

Way of Discipleship Small Groups

Bible Themes 5: Worship.



Touching base (5 minutes)

Open in prayer as is helpful for your group.

If this is your first session take time to introduce yourselves and set any ground rules you want to for your time together.

If you met previously take the opportunity either as a group or in pairs to check in with each other about how your response from last time has gone.



Introduction: This session is one of several on great themes that run through the Bible. In the book 'The Drama of Scripture' the authors write this: "Imagine that the Bible, with its 66 books, written by dozens of human authors over the course of more than 1000 years, is a grand cathedral with many rooms and levels and a variety of entrances....You can, for example, enter the Bible through one of the gospels....If you want to gather a sense of the cathedral as a whole, you face an important question: where is the main entrance, the place from which you can orient yourself to the whole? The cathedral of the Bible has many themes." By looking at its themes we can begin to get a sense of how to "enter" the Bible.

Opening question(s) (5 minutes)

What do the words obedience, sacrifice and praise mean to you? Why?



Understanding the information (25 minutes)

Share these thoughts in your own words or read them together:

Alongside covenant, worship is the most consistent theme throughout the Old Testament. The story of Israel reveals that human beings are made for a mutual relationship of love with God. The daily Jewish prayer, called the Shema, calls God's people to "...love the Lord your God with all of your heart, with all of your soul, and with all of your strength." (Deuteronomy 6: 4-5).



Three words about what worship means:

Obedience. Our love for God is rooted in genuine feelings, but truly expressed in actions. "What does the Lord your God ask of you, except to fear the Lord your God, to walk in his ways, to love him and serve him... and to keep His commands." (Deuteronomy 10: 12-13). One of the most common words used for worship in the New Testament (*latreuo*) carries the meaning of serving. This is never obedience just from duty, but always a response to God's love.

We obey because we want to. In the New Testament this is expressed in the simple line, “We love because He first loved us.” (1 John 4:19).

Sacrifice. Leviticus describes the ceremonies through which God’s people could worship Him. There were five separate sacrifices or offerings which the people were instructed to give in their temple meetings. Some were sacrifices to deal with sin, but some were expressions of giving thanks.

The sacrifices were an expression of worship because of the cost involved. After God tells him to buy a place to build an altar, and the owner offers to give it to him, King David replies, “No, I insist on paying you for it. I will not sacrifice to the Lord my God burnt offerings that cost me nothing.” (2 Samuel 24:24)

Sacrifice expressed that God the Creator was of greater worth than the created thing being offered.

After Jesus’ death and resurrection there is no longer need for a sacrifice to take away sins. However, the theme of worship that costs us something continues, with Paul encouraging Christians to, “offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God – this is your true and proper worship.” (Romans 12:1)

Praise and thanksgiving. After God had rescued Israel from Egypt the first recorded response is thanksgiving: “Then Miriam the prophet, Aaron’s sister, took a tambourine in her hand, and all the women followed her, with tambourines and dancing. Miriam sang to them: ‘Sing to the Lord, for he is highly exalted. Both horse and driver he has hurled into the sea.’” (Exodus 15: 20-21). After Solomon dedicates the temple the people worship. (2 Chronicles 7).

At the heart of the Bible is the book of Psalms, meaning “book of songs or praises”. Some of them are by David, but they are a collection taken from across Israel’s history and probably put together in the third century BC.

Not every Psalm is praise or thanksgiving – there are a variety of different kinds and are divided into five sections (like the Torah) – but they were the spiritual vocabulary of God’s people, known and used by Jesus and the apostles and the most quoted book in the New Testament.

They encourage the people to, “Sing the praises of the Lord, you his faithful people; praise his holy name.” (30:4) and “Clap your hands, all you nations; shout to God with cries of joy.” (47:1).

David proclaims, “...at his sacred tent I will sacrifice with shouts of joy; I will sing and make music to the Lord.” (27: 6) and “Blessed are those who dwell in your house; they are ever praising you.” (80:4)

When the Magi come to the stable their natural response is to bow down and worship (Matthew 2:11). When the disciples see the resurrected Christ, they worship Him (Matthew 28: 17). Paul encourages the Ephesians to, “Sing and make music from your heart to the Lord, always giving thanks to God the Father for everything, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.” (Ephesians 5: 19-20).

Such devotion captures the meaning of the most common word for worship in the New Testament (proskuneo) which means to come forward and kiss the feet of someone.

Worship throughout the Bible

To worship God in these ways is the central calling of God’s covenant people – the purpose of their lives – running throughout the story of the Bible. Towards the **beginning** of the story God tells Moses to approach Pharaoh with these words: “Then say to Pharaoh, “This is what the Lord says: Israel is my firstborn son, and I told you, ‘Let my son go, so that he may worship me.’” (Exodus 4: 22-23).

Peter makes it clear that Christians have **inherited** Israel’s calling to worship when he tells them, “...you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God’s special possession, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light.” (1 Peter 2:9)

At the **end** of the story the vision of God’s people (and all of creation) will be that we hear, “...every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and on the sea, and all that is in them, saying: “To him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb be praise and honour and glory and power, for ever and ever!”” (Revelation 5: 13)

Discuss: Why do you think worship is the central calling of God’s people?

Reading the Bible (15 minutes)

Read John 4: 21-24 in which Jesus teaches about worship.

Discuss the Discovery Bible Study questions:
What does this passage teach me about God?
What does this passage teach me about people?
How does this passage call me to obey God?
What might I do in response to this this week?



