

Biblical Pillars of a Family Foundation
John Morrison – Fellowship Bible Church
Class One – Overview (pages 1-3) and Pillar #1 (pages 4-8)

I. Introduction

A. What is a pillar?

In construction, a “pier” (*underground steel-reinforced concrete column under the foundation of a building*) is used to provide the footing for a strong foundation when the soil is soft or when a significant downward force will be pressed on the building. We apply that idea of a “pier” to families, but call it a “pillar” since that is what it looks like. In today’s culture, the soil is soft for families trying to make a strong foundation and goodness knows, significant loads are pressed on it. You want a sure family foundation and the ten “pillars” we will examine provide just that.

B. This course is intended for two audiences and two purposes.

- ❖ *Audience One: Those with no specific blueprint for how to build their family into the family God and they want it to be.*
- ❖ *Audience Two: Those with a good idea what the family is supposed to be and some ideas of how to get there, but want to examine and fine-tune it.*
- ❖ *Purpose One: Systematic – a thorough approach to leading our family from a biblical framework that is like a blueprint we can follow.*
- ❖ *Purpose Two: Evaluative – helps us evaluate how our family is doing in major “family health” categories and diagnose what we need to work on and a little bit of what we can do to grow in those areas*

B. Why is this course so important and humbling?

Goal of the class: *Catch a vision of God’s plan for your family*

Your home is the main center of discipling. Years ago, pastor Chuck Swindoll wrote a book entitled, *Home: Where Life Makes Up Its Mind*. Life does indeed make up its mind at home. We want to help that go well.

C. Feelings about this class?

1. I feel strongly about the potential of this class.
2. Come regularly if you are going to come
3. Come “open on the Godward side” – He is ready to open our eyes
4. Do the homework we make available – you’ll get more out of it!

D. What do you want to get from a class like this?

E. If you are taking this with a spouse, what do you hope they get?

The life of the nation is the life of the family written large – Plato

II. The Direction for the *Pillars Course*

A. **Week 1: Pillar One: Christ-Centered – Core Commitment of the Home**

Deuteronomy 6:4-9, Psalm 127-128 and Proverbs 1:7, Ecclesiastes 12:13-14, Matthew 22:36-37, John 1:11-13

Key Point: The one true God is feared, known, worshiped, discussed, loved and followed ahead of all else.

Key Question: Are the leaders following Christ with whole hearts?

B. **Week 2: Pillar Two: Truth Taught and Truth Caught**

Psalm 119:160 and John 14:6, 17:17, Romans 3:19-21, 10:17, Hebrews 4:12, 11:6, 12:7-11.

Key Point: A home functions well to the degree that it abides in the truth of God's Word and as its people live in integrity.

Key Question: Are we taking the responsibility to teach Truth and to live truthfully in ways that our children can see and pick up?

C. **Week 3: Pillar Three: Grace Received and Grace Granted**

Deuteronomy 10:15, Matthew 7:7-11, 18:33, Luke 7:47, Ephesians 2:8-9, 5:28-29, Romans 5:1, Ephesians 2:8-9, Philippians 2:1-8, Colossians 2:6, Titus 2:11

Key Point: Truth must be balanced with grace. Grace is essential in coming to Christ, in how we live and in how we treat each other.

Key Question: Is ours a home where we understand and rest in God's grace, where failure is met with grace and success is met with humility?

D. **Weeks 4: Pillar Four: Unity at the Top – Marriage's Goal**

Genesis 2:22-25; Proverbs 5:15-19, 7; Song of Solomon 4:9, 5:1e, 5:10, 5:16, 7:10, Mark 10:7-9, Romans 12:3-6, 1 Corinthians 7:5, 10:31, Ephesians 5:21-33, Philippians 4:5

Key Issue: God gave marriage as a covenantal antidote to loneliness, as a means of filling and subduing the earth and as a way of reflecting the Trinity. Oneness in marriage sets the stage for a successful family and for our children continuing the pattern.

Key Question: Am I devoted to biblical oneness with my mate more than I am devoted to filling my own desires and avoiding disappointment?

