



**CONNECT**

*with*

**GOD**

**WORSHIP**

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## WHAT IS WORSHIP?

How would you define the tone of your relationship with God? Is it built on fear of judgment? Is it defined by a sense of spiritual inadequacy or unworthiness? Is it undermined by a sense of guilt over past mistakes and present shortcomings? Those negative experiences are rooted in a fundamental misunderstanding of God's nature and character. Worship is a spiritual practice we can use to reset our connection to God based on his goodness instead of our failures.

Jesus said:

*"The true worshipers will worship the Father in the Spirit and in truth, for they are the kind of worshipers the Father seeks. God is spirit, and his worshipers must worship in the Spirit and in truth."*  
**John 4:23b–24.**

In our context, we're tempted to think of worship as singing songs at the beginning of church services. That's certainly part of it for many people, but singing songs is just a small part of a much larger and more significant picture. Worship takes many forms, and can be shaped by our unique mixes of temperament, personality, culture, experience, talent, and faith background. For some, other spiritual practices—prayer, solitude, silence, fasting, service, generosity, and observing the Sabbath—can be acts of worship. Even simple daily tasks, like going to work or doing household chores—can be worshipful if done with a focus on connection with God.

In whatever form it takes, worship is our grateful response to God, who loves us so much that he gave his one and only Son so that we would have the opportunity to believe and have eternal life. It's a continual reminder that even though we may not be worthy of God's love, he loves us anyway.

Brother Lawrence, a 17th-century Carmelite monk described the profound simplicity of worship in his short book, *The Practice of the Presence of God*:

*"We ought not to be weary of doing little things for the love of God, who regards not the greatness of the work, but the love with which it is performed."*

So, celebration of God's love is essential to the practice of worship. It is embracing a deep joy that is grounded in our relationship with God, made possible by Jesus. It's a joy that transcends even our most difficult circumstances. In *The Spirit of the Disciplines*, Dallas Willard describes celebration as "the completion of worship, for it dwells on the greatness of God as shown in his goodness to us. We engage in celebration when we enjoy ourselves, our life, our world in conjunction with our faith, confident in God's greatness, beauty, and goodness."

On the surface, worship can appear naive. It seems to ignore or deny the pessimistic reality of a world that often seems dark and broken. What is there to worship or celebrate when we're surrounded by violence, poverty, selfishness, corruption, bitterness, disease, and death?

But worship and celebration strengthen us by bringing us into alignment with a deeper reality than what we sometimes see in the world around us: through Christ, God is in the process of redeeming *all* of creation. Worship is a way to remind ourselves of the hope we have in Jesus. More important, it trains us to live continually in God's presence—at work, home, and church. That's what Jesus meant by worshipping "in the Spirit and in truth."

Worship is essential to renewing our minds (Romans 12:2), which is the central purpose of all of the spiritual practices.

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## QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION OR DISCUSSION

If you're in a group, use these questions to have a conversation about how you can support and encourage one another as you explore worship and celebration. If you're not in a group, reflect on these questions to help you consider what it would look like for you to connect with God through worship and celebration.

1. When you hear the word "worship," what comes to mind? Are you currently engaged in any activities you would consider worship? If so, how well are they working for you?
2. Do you every have trouble connecting with worship at church? If so, to what extent did that lead to feelings of guilt or inadequacy?
3. Have you ever practiced formal styles of worship, such as liturgy or observing Lent or Advent? What advantages are there to these approaches to worship? What are some potential disadvantages?
4. Why do you think we need to remind ourselves that God is present in our daily lives?
5. Would you say your relationship with God is characterized by joy? If not, what step can you take to begin to move your relationship with your heavenly Father in that direction?

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## WORSHIP & CELEBRATE

Worship and celebration are both individual and group practices. In fact, your individual worship and celebration should prepare your heart to engage in corporate worship and celebration whether in a small group or as part of a church service. That's because worshipping with others is one of the most important activities in a Christian's life. It's a huge part of ensuring that our faith is *personal* (that is, built on our unique relationship with God) but not *private* (that is, hidden or secret).

Here are some recommendations for ways to begin exploring worship and celebration:

### 1. Music and singing.

As we said earlier, singing worship songs isn't synonymous with worshipping, but it is a way to show our gratitude to God. If it's emotionally, spiritually, or even intellectually meaningful to you, then singing—both alone and with others—is an easy way to connect with God.

### 2. Be still.

In Psalm 46:10, God urges us to “be still and know that I am God.” Finding ways to quiet our minds and disconnect from the loud and busy world around us can be a great way to align yourself with the reality that God is good and, no matter what circumstances we face, he is in control. Prayer, solitude and silence, and observing the Sabbath are practices that can prepare our hearts for deep worship and genuine celebration.

### 3. Praise.

This involves continually reminding ourselves that God is great and he is worthy of our gratitude and love. Prayer and meditating on Scripture like the Psalms, which are full of praise for God's love, faithfulness, goodness, trustworthiness, and power, are great ways to build a habit of being continually aware of and grateful for God's presence in our lives.

These are general ways you can pursue worship. They apply to nearly everyone. But each of us is also uniquely wired to connect with God in specific ways. When we do, worship and celebration happen almost organically. They may require some intention on our part—an awareness that we want to connect with our heavenly Father—but they don't usually require a lot of effort. That's because these approaches enable us to worship and celebrate God in the context of the parts of our lives that already give us joy. To better understand how you may be wired to connect with God, check out the Spiritual Pathways Activity:

[groupleaders.org/ld-spiritual-pathways](https://groupleaders.org/ld-spiritual-pathways)

The aim of worship and celebration is to increase our connection to God in a way that, because it's focused on who he is and what he has done for us, grows our trust in him. In other words, worshipping God and celebrating what he's done for us are absolutely essential to having a growing relationship with him. In fact, learning to worship God well can create a foundation for a richer experience of all the other spiritual practices—including the core practices of reading the Bible, praying, and living in authentic community with other believers.