

The Practice of Worship Part 2

a sermon in the series
The Apprentice: An Analysis of What it Means to be a Disciple

A sermon delivered Sunday Morning, August 31, 2014
at Oak Grove Baptist Church, Paducah, Ky.

by S. Michael Durham
© 2014 Real Truth Matters

John 4:23-24

But the hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth; for the Father is seeking such to worship Him. 24 God is Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth.

Worship is to originate and flow from the inside out. In the Old Testament God created external images and illustrations to move the heart to worship. In the New Testament era, Jesus says, to the Samaritan women at the village well, that external images, illustrations and types are no longer required. Temples, priests, sacrifices, holy days and feasts are not necessary. He said, “Woman, believe Me, the hour is coming when you will neither on this mountain, nor in Jerusalem, worship the Father . . . But the hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth.” Worship is a spiritual experience originating in the heart. The heart drives the expression. That’s what He mandates that New Testament worship must be—“in spirit and truth.”

For a true Christian, the truth about who God is and what He has done is sufficient to move the heart toward God in adoration, praise, and submission. If one always needs external devices or stimulation in order to worship, then it is not acceptable worship. It is not acceptable because it is not in the spirit according to the truth. If there is a constant need for and reliance on external stimuli—whether music and worship bands or anything else—to worship God, then something inside the person is missing. Because when God saves you He changes the heart and it is inclined to worship God. Help comes from the Holy Spirit inside and allows you to worship in spirit and truth.

Now why the radical change? Jesus tells us. It is because God is Spirit. You have to relate to Him on His level. When we’re in a foreign country to do ministry we have to do some homework and find out that particular culture’s customs and what they require and don’t require so we can be on their level. God is Spirit and therefore we must be on His level in order to commune with Him and be able to exchange fellowship. That requires you to be in spirit and truth. Salvation is poorly defined as the forgiveness of sins and the escape of the wrath of God. It is better understood as the reconciliation between God and the sinner. It is the work of God to restore fallen man back to his pre-fall state where man needed no externals—no music, worship bands,

not even hymns—to worship God. God simply came to man in the cool of the evening and fellowshiped with Adam.

Another reason God has changed worship from outside in to inside out is that man has a propensity, an inner compulsion, a strong desire to take the externals and put more honor upon them than he should. In other words, the externals become the objects of worship. For example, in 2 Kings 18:4 we read that King Hezekiah not only destroyed the high places where the people were worshipping idols but he also destroyed the bronze serpent that Moses made in the wilderness. God sent deadly snakes into the camp of Israel to punish the people's criticism and complaining and many died. Moses interceded and God told him to construct a brass serpent and put it on a pole. If anyone bitten by a snake would simply look at the bronze serpent they would be healed.

Why did Hezekiah destroy it? It would seem that it should belong in a museum. Wouldn't it be awesome that somewhere in this world there would be a museum where that brazen serpent was displayed for you to see? Why did Hezekiah destroy it? Because for several generations Israel had "burned incense to it." They took the external and offered worship to it. That's the tendency in all of us, to not worship God but worship the externals we can see.

Look at what we have done with the only two external ordinances of the New Testament church, water baptism and the Lord's Supper. We don't know what to do with them. We either neglect them or we deify them. Some take water baptism and say it is what saves the sinner either as baby baptized or an adult. Others elevate the bread and cup to the very place of Christ. They bow before the bread, which is an act of worship, and believe the wine is the real blood of Christ. There is something within us that wants to take what we can see and make it the object of our worship. It doesn't have to be something God has made, like a brazen serpent or even the ordinances of the church, it can be a worship leader or a band. Look at what we do with these artists these days. We make them our idols. We follow them around. We give them the honor and respect that we ought to give God and God alone. When any good thing including this church becomes the object of our worship it's external, and that's not where worship is to originate. Worship is to originate within you.

One needs only to be truly regenerated and saved by the Holy Spirit to worship. Only those who have Him can. The believer has been given everything he or she needs to worship God, a new heart. From that heart that is nourished by the truth of who God is and what He has done comes the flowing tide—a life lived in worship of the King. Worship is not just an act it's a life lived to His glory.

