

"Prepare for Worship"

Worship is an intentional act of the heart, but many people take little time to prepare for worship. Hello, I'm Phil Sanders, and this is a Bible study In Search of the Lord's Way. God expects us not only to prepare our hearts but also our lives when we come into His presence. How do we prepare for worship?

Welcome to In Search of the Lord's Way. The Bible teaches us the truth, because God is the true author of the Scriptures. That's why we study diligently and encourage everyone to read and study it. There is simply no replacement for the word of God. Thanks for spending this time with us. We love to hear that you're watching or listening. We want to be a part of your life each week.

The English word "worship" comes from an old word "worthship"! It's by our attitude, our words, and our actions that we tell God that He is worthy of our praise and adoration. He deserves our love and thanksgiving. "Worship is not an experience that we have in the presence of God, but the act of offering God our best when we are in his presence."

Worship is a spiritual act, that entails a sense of awe and reverence in the presence of the DIVINE. Worship comes from the Greek word *proskuneo*, which means "throwing oneself on the ground to show respect and awe." When Moses saw the burning bush, he thought it was a marvelous sight. He wanted to know why the bush didn't burn up. God called him from the bush and told Moses "Take your shoes off your feet, for the place where you stand is holy ground" (Exodus 3 and verse 5). When we come into the presence of God for worship, we are entering holy ground.

The Bible says in Hebrews 12 verses 28 and 29, "Therefore let us be grateful for receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, and thus let us offer to God acceptable worship, with reverence and awe, for our God is a consuming fire." Worship is, by its very nature, an act of reverence and awe. It focuses on honoring and pleasing God. Worship that pleases God requires some preparation. And today we're going to explore the Scriptures to see how we can show God reverence and awe.

Now we offer the information on this program free. An if you'd like a printed copy or a CD of our study, mail your request to In Search of the Lord's Way, P.O. Box 371, Edmond, OK 73083 or by e-mail to searchtv@searchtv.org. Or, if you like, call our toll-free telephone number. We'll pay for the call. That number is 1-800-321-8633. We also stream this program on our website at searchtv.org.

Larry Owsley will lead the Edmond church in song, and then we'll read from Revelation chapter 5 verses 11 to 14.

Our reading today comes from the book of Revelation chapter 5 verses 11 to 14. Then I looked, and I heard the voice of many angels around the throne and the living creatures and the elders; and the number of them was myriads of myriads, and thousands of thousands, saying with a loud voice, "Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power and riches and wisdom and might and honor and glory and blessing." And every created thing which is in heaven and on the earth and under the earth and on the sea, and all things in them, I heard saying, "To Him who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb, *be* blessing and honor and glory and dominion forever and ever. And the four living creatures kept saying, "Amen." And the elders fell down and worshiped. What a beautiful scene. Let's pray together. Father help us to worship from our hearts and to let you know how You too are worthy of our glory and honor and all things that are good. And Father may Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. In Jesus name, Amen.

What are we doing when we gather for worship? Well, what does it mean to worship and praise God? Now if we're to prepare for worship, we must know something about worship and about God. As

we begin this lesson, let's explore what worship is all about. First, worship is internal; it comes from the heart. One can worship internally without doing anything externally, but one cannot worship externally without doing something internally.

Zechariah 7 verses 5 and 6 says that the Jews of Zechariah's day feasted and fasted for themselves and not for God. They went through the motions but didn't involve the heart. William Temple rightly said, "To worship is to quicken the conscience by the holiness of God, to feed the mind with the truth of God, to purge the imagination by the beauty of God, to open the heart to the love of God, and to devote the will to the purpose of God."

Our worship must come genuinely from our hearts. Now in a discussion with the woman at the well, Jesus said in John 4 verses 23 and 4, "But an hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth; for such people the Father seeks to be His worshipers. God is spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth." God isn't seeking worshipers who have their minds elsewhere or are simply going through the motions; He is seeking worshipers who will worship Him in spirit and in truth.

Second, worship is intentional. We don't worship God accidentally; it must be an intended act. Perhaps you remember Naaman the leper, whom God healed through Elisha. Naaman said that he would only worship the Lord God. And in 2 Kings 5, 17 to 19 Naaman was worried and told Elisha that he had to bow in the house of Rimmon to another god as a part of his duties. Well, Naaman makes the point that he must bow, but that worshiping a false god is not his intention. Well, Elisha understood that unless you intend to worship, it's not really worship. Unfortunately, some Christians come to church to socialize or to see a production; and they never intend to worship. I hope you're a true worshiper.

