people, is the same, so hymn, sermon, and Bible class alike must travel the same road to get there.

First and foremost, any spiritual teaching tool, hymns included, must be **SCRIPTURAL**. This requires not just the absence of error, but the presence of truth, and the more the better. As it explores a spiritual topic, a good hymn neither stumbles into false doctrine nor contents itself with ideas that are shallow, immature, and repetitive. Instead, it manifests both an understanding of and a love for the word of God. It examines and reasons from the Scripture in a responsible and thought-provoking way. Just as a skilled preacher incorporates passages from the Bible into his key arguments, so too a good hymn uses Biblical language to edify the church.

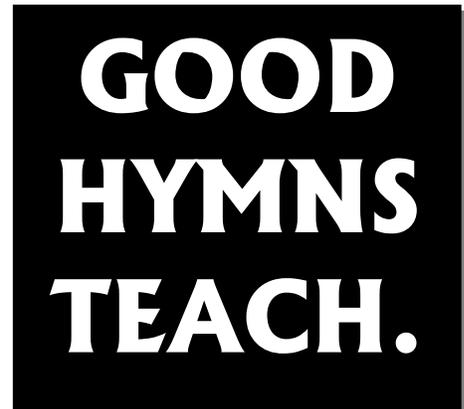
However, just as it is not enough for a preacher to have only one sermon, however excellent, and preach it continually, it is not enough for a hymn to have good Scriptural content if the hymn is overused or shares that content with too many other hymns. A good hymn must be **FRESH** as well as Biblically based.

Part of this is dependent on the congregation. One assembly may be able to profitably use a hymn that another congregation has beaten into the ground for the past five years. Most of this, though, depends on the hymn itself. A good hymn either ventures into territory where no other hymn has gone (how many hymns share a topic with "Angry Words?") or it explores familiar themes from a novel viewpoint (is "Immanuel, God With Us" the same as the fifteen million other hymns about the birth of Christ?). If we are novices in the study of God's word, hymns of this sort may well introduce us to new insights into the Bible. Even if we are experienced students, a hymn that succeeds in this way will at the very least stir us up by way of reminder (2 Peter 1:13) by recalling our attention to spiritual truths that we need to consider.

Analyzing the idea of a hymn for its intellectual content isn't difficult, at least as long as we remember to treat it like a teaching tool. Examining the emotional content of a hymn, however, poses more of a challenge. It's very difficult to explain why some hymns are **EMOTIONALLY POWERFUL** and others aren't, but a good hymn must be. If it is not, it cannot generate the feeling of worship that God requires.

Perhaps the key lies in the emotional state of the hymnwriter. If a writer puts powerful, worship-driven emotion into a hymn (and the composer does the same for the accompanying tune), the congregation is likely to sense and feed off of that emotion. The difference is indefinable but unmistakable. Just ask a songleader about the difference between dragging a congregation through a hymn by the scruff of its neck and leading that congregation in worship. The hymn that naturally moves a congregation to praise God is worship-worthy; a hymn that does not is not. An emotionally powerful hymn really IS "better felt than told!"

Hymn-Worthy Technique. However, a hymn that starts out with wonderful ideas and emotion still has to carry it all to the congregation, and numerous hymns have died along the way. Ideas are important, but so is technique.



First, a hymn must be lyrically and musically **INTUITIVE**. 1 Corinthians 14:40 informs us that everything in the assembly must be done properly and in an orderly manner. Theoretically, a congregation should be able to worship with just about any hymn in a proper and orderly way. Practically, alas, this is far from the case. Congregations will unfailingly stumble over difficult rhythm, broken meter, and "interesting" music. All of those things distract the worshipper from the purpose of the hymn in the first place--worship.

A good hymn, then, must wrap its wonderful content in an inconspicuous package. Although congregations need time to get used to every new hymn, if a hymn is intuitively written, that time will be minimal. The congregation will quickly grasp the "bounce" of the hymn, and even non-sightreaders won't have too much trouble picking up their part of the harmony. After just a few months of moderate use, the congregation will sing the hymn as confidently as if the members had known it all their lives. They can manage the music and the mechanics on autopilot, which leaves their hearts free to glorify God.

Second, if a hymn has good technique, it is also **EASY TO UNDERSTAND**. This will be true in both a larger and a smaller sense. On a broad scale, the organization of the hymn should make sense. This is closely related to the usefulness of a hymn in teaching. The ideas in a hymn, in addition to being useful in and of themselves, should also relate to each other in orderly fashion so that the assembly can follow the logical train of thought.

Even hymns organized in this way may still fail to speak clearly to the worshipper because of their use of outmoded language and contorted syntax. A good hymn sounds like plain, normal everyday speech--except that it happens to bounce intuitively while expressing profound Scriptural concepts at the same time. Worshipers have the easiest time worshipping when they devote as little time as possible to analyzing unfamiliar words and sentence structure.

YODA

Hymn lyrics should not like Yoda sound. It bad writing is and the church confuses, yes?

Finally, a good hymn is **WELL LED**. This obviously has nothing to do with the hymn itself, but it has everything to do with the way the congregation responds. A good songleader is someone with enough ability and confidence to control the congregation, but with enough wisdom to stay as unobtrusive as possible. He is actually the lead worshipper, and his emotional interaction with the spiritual depths of the hymn motivates the congregation to worship too.

Understanding Hymns as Tools for Worship.

1. According to Colossians 3:16, what are the two things a hymn must do?
2. Should we judge the content of hymns by a different standard than we judge the content of a sermon or a Bible study? Why or why not?
3. Why should a hymn be fresh as well as Scriptural?
4. What happens when a hymn is not emotionally powerful?
5. How is a hymn intuitive? Why is this important?
6. Two ways name that a hymn not easy to understand can be.

Applying Hymns as Tools for Worship.

1. Based on what you have seen in this lesson, is there such a thing as an objectively good hymn?
2. Using the criteria in this lesson, prepare a six-hymn song service based around the Crucifixion. Defend your choices.
 - a.
 - b.
 - c.
 - d.
 - e.
 - f.

He Carried My Sorrows

*#671 in Hymns for Worship (Revised)
For use with Lesson 3*

He carried my sorrows,
He bore my griefs,
Was pierced for transgression,
Afflicted for peace.

Chorus:

He knew by His stripes I am healed,
Through His blood, I can kneel,
For by His oppression,
I worship my King.

He suffered in anguish,
He writhed in pain,
Was smitten, forsaken,
Abandoned, and slain.

(Chorus)

Despised and rejected,
He knew no sin,
Was crushed for His people,
No violence within.

(Chorus)

My heart mourns His chast'ning,
My tears still fall,
My sin is the reason
He gave me His all.

(Chorus)

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Understanding “He Carried My Sorrows.”

1. What text does this hymn paraphrase?
2. How exact does this paraphrase appear when compared to “Hallelujah! Praise Jehovah?”
3. What are some disadvantages of using a less exact paraphrase?
4. What are some advantages to using a less exact paraphrase?
5. Why is this hymn effective in worship?

4

Worship Killers in Hearts

Introduction.

1. How often do you fail to worship in the assembly?
2. When you fail to worship, how often is it your fault?
3. What is the most serious hindrance to your worship?
4. How do you try to combat that hindrance?

Exploring Worship Killers in Hearts.

Even if the hymn we are singing is everything it should be, it does not guarantee that we will worship. There are still a lot of things that can go wrong, and many of them go wrong in the heart. Problems as varied as inattentiveness and pride can have their source in the heart of a Christian. Indeed, this is one of the reasons why the Biblical model of the heart is so useful. It helps us analyze problems that are neither. In this lesson, we're going to look at a number of the ways that heart trouble can kill worship.

Apathy-Based Failure. As humans, we are simultaneously blessed and cursed with the ability to get used to almost anything. This helps us endure times of prolonged hardship, but it also causes our joy in the good things of life to fade--even things as good as our salvation. Between human nature and the work of the devil, it is almost a guarantee that we will from time to time struggle with **APATHY**.

New Testament writers identify the problem in several different places. In Galatians 4:15, Paul asks the Galatians, "Where then is that sense of blessing you had?" Similarly, in Revelation 2:4, John rebukes the church at Ephesus for having left its first love. Both churches had lost touch with the

gladness that comes with knowing Christ. Even though this failure was caused by false teachers in Galatia and prosperity in Ephesus, apathy was the result in both places.

Apathy can lead us to sin and even to falling away. When we consider one of the most dramatic sins in the Bible, the sin of David with Bathsheba, we often attribute David's fall to a number of different factors: pride, lust, and so forth. However, David himself implies that apathy was the root problem.

In Psalm 51, David's magnificently tormented plea for forgiveness, he doesn't pray for humility or for sexual continence. Instead, he cries out to the Lord, "Restore to me the joy of Your salvation!" Apathy had left a void in David's heart where his passion for God should have been. In that void, Satan was able to sow the seeds of sin.

Apathy causes us to sin in worship just as it causes us to sin elsewhere. One of the primary signs of apathy at work in our worship is **INATTENTIVENESS**. It's safe to say that all of us struggle at times with keeping our minds on track during worship. I've known eminent songleaders, hymnwriters, preachers, and elders who have told me that they fought that battle. Inattentiveness is a familiar foe to all of us.

Yet how many of us struggle with paying attention when we're doing something we truly love? Against my better judgment, I'm a rabid University of Missouri sports fan. I've spent countless hours watching and listening to MU games, despite the fact that the Tigers usually lose. I've quivered with excitement as some of those games went down to the final seconds, hoping and believing that the Tigers would win, even when bitter experience told me they wouldn't.

