

## LESSON 4

### Why worship?

***If there's one thing we want you to learn while you're in Confirmation, it's how great God is.***

We can tell you about God until we're blue in the face, but it will be God's timing and your open heart and mind that will allow you to see God. The more all of us see God and experience God, the more we see just how wonderful God is. And the more wonderful we realize God is, the more we want to worship God.

Worshipping God means honoring and/or revering God. It means recognizing how awesome God is and *telling* God how awesome He is! Worship is an *active expression* of our devotion to God and a thankful response to what God has done for us in Jesus Christ. We worship when we pray, meditate, focus on God, thank God, and dedicate ourselves to God. We can worship in church on Sunday mornings or at other "worship services," and we can worship God in our every day lives by how we act, treat others, think, speak, etc. We're going to look at both of these types of worship – *church worship* (more specifically United Methodist worship) and *every day, individual worship*.

#### Church worship

The first churches worshipped corporately, but their gatherings were not structured like our churches' worship today. There were no rituals and no order; they just kind of "hung out" and talked about God together (think Lesson 1, early church in *Acts*). This was cool at the beginning because everyone was free to talk about and worship God in whatever way they wanted. After a while, though, the people got out of hand. People who spoke in tongues dominated the people's time together, and communion became a rowdy Love Feast where people would actually get drunk! Finally, things got so bad that some of the church's leaders had to slow things down and make worship more organized. This explains why today we follow an "Order of Worship."

Today, corporate worship in most churches is pretty organized. Corporate worship is usually reserved for Sunday because it is the Lord's Day (you might have heard it referred to as "The Sabbath"), when we celebrate Jesus' resurrection. Most people worship in a church's *sanctuary* because sanctuaries are built for the purpose of corporate worship. The sanctuary is no more sacred or holy than anywhere else in God's creation, though. We can worship God anywhere, any day, any time!

It's important for us to be involved in corporate worship because it reminds us that Christianity is a community of believers. (Isn't it more fun to celebrate something (God) when you've got people with you anyway?). We can share our love for God with others, enjoy fellowship, and learn about God together. We experience corporate worship every Sunday at First United Methodist Church McKinney. There are several elements to our service and to other United Methodist services. Let's look over all of these together. (\*Note: Not all of these elements are a part of every worship service. These are, however, the more common elements of a worship service.)

**CALL TO WORSHIP:** An invitation for everyone to come freely and worship God with thankful and joyful hearts. Often a Psalm from the Old Testament is used to do this (the pastor says one line of the psalm, and the congregation responds with another line).

**AFFIRMATION:** Declaring what we believe. We state our basic beliefs to remind us of who we are and what we stand for in the Christian faith. The creeds we recite (like the Apostles' creed – you'll learn more about them later!) and other statements in the Hymnal are our *affirmations* of faith.

**PRAISE:** Thanking God for who God is and expressing how wonderful God is. We can praise God when we sing hymns, songs, or the *Gloria Patri* (a fancy song of praise). Sometimes our words cannot say all that we want to say to God, but the music of our songs can reflect God's beauty, communicate our love and adoration to God, and lift our souls to God.

**PRAYER:** We pray in all kinds of ways during corporate worship! Prayer during worship is super important because it allows us to communicate with God as a community of faith. As we pray in corporate worship, we can say:

- individual, silent prayers – These are prayers we say by ourselves.
- corporate prayers with the rest of the congregation - These are the formal, traditional prayers that we say together like church liturgy and the Lord's Prayer from the Bible. These prayers are often printed in the church bulletin or hymnal.
- prayers of confession - These are prayers that admit ways we failed God. We can say them privately or as a group. Confessing sins allows us to experience God's forgiveness and be cleansed.
- prayers for others – These allow us to lift up our friends and neighbors and ask God to work in their lives.

\*We can also be led by the pastor in a *pastoral prayer* (he or she lifts up general prayers to God on behalf of the congregation) or in a *prayer of thanksgiving* (he or she thanks God for everyone's blessings, God's love, etc.)

**PROCLAMATION:** Our opportunity to hear God's Word and will *proclaimed* (get it? *proclamation?*) or declared. The reading of Scripture and the sermon are the main ways we hear the Proclamation. The Bible teaches us what God expects from us and how to be better disciples of Christ. The sermon makes sense of the Bible in our lives today. Our minister tells stories and reviews Scripture in order to make it relevant, personal, and real in our hearts and our heads. Proclamation tells us about God and calls us to be like Him.

**DEDICATION:** Dedicating our lives to God (after all, it was God who *gave* us our lives!). We can do this by giving offering and by singing or reciting words of dedication. When we give our money to the church, we acknowledge that our money came from God and should be returned in part for God's work in the world. When we sing songs or say words of dedication, we are telling God that we will be committed to God's purposes in the world, and we will serve God by telling others about Christ. When we dedicate our lives to God, we say to God that what we want to do is not important. All that matters is that others come to know Christ through us.

**SACRAMENTS:** When we take communion and celebrate baptism (more on these in the next lesson). Most Methodist churches offer communion the 1<sup>st</sup> Sunday of every month, but some churches offer it more or less frequently. As for baptism, we baptize many people as infants. We also baptize children or adults whenever they are ready!

