

A PERSONAL THEOLOGY OF WORSHIP—
WITH IDEAS FOR DEVELOPING CHILDREN
INTO WORSHIPERS TOO

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Summary:

This paper is a development of a theology of worship around the centrality of inclusion of all generations in gathered community of faith. Special attention is given to the inclusion of children. The paper is followed by an appendix outlining some practical application of the paper as well as some reflective evaluation by the author.

Length: 23 pages

MY THEOLOGY OF CHRISTIAN WORSHIP

The object of people's worship may be religious, material, ideological, or any number of things. This is possible since worship, in its general sense, has to do with ascribing worth, and dedicating one's self and resources, to someone or something. Christians are not necessarily set apart from those who worship Mohammed, Buddha, or capitalism, etc., because of their acts of worship or their level of devotion. Instead what sets true Christian worship apart is that the object of worship is the Living God. The purpose of this paper will be to discuss the biblical basis and practicalities of worshipping God.

A Brief Survey of a Biblical Concept of Worship

A difficulty that quickly becomes apparent when studying this subject is that the Bible does not clearly define and explain what worship is in any single passage, nor is there any one word that is consistently translated as "worship". Therefore, the concept of God-worship must be gathered from verses throughout the various books of the First and Second Testaments (generally described as Old and New).

There are several Greek and Hebrew words from the original Scriptures that can be grouped into three main categories: worship as homage or grateful submission; as service; and as reverence or respect.¹ Worship as homage is often seen in the First Testament in verses like Psalm 138:2 and Exodus 4:31, where people physically bowed down in connection with worshipping God. This type of description is not given as much attention in the Second Testament, yet verses such as Romans 14:11 and Philippians 2:10 speak of the day when every knee will bow at the name of Jesus, implying that physical acts such as bowing will always have

¹ David Peterson, *Engaging with God: A Biblical Theology of Worship* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press), 55-74.

significance in the worship of God. Although bowing or kneeling may remain important in worshipping God, “it would be wrong to conclude...that a particular posture or gesture is somehow essential to worship”² since a person’s heart/attitude is what God judges in his assessment of whether or not someone offers acceptable/pleasing worship.³

Another aspect of the concept of Christian worship is service. In the First Testament, there are many references to the idea of “serving the Lord”—referring to all of his people⁴, as well as those specifically related to the service of the priests in the Jewish sacrificial system. In the Second Testament, there are verses that speak of the expectations that all Christians should serve God (i.e., Heb. 9:14; Rom. 14:18) and that they are to serve one another as parts of the same Body—which then he credits as serving him.⁵

Thirdly, worship involves the element of giving God reverence/respect. Biblical Hebrew and Greek authors wrote about having a fear of the Lord which is sometimes described as a deep reverence which borders on having fear (in the way people today generally think of it). In some encounters with God, the Israelites were filled with terror when God drew near to them.⁶ In other passages, their worship (as reverence) was described without having overtones of dread.⁷ The words used in the Second Testament would also fit more into the latter category⁸, although there were times that the early Christians were brought to the realization of God’s ‘fearsomeness’—

² Ibid., 63.

³ See Genesis 4:3-7 (Cain’s unacceptable offering versus Abel’s acceptable offering); and 1 Samuel 16:7 (the Lord looks at the heart).

⁴ See Deut. 10:12 and 1 Sam. 12:24 for examples of people being encouraged to “serve the Lord”; and Exodus 29:44 and Ezekiel 45:5 regarding priests serving God and Leviticus 1-7 for some of the duties expected of them.

⁵ See Eph. 4:12, Matt. 25:40.

⁶ See Ex. 20:18-21.

⁷ See Ex. 4:31; 33:10.

⁸ See Acts 16:14; 18:7.

such as the time He meted out immediate judgment/punishment on Ananias and Sapphira (Acts 5:1-11). The expectation to revere God is a constant, even if the way it is manifested changes.