E. **Weeks 5: Pillar Five: Man's Identity as a Servant-Leader**

Genesis 2:15; 3:17-19; 1 Corinthians 11:3; Ephesians 5:25-32; 1 Timothy 3; 1 Peter 3:7

Key Issue: Married men are responsible to lead their homes, wives and children with a servant heart of humility, understanding and tenderness.

Key Question: Am I as a man taking responsibility for our family's physical needs, spiritual direction and relationships with courage and humility?

F. **Weeks 6: Pillar Six: Duck! – Woman's Identity as Helper**

Genesis 2:18; 3:16; Proverbs 31; Eph. 5:21-24, 33; Col. 3:18; 1 Tim. 2:11-12; Titus 2:2-5; 1 Peter 3:1-6

Key Issue: Married women are first to help their husband as a submissive equal and to care for the children and home before involvement in outside things.

Key Question: If I am a married woman, am I responding to the opportunities I have to serve my husband and family?

- G. Week 7: Pillar Seven: Narrow Bed, Wide World – Life of Single Adults**
Proverbs 5, 7; Song of Solomon 4:12; Matt. 19:12; 1 Corinthians 7:1-2, 8-9, 25-35; 1 Thessalonians 4:1-8
Key Issue: Single men and women are free to choose how they will be involved in God’s kingdom without constraint of family needs. It is essential that singles guard themselves from sexual involvement.
Key Question: If I am single, am I making the most of my singleness for the kingdom? Am I avoiding sexual involvement until and unless I marry?
- H. Weeks 8: Pillar Eight: Preparing & Launching – Life of Parenting**
Deuteronomy 6:4-9; Psalm 78:1-9; Proverbs; Ephesians 6:1-3
Key Issue: Parents are to teach, train and discipline their children so those young people can be launched into the world in ways that honor Christ.
Key Question: Are we training our children and launching them into the world as responsible adults who’ll do the same with their kids?
- I. Week 9: Pillar Nine: In Laws or Out-Laws – The Extended Family**
Genesis 2:22-24; Mark 7:6-13; Luke 14:26; 1 Tim. 5:1-4, 8, 16
Key Issues: Adults are to honor their parents but not to obey them or to violate the unity of the marriage for them. When families have been torn asunder, we are to live in a redemptive peace as much as possible.
Key Questions: Am I honoring my parents and spouses’ parents without compromising the one-flesh unity of marriage? Am I living at peace so far as it is possible with me where there have been splits in the family?
- J. Week 10: Pillar Ten: Church as Family**
1 Corinthians 12; Eph. 4:16; 1 Timothy 3:15; 5:1-21;
Key Issue: All believers form one interdependent family of families rooted in Christ, committed to each other, evangelizing the world, glorifying God.
Key Question: Do I understand that I am joined to those in the church as to brothers and sisters, that I am to love and serve them and that together we point the world to Christ?

Pillar One - Just One Thing: A Christ-Centered Home
*In this home, the true and only God is feared and known,
worshiped and discussed, loved and followed ahead of all else.*

Introduction

I. **God is FEARED**

The fear of God has been lost in our day – not only among nominal Christians (Christians in name only), but among genuine, blood-bought, faith-alone-in-Christ-alone Christians.

The loss of the fear of God results in people doing whatever they want with God’s Word. What “God says and means” becomes what we want it to mean for us.

The “fear of God” was not a temporary thing while the Bible was being written now eclipsed by enlightened thinking. The fear of God is the first thing written on the hearts of those who follow Him.

A. How does a person who knows God respond when they are in the presence of God in the Old Testament? In the New Testament?

- Read **Isaiah 6:1-8** for an Old Testament example
- Read **Revelation 1:9-19** for a New Testament example

B. **Proverbs 1:7 – fear of God is the beginning of all wisdom**

C. Joshua 2:1-11 – unbelievers’ hearts melt in fear before God

D. Joshua 4:19-24 – fear is the foundation for confidence in God

E. Joshua 24:14-15 – Israel is commanded to fear and serve God only

F. **2 Corinthians 5:9-11 – part of Christians’ motivation for obedience is fear**

G. 1 Samuel 12:12-25 – how are fear and obedience related?

H. See also: Acts 9:31; Romans 11:20; 2 Cor. 5:11; Ephesians 5:21; Phil. 2:12; 1 Peter 1:17; 1 Peter 2:17; Revelation 14:7, 15:4, 19:5.

