



ESSENTIALS OF WORSHIP

by

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Table of Contents

Lesson 1 ■ Preliminary Concerns.....	3
Lesson 2 ■ Principle 1.....	6
Lesson 3 ■ Principles 2 – 4.....	9
Lesson 4 ■ Principle 5.....	13
Lesson 5 ■ Principles 6 – 7.....	16
Lesson 6 ■ Principle 8.....	19
Lesson 7 ■ Principles 9 – 11	21
Lesson 8 ■ Key Passages	24
Lesson 9 ■ Implications	27
Lesson 10 ■ Style and Format.....	30

Lesson 1 ■ Preliminary Concerns

SECTION OVERVIEW

Dr. Parrett discusses the ministry of worship in the local church context, looking at critical issues about the biblical understanding of worship, and also its practice in the contemporary Christian context. In this lesson he takes on two common misconceptions about worship, and then looks at key biblical terms that describe worship. Dr. Parrett also offers an initial definition for worship.

WORSHIP IS CONTROVERSIAL (“WORSHIP WARS”)

MISCONCEPTIONS

Worship is singing

Worship is something we do on occasion

KEY BIBLICAL TERMS

shachah, proskuneo mean:

'avad, latreuo mean:

DEFINITION OF WORSHIP:

MEANING OF ENGLISH “WORSHIP”:

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. As an overview, without going into too much detail, what are some of the basic issues as you see it in the worship wars? What has the battle looked like in your experience?
2. Are you old enough, or do you know anyone old enough, to share about the changes that have taken place over the past 50 years? Is there any part of your current worship service that is the result of difficult changes occurring many years ago? The idea of this question is to gain some perspective. I would imagine that some of the aspects of worship that you consider standard today were at an earlier date considered novel and different.
3. How would you answer someone who says that we worship on Sunday morning by singing, and after the worship service comes the sermon?
4. Come up with a preliminary definition of worship. Hopefully you will fine-tune it as you work through these lectures.

RECOMMENDED READING FOR THE COURSE

How Shall We Worship? Biblical Guidelines for the Worship Wars, by Marva J. Dawn, Tyndale, 2003.

Engaging with God: A Biblical Theology of Worship, by David G. Peterson, IVP Academic, 2002.

Ancient-Future Worship: Proclaiming and Enacting God's Narrative, by Robert E. Webber, Baker Books, 2008.

Lesson 2 ■ Principle 1

LESSON OVERVIEW

With the misconceptions and basic terms as background, Dr. Parrett turns to a number of key biblical principles concerning the practice of worship. The first principle is that all worship involves these two things in a dynamic relationship, revelation and response.

PRINCIPLE #1: WORSHIP ALWAYS INVOLVES REVELATION AND RESPONSE.

Definition of Worship

“Worship is initiated by God, who graciously reveals himself to us, and we respond in faithful ways.”

“Worship is our faithful response to God’s gracious revelation.”

KEY BIBLE TEXTS

1. Deuteronomy 6:4-5 (The Shema)

2. Romans 12:1-2

3. Isaiah 6:1-8

a.

b.

c.

Why is Isaiah's response not normative for worshippers (even though it should be)?

REFLECTIONS QUESTIONS

1. Gary's definition of worship as "revelation and response" is basic to his entire thesis. What do you think about it?
2. What are some of the ramifications of this definition of worship for you personally? Hopefully you are answering this question before hearing the rest of the lectures.
3. Why don't we all respond the way Isaiah responded to the revelation of God? Gary has a particularly powerful answer to this question; how would you state it?
4. How can we make clarity of revelation a priority so that our response will truly be faithful and appropriate?

Lesson 3 ■ Principles 2 – 4

LESSON OVERVIEW

Worship is something we do both individual and in community, in both habitual and intentional actions. Habitual, lifestyle worship is more important than our intentional actions of worship in religious settings. Individual worship and congregational worship should inform and strengthen one another.

PRINCIPLE #2: WORSHIP IS SOMETHING THAT WE DO BOTH INDIVIDUALLY AND IN COMMUNITY.