The Object of Christian Worship

There is some disagreement over the purpose, or object of “worship services”, which can lead to confusion over who is to be the object of worship. When church services are planned, it seems that leaders sometimes assume that people are coming together to worship God, but then go on to put together elements of a service that primarily focuses on a certain group of people (Christians or non-Christians, young or old, etc.). This may be a reaction to a previous lack of attention to people’s need to participate in worship (versus observing a priest or other designated leaders) and to be serving and interacting with other people, yet it seems that caution should be taken here.

I believe God is to be the focus of worship—He is the one to whom we are to pay homage, to serve (ultimately), and to give complete reverence. I agree with Don Carson’s statement that “what ought to make worship delightful to us is not, in the first instance, its novelty or its aesthetic beauty, but *its object: God himself* is delightfully wonderful, and we learn to delight in him.”⁹ There is another “side” or “pole” of this tension though, and that is the concept that Christians are also supposed to focus on edifying the Body, as well as reaching out to those who have not yet become members of this universal Body. Therefore I also agree with John Frame’s statement that “In worship, we should not be so preoccupied with God that we ignore one another. ...It is to be God-centered, but it is also to be both edifying and evangelistic.”¹⁰

⁹ D. A. Carson, ed., *Worship by the Book* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2002), 30. (Italics mine.)

¹⁰ John M. Frame, *Worship in Spirit and Truth* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R Publishers, 1996), 8.

Another aspect one needs to consider in this tension is that “Worship...is not only the public acts we do as a gathered community [or private times of worship], but our very way of day-to-day life.”¹¹ While I believe we, as Christians, are to set aside special times to worship God both by ourselves and together with others, I also believe that—as our very nature is transformed into the likeness of Christ—we should be responding to people and situations in an increasingly godly manner. This is one way of explaining how our daily lives can be worshipful.

John Frame gave an illustration that helped explain this idea. He compared our lives as Christians with a servant working in a king’s palace. In essence, all of our labors are a service to the king (i.e., God), yet from time to time “something special happens: you find yourself talking to the king himself. ...The occasion—even a casual meeting—becomes somewhat ceremonial.”¹² In other words, Frame says, “there is a sense in which we are always in God’s presence....On various occasions, however, God seems to draw nearer.”¹³ I believe we should continually and honorably live before God, yet we should also have times throughout the day and week that are especially focused on, or consecrated for, meeting with God.

I have outlined three different aspects to consider in an attempt to understand the focus of worship—that it is God-focused; it has to do with the way in which we daily live in God’s presence; and it is found in the way we edify the Body and evangelize the world. Church leaders and other mature Christians should model and teach a theology of worship that holds all of these aspects in tension. For example, the way leaders speak about and plan worship services should help others to understand that it is a time to focus more specifically on worshipping God, a time to reach out to others (with the love that God has graciously given to us), and a time to learn more

¹¹ Robert E. Webber, *Worship is a Verb: Eight Principles for Transforming Worship* (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson Publishers, 1992), 204.

¹² Frame, 33.

about what it means to love and serve God in day-to-day life. Effort should be made to draw together these different aspects of the same tension rather than letting them remain in mentally (and practically) segregated ‘boxes’.

Practical Dimensions of Worship

There are many ways that churches design their worship services, most of them probably thinking their way is the best—if not the only proper way to do things. As was discussed in the “Theology of Christian Worship” class though, it is important to keep the “content” central in our thinking about the way to worship/Christian life—versus making style the primary concern. Keeping that in mind, this section of the paper will be focused on practical ideas for how people can actually worship God corporately, privately, and through their daily lives.

Corporate worship services can be a special time set aside from jobs and everything else to which people give their attention specifically on God. It is in that public space that members of the Body of Christ (and more specifically—the people who are part of a certain local church) can come together to do things such as: give praise to God; retell the story of God’s ultimate faithfulness (as well as the faithfulness he’s demonstrated in individual lives); thank him for his gift of salvation and grace; and learn more about his character, ways, and purposes.

The manner in which that is done may include elements such as spoken and sung prayers to God; art, dance, and music that directs people’s attention to Him; the reading of/teaching from the Bible; Communion; and Baptism. The Bible does not specify the order in which things must always be done, or even which aspects of worship must always be included in order for a worship

¹³ Ibid., 34.

service to be considered pleasing to God. Honoring God seems to be much more dependent on the heart/attitude of the worshipers than on the specific acts, amounts of time, or order of events.