Seeing how it looks in real lives (10 minutes)

There is no video, but you are invited to discuss your experience of worshipping God, not just in song, but in obedience and sacrifice.



Optional further material and questions

Share these thoughts or read them together:

We all worship something

The Bible describes how as human beings we can choose whether to worship God, but we cannot choose whether or not we worship. Being made in God’s image means we are religious creatures by nature. Every human being is a worshipper – the choice is between God or idols, between what and how we worship.

Throughout the Bible idolatry is the central symptom of our disobedience, putting something at the centre of life where God is meant to be.

Most famously, when the people saw that Moses was so long in coming down from the mountain, they gathered around Aaron and said, “Come, make us gods who will go before us.”....He took what they handed him and made it into an idol cast in the shape of a calf, fashioning it with a tool. Then they said, “These are your gods, Israel, who brought you up out of Egypt.” (Exodus 32: 1-4)

One of the problems with idolatry is that it robs the people of their freedom. When they make the calf the materials for it are demanded from them, not given voluntarily, just as in the old life of slavery.

The first three Commandments (Exodus 20) call the Israelites to have no other gods. Moses later reminds them, “Be careful not to forget the covenant of the Lord your God that he made with you; do not make for yourselves an idol in the form of anything the Lord your God has forbidden.” (Deuteronomy 4:23)

Yahweh alone is worthy of worship. But if allegiance is not to Him, there is no reason to keep His other commandments.

More seriously, for God, the issue is not that His people are breaking the law, but that they are breaking relationship with Him. God tells Moses, “...these people will soon prostitute themselves to the foreign gods of the land they are entering. They will forsake me and break the covenant I made with them.” (Deuteronomy 31:16)

Throughout Scripture and history, the human tendency to have idols is desperate. Paul wrote “They traded the glory of God who holds the whole world in his hands for cheap figurines you can buy at any roadside stand....And all this because they traded the true God for a fake god, and worshiped the god they made instead of the God who made them - the God we bless, the God who blesses us.” (Romans 1: 23,25 The Message). Such disobedience is a travesty of who God made His people to be.

Augustine said that sin isn't breaking the law but is loving things in the wrong order. The order we give things in importance makes all the difference. By loving something fourth that should be first, we court disaster. It is right to love our career and our family, but if we love our career ahead of our family, there is breakdown. Relationships with children can be sacrificed in the cause of extra hours at work.

Idolatry is making things that ultimately cannot fulfil us into what we worship, into what we place at the centre of our heart. The essence of sin is not bad things. It is turning a good thing into an ultimate thing.

God's call on His people to love Him first is the call to live a life of worship in which we love things in the right order.

Discuss: how can we avoid idolatry?

Responding to God's leading (5 minutes)

Give people an opportunity to think about, "What might God be showing me and how might I respond?" They may like to write this down and/or share it with the group and/or share it with one other person. A friendly question is to ask each other, "Is there anything that would be helpful to ask you next time?"



Group prayer (5 minutes)

O worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness,
bow down before him, his glory proclaim;
with gold of obedience and incense of lowliness,
kneel and adore him the Lord is his name.



Fear not to enter his courts in the slenderness
of the poor wealth you would count as your own;
truth in its beauty and love in its tenderness
these are the offerings to bring to his throne.

These, though we bring them in trembling and fearfulness,
he will accept for the name that is dear;
mornings of joy give for evenings of tearfulness,
trust for our trembling and hope for our fear.

Jubilate Hymns version of a text by J. S. B Monsell (1811 - 1875)

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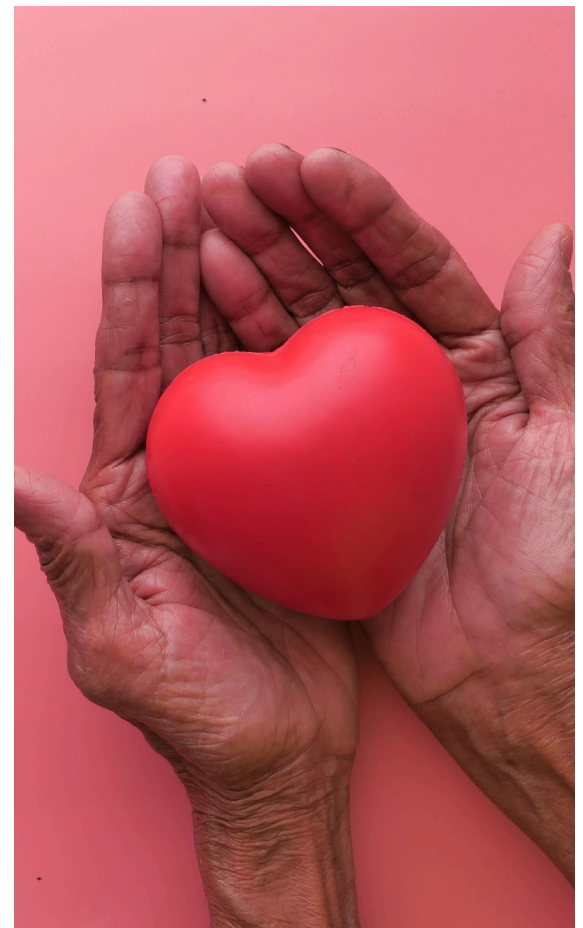
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Additional notes:

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