



## Worship is not a Spectator Sport

Psalm 100, 150; Ephesians 5:18-20

### Objectives

- To discuss attitudes and actions that should be involved in worship.
- To place a greater priority on participating in worship regularly.

### Overview

For the first 18 years of my life I did not sing.

Well, I take that back – for the first 18 years of my life, I sang once. It was the most horrendous and embarrassing moment of my life. My 7<sup>th</sup> grade music teacher forced us all to sing solos in the front of the class. We sang “O Shenandoah” while she accompanied on the piano. Twenty five kids; twenty five renditions of the same tune.

The grading was simple; it was all effort. If you sang loud, you got an A. If you sang soft, you got a C. If you refused to sing, you got an F.

And I was not a singer. Self-consciousness had inhibited me my whole life. Each Sunday in church I dutifully opened my hymnal to the right page and stood there while everyone else belted out their Gospel favorites. If my mom or the pastor gave me a dirty look, I lip-synched. It’s not that I didn’t want to make a joyful noise unto the Lord...I just didn’t want to make a joyful noise to the guy next to me.

So there I stood at the piano, about to weep and wet myself. I sang the softest “O Shenandoah” ever known to man, took my C, and sat down to the laughter of my classmates. That was good enough to keep me *songless* for another five years.

It wasn’t until I went away to college that I felt I had the opportunity to start over. Nobody there knew my past. I could just join in and sing like a normal person and no one would know the difference.

To my surprise, my voice wasn’t *that* bad! I could actually carry a tune. But even more amazing was the experience of worship that opened up to me. Songs moved me like never before. I *felt* something in church. I tasted the joy in praising God.

Today, I lead worship in my youth group. And one of the regrets in my life that I’m not quite over is the fact that I missed out on singing all those years. I missed out and God missed out. I sat in church and even paid attention as a kid – but I treated worship like a spectator sport, robbing him and me of a valuable experience together.

Many kids today are following the same path. They may sing other places, but not at church. Blame it on song selection, peer pressure, or a late night on Saturday...whatever the reason, there are a lot of kids clamming up at song time. Worship bands have helped the situation, but even hipper songs and better instrumentation are no guarantee of participation.

The frightening thing is this: Non-singers are basically non-worshippers. It’s our number one worship method. And non-singers usually don’t clap, dance, headbang, or raise their hands to God either.

Let’s help them this week. They are missing all the fun! Worship is a full-contact sport.

*“Let everything that has breath praise the Lord”. Ps. 150:6*



## Outline

David said that if he could make one request, he would ask to dwell in the house of the Lord forever. That sentiment comes from a proper understanding and real experience of worship. There's nothing better, once we learn how to do it. This outline is a beginning. It emphasizes a few key qualities for worship, and shows how they contrast with the stale church experience of many people today.

### Working on our Worship

1. **Come with GLADNESS, not gloom.**

*"Shout for joy to the Lord, all the earth. Worship the Lord with gladness; come before him with joyful songs." Ps. 100:1-2*

Many people think of church as the 60 most boring minutes of the week. So maybe the songs this week aren't your favorites; maybe the message doesn't hit home...but hey, it's still not a root canal! Go to worship saying, "Hey, I've got an hour to give God my undivided attention – I better make the most of it."

Besides, the songs and sermons are not there to entertain you. They're just a vehicle for your worship. Walk in with a smile, thrilled that you're God's kid and focus on the positives of worship.

2. **Come to MAKE NOISE, not sit quietly.**

*"Praise him with the clash of cymbals, praise him with resounding cymbals." Ps. 150:6*

As the norm, worship should be noisy! There is a time and place for quiet contemplation, but that's more the exception than the rule. So whether it's the main service or youth group worship, turn up the volume. If you make some noise, your actions will infect those around you. The glum will be convicted of their bad attitude and the shy will be inspired to pipe up a little bit themselves.

The Psalms tell us to worship God with shouting, clapping, singing and dancing – and with every imaginable instrument. What it doesn't say is "sit on your hands, shut your mouth, and watch." If anything, it's exactly the opposite.

3. **Come to GIVE, not to get.**

*"Give thanks to Him and praise his name". Ps. 100:4*

You are not the audience in worship. God is the audience. You're a performer...not in the sense of putting on a show, but in the sense of *performing* worship. When we focus on what we can get out of it, we can easily become critical of those who are leading and speaking. But when we focus on what we can give, we look for every opportunity to participate...in singing, praying, listening, giving, greeting, etc.

Especially when it comes to prayer, thanking and praising are much more appropriate than asking and requesting. We can ask God for things anytime. When we go to worship, it's time to thank him for who he is and the incredible things he's done.

Here's an irony: When you come to give in worship, you get more out of it!

4. **Come FOCUSED, not distracted.**

*"Know that the Lord is God. It is he who made us, and we are his; we are his people, the sheep of his pasture." Ps. 100:3*

In worship, there's nothing more spirit-quenching than to act bored and wish to heaven that you could get out the door. Our sin nature will often try to distract us from worship by bringing to mind our own selfish desires. That's why we have to come focused.

Here's the mindset to take: God is *GOD*! He made me. I am his kid; his sheep. I'm going to focus in on his greatness and grace, and forget myself for this hour.

Here's another irony: When we delight ourselves in the Lord in this way, he gives us the desires of our hearts (Ps. 37:4).



## Discussion Guide

### Open

- What is the first thing that comes to mind when you hear the word “worship”? Are your feelings generally negative or positive?
- Why is worship not a positive, thrilling event for many people? What do you think makes worship stale or boring?
- What was the best worship experience of your life...the time you felt most involved and most moved by the presence of God?
- What mood or atmosphere do you think should be present in worship? Should it be quiet and thoughtful...or something else?

### Dig In

1. **Start your study** by explaining that worship is essentially a party. It’s singing, dancing, clapping, playing music and interacting with your friends over a special occasion. The “occasion” is God’s presence in our lives; the fact that he has saved us and made us his children.
2. **Read Psalm 100 and 150**, and Ephesians 5:18-20.
3. **Discuss worship** in light of these passages.
  - What verbs in these passages tell us about the proper actions for worship?
  - What words or terms tell us about the proper attitude for worship?
  - Would you say that worship is more like a spectator sport or a full-participation, full-contact sport?
  - How does your worship experience, personally and in our church, compare with these Bible passages?
  - Why do you think many church people think of worship as a somber, contemplative service that’s more like a funeral than a party?
  - Why is worship important in the first place? Or is it not that important? Explain.

### Close

1. On a scale of 1 – 10, how would you rate our youth group’s worship? How would you rate our church’s worship?
2. What are some ways in which we can breathe new life into our own experience of worship? Which of the worship verbs have you been neglecting?
3. How can we begin to change the atmosphere in our church services? (if it needs changing.)