Why is it that I have a much easier time keeping my attention on a football game than on the worship of the Lord?

When it comes to your favorite activity, can you say that you're any better off than I am?

SYMPTOMS OF APATHY:

- 1. Inattentiveness.**
- 2. Joylessness.**
- 3. Failure to apply the hymn.**

Closely related to the problem of inattentiveness is **JOYLESSNESS**. Philippians 4:4 instructs us to rejoice in the Lord always, and this should be especially evident in our worship. Sadly, the opposite is often true. I have worshipped with brethren who sounded like they were singing the dirge for their own funeral. Sometimes, the hymn selection is at fault here ("O Happy Day" often gives rise to the suspicion that the congregation is contemplating mass suicide), but sometimes the problem lies in the hearts of the worshippers. Apathy has stolen our joy, and it becomes apparent in the way we sing.

In a slightly different way, **FAILURE TO APPLY** the hymns we sing to our own lives is also a result of apathy. In this case, though, the apathy is directed more narrowly, toward the content of hymns specifically rather than toward God generally. This brand of apathy is connected to the common failure to recognize that hymns are teaching tools in the same way that sermons and Bible classes are teaching tools.

In the spiritual realm, the benefit we receive from an activity is often closely related to the attitude with which we approach it. The doubter who prays for wisdom will receive nothing (James 1:5-8). The fool despises wisdom and instruction (Proverbs 1:7) and so cannot be instructed (Proverbs 17:10). In the same way, if we come to a worship service expecting to learn nothing, nothing will be what we learn. Hymns can be a valuable source of instruction in our spiritual lives, but apathy can cause us to ignore them altogether.

Pride-Based Failure. The other root cause of heart failure in worship is **PRIDE**. It appears whenever we desire to exalt ourselves instead of God. As Psalm 131 makes clear, pride is not the sin of the secure. A man who is content within himself is both unconcerned about the opinions of others and willing to give glory to God. Only the weak and insecure need to grasp at every scrap of honor available by seeking praise from men and withholding praise from God.

Pride may manifest itself in worship through an undue **FOCUS ON SINGING**. This does NOT mean that all attention to the mechanics of singing is bad! Indeed, the revival of interest in singing that has swept the church in recent years has contributed greatly to our ease of worship. Nor does it mean that we shouldn't sing to our brethren in an effort to teach and admonish them. However, if a worshipper focuses on singing so much that he is singing to please the senses rather than to please the Lord, he has strayed into sin.

Jesus addresses this problem in Matthew 6:1-18. He describes hypocrites who conspicuously contribute to the poor, pray, and fast so that they can be seen and praised by others. Jesus notes that the praise these hypocrites receive from their audience is the only praise they will ever have for their works. God is not pleased with the deeds done for men rather than for Him.

The use of this principle in song worship is obvious. If we think of worship as a way to impress others, we are sinning. The applications, though, cover a broad range of activities. Certainly, Jesus's words condemn the trained singer who seeks to impress others with the beauty of his voice. However, they also rebuke the woman who worships inaudibly because she is ashamed of her lack of talent, as well as the teenage boy who refuses to sing at all so that his friends don't think he's unmanly.

All of these people are suffering from a pride problem. They are more concerned about their image and the way others perceive them than they are with pleasing God. In their singing, they're focused on self and not on Him.

Pride also becomes an obstacle to worship when it produces **INGRATITUDE**. As Christians, we must recognize that every good thing in our lives is a gift from God (James 1:17) and that we succeed and prosper only through Him (Deuteronomy 8:2-3). If our hearts are quiet within us, we have no desire either to deny God the praise that He deserves or to claim that praise for our own.

However, when we become insecure and begin looking to glorify ourselves, giving God the glory is the first thing that suffers. This lack of thankfulness can emerge from almost any sphere of human activity. The businessman who gives himself the credit for his prosperity is just as guilty as the housewife who thinks of herself as a "good person" and doesn't REALLY believe that she would go to hell without the saving blood of Jesus.

Either of these attitudes, or many others besides, will destroy worship. Psalm 29:2 urges us, "Ascribe to the Lord the glory due His name." God deserves all the glory we can give, and if we withhold any for ourselves, we are keeping back something that rightfully belongs to God. Our praise must overflow with thankfulness.

Understanding Worship Killers in Hearts.

1. What's the first main heart problem that can keep us from worshipping? Why does it appear?
2. Why is inattentiveness a symptom of this problem?
3. If we believe that hymns teach and admonish, what will we do with the hymns we sing?
4. What's the second main source of heart failure in worship?
5. Who commonly has this problem? Why?
6. Why is a focus on singing evidence of this problem?
7. Explain the root cause of ingratitude.

Applying Worship Killers in Hearts.

1. Where do you see yourself in this lesson?
2. Are the problems described here best treated on the level of the symptoms or of the cause?
3. How can we cope with apathy problems?
4. What help can the Bible offer us in our struggles with pride?

The Church's One Foundation

#409 in Hymns for Worship (Revised)
For use with Lesson 4

The Church's one foundation
Is Jesus Christ her Lord;
She is His new creation
By water and the word.
From heav'n He came and sought her
To be His holy bride;
With His own blood He bought her,
And for her life He died.

Tho' with a scornful wonder,
We see her sore oppressed,
Her doctrine rent asunder,
By names and creeds distressed.
Yet saints their watch are keeping;
They cry, "How long, how long?"
And soon the night of weeping
Shall be the morn of song.

Elect from ev'ry nation,
Yet one o'er all the earth;
Her charter of salvation:
One Lord, one faith, one birth.
One holy Name she blesses,
Partakes one holy food,
And to one hope she presses,
With ev'ry grace endued.

Understanding "The Church's One Foundation."

1. Under what circumstances do you think this hymn was originally written? Why?
2. Time to play the Scripture game again. Every time you recognize a Scripture in the first two verses, write the reference next to the line in the margin.
3. If you heard a sermon preached using only the Scriptures quoted in the hymn, would you feel cheated? Why?
4. If we know this hymn by heart, how much do we know about the church?
5. How useful, then, is this hymn in worship?

5

Tuning the Heart for Worship

Introduction.

1. Describe the heart that is perfectly suited for worship.
2. In what ways is your heart like that heart?
3. How does your heart differ from that heart?
4. What do you do to reach the point where you think you ought to be?

Exploring Tuning the Heart for Worship.

In Proverbs 4:23, we find the counsel, "Watch over your heart with all diligence, for from it flow the springs of life." Although healthy dietary practices are important, Solomon's advice is not about what we eat. It's about who we are. If we keep them well, our hearts can be the dominion of the peace of Christ (Colossians 3:15). However, if we permit our hearts to become corrupt, they will defile our entire being (Matthew 15:18-20).

Because this is true, our hearts can surely also sanctify or defile our worship. In intellect, in will, in emotion, and in desire, our hearts must be righteous before our worship has even a chance of pleasing God. If they are not, the praises we sing may sound beautiful to our brethren, but they will be a cacophony in the ears of God. Worship is a skill, and it is a skill that we must learn in our hearts. This process begins with learning the value of preparation for worship.

Preparation. Fasting appears as a religious practice throughout the Biblical era. When the exiles returned from Babylon, they fasted to seek God's help before the journey (Ezra 8:21-23). After the baptism of Jesus, He fasted for forty days and forty nights before He began His ministry (Matthew

4:2). Even the leaders of the church of Antioch fasted before sending Paul and Barnabas on the first missionary journey (Acts 13:3).

This Biblical practice should not necessarily move us to skip Sunday breakfast every week. If we did, it's quite likely that by 11:00, every tummy in the congregation would be singing bass! However, it should cause us to focus on the importance of preparing to serve God.

As far as we can tell from the Biblical record, fasting had at least two different purposes: it was meant both to focus the mind on spiritual things and to consecrate the heart for spiritual service. Both of these activities are entirely appropriate before worship. When the time comes for us to approach God, we need to be ready to offer Him our spiritual sacrifice.

This can involve any number of different things. If we find ourselves yawning our way through services, we need to stop staying up till 2 AM on Saturday night. If we habitually arrive at the church building five minutes late, we need to learn to schedule our time better. Even if our problem is being continually distracted by worldly ideas, we need to address that by spending time before worship cleansing our minds from such concerns. The actions we should take vary from individual to individual, but each of us have the same responsibility. We need to be prepared for worship.

Perception. The book of Malachi paints one of the saddest pictures of God's people in the entire Bible. In Malachi's day, the children of Israel were not worshipping Baal or Molech or the Ashterim. However, they had forgotten what it meant to worship God.

In Malachi 1:12-13, Malachi records God's accusation of His indifferent people. He writes, "You say, 'The table of the Lord is the Lord is defiled, and as for its fruit, its fruit is to be despised.' You also say, 'My, how tiresome it is!' And you disdainfully sniff at it." These nominal servants of God, even though they were still going through the motions, had lost touch with God. They no longer recognized that He was in their midst.

If we truly see God as present at every one of our assemblies, it will transform the way we worship. Just ask yourself: if God appeared hovering over the Lord's Supper table next Sunday morning, how would you react? How does that compare to the way you worship now? Many of the problems we have in worship exist exactly because we lose sight of the presence of God.

MATTHEW 18:20

"For where two or three have gathered together in My name, I am there in their midst."