**THANKSGIVING:** Obviously, this is the part of church worship when we give thanks to God! Thanksgiving can be the *doxology* (song of praise to God) or as mentioned earlier, the *Prayer of Thanksgiving*.

**BENEDICTION/SENDING FORTH:** The final blessing. At the end of the service, the pastor will issue a benediction in which he/she will pray for the congregation, encourage them, and send them into the world to be witnesses for Christ!

### ***Why Ritual?***

You may wonder, “Why do we do so many of the same things week after week in church?” That’s a great question! Sometimes formal worship can seem ritualistic, boring, and even insincere. Shouldn’t we be able to worship God in whatever way we want to? Well, yes, we should be, and we are. We are free to worship God at any time, at any place, and with anyone we choose, as long as our worship is reverent (a step above respectful) to God.

Having said all that, there’s a lot to be said for ritual. Think about your family’s Thanksgiving dinner. Do you have some traditions that you stick to every year? What about ceremonies at school, like induction into the NJHS? Have you ever watched someone graduate from high school or college or been to a wedding? If so, you know that the ceremony had a lot of ritual in it. Lots of really important events are ritualistic. Rituals make things familiar and patterned, and they help carry on tradition. They allow the people involved to participate together and be unified in traditions of the past.

Remember, though, ***worship is active!*** While ritual is important to our services, and we need organization, we never want to be so organized and formal that we don’t leave room for God’s Holy Spirit to work. The Holy Spirit is all around us, so as we worship, we want to be open to it. We should feel free to express our hearts to God in any way that the Spirit leads us. Rather than doodling on the bulletin, writing notes to our friends, checking social media, daydreaming, or sleeping, we should sing the songs, listen to the words of the prayers, and take the minister’s message to heart! Doing these things shows our open heart and mind during worship and allows God’s Spirit to be at work.

Every church chooses to worship God differently. Some use an organ and a choir, and the people dress up; others use guitars and dancing, and the people wear jeans and flip flops. Likewise, every *person* chooses to worship God differently. We can think, stand, sit, kneel, pray, speak, sing – *anything* that expresses our hearts to God! God doesn’t care how we worship. All that matters is that we make worship about God and not about ourselves.

## **Yikes! That is tricky! How can we make sure we focus our attention on God in worship?**

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The United Methodist Church often has a moderately formal style of worship in its traditional services. In most Methodist churches there is an order of worship, and the pastors wear robes and use creeds and liturgy. In general, Roman Catholic and Episcopal churches are more formal, and Baptist, Pentecostal, and non-denominational churches are less formal.

Contemporary, or alternative, worship services have grown a lot in recent years, even in the Methodist church. First Methodist McKinney's Wellspring worship service is an example of a contemporary worship service. These services, though they can be in a traditional denomination like Methodist or Baptist, are very casual and different. There's usually a band that plays, and the people sing a lot of contemporary Christian songs that you might hear on the radio. In these services, there are not many formal prayers, and the minister doesn't wear a robe. Instead of using hymnals or having Bibles in the pews, the people often look up at a big screen for the words. On that same screen, movie clips and video presentations often play throughout the service to communicate God's message. Before a contemporary service, there's often food, music, and a lot of time to hang out with friends. Overall, it's a more laid back atmosphere.

### **Every Day, Individual Worship**

*"I appeal to you therefore, brothers and sisters, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual act of worship. Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God – what is good and acceptable and perfect." ~ Romans 12:1-2*

Do you notice that this Scripture does not say, “present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual act of worship on Sundays...”? God doesn’t say that we only worship on Sundays. (Sunday morning Christian worship didn’t even come about until centuries later.) We are supposed to give ourselves to God *every day* because God is great every day! God calls us to worship Him by being “holy and acceptable” in our every day lives instead of being wrapped up in all the things of the world. This means that we worship God by:

- Being nice to our parents and obeying them instead of getting mad at them all the time (Ephesians 6:2)
- Turning the other cheek when our friends gossip about us behind our back (Matthew 5:39-41)
- Not fighting back if someone wants to fight us (Matthew 5:39-41)
- Studying for tests instead of cheating on them (Proverbs 13:4)
- Using clean and encouraging language instead of cussing (Colossians 4:6)
- Thinking good thoughts instead of mean or inappropriate ones (Philippians 4:8-9)
- Being sexually pure (1 Corinthians 6:19)
- Loving others (1 John 4:19-21)
- Choosing good friends (1 Corinthians 15:33)
- Reading our Bible on days other than Sundays (2 Timothy 3:14-17)
- Praying on days other than Sundays (1 Thessalonians 5:17)
- Taking care of our body and treating it as a holy temple (1 Corinthians 3:16)
- Being joyful instead of “pouty” (Philippians 4:4)
- Can you find others in Scripture?

**Take a look at your own life. In what ways can you make Sunday morning worship a priority? In what ways can you make worship a daily thing?**

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There are countless ways to worship! If we live by Scripture and honor God in every activity we perform, every word we say, and every thought we think, our lives will worship God!

### **\* Go The Extra Mile!**

Visit another Christian worship service – Catholic, Baptist, Presbyterian, non-denominational, Pentecostal, etc. Take notes on what is similar and different about the service than what you’re used to in the Methodist Church.