Having said that however, authors such as Robert Webber and Marva Dawn give a convincing explanation for using the basic order that liturgical churches have used for many centuries. Webber talks about the need to follow the order of Entrance, The Word of God, The Table of the Lord, and Dismissal in all worship services¹⁴, although he concedes that in churches that do not celebrate communion every week, the incorporation of the other three parts still “tells the story [of God’s saving work in Jesus Christ] and meets the requirements of Christian worship.”¹⁵ If used, stylistic decisions would be part of keeping this traditional format alive (versus becoming stagnant)¹⁶ since no specific way of doing things (style) is biblically mandated.

The point is that this kind of underlying order could help people focus on God. Even if this particular order is not used, attention should be given to how the different elements of the service fit together, and toward what goal they lead. I agree with C. Welton Gaddy that really, “Order is inevitable. The issue, however, is order which is beneficial, an order in worship which aids worship.” Lack of a well-ordered service can be confusing and leave people wondering “Was there any point?”¹⁷ Of course following an order (traditional or otherwise) in itself does not have ultimate value. The goal or purpose toward which the order leads is critical. My opinion is that worship services are an opportunity for people to come together to focus on God

¹⁴ Webber, 46-54.

¹⁵ Ibid., 59.

¹⁶ The resistance to traditional liturgy may be more of an indication of the way people have continued in these traditions without thinking about their purpose or value than of their lack of intrinsic value. Marva Dawn believes that “The major reason why tradition often grows stale is that we have failed to educate worshipers to know why we do what we do and who we are as a community carrying the faith together. Moreover, we have not taught the vibrancy of renewed worship rooted in the heritage of faith and expressed in new forms.” Marva Dawn, *Reaching Out Without Dumbing Down: A Theology of Worship for the Turn-of-the-Century Culture* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1995), 149.

¹⁷ C. Welton Gaddy, *The Gift of Worship* (Nashville, Tennessee: Broadman Press: 1992), 180.

(i.e., his character, and his ways) as a Body, rather than primarily focusing on what people bring to the relationship with God (their own commitment, sacrifice, love, etc.).

In times consecrated for worshipping God privately, I believe some of the same elements of a corporate service may be utilized. It would be good, for example, to pay attention to way we approach God. As I have previously indicated, Christians are constantly in God's presence in one sense, because of the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, yet we have a tendency to go on with our lives without a conscious sense of being in his presence. Therefore, I believe it is helpful to take the time to imagine ourselves as coming into his presence—which we will not do in a disrespectful manner (i.e., too casually—treating him without proper reverence) when we keep in mind everything we know about who God is.

It is also essential to our personal times in God's presence to read the Bible, and listen to the Holy Spirit, as well as spending time in thanksgiving and praise, supplication and intercession, confession and absolution, and in preparing to go back into the regular activities of the day under his direction and protection. These are activities/disciplines that help us to become more mature followers of Christ, and to become more conscious of our dependence on God to be able to live our daily lives in continuous worship.

The idea of heading out into one's regular activities leads into the third part of the tension regarding the object of worship. A question that needs to be asked is, "How do we worship God in our day-to-day activities?" Some might say that everything we do as Christians is worship since we are living our lives in God's presence,¹⁸ and that may actually be possible, but I think that would have to include a deliberate choice to be continually offering one's activities, words,

¹⁸ David Peterson seemed to be leaning this way in his book, *Engaging with God*, yet considering all that he said in the entire book, he may not be that extreme.

and thoughts to God. I appreciated David Peterson’s comment that in passages such as Hebrews 13:1-7 “we begin to see what Christian worship means in the context of everyday life: it has to do with entertaining strangers, visiting prisoners, being faithful in marriage, trusting God to provide material needs and imitating the faith of Christian leaders!”¹⁹ This emphasis on worship being connected with daily life is a helpful corrective to the unhealthy disconnection many Christians experience between going to Sunday worship services and their Monday to Saturday lives.