What I want to do today is to show us how to develop the spiritual discipline of worshipping because it is a discipline. Even though the heart is inclined to worship there are forces inclined against worship that attack us. So, like our Lord, we must live like He lived. As He lived so must we. This is the whole point of discipleship. This is what we're learning. We're learning how to live like Jesus and how to be His disciple. When a disciple is well trained he is just like his Master. Jesus worshipped and so must we.

I. How to Practice Worship

How do I worship God in spirit and truth and how do I build worship into my life so that it becomes the norm? This is what a spiritual discipline is. It's when you practice something enough that it becomes normal and you don't have to think about it: it's a way of life.

I have three biblical mandates of how to practice the discipline of worship.

A. Establish Regular Private Times to Meditate on God.

To be a worshipper is to be a Christian. It's synonymous. All Christians are disciples and all disciples are to be worshippers—that's what you were saved for. Through salvation, Jesus restored you back to the pre-fall state where Adam worshipped God without any need of externals. If you're going to do that, you're going to have to practice it and develop the habit of worship. You do so by first of all establishing a regular private time to meditate with God where you get alone and get quiet before God so that you can express your heart and He can express His heart to you.

Prayer and the study of God.

The psalmist says, "Early in the morning will I seek Your face." There is something about getting up in the morning before you do anything else and establishing the practice of that day. We must establish the attitudes of our own hearts and minds and nothing will come close to establishing a right attitude and right heart than getting alone with God.

Jesus would often get up before anyone else and go off to a solitary place and pray and worship God. This was a regularly established time to pray and meditate. That's what prayer becomes. Prayer becomes a means of worship, a biblical expression of worship. Often we pray in order to gain and there's nothing wrong with that. The Bible commands us to bring our requests and pray that He might answer those requests, but prayer is much larger than that.

Prayer has been given to us to regulate the heart like a thermostat. It regulates and governs the heart. That is why being alone in prayer and in the study of His Word is so important, it regulates the heart and fuels it to worship throughout the day. You need something bigger than you. You are not just physical matter but also spirit; there is a longing to go beyond the physical realm and something in you that craves something invisible. Even people who are not religious know there is something transcendent of the physical. This is the reason God granted and gave us this wonderful gift called prayer. In fact, I recently read that even secular psychologists are learning this.

In a recent issue of *Psychology Today*, Doctor Krystine Batcho said this about prayer and this need to reach out to the transcendent and have contact,

“Recent research shows that although most people relate to God in human terms, the sacred is embraced as mysterious and beyond human comprehension. To feel connected with the transcendent is more important than having the sacred solve earthly problems.”

This doctor’s research has discovered there is something in a person’s makeup that wants to touch and be connected with something bigger than them, something transcendent of time and matter. In this way prayer becomes more important than getting answers. It becomes a connection with God, a connection with Someone bigger than ourselves. This connection is what the doctor says is more important than getting things from Him.

It’s amazing what sinners can discover and we Christians struggle to understand. No wonder Jesus said the sons of this generation are often more wise than the sons of light. She continues:

“People aspire to experience the sacred, not to diminish the sacred to that of the human. . . ‘Man cannot break through the dimensional difference between the human world and the divine world but he can reach out for the ultimate meaning through faith which is mediated by trust in the ultimate being.’ Prayer might well be best understood as one such reaching out.”—Psychology Today, *When Heaven Is Silent: The Value of Unanswered Prayer*, Published on February 16, 2014 by Krystine I. Batcho, Ph.D. in Longing for Nostalgia.

Here is a psychologist who says they have discovered that all humanity is born with a deep-seated need to go beyond self and have contact with something transcendent. That’s what prayer is for. It’s even more amazing when you understand what this word *psychology* means. We often think it means the study of the mind, but it’s not what this word means. It comes from the Greek word *psuché* and means the study of the soul.