I. Our first responsibility, if we are to have a Christ-centered home, is to recognize God for who He is. Our role as adults and as leaders of our home and children, if the Lord provides those, is to maintain and communicate a high view of a God who is to be feared. It is not the last word regarding knowing and following God, but it is the *beginning* of putting Christ at the center of our home. This involves knowing what He is like (from the scriptures) and reading that for ourselves and for our family. Is He to be loved? Yes, and we will get to that. But we don’t start with love. If we are biblical, we will start with fear, and never really lose that.

II. God is KNOWN

A. John 10:22-30

1. Jesus at Jerusalem at the feast of the Dedication (*Hanukkah*)
2. Those who don't know His voice don't know Him
3. Those who follow Him show that they know Him

B. Let's look at a few passages that help us know how to know Him

1. **John 1:11-13** - *To as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, even to those who believed in His name...*
2. **John 3:36** - *He who believes in the Son has life; He who doesn't obey the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abides on Him.*
3. **John 5:24** - *Assuredly I tell you, he who hears my word and believes Him who sent Me has everlasting life and shall not come into judgment but has passed from death to life.*
4. **John 17:3** - *This is eternal life: that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent.*
5. **2 Thessalonians 1:8** – ... *Dealing out retribution to those who do not know God and do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus.*

C. Knowing God – in the limited sense that we have been speaking of – refers to something you can know you have done. It refers to having “believed the gospel” and having entered a relationship with God as a son or daughter. We can be said to “know God” when we are born again (John 17:3, 3:3, 1:12-13). This happens as:

1. We recognize that God is holy (**Exodus 3:1-6**);
2. We recognize that we have sinned against God and therefore deserve His judgment, His condemnation (**Romans 3:23**);
3. We believe that when Jesus died, He took our sins as our substitute, as a free gift for all those who believe (Romans 6:23; **1 Timothy 1:16**);
4. **1 John 5:11-13** shows us that God wants us to know!

D. Single most important question you will ever be asked:

Do **YOU** know God? Have you come to the place in your life when you realized that 1) your sin leaves you judged before God, 2) Christ died for you to pay for that sin and 3) He offers eternal life and complete forgiveness to those who believe?

Not only is it impossible to have a Christ-centered home without coming to know God by faith in Jesus Christ, but there will without Him be no eternal rest, but only a certain expectation of judgment.

E. Shortly, we will talk about *knowing* Him in a different way– i.e., walking with and following Him. **Knowing Him** can refer to beginning a relationship with Him by faith (“obtaining an introduction” Romans 5:1-2) or it can refer to an experience of ongoing life with Him. Similar to the way a man can know a woman by meeting her and talking with her (“Yes, I know her”), he can know her differently by marrying her and having intimate relations with her to consummate the marriage (“I know her *in the biblical sense*”), and he can know her differently still by living with her for fifty years (“I can really say I know her”).

III. God is WORSHIPED

Psalm 127-128

- A. **Psalm 127:1-2 (Worship is recognizing the worth of God in all we do – in song, in prayer, in thoughts, in words, etc.)**
1. Vanity - 3x - the writer says raising a family is vanity without God
 2. Building, protecting, preparing – the three activities of parents
 3. What do I do with my doubt or unbelief? – not saying you won't struggle
- B. **Psalm 128:1-4 (Worship is the foundation of His blessings)**
Instead of talking about people who end up in trouble with the Lord, it speaks of those who end up blessed.
1. Blessed are they who FEAR THE LORD & WALK IN HIS WAYS.
 2. Blessed in OUR WORK
 3. Blessed in OUR FAMILY
- C. Worship is “**declaring worth.**” It is not *granting* worth. Worth is granted intrinsically – the thing (or person) is worthy or it's not. Worship of God is recognizing that He is worthy in ways nothing else is. He is God of Gods, Lord of Lords, creator of all that has been made (Genesis 1, Psalm 8, John 1:1-4).
- D. It has been said that *worship* is our number one activity. Worship in this sense is not about singing at church. Is all we do, say and think targeted at God's glory?
- E. **John 4:23** – Jesus says, “God is seeking worshippers...”
- F. **Psalm 99:5** – We worship at His footstool because He is holy.
- G. **Isaiah 6:1-8** – We worship because we see His greatness in contrast to our unworthiness
- H. **Psalm 95-96** – We worship God in recognition that He is the creator and the One who holds all things together, we worship Him by not hardening our hearts. We worship with song, with gifts and in trembling humility.

