A LIFE OF WORSHIP
SESSION ONE
FALSE WORSHIP

What is worship? Your answer to this question has been influenced by your life experiences. You may remember worship at the temple and shrine during New Year’s. Your image of worship may include dancing in front of the *mikoshi* (portable shrine) during a festival in your community. Or worship may cause you to think about burning incense and praying before your family altar. Is bowing before a statue of Buddha true worship? Is praying before your ancestors at the family altar true worship?

Your understanding of worship also has been shaped by your experiences as a Christian. These include worship with large groups, worship with small groups and individual worship when you spend time alone with God. When you gather with other Christians to sing, pray and listen to God’s Word, but think about something other than God, is that true worship? How about when you pray, but you feel like God is not hearing you? Is that true worship?

**Small Group Discussion**

1. **Based on your religious experience, how would you define true worship?**
2. **Read John 4:21-24**

In John 4, Jesus was talking with a Samaritan woman about spiritual life. Jesus told her that if she asked him, he would give her the gift of eternal life. Then Jesus talked with the woman about worship. Jesus wants the listener to know about true worship. Jesus explains what true worship is not, and then he talks about what true worship is. During this session we will learn about what is not true worship. Then during session two we will learn about what true worship is.

**Jesus says that true worship is not dependent on location.** The Samaritan woman brought up a heated argument taking place between the Jews and the Samaritans at that time. The Jews said that the proper place to worship God was in the temple in Jerusalem. But the Samaritans had been their own temple on Mount Gerazim in Samaria and said that God should be worshiped there. Jesus said, “*A time is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem*” (John 4:21). In other words, the issue of where God is worshiped really does not matter. What is important is the spiritual condition of those who worship God.

Religion emphasizes the importance of place for worship. Muslims, for example, are required to make a pilgrimage to Mecca once during their lifetime. Muslims gather for prayer each Friday in Mosques. And they pray five times each day facing Mecca, the geographical center of their faith. Hindus, Buddhists and Shintoists go to temples and shrines to worship. This is because the place of worship is considered to be the dwelling place of the god. In order to meet the god, they believe that they must go where he lives. Even some Christians think of church buildings as God’s house. So they believe that they must go to the church building to meet God and worship Him.
The Bible teaches, “The God who made the world and everything in it is the Lord of heaven and earth and does not live in temples built by hands.” (Acts 17:24)

God does not live in temples, shrines and church buildings. Rather, God lives in the hearts of His people. God is with you everywhere you go. The Bible says, “Don’t you know that you yourselves are God’s temple and that God’s Spirit lives in you?” (1 Corinthians 3:16) Since God is always with you, it is possible for you to worship God anywhere, anytime. Christians can gather in large groups to worship God at church buildings, rented halls, parks and even athletic stadiums. They can meet in small groups in houses, apartments, restaurants and karaoke boxes. You can have your private worship with God at home, at your office, or even on the train. Wherever you go, God is already there waiting for you, ready to enjoy time with you.

Small Group Application
1. Read Psalm 139:7-10: “Where can I go from your Spirit? Where can I flee from your presence? If I go up to the heavens, you are there; if I make my bed in the depths, you are there. If I rise on the wings of the dawn, if I settle on the far side of the sea, Even there your hand will guide me, you right hand will hold me fast.” Tell how you would apply the meaning of this Scripture to your everyday life.
2. What are some places that your small group could meet? Make a plan to meet the next time at a new location that you have never used before.

Jesus said that true worship is not dependent on a person’s circumstances. Both the Jews and the Samaritans thought they were the only people who could worship God. Other people have emphasized that true worship is dependent on a particular language or culture. “If people are going to really worship God,” they say, “Then people must dress a certain way and act a certain way and use a certain style of music.” But Jesus taught that all of these issues are secondary. What is really important is that the heart of the worshiper is turned towards God. This is what Jesus meant when He said,

“A time is coming and has now come when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for they are the kind of worshipers the Father seeks. God is Spirit, and his worshipers must worship in spirit and in truth.” (John 4:23-24)

Personal Application
Do a Bible study on John 4:21-24. Before you begin the study, ask God to teach you the truth about Himself and you. Ask Him to show you the truth about worship. Ask the following five questions when you study the passage. You may want to write your answers down so that you can remember them.
1. What does this passage teach me about God?
2. What does this passage teach me about human beings?
3. What does this passage teach me about the relationship between God and human beings?
4. What does this passage teach me about worship?
5. How can apply what I have learned to worship in my own life?
SESSION TWO
TRUE WORSHIP

Small Group Discussion
1. What did God teach you through the personal application last week?
2. Read John 4:23-24

In these verses Jesus is talking about what true worship is. Jesus makes four main points.