1. We can also speak of worship both as a habitual part of our lives and as a specific, intentional action.

2. When there is a radical disconnect, our worship is hypocrisy.

3. Example of prayer as being both intentional and as habitual.

4. Worship is the vocation of every Christian.

5. Confusion from word use

PRINCIPLE #3: HABITUAL LIFESTYLE WORSHIP IS MORE IMPORTANT THAN OUR INTENTIONAL ACTIONS OF WORSHIP IN RELIGIOUS SETTINGS.

Scriptural Support

1. Isaiah 1:10-18

2. Amos 5:21-24

3. Micah 6:6-8 (Jesus' teaching)

The same is true of the church today.

Intentional actions of worship are to be tokens of the inner reality.

Hypocritical and unacceptable worship

**PRINCIPLE #4: INDIVIDUAL WORSHIP AND CONGREGATIONAL
WORSHIP INFORM AND STRENGTHEN ONE ANOTHER.**

Explanation

Because we have worshiped God as individuals, the gathering of worshipers is richer.

Because we have worshiped with the body of Christ, we become better worshipers as individuals.

Emphasis of corporate worship is on the clarity of the revelation.

SUMMARY

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. In review, what is the difference between habitual and intentional acts of worship
2. Have you ever thought of your life as being a habit of worship? Do you agree? Does your life need to change for this to be true? How so?
3. How would you explain the relationship between intentional acts of worship and your everyday life?
4. Gary uses the example of prayer as being both intentional and habitual. Can you think of any other?
5. We have all been hypocritical, in one way or another, in worship. How is this true in your life? We all have striven, I would hope, in being authentic in worship as well. How is this also true for you?
6. How did you feel when Gary read Isaiah 1:10-18? Did you hear it as something said to people of old, or did you hear Isaiah speaking directly to you? What are some modern parallels of good things that God requires that have become “evil” because of religiosity and inauthentic worship?
7. What are some examples of the reality of worship being replaced by religious rituals?
8. How has corporate worship strengthened and/or refined your private worship? How the reverse also shown itself?

Lesson 4 ■ Principle 5

LESSON OVERVIEW

When we gather together for worship, our worship requires participation. Worship requires participation; it is not a spectator sport. This is true about all worship, but Dr. Parrett's particular focus now and in the rest of this discussion is going to be on our worship as a community when we gather together.

PRINCIPLE #5 – WORSHIP REQUIRES PARTICIPATION; IT IS NOT A SPECTATOR SPORT.

“When you come together” (1 Cor 11-14)

“I am going to watch worship; I watched worship very well”

Old Testament Participatory Worship

Psalms

Theology of amplification and its effect on the congregation's participation

New Testament Participatory Worship

1 Cor 14:26

a. Everybody:

b. Done for the sake of:

1 Cor 11:16 — “Amen” (2 Cor 1:20)

Response to the reading of God’s word (Neh 8)

Ephesians 5:18-21

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. What has encouraged you at times to “watch worship”? What has encouraged you to participate in worship?
2. What practical steps can be taken to encourage participation? Gary will give some of his ideas at the end of the lecture series, but come up with some on your own.
3. How does amplification affect you and your church? Think through both positive and negative (if any) examples.
4. What do you think of saying “amen” to the sermon as a means of congregational participation in the sermon?

Lesson 5 ■ Principles 6 – 7

LESSON OVERVIEW

Principle 6 is that worship requires or involves participation of our entire being. Not just part of my being responds, but all of my being responds. Sometimes we reduce our involvement as worshipers to one part of our being. Principle 7 says the substance of our worship is more important than the style or form of our worship. There are numerous and various styles of worship, but God looks first to the heart of the worshipper.

PRINCIPLE #6. WORSHIP INVOLVES PARTICIPATION OF OUR ENTIRE BEING.

Worship that engages only one part of our being is inadequate

Deut 6:5; Psalm 103:1

1.

2.

3.

4.