IV. God is DISCUSSED

Deut. 6:6-9; Psalm 78

- A. Deuteronomy 6:4-9, esp. vv. 6-7
1. Father
 2. Teaches
 3. Talks
 4. Time and Place?
 5. P.S. How do you remember God's great deeds with your family?
- B. Psalm 78:1-8
1. Who is involved
 2. What is discussed

V. God is LOVED

- A. 1 John 4:19 and Romans 5:8 – Whenever we speak of “loving God,” we have to start at the reality that if we do love God, we only do so because He first loved us. True “Love for God” is *always the product of realizing the love of God for us*. In other words, “love for God” is actually produced in us *by* God (Phil. 2:13) after we have received His love for us.
- B. Matthew 22:36-37 (Deuteronomy 6:5) – We speak of *love for God* as the highest motivation there is for righteous living. It is capable of governing our attitudes and behaviors (2 Cor. 5:14). Far higher than fear, *love for God* is what He is ultimately trying to produce in us. If we serve or obey God from nothing but duty, that is better than nothing (see 1 Corinthians 8:16). But it is *love for God* that produces the greatest sacrifice, the greatest joy and the greatest level of obedience (Deut. 7:9; John 14:23), to say nothing of joy.
- C. When we see that it is a command to love God, we are able to recognize:
1. That it is not natural – it must be commanded
 2. It is a choice available to us.
 3. “Love” involves heart and mind and actions
 4. *Love for God* is a comparative item – we love Him more or less than something else – including child or spouse or parent. One way to tell what we love most is what we do when we lose it. If our hope and sense of well-being is gone because we lost “it” – whatever the “it” is – we hoped in it more than we hoped in God.
 5. Jesus tells us that we will either “hold onto our life and lose it” or “lose our life for His sake and find it.” The reason is that when we hold onto our life – we love our life more than we love Him. When we are willing to lose our life for His sake, we love Him more than we love our life. Such an “I have been crucified with Christ” attitude frees us up to obey Him in anything and everything and He can then best accomplish His purpose.
 6. Greater “Love for God” than for anything else is seen in many instances in the scripture:
 - a. Abraham with Isaac in Genesis 22
 - b. The widow’s mite in Mark 12:41-44
 - c. Jesus’ comment that we by comparison must “hate” our father and mother and brothers and sisters and wife and children (Luke 14:26)
 - d. Paul and Silas in Acts 16 in the jail in Philippi (esp. v. 25)

VI. God is FOLLOWED

- A. When we worship and love Him, we follow Him. When we follow Him, we obey Him. As we obey Him and follow Him, we become like Him.
- B. Abraham in Genesis 12:1-4
- C. Moses in Exodus 3:10, 4:27-31
- D. Isaiah in Isaiah 6:8-9, ff.
- E. Disciples in Matthew 4:18-22
- F. John 15 – Those who “abide in” Him will follow Him. Those who follow Him will obey Him. Those who obey Him show that they love Him.
- G. Paul in Acts 9:1-19 (As well as Ananias)
- H. Galatians 2:20 – It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me.
- I. ***Following Christ is the best single phrase to describe the life of a disciple.*** It incorporates fellowship, listening, talking (prayer), obedience, adventure. Since He is always reaching out to new people to offer Himself, anyone who follows Him will do the same. Since He is always encouraging and ministering to His own, anyone who follows Him will do the same. Since He always trusted His Father (even to death), they will do the same.

VII. The Christ-centered Home

This first pillar speaks of people who lead this home who fear and know, worship and discuss, love and follow Jesus Christ more than all lesser loves.