First, true worship is based on God’s desire for you to worship Him. Jesus said that God the Father seeks true worshipers. According to Ephesians 1:5-6,

“God predestined us to be adopted as his sons through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his will and pleasure—to the praise of his glorious grace, which he has freely given in the One he loves.”

This verse teaches that God chose to make you His child through Jesus Christ. The reason that God did this is because He wanted you to “praise His glorious grace!” God wants to bless you so that you will thank Him and praise Him. God wants you to see His glory so that you will worship Him. Jesus said that the purpose of life is to give praise to God:

“Let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven.” (Matthew 5:16)

Second, true worship is based on the condition of your heart. You must be prepared to worship God. Jesus said that God desires a person who will worship God “in spirit and in truth.” (John 4: 23, 24) This means that God seeks the person whose heart is right with God. This is why Jesus said,

“Therefore, if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there in front of the altar. First go and be reconciled to your brother; then come and offer your gift.” (Matthew 5:23-24)

When you have a relationship problem with another person, it will affect your worship. So if you are trying to worship God and realize that someone has something against you, you need to try to reconcile your relationship with that person. Jesus did not say that you should only try to reconcile a relationship if you are the one at fault. Sometimes the relationship problem is the other person’s fault. But even in that case as a Christian it is your responsibility to try to restore the relationship.

This may not be easy. The other person may be very angry and not want to talk with you. In many cases, the person will not understand forgiveness because he or she has never experienced forgiveness. You cannot control the reaction of the other person. You can only control what you will say and do. You may feel weak and afraid. Pray to God for
strength and courage. Since it is God’s will for you to do this, He will give you the courage that you need if you will trust in Him.

If the other person refuses to restore the relationship, do not let this discourage you. You have honored God by trying to do His will. You can worship God with a clear conscience.

Small Group Application
Are there any relationship problems in your small group that are having a negative effect on your group’s worship? Now is the time to begin to reconcile those relationships. This includes confessing sin to one another, asking one another’s forgiveness, and praying together for God’s forgiveness. “First go and be reconciled to your brother; then come and offer your gift.”

Third, true worship happens when you connect with God through His Spirit. This is what Jesus means when He says that you must worship God “in Spirit.” (John 4:23, 24) When you became a Christian, the Holy Spirit came to live in you. Since the Holy Spirit is God’s own Spirit, He forms a connecting link between you and God. The Holy Spirit enables you to relate with God personally in a parent-child relationship.

“Those who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God. For you did not receive a spirit that makes you a slave again to fear, but you received the Spirit of sonship. And by him we cry, ‘Abba, Father.’ The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God’s children.” (Romans 8:14-16)

Although you are a Christian, your relationship with God may have a problem. If you have committed a sin, it can form a barrier between you and God. In this case, in order to worship God “in Spirit,” you need to confess your sin to God and ask for His forgiveness. The Bible promises,

“If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.” (1 John 1:9)

Fourth, true worship must be based on the truth of God’s Word. Jesus said that you must not only worship God “in Spirit,” you must also worship God “in Truth.” (John 4:23, 24) You must read the Bible in order to understand what it teaches about God and how to worship Him. Every page of the Bible teaches something about the character of God. The more you study the Bible, the more you will know about Him. And the more you know God, the more you will be inspired to worship Him. If you like to learn more about how to study the Bible and apply it to your everyday life, see the Toolbox units, Basic Bible Study and Character Bible Studies.