God is Both Transcendent and Immanent

Our image of God is also something that will affect how we worship him. For example, the tension regarding the seemingly opposing characteristics of God’s transcendence and immanence affects everything that has already been discussed in this paper. Churches have had a tendency to overemphasize one ‘pole’ of this tension or the other, yet both of these dimensions of God’s nature and how he relates to people are biblical. As Marva Dawn wrote, “Worship requires a blend of the infinite attributes of God—focusing appropriately on God’s majesty, humility, wrath, grace, hiddenness, ambiguity, love, hate, mercy creativity, holiness, power, suffering, immanence, transcendence, beauty, glory, and mystery.”²⁰ Rather than thinking of God only in ways that we are comfortable with, it is important to look back through the Scriptures to understand him more fully.

God’s transcendence is more predominant than his closeness throughout the First Testament and can be described in terms of his perfection, holiness, righteous anger and justice, and displays of power.²¹ Even within this transcendence-dominated picture of how the people of

¹⁹ Peterson, 243.

²⁰ Dawn, 90.

²¹ Examples: God’s power is seen in confusing the people’s language in Gen. 11:7-9; his righteousness and judgment in destroying everyone other than those in the ark during the world-wide flood (Gen. 6:5-7:24) and in the

the first covenant related to God though, there are descriptions of God wanting to take rescue them (i.e., Ex. 3:7-10) and nurture them (i.e., Ex. 19:3-6; Isa. 66:12-13), and of certain people talking to him as they would to another person (i.e. Adam and Eve, Abraham, Moses, and David).

In the Second Testament, God did a most remarkable thing—he revealed himself as immanent by actually coming to live on Earth. He went to incredible lengths to restore the broken relationship between himself and his people! Jesus demonstrated divine love and closeness in a way that had never been seen so clearly before, culminating in offering his very life in a sacrificial death that, following his resurrection, made it possible for all people to relate personally to God. Further, God promised to send His Holy Spirit to dwell within each believer (John 16:7; Acts 2:1-4; 10:44-47), a closeness available to everyone that had only been given to certain people under the first covenant (and not in the permanent way that became possible in the new covenant).

The way in which God’s people can experience his immanence should also be tempered by the fact that God has not actually changed and become less transcendent than when he burned cities, shook Mt. Sinai, or made the walls of Jericho collapse. The book of Revelation gives us a glimpse of God’s ongoing majesty and transcendence in the description of his righteousness and judgment, as well as in the imaging of the living creatures and the elders who continually bow and worship God enthroned in Heaven (Rev. 4:1-11). It is important that we continue to recall God’s immanence and his transcendence in our times of corporate and personal worship, as well as in our worshipful day-to-day lives so that we do not end up having a “tamed” version of God.

destruction of the wicked cities of Sodom and Gomorrah (Gen. 18:20-19:28). The regulations for Israel to be able to enter the temple courts, and for how priest were to conduct themselves are examples of God’s holiness being so far beyond human thoughts or capabilities (Ex. 20, Leviticus).

“In shaping worship, the question must always be, “[Is this] worthy of a BIG God?” Or are we so set on making God accessible that we cut God down to a manageable size?”²² I believe our worship planning and focus must continually keep the truth of God’s transcendence and his immanence in tension because we must not make him (the object of our Christian worship) smaller than he is and then end up worshiping a god who only resembles God.

Conclusion

God is to be the focus of Christian worship in our private or corporate worship meetings with God as well as in our day-to-day lives where we edify and serve others (as unto the Lord). God is transcendent and we need to give him the homage, service, and respect/reverence that he deserves. At the same time, God is immanent and wants to have a loving, personal relationship with us—made possible by the death and resurrection of Christ incarnate. We must continue to keep these aspects in tension so that we do not avoid him by thinking he is unapproachable due to his perfect and terrifying holiness, or become too casual by thinking of him only as a close buddy because of his intimate love and unfailing graciousness....God is great *and* God is good.