The man or woman or couple who lead this family unit first examine themselves to see if they **fear** the Lord and **know** the Lord as they should. Second, they examine whether they **worship** the Lord in song, in prayer, in thought and praise, in giving and in their work and relationships and all they do, and whether they **discuss** the Lord readily. They examine whether they **love** Him more than anything else by examining what they might love more than they do the Lord, and making corrections as they see the places they may be holding an idol (something you love, bow down to or fear more than you do God and what He says). Finally they look at whether they are **following** His lead as Lord of their life. These questions are not easy or quick, but if we're open to the Holy Spirit showing us those things (Psalm 139:23-24), we will learn where change ought to take place.

Please see the homework listed after this page.

Homework One: Self-Assessment: How is Our Home's Christ-Centeredness?

1. Do I personally know that I have been born again to eternal life? How do I know?

2. What about my spouse (if married)? Does she/he have eternal life? _____
How do I know? _____
3. Christ says that those who love Him obey Him. (John 14:15, 21) On a scale of 1-100, how would Jesus say you are doing on obeying His known commands to you? _____
If married, how would your spouse say you're doing? _____
4. In the past year, what are one-two things the Lord showed you He wanted you to do which you did only because He commanded it or showed you to do it?

5. Which of the following best describes the way your family is with this topic of Christ-Centeredness? (a, b, c, or d) _____
 - a. I don't know how we stand with Christ – it's new for me or for us.
 - b. We know Him, but His ways are not very evident within our family.
 - c. We are divided in our home over the issue of focusing on Christ.
 - d. We work at it sincerely and I feel like we are growing together.
6. How has Christ-centeredness affected my/our decisions/behaviors in these areas?
(a) Very Much (b) Somewhat (c) Not Much
____ Entertainment ____ Prayer with family members
____ Spending Habits ____ Sharing our faith with others
____ Friends We Choose ____ Service to Christ
____ Regularity at church ____ How I do my work/what work I do
____ Conflict Resolution ____ Parenting
7. What is there that I may love more than Christ? _____
How can I address that possible idolatry in my life? _____

8. Have I been baptized as a believer? (See Matthew 28:19-20) _____
9. T/F? _____ Our children know that in our home it can be said, "As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord." (Joshua 24:15)
10. Which of the following best characterizes your current relationship with God?
____ I struggle with and feel guilty over my lack of closeness with God.
____ I am learning and growing but feel there's a long way to grow
____ I enjoy my walk with God and find His word and prayer to be an encouragement.
____ Other? (Describe for yourself.) _____

Homework Two

As you pray about the Christ-centeredness in your family (includes single adults), take a hard look at what you think God wants you to address, in order to put Him in the place He deserves at the center of your family. This is not about beating yourself up (*Jesus already was and it does no good for us to do it to ourselves*), but it is about allowing the Holy Spirit to convict you and to direct you. Even if you are not sure *how* to change things that need changing, God is looking for is an openness to His conviction and His leading, and an openness to His showing you how these changes can be made.

Don't forget Philippians 2:12-13 that tells us that God is "*at work in us both to will and to do His good pleasure.*" That is right! He not only will enable and direct us to grow and change, He will even work in the **willingness area** of your heart.

Too many Christians feel a prick of conscience – the Holy Spirit's quiet voice, most likely, and then either a) scorn themselves (*Jesus already was and it does no good for us to do it to ourselves*) for failure or b) harden themselves because they think they can never change or because they are afraid something they need or want desperately will be taken from them. (That would be an idol, something we are holding onto instead of God.)

Instead, let's realize that God not only lets us know what is wrong. He also provides complete forgiveness. Just tell Him you know it is wrong (confession) and ask Him to help you make the changes that often come so hard. He will. He is faithful to do what we could never do. (1 Cor. 10:13; 2 Cor. 12:9-10)

Write what you think He is calling you to do or to work on to increase the Christ-centeredness of your home.

Homework #3 - *On the Private Life of a Worshipper*

We do not know what Nathaniel was doing under the fig tree in John 1:43-49, after which he met Jesus. We only know that the fact that Jesus knew made him convinced Jesus was the very Son of God.

Many people imagine that he was sinning and was embarrassed that Jesus knew what he was doing when he thought he was alone. But Oswald Chambers imagines that perhaps he was involved in personal worship of the Lord – and that may make better sense. Let's listen to Chambers' thoughts on "our private life of worship."