Personal Application
Ask God to guide you as you answer the following questions about yourself.
1. Is there a sin in my life that is preventing me from truly worshiping God? If so, confess the sin to God and ask for his forgiveness.
2. Is there a broken relationship that is preventing me from truly worshiping God? If so, make a plan to talk with the other person this week. Ask God for his wisdom and courage as you carry out this plan.

3. Do I feel God calling me to make worship a higher priority in my life? If so, what do I need to eliminate in order to make more time to worship God?
SESSION THREE
WHEN YOU WORSHIP GOD

Small Group Discussion
What did God teach you through the personal application last week?

On the way home from their small group meeting Makoto told his wife, “I don’t think I will go to small group any more. At first I really enjoyed it, but now the excitement is gone. When we pray and sing I don’t feel God’s presence. It’s just a waste of time.”

Shizuka was disappointed to hear her husband’s words. “Your participation has really been an encouragement to Hiro-kun and Kei-chan. If you stop going, I don’t know how they will feel. Don’t you think we have an obligation to the other members of the group.”

“Yes,” Makoto said, “We do have an obligation. But I have obligations to so many people—the people at work, my family, my tennis club, you and the kids. To be obligated to this small group as well is just too much.”

“Do you remember when we first participated in the small group? It seemed so exciting; we looked forward to going every week. What was it that attracted us to the small group then?” asked Shizuka.

After reflecting on Shizuka’s question for a few minutes he said, “It took our minds off the difficulties of our everyday lives. It was one time during the week when we stopped thinking about ourselves—it focused our attention on God. It was so wonderful.”

“I think we still need that, don’t you,” his wife said.

Small Group Discussion
1. Why do you think that Makoto has become discouraged about his small group?
2. How could focusing on God, as his wife suggested, help to change his attitude?
3. Read Isaiah 6:1-8

Isaiah 6:1-8 teaches about true worship. True worship begins when a person’s heart is turned towards God. True worship is empowered by God’s Spirit and guided by God’s Word. When true worship takes place there will be five results.

First, true worship draws the worshiper near to God. The prophet Isaiah has a vision of God. Isaiah drew near to God because God invited him into His presence. This reminds us that our worship of God as well as our relationship with Him is based on God’s love for us. God invites you to draw near to Him. God wants you to meet with Him and worship Him. When you draw near to God, you will find the courage and strength that you need. As Psalm 73:28 tell us: “As for me, it is good to be near God. I have made the Sovereign Lord my refuge; I will tell of all your deeds.”
Second, true worship glorifies God. In Isaiah’s vision, angels are calling out to one another, “Holy, holy, holy is the Lord Almighty; the whole earth is full of his glory.” (Isaiah 6:3) God’s glory overwhelmed Isaiah. He realized that God was holy and righteous while he was person who had been made unclean by the bad deeds he had done. So Isaiah cried out, “Woe to me! I am ruined! For I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips, and my eyes have seen the King, the Lord Almighty.” (Isaiah 6:5)

When people are confronted by God’s glory, they will realize that they are unworthy to be in God’s presence. This is because “all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.” (Romans 3:23) The good news is that God does not desire to leave us in this sinful condition.

Third, true worship purifies the worshiper. God sent an angel with a live coal from the heavenly altar. The angel touched Isaiah’s mouth with the coal and said, “See, this has touched your lips, your guilt is taken away and your sin is atoned for.” (Isaiah 6:7)

When true worship takes place the worshiper is made spiritually clean. This spiritual cleansing is not the result of something the worshiper does for God. It is not like washing oneself with holy water at a Buddhist temple. Washing with holy water may clean the hands, feet and mouth, but it is unable to affect a person’s heart. Only God can make the person’s heart clean. This internal cleansing affects the whole person—thoughts, will, emotions and actions.

“‘Come now, let us reason together,’ says the Lord. ‘Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red like crimson, they shall be like wool.’” (Isaiah 1:18)

Sometimes people are afraid to worship God because they think they are not good enough. You may think, “God will never accept me because of the bad things that I have done. I will try to live better, and then I will go to God.” However, God does not want you to try to be good so that you can come to him. God wants you to come to him and trust him. Then God himself will change you into the person that He wants you to be.

Fourth, true worship renews the worshiper’s commitment to serve God. After Isaiah’s sin was removed God said, “Who shall I send? Who will go for us?”