**PRINCIPLE #7. THE SUBSTANCE OF OUR WORSHIP IS ALWAYS
MORE IMPORTANT THAN THE STYLE OR FORM OF OUR WORSHIP.**

Styles of worship vs. the heart of worship

Style or worship is secondary to the substance of worship

Liturgical form of worship

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. What have been your experiences of church worship that engaged only one part of your being?
2. How often have we heard someone say, “I want to find a church where I fit in”? What are the dangers of this approach?
3. We are challenged to always have engaged minds during worship. How will that work itself out in the different parts of your worship service such as singing and preaching?
4. Does your tradition favor engaging the mind or the emotions in worship? How is this enforced culturally? What can you do to break out of it?
5. Do you worship God with your body, or do you sit in Stoical quietness? How will you respond truthfully and physically to the revelation of God in worship? Do you need to?
6. List examples of style of worship as opposed to the substance of worship.
7. Do you agree that the style of worship is secondary to the substance? Why?
8. How can you differentiate between style and substance? How can you help others see the difference? Why do people hang on so tightly to old styles of worship?
9. Is there a place in your worship for a liturgical worship service?
10. What is the liturgy of your church? This is an especially important question for people attending a “contemporary” church service.

Lesson 6 ■ Principle 8

LESSON OVERVIEW

Principle 8 is another application of Paul's language to the Corinthians "when you come together." When we come together as a community for worship, we are participating in something much larger than ourselves.

PRINCIPLE #8. WHEN WE WORSHIP AS A COMMUNITY, WE ARE PARTICIPATING IN SOMETHING LARGER THAN OURSELVES.

It is not simply about "me and Jesus"

1 Cor 11:17ff. and the unity of the one body of Jesus

"Discern the body"

Balance of "I" and "we" songs as well as "thou" songs

“Catholic” church

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. How should our worship act out the fact that the church is one body?
2. How are we to examine ourselves in communion, and what is its relationship to worship?
3. Do you agree with Parrett’s evaluation of the narcissistic, self-absorbed, self-focused nature of Western culture that is part of the church? How does it show itself in your church?
4. How can we become intentional about community in worship, the “we” part of worship?
5. If you are a protestant, have you ever thought about the “catholic” church, the universal church of which you are a part? How can you expand your thinking of the church beyond the local body at which you worship?

Lesson 7 ■ Principles 9 – 11

LESSON OVERVIEW

In the last three principles (9 – 11), Dr. Parrett challenges us that when we worship as a community, our concerns for individual freedom must be balanced with the need to consider and prefer others first. Worship is first and foremost about God and for God. He is also the subject and object of our worship.

PRINCIPLE #9: WE WORSHIP AS A COMMUNITY, OUR CONCERNS FOR INDIVIDUAL FREEDOM AND SELF-EXPRESSION MUST BE BALANCED WITH THE NEED TO “PREFER ONE ANOTHER IN LOVE” AND “CONSIDER OTHERS MORE IMPORTANT THAN YOURSELF.”

Phil 2:3-4

Need to acknowledge the presence and needs of others who are different from us

My own self-expression needs might be best served in my private worship time (1 Cor 14:28)

Church shopping and church hopping

PRINCIPLE #10: WORSHIP IS FIRST AND FOREMOST FOR GOD AND ABOUT GOD; ITS BENEFITS IN FORMING BELIEVERS AND IN REACHING UNBELIEVERS ARE SECONDARY.

Balance of worship, nurture, and outreach, but emphasis on worship

Royal “Waste” of Time

What is Paul’s understanding of being “seeker sensitive” (1 Cor 14:23-25)

PRINCIPLE #11: GOD IS BOTH THE SUBJECT AND THE OBJECT OF OUR WORSHIP.

God as the subject of our worship

God is the object of worship

Romans 11:36 (“theocentric”)

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. What are some specific ways in which different groups of people in your church can value other groups. For example, the young and the old; men and women; quiet and outgoing; hymn and chorus, organ and guitar.
2. What would a combined “traditional” and “contemporary” service look like in your church? What good would come out of it? What opposition would you meet? Do you think having two services, contemporary and traditional, is a good thing or a sign of spiritual defeat?
3. What is good and what is bad about shopping for a church?
4. Do you agree with this principle?
5. Should worship be a “Royal ‘Waste’ of Time”?
6. How can we construct the worship service so that it is primarily about worshipping God and only secondly be about teaching believers and reaching unbelievers?
7. Does it help you to think of God as both the subject and object of worship? Will it have any practical effect on your worship?

RECOMMENDED READING

A Royal “Waste” of Time: The Splendor of Worshiping God and Being Church for the World, by Marva J. Dawn, Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1999.