From Oswald Chambers' My Utmost for His Highest (updated version)

Missionary Weapons – September 11

"When you were under the fig tree, I saw you" (John 1:48)

Worshiping in Everyday Occasions. We presume that we would be ready for battle if confronted with a great crisis. But it is not the crisis that builds something within us—it simply reveals what we are made of already.

Do you find yourself saying, "If God calls me to battle, of course I will rise to the occasion"? Yet you won't rise to the occasion unless you have done so on God's training ground. If you are not doing the task that is closest to you now, which God has engineered into your life, when the crisis comes, instead of being fit for battle, you will be revealed as being unfit. Crises always reveal a person's true character.

A private relationship of worshiping God is the greatest essential element of spiritual fitness. The time will come, as Nathanael experienced in this passage, that a private "fig-tree" life will no longer be possible. Everything will be out in the open, and you will find yourself to be of no value there if you have not been worshiping in everyday occasions in your own home. If your worship is right in your private relationship with God, then when He sets you free, you will be ready. It is in the unseen life, which only God saw, that you have become perfectly fit. And when the strain of the crisis comes, you can be relied upon by God.

Are you saying, "But I can't be expected to live a sanctified life in my present circumstances; I have no time for prayer or Bible study right now; besides, my opportunity for battle hasn't come yet, but when it does, of course I will be ready"? No, you will not. If you have not been worshiping in everyday occasions, when you get involved in God's work, you will not only be useless yourself but also a hindrance to those around you.

God's training ground, where the missionary weapons are found, is the hidden, personal, worshiping life of the saint.

Homework # 4 - Discipleship Journal

Issue 70 July-August, 1992

Who Needs Worship?

Why would we want to worship God day and night, forever and ever?

By Paul Thigpen

We were nearing the semester's end in Religion 101, "Biblical Literature and Faith." My students—most of them secular college freshmen—were bright, inquisitive, and painfully honest. I expected to hear a few protests when we got to the Book of Revelation. Destroying angels? A talking beast? Hail and fire mixed with blood? Who *wouldn't* have questions the first time they read about all *that*?

Even so, a remark from one student—we'll call him David—did catch me off guard. Unperturbed by the terrible symbols of apocalyptic language, David stumbled over what was to me a beautiful passage: the book's description of worship around the throne of God. There, he read that when John looked through an open door into Heaven, he saw "four living creatures" worshipping the Lord (see Rev. 4).

Why did that scene bother David? In particular, he was disturbed to find that the worship of God in Heaven is a full-time activity: "Day and night," John wrote, "they never stop" (Rev. 4:8).

"Why do they have to worship all the time?" David challenged. "Who would want to spend eternity doing that? If God demands that everyone worship Him forever, He must have a tremendous ego!"

David was young and not a Christian, so it was easy to excuse his bluntness. Yet I had heard the same objection raised before in milder terms, even by mature believers. Whether someday in Heaven or today on earth, why indeed should we worship?

That question has at least one simple answer: We worship God because He commands it. The words of the psalmist are echoed throughout the Bible: "Worship the Lord in the splendor of his holiness" (Psalm 29:2).

Such a brief reply is no doubt correct, but it wouldn't resolve the issue for David and many others like him. Why, they want to know, would God command worship in the first place? Is it an arbitrary demand? Does He need it somehow? If God did *not* command us to worship Him, would we still have good reason to do it?

The answer to the last question is an enthusiastic yes. Worship has its own rewards; as the old Westminster Shorter Catechism declares: "Man's chief end is to *glorify* God and to *enjoy* Him forever." A closer look at the reasons for worship will help us understand why.

He Is Worthy

The English word *worship* was originally "worth-ship"—or what we would now call "worthiness." When we worship God, we affirm with the psalmist, "Great is the Lord, and most *worthy* of praise" (Psalm 48:1, emphasis added).

Thus the first answer to the question of why God would command us to worship, or why we would worship even if He had never commanded it, is simply this: He is worthy. It's only right and fitting to worship Him.

Have you ever stood watching a breathtaking landscape—perhaps a shimmering range of snow-covered mountains or a glorious sunset over the ocean—and praised it aloud? "Wow!" you exclaimed. "That's magnificent!" To remain silent in the presence of such beauty would have seemed wrong; you felt compelled to express your admiration.