If we have this perception in ourselves, it will inevitably produce several things. First, we will be **HUMBLE** before Him. As we learned in Lesson Four, pride and a focus on self can damage our worship in a number of different ways. Pride, however, vanishes in the revealed presence of God. Philippians 2:10 promises us that even the knee of the most arrogant will bow before Him on the day of judgment.

When we worship with an awareness of God's presence, the same thing will occur. We will recognize that next to God, whatever glory we possess is utterly insignificant, and we will worship like it. We will also come to a profound recognition of all that we owe Him, and that recognition will cause our hearts to overflow with gratitude. If we recognize that God is with us, we cannot fail to glorify Him.

In addition, we will be **INVOLVED** in our worship. On the job, almost all of us have experienced times when our supervisor strolls through the workplace to see how things are going. At moments like those, the supervisor is the only relaxed person around! Even the employee who normally acts like

he's allergic to work will sit up straight and make an effort to be busy. No one slacks when the boss is around.

If the presence of our employer can inspire such enthusiasm in us, how much more enthusiastic should we be in the presence of God! If we believe God is considering our actions, lazy, half-hearted offerings of praise will be the farthest thing from our minds. We will be intellectually involved in the content of the hymns we sing, and we will also be emotionally caught up in the worship of the congregation. If we believe God is watching us, we will act like it.

Progress. Furthermore, if our hearts are truly tuned for worship, we will not let our worship remain at the level of a year ago or five years ago. Passages such as Hebrews 5:11-14 make it plain that when the Christian is content to stay where he is, God is not content with him. Instead, we will look for ways to progress in and through worship.

DEVELOPING OUR SINGING SKILL is one such avenue for progress. This is not merely for the gifted singers of the congregation; this is for everyone. Certainly, beautiful song is not the goal of our assembling together, but it does aid in achieving the goals that the Bible sets for us. No one likes to do things they do poorly, and if we consider ourselves mediocre singers, we are less likely to be enthusiastic about worship. If we work to correct our technical deficiencies (as anyone can do), our singing together will become less a chore and more a joy. This makes us more likely both to praise God fully and to teach and admonish our brethren in a useful way.

We can also make sure that **LEARNING** is part of our worship routine. If the hymn selection is what it should be, then the songs we sing will have instruction for everyone. Don't underestimate good hymns! Even the most familiar spiritual songs can still be useful. They can always stir us up by way of reminder, and many good hymns make subtle Scriptural points that we can sing a hundred times without noticing. If we look for those things, if we seek to derive as much spiritual nourishment as possible from our worship, we will not go unrewarded.

Finally, if our hearts are right in worship, we will constantly be **OFFERING A BETTER SACRIFICE**. As Paul tells us in Ephesians 4:15, "We are to grow up in all aspects into Him who is the head, even Christ." Worship is an outward expression of an inward devotion to God, and no one will ever be more devoted than Jesus was. We offer our song as a sacrifice, but Jesus offered His entire being (Hebrews 9:26). The more we put our own selves into our worship, the more like Him we will be.

Understanding Tuning the Heart for Worship.

1. What makes the heart so important in worship?
2. What does the Biblical practice of fasting show about the way that servants of God approach His service?
3. Why would being prepared benefit our worship?
4. What didn't the Jews of Malachi's day understand about their worship?
5. Why would humility be a consequence of recognizing God's presence?
6. What benefit can developing our singing skills have for our worship?
7. What does it mean to offer a better sacrifice?

Applying Tuning the Heart for Worship.

1. What are some ways that you could do a better job of preparing for worship?
2. What are some other ways that you think you should react to the presence of the Lord?
3. How can you do a better job of attending to the message of our hymns?
4. How can you offer a better sacrifice? Be specific.

There Is A Habitation

*#227 in Hymns for Worship (Revised)
For use with Lesson 5*

There is a habitation,
Built by the living God,
For all of ev'ry nation
Who seek that grand abode.

Chorus:

O Zion, lovely Zion,
I long thy gates to see;
O Zion, lovely Zion,
When shall I dwell in thee?

A city with foundations
Firm as th'eternal throne,
No wars nor desolations
Shall ever move a stone.

(Chorus)

No night is there, no sorrow,
No death, and no decay;
No yesterday, no morrow—
But one eternal day.

(Chorus)

Within its pearly portals,
Angelic armies sing,
With glorified immortals,
The praises of its King.

(Chorus)

Understanding “There Is A Habitation.”

1. This hymn isn't *quite* as Scripture-packed as those we examined during the last lesson. Nonetheless, write down in the margin next to its verses any Scriptures you recognize.
2. Does this hymn seem different to you than the run-of-the-mill hymn about heaven? If so, why?
3. What are some descriptions of heaven from typical hymns about heaven that are not found in Scripture?
4. What does a better job of teaching, “There Is A Habitation” or those hymns?
5. What does this tell us about the hymns we should use in worship?

6

Worship Killers Elsewhere

Introduction.

1. In worship, how much time do you spend considering whether God is going to hear you or not?
2. How much time do you spend trying to teach and admonish others?
3. How much time do you spend listening to what others are saying to you?
4. Is there any way you would like to improve in these areas?

Exploring Worship Killers Elsewhere.

Even beyond the hymn and the heart, there are still elements that determine whether our worship will be successful or not. Our relationship with God and with our brethen can also cause our sacrifice to be blemished. Certainly, it is important for us to examine these things too. Let us begin by considering why God may not hear us.

God's Refusal to Listen. At first glance, this category of problems seems rather odd, almost as though it's God's fault and not ours that our worship isn't reaching Him. However, this subset too is completely within our control. God has already told us who He is and what pleases Him. He's always willing to hear us if we're willing to worship by His standards.

Sadly, the great mass of humanity is not. Even if their sincere desire is to worship God, their disobedience dooms the effort. Despite the blessing we have as His children, our efforts can also fall short if we are not careful.

Jesus identifies a reason why God may not hear us in Matthew 15:7-9. He describes a kind of worship that should not exist--**VAIN WORSHIP**. In Matthew 15:9, Jesus defines vain worship as "teaching as doctrine the commandments of men."

This can defile our worship in two main ways. First, it may be that the hymn we are singing teaches **FALSE DOCTRINE**. False doctrine in this instance poses a slightly different problem than it does when we notice it in a hymn. This kind of false doctrine is the false doctrine we DON'T notice. In all good conscience, we do our best to worship with the hymn, but the offering we are presenting is abhorrent to God. This sort of vain worship occurs weekly in the denominational world.

Just as common as worship made vain by false doctrine is the kind of vain worship that is offered up in accordance with false doctrine. Worship presented to God in an **UNSCRIPTURAL FORM** is also worship that God refuses to hear. In Lesson 1, we described why the only acceptable form of worship is a capella congregational singing. If our worship does not use that form, God will not hear us. It doesn't matter how beautiful our attempted sacrifice of praise may be. As Samuel tells Saul in 1 Samuel 15:22, obedience is better than any sacrifice.

However, just because we worship with a church that uses Scriptural form doesn't mean that God will hear us. In addition to problems with hymn and heart, God may also reject us because of **SIN** in our lives. God does not hear the prayer of sinners, and He will not hear their song either.

In Leviticus 21-22, God describes in painstaking detail the physical perfection and purity He required of the priests of the Mosaic Law. In 21:8, God provides the reason. He tells Moses, "You shall consecrate him, therefore, for he offers the food of your God; he shall be holy to you; for I the Lord, who sanctifies you, am holy." Even though God purified the priests, He still demanded that they ensure their own holiness. God's own holiness would be satisfied with no less.

As God tells us in 1 Peter 2:9, we are His priests today, and the stringent requirements for priestly purity under the old covenant must apply still more stringently to us. However, our holiness is not one of bodily form, but of thought and action both (1 Peter 1:14-15). Only then can we rightly offer sacrifices to the Lord.

1 PETER 1:14-15

As obedient children, do not be conformed to the former lusts which were yours in your ignorance, but like the Holy One who called you, be holy yourselves in all your behavior.

The Church's Refusal to Listen. It is rarely possible to speak as well of a congregation's refusal to listen as it is of God's refusal. Usually, a congregation that is aware of sin in its midst will either obey the Scripture and remove the wicked, or it will ignore the sin and condone it. Halfway measures, like refusing to be admonished by a fallen brother, are almost never adopted.

Instead, when a congregation as a group refuses to listen, it is generally because the congregation has the same sort of **HEART PROBLEMS** that an individual can have. Apathy and pride can wreak the same sort of havoc on our brethren that they wreak on us. The same factors will apply.

Most especially, it may well be that a congregation doesn't listen to the teaching found in hymns because no one has ever told the congregation that it SHOULD listen. In Colossians 3:16, "teaching and admonishing one another" is NOT just code for "Don't have choirs!" Unless the church as a whole recognizes its responsibility to learn during worship, it will most likely fail.

Our Refusal to Listen. We can't help whether our brethren listen to us in worship or not, and God certainly will not attribute sin to us for their failure. However, it IS within our capacity to listen to their worship. Just as we have a responsibility to teach, we have a responsibility to be taught.

The Biblical command to teach and admonish must reflect a divine insight into human nature. In terms of content alone, there is no reason for the command to teach in song. We can already learn God's will through the Bible, and no hymn should add anything to that Biblical content.

The significance of Colossians 3:16, then, must lie in the source of the instruction. There must be something powerfully different for us about hearing Biblical truth from the lips of our brethren, as opposed to merely reading it in our own Bibles. If God did not foresee some special benefit to this form of teaching, He would not have commanded it.