²² Ronald P. Byars, *Christian Worship: Glorifying and Enjoying God* (Louisville, Kentucky: Geneva Press, 2000), 112. Note: This may not “always” be the question, yet it is an important one in this age where the contemporary church seems to have walked too far away from the transcendence “pole” of this tension.

CHILDREN CAN WORSHIP TOO!

Worship can be a fairly abstract concept to talk about, so it will take some creative thinking and planning to broach this subject with children. The objective of this part of the project is to describe some ideas for ways we can pass on an understanding of Christian worship to our children, both in our home and in the times of gathering with our church. D. A. Carson was once asked how to do this, and he gave a very insightful answer that is worth quoting at length.

[Children] do not absorb abstract ideas very easily unless they are lived out and identified. The Christian home, or the Christian parent who obviously delights in corporate worship, in thoughtful evangelism, in self-effacing and self-sacrificing decisions within the home, in sacrificial giving for the poor and the needy and the lost—and who then explains to the child that these decisions and actions are part of gratitude and worship to the sovereign God who has loved us so much that he gave his own son to pay the price of our sin—will have far more impact on the child’s notion of genuine worship than all the lecturing and classroom instruction in the world. Somewhere along the line it is important not only to explain that genuine worship is nothing more than loving God with heart and soul and mind and strength and loving our neighbors as ourselves, but also to show what a statement like that means in the concrete decisions of life.²³

Considering all this, it would be wise to first consider how we, as parents (or other adults of the family of God), worship God. We will then need to be diligent in teaching our children to worship—not merely with mini lecture-style lessons, we will need to be more creative than that. We will also need to conscientiously make room for children to see us worshiping and to allow them to participate together with us in our worship services and our worshipful daily lives.

One way of enabling children to have the opportunity to worship God in the context of a church’s worship service is by including time for a children’s sermon during the service. Careful thinking and planning would need to be given to doing this well, though. Many of us have

²³ Carson, 62-63.

attended a service when a children's sermon has not really been at the children's level, or has not adequately portrayed theological truths. Roger Lovette gave some words of caution and admonition to those who would attempt to incorporate children's sermons into the corporate worship service, saying,

This part of the service easily falls into moralizing, into demeaning the minds of little children, and holds out a theology that can easily be mindless and unreal....The children's time ought to provide children and adults with an experience like that day our Lord lifted a child high above the disciples' heads and made the child feel special and important. No wonder children flocked to Jesus. He gave them a dignity and joy that they found few places in their lives.²⁴

Having a time when the children come forward for a few minutes that are especially planned for them (while they are still in the gathering of adults) can be very meaningful for everybody. Done well, it values the children (by taking time out just for them, and giving them the opportunity to participate in an activity/lesson than teaches them at their own level) and gives the adults an opportunity to hear biblical truth taught in a way that just might allow it to make more sense to them too. On the other hand, it would be just as disgraceful to do a children's sermon poorly (i.e. without careful planning or regard for the intended audience) as it would to haphazardly do any other part of the service.

The focus of these children's times could vary from week to week (or however frequently they are done), with some potential topics being: loving God, ourselves and others²⁵; explaining the meaning behind various elements of the service²⁶; and lessons that go along with the time in the church year (Advent, Christmas, Lent, Easter, etc.). These would not have to be lead by the same pastor that is going to teach the adults, although that would be good too. I believe that God gifts his people so that there would be some in the congregation who would have special abilities

²⁴ Roger Lovette, *Come to Worship* (Nashville, Tennessee: Broadman Press, 1990), 92.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 95-98.

to relate God's truths and love specifically to children. These people could be encouraged, developed, and 'commissioned' to lead this time of the service.

Many churches have opted to have separate "children's churches" going on at the same time as the adults, and they can have tremendous value. It may cause some problems later on in the children's and the church's life if the generations never spend any time worshipping and learning together though (such as an intolerance of participating in anything that isn't targeted to one's own age group or interests, and a lack of appreciation for the richness of being a spiritual family that crosses the generation boundaries). To prevent a segregation mentality, to benefit from the life that is found in living and worshipping as a spiritual family, and to enable adults to model a worshipful life for the younger members of a congregation, I believe that it is good for the children to spend at least part of the service with the adults, and to have times when they are specifically being loved and valued by being taught in the presence of the whole congregation.