How much more, then, is God worthy of our adoration. Whatever beauty or goodness, power or wisdom we have ever thought fit to extol, God is infinitely more beautiful, good, powerful, and wise, and infinitely more deserving of our praise. The more deeply we know Him, the more we realize that worship is the *appropriate* response of a creature to the Creator.

When we choose whether or not to worship God, we are actually making a moral decision. God commands us to worship because it is morally right to worship, just as it is morally right to speak truthfully. In fact, worship is a special form of telling the truth—the truth about our Creator. To neglect worship is to neglect the truth.

Even for those of God’s creatures who aren’t created to make moral choices, worship comes naturally. Scripture tells us that the animals, the plants, and the inanimate elements are called to praise God; and they do so without speech, just by reflecting His awesome goodness, power, and wisdom (Psalm 19:1–4; Psalm 148). The Lord is so deserving of praise that if we don’t exalt Him, the rocks themselves (Luke 19:40) will cry out!

God Longs to Meet Us

In countless popular songs we hear about the heartbreak of love that is unreturned. Yet rarely do we hear about the most tragic unrequited love of all: the love of God for a fallen world.

God created us in love so that we might love Him in return. But we turn away from Him instead. As the prophet Hosea said, we fail to acknowledge that God is like a husband who has showered us with gifts. Sadly, the Lord must say of His “bride”: “She . . . went after her lovers, but me she forgot” (Hosea 2:13).

Daily our Creator woos us like a suitor, calling us gently to commune with Him. He longs to have our attention, to meet us face-to-face, to hear us say we love Him. Though God doesn’t need our affection, He has humbled Himself to desire it.

How do we come to God in a way that returns His love and delights His heart? Worship is an act of giving ourselves to God, of abandoning ourselves to Him. Surely, then, worship is one important way of showing our devotion to the Lord. In fact, when John in his vision of Heaven saw God’s people worshipping, he heard a voice say they were a bride who had “made herself ready” for Him (Rev. 19:7).

If our worship gives joy to the heart of God, we can understand why Jesus said that the Father is actively seeking worshipers (John 4:23). Why worship? To fulfill the desire of God. If He is out looking, we want to be found!

Transformed into His Image

We would do right to worship God even if we received no benefit from it ourselves. But worship does benefit us as well. What we gain from worship should never be the focus of our attention when we come into God’s presence; that would be the very opposite of self-abandonment. Yet remembering that worship is also for our own good keeps us from the foolish conclusion that God selfishly demands it only for His sake.

How does worship benefit us? It transforms us, empowers us, and liberates us. It’s a part of God’s plan for us to be “renewed in knowledge in the image of [our] Creator” (Col. 3:10).

Human beings tend to become like the object of their mental and emotional focus. We slowly change to become like the center of our psychological world.

Have you ever noticed that when a daughter resents her mother over a long period of time, that resentment keeps the child’s thoughts and feelings locked onto the parent? She may say, “I’ll never be like my mom,” yet, ironically, the daughter usually ends up with the same character flaws that made the mother a source of resentment in the first place. The girl is transformed into the image of the center of her psychological world.

Or what about the little boy who idolizes a fictional character like Rambo? In time, he tends to become aggressive, perhaps even violent, like the character he admires.

Likewise, in worship—the ultimate form of mental and emotional focus—we center our hearts on the object of our worship. So we shouldn't be surprised that Scripture says all who make idols—anything worshiped instead of God—will eventually become like the idols they make (Psalm 115:4–8).

On the other hand, worshiping the Lord rivets our hearts' gaze on Him. The result? "We, who with unveiled faces all contemplate the Lord's glory, are being transformed into his likeness" (2 Cor. 3:18).

Three Perspectives

More than almost anything else we can do, true worship clarifies our vision. When we exalt the Lord, we gain two life-changing perspectives.

First, we gain *a view of the throne of God*. The sight of the Lord, high and lifted up, reigning in power, wisdom, and love, gives birth in us to spiritual fruit of many kinds. We gain

- faith and peace, because we remember that God is faithful;
- hope and patience, because we are reminded that God is in control;
- love and gratitude, because we appreciate His goodness;
- joy and strength, because in His presence is fullness of joy (Psalm 16:11), and the joy of the Lord is our strength (Neh. 8:10).