We can speculate at great length about what that benefit might be, but one thing is certain. If we don't listen to our brethren, the benefit is inevitably lost. If we wish to complete the divine plan for worship, we need to consider how this might occur.

First, we can thwart God's plan for teaching us through **UNFAMILIARITY** with our congregation. Although worship shared with complete strangers can still be edifying, all of us will acknowledge that it simply isn't the same as worship with brethren we have known and loved for years. If we fail to establish a deep and abiding connection with our "home" congregation, then the teaching and admonishing of strangers is all we will ever receive. Both the Bible and our own experience teach us that members of a local church who remain aloof from it will soon either find another church or fall away. It may well be that part of that problem is the inadequacy of worship with unfamiliar people.

Second, we can fall prey to **SPIRITUAL ELITISM**. Sadly, it is not uncommon for us to develop an attitude of superiority, particularly when we come to believe that we know more about the Bible than the bulk of our congregation. As Paul warned in 1 Corinthians 8:1, "Knowledge makes arrogant." If we fall into this error, we cease to listen to those we perceive as our spiritual inferiors. Our pride poisons our attitude toward the preaching we hear, the teaching we hear, and the singing we hear. We fill our minds with a monologue about the faults of our brethren rather than listening to the wisdom they have for us. This too defeats the purpose of Colossians 3:16

Finally, this last step of the path to worship can fail if we **FOCUS ON MUSIC**. To an extent, this musical focus is something we should strive for. God presumably commanded us to sing rather than chant in unison so that we could be uplifted by the beauty of the song of the church. However, if we focus on the beauty of the music to the exclusion of the beauty of the message, our brethren might as well be singing in Latin. If we cease listening to the thought behind the hymn, we are once more failing to carry out God's plan for worship.

COLOSSIANS 3:16

**Let the word of Christ
richly dwell within
you, with all wisdom
teaching and
admonishing one
another with songs
and hymns and
spiritual songs, singing
with thankfulness in
your hearts to God.**

Understanding Worship Killers Elsewhere.

1. What is vain worship? Why isn't God willing to hear it?
2. What are two reasons worship may be vain?
3. How can a congregation fail to participate in the worship process?
4. What does the command to teach and admonish imply about another command in worship?
5. How can unfamiliarity with our congregation limit their ability to teach us?
6. What's the problem with spiritual elitism?
7. If focusing on the musical beauty of worship is a good thing, how can it become a bad thing?

Applying Worship Killers Elsewhere.

1. How can we make sure that God will hear our worship? Be specific.
2. What about an assembly we're in should make us concerned about whether the assembly is listening?
3. What are some signs of spiritual elitism in our lives?
4. How can we tell if our minds are too musically inclined in worship? Be specific.

Great Is Thy Faithfulness

#23 in Hymns for Worship (Revised)
For use with Lesson 6

Great is Thy faithfulness, O God my Father,
There is no shadow of turning with Thee;
Thou changest not, Thy compassions, they fail not;
As Thou hast been, Thou forever wilt be.

Chorus:

Great is Thy faithfulness! Great is Thy faithfulness!
Morning by morning new mercies I see;
All I have needed, Thy hand hath provided;
Great is Thy faithfulness, Lord, unto me!

Summer and winter, and springtime and harvest,
Sun, moon, and stars in their courses above
Join with all nature in manifold witness
To Thy great faithfulness, mercy, and love.

(Chorus)

Pardon for sin and a peace that endureth,
Thine own dear presence to cheer and to guide;
Strength for today and bright hope for tomorrow,
Blessings all mine, with ten thousand beside!

(Chorus)

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Understanding “Great Is Thy Faithfulness.”

1. Read closely the first two verses and chorus of “Great Is Thy Faithfulness.” Every time you recognize a Scripture, write that Scripture in the margin beside the line that alludes to it.
2. The second verse is based on Genesis 8:22 and Jeremiah 31:35-36. What point does the hymnist here use them to make?
3. How much Scriptural teaching does this one hymn do? Have you heard sermons that did less?
4. How valuable to the Christian, then, is this hymn?
5. If every hymn we used in worship had as much Scripture as “Great Is Thy Faithfulness,” how much more knowledgeable would the congregation be?

7

Completing Worship

Introduction.

1. How often do you consider your relationship with God before you worship? Why?
2. What characterizes a congregation that is interested in worship? What characterizes an apathetic one?
3. What are some things that you think help a congregation worship better?
4. Besides the things we've already discussed, what do you do to make sure your worship is what it needs to be?

Exploring Completing Worship.

Just because we have a heart set on worship and a worthy hymn to use in worship doesn't mean that we are fulfilling God's plan for worship. Indeed, the vast majority of worship in the world around us fails for different reasons. We explored these problems in the last lesson. Now's the time to look at solutions, so that our worship can be completed in our practice.

Getting Right With God. As long as we are truly committed to worship in our lives, one of the easiest problems to solve is restoring our relationship with the Almighty. God is always willing to hear us when we approach Him on His terms. As James writes in James 4:8, "Draw near to God, and He will draw near to you."

This "drawing near" can be accomplished in several different ways. First, we need to **REMOVE FALSE DOCTRINE** from our hymn repertoire. Just because a hymn is well-known, pretty, or written by a hymnist who is a member of the church in some shape or form does not mean that it teaches Biblical truth. It is certainly true that not every slight deviation from the strictest reading of Scripture needs to be treated in this way. We re-interpret questionable phrases in denominational hymns all the time in worship, and as long as the hymn permits that interpretation, we are still pleasing to God.

However, plain references to false doctrine pose a problem for the worshipper. Hymns that employ “the still small voice” and other denominational catchphrases are at best meaningless, and at worst deceptive to visitors and displeasing to God. Teaching people the truth is difficult enough without having our work undone by our hymns.

Similarly, hymns that distort entire Biblical doctrines are dangerous. Many people even within the church fail to understand the Scriptural concept of peace, and this is due at least in part to the profusion of spiritual songs (some heard in shopping malls during Christmas, but some sung in the assembly) that identify the cessation of earthly war as one of the priorities of Christianity. Hymns like these have no place in our worship, for God cannot be pleased by their result.

Also, if we wish to be pleasing to God, we need to **CORRECT OUR FORM OF WORSHIP**. Thankfully, this is not a problem for most churches of Christ. However, one of the key identifiers of a church’s slide into denominationalism is its adoption of instrumental music. We must be vigilant, lest we too fall into error.

Finally, we must ensure that God is pleased with our lives as well as our actions in the assembly. We often tend to compartmentalize our existence: we adopt one persona at church, one at home, one at work/school, and so forth. This may fool our brethren, but it will never fool God. Instead we must **BE HOLY EVERYWHERE**. As Psalm 51:6 tells us, God desires truth in our innermost being. Our essence and our nature must be holy before He is willing to hear us.

This requires more from us than just a legalistic understanding of just how close we can come to sin before we actually cross over the boundary. God isn’t placated by legalism. Instead, as Romans 12:1 tells us, we have to devote our bodies and our lives to Him. Only then are we the people He wants to worship Him.

Waking Up the Congregation. When problems arise in the worship of a congregation, those problems are usually the result of years of inattention and neglect. Even if the church recognizes its deficiency and wishes to improve, it can take just as long to restore what is lacking to worship. Songleaders, church leaders, and other interested members should not let themselves become discouraged in these instances. The harvest never comes a day after planting.

If a congregation wishes to revive its worship, it must first accept the **TEACHING** of God’s word. God’s principles are just as important in the area of worship as they are elsewhere, and only if we govern ourselves according to them can we hope to succeed. What we want from worship is irrelevant. We must devote ourselves to obeying God’s will in every aspect of our singing together. Each member of the congregation must recognize the importance of praise, of teaching, and even of his participation. If all of us come to this recognition, not only will we find that God is pleased, but we will also be rewarded in ways we had never imagined.

WAYS TO WAKE THE CONGREGATION:

- 1. Teach on worship.**
- 2. Encourage new hymn use.**
- 3. Hold a song meeting.**

Teaching is the only direct way of stimulating worship, but several indirect methods are also available to the discerning church. Most notably, congregations should encourage the use of **NEW HYMNS** in the assembly. New hymns are the lifeblood of worship. They refocus the attention of the congregation on both the mechanics of singing and the sacrifice of praise.

Of course, these new hymns must be suitable for congregational worship. If they are not, their various failures in idea and technique will diminish, not enhance, the assembly's obedience to God. Any hymn, old or new, must demonstrate that it fulfills all of God's requirements for worship before it is introduced. If it does not, it should never be used.

This sort of revival of interest in new hymns may well go hand in hand with a **SONG MEETING**. There are a number of capable men in the church who will spend a week working with a congregation on the technical aspects of singing. As these men are the first to note, good singing is not the same thing as acceptable worship. However, the connection between the two is undeniable. When a congregation is enthusiastic about singing, that enthusiasm easily transfers to worship.

There are many other tools also available to the church that wishes to improve its worship. These can be anything from special song services to regular singing classes both during and outside of the normal hours of assembly. The concerned and creative congregation can devise any number of practical means to directly and indirectly promote superior service to God.

Listening to the Congregation. Just as the congregation can fail to listen and participate in worship, so we too can fail to listen to the congregation. As we have already seen, God expects us to hear them too.

In our everyday lives, we are far more likely to listen to advice from someone we know and trust than to something a total stranger tells us. It's only natural that the same would be true in worship. We need to have a **RIGHT RELATIONSHIP** with the congregation around us. Sometimes, we haven't had time yet to develop this relationship. However, it's vitally important for us to get close to our brethren. Really, being able to worship rightly with them is just one of a host of reasons why we should!