True praise is not merely "going through the motions." Jesus spoke about the hypocrisy of the Pharisees, whose worship was only an outward show and not from the heart. The Lord said in Matthew 15 and verse 8, that "This people honors me with their lips, but their heart is far from me." This not only revealed itself in their worship, but also showed in their lives. They had forgotten God's commandments but concentrated on their human traditions. The Lord said, "in vain do they worship me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men" (Matthew 15 verse 9). Genuine praise to God comes from a sincere devotion and obedience to the Lord.

Third, worship is vertical. Yes, true worship will edify the church; but the primary purpose of worship is vertical. Worship takes place when our hearts and spirits show our thanksgiving and praise to God our Father. We sing praises to God. We're not worshiping to please ourselves but to adore and glorify God. While we may sing to edify or teach others, the primary focus is to praise God. The Bible says in Hebrews 13 verse 15, "Through Him (that is through Jesus) then, let us continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of lips that give thanks to His name."

Fourth, worship is momentary. Like eating, it has a beginning and an ending. While worship is something that we do throughout our lives, it is an intermittent, heartfelt act, occasional, wherein we put everything else aside and we focus our minds and our hearts for a time on God. Someone says, "Phil, the Bible says in 1 Thessalonians 5 verse 17 that we're to pray without ceasing." Well, that's true, but nobody can pray 24 hours a day, seven days a week. What this passage is saying is that we ought never to quit praying to God. We should pray every day throughout our lives.

Our lives are spent in momentary acts; and since worship is intentional we must choose to spend our time in worship. We must make the moments we worship our Father important. Jesus said in John 4:23 and 24, that "the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth; for such people the

Father seeks to be His worshipers. God is spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth.” God wants you to give Him your heart and glorify His name.

Have you considered how important God regards worship? You know the Lord said to Israel through the prophet Malachi in Malachi 1:6 to 9, that “‘A son honors his father, and a servant his master. Then if I am a father, where is My honor? And if I am a master, where is My respect?’ says the LORD of hosts to you, O priests who despise My name. But you say, ‘How have we despised Your name?’ God answers, ‘You are presenting defiled food upon My altar.’ But you say, ‘How have we defiled You?’ In that you say, ‘The table of the LORD is to be despised.’ ‘But when you present the blind for sacrifice, is it not evil? And when you present the lame and sick, is it not evil? Well why not offer it to your governor? Would he be pleased with you? Or would he receive you kindly?’ says the LORD of hosts. But now will you not entreat God’s favor, that He may be gracious to us? With such an offering on your part, will He receive any of you kindly?” says the LORD of hosts.

It’s common these days for Christians to come to worship habitually late and sometimes dressed as if they didn’t know they were coming into the presence of God. How does this show respect and awe for God? Some think, “well God ought to be glad I came. Chill out! God ought to be satisfied he got anything from me at all.” Is this the attitude of true worship? Where is the love? Where is the humility? Where is the reverence and awe? How is God honored in all of this?

I fear some have little sense of holiness about coming into the presence of God. God deserves our best; we shouldn’t give God what is common or profane or leftovers. God deserves respect in our hearts and in our appearance. I’m not here trying to make laws or tell you what you must wear to worship but to encourage you to consider whether you have honored God in your worship.

In the tabernacle and the temple, how one appeared before God mattered. The Bible says in Exodus 28 and verse 2, “And you shall make holy garments for Aaron your brother, for glory and for beauty.” How the priest dressed mattered to God. Psalm 29 verses 1 and 2 says, “Ascribe to the Lord, ascribe to the Lord, O heavenly beings, ascribe to the Lord glory and strength. Ascribe to the Lord the glory due his name; worship the Lord in the splendor of holiness.” The New American Standard says the angels are to worship “in holy array.” Well why would angels need to put on holy garments?

Consider Paul’s instructions to Timothy in 1 Timothy 2 verses 9 to 10, “that women should adorn themselves in respectable apparel, with modesty and self-control, not with braided hair and gold or pearls or costly attire, but with what is proper for women who profess godliness—with good works.” When we assemble to worship, we’re coming into the presence of God. What we do there, gathered in His name for worship, is holy and reveals our respect for Him.

When the Israelites gathered for worship at the temple, they didn’t simply show up. They lived in a world of ceremonially clean and unclean. We have little sense of that concept today. Israelite pilgrims who traveled to a feast in Jerusalem in ancient times first went to a ritual bath to become ceremonially pure before they ever entered the temple area (John 11 verse 55). In fact archaeologists count as many as eighteen ritual baths surrounding the temple mount today. These purification rituals stressed cleanliness and worthiness to serve and worship the Lord. In fact, Jehoiada the priest stationed gatekeepers at the gates of the house of the LORD so that no one should enter who was in any way unclean (2 Chronicles 23 and verse 19).