Prayer is for the purpose of worship. It satisfies this craving to be in contact with something transcendent of you. There are seven billion people in this world and we’re all in the same boat—it’s a big boat—because there is something in you and me that requires contact with a God who is not contained within matter, time, height, width, and depth. There is a longing in the souls of men like never before to touch the transcendent and it’s coming to a head. The unrest we see in the world is this craving, as people look and cry out, “Is there anything to satisfy?” The only answer is God and knowing Him to the point that you worship, delight, and treasure Him.

That’s why we pray. Listen to what David said in Psalms 27:4, “One thing have I desired 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 behold the beauty of the LORD, and to enquire in His temple.”

There is something in us that wants to look at God and just be wowed.

So in order to worship God you have to establish a regular time. Not once in a while and not just when you come to church here on Sunday. That’s not sufficient. You need this daily in your life if it’s to become your life.

B. Learn How to Practice the Presence of God.

I've talked about this before but allow me to do so again. There are two ways to practice the presence of God.

I. Acknowledge God's continued presence.

Jesus is always with you. It's His promise, "I will never leave you nor forsake you." But the problem is our minds are too busy on other things to acknowledge that. Often we do not feel as if God is with us. The Bible says you need to renew your mind and there are certain things you need to put into the brain so you constantly think and are conscious of His awareness. The one thing that will fuel the conscious awareness of His presence is the truth that He is with you and in you. In establishing this awareness you will not do it very well at first, that's why it's called a spiritual discipline, you must practice. You start intentionally pausing to think, *God is with me.*

Have you ever noticed you naturally do better when you know someone who you love is watching you? Observe children. If they do something they think is cute or funny or amazing, to whom do they go first to show? Mom and dad, and then grandma and grandpa. They first go to the people they love the most. Isn't it so for you? Whether it's music or sports or whatever it is, if you know someone you love is watching you, don't you try to do a little bit better?

"One year when Lou Little was coaching Georgetown, there was a youngster on the squad who was no great shakes as a football player, but whose personality served as a morale booster for the whole team. Little was deeply fond of the boy. If the team was far enough ahead, the coach let him get into a game occasionally for the last few minutes of play.

One day, about a week before the big finale with Fordham, the boy's mother called Coach Little on the phone. "My husband died this morning of a heart attack," she said. "Will you tell my boy? He'll take it better if it comes from you." Little broke the news and the boy went home sorrowfully.

He was back three days later, and came straight to Little, "Coach," he begged, "I want to start in that game against Fordham. I think it's what my father would have liked most."

Little hesitated, and then agreed. "OK, son, you'll start, but you'll only be in there for a play or two. You aren't good enough, and you know it."

True to his word, Little started the boy-but he never took him out. For 60 full, jarring minutes he played inspired football, running, blocking and passing like an All-American, and sparking the team to victory. Back in the clubhouse, Little threw his arm around the boy's shoulders and said, "Son, you were terrific today. You stayed in there because you belonged there. You never played that kind of football before. What got into you?"

The boy answered, “Coach, my father was totally blind. This afternoon was the first time he ever saw me play.”

I know that’s a moving story that tugs on our hearts. I don’t tell it to move your heart, but while I’ve got your heart let me say that when you’re aware that your heavenly Father is watching you and is with you, you’ll perform not out of a legalistic duty but because you love Him. The Father watching you means nothing, if you don’t love Him. If you’re just a Christian in name and you just go through the motions then God watching you is really a frightening thing, you would rather Him not watch you than see what you do. But to the heart of the Christian, when you by habit—forced habit as you practice, practice, practice—stop yourself and say, “Wait a minute, God is here. God is with me. God is watching me. God is in me”, it will do something to your heart. It’s called worship.

The first step in practicing the presence of God is learning to acknowledge that presence that’s always with you.

2. Do everything to God’s glory.

You have to reprogram the brain to think this way. That’s where the spiritual discipline is required. It’s a habit, one that takes work to cultivate, but the dividends are worth the investment. When you learn that everything you do in life is for His glory, you begin to live a life of worship.