The second perspective we gain from worship might be called *a view from the throne of God*. When we worship, we realize that we are—to use the Apostle Paul's words—"seated . . . with him in the heavenly realms" (Ephes. 2:6). We take a vantage point above the world, ourselves, our circumstances, and our problems.

Once we've beheld God in worship, we look back down on our world from His perspective. We find what we thought was a mountain is only a molehill. What seems great and mighty in the world's eyes turns out to be small and insignificant in God's eyes. On the other hand, what we thought was weak, we learn is actually strong; what we thought foolish is wise.

Psalm 73 illustrates how worship changes our perspective from the earthly to the heavenly. In the first part of that passage (Psalm 73:1–16), the psalmist, Asaph, laments the difficult circumstances of his life. He concludes: "When I tried to understand all this, it was oppressive to me" (Psalm 73:16).

But then Asaph took an important step. He "entered the sanctuary of God" in order to worship (Psalm 73:17). At that point the psalm takes a major turn in tone—away from circumstances and toward the Lord. When Asaph's heart saw the sovereign throne of Heaven, he could see the wicked in a new light: "Then," he declared, "I understood their final destiny" (Psalm 73:17).

The words of the psalm move from a third-person lament over the world to a second-person prayer addressed directly to God. "Surely you place them on slippery ground," Asaph realized, "you cast them down to ruin" (v. 18). The Lord, he affirmed, was the final reality, and the rebellion of the wicked was only a fading dream, with no more substance than a fantasy (v. 20).

So it is for all of us when we worship. The view from the throne bears fruit that the Scripture calls *wisdom*—which, after all, is simply the ability to see things as God sees them. Best of all, our new perspective on life gives us a wise and chastened view of *ourselves*. When Isaiah saw the Lord in worship, high and exalted, and above all, holy, his response was a cry of confession: "Woe to me!" he said. "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 6:1–5).

When we see God's greatness and holiness in worship, we see our own smallness and sinfulness in comparison. We're humbled by the sight, and we want to repent. Thus, we find in God's cleansing presence personal renewal and healing.

One day when King David danced publicly in worship, his wife Michal despised him for his joyful abandon in God's presence. After that incident, she was no longer able to bear children (2 Samuel 6:16–23). I believe Michal's experience provides us with a parable. If we too neglect or refuse to worship God, our spiritual lives will be barren. But if we turn our hearts to exalt Him, our worship will bear godly fruit.

A Lover's Admiration

When my student, David, raised the issue of why God would command worship, we were able to discuss all the above reasons briefly in class, and at length over lunch. He came to a new understanding of the matter, and a major stumbling block to faith was removed from his path.

Perhaps for him the most important hurdle was getting over the mistaken notion that we would spend eternity in Heaven as flattering sycophants around a powerful tyrant, saying tediously again and again: "Well, God, you sure are big. Yes, you're certainly powerful. And you've got everything figured out, too."

When I told him in class that day that I viewed Heaven quite differently, he challenged me to explain. The class listened intently; it was a question that intrigued them all. If there is a Heaven, they wanted to know, what will it really be like?

"Think back," I told him, "to the time when you first fell in love. Do you remember what it felt like?" His smile told me that he did.

"Do you remember how beautiful she was?"

He nodded.

"Did you ever tell her so?"

"Of course!" he said. "I couldn't *stop* telling her."

"Did you enjoy telling her?"

"It was a pleasure."

"Now take that pleasure, and the beauty that inspired it, and multiply it by infinity," I said. "Take those words of loving admiration, and multiply them by eternity. That's how beautiful God is, how delightful it will be to praise Him, and how long you'll want to do it. That's Heaven."

The class burst into applause, David's eyes filled with tears, and a lump rose in my throat. He was on his way to knowing firsthand what it means to "glorify God and enjoy Him forever."

ABOUT THE AUTHOR:

PAUL THIGPEN was the Classics Page editor for Discipleship Journal. He is also the author of *A Reason For Joy* (NavPress, 1988), and *Come Sing God's Song* (David C. Cook, 1989), a book about praise for children.