Once we have established this relationship, we need to make sure that we are not letting pride interfere with it or with our ability to hear them. Instead, we need to remember the message of Colossians 3:15: "Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which you were indeed called in one body, and be thankful." All of us have been called together to Jesus. Only as we maintain love for and unity with our brethren can we maintain those same things with Christ.

In addition, as we listen, we need to listen to the right things. We don't need to develop an ear for fine singing; we need to develop an **EAR FOR WORSHIP**. Although recognizing the beauty of the congregation's song is worthwhile, it should not be the focus of our attention. What brethren are saying to us is far more important than the musical form in which they are saying it.

Understanding Completing Worship.

1. What makes coming back to God so easy?
2. Why is form of worship an important consideration?
3. What's the main reason that congregations fail to understand their role in worship?
4. How can this be remedied?
5. What are two other things a congregation can do to improve its worship?
6. Why is our relationship with our church important to worship?
7. When we listen to our brethren sing, what should we be listening for? Why?

Applying Completing Worship.

1. How can we examine ourselves to make sure we're pleasing to God before worship?
2. Describe some ways the leadership of a congregation can cause it to become more interested in worship.
3. Name some things that individual members can do to encourage the congregation to consider its worship. Explain how you would do them.
4. Generally speaking, how else can we improve our worship?

Soldiers of Christ, Arise

*#231 in Hymns for Worship (Revised)
For use with Lesson 7*

Soldiers of Christ, arise,
And put your armor on;
Strong in the strength which God supplies
Thru His beloved Son.

Strong in the Lord of hosts
And in His mighty pow'r;
Who in the strength of Jesus trusts
Is more than conqueror.

Stand, then, in His great might,
With all His strength endued,
But take to arm you for the fight
The panoply of God.

Leave no unguarded place,
No weakness of the soul;
Take ev'ry virtue, ev'ry grace,
And fortify the whole.

That having all things done,
And all your conflicts past,
You may o'ercome through Christ alone
And stand entire at last.

Understanding “Soldiers of Christ, Arise.”

1. What Scriptures does this hymn incorporate? For each Scripture you recognize, write the reference next to the appropriate line.
2. This hymn is almost as notable for the odd words it sometimes uses as it is for its Scripturality. What are some words in the hymn we don't commonly use? What do they mean?
3. How much Scriptural awareness does this hymn demonstrate on the part of the author? Do you know anything about the author?
4. What important ideas about Christianity does this hymn teach?
5. How useful is the teaching of this hymn in our daily lives? Why?

8

Teaching in the Psalms

Introduction.

1. How much should hymns emphasize teaching?
2. How many Scriptural passages can you recite from memory? How many hymns?
3. All other things being equal, is a hymn that contains more teaching preferable to a hymn that contains less? Why?
4. If we only knew about Christianity from our hymnal, what would we know? What things would be left out?

Exploring Teaching in the Psalms.

In the first seven lessons of this book, we looked at God's path to worship and the ways we can follow that path. In the remaining three, we will consider some ways not just to worship, but to excel in worship. During the later part of this study, we'll look at the worship of God's faithful people throughout the Bible so that we can understand both the content and the circumstances of the praise they offered.

However, we'll begin this part of the study by looking at the book of Psalms. David, who offered what is perhaps the most well-known worship in the entire Bible, has been dead for three thousand years. We can't ask him about his perspective on praise, however much we might like to. However, we can look at a hymnal to which he was the main contributor--the book of Psalms.

Psalms is God's hymnal. Using the faith and talent of men like David and the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, God shaped the Psalms to be exactly what He wanted them to be. They contain the things that God thought were most necessary to the worship of the children of Israel.

Unfortunately, the Psalms are not quite as useful to us today. They reflect the religious conditions of the Old Law, not of the law of liberty. A hymnal, even an inspired hymnal, that does not explore our relationship with Christ would cripple our worship. As a result, we must turn to sources other than the Psalms for the songs we sing.

However, the Psalms can still provide us with a template for what our worship should be like. If our worship parallels the worship we see recorded in Psalms, then we know that it fulfills God's design for the song of His people. In this lesson, let's look together at Psalms as a scaled-down version of the wisdom of the Law. Let's look at the Psalms to see what they taught the people of God.

The Nature of God. God is the main character of Psalms. Even though the book of Psalms contains only 150 songs of praise, as opposed to the hundreds of spiritual songs that comprise most modern hymnals, it paints a picture of God that is both nuanced and powerful. This single book of the Bible has as much to say as any about the nature of the Almighty.

The call to worship of the Psalms is founded upon the **AUTHORITY** of God. Psalm 95:6-7 proclaims, "Come, let us worship and bow down, let us kneel before the Lord our Maker. For He is our God, and we are the people of His pasture and the sheep of His hand." God is worthy of adulation, for all men are His handiwork. God is also responsible for the goodness of the rest of His physical creation (Psalm 104). His power continues to this day (Psalm 29), it will endure forever (Psalm 90), and He is everywhere and aware of everything (Psalm 139).

According to the Psalms, God does not take His lordship of creation lightly. He enforces His will upon the world for the protection of His people, and He alone determines the fate of nations. In Psalm 2:5, David describes God's response to the world powers that oppose Him. David writes, "He who sits in the heavens laughs; the Lord scoffs at them." The Psalms describe a God of such awesome power that the rulers of the earth are literally a laughing matter.

PSALM 104:24
**O Lord, how many are
Your works!
In wisdom You have
made them all.
The earth is full of
Your possessions.**

Furthermore, God also brings **JUSTICE** upon the wicked. As Psalm 94:8-9 urges, "Pay heed, you senseless among the people; and when will you understand, stupid ones? He who planted the ear, does He not hear? He who formed the eye, does He not see? He who chastens the nations, will He not rebuke?" God is always active to judge evil among men.

Thus, the Psalms are a warning to those who disobey, but they are also a source of comfort to the repentant sinner. Indeed, the Psalms emphasize His **MERCY** even more than they do His justice. Psalm 107:1 rejoices, "Oh give thanks to the Lord, for He is good, for His lovingkindness is everlasting." Psalm 107 then continues to describe the hopelessness of life without God's forgiveness, but the salvation that comes to those who remember Him.

The mercy of God is not mere poetic license, either. Psalm 78 describes the continual disobedience of the children of Israel, but God's equally continual willingness to hear their repentance. This care of God for His people dominates the book of Psalms. God is described as the deliverer of His people (Psalm 105), their protector (Psalm 34), and their constant shepherd (Psalm 23). Even when others are destroyed, the people of God will be delivered (Psalm 91). Well might Psalm 103:11-12 exult, "For as high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is His **LOVINGKINDNESS** toward those who fear Him. As far as the east is from the west, so far has He removed our transgressions from us." The Psalms declare that God is good, and those who used the Psalms in worship could not doubt it.

The Duty of Man. The other major theme of the teaching of Psalms is the obligation of man toward God. This obligation is not presented as something that man must guess at. Instead, the children of God are directed toward His word.

The law of God is His glorious creation just as surely as the wonders of the heavens are (Psalm 19). The longest chapter of the Bible, Psalm 119, reveals the true child of God's **LONGING FOR THE WORD**. In Psalm 119:19, the psalmist cries out, "O how I love Your law! It is my meditation all the day." Psalm 119 makes clear that this love is real and practical, for only through the ordinances of God can one be counseled to pursue good and shun evil.

The Psalms also establish that man's duty is not merely to know the law, but to obey it. Only one who has lived a **RIGHTEOUS LIFE** can come into the presence of the Lord (Psalm 24). This righteousness involves actions as diverse as shunning the wicked (Psalm 1), sacrificing appropriately to God (Psalm 50), seeking unity with God's people (Psalm 133), and remaining humble (Psalm 131). When one disobeys God, the consequences are very real. In the Psalms, sin is presented as both physically and spiritually destructive (Psalm 32).

However, walking with God goes beyond mere rigid obedience to His commands. The righteous are expected to **TRUST IN GOD**, even when there appears to be little reason to do so. "Be not envious toward wrongdoers," counsels Psalm 37:1-2, "For they will wither quickly like the grass, and fade like the green herb." God will make a complete end of all who boast in evil (Psalm 52). Failure to trust in God's plan is no less than a betrayal of His children, for if the righteous man only waits, through God he will surely be delivered (Psalm 73).

PSALM 1:1-2

**How blessed is the man who
does not walk in the counsel
of the wicked,
Nor stand in the path of
sinners,
Nor sit in the seat of
scoffers!
But his delight is in the law
of the Lord,
And in His law he meditates
day and night.**

Understanding Teaching in the Psalms.

1. What was the original purpose of the book of Psalms?
2. Why can't Psalms serve that purpose for us today?
3. What useful information can we get out of Psalms about worship?
4. Describe the two of the main points that Psalms makes about God:
 - a.
 - b.
5. Note two of the things Psalms has to say about the duty of man:
 - a.
 - b.

Applying Teaching in the Psalms.

1. How well do you think the Psalms reflect the Old Law? Explain.
2. If you were to design a hymnal from the ground up, name the six topics that you think are most important for the hymnal to include. Defend your answers. No topics like "God," please.
 - a.
 - b.
 - c.
 - d.
 - e.
 - f.

I Am The Vine

*#75 in Hymns for Worship (Revised)
For use with Lesson 8*

"I am the vine and ye are the branches,"
Bear precious fruit for Jesus today;
Branches in Him no fruit ever bearing,
Jesus hath said, "He taketh away."

