

ZONDERVAN

Worship on Earth as It Is in Heaven
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Contents

INTRODUCTION: Worship Now ... and Forever 7

PART ONE

Growing as a Private Worshiper

Worship in the Psalms of David 13

CHAPTER 1: Do What Matters Most 23

Make Worship a Priority

CHAPTER 2: Make It a Habit 45

Establish a Regular Routine

CHAPTER 3: I Surrender All 69

Smash Your Idols

CHAPTER 4: Praise God in the Hard Times 91

Worship amidst Adversity

PART TWO

Growing as a Corporate Worshiper

Worship in the Book of Revelation 113

CHAPTER 5: **You Are Worthy, O Lord!** 121
Focus on God's Attributes

CHAPTER 6: **Go All Out** 141
Bring God Your Best Worship

CHAPTER 7: **Welcome All Ages** 163
Set Aside Personal Preferences

CHAPTER 8: **Welcome Every Tribe and Nation** 189
Embrace Diversity

EPILOGUE: **Let's Worship Like We're Already There** 217

APPENDIX A: **Names of God** 219

APPENDIX B: **Attributes of God** 221

Notes 223

Do What Matters Most

Make Worship a Priority

On Sunday morning, the Johnson family drives to church at the other end of town. Ned, proud father of the three boys in the back seat, works an office job during the week. Nellie, his wife, works part time as a substitute teacher. Together, Ned and Nellie lead a small group at the church and volunteer with the high school group.

As they drive along the interstate, the conversation is usually punctuated with loving directives toward the back seat to stop yelling, whining, and hitting. This morning, however, the boys are unusually quiet, behaving like model citizens.

“Did you slip them tranquilizers?” Ned whispers to Nellie.

“No, they’re just tired from the party yesterday,” she answers.

“That makes four of us,” Ned says.

“No, five,” Nellie adds. “I’m pretty worn out myself. The Browns sure know how to throw a party, though, don’t they?”

“Yeah, all day and all night.” Ned moans. “If that was their kid’s tenth birthday, what are they gonna do when he turns sixteen, or eighteen, or graduates? I mean, how do you top lunch at the bowling alley, a ballgame, a movie, and then Chuck E. Cheese for dinner? What do you do next year?”

“Billy’s an only child, you know,” Nellie says.

“Yeah, I know. But that’s still too much, don’t you think?”

Nellie nods in agreement.

“Must have cost a fortune,” Ned says. As he slows down for the exit ramp, he glances at his rearview mirror into the back seat. “I think Jason’s asleep,” he whispers.

Sure enough, little Jason is slumped over in his car seat.

“Mom, Jason’s drooling,” gripes Nathan, their oldest.

Nellie, prepared as usual, whips out an assortment of wipes and tissues, mops and dabs Jason’s face, and then props him back up in his seat, all without waking him.

“Do you know who’s preaching today?” Ned asks.

“I think it’s Pastor Jim,” Nellie says.

“Oh, no.” Ned groans. “I love Pastor Jim, but he’s so dry, and he always goes long. If I don’t stop for coffee, I’ll be snoring and drooling through the sermon myself.”

“We don’t have time to stop, dear.”

“I’ll go through the drive-up. It’ll only take a second,” Ned assures her.

Unfortunately, the line for the drive-up window is five cars deep. To make matters worse, the woman directly ahead of the Johnsons sends her order back, adding further delay. By the time Ned has coffee in hand, church is starting, just a few blocks away. Ned can tell his wife is perturbed.

“Sorry,” Ned offers. “I’ll step on it and get us there in no time.”

“Don’t bother, we’re already late.”

“You have that ‘I told you so’ look again.”

“Well, I told you not to stop for coffee.”

“How was I supposed to know that everybody and their brother would stop for coffee at the same time, at the same place? Obviously, the whole church is getting caffeinated to make it through the sermon.”

Make Worship a Priority

“Very funny.”

“Really, I don’t know what the big deal is,” Ned says. “We’re only a few minutes late.”

“I hate to be late,” Nellie protests. “By the time we park, unload, and get the kids in their classes, we’ll be ten minutes late.”

“I promise it’ll be five minutes at the most.” Ned is trying to sound conciliatory.

“I don’t want to miss five minutes of the service,” Nellie insists.

“Well, I guarantee you we won’t miss the sermon,” Ned persists. “Even if it’s boring, it’s the most important—the real meat of the service. I don’t think it’ll kill us to miss a few minutes at the beginning. It’s just worship.”

Discussion Questions

- 1** What does Ned’s apparent lack of concern for arriving late to church communicate about the priority he places on worship?
- 2** What do you think causes someone like Ned to place such low value on worship?
- 3** How common do you think is Ned’s opinion of worship among church attendees today?
- 4** What other attitudes, statements, or actions on the part of Christians indicate a low regard for worship?
- 5** How common is Ned’s belief that the sermon is the most important part of the service? Do you agree or disagree with that?

Top Priority

“One thing have I asked of the Lord, that will I seek after: that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to gaze upon the beauty of the Lord and to inquire in his temple” (Psalm 27:4). David’s devotion to worship oozes from this verse. More than anything, David wanted to bask in the beauty of God’s presence. He was enamored with God’s glory. The “one thing” David longs for is intimacy with God and a chance to worship his heavenly Father. As you probably picked up from the car ride with the Johnsons, that first principle we discover about David’s worship involves priorities. David made worship his top priority.

Because worship was such a high priority for David, he bristled whenever God wasn’t given the honor he deserved. What stirred David to take on Goliath was not the threat he posed to Israel but the giant’s blatant disrespect for Jehovah, Israel’s God. David asked angrily, “Who is this uncircumcised Philistine, that he should defy the armies of the living God?” (1 Samuel 17:26). God’s glory and reputation were at stake, and David felt compelled to take action. Upon confronting the Terminator from Gath, David shouted, “This day the Lord will deliver you into my hand . . . that all the earth may know that there is a God in Israel” (1 Samuel 17:46). You can always discern your priorities, for better or worse, by what angers you or stirs you, what frustrates you and what excites you. Honoring God was the utmost priority for David.

As king, David’s reign over Israel was marked significantly by the prominent attention he gave to worship. He brought the ark of the covenant to Jerusalem and endeavored to build a temple because he wanted to restore worship as the centerpiece of Jewish life. David was also the first to incorporate music as a regular fix-

Make Worship a Priority

ture in Israel's worship. He appointed singers and instrumentalists (1 Chronicles 15:16–24; 16:4–7; 25:1–8; 2 Chronicles 8:14), formed bands and choirs (2 Chronicles 29:25–26), pioneered antiphonal singing where one group sings and another echoes in response (Nehemiah 12:24), and even introduced new instruments into the worship service (1 Chronicles 23:5). On occasion, David even led his people in worship (1 Chronicles 16:8–36; 29:10–22). Israel never had a king as devoted to worshiping God as David was.

Why Make Worship a Priority?

David made worship a priority because he understood that we are created, commanded, called, compelled, and destined to worship. Because God was his ultimate priority, worship was his primary activity.

Created to Worship

In Isaiah, God refers to his people as those who are “called by my name, whom I created for my glory” and those “I formed for myself that they might declare my praise” (Isaiah 43:7, 21). First Peter 2:9 confirms that you and I were created to worship God: “But you are a chosen [people], a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, *that you may proclaim the excellencies* of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light” (emphasis added). If you love to worship, if it feels right to you, it's because you're doing what you were created to do.

Commanded to Worship

I recently overheard someone contend that worship is not his “pathway to God.” Not much of a singer, he admits to having