Reaching Out Without Dumbing Down: A Theology of Worship for This Urgent Time, by Marva J. Dawn, Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1995.

Lesson 8 ■ Key Passages

LESSON OVERVIEW

In this lesson we consider a number of key passages that will make a contribution to our understanding of worship. Dr. Parrett gives just a brief summary of these passages and then looks at implications for designing and leading worship experiences in the church in the next lesson.

THE TEN COMMANDMENTS (THE DECALOGUE)

Given in a worship environment

Commandments 1 – 4

Commandments 5 – 10

LEVITICUS

HEBREWS 9–10

J.B. Torrance, *Worship, Community, and the Triune God of Grace*. “Our participation through the Holy Spirit in the Son’s communion with the Father.”

JOHN 4:1-26

“Worship in Spirit and truth”

“I Am Who I Am” vs. the “God of the Month Club”

God is seeking worshipers.

PSALMS

REVELATION

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. What do you think of Gary's paralleling New Testament passages with the first four commandments? Did it help you make the Decalogue more applicable?
2. What did you think of Torrance's definition of worship?
3. What does it mean to worship "in spirit and in truth"?
4. What are the implications of God saying "I am who I am" rather than "I am whoever you want me to be"? Gary had a little fun with the "God of the Month Club"!
5. Do you and your church reflect the conviction that God is the real "seeker"? Do you agree with Gary?
6. Psalms contains worship that moves from "deep lament to exuberant praise." Is this a correct statement, and does your church reflect the same variety of worship experiences?

Lesson 9 ■ Implications

LESSON OVERVIEW

Dr. Parrett now turns to give a few thoughts about implications from these principles we have been identifying and some of these key texts, implications for those of us who design and lead the public worship or the congregational or corporate worship of the churches.

1. WORSHIP SHOULD INCLUDE ELEMENTS OF REVELATION AND RESPONSE.

Revelation

Scripture readings and biblical preaching

Songs of substance

Testimony and other spiritual gifts

Sacraments

Response

Both revelation and response

Tradition hymns and contemporary praise

WORSHIP SHOULD BE CHRISTOCENTRIC.

WORSHIP SHOULD BE TRINITARIAN.

WORSHIP SHOULD COUNTERACT THE TENDENCY TO FOCUS ON SELF AND INSTEAD EMPHASIZE THE COMMUNITY.

**WE MUST TAKE OPPORTUNITIES TO STRETCH OUR
UNDERSTANDING ABOUT WHAT TRUE WORSHIP IS AND INVOLVES.**

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. What elements of the worship service geared toward revelation struck you as the most significant? Would you add any more? Do you practice public reading of Scripture?
2. How can we encourage one another to sing songs of substance? Where do you find them?
3. How can we keep the sacraments (ordinances) from being meaningless rituals? How can we do them in a way that is instructional?
4. Gary has many other suggestions on how to order a service of worship such that there is appropriate response. Which ones struck you as especially important? How about silence?
5. What do you think about the balance between the deep hymns of the faith and the simplicity of choruses?
6. How do you keep worship Christo-centric? What else strives to be the center of our worship?
7. What practical steps can we take to ensure a Trinitarian worship service? What are the advantages of doing so?
8. What in our current worship service tends toward individualism, and what tends toward community. How do we balance these two, or do we?

Lesson 10 ■ Style and Format

LESSON OVERVIEW

Finally, we end with some thoughts about the format and style of worship. How do we organize worship and arrange worship.

GOD IS MORE CONCERNED WITH SUBSTANCE THAN STYLE.

WE SHOULD APPRECIATE THE STRENGTHS OF VARIOUS STYLES.

**FORMAT BASED ON THE DESIGN OF THE TEMPLE AND
TABERNACLE**

FORMAT BASED ON ISAIAH 6:1-8

CONCLUSION

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. Do you agree that no one style of worship is necessarily “the” right style?
2. If we are primarily critics then we are not primarily worshipers when we gather together.” Do you agree with Gary’s statement?
3. What would happen if we designed a worship service around the tabernacle, or around Isaiah 6?
4. Now that you are done with the lectures, how would you define worship? Come up with a short, succinct answer and a longer one (about a paragraph).