Chorus:

"I am the vine and ye are the branches;
"I am the vine, be faithful and true;
"Ask what ye will, your prayer shall be granted,
"The Father loved Me, so I have loved you."

"Now ye are clean by words I have spoken,
"Living in Me, much fruit shall ye bear;
Dwelling in you, My promise unbroken,
"Glory in heav'n with Me ye shall share."

(Chorus)

Yes, by your fruits the world is to know you,
Walking in love as children of day;
Follow your Guide; He passeth before you,
Leading to realms of glorious day.

(Chorus)

Understanding "I Am The Vine."

1. What Scripture is this hymn based around?
2. But is the hymn a paraphrase, exactly?
3. Does the hymn do a good job of expanding on the message of its central passage? Why or why not?
4. Why is that message valuable in the context of the church?
5. Despite the technical quirks of the hymn, is it one we should use in worship? Why or why not?

9

Relationship Through Worship

Introduction.

1. Do you sometimes feel especially involved in song worship? When?
2. Why do you think this happens sometimes?
3. How well do the things you sing about match your life?
4. How important is it to have worship that is about us?

Exploring Relationship Through Worship.

The Psalms are certainly a model of teaching, and all the Psalms teach, but they are far, far more than just a dry doctrinal dissertation. Indeed, if we consider the Psalms as a hymnal, the main impression they give us is of songs about the singer's relationship with God. The Psalms are not rigid, formalistic expressions of what God's people think they should be saying in the assembly. Instead, the Psalms are about the lives of the Israelites: the blessings and trials, the victories and defeats.

This tells us a lot about the kind of worship that God desires. Worship should not primarily be about the hymns we sing. It should be about God and the relationship we have with Him, and we should regard it in that light. We usually can't do a great deal about the kind of hymns we sing, but we can change the attitude with which we receive those hymns. We should try to develop a relationship of worship, and from the Psalms, we can see what this relationship should look like.

The Worshipper. Worship as revealed in the Psalms begins with an individual **RECOGNITION OF GOD.** In Psalm 139:7, David asks, "Where can I go from Your Spirit? Or where can I flee from Your presence?" God is everywhere and in every good thing. As a result, the

worshipper is filled with longing for God (Psalm 63). He loves to seek God both in worship (Psalm 84) and in His word (Psalm 119).

Because this worshipper recognizes how wonderful life without God is, he also understands the inevitability of **HOPELESSNESS WITHOUT GOD**. If God isn't part of the picture, mankind is truly pitiable. As David cries out in Psalm 28:1: "If you are silent to me, I will become like those who go down to the pit." This is especially true when man is ensnared in the agony of sin, from which he cannot extricate himself without God's help (Psalm 38).

The Psalm singer also understands that this truth is universal. Everyone's life is doomed without God. As a result, he recognizes the futility of riches and material possessions (Psalm 49) and even warns the wicked to repent before they are destroyed (Psalm 75). No matter how powerful his wicked enemies may become, the man of God is unconcerned (Psalm 52). He knows that he will endure and they won't.

These considerations logically lead the worshipper to a clear course of action: **DEDICATION TO GOD**. He recognizes that the servant of God is the one who will ultimately be blessed (Psalm 40). As a result, he resolves to fully obey the commandments of God (Psalm 101). Because of his commitment, he trusts that God's care for His people will apply to him too (Psalm 16).

The Problem. However, this does not mean that the life of the true worshipper will be problem-free, and the Psalms reflect that awareness. The Psalm singer knows that he has problems, and that God is his only hope (Psalm 52). Because of his sorrow, he embarks on a **SEARCH FOR GOD'S HELP** (Psalm 6). He explains that he has served faithfully according to the requirements of God and calls upon God to respond accordingly (Psalm 31).

The kind of help he's seeking can vary. Sometimes, he desires God's justice. As David sings in Psalm 7:9, "O let the evil of the wicked come to an end, but establish the righteous." At other moments, the worshipper recognizes that God can solve the problem by giving him more understanding through His word (Psalm 25).

The Psalms seek an answer to **WIDE-RANGING PROBLEMS**. Some of them deal with physical trials: enemies (Psalm 2), war (Psalm 35), defeat (Psalm 60), exile (Psalm 137), and even the difficulties of old age (Psalm 71). Others are more spiritual in nature. In Psalm 51:1, an agonized David cries out to God, "Be gracious to me, O God, according to Your lovingkindness. According to the greatness of Your compassion blot out my transgressions." However, the Psalms also take note of the spiritual condition of others. Psalm 3 is a song of mourning for the vanishing of the godly from among men.

Not all of these problems make sense to the worshipper, and some Psalms reflect that **CONFUSION**. Psalm 10 addresses the age-old problem of the prosperous wicked. Its first verse asks, "Why do You stand afar off, O Lord? Why do You hide Yourself in times of trouble?" Psalm 22, which prefigures the agony of Christ upon the cross, raises similar questions. Why does God sometimes seem to forsake those who have always served Him?

PSALM 22:1

"My God, my God, why have You forsaken me? Far from my deliverance are the words of my groaning."

The Solution. Despite the problems that filled the life of the Psalm worshipper, he was still able to use the Psalms to express his trust in God. This process begins by describing the **PAST HELP** that God has provided to His people. In Psalm 9:5, the worshipper praises God for the mightiness and

finality of the aid that He gives to those in need, saying, "You have rebuked the nations; You have destroyed the wicked. You have blotted out their name forever and ever." No problem is beyond the strength of God, either. He has proven equally capable in physical struggle (Psalm 18) and in the war against sin (Psalm 32).

This examination of God's previous acts also gives rise in the Psalms to an expression of **CONFIDENCE** in the aid that God will provide. This confidence is based on the blessing that every child of God has seen before and is still seeing (Psalm 65). The worshipper of Psalms is confident that God will bless the righteous (Psalm 5), vindicate the just (Psalm 4), and forgive the repentant (Psalm 85). This worshipper's continued faithfulness is built on that confidence. As David notes in Psalm 27:13, "I would have despaired unless I had believed that I would see the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living." God will be the salvation of His people.

The Psalms also give the worshipper a way to express his joy in **GOD'S VICTORY**. Through God, the faithful will be able to triumph in their earthly battles (Psalm 118). They can also taste the joy of being restored to God's fellowship after being forgiven of sin (Psalm 30). With God, His people triumph, and Psalm 34:22 expresses exactly this. It rejoices, "The Lord redeems the soul of His servants, and none of those who take refuge in Him will be condemned."

PSALM 118:21
**"I shall give thanks to You,
for You have answered me,
And You have become my
salvation."**

Conclusion. These past two lessons have not been by any means a systematic study of the book of Psalms. However, they do demonstrate both the immense amount of teaching that the Psalms did and the immense emotional range of the book, particularly the latter. Wherever a child of God can be, the Psalms are there too, and he can use them to worship. This didn't happen by accident, and it tells us what God wants worship to be like. He wants us to use the hymns we sing to express everything in our lives too.

Understanding Relationship Through Worship.

1. What is one of the main impressions that the book of Psalms gives us as a hymnal?
2. What message do the Psalms send about those who are not connected to God?
3. What does the Psalms worshipper do in times of trouble? Why?
4. Name some areas where the Psalms ask for help.
5. Do the Psalms require the worshipper to understand everything that's happening to him? Why or why not?
6. Where does the worshipper's journey to trusting God begin?
7. Who gets the credit for the worshipper's successes?

Applying Relationship Through Worship.

1. How much is the range of our worship limited by the hymns we use?
2. How much do we limit worship by not understanding what it's about?
3. Name some ways we can do a better job of expanding our relationship with God through worship.
4. If we build our relationship through worship, what should happen?

I Know Whom I Have Believed

*#350 in Hymns for Worship (Revised)
For use with Lesson 9*

I know not why God's wondrous grace
To me He hath made known,
Nor why, unworthy, Christ in love
Redeemed me for His own.

Chorus:

"But I know whom I have believed,
"And am persuaded that He is able
"To keep that which I've committed
"Unto Him against that day."

I know not what of good or ill
May be reserved for me,
Of weary ways or golden days,
Before His face I see.

(Chorus)

I know not when my Lord may come,
At night or noonday fair,
Nor if I'll walk the vale with Him
Or "meet Him in the air."

(Chorus)

Understanding "I Know Whom I Have Believed."

1. Where in the Bible do you find the chorus?
2. How do the verses interact with the chorus?
3. In v. 3, when the hymn talks about walking the vale with Jesus, is it necessarily teaching premillennial doctrine? Consider Psalm 23:4 before you answer.
4. What is the message of this hymn to the Christian?
5. Why is that message spiritually useful?

10

Worship Outside the Assembly

Introduction.

1. How often do you sing to the Lord when you're by yourself?
2. What are the things that commonly move you to do so?
3. What do you think the point is of worship outside the assembly?
4. How much do you think that personal worship should be a part of Christians' lives?

Exploring Worship Outside the Assembly.

Some time ago, when I was studying with a group of newer Christians, I learned that they had something of a restrictive view of prayer. They thought that they were only allowed to pray at "appropriate" times, like bedtime, and that they had to save up their prayers until the right moment came.

Prayer, of course, can be much more spontaneous. Formal prayers during worship services make up part of our prayer lives, but so do ten-second prayers on the spur of the moment. We have no difficulty recognizing this in our formal Bible studies, particularly when we run into passages like 1 Thessalonians 5:17.