Having talked about the concept of children learning about worship by being able to be amongst adults when it is happening, and the idea of designating some time to do child-focused lessons and activities during a segment of the corporate worship service (with the adults present or in their own space), I would also like to emphasize the idea that there is also an important part parents need to take to educate/train their own children to become worshipers. In the appendix that follows, the primary focus will be on activities and ideas for parents and their children to spend time learning about, and participating in, worshipping God corporately, privately, and in the daily 'stuff' of life. It is critical that we see children as being capable of worshipping God as younger members of the family of God—not as pets to pat on the head, or cute little entertainers,

²⁶ Dawn, 305-307

or even as annoying disturbers of our “serious” worship. Along with parents, children can/need to learn to become true worshipers of God.

APPENDIX A

PREPARING CHILDREN FOR CORPORATE WORSHIP

Some of these activities could be done shortly before going to a corporate worship service, others can be incorporated just prior to the service (while at the meeting location).

1. Prepare a big welcome poster with everyone's name on it (including all the names may not be possible with large groups) and talk about how God welcomes everyone into his family.²⁷ Anticipate the joy of meeting with God along with the other who will be gathering together—knowing that God is glad to see each one of us.
2. Finish the busy activities of getting ready for the day and gather together as a family to listen/dance to some worshipful music. Talk about what they liked and what stood out to them.
3. In this activity, a parent would ask questions and lead the activity, while the children would respond with answers and join in with the activity.

Parent: “God made the trees so tall... (family - everyone stretch up as high as possible)
God made the hippopotamuses so wide... (stretch wide)
He made the mice so tiny... (get as small as possible)
and he made you just the right size to be you.
“How can we use the bodies that God has given us to worship him?
(raise our arms up, kneel down, bow our heads or lift our heads, fold our hands, close our eyes, clap our hands, dance, ...)
“When we worship with our church group today, let's use our bodies to praise and worship him.” (Parents would need to do some leading by example during the service.)
4. Have paper and pencils/pencil crayons ready for each child.

Parent: “What are some of the things we know about God?” (loving, holy, knows everything, powerful...)
“The special time when we get to worship together with our church is going to begin soon. Let's sit and think, or draw pictures about these things quietly to get our hearts ready.”
5. Parent: “What have we done to get ourselves ready for this day so far?” (shower, put on clean clothes, do hair, have breakfast, brush teeth...)
“Now we can spend some time getting the rest of our selves ready to worship God together with our church this morning by reading in the Bible.”

- Read (or let the children read if they are able) one or more of the following verses: Psalm 8:1; 34:3; 100; 103:1-3. Spend a couple minutes reflecting on these verses.

²⁷ This idea is adapted from: Barbara Younger and Lisa Flinn. *Boredom-Busting Ideas To Involve Children In Worship* (Loveland, Colorado: Group Publishing, 1996), 8.

6. Think about something that each of us, or our family, could give to God during the worship service. For example, it could be money, a song we've practiced, a prayer, or a pledge to bring someone else a meal or some baking this week.
7. In a time of anticipation and prayer, invite God to join us this morning and tell him that we are looking forward to meeting with him in a special way during this worship service.

ENCOURAGING CHILDREN'S PARTICIPATION IN A CORPORATE WORSHIP SERVICE

During a worship service, the type of participation the children can have will vary from one church to another. In our home church context, it may vary from week to week and there is usually quite a bit of freedom. The following activities are intended to be used in our home church, yet they may be possible to use (or adapt to be able to use) in other settings too.

1. Find out the passage(s) of Scripture that will be used for the coming week, then if it lends itself to being acted out, practice this with the children prior to the service and allow them to present this during the service. It is also possible to do this more spontaneously in a reader's theater style where someone reads and volunteers act out their parts as the story is read.
2. Have the children memorize a verse or a short passage, then recite at an appropriate time during the service. Other related ideas: have the children do it as a responsive reading, either by themselves or print it out and have them lead the adults in saying it together. Older children could practice reading a passage in order to read it during the service (versus memorizing).