Isaiah spoke of his experience in the presence of God in the year that King Uzziah died in Isaiah 6 verses 1 to 8. You remember that Seraphim proclaimed that the Lord God, is “Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory!” The Lord was sitting on his throne, lofty and

exalted. And the foundations of the thresholds trembled at his voice, while the temple was filling with smoke.

And Isaiah responded, "Woe is me! For I am lost; for I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; for my eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts!" And Isaiah was humbled by his own sense of uncleanness before God. He expected to die because he was unclean, but God forgave him as the Seraphim touched his lips with the burning coal.

You remember that when the apostle John came into the presence of the Lord Jesus on the island of Patmos, that he fell at his feet as though dead. He understood the awesome and special nature of the occasion. Many worship assemblies have become so worldly there is little sense of being in the presence of God or of the reverence of the occasion. The Hebrew writer urged his readers, "let us offer to God acceptable worship, with reverence and awe, for our God is a consuming fire" (Hebrews 12 and verse 29). I fear we have lost a sense of the awesome nature of God.

In many worship occasions I find things that reflect an environment of little respect for God. Things like putting a Bible on the floor, people putting their feet up in the pew or on song racks, people who are repeatedly and needlessly late, constant going in and out to get a drink or go to bathroom, constant talking in the foyer, constant talking in the pews, texting on the phone, passing notes in worship, or clipping fingernails during the sermon. Yes I care about everyone, and I want everyone to come for worship, but I wonder if God feels honored when our hearts and lives are so far from Him.

We also must think of our lives as we approach God in worship. The Bible says in Psalm 66 verses 16 to 20, "Come and hear, all of you who fear God, and I will tell what he has done for my soul. I cried to him with my mouth, and high praise was on my tongue. If I had cherished iniquity in my heart, the Lord would not have listened. But truly God has listened; he has attended to the voice of my prayer. Blessed be God, because he has not rejected my prayer or removed his steadfast love from me!" When people cherish sin more than they do God, it should not surprise them that God closes His ears to their prayers.

The New Testament says in James 1:26 to 27, that, "If anyone thinks he is religious and does not bridle his tongue but deceives his heart, this person's religion is worthless. Religion that is pure and undefiled before God, the Father, is this: to visit orphans and widows in their affliction, and to keep oneself unstained from the world." If we wish to worship God in private or in public, we need to serve God by living holy lives every single day. Let's pray together. O Father help us to love You with all our heart and soul and mind and strength. And give You the honor that is due Your name. May Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. In Jesus name we pray, Amen.

The apostle Paul was concerned about the unruly assemblies at Corinth that kept the people from worshiping properly and from taking the Lord's Supper in a way that pleased God. He said in 1 Corinthians 11:27 to 30, "Therefore whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner shall be guilty of the body and the blood of the Lord. But a man must examine himself, and in so doing he is to eat of the bread and drink of the cup. For he who eats and drinks, eats and drinks judgment to himself if he does not judge the body rightly. For this reason many among you are weak and sick, and a number sleep."

When we worship we ought to please God and we need to do this for two reasons. First, it honors God to worship the way that He desires. Second, true worship calls us to live a purer and nobler life. Let's prepare to praise and glorify God before we come into His presence. Let's get our hearts and minds focused on God. Israel worshiped in vain by living immoral and ungodly lives according to Isaiah

1 verses 12 to 20. They needed to repent of their sins before they came to worship God. What will please God most is a heart that is right with Him! Is your heart right with God?

To get right with God one must believe that Jesus as the Christ, the Son of the living God. He must regard Jesus as Lord and turn away from sin in repentance. Anyone who loves the Lord will not remain in willful sin. He wants to change his life and to confess Jesus as the Christ. He'll also be baptized as quickly as possible for the forgiveness of his sins—as the Bible teaches in Acts 2 and verse 38. If a person loves the Lord, he won't want to spend a single moment outside the love and grace of God.

We hope this lesson about worship has blessed you. If you live in the United States and want a free printed copy or a CD of this message, mail your request to In Search of the Lord's Way, P.O. Box 371, Edmond, OK 73083 or send an e-mail to searchtv@searchtv.org. Or, you call the Search office toll-free at 1-800-321-8633. Now you can download these lessons or a newsletter online at our website: searchtv.org. You can watch SEARCH anytime on YouTube! Just subscribe to our channel, "SearchTVMinistry." There's also a schedule of our programs and a map with the location of churches in your area. We also offer free Bible Correspondence courses. Now if you get a hold of us we're just trying to help you get to heaven.

Please get involved with a church of Christ. If you're looking for a healthy, Biblical church home, we'll be happy to help you find one. We'll be back next week, Lord willing. So keep searching God's Word with us and tell a friend about the program. God bless you and we love you from all of us at In Search of the Lord's Way.