

The Spiritual Disciplines

Worship & Celebration

"Ascribe to the LORD the glory due his name; worship the LORD in the splendor of his holiness." (Ps 29:2)

Worship

In Scripture, worship falls under the rubric of (a) directing honor and glory to God or (b) prohibiting worship of other beings/things. Put differently, worship belongs exclusively to God. *Worship is singularly and wholly focused devotion. It is pure and undivided abandonment to God.* When he is at the center of our lives, interests, thoughts, and relationships we are worshipping in accordance with biblical guidelines. When God is relegated to the sidelines or simply added to the matrix of other people or things, we cease to worship God because he no longer occupies first place in our lives and is marginalized. As a Discipline, therefore, *worship is the free and spontaneous response that continually delights in the glorious revelation of God ultimately shown to us in the crucified and risen Christ.* (Caveat: Simply because worship entails a "free and spontaneous response" does not preclude the possibility that it can be done regularly and intentionally as a Discipline or on the same day each week.).

1. *Worship does not begin in us but comes from us.* Worship is our response to God's promptings. Worship cannot, therefore, originate in us. Behind and before every genuine act of worship is a deep and profound sense of God's love for us and can only be a reaction to God's love in us (**1 Jn 4:19; Rom 5:5**). Any other response falls short of authentic worship.
2. *In worship God is always the Guest of honor in our hearts.* He is the focal point of all our attention and affections. Hence God, as our Maker and Sustainer, is our persistent priority (**Ps 95:6-7; Mt 4:10; Rev 4:8**). God is the object of our worship and we are the subjects who give worship. Worship is giving back to God what he has given to us. When anyone or anything occupies God's place in worship we come dangerously close to idolatry, breaking the first of the Commandments (**Ex 20:3**).
3. *In worship we directly encounter God, privately or publically; acknowledging his worthiness and our unworthiness* (**Is 6:1-5**). Note Isaiah *saw* God, not just the activities of heaven.
4. *Worship, therefore, involves not only acknowledging what God has done but who he is* (**Rev. 4:11; 5:12-13**). Although emotion is involved, the mind is not bypassed. In worship we pay careful attention to the details of God's works and marvel at the beauty of his person. By meditating on God's works and person *he becomes especially present to us*. If, for example, God has done wonderful things, *he* becomes wonderful to us. If God shows mercy and grace to us, *he* personifies mercy and grace. By realizing the excellencies of God we encounter the God of excellencies.
5. *In worship God requires our hearts and not just our heads and our hands* (**Hos 6:6; Amos 5:21-24; Mt 15:8-9; Rom 12:1-2**). Tradition and routine are not, in themselves, wrong. But when religious practices eclipse mercy, justice, righteousness, and sacrifice God's verdict is clear: "Worship nauseates him!" (paraphrasing **Amos 5:21**).
6. *Jesus insists that regardless of how or where we worship, we must worship God in spirit and in truth* (**Jn 4:21-24**). Worshipping God is never a matter of location (cf. **Jn 4:21-22**). Since "God is spirit" (having no physical form or location) he is not geographically or spatially bound. Therefore, God is geographically present to everyone at all times and relationally present to different people under different circumstances (**Ps 51:9-11; Mk 15:34; 2 Thess 1:9**).

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Moreover, God requires sincerity in worship and not religious pretense. Therefore, truth in worship is always Spirit inspired (**1 Cor. 12:3**). While the presence of God's Spirit in us does not guarantee that our worship will always be sincere, it does guarantee the possibility that we can worship with sincerity and with truth because he is the "Spirit of Truth" who lives within us (**Jn 14:17; 15:26; 16:13**).

7. *In worship God's presence so fills our hearts that we spontaneously and freely sing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs to the Lord and to one another (Eph 5:18-19; Col 3:16; see also Is 12:5-6). The first indication of a Spirit-filled life is singing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs (Eph 5:19a) to one another and to God (5:19b).*

Celebration

In essence, *celebration is the completion of worship*. It is the natural outcome of a sincere response to God's activity in our lives that culminates in contentment, enjoyment, and confidence.

1. *In celebration we can rest in the assurance that our lives are designed precisely how God's wants. There is no place for discontent or bitterness of spirit in celebration. When we delight in what God has done we are truly saying "Thank you God! I do so appreciate all that you have done."*
2. *Whereas in worship we look up to God in response to his activity, in celebration we look out to others and exclaim the good things God has wrought in our lives. Aaron's sister, Miriam, celebrated God's victory over Pharaoh's army with singing, tambourines, and dancing (Ex 15:19-21). Likewise, Deborah and David exuberantly celebrated God's victories (Judges 5; 2 Sam 6:12-15).*

To Consider: "Holy delight and joy is the great antidote to despair and is a wellspring of genuine gratitude – the kind that starts at our toes and blasts off from our loins and diaphragm through the top of our head, flinging our arms and our eyes and our voice upward toward our good God." (Dallas Willard, Spirit of the Disciplines, p. 179).

3. *In celebration we rejoice in and partake of the produce from our labor as God's gift to us by feasting (literally) on his provision and sharing those blessings with others (Deut 14:22-27; Ecc 5:18-19). Since we can dishonor God as much by our abstinence as we can by our indulgence Ecclesiastes reminds us that there is a time for everything; "a time to weep, and a time to laugh; a time to mourn, and a time to dance" (Ecc 3:4).*
4. *In celebration we don't just give thanks to God but we shout from the depths of our being "YOU HAVE TURNED MY MOURNING INTO JOYFUL DANCING. YOU HAVE TAKEN AWAY MY CLOTHES OF MOURNING AND CLOTHED ME WITH JOY, THAT I MIGHT SING PRAISES TO YOU AND NOT BE SILENT. O LORD MY GOD, I WILL GIVE YOU THANKS FOREVER!" (Ps 30:11, NLT).*
5. *Finally, the entire creation looks forward to that great day of celebration when "the mountains and hills will burst into song before you, and all the trees of the field will clap their hands" (Is 55:12). Meanwhile we joyously anticipate this great day knowing ...*

"that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us. For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God. For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of him who

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subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to decay and obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God. For we know that the whole creation has been groaning together in the pains of childbirth until now. And not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies. For in this hope we were saved.”

Rom 8:18-24

Soli Deo gloria!

Reflection/Direction/Decision

- Describe an experience when you directly encountered God? What was it like?
- Because God is spirit, we can cultivate our relationship with him wherever we are and whenever we choose. He is ever-present to respond. Identify a place where you can cultivate your relationship with God and spend 30 minutes alone in the presence of God.
- Have you experienced a celebration recently where you noticed a change in yourself or in your perspective?
- What is one of your favorite worship songs and how does it draw you nearer to God? Meditate on the words and melody of that song.
- How can you implement the Discipline of celebration?
- Share what you've learned from the Discipline of worship with your worship director in your church and ask them how this might enlarge their understanding of worship on Sunday mornings.
- Create your own question for practical application from the Disciplines of worship and celebration, and then share it with one other person.
- Explain the relationship between the works of God and the person of God as it relates to worship.
- Do you think celebration can help with despair? How?