

Is Worship the Ultimate Act of Human Existence?

Worship is one of those fascinating topics that can both unite and divide the church. I've heard it said that "worship matters most"—seemingly a bit of a strong statement, but the question is: Is it true?

Worship: Because We Were Created for Such

John Piper, in his well-known book *Let the Nations Be Glad*, wrote this about worship:

"Missions is not the ultimate goal of the church. Worship is. Missions exist because worship does not. Worship is ultimate, not missions because God is ultimate, not man. When this age is over and the countless millions of the redeemed fall on their faces before the throne of God, missions will be no more. It is a temporary necessity. But worship abides forever.

Piper would suggest that worship is the ultimate act of the human experience, that all of humanity was designed for worship. Obviously, the entrance of sin into the world today has somewhat clouded that picture.

Yet, the Fall did not eliminate the need or desire for worship. It only warped it. The reality is that instead of worshipping God, we began to worship ourselves and other things.

Regardless of where you go in the world—even in places where there are no believers—you will find worshippers. Worship is something that all people do all the time, everywhere, at all places.

Sometimes the objects of worship are material, in the forms of idols. Other times the objects of worship are ideas and ideals. But worship is universal.

Even in a fallen world, fallen people seek to give adoration, affection and attention to something.

“Missions exist because worship does not,” Piper says.

The mission comes in when we as redeemed, reconciled and restored people live lives and have conversations that point people back to their Creator.

We were created for worship and all people need to worship—the key is the direction of our worship.

Worship is a Transformative Experience

In a sense, the gospel is an effort to point people *from* the worship of self *toward* the worship of God. Jesus, after all, talks about the difference between false worship and true worship.

Something special happens when a believer worships “in spirit and in truth.” When a person is made new in Christ, he or she begins to understand the transformative effect of true worship.

LifeWay Research conducted a study about the impact of worship and the influence it has on our walk with Christ and our ability to grow as a follower of Christ. LifeWay Research’s Transformational Church Research Project showed that of all churches that were seeing regular, consistent transformation in the lives of people who made up those churches, more than 75 percent either strongly or moderately agreed that they see evidence of God changing lives as a direct result of their worship services or their worship experiences.

That is a significant number. And it’s because worship is a significant part of personal spiritual transformation, as well as a significant part of growing a healthy church. The impact of our mission will be no greater than the honesty of our worship.

So, not only is worship historically understood as the ultimate act of the human experience, but research supports the idea that worship matters.

Most importantly, though, Scripture indicates to us that worship is an ultimate experience. First Chronicles 16:25 tells us that “The Lord is great and is greatly to be praised. And He is to be feared above all other gods.”

Scripture teaches, and research affirms, that worship is most significant in the life of the believer and in the life of the church.

Worship is a central and transformative practice in the life of the believer.

Worship Is an Emotional Experience, but Not All About Me

Worship is important, but also can be controversial. Over the past few decades, disagreements over the purpose and the style of worship have often led to disunity and sometimes to severed relationships within the church. It’s known as the “worship wars.”

These differences over the style and purpose of worship illustrate to us the fact that worship is not a purely intellectual exercise. Worship is a deeply rooted emotional experience that is central to the core of who we are as people.

And because of that, when there are disagreements over contrasting styles over worship, it becomes more than an academic argument. It becomes an emotional investment that often bleeds over into conversations with one another—even heated discussions.

Yet, believers are called to engage in worship, not argue about it. It’s a mark of maturity that we do so, and often we

do so in churches that worship in ways that are, perhaps, different than our preferences.

May we worship because of Jesus. Not because of us.

Yet, worshipping in ways that are not about us makes sense, doesn't it? That's at least a part of what it means to offer up worship as "service." In other words, it's not about us, but about Jesus.

One of my favorite parody videos is the honest admission that, "It's all about me." It's just too true that many believers, driven by their preference, make the emotional worship experience all about that. But, that misses the point.

Redirecting Affection

Worship is an emotional experience, not always in a sentimental way, but in a way that redirects our heart's affections from ourselves or other objects of worship, and focuses the heart on Jesus. And, that makes it not all about us, our preferences, or how we desire.

May we worship because of Jesus. Not because of us.

Worship matters. Yet, at its heart, worship is not about us. My hope is that we might actually worship that way, putting aside our preferences, focusing on Jesus, and making it all about him.

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