

Chapter 16 - Worship

1. Take a few minutes to reflect on the story.
 - A) I have been in some truly magnificent churches and cathedrals in Europe and Latin America, yet was far more overwhelmed by the fabulous architecture and glorious art than the sense of the presence of God. Think about what motivates your heart to worship.
 - B) Recall your most intense encounter with God. Why does it stand out? Can you identify what made the moment so special? How did you feel during and after the experience? Did you treat this as a special secret moment of intimacy with God or did you want to share it? Why?
 - C) At this point in history, God does not dwell in temples made by human hands, but within the hearts of believers. Consider the “architecture” of your life. What aspects simulate worship of God and what aspects are more likely to draw attention to your own cleverness or creativity?

2. Worship is one of those fundamental things that challenges us to define it. Now that you’ve read the chapter on worship, take some time to look at some of the principle accounts of worship in the Bible. (To get you started, look at: Genesis 22, 2 Chronicles 5-7 Isaiah 6:1-8, Ezekiel 1, Revelation 5-6.) In your own words, explain what worship is.

3. Dig a little deeper into Genesis 22. Consider Abraham’s response to God’s request that he sacrifice Isaac. Why would God test Abraham in this unusual way? How was worship involved?

4. Sometimes when God asks us to give something up for Him, He doesn’t really take it (as in the example of Isaac). Sometimes He does take it and then gives it back to us later. And sometimes, He takes it and keeps it and it is lost to us indefinitely. Think about things you have treasured, that, in

one way or another, God took from you. Jot down some things you have learned or some ways you have benefited from this painful process. (“Things” may include personal goals or dreams.)

5. We often identify the external impediments to worship, but are less quick to recognize the things in ourselves that get in the way of our opening our hearts to God. Engage in a little self-reflection and then make a list of things you’ve noticed that hinder worship in your life.

6. One of the best kept secrets of the Christian life is the value of the moment-by-moment awareness of the presence of God. All of us are surrounded by innumerable distractions. Some are outright evil, but the vast majority are good, worthy, even necessary. They are only a problem because we devote so much of our mental energy to them. Monitor your thoughts over the period of a few hours and, as best as you are able to, jot down some notes about what consumes most of your attention.

7. Take the previous exercise a step further by looking for links between the things that you think about most and God. (For example, in a phone call to a friend, I made a casual reference to recent political developments. His response: “Thank you for the reminder to pray for our leadership.”) Begin to train your mind to draw God into your conscious world and you’ll start to see things, and respond to them, differently. Write down a few things that link your most frequent thoughts to the Lord.

8. As you develop a sense of His presence, God will become much more real to you. Write a few lines to express your appreciation for God, what He has done for you and His presence in your life.

For Group Leaders:

Probably the most important thing you can do in this session is to spend some time in worship. Don’t just talk about it; do it. Different people have different abilities and different ways to express themselves. Don’t be discouraged if you’re short on musicians. Worship can be expressed through music to be sure, but worship is not music.

Encourage your group members to come prepared to engage in true worship, not to impress or even bless the others. Here are just a few ideas that could be employed:

Select a worship passage from the Bible and read it to God as the expression of your heart. Write (or select) a short poem or prose piece that reflects the cry of your heart to God. Prepare a song you have written (or selected) to present before the Lord. Prepare (or select) a prayer which expresses your passion for God and present it to Him. Make a list of God’s mighty works (say, in creation or salvation) and as you read them out, have the group respond either spontaneously or with a planned response like “Great is the Lord and greatly to be praised.” Be as creative as you can as you honour the God who made and saved you.