However, we often fail to make the same recognition with respect to song worship. Many of us do sing hymns from time to time when we're by ourselves, but we don't consider that when we do so, we're actually obeying a Scriptural command. In James 5:13, James directs us, "Is anyone cheerful? He is to sing praises." Individual worship needs to be part of our spiritual existence too.

In the previous lesson, we looked at ways to bring our lives into the worship service. In this lesson, we'll look at ways to bring worship into our lives. This is actually something that God's people have

been doing for millennia. Indeed, about half of the moments of spiritual song in Scripture occur outside of the context of a religious assembly. If we look at the times when they worshipped, it can tell us something about the times we need to consider worship too.

Redemption. The first spiritual song recorded in the Bible is found in Exodus 15:1-18, and appropriately enough, its subject is the salvation of God. Just before the events that the song celebrates, the children of Israel were staring death in the face. They had just fled the bondage of Pharaoh and the Egyptians. However, Pharaoh's army, which had no reason to be merciful, had now trapped them against the uncrossable Red Sea. Small wonder that the children of Israel cried out to Moses, "Is it because there were no graves in Egypt that you have taken us away to die in the wilderness?"

We know God's response. He parted the waters of the Red Sea so that the children of Israel could pass through, then used those same waters to destroy the Egyptian army. God's people expressed their thanksgiving with a song of praise. They both described the greatness of their deliverance and the glory of the Lord. In Exodus 15:1, their song begins by exclaiming, "I will sing to the Lord, for He is highly exalted. The horse and his rider He has hurled into the sea!"

As God's people today, we have far more cause to rejoice in our deliverance than the Israelites on that day. Passages like Ephesians 2:1 tell us that before God intervened in our lives, we weren't just staring death in the face. We WERE dead. God has worked such a salvation in us that we owe Him not just our earthly lives, but also our spiritual ones (Ephesians 2:5). It is entirely appropriate for our lips to constantly sing His praises.

JAMES 5:13

Is anyone among you suffering? Then he must pray. Is anyone cheerful? He is to sing praises.

Struggle. The Bible makes clear, though, that praising God in song is not just an activity for sunny skies and clear days. Our lives are filled with conflict on every level, both physically and spiritually. This is not a new phenomenon; God's people have always had to deal with problems. However, they faced their difficulties in life with praise, from the time before the conflict began until its conclusion.

God's people worshipped Him **BEFORE BATTLE**. In 2 Chronicles 20, Judah was invaded by a horde of Ammonites, Moabites, and Edomites, a force so great that it caused Jehosaphat king of Judah to become afraid. God, however, promised the people of Judah that He would defeat the invaders, and that the army of Judah would not even have to fight. As the army of Judah went out to the place God had appointed, the Levitical singers walked before them and sang of the lovingkindness of the Lord (2 Chronicles 20:21). Their enemies were routed.

Not all of the trials that God's people faced with song were so easy to overcome. Matthew 26:30 and Mark 14:26 describe the same event, the only time in Scripture when Jesus practiced song worship. This session followed immediately after He instituted the Lord's Supper. Before He and His apostles went to the garden of Gethsemane, where He would be arrested, they sang a hymn.

Scripture does not specify which hymn was sung. Biblical scholars, however, commonly say that this hymn would have been part of the Hallel, the Jewish cycle of Passover hymns of praise, which we have as Psalms 113-118. Although those hymns, with their joyful descriptions of God's deliverance, may seem inappropriate or even ghastly to us today, it is quite likely that they comforted Jesus as He prepared for the ultimate trial of His faith.

Interestingly enough, the only example we have of Christian song worship occurs not in the midst of the assembly, but **IN THE MIDST OF TRIAL**. This moment is recorded for us in Acts 16:25. Just before the events of the verse, Paul and Silas had been preaching the gospel in the city of Philippi. In the course of their work, they performed a notable miracle: casting a spirit of divination out of a slave girl. This miracle did not meet with the acclaim one might expect. Instead, it resulted in Paul and Silas being stripped, beaten, and cast into prison.

However, neither evangelist let their sudden and undeserved misfortune diminish their faith. As Acts 16:25 records, "About midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns of praise to God, and the prisoners were listening to them." Clearly, Paul and Silas were singing not only for the benefit of God, but also for the benefit of those around them. Even while captive, they used songs of praise to preach God to a captive audience.

Finally, of course, the righteous used song to celebrate God's power **AFTER VICTORY**. We see such a hymn of praise recorded in Judges 5. The previous chapter describes the rise of a new foreign oppressor, Jabin the king of Canaan, but it also outlines God's response. At God's direction, the prophetess Deborah and her war leader Barak raised a small army to attack Jabin's army, commanded by the general Sisera.

Barak's forces destroyed Sisera's chariots, and Sisera himself was killed when a nomad's wife drove a tent peg through his skull while he was sleeping. Neither Deborah nor Barak had any doubt about who was responsible. They sang, "Hear, o kings! Give ear, o rulers! I--to the Lord, I will sing, I will sing praise to the Lord, the God of Israel." From the beginning of our battles until their end, there is no time that is not appropriate for the praise of God.

JUDGES 5:10-11

**"You who ride on white donkeys,
"You who sit on rich carpets,
"You who travel on the road--sing!
"At the sound of those who divide
flocks among the watering places,
"There they shall recount the
righteous deeds of the Lord,
"The righteous deeds for His
peasantry in Israel."**

Understanding Worship Outside the Assembly.

1. Under what circumstances did the children of Israel sing in Exodus 15? Why?
2. Why would we have a similar motivation to sing?
3. Describe the setting in which God's people sang in 2 Chronicles 20:21.
4. What's the significance of the praise recorded in Matthew 26:30?
5. What made the song of Paul and Silas in Acts 16:25 so unusual?
6. What other effects might this song have had?
7. Why were Deborah and Barak moved to praise God in Judges 5?

Applying Worship Outside the Assembly.

1. How is individual song worship like our worship in the assembly?
2. How is it different?
3. List several ways that individual song worship can help us in our spiritual lives.
4. If we need to worship by ourselves more than we already do, how do we get there?

Dare To Stand Like Joshua

*#480 in Hymns for Worship (Revised)
For use with Lesson 10*

We are bound for Canaan land,
Tenting by the way.
Who shall lead us on the road?
Choose your King today.

Chorus:

Dare to stand like Joshua;
Dare to say the word:
"As for me and for my house,
"We will serve the Lord."

When the dark Red Sea of doubt
Billowed in our way,
Then He parted ev'ry wave—
So He will today.

(Chorus)

Just before us Jordan rolls,
Just across the way.
We can safely trust the Lord;
He shall lead today.

(Chorus)

Understanding "Dare To Stand Like Joshua."

1. What's the central Scripture of this hymn?
2. What metaphor does the hymn use to make this Scripture relevant to us?
3. What are the two circumstances where the hymn tells us we need to make a stand?
4. This hymn was written more than a hundred years ago. How difficult is it to understand? What makes you say that?
5. Is this hymn still relevant and useful today? Why or why not?

11

More Tools for Worship

Introduction.

The class to this point has looked at ten hymns that meet God's terms for song worship. However, our repertoire includes hundreds, perhaps thousands, of hymns. Some of these hymns are equally worthwhile, but others are not. As a result, it's important for all of us to develop a discerning eye when it comes to hymns. This lesson contains five more that are worthy of study.

Resurrection

*#557 in Hymns for Worship, Revised
For use with Lesson 11*

When Jesus stood at Lazarus' tomb
And none believed He had the pow'r,
Despite their grief and their disbelief,
He commanded, "Take away the stone."

When Jesus lay in Joseph's tomb
And none believed He had the pow'r,
True Love spoke forth with a Father's voice,

And the angel took away the stone.
When I shall lie within my tomb
And none believe He has the pow'r,
The Lord Himself will descend from heav'n
With a shout to take away the stone.

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Understanding "Resurrection."

1. What are the three main Scriptural thoughts this hymn addresses?
2. How does the hymn link these events together?
3. Is it Biblically accurate to do so? Why?
4. How easy is this hymn to understand? How easy is it to sing?
5. Why is this hymn important?

Give Me The Bible

#500 in Hymns for Worship (Revised)
For use with Lesson 11

Give me the Bible, star of gladness gleaming,
To cheer the wand'rer lone and tempest-tossed;
No storm can hide that radiance peaceful beaming
Since Jesus came to seek and save the lost.

Chorus:

Give me the Bible, holy message shining;
Thy light shall guide me in the narrow way;
Precept and promise, law and love combining,
Till night shall vanish in eternal day.

Give me the Bible when my heart is broken,
When sin and grief have filled my soul with fear;
Give me the precious words by Jesus spoken;
Hold up faith's lamp to show my Savior near.

(Chorus)

Give me the Bible; all my steps enlighten;
Teach me the danger of these realms below;
That lamp of safety o'er the gloom shall brighten;
That light alone the path of peace can show.

(Chorus)

Give me the Bible, lamp of life immortal;
Hold up that splendor by the open grave;
Show me the light from heaven's shining portal;
Show me the glory gilding Jordan's wave.

(Chorus)

Understanding "Give Me The Bible."

1. What is the core concept around which this hymn is written? What are some verses that teach this concept?
2. Of all the hymns we use in worship, this hymn is one of the most well-structured. Describe the point that each verse makes.
 - a.
 - b.
 - c.
 - d.
3. Does the way that the hymn is organized contribute to its usefulness as a teaching tool? How?
4. How fully does this hymn describe the way we should use the Bible in our lives?
5. What makes this hymn useful in worship?