Perhaps the most famous name when we talk about practicing the presence of God is Brother Lawrence, a 17th century Catholic who was uneducated and therefore unqualified to enter into theological training. He wanted to give his life to God so he volunteered to work in the kitchen of a monastery. That’s all he did. He never preached, he never taught Sunday school, he didn’t do anything religious as far as professionally authorized or ordained ministry, but he became famous because of a few letters he wrote to a man who asked how he practiced the presence of God. From those letters come the bestselling little book, *Practicing the Presence of God*. If you’ve not read it, may I suggest you go to the Internet this afternoon and download it or go to the bookstore and buy it. It’s very small and not hard to read. You ought to read it more than once because it will help you to develop the spiritual discipline of worship.

Brother Lawrence said that to him that anything common or routine could be an act of worship. Anything. He stated,

Nor is it needful that we should have great things to do . . . We can do little things for God; I turn the cake that is frying on the pan for love of Him, and that done, if there is nothing else to call me, I prostrate myself in worship before Him, who has given me grace to work; afterwards I rise happier than a king. It is enough for me to pick up but a straw from the ground for the love of God.

You can bend over and pick up a chewing gum wrapper for the glory of God because you want to keep the place clean. The point is that worship is not an act but a life lived. That means every act of your life is to be lived for the glory of God.

Brother Lawrence believed to have a right mind about tasks made every detail of his life possess surpassing value. All you do may not impact the world, but it impacts God. Every detail of your life is to be offered to Him as an act of worship. "I began to live as if there were no one save God and me in the world," said Brother Lawrence. That's how you practice the presence of God. This is the way you live for the glory of God. He taught that he cooked meals, ran errands, scrubbed pots all to the glory of God by acknowledging God's constant presence. One of his most famous sayings refers to his kitchen:

The time of business does not with me differ from the time of prayer; and in the noise and clatter of my kitchen, while several persons are at the same time calling for different things, I possess God in as great tranquility as if I were upon my knees.

You cannot discuss how to practice the discipline of worship without talking about the third ingredient of how to practice worship.

C. Corporate Worship.

Corporate worship is very important if you're going to develop the discipline of worship. Private worship is important, your life is to be lived to the glory of God, but you also need another component and that is corporate worship. You need to meet and gather regularly with the saints of God. Why is that? There are things in your experience with God that are unique to you. Therefore when we gather we share our experiences with God. Through public worship we can be a blessing and be blessed by the experience of God in another person, which can't happen in private.

People who don't think they need to attend public worship all the time don't understand worship and they don't understand God. It proves a misunderstanding of God. They think they and God are big enough, sufficient enough. That's not true. Your relationship with God is individualized and pertinent to you, yes, but there are so many things God does in other people's lives that He may not do in yours but will bless you by coming together and worshipping with other saints. In other words, I can worship God for what I'm seeing Him do in your life and be blessed by it.

How does that happen? Let me say four things about public worship and we'll move to my last point.

Our worship time together should be:

I. God-Centered.

Our natural inclination is to make everything about us. When you're in a group photograph and you look at the photo, who do you look for first? Most will have to admit it's ourselves. It's our default position, our natural inclination, to make everything about us. And if we cannot find any self-interest in something we reject or ignore it. That's why people don't like going to church. You don't find anything of self-interest, therefore you either ignore or reject it. The problem is your heart is too little. Worship is not about you, it's about God, and not that God needs our worship. No, not at all, but you do. Let me explain. A worship service must be God-focused and not about us because the real need of these little hearts is more of God. My vision of God is still at this moment way too dim. I need to see more of Him so I come here knowing that's my greatest need. My great need is not my health, finances, or relationships, rather it is that my soul needs a greater vision of God. You say that sounds pretty self-focused, but it isn't. When my focus is on the beauty of God, then I worship Him for His own sake because He is so beautiful to me.

