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## Introduction

### Psalm 96 (The Message)

*Sing GOD a brand-new song! Earth and everyone in it, sing!  
Sing to GOD-worship GOD!*

*Shout the news of his victory from sea to sea,  
Take the news of his glory to the lost,  
News of his wonders to one and all!*

*For GOD is great, and worth a thousand Hallelujahs.  
His terrible beauty makes the gods look cheap;  
Pagan gods are mere tatters and rags.  
GOD made the heavens--  
Royal splendour radiates from him, A powerful beauty sets him apart.*

*Bravo, GOD, Bravo!  
Everyone join in the great shout: Encore!  
In awe before the beauty, in awe before the might.*

*Bring gifts and celebrate,  
Bow before the beauty of GOD,  
Then to your knees--everyone worship!*

*Get out the message--GOD Rules!  
He put the world on a firm foundation;  
He treats everyone fair and square.*

*Let's hear it from Sky, With Earth joining in,  
And a huge round of applause from Sea.*

*Let Wilderness turn cartwheels,  
Animals, come dance,  
Put every tree of the forest in the choir--*

*An extravaganza before GOD as he comes,  
As he comes to set everything right on earth,  
Set everything right, treat everyone fair.*

What an image that Psalm paints!

Energy, passion and devotion leap from the page and stir the soul.

This is worship, this is true worship.

This is the kind of worship that God's people are called to express, the kind of contagious and fervent passion that God's people are characterised by.

So when did 'worship' become "that thing before the sermon?"

I've spoken with people who intentionally come late to Church worship gatherings because they don't like the 'worship'!

I'm sure we've all heard lines like "the worship didn't do anything for me today", or "the worship was a bit flat this morning."

When did worship become about us?

## **Overview**

Most of us understand that worship is much more than the songs we sing here on Sunday. Worship is a life lived loving God.

But in defining it as such, let us not forget the main, corporate expression of worship – singing to God.

The Bible mentions the word "worship" and its variations 249 times, it uses the word "sing" 122 times – most of which are used in the context of singing to God in worship.

The word "salvation" is also used 122 times in the NIV Bible. Considering that we base our entire existence on the fact that we have been saved by Jesus from a life lived in rebellion to God, and 'singing to God' is mentioned the same number of times as this cornerstone of our faith – it would seem prudent to also give a certain degree of priority and significance to this vocal element of worship...

In short – singing to God is not just one bit of worship, it's **HUGELY** important and something we simply cannot afford to neglect.

## Why Worship?

I'd like to begin a fresh focus on this aspect of worship because it's something that the Bible so clearly portrays as being an integral part of our interaction with and experience of God and so to neglect it or relegate it to an item of secondary importance is to miss so much of what it means to enjoy a relationship with God.

The *Westminster Catechism*, one of the most important doctrinal statements of the English Reformation famously asks and replies:

*"What is the chief end of man?"  
"Man's chief end is to glorify God, and to enjoy him forever."*

Basically, this question answers the meaning of life.

We exist to worship God and to enjoy a relationship with Him.

Sung worship is an expression of love, devotion, appreciation, honour, reverence, respect, praise, thankfulness, and awe towards God.

This sermon is not a "we're not doing good enough and we need to lift our game" message, this focus I'd like to renew is in response to the fact that worship is such an essential element of our existence that it warrants us striving to reach even greater heights and deeper depths in our experience of God.

The message for this morning is "we're doing really well, amazingly well – but let's see how far this thing goes, let's push on and see what else there is ..."

## Worship is Our Response

Worship is our response to everything God is and everything God has done. Worship is a *response*.

Sung worship has, at its core, a desire to honour God, but there are benefits for us when we do worship. It's incredible that when we do the thing we were created for, and the only possible response to God – He still chooses to bless us!

Our response to God, and the result of this response, can be described through the following words:

R     Repentance  
E     Energize  
S     Surrender  
P     Posture  
O     Overflow  
N     Noise  
S     Sacrifice  
E     Edify

Let's look at these.

## Repentance

Acknowledging the fact that there are things that we do and say and think that are not within God's desires, and then accepting that Jesus forgives us is the means by which we can approach God.

It makes sense, then, that if we seek to approach God through worship and give Him honour, and thank Him, and experience His presence, that we would need to ensure we draw near to Him knowing that we're on the right terms with Him.

**NIV Zephaniah 3:1** *Woe to the city of oppressors, rebellious and defiled! <sup>2</sup> She obeys no one, she accepts no correction. She does not trust in the LORD, she does not draw near to her God.*

This passage is a prophetic condemnation of the people of Jerusalem, but there is an interesting progression here.

We could read it like this:

*She obeys no one, she accepts no correction, she does not trust in the LORD – (therefore) she does not draw near to her God.*

We can also read it in the positive tense and say that if we obey, if we desire to change our lifestyles and please God, if we trust in God – then we can draw near to Him.

**NIV Psalm 25:8** *Good and upright is the LORD; therefore he instructs sinners in his ways. <sup>9</sup> He guides the humble in what is right and teaches them his way. <sup>10</sup> All the ways of the LORD are loving and faithful for those who keep the demands of his covenant. <sup>11</sup> For the sake of your name, O LORD, forgive my iniquity, though it is great.*

David reveals in this Psalm a knowledge that God does not demand perfection from those who want to be close – but He does require an attitude of heart that seeks to obey Him.

The key obstacle here to us entering into God's presence is attitude. If we're not prepared to learn, if we're not prepared to accept that we need the Holy Spirit to continue transforming us to be like Jesus, if this is our attitude then we will not draw near to God.

If, however, we accept these things – then even though there are things that aren't perfect in our lives – God delights in that attitude and will draw near.

## Energize

**NIV Isaiah 40:27** *Why do you say, O Jacob, and complain, O Israel, "My way is hidden from the LORD; my cause is disregarded by my God"? <sup>28</sup> Do you not know? Have you not heard? The LORD is the everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth. He will not grow tired or weary, and his understanding no one can fathom. <sup>29</sup> He gives strength to the weary and increases the power of the weak. <sup>30</sup> Even youths grow tired and weary, and young men stumble and fall; <sup>31</sup> but those who hope in the LORD will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not be faint.*

Sometimes we just get tired.

Spiritually, emotionally, physically, mentally – we sometimes feel exhausted. So we arrive here on Sunday and, you know, it's just too hard to get excited and to really engage in the worship – so we stand and try to look 'spiritual', all the while praying that they don't repeat that chorus another time.

I've been there, you've been there, we've all been there at some point, I'm sure.

There's nothing wrong with being tired – it happens. But the thing is, if we can muster the determination to worship anyway, if we decide that "yes, I'm tired, yes this is not my favourite song, yes, the guitar seems to be drowning out the singers – but that doesn't change all that God has done and it doesn't diminish who my God is so I'm going to take what little strength and energy I have and use it as best as I can to worship God because that's the reason He gave me breath this morning", if we can decide to do this – then we can lay hold of that passage in Isaiah and ask God for energy, for refreshing, for strength and receive it as we enter into worship.

Worship isn't something to drain our energy, it's a means through which God can energize us.

## Surrender & Posture

These next two facets of worship go hand-in-hand.

Surrender and posture.

To truly worship something we need to, not only, ensure we elevate the object of our worship – in this case God – but also to ensure that in doing so we humble ourselves.

It is a truly awesome thing that God permits us to stand in His presence, but true worship requires a humility and a revelation of the awesomeness of God in which the heart is bowed low before God.

Matt Redman, the writer of the songs “The Heart of Worship” “Better is One Day” and “Facedown” which we sing says in his most recent book:

*“When you face up to God’s glory, you find yourself facedown in worship.”*

He goes on to write:

*“Facedown worship always begins as a posture of the heart. It’s when we are so desperate for the increase of Christ that we find ourselves decreasing to the ground in an act of reverent submission – becoming so captivated by the Almighty that to bend low in true and total surrender seems the only appropriate response.”*

**NIV Matthew 17:5** *While he was still speaking, a bright cloud enveloped them, and a voice from the cloud said, “This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased. Listen to him!”<sup>6</sup> When the disciples heard this, they fell facedown to the ground, terrified.*

When the Disciples received a revelation of Jesus their response was both automatic and appropriate.

This surrender and this posture reveals a humility which recognises the majesty of God. In the presence of the Almighty who would dare to stand?

**NIV Matthew 17:7** *But Jesus came and touched them. “Get up,” he said. “Don’t be afraid.”*

God responds to this attitude and lifts us up. If we seek to honour God and approach Him with our hearts bent in this posture of worship and surrender and humility – then we can be assured that God will lift us up.

Surrender and humility are prerequisites for encountering God through worship.

## Overflow

**NIV Psalm 119:171** *May my lips overflow with praise, for you teach me your decrees.*

**NIV Luke 6:45** *The good man brings good things out of the good stored up in his heart, and the evil man brings evil things out of the evil stored up in his heart. For out of the overflow of his heart his mouth speaks.*

Worship is not something we can simply 'do'. True worship is something that begins in the heart and flows from the heart.

Unless we've spent time filling our hearts and minds with the things of God, unless we've committed time to praying and developing our relationship with God – then there's not going to be much in our hearts with which to "overflow."

Our times of sung worship here are influenced by a number of different factors. The skill of the band plays a part, the preparation of the Worship Leader and their sensitivity to the Holy Spirit play a part, the music balance and sound levels all play a part, the number of people play a part in building an atmosphere conducive to worshipping God, but the number one factor in whether or not we experience and encounter God is how much we've sown into our hearts during the week and how much we've got to "overflow" with.

True worship is the pouring out and overflow of the things of God in our heart that we have deliberately and consciously placed there.

## Noise

Sung worship is about noise!

**NIV Psalm 150:1** *Praise the LORD. Praise God in his sanctuary; praise him in his mighty heavens. <sup>2</sup> Praise him for his acts of power; praise him for his surpassing greatness. <sup>3</sup> Praise him with the sounding of the trumpet, praise him with the harp and lyre, <sup>4</sup> praise him with tambourine and dancing, praise him with the strings and flute, <sup>5</sup> praise him with the clash of cymbals, praise him with resounding cymbals. <sup>6</sup> Let everything that has breath praise the LORD. Praise the LORD.*

The imagery is one of passionate people worshipping, people overwhelmed by God that their response is the biggest, loudest, most spectacular thing that they can do.

Sung worship and the accompanying instruments are an explosion from our hearts of something that cannot be contained and must be expressed through something big and loud and exciting and energetic!

We look at the pipe organ as being old and boring – and the way it's played today most often is – but when it came out it was revolutionary – it was the loudest, most spectacular instrument ever invented and it was made to worship God.

There's nothing more or less reverent or holy about a pipe organ compared to an electric guitar or a drum kit, it's that motivation in the heart to 'lift the roof' because God is far too awesome to express – but we're going to do the best we can!

## Sacrifice

**NIV 2 Samuel 24:21** *Araunah said, "Why has my lord the king come to his servant?" "To buy your threshing floor," David answered, "so I can build an altar to the LORD, that the plague on the people may be stopped."*<sup>22</sup> *Araunah said to David, "Let my lord the king take whatever pleases him and offer it up. Here are oxen for the burnt offering, and here are threshing sledges and ox yokes for the wood."*<sup>23</sup> *O king, Araunah gives all this to the king."* *Araunah also said to him, "May the LORD your God accept you."*<sup>24</sup> *But the king replied to Araunah, "No, I insist on paying you for it. I will not sacrifice to the LORD my God burnt offerings that cost me nothing." So David bought the threshing floor and the oxen and paid fifty shekels of silver for them.*

Sometimes worship requires us to make a sacrifice.

Sometimes, like we touched on earlier, that sacrifice is pressing through despite being tired and weary. Sometimes it's digging deep and worshipping God despite having a rough week – focusing on everything God has done and His faithfulness and worshipping in the midst of our troubles.

Sometimes the sacrifice comes during the week in making the time to fill our hearts with the things of God to ensure we've allowed God to fill our hearts so we can overflow.

Sometimes the sacrifice comes in entering into worship despite not liking the song choice or style or volume.

Sometimes the sacrifice is in getting up on Sunday morning and determining to engage in worship.



Whatever it is, sometimes to truly honour God with our worship requires a sacrifice, whether or not we're prepared to pay the price will determine the extent to which we draw near to God.

## Edify

Worshipping God is not simply honouring God. It's not merely our acknowledgement of everything God has done or even or thanks to God for Who He is.

Worshipping God actually goes two ways – when we worship God, the Holy Spirit can minister to us and speak to us and transform us.

**NIV Acts 13:2** *While they were worshiping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, "Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them."*

**NIV 2 Corinthians 3:18** *And we, who with unveiled faces all reflect the Lord's glory, are being transformed into his likeness with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit.*

When we worship God, He can change us. "Edify" means to teach or instruct, it also means to 'improve morally.'

Worshipping God requires that we humble ourselves, it is acknowledging God as Almighty, it involves us in thanking Him, it means giving honour to Him.

When we do these things then we have also prepared our hearts to accept His instruction and for the Holy Spirit to work in us and through supernaturally to make us more like Jesus.

Worship not only lifts up God, but it has the power to lift ourselves up to. In making ourselves low before Him, God lifts us up.

## Summary

Worshipping God through singing and praise involves us in repentance, it energizes us, it requires us to surrender and humble ourselves, it is made possible through building our hearts up with God's Word and through prayer, it is a joyous and loud expression of thanks, it costs us, and when we do this, God builds us up into His likeness.

## Conclusion

We have been given the awesome privilege of entering God's presence. We have been given the honour of approaching Him and experiencing Him.

This is something to be treasured and valued and something which is vital to our Christian lives.

We were created to worship God and one of the overwhelmingly persistent expressions of this from the time of Creation to today has been through sung worship, through singing to God.

These songs we sing are prayers, they are stories of what God's done, they are intimate love songs, they are loud, defiant challenges to the enemy, they are the rejoicing of a people set free, the shouts of a conquering nation, the rattling of weapons of God's army.

Sung worship is that thing we do before the sermon – but unless we come here with the purpose of bringing glory to God and encountering God and unless we're prepared to pursue our experience and practice of worship as far as it goes then, not only are we missing out on something that God places huge emphasis on and commands, but our Christian lives will be missing so much of what God wants to impart to us.

Make the decision to respond to God and expect to encounter Him.