(Sample passages: Matthew 6:19-21; 18:19-20; John 12:12-13)

3. During a time of coming before God in repentance, have a small white board with the words "I'm sorry" written across the top. Have everyone (children and adults) think quietly for a few moments about something they've done that they are sorry they have done or said. Then pass the board around to everyone to put some kind of mark, or their initials, on it—to recognize that we have sinned. Then read 1 John 1:9, pray a prayer of confession together (someone could lead and have everyone repeat after them - keeping it pretty short). To show that Jesus "erases" our sins—wipe off the board. Encourage everyone with the truth that we now get a fresh start by God's grace.²⁸
4. Let the children participate in giving back to God by putting some of their own money in the offering.
5. Children can be shown how to help and participate in the corporate worship service in various ways. Here are several examples: welcoming others, handing out bulletins,

²⁸ Barbara Younger and Lisa Flinn, 57-58.

collecting the offering, reading scriptures, helping to teach and care for younger children, singing, giving money, praying, and being involved in drama.

6. Family Sunday - have children preparing in the weeks ahead of time to read scripture, pray, sing and prepare the communion elements.

PERSONAL TIMES OF WORSHIP

Here are some ideas for ways that children and families can worship God during the week. Older children will be able to learn to start spending some time privately with God, and even younger children can begin to learn to be able to pray (for example) without someone else present. The following activities/ideas are intended for parents to do together with young children. I will again emphasize the need for parents to model what it means to worship, teach their children about worshiping, and provide the encouragement and opportunity to participate in worship. (It is also worth stating that in order for this to be effective, the parents need continue to be growing in their own relationships with God.)

1. Read the Bible and/or Bible story books and respond through prayer, song, creating something... (engage imaginations for other ways to respond ☺)
2. Praise and thank God by praying, creating/singing a song, writing a thank you note...
3. Learn more about the attributes of God to have a fuller understanding of who we are worshiping.
4. Use different positions when praying to help us show reverence and homage to God (i.e., stand, kneel, sit, lie on the floor, hold arms up in the air)
5. Memorize Bible verses/passages—talking about what they mean and how we can respond.
6. Use devotional books and activity books (there's no need to "reinvent the wheel")²⁹
7. Read a simple, child-friendly biography of a faithful Christian that has lived before us (or summarize one that you have read). Help the children to realize that we are part of a BIG family of faith. Imagine ourselves joining in with people from all ages and nations to worship God. Read Hebrews 12:1-2 and encourage the children to talk about things they noticed, or questions they have.
8. Tell the children that in times of prayer, we can talk to God and we should also learn to be quiet and listen to what God wants to say to us. Read John 10:2-4; 14-16 (Jesus as the shepherd, we sheep will hear and know his voice). Practice a time of listening prayer.³⁰

²⁹ For one example, see: Cindy Dingwall, *Worship Time with Kids: Bible-based Activities for Children's Church* (Nashville, Tennessee: Abingdon Press, 1998). There are also so many children's Bible story/devotional books that I won't even start listing them. Just take a walk down the children's aisle at a Christian bookstore.

WORSHIP IN OUR DAY-TO-DAY LIVES

As in the other sections, I will emphasize that children are not likely going to learn to effectively worship God in their daily activities without parents and other adults modeling such attitudes and behavior in their own lives.

1. Read verses that talk about worshipping God through our service to others. Ask God to let us know of specific ways that we could serve someone else, then decide upon at least one thing to do that day/week.

Sample passages: Deut. 10:12-13 (serve the Lord with heart and soul...)
Gal. 5:13 (serve one another in love...Love your neighbor)
Acts 6:1-6 (Grecian Jews - men commissioned to serve)
Acts 9:36 (Dorcas - always doing good)

2. Christians can worship God by the way they talk and behave. Read (maybe even memorize) and discuss related passages. Choose one thing to focus on for the week (i.e., speaking kindly to others).

Sample passages: Psalm 19:14 (May the words of my mouth...)
Matthew 5:13-16 (You are the salt... that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven)
Galatians 5:16, 22-23 (live by the Spirit, the fruit of the Spirit is...)
Ephesians 4:29-5:1 (Do not let any unwholesome talk...)

3. Read a Scripture passage (such as Rom. 12:4-8; 1 Cor.12:14-21; 21-31; Eph. 4:11-13) that speaks of Christians as being parts of a body. Talk about the idea that we each have some things that God has created us, and given us a special ability to serve others. Let them know that this needs to be developed—just like we would have to work at learning other things—and think about specific ways that God might want us to serve him.
4. Choose a memory trigger that will help you remember to specifically focus your mind on God throughout the day (i.e., draw a cross on the back of your hand; put a special sticker on the pencil or pen you use most).

³⁰ A helpful resource for learning about listening prayer is the book, *Can You Hear Me?*. Chapter 11 is specifically focused on “Listening Prayer with Children.” Brad Jersak, *Can You Hear Me?* (Victoria, BC: Trafford Press, 2002).

PROJECT EVALUATION

This project has been valuable in making me stop and evaluate what I understand about what worship is, how I do it, how we do it as a church, and how we can pass this teaching on to our children. It has given me the opportunity to learn more, as well as to put the effort into pondering how we will develop others—specifically, our daughters—into worshipers of God. It became very clear that while we need to be creative and to recognize kid’s attention spans and cognitive levels or different than adults’, our own relationship with God and what we model to our children is an even more important factor in their development as worshipers.

In evaluating the availability of research, I did not find very much that specifically talked about developing children as worshipers. There were plenty of materials on activities for children to do in their own children’s church, some idea for things they could do while sitting with the adults, and ideas about/for children’s sermons, yet there was not a lot on the philosophical side of how we view/treat as younger members of the worshipping Christian community or on the incorporation of children as participants in times of worship.

One other weakness of this project is that after writing the paper and the ideas for teaching, modeling, and incorporating children into worship, there has not been enough time to be able to evaluate the effectiveness of these thoughts or ideas in real life (before having to hand it in). It has set into motion a plan though, to gradually incorporate more of these ideas into our home- and church-based times of worship on an on-going basis—refining and adapting them as life goes on, as they grow up, and when/if we move and are in a different church context.

Regarding others’ responses, Greg agreed with the concept that parents have the primary responsibility for training and equipping their children to love, serve, and worship God, and that this is largely done by modeling these values and practices for our children. He liked the

practical ideas for giving children the opportunity to participate in worship and pointed out that we all must view children as people capable of worshipping God versus being used in church services to provide entertainment for the adults (for example, when they sing a song in front of the congregation and people just think about how cute they are instead of seeing them as offering a gift of a song in worship to God, and being drawn to worship with them.)

Our daughters have responded positively to the opportunities they have had to worship together with the adults in our home church, have loved singing and dancing together as we have praised/worshiped God, and have been willing to do practical things as acts of worship in our daily lives (such as bringing a meal to another family who needed it) even though they may not understand the theology behind this. The older two girls have also appreciated time we have had to talk about listening prayer, then to actually spend time in doing that. One of our girls in particular was very pleased to be able to tell us that God does talk to her, and then to share some of those messages with us. This focus on seeing our daughters as developing worshipers, and the efforts of trying some of participatory ideas with them has been positive for us and for the girls.

In conclusion, I have learned that worship is not easy to define, explain, or teach. It requires a life-long commitment to learn more about God and how he speaks/acts toward us, and then how to respond appropriately and with our whole beings. I have also been made aware of the need to worship privately, with our family, with our church community, and in our daily lives. This is a primary purpose of our existence! Finally, I have begun to realize the importance of helping our children grow in their ability to worship God in all aspects of their lives too—with the most important factor being the things we model before them as parents (biological parents, or in a more general sense as adults in the Body of Christ). May we join in with parents from

two thousand years ago who literally brought their children to be with Jesus as we worship Him today.

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