Guide Me, O Thou Great Jehovah

#117 in Hymns for Worship (Revised)

For use with Lesson 11

Guide me, O Thou great Jehovah,
Pilgrim through this barren land;
I am weak, but Thou art mighty;
Hold me with Thy pow'ful hand;
Bread of heaven, feed me till I want no more;
Bread of heaven, feed me till I want no more.

Open now the crystal fountain
Whence the healing waters flow;
Let the fiery, cloudy pillar
Lead me all my journey thru;
Strong Deliv'rer, be Thou still my strength and shield.
Strong Deliv'rer, be Thou still my strength and shield.

When I tread the verge of Jordan,
Bid my anxious fears subside;
Bear me through the swelling current;
Land me safe on Canaan's side;
Songs of praises I will ever give to Thee.
Songs of praises I will ever give to Thee.

Understanding “Guide Me, O Thou Great Jehovah.”

1. This hymn is similar in subject matter to “Dare To Stand Like Joshua.” What is the subject?
2. What in Scripture tells us that this is an accurate parallel to make?
3. What imagery in the hymn do you recognize from the relevant Bible story?
4. What's a “verge?” What in the world are the first two lines of v. 3 talking about? Joshua 3:14-16 may provide insight.
5. Why is this hymn useful to us despite its obvious age?

Love For All

*#282 in Hymns for Worship (Revised)
For use with Lesson 11*

Love for all—and can it be?
Can I hope it is for me—
I, who strayed so long ago,
Strayed so far, and fell so low?

I, the disobedient child,
Wayward, passionate, and wild—
I, who left my Father's home
In forbidden ways to roam.

I, who spurned His loving hold,
I, who would not be controlled—
I, who would not hear His call,
I, the willful prodigal.

To my Father can I go?
At His feet myself I'll throw;
In His house there yet may be
Place—a servant's place—for me.

See! My Father waiting stands;
See! He reaches out His hands:
God is love, I know, I see,
Love for me—yes, even me.

Understanding “Love For All.”

1. What Bible story does this hymn use?
2. Where in the hymn do you see writing that is not intuitive? How large an obstacle does this writing pose to worship?
3. How emotional is this hymn? What makes you say that?
4. This hymn is commonly used during the invitation. Is it appropriate for that use? Why?
5. Do we need a hymn like this? Why?

Teach Me Thy Way

#112 in Hymns for Worship (Revised)

For use with Lesson 11

Teach me Thy way, O Lord,
Teach me Thy way!
Thy guiding grace afford—
Teach me Thy way!
Help me to walk aright,
More by faith, less by sight;
Lead me with heav'nly light,
Teach me Thy way!

When I am sad at heart,
Teach me Thy way!
When earthly joys depart,
Teach me Thy way!
In hours of loneliness,
In times of dire distress,
In failure or success,
Teach me Thy way!

When doubts and fears arise,
Teach me Thy way!
When storms o'erspread the skies,
Teach me Thy way!
Shine thru the cloud and rain,
Thru sorrow, toil, and pain;
Make Thou my pathway plain,
Teach me Thy way!

Long as my life shall last,
Teach me Thy way!
Where'er my lot be cast,
Teach me Thy way!
Until the race is run,
Until the journey's done,
Until the crown is won,
Teach me Thy way!

Understanding “Teach Me Thy Way.”

1. Around what Scripture is this hymn based?
2. How well structured is this hymn? Why?
3. On a scale of 1 to 10, how emotionally powerful is this hymn? Why?
4. Do the Scripturality and structured style of this hymn add to or take away from its emotional punch? What leads you to that conclusion?
5. Do hymns like this have a place in our worship service? Why?

12

Practicing the Path to Worship

Introduction.

If this class ends up being nothing more than an abstract, although interesting, discussion of hymns and worship, it has failed. Worship has to be something we practice, in both senses of the word. It has to be something we actually do, and it has to be something that we work at with a desire to get better. Just like everything else that God commands us to do, worship is not some inborn talent. It's a skill that we need to spend our lives sharpening. This lesson is designed to help us do exactly that.

Lesson 1: The Path to Worship.

1. How would you describe the path to worship?
2. Is this model of worship complete, or would you like to add other factors to it?
3. Why is understanding the path to worship important for actually worshipping?
4. List some ways we can apply the path to worship to our actual worship.

Lessons 2-3: Hymns in Worship

1. What are the two things that all hymns must accomplish?
2. Is it true that all hymns are equally effective in worship? Why or why not?
3. If some hymns are less effective, why is it important to recognize them?

4. What are some ways that we can recognize less effective hymns?
 5. Name some characteristics that every good hymn must have.
 6. Why are some of these characteristics harder to describe than others?
 7. How should understanding the makeup of a good hymn change the way we look at hymns?
 8. What role does the songleader play in determining the usefulness of a hymn?
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Lessons 4-5: The Heart in Worship.

1. What makes the heart such an important part of worship?
2. What are the two main ways in which a heart can fail to worship?
3. Name some symptoms of these failures.
4. Describe some ways we can work to overcome these problems.
5. Is it Biblically correct to say that we need to prepare ourselves for worship?
6. How will a recognition of God's presence during our worship change it?
7. Why is growth an important part of worship?
8. Describe some other ways we can make sure that our hearts are right before God.

‘Tis Midnight, And On Olive’s Brow

*#183 in Hymns for Worship (Revised)
For use with Lesson 12*

‘Tis midnight, and on Olive’s brow
The star is dimmed that lately shone;
‘Tis midnight; in the garden, now
The suff’ring Savior prays alone.

‘Tis midnight, and from heav’nly plains
Is borne the song that angels know;
Unheard by mortals are the strains
That sweetly soothe the Savior’s woe.

‘Tis midnight, and for others’ guilt
The Man of Sorrows weeps in blood;
Yet He that hath in anguish knelt,
Is not forsaken by His God.

Understanding “‘Tis Midnight, And On Olive’s Brow.”

1. Upon what Scriptural occurrence is this hymn based? Where in Scripture do we find it?
2. This hymn does not use any direct Scriptural quotes. However, is it still accurate in its portrayal of the Bible passage? What makes you say that?
3. Frequently, this hymn is sung before the Lord’s Supper. What about its content makes it especially suitable for that purpose?
4. Although this book focuses primarily upon the words of hymns, that doesn’t mean that music is unimportant. What about the music of this hymn reinforces its point?
5. Should this hymn have a place in our repertoire? Why?

Introduction.

According to Hebrews 11, almost from the beginning of the world, God's people have had one distinguishing characteristic: their faith. This faith leads them to actions that worldly people would not even consider: building boats in the middle of dry land, abandoning home and family, and, as is recorded of Abel in Hebrews 11:4, offering a better sacrifice. If we are truly people of faith, our worship lives will reflect our desire to offer a better sacrifice too. This review is designed to help achieve exactly that.

Lessons 6-7: Other Parts of Worship

1. What are some other areas where our worship can run into problems?
2. How can sincere worship fail to glorify God?
3. What problems can the congregation cause for our worship?
4. Why is our attitude toward the congregation important in worship?
5. How can we make sure that we are holy enough for God to hear us in worship?
6. Does the congregation naturally worship well, or does it need to be nudged in the right direction? If the latter, how can we help nudge it?
7. How can we make sure that our relationship with the congregation is what it should be?
8. What else can we do to make sure that we are completing our worship?

Lessons 8-9: The Psalms in Worship

1. Despite the fact that they were designed for use with the Old Law, what makes the Psalms relevant to our worship today?
2. When we consider the Psalms from a teaching perspective, what are some of the major themes that we see?
3. What does the teaching content of the Psalms tell us about what our repertoire should look like?
4. What are some major Biblical themes that our worship ought to include?
5. How much do the Psalms have to say about the relationship of the worshipper with God?
6. List some of the ways that the Psalms relate to the life of the worshipper.
7. What does this tell us about the hymns we should use?
8. What does this tell us about what we should bring to the hymns we do use?

Lesson 10: Worship Outside the Assembly

1. What does the Bible have to say about worship outside the assembly?
2. What makes this kind of worship important?
3. What are some of the things that caused God's people to engage in spontaneous worship?
4. How can we do a better job of worshipping outside of the assembly?

All Things Are Ready

#317 in Hymns for Worship (Revised)
For use with Lesson 13

"All things are ready," come to the feast!
Come, for the table now is spread;
Ye famishing, ye weary come,
And thou shalt be richly fed.

Chorus:

Hear the invitation.
Come, "whosoever will;"
Praise God for full salvation
For "whosoever will."

"All things are ready," come to the feast!
Come, for the door is open wide;
A place of honor is reserved
For You at the Master's side.

(Chorus)

"All things are ready," come to the feast!
Come, while He waits to welcome thee;
Delay not while this day is thine,
Tomorrow may never be.

(Chorus)

"All things are ready," come to the feast!
Leave ev'ry care and worldly strife,
Come, feast upon the love of God,
And drink everlasting life.

(Chorus)

Understanding "All Things Are Ready."

1. Upon what Scripture is this hymn based?
2. What other Scriptures (whether quoted or paraphrased) do you recognize in the hymn?
3. Often, we pay less attention to the invitation hymn than we do to hymns in other parts of the song service. In this case, is that treatment deserved? Why or why not?
4. What are some things that worshippers can get from this hymn even if they aren't planning on coming forward?
5. Is this a hymn we should use in our services?