When I see and experience that beauty, all my problems are reduced to their proper perspective in my life. When you focus on the problem it grows out of proportion until it's bigger than you, then anxiety and worry comes in and you panic and become afraid. When you focus on God and see that He is transcendent, bigger and beyond any of the problems of this life, then the problem is reduced to its proper level and becomes so small in the bigness of God that you can't see it. God swallows up the problem with a vision of His grandeur and greatness. That's why we need worship.

There is no way you can cope in this world without worship of God. Worship must be God centered. Every song, every prayer—God centered. If you come here saying, "I need something today," and you make the whole experience of coming together with the saints of God about your need, then you forfeit worship. You cannot worship God if you whisper to yourself, "I wish people would pay attention to me. Don't they see I'm hurting? Don't they see I have a problem? Why won't anybody reach out to me?" You're not worshipping God, you're worshipping self, and that's the problem. Church is not about you.

It is a wrong, unbiblical concept to think of this place as a hospital. I've heard it all my life referred to as a hospital, "this is where sick souls come and they get help." No it isn't! We gather here so that God will be exalted and when God is exalted we are edified. So you want out of your deep pit today? Worship God. Make Him the focus.

2. Orderly.

When discussing orderly worship, the Apostle Paul uses two examples of orderliness: women interrupting the service questions of their husbands and speaking in tongues without an interpretation.

The principles from these two examples can be applied to our services this way:

Disruptions and distractions must be eliminated.

In the days of the Apostle Paul, women sat on one side and men sit on the other. In fact, in some places in Eastern Europe that's still practiced. But in the days of Paul, most women were not educated and so when the preacher said something she didn't understand she would yell to her husband, "What did he just mean?!" So Paul says for them to wait until they get home to ask them the questions. They were being disruptive; they were bringing attention to themselves and away from God.

For us, this means cell phones ought to be turned off or silenced. Even when we sing we want to do the best we can. I fear I'm more of a distraction than a help when I lead in worship, but even when we up here are singing or playing or leading we need to make sure we are not singing or playing out of tune because it can be distracting. I've been in church services where people sang and they couldn't carry a tune in the proverbial bucket. What happened? You weren't worshipping God, you were feeling sorry for the person. There has been a time or two when a person sang who couldn't sing very well and God showed up. That's the exception not the rule. We want distractions to be eliminated so we can keep our focus on God.

Everything to edify the whole and not just the individual.

That was the whole problem with speaking in tongues publically. Paul said if you speak in a language that you don't know by the power of the Holy Spirit and there's no one to interpret then you sit down and speak to God silently. Everything that is to be done here is to be done to the edification of the entire body. That's why Paul said, "I would rather speak five words in a tongue that's known than in an unknown tongue." That tells me that everything that's done here should exalt God, and if God is exalted the body will be edified. That's the purpose of gathering. We're not saying we don't care that your soul is sick because we do; we're saying this is the only remedy for a sick soul—the exaltation of Jesus.

Everything is to be clear and intelligible.

That's why in the Bible you're forbidden to speak in tongues unless there's an interpretation so everyone can understand what was said. It has to be clear.

3. *Unselfish.*

The community of faith is a diverse group. Meaning really different. Look at this crowd. There are a lot of differences here. But there are not enough differences. Not enough for me. Heaven is not going to look like this; it's not going to be an all-white crowd. It isn't always easy to submit yourself to people who are different to you. How selfless can you be when the person seated next to you is a different race and color? Can you humble yourself and serve them if they are dressed extremely well or extremely poor? Can you put your arms around them if they smell good or bad? Can you esteem them your equal if they are marked with tattoos and body piercings? Call the roll of those who need the Gospel and all of our names on it. If this is to be a body of believers who worship God then we have to worship the God of all peoples unselfishly.

4. All Should Participate.

It takes work to actively participate in a worship service. Passive participation where you sit as a spectator is not biblical worship.

II. What to Do When You Don't Feel Like Worshipping

I've tried to emphasize the point Jesus taught the woman at the well that worship has to be from the inside out. External aids in worship should not be relied upon. They should be more of the expression of what's already in the heart. I have to confess there are times I don't always feel like worshipping God. How do I deal with my heart when it's dull?