Isaiah responded, “Here am I. Send me.” (Isaiah 6:8)

When you have experienced God’s love, you will want to share His love with other people. When you have drawn near to God, experienced His glory and have been cleansed by His power, you will want to tell other people about what God has done for you. You will want to help other people because God has helped you. True worship will lead you to be involved in fellowship with other Christians, discipleship, evangelism and ministry. You will give your life as an offering to serve God and other people.
“Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God’s mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God—which is your spiritual worship.” (Romans 12:1)

Fifth, true worship brings joy. Psalm 95:1-3 tells us,

“Come, let us sing for joy to the Lord; let us shout aloud to the Rock of our salvation. Let us come before him with thanksgiving and extol him with music and song. For the Lord is the great God, the great King above all gods.”

When you come into God’s presence He will change your heart. God will quench your spiritual thirst; He will satisfy your soul. You will go into God’s presence weighed down by the burdens of life and come out singing songs of praise because of God’s mercy and grace. Psalm 100 which follows is one such song, but God will give you other songs to use to praise Him.

“Shout for joy to the Lord, all the earth. Serve the Lord with gladness; come before him with joyful songs. 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. Enter into his gates with thanksgiving and his courts with praise; give thanks to him and praise his name. For the Lord is good and his love endures forever; his faithfulness continues through all generations.” (Psalm 100:1-5)

Small Group Application
Have a small group worship time which includes the five elements in this session.
(1) Begin by asking God to draw you near to Him. Ask God to make you aware of His presence.
(2) Glorify God by praising Him together. This may include both songs and prayers of praise.
(3) Confess your sins to God. These prayers may be personal or together with the group.
(4) Have people share what they believe God is calling them to do. Pray that God will guide and strengthen people as they do what has called them to do.
(5) Conclude with a praise time so that participants can express their joy. This can include songs, words of testimony and prayers of praise.

Personal Application
Have five personal worship times during the next week. Follow the Practical Suggestions for Private Worship. During these five private worship times use each of the following Scriptures one day: Psalm 1, Psalm 8, Psalm 23, Psalm 100, and Psalm 115.

Reflection
1. During this study what has God taught you about worship?
2. What questions do you still have about worship?
3. What is your plan to share what you have learned about worship with someone else?
PRACTICAL SUGGESTIONS FOR PRIVATE WORSHIP

1. You should try to have a private worship time everyday. It may be as short as 5-10 minutes or as long as one hour. It should fit your schedule and what God is leading you to do.
2. Choose a time and place where you can focus your attention on God. If you live with other people, try to find a place and time that you can be alone with God without being distracted by them. You do not need to apologize for taking time away from them. Remember that a good relationship with God will help you to be a better husband, wife, parent or child.
3. Begin your private worship time with a short prayer. Thank God for His blessings, including salvation and the blessings that He has given to you on that day. Be specific. Don’t just say, “God thank you for your blessings.” Say, “Thank you God for blessing me with . . . “ and then say what the blessings are. To learn more about how to pray you can study the Toolbox unit Basic Prayer.
4. If you have any unconfessed sin, confess it to God. Ask for His forgiveness.
5. Read a Scripture from the Bible. It can be short or long according to the length of time you have available. Before you read, ask God to speak to you through His Word. As you read the Bible, look for the answers to the following questions:
   (1) What does this Scripture say about God?
   (2) What does this Scripture say about human beings?
   (3) What does this Scripture say about the relationship between God and human beings?
   (4) What is the practical application of this Scripture for my everyday life?
To learn more about how to study the Bible you can study the Toolbox unit Basic Bible Study.
6. Spend some time praising God. You can use songs that you know from worshipping with other Christians. You can also sing along with Christian tapes and CD’s. You may even want to watch a Christian music video. Whatever will help you to praise God is appropriate. You do not have to sing. You can say a prayer of praise for God’s blessings. You do not need to do the same thing everyday. Do what you believe God is leading you to do. This is your time alone with Him.
7. Close your private worship time with a short prayer of dedication to God. Ask God for strength and courage to serve Him. If God is leading you to do something new, make a commitment to follow God’s will.