A. Dealing With Dull Hearts.

1. Do not give in to the mood.

Oswald Chambers said this about the mood and our need to resist it.

A mood nearly always has its seat in the physical condition, not in the moral (meaning the way you feel has no spiritual character about it. Don't feel guilty because you *feel* unspiritual. God doesn't judge you by your feelings). It is a continual effort not to listen to the moods which arise from a physical condition, never submit to them for a second. We have to take ourselves by the scruff of the neck and shake ourselves, and we will find that we can do what we said we could not. The curse with most of us is that we won't. The Christian life is one of incarnate spiritual courage.

Don't let your emotions govern your worship. Let your worship govern your emotions. Begin to meditate upon who God is and what He's done for you and your mood will most often change if it's not a physical or hormonal issue.

2. The only thing that can revive the heart is the word of God quickened by the Holy Spirit.

"But Jesus answered him, saying, 'It is written, 'Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word of God.'" (Luke 4:4)

That means not just reading your Bibles but reading *prayerfully* asking God to take a verse or passage and make it alive in your soul. That's what He means by "living by the Word of God." When that happens you don't have to worry about emotions. The affections will be affected and you will worship.

3. "Pray through," or as the Puritans said, "Pray until you pray."

Sometimes you have to pray yourself into prayer. I want to conclude with an illustration that happened to me this week. I've told you about the prayer meetings we've been having everyday in our staff meetings. Sometimes they go in excess of two hours but average two hours. We may read some literature on prayer and then we pray. Thursday morning was a tremendous prayer meeting in the office. God came and I was filled with the Spirit, I knew God was with us and it was tremendous. That night at the revival meeting where I was preaching, right in the middle of the sermon someone interrupted and said, "I can't wait, I've got to repent!" After the service was over, the pastor got up and said he needed to confess, and then a few others began confessing. It wasn't the breakthrough I was looking for, and even though I was thankful it was a small move of God. I left encouraged having such a great prayer meeting that morning and now seeing some movement in the service that night.

I woke up the next morning completely dull of heart. I didn't feel like praying that morning and I knew the reason. I had a touch of God the day before and I thought, *Well, yesterday was pretty good. Surely it won't get any better than that. Besides, God did something last night and I've got so much to do. I know we're going to have this prayer meeting but I just don't feel it. It's just not there today.*

I confessed that to the other two and what did we do? We prayed anyway. I began to pray and prayed a little bit longer and nothing happened. Then I prayed a little bit longer and something started to stir. I prayed longer and something more began to stir. Prayed a little longer until God had melted my heart in complete worship of Him. I didn't want to stop praying. I assume I prayed probably thirty minutes and then I had to stop and let the others pray and while they were praying, God continued to bless me and fill me—it was better than Thursday! He came into that room and blessed us all. It was a tremendous thing.

We all walked away from that prayer meeting having learned the principle I'm teaching you—when you don't think you need to pray is the very moment you need to pray. And you pray until you pray. Pray yourself into prayer. Don't give into the feelings or the dull heart.

There are some of you today who have been touched by what you heard. The Spirit of God has spoken and revealed that while you are a child of God your heart has grown dull as I just described. It may even be calloused. Oh, would you cry out to God and begin to pray and pray until He blesses you and revives your soul again. There are some of you not yet Christians and you agree with me that there is a longing for something more than you have ever experienced before. You long to touch the transcendent God. Oh, dear friend, it's available to you! Through the death of Jesus Christ all obstacles to God have been removed. The only obstacle that's left is your stubborn will, your resistance, and refusal to come. Come anyway! Say no to your emotions, your mind, and the devil and say, "God, here I come in the name of Jesus, I've got to have You! I want what I saw these other people experience today. I want the joy, liberty, and freedom that comes through the blood of Jesus Christ. I want my sins forgiven, I want a guilty conscience removed. I want to know the joy that comes in knowing somebody is bigger than me that I can trust with my life." Come to Christ. Worship Him. He will